GENERATION WEST: HUNGARIAN MODERNISM AND THE WRITERS OF THE
NYUGAT REVIEW

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how the Nyugat review played an essential role in the development of literary and cultural modernism in early twentieth century Hungary. My chief argument is that modern Hungarian literature and culture, under the auspices of Nyugat, are part of that Central European canon which had shaped some of the most influential literary and critical theories. The review nurtured over one-hundred and twenty writers, artists and intellectuals who left a lasting impact on Hungarian literature and culture. These authors are known as the Nyugat-generation, a term which I adopt as Generation West. They contributed to the journal in Budapest between 1908 and 1941. My dissertation focuses on three of the most important contributors to Nyugat: Margit Kaffka, Dezső Kosztolányi and Antal Szerb and their respective works, Colours and Years, Esti Kornél, and Journey by Moonlight. They exemplify their generations’ perspectives and illuminate the course of Nyugat over three distinct periods. Inspired by the modernist currents of Western Europe which they espoused, these writers along with other members of the Generation West experienced “in-betweenness,” a condition characterized by the values of the traditional and the modern, East and West, nation and the individual, and feudal and bourgeois, which marked and also fuelled their output. Nyugat has come to epitomize the experience of Hungarian identity expressed through the themes of nationhood, nostalgia and commemoration. To demonstrate the journal’s legacy in Hungary today, I conclude by analyzing the events of the Nyugat 100-year anniversary that took place in 2008. My dissertation tells the story of how a community of writers and artists from a small nation in East-Central Europe instituted a profound literary and cultural movement under the aegis of a journal. I consider my study a call for reworking models of literary and cultural history and for expanding existing epistemologies of modernism.
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INTRODUCTION

Preparatory Notes

In Hungary, 2008 marked the 100-year anniversary of the literary and cultural review, Nyugat. The word Nyugat translates as “West” and refers to Hungary’s cultural orientation in the twentieth century. Today in Hungary Nyugat ranks as the country’s greatest literary review and also as a cultural phenomenon. The review’s legacy is still visible: Hungarian streets, squares, libraries, and cafés are named after Nyugat writers, plaques on buildings and in parks commemorate people and events associated with the journal, and school curricula encompass many facets of it. There is also ongoing research in Hungary on Nyugat and its authors, yet outside of the country they remain relatively unknown. Most of Hungary’s intellectuals and artists of the first half of the twentieth century were part of Nyugat. Hungarian literary history refers to them as the “Nyugat nemzedék” [“Nyugat-generation”], and in turn for the purpose of my dissertation I adopt the name “Generation West” to describe the members of Nyugat. From its start in January 1908 until the final edition in August 1941, Nyugat nurtured over one-hundred and twenty writers, artists, and scholars who shared an appreciation of the modernist international and Hungarian cultural currents and contributed to them, each in their own way. Our knowledge about Nyugat and its authors is likely to remain incomplete and lifeless until we take steps to shed light on how they contributed to modernism in Hungary and elsewhere. I argue that twentieth century modern Hungarian literature and culture cannot be fully understood without recognizing the part Nyugat played in European modernism. To this effect, my position is that modern Hungarian literature and culture, under the auspices of Nyugat, are part of that Central European canon which had inaugurated and shaped some of the most influential and important contemporary literary and critical theories.
With this dissertation my ambition is to present an analysis of the Nyugat review in the context of modernity as it pertains to Hungary’s social, political and cultural transformation at the turn of the century. I focus on three authors of Nyugat and their main works, namely Margit Kaffka (1880-1918) and her novel Szinek és évek (1912) [Colours and Years, 1999], Dezső Kosztolányi (1885-1936) and his novella cycle Esti Kornél (1933) [Le double, 1967], and Antal Szerb (1901-1945) and his novel Utas és holdvilág (1937) [Journey by Moonlight, 2000]. After researching the figures of the Generation West, I have chosen to study these three authors because they represent eloquently both the similarities and differences the journal stood for and fostered. I focus on their works for the distinctive ways each addresses issues concerning the Nyugat-generation and Hungarian modernism in general, and how they engage the themes of travel and Budapest in particular. While Kaffka, Kosztolányi and Szerb are well-known authors in Hungary who wrote their novels when they were already highly regarded members of Nyugat, they are less read in Canada and North America. They, along with other Nyugat writers, grew out of and contributed to the traditions of the restless and homeless cosmopolitanism that had become a trademark of East-Central Europe. By expressing their own Hungarian experiences in relation to their generation in the semi-autobiographical genre of the novel, each author raises questions about identity (Hungarianness) and Hungarian modernity. As I show in the following chapters, Nyugat has come to epitomize the experience of Hungarian identity in which the notions of aestheticism, high culture and scholasticism are expressed through the themes of nationhood, nostalgia and commemoration. These themes serve as reference points not just for each writer’s search for selfhood but also for articulating the experience of identity understood in the context of a cultural problem. While these modernist subjects are not solely Hungarian, they articulate in distinctive ways what is emphatically pertinent to the Generation West. To this effect, the objective of my dissertation is to analyze and compare the many and divergent
approaches to Nyugat—primarily from Hungarian sources—and to the selected authors’ works in an effort to contextualize their contribution to modernism within and outside of Hungary. In turn, I consider my study a call for reworking models of literary and cultural history and for expanding existing epistemologies of modernism.

Different aspects of Hungarian literature and culture have been examined in English across several disciplines. However, my dissertation addresses a topic that has not been well documented outside of Hungary and that is where the originality of my research lies. My aim in studying Nyugat is also to provide an interpretive framework for locating Hungarian in European modernism and elucidating what is distinctive about it. While there are hundreds of publications about Nyugat and its writers in Hungarian, many of which I draw on, there are very few studies in English relating or referring to Nyugat.¹ The existing English sources are good but few and they do not offer a broad perspective on the complexities that Nyugat represents. More studies are needed to gain a better insight into Nyugat’s influence on modernism, and within it Kafka’s, Kosztolányi’s and Szerb’s pivotal contributions to Hungarian literature, and in turn world literature. Since my dissertation is not a comprehensive study of Hungarian modernism but rather an examination of one of its main components, I attempt to avoid an overemphasis on well-known debates surrounding modernism in Western thought and instead offer a relevant discussion from the margins. My study is a contribution to and is inspired by comparative literature, a field that is largely rooted in East-Central European scholarship.

In his 1877 article, entitled “The Present Task of Comparative Literature,” the Austro-Hungarian literary scholar, Hugo Meltzl de Lomnitz outlined the demands of the discipline that prospers on a “comparative method” as an “intellectual tool” (in Saussy 7-8). In the footsteps of Goethe who referred to the idea of Weltliteratur in response to the global expansion of texts in

¹ I include a selective list of these works, among them Ph.D. dissertations, in Appendix A.
different languages which had become widespread in the 1820s, Meltzl de Lomnitz designated “the principle of polyglottism” and translation as representations for the discipline which sets itself against the model of national language and literature studies (in Saussy 8). For Meltzl de Lomnitz comparative literature ought to consider wider aspects of literary studies, arguing that “without ethnological considerations…the literatures of remote regions could not be fully understood” (56). The “principle of polyglottism” for Meltzl de Lomnitz comprised Hungarian as one of “ten languages” necessary for all comparative studies (in Saussy 8-9). By including Hungarian, argues Haun Saussy, comparative literature has severed the link between related languages, ancestors, and cultures because Hungarian is part of an entirely different language group: “science will have to suspend its allegiance to genealogical reasoning and take its bearings from reports of contact or similarity…Hungarian [therefore]…opens comparative literature to being something other than a science of origins” (8). In this respect, a small nation like Hungary ought to adopt a comparative perspective in order to negotiate between its own (literary and cultural) traditions, external influences, and broader contributions.

As the Hungarian historian István Rév argues, “Hungary is a hopelessly monocentric country, where Budapest is the only real urban center on a European scale, where everything happens in that single city. Either you lived in Budapest…or you did not live anywhere else” (4). Hungary maintains a conscious historical “mission in the Carpathian Basin” with a “traditional cultural superiority over the neighboring ethnic groups,” based on centuries-long traditions that claim liberty as well as the “iron laws of historical progress” (7). Hungarians are often seen as “an Oriental people whose destiny was to become European and to act as the guardians of the West” (Makkai xiii). Yet Hungary remains uncategorizable, and despite its efforts it continues to be marginalized in the global arena. New “taxonomic categories” may be necessary for today’s cultural definitions (Rév 7). With respect to language, the Australian literary critic Andrew
Riemer suggests that “perhaps because Hungarians speak a language practically without affinities with any of the major European languages, Hungarians have always been obliged to be more outwardlooking than those of us fortunate enough to live in one of the great linguistic communities of the world” (10). Although Hungarian “has no recognizable relationship with other European languages” (Czigány 12), the Magyar mother tongue [magyar anyanyelv] is not just a marker of otherness but above all a rallying post for keeping the Hungarian nation together. Treading water in the sea of pan-Slavic, Turkish, and German languages Hungarians have preserved their traditions and cultures by insisting on using their own language. Hungarian is classified as belonging to the Finno-Ugric languages, similar to Finnish and Vogul, which are part of the larger grouping of Ural-Altaic (Czigány 12-13). Contact with other groups of people, such as Turkish, Slavic, Latin, and Germanic throughout the centuries has resulted in the incorporation of many of their words into Hungarian. While Hungarian etymology is a “tricky business” (Czigány 13), a Finno-Ugrian source has been “successfully proven” by “the structure of the grammar,” “suffix system,” and “a common Finno-Ugrian stock of words which follows a regular pattern in the various shifts of vowels and consonants” (13). Hungarians’ language and literature kept them connected despite their many different individual attributes as a people.

Relatedly, cultural historians Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček caution that “trying to understand [Hungary] merely from the standpoint of [its] internal referential systems is a limited enterprise; while trying to explain them from an ideal-typical ‘Western perspective’ is an oversimplification” (15). With this point in mind, I join them in searching for a “middle way…to place these narratives of identity in a more encompassing…setting,” where I can negotiate “the internalization of the ‘external’…[in order] to point out the complexities of the formation of cultural identity” (15). The Nyugat-generation seems to correspond to this notion of a “middle way,” which can be seen as an interstitial position. Most Hungarian scholars describe members
of Nyugat as “being in-between” [“köztes állapot”]: in-between the values of the traditional and
the modern, East and West, nation and the individual, and feudal and bourgeois (cf. Kenyerés;
Pomogáts; L. Rónay). Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha has developed the notion of “in-betweenness”
with reference to race, class, gender, nation and community. These categories are contained in
the interstice, the in-between space which allows for “cultural hybridity” and refuses “imposed
hierarchy” (4). While Bhabha focuses on postcolonial spaces mostly in the Third World today,
his metaphor of “bridging the home and the world” (13) is useful for my purposes in describing
the Generation West. I draw on his articulation of the “subject positions” in cultural difference as
located in “‘in-between’ spaces” (1). In-betweenness ought to be understood as designating “new
signs of identity” (1), exactly the mode of being which the Nyugat-generation experienced a
century ago. Bhabha sees Goethe’s concept of world literature in particular as a “prefigurative
category that is concerned with a form of cultural dissensus and alterity” (12). Dissensus and
alterity are also two important characteristics that define the members of Nyugat in early
twentieth century Hungary. But instead of presenting in-betweenness only thematically and
semantically, I wish to emphasize its significance from a syntactical approach as one of
continuity and interconnection.

In my dissertation I elucidate some of the moments, events and processes in the history of
Nyugat from a variety of sources and approaches. The accumulation of source material with
regard to the Nyugat journal presents itself as a genealogy, but with the caveats in mind which I
have already noted by Saussy above. Michel Foucault’s ideas on “genealogy” provide me with
some methodological principles in developing this approach. In this regard, my objective is not
the “pursuit of the origin,” but from a genealogist’s perspective I want to examine and
“recognize the events of history” (80), specifically with reference to Nyugat. We ought to
understand the context in which Nyugat grew as a “profusion of entangled events” which
necessitates a “historical sense” (Foucault 89-90). Along similar lines, Foucault’s essay stresses the notion of “emergence,” which he characterizes as an “entry of forces” that “occurs in the interstice” (83, 85). This idea denotes the concept of “in-betweenness” which I elaborate with regard to the mutual experience of Nyugat members. I want to highlight those moments when Hungarian literary modernism was able to proliferate in the spatio-temporality of the interstice. What makes Nyugat a special phenomenon is the number of genuinely talented writers, poets, and artists culminating in a marginal cultural-geographical location within roughly a thirty-year period, which is largely unmatched by any other literary currents. To study such a phenomenon requires what Foucault calls “relentless erudition” (77). Nyugat authors from the start were legendary in Hungary, and seen as having a vatic spirit that blurred the outline of an origin but offered instead a lasting legacy.

In attempting to sustain such a relentless erudition my contribution to and inspiration from comparative literature prompt a methodology of a “genealogical” study of Nyugat. While comparative literature allows me to compare and contrast simultaneously the heterogeneous array of literary texts and languages at hand up close, my additional background in sociology fosters a method of homologies. That is, the structural resonance between the different elements that make-up the socio-cultural and historical between literature and society as mediated by writers where literature is the driving force and/or represents the conscience of a social group. To this effect, I shall tease out the tension between similarities, differences, parallels and oppositions within and among the works at hand and point out their vast heterogeneity, with modernism understood as the tertium comparationis. The Nyugat review and the selected works I study by Kaffka, Kosztolányi and Szerb offer a new and more nuanced understanding of Hungarian literature and culture, and of modernism more generally, than has usually been recognized. My hope is that Nyugat and the Generation West become household names in English-speaking
scholarship. I have accessed the material published in Nyugat in their original hard copies, and also through the online catalogue Nyugat folyóirat (1908-1941) – elektronikus változat, that is, the Nyugat Electronic Database, produced by the National Széchényi Library of Hungary. While I was unable to access some of the primary and secondary texts because they are out of print or unavailable in libraries and archives, the sources I draw on provide a diverse documentary basis for my study. The primary source materials, the Nyugat review and the selected works by Kaffka, Kosztolányi and Szerb are originally in Hungarian. I also make use of the English translations of Kaffka’s Színek és évek and Szerb’s Utas és holdvilág, as Colours and Years and Journey by Moonlight, along with the French translation of Kosztolányi’s Esti Kornél as Le double. All other translations, which are not available in English or French, are mine. I also regularly take the liberty of translating through paraphrasing.

The origins of my interest in choosing to write about Nyugat is partially that I have known about the review ever since I can remember. I grew up in Hungary when one could not miss the significant stamp of language and literature on daily life. My mind and body have been steeped in the spirit of Nyugat. The body, in Michel Foucault’s words, represents the “domain of the Herkunft,” of origin in the sense of emergence, which has developed from “everything that touches it: diet, climate, and soil” (83). I had read the works of many Nyugat authors in and outside of school. Kaffka, Kosztolányi and Szerb had a deep influence on my early literary experiences. Even now, when doing my doctoral research, they trigger vivid recollections of my life in Hungary. As an expat living in Canada for many years, I still conjure memories of my encounters with Hungarian literature that ground my worldview. While feeling a sense of belonging and loss at once, I have become Canadian and the Hungary I used to know has undergone globalization in the wake of communism’s collapse. Origins and double-identities
become intertwined in my own experience. The Nyugat writer and Kaffka’s contemporary Anna Lesznai, who immigrated to the United States, helps me express this insider-outsider standpoint:

I lived intensely within it, and yet I also had the objectivity of the outsider. The very position of the outsider forces one to become an observer and recorder of events because one’s fundamental situation is ambiguous. One is inside but is still a foreigner and thus has sharper eyes. (in Gluck, GL 74)

My “ambiguous” standpoint as a Hungarian in Canada, therefore, is a component of how I frame my dissertation and how my research arises from such experiences.

Beginnings

Most scholarship considers Vienna as the centre of modernity’s artistic and intellectual developments in Europe with Freud, Schnitzler and Schönberg as leading figures (see Beller, Hanák, Schorske). As the American historian Steven Beller puts it, “Vienna at the beginning of the twentieth century was the birthplace of a major part of modern culture and thought which forms the basis of our consciousness to this day” (1). But as the contemporary Hungarian literary theorist Zoltán Kenyeres asserts, the political, economic and cultural region of East-Central Europe has never had a definite self-awareness and self-knowledge. This lack of self-consciousness is “one of the typical marks of East-Central Europe” (Kenyeres 25). Despite Oskar Kokoschka’s famed definition of East-Central Europe as a “cultural commonwealth” (20), referring to the similar spiritual and mental make-up of people that developed through their common fate in struggles, especially artists of this region, people hardly knew each other, their traditions and customs. Kenyeres explains this point by suggesting that “East-Central Europeans have always looked to the West or to the Far East for inspiration but never at each other” (25). They have never considered it worthwhile to learn about each other. Carl Schorske calls East-Central Europe the “Epimethean culture” in his Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. He posits that there,
people tend to look backward instead of forward, and to turn inward rather than outward (xxiv). They do not have a picture of the future, nor do they see a hopeful path out of misery, and they eschew utopian thinking. And yet the emergence of a common cultural denominator, what Beller explains as “the revival of a Central European identity based on the cultural golden age of the Vienna-Budapest-Prague triangle,” can be recognized (8). What East-Central Europeans wanted was to “live life by artistry, to be like artists; this was their ideal and desire which was entirely in opposition to the realities they experienced” (Kenyeres 26). The geographical triangle of Vienna-Budapest-Prague provides the axis points of East-Central Europe, but with no real centre. The region has always been more of an ideological phenomenon than a material locus and, as the American historian Mary Gluck points out, “Vienna 1900 has become a cultural paradigm precisely because of its complexity…The real question is not whether it constitutes a paradigm or not, but rather, how we can understand the nature of the implicit relationship between its different component elements” (“Afterthought” 266). We appreciate its familiarities only now, in hindsight, and see it as the more or less unified community of East-Central Europe. To this effect, it is exciting to realize that “a large part of the birthplace of modern thought lay behind the Iron Curtain” (Beller 6). With the fall of communism such legitimacy has become easier to claim in Hungary and the Czech Republic. As I argue with reference to the Nyugat-generation, and in this case with tongue-in-cheek, most people in this region have always been aware of their contribution to modernism but have not always touted it.

The works of Nyugat authors I engage with in my dissertation are cherished and revered literary texts in Hungary, which express not a valiant or extravagant side of Hungarian literature and culture, but rather an authentication of the resilience and sophistication of Hungarian identity. With a manifestly Hungarian emphasis, these works illuminate a passionate Hungarian worldview that reflect both cosmopolitanism and tradition, urban and rural cultures, while being
astutely aware of their in-betweenness. They also follow in the tradition of the tumultuous twentieth century as the culmination of anxieties and identities that developed from the fin-de-siècle political, social and artistic turns of Central-Europe. Their immediate forerunner can be located in Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s 1902 “The Letter of Lord Chandos” in which he laments the crisis of language in failing to convey actual experience and thus to renew the cycle initiated in the earlier European grand epoch with Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*. While Goethe’s hero in the late 1790s looks into the future with hope and optimism, by the late 1800s the first signs of cultural fragmentation became evident. Hofmannsthal’s “Letter” was the first of its kind to chronicle the phenomenon of “fragmentation as [an] essential part of reality not just of the arts” (Kenyeres 8). As I have pointed out with reference to Schorske’s study of Viennese culture, artists in Vienna did not revolt against the new bourgeois class as their contemporaries had in Paris or other parts of Western Europe. Instead they turned against and/or away from the monarchical rulers to (re)claim the project of modernity. Hofmannsthal portrays his fictional character, Lord Chandos in the early 1600s, as an allegory for the social crisis between the old social order and the new literary and artistic movements in turn-of-the-century Austria, in which the latter had begun to clamour for change. Not social or political relationships, but the individual’s own experiences became central in “The Letter,” as Philip Chandos confides to Francis Bacon in 1603: “In those days I, in a state of continuous intoxication, conceived the whole of existence as one great unit” (132). But this original sanctity of nature and human beings is breaking down in front of Chandos and he bemoans how, through a revelation, he has arrived at a profoundly new level of experience: “I have lost completely the ability to think or to speak of anything coherently…For me everything [has] disintegrated into parts, those parts again into parts…” (133-34). Bourgeois liberalism arrived in East-Central Europe later than in Western Europe, and consequently so did the process of democratization. This delay also brought with it a
speeding-up of fast capitalist development and the ensuing crisis of liberalism, creating a much more conscious and self-aware ideological and historico-philosophical discourse and movement. As Hofmannsthal posits, Lord Chandos is in “an inexplicable condition” (140), which György Lukács in his 1964 essay “The Ideology of Modernity” sees as a result of separating time “from the outer world of objective reality [so that] the inner world of the subject is transformed into a sinister, inexplicable flux and acquires—paradoxically, it may seem—a static character” (204). This foregrounding of the subjective over the objective social experience also signals the loosening of the subject’s relations to the world, creating a more superficial and insecure, a so-called slippery reality (das Gleitende) (cf. Kenyeres 8-9). The Nyugat review in turn-of-the-century Budapest grew out of this modernist crisis surrounding language, literature, the arts, philosophy, psychoanalysis and sociology.

In Chapter One I first offer a brief historical overview of Hungary from the 1867 Consolidation to its place in the Dual Monarchy, with Budapest as the locus of the Hungarian Millennium events. By comparing Budapest and Vienna as progressive central cultural spaces, I provide a context for understanding the underlying elements that allowed the formidable development of print culture from which Nyugat grew. I draw on Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities to help explain conditions in Hungary which fostered concepts of nation specifically with regard to print culture. I discuss how and why members of Nyugat were looking westward in order to define themselves. The notions of both East and West play an important part in the experiences of the Nyugat-generation and their sense of “in-betweenness.” By drawing on Robert Wohl’s and Karl Mannheim’s theories, I also explain how the Nyugat writers can be understood to form a community and a chain of generations interlinked by their precursors, founders and realizers. I briefly survey the history of literary magazines in Hungary and elsewhere in Europe and North America to compare the form, content and structure of the
Nyugat review. Editors of Nyugat defined their publication as “szemle,” that is a “review” which I interchangeably also refer to as a journal, magazine and periodical throughout my dissertation. A significant part of this chapter includes the history of Nyugat from its beginnings in 1908 to 1920, its middle period in 1920-1930, to its dissolution from 1930-1941. I also elaborate on the life stories of some of its members, many of them Jews, in order to present a glimpse into successive generations of Hungarian society, culture, and politics. I contextualize conceptions of literary modernism in Hungary, and emphasize that Nyugat did not initiate modernism in Hungary but rather tapped into an already existing trend while propelling it in a particular direction. I argue that with Nyugat, literature in Hungary reached the zenith of modernism and high culture *en par* with Western Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

Chapter Two looks at the first period of Nyugat through the writings of Margit Kaffka. I begin with a short overview of women authors and the feminist movement in Hungary at the turn of the century, highlighting some of the similarities and differences between Hungarian and other Western women’s movements. Here I point to the significance of women writers and their role in forming modern Hungarian literature and link those ideas to the women authors of Nyugat. One of the most important woman representatives of the early period of Nyugat was Margit Kaffka. I engage with a selection of her works in Nyugat and explicate the symbiotic influence between the author and other members of the journal. Kaffka’s early death left a gap in the contribution made by Hungarian women writers, and her legacy, although well preserved by Nyugat, had begun to diminish. Kaffka’s most accomplished novel, *Színek és évek* [*Colours and Years*], is a prime example of the feminist modern novel. In analyzing the novel I draw on Roland Barthes’s concepts of the narrative code to explore how the reflexive narration of the novel is permeated by the memories of the heroine, Magda Pórtelky. *Colours and Years* is Kaffka’s semi-autobiographical work and it depicts a transition from the traditional values of the gentry to the
new values of the bourgeoisie that affected her generation, providing us with a distinctive view into *fin-de-siècle* Hungarian social structure and culture from which *Nyugat* formed.

Chapter Three encompasses the first, second and partially the third period of *Nyugat* through the figure of Dezső Kosztolányi. Kosztolányi’s expansive influence covers a linguistic revival and an aesthetic emphasis on literary style and content that the journal also benefited from. I depict Kosztolányi’s role in *Nyugat* as a bohemian artist, and by doing so I also offer a view into the early twentieth century bustling metropolis of Budapest in which the magazine thrived. World War I, the Republic of Councils and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy are some of the important points of reference in the poems, short stories, and novels that Kosztolányi published in *Nyugat*. As translation was one of Kosztolányi’s main interests, I draw comparative analyses between his concepts and those of other scholars, including Walter Benjamin who has examined the translator’s task. Kosztolányi’s novella cycle, *Esti Kornél*, which he wrote between 1925 and 1936, portrays the author’s double in the grotesque but also compassionate figure of Kornél Esti. I analyze the narrative structure of the novella by making use of the heterogeneous perspectives found in Hungarian sources and emphasize how Kosztolányi’s attentiveness to language and aestheticism affected the discourse of *Nyugat*. Here I also draw on psychoanalytical concepts along with existentialist themes from Nietzsche concerning the individual, and Derrida’s model of language as a structuring force. Since this publication is not available in English, I translate parts of the original Hungarian text and rely on the French translation, *Le double: les récits funambulesques de Kornél Esti*. Finally, I show how Kosztolányi’s work has been highly influential on Hungarian modernism in general, and on the Generation West and later writers in Hungary in particular.

Chapter Four explores the second and third period of *Nyugat* through Antal Szerb’s works, and the younger generation of writers at the journal who took their cues from Kafka and
Kosztolányi. As a literary historian, Szerb affected Nyugat’s critical, theoretical, and scholarly scope. His treatises on Magyar irodalomtörténet [The History of Hungarian Literature] and A világirodalom története [The History of World Literature] are considered seminal studies of modern literary history that reflect a paradigmatic turn in Hungarian scholarship. These books also fostered a mutual bond between Szerb and Nyugat. Drawing on the German school of intellectual history (Geistesgeschichte), psychoanalysis, and György Lukács’s philosophy, I discuss how Szerb produced a decisive grounding of modern literary studies in Hungary under the aegis of Nyugat, and how his theoretical concepts contextualize his fictional works. His novel Utas és holdvilág [Journey by Moonlight], based on the autobiography of his adolescence in Budapest, engages the concept of nostalgia through a travel in Italy with the rise of fascism in the background. Nostalgia serves as both the structuring element of the novel and also as the embodiment of the main protagonist, Mihály, and for its analysis I make use of Lukács’s The Theory of the Novel. I also discuss how the many layers of literary allusions Szerb employs promote a unique form of intertextuality that marks out a textual stratification of linkages between author/hero and preceding literary figures. I contend that these linkages refer to the ideas of generation and genealogy which resonate throughout Nyugat. Finally, I point out how Szerb and members of Nyugat have become part of the Hungarian collective memory, a premise that serves as segue into my final chapter.

My last chapter is not merely a conclusion that summarizes my previous analyses, but is rather a discussion or a comment on the Nyugat heritage today in Hungary. I advance my analysis of the journal by examining the 100-year anniversary celebrations of Nyugat that took place in Hungary in 2008 in an effort to produce a convincing explanation of how the periodical left a lasting legacy in and impression on Hungary and what it might mean for world literature. To this end, I draw on Maurice Halbwachs’s theory of collective memory along with Paul
Connerton’s concepts of commemoration and remembering. I also contextualize the course of Nyugat’s legacy during the last sixty years and discuss attempts to continue Nyugat by other journals. I elaborate on how during the centennial year numerous events commemorated Nyugat and its authors, including the compilation of online and electronically collected databases of all the issues of the Nyugat journal. Finally, I focus on the Nyugat centennial exhibit held at the Petőfi Literary Museum in Budapest. Museum theory, along with concepts of commemoration help me link the findings with my personal experiences at the museum exhibit and the broader themes addressed in this dissertation. I discuss how and why the reasons for this elaborate celebration and ongoing veneration of Nyugat promote Hungarian literature and culture and in turn perpetuate modernism. In closing, I rearticulate the hopes and aims which have inspired my study by carving out a location for Nyugat and the Generation West in European modernism and world literature.

While the phenomenon of écrivain engagé is certainly not exclusively Hungarian, a peculiar bond between society and artist can be said to be unique to Hungary. Literature plays a special role in Hungarian culture, in part by acting as glue that holds the nation together. Writers and poets are the counselors and healers of Hungarians. In fact, there has been “an almost unbroken succession of poetic apprenticeship and shamanistic inheritance; older poets acting as mentors and welcome influences of younger ones,” as the American poet and scholar Frederick Turner explains (117-18). Today, especially in North America, it is difficult to understand how a community of writers and artists from a small nation in East-Central Europe could stir such a profound and influential literary and cultural movement under the aegis of a journal. My dissertation aims to tell this story. The array of writers and the variety of articles published in the Nyugat journal are so vast that, in the words of the Times Literary Supplement, “[a] full critical assessment of Nyugat would mean narrating the whole story of modern Hungarian literature”
Indeed, the material of *Nyugat* seems almost impenetrable. So instead of offering an all-inclusive study of *Nyugat* and the Generation West, which would require the writing of more than one dissertation, I embark on examining key aspects of *Nyugat* and three of its authors, thereby making its material more accessible for English language scholarship. To this effect, I see my work not as exhaustive or complete, but rather as an invitation to solicit future discussions about *Nyugat* and twentieth century modern literature in Hungary. My study also offers a way of understanding Hungary’s present in light of its recent past, so that contemporary literature and cultural practices that might otherwise appear strange or evident, trivial or complex, can be re-evaluated.

Edward Said notes that “a work’s beginning is, practically speaking, the main entrance to what it offers” (3). If we understand the beginning as an active process rather than a passive state then the question of whether or not there is a “privileged beginning for a literary study” (6) can be answered with our movement through time frames, places, and events “from present to past and back again, from a complex situation to an anterior simplicity” (29). Beginning is also self-reflexive. Following Said, I suggest that “a beginning is a moment when the mind can start to allude to itself and to its products as a formal doctrine” (42) while also acknowledging “the perpetual trap of forced continuity” (43). Siding with Said in “not believing that any beginning can be located,” or that at least beginnings can be understood as indicating “a later time, place, or action…[and] a consequent intention” (5), I place my project on a continuum which stretches from *fin-de-siècle* Hungarian culture to its post-Communist counterpart while allowing what happened in between to play in the background. I prefer to see beginnings as continuities and with this notion in mind I set out to look at the beginning or numberless beginnings and discontinuous continuations of *Nyugat*. 

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CHAPTER ONE

The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Modernization of Budapest

I begin with a brief historical overview of the turn-of-the-century Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in order to contextualize the Nyugat review as a conveyor of the conditions of cultural modernity in Hungary. Hungary began a swift socio-economic transformation from a predominantly (feudalist) agrarian to a semi-industrialist society in the late 1800s at a time when Western Europe had already been transformed from industrialism to monopoly capitalism. This transformation in Hungary is considered to be a delayed but not a singular phenomenon, since other regions of the Austrian Monarchy, the Russian Empire and Spain also experienced deferred industrialization. What instigated these changes was the 1867 Compromise by which Hungary became an equal part of the Habsburg Monarchy. The Compromise, as the British historian Bryan Cartledge explains, “gave Hungary a launching pad from which to develop the attributes of a modern European state” (248). Unlike the English word that originates from the Latin “compromissum,” “compromise” is translated as “kiegyezés” in Hungarian and “Ausgleich” in German, each containing the preposition “out” and the adjective “equal” or “same” which indicates an agreed parity. The Compromise for both Hungary and Austria meant the affirmation of an imperative relationship of mutual dependence. Now both nations were at last able to achieve their own distinct sense of identity, although Hungary was often still viewed as Austria’s other, or even its imitator.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Austria-Hungary was considered the “very core of Europe, and not simply geographically” (Fenyő, LP 1). This notion prompts a comparison between the two capitals, Vienna and Budapest, in terms of their socio-cultural development. As Steven Beller notes, Vienna is seen as the “spiritual capital and symbol not only of itself but of the whole region of which it had been cultural—and political—head” (6). After Paris, the
bohemian art and cultural centre of Europe in the late 1800s, Vienna flourished as a cultural
temple and as an aesthetic and psychological hub, but with a politically alienated new
bourgeoisie (Beller 3). Péter Hanák explains that with the building of the Ringstrasse in the
1860s, which served as a divider in place of the old demolished city wall, Vienna acquired a new
urban structure that fostered a new social and cultural milieu (12). Urban restructuring was
necessary with the sudden growth of population in Vienna, which rose from less than half a
million in the mid-1800s to 1,342,000 by 1890 (Hanák 11). Artistic, educational and social
institutions clustered along the imposing ring-shaped boulevard, giving the city “a sense of
historical authenticity, greatness, and dignity,” which also served as a “communal binding force,
and a sense of home,” while separating the “haute bourgeoisie from the quarters of the…working
classes” (12). Along the Ring, the Viennese bourgeoisie developed a particular ability to shape
new identities.

Mary Gluck contends that we have come to see turn-of-the-twentieth-century Vienna as
“a generalized vision of modernist culture, based on a particular theory about the relationship
between aesthetics and politics” (“Afterthoughts” 264). This vision is largely due to Carl
Schorske’s seminal 1961 book, Fin-de-siècle Vienna, which established a whole repertoire of
cultural concepts for modernism. Gluck suggests that Schorske’s hypothesis ties Vienna’s
political and social developments to a pronounced aesthetic culture in which the children of the
bourgeoisie were able to cultivate their subjectivity and psychic experiences. Schorske describes
the Wiener Moderne as a particular mode of urban reconstruction and aestheticism for the
authentication of the bourgeoisie and their independence from the aristocracy. The Austrian
bourgeoisie gathered around the Ringstrasse and immersed themselves in the “garden of art”
(302), fictional or real, in order “to refract the problem of relating cultural values to a social
structure in transition” (280). Theirs was a “high bourgeoisie unique in Europe for its aesthetic
cultivation, personal refinement, and psychological sensitivity” (298). However, the Austrian bourgeoisie faced socio-political problems and needed a cure for their political impotency, which resulted in resignation. As Schorske argues, “the cure is Bildung, the training of the character in a holistic sense” (281). The genre of the Bildungsroman, to which Adalbert Stifter’s utopian Der Nachsommer belongs, was cultivated by several writers to help the Austrian bourgeoisie regain certain “realistic elements” in their everyday lives (Schorske 281). The “novel of development” depicted their heroic progression out of a feudal-imperial adolescence into adulthood and their own liberated identity. Schorske places great value on the idea of Bildung and suggests that it defined the “public ethos of liberal Austria” by penetrating “deeply into the private sphere” (296). Stifter’s novel had a pedagogic aim and he saw the greatest task of the state in the education of the masses. His novel presented the Austrian, and especially the Viennese bourgeoisie with “a model for personal fulfillment in a cultivated and refined life of ethical perfection” (Schorske 293). Such aestheticism, coupled with a form of political isolation that grieved about how to go on living in a disintegrated world, challenged liberalism and provided the context for the birth of modernism.

Schorske’s historical study located the centre of aestheticist modernism in turn-of-the-century Vienna. However, recent scholarship about fin-de-siècle Vienna challenges Schorske’s metaphorical treatment of the period as a retreat into the garden. Rather than advance claims about the originality of modernism, Gluck argues that “the modernist aesthetic project has come to appear as deeply implicated in the political values, commercial relations, and social practices of the world of bourgeois modernity that it denounced” (“Afterthoughts” 268). Like Gluck, I want to show how modernism was a heterogeneous phenomenon in Hungary within the socio-political context of the Dual Monarchy. To this effect, as Hanák argues, I note that there are two main cultural differences between Vienna and Budapest: one, the Hungarian new bourgeoisie
“solved its identity problems not by withdrawing from the national community but by revising the concept and idea of a nation...[along] with the program of transforming the whole society in a radical, democratic way” (xvi). Second, the ideas of the “national and universally human aspects were not severed or opposed to each other” (xvii). The bourgeois class of Budapest in 1900 was more parvenu and less established than the old Bildungsbürgertum and Besitzbürgertum of Vienna. The Budapest bourgeoisie were often seen as members of a “semibarbaric country” (Schwartz, SV 6). Nonetheless, they were more capable of breaking free from monarchical ideals and habits than their Viennese counterparts. Vienna’s new bourgeoisie, artists and intellectuals secluded themselves in their gardens, and retained a sort of Baroque cultural sensibility combined with their enthusiasm for the theatre, music and eroticism, which they now confirmed in part through the innovative discipline of psychoanalysis. In contrast, the younger and more eclectic bourgeoisie of Budapest did not withdraw into any gardens but “looked to the questions of the future, society, and reform; they wanted to set about building a new Hungary, through art, literature, and culture” (Hanák xxiii). Although modernist developments in Budapest were delayed by a couple of decades, it is important to emphasize that both Vienna and Budapest “affected Europe overall,” which, as Hanák notes, “underlines the argument that the turn-of-the-century cultural boom was by no means an outgrowth of the decaying Monarchy” (64). Hungarian sensibility was also heightened by the Millennium celebration.

1896 was the one-thousandth year anniversary of the Magyars settling [honfoglalás] in the land that is now called Hungary (Cartledge 60; Engel 96). The 1867 Compromise was a necessary prelude for the Millennium because it re-established Hungarians’ sense of autonomy, even if it was within a united dominion. The celebrations were concentrated in the capital city of Budapest (cf. Gerő), and they aimed to express “the immutability of the Hungarian concept of
state…[the] consolidated state existence, which enjoyed a full existence at one time…[and hence was] to be immortalized and made visible,” explains Kálmán Thaly of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1882 (in Gerő 182). To ensure that this concept of consolidation and responsiveness would have a lasting expression, a yearlong celebration was held to include festivals, the launching of the first underground train on the continent, and the creation of memorial sites that gave history a sense of aesthetic permanence. The most colossal among these was the Millennium Monument. Though its construction began in 1896, the Monument was not completed until 1926. The finished Monument, erected on Heroes’ Square [Hősök tere], is comprised of fourteen individual statues of outstanding Hungarian leaders from the settler Chief Árpád to the 1849 Regent-President Lajos Kossuth, and includes two statue clusters representing the seven tribes that founded Hungary with Archangel Gabriel installed on the top of an obelisk. In addition to the Monument, the historic glory of Hungary as a nation was celebrated with many grandiose events of the Millennium which continued into the early 1900s.

In the fever of the Millennium celebrations the capital had acquired a medley of architectural styles with the original buildings of the Renaissance and the Baroque now mixing with neo-Gothic, neo-classical, and Jugendstil (Molnár 227). The movements of the Modern Style (Britain), Art Nouveau (France) or Jugendstil (Germany) between 1890-1910 had a common purpose: to make art, architecture and design part of the everyday. They constructed
buildings with ornaments and ornamental lines based on organic, vegetative or geometric designs which renounced past styles and building forms (Speidel 7). The counterpart of this movement in Austria was known as *Sezessionsstil*, and in Hungary as *Szecesszió* [Secession]. The Viennese art director Max Burckhard first used the word “secessio” after the people of ancient Rome who broke with the city and left for the holy mountain in their protest against the patria’s domination (*secessio plebis in montem sacrum*) (Kenyeres 30). Such a folk-inspired movement caught Burckhard’s attention in the midst of the Viennese artists’ attempts at self-realization with the support of the bourgeoisie. The main motifs of the Viennese *Sezessions-Stil* are geometric forms, mainly the square, which were influenced by Charles Rennie Mackintosh from the Glasgow School of Art (Sterk 11). Generally, though, the forms were limited to decoration and restricted to the outer skin of the building.

At the same time, Hungarian architecture moved towards reconnecting the nation’s past with its folk traditions and the East, where Hungarians’ ancestors originated, and in turn to bolstered the country’s burgeoning national pride. The internationally recognized Vienna *Sezession* did not have many followers in Budapest, despite the proximity of the two cities. The most characteristic attribute among Budapest architects was versatility. As Balázs Dercsényi explains, “they explored the peasant architecture of the mountainous countryside, investigated materials, functions and structural solutions, copied the ornaments on the houses and things of everyday use and made sketches of the remarkable shapes of the roofs” (102). They transformed the capital, modernizing and beautifying the city and allowing it to emerge from its “provincial state” (Gerle 114). No Hungarian architect epitomized the *Szecesszió* style more successfully than Ödön Lechner. Inspired by a variety of sources such as Hungarian folk art, the Austro-Hungarian Romanesque, sculptural symbolizing and organic scrolls, Lechner’s style is Art Nouveau to the extreme, as exemplified by the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest. Lechner
and his followers produced architecture that was both “modern and national” (Ferkai 17), and
their works embodied a language of form by initiating the inclusion of folk art ornamentation as
part of an aspiration for creating a national capital worthy of the Magyars.

But for Westerners Budapest remained a “provincial city filled with exoticism, the capital
of a backward Eastern and semi-feudal district. The border between Austria and Hungary was
the frontier of Western civilization” (Fenyő, LP 2). Against these notions, I want to demonstrate
that Budapest was one of the cultural centers of the Habsburg Empire, along with Vienna and
Prague, completing the geographical triangle of East-Central Europe. In 1873, Budapest was
inaugurated by combining three separate towns: Óbuda, an ancient settlement, Buda, the royal
seat, and Pest, a small town of peasants, craftsmen and fishermen (Molnár 227). Budapest’s
Millennium construction expansion was influenced by the Viennese affinity for arranging the
cityscape along boulevards. According to Hanák, the “urbanization of Budapest did not lag
behind Vienna’s in any way” (12). Along with the rise of population from 270,000 to 1.1 million
between 1869 and 1910, the number of buildings grew from 9,300 to 17,000 in Budapest (Hanák
12). Many of the new buildings and their inhabitants concentrated around the new boulevards,
Nagykörút [Grand Boulevard], Sugárút [Radial Road], or as it now known Andrássy út
[Andrássy Road], and Kiskörút [Small Boulevard], that is, Ferenc and József körút [Franz and
Joseph Roads]. The construction of the 4.5 km Nagykörút began in 1871 and was completed in
time for 1896 (Hanák 12). It links Buda and Pest, the inner and outer districts of the capital. As
Hanák argues, the Nagykörút is similar in nature to the Ringstrasse, but instead of its “‘divisive’”
effect in Vienna, it has a binding effect (13, 14). In contrast to the Ringstrasse’s imposing
buildings, the boulevards in Budapest are crammed with apartment buildings, offices, stores,
workshops, a railway station and numerous road junctions and intersections, and most
importantly for my purposes, countless coffee houses. Such structures combined and blended the
various classes and ethnicities of the population rather than separating them. The changing
cultural scene and the cityscape mutually influenced the transformation of Budapest. By 1910
Budapest had become an exultant symbol of urbanism and bourgeois progress comparable with
the grandeur of Vienna.

In the wake of the Compromise and Millennium, Hungary, with Budapest as its fulcrum,
began its swift transformation from a primarily feudal to a semi-capitalist society where
intellectuals, many of them Jewish, created a vibrant cultural milieu. Budapest became a
“national space” for Hungarians and for the many assimilated minorities in Hungary, all of
whom could participate in this “deliberate process with a nationalist end” (Gerő 175).
Nationalization also meant assimilation, whereby a large portion of the population became
assimilated to Hungarian culture. This tendency is an important fact, because in spite of the
growing number of urban middle classes, over 20 percent of them were born abroad (Glatz 13).
Historians argue that “the identity of the Hungarian ‘half’ of the Habsburg ‘whole’ was far better
defined than that of its other components…the Magyar sense of identity was respected” (Molnár
209; cf. Cartledge 276-87). The Hungarian proponents of the Compromise, such as Ferenc Deák
and Count József Eötvös,1 emphasized in their charters the idea of Hungarian “self-conscience”
[“önlelkiismeret”]—the responsibility to maintain Hungarian identity and independence in the
legacy of the nation’s founding fathers—in an attempt to distinguish Hungary from Austria and
from Eastern Europe (Kosáry 414). Half of the population in the Dual Monarchy was neither
Hungarian nor Austrian. These ethnicities, including Croat, Slovak, Swabian, Romanian, Serb,
and Jewish, often suffered from negligence and marginality. Deák’s famous Nationalities Act of
1868 gave protection to the various ethnicities that were citizens of Hungary, but their

1 Ferenc Deák (1803-1876) was a Hungarian politician and the leader of the delegation of the Compromise.
Count József Eötvös (1813-1871) was a Hungarian writer, statesman and education reformer. Along with Deák, he
was the chief proponent of the Compromise in Count Gyula Andrássy’s cabinet.
parliamentary representatives rejected the Act (Cartledge 277-78). Comparably, already during the 1848-49 Revolution and War against the Habsburgs, Lajos Kossuth, in recognition of their support, “proclaimed the emancipation of the Jews” (Kadarkay 8), and then in 1867 the parliament passed Eötvös’s bill, establishing equal rights for Jews in Hungary. The 1867 liberalizing measures “acknowledged and encouraged the increasingly important role of Jews in the life of the Hungarian nation and their growing assimilation into the Magyar community” (Cartledge 271). In particular, liberal political and cultural institutions encouraged assimilation and even the ennobling of many ethnic Jews in Hungary, who not only learnt the Hungarian language and customs, but also Hungarianized their names (cf. Fenyő LP; Kadarkay; Cartledge).

Hungarian nationalism had to succeed within the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire, where the elite relied heavily on Jewish financial backing for maintaining political liberalism. Along with its Magyarising aims, the 1867 Compromise also enabled the liberal democratization of Hungary at the end of the nineteenth century.

Around the late 1890s, conservative forces emerged and demanded more attention to the project of nationhood, mostly through emotional appeals and references to the tradition of Hungarian ancestors and the pastoral times of the medieval period. Their efforts were decidedly anti-capitalist and reactionary; they idealized the dispossessed gentry as the embodiment of Hungary and guardians of Hungarian culture and language. The great landowners, the aristocracy and the gentry outnumbered the bourgeois class in power and influence as representatives of Hungary in the Parliament (Fenyő, LP 15). As Gluck explains, the signs of breakdown began to show with new right-radical nationalists of the gentry class, anti-Semitic mass movements, and Slavic nationalists assuming a powerful voice against Hungary’s liberals. But this trend was not unique to Hungary because at the same time conservative ideologies also came into fashion
across Western Europe (Gluck, GL 56). Under the leadership of Mayor Karl Lueger, Jews in Vienna faced increasing discrimination. As Paul Hofmann explains, “Lueger’s Christian Social Party proclaimed itself the advocate of the little people who resented corruption in City Hall, the power of industrialists and the banks, and Jewish influence in business and cultural life” (142). Meanwhile, Hungary pressed on with “Magyarising policies,” which aimed at incorporating the ethnic groups, especially the Jews, thereby ensuring their “loyalty to the Hungarian state,” primarily through the use of Magyar as the official language (Cartledge 279). While anti-Semitism in Vienna had become widespread by the early 1900s, during the same period, Jews became the most assimilated and protected in Hungary within Europe (see Cartledge 273). Any anti-Semitic movements were quickly extinguished, following the legacy of Kossuth who considered such infractions a national shame. Until the early 1930s when fascist pogroms made their way into Hungary, Jews enjoyed equality, feeling “at home in the haza [homeland], as much as one with their Christian Magyar compatriots, as much [a] part of the great important cultural entity in Europe” (Cartledge 273). Among all the ethnic groups of the country, the Jewish population became the most Hungarianized, and it enjoyed the most integrated existence within Hungary.

Bryan Cartledge’s demographical survey shows that the Jewish population in Hungary “grew from 343,000 in 1857 to 407,800 in 1859, to 624,700 in 1880 and to 910,000—8.5 per cent of the total population—in 1910” (270). Data that I have found in the *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv 1909* [1909 Hungarian Statistics Yearbook] also indicates that based on birthrate the Izraelita [Jewish] population increased threefold by 1900 (17). In fact, the majority of the Jewish population lived in Budapest and comprised 23 per cent of the inhabitants of the capital city by 1910. A large proportion of Hungary’s Jews had gained dominance in the growing

2 Karl Lueger (1844-1910) was the Mayor of Vienna from 1897-1910. His notorious anti-Semitism gave ammunition to Adolf Hitler’s concept of Jew-hatred.
manufacturing and banking areas, many of them as the most patriotic members of Hungarian society who were often ennobled for their work and loyalty. Some of the well-known Jews in millennial Hungary were the bankers Zsigmond Kornfeld, Mór Wahrmann, Ármin Brull-Biró, industrialists Péter Herzog and the Ganz and Goldberger families, ministers József Szterényi and Baron Samu Hazai, and the cinema pioneers György Czukor and Mihály Kertész, scholars Ármin Vámbéry, Gyula König, and Gyula Szekfű just to name a few (cf. McCagg). They were indisputably significant agents of Hungary’s modernization, gaining powerful positions beyond their numbers compared to any other country, and eager to assimilate into Hungarian culture (see Cartledge 271). The Jewish upper-middle classes took on an important role in urban cultural development and contributed to the “emergence of talent in Hungary” which intensified “interdisciplinary cross-fertilization and fermentation” (Fenyő, LP 6). As the Hungarian-American historian Mario D. Fenyő argues in his Literature and Political Change, Jewish and part-Jewish intellectuals and artists represented a “relatively homogenous stratum” (7). However, interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarian artists and scholars became prevalent in certain groups. According to Fenyő, “the ethnic factor was not a cause, but a symptom” (LP 7); thus “the explanation of the prominence and achievement of these groups of individuals…is to be sought not in their ethnos, but in their ethos” (LP 6). A remarkable collaboration of Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians represented a decisive element in the Hungarian socio-cultural turn in the wake of the Compromise.

Likewise in Vienna, Steven Beller argues, Jews similarly played a large role in the development of that city’s modernist culture (7). While the linking of Jewish traditions as a major influence on modern Viennese culture “threatened to make Vienna 1900 only a special instance of [a] larger phenomenon” (Beller 9), in Hungarian society it gained a manifest

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momentum. According to Mary Gluck, Jews played a “disproportionately large role in the modernization of Hungary…[where] by the late nineteenth century, Jews made up 5 percent of the total population of Hungary but supplied 12.5 percent of the industrialists, 54 percent of the businessmen, 43 percent of the bankers and moneylenders, 45 percent of the lawyers, and 49 percent of the doctors” (GL 58). Traditionally the Hungarian aristocracy and the gentry occupied these professions, and so for them, and “in the eyes of much of the population, Jews inevitably became the symbolic representatives of capitalism, and the living embodiment of all the alien, destructive tendencies of the modern world” (Gluck, GL 58). On the other hand, in her “The Budapest Flâneur: Urban Modernity, Popular Culture, and the ‘Jewish Question’ in Fin-de-Siècle Hungary,” Gluck questions how large a role the Jews might have had and contends that Budapest Jews were for the most part invisible. She examines the Budapest Jewish culture through a discussion of Adolf Agai’s collection of vignettes, entitled Voyage from Pest to Budapest, 1843-1907, and argues that although the Jewish presence in Budapest was an undeniable fact, “many Jews experienced, and continue to experience, their situation as if they were invisible” (4). The invisibility of Jews is a paradoxical phenomenon that causes problems for Jewish identity. Gluck sees this issue as indicative of an “alternate conception of self and culture that constituted a subversive subtext to the liberal ideology of Jewish emancipation and, ironically, deflated celebrations of Jewish acculturation…Jewish Budapest was ‘invisible’ precisely because it did not, could not, and would not envision Jewishness as a distinct religious, ethnic, or national identity” (4). In this shadow of invisibility, upper and middle class Jews often lived “double lives as patriotic citizens and as ironic flâneurs” (19). The subcultural world of entertainment provided a recovered identity for many Jews, often in the guise of humour and transgression.

It is important to stress here that the creation of an ethnic identity also went along with the conception of a language community of culture in Hungary. To this effect, Hanák argues that
“the Hungarian spoken by the assimilated Jews was…mixed and represented a…characteristic way of speech” which blended “Yiddish with literary German, and then with Hungarian words” (50). Cartledge explains that the Jews in Hungary, unlike the various Slavic ethnic groups, “had no reason to resist the adoption of the Magyar language as their own; on the contrary, assimilation into the culture of the nation that had now accorded them equality of rights seemed logical and the natural road to advancement” (271). One could be Jewish and Hungarian at once, linked by language. Jewish writers, figures of culture and politics occupied a special position, and can be seen as having a bi-cultural identity. The contemporary Jewish-Hungarian writer György Konrád explains that “what a Jew writes is Jewish literature, but it can also be Hungarian or other national literature” (178). This double identity further entails being part of a larger community: “Being Hungarian in Europe means not being alone. It means that among a hundred Europeans of various national persuasions we can expect a few Hungarians as well…Being European in Hungary means learning biblical democracy, in other words, that we are equals in every situation” (15). For Konrád, as for many Jewish Hungarians, then and now, one identity does not exclude the other. A dual identity, Hungarian and Jewish at once, locates difference in sameness, but in a way which is at odds with the prevailing view of nationalism. I wish to emphasize the possibilities of this bi-cultural identity and formulate it as part of the concept of in-betweenness that many members of the Hungarian artistic and intellectual circles experienced. I will elaborate on this notion further below and in subsequent chapters.

In contrast to the Austrian view then, I propose to see the Hungarians of Budapest—Jews and non-Jews—especially writers and artists, as having recognized the demise of bourgeois developments and various political crises at the turn of the 1900s. They expressed those observations in works which were driven and inspired by the radical changes of Hungarian
society and which were seen by forward-looking politicians and intellectual figures of the Compromise as guiding lights. The Hungarian comparatist László Ferenczi argues that modern Hungarian literature…emerged against a background that was far from [being] intellectually isolated, introspective or backward-looking; it was an open environment, which looked to the future and was able to incorporate foreign influences in a sovereign manner. The environment was one in which the works of Marx, Nietzsche, Ferrero, Bergson and Freud were known to every educated man or woman. (125)

In part due to Hungary’s delayed yet all-the-more rapid socio-cultural transformation, divergent currents from Symbolism, Naturalism, to Art Nouveau, Impressionism and Futurism seemed to have arrived in the country simultaneously. In the early 1910s, Budapest was host to international exhibits of works by Picasso, Kandinsky and the Italian futurists (Ferenczi 125), and translations of poetry by Russian and Belgian Symbolists, German Expressionists, and others were published in several collections. Many artists and intellectuals of Budapest, like those in Vienna, Prague and Berlin, had experienced what Fenyő called, a “process of cross-fertilization,” realized by the cultural figures of these cities who moved among them (LP 4). However, it cannot be considered “simply [a] coincidence that a certain group of intellectuals gathered in Budapest at a particular time. Nor is it sufficient to argue that all the creative activity that ensued was simply fermentation due to a certain lack of barriers…between the sciences and the arts” and between ethnic backgrounds (Fenyő, LP 4). What made these developments possible was partially the emergence of the liberal political institutions in the wake of the Compromise. These institutions encouraged and “favored a certain type of cultural development” (LP 5). This historical and cultural context enabled the foundation and operation of many new journals and magazines in Hungary, among them the Nyugat journal, which in turn further fostered the idea of an independent Hungary and the modernization of culture.

Cultural and artistic fermentation took place most often in the ubiquitous coffee houses of Budapest. In the early 1900s, there were over six hundred coffee houses in Budapest, more than
in Vienna during the same period (Cartledge 299; cf. Fenyő, *LP* 2; Saly; Schorske). These cafés were part of what Cartledge describes as “the new splendour of the capital, with its boulevards… its vibrant intellectual and cultural life [that was also] reflected in the theatres, concert halls and cabarets” where men and women met (299). They discussed art, politics and literature to a degree that affected not only Hungary but also the world. Among them were artists, scholars, poets and writers who became known as the “Nyugat-generation,” the contributors of the *Nyugat* magazine. In search of new ideologies and means of expression, they met daily in such coffee houses as Central, New York, and Bristol along the boulevards (Fenyő, *LP* 2). Sipping coffees and cognac, savouring confectioneries or a dish of paprikash, and smoking thick cigars while playing cards and chess, they enthusiastically debated and exchanged ideas, encouraged and inspired each other. Most authors wrote their key works in these establishments. They, in effect, lived in these cafés, forming a cultural community ripe with aspirations for a new and better world. Coffee shops catered to their clients’ needs not only with food and drinks; they also carried most Hungarian and European newspapers and magazines, writing pads, pens and ink, called “kutyanyelv” [“dogtongue”], books and dictionaries. Patrons ran tabs and waiters frequently lent money to them in view of their forthcoming published pieces. Frigyes Karinthy, one of *Nyugat*’s chief contributors, coined the term for the coffee shop clientele—including himself—as “Homo Caffeaticus Litterarius” (PLM Virtual). The experience of these writers and artists is not comparable with that of today’s pseudo coffee house culture where dispersed individuals sip grande lattes and tap on laptops. Although, my description may well exoticize and hyperbolize the milieu of these coffee shops in Budapest, it is clear that they held a significance for artists and intellectuals. To support my point I draw on Fredric Jameson’s observations on the differentiation of ideology. In his “Preface” to *Marxism and Form*, he argues that we must “reorder” and “restructure” our awareness of “the historical present,” the “modern society” we
live in (xvi). Our thinking has gone through a “new politicization” (xvi) compared to the reality that existed prior to World War II. The early 1900s was characterized by “a simpler Europe and America which no longer exists” (xvii). I also want to emphasize Jameson’s point that the twentieth century “had more in common with the life forms of earlier centuries than it did with our own” (xvii). While I agree with Jameson that “it was a world in which social conflict was sharpened and more clearly visible” (xvii), I also see within such a seemingly homogeneous society complex forces which play a mitigating role in the relationship of these individuals to their world. In the next section I examine the concept of generation in relation to the members of the *Nyugat* magazine and how the impact of print media developments transformed the society, its writers and artists along with the reading public.

**Generation, Nation and Print Media**

In his sweeping survey of *The Generation of 1914*, Robert Wohl asserts that until the early twentieth century the term generation denoted the dichotomous relationship between older and younger people living approximately at the same time, such as fathers versus sons. “Generational consciousness,” however, had developed as a result of a new understanding of time and change already evident in the late 1700s (Wohl 204). Wohl explains that an accumulation of conflict between fathers and sons, where sons began to see their fathers’ values as oppressive, was not the only cause of ensuing generational consciousness in Europe. Rather, by the late 1800s the “weakening of traditional forms of social identification and a growing sense of collective (as opposed to individual or local) destiny,” along with the fading of “regional and religious differences,” the participation of the masses in politics, the uniformity of fashion through faster means of manufacturing and communication, the encroachment of national languages over dialects, standardization of public education and cityscapes—modeled after
Haussmann’s Paris—and the growth of print media all played important roles in the development of concepts about generation (207). Wohl considers “the rise of generational consciousness” as a “side effect of the coming of mass society” (207), which operated *en par* with the “premise that youth was a superior and privileged stage of life, beyond which lay degeneration” (205). A sharing of age and common destiny shaped the consciousness of this generation, and a new century fostered their sensibilities to see themselves as distinct.

According to Wohl, people born between 1880 and 1900 represent the particular generation that was able to break most seriously from their fathers’ generation by recognizing and responding to an overarching “sense of discontinuity” that was lurking at the threshold of the *fin-de-siècle* (207). Sons of the aristocracy and the new bourgeoisie were now attending the same schools and developing intellectual interests together while demanding social and cultural change. They embodied a “specific social group: literary intellectuals” along with philosophers, sociologists and psychoanalysts such as Freud, Bergson, Weber, Mannheim, and Pareto (Wohl 208, 212). Furthermore, Wohl contends, the “generation of 1914,” named after their shared experiences of World War I, was a self-promoting and self-describing cohort of intellectuals, a “project of hegemony over other social classes that derived its credibility and its force from circumstances that were unique to European men born during the last two decades of the nineteenth century” (209). This young generation’s idealism, grievances, and sense of rupture from their forefathers’ world ushered in a new culture with a new worldview. They saw themselves as different and unique, but most of all, as a generation. Theirs was the generation of modernity.

What ties people together in a generation? The Hungarian-born sociologist Karl (Károly) Mannheim suggests that a generation is like a *location* in society. Following August Comte, Mannheim explains that “the average generation period [is] 30 years” (277). In his seminal essay
from 1928 “The Problem of Generations,” Mannheim provides a historical outline and sociological method for interpreting the concepts behind the notion of generation. Mannheim argues against adopting a “unilinear conception of progress” when defining generation, and suggests, after the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, that the problem of generations is “the problem of existence of an interior time that cannot be measured but only experienced in purely qualitative terms” (281). A generation denotes an experience of people of similar age living together at a given time. To express this abstract notion, Mannheim envisions a utopian society encompassing an “ideal type” where only one perpetual generation exists with none of its members dying. But what happens when, as in reality, many generations live within a same time period? Mannheim explains that “each generation builds up an ‘entelechy’ of its own by which means alone it can really become a qualitative unity…the unity of its ‘inner aim’—of its inborn way of experiencing life and the world” (283). Generation for Mannheim therefore is not a compartmentalized order, but constitutes rather a perpetual flow with dialectical influences.

While Mannheim does not base or apply his concepts on an existing society, they are helpful for our understanding of how Nyugat writers represent the culmination of a particular Hungarian generation in a given time, place, and intellectual context. As I understand Mannheim’s thesis, the experience of a generation is bound by a particular spatio-temporality: “Members of a generation are ‘similarly located’…in so far as they are exposed to the same phase of the collective process” (297). In this regard, the Nyugat-generation at the turn of the twentieth century was located in such a way that they all experienced Hungary’s rapid social and cultural transformation, from feudalism to modernity, from within a political, geographical and cultural place. As Mannheim argues, it is not that “people are born at the same time, or that their youth, adulthood, and old-age coincide” at a given location, that makes them into a generation (287); rather, it is a similar location that allows these people to “experience the same event and data,”
which Mannheim defines as the “phenomenon of the ‘stratification’ of experience (Erlebnisschichtung),” or “a similarity [of] ‘stratified’ consciousness” (297). This “stratification of experience” is what made Nyugat writers into a generation, which then provided the basis for the formation of subsequent literary generations. Mannheim’s concepts help me make sense of the generational phenomenon Hungarians conceptualize as the “nyugatosok” [“westerners”] or the “Nyugat nemzedék,” [Nyugat-generation”] which I call in turn the “Generation West.” The Generation West was comprised of the creators and members of the Nyugat review, and lasted a little over thirty years, from 1908 to 1941. Indeed, Nyugat encompasses and embodies a full generation under the parameters of Mannheim’s model.

In the early 1900s Hungarian society was “hybrid”: it was “neither wholly feudal nor wholly bourgeois, [and yet] seemed to have broken the continuity in the western tradition,” as the Lukács historian Árpád Kadarkay explains (102). Young intellectuals and artists in turn-of-the-century Hungary, like elsewhere in Europe, wanted radical change in culture and a society that was distinguishable from that of their forefathers:

The unsociable sons, rejecting family and society, congregated in circles whose erotic and ascetic values ripened into new wants that collided head-on with social values. These angry sons, each of whom felt his life defaced and disfigured, and his human experience embittered, were convinced that a new culture could be born out of their own unsociability. (Kadarkay 60)

These Hungarian intellectuals, many of them Jewish—and in the eyes of Christian Hungarians were therefore “overdeveloped” for Hungarian society—sought a resolution to their desolation (cf. Kadarkay 60). They met at coffee houses or gathered in groups, such as Lukács’s Vasárnapikör [Sunday Circle] at Balázs’s apartment in Buda, or the more science-driven Galileo Circle, and the Bembe Circle4 whose members identified themselves as avant-garde, Fauvist and

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4 The acronym “Bembe kör” [“Bembe Circle”] stood for Budapest’s first Bolzano Circle, named after the Italian Catholic priest, mathematician and philosopher Bernard Bolzano (1781-1848). It was spearheaded by Jenő Varga.
Freudian. Their main purpose was to find an alternative to the Hungarian cultural and social milieu, which they saw as lagging behind Western currents. They looked for a “cultural rebirth and integration”; they wanted to liberate their own souls from the spiritual crisis of official Hungary (Gluck, GL 12, 64). By 1908, most of the writers, artists and intellectuals who joined Nyugat witnessed the end of relative political stability in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy’s liberal hegemony and the beginning of ever-worsening constitutional, political, and social conflicts which would eventually lead to the end of the Monarchy in 1918 (cf. Gluck, GL 44).

The late nineteenth century seemed “excessively negative” for them with its “cerebral and individualistic temper,” and political liberalism and positivism seemed to be outdated models of praxis (Gluck, GL 5). This young generation of artists and intellectuals longed to “live once again in a harmonious and integrated culture” (8) and were convinced that the rebirth of culture would “give rise to a new, synthetic culture of the twentieth century” (9). In order to hasten in this new period, they sought to establish solid norms and secure their ethical idealism within a current of metaphysical spirituality.

In her study Georg Lukács and his Generation 1900-1918, Mary Gluck links the portrait of Lukács’s generation with larger historical forces in a way that helps me expand my argument about the Generation West. Within a heterogeneous group—based on class, wealth, status, occupation, and ethnic origins—what is characteristic collectively across almost all of the Nyugat-generation is what Gluck describes in defining Lukács’s generation: “longings for unity, affirmation, inner truthfulness, and simplicity, after what they perceived as the excessively negative, cerebral, and individualistic temper of the late nineteenth century” (GL 5). Lukács and many of his peers along with other Nyugat members were “the children, or at most the grandchildren, of humble Jewish peddlers, artisans, shopkeepers, and merchants; and memories
of their common past were not entirely erased from their consciousness” (GL 47). Moreover, they defied their parents’ values, especially their bourgeois urban comfort and laissez-faire liberalism, and against these values sought salvation in messianic or metaphysical beliefs. They rejected and were estranged from their parents’ generation, which considered them unreliable and “untrustworthy” (GL 65). Instead, they shared a “mood of hopefulness” that seemed to comprise “contradictory elements, held together by a passionate, almost eschatological…despair and elation” (GL 5). They also rejected the “dualism between body and soul,” and intended to “integrate the physical and the spiritual in a life-affirming totality” (GL 6) while comprehending their life through a “nostalgic awareness” of the past which they used as an “instrument of criticism against the present, as well as a model of integrity and synthesis for the future” (GL 7). The new intellectual attitude they created, based on the ideologies of a synthesized culture, often had its roots in pristine and primitive folklore, such as folk music, tales and crafts, and yet they did not transplant those directly into their own works. What they retained and captured from their upbringing was their own childhood, and their youthful rebellion against parental authority. As Gluck argues, it is not the revolt against their parents that is peculiar to Lukács’s generation, because “that is characteristic of most young children. What is noteworthy is that they carried over these impulses and intuitions into adult life; that they chose these particular details as the defining characteristics of their early worlds and as the measuring rods of their mature cultural strivings” (GL 68). I want to avoid any misleading impression concerning the infantile character of Lukács and the Nyugat-generation that Gluck’s argument might prompt. With reference to these notions, what I intend to show more closely in the works of Kaffka, Kosztolányi and Szerb in the subsequent chapters is how the “irrational, magical attributes of childhood” (GL 68) constitute a powerful force in the intellectual and artistic output and identity formation of their generation.
Indeed, the idea of generation was born out of the need for a collective identity. Wohl’s
concepts about the generation of intellectuals in the early 1900s help us further understand the
Generation West’s experience:

The generation of this age group had been brought up to revere the nation and to believe
that the interests of the national community stood above the interests of classes or any
international body. Their ambition, conceived in youth, had been to overcome the
ideologies of the nineteenth century, to revive the spirit of adventure and risk, to live for
the values of the spirit rather than for material advantage, and to combine the virtues of
the warrior and the man of faith. They were radical in their dislike of the industrial and
commercial civilization of the present, but deeply ambivalent about the values of the
preindustrial past. (231)

The Generation West experienced these anti-bourgeois impulses and cultural crises of their age,
which they addressed in theoretical and literary writings. For them, as for other Europeans, moral
and intellectual values were over-determined by economic and social factors. Theirs was a
difficult task which, following Wohl’s argument, can be seen as “the transition from an elitist to
a mass and bureaucratic society, while at the same time resigning themselves to the relative
shrinkage of the power both of their own nation in particular and of Europe in general” (235).
Although education was a determining force in the transformation of this generation’s way of
thinking, the ideals they further developed about a new culture, however, were not part of the
school curriculum.

This small group of the elite operated at once as both a cultural workshop and a social
forum with Nyugat embodying their stratified generational consciousness. It was a workshop of
language and literature, where writers and editors worked as a community drawing up new
interpretations of literary criticism, style, method, and discourse. Mutually influencing and
inspiring each other, they changed the Hungarian language by ridding it of its clunky and
provincial structure, grammar and vocabulary, which I shall elaborate on in relation to the works
of Kafkka, Kosztolányi and Szerb. Hungarians have adopted and implemented this modernized
manner of speech and writing ever since. Mannheim’s analysis is all the more helpful then when we consider his suggestion that “only where contemporaries definitely are in a position to participate as an integrated group in certain common experiences can we rightly speak of community of location of a generation” (298). Such a fertile environment was the forum where contributors of Nyugat fought for independent critical thought, debated issues of social and artistic conflict, and gave expression to a new cosmopolitan national identity parallel to the efforts of Western European intellectual and artistic circles.

A concern with cultural legacy was part of the experiences of the Nyugat-generation. That is, they were shaped by the Hungarian way of life, by traditions, attitudes and feelings that were particular to Hungarians within the overarching influence of the Habsburg Monarchy. Mannheim’s description can enable us to further see how this generation negotiated its existence within such a context: “Experiences are not accumulated in the course of a lifetime through a process of summation or agglomeration, but are ‘dialectically’ articulated” (298). In fact, these experiences are enacted and tried out through participation, and specifically through what Mannheim calls the “participation in the common destiny” which binds together the “historical and social unit” of generation (303). The Generation West experienced a common bond “by their being exposed to the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic de-stabilization” (303). Their aim was to transform Hungarian society and culture once and for all. Mannheim cites Heidegger in explaining the “qualitative relationship” that situates “the inescapable fate of living in and with one’s generation [that] completes the full drama of individual human existence” (282). Generation West, as I have suggested before, was not a homogeneous unit. Each member represented and aligned him or herself with divergent movements, political parties, and classes. What held them together was a common goal and a belief in their collective fate
which they sought to realize through the reform of literature and culture. For this task, literary magazines served as the means for expressing themselves and conveying their views to readers.

Earlier I referred to how Hungarian nationalism had gained prominence through the use of the Magyar language. Now I shall elaborate on this argument by pointing out the importance of print media. I make use of the concept which Benedict Anderson calls “imagined communities,” and I adopt his argument with regard to print culture against what Ernest Gellner says about nationalism and nation. In his influential *Nation and Nationalism*, Gellner suggests that the invention of industrial society plays the key role for the development of a society’s self-consciousness. While education and culture are essential to a nation’s self-recognition, Gellner contends, their functionality is dependent on state politics and sanctions: “nationalism emerges only in milieu in which the existence of the state is already very much taken for granted” (4). In this way, he addresses the concept of “one state and one culture,” which is preceded by industrial development. In opposition to Gellner’s argument which interlinks nationalism and production, Anderson emphasizes the ambiguity around the definitions of “nation,” and he interprets nation and nationalism as “cultural artefacts of a particular kind” (4). Anderson’s argument includes and also supersedes Gellner’s by focusing on print media. For Anderson, culture determines nation only insofar as the nation is “an imagined political community” where no members of any nation ever know all their fellow-members, but only “imagine” their existence and membership in their “community.” That is, “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (6-7). Crucial to Anderson’s thesis is the “idea of simultaneity” to which the printing press in particular already gives rise from the fifteenth century on (24). It is with books and newspapers that people begin to conceptualize their everyday lives by imagining other human beings’ existence simultaneously; hence sameness and difference operate concurrently:

No surprise then that the search was on, so to speak, for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together. Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search,
nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly
growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others,
in profoundly new ways. (Anderson 36)

Since print media depends on language, demanding and making a reading public that uses a
particular language in a particular geographic location, such media facilitate new technological
and capitalist developments while paving the way to imagined communities which share a
national, ethnic and subjective consciousness. Anderson evokes exactly this imaginary condition
with specific reference to Hungary in the 1700s and 1800s: “If ‘Hungarians’ deserved a national
state, then that meant Hungarians, all of them; it meant a state in which the ultimate locus of
sovereignty had to be the collectivity of Hungarian-speakers and readers” (82). The creation of a
reading and speaking collectivity is of course not a solely Hungarian goal.

The Canadian literary critic Louis Dudek explains how in England by the late 1700s the
purpose of publishing, especially of newspapers and magazines, was “to disseminate useful
knowledge among all ranks of people at a small expense” (98). People were “hungry for factual
knowledge” which inexpensively mass-published rudimentary “digests of history, science, and
practical arts,” such as the Penny Magazine (Dudek 98, 100). Before the present digital era,
paper was a crucial medium of communication: “it was the main delivery system for radical
ideas” (Heller 6). Beside paper and Gutenberg’s printing press, what made the mass-production
of magazines possible in England and also in Hungary was the printing process called
“stereotyping,” followed by “electrotyping” and “photo-engraving” which enabled on a large-
scale the reproduction of pictures and photographs (Dudek 90). As Dudek explicates, after the
French inventor Claude Genoux’s stereotyping “wet matrix process” in 1828, the Germans
further improved the mechanization of printing by using a “dry pulp” or “wood pulp” and adding
“a printing plate made by electric deposition of a metal on a mold of…soft substance” (94).
Newspapers and magazines also benefited from the development of photography in using this
halftone or screen method. By the late 1800s, magazines with colour images and photographs served general and specialized purposes to entertain and inform audiences of all classes. Technological developments led to fast and efficient rotary presses and paper made from wood pulp drastically reduced production costs, allowing for low-priced newspapers and magazines. A new kind of literary magazine, “the literary weekly,” began to be popularized in England during the second half of the 1800s, such as Thomas Carlyle’s and Walter Pater’s *Athenaeum* and J.F. Stephen’s *Sunday Review*, which were concerned not with publishing new literature but with “critical comment, reviews of books…and timely discussion” (Dudek 113). The interlinking of industrial developments, the extension of literacy and the creation of new reading markets, particularly in urban areas, promoted new conditions for writers and readers.

What print media meant for Hungarians by the 1860s was a combination of civic liberty and nationalism which fostered “economic transformation brought about by industrial and commercial progress,” and which enabled the weak and diffident Hungarian middle-class to rise against the stronghold of the aristocracy (Molnár 226). They were the very readers or consumers of print media essential to the battle for national sovereignty and capitalist progress. As Anderson explains, following the anti-Latin and pro-German linguistic *Hausmacht* efforts of Emperor Joseph II’s and the linguist Ferenc Kazinczy’s Hungarian language reforms, Hungarian nationalism was in large part championed by literate people using Hungarian as their primary language. I want to emphasize also, following the Hungarian historian István Nemeskürtty, that the Hungarian language, like all languages, articulates and manifests a certain way of thinking. While Hungarians today hardly have any biological or genetic links to the settling Magyars of the 800s A.C.E. (Nemeskürty 9), they share a sense of how their

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5 Ferenc Kazinczy (1759-1831) was a Hungarian author and linguist. As a chief leader of the Language Reforms, Kazinczy coined, reformulated and revived thousands of words and expressions making Hungarian language applicable for contemporary science and literature. Through his efforts Hungarian became the official language of the nation, including the language of the Parliament, in 1844.
“gondolatkincs” or “treasure of thought” has been passed down to them and defined how they perceive and experience the world (17). The concept of the “treasure of thought” can be considered as the cerebral inheritance of Hungarians. To this effect, the spread of print-Magyar helped convey a particular way of thinking. As Anderson suggests, “the growth of a small, but energetic liberal intelligentsia all stimulated a *popular* Hungarian nationalism” (102-3) which, I suggest, was intertwined with the emancipation of Hungary’s Jewry. As I show in the following sections, *Nyugat* in this respect became a focal point for the Hungarian “imagined community” and epitomized the moment where popular vernacular converged with aestheticism, high culture and scholasticism.

Readers in Hungary have enjoyed a variety of print media since the early 1700s, including several literary and cultural journals, many of them in German, some in the language of various ethnicities, and others in Hungarian. The *Hungarian Electronic Library* website offers a detailed overview of “The History of Hungarian Print Media” from as early as 1705. Accordingly, during the Hungarian Enlightenment and Jacobin Movement of the late 1700s such papers gained prominence as the *Magyar Kurir, Magyar Merkur*, and *Der Mann Ohne Vorurteil*. In the early 1800s the poet, Mihály Vörösmarty’s journal *Tudományos Gyűjtemény [Scientific Collection]* provided an outlet for writers, poets, and scholars along with *Kritikai Lapok [Critics’ Papers], Athenaeum*, and *Felső Magyar Országi Minerva [Upper Hungarian Minerva]*. During the Reform era new magazines appeared and promoted cultural progress, such as *Regélő-Homművészet [Stories of Homegrown Art], Pesti Salon [Pest Salon]*, and *Jelenkor [Present]*. By the late 1800s, most of these magazines had died out and were replaced by *Szépirodalmi Közlöny [Literary Bulletin], Delibáb [Mirage]*, and the poet János Arany’s *Szépirodalmi Figyelő [Literary Observer]*. The increase in the number of newspapers and periodicals published in Hungarian from the mid 1800s until the early 1900s is remarkable with 65 such publications in 1862 rising
to more than two-thousand in 1907 (Keresztury 2). By 1900 in Budapest alone readers could choose from 21 daily newspapers, including Hungary’s first tabloid *Az Est [Evening]*, in addition to many more papers and journals in German, Slovakian, Romanian and other languages (Cartledge 254).

The press rallied around two distinct poles: conservative academic and bourgeois liberal with radical undertones (see Cartledge 299; Pomogáts 69). As such, the *Budapesti Szemle [Budapest Review]*, *Magyar Szalon [Hungarian Salon]*, and *Vasárnapi Újság [Sunday Paper]* were the most important papers of the first group, and *Új Idők [New Times]* and *Magyar Figyelő [Hungarian Observer]*, and *Szabadság [Liberty]*, *Ország [Country]*, *Budapesti Napló [Budapest Diary]* represented the second (cf. Pomogáts 69). *Huszadik Század [Twentieth Century]*, launched in 1900, was the first sociology journal and was considered a radical publication with György Lukács and Oszkár Jászi (editor-in-chief) on staff. Its left-leaning counterpart, *Szocializmus [Socialism]* was founded in 1906. These journals signaled not only the beginnings of modernism in Hungary, but also prefigured, separate from the Millennium celebrations, the nation’s rapid cultural transformation in the twentieth century (Tamás Gáspár 9). There were also several small but significant and often rather short-lived literary magazines, such as the 1890 *A Hét [The Week or The Seven]*, from 1892 *Magyar Géniusz [Hungarian Genius]*, from 1900 *Új Magyar Szemle [New Hungarian Review]*, in 1903 *Jövendő [Future]*, in 1905 *Figyelő [Observer]*, and in 1906 *Szerda [Wednesday]*, all of which can be considered as the forerunners of *Nyugat*. In 1908 *Nyugat* was one of an astounding 802 newspapers and periodicals regularly published in Budapest (Fenyő, *LP* 194). By 1910 a total of 1823 newspapers and journals were published across the country in Hungarian, out of which 59 were devoted to literature (Fenyő, *LP* 195). *Nyugat* was among the few which endured and fundamentally shaped modern Hungarian literature and culture.
Internationally, the early twentieth century saw the bourgeoning of new journals, magazines, periodicals and newspapers. As the American art director Steven Heller argues in his illustrated study of avant-garde magazines *Merz to Emigre and Beyond*, periodicals, due to their immediacy at the time, “served both as a channel for ideas and—in the spirit of Marshall McLuhan’s mantra of medium as message—as the ideas themselves” (10). These magazines disrupted the equilibrium of the body politic; they had a shock value where “print on paper could unlock passions, ignite emotions, and change the world, if only for brief moments” (Heller 10). Already in the mid-to-late 1800s, European “press freedom,” as Heller explains, “opened the door to an outpouring of illustrated magazines advocating social justice and cultural openness,” and were often manifestly comical or transgressive, including *l’Eclipse, Le Mot, Simplicissimus* and *Jugend* with “fanciful cover illustrations and mutating logotypes...[in] rebellion against entrenched, stolid artistic conventions (16, 18). The fin-de-siècle European cultural landscape was held by the opposing camps of the superficial belle-époque and the extremist avant-garde artists driven by angst and compassion. In monarchical Austria-Hungary such modernist journals as *Ver Sacrum*, founded in 1898, led by Gustav Klimt and published in an office in the Secession building in Vienna, vociferously challenged and attacked the established political order. The journal’s “unconventional square format,” according to Heller, “allowed enough image space for the artists to strut their wares” (31). In 1916 in Zürich, the artist collective known as *Cabaret Voltaire* drew instant attention. They created a magazine with the same name which synthesized Expressionism, Futurism, Cubism, and Dada, and literary modernism, experimental poetry, imagery and confrontational manifestos (Heller 52). In 1919 the French surrealist poet André Breton founded *Littérature* with Louis Aragon. *Littérature* was an outlet for experimental literature and it included “dream analysis and automatic writing” as a way of attacking “past artistic verities” (Heller 144). Across Europe during the first half of the twentieth century a large
number and a wide range of art, avant-garde, and literary publications existed. While my dissertation cannot survey them in further detail, I do want to mention *The Gram* edited by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the French *Revue Blanche*, and the Russian *Мир Искусство* as intriguing contributors to literary magazine modernism (cf. Szabolesi 15). Closer to Hungary, the *Die Neue Rundschau* was also an important journal for German-Austrian literature. And so was the Czech *Moderni Život* review. It was born in the Syrinx literary circle under the editorship of Karel Toman, Frantisek Šrámek, and Jaroslav Hašek in 1902, whose aim was to turn away from the older generations’ nationalist sentiments and pathos (Kenyeres 21).

During the same time in the United States, literary magazines gained attention in high-culture circles such as Ralph Waldo Emerson’s and Margaret Fuller’s *The Dial* (1840-44). As the American literary historian Frederick Hoffman suggests, experimental literary publications burst on the scene in 1912 with Harriet Monroe’s and Ezra Pound’s *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* and the New York-based Margaret Anderson’s *Little Review* in 1914, which also gave the name to the genre: “little magazine” (2). A little magazine, as Hoffman defines it, “is a magazine designed to print artistic work which for reasons of commercial expedience is not acceptable to the money-minded periodicals or presses” (2). Editors and creators of these magazines gave license to artistic liberty and avoided censorship as their chief mandates, catering knowingly only to a limited group of people. The format of the little magazine, although not physically small in size, “helped generate the modernist poetics of fragmentation and collage by provoking reading strategies different from those applied to books” (Churchill 10). Hence they fostered new kinds of spatial strategies for writing and reading. Although each paper differed in form and content, what was common among them is that they were stimulated by “discontent,” “despair,” “unorthodox aesthetic or moral beliefs,” “rebellio[n] against the doctrines of popular taste” and a sincere conviction for the need to reform “attitudes toward literature” (Hoffman 4). While
technological and economic advancements made possible the mass-publication of magazines, including avant-garde papers, they also realized the commercialization of literature. Little magazines rebelled against such commercialization and instead promoted experimental forms of modernist literature and art.

Some of the most noted little magazines were also *Glebe* (1913-14), *Others* (1915-19), *Double Dealer* (1921-26), and *Smoke* (1931-37). Many of these magazines helped launch the careers of “innovative and influential American poets” and modernist writers, including William Faulkner, T.S. Elliot and Amy Lowell to name a few. Harold Loeb’s 1921 *Broom* and Gorham B. Munson’s 1922 *Secession* “belonged to the generation of American writers which Gertrude Stein (and Ernest Hemingway after her) described as ‘lost’, and whose members moved to Europe after the Great War—mainly from New York’s ‘bohemian’ centre of Greenwich Village—to escape their homeland’s provincialism,” and also because American currency was worth more in Europe at the time (Botár 38). Many of them lived comfortably in Paris, others in London, Rome, Vienna and Berlin. A curious intersection lies between the worldview of American and Hungarian journals: while American artists wanted to escape their country’s commercialism and sought the expression of modernism in Europe, particularly in Central Europe, their Hungarian colleagues looked to the West and America for cultural salvation (Botár 42). Writers of *Nyugat*, among them Lajos Kassák, who later founded the journals *A Tett [The Deed]* and *Ma [Today]*, were fascinated by “America’s technological advances” and in whose image they envisioned “the construction of a new world” (Botár 40-41). *Nyugat* authors often found inspiration in their Western contemporaries.

Between 1912 and 1947, over six hundred little magazines were published in English, although most of them were short-lived due to financial difficulties, censorship, or “internecine quarrels” (Hoffman 2, 6). In the history of Canadian little magazines the period from 1916 to
1956 was also productive. In his survey, Irvine Dean examines the emergence of Canadian cultural modernity and suggests that in many cases “women established and edited these kinds of periodicals,” such as Anne Marriott, Floris McLaren, Doris Ferne and P.K. Page. While most histories of Canadian print magazines neglect to acknowledge the active role of women, Irvine calls attention to how women “modified the period’s dominant, normative, masculinist modernism,” particularly in the 1930s that stands as an era of “the wholesale omission” of women’s contribution to the little magazines (8, 13). Within the “lost” periodicals and texts, which constitute the basis of an alternative history of Canadian literary culture, Irvine located a copious number of little magazines. The second half of the twentieth century saw such journals in Europe and America as the French *Les Temps Modernes* founded in 1945 by Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and *Cahiers du Cinema* created in 1951 by André Bazin, Joseph-Marie Lo Duca and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, and also the American *Hudson Review* from 1947 onward by William Ayers Arrowsmith, Joseph Deericks Bennett, and George Frederick Morgan. In their genre, calibre and style, these publications can be loosely compared to *Nyugat*. The Hungarian literary historian Miklós Szabolcsi argues that the only journal truly comparable to *Nyugat* in its time was the Parisian *Le Nouvelle Revue Française*. *NRF* was founded in November 1908 by Eugène Montfort but the first real issue appeared only on February 1, 1909 under the new editor, André Guide. Jean Schlumberger joined Guide at the editorial helm along with Jacques Rivière and Albert Thibaudet a little later with the aim of overcoming Symbolism and promoting *classicisme moderne* (Szabolcsi 15-16). While the staff

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6 Some of these little magazines were: *Sunset of Bon Echo* (1916-20) edited by Flora MacDonald Denison, *Woman Worker* (1926-9) by Florence Custance, Mary Davidson’s *Twentieth Century* (1932-3), *Canadian Forum* (1935-47) by Eleanor Godfrey, Catherine Harmon’s *here and now* (1947-9), and Margaret Fairley’s *New Frontiers* (1952-6). Such other publications as *Contemporary Verse* (1941-45), with *The McGill Fortnight Review* (1925-27) as its forerunner, also the *Preview* (1942-45), *First Statement* (1942-45) and *Direction* (1943-46) need mention. In Quebec *Amérique française, Montréal* ran from 1941 until 1955, among other literary publications. The 1950s were the most productive years with such magazines as *Contact, Combustion*, and Louis Dudek’s *Delta* from 1957 to 1966 in English, and *Art et Pensée, Emourie* (1953-56), and *Le Message des poètes* (1956-66) in French.
of both journals knew about each other there was no contact between them (16). Other significant counterparts of Nyugat were La Voce, a literary journal from Florence, and the German Logos, under the editorial direction of the philosophers Heinrich Rickert and Wilhelm Windelband. While Nyugat writers hungered to join Western philosophic, literary and artistic currents they also held onto and reinforced their Hungarian roots in order to express a Hungarian literary and cultural turn (Fenyő, LP 35). However, placing Nyugat in the context of global literary and cultural periodicals is overall a difficult task because the journal, from its very beginning, had been defined as both a review and a literary movement of a generation equipped with a decisive energy that transformed the entire Hungarian culture (cf. Szabolcsi, Kenyeres, Pomogáts, M.D. Fenyő). Neither is it easy to compare Nyugat to other journals since in its genre, structure, content and purpose it can be seen to be novel or original in constructing its own ideals as measuring rods of literature (Szabolcsi 15). Therefore, relations of influence and contact between Nyugat in Hungary and other journals outside have been difficult to establish (Szabolcsi 15). What is important to emphasize is that Nyugat played the role of a central literary agent for writers and for the public and that it was a singular type of journal and journalism that until this day defines Hungarian literature and culture (Szabolcsi 16). In fact, as I argue throughout this dissertation, modern Hungarian literature and culture cannot be understood without first considering the impact of the Nyugat periodical.

The Nyugat Period(ical)

Research studies of Nyugat have been ongoing and seemingly inexhaustible in Hungary. In spite of all the discoveries and analyses there are still many obscure and unknown facts and details about the periodical, including the circumstances of its foundation. There is one single monograph available, Miksa Fenyő’s, which sheds light on some of the historical and personal
contexts of *Nyugat*. Throughout my dissertation I draw on several of these works to develop my analysis. According to most of these studies, *Nyugat* represented a paradigm shift in early twentieth century Hungarian literature: “European and Hungarian identities became united” on the pages of the review (Kenyeres, “Vigilia”). Miksa Fenyő explains in his memoir that to read and “know the *Nyugat* also means learning about the Hungarian soul…[and about a] belief in its and Europe’s future” (10). Although it has been argued that writers of *Nyugat* were “simply a small number of progressive intellectuals writing for one another only” (Fenyő, “Writers” 191), *Nyugat* can be understood as the porte-parole of most early twentieth century Hungarian authors and artists (Fenyő, *LP* 8). For a writer to be published in the journal meant the greatest prestige (Kenyeres, “Vigilia”). Never before or after *Nyugat* have there been so many talented and prominent writers, artists and intellectuals converging in Hungary at once, a phenomenon which has puzzled scholars ever since and promoted vigorous research.

Rather than assume that *Nyugat* signals the beginning of Hungarian modernism in literature and culture, I follow Zoltán Kenyeres’s argument that *Nyugat* was not born “in a vacuum, but rather in the midst of vibrant and wide-spanning intellectual and literary milieu” (*EE* 150). *Nyugat* came to the Hungarian cultural scene when modernism, for the most part, had already commenced. Indeed, the first wave of modernism arrived in Hungary in the early 1880s, bringing Naturalism to the fore (Schwartz, *SV* 7). The second wave of modernism, which started right at the turn of the twentieth century, had “more similarities to Viennese modernity” (Schwartz, *SV* 7); it pronounced a new contradictory experience characterized by the splintering of the unity and permanent uniformity of society (Kenyeres, *EE* 20). *Nyugat* was founded as part of this second wave of modernism, but not as its instigator. In fact, *Nyugat* creators disregarded

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7 magyarság és európaiság valósággal egybeforrt [a legnagyobbaknál].
8 “A *Nyugat* első száma nem légüres térben jelent meg, hanem éppenséggel egy igen eleven és kiterjedt szellemi és irodalmi élet kellős középpén.”
their immediate literary predecessors, the modernist authors Komjáthy, Beöthy, and Reviczky to name a few, and looked for ideals in earlier poets, Mihály Vörösmarty and János Arany. As Kenyeres laments, Nyugat was more of a continuation of both the mid-1800s classicists and the new modernists rather than an instigator of modernism (EE 151). Furthermore, Kenyeres argues that Nyugat’s modernism is also part of its fame: it was indeed modern in contrast to the “school of provincial folk-literature writers” [“népnemzeti iskola”] and the old-school academics, but it was not modern in the sense of promoting experimental movements either in Hungarian or international contexts (151). Dadaism, Surrealism, and Poetism for example, which are pertinent movements within modernism, eluded the interests of Nyugat. Nyugat’s modernism spread between symbolism and pre-expressionism; even in its later years it did not move beyond Proust, and it stopped short of the avant-garde (Kenyeres, EE 151). The disillusionment in the wake of WWI killed Secession and the so-called “golden age” of art and culture (between 1890 and 1914) was never to return. Thus stood Nyugat for a humanist classicism with liberalism as its bastion of modernity. The views of its writers on liberalism, however, did not refer to what we understand today, but to those ideas formulated by Lamennais and Mill, that is, to a form of leftist bourgeois liberalism (Kenyeres, EE 44). Kenyeres suggests that the cultural meaning of Nyugat should not be interpreted as new and modern, but rather as a representative of “ethical aesthetics” [“etikai esztétizmus”] or as grounded in a “practice of aesthetics with ethics” [“etizáló esztétizmus”] (EE 151-52). Like Nietzsche’s belief about art and aesthetics as the highest task of life (The Gay Science), Nyugat’s ethical aestheticism stood as a shield against shallow moralizing tendencies, and moved beyond aphoristic philosophizing which, in Hungary, was played out on the divided political battlefields between national liberals demanding territorial integration and everyone else who promoted any sort of social or cultural reform (Kenyeres, EE 28). At the same time, Kenyeres argues, “we can consider the era of Nyugat an
independent phase in relation to the previous and subsequent literary periods” in Hungary, not as part of a linear development within a “two-hundred year epoch that had begun at the end of the eighteenth century and still lasts today” (EE, 10-12). Nyugat writers were aware of this contradiction and they looked upon it with dismay and suspicion while searching for their own voices.

Three Hungarians, the critic Ernő Osvát, the lawyer and journalist Dr. Miksa Fenyő, and the poet and literary critic Ignotus, founded Nyugat in late 1907. Osvát, Fenyő, and Ignotus were members of the new generation which I have described above. They came from the Jewish bourgeoisie and advocated radical social and cultural changes that gained expression in their taste, mentality and practice for anything new and progressive. Osvát (1877-1929) studied law and literature at the University of Budapest and published his first essay of criticism in 1897 in Esti Újság [Evening News]. Believing that the “poet and writer are their time’s conscious representatives,” and that they possess the creative force to name things as they are, Osvát tasked himself with nurturing young talents and developing a positive and supportive culture around print media (Kenyeres 33). As Miksa Fenyő recalls, Osvát was an avid and attentive reader of all available Hungarian and international newspapers and journals (FN 12). Osvát was the first to recognize the talent of Endre Ady, Margit Kaffka, and Dezső Kosztolányi, publishing their poems in Magyar Géniusz (Fenyő, FN 13). Already in Figyelő in 1905, Osvát’s introductory article expressed the need to liberate Hungarian talents from the suffocation of Hungarian society: “Nowhere else in the world do more talents die without ever gaining attention than in Hungary…They cannot break out of the pressures of their circumstances because a numbing seduction ties them down” (in Fenyő, FN 21).9 Osvát’s acute awareness of East-Central European culture made him part of the Budapest, Vienna and Prague triangle, which tapped into

9 “Sehol több tehetség el nem pusztul, mint Magyarországon…nem birják kiszabadítani törzseiket, a körülmények nyomása és valami zsibbasztó varázslat megkötő őket.”
the symbiotic movements of Symbolism, Impressionism and Secession (Kenyeres, EE 33). He considered literature to have a responsibility to society apart from politics and the empty slogans of nationalism; its role is to foster an intellectual fulfillment through aesthetics. Throughout his time as the editor of Nyugat, he was able to carry out and maintain his vision, although sometimes not without altercations or disagreements with his colleagues. In 1919 during the Republic of Councils Osvát became the President of the Writers’ Alliance. Following the revolution, his role in public life and at Nyugat decreased, which led him into further financial difficulties. When Ágnes, his only daughter, died from tuberculosis on October 28, 1929, Osvát shot himself at her bedside in their home (Kenyeres, EE 49). With Osvát’s suicide a particular unifying force of Nyugat also irrevocably compromised.

Miksa Fenyő (1877-1972) came from a provincial Jewish family. He earned his law degree at the University of Budapest in 1899 and opened his own law office shortly thereafter. He took an active role in the National Alliance of Industry Proprietors from 1904 onwards. Between 1908-1941 he was one of the co-editors of Nyugat, between 1921-1929 its chief correspondent, all the while providing financial support throughout the years, mostly by convincing industrialists to take out subscriptions for the review and to advertise on its pages. Fenyő obtained the first license from the government for the publication and held it until the late 1920s, when financial and personal difficulties at the journal brought about unavoidable changes. At this time in Hungary one had to submit a request to the city mayor’s office (or City Hall) for starting up a paper that was to be published frequently or a minimum of five times a year (Voit 8). Certain criteria had to be met in order to receive such permission, depending on the type of paper or periodical. In all cases the owner/publisher of the paper had to prove his or her financial capacity for maintaining the paper, and to provide a deposit or bond of a significant sum (Voit 8). This permission also referred to the undersigned party as the owner(s) of the paper, which in
most cases was transferable (8). The owner was also responsible for sending one copy of each issue of the paper to the Library of the Hungarian National Museum, which was meant to ensure the proof of liability (Voit 9). Fenyő looked after this licensing issue and all the administrative and public relations aspects of Nyugat, and he also contributed articles. Between 1931-35 he was a Member of Parliament, but with the encroachment of anti-Semitism and the rise of fascism he withdrew from public life and from active participation in managing Nyugat.

Hugo Veigelsberg, or as he is better known by his nom de plume, Ignotus (1869-1949), came from a German-speaking Jewish family. His father, Leo Veigelsberg was the editor-in-chief of the paper Pester Lloyd. Like Fenyő, Ignotus also earned his law degree at the University of Budapest but followed in his father’s footsteps and became a journalist. As a newspaper reporter he traveled across the world. Between 1891-1906 Ignotus worked at the papers A Hét and Magyar Hirlap [Hungarian Newspaper], until he joined Osvát and Fenyő at Szerda then at Nyugat. Ignotus took on the role of editor-in-chief for Nyugat between 1908-1929. He became Hungary’s “Literary Leader” [“Irodalmi Vezér”], a title he inherited from Pál Gyulai10 in the early 1900s. It was Ignotus who gave philanthropic support to Ady’s volume of Új Versek [New Poems] in 1906 and discovered Attila József’s11 genius in 1926. After the Republic of Councils he moved to Vienna then to Berlin from where he continued editing Nyugat until 1929, when the new editors, Mihály Babits and Zsigmond Móricz12 took over the journal, and Ignotus’s name

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10 Pál Gyulai (1826-1909) was a Hungarian writer, poet, critic, teacher, and Hungary’s literary leader.
11 Attila József (1905-1937) was a Hungarian modernist poet.
12 Zsigmond Móricz (1879-1942) was the son of peasant parents. Móricz studied theology and law at the University of Debrecen while also working as an assistant editor for the Debreczeni Hirlap [Debreczeni Newspaper]. In 1900 he moved to Budapest to study law and art. He was most interested in Hungarian folk traditions and conducted numerous ethnographic studies across the country, which later inspired his literary works. His first success, the novella called “Hét krajcár” [“Seven Pennies”], appeared on the pages of Nyugat in 1908. In 1915 he worked as a reporter on the war front. By the early 1920s Móricz had become an established and well-paid writer.
Mihály Babits (1883-1941) came from an aristocratic Christian family in western Hungary. He earned his degree in French and Hungarian literature at the University of Budapest, where he became good friends with Dezső Kosztolányi. His first poems were also published in Nyugat in 1908. Babits became one of the most prominent literary historians, writers and translators in Hungary with Dante’s Divine Comedy listed among his many translations. He was influenced by the philosophy of Schopenhauer and the new concepts of psychoanalysis. Before
was removed from the cover. In 1938 he emigrated from Hungary and eventually settled in the United States only to return in 1948 with a hope of renewing and reinvigorating Hungarian literary culture. His death defeated his dreams. Osvát, Fenyő and Ignotus embodied and propelled the fin-de-siècle Central-European worldview that I have sketched above, with all its incumbent anxieties over the surrounding reality and its vision for a new literature and culture.

Their immediate collaborators included the critic Aladár Schöpflin, the writer Zoltán Ambrus who fought for literature’s independence from journalism, the prominent author and financial backer Count Lajos Hatvany, the art historian Artúr Elek and the enthusiastic young writer Oszkár Gellért,\(^\text{13}\) all of whom frequented the same coffee houses (Fenyő, \textit{FN} 37; Kenyeres 33). According to the contemporary Hungarian literary historian Béla Pomogáts, the editors of \textit{Nyugat} were steeped in existential philosophy and the works of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Dilthey, Nietzsche, and Simmel whose philosophical and sociological orientations defined their joining the editorial board of \textit{Nyugat} in 1916, Babits taught at various secondary schools. From 1932 Babits was the chief editor of \textit{Nyugat} with Oszkár Gellért on the editorial board. Babits also took on the role of Director for the prestigious Baumgarten Prize. He was a private and quiet person, living a secluded life with his wife, Sophie Török and a close circle of friends. Despite being beset by illness in the late 1930s, Babits maintained the journal’s high quality until his death in August 1941.

\(^{13}\)Aladár Schöpflin (1872-1950) was born into an educated middle class family. He studied philosophy at the University of Budapest and in 1898 he became the assistant editor of \textit{Vasárnap}i Újság and from 1902 its chief literary critic. He joined \textit{Nyugat} in 1908. Schöpflin also took on roles in various literary societies, including the Vörösmarty Academy founded in 1918, the Hungarian PEN Club in 1926, and the Kisfaludy Society in 1936. He was a chief correspondent for the journal \textit{Tükör} between 1933 and 1942. He helped found and edit \textit{Magyar Csillag} in 1941.

Zoltán Ambrus (1861-1932) was born into an impoverished Hungarian and German gentry family. He studied law at the University of Budapest but did not finish his degree. Ambrus lived in Paris for a year where he became inspired by new literary and artistic movements which he brought back to Budapest. He was co-founder of the journal \textit{A Hét} in 1890.

Count Lajos Hatvany (1880-1961) was born into an old aristocratic family of Hungarian and Jewish descent. Although he traveled abroad frequently, he lived in Budapest for most of his life as a writer, critic, and literary historian. He helped finance and promote \textit{Nyugat}, but in 1911 he gave up his role at the journal due to disagreements with Osvát. The two of them ended their friendship with a duel. He is often referred to as the “utolsó mecénás” or the “last Maecenas.”

Artúr Elek (1876-1944) was a Hungarian art critic. From their inception, Elek took part in the editing and writing of Osvát’s papers, \textit{Magyar Géniusz, Figyelő,} and \textit{Szerda}. He had a regular column in \textit{Nyugat}. Elek also founded the \textit{Műbarát [Friends in Art]} journal in 1921. He committed suicide during the German occupation of Hungary. Oszkár Gellért (1889-1967) upon completing legal studies, published his first poems in 1902 in Osvát’s \textit{Magyar Géniusz}, and also became one of its editors. Gellért was from the inception part of the permanent writing staff of \textit{Nyugat}. During World War I, he also edited the \textit{Pesti Hirlap [Pest Newspaper]}, and ran the press offices of the Republic of Councils in 1919. Gellért was arrested for his participation in the communist revolution. From 1920 until 1941 he was on the editorial board of \textit{Nyugat}. Along with Schöpflin he helped found \textit{Magyar Csillag}. 

\(56\)
initial perspectives (83). As I have pointed out above, many progressive daily and weekly publications with literary columns had already nurtured writers and a keen bourgeois reading public. Theatre and publishing houses were also thriving, such as the Thália Theatre under Lukács’s directorialship, and the Grill, which published “thirty novels under the series title ‘Magyar Irók Aranyakönyvtára’” [“The Golden Library of Hungarian Writers”] (Kenyeres 32, 150). Nyugat became part of this existing literary movement and was born out of a small circle of friends’ passion for literature. Important precursors of Nyugat were three journals which Osvát and also Oszkár Gellért edited: Magyar Géniusz from 1902-1905, Figyelő in 1905 and the 1906 secessionist youths’ Szerda (named for the day its writers met up at Café Kairó), although producing only seven issues (Kenyeres, EE 7). Osvát turned the weekly family magazine, Magyar Géniusz, into a literary journal, surveying the contemporary literature of Europe from the West to the North and East, while concurrently promoting young Hungarian talents. In 1905 Osvát and Miksa Fenyő created Figyelő, which, according to the Hungarian literary historian Erzsébet Vezér, was the first paper of modern Hungarian journalist criticism (FL 7). What modern Hungarian journalist criticism referred to was a manifest turn away from the official practice of criticism carried out by conservative scholars of literature who were ensconced in folk traditions and positivism (Vezér, FL 5). As Vezér explains, the young journalist literati were influenced by Nietzsche’s philosophy of the will to power and his aphoristic style, and by Alfred Kerr’s impressionist criticism (FL 19). But it was primarily aphoristic wisdom which found great popularity in the anti-philosophical Hungarian mass culture, suggesting a superficial depth of knowledge along with a rejection of epigonism and an emphasis on the individual for journalists and readers (Vezér, FL 18). The phenomenon of mutual influence between writers and readers is what best indicates the proliferation of Hungarian literary papers in the early 1900s. Osvát,
Fenyő and Ignatus were committed to Hungarian literature and their mission of radically changing popular perception.

At cafés, like the “Pool és Mally,” Bristol, Royal, Club, Centrál, New York, Szabadság, Philadelphia and Modern,¹⁴ and during long walks on Nagykörút, Osvát and Fenyő were planning the future of Hungarian literature (Fenyő, FN 20). The name of the review, Nyugat, which means “west” or “occident,” came to Osvát, after generating a list of titles such as, Kelet Népe, Kelet, Csillag, and Disputa [People of the East, East or Orient, Star, Dispute] at the Café Royal in 1907 (Fenyő, LP 38-39; Buda 13). The tension between an association for the name of the new journal with an orientation to the East or West reflects an ongoing dilemma for Hungarians. They locate their origins in the East, in Asia, yet for over a thousand years the word “nyugat” has signaled more than a geographic position for Hungarians. The West defines the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, material, and imaginary topos that Hungarians long to understand, belong to, and be an equal part of. To this effect, Nyugat editors aspired to annihilate the traditional forms of existence, the social stratification in which many of them were born. They were seen as the rebellious children of their forefathers, who had become faithless through the forces of new ideals while trying to hold on to their belief in the traditional social system. They encountered an impasse at the threshold of modernity and found themselves wedged between the values of the traditional and the modern, East and West, nation and the individual, and feudal and bourgeois. In such a paradox the Nyugat-generation struggled in the breach, in a state of in-betweenness. Their experience of in-betweenness prompted a high cultural productivity that encompassed both a nostalgic backward gaze and a responsive forward-looking worldview.

¹⁴ Many of these cafés still exist, including Central and New York; others changed names but not location.
Contrary to their contemporaries in the architectural movement, as I have pointed out earlier, in literature Nyugat authors turned away from Hungarian folkism and the “last buffaloes” of Romantic nationalist literature, such as Mór Jókai, Kálmán Mikszáth and Géza Gárdonyi, and instead embraced young writers and poets (Fenyő, “Writers” 186-87). Mario D. Fenyő, the son of Miksa Fenyő, emphasizes that while folk roots and particularly nationalism were crucial motivators for Hungary’s efforts in achieving independence from the Habsburg House in the mid-1800s, by the early 1900s nationalism developed conservative and reactionary connotations (“Writers” 187). Perhaps it was for this reason that the issue of nationalism and within that the questions of Hungary’s divergent nationalities were not among the Nyugat writers’ interests (Fenyő, “Writers” 189). Many of them had traveled abroad, lived in Paris, Berlin or Florence, and were influenced by the dynamic movements of Western Europe which they enthusiastically adopted. They were looking towards the West, especially to France and America, for enlightened inspiration that they could transplant into the Hungarian context. The high regard for “the institutions of France, its political democracy…culture of the public…[and] intellectual emulation,” the editors hoped, “would result in the emulation of social and political institutions [in Hungary] as well” (Fenyő, “Writers” 187). The Nyugat-generation’s new and radical mode of thinking and their appreciation of anything Western were promoted in the review, which in turn materialized a way into a new kind of Hungarian culture.

The writers of Nyugat were independent agents with divergent styles and currents centred around the journal, and they also “constitute[d] a whole, a unit” (Fenyő, LP 10). Over one-hundred and twenty Hungarian writers and numerous artists and scholars of the first part of the twentieth century were associated with Nyugat. Hungarian literary history considers Nyugat authors as one whole generation, the “Nyugat-generació.” Within this definition a diachronic triad of first, second and third ‘sub-generation’ contributors have also been identified based on
the three chronological periods of *Nyugat*. These three phases of *Nyugat* writers were connected not only by their demographic, but also by their own particular artistic community. Their stratification was always interlinked by that dialectical flow which Mannheim describes, as I have shown before. It is important to mention that there were also those well-known writers who did not join the community of *Nyugat*, such as Sándor Bródy, Ferenc Molnár, Géza Gárdonyi, Gyula Krúdy and Ferenc Móra (Fenyő, *FN* 61). The question of why these prolific and popular writers were not part of *Nyugat* can be accounted for in terms of personal, literary, and social reasons, as Miksa Fenyő reflects (*FN* 61). According to Fenyő, for Ferenc Molnár, it was not appealing to be counted as a *Nyugat* writer, although he was not an enemy of the journal (61-62). In fact, he presented a lecture at a *Nyugat* reading event in which he mocked Béla Balázs (Fenyő, *FN* 62). Others included Ferenc Móra, whom *Nyugat* editors simply forgot to approach, according to Miksa Fenyő (*FN* 62). It is a curious oversight since Móra had already gained canonical fame during his lifetime in Hungary and abroad.

The first period of *Nyugat* can be located roughly between 1908 and 1920. Along with the inaugurating generation belonged the poets and writers, namely Endre Ady, Mihály Babits, Zsigmond Móricz, Árpád Tóth, Gyula Juhász, Milán Füst, Dezső Kosztolányi, Anna Lesznai and Margit Kaffka, and intellectual figures such as Béla Balázs, György Lukács, and Károly Mannheim. Their aesthetic perspectives exhibited elements of Impressionism, Symbolism, Secession and intellectual objectivity, while their focal point was the inner world of the subjective individual (Pomogáts 139). They are considered as the “nagy nemzedék” or the “great generation” because they were the first members of *Nyugat* and its most innovative writers,

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15 Ferenc Molnár (orig. Ferenc Neumann; American name Franz Molnar) (1878-1952) was a Jewish-Hungarian dramatist and novelist. As a novelist, Molnár is remembered principally for his *A Pál utcai fiúk* [The Paul Street Boys], a classic novel of youth literature, beloved in Hungary and abroad for its reflection on the ideas of solidarity and self-sacrifice. Molnár emigrated to the United States to escape Nazi persecution during World War II.

16 Ferenc Móra (1879-1934) was a Hungarian novelist, journalist, and museologist. He was a prominent figure of youth literature in Hungary. His parallel career in museology started in 1904 at the combined library and museum of Szeged. Móra is internationally recognized and acclaimed as a major author in Hungarian literature.
artists and thinkers. All of them were about the same age, moved in similar circles, and shared mutual ideals and goals (Gy. Rónay 5). This “great generation” of *Nyugat* represents the writers and poets who first stood up most radically to perpetuate modernist change. Sporadically, special issues commemorated the works of this generation, such as the 1923 Ady and Osvát edition, the 1924 Móricz, Babits and Igingus issues, and the 1936 Kosztolányi commemorative.

The second period of the journal spanned from about 1920 until about 1930. Within this era, another young community of writers was demanding more space and acknowledgement, among them György Sárközi, Gyula Illyés, Sophie Török, Lőrinc Szabó, László Németh, Gábor Halász, and Antal Szerb. Their main genre was essays and criticism. They were the political rebels of their time, affected by the clash of the avant-garde and poetic realism along with the dismantling of Hungary at the Treaty of Versailles in 1920. Their main interest became the description and transformation of the social world around them through a manifest political message. The quiet and jovial theoretical and aesthetic battles of *Nyugat* writers now became more apparent with the voices of the second generation. Babits accused the rebellious young writers with “a new type of literary patricide” [“irodalmi apagyilkosságnak egy új fajtája”] in failing to follow in the footsteps of the first generation (in Pomogáts 74). Against the post-war political and cultural crises, Babits turned to neo-classicism as the only paragon of universal humanism. In response, the second-generation writers blamed Babits for wanting to relegate them to the role of “epigone” (Pomogáts 74). Despite the internal contradictions, *Nyugat* remained a solid unit.

The final period of *Nyugat* began around 1930 and lasted until Babits’s death in 1941. Under Móricz’s and Babits’s guidance from the late 1920s, the third generation poets, such as, Miklós Radnóti, Sándor Weöres, Géza Ottlik, Erzsébet Kádár, and Ágnes Nemes Nagy gained prominence. These authors seemed to operate more or less in solitude and were suspicious of
grand theories and changes in the world around them. They returned to the first generation’s ideals with regard to nature and humanism by turning away from the outside world and toward the inner sanctum of the individual. Lyricism gained more importance for them, which helped to subdue the sharp ideological and artistic conflicts evident among all three generations (Kenyeres, EE 56). Their aim was to rescue the aesthetic values of humanism by forging the writer as an individual who can resist fleeting ideologies (Pomogáts 80). In light of World War II, their philosophy centred on political and social problems, and coincided with Babits’s faith in neoclassicism. Nyugat provided a hermitage for their protest against rising fascism. The three sub-generations of Nyugat were interlinked by an overarching “nemzedéki szolidaritás” or “generational solidarity” based on their historical, linguistic and cultural worldview, which does not mean that this solidarity constrained them in any way (Pomogáts 146). Instead, as Pomogáts asserts, the Nyugat generations openly proclaimed their differences (146). Within these differences they created a kind of synergy and responsibility that established, nurtured and opened up further possibilities for modern Hungarian literature, as I shall delineate below and also with regards to the contributions of Margit Kaffka, Dezső Kosztolányi and Antal Szerb in the following chapters.

On January 1, 1908 the first issue of Nyugat was published, with Osvát as spiritus rector and Ignotus as editor-in-chief. It is a less known fact, however, that the actual first issue of Nyugat appeared already in late December 1907 (Fenyő, LP 35; Kenyeres 5), as the letter to the Mayor of Budapest, dated December 12, 1907, signed by Ignotus, Fenyő, and Osvát, announced the launching of Nyugat: “a literary, arts, social and economic review” [“szépirodalmi, művészeti, társadalmi és közgazdasági szemle”] on December 20. But this first issue went unnoticed. They relaunched Nyugat in January with a small print run of less than 500 copies. In fact, during the journal’s entire existence circulation varied between 600 and 4,000 copies per
issue (Fenyő, “Writers” 192). Financial difficulties threatened the journal with closure after the first five issues, only to be rescued by Hatvany (Buda 14), and the editors often worked without salaries (Fenyő, FN 37).

3. Letter to the Mayor of Budapest announcing the foundation of Nyugat

Ignotus’s editorial article in the January 1, 1908 issue, entitled “Kelet népe” or “People of the East” was, as Miksa Fenyő underlines, a “programcikk,” that is, a thesis statement about Hungary’s path in Europe, prompted by a Finnish theatre company’s performance in Budapest the previous year (FN 48). Its core message was preceded by József Diner-Dénes’s 1902 article entitled “Nemzeti művészet” [“National Art”] in the revue Művészet [Arts] in 1902. In it Diner-Dénes proclaimed that Hungarians differed from the rest of Europeans and also from Asian nations; both in geographical and spiritual characteristics Hungarians are somewhere in between (in Kenyeres, EE 22). But Kenyeres warns us not to see Diner-Dénes’s articulation of Hungarian identity as a forerunner or inspiration for Ignotus’s piece: “Diner-Dénes recommended a national turning inward with eyes-wide-open” (22). In order to elaborate on such sense of “in-betweenness,” Ignotus offers a comparison with the small Finnish nation, who are known to be kin to Hungarians and then suggests: “we think of the Finns like other school-learned subjects: their name brings to our mind a respectful empty signifier,” explains Ignotus (Nyugat
The Finns, as the people of the East in Ignotus’s view, were represented as similar to Hungarians: a small and unimportant nation, with a strange language of the Finno-Ugors among the many powerful ones in the world, which must demand attention for itself so that it will not appear foreign anymore. “Others look at it with disdain,” Ignotus explains, “but it must not return this contempt; it must return love…since it has no place outside of this world…people of the East ought to settle in it” (Ignotus). Ignotus alludes to Mihály Vörösmarty’s poem “Szózat” [“Appeal”] (1836) in these lines and also uses the term “honfoglaló” or “settler,” for which there is no equivalent translation in English, because “honfoglaló” literally means the one who reserves or takes a home. Ignotus’s vision does not hinge on nationalistic sympathies, but I see it as promoting synchronicity with the world (cf. Fenyő, FN 49).

This first issue also included the by then highly-regarded modernist poet Endre Ady’s article. Most Hungarian literary historians identify Endre Ady as “the leading poet” and a “common source of inspiration” in that epoch for Hungary’s left-leaning intelligentsia (P. Ignotus 151). Endre Ady (1877-1919), the son of gentrified Calvinist small-holders from Transylvania with an education in law and a career in provincial journalism, broke onto the literary scene with his collected Új Versek [New Poems] in 1906. These poems were the harbingers of new songs for new times based on Ady’s experiences in the Paris art scene, which he wanted to adopt although not without criticism for Hungary. His book was considered an exemplar of revolutionary lyricism and it created “the hottest literary debates in Hungary…and it has been regarded ever since as the touchstone of modern Hungarian poetry” (Czigány 290). Literature and society had reunited in Ady’s poems, inspiring Osvát and his circle to

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17 “A finnekkel is úgy vagyunk, mint a legtöbb iskolai szerzeményünkkel: tisztelettel elegy semmit nem gondolás, amit nevük hallatára érzünk.”
18 “Kicsinységében tán nem szabad, hogy viszont lenézze, akik őt lenézik, és nagyon kell szeretnie, akik őt szeretik…s, hogy a helyét, melyen kívül a nagy világon más nincsen számára…mindenütt honfoglaló legyen kelet népe.”
revolutionize the Hungarian cultural scene. Ady’s opening article in *Nyugat*, entitled “A Magyar Pimodan,” appeals to Hungary’s Europeanness and its consortium of “féllelkek” [“half-souls”]:

I tell you, I consider myself the grandson of Mihály Csokonai: a terribly un-European Hungarian, but who lives and dies for Europe with ridiculous fanaticism…In the Hungarian race there lives, unconsciously and horribly, the hunch of a curse, the insatiableness which is the curse of half-souls. We have been half-souls, beautiful, pugnacious barbarians, who not without cause but rather with just bitterness, have been pounding on the door of a cultural Byzantium and have been annoying Western Europe. Things that have happened to us in the past one thousand years, all the things we would like to add to the bill of fate’s anger, [are] things we try to embellish with martyrdom and which are the sins and causes of our imperfections. The artist, who may be a bit of a genius and Hungarian at once, carries the weight of this curse a thousandfold more. And once again it is his Hungarian identity that causes him not to eat hashish to soothe [this curse], which is the poison of higher ranking and more delicate nervous systems, but out of necessity and style he takes a glass of wine or a leather-flask of brandy.

Ady confronts the reader with the plight of Hungarians, especially those writers and artists who have upheld the nation’s culture for centuries but who still cannot secure a space for themselves on the European cultural scene. The “Hungarian curse” that has been handed down to its people for generations is the condition of being neither part of the East nor of the West or of being part of both, but not quite one or the other. Ady’s dilemma then can be illuminated with Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of in-betweenness as “the ‘right’ to signify from the periphery…resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness” (2). The *Nyugat*-generation’s symptomatic “in-betweenness” in Europe is also

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19 Ady refers to the Hotel Pimodan in Paris, which was, according to his account, an opium den for artists with such noted visitors as Baudelaire and Balzac.
20 Mihály Csokonai Vitéz (1773-1805) Hungarian poet of the Rococo era with an original and creative voice. He was born and lived in Debrecen, the same region where Ady grew up. Csokonai is considered the *poeta doctus* of Hungarian poets, who had deep insights into Hungarian and European cultures, which he illuminated in his poems.
21 Mondom: Csokonai Vitézz Mihály unokájának érzem és tudom magam: veszettül európaiatlan magyarnak, aki kacagtató fanatizmussal és komolysággal él-hal Európaért…A magyarnak fajtában öntudatlanul és rettenetesen él egy átok sejtése, azé a kielégülhetetlenségé, mely a féllelkek átka. Fél-lelkek lehettünk mint szép és harcias barbárok is már s nem ok nélkül, sőt jogos keserűséggel döngöttük a kultúrás Bizánc kapuját s kellemetlenkedtünk a nyugati Európának. Mindaz, ami ezer éven át történt velünk s amit szeretnénk a sorharag számlájára írni, amit szépitgetünk s mártir-aureolával ékesítünk, ami tökéletlenségünk bûne, következménye egyszerűen. A mûvész, aki egy kicsit zseni és magyar, természetesen ezer métermászával súlyosabb teherként cípeli lelkén ezt az átkot. S megint magyar oka van annak, hogy nem hasist eszik hozzá, ami már magasabb, finomabb idegrendszerű mérge, de kénytelen és stílusosan boros kupát fog vagy pálinkás butykost.
coupled with an inescapable and incurable social and cultural duality, which induces an inward self-ironization and suspiciousness toward outsiders. Ady expresses a quintessential element of such an interstitial condition of Hungarians, which embraces the curse of excellence and hopelessness as partners in a tumultuous dance within both their own and European culture.

Ignotus’s introductory piece and Ady’s criticism of the Hungarian cultural scene pronounced the writers of Nyugat as the new leaders of literature, and in so doing, they inaugurated a paradigm shift away from tradition. Nyugat had drawn instant attention in Hungarian literary circles, prompting debates and taking over leadership from the already modernist József Kiss’s A Hét, Sándor Bródy’s Jövendő and Ferenc Herczeg’s reputation at Budapesti Hírlap. Nyugat writers were accused of defying traditional Hungarian literature, Christian beliefs, and the Hungarian nation in exchange for new themes, such as sexuality and the problems of bourgeois capitalism (Fenyő, FN 100-01). The conservative literati considered poetry appearing in Nyugat as “not understandable for normal people” and that the “young poets were either crazy or consciously destructive, the followers of equally mad foreigners, especially the French” (Held 7). While the young writers of Nyugat were seen as “enemies of the Hungarian nation,” they were convinced that they could establish a new intellectual freedom (Held 7). They were right; Nyugat became the most progressive and sustained representation of modernism in Hungary. As Miksa Fenyő argues, “the dogma of Nyugat was freedom of thought. It was an ideological revolution…All real writers are revolutionaries…because nothing in the world is perfect, and everything there is in the world deserves change” (FN 60). Miksa Fenyő considered Nyugat a revolutionary periodical promoting freedom of thought and a revolutionary spirit beyond the cause of literature, and standing for “human rights, social justice, and humanity” (FN 94). As I have emphasized above, the founders of Nyugat believed that social reforms, with which a strong middle-class and parliamentary constitution would emerge, had to
include changes in the way of thinking, spearheaded by intellectual and literary reforms (Fenyő, *FN* 42). In a sense they launched a campaign to disseminate modern Hungarian literature. The chief objective of *Nyugat* was the creation of this intellectual milieu for freedom of thought (Fenyő, *FN* 42, 44). *Nyugat* editors described their publication as left-leaning bourgeois. According to Mario D. Fenyő, “the writers of *Nyugat*…were not merely bourgeois, they wrote in the interests of the bourgeoisie, and catered to a bourgeois public (as opposed to the gentry or aristocracy)” (“Writers” 186). The political orientation of *Nyugat* members was progressive with a preference for the aesthetic value of *l’art pour l’art* and shared ideas about European high culture and classical humanism (Fenyő, “Writers” 188). Despite the various authors’ different social statuses and cultural backgrounds, the strength of *Nyugat* in fact lay in how it emblematized an eclectic group of people and their diverse ideals. The editors’ most salient criterion was that writers must write with a conviction that would further the freedom of thought and expression, regardless of their political, religious, cultural or linguistic alliances and disagreements (Fenyő, *FN* 44).

*Nyugat* started out on a shoe-string budget. As a result of financial restrictions, *Nyugat* was printed on inexpensive standard newsprint size paper (180 mm x 240 mm) and usually contained between 160 and 200 black and white pages. The interior layout was consistent with black serif typeface set in a single justified column with the exception of the “Figyelő” section which carried two justified columns per page. Illustrations were usually placed on adjoining pages or sometimes mortised out of the columns and framed with borders. The cover page heading was set in all caps sans-serif typeface: **NYUGAT**. But by the third year the typeface of the journal changed to a serif font in red ink, which became its most-established look. In the beginning a subtitle was also inserted that read: “A ‘Figyelő’ új folyama,” that is, “The New Release of Observer,” referring to Osvát’s previous journal *Figyelő*. Later they named the
review section in Nyugat “Figyelő” for the same allusive purpose. The Hungarian sculptor Fülöp Beck Ö.’s 22 circular relief of Kelemen Mikes 23 became the front cover logo. This image, like an exergue, served as the permanent emblem for Nyugat throughout its existence, from the first black and white photo-screened version to the later lithographic-cut and monochromatic image. The cover also serves double duty as a table of contents for the articles in most issues. At the bottom of the page the price of the journal was shown, listing subscription rates for one year as

22 Fülöp Beck Ö. (1873-1945) was an internationally acclaimed and award-winning Hungarian sculptor and coin designer. He studied at the Design School of Budapest, and between 1894 and 1900 he attended the École des Beaux Arts in Paris under Hubert Ponscarme. Beck designed many of Hungary’s Millennium memorial coins. He was also commissioned for architectural facades, such as the famous Corvin department store in Budapest.

23 Kelemen Mikes (1690-1761) was a Transylvanian-born Hungarian political figure and essayist, noted for his rebellious activities as an assistant to Ferencz Rákóczi II against the Habsburgs in Hungary. He is famous for his Letters from Turkey (1717-1758). With these, Mikes laid the foundations of Hungarian literary prose, and he is regarded as one of the first Hungarian prose authors. Eventually Mikes along with Rákóczi was forced to flee to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, then to France and lastly to the Ottoman Empire. While living in exile in Tekirdağ, Mikes wrote and published essays up until the time of his death.
20 korona, for half a year 10 korona, and a single issue for one korona. 24 In a second column the publica-
tion date is noted as the “first and on the fifteenth of each month,” and the publishing office is at number 6 Tudor utca [Tudor Street]. The back cover was usually reserved for advertising, often in a four-grid format, allowing for four different products or services to appear, from banking to alcoholic beverages. Binding was resolved by side wire stitching whereby a central staple holds the journal pages together and the cover is wrapped around and pasted on the spine. The subsequent issues retained the size and general design but the layout, font, colours, editorial office location, and journal price went through changes over the years. The cover and masthead of each issue also varied throughout the years and special issues, such as Anna Lesznai’s secessionist cover featuring designs of bold floral images in black and red ink, occasionally replacing the type-heavy, plain white covers. The cover was printed on medium weight, uncoated paper which allowed for colour saturation. The magazine’s appearance reflected the impact of design innovations and financial restrictions. As in Suzanne Churchill’s description of “little magazines,” the Nyugat journal allows us “to read modernist texts in their original contexts…[since it is] not simply a possible background…for a modernist text; its content, covers, paper quality, illustrations, and prints, advertisements, manifestos, and editorials shape the meaning and reception of a text” (9). From 1935 on, Nyugat only appeared once a month; it was the blueprint of Hungarian literary modernism both in ethos and style.

As for reaching readers, the Nyugat magazine was sent out to subscribers and the rest were distributed to newsstands and shared among the staff’s friends. As Mario D. Fenyő explains, the readership of Nyugat remained a mere handful…members of the middle-class presumably” (“Writers” 192). Although the number of subscribers fluctuated during the years,

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24 Hungary used the Monarchy’s currency of the korona from 1892 until the dissolution of the Empire in 1918. Between 1918 and 1927 Hungary’s own korona was used. On January 1, 1927 Hungary’s new currency, the pengő came into circulation, lasting until 1946.
Nyugat’s authority and potency continued to grow. Fenyő argues that “the intellectuals among the middle-class were numerically almost negligible,” where “the cream of the intellectual crop numbered 15-20,000” (“Writers” 192). Therefore, Nyugat subscribers, continues Fenyő, must have come from this social group. According also to Fenyő, two-thirds of the existing subscribers were Jews and one-third of them came from the Christian middle-class (FN 63).

Among the subscribers were a few Hungarian aristocrats led by Count Gyula Andrásy Jr., who recruited readers for Nyugat from the circle of the National Casino (63). Referring to Lajos Kassak’s autobiography, Mario D. Fenyő points out that besides the landed provincial aristocracy, factory workers also read Nyugat (LP 111). In contrast, Miksa Fenyő argues that, “Nyugat [had] no audience, it [had] writers, and a few good friends surrounding these writers” (“Vezér interjú”). Nyugat relied on its own authors as its audience (Fenyő, FN 58). The amount they incurred from subscriptions was not enough nor were advertisements to sustain the paper (FN 63-64). But there were always a few people with sufficient financial backing who saw the importance of the journal for Hungarian literature and culture and wanted to keep it alive (FN 64). In order to gain more attention and attract more paying readers, Nyugat editors often held lectures and reading performances in Budapest and in provincial towns, advertised with posters which impelled readers with phrases like this: “minden művelt ember olvassa a Nyugatot” [“all educated people read Nyugat”] (Fenyő, FN 63). Miksa Fenyő recalls that during these events they would receive more article submissions than subscribers (FN 63). From large, colourful posters to flyers and customized stationary with the main authors’ portraits and short quotations, Nyugat editors tried every marketing tool to recruit more readers.

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25 Count Gyula Andrásy Jr. (1860-1929) was a Hungarian politician, Minister of Internal Affairs, lawyer, and the last Austro-Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs. His father, Count Gyula Andrásy Sr., was Hungary’s Prime Minister between 1867-71.

26 Count István Széchenyi founded the Hungarian Casino which held its first meeting on June 10, 1827. Contrary to its connotation with gambling, the Casino was an organization for politicians and influential power figures to gather and discuss important social, economic and political questions outside of the Parliament.
It is important to note that when *Nyugat* was launched in 1908, “almost half of Hungary’s population was illiterate, and about half could not speak or read in Hungarian” (Fenyő, “Writers” 191). This fact, I argue, demystifies the assumption that Hungarian literature and nationhood were one and the same. *Nyugat* published all of its articles in Hungarian at a time when the majority of the bourgeois population of Budapest was bilingual, and spoke German in social circles more often than Hungarian (Fenyő, *LP* 22). Its multidisciplinary genre should also be emphasized, which Ignotus’s 1909 letter to Count Hatvany confirms: “We must attract all the so-
called modern movements from the theatre, music, painting to the social and political” (PLM Virtual). Indeed, besides poetry, fiction, and criticism, *Nyugat* became the forum for analyses of high culture and society, including photography, film, theatre, fine arts, and music. For example, the sheet music of Béla Bartók’s *Allegro Barbaro* was first published in the *Nyugat* in 1916, and the painter József Rippl-Ronai’s portrait series of contemporary Hungarian writers and poets was reprinted on the journal’s pages. Once permission was obtained, the periodical also published political opinion pieces (Fenyő, “Writers” 188). What truly mattered for the editors was that the articles had to be engaging and stylistically attractive. *Nyugat* carried the most innovative and original works by Hungarians and of the international canon in translation.

It is worth mentioning the book-publishing venture of the *Nyugat* editors, which they initiated in order to help maintain the journal’s financial viability. In an effort to raise the

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27 Nékünk magunkhoz kell fűznünk minden úgynevezett modern mozgalmat színházban, zenében, festészetben, társadalmi meg politikai dolgokban is.

28 Each original copy of *Nyugat* is considered highly valuable as a coveted cultural artefact. I have a copy of *Nyugat* from October 16, 1925, 19:18. Although this issue does not contain any of the authors’ works I am dealing with besides a short literary criticism by Kosztolánya, it has significant value as a historical relic. A curious aspect of this copy is that the pages 141 to 148 and 161 to 164 were still uncut when I obtained it. While Ignotus appears as editor-in-chief, the co-editors now are listed as Mihály Babits, Oszkár Gellért and Ernő Osvát. Miksa Fenyő’s name is marked under “főmunkatársak” or “co-editors.” I shed light on these changes in leadership later in this chapter. The look and design of this issue already differs from the first one. The relief image of Kelemen Mikes is now a litho-cut in red, just like the journal title on top. The paper quality is poor and fragile, almost every page has rips. I thank Péter Laborcz and Péter Czink for helping me procure this copy.
journal’s readership and most of all income, the Nyugat Press was established in 1909 (Buda 16). The first book by Nyugat Press was authored by one of their own writers, Oszkár Gellért. Each editor of the Nyugat journal bought shares in the Nyugat Press company and appointed Henrik Gonda, an attorney and parliamentary secretary, as the chief executor of the company. In 1910 the Nyugat Könyvkiadó Részvénnytársaság [Nyugat Publishing House Incorporated] was founded which undertook the publishing and distribution of both the journal and books (Buda 21). Despite representatives of big business being listed as shareholders, its invested capital of 150,000 koronas was less than what they had originally planned to start with, and this initial shortcoming haunted the Nyugat Press throughout its existence (Buda 24). Nyugat Press published many books by writers of the journal and also pursued a series of translations. Financial setbacks during the turbulent war years, revolutions, and the geographical reconfiguration of Hungary after 1918 all hindered its objectives. The Press went through multiple changes in ownership, managers and company names until its final days in 1949.

In 1911 a disagreement between Osvát and Hatvany about editorial authority over the need to attract new talents or to nurture the preexisting authorial membership led to the removal of Osvát’s name from the cover of Nyugat in 1912. Without official recognition, Osvát continued the editing of Nyugat. In the same year, the journal Ugat [Bark] (a play on the word Nyugat) also appeared as a parodic counter-publication to Nyugat. Though Nyugat editors kept an eye on politics and their direction in Hungary and abroad, the journal did not become politicized. At the escalation of nationalist movements and at the outbreak of World War I, it sided with pacifism. Even after 1916, when it obtained permission to publish manifest political articles, it maintained an anti-war and anti-military stance (Kenyeres 42). Its focus shifted from aesthetics toward ethics under the leadership of the new editors, Mihály Babits and Endre Ady in 1916. The most productive first few years of Nyugat were disrupted by World War I. Hungary was in a
maelstrom of political change: first the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, then
the bourgeois revolution in the fall of 1918, the communist revolution in March 1919 (both
defeated), and the final blow of the 1920 Versailles Treaty which resulted in Hungary losing
two-thirds of its territory and over half of its population, with about four million Hungarian
speaking people being entirely cut off from the country. During these disastrous times, Nyugat
remained steadfastly committed to Hungarian literature and culture, although often in imposed
silence. Post-World War I and post-revolutionary Hungarian writers and artists still met in the
cafés of Budapest (cf. P Ignotus 153; Saly 27); however, their discussions became less radical
under the gaze of Admiral Miklós Horthy’s29 authoritarian regime, the so-called “Fehér Terror”
[“White Terror”]. During the 1919 Republic of Councils, Nyugat members split; some openly
took part in the communist revolution, such as Lukács and Balázs, and even Osvát, while others
like Babits observed it from a distance. The Councils in fact banned the publication of Nyugat,
and only after a three-month hiatus, when the regime fell, did it resurface in November
(Kenyeres 43). Now Horthy’s government blamed Nyugat for the communist revolution and
subsequently its writers suffered political attacks, even though Babits openly separated himself
from any affiliation with the revolution (Pomogáts 70-71). Others fled into exile in Vienna or
Weimar, like Károly Mannheim, Béla Balázs, and György Lukács, and left their mark on the
“Kulturbolschewisten…as exasperated doctrinaire communists” (P. Ignotus 159). Both Count
Hatvany and Ignutus emigrated to Vienna.

29 Miklós Horthy de Nagybánya (1868-957) was the Regent of Hungary during the interwar years and throughout
most of World War II, serving from March 1, 1920 to October 15, 1944. In light of the Republic of Councils in 1919
a counter-revolutionary government formed and asked Horthy to take command of its forces. When the Romanians
evacuated Budapest in November, 1919, Horthy entered as the head of the National Army. The Hungarian
Communist Party was banned, and in 1920 Horthy was declared Regent and Head of State, a position he held until
his fascist rival, Ferenc Szálasi, took over in October 1944. A conservative who was distinctly inclined toward the
right, Horthy led Hungary through the years between the two world wars, and took it into an alliance with Nazi
Germany, in exchange for the restoration of Hungarian territories lost after the First World War. In October 1944
Horthy announced that Hungary would surrender and withdraw from the Axis. He was forced to resign, placed
under arrest and taken to Bavaria. Eventually, he came under the custody of U.S. troops. After appearing as a
witness at the Nuremberg war-crimes trials in 1948, Horthy was exiled to Portugal.
In January 1920, Osvát regained his editorial post and his name was again printed on the cover alongside Babits. But by now, Nyugat had lost several of its prominent writers, including Margit Kaffka and Endre Ady. The second phase of Nyugat experienced further financial setbacks, and internal disagreements between Osvát, Babits and Ignotus, while external political pressures threatened to fold the journal (Vezér, FL 39, 40). In the legacy of the Compromise, Babits announced a “battle on two fronts” [“kétfrontos harc”] and called on the “generation of Nyugat” to represent the “középhadsereg” or “middle army” to stave off any extremist nationalist or anti-Semitic movements from the right and extremists from the left (in Pomogáts 73, 75). He wanted to gather all the literary forces in one camp under Nyugat to create a unified aesthetic and ethical protest against totalitarianism (Pomogáts 75). At the same time, many of the Nyugat writers’ works, especially those of the younger members, appeared in the new liberal publications, which they often helped create, such as A Toll [The Pen] and Kortárs [Peer], to name a couple (Pomogáts 70). However, by the mid-1920s they had to share the field with more extreme elements such as the racist and anti-Semitic Aurora or the right wing folk-nationalistic Magyar Élet [Hungarian Life] and Magyar Út [Hungarian Road] papers (Pomogáts 69). In 1923 Napkelet [Dawn], edited by the woman author, Cécile Tormay, gained instant and rapid popularity so much so that it threatened to take over the leading role of Nyugat (Kenyeres, EE 46). In the end, Napkelet joined the concurrent publications without leadership. On the other hand, Est-lapok [Evening Papers] did become a true rival to Nyugat, luring over many of the latter’s young, second generation writers permanently (Kenyeres, EE 46). To the far left of Nyugat, the papers Apollo, Válasz [Answer], and Hid [Bridge] need mentioning (see Pomogáts 69). The print media of Hungary’s provincial towns had also grown, including Hungarian papers, such as the Erdélyi Helikon, in those areas which were no longer part of Hungary. With fascism looming in Hungary by the mid-1930s, Nyugat, among other similar periodicals, such as
Vámbery’s radical Szádunk [Our Century], Kassák’s socialist Munka [Work], the communist Gondolat [Thought], and Attila József’s Szép Szó [Belle Lettres] maintained intellectual freedom.

As Miksa Fenyő explains, maintaining financial stability for the journal while fighting external political battles had become more and more difficult, and with Osvát’s death in 1929 Nyugat was on the verge of bankruptcy yet again, paying for paper and printing costs from further loans (FN 54, 56). At that time the journal had a print run of 1700 copies, out of which 600 went to subscribers (Kenyeres, EE 50). All of the editors agreed that it was crucial to save Nyugat for future generations (Fenyő, FN 56). At last, in December 1929, writer Zsigmond Móricz put up his own money and became the editor, with Mihály Babits and Oszkár Gellért in tow as assistant editors, but both Ignotus’s and Osvát’s names were removed from the journal’s cover permanently (Fenyő, FN 51). In his memoir, Fenyő admits with sincere regret that it was in fact largely his responsibility that the two original editors’ names were eliminated, since as he said, he could have prevented it (51). Ignotus was deeply hurt, refused to collaborate in any way, and he declared the imminent collapse of the now quarter-century old Nyugat. While Móricz and Babits represented and fought from two opposing poles of literary ideology—social commitment for Móricz and philosophical aesthetics and ethics for Babits—they kept the overall interest in and mandate of the journal at the forefront. Under their tutelage the subscribership had also grown to 1200 by 1930; however, this increase only lasted a couple of years and fell to 895 in 1932 (Kenyeres, EE 51). In comparison, the revue Új Idők [New Times] had in the same period 25,000 subscribers (EE 51). We have to keep in mind that it was not necessarily the number of subscribers or even readers that created and maintained Nyugat’s popularity, but rather the phenomenon of the publication itself.

In 1931 Babits and Móricz initiated the “Friends of Nyugat” lecture series at Hotel Britannia in Budapest in an effort to reach out to readers and invite new young talents. In January
1932, *Nyugat* celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary at the Music Academy in Budapest. But by February 1933 Móricz’s editorial alliance with Babits ended over a disagreement. Both Babits and Móricz defended the writer’s right to freedom of expression, but Móricz did not accept the aesthetic puritanism of Babits’s neo-classicism and supported the younger writers’ compulsion for participatory action (Pomogáts 78). Móricz left *Nyugat* and from 1939 he edited the journal *Kelet Népe* [*People of the East*]. Babits and Gellért continued editing *Nyugat*, but with Babits’s failing health a young writer, Gyula Illyés, took on most of the editorial duties in 1940. The last issue of *Nyugat* was in August, 1941. With Babits’s death on August 4, 1941, *Nyugat* ceased to exist. During its course *Nyugat* had three owners, Miksa Fenyő, Zsigmond Móricz, and in the last period Mihály Babits. In contrast to the two previous owners’, Babits’s licence for the journal was not transferable, *Nyugat* could not be renewed: “‘Non-licensed’ periodical publications could no longer be ‘tolerated,’” explains Fenyő (*FN* 165). *Nyugat* survived WWI and two revolutions, but it collapsed under the political calamities of World War II. Following official orders the *Nyugat* periodical closed down and its name became nontransferable to any succeeding journals that claimed a literary lineage with *Nyugat* (*Buda* 136). According to the research of the Hungarian literary historian Attila Buda, for a short period, Gyula Illyés was able to obtain a license for a journal to carry on the spirit of *Nyugat* under the title *Magyar Csillag* [*Hungarian Star*] (136). The choice for the publication’s name came from a long list that Illyés and Gellért put together during a meeting in a café, just as Osvát and Fenyő had done thirty-three years prior. Their first choice was “Hűség” [“Fidelity”] which the fascist authorities did not allow, and so came the name *Magyar Csillag*.

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30 Gyula Illyés (1902-1983) came from a humble provincial background. He took part in the communist revolution in 1919 and was arrested. In 1921 he began his study of Hungarian and French literature at the University of Budapest but was forced to emigrate due to his political ties. Illyés settled in France where he participated in the avant-garde movement. He gained amnesty and returned to Hungary in 1926. His first poem appeared in the November 16, 1927 issue of *Nyugat* and from there on the journal published his poems and novellas frequently. With the folding of *Nyugat* in 1941, Illyés initiated its successor, *Magyar Csillag*. 
Illyés and his colleagues considered *Magyar Csillag* only as a “temporary title until they could work out the legal issues and renew the name *Nyugat*” (Buda 135). Using the same printing company, Hungaria, and remaining in the offices of *Nyugat*, the editors of *Magyar Csillag* featured the same authors as *Nyugat* did before. *Magyar Csillag* was able to publish twice a month during the war. Although Hungary joined the war on Hitler’s side in 1941, the front did not reach its borders until the fall of 1944. By then Illyés felt that not only the journal but also his life were in danger, declaring: “until Hitler’s voice is silenced ours cannot be heard” [“amig itt Hitleré a szó, mi nem szólhatunk”] (in Buda 143). Illyés turned *Magyar Csillag* over to fellow writer István Örley in March 1944, but “after the first issue under Örley in April [the incumbent Soviet] authorities prohibited the publication of the journal” (Buda 145). In 1945 and 1946, some of the young writers with Géza Ottlik’s31 initiation applied for a permit to renew the journal at the Soviet headquarters in Budapest, but to no effect. Despite all efforts and good intentions, *Magyar Csillag*, as the successor of the *Nyugat*, folded under political pressure in 1945. There were a few more attempts at reviving *Nyugat/Magyar Csillag*, but none were successful.

Hungary’s first post-World War II literary journal was *Magyarok [Hungarians]* commencing immediately after the liberation of the country in April 1945 (Buda 151). Another journal called *Válasz [Answer]*, edited by Márta Sárközi, the widow of the *Nyugat* writer György

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31 Géza Ottlik (1912-1990) was a Hungarian writer and translator; member of the youngest generation of *Nyugat*.
Sármándi and daughter of Ferenc Molnár, appeared shortly after (Buda 151). In 1946 the youngest generation of writers created Újhold [New Moon] under Balázs Lengyel’s and Ágnes Nemes Nagy’s editorial leadership. All these literary publications aimed to carry on the spirit and legacy of Nyugat, but they could not reclaim its name as a result of legal issues over licensing. Interestingly, Nyugat Press lasted on until April 1949 when the nationalization of private property began to take place under the new system of socialism in Hungary.

In the early 1960s during the Kádárist political and cultural thaw, Géza Ottlik pointed to the cultural legacy of Nyugat in an effort to draw attention to its possible renewal:

Nyugat would have been an important movement in any country; [it was] similar—if it is at all possible to transfer this phenomenon to another linguistic region—to the French encyclopedists in European history. For us Hungarians it was the greatest ethical and intellectual renewal after the Reform Era…The ideologies that they [Nyugat writers] promoted still live in us writers today, who claim to be its rightful successors…If someone cannot understand that such inheritance must not be wasted, it is their problem. If someone feels that we would have been better off to become an industrial empire, well then he should just sulk about it. But a Hungarian writer would be a great fool not to see Nyugat as a cultural empire. (215-16)

Ottlik also formulated the idea of “másik Magyarország,” or “another Hungary,” that Nyugat represented in opposition to the official Hungarian state both in its time and, with its legacy, during the socialist regime (in Pomogáts 5). As Ottlik contends, Nyugat signified, promoted and preserved the true Hungary, its language and culture (in Pomogáts 5). At first glance, these

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32 Reform era, Reform kor in Hungarian, is the period of 1825-1843 when under the leadership of Count István Széchenyi’s land reforms the break-up of the age-old contract between lord and bondsman began. Széchenyi initiated these political reforms and eventually brought them into law through rulings of the Parliament. A powerful literary movement that developed as the successor of the language reformers’ group provided the cultural support and milieu for the political and economic reformation during this time. Some of the most prominent intellectual and literary figures of the time were Mihály Vörösmarty, Ferenc Kölcsey, Sándor Petőfi, János Arany, and Lajos Kossuth. The Hungarian Reform era can be compared to German Classicism and the French Enlightenment.

33 A Nyugat egy nagy lélekszámú országának is fontos irodalmi és művészeti megmozdulása volna—olyasféle jelentőségű Európa történetében, ha át lehetne tenni más nyelvterületre, mint mondjuk a francia enciklopédistáké—, nekünk magyaroknak pedig a reformkor után a legnagyobb erkölcsei és szellemi megújulásunk…a szellem amit hirdettek, nemcsak bennünk, idősebb írókban él ma is töretlenül, akik fenntartás nélkül örököseinek valjuk magukat…Ha valaki nem tudja fölérni ésszel, hogy ezt az örökséget nem lehet elherdálni, hát az ő bája. Ha valaki úgy érzi, jobban jártunk volna, ha inkább egy ipari, politikai nagyhatalom lennénk ma, hát bánkodjon fölötte. De bolond lenne az a magyar író, eltökélt bolond, aki a Nyugat nagyhatalmi rangjánál alább adná.
statements seem to bristle with extreme nationalism. But what Ottlik and many of his contemporaries wanted to emphasize was a qualitative difference in the case of Hungary, which, as a small nation could only rely on its high-cultural values to survive (5). “Another Hungary,” however, has remained a utopian ideal even after 1989.

As for the reception of Nyugat within the Hungarian press and political climate of its time, there were divergent views. Mario D. Fenyő argues that “to appreciate fully the influence of Nyugat, one must read the attacks directed against it and trace these to their source [as] its influence went far beyond its handful of subscribers” (“Writers” 188-89). Even Lukács and Balázs, who frequently published in Nyugat, tried to counter the power and popularity of the journal by initiating the journal Renaissance (Kenyeres 36). As Fenyő suggests, the “influence of Nyugat was due not only to its subscribers and supporters, but also to its enemies…such as [the politicians] Count István Tisza and Count Albert Apponyi, and in post-war Hungary Count István Bethlen34 [who] consider[ed] Nyugat and also Huszadik Század, and their writers dangerous…[and] out of foresight” (“Writers” 192). These politicians saw Nyugat’s ideologies as too foreign. As well, in interpreting “Nyugat’s sickening modern decadence” (Kenyeres 38), the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and most of the literary societies of Hungary rallied against Nyugat. They and other conservative critics identified the literature and worldview of Nyugat with socialism and anti-nationalism (Fenyő, “Writers” 193). Tisza accused Nyugat not only of

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34 Count István Bethlen de Bethlen (1874-1946), was a Hungarian aristocrat and statesman and served as Prime Minister from 1921 to 1931. He was also the representative of the new Hungarian government at the Paris Peace Treaty in 1919.
Count Albert Apponyi (1846-1933) was a Hungarian politician, Minister, and a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He also took part in the Paris Peace Treaty where he delivered his famous speech on behalf of the Hungarian delegation on February 16, 1920. His exceptional decorum, perfect French, and brilliant speech captured the Treaty officials. However, Hungary’s fate had already been decided by England and France, and Apponyi’s plea could not have won them over.
Count István Tisza de Borosjenő et Szeged (1861-1918) was the Prime Minister of Hungary from 1903 to 1905 and from 1913 to 1917. He was the son of Count Kálmán Tisza, Prime Minister of Hungary from 1875 to 1890. In July 1914, he opposed Austria-Hungary going to war with Serbia. Tisza was removed as Prime Minister by the reformist King-Emperor Karl I for his opposition to expanding the franchise. He was murdered in Budapest by a gang of soldiers during the Chrysanthemum Revolution of October 1918.
anti-nationalism, but also anti-religion on the pages of Magyar Szemle [Hungarian Review], an opposition journal he created against Nyugat. Some of the attacks by fellow writers turned into ridicule and mockery. Criticisms even came from abroad, for example, from the Romanian writer Octavian Goga who in anti-Semitic slurs blamed Nyugat for disseminating “Jewish ideologies in place of Hungarian national literature” (Kenyeres 38). Yet as Fenyő shows, Nyugat had a larger readership than Magyar Szemle, and even larger than its intellectual competitor Huszadik Század and other social science publications (“Writers” 193). In response to Nyugat’s anti-war articles its attackers claimed that the journal dishonoured Hungarians’ defensive efforts (Fenyő, FN 102). Miksa Fenyő points out that Nyugat writers were more concerned about the soldiers’ suffering than writing glamorous songs about their feats, and they were more distraught about the catastrophes World War I had initiated than they were about giving in to nationalistic fervour (FN 103). Nyugat exposed social injustice more vividly than any other paper; it appealed to readers’ emotions, and so its impact was more far reaching.

In a recent article from the leading Hungarian weekly literature and culture paper Élet és Irodalom [Life and Literature], the contemporary cultural analyst András Nyerges makes similar observations. Although Nyerges’s underlying aim is to point out the similarities between the voices of right wing forces a hundred years ago and today, his archival media research offers valuable information for my analysis. Nyerges reveals a continuous political and ideological battle against the Nyugat by the liberal right wing, conservative and ultra nationalist/anti-Semitic groups during the journal’s thirty-two year existence. Nyugat occupied the ideological left or left-leaning camp in Hungary with an openly progressive, bourgeois tone. The circle of the Budapesti Hírlap [Budapest Newspaper], a nationalist conservative group, Alkotmány [Constitution], a Catholic publication, and Magyar Kultúra [Hungarian Culture], a Jesuit-oriented paper, among others, regularly accused Nyugat for “treason and immorality” against
Hungarian civilization “in the guise of barbarians” who “want to destroy national self-awareness” (in Nyerges 6). “Nyugat is not Hungarian,” asserted Dénes Görcsöni in 1908 (in Nyerges 6). “Barbarian and uncultured” seemed to be common terms of abuse among the attackers when describing Nyugat and its writers, along with “lecherous” and “uncivilized.” “Zsigmond Móricz is among the leaders of Nyugat,” who according to Dr. Béla Várady’s article of Magyar Kultúra in 1916, “offers mere pornography on the one hand, and fuels anti-Hungarian sentiments on the other” (in Nyerges 6). Racial slurs were widespread by the opposition, such as Várady’s commentary: “Nyugat is the literary vehicle of the Jewish race and its association’s anarchy” (in Nyerges 6). Or others claimed that “in the name of a new direction, these culotte-wearing young Jews try to steal our literature…with modernism Nyugat injects foreignness…which is supported by some token Christians among them…” (in Nyerges 6). In 1921 the literary historian János Horváth sees Nyugat as “a group of Jewish and philosemitic writers: a miniature version of the saturated Jewish assimilation in Hungary…the literature of the Nyugat is the first realization of the assimilated Jew’s literature” (in Nyerges 6).

Nyerges highlights some of the most vocal and volatile accusations with precision, such as those contained in István Lendvai’s article from October 16, 1919 in the review Gondolat [Thought], which called for “the defeat and annihilation of Nyugat.” Following the collapse of Hungary by the Trianon Peace Treaty declarations, right-wing nationalists found a new reason to blame Nyugat: “for the excruciating hell of Trianon, we pronounce the responsibility of the left-wing radicals, the literary counter-movement, which has to be defeated” (in Nyerges 6). In a July 27, 1924 article the Nyugat was accused of the intellectual and spiritual destruction of Hungary through the denunciation of the nation. László Tamás of Magyar Kultúra wrote in 1932 that Nyugat writers were those “who grew up in the ghettos, night coffee houses, they are the rags-to-riches scum.” A 1936 article of Koszorú [Wreath] from the Petőfi Association argued that “the
[Hungarian] nation never understood Nyugat, considering it foreign in its ideological temperament. Nyugat had divided Hungarian literature and tore its readers away from the national worldview.” By 1938 nationalism became fascism, and its leaders threatened to suspend Nyugat’s operation to “show them how powerful we are.” In early 1945, when only a few staunch members of the Hungarian fascist Arrow Cross operated, and Nyugat had already ceased to exist, there were still some who took issue with Nyugat. In his March 1, 1945 article, Lajos Kutasi Kovács exclaimed that “Nyugat produced a destructive literary community…against the Hungarian nation…who ran into their own inevitable demise” (in Nyerges 6). These and many other attacks on Nyugat never weakened its operation and mandate, despite the added internal and other external struggles. In spite of the series of anti-Jewish laws that were introduced between 1938 and 1941 in Hungary (see Cartledge 372), which limited the opportunities of Hungarian Jews in a wide sector of occupation including journalism and the arts, the review survived under the Babits’s secular protection and leadership. As Kenyeres asserts, “after 1912 Nyugat solidified its position in promoting and disseminating ethical aesthetics and classical humanism as operative ideologies and praxis, creating the so-called ‘cultured reader’ [‘művelt olvasó’] against conservatism, and also against the avant-garde” (37). Against the volatile gestures of the various artistic movements Nyugat created its own genre and tradition, which became representative of high culture in Hungary.

Present-day Hungarian literary historians contend that nowhere in Europe has there been a literary journal as influential and important as Nyugat (see Kenyeres, Kelevéz, Poszler, Pomogáts, Szabolcsi, Tamás Gáspár). The writers of Nyugat produced some of the best works of modernism in Hungary; their influence and legacy have penetrated into the Hungarian consciousness and experience of later generations. Their deep sensitivity and exuberant poignancy are still relevant today and inspire Hungary’s best contemporary novelists, like Péter
Esterházy and Péter Nádas. *Nyugat* writers are seen as those who defeated all that hindered Hungarian culture, i.e. feudalism, right-wing nationalism, fascism, Stalinist totalitarianism, corruption, chauvinism, and anti-Semitism. In the words of the Hungarian-British literary historian Loránt Czigány: “No single event was more significant in the history of modern Hungarian literature than the first appearance of a new periodical, *Nyugat*” (289). These writers expressed a “‘Hungarian experience,’” insofar as “they retain that particular Hungarian flavour in their works which has made them unique in addition to being modern” (Czigány 305).

Similarly, Mario D. Fenyő emphasizes that the journal was more than a literary publication: “it was a metaphor, a symbol objectifying abomination for some, cultural progress and even revolution for others” (*LP* 8). Most Hungarian literary theorists assert that *Nyugat* has had a lasting value-added legacy that affirmed, transferred and defined Hungarian culture and has become a metonym for it (see Pomogáts; Szabó B.; Kenyeres): “the history of *Nyugat* is the history of universal Hungarian culture” [“a Nyugat története az egyetemes magyar kultúra eseménye”] (Kenyeres “Vigilia”). *Nyugat* as the vehicle of the Generation West furthered modernist high culture. The *Nyugat* writers synthesized European and Hungarian literary traditions in order to achieve a particular style: the “*Nyugat*-style” in the midst of twentieth century modernism (Pomogáts 84). Equipped with new ideological and intellectual characteristics *Nyugat* gained such a powerful influence over Hungarian writers and the reading public that even today it defines literature and reader-reception in Hungary. Though I share the enthusiasm with these scholars for the importance of *Nyugat*, I also want to avoid elevating *Nyugat* to the role of a causal agent for Hungarian literature and culture. Instead, I have aimed to show how it could be understood as part of Hungarian modernism and worthy of European modernism. Writers of *Nyugat* defined a new kind of Hungarian life and experience, a Hungarian *Weltanschauung*, by regenerating and in a sense restructuring Hungarian language, literature and
the Hungarian way of thinking. An analysis of the thousands of works by all of Nyugat authors would be an impossible task given the constraints of a dissertation. Therefore, in an effort to elaborate on Nyugat’s output, I illuminate some key aspects of its unity, diversity, discourse and legacy through a close examination of the lives and the works of Margit Kaffka, Dezső Kosztolányi and Antal Szerb because they are the best literary exemplars of their generations and Hungarian modernity.
CHAPTER TWO

A New Type of Woman: Feminism in Hungary at the Turn of the Century

*Nyugat* nurtured a number of woman authors, artists and scholars throughout the years who in turn made a significant impact on the course and discourse of the journal and on Hungarian modernism. My second chapter surveys the first period of *Nyugat* and its foremost woman author, Margit Kaffka. But before I launch into my analysis I feel it is important to offer a short overview of women writers and the influence of feminist movements on their works in the late 1800’s Hungary, which I will link with the *Nyugat* review and Margit Kaffka’s novel *Színek és évek* [*Colours and Years*]. The general view is that Hungarian women writers’ contributions have been undervalued or misinterpreted according to masculinist norms of quality, aesthetics and reason both in Hungary and internationally (Schwartz & Kádár 3). An ongoing prejudice about feminism in Hungary claims that “feminism was foreign to the Hungarian tradition,” as the Canadian literary scholar Agatha Schwartz explains in her book, *Shifting Voices* (13). This argument can easily be refuted given that “texts demanding rights for Hungarian women went as far back as the eighteenth century” (Schwartz 13). Similarly, the Hungarian feminist scholar, Judit Acsády suggests that feminism as a social movement was considered to be a brutal attack on respected traditions and nature in Hungary (59). During her research in the 1990s, Acsády met several scholars in Hungary who denied the history and existence of a women’s movement in Hungary, or if there was any feminism “it should certainly not be considered part of mainstream Hungarian history” (59). These perspectives, based on the legacy of both the communist dogma, which alleged women’s equality and consequently afforded no special recognition, and of patriarchal traditions of the past centuries, have all marked and damaged feminist efforts. There is also a ubiquitous assumption in Hungarian literary history that emphasizes the lack of major “women prose writers, with the exception of Margit Kaffka” at the
turn of the twentieth century (Schwartz, “Image” 81). While I have found numerous books about Hungarian feminism and women authors in Hungarian, especially with the recent surge of feminist scholarship, I came across only a few studies in English. In light of this situation, I hope to draw more attention to the first-wave of feminism and women authors in Hungary in order to contextualize Kaffka’s role in *Nyugat*.

Women’s emancipation in Hungary reaches back to before the first-wave of feminism in Hungary, and even before the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in England. Already in 1790 a Hungarian man, Péter Bárány, wrote a petition to the National Gathering of Hungarian Noblemen on behalf of Hungarian mothers requesting “noble women’s participation in the session of the Gathering as spectators” (Acsády 60). As Acsády explains, Bárány demanded better education for women so that “they would be better patriots and hence better educators of their sons” (60). Under Emperor Joseph II in the late 1700s women were given certain rights. They were able to “take up employment without their husband’s permission, inherit property, and own and administer their own property” (Schwartz, *SV* 35; Jánossy 106). These were rights that most European countries did not offer their female population during the same period. Unfortunately, even women of the middle- and upper-classes remained unaware or unenthusiastic about these rights likely because women could run their own estates only if the given family had no male members who could inherit the estate (Acsády 60). Indeed, as Schwartz observes, it took the “initiative of courageous women and the clout of organized women’s groups at the end of the nineteenth century to claim those existing rights and push for the realization of others” (*SV* 35). But before them, already in 1817, the first women’s organization, the *Pesti Jótékony Nőegylet* [*Pest Women’s Charitable Society*] was founded and was followed by similar small groups totalling around 800 by the end of the nineteenth century (Acsády 61).
Acsády sees the significance of early feminists in that they did not only fight for suffrage but also addressed social problems, workplace conditions and educational opportunities for women (“A huszadik” 246). Secondary and higher education for women had been seriously neglected. In her weekly journal, Családi kör [Family Circle], established in 1860, Emília Kánya spoke out against women’s oppression and lack of education. As Schwartz explains, Kánya “without challenging women’s role of wife and mother…demanded the opportunity for unmarried or widowed women to make an income” (SV 14). While the progressive education reformer Count József Eötvös urged the establishment of teacher training colleges for women in the late 1860s, he also expressed conservative views about girls’ upbringing and training in accordance with “the feminine vice” (N. Szegvári 126). In order to advance and promote women’s professional and educational status several organizations were established in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹ Due to the efforts of Pálné Veres,² major improvements were made in women’s educational opportunities by the late 1890s, resulting in women’s enrollment in university arts and medical science, including pharmacy (Fábri 181). While most of these organizations “did not mobilize women on a larger scale, [they] can nevertheless be considered the forerunners of women’s political organizations” (Schwartz, SV 21). Women’s self-awareness materialized in the expansion of feminist movement in Hungary.

Feminists emphasized that they want to maintain their differences as a basis from which to regenerate culture and society, while seeking equality with men on other levels. By linking

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² Pálné Veres* (née Hermin Beniczky) (1815-1895) initiated the first all-girls’ secondary school in Hungary in an article in the journal A Hon [The Homeland] in 1865, which is considered the beginning of the Hungarian feminist movement. In May 1868, Mrs. Veres with a handful of other women founded the Országos Nőképző Egyesület [National Women’s Education Association] with the aim of elevating women’s basic education and opportunities for higher education.
* When women in Hungary take their husband’s name the suffix ‘né’ is added to the male’s first name ending, for example, Pál+né. This is equivalent to the English Mrs. Paul Red, for example. Hungarian names are ordered as family name first and given name second.
equality and difference, Hungarian first-wave feminists had already expressed a key notion that became the platform for the third-wave of feminists in Western Europe and North America. Some men also took part in advancing feminism. In his 1911 book, Gábor Jánossy, a progressive male advocate of women’s rights, argued that “the question of feminism was also the question of human liberty, progress and justice” [“a feminizmus kérdése az emberi szabadság, a haladás, az igazság kérdése”] (3). Jánossy believed that the efforts of the Hungarian women’s movement brought on positive changes in public perception (69), and he fought for women’s right to vote, which would end the subjugated status of women (114). Already at a provincial council meeting in December 1843, several councilors stood up recommending noble women’s right to vote, reasoning that Hungary’s national betterment was also dependent on women’s participation in politics (Tóth 8). The recommendation was rejected and the question of women’s suffrage would be delayed until 1918. Mihály Károlyi’s government reinitiated the topic of women’s right to vote in the “1918 First Bill of Rights” [“1918. évi I. Néptörvény”] with a clause that only literate women could vote (Tóth 8). During the 1919 Republic of Councils, all women eighteen years and older were granted the vote, but when the Republic was defeated their voting rights were revoked and radical feminism in Hungary died. The conservative interwar Hungarian government granted some women the right to vote, advancing those of thirty years or older, literate and with three children (Tóth 9). Suffrage reforms and women’s rights did not become part of the political agenda until after 1945 (Schwartz, SV 55-56). These political tenets and the work of the feminist movement greatly affected women’s life in Hungary which women authors often expressed, reflected and strove to advance.

By the early to mid-1800s in Western Europe, women’s works were widely popularized, such as those by Jane Austen, Mary Godwin-Shelley and Mme De Staël when Éva Takács became the first Hungarian woman to publish a scholarly article on marriage in 1822 entitled
“Egy két szó…” [“A Few Words…”] and in turn was vehemently criticized (Acsády 61). In fact and sadly, writings of these European women were available only to those few Hungarians who could read them in the original; their translations did not become available until the 1920s (cf. Földes 7). But by the late 1800s, according to Schwartz’s research, like their Austrian contemporaries, such as Grete Meisel-Hess, Maria Janitschek and Elsa Asenijeff, Hungarian feminists “conducted their activism not on the streets but through their publications and speeches, as well as their counseling services for women,” for example, with legal, employment, and childcare facilities (SV 15). In Paris, women had already established the first International Women’s Congress in 1877, and the International Council of Women in Washington D.C. formed in 1888, but it was not until 1904 that the Hungarian Feminist Association [Magyarországi Feministák Egyesülete] opened and the Hungarian chapter of the Council of Women formed in 1905 (Fábri 181, 244-45). These groups also produced several journals, such as the Nő és a Társadalom [Women and Society] and Egyesült erővel [With United Force]. One of the first full-time female journalists was Anna Szederkényi, and in 1910 in the Pesti Hirlap [Pest Newspaper] she started up a permanent column for feminist writers (Fábri 183).

Simultaneously, the Hungarian feminist movement leader, Rózsa Bédy-Schwimmer, published articles about the state of women’s education. She took issue with the lack of women working towards feminist goals, and urged others to implement similar national programs she encountered abroad.

The early feminist movement and women writers symbiotically influenced each other in Hungary. Loránt Czigány suggests that in Hungary “it was a social necessity that the appearance on the scene of emancipated female creative writers should coincide with the emergence of the feminist movement” (333). The “concept of Modern Woman, with its moral, social, human, and vocational implications,” according to Czigány “was part of the social progress by middle-class
radicalism” (333). Janka Wohl (1846-1901) who founded and edited such magazines as Divat [Fashion], Nők Munkaköre [Women’s Work] and Magyar Bazár [Hungarian Bazaar] was one of the earliest feminist poets. Wohl was also the first woman to receive the Golden Cross of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1897 for her literary work (S. Sárdi & Tóth). Janka along with her sister Stefánia, who was also a writer, ran a literary salon and welcomed such famous visitors as Franz Liszt. In her 1887 novel Aranyfüst [Golden Smoke], Stefánia Wohl depicts modernization during the Dual Monarchy in Hungary and women’s position and role in the process (Shwartz, SV 33). She was attacked with such severe criticism, as Schwartz explains, that she became “discouraged from further writing until shortly before her death” (SV 32). Hungarian feminist writing was not curtailed, however, and numerous women followed in the footsteps of the Wohl sisters, for example, Countess Sándorné Teleki (1864-1937) who wrote under her pen name Szikra.3 In her first novel, A bevándorlók [The Immigrants] (1898), Szikra spoke for the oppressed, a commitment she was devoted to throughout her life. The sex trade, illiteracy, high divorce rates and the devastation of tuberculosis were some of her main concerns. She agreed with many of her feminist contemporaries on the point that women’s education is above all an economic question and necessity (in Schwartz, SV 38). Szikra was also highly critical of the decadent lifestyle of the urban gentry and bourgeoisie, calling Budapest “Sznobopolisz” (Fábri 171). She edited the feminist movement’s journal, A Nő [The Woman], and she was the president of the Seventh International Women’s Suffrage Congress held in Budapest in 1913 (Fábri 169). Szikra’s was one of the most well-known literary salons in the capital with such members as Fruzina Szalay, Minka Czóbel and Margit Kaffka.

The Hungarian feminist scholar, Anna Fábri explains that Szalay (1864-1926), the daughter of a middle-class bourgeois family, expressed a Secessionist contrast between nature

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3 The Hungarian word ‘szikra’ means ‘spark’.
and urban settings with an underlying irony in her poems (159). None of Szalay’s verses touched on the topics of love or nation, which drew the attention of József Kiss who then frequently published her works in his journal \textit{A Hét [The Week]} (Fábri 159). On the other hand, Czóbel (1855-1947), who came from an aristocratic family, was considered one of the most philosophical poets of her time. She was influenced by Catholicism and by existentialist philosophy, German and English Romanticism, and Buddhism (Fábri 162). Like her contemporaries outside Hungary, the Austrian Ada Christen and the Italian Ada Negri,\footnote{Ada Christen (1839-1901) was an Austrian female poet and writer. Ada Negri (1870-1945) was an Italian poet, who in 1940 became the first woman member of the Italian Academy.} Czóbel discussed social issues in her essays, such as the plight of the working class and the right of women to claim an independent life (Fábri 165). However, feminist discourse at this time rarely expressed sensuous love, sexuality, or homosexuality. Nevertheless, leading feminists did criticize existing marriage practices (Schwartz, \textit{SV} 57). Contrary to these women writers’ discussion of dominant gender roles and social problems, Countess Sarolta Vay (1859-1918) preferred to express her masculine side and she wrote most of her works under male pseudonyms, such as D’Artagnan and Sándor Vay (Fábri 169).\footnote{Publishing under pseudonyms seemed to be an accepted practice, not only for women, but men also wrote under women’s names, such as Ignotus as Emma, and Ferenc Herczeg as Horkayné [Mrs. Horkay].} Vay came from an old noble family, studied at university, took part in duels, and wore men’s outfits. She frequently published in such papers as \textit{Vasárnapi Újság [Sunday Paper]} and \textit{Új Idők [New Times]}, and earned her living entirely from her writing. While often masculine in tone and style, it is not clear whether Vay’s work included manifestly lesbian lyricism. Schwartz argues that the bourgeois women’s movement did not examine lesbian love and homosexuality, and “even in women’s fiction, lesbian love [was] only rarely addressed” (\textit{SV} 56). Gay and lesbian literature were not part of
mainstream publications but a sub-literary culture likely existed while feminist voices became ever more vocal.

The late 1800’s Hungary, as the Hungarian-American scholar Joseph Reményi explains, was an “atmosphere filled with the illusion and delusion of masculine superiority and influenced by literary misogynists, [hence] there was little opportunity for the objective estimation of women writers and their work” (284). In response to the feminist writers’ efforts, a growing number of misogynistic arguments surfaced with the aim of keeping “women in their ‘natural’ place and role” (Schwartz, “Image” 87). There is evidence that woman authors reacted to anti-feminist attacks. The Jewish-Hungarian Renée Erdős’s (1879-1956) was the strongest voice of misandry. Erdős’s success arrived with her novel, *Leányálmok [Girl’s Dreams]* in 1899. Her prose and lyricism articulated only rarely expressed female eroticism, “employing unusual, sensuous and grave words to speak about relationships between men and women” (Fábri 167). She engaged the topic of male hatred most critically in her 1922 novel *A nagy sikoly [The Big Scream]*. Her focus on feminism and women’s eroticism was also a statement of criticism directed towards patriarchal morality. She was an avid supporter of Sigmund Freud’s concepts. Interest in her work grew quickly, earning her large honoraria from the journals in which she published. By the turn of the twentieth century in Hungary, a large number of women openly engaged in debates about femininity and masculinity in their articles and fiction, and also projected their own ideas and desires onto men, while reflecting on the female condition (Schwartz, *SV* 75). Psychoanalytical concepts about sexuality, the subconscious, sex drives, women’s “frigidity” and the “fallen woman” had become quickly known and disputed. As Schwartz argues, Freud’s discoveries had a powerful impact on male and female writers alike, and in Hungary, his ideas became familiarized and popularized through his student Sándor Ferenczi (*SV* 5). Even before Freud, Ferenczi recognized the impact and influence of social
agents and conditioning, that is, education and upbringing on women’s sexuality, and advocated for women’s right to sexual pleasure in and outside of marriage.

However, many feminists criticized the “Freudian concepts and sexual practices based on the moral double standard and the marriage of convenience” (Schwartz, SV 56). As Schwartz points out, “Hungarian feminists had an additional reason for caution when it came to attacking attitudes with respect to sexuality and marriage, namely ‘fear that sexual radicalism would undermine the success of the suffrage campaign’” (SV 57). At the same time, other voices of feminism, and critics of misogyny and misandry also became heard. When the Hungarian translation of Otto Weininger’s 1903 book *Geschlecht und Charakter* was published in 1913, many feminists fought outspokenly against misogynist texts, manifestly attacking women-hating discourses and exposing latent misogynistic publications that were masked in praise. Although Margit Kaffka was not a feminist in terms of joining feminist organizations, as Schwartz emphasizes, she openly condemned Weininger and his text, comparing it with Zoltán Szász’s misogynist book, *A szerelem* [*Love*], in an article in *Nyugat* in 1913 (SV 87-88):

From [Szász’s] stance, some statements are problematically daring and funny for a woman reader. Since a woman’s sense and ability of judgment is smaller, in love she “idealizes more.” It is a funny thing to read Weininger’s similar passage on the same day, whose young and lyrical love hating arsenal, at the misfortune of the woman of course, states that “only men can idealize” and are capable of true love. And that “woman’s love is more joyful (?), only because man’s higher status elevates her,” and that “her subordination and dependence is joy.” The opposite of these lighthearted and chatty observations could be proved just as well. Most likely the author has not heard timid, giving wives talking about men “among themselves,” in the intimacy of sisterhood. (outside, “Szász Zoltán: A szerelem,” *Nyugat Electronic*)
Kaffka’s ironic tone pokes fun at both Szász’s and Weininger’s books, while cleverly making a demand for women’s rights. But it was particularly with her literary works that Kaffka exposed women’s struggles contributing to the definition of the “new woman” [“új tipusú nő”] (Fábri 185). In her 1913 “Az asszony ügye” [“In Woman’s Matters”] published in the journal Világ [World], Kaffka paints the image of a “higher female being whose life should move in the direction of ‘professions, work, love, creation, battle, action, and learning’…not merely into how to please a man,” while also stressing that a woman should “try to get closer to herself” (in Schwartz, “Image” 84). Kaffka believed in a “new woman,” not simply as an ideal but as a flesh and blood reality, which she herself embodied with all the struggles and joys that a woman’s role as wife and mother brings. The concept of a “new woman” is already present in her 1912 novel, Szinek és évek, as I will show later in this chapter.

By the turn of the twentieth century Hungarian women writers had established themselves in the literary scene, at least to the extent that their critics no longer expressed patronizing tones or treated them as a novelty with a focus on their appearance instead of their output. In the early 1900s, women writers’ works proliferated on the pages of the journals Új Idők [New Times] and A Hét [The Week]. Herczeg in his Új Idők published close to two hundred pieces by female writers between 1894 and 1913 (Fábri 173). From its inception Nyugat also promoted women writers, first Margit Kaffka and Anna Lesznai. Anna Lesznai (1885-1966) was also part of fin-de-siècle Hungarian intellectual circles, having married the sociologist Oszkár Jászi whose journal Huszadik Század [Twentieth Century] was the most prominent social science publication of the time. Lesznai came from an old ennobled Jewish family; her first cousin was Count Lajos Hatvany. The theme of land along with nature and folk traditions were ingrained in her writings, illustrations and embroideries. Contrary to many of her female contemporaries’ beliefs, Lesznai claimed that “love was the only and true grounding force in women’s lives” (in...
Fábri 187). The Nyugat editors, Osvát and Ady, recognized Lesznai’s lyricism early on, and published her works frequently in the journal, mostly in the form of poems and cover illustrations. Her main talent was writing children’s stories. She published five books, and her most popular novel just before her death in 1966, entitled Kezdetben volt a kert [In the Beginning was the Garden], was based on her autobiography.

Nyugat, under Osvát’s editorship, published 53 woman authors’ works, including prominent young talents, such as Zseni Várnai (1890-1981) and Sarolta Lányi (1891-1975). Both Várnai and Lányi actively took part in the early working class movement in Hungary, and became best known for their feminist communist lyric poetry (Fábri 190). Following WWI and the defeated communist revolution in Hungary, women writers tended to turn to more traditional ideals and promoted conservative cultural models, losing such first generation avatars as Kaffka who died in 1918, Lesznai, who immigrated to America, and Lányi,7 who moved to the Soviet Union with her husband in 1922. The conservative female author, Cécile Tormay’s (1875-1937) Bujdosó könyv [Book of Exile] became the most popular text for the newfound beliefs. Her novels were also translated into several languages, including the 1914 A régi ház [The Old House], which earned Tormay a Literary Prize from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Tormay was also nominated for the 1937 Nobel Prize of Literature, but her untimely death prevented her from receiving it. In 1922 she became editor-in-chief of the Napkelet [Dawn] journal, which was founded to counter the progressive views of Nyugat. While Napkelet promoted conservative political values, it also published approximately three hundred articles by over one hundred women authors during the life of the journal between 1922 and 1937. During the same period, Nyugat published only 60 women authors’ works, many of those by the lovers

7 Sarolta Lányi moved back to Hungary in 1946.
or wives of the journal’s writers, such as Sophie Török,8 Piroska Reinhard, Szefi Bohuniczky, Mária Kovács, Kosáryné Lola Réz and Erzsébet Kádár (Fábri 192). But contrary to Schwartz’s contention that Nyugat writers expressed “antifeminism” (SV 7), I want to argue that Nyugat promoted women writers and most of its members supported their work. Many of the Nyugat critics respectfully welcomed their female colleagues. On the other hand, it would be misleading to imagine that women writers enjoyed parity and equality with male writers. Most critics of the various papers drew on chauvinist stereotypes, accentuating women’s fragility and emotionality, or they simply denied the existence of women’s intellect (Fábri 191). Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that many women writers in Hungary during the early part of the twentieth century had gained a relatively large publishing output and audience.

In this short and incomplete overview I intended to show how Hungarian feminism and women authors were interlinked at the turn of the twentieth century so as to preface their role in and impact on Nyugat with a special focus on Kaffka. Woman authors employed many genres, styles, they engaged feminism, socialism, and psychoanalysis, and also conservative ideals. With the growing number and popularity of women writers in Hungary research about them also rose. Important texts about woman authors appeared between 1931 and 1943, among them Margit Bozzay’s 1931 book Magyar asszonyok lexikona [Hungarian Women’s Lexicon], and Sophie Török’s essay of “Nők az irodalomban” [“Women in Literature”] in Nyugat in 1932 (195). Török was interested not in the emancipated woman but in “other kinds of possibilities for women’s liberation: the dissolution of the dichotomy between the body and soul, the spirit and matter” (Fábri 195).9 It was also a woman, Lujza Farkas, who wrote the first doctoral dissertation about the Nyugat journal in Hungary and published it in 1935 under the title, A Nyugat és a

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8 Sophie Török (1995-1955) was the pseudonym of Ilona Tanner, Mihály Babits’s wife. Babits’s gave her this nom de plume after one of his linguist idols, Ferenc Kazinczy’s (1759-1831) wife, Countess Zsófia Török (Fábri 195).

9 …másfajta szabadság lehetőségei: a test és lélek, a szellem és anyag kettőségének felodása.
századejei irodalomforduló [Nyugat and the Literary Turn in the Early 1900s]. Soon after in 1937, another female writer, Éva Fodor, published her study about *Nyugat* entitled, *Nyugat-gondolat a magyar irodalomban* [The Nyugat Thought in Hungarian Literature]. Also, some Hungarian women writers, among them Szikra, Renée Erdős, Margit Kaffka and Cécile Tormay “enjoyed considerable fame and respect, not only from readers but also from critics and fellow writers, both female and male” (Schwartz, *SV* 4). But it was only with Kaffka that literary critics first “accepted a Hungarian female author as equal with the best of male authors”; “it was in [Kaffka’s] case that literary criticism first dismissed the need to differentiate between ‘literary’ and ‘women’s literary’ works” (Fábri 186). Contemporary feminist theory contends that gender behaviour and differences, either manifest or subtle, operate in such a way as to influence beliefs about gender, which in turn, are “always implicitly available to shape individuals’ evaluations and behaviour” (Ridgeway & Correll 515). As the American sociologists Cecilia L. Ridgeway and Shelley J. Correll argue, “even when men and women perform objectively similarly in contexts in which hegemonic beliefs are salient, the men are likely to be judged by themselves and others as having somewhat more ability at the task than the women” (519). In retrospect, it would be difficult to measure how much better Kaffka would have had to perform as a female writer. But the material available on her life and work, and her publications help us gain an insight into her struggle to break through the androcentric barriers of the *Nyugat* and earn its respect.

**Margit Kaffka and the Nyugat**

Along with the recent interest in Hungarian literature in English translation, Margit Kaffka’s works have also gained attention. The studies that have been published about Kaffka in North America so far, although small in number, short in length and low in caliber, represent an
important gesture towards Hungarian women authors in general that I would like to capitalize on while also making comparisons with some of the Hungarian scholars’ analyses at hand. Most of these articles make links between Kaffka and the *Nyugat* review, but they are not explicit enough. In this chapter I advance analyses about Kaffka as a *Nyugat* writer. In particular, I focus on her major novel, *Színek és évek* [*Colours and Years*], and suggest reading it as a feminist modern novel and an essential part of the Hungarian literary canon for which the *Nyugat* journal provided a chief discursive milieu.

Margit Kaffka was a member of the first generation of *Nyugat* writers; the most prolific group of people assembled in Hungary at once (born between 1875 and 1885), with such figures as György Lukács, Endre Ady, Ernő Osvát, Zsigmond Móricz, Béla Bartók, Mihály Babits, Dezső Kosztolányi, and Anna Lesznai (cf. Földes 32). As the first woman author of the *Nyugat*-generation, Kaffka represented women in general which was not an easy role to fulfill. The ubiquitous opinion about writers in Hungary was influenced by Pál Gyulai, the country’s leading authority on literature, who argued that women should not take up occupations of lyricism because by nature and by society’s strictures those were reserved for men only (Földes 6). Being a woman was both a label and a role for Kaffka. Recognizing her difficult position she felt obligated to make women’s voices heard in literature. In her works she created the woman’s standpoint to combine subjective experiences for describing and evaluating the objective world, and in particular, Hungarian society. As the Hungarian literary scholar Anna Földes argues in her book-length study on Kaffka, “Kaffka had a unique and until-today inimitable female perspective” [“Kaffka sajátos és mindmáig utolérhetetlen női látása”] (10). Through her writings, she “rail[ed] against a world in which vanishing feudalism, misapplied gentility and philistine hypocrisy or unimaginativeness endeavored to sustain the conviction that it was social heresy for women to pursue certain activities,” and because of this she was seen as “jeopardizing the
potentialities of the national character” (Reményi 285). Kaffka strove to illuminate morality and beauty simultaneously, and exemplified “the artist as the educator” (Reményi 285). The pedagogic tendency is not by accident: she was a secondary school teacher by day and a writer by night.

Despite having a similar sounding last name, Margit Kaffka has no relation to her contemporary in Prague, Franz Kafka (1883-1924). She was born to parents of the provincial gentry in Nagykároly10 in the south east of Hungary on June 10, 1880. When Margit Kaffka was six years old, her father the high-ranking attorney, Gyula Kaffka, died. This tragedy also meant a financial breakdown and subsequent hardship for her family. Her mother, Margit Uray, soon remarried and had three more children. Tough circumstances made the young Kaffka restless but also gave her strength to strive for a different sort of existence. She wanted to learn, to teach and to write. Her Catholic upbringing included free secondary school studies in Szatmár, due to her family’s financial difficulties, in exchange for teaching at a local elementary school without pay for one year upon finishing her education (Brunauer 32). 11 It was during these years that Kaffka first tried out lyricism; her poems, under the pseudonym Pintyőke,12 were published in the Nagykároly school paper, Ébredés [Awakening] (Földes 37, 55). The initial experience as a teacher brought disappointment for her; the stifling religious educational institution and the small town atmosphere suffocated her. Determined to make a living as an independent woman, she traveled to Budapest during the spring break to gain admittance to the Teachers’ Training College (Földes 41). In the fall of 1899, Kaffka enrolled in one of Hungary’s finest women’s educational institutions, the Erzsébet Nőiskola in Budapest against her mother’s will but with her

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10 Nagykároly (Carei) is in Transylvania, now part of Romania. Some other famous Hungarians are also linked to this town, such as Ferenc Kölcsey who worked there as an attorney, Endre Ady who attended the Piarist high school, and the sociologist Oszkár Jászi (1875-1957) who was born and grew up a few streets over from Kaffka’s house.

11 In Hungary at the time, certain high schools granted elementary school teaching certificates.

12 “Pintyőke” means “finch” or “chaffinch” in English. Pintyőke is a relatively common nickname given to people who are good singers, show talent for prose and lyricism, or simply are chatty.
grandfather’s assistance (Brunauer 32). At last, she had found her calling at the College in Budapest: here Kaffka discovered the joy of learning, and as she confessed to her cousin, Hedvig Nemestóthy Szabó, she was “madly in love with the comparative method of the Finno-Ugric and Aryan languages [and] with Homer’s radiant verses” (in Földes 45). Literature was a “drug” [“kábitószer”] for Kaffka (Földes 45). The metropolis, with all its glamour and dirt, theatres and seedy bars, both attracted and repelled her at once. After three years she obtained a teaching diploma which enabled her to work at the “polgári iskola” level, a secondary school designed to provide classical education with a practical element for students of middle-class background.

In the fall of 1902, Kaffka began teaching literature and history at a secondary school in Miskolc in the north east of Hungary. She was familiar with the town but was unable to feel comfortable there. She missed the vibrant atmosphere of Budapest. At the same time, she was dreaming of love, family and career, but the idea of marriage frightened her. While Kaffka longed for a new kind of liberty for women, she also knew that her circumstances could not afford her an independent life, just yet. She accepted a proposal from the good-looking and patient young forestry engineer, Brúnó Fröhlich. They got married in February 1905, and had a son the next year named Lacika. As a contradiction, in the same year Kaffka “wrote a spirited essay defending a woman’s privilege not to marry” (Brunauer 32). Regrettably, I could not access this article, but as Dalma H. Brunauer argues, Kaffka’s effort “would do credit to any feminist authors writing today” (40). It is doubtful that it was simply an exercise in feminist journalism for Kaffka to write this article, but more definitely a sign of formulating ideas that she believed in and developed further in her subsequent literary works. The life of a young mother and wife presented her with tasks she resented, while her teaching job took up most of her

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13 Erzsébet Nőiskola [Elizabeth School for Women], a non-denominal institution of learning, was founded by Jánka Zirén in 1873 and named after Empress Elizabeth of Austro-Hungary.
14 Szerelmes vagyok vadul, a finnugor és árja nylevek összehasonlítási módszerébe, a homeri versek sugaras életébe.
15 Lacika is the diminutive of the Hungarian male name László.
energy. She also dreaded the thought of being stuck in the provincial atmosphere (Földes 75). Kaffka knew she wanted something different from life; she wanted to earn her living from writing.

Already, while Kaffka was pursuing her teacher training education she wrote poems. Her verses caught her stepfather’s attention who took them to the local journal in Nagykároly. “Ind legenda” or the “The Legend of Ind” was Kaffka’s first poem appearing in a noted paper, the Szatmármegyei Közlöny [Szatmár County Bulletin] on April 21, 1901 (Földes 55). According to Földes, Kaffka’s schoolmates also encouraged her to publish, and they sent a few of her works to Magyar Géniusz (57). Indeed, the journal’s first editor, Árpád Basch selected and published some of Kaffka’s poems, those with a conventional folkish tone and style. But it took the young new editor, Oszkár Gellért, to recognize Kaffka’s talent. Following Basch’s death, Gellért took over the journal but was left without a key to the late editor’s desk. Gellért broke the lock and found a whole batch of Kaffka’s unpublished poems, which he immediately liked and proposed to collect in a book, consulting Kaffka only on the colour of the book cover. He titled it Versék [Poems] and it was published in 1903 (Földes 57, 62). The first septet of her poem “A játékszer” [“The Toy”] in Versék is a good example of Kaffka’s style and ideological views that many of her male critics found fault with:

Somewhere Don Juan
Saw a sad woman,
Who, like porcelain, was white,
And quiet and silent.
He thought: It would be good to shatter!
To find out, what is inside?
What is in her heart?16 (Az Élet 28)17

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16 Valahol egy szomorú asszonyt
Látott meg Don Juan,
Ki mint porcellán, fejér volt,
És csendes, szótalan.
Gondolta: Jó volna összetörni!
Megtudni, benn mi van?
A szívében mi van?
These are words of protestation that elicit the minute details necessary to convey the sense of a woman’s discontent that is cleverly hidden in Don Juan’s ridiculous and destructive act of curiosity. The poem echoes both a young woman’s rebellion and an elderly woman’s wisdom. The emphasis on binaries, such as young and old, or rebellious and wise remains a trademark in Kaffka’s works. This volume also includes “Petike jár” [“Petike Walks”], to this day Kaffka’s most popular poem, which celebrates the first steps of the poet’s cousin’s toddler. Now with a published volume of poetry, Kaffka also began to gain recognition at other journals, such as Pesti Napló [Pester Diary], A Hét [The Week], Figyelő [Observer], Szerda [Wednesday], and Jovendő [Future] (Bodnár 5). Magyar Géniusz also published Kaffka’s first novellas; “Új tipusok” or “New Types” appeared in the 17th issue of the journal in 1903 (Földes 117). Her first novellas were published in a collection, entitled A gondolkodók [The Thinkers] later that year. By envisioning the promise and demise of emancipation, these pieces already portrayed the “new woman”: liberated and educated, who was able to gain self-identity from the oppression of patriarchal subjugation not through men or husbands, but independently. These works grounded Kaffka’s later novels that overtly emphasize the inevitable change in women’s gender and social roles.

In Miskolc Kaffka’s students took pride in their “famous teacher” and, as was popular at the time, they rushed to copy out her poems into their diaries (Földes 66). These verses were inspired by the minor poet Mihály Szabolcska18 and the young Endre Ady. At home Kaffka’s artistic and intellectual talents were ignored by her family. Neither her mother nor her patient but conventional husband Brúnó were keen on Kaffka’s literary aspirations. As the Hungarian literary historian, György Rónay explains, when her family disowned Kaffka for her aspirations

17 As I could not access the volume Versek [Poems], I quote this poem from a posthumous collection of Kaffka’s works entitled Az élet útján. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1971.
18 Mihály Szabolcska (1861-1930) was a Hungarian poet and Lutheran priest. He began publishing poetry in 1882 and was considered Petőfi’s epigone. As a curious aside, I grew up on a street named after Szabolcska in Budapest.
she also disowned them (109-10). According to the gentry ideals of Kaffka’s maternal family, writing was a “deadly sin” [“halálos bűn”], a notion that the young Kaffka wanted to dispel, to “expose the problems and difficulties that were carefully covered over” (Rónay 110). She “was in and outside [of this gentry class] at once” [“egyszerre volt benne és kivüle”] (110), experiencing an in-betweenness that fuelled both a sense of contempt and love in her. She saw the inevitable sinking and self-destruction of the gentry and with it the disappearance of all the traditions, mores and beliefs that had stood for centuries. As Reményi sees it, “while she had grown away from her class, she could not overcome the feeling of being affected by the apathy of many of its members; by their incapacity to face hard realities” (289). Kaffka both hailed and regretted this inevitable change in society that she personally experienced and ushered in but ultimately wanted to halt. She was unhappy with her social status, her job and her marriage. She looked for solace in an affair with the Miskolc painter Attila Sassy Szabó19 (Földes 76). When Sassy moved to the capital, Margit lost all hope; she decided to try to follow him there.

For Kaffka Miskolc felt like a prison and Budapest freedom and home (Földes 70). She was overworked; as a teacher, wife and mother she never had spare time for herself, and she suffered from ill health partially as a consequence of her difficult pregnancy. Always on the run, she could dedicate very little time to writing, and then only at night. Fearing that she would be quickly forgotten as a poet, she wrote to Gellért: “I feel really bad here again. Not a single pulse of artistic life can reach me…” (in Földes 70).20 It was during this time that Kaffka came in contact with Miksa Fenyő, who was co-editing Figyelő with Ernő Osvát, and in a letter dated June 11, 1905, she expressed her excitement about the prospects of publishing in the review:

Dear Fenyő!
I was glad to receive your kind letter; Figyelő has been my main ambition ever since it first appeared. I would like to write for it often, but I can’t write poems nowadays. I do

19 The by-now famous pastel portrait of Kaffka by Sassy commemorates their relationship.
20 most megint érzem, milyen rossz itt. A művészeti életnek egy lüktetése sem juthat el hozzám...
prose, but I am not sure how good it is, and I hardly have time to make copies. Next month I will have more time. Then, in the beginning of July, I am going to [Buda]Pest, and I would be very happy, if some of you would look me up at the [Hotel] Otthon, where I will be staying—I hardly know any writers and have little practice in this business, and I would like to ask your advice about this. For example—now that I have a volume-worth of novellas—what should I do with them?…Here none of the new or good old books, research material, or valuable foreign [works] can be found. I would like to rely on your help for many things. With heartfelt regards, Mrs. Fröhlich…(in Vezér 389-90)²¹

Kaffka’s first letter to Fenyő expresses enthusiasm about writing for Figyelő, and also her awkwardness about how to become a writer, despite the fact that she has already had experience in publishing. Her lamenting over the poor literary material available in Miskolc would become a feature theme in many of her subsequent letters. Unfortunately, Fenyő’s letters to Kaffka are not available (he did not make carbon copies of his letters), but Fenyő kept almost all of his correspondence with the many other Nyugat authors.²² Beyond their literary historical significance, these letters also relay a curious story, which, I think is worth mentioning in an effort to illustrate the intricacies of the Nyugat-generation. As the Hungarian literary historian, Erzsébet Vezér explains,²³ when Fenyő arrived in New York in 1953, he discovered that the trunk containing the collection of his correspondence was missing.²⁴ On the third day the luggage turned up in the storage room of Hotel Wales where the Fenyős were staying, but by then the word had got out that the trunk with valuable literary material was lost, and Fenyő, with

²¹ Kedves Fenyő! Örultem a szives levelének, mert mindig a Figyelő volt a főambicióm, mióta megjelent. Irnék be bele többször, de én verset mostanában nem tudok, prozát szoktam, de arról nem vagyok biztos, hogy jó-e és olyan kevés az időm másolni. Jövő hónapban inkább lesz. Akkor július elején fel is megyek Pestre, és nagyon örömmel venném, ha néhányan fölkeresnének az Otthonban, a hová szállok—allig ismerek két irót és sok dologban teljesen járatlan vagyok, mire nézve a szives felvilágosításukat kérném. Például—hogy most van egy kötetre való novellám,—mit kell avval csinálni?…Semmi új vagy régi jó könyv, forrásmunka, vagy értékes idegen itt nem kapható. Sokban szourlnék a segítségükre. Szives üdvözlettel, Fröhlichné…

²² In his Főljegezések, Fenyő recalls receiving forty letters from Kaffka altogether; in one addressing him as “Sándor Fenyő” instead of “Miksa Fenyő” (177-78).

²³ Erzsébet Vezér interviewed Fenyő during one of his visits to Budapest in 1970, and her “Notes to the Notes” are assembled from this information. Part of this interview became available on the Nyugat CD by Arcanum in 2000.

²⁴ Fenyő and his family were in danger during Hungary’s fascist occupation and were hiding with the help of friends. In 1948 the Fenyős emigrated from Hungary, first settling in Rome and Paris, then immigrating to the United States in 1953. Miksa Fenyő moved to Vienna in 1970 so that he could be closer to his beloved Budapest.
a journalistic forethought, decided that he would rather keep the “myth” alive until the appropriate occasion presented itself (468). His 1970 visit to Budapest became such an occasion; the letters were donated to the archive of the Petőfi Literary Museum [Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum]. Vezér included most of them in her edited text of Fenyo’s book.

In her third letter to Fenyo, on June 27, Kaffka conveyed surprise that he found her works good, and that she knew “Figyelo is a poor paper” [“szegény lap”], that is, “poor but rich” [“gazdag szegény”], meaning that it has talented authors whom it cannot pay (in Vezér 391). Nonetheless, she expressed her disappointment that she had not been compensated for her works, not even with “stamps and paper” [“bélyeg és papír”] (in Vezér 391). Although both Kaffka and Fröhlich worked full time, their financial situation seemed insecure. In yet another note to Fenyo, Kaffka expressed hope that he would visit her in Miskolc and revealed that her colleagues at the school condemn her artistic aspirations, contending that “‘it would be better for all women writers to pluck chickens and make pillows instead’” (in Vezér 396). Feeling smothered by the provincial milieu, the rigid institutional rules at the school, and a loveless marriage, Kaffka desperately wanted to move to Budapest where she believed she could become a writer and live with her lover: “I must hurry, or else the door may open too late, when I no longer have wings to fly with,” she wrote to Fenyo (in Vezér 397). But Brúno resisted, which Kaffka sensed and expressed in her September 20, 1906 letter to Fenyo: “My dear hubby is giving me much trouble now…he still hesitates [fearing] that in [Buda]Pest I would be even less of a wife than here…”(in Vezér 402). Kaffka’s intimate confession to Fenyo is all the more curious because the two had not yet met personally. Relentlessly, she kept applying for teaching posts in the various Budapest school districts while encouraging her husband to seek a transfer to the capital.

25 minden író kobb tenné, ha csirkét koppasztana [!] és párnáinsetzet [!] stikkelne.
26 Az uracskámmal nagyon sok most a bajom…én Pesten még annyira sem leszek neki felesége, mint itt…
At last in January 1908, the Fröhlichs relocated to Budapest or rather to one of its suburbs, Újpest, where Margit secured a teaching position at a girls’ school (Brunauer 33). She sent a letter at the end of January to Fenyő from Újpest expressing her anticipation and desire to meet him and Osvát, who had just created Nyugat: “This week, Wednesday or Thursday, if the weather permits, I will visit you at [café] Bristol… I could use some tender words!” (in Vezér 407). It seems that Kaffka had the right kind of supporters in Fenyő, Gellért and Osvát to make a break onto the pages of Nyugat. Interestingly, it was not her poetry or prose that first appeared in Nyugat, but a review she wrote about Dezső Kosztolányi’s new volume of poems entitled, Négy fal között [Between Four Walls]. She writes with confidence and praises Kosztolányi with the tone of an older, more experienced colleague:

Among those sages with grand sense and feelings, those who work for the “chosen ones,” for the nobles, gentiles, the biedermeiers—sometimes one-eyed, other times helpless but always working wholeheartedly—a ray of modern vision has fallen in the spiritual path of the Kölcseys\(^{27}\) and Kazinczys. It is the art of the nerves, a handful of intimacy that a chisel shapes into a fine form. This phenomenon [komplexum] is called Kosztolányi…All in all, we gain with Kosztolányi. His recent new poetic essays reveal that he is a serious and self-confident aesthete. As for his volume, there are too many verses in it. (“Kosztlányi”)\(^{28}\)

As she had already begun during her correspondence with Fenyő, here in the “Figyelő” section too, she signed her name for this article as “Fröhlichné Kaffka Margit,” signalling her desire for independence. Kaffka’s use of adverbs and metaphors to describe Kosztolányi as a “komplexum” underlines her lyricism that remains constant throughout her works. In her eyes, Kosztolányi is worthy of Nyugat and she welcomes him into the line of poets who are the cream

\(^{27}\) Ferenc Kölcsey was one-eyed; he wore an eye patch.

\(^{28}\) A nagy érzők, az érzéssel mesterkedni is szépen tudók, a “választottak számára dolgozók” a nemesek, gyöngédekes, biedermeieresek - néha félszeműek, néha gyámoltalanok, de mindig egész szívvel dolgozók; szóval a Kölcseyek, Kazinczyak szellemébe beleszakadt egy sugár modern látás, egy eszmé összetett idegművelet, jó adag bensőség és kifejezésben a cizelláló véső szinte betegs finomsága. A komplexumot Kosztolányinak hívják…Egészből véve haszon és nyereség nekünk Kosztolányi, akiről újabban néhány prózai dolgozata révén derült ki, hogy komoly és öntudatos esztéta. Ami a kötetét illeti - túlságosan is sok vers van benne.
of mid-1800’s Hungarian literature, i.e. Ferenc Kölcsey and Ferenc Kazinczy, and whom subsequent poet generations have revered. By comparing Kosztolányi to these preceding figures of national literature, Kaffka canonizes him, that is, she approves of her young colleague and deems his work suitable for study. This article also marks Kaffka’s friendship with the younger Kosztolányi, which was mutually inspiring and supportive. Although their literary styles differed, they shared a cultural, generational, historical and intellectual milieu of philosophical, psychological and political heritage. It was the artistic and literary community that most attracted Kaffka to Nyugat; meeting and exchanging ideas with writers and editors (Földes 79). In a letter to Fenyő dated November 20, 1908, she declared: “Nothing interests me more than the cause of Nyugat, and if only house chores, marking papers, unpacking and other joys of life would not prevent me from being there every third day and publishing in every second issue” (in Vezér 410).29

Kaffka’s second piece in Nyugat appeared in the third issue, in February 1908. It is a short story, entitled “Neuraszténia,” that describes the paranoid visions of a woman (perhaps Kaffka) in a stranger’s house. Throughout 1908 her writings regularly appeared in Nyugat. But there was a break in 1909, when only six of her articles were published. It was during this time also, between 1908 and 1910 that Kaffka co-authored secondary school textbooks on literature, grammar and poetry analyses, and wrote a children’s book, entitled Képzelet-királyfiak [Imaginary Princes] (Földes 246-47). Her interest in children’s education had a broad scope which included her critical attention to the mass-produced and expensive children’s toys available in stores. In several articles she problematized the quality of manufactured toys and argued for making toys more creative, the kind which children could build and take apart. She also advocated using recycled household materials to make mini theatres, doll museums, or

29 …semi sem érdekel jobban, mint a Nyugat dolga,—és hogy csak házigondok, írkajátítás, költözés és hasonló élet-szépségek akádályoznak, hogy minden harmadik napon és minden második számban jelen ne legyek.
children’s magazines (Földes 250-51). Regrettably, her articles did not lead to changes in the toy industry, but she can be considered a pioneer in envisioning practical and stimulating toys, made from reusable material, that have become popular in “green-conscious” communities today.

As time went by Kaffka wanted more; most of all she wanted to be liberated so that she could live entirely for writing. Brunauer, drawing on one of Kaffka’s first biographers’ notes, explains that for her, “living in a big city [brought] to the surface previously hidden emotional conflicts”; Margit Kaffka and Brûnó Fröhlich “separate[d] in peace and quiet” in the summer of 1910 (33). Kaffka finally felt free, but alone; Sassy had left for Paris. Kaffka moved to a smaller apartment in Buda at the end of Márvány Street at the foot of the hillside. It was a dark and cold ground-floor two-room apartment overflowing with toys, books and papers. She was now raising Lacika on her own with very little financial support from Fröhlich. Living on a low-paying teacher’s salary and earning only pennies for her writings forced Kaffka into permanent financial hardship. She spent four hours traveling on trams across the city to the school and back each day. She was always exhausted. Nevertheless, she reveled in her friendship with members of the *Nyugat*. Although the *Nyugat* movement divided critics and audiences from the very beginning, Kaffka knew that she was part of something grand (Földes 85). On Sundays she hosted their meetings at her apartment, serving freshly baked pastries, coffee and wine (Földes 94).

Kaffka adored Ady, whom she met early on in her career, although not in Miskolc but later in Budapest. In a December 1908 letter, Schöpflin tells Ady that: “Yesterday I spoke with the only Hungarian woman who deserves the title of writer: Margit Kaffka. Do you know what she said? That since she has read your last poems, she does not dare to write poems again. She feels that she cannot escape your influence. This is such a compliment!” (in Földes 88).30 Ady

30 Tegnap beszéltem Őről szemember az egyetlen magyar nővel, aki megérdemli az író nevet: Kaffka Margittal. Tudja mit mondott? Hogy amióta Önt olvasta, nem mer verseket irni. Érzi, hogy nem bir szabadulni az Ön hatásától. Ez csak bök!
and Kaffka’s relationship was mutually amicable and reverential. Ady also admired Kaffka for her talent but to Kaffka’s regret less so because she was a woman: “You are such a great writer that I cannot see the woman in you,” Ady confessed to Kaffka (in Földes 90). They met frequently at the _Nyugat_ tables in the cafés, or in Ady’s favourite night bar, the Három Holló [Three Ravens], and later at Kaffka’s literary Sunday afternoons in her apartment (Földes 89). Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek considers Kaffka’s association with Ady an important point in her artistic career despite their initial encounters, which caused Kaffka frustration because of Ady’s “apparent manifestation of patriarchal values” (180). Ady wanted to see the author and the woman as two separate entities. Consequently, Kaffka’s early critics saw her as a “hysterical woman, deprived of the protection of her social set”; it was unusual for a woman in _fin-de-siècle_ Hungary to flaunt “a strong will” or follow “pessimistic temptations” (Reményi 288). Ady attacked Kaffka’s second novella collection _Csendes válságok_ [Quiet Crises] in 1909 as an example of “feminini generis” (in Földes 121), while Lukács considered it merely “interesting” (in Földes 122). Most critics outside of _Nyugat_ condemned Kaffka for depicting her male protagonists from merely a woman’s point of view.

In the January 1910 edition of _Nyugat_ Kaffka reappeared with a book review about Felicián Kupcsay’s³¹ _A boldogság kis kátéja_ [A Little Catechism of Happiness], but signed as Margit Kaffka in light of her imminent divorce from Brúnó Fröhlich. From then on, she exclusively used her maiden name. Her output in _Nyugat_ was productive in 1910. As much as time and energy allowed, Kaffka visited the Bristol café where many _Nyugat_ writers gathered, and she was always graciously welcomed. She also attended most of the journal’s official gatherings, dinners and literary evenings, but felt humiliated when she had to sit at the “wives’ table” (Földes 84). She felt most at home among the inner circle of the _Nyugat_ writers. The

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³¹ Felicián Kupcsay (1876-1964) was a Hungarian writer.
reason for this association could also be located in more of a personal matter: Kaffka had a short but very intense dalliance with Ernő Osvát in 1911. Osvát was married and had a daughter, however, he also possessed a magnetic personality that attracted most people, among them, Kaffka. Kaffka fell in love with Osvát. When Osvát broke up with her she felt devastated and angry, so much so that she was ready to bring down the whole Nyugat (Földes 97). In fact, it was Kaffka who demanded to have Osvát’s name removed from the review’s cover in 1912 (Földes 97). Her subsequent relationship with the author Dezső Szabó in 1913 also ended on less than amicable terms. As Földes explains, Szabó’s autobiographical writings reveal his enthusiasm but also confusion about Kaffka’s complicated character: “What is the secret of this interesting looking woman who brings on such little sexual desire for her in men?…she can only love with her soul” (95). The existing photographs depict Kaffka as a tall and slender woman with a dark crown of hair, big dreamy grey eyes with dark circles underneath, and a curiously protruding nose. According to her time’s conventions of feminine beauty she was considered unique but certainly not attractive (Földes 24). She lacked both money and a flair for fashion, for she dressed, as her contemporaries described, in untidy long skirts with colourful unmatching tops and hats, and wore black boots that looked like men’s shoes. Szabó portrayed her outfit as always a “colour-staccato,” a “bizarre elegance” that shocked almost everyone she met (in Földes 26-27). Her eclectic dressing hid a complex personality. During their first short trip to Paris, instead of listening to Szabó’s wooing, Kaffka would break into desperate tirades about her unhappiness and failed marriage (Földes 98). Szabó contributed to Kaffka’s discontent about her sexual repression and claimed that “in the most inadequate moments she would launch into deep philosophical discourses” (in Földes 98). Comparably, in a letter to Ady in the summer of 1913, she argues that men cannot imagine how a woman can feel like nothing: “Bandika, how

32 Osvát’s frequent affairs, often with women writers of Nyugat, led his wife, Cornélia Stenier, to suicide in 1927.
much would you want to trade places with me and be a woman?” (in Fülöp 58). Although Kaffka had several relationships in the early 1910s, none were serious; men saw her as a sexually irritated woman who was permanently absorbed in her own loneliness.

Kaffka sought and at last secured a transfer to another secondary school in Angyalföld, a suburb closer to the centre of Budapest. Her travel time to work was cut into half, but her tasks did not lessen. On the verge of exhaustion she was granted a one-year sabbatical from the school, without pay, in 1911, freeing her from teaching but doubling the responsibility of finding another source of income. Kaffka was looking for every opportunity to publish. It was during this crisis-laden time that she also began writing _Szinek és évek_. Sensing urgency, Kaffka worked feverishly on the novel. Her then close friend, Viktor Papp, later described noticing Kaffka folding each piece of paper into half, and writing on one half only, then dropping the paper on the floor: sheets of paper covered every inch of the floor in her apartment (in Földes 129). These were the hand-written pages of her first novel. _Szinek és évek_ brought her immediate success in its serial form in the magazine _Vasárnapi Újság_. Her colleagues at _Nyugat_ celebrated Kaffka’s novel in reviews: Zsigmond Móricz declared, with happy surprise, that “no one before Margit Kaffka’s writing could depict the social stratification of Hungary in such a way…from the perspective of the woman, from the life of the woman…” (“Kaffka”). Similarly, in his December 31, 1912 article Aladár Schöpflin welcomed Kaffka’s novel and considered her talent to be making observations that turn the quotidian into the symbolic. He described Kaffka as “the first in Hungarian literature who, cleared from the needlepoint-dilettantism, expresses art while retaining her femininity…It is exactly this womanly pondering which enables Margit Kaffka’s novelty and

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33 Bandika, mennyiért lennél helyettem asszony? (Bandika is the diminutive of Ady’s first name, Endre).
34 A magyar társadalomnak azt a rétegét, amelyet Kaffka Margit írásban ad: soha senki nem adta, nem is adhatta…asszonyszemmel látott, asszonyeléettel átélt…
freshness…There is no other womanly writer, perhaps in the whole wide world” (“Kaffka”).

These reviews carry unquestionably patronizing tones towards Kaffka. But considering the context of their time, they offer the most overt recognition a woman writer had ever received in Hungary thereby ensuring Kaffka’s place among Hungarian male writers, and in Schöpflin’s view, among female authors internationally. Even the traditionally conservative critics of *Magyar Figyelő* and *Budapesti Szemle* applauded Kaffka, as “the most outstanding woman writer” “[“legkülönb magyar női író”], although they did not consider *Színek és évek* a “serious and monumental novel” “[“komoly és nagyszabású regény”] (in Fülöp 63). Kaffka, upon returning to the school received ovations and admiration from her students. She was determined to bring reforms to the stuffy school curricula by introducing Ady’s poems to the chagrin of the principal (Földes 101). According to Földes that was Kaffka’s last year at the Angyalföld school.

We ought to imagine the difficulties Kaffka, as a single parent, a career woman and an accomplished but financially struggling author, must have experienced in the dominantly patriarchal culture of the metropolis. These external difficulties were underlined by her psychological and health problems, which a September 1911 letter to her mother confirms: “My health is really weakening, I must have a very overworked body and mind; I feel all kinds of ailments starting to take over” (in Fülöp 55). With a poignant self-irony she described herself to Lajos Hatvany in a letter the same year as: “a teacher in the morning, a writer in the afternoon, and a lady at night” (in Fülöp 55). It might have been more of a complaint, because at this time Kaffka was also giving lessons to Hatvany’s two children from an extramarital affair to augment her income (Buda 28). In spite of the close-knit community at the *Nyugat* and her short-lived love affairs, she basically always felt lonely.

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35 ...a magyar irodalomban az első asszony, akiben az író minden asszonyi kézimunka-dilettanizmustól megtisztulva, igaz művész miaváltában nyilatkozik meg, de asszonyásának teljes megőrzésével…Épp ez az asszonyos álmlékolás...adja meg Kaffka Margit gondolatvilágának újságát és frissességét…Nincs ilyen asszonyias író több, talán az egész világon.
Eventually, Kaffka developed close friendships with a few women she met at or through the Nyugat, and at Emma Ritóok’s salon, among them Anna Lesznai. As Földes describes Lesznai, “she was born and grew up in that particular intellectual elite milieu that had brought down the archaic and established the modern culture of Hungary” (104). She was wealthy and well educated, attributes which Kaffka admired in her, but she also envied Lesznai for her smooth skin, which Kaffka imagined, was a result of long and much untroubled sleep (Földes 105). In turn, Lesznai was also jealous of Kaffka’s literary fame and success. It was Kaffka who introduced Lesznai’s first volume of poems in her 1909 Nyugat review. The two women collaborated on translating Paul Claudel’s The Rest After the Seventh Day [A hetedik nap pihenője] for the March 1913 issue of Nyugat. Kaffka often spent her summer holidays at Lesznai’s estate at Körtvélyes in the northeast of Hungary. It was during one of these holidays that Kaffka first met Béla Balázs’s younger brother, Ervin Bauer, the dashing and sporty medical student who was ten years her junior (Brunauer 37; Földes 107). Initially, Kaffka was annoyed by Bauer’s lighthearted elegance and carefree flirtatiousness, especially because she knew that he was engaged while also having an affair with another woman. Running into each other, not only at Lesznai’s but also at Balázs’s sister, Hilda Bauer’s, their friendship eventually developed into love. This is the first time that Kaffka felt immersed in a mutual feeling of love and affection. The couple set out on a trip to Italy in the summer of 1914. It was in Perugia that the news of the war reached them. Despite Balázs’s protest, they decided to get married immediately upon their return. They had a short and unceremonious wedding at Szeged City Hall.

Emma Ritóok (1868-1945) was a Hungarian feminist writer who gained recognition with her 1897 essay “A természettudományi irány a szépirodalomban” (“The Natural Science Stream in Literature”) and popularity with her 1905 award-winning novel Egyenes úton egyedül [Alone on a Straight Road]. Ritóok attended universities in France and Germany; she was one of Georg Simmel’s students in Berlin, and earned a doctorate in philology. She also became a founding member of Lukács’s Sunday Circle in Budapest. She eventually turned away from the metaphysical outlook of her contemporaries, and delivered harsh criticism of them in her 1921 novel, A szellem kalandorai [The Adventurers of the Spirit].

Béla Balázs’s original name was Herbert Bauer.
on August 15, followed not by a grand dinner but merely coffee with friends (Földes 178). After only a few days together Ervin was called up for service in August 1914 (Brunauer 38; Földes 177).

From free verses, such as “Hajnali ritmusok: Május 23” [Rhythms of Dawn: May 23”] to her novel series, entitled Mária évei [The Years of Maria], Nyugat carried most of Kaffka’s works. Kaffka was also considered a talented critic. However, she published very few critical essays in Nyugat. While in 1913 Kaffka wrote frequently in Nyugat and in other journals, in 1914 she published only one poem in the last issue of Nyugat of that year, called “Záporos, folytonos levél” [“It Is Continuously Raining Letters”]. It is an anti-war poem that mourns the soldiers and their loved ones back home, like Ervin Bauer and herself. Wounded twice, Ervin was able to visit home during the war years to be nursed back to health by Kaffka. She “suffered agonies of worry” and celebrated her love for Ervin, which she expressed in such poems as the “A te szined előtt” [“In Thy Presence”] in Nyugat in 1915. I quote the last two cantos of this five-stanza verse in my translation to illuminate Kaffka’s emotions embellished by style and principles:

Until now, my life was awful;  
Mixed up, wasteful, half, broken!  
-Now my past has healed,  
As I have told you.-  
Because you have seen my fate: I came to love it, too.

You have offered me the golden grail  
Of your noble, saintly faith,  
You have offered me the wine of your love.  
From now on, until I live, I will be a saint!  
You have raised me with praise; I will be up there;  
Always “in thy presence”…  
Oh thank goodness, thank goodness, thank goodness!

(Nyugat Electronic)38

38 Oly csúnya volt, mit eddig éltem;  
Kevert, pocsekoló, fél, törött!…  
-Most a multam is rendbejött,
Kaffka’s exultant confession depicts urgency for love and life to be lived without hardship, or at least to live with the privation of love alone. Kaffka uses “szined előtt,” a phrase used exclusively to express one’s appearance in front of the highest dignitaries or God, which the English translation of “in thy presence” does not relay so successfully. The phrase is very significant, however, because it permits the speaker, Kaffka, to address Ervin in the second person in order to anoint him as if he were a saint, so in turn he too elevates Kaffka; they are to be each other’s saints. Eroticism blends with ethereal acts in Kaffka’s metaphors whereby the drudgery of her life is transformed into fate marked by love. Her voice is not of the feminist here but of a person who has come to fulfill herself as a woman. “In Thy Presence” celebrates love and also speaks out against the war. Shortly after this poem, Kaffka followed up on her conviction of anti-war sentiments in a novel, *A két nyár* [*Two Summers*] that appeared both serially in *Nyugat* and as a book in 1916.

Kaffka’s days were dominated by mood swings, coupled with tremendous fear about the war and worry about Bauer, while still working at a school. Realizing that she could not spare any more energy, she retired from teaching after more than ten years service. Now she could devote her full attention to Bauer and writing. Towards the end of the war Bauer was stationed at the Temesvár39 military hospital, and so Kaffka moved there with her son. She wrote several articles, poems, and finished her novel *Állomások* [*Stations*] in between feeling deeply depressed, ill and uninspired (Földes 188). Each of the pieces expresses her protest against the

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Földes 188

Ahogy teneked elmeséltem.-
Mert láttad sorsom: megszerettem.

Nemes, szent csordultig-hited
Aranykelyhét felém kináltad,
Szerelmed gralborát ajánáltad.
Most már, mig élek, szent leszek!
Felmagasztaltál; fent leszek;
Mindig "te szined előtt" járva...
O hála, hála, hála!

39 Temesvár (Timisoara) is now in Romania.
war, her solidarity with soldiers and with women, and her declaration of pacifism as a collective experience (Földes 203). Constant financial insecurity multiplied her troubles. According to Földes’s research, Kaffka had to ask the *Nyugat* editors’ permission, in particular Hatvany’s, to be allowed to write for other papers and seek a salary (223). It is not clear to me if and what kind of contract Kaffka might have initially signed with *Nyugat* regarding her works, but most of the biographical studies suggest ongoing pecuniary negotiations with the review (Földes, Fülöp, Bodnár, Brunauer, Schwartz). In her letter to Fenyő on October 23, 1916, Kaffka sent the manuscript of her new novel, *Hangyaboly* [*Ant-heap*]. What is also particular to note in this letter is Kaffka’s appreciation for being a member of *Nyugat*:

> It felt really nice that the *Nyugat* counts on me and cares about my work. This is nice. A thirty-six year old writer must belong somewhere. *Nyugat* has become political now, hasn’t it? I don’t think it is a problem, since it couldn’t have been otherwise, as long as it does not squeeze out literature. I see from the [editor’s] letters that you won’t let the tradition go. I am going or rather planning to work a lot now…(in Vezér 416)\(^{40}\)

Kaffka always felt honoured to be part of the journal. Her only other solace was to be near her husband. Bauer was an avid medical researcher of bacteriology and studied under the famous Professor Kaufmann in Germany for two years before receiving his medical degree in Szeged. Medicine and science fascinated Kaffka. She often sat with and even assisted Bauer in his laboratory. She wanted to surprise Bauer with a Zeiss microscope; it was only fair, she thought, since she had acquired her profession’s tool, a typewriter, a couple years earlier. In her October 30, 1916 letter to Fenyő, Kaffka expressed her anticipation of receiving an honorarium from *Nyugat*, which she would spend on a new winter coat, gloves, and if *Hangyaboly* was published as a book, “on a really good Zeiss microscope for my poor husband” [“abból még egy jó és igazi

\(^{40}\) Igen jólesett, hogy a Nyugat szómit rám ás törödik a dolgozássommal. Ez jó dolog. Mert valahova bizony kell tartozni már egy harminchat éves irónak. A Nyugat most “politiakai” lett ugye? Azt hiszem, ez nem baj, és tán nem is lehetett itt más képpen, csak ha litterátúra nem szorul ki emiatt; és a levelekéből úgy látom, hogy ebben nem engednek a tradicióból. Én most sokat fogok, ill. készülök dolgozni...
Zeiss-féle mikroskópot akarok vérge szerzni szegény uramnak”] (in Vezér 418). Hangyabol was published and it also appeared serially in Nyugat in 1917. A letter to Fenyő dated April 23, 1917 details her plans for a poetry collection of thirty-nine poems, entitled Az élet útján [On the Path of Life], and the proceedings of her works’ German translation (in Vezér 424). This was Kaffka’s last letter to Fenyő.

Already in her early writings, Kaffka defined the portrait of the “new woman.” With more foresight than any of her feminist contemporaries, Kaffka demanded that the “new woman” have a right in choosing a career, love, study, and praxis (Földes 255). Her criticism of gender oppression interlinked sexual, social and class inequalities. A late 1917 Nyugat article, prompted by a conference Hungarian physicians held in search of a cure for the ailing country from a medical perspective, illuminates her argument for a reform of the entire society:

...here everything has to go under reforms, we must change everything...Or to abolish it all and rebuild it from scratch...Life has since defied Marx’s genial, apostolic theories (for example, the collapse of capitalism by its own forces...)...and they [doctors] have been delaying the Marx-predicted collapse of society and world poverty, which in fact could have brought about radical changes. (“Glosszák” Nyugat Electronic)41

Kaffka supported socialist ideologies and the Mihály Károlyi-led Chrysanthemum Revolution in the fall of 1918. She was among the eleven most highly regarded intellectuals Hatvany appointed to the new National Council (Földes 261). Kaffka did not want to take up a public role, but with the prescience of the inevitable break-up of the Dual Monarchy, she, along with her colleagues, advocated the nation’s rebirth within socialist democratic goals.

41...itt mindent, mindent reformálni kell, megváltoztatni...Vagy talán megszünteti, újraépíteni...Híssz a zseniális, az apostoli Marx legsarkalatosabb teóriáit (például a tőkés-társadalom magát-önkretevő, önként felemesztődő természetéről szóló teóriáit) is meghazudolta azóta az élet; s ők...késleltetik ezt a Marx-megjósolta társadalmi végelgyengülést, világszegényedést, mely tán elhozta volna a győkeres megoldást.

42On October 30, 1918 returning soldiers and starving citizens in Budapest initiated the so-called Chrysantium Revolution, symbolized by the flower on the soldiers’ cap, demanding secession with and independence from Austria. Count Mihály Károlyi was elected as Prime Minister to lead Hungary to its first independent Republic.
Although a few months earlier she promised Fenyő that she “would submit manuscripts to Nyugat as long as they want them,” and that she “would not ask for more than a regular honorarium” [“rendes munkadijon kívül ezen túl sem kérek egyebet”] (in Vezér 422), after 1917 there were no more works by Kaffka in Nyugat. Her second children’s book A Kis emberek, barátocskáim [The Little People, My Little Friends] appeared just in time on the store shelves for Christmas 1917 (Földes 248). Kaffka took a pause from writing and dedicated all her time to Ervin and his profession. Indeed, for the first time in her life, Kaffka was financially secure, maritally happy, the war and all its encumbent horrors over (Brunauer 39; Földes 244). She had reached a turning point and was looking forward to a better future. Feeling more relieved with the end of war in sight in the summer of 1918, Kaffka wrote a short story called “Álom” [“Dream”] that drew on a recent experience at a diorama she and Bauer encountered in a small town. Seeing the images of distance cities, Moscow, Cologne and Naples, Kaffka captures the spatio-temporal possibilities of her life that were negated by the war. With peace at last, in the fall of 1918 Kaffka and Bauer moved back to Budapest. She began to write again, although two poems only—“Te Deum” and “Rosszalkodás” [“Misbehaving”]—but she published eleven articles in various papers, and continued to research material for a sizable novel about Josephus Falvius (Földes 245). Her main theme in these works is the future of women.

The only thing that tainted Kaffka’s newfound outlook and happiness was the swiftly spreading Spanish influenza that had been claiming thousands of lives in Hungary that year. She decided to “avoid traveling on trams, to always wash her hands with “lizoform” [a disinfectant] and to keep aspirin at home”; “not that aspirin would protect anyone from the forty degree fever and its tremendous pain, as if it were the medicine against death,” points out Földes (266). She pleaded with her son not to travel either, but the Temesvár boarding school closed down due to the disease, and Lacika came to Budapest by train on November 16 (Földes 268). Aladár
Schöpflin visited Kaffka on the last Sunday of November. In his retrospective 1928 article in *Nyugat*, Schöpflin describes his meeting with Kaffka as warm and jovial, with Kaffka offering him cold cuts and wine; they were toasting the end of the war and the future: “She felt she had finally been acknowledged as a writer, the public began reading her books, several papers published her articles, her financial hardship had eased…she could have Lacika with her…she was full of plans” (“KM Most”). As they were conversing, writes Schöpflin, Lacika complained about a headache. The following day Béla Balázs told Schöpflin that both, mother and son had to be hospitalized due to high fever. They had both contracted the dreaded influenza. As Földes suggests, Kaffka was among the few fortunate patients who had a private bed and could use her own bed linen (269). But her condition worsened rapidly and she died in her husband’s arms on December 1. Lacika succumbed the next day. It was at the first meeting of the Vörösmarty Academy on December 1, 1918, recalls Schöpflin, when Hatvany told them in a trembling voice that Margit Kaffka had passed away. Schöpflin and all the writers at *Nyugat* were deeply shaken by the loss of their friend and colleague. Kosztolányi, Babits and Móricz gave Kaffka’s funeral orations on behalf of many friends, including Endre Ady who was on his deathbed, crying for Kaffka for three days (Földes 270), before dying a month later from syphilis. Miksa Fenyő commemorated her in the lead article of the December, 1918 issue of the journal by elaborating on their friendship, Kaffka’s input in *Nyugat*, and how her *Színek és évek* represented

43 Kaffka’s last wish for Ervin Bauer was that he should remarry. Indeed, Bauer married the mathematician, Stefania Szilárd at the end of 1919. After the defeated communist government in which Bauer actively partook, the couple fled to Vienna and then were invited to move to the Soviet Union to work as scientists. In 1937 Bauer and Szilárd became victims of Stalin’s terror: accused with spying, they were both executed in January 1938.

44 Count Lajos Hatvany founded the Vörösmarty Academy with the aim of uniting the best intellectuals and writers of the new and now independent Hungary. The president of the Academy was Endre Ady, with Mihály Babits and Zsigmond Móricz as vice presidents, and Aladár Schöpflin as chief secretary. The Academy comprised most members of the first generation of *Nyugat*. 
one of the artistic and most Hungarian novels.\textsuperscript{45} By early 1919, \textit{Nyugat} had lost two of its greatest first generation writers along with others on the front.

As I have tried to illustrate so far, Kaffka was a productive writer. During her lifetime she wrote five volumes of poetry. Most of her poems are written in the style of free verse employing unconventional metaphors. Kaffka also strove to move beyond poetry; she became “obsessed with the ambition to produce better prose than had any other Hungarian woman before her” (Brunauer 32). Indeed, she is best known for her prose; she produced eight volumes of short stories, one volume of fairy tales, two volumes of children’s stories and four novels while also publishing primarily in \textit{Nyugat}. In 1916 Kaffka wrote two novels, \textit{Hangyaboly} \textit{[Ant-heap]} and \textit{Állomások} \textit{[Stations]}. \textit{Hangyaboly} is inspired by Kaffka’s memories of repressive Catholic schools, and \textit{Állomások} is her homage to \textit{Nyugat}. It depicts the life and friendship of two woman artists, a painter and a writer, and their ultimately successful struggle for independence. Their common denominator is the journal \textit{Kultúra}, like \textit{Nyugat} was for Kaffka, around which their artistic generation gathers in a quest for creating a better society. As Földes contends, Kaffka was also keenly aware of what attracted readers, what sold, and what bore a classic universal value; she sought for and established models beyond herself (228, 230). She was, as the \textit{Nyugat} author, Sándor Mária declared many years later, “equal with male writers…an assertive writer…with a very sensitive spirit” (in Fábri 187). She is one of the very few canonized female Hungarian authors of the early twentieth century. Altogether I located 91 works by Margit Kaffka in \textit{Nyugat} between the years 1908 and 1917 in the \textit{Nyugat Electronic Database}. Among these works there are two serialized novels, \textit{Mária évei} \textit{[Years of Maria]} (1912) and \textit{Hangyaboly} \textit{[Ant-heap]} (1917). There are also four novella series, “A város” \textit{[“The City”]} (1910), “Szent

\textsuperscript{45} “Színek és évek” című regényét, melynél ellensúlyozottabb, arányaiban művészibb, történetében öszintébb és magyarabb könyvet keveset ismerünk.
Ildefonsó bálja [“The Ball of St. Ildefonso”] (1913), “Lirai jegyzetek egy évről” [“Lyrical Notes about a Year”] (1915), and “Két nyár” [“Two Summers”] (1916).

Criticisms, positive and negative, appeared after each of Kaffka’s new works, however, the first literary historical study was not published until 1920. György Király’s essay, originally meant for the commemoration of the first anniversary of Kaffka’s death on the pages of Irodalomtörténet [Literary History] but delayed by a paper shortage, appeared in the January double issue of Nyugat in 1920. Király emphasizes reflexivity coupled with a strong visual quality as emblematic of Kaffka’s works from poems, to short stories and novels. She made every effort in her works to liberate the oppressed for which she created, as Kiraly points out, a “new type of woman” [“új asszony-tipus”] (“Kaffka”). At that time, Király could not have foreseen that with Kaffka’s death her books would also disappear from stores, and posthumous publications of her works became sporadic, partially due to copyright issues (Földes 12-3).

Aladár Schöpflin explains in his 1928 article in Nyugat how much he and his colleagues liked and respected her, but laments that aside from a few words in school books, Kaffka has been forgotten: “We should have done something to keep her memory alive…the Hungarian literary and reading public are not worthy of Margit Kaffka” (“KM Most”).46 While the 1936 edition of Színek és évek was well received, in general Kaffka’s works were not read because, as the third generation Nyugat poet Miklós Radnóti says in his 1938 article in the journal, echoing Schöpflin, they were not easily accessible due to the scarcity of reprints, or if some copies were available they simply collected dust on the back shelves of bookstores. Ironically, Radnóti in his 1934 doctorate dissertation on Margit Kaffka, in search of linking the problems of the soul and form as related to women and their works, declared that she was “entirely the writer of her own time, and so her battles have disappeared with her era’s battles” [“Kaffka Margit mindenestűl, és csak

46 Kellet volna valmit csinálni legalább emlékének fentartásáért...a magyar irodalom és közönség nem érdemelte meg Kaffka Margitot.
korának írója, s így harca is a korral eltűnő”] (in Földes 13). On the twentieth anniversary of Kaffka’s death, however, Radnóti visited the writer’s grave and his experience there moved him to recognize her influence, as he depicted in the December 1938 issue of *Nyugat*:

(The work is alive.) Around that time, I went to the Farkasréti cemetery to put some flowers on her grave. I asked for directions to her burial site in the cemetery “Management Office,” feeling upset and puzzled because I never liked offices that deal with dead people. In the office a lady in her forties with glasses greeted me. “I am looking for Margit Kaffka’s grave,” I told her quietly. Her face remained emotionless without a single spark in her eyes. The name did not mean anything to her. “When did she die?” “She died on December first and was buried here on December fourth,” I answered with astonishment. She placed a giant book on the counter and began to fumble through it. “Was she buried with her little son?” “Yes.” “Then I have found her.” She grabbed a piece of paper from the drawer, carefully cut it in half with a pair of scissors, put one half back in the drawer and wrote numbers on the remaining half which she handed to me. “Have you ever heard of Margit Kaffka?” I asked timidly. The expression on her face changed into sympathy, her eyes expressed doubts, and she said “No, why?” I apologized and walked out. (“Kaffka Margit”)

Radnóti’s wonderfully poignant description of his encounter with the female official at the cemetery reveals a seemingly conscienceless ignorance. High culture was met with general apathy in the Hungarian reading public at this time. By paying his respects at the cemetery, Radnóti perhaps wanted to make amends with his hurried depiction of Kaffka’s realism as being outdated. But he was not alone in considering Kaffka’s pioneering work dated.

Like Radnóti, Antal Szerb did not know Margit Kaffka personally either, since he had just written his first high school poems when Kaffka died. In his sweeping study of Hungarian literature in 1934, Szerb portrays Margit Kaffka as a “great woman writer” [“nagy nőíró”] who created “key novels” [“kulcsregény”] for women’s break from patriarchy (Mi 527). But Szerb

barely squeezes out two paragraphs on her under the subtitle “A többiek” or “The Rest [of the Nyugat writers’]” and defines her works as marked by a kind of archaic realism that is blended with “romantic lyricism” [“romantikus liricizmus”] (Mi 527). These two younger giants of Nyugat might sound disrespectful towards Kaffka with their anti-realist discourse, but even Schöpflin acknowledges in his 1939 Nyugat article that only with the erection of Kaffka’s statue on her grave48 on June 11, 1939 “did they make up for the twenty years of shameful neglect” of their writer and friend [“több mint húsz esztendős szégyenérzéstől szabadit meg minket”] (“KM Siremlékére”). Kaffka first exposed Hungary and its social and moral conflicts that affected women, from an entirely new, woman’s perspective and this is where her originality lies (Schöpflin 1935; 1939). Sophie Török in her 1943 book, Költőnők antológiája [Woman Poets’ Anthology], exclaims that “Kaffka spoke on behalf of all Hungarian women” [“minden asszony helyett beszél”], yet her memory has already faded, and she pleads for a renewal of recognition for Kaffka (in Földes 14). It was not until the 1960s that Margit Kaffka’s works were rediscovered and earned their deserved canonization in Hungary.

**Kaffka’s First Novel: Colours and Years**

Hungarian literary scholars consider the novel Szinek és évek Kaffka’s most significant work, a canonical book (Reményi, Czigány, Fülöp, Bodnár, Földes, Fábri, Töösy de Zepetnek, Schwartz, Brunauer). This first novel instantly secured Kaffka’s status among not only female but also the most accomplished male writers of Hungary, and as Reményi points out: “it is reasonable to assume that she will be remembered as the most important feminine voice of literature in the first quarter of twentieth century Hungary” (291). Kaffka wrote Szinek és évek in

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48 The Hungarian woman sculptor, Elza Kövesházi Kalmár created the memorial gravestone with the support of the Margit Kaffka Circle. There is evidence that efforts were made to erect Kaffka’s memorial gravestone earlier as the “A Nyugat hirei” [“Nyugat’s News”] section of the January 1, 1919 issue of Nyugat suggests: a call for donations for Kaffka’s grave is accompanied by the list of received sums, such as 5000 koronas from the Vörösmarty Academy, 400 from Fenyő, and 100 from Osvát, etc.
1911 and it is regarded an essential component of the *Nyugat* discourse. However, it did not appear in *Nyugat* but serially in the journal *Vasárnapi Újság* [*Sunday Paper*] before its publication as a book in 1912 (Bodnár, Földes, Fülöp). The reason *Nyugat* did not contract Kaffka for her first novel’s publication may well be due to Kaffka’s misguided love-affair with Osvát at the time. It is also likely that *Vasárnapi Újság* offered to pay more upon delivering the work on time than *Nyugat*. *Nyugat*, however, published her second novel, *Mária évei* [*Years of Maria*] in late 1912. The Corvina publishing house in Budapest produced George F. Cushing’s wonderful English translation under the title *Colours and Years* in 1999. For my analysis I draw on both the original Hungarian text and the English translation. In fact, I use the same book by the Budapest publisher, Szépirodalmi’s paperback series in 1973, from my mother’s book collection, which I first read during the summer when I was thirteen. Kaffka’s novel at that time must have had an affect on me because I remember reading Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le deuxième sexe* in Hungarian translation shortly thereafter. Although I eventually abandoned Beauvoir’s book halfway through, I consider both texts as being central to my teenage gender and sexual identity formation. My early personal experience with Kaffka’s *Színek és évek* also motivates my intentions of revisiting her novel for my dissertation. The novel is also semi-autobiographical, since, according to Földes, Kaffka consciously created her works based on her own personal experiences occasionally infusing them with the experiences of her friends as they were recounted to her (18).

In *Colours and Years*, Kaffka depicts the lives of three generations of provincial gentry women in the late 1800s. Magda Pórtelky, the story’s heroine, and her two brothers Sándor and Csaba are raised by their widowed mother and grandmother in the small town of Szinyér in the south east of Hungary. The Pórtelky name denotes the ancestral land in Pórttelek, and thus determines Magda’s social status. Although Magda’s father, the respected gentry lawyer, dies
from symptoms of alcoholism, her childhood is obliviously happy. During a summer holiday at her aunt’s village estate in Hirip she experiences love for the first time with Endre Tabódy. Two years later, following winter balls and social events, Magda enters into a semi-arranged marriage with Jenő Vodicska, a petit-bourgeois lawyer of Slavic descent. Their marriage is cordial but only the birth of their son, Istvánka, brings them closer. Magda is ambitious; she wants to be a powerful and respected woman in Szinyér, but she is aware that as a woman she can only gain attention for herself through her husband. The visit of the Royal Prince to Szinyér and Magda’s encounter with him in the disguise of a Gypsy fortuneteller lends the plot a fairy tale element, only to be countered by the town elections. Vodicska is nominated for deputy sheriff but when he loses he cannot bear to face the burden of rebuilding his future; in a desperate moment he kills himself. Distraught and suffering, Magda goes to Budapest in search of succor, but finds the capital decadent and socially repugnant. She returns to the land of her paternal ancestors to stay with her uncle, a lecherous old man who ultimately tries to force himself onto the young widow. Feeling humiliated, with nowhere to go and no one to turn to, she rekindles her correspondence with Dénes Horváth, a supportive friend. Horváth, an ex-musician turned notary, initially met Magda at a lawn tennis game they both attended as spectators at her cousin, Melanie’s lavish home. After Vodicska’s death it was Horváth who gave unrelenting support to the grieving Magda. The news of the fire in her town hastens Magda’s return where Horváth confesses his love for her. But only after they get married does Magda realize that Horváth lacks ambition for work and life in general. Despite his addictions to gambling, alcohol and extramarital affairs, Magda accepts that she loves him and they produce three daughters who they raise to have their own vocations, an achievement that gives her hope for women in the future.

The character of Magda Pórtelky is based on both Kaffka herself and her mother, who, as Kaffka explains in her autobiography, “became a widow once again and is still living in her
hometown very quietly” (“Önelétrajz” 401). By portraying her mother’s generation Kaffka displays respect for but also demarcates herself from the old and dying middle nobility. Magda Pórtelky is an ambitious yet helpless woman, who, after fulfilling her social and gender roles as a wife, mother and widow, develops an understanding of the possibilities about the “new woman,” which identity she transfers to her three daughters: Klári, Marcsi, and Zsuzsi. Jenő Vodicska is depicted after Gyula Kaffka, and Dénes Horváth after Kaffka’s stepfather, the lawyer and spendthrift Ignác Almásy. The men are mostly a mix of crude masculinity and weak genteelness, whereas the women, although often shallow and shortsighted, display a more authentic existence. The town Szinyér⁴⁹ is modeled after Nagykároly, the multi-ethnic town of Hungarians, Germans, Romanians and Jews. The similarities are so striking that Kaffka’s hometown disowned her for painting it too truthfully (Kaffka, “Öneletrajz” 401). This novel thus provides us with a certain perception into Kaffka’s life and her point of view that I argue, advances our understanding of the experiences of the Generation West. Consequently, I want to focus on an interpretation pertaining to the literary discourse within the narration that illuminates the characters’ experiences as particular to the late 1800’s Hungary.

Colours and Years depicts Hungary at the threshold of transformation from a semi-feudal to a modern society, a particularly East-Central European or even Hungarian phenomenon at the time. This period of in-betweenness—roughly comprising the second half of the 1800s—of lingering feudalism blending with the push of modernity presented a specific cultural framework for the life and worldview of Hungarians, hyperbolizing a Hungarianness within a larger European context. The in-betweenness refers to the social and psychological coupled with the revaluation of gender and sex roles of women, which Kaffka herself but primarily her mother’s generation experienced. Kaffka portrays individual and social deficiencies which come into view

⁴⁹ Szinyér is an actual town in the region that is now part of Slovakia and it is called Svinice.
as being exclusively Hungarian. But as Reményi argues, these were “characteristics of all nations conditioned by an agrarian psychology and an exaggerated sense of decorum” (289). What then makes this work a uniquely modern Hungarian novel? Perhaps what can be seen as defining Hungarians’ archetypal sensibility and characterization in Kaffka’s work is the “melancholy” coupled with “suffering and sorrow, pondering loneliness, [and] an almost morbid resentment of [the] amorphous character of Hungarian society,” which Reményi links with the “Turkish scourge [that] first fell upon the nation in 1526” (289). Undoubtedly, Hungarians seem to carry an ever-present chip on their shoulders as a result of hundreds of years of oppression coupled with a relentless national pride that is deeply interwoven with notions of class and status. Kaffka elucidates these Hungarian characteristics by depicting provincial professionalism, squandering, and aristocratic values contrasted with nouveau-riche penny-pinching, picnics, boorish manners, csárdás dances, and Gypsy serenades of the small town environment that collide with glitter, dirt, corruption, Donjuanism, false consciousness, coffee houses, operas, and the expensive unheated living quarters of the metropolis. In the figure of Magda, Kaffka recounts but also bids farewell to the last generation of Hungarian gentry.

*Colours and Years* is both a *Bildungsroman* and a reflexive novel told in a first-person narrative by Magda Pör telky as she reflects on her life. The novel, as a particular segment of reality, is materialized by the narrative text of a finite and structured entity of language. Kaffka’s technique of reflective memory that plays with multiple time lines, as Rónay argues, culminates from a specific time and place when the destruction of the feudal class system was colliding with the rapidly developing modern bourgeoisie in Hungary, a phenomenon which facilitated this discourse as uniquely Hungarian (111). Kaffka’s innovation lies in the genre of memory narration, which, as Tötösy de Ze petnek contends, “broke new ground in Hungarian literature,” (187). The Hungarian literary scholar Lajos Fülöp in his 1987 book on Kaffka suggests that it is
the structure that makes *Colours and Years* unique. He argues that the composition of narration around the mechanism of reflection was considered pioneering in modern Hungarian literature at the time (65). In Hungarian literature it was also Kaffka, with her *Colours and Years*, who first gave such a deep and rich psychological account of a woman through her memories (Fülöp 89). The technique of reflective memory narration certainly cannot be thought of as originating in Hungary. Kaffka structures her novel around this concept of duration so that it is through the lapsing of time that Magda’s reflective narrative provides the insight into late nineteenth century Hungary, in both a provincial and metropolitan setting. The story that she relays about her life, in terms of narratology, is a fabula, which is a series of events, mostly chronological, that she and other actors create and experience. It is the layers of fabula that contain the relationships among actors, events, space and time, which Kaffka effectively illuminates with linguistic tropes resulting in a modernist novel. I am most interested in looking at this aspect of the novel because the relationships of the characters and events with space and time offer us a more nuanced comprehension of people and place. To this effect, I draw on Roland Barthes’s concepts of the narrative code in his *S/Z* for my analysis of the novel with regard to the story, plot and textual levels.

Barthes sees texts based on a common model which allows them to be recognized as narrative. As such, the “hermeneutic code” organizes the enigma of the plot, although without “any fixed order” (19). Recurring events form the linear order of the narrative, such as Magda’s two marriages—both to public notaries incidentally—the birth of her children, and the two town elections are part of what Barthes calls the “sèmes” which all form “a single thematic grouping”

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50 Henri Bergson introduced the concept of *durée* or duration in his doctoral dissertation, entitled, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* [*Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 1910] in 1898, taking account of Herbert Spencer’s and Immanuel Kant’s theories of time and consciousness. He later further developed the theory of *durée* in his 1934 *La Pensée et le mouvant* [*The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 1946]. Henri Bergson’s concept of *durée* most likely had a significant effect on Hungarian authors like Kaffka at the time.
albeit as unstable “flickers of meaning” (19). The “symbolic grouping” ties events, organizes the signifieds into theatrical characters and inverts their concepts, such as the impoverished aristocracy in the characters of Telekdy and Tabódy. Through the code of “actions” or “proairetic code” (19), the characters’ actions can be organized and sequenced, such as Magda’s reminiscing, her stroll under the starry sky with Endre Tabódy, her first ball, and Jenő Vodicska’s suicide. Finally, the “cultural codes” refer to a “type of knowledge” (20) that calls the reader to draw on her or his experience and knowledge of the real world in order to make meaning of the novel. Women’s status and a semi-feudal class structure enhanced by Gypsy music and dances are part of the “cultural codes” at hand. Barthes explains that these “five codes create a kind of network, a topos, through which the entire text passes” and whereby “the code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures” which “has always been already read, seen, done, experienced” (20). Kaffka’s readers may already have certain knowledge about Hungarian culture that can be considered as popular wisdom and which, I argue, also illustrates the stereotypes that exist about Hungary and Hungarian people. Kaffka brings narrator and reader closer together through memory and her conscious recognition for the act of remembering. In my analysis I read *Colours and Years* through the network of these codes Barthes laid out by the structure of the quotations.

As I have pointed out earlier, literary critics declared Kaffka’s first novel a classic; it was considered the “European moment of Hungarian prose,” as it introduced the narrative style and structure of modern European literature (Földes 145). *Colours and Years* is also a “multi-dimensional” novel (Fülöp 67; Tötösy de Zepetnek 186). This multi-dimensionality pertains to narratological aspects, gender, sociological, and psychological themes, style and expressiveness, such as the account of a woman’s life through family generations in the social milieu of a particular era (cf. Fülöp 67; Tötösy de Zepetnek 186). The plot takes place along two time lines:
the present in which Magda as a fifty-year old twice-widowed woman recalls her memories, and
the memories of the past that come to life in her stories. These two temporal planes sometimes
converge, suggesting an inevitable past in every moment of the present. Memory is the motivator
for the two planes of past and present and makes the act of remembering itself the object of the
novel. We enter the novel three years after Horváth Dénes’s death; Magda, sitting on the porch
of her little house, begins recounting her life: “I think and reflect, and always about the same
thing: about how things were, and how they might have been…I veritably live backwards
[valósággal visszafelé élek (SzÉ 8)]…I ponder and reenact the past” (CY 20). Retrospection,
argues Fülöp, “gains a singular experience in the heroine’s material of memory” (81). Magda
does not harp or complain, neither is she angry. Her inner battle between a desired life and what
life really offers wanes and a calm resignation takes its place: “I am old and lonely, but when I
think back, I see that I have lived through a great many things…that seem like a dream” (CY 18).
Her memories, as contemplations, are mixed with a celebration of life and a resigned awareness
of life’s end, punctuated by a longing for ease and comfort.

The logic and psychology of Magda’s reflections organize and contribute to the plot. In
recalling the past she also develops her subjective inner time line, which links her with the
objective external time line (Fülöp 107). Magda’s time line is not entirely linear nor is it rigid. In
her memories, she recounts her life both as a whole unit and as broken down parts in reference to
particular periods, which also subsequently alters her present mood, and her evaluation of it.
There are four major periods in Magda’s life—childhood and adolescence, first marriage with
Vodicska, mourning, and second marriage with Horváth—each element is given roughly the
same amount of space in the novel. These periods are always separated and underscored by
adverbs referring to the present in which the now elderly Magda reflects, such as “From a later
date I once again have a very vivid recollection…” (25), or “Oh dear! How I’ve been rambling
Kafkas purpose is to formulate a narrative technique that helps the reader simultaneously experience the passing of time in Magda’s act of relaying her story (105). The structure of narrating the story through the memories of the first person also enables Kafkas to express her views through the heroine and to advance the plot, not through typical conventions but more at the whim of the heroine/narrator’s reflections.

Kafkas allocates Magda’s recollections partially as self-ironization that appears as melancholia, but never fully nostalgia, unlike Kosztolányi’s *Esti Kornél* and Szerb’s *Journey by Moonlight*, as I will show later. Magda does not experience nostalgia because the recognition of reflection animates her, providing her with a particular experience about the present: “…I can think of no preoccupation more interesting, colourful and precious than this [reflection]” (21). Her melancholia is a result of mourning. Sigmund Freud explains that melancholia derives from mourning as a result of “the pros and cons of the conflict of love that has led to the loss of love” (“Mourning” 586). Magda’s loss of love encompasses not only the people she cared about but also the loss of an era, as we learn from her reflections. Her experience, as a “mental constellation,” can be seen as what Freud calls “a revolt,” and which “by a certain process, passe[s] over into the crushed state of melancholia” (586). Mourning is a state of surmounting loss, but melancholia is perpetually present without being able to heal. Melancholia is marked by ambivalence towards relationships bound by love, and is unable to open up; the person does not recognize change. Melancholia is “like an open wound” to which there is no consolation, however, it also diminishes with time without leaving traces of trauma (Freud 589). Indeed, Kafkas, in exploring her heroine’s melancholia, does not relive but rather redeem the time that
was Magda’s life, forming it into memory that weaves her experiences together and makes sense of her life.

Kaffka carefully avoids essentializing Magda’s story as an ultimate truth about the recent past. She confirms Magda’s selective memory through gaps and hesitations in her account; certain events blur into one another: “Now I only have confused memories, as in a dream” (133), other times she forgets many things. By these Kaffka problematizes the difficulty of exact memory. Magda’s memories of the past are altered by the distance of time that serves as a screen onto which memory is reflected. In the beginning she admits: “I don’t even know if every little thing happened just the way I remember it, or whether I simply remembered it and recounted it that way so often, that I came to believe it myself” (20). Magda tells herself a story as if her memories were projected on a screen. Her reluctance to remember can be understood by what Freud explains as “the memory impressions and thoughts of a later date whose content is connected with its own by symbolic or similar links, [and] may appropriately be called a ‘screen memory’” (“Screen” 123). Magda’s memories are rooted in her childhood—as I have signalled in Chapter One—in that magical and often irrational reality. Following Freud, such a mental return to the place of this childhood after a long time, a period which is marked by shock and struggle, evokes feelings of longing. These feelings are often associated with physical objects, tastes, smells and visual connotations. A certain scent, colour, sound, or gesture gains particular significance for Magda, and by association, brings back all her memories:

I sometimes sit like this on the porch; the gentle tolling of the church bell reaches me through the blue and white of the late-afternoon summer sky, and the warm fragrance of my little old lady’s flowers drift fragrantly towards me in this handkerchief-sized place. Across the way, by the blank wall of the neighbouring house, the pansies are in bloom, closer up a bed of mignonettes and another of nasturtiums, basil, love-lies-bleeding and lousewort all in a bunch, and at the foot of the porch, among the humble purslanes, a couple of red hollyhocks and three tubs of blooming oleanders. I broke off their shoots myself from the branches of other, older oleanders which had grown and blossomed in my family. (CY 19)
These are recurrent images in memory which create a particular mood, providing a rhythm for Magda’s experiences. They act as leitmotifs, a repetition of leading patterns, phrases, images and situations, which Kaffka places regularly throughout the novel, supporting the theme of remembering:

Red hollyhocks, mallow, love-lies-bleeding, basil, mignonette and lady’s slippers—these flowers grew in the garden of the old Zimán house, too, where I spent my childhood. (22)

Or

That is how the picture is fixed in my memory. Down below Jenő bends over the rose-stocks in the big flower-bed…the sun sinks lower and the spray of water from the rose of the watering-cans drifts in gold and rainbow-hues diagonally…And the sweet, all-embracing perfume of ripe raspberries floats upwards. (115-16)

And

…those bright and radiant colours, those light and hovering years. (48)
A countless host of years, seasons and days inextricably intertwined! (191)
I measured the passage of time, the years and seasons…(216)

The repeated evocation of flowers, colours and years lend an organic sense to the text, making it soft, round and feminine. Kaffka’s technique of reflection carries a sensation similar to what Marcel Proust created a year later for Swann’s memories in Combray; it finds the kinds of words that produce synaesthetic impressions to fill the light summer air with heavy, hazy images in pastel colours similar to a plein-air painting. The invocation of these memories is projected through Magda’s experiences that have occurred in the meantime; remembering according to Freud, is not childhood memory but “only a phantasy put back into childhood” (“Screen” 123). What we are dealing with in light of these memories then may be something that never happened at all. It is not clear whether Kaffka had read Freud’s 1899 essay beforehand, but it is curious how she treats psychoanalysis with a lyrical ease in Magda’s soliloquy: “…possibly, what I regard today as the story of my life is merely a picture of my life, shaped by my present way of thinking” (CY 21). What really was and what memory retains and plays back unites in screen
Screen memory, following Freud, “owes its value as a memory not to its own content but to the relation existing between that content and some other, that has been suppressed” (“Screen” 126). Screen memory determines events as a whole of reality in a different retrospective for Magda. Reményi harshly criticises Kaffka’s style and word play, which he characterizes as over-indulgent and sensational: “her overused words disrupted the clarity of her ideas and detracted from the quality of composition; it also detracted from the efficacy of her work” (287). Reményi sees one of the main problems with Kaffka’s writing in “transferring to adjectives the kind of meaningfulness that verbs should have realized,” by which “her realistic consciousness placed her outside the stream-of-consciousness school of writing” (287). It is her “extreme submission to words that [makes] her style…too ornamental, thus interfering with the desired tightness of construction,” and as he further argues, “her peculiar mental and emotional association…suggests neurotic awkwardness” (287). Similarly, Czigány negatively evaluates Kaffka’s style for what he contends is “her excessive love of subjective adjectives, and her use of overloaded, complex sentence-structures with ill-shaped meaning” (335). Contrary to Reményi and Czigány, I see Kaffka’s description of minute details as both calling on the evocative power of the senses and on the organic experience of events. Drawing on Fülöp, Kaffka’s descriptive method and narrative technique produce the “cult of spectacle” [“látványkultusz”] (114), which propels the heroine’s memories primarily based on associations (114). The crowded word associations, metaphors, the aggregation of verbs and adjectives in turn produce “szókultusz” or a “cult of words” and the “intoxication by words” [“szómámor”] in her novel (Fülöp 115), designating it Secessionist realism. In fact, I see order in Kaffka’s tumultuous stylization that expresses Magda’s external discipline in contrast to the inner fire that rebels against her fate. In the colourful and over-embellished sentences, as István Nemeskürty suggests, “Ady’s sensitive
restlessness vibrates” along with “a ravenous and impatient affirmation of life” [“ott vibrál Ady érzékeny nyugtalansaga, mohó és türelmetlen életigenlése”] (689). Through stylized narrative, Kaffka is also able to relay the socio-factual dimension of the outdated gentry class, patriarchy, and the fate of women of her time in Hungary on a more personal level. The innovative form and content she employs can be seen as a modernist prose developed from within the discourse of Nyugat, which also moves beyond it and in turn advances the journal-collective’s viewpoint.

We might assume Magda’s failures in life are due to her helplessness that weighs upon her. But in fact, Magda is trapped by the “reigning social codes and the importance of material considerations [that] are omnipresent and determining factors of [a] woman’s defenceless and subordinate position in society” (Tötösy de Zepetnek 181). She makes good resolutions only at the expense of repressing her internal dissatisfaction with her fate and lot in life. Magda recognizes “a sudden feeling of despair…as a girl…at the mercy of others,” as she repeatedly proclaimed, but these feelings were “soon stifled in the comforting order of family discipline and respect for convention” (CY 52). The conventions of her class status also foster sexual repression, which she first acknowledges at Endre Tabódy’s advances: “…escaping his lips…It was the first time in my life that I had felt such a strange sense of seriousness” (57). In her reflections, Magda does not want to accept love as sensual and assures that between her and Horváth “all that may happen between a man and a woman did not occur” (189). Sexuality equals dependence for Magda: “I could only exist through someone else, through a man, whom I desired strongly” (189). While Reményi deems Magda to be a hopeless representative of “the Hungarian woman who lost her roots in the soil of her traditions” (291), he also salvages Kaffka by acknowledging her “refusal to paint reality in glowing terms…her unwillingness to be docile and ‘good-natured’…[with] unbending principles and…a tragic sense of life” (291). I see the
repressed sexuality in Colours and Years as a subtext, which cannot be brought to the surface because of the overriding social criticism Kaffka prefers to advance.

Furthermore, the reason class status gains more importance over sexuality in the novel is because Kaffka wants to examine its elements and dismantle its outdated codes in order to create a space for subjecthood in the Hungarian social transformation. In this light, Magda, who has a “nonerotic and futile destiny” filled with “hopes and miseries,” struggles “for an independent existence” within the confines of her class (Reményi 290). On her mother’s side, the “Zimán family’s town estate” (CY 22), was said to be “at least three hundred years old” (26), which constituted Magda’s “pedigree…of [her] own powerful, fine, distinguished family that preserves its position at the top” (36). Her paternal lineage contains even “older and more genuine nobility” (42), and thus the two families have been in “eternal opposition…the noble family of lesser importance…facing the family of [the] son-in-law, that more powerful, more cocksure mob” (52). By the late 1800s, a large segment of the Hungarian nobility retained its title only; they had lost their land due to rapid industrialization and urbanization, just like Telekdy and Tabódy in the novel. These impoverished nobles barely differed from the serfs, hence the term “noble with seven plum trees,” referring to the small size of their land (Frigyesi 259). In general the gentry did not accept changes in society and refused to take on occupations in commerce, considering them “unworthy of their gentile birth” (Cartledge 269). For the gentry, the most important aspect, even more than wealth, was “an impeccable family tree,” declaring that “one inherits money, one does not earn it” (Frigyesi 262). The Pórtelkys are of this noble stature:

After 1848, a distant branch of the family that had put its roots down in Tyúkod acquired a barony and became very wealthy, but the rebellious gentry of the true marshland Pórtelkys still did all they could for a long time to disown, despise and disregard the horde of relatives who had deserted, the ‘traitors’. (CY 176)

Kaffka depicts, with a sense of underlying regret, the patriarchal Hungarian nobility’s fate. As an integral unit, the gentry “represented ‘the nation’” in Habsburg Hungary, proclaimed itself the
“prototype of Hungarians...[and] virtually personified the nation in the public mind” (Frigyesi 259, 263). Only the Compromise ended, as Cartledge explains, the “practice of passive resistance and removed all stigma from state service [whence the] job-seeking gentry invaded Pest-Buda in their thousands” (269). Kaffka delineates her own family’s decline, due to a hopeless situation grounded in the milieu of intellectual immobility and social fate, through Magda’s first person narrative.

Kaffka depicts the period of transition in the gentry tradition which Magda and her brothers represent, with Sándorka settling on an occupation worthy of his class status, that of a priest, and Csaba struggling to adapt to the ways of the urban bureaucrat, contrasting it with the new class, the bourgeoisie to whom Vodicska belongs: “These folks are wealthy, you can be sure [of that]” (CY 66). As the Hungarian music historian Judit Frigyesi illustrates, the gentry’s refusal to partake in capitalist enterprise in fact “hastened [their] demise,” and thus, “the deeper the middle nobility sank economically, the more it cleaved to its outmoded way of living, which in turn drove it even further toward impoverishment” (270). Since the gentry, as a result of deeply rooted historical beliefs, acted as the “guardians of national identity” they transformed from “an economic class into a political class” following the Compromise (Frigyesi 263).

Kaffka, with Magda’s ambitions for Jenő Vodicska’s political career, illuminates the tendency that was prevalent among the middle nobility of uniting with the new provincial bourgeoisie class. As in the case of Vodicska, the gentry, who prolonged the status quo in the provincial political arena with feudal elements, most often ousted the bourgeoisie. The gentry was considered to possess the original right for leadership; they were referred to as the “historical class” of Hungary since the time of its first king, István [St. Stephen], who granted the administration and possession of the land and the exercise of political rights to the nobility (Frigyesi 266). The gentry gloated on patriotism pinned to the relics of an outdated tradition.
Gentry patriotism, as Frigyesi argues, partook in the “national spirit, which gravitated toward a spiritual center best expressed in the culture of the Volk” (267). What Kaffka illustrates in the actions of Magda’s family is congruent with a middle nobility lifestyle at the turn of the century Hungary. One of its most pronounced elements in the novel is its association with Gypsy music and the Hungarian folk dance, csárdás, which was adopted by the gentry.

Throughout the novel Kaffka revisits the theme of Gypsy music and csárdás:51 “They are dancing the csárdás in the big drawing-room…” (27); Magda enjoys the balls and “the vitality of the long, hot supper-csárdás…near to the gypsies, with one or other partner” (48), and she remembers how she tasted the champagne and “gazed into the eyes of Bankó, the Gypsy bandleader, as they shone with slow fire at me…it was for me that he played” (49). She danced the csárdás with Endre Tabódy most: “The band struck up a csárdás and once again he was my partner” (64). Tabódy fell in love with Magda when they were teenagers spending a summer at Hirip, but both of them knew that class boundaries would keep them apart; Tabódy came from the old nobility with vast lands and property, and Magda did not measure up to him. Tabódy serenaded Magda on two occasions with Bankó’s entire Gypsy band; once before Magda’s engagement to Vodicska, and then years later when he visited Magda, now married to Horváth, on her name day,52 filling the air with a “sound of the gypsy band” (CY 222), and the “quick movement of a great wild csárdás” (CY 226). Csárdás is the national dance of Hungary.

According to Czigány, Hungarian peasant music is “probably the most ancient cultural relic” that

51 Csárdás is performed by couples, consisting in its simplest form of two steps to the right and two steps to the left, followed by turning the woman around (Hungaria.org). It is divided into two parts: the first slow and melancholic, the second fast and high-spirited (Craine & Mackrell). Regional variations of csárdás add numerous intricate steps to the dance. Csárdás dance originates from traditional peasant dances, and it first appeared in ball-rooms in the mid nineteenth century (Craine & Mackrell). Although the peasantry had traditionally been excluded from Hungarian politics and were dismissed as an unimportant element of society, curiously their art and music were regarded as the essence of Hungarian national identity and it was emulated by high culture.

52 Name days are traditionally celebrated in Hungary with the same emphasis as birthdays. Every name in Hungary has at least one or sometimes several designated calendar day(s), and some are noted after saints, such as St. Katalin (St. Catherine) on November 25, or St. Stephen on August 20 (after Hungary’s first Christian King). The name Magda is celebrated twice, on May 25 and on July 22.
carries a “structural affinity with the songs of ancient and primitive Asiatic peoples” (271). Hungarian peasant music, *verbunkos* and *csárdás* of the early nineteenth century, was popularized by Gypsy musicians across the country who likely adopted a particular style that hallmarked their composition. Hence, Gypsy music became regarded as the native music of Hungary particularly after Franz Liszt began interpreting and composing music inspired by such songs (Czigány 271). On the other hand, Hungarian peasant music was almost hidden “under the luxuriant gypsy ornamentation, until the ethno-musicologists Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály discovered and researched authentic folk tunes” (Hanák 87; cf. Horváth 461). Csárdás became the most popular repertoire of Gypsy musicians who were hired by noble patrons to play at balls, events and restaurants.

What most of these noble patrons wanted to hear was part of the Hungarian folk romanticism that included both “*euphoria and disenchantment* [mámor és kijozanodás]” (Frigyesi 269; cf. Horváth 457). The csárdás of the Gypsy band “draws people of the same type into a community of secret understanding, towards each other” (*CY* 49), proclaims Magda. Gypsy songs [cigány nóta] traditionally express and symbolize loss. Hungarians themselves and their (self-)portrayal seem to emphasize “the weeping-rejoicing Gypsy music [as] the most characteristic and spontaneous expression of [the] Hungarian soul” (Frigyesi 274). Such lifestyle consequently demanded a context for which in part is why Gypsy music was a perfect conduit of emotions but also political energy. Gypsy music was imbedded in and dispersed through Hungarian nationalism of the late 1800s against which Kaffka acutely warns in Péter Telekdy’s criticism at Magda’s first ball:

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53 Violinists from successive generations of famous musical families often led these Gypsy bands. Modern Hungarian Gypsy music is a result of 19th century composers’ works. Frigyesi points out that professional musicians at the service of patrons were associated almost exclusively with Gypsies, who were more or less a trained closed group with a flexible repertoire which depended on the taste of the patron coupled with an idiosyncratic Gypsy manner (Frigyesi 267).
They clasp hands and leap about in order to be able to embrace each other legitimately, or with stupid and senseless outbursts of grief they prick up their ears to listen to an antiquated, undeveloped and childish music while methodically pouring all sorts of harmful liquids into themselves until they go wild or become as dumb as cattle. Hungarian folk will never amount to anything…(CY 50)

In Telekdy’s argument, Kaffka takes issue with the stereotypes, which depict Hungarians as instantly shedding tears upon hearing Gypsy melodies as it prompts them to reminisce about their great nation and its losses under foreign oppression. Frigyesi contends that Gypsy music “accorded well with the Hungarian chauvinist ideology,” wherein Hungarians’ “national self-identification was not sought to be defined in political, social, and economic terms, not even in cultural terms…[but] with what was thought to be spontaneous and uncontrolled, with facial types, gestures, temperaments” (270-71). Kaffka, in diagnosing the ails of her time, underlines these typically Hungarian elements represented by Gypsy music and dancing the csárdás. As part of the late 1800’s cultural synthesis, Gypsy music was therefore elevated to be the authentic folk music of Hungary, advancing a romantic idealization of popular tradition (Hanák 87). However, it is a confusing claim since it negates the Roma’s and the Hungarians’ musical traditions and roots at once. Béla Bartók criticized Gypsy music on “aesthetic grounds,” and argued that “Hungarian popular art music” was “incorrectly called Gypsy music” (in Frigyesi 271). Furthermore, we cannot accept Gypsy music to be the archetypal expression of the Hungarian spirit, because as Frigyesi argues, it is rather “a portrayal of the banal image of the ‘weeping-rejoicing’ Hungarian” (269). Gypsy music was the overriding example of turn of the century romantic sentimentality, which Kaffka wanted to liberate Hungarian culture from on its path to modernity.

For Magda the first sign of the breakdown of traditional existence arrives in the wake of her first husband’s suicide, as it did with the death of Kaffka’s father. Suicide and depression had become emblematic of the Hungarian experience. As Stack et al. argue, “Hungarians are well
known for having elevated rates of depression, and the high incidence of depression suggests that a relatively high proportion of Hungarian families have suicide among its members” (353). Recent research indicates a genetic predisposition for suicide among Hungarians, the “Finno-Ugrian gene” (Stack et al. 354), which is conceptualized by the “Finno-Ugrian Suicide Hypothesis” (Voracek 543). According to Martin Voracek, Hungarians fall within the “contiguous, J-shaped belt, spanning from Finland to Austria,” whose predisposition to suicide is the highest in Europe (543). In the 1800s, suicide was prevalent in Hungary claiming many of its leading figures, such as Count István Széchenyi who shot himself in 1860. Kaffka was not preoccupied with the idea of suicide, nor was she suicidal as far as I can tell from the material available to me, but the gravity of the phenomenon must have ultimately touched her. Suicide then, it is argued, has been viewed in Hungary “as an acceptable solution to life’s problems” (Stack et al. 353). Kaffka illuminates this with an abrupt account of Vodicska’s death:

She [the maid] heard the sound of the shot more clearly. They all jumped up…I collapsed in the doorway…I don’t know anything else…at that moment…everything, everything came to an end. (CY 135)

It is almost as if Vodicska’s suicide was inevitable, so matter-of-fact is Kaffka’s description of it. In fact, the topic of suicide surfaces again in Kaffka’s later novel, Mária évei [Years of Maria], a companion novel to Colours and Years. Maria is the “new woman” who strives for independence and a career – she earns her teaching degree. Her ideals and endeavours, however, run into many obstacles in the small town where she works, and seeing her battle as unwinnable she ends her life by jumping into the Danube from the Margit Bridge in Budapest.

From its opening in 1877, the Margit Bridge, that links Margit Island in the middle of the Danube to Budapest, became a notorious place for suicide victims, as the Hungarian poet János
Arany\textsuperscript{54} recounts in his poem “Hid-avatás” [“Bridge Opening”]. I translate one stanza here:

\begin{verbatim}
In giant drops falls this shower,
Giant bubbles dance below:
Group of suiciders form a semi-circle
Like the mill-wheel, it murmurs:
The Danube can take it and wants more.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{verbatim}

Arany depicts the river as a relentless machine; its violent flow is unforgiving. This poem effectively illustrates the impact of suicide as a widespread phenomenon in Hungary in the late 1800s. I will return to the topic of suicide in Chapter Four when I discuss Antal Szerb’s novel, \textit{Journey by Moonlight}, where it takes a central role for the protagonists’ experiences.

Following Vodicska’s death, Magda, drifting from her mother’s and the Zimán relatives’ homes, accepts her aunt Marcși’s invitation to come to the metropolis. She is excited but also instantly confused about what the “miserable, alien and jarring tempo of Pest” (\textit{CY} 150) offers. The “music…in the big coffee-house” entices her, while the cramped apartment, where she sleeps on “strange-smelling pillows” (151) in “the iron camp-bed” which “by day was folded up in the bathroom” (150) repulses her. Window-shopping on the boulevards, ice-skating, and a “cheap box at the National Theatre” all mean doing it “in style” (153). Class differences now gain a new meaning in the context of urban and provincial binaries: “My God! How the certainty of provincial pre-eminence shrinks to nothing here!” Magda realizes (154), and admits that in Szinyér she could still feel that she was a person (155). After a short affair with a notorious womanizer named Attila Losonczy, Magda begins

\textsuperscript{54} János Arany (1817-1882) was a Hungarian poet, Sándor Petőfi’s contemporary and friend. He wrote numerous poems and ballads that are still revered today, among them the epic long poem \textit{Toldi}. Arany spent many afternoons on Margit Island and was present at the Margit Bridge opening. He might have witnessed, but most certainly read in the daily papers about people committing suicide from the bridge.

\textsuperscript{55} Orjás szemekben hull e zápor,
Lenn tányol orjás buborék:
Félkörben az öngyilkos tábor
Züg fel s le, mint malomkerék:
A Duna győzi s adjá még.
to grow sick of the amusements that gave Marika such naïve satisfaction. Going out to the promenade and staring at all the dresses so much more attractive than mine, sitting in Kugler’s confectionery and paying through the nose to breathe the same air as those who with a comfortable sense of belonging, gossip, flirt and live their own lives there without noticing any outsiders. (CY 156)

Kaffka certainly does not express her own feelings about Budapest in the character of Magda, since the capital utterly mesmerized her. She rebukes the new bourgeoisie for their superficial values while condemning the gentry for their stodginess. Magda’s interlude in Budapest is part of Kaffka’s expression of this binary.

As if exchanging the roles between mother and daughter, Kaffka hands it off to Magda’s mother Klári to embrace the capital. It is a necessary technique for Kaffka in order to separate and distance herself from Magda and her provincial mentality, and from the decadence of the gentry. Now old and having buried her second husband Péter Telekdy, Klári moves up to Pest and finds a “niche for herself” in the midst of “noisy streets, theatres, households free from work, and a life of idleness, cheapness and easy semi-starvation” (CY 231). In her letter, trying to convince Magda to follow her, Klári rejoices in the city in spite of the “many insects here, damn them!” in going to coffee-houses on Sundays where “for thirty kreutzers you get a lot of whipped cream, fashion journals, electric light and good warmth, while three waiters hover around you, and through the glass window you can watch the street where there’s always a crowd of people going to and fro and you don’t see the same person twice” (231-32). Magda responds by seeing herself as being more mature than her mother. Reményi points out that Kaffka “did not decry the values of the past; she recognized certain qualities and did not forget…she had a historical perspective,” through which she set out to “liberate the indifferent, improvident, or depressing social scene of her country from obsolete norms” (286). Hers was the kind of “social-mindedness” that inspired a mission “to help the moral and economic release of those who were
inside and those who were outside her social status” (Reményi 286). As such, Budapest is Kaffka’s intermediary.

While women’s emancipation was also a very important issue for Kaffka, she was not an idealist in reality; she knew that a woman’s life was hard and full of struggle, since she was one of those women who fought for independence while remaining bound by the duties of the household and the roles of mother and wife. In her article “The Image of the ‘New Woman,’” Agatha Schwartz sees Magda Pórtelky as a typical woman of her place and time who embraced marriage as “an institution that provided women with material security”; marriage contains the only meaning in her existence (83). While picking up after her husband Magda felt: “housework was slavery, but inwardly something drove me on and compelled me to put into it breathless passion and urgent exaggeration” (CY 69). She eventually grows into her role as the respectable young wife of an aspiring lawyer; she learns to find enjoyment in most things, by immersing herself in household chores, by attending lavish dinner parties, and by admitting: “I want to be somebody here in Szinyér, the wife of a leading personality, whom nobody may so much as dare to despise” (90). But when Jenő Vodicska commits suicide, the meaning of her life also disappears: “she is unable to get on with her life as an independent human being within the limited social framework that had been available for the women of her generation” (Schwartz 83). On the other hand, her class is stifling; she takes it as an insult when Melanie tries to convince her “to rent [her] furnished rooms…to unmarried officials,” or to open a “hat-decorating salon” because she is “so clever” with her hands (CY 145). In Hungary gentry women, like Magda, could choose between becoming “a governess, a teacher for girls, or opening a fashion store” (Schwartz 91). By turning down Melanie’s suggestions, Magda in fact makes a statement about embracing the ideals of a “new woman,” although without actualizing any of its elements herself. While she is able to relinquish part of her dependence on her family
and on a husband, “her new partial independence leads her into the morass of insecurity” (Tötösy de Zepetnek 183). As Fábri points out, as early as 1907 Kaffka spoke at various forums in defense of women, arguing that “‘women should be given free reign, not because they are equal with men, but because they are different than men’” (185). Kaffka strove to synthesize the image of the working, thinking, and independent “new woman” for which Colours and Years is an enriching example.

In the novel Magda begins to formulate the image of an independent woman, this time through Melanie’s initiation of organizing a “woman’s society here” (99), but curiously, it is Péter Telekdy who speaks for the rights of women:

The age of independent, strong women capable of fighting is coming, women who can stand firm even in trouble, responsible for themselves and for those entrusted to them by nature, as mothers. …Indeed I believe we’re now seeing the development of a totally new type of women, a great mass of females who are left cold by the caprices and weakness of love and who absolve themselves from the problems of bearing and caring for children in order to devote their powers entirely to the community of mankind…And it is necessary for this to be the way of development…(CY 143)

Telekdy is one of those quirky aristocrats who have progressive visions of society’s future and economy; he treats his peasants well, develops a special agricultural method for his land, makes use of new inventions and harshly criticizes the concurrent Hungarian society. However, in the end Telekdy goes mad, partially from the experimental food he grows and eats—“a cattle-disease, and it reached him through the untreated milk” (CY 213)—and from his inability to make immediate drastic changes in society through theory even when they are put into practice. Eventually, he retracts from his progressive views and affirms his patriarchal contentions:

The woman will always remain inferior; things can’t be otherwise. After all, two thirds of their life-span are occupied with unconscious animal cares and duties that go with the maintenance of humankind, and instincts guide their intellect. If they liberate themselves

56“a nőknek nem azért kell szabad teret biztosítani, mert olyanok, mint a férfiak, hanem azért, mert mások, mint a férfiak.”
from these, they become wayward, mongrel figures who can’t find their own place…All the philosophers, Plato, Spinoza, Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche agree…(CY 212)

It was structurally necessary for Kaffka to portray Telekdy in an almost misogynistic light in order to make the shift in Magda’s realizations about her and all women’s positions. By including philosophers in Telekdy’s rant, Kaffka projects her own criticism of these thinkers’ shortcomings about women. She formulates in Magda’s experiences the condition of women living in a man’s world, in what several years later the French existentialist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir theorizes as “alterity”:

…humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him: she is not regarded as an autonomous being…And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called “the sex,” by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex—absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other. (xxii)

In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir defines gender categories as the sex categories of men and women, which in turn organizes them into socially unequal relations predicated on the basis of the subject and its other. The definition of the subject in relation to the other, Beauvoir argues, produces hegemonic cultural beliefs about gender and sex. Kaffka does not allow her readers to harbour such illusions about men, even about such weak and harmless characters as Magda’s second husband, the ex-musician/notary, Dénes Horváth. She sees Horváth as a “human wreck” (CY 229), a man whose bad habits drove him weak and eventually to his death. On his deathbed Dénes’s last gesture, as if in an attempt to make up for his misdemeanor, is to draw Magda’s hand to his lips, but his trembling kiss turns into a frightful bite: “It was the semi-animal, indecisive, unfinished movement and intention of a paralytic” (CY 240). After the passing of Horváth, although mourning, Magda finally reconciles her life, feeling if not entirely liberated but at least relieved. Magda is the woman who is still incapable of pursuing the ideals of the
“new woman,” and recognizes their absence as part of her unhappiness in life. In turn, she envisions such possibilities for her daughters: “Permission has been given now for girls to attend grammar school too…Let them go and be doctors or teachers! Let them have the same chances as men!” (CY 230). Kaffka ends Magda’s story by proclaiming: “My daughters are doing well” (CY 242); projecting a reassured hope for women in the future. With this statement Kaffka’s novel constitutes a clearly feminist standpoint that marks a milestone in modern Hungarian women’s literature.

In her novel, Kaffka portrays the archetypal forms and cultural expressions of Hungarians, and fosters progressive ideals for a generation of women at the turn of the century. Furthermore, Colours and Years sensitively illustrates the themes of gender and class divisions in Hungary, the rural and urban dichotomies that I suggested to be understood as in-betweenness, a condition which the Generation West experienced and was attuned to. Margit Kaffka inspired numerous subsequent Hungarian women writers. A 1938 photograph I found in Anna Fábri’s book depicts the members of the Kaffka Margit Kör [Margit Kaffka Circle]; among the eight women are such noted authors as Anna Hajnal and Zseni Vármai, former members of Nyugat. These authors, along with Magda Szabó later, were Kaffka’s most acclaimed successors who continued to examine women’s lives in modern Hungary. Reményi states that Kaffka is “not much read today and it is questionable whether in the future she will ever be read by many” (291). In opposition, I hope that I have been able to create interest in Margit Kaffka’s contribution to modernist and feminist literature. I share Földes’s anticipation that by engaging Kaffka’s œuvre we have begun to redeem her rightful memory.

Kaffka’s novel is an essential part of twentieth century Hungarian literature, specifically women’s literature, and it is an important element of the Nyugat-generation’s discourse. Her concepts were shaped by Nyugat, its aesthetic ethics, and she also influenced the journal’s
direction. As Bodnár explains, Kaffka worked on the continuous development of *Nyugat* with relentless energy, trying to overcome the difficulties of creating a modern course of literature while remaining faithful to her own ideals (17). The bond among *Nyugat* authors was their mutual faith in cultural humanism, which Kaffka extended with her forward-looking perspectives about women. The culture-centredness of the Generation West, aesthetic and ethical, reverberated best with readers during WWI; subscription for *Nyugat* rose quickly in 1916 (Horváth 452). But by the end of the war and the Dual Monarchy, the political upheavals taxed the cultural outlook of *Nyugat* members. Babits, now as editor, salvaged what he could to maintain the journal. In 1919 only seventeen issues of *Nyugat* were published due to censorship and a ban. After a five-month hiatus, Babits’s essay “A magyar költő kilencszáztizenkilencben” [“The Hungarian Poet in Nineteen-nineteen”] in the November issue of *Nyugat* in the same year debates the concepts of nation and culture, by rejecting nationalist meaning making and advancing a proposed equilibrium between nation and culture. For Babits nation could only be valid if it was attached to culture: “Nemzet: a kultúra” [“Nation: is culture”]. The new task of literature is to take more responsibility for words and advance form, argues Babits, in order to shed the dangers of nationalism and politics, either communism or right wing conservatism, with words. Babits’s efforts coincided with the remaining members of *Nyugat* and also with Osvát who officially rejoined the editorial staff in January 1920. Thus the second era of *Nyugat* began. In the next chapter I discuss Dezső Kosztolányi’s contribution to the *Nyugat* journal with a focus on his novella cycle *Esti Kornél*. 
CHAPTER THREE

Dezső Kosztolányi and the Nyugat

“It is more difficult to write in Hungarian after Kosztolányi,”¹ proclaims the Hungarian literary critic Júlia Levendel (5). The Hungarian poet, novelist, translator, journalist and first generation Nyugat author, Dezső Kosztolányi left the greatest mark on twentieth century Hungarian literary language. Throughout the years I read several of Kosztolányi’s poems, novellas and one or two novels as part of various school curricula in Hungary, but I did not fully “get” him until I was about twenty. Then suddenly I became captivated by his work, so much so that his creative force permanently touched me. “As if he were standing behind me,” Levendel explains in her study entitled Igy élt Kosztolányi [Thus Lived Kosztolányi], “with a twinkle in his eyes, watching me whether I find the most perfect phrases, if I am able to make language come alive” (5). This is how I feel too, with Kosztolányi peering over my shoulders, making me self-conscious as I write: am I economizing cleverly with my words? Am I finding poignant, elegant and also playful phrases? Most likely, no matter how hard I try, I would leave him unsatisfied. Kosztolányi was a master of words. In this chapter I illuminate some aspects of his life and work as a chief figure of Nyugat, and engage his most debated prose work, the novella cycle Esti Kornél [Le double].

Kosztolányi intensified the linguistic and aesthetic ethical charge of Nyugat. As I have pointed out earlier, the contributors of Nyugat were a heterogeneous group, often disagreeing with each other about ideological, political views and approaches to literature. What held them together was their conviction that the official canon of Hungarian literature maintained by the Academy of Sciences and various literary societies had become outdated (Held 5). Young authors were determined to transform Hungarian literature by establishing their own literary

¹ Kosztolányi után nehezebb magyarul írni.
magazines, such as *Nyugat*. Kosztolányi was one of the first young authors to join *Nyugat* in 1908. He was an experimental writer conceptualizing ideas about what language can and cannot do. In this respect, Kosztolányi can be seen as a forerunner of French semiotics studies in the 1970s. He sought to articulate that language is part of a structure where sign, signifier and signified are based on signifying practices found in a given collective but where the process of meaning making is ultimately determined by the individual’s relation to the existing language community. To this effect, he developed a method of harnessing the aesthetic and psychological elements of language, which, when dealing with translations sometimes resulted in a diminishing of the original meaning. One of the most eloquent examples of his experimentation with language was his novella cycle *Esti Kornél* where form and content are linked with concepts of semiotics and narratology through which interplay binary opposites become producers of meaning and offer a model for an unconventional narrative style. In this chapter I aim to tease out the most important aspects of Kosztolányi’s ideas about language and aesthetics, and demonstrate his inexhaustible productivity and creativity. Hungarian scholars have conducted copious studies about Kosztolányi, but there have been very few written in English. I make use of and compare a selection of these sources. Kosztolányi’s complex œuvre often puzzles academics; many literary historians (Czigány; Kenyeres; Levendel; Gy. Rónay; L. Rónay; Pomogáts; Reményi) acknowledge and celebrate Kosztolányi’s linguistic and aesthetic achievements, but they also condemn him for neglecting to draw on realism or ensure precision in translation. In my analysis I engage these notions in reference to Kosztolányi’s works, while I propose to see his language-centred and aesthetic emphasis as a crucial element of modernist Hungarian literature which, I argue, profoundly complemented the discourse of *Nyugat*.

Dezső Kosztolányi came from a comfortable household that was a blend of old Hungarian nobility and classically educated new bourgeoisie where books lined the walls, music
filled the rooms and conversations about philosophy, theatre performances and the nation were part of the quotidian (L. Rónay 6, 30). As a result he felt much more at ease with the bourgeois life-style than most Hungarian writers of his generation (Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1232).

Kosztolányi was born in Szabadka, a southern town in old Hungary on March 29, 1885. He was the first son of the mathematics teacher and high school headmaster Árpád Kosztolányi and his young wife, Euália Brenner. They adored him, hence his name Dezső, that is, Desiderius, the “desired one” (Levendel 7). His father was a strict disciplinarian, not only with Dezső but with his younger brother Árpi and sister Mariska, too. It was grandfather Ágoston Kosztolányi who first taught the young Kosztolányi at the age of four to read and write, exposing him to the English language, and telling him stories about Turkey and America (Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1231-32). At the age of ten, Kosztolányi experienced his first crisis with the death of his paternal grandfather. The shock of his grandfather’s passing remained with him, and the notion of death and a nostalgic longing for a lost childhood became a permanent topic for him, which he formulated into poems.

As an adolescent Kosztolányi was deeply influenced by his readings of Blaise Pascal, and he loved music, especially playing the piano, and dreamed of becoming a painter, but he also remembered his grandfather’s pragmatic warning to earn a living (L. Rónay 8). He was a successful and popular student, and during high school he sent one of his poems entitled “Egy sir” (“A Tomb”) to the prestigious Budapesti Napló [Budapest Diary] in 1901. Kosztolányi became drunk with success from the publication of his poem and subsequently he adopted the pose of a bohemian, a characteristic he cherished and cultivated until the end of his life (Levendel 26). He was expelled from the local high school, where his father was headmaster, for

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2 Szabadka is now Subotica in Serbia.
3 They nicknamed the young Dezső Kosztolányi “Dide” [deedeh].
4 Captain Ágoston Kosztolányi fought in Lajos Kossuth’s army against the Habsburgs in 1848-9 and was forced into temporary exile with the General, first to Turkey then to America. Ten years later he returned to Szabadka where, influenced by the American spirit of utilitarian positivism, he opened a dry-goods store.
improper behaviour and left for Szeged. Eventually he returned home and at last matriculated in 1903. But this unexpected interruption in high school haunted his university experiences.

In the fall of 1903, Dezső Kosztolányi moved to Budapest, the city he called a “modern Babylon” (Levendel 32). He enrolled in the University’s Hungarian and German literature program. It was in the seminar of László Négyessy, the highly respected although conservative Hungarian philologist, that he met and quickly became friends with the young Mihály Babits, Gyula Juhász and Béla Zalai (Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1233; Levendel 32). What made their friendship significant was that together they first set out to reform Hungarian literature on the pages of Nyugat. They belonged to a new and competitive world, aware of the changing time, writing and reading poems and essays to each other in their cold rented abodes (L. Rónay 20). They were fervently seeking opportunities to express their generation’s dramatically different and innovative perspectives in opposition to the traditional authors whose works, depicting national pride and syrupy romanticism, Új Idők and the conservative Jenő Rákosi’s Budapesti Szemle magazines carried (Held 6). Enjoying the attention, Kosztolányi was the clown of the group, always on the lookout for comical and grotesque situations while remaining a serious student, often feeling the need to withdraw, to step outside the circle and become an observer (Levendel 35, 39). According to Levendel, numerous documents indicate that despite Kosztolányi’s apparent joviality, he felt very lonely and sad (75), as his 1909 letter to Gyula Juhász reveals: “I have no one [to love]. Supposedly I am a genius and famous writer, but I live

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5 When his literature teacher questioned an essay he had written about Lajos Kossuth, the teenaged Kosztolányi responded rudely: “You are not an expert, Professor. I am not interested in your opinion” [A tanár úr ehhez nem ért, különben sem vagyok kiváncsi a véleményére] (in Levendel 28).

6 Gyula Juhász (1883-1937) was a Hungarian modernist poet and member of the first generation of Nyugat.

7 Béla Zalai (1882-1915) was a Hungarian philosopher, a student of Wilhelm Wundt, Károly Bohm and Alexander Bernat at the universities of Budapest, Kolozsvár, Leipzig and Paris. György Lukács considered him the greatest living Hungarian philosopher. Zalai’s Allgemeine Theorie der System (1913-14), discovered among Lukács’s personal collections, is a phenomenological investigation influenced by Husserl. Zalai died from typhus in a Siberian prison camp during WWI in 1915.
like a dog. Without anyone” (BJK L 1 193-94).\(^8\) He also liked to study himself. Surviving photographs depict a tall and athletic figure. Standing in front of the mirror he would strike poses, staring into his sparkling green-grey eyes while he arranged his light brown hair into a bohemian style (Levendel 36). Levendel calls Kosztolányi a “Narcissus with a healthy self-irony,” the one who wore a mask of self-mockery, but also believed in his creativity’s power (36). Behind Kosztolányi’s mask clashed a hyperactive life force with constant hypochondria and a fear of death. This mirror and masked image became central to his Esti Kornél.

The environment of the metropolis and the intellectual and artistic circles of the university radically and permanently changed Kosztolányi’s worldview from provincial nationalism to European modernism. He embodied both the Hungarian and European identities at once, with a belief in individual liberty and democracy (Pomogáts 56). He was a flâneur with an insatiable appetite for life. In the fall of 1904, Kosztolányi left for Vienna to study philosophy in Emil Reich’s class (L. Rónay 13). But soon he found the university there “hardly less conservative than the one he had left behind in Budapest” (Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1233). It must have been during this year in Vienna, as Szegedy-Maszák suspects, that Kosztolányi heard about Freud for the first time, an experience that inspired many of his future works (EW 1233). Kosztolányi returned to Budapest, but he soon decided to abandon university and begin working as a junior journalist for the papers Szeged és Vidéke [Szeged and its Surroundings] and Bácskai Hirlap [Bácska Newspaper]. He quickly gained a reputation as a capable writer and in 1906 Budapesti Napló invited the twenty-one year old Kosztolányi to replace Endre Ady. He wrote to Babits: “I am stuck in [Buda]Pest…in Endre Ady’s post, who went to Paris…I am writing articles about literature…I am the editor of the poetry column” (BJK L 130). Ady’s and Kosztolányi’s poems “appeared in the same paper on alternate Sundays, and a rivalry that

\(^8\) Nekem nincs senkim. Állítólag zseni vagyok és hires író, de úgy élek mint a kutya. Egy ember nélkül.
divided both writers and readers developed between the two poets” (Szegedy-Maszák 1233). Ady’s 1906 Új versek [New Verses] collection, which reflected the modernist voice he had discovered as a result of his experiences in Paris, surprised Kosztolányi, if not affected and aggravated him. Kosztolányi, as did Babits, considered Ady’s poems archaic, because they focused on Hungary’s backward-looking society, when in fact the country was experiencing a rapid never-before-seen social, economic and political transformation which also promoted a new culture (Levendel 43). Kosztolányi and Ady can be seen as the two opposite poles of Hungarian modern lyricism (Gy. Rónay 170). While Ady was the archetype of the provincial gentry, drunk on wine and Gypsy music, Kosztolányi represented the classically educated bourgeois class [“magyar lateiner”] (Gy. Rónay 170-71). Kosztolányi’s and Ady’s views differed on lyricism and the role of the poet. Contrary to Ady who, following the legacy of Hungarian romanticism, saw poets and writers as the spiritual leaders of their nation, Kosztolányi rejected such a loaded role and felt poets must focus on aestheticism (cf. Czigány 311). For Kosztolányi poets and writers should only create and defend beauty through and in language.

Babits, upon seeing Kosztolányi’s rapid success as a newspaper writer, was not only envious but also felt that Kosztolányi had sold his soul for cheap sensationalism instead of working towards their earlier goal of reinvigorating Hungarian literary culture (Levendel 57). In spite of Babits’s gradual distancing in their friendship and eventual admiration for Ady, Kosztolányi never ceased to support Babits and always held him in high regard. The collected correspondence between the two of them reveals that Kosztolányi sensed Babits’s disapproval of the path he had embarked on and tried to make amends as seen in his June 24, 1906 letter:

…I am mailing you the verses. I ask you to please send them back to me within three days because I might need them [for publication] any minute…I make two hundred koronas in a month as the contributing editor of Magyar Szemle and Budapesti
Kosztolányi’s tone is friendly yet it seeks Babits’s approval for his poem; the letter also flaunts his financial earnings as a reward for his success. In opposition to the quiet Babits, Kosztolányi embodied the characteristic of a “double” or “split personality,” which in turn underlined his experiences of struggling with the problem of the “gap between the bourgeoisie and the artist” (Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1232). Kosztolányi’s split or dual personality is exemplified by his enthusiasm for play and humour while possessing serious organizational and disciplinary qualities. The combination of the two granted him energy and passion along with an exactitude for writing: “he burned with an inner fire, and wrote with fever…forever in contradictions, filled with passion and angst” (Gy. Rónay 179). Kosztolányi was inspired by the Hungarian classics of the 1800s along with Europeans from Dante and Shakespeare to Baudelaire, Nietzsche, and Ibsen. When his first collection of verse was published in 1907, entitled Négy fal között [Between Four Walls], Ady “reviewed it in a condescending tone for Budapesti Napló” comparing it to Károly Szász’s mediocre artistry (Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1233). Indeed, as Levendel notes, this first collection of verse included a medley of styles and influences and revealed only a kernel of the talent that was yet to come (46). But unlike Margit Kaffka’s praise in the first issue of Nyugat that recognized Kosztolányi’s aesthetic sensitivity, Ady’s criticism was still unjust (Levendel 48). However, it did not deter Kosztolányi from his desire to be a poet and writer. He respectfully thanked Ady for his review in a letter, but it took him over two decades to respond to Ady’s attack, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

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9 …A verseket már útnak inditom. Kérem, három napon belül mind küldje vissza, mert bármelyik pillanatban szükségem lehet rájuk…Havonta kétszáz koronát keresek. A Magyar Szemlének s a Budapesti Naplónak belmunkatársa vagyok…Én most megyek aludni, illetve az ágyba fekszem és megpróbalom, birok-e. Óleli a régi Kosztolányi. (Note the use of personal pronoun: Kosztolányi and Babits used the formal address with each other until 1907, which was customary among educated middle-class people.)
Along with Babits, Kosztolányi was among the first young authors Nyugat recruited in 1908. Kosztolányi reveals in a retrospective article in 1923, entitled “O.E.,” that both his journalistic reputation and first poems caught Ernő Osvát’s attention and he was only nineteen years old when he came in contact with the legendary editor shortly after moving to Budapest. Osvát asked Kosztolányi in a letter to look him up at the Café Bristol. At their first meeting Osvát “interrogated” [“kikérdezett”] the young Kosztolányi about his work and plans, and then Figyelő, the precursor of Nyugat, published three of his sonnets. “Since this meeting I have been in touch with him every day,” explains Kosztolányi, “he is the eternal-influence, the one who emanates perpetual ethical energy” (“O.E”).10 Kosztolányi’s praise and respect for Osvát were sincere; they cemented their friendship through an aesthetic ideology that they both considered to be crucial for a Hungarian literary renewal. I have counted over 600 published pieces by Kosztolányi on the Nyugat Electronic Database that appeared in Nyugat between 1908 and 1936, ranging from verses, short stories and serial novels, to book reviews and translations. His first piece, a poem entitled “Boszorkányos este” [“A Bewitching Evening”], appeared in the March 1, 1908 issue of Nyugat, which also became the title of his short story collection published the same year. This five-stanza poem engages the topic of death with romanticized avant-garde images. It is more of an iambic exercise in word associations and sounds than an offering of serious content, as the first stanza already reveals:

Ma a halállal szembenültem.  Today I sat across from death.
Ma nem merek elmnenni hozzád.  Today I do not dare to visit you
Holt kertbe bolygok kimerülten.  I roam in the graveyard breathless. (Nyugat Electronic)

I purposefully juxtapose the original Hungarian verse with my English translation, and I will continue to do so in this chapter, because I want to provide a visual image of the linguistic structure in order to explicate my analysis of translation as a problem between creation and

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10 A találkozás óta minden napos kapcsolatban vagyok vele…Mindig-ható, mindenütt-jelenlévő erkölcsi erő.
reproduction, an idea I will elaborate on later. Even though the structure of this poem is simplistic and its imagery is somewhat cliché, it reveals the binary elements of the somber and vivacious, the selective word choice, and a role-play Kosztolányi acts out with himself as speaker and poet, all of which became representative trademarks of his writing. For Kosztolányi, composition, form and content together had to yield linguistic experimentation that demonstrates both attention to structure and the possibility of play.

Kosztolányi followed up his lyrical works with the short story collections Bolondok [Fools] in 1911, Beteg lelkek [Sick Souls] in 1912, Mécs [Torch] in 1913, all the while writing numerous book reviews for Nyugat. While literary theory was scarce in Nyugat, it carried all the more literary reviews and criticism, a mixture of “literary history survey…and gibberish” in the “Figyelő” section (Gy. Rónay 169). Beside Aladár Schöpflin, who was considered one of the sharpest critics, Kosztolányi was most often given the task of writing reviews. As Gy. Rónay interpolates, Nyugat editors saw in “Dide,” as they nicknamed Kosztolányi, elegant tactfulness combined with gentle irony, the type of writer that offered a midway gesture to both friends and foes (168). The more tasks he had the more motivated he felt to write (Levendel 167). By the publication of his second collection of poems in 1910, entitled A szegény kisgyermek panaszai [The Laments of a Small Child], Kosztolányi had begun developing “his own poetic idiom, rid[ding] himself of his literary mannerisms…sidestepping the temptations of blatant journalese,” while immersing himself in “eclecticism” (Reményi 252). It was “Hedda,” the thirteen-year old daughter of the Szabadka Music School director who served as his muse (Levendel 67): although their two-year relationship primarily consisted of an exchange of heated letters interspersed with only a few personal meetings. Szegedy-Maszák considers The Laments verse-cycle collection “a masterpiece of the Hungarian Secession and one of the most highly organized volumes of poetry” in Hungarian (EW 1234). Not separated by titles but created like a
montage of a “dramatic monologue,” the poems ventriloquize “a small boy’s world vision of plentitude in contrast to adult life, which brings alienation and materialism” (EW 1234). Many of the poems in *The Laments* first appeared in *Nyugat*, like the one I include here, which already demonstrates Kosztolányi’s dark vision, but also his masterful talent for words, rhyme and structure:

Mint aki a sinek közé esett...  
Like the one who fell between the train tracks...

Es általérzi túnó életét,  
He feels his fleeting life,
Míg zúgva kattog a forró kerék,  
While the wheels clatter and clack,
Cikázva lobban sok sok ferde kép  
Images zig-zag in front of his eyes
És látt, ahogy nem látott sose még.  
He can see as he has never seen before.

Mint aki a sinek közé esett,  
Like the one who fell between the train tracks,
A végtelelent, a távol életet  
I say farewell to the endless life in the distance
Búcsúztatom, mert messze messé lett.  
Since it has become a fairytale.
Mint aki a sinek közé esett.  
Like the one who fell between the train tracks.

Mint aki a sinek közé esett -
Bús panoráma, rémes élvezet -
Sinek között és kerekek között,
A bús idő robog fejem fölött.  
Gloomy panorama, a horrific enjoyment -
To be between the tracks and wheels,
És a halál távolba menydörög,
For a moment I can grasp what is eternal,
Egy perere megfogom, ami örök,
Butterfly, dream, the horrific, and the sweet.
Lepkéket, álmat, rémest, édeset.
Mint aki a sinek közé esett.  
Like the one who fell between the train tracks.

Regretfully, my translation does not do justice to the fascinating shoring up of metaphors, metonyms and similes, the stylistic iambic rhyme scheme nor the carefully chosen words that Kosztolányi employs in this poem. There is no unnecessary embellishment in this piece; empathetic meaning making instigates every adjective. A single line at the start and end frames the two quatrains and a septet while he references the third person. Szegedy-Maszák contends that Kosztolányi did not so much search for subjective self-expression as for the loci where language could reign the fullest (“Fordítás” 147). There is a pulsation in the verse strophes that mitigates the contradiction between the horror of death and the beauty of life; between (sexual)
ecstasy and faithlessness. He enlivens the drive of two forces, death and love, or what Freud called Todestrieb and Eros, ideas which Kosztolányi was greatly influenced by. We also meet Kosztolányi’s alter ego, a small child, who is the hero of mischief and a metaphor for the nostalgic and dreaming flâneur (cf. Levendel 68), a character who would reappear in prose form twenty years later as Kornél Esti. Gy. Rónay notes the unquestionable influence of the Belgian poet, Emile Verhaeren’s Les premières tendresses cycle on Kosztolányi’s poems, and the French Francis Jammes’s inventory-like still-life lyricism (187, 189). Central to the fin-de-siècle European authors’ themes was indeed this profound interest in childhood, which Kosztolányi tapped into. Indeed, childhood, as I have argued in the first chapter, served as the original guideline or “measuring rod” for Kosztolányi and many of the writers, artists and intellectuals of his generation, for which Esti Kornél is a prime example, as I shall illuminate below.

Like most members of the Generation West, Kosztolányi also looked to Paris, as the ultimate symbol of cultural fulfillment (L. Rónay 41). But he envisioned an “aesthetic creation…in an almost superstitious reverence for language and the power of written words” (L. Rónay 21). He seemed alone with his views since most Nyugat writers saw the role of the writer and poet as being in charge of literary and artistic culture in Hungary. László Rónay criticizes Kosztolányi for failing to portray social change while favouring psychoanalysis and aestheticism over realism (146,161). As L. Rónay argues, Kosztolányi, under Nietzsche’s influence, saw such collective endeavours as a “herd mentality,” and with a more plastic and subjective perspective he embraced a Zarathustra-like attitude of the lone individual who must create his own path (18). Kosztolányi felt that “he was a lonely genius” (L. Rónay 18) who, like Zarathustra, “must descend into the depths,” on his own terms (Nietzsche 39). He saw himself as similar to what Nietzsche depicted in Zarathustra: “the cup that wants to overflow” (39). According to L. Rónay, Kosztolányi lacked a sense of communal anxiety that many of his fellow writers brought with
them to the review and which in turn framed the group’s atmosphere (11). Also, Ady’s overpowering influence on *Nyugat* kept Kosztolányi at a distance (L. Rónay 17). This is also why, contends to L. Rónay, with regard to his generation Kosztolányi felt somewhat of an outsider (58); he felt that the others looked down on him for his aesthetic fleetness, or were jealous of his admirable writing skills, which he honed through hundreds of newspaper articles. Moreover, while most members of *Nyugat* were bilingual—Hungarian and German—they read but did not speak other languages (L. Rónay 19). Kosztolányi was an autodidact and became fluent in many languages. He also stood apart from his fellow writers with his elegance, dandyism (wearing colourful shoestring ties and shirts with wide lapels), curious and extravagant gesticulations, and the need to live every moment of life with fervent impatience. Miksa Fenyő describes Kosztolányi in his *Notes About Nyugat*, as “a man with ideal good looks, with impeccable manners and education, and with a great sense of humour, the one who attracted instant attention everywhere he went…he seemed like a character from a novel, a twentieth century Balzac-figure” (146). Kosztolányi’s favourite haunt was café New York on Nagykörút, the large ring road in the metropolis that was overflowing with coffee houses (Levendel 71). He spent most days there with Frigyes Karinthy\(^\text{11}\) and many of the *Nyugat* writers. The New York and other cafés often served as the editorial headquarters for the journal.

“‘Practical’ interests were confusing to [Kosztolányi],” asserts Reményi, meanwhile he also recognized the “pragmatic and moral value of family life and middle-class comforts” (253). Although Kosztolányi was not particularly keen on marriage, he was looking for companionship. He met a young actress and inspiring writer/translator, Ilona Harmos, a.k.a. Ilona Görög, at a play in 1912, and after a year of courtship they got married in 1913. Within two years, with

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\(^{11}\) Frigyes Karinthy (1887-1938) was part of the first generation *Nyugat* authors. He is best known for his grotesque and humorous sketches, including his 1912 *Igy irtok ti* [*That is How You Write*] collection and the most famous “Utazás a koponyám körül” [*“Travel Around My Skull”*] which he wrote in 1936 after his brain surgery in Sweden. The now popular idea of “six degrees of separation” originated in his 1929 short story “Láncszemek” [*“Chains”*].
financial help from Hatvany and a loan from the bank, they bought a rundown house at the foot of the Buda Castle on Tábor Street (L. Rónay 69), and in April 1915 their son, Ádám was born (Levendel 106). They felt out of place living a well-behaved bourgeois lifestyle and mocked the institution of marriage; they were persistently playful (Levendel 178). Despite his happy family life and close ties with Nyugat authors, the imminence of war caused Kosztolányi tremendous anxiety. He became overwrought with worry for his parents and decided to travel to Szabadka on June 28, 1914, only to hear Ilona’s cries on the platform about the murder of Franz Ferdinand (L. Rónay 69). Kosztolányi avoided conscription and instead of returning to Szabadka the couple left for Western Europe. Like Kaffka and Bauer, they were planning to travel to Paris, but due to the escalating political crisis, they only went as far as Venice (Levendel 93). These experiences came to light in many of Kosztolányi’s works during WWI. In the fall 1914 double issue of Nyugat Kosztolányi’s poem to his brother, Árpád, who was serving as military physician on the front, expressed his distress. I have translated the first quatrain of this seven-stanza poem entitled “Őcsém” [“My Younger Brother”] to provide a glimpse into Kosztolányi’s emotions at the time:

Az én öcsém mostan katona a határon,    My younger brother is now a soldier on the front
A szerb hegyek mentén Ferenc József bakája,  For Franz Joseph in the Serbian mountains,
Szívdobbanásmmal mérek fel minden éjet       I think of him as I lay awake and turn on the light
Lámpákat gyujtok és így gondolok reája.       The beat of my heart keeps time at night.

This poem does not raise questions nor does it blame anyone for the war, but it illuminates a quiet pacifism and subdued sadness crafted with careful attention to rhyme and rhythm. Initially, the war might have temporarily stifled the author, but he soon recovered his motivation for writing. His forty-line poem, “Boldog, szomorú dal” [“Happy, Sad Song”], which appeared in the January 1, 1917 edition of Nyugat describes, with an ironic twist, how the poet sought contentment among the horrors of the war. The poem begins with an inventory of Kosztolányi’s

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12 A plaque on the how now indicates that the Kosztolánys lived there.
material possessions, such as a family, house, telephone, suitcases, pen, and good friends who know him in Budapest. But in the last twelve lines, like a soft, sudden realization, Kosztolányi admits that these worldly possessions would not replace the “treasure” that has been lost due to the war:

De néha megálllok az éjen,        But there are times at night I stagger
Győrödve, halálba hanyatlón,       tortured and weary, suicidal,
Úgy ásom a kincset a mélyen,        seeking a missing hidden figure,
A kincset, a régit, a padlón,       frenetically digging for that vital
Mint lázbeteg, aki feleszmél,       cipher as if I had just woken
Álmát hüvelyezve, zavartan,         out of a fevered dream, half-babbling,
Kezem kotorásza keresgél,           and everything around me is broken
Hogy jaj! valaha mit akartam,       only my fingers faintly scrabble.
Mert nincs meg a kincs, mire vágytam,       It isn’t there, the thing I treasure,
A kincs, amiért porig égtem.         all that I burned and longed for vanished.
Itthon vagyok itt e világban         On earth I live as if at leisure,
S már nem vagyok otthon az égben.       from heaven though, I have been banished.

(Nyugat Electronic)       (Szirtes in Lost Rider 215-16)

I have made use of George Szirtes’s translation for this poem to better illustrate Kosztolányi’s style and rhyme scheme that hammers down the idyllic pictures he first paints. However, this translation does not capture the intricate play on words that Kosztolányi purposefully employs with the terms of “itthon” and “otthon,” that is, how he is “at home in this world,” but not welcomed to a “home in heaven.” With this emphasis I not only want to call attention to Kosztolányi’s metaphors that speak to the shame and pain he feels, but also to the notion that translation is always contingent on the translator’s subjective voice, enabling divergent meanings.

In spite of his grief about the war, Kosztolányi did not allow any emotions to show in his newspaper articles. He was determined to maintain an objective, reporter-like perspective to convey a realistic picture of the horrors of war while satisfying the official censors (Levendel 98). But like many of the Nyugat authors, Kosztolányi was deeply saddened by the Versailles Treaty; he was cut off from his parents and relatives in Szabadka, who now lived in the new
Kosztolányi did not foster religious beliefs; neither did he commit himself to any political parties or organizations. While he welcomed the Mihály Károlyi-led democratic revolution in the fall of 1918, he dreaded the subsequent terror in the wake of the events (Levendel 118). On December 1, 1918, he proudly accepted an invitation from the newly founded Vörösmarty Academy to chair the “Europe and Pacifism” group and to become a member of the board responsible for translating Marx’s works (Levendel 119, 122). But at this time he was also mourning the loss of his friends Béla Zalai and Margit Kaffka, and his cousin Géza Csáth. He and Ilona also contracted the devastating Spanish influenza which tormented them for weeks, and while still ill he bid an emotional farewell in various papers to his rival, Endre Ady at the end of January 1919 (L. Rónay 87). In turn, a burgeoning conservative literary movement that rose in opposition to Nyugat now placed Kosztolányi along with Ady in the left-wing camp (Levendel 121). During the Republic of Councils in the spring of 1919, Kosztolányi, as Levendel explains, requested an interview with the communist leader Béla Kun, an old colleague at the Budapesti Napló ten years prior (122). Counting on their old-time comradery, Kosztolányi expressed his enthusiasm for the Republic, envisioning a literary democracy. To Kosztolányi’s regret, Kun coldly informed him that poets and writers would not be needed for communism to succeed (Levendel 122-23). Disappointed, Kosztolányi turned away from the Republic, something for which György Lukács and Béla Balázs severely criticized him. In a desperate move, Kosztolányi sided with the irredentist Miklós Horthy’s leadership and in the fall of 1919 he began writing for Új Nemzedék [A New Generation], an ultra-nationalistic right-wing daily paper (Levendel 124). As Levendel suggests, it was a disgraceful period in Kosztolányi’s life, and it is still unclear why he took such a contradictory turn (124-25). Meanwhile, Nyugat

13 Géza Csáth was the pen name of József Brenner (1887-1919), Kosztolányi’s maternal first cousin and childhood best friend. Csáth was a physician, and he was also interested in literature, music and psychoanalysis. He contributed numerous articles to Nyugat. Seeking sanctuary from his morphine addiction he asked for a secluded physician’s position in the provinces. But his condition worsened and he was committed to psychiatric care. Upon escaping from the institute he murdered his wife and shortly thereafter committed suicide.
was in danger of folding under both communist censorship and Horthy’s dictatorship. At last, Kosztolányi left Új Nemzedék and severed his ties with the counter-revolutionary government in January 1921 (Levendel 135), only to face more rejections from fellow writers.

Kosztolányi sank into depression, which he tried to alleviate with drugs (morphine), and huge amounts of black coffee and cigarettes (Levendel 180). He seemingly drifted the farthest from the shared ideals of his generation and in turn faced loneliness (L. Rónay 93). He was not considered to be among the greatest contemporary authors by his peers who revered Ady and Babits, partially due to his experiments in the linguistic domain (Király 413). In fact he was stigmatized and some of his colleagues spread scandalous rumours about him (Király 416). It was Miksa Fenyő who first defended Kosztolányi from the many attacks (FN 147). In the wake of personal and artistic crisis, from the early 1920s on, as Levendel argues, Kosztolányi created some of the greatest works of Hungarian literature (137). Regaining his strength, he surfaced on the literary scene in late 1921, this time with prose fiction, following in the footsteps of Margit Kaffka’s Szinek és évek, the new modern Hungarian novel. But in opposition to Kaffka, Kosztolányi’s works are antididactic and, influenced by Nietzsche, they engage existentialism and the transcendental. His first published novel was A rossz orvos [The Bad Physician] in 1921, then Néró, a véres költő [Nero, the Bloody Poet]14 in 1922, followed by the 1923 Pacsirta [Skylark], Aranysárkány [The Golden Kite] in 1924, and his last novel Édes Anna [Anna Édes] in 1926, all of which first appeared serially in Nyugat. It might seem curious that many of Kosztolányi’s major works, along with many other authors’, were first published in Nyugat. Nyugat provided writers with the kind of cachet or advertisement that would preempt the works’

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14 Néró, a véres költő was the result of Kosztolányi’s literary battle with the provincial nationalist writer Dezső Szabó whom I mentioned in relation to Margit Kaffka in Chapter Two. Kosztolányi portrays the Roman Emperor, Nero, after Szabó, as a dilettante poet and, he depicts the calamities of WWI and the subsequent revolutions (1918 and 1919) in Hungary in the metaphor of the tyranny of the antiquities. For Néró, a véres költő Kosztolányi received the literary prize of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and for its German translation, Thomas Mann wrote the Preface.
book publication. Moreover, as the review was continuously having financial struggles, the works presented in parts ensured a more devoted readership as this “Notice” exemplifies in the March 1923 issue: “All government administrators, private secretaries, or university students who find five new subscribers will receive free issues of Nyugat as long as these subscriptions are paid for” (Nyugat Electronic). But it is the artistic and intellectual milieu that we ought to recognize as being unique to Nyugat in providing a locus for writers like Kosztolányi to realize their literary paradigm shifts. Kosztolányi turned personal and national crises into linguistic and aesthetic explorations of literature, creating a new discursive zone in Nyugat.

One of the best examples of this desire is Kosztolányi’s A bús férfi panaszai [The Laments of a Man of Sorrow] (1924), a counterpart to his previous cycle of poems in The Laments of a Small Child. This volume, as Szegedy-Maszák suggests, “reveal[s] the poet’s consummate artistry in manipulating the relation between various textual segments,” playing with time frames by moving from the present to the past and back to present again (EW 1235). The collection of 53 verses, which he wrote over several years, is a “kind of diary in unrhymed iambic feet” describing the poor and wealthy, the young and old, his son, wife and friends (Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1244). It includes “New York, te kávéhéz” [“New York, Coffee House”], an octet that reveals his memories about a much-cherished place of a bygone era:

New York, te kávéház, ahol oly sokat ültem, hadd nyissam ki az ajtód, leülni még szabad tán, csak mint a koldusnak, aki pihen a padkán, s megnézni, mi maradt belőlem és körültem. New York coffee house, where I sat often, may I enter and sit down for a while, like a beggar who rests on a bench, I look and see what has remained of me and around me.

E nyári koraestén, hogy még mind vacsoráznak, meginnék asztalomnál egy langyos, esti kávét, és mint hívő keresztény, elmondanék egy ávét, múltán az ifjúságnak s múltán a régi láznak. This summer eve, they are having dinner, I’d like to drink a cup of coffee at my table, and like a Christian, I’d even say a prayer, for the lost youth, and for the old fever.

(KD Intratext)
By the mid 1920s Kosztolányi recognized that the seemingly unified group of *Nyugat* had broken into a collective of isolated members and was only held together by Osvát’s magnetism (L. Rónay 122). Their old haunts of the New York and other coffee houses were now occupied by a younger generation and they, the original flâneurs of Budapest, no longer felt comfortable in this transformed environment. Kosztolányi portrays a figure that now looks not to childhood but commands tranquil nostalgia while registering the change of an era. Czigány contends that Kosztolányi’s poems in this volume demonstrate how “pure art and human compassion are not incompatible” (312). Through stylistic and aesthetic meticulousness these poems present his acute diagnosis of a sped-up capitalism, of consumerism and of dehumanizing bureaucratization and rationalization—which Max Weber and Franz Kafka identified earlier so clearly—as revealed in the poem “Beirtak engem mindféle Könyvbe” [“They Have Written My Name Into All Kinds of Books”]. I understand this collection to also exhibit the kind of solitude and despair that overwhelmed Kosztolányi and for whom nostalgia seemed a source of consolation.

His artistic achievement as well as his personal life had reached a saturation point. His father died in December 1926, an event that Kosztolányi accepted with dismay sensing that now he too was a step closer to death (Levendel 180). He commemorates his father’s death in “Halotti beszéd” [“Death Sermon”] published in the January 1, 1927 issue of *Nyugat*. In this poem, Reményi sees Kosztolányi being moved “by the incoherent contradictions of reality, by its misleading complexities, by its heterogeneous inconsistencies” (254). It is also during this time that he starts to develop the figure of Kornél Esti. By the late 1920s, Kosztolányi’s ethical perspective deepened while he remained committed to the ideal of aestheticism in literature. In 1929, *A Toll* [*The Pen*], a left-wing literary periodical, asked Hungarian writers to define the significance of Ady’s work ten years after the poet’s death. Kosztolányi forwarded a cruel but
witty reevaluation of Ady’s œuvre in a long pamphlet entitled “Az irástudatlanok árulása” [“The Treason of the Illiterate”]¹⁶:

…Ady—undoubtedly—is primarily a famous political poet…The illiterate, who understands a poet only through his life story and themes instead of his inner identity, that is, by his art and form, likes to compare him to Petőfi, parallel him and even raise him above [Petőfi]...(Magyar Irodalom-ELTE Sulinet)¹⁷

Kosztolányi admits Ady’s excellence as a poet but argues that he cannot be compared to Hungary’s greatest romantic lyricists. Kosztolányi had been following the ever-increasing interest in Ady’s work, including the Hungarian literary theorist, Albert Berzeviczy’s 1927 presentation about the damaging effects of the “Ady phenomenon” (L. Rónay 213). Kosztolányi rejects Ady’s messianic character and vision, and investigates the misinterpretations of Ady, or as Szegedy-Maszák sees as being “based upon the idea that literature is no more than an instrument of nationalistic propaganda…and [so] he warns readers against an indiscriminate praise of all the poems written by Ady” (EW 1244). As Gy. Rónay argues, Kosztolányi’s attack was not so much directed at Ady as at the fad itself, the “Ady-cult” [“Ady kultusz”] and the “Ady-myth” [“Ady mitosz”], that was created in both left and right wing camps, including the nationalistic and anti-Semitic groups which appropriated Ady for their proposes (172). In an effort to try and create a radically different discourse, Kosztolányi distanced his works from Ady’s, calling him “homo moralis” in contrast to himself as “homo aestheticus” in reference to the French philosopher, Jules de Gautier.

Kosztolányi’s reinterpretation of Ady’s work caused serious damage to his reputation. Although he intended this article to be a challenge, he did not expect to see the kind of turmoil that it provoked from every camp in Hungary. What he most wanted to see was how the Nyugat

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¹⁶ This title is in response to Mihály Babits’s seventeen-part article about the contemporary Hungarian literary scene entitled “Az írástudók árulása” [“The Treason of the Literati”], which appeared in Nyugat in 1928.
¹⁷ Ady—ez tagadhatatlan—elsősorban mint politikai költő híres, emlegetett…Az írástudatlók, akik egy költőt mindig életkörülményei s a témái szerint ítélnek meg, nem pedig a belső mívolta, vagyis a művészete, a formája alapján, szeretik Petőfivel együtt emlegetni, melléje, sőt sokszor magasan föléje helyezni…
members would react, including Babits and Miksa Fenyő (L. Rónay 223). In the August 1929 issue of Nyugat, Fenyő patronizes Kosztolányi in his article, explaining that he:

respect[s] Kosztolányi, for his talent… and for his human qualities… (I always watch him). So his latest article interests me, too. For over twenty years he has been carrying this thorn, like an open wound that can’t heal and from which he has been feverish. For over twenty years he has been saying, quietly seeking accomplices—especially since Ady’s death—more laudably, that the issue about Ady needs to be reexamined, a task which he feels shall fall on him… (“Kosztolányi”) 18

Fenyő acknowledges that Kosztolányi felt hurt by Ady’s permanent repudiation of him, but he was more upset that Kosztolányi attacked Ady, as was Babits. They both defended Ady to his regret: “I admit that they saddened me,” 19 Kosztolányi indicated in an interview (in L. Rónay 227). For a while, Kosztolányi remained isolated from Nyugat, in L. Rónay’s view, inflicting a “vivisection by cutting himself open and off from Nyugat” (242), only to attain recognition from the youngest generation of poets, like Attila József and Miklós Radnóti. Fanatic about creating and protecting linguistic and artistic values, Kosztolányi enthusiastically supported young talents. On January 1, 1933, Nyugat published Kosztolányi’s self-reflective seven-part essay, entitled “Önmagamról,” that is, “About Me.” Background to this essay were Babits’s and Kosztolányi’s lectures in two subsequent weeks in December 1932, where each author presented his ars poetica, with Babits expressing “dissatisfaction” [“elégedetlenség”] and Kosztolányi “satisfaction” [“elégedettség”] (Király 408). Although the title of the piece may suggest an egocentric romantic confession, Kosztolányi’s essay denotes a humble, respectful, objective, sincere and grateful author’s self-portrait:

First of all, let me tell you that I am happy. I am happy because I write and I’m allowed to write. I have always searched for and found happiness in writing, probably because

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18 Kosztolányit becsülöm, írói tehetségét is,… de emberi kvalitásait is…. (Nagyön figyeltem öt.) Ez a mostani megnyilatkozása sem érdektelen. Több mint húsz esztendő óta hordja magán, tartja nyitva, nem engedi behegedni ezt a sebet és szenvedi forróhideg lázait. Több mint húsz esztendő óta állítja, elinte csak súgya, titkos társakat keresve, majd - különösen Ady halálá óta - mind hangsosabban, mind nyugtalanabbul, hogy az Ady-ügy revizióra szorul és ennek küldetése reá van bízva…. 

19 Készséggel elismerem, hogy leverték.
nowhere else in the world could I find it. I am also satisfied. Not with my output but with
the kind of work I do. I am still not jaded by marveling at the force of linguistic
expressiveness…(“Önmagamról III”)

It is still writing that makes Kosztolányi happy, even after so many years, so many trials and
errors, crises and successes. As a “homo aestheticus” Kosztolányi embraces writing and
language for the sake of beauty. Already in 1930, he was elected president of the Hungarian PEN
Club at which post his main goal was to promote Hungarian literature not only at home but also
abroad (Levendel 196). Well-known for his enthusiastic and democratic spirit, at international
meetings Kosztolányi was able to make English, French, German, and Swedish writers, among
others, feel the Hungarian literary spirit as closest to their own (Levendel 197). But internal
politics and his failing health forced him to the margins of the association.

On a June evening in 1933, while hosting a dinner party for the Gellérts, Kosztolányi
discovered a tumor in his mouth (L. Rónay 265). He rushed to the bathroom and called in Ilona
to take a look at the plum pit-sized growth on his lower gum, exclaiming: “I have cancer!”
[“Rákom van!”] (Levendel 218). His previous preoccupation with death and Stoicism did not
stop him from seeking all possible medical advice and options. Twenty physicians examined him
before his surgery in January 1934, first suggesting tooth decay then eventually diagnosing it as
cancer of the gum (Levendel 218; Szegedy-Maszák, \textit{EW} 1245). He was intensely observant of all
the procedures and medical institutions, arguing that from an artistic perspective this kind of
material was useless (Levendel 219). He did not consider giving up writing, despite experiencing
ongoing pain and fatigue, and he accepted speaking engagements and readings organized by
\textit{Nyugat} across the country. Eventually, Kosztolányi travelled to Stockholm to see a specialist

\footnote{Először bevallom, hogy boldog vagyok. Boldog vagyok, hogy irok és írhatok. Mindig ebben kerestem és
leltem meg a boldogságot, nyilván azért, mert sehol másutt a földön nem találtam meg. Elégedett is vagyok. Nem
munkásságommal, hanem azzal, hogy az a munkásságom, ami. Még ma se fásultam el a kifejezés rejtelmes
gyönyörűsége iránt.}
who told him that the Hungarian laboratory diagnosis purposefully falsified the growth as benign, and despite radiation his condition was incurable (Levendel 222). At home, he underwent further procedures: he had eleven blood transfusions and nine operations. (Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1246). In the meantime he busied himself with organizing his poetry collection Számadás [Summing Up] as the final installation of Kosztolányi Dezső összegyűjtött költeményei [Dezső Kosztolányi’s Collected Poems], which was published in 1935. Parts of this collection had already appeared in Nyugat in 1933. In the title poem, “Számadás,” Kosztolányi posits that a teleological view of life is futile because the belief in a superior form of existence is lost in childhood: “Most már elég, ne szépitgesd, te gyáva,” that is, “It’s enough now, don’t make it better, you coward” (Nyugat Electronic). One of his most famous verses, “Szeptemberi áhitat” [“September Ecstasy”] also appears in this collection. Kosztolányi addressed this love poem not to his wife, but to Mária Radákovics, a pious, young married woman he met at the Journalists’ Association retreat in Visegrád in the summer of 1935 (Levendel 233). As a last gesture of hope in life, stifled by pain and immense suffering, Kosztolányi began a love affair with Mária. The young woman’s husband challenged Kosztolányi to a duel to defend his wife’s honour, and the poet seemed to enjoy a Pushkin-like romantic seducer’s role (Levender 236). Ilona was patient and pleaded with Kosztolányi, but when the poem appeared in the October 1935 issue of Nyugat, they considered divorce (Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1246). I cite the sestet of the poem after the opening double sonnet stanza to illustrate Kosztolányi’s powerful lyricism reminiscent of Virgil’s eclogues in its melodious and smooth technique and structure:

Érett belét mutatja, lásd, a dinnye,
fehér fogától villog vörös inye,
kövér virágba bújik a darázs ma,
a hosszu út után selymes garage-ba,
méztől dagadva megreped a szőlő
s a boldogságtól elnémul a szóló. (Nyugat Electronic)
The melon yields her ripeness, white as milk
Her baby teeth are sparkling in the gum;
Exhausted wasps find shelter in the silk-
Soft garages of flowers in full bloom;

The grapes are almost splitting with their
sweetness;
struck dumb with joy, the mouth is
rendered speechless. (Szirtes 235)

Ripe melon reveals its inside, look,
white teeth illuminate its red flesh,
the bumble bee penetrates a fat flower,
like after a long journey, it
enters a velvet garage,
the grapes burst with honeydew
and the speaker becomes mute with joy.

Szirtes’s translation, under the title “Pieties for September,” deflates the erotic aspects of the
poem in order to advance the style. On the right side, in my translation, I want to emphasize the
erotic in the pastoral; however, the rhyme scheme suffers. The bucolic idyll also refers to a sense
of completion that arrives at the end of one’s life, embroidered with similes and action verbs.
Although there is not a single line about love in this poem, it is a highly eroticized, beautifully
lyrical confession. It speaks to Kosztolányi’s determination for wanting to live even when all
seems lost.

Kosztolányi was convinced that he could be cured and travelled to Sweden twice more
for further consultations and treatment to which Ilona accompanied him. During his February
1936 trip to Stockholm he even attended evening courses on Hungarian language because, as
Levendel suggests, “he wanted to see those handful of young people who were interested in
learning his mother tongue” (241). On their way home to Budapest, Kosztolányi fell into
delirium. He was deathly ill. As a consequence of his last operation, he lost his voice and was
now forced to communicate in writing, scribbling in his usual green ink: “Hiszek az életben,”
that is, “I believe in life” (in Levendel 243). The many operations and radiation treatments left
his face disfigured and his body limp. When Ignotus visited Kosztolányi in the fall he left the
room crying (Levendel 243). Kosztolányi’s suffering escalated desperately but he still managed
to see humour in his circumstances, writing on his note pad: “Levert volt, kapott egy kevert port”
[“He was disturbed, so he got a powder well-stirred”] (in Király 421). He was lucid until the end
and wrote: “I would like to live. I am afraid of dying….More air, please” in reference to Goethe’s last words: “Mehr Licht” (in Levendel 244-45). Dezső Kosztolányi died in Budapest’s Szent János Hospital on November 3, 1936.

*Nyugat* dedicated the December 1936 issue to his memory; “perhaps the most beautiful issue of the review in its entire history” (Kenyeres 59). Kosztolányi’s letters and many photographs are included on the pages. Mihály Babits, Aladár Schöpflin, Frigyes Karinthy and others bid farewell to their friend and colleague. Babits’s long necrology opens with an apology:

> The poet, who departed from us, was the first friend in my youth…But who cares what he meant to me? What is important is what he meant for all of us, for *Nyugat*, for Hungarian literature, for the whole of Hungary…We had parted, which hurt both of us; we had misunderstandings, which the memory of our youthful enthusiasm made even harder…His illness took him further away from me. Only for death to bring him close again…(“Kosztolányi”)22

Babits also surveys Kosztolányi’s life’s work. He sees Kosztolányi as an eternal child, although a talented one, and ends by stating that his last works are among Hungary’s best lyrical poems:

> He grew up very slowly, like a horrific embryo…As if his entire œuvre would have been simply a preparation for those last few poems in which this thought ripens and comes to fruition: the idea of death. He loved life in all of its minute details and tiniest shivers. Beyond them he believed in Nothing.23

Babits might sound fawning and condescending at once, but he most accurately summarizes Kosztolányi’s worldview, which Gy. Rónay sees as related to the elements of the ancient Etruscans’ belief in death, a point I will elaborate on further in relation to Antal Szerb’s work.

(192). Besides Zsigmond Móricz, *Nyugat* did not have another productive author like Kosztolányi (L. Rónay 210). But contrary to Móricz’s close-up critique of society, Kosztolányi

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21 Szeretnék élni. Félek, hogy meghalok…Egy kis levegőt.
22 A költő aki eltűnt közülünk, fiatalságom első baráta volt…. Kit érdekel, hogy mi volt ő nekem? Arról van szó, mi volt mindnyájunknak, a Nyugatnak, a magyar irodalomnak, az egész magyarságnak…Eltávolodtunk, bár ez mindakettőnknek fájt; félreértések is estek köztünk, amiket a régi szenvedélyes rajongás emléke csak nehezített…Betegsége még messzebb vitét tőlem. Míg most a halál egyszerre megint közel hozta
23 Lassan nőtt föl, mint egy rettenetes embrió…Egész életművé mintha csak előkészület lett volna arra a néhány utolsó versere, amelyben ez a gondolat megérík és kiteljesedik: a halál gondolata. Imádta az életet minden kis jelenségében, minden legapróbb borzongásában; ezeken kívül csak a Semmit hitte.
aestheticized his observations, a method which the third generation Nyugat authors were
genuinely inspired by in the late 1930s when Nyugat was considered part of the subculture, “an
almost prohibited publication” [“szinte-szinte tiltott olvasmány”] (Nemes Nagy 160).
Kosztolányi’s writing produced ten volumes of poetry, along with countless newspaper articles,
essays, criticisms, and reviews, numerous volumes of short story and novella collections, and
five novels during his life. The first posthumous study of Kosztolányi appeared in Magyar
Szemle by the Hungarian writer and literary critic, Dezső Keresztury in 1937. In 1938, Ilona,
Kosztolányi’s widow published her biography of the author, and the first book about Kosztolányi
appeared by János Barta in 1940, entitled Kosztolányi költői hagyatéka [The Poetic Legacy of
Kosztolányi]. With nearly a fifteen-year hiatus, only after 1956 did Kosztolányi regain
popularity, and reprints and new arrangements of his works since then have appeared regularly.
Ferenc Kiss wrote the first doctoral dissertation about Kosztolányi in 1962. Today, Kosztolányi
is one of the most widely read and discussed authors of modern Hungarian literature; “his
position is unique in Hungarian literature [as] he is the only author in the language who has
succeeded in writing first-rate works in both lyric verse and narrative prose” (Szegedy-Maszák,
EW 1248). Ongoing interest in Kosztolányi’s body of work has produced numerous publications
in Hungary.

Language and the Impossibility of Translation

When György Lukács reviewed Kosztolányi’s first volume of poems, Négy fal között, in
1907, he argued that Kosztolányi was the only young poet who could be “compared with Ady,”
the “only one whose work is worth reading” [“Ady mellett, akivel érdemes foglalkozni”] (26). In
the article Lukács also recognizes the link between the linguistic and aesthetic in Kosztolányi’s
work, calling him poète littéraire, suggesting that Kosztolányi needs an original language that
could fulfill all the perfect expressions his lyricism demands: “Any poet today who strives for a cultural sensibility, like Kosztolányi, will need to create a brand new language” [“Mai kulturérzések kifejezésére törekvő költőnek, mint Kosztolányi, egészen új nyelvet kell teremtenie” (27). The fact that Lukács, within a couple of years, turned away from aesthetics in preference for realism, as conceptualized in his essay, “Aesthetic Culture,” is well known. However, Lukács’s early view of his colleague’s aestheticism in terms of its relation to language is key to our understanding of the foremost pillar in Kosztolányi’s writing. Similarly, but many years later, the second generation Nyugat author, Gábor Halász defined Kosztolányi’s creativity in which “not the poem usurps language, but the possibilities of language inspire his poetics” (“Az ötven”).24 The third generation Nyugat poet, Ágnes Nemes Nagy argued that Kosztolányi preempted the concept of “semantic suffering” [“szemantikai kin’] which linguists of the second part of the twentieth century adopted in order to reject the priority of word. Kosztolányi proposed that language, especially poetics, was incapable of expressing the complexities of human experience (164). He believed in the power of words and saw the linguistic barrier not in expression but in the impossibility of the mode of expression (164).

Like Nietzsche, Kosztolányi was extremely attentive to word use; he insisted on “conscientious writing” and felt exhilarated by the “adventurous possibilities of words” (Reményi 262). As Czigány explains, Kosztolányi’s “obsession with the written word led him to believe that to play with words was to play with destiny, for [he] was extremely conscious of, and respected, the magic created by the evocative force of the written word” (311). His aesthetic beliefs represented his ethical commitment which included ideals about national identity being indebted to language. Following in the footsteps of the language reformer Ferenc Kazinczy who toiled a hundred years prior, Kosztolányi “organized a purist movement” (Szegedy-Maszák, EW

24 Nála nem a vers fogja igájába a nyelvet, hanem a nyelvi lehetőségek fakasztják ki a költészetet.
1240). In Gyula Illyés’s words, Kosztolányi “finished Kazinczy’s plans” [“ő fejezte be Kazinczy tervét”] to uncover the psychology of language and make it productive for poetics (in Pomogáts 55). Kosztolányi’s hermeneutic and epistemological turn arrived during the late 1920s; linguistics gradually became intertwined with psychology and the concept of community (Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1240; Pomogáts 53). The posthumous publication of *Nyelv és lélek* [Language and Soul] is a collection of 182 essays, written between 1905 and 1935, in which Kosztolányi passionately reflects on linguistics, aesthetics, and translation. Many of these essays were originally published in *Nyugat*. In order to show Kosztolányi’s depth of concern for language, I include excerpts from a few of these short essays here.

The September 1, 1909 “Öreg szavak” or “Old Words” article laments the loss of certain Hungarian words:

…within the past five to ten years an entirely new Hungarian language has been created. During these five to ten years some very important and valuable words were dropped unexpectedly…at the mercy of fashion and life itself…We barely dare to write the word *kebel* [breast]. The word *hon* [home country] prompts laughter. The words *dicső* [glorious], and *lánglelkű* [flamboyant] sound humorous, just as *pást* [pastry] and *ifjú* [young]…New words push out the old ones; what the language loses on one end it gains on the other…We need new and fresh words, perhaps simpler ones…which [have the ability to] surprise us…(*Nyl* 13-15)²⁵

It is not so much that Kosztolányi regrets the dying out of old words but rather he wants to draw attention to a linguistic renewal that would encourage a more pragmatic approach to the Hungarian language. In fact, his crusade initiated a re-examination of many Hungarian words along with the attendant influence of foreign words. Kosztolányi emphasized the purification and protection of the Hungarian language against foreign influences that permeated and diluted the

²⁵ …öt-tíz év alatt egy egész új magyar nyelv alakult s öt-tíz év alatt szinte váratlanul kicsöppent, a használatból néhány komoly és becsületes szó, sem jobb, sem rosszabb, mint a többi, a divat és az élet kégeltje. Sok émelygősnek, sok komikusnak sok izléstelennek tetszik. A “kebel”-t például ma már alig merjük leírni. A “hon” egyszerűen nevetést kelt. De humoros mellékíze van a “dicső”-nek, a “lánglelkű”-nek, a “pást”-nak és az “ifjú”-nak is… Az új szavak mechanikusan kiszorítják a régieket; amit az egyik oldalon vesz a nyelv, visszanyeri a másikon….Új és friss szavak kellene, talán egyszerűbbek, szűkübbek és kevésbé lelkesek, melyek a szokatlanság erejével hatnak…
language as a consequence of print media and the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the capital (Pomogáts 51). He viewed with repugnance any foreign words that had found their way into the Hungarian language. His 1916 “Nyelvtisztítás” [“Language Purification”] article that first appeared in Nyugat on February 1, takes issue with the abundance of foreign words infiltrating the lexicon and humorously proposes cleansing them from the country’s vocabulary:

And now, it is time to clean up our words [szókincs] – not because of lazy patriotism but out of pious love. Especially those [words] of the educated, [and] the language of the newspapers. Undoubtedly, German damages and poisons the Hungarian sentence structure, but it is also true that ninety percent of the foreign words we use in our writings have Latin origins, or if you wish, French and Italian flavours. I am talking about those words for which we actually have excellent [Hungarian] expressions and so they do not enrich our vocabulary. Let’s have a look at today’s papers. In a minute I can tally up a little dictionary hereby: abnormális, abszolút, agilis, blazirt, bornirt, civilizáció, diszponál, ensemble, evidens, exkluziv, fanatakus, fiktiv, ideális, imponál, inkorrekt, intelligens, intim, kritika, naiv, nívó, nüance, objective, premier, pláne, reputáció, szinekura, tradició, verve, zseniroz… We should proclaim it once more that parading [these words] is either an act of ignorance, laxity, or ostentatiousness. (Nyl 33)26

In this quotation I purposefully avoid translating the foreign words Kosztolányi listed, because I want to demonstrate how little these words change when adopted into the Hungarian language.

Kosztolányi does not offer the Hungarian equivalent of these foreign words but argues that such a project should be the undertaking of a “lively literary organization” [“eleven irodalmi társasag”] (Nyl 34). I could not find evidence as to whether or not Kosztolányi considered Nyugat to be such an organization.

The 1927 essay “ÁBÉCÉ a nyelvről és lélekről” [“The ABC of Language and Soul”] illuminates Kosztolányi’s contention with his mother tongue:

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26 Most pedig igazán idejen való lenne, hogy szókincsünket—nem hányaveti nemzetieskedésből, de áhitatos szeretetből—kissé megkeféljük. Különösen a műveltek, az újságok nyelvét. Mert amilyen igaz, hogy a magyar mondatszerkesztést mindeneleltőt a német rontja és mérgezi, éppoly való, hogy a cikkeinkben használt idegen szavak kilencven százaléka latin eredetű, vagy ha úgy tetszik, francia és olasz zamatu. Azokról beszélek, melyekre kitűnő kifejezéseink vannak, és semmiféle gazdagodást sem jelentenek. Magam elé tétetem a mai lapokat. Egy perc alatt összetalálom ezt a csinos kis szótárt: abnormális, abszolút, agilis, blazirt, bornirt, civilizáció, diszponól, ensemble, evidens, exkluziv, fanatakus, fiktiv, ideális, imponál, inkorrekt, intelligens, intim, kritika, naiv, nívó, nüance, objective, premier, pláne, reputáció, szinekura, tradició, verve, zseniroz… Ki kellene újra kiáltani, hogy a fitogtatásuk vagy tudatlanság, vagy pongyolaság, vagy tudálkosság.
Hungarian. The fact that my mother tongue is Hungarian and that I speak, think, and write in Hungarian is the greatest experience of my life that nothing else compares to…It is deeply inside of me, in the drops of my blood, in the knots of my nerves as a metaphysical mystery…I think about it often every day, as much as I think about the fact that I was born, I live and I will die. (Nyl 75)²⁷

It is not a spirit of nationalism or patriarchy that we should glean from Kosztolányi’s text, because, as I have pointed out earlier, he was not interested in nationalist politics, but rather in the idea of how language and nation are intertwined. What is important to emphasize is how Kosztolányi viewed his mother tongue as the “greatest treasure” Hungarians ever gave to themselves (Pomogáts 55). This linguistic treasure shaped their mutual worldview and helped them withstand many external political and cultural oppressors. Kosztolányi also expressed his skepticism about words, because words, he argued, could not articulate the kind of communication that the overdeveloped capitalist culture had instigated (L. Rónay 192). Preceding Franz Kafka’s notion of how “the railway, the motor car [and] the aeroplane” along with the telephone and cinema cut through time and space to convey messages (182-3), Kosztolányi’s 1927 essay “Hajnali párbeszéd önmagammal” [“Conversation with Myself at Dawn”] comments on how transportation and the radio tore down intellectual barricades, and technological advances released a tidal wave of books that flooded the globe [“A közlekedés, a rádió ledöntötte a szellemi sorompókat… Könyvek dagálya önti el a földgolyót”] (Nyl 607).

While Kafka emphasized the consuming phantom effect of communication, the “ghostly element between people” (183), Kosztolányi predicted a “mental mutiny” [“agyvelő lázad”] as a reaction to capitalist mass culture that relies on a specific stock of words (in Nyl 608). He also recognized the difficulty of his project to protect Hungarian language while keeping in step with swiftly changing technological developments in communication. “To be a good European and good

²⁷ Magyarul. Az a tény, hogy anyanyelvem magyar, és magyarak beszélek, gondolkozom, irok, életem legnagyobb eseménye, melyhez nincs fogható…Naponta sokszor gondolok erre. Épp annyiszor, mint arra, hogy születtem, élek és meghalok.
Hungarian at once” [“Jó európainak lenni és jó magyarnak lenni”], he wrote in 1930 in another piece in *Nyugat* entitled “Lenni vagy nem lenni” [“To be or Not To Be”], also meant “being capable of opening to both the West and the East” [“kétfelé vívó nyugatinak és keletinek”] (*Nyugat* Electronic). But language must occur above and beyond politics. He wanted to dislodge language from its use for nationalistic aims and champion it as part of an individual within a community: he posited a linguistic and cultural relativism. In this view, linguistic identity defines one’s location in society and in history, where in turn this history is linked to the memory intrinsic in language.

According to Szegedy-Maszák, Kosztolányi considered language “a social product,” while asserting that “each language must be regarded as a convention belonging to one particular community” (*EW* 1241). Kosztolányi saw language rather than ethnicity defining communities, that is, “different languages create divisions in the world and impose different value systems” (*EW* 1241). By 1930 Kosztolányi argued that the refining of one’s mother tongue was not simply a question of linguistics, but it was also a moral dilemma. In the July 16, 1930 issue of *Nyugat*, Kosztolányi engaged the ideas of the renowned French linguist Antoine Meillet who complained about the linguistic division of Europe in his prominent 1928 book *Les Langues dans l’Europe nouvelle*. Kosztolányi, seeing Meillet as a belated proponent of universal language modeled on mathematics as conceptualized by the ideals of the Enlightenment, argued against the French scholar’s prioritization and separation of thought from language. In the article “A magyar nyelv helye a földgolyón: Nyilt levél Antoine Meillet úrhoz, a Collège de France tanárához” [“The Place of the Hungarian Language in the World: An Open Letter to Professor Antoine Meillet of the Collège de France”], Kosztolányi speaks out against the French linguist’s demand that small and isolated communities give up their languages and espouse a more widely spoken, and by that he meant, more civilized language, such as French. “This language [Hungarian] does not retain
any elements of the origins of civilization,” because “its literature has no authority,” argued Meillet in the quotations that Kosztolányi includes in his article (*Nyl* 101-2). In Kosztolányi’s view, language delineates each community and culture, and consequently it is language that also defines people’s way of thinking. Meillet’s universal language genealogy promotes Indo-European languages at the expense of all other linguistic groups, such as the Finno-Ugric. Kosztolányi’s response to Meillet is a careful and logical defense underlined with respect and humour:

At last I see in front of me this moving scene of all the small nations of the world—who have been beaten by larger nations and whose members have suffered from the ignorance and pride of the oppressors—should now sign in blood a contract which makes them choose one single language. It will happen as such: in a given hour and minute of one evening they all take a numbing sleeping pill before going to bed, which makes them forget their mother tongue, and the next morning, which most likely will be bright and sunny, they will wake up, rub their palms together and they will all speak one world language, fluently. (*Nyl* 94)²⁸

Kosztolányi points out that language, as a social construction, is not void of the binary forces between oppressor and oppressed, but recognizes at the same time that rationalism cannot be applied to the natural phenomenon of language. He argues, language is intimately linked to the soul, that is, to the inner emotions of the human being:

…it is the fire of the spirit that melts it [language] down and solders it together, it is that spirit that forms and “refines” it, and compared to this mystifying process, the “civilizational fact.” As to whether language is incidentally purified by those whose passion and profession it is to refine, namely poets and writers, is an insignificant trifle. From this lofty perspective all languages are equal. “Liberty, equality, fraternity” must ring true in hell as it does in linguistics. Such a thing as a “barbaric language” does not, has never, and can never exist. (*Nyl* 96)²⁹

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²⁸ Most már végképp látom magam előtt azt az igazán megindító jelenetet, amikor a világ összes kis népei, melyeket annyit vertek agyba főbe a sorscsapások és a nagyobb népek, ezeknek valamennyi tagja, aki annyit szenvedett a többiek mellőzésétől és dölyfétől, aláír egy vérszerződést, melynek értelmében mindnyájan egyetlen nyelvet választanak. Úgy történik ez, hogy egy este, az estének egy határozott órájában és percében, lefekvés előtt mindnyájan bevesznek valami zsibasztó álomport, mely elfeledteti velük multjukat, a szavak e sajátos támasztószövetét s az anyanyelvüket és másnap reggel, mely bizonyára derű lesz és enyhe, kezüket dörzsölve arra ébrednek, hogy mindnyájan egy világnyelvet beszélnek, folyékonyan.

²⁹ a lélek forrósága olvasztja meg és ragasztja össze, hogy a lélek “műveli ki” és ehhez a titokzatos folyamatohoz képest jelentéktelen semmисég az a “civilizációs tény,” vajon a nyelvet mellesleg csiszolják-e azok, akiknek véletlenül ez a szenvedélyük és mesterségük, az úgynevezett költők és az írók. Ebből a magas szempontból minden
While Kosztolányi emphatically rejects the view of the Hungarian language as being uncivilized, he also recognizes that the unique perspective that every language creates also contains an isolating element, which thereby perpetuates a communicational impossibility. But renouncing one’s language would also seem fundamentally impossible.

Similarly, Kosztolányi emphasized how “speech communities select, classify, organize, abstract, and evaluate experience differently,” which echoes Benjamin Lee Whorf’s concepts about how thinking is already inlaid by the materials existing in the environment of one’s mother tongue (in Szegedy-Maszák, *EW* 1241). Kosztolányi had a subscription to *The Dial*, a journal which the linguist, Edward Sapir published, and whose theories likely influenced the Hungarian author (Varga 145). In his 1933 “A lélek beszéde” [“The Language of the Soul”], Kosztolányi links linguistic connotations to historical phenomena, emphasizing that they serve as a basis for the divergent interpretations of any text. As a further example of this, I examine Kosztolányi’s 1933 essay, “A tíz legszebb szó” [“The Ten most Beautiful Words”] in which he acknowledges how translators engage either the signified or the signifier and specifies that he prefers the signifier. He appreciates Paul Valéry’s list of the ten most beautiful French words and translates both their phonographic and sonic equivalents. He suggests that only in their lyrical translation do these words gain the same aesthetic sense as their original French meaning, such as “onde, feuille, moule” as “hullám, levél, csermely,” compared to the more lyrical sounding “mondd, főjj, múlf” [“say!, cook!, pass!”], although with a loss in meaning. Subsequently, Kosztolányi provides his list of the most beautiful Hungarian words:

\[ \text{Láng, gyöngy, anya, ős, szűz, kard, csók, vér, szív, sir [Flame, pearl, mother, autumn, virgin, sword, kiss, blood, heart, cry [or grave site]. (Nyl 241)} \]

nyelv egyenlő. “Szabadság, egyenlőség, testvériség”, még a pokolban is, még a nyelvészetben is. Nincs, nem volt, nem lehet “barbár” nyelv.
The literary artifact takes on a new word and meaning, different from the preexisting language in Kosztolányi’s comparisons. As a non-native speaker of English, let me not judge as to whether these English words sound just as beautiful as their Hungarian counterparts. I also cannot attempt to provide a more lyrical interpretation of them. But as Szegedy-Maszák considers, Kosztolányi’s “impatience with the view that style is of secondary importance in narrative fiction” led him to postulate that language operated at the deepest level of the human unconscious (EW 1241). For Kosztolányi, the form of a word and its sound or musicality, in any language, is just as important, and sometimes more important, than what it signifies. He was the only critic in Hungary to practice a similar approach to the Russian formalists, to which effect Szegedy-Maszák sees Kosztolányi’s concepts also anticipated the structuralists of the 1960s and 1970s (EW 1242).

Kosztolányi inherited his view about translation from the nineteenth century linguists, Ferenc Kazinczy and Pál Szemere, who cautioned translators to adopt the unevenness of the language at hand into their Hungarian translations, because “‘the age, language and poet are inseparable from one another’” [“kor, nyelv és költő elválaszthatatlanok egymástól’”] (Szemere in Józan 56). In her article “Irodalom és fordítás” [“Literature and Translation”] the Hungarian literary scholar Ildikó Józan explains that Nyugat writers not only made use of the traditions of translation but also further developed them in search of the new literary form and content that they had so much yearned for and discovered in their contemporary Western European poets’ and writers’ works. This notion became most evident, as Józan explains, in Endre Ady’s Baudelaire and Verlaine translations, which he included among his own poems in his collection titled Új versek of 1906 (59). While Nyugat translators never ceased to question the relationship between writer and translator, language and meaning, and text and reader, suggesting to maintain the loci of uncertainty and paradox in the finished work and examine how it might affect
Hungarian literature in particular, they took pains to gain univocality from the multitude of signs (Józan 65-6). The productivity and creativity of the Nyugat generation, accompanied by their conceptual, theoretical and methodological solidification and/or innovation, has defined the field of modern translation in Hungary. In addition, the works they chose to translate produced the kind of international literary canon in Hungary that is upheld to this day.

Within Nyugat’s discourse on translation, Kosztolányi believed in the impossibility of translating poetry, or more specifically, he referred to an interstitial reading of the foreign texts in Hungarian. The degree of fidelity that the process of translation produces between the so-called “source text” and “target-text” becomes secondary for Kosztolányi. The repetition of the signifier, for Kosztolányi, always depends on the tradition of a given language culture, a point that Roman Jakobson conceptualized in the late 1950s (Szegedy-Maszák, “Fordítás”147). As Szegedy-Maszák argues in his Literary Canons, “Kosztolányi spoke of the untranslatability of literature as early as 1913, in his essay on translating Poe’s poem “The Raven,” as well as in the “Preface” to his collection of verse translations Modern költők [Modern Poets], a three-volume anthology of Western and Eastern poetry (62). Inspired by the Viennese Sezessions-Stil, Rainer Maria Rilke, and others, the significance of this collection, as L. Rónay reminds us, is how Kosztolányi single-handedly presented Hungarian readers with previously untranslated works (68). In the Preface of Modern költők, Kosztolányi explains that he purposefully left his mark on these translations: “here and there I notice my own words…I could erase them…but I don’t want to [because] it would disable these poems, I would kill the rhythm, the electricity of the verse” (in Gy. Rónay 184).30 Kosztolányi was more interested in the metre and rhyme than the obvious meaning of a word, and his main concern was to translate poems of the classic international canon into Hungarian in such a way that would showcase the depth and richness of his mother

30 …itt-ott a tulajdon szavaimat is észreveszem…Eltüntethetném…őket, de nem akarom. Vele megbénitanám a verseket, megőlném az ütemet, a vers villamosságát.
tongue, which, as Levendel points out, sometimes resulted in less than faithful translations of the original works (89). Similarly, Gy. Rónay takes issue with Kosztolányi’s method of translation and accuses him of changing the spirit of the original poems by making their rhyme scheme too “Kosztolányian” [“legkosztolányisabb”] (184). Since Kosztolányi considered translation as a form of creation and not a simple reproduction, he wanted to make foreign texts most palatable to the Hungarian language from an aesthetic-linguistic perspective. The desire to be as accurate and preserve the original message as much as possible in the translation seemed secondary to Kosztolányi. According to Szegedy-Maszák, Kosztolányi saw a fundamental weakness in an “emphasis on the signified at the expense of the signifier” (LC 62). For Kosztolányi a literal translation of a poem is “not poetry, just as the literal translation of a proverb is not a proverb”; a work can only realize “its aesthetic potential within an interpretive community that shares its mother tongue with that work” (Szegedy-Maszák, LC 63). But the mother tongue itself must be understood in “a broad cultural and historical sense” along with communities which must be seen as “temporary, shifting, constantly embattled, disintegrating, multiple, and intersecting” (LC 63).

Like Walter Benjamin who problematized the reading community of a translated work, translation for Kosztolányi meant that “the canonicity of a work has been de(con)structed…by a second community” (LC 63) and, hence the value of translation depended on its readers.

Walter Benjamin conceptualized translation as a “form,” that is, how the original text upholds “its translatability” (254). Translatability for Benjamin does not mean a precise copy of the original text. Translation marks the continuation of a text’s life and it also transplants the original text into an ultimate linguistic realm. Benjamin argues that we ought to figure the “kinship of languages” into the theory of translation (256). During the process of translation the original text and meaning are transformed along with the translator’s mother tongue (Benjamin 256). Therefore, linguistic “resemblance does not necessarily appear where there is kinship”
Benjamin suggests, but on the level of the “individual elements of foreign language—words, sentences, associations” (257). In turn, through the efforts of the translator, languages complement each other and give way to nuanced meaning making. Benjamin argues that since translation renders an original text into “a more definitive linguistic realm,” where a secondary meaning becomes more contingent, it is imperative for the translator to find “the particular intention toward the target language” which promotes “specific linguistic contextual aspects” (258). I understand Benjamin’s recommendation that the “task of the translator” is to seek out and locate the specific intention of the target language which then produces a resonance with the original language in a way that overcomes the impossibility of translation. In contrast to Benjamin, Kosztolányi considered the reader, that is, the receiver of the translated text, as integral and maintained that the poet had no control over his language, which was the embodiment of historical memory (Szegedy-Maszák, LC 63). He developed a target-oriented approach to translation and a reader-response theory of literature. As Szegedy-Maszák suggests, Kosztolányi had a “distrust of [the so-called] international canons” due to his own “cultural relativism” and as a result of “his rejection of the production-oriented aesthetics” implicit in Benjamin’s concepts (63). Kosztolányi was keenly aware of the consequences of “belonging to a small community with a relatively inaccessible language” (LC 63). As Szegedy-Maszák points out, he considered translation “as one of the many possible manifestations of intertextuality” (63). Furthermore, he rejected any partitions between creative writing and translation, between the original and the derivative, and between the canonical and the non-canonical. To this effect, Szegedy-Maszák argues, the “relations between translation and canon formation are governed by one principle: on the one hand, literature by its very nature is untranslatable, on the other, no literary work exists that cannot be read as translation” (LC 64). He contends that Kosztolányi was “convinced that all works of literature contained quotations that cannot be recognized
outside a specific interpretive community…[and] dismissed the idea that equivalence was a valid
criterion for judging translations” (63-64). Consequently, as Szegedy-Maszák points out,
Kosztolányi’s theory and practice “had striking similarities with those of…Vladimir Nabokov,
whose translation of Eugene Onegin has to be read as part of his textual commentary” (64). In
the final analysis, it is the reader who makes the ultimate interpretation of a translated text. As
translation means “displacement,” this displacement then carries a built-in contradiction, because
meanings of a culture’s given language have to be lifted out of their original contexts and made
viable in a new culture’s language and meaning. To this end, Kosztolányi anticipated Hans-
Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics about communities differing due to the internal structures of
their specific languages; that is, there is a givenness of tradition in any basic social group upon
which language and interpretation rely, a condition which in turn affects customs and beliefs
(Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1241). Kosztolányi problematized translation as part of the
communication among nations, where a work’s successful translatability depends on the culture
translating the original work.

In order to further illustrate Kosztolányi’s point I draw out his essay “Tanulmány egy
versről” [“The Study of a Poem”] in the spring 1920 issue of Nyugat, which also enabled a long
awaited recuperation of his reputation. The essay discusses Goethe’s poem, “Über allen
Gipfeln,” and the difficulties of its Hungarian translation (L. Rónay 96). In his analysis he draws
on an inductive method in order to demonstrate the problem of translating the rhyme scheme and
metre, such as he shows in this annotation: ⌃ ⌃ — — —|○○— — —| — — — — — (‘Tanulmány’). By
comparing previous translations of this Goethe verse, Kosztolányi argues that each translator was
inevitably motivated to make changes to the rhyme and metre of the original when subordinating
one for the other. Translation also seems like a form of experimentation for Kosztolányi. That is,
the author saw a link between “translation and meaning making” [“átköltés és értelmezés”]
whereby the Hungarian translation of a foreign text gains unintended meanings and carries “the moment of a historical act” [“történeti lényegű esemény”] (Szegedy-Maszák, “Fordítás” 146). Contrary to Babits, who strove to achieve the most precise literary translations, Kosztolányi considered it imperative to enable a cultural dialogue between the original and the Hungarian texts (146). Kosztolányi closes his article by suggesting that the essential “spirit of the poem nonetheless remains unattainable…but its beauty can perhaps be better appreciated” [“A költemény lelke ezek után épp oly megközelíthetetlen…De a szépségét [e kísérlet nyomán] még is jobban látjuk”] (“Tanulmány”). Kosztolányi did not so much translate the foreign text into Hungarian but “thought it as Hungarian” [“magyarul gondolja végig a szöveget”], and hence, suspended its foreignness (Szegedy-Maszák, “Fordítás” 157). Translation this way becomes the transposition of culture via language.

Kosztolányi became, as Szegedy-Maszák purports, “probably the most important translator of his generation” (EW 1234). No other writer from Kosztolányi’s generation was as knowledgeable and sensitively aware of the international literary canon as he, writes Gy. Rónay, introducing Hungarian readers to Alexander Blok, Bertolt Brecht, Aldous Huxley, Antonio Machado, and Giuseppe Ungaretti among others (190). Working on translations always brought a certain serenity to Kosztolányi’s life, especially during crisis-wrought periods (L. Rónay 190). His enthusiasm for Shakespeare produced translations of Romeo and Juliet, King Lear, and The Winter’s Tale which Hungarian readers still enjoy today. He translated Byron’s Mazeppa and Beppo, Guy de Maupassant’s complete poetry, Oscar Wilde’s Salome and The Portrait of Dorian Gray, and Thomas Mann’s Tristan among others. Kosztolányi also translated poems by François Villon, Rubén Dario, John Donne, Friedrich Hölderlin, William Blake, Walt Whitman, William Butler Yeats, Stefan George, Paul Claudel, Amy Lowell, Li Po, Japanese haiku writers, along with several works by Friedrich Nietzsche (Szegedy-Maszák, EW 1234). Thanks to his
“exceptionally sensitive ear,” Kosztolányi was able to recreate the style of these authors and he found hidden resources in the Hungarian language through which to render even the most idiosyncratic element in any work for the translation at hand (Szegedy-Maszák, *EW* 1234). In contrast, as Mario D. Fenyő suggests, “it would be quite laughable to speak…of the Hungarian influence on the course of Western literature; it is worth noting, however, that some *Nyugat* writers were given publicity abroad…[including] Ady, Kaffka and Ignotus” (34). As early as 1907, a German series dealing with “‘exotic’ literatures,” entitled *Die Lyrik des Auslandes in neuerer Zeit* edited by Hans Bethge, introduces the poetry of Juhász and Kosztolányi (Fenyő, *LPC* 34). Indeed, Kosztolányi’s œuvre has gained significant international attention, despite the fact that paradoxically “his great emphasis on the distinguishing features of the Hungarian language makes his works less translatable than those by any other major Hungarian writers” (Szegedy-Maszák, *EW* 1248).

**Who is Kornél Esti? Fragments of a Story**

After *Édes Anna* in 1926, Kosztolányi began working on a new novel, entitled *Mostoha* [*Stepmother*], about an older man’s young wife who desperately tries to avoid becoming a fairy-tale-like wicked stepmother. As Szegedy-Maszák explains, in order to complicate the plot Kosztolányi was thinking of including another character he named Esti (*EW* 1240). This character might have originated in a game Kosztolányi played with his son, Ádám: “he pretended to have another child, ‘Kornélka’, who was wicked, lived in the chimney, and ate lion flesh” (*EW* 1242). Kosztolányi enjoyed playing with names and he had already used the name Kornél in his novel, *Édes Anna*, for the oppressive master Kornél Vizy. But his “Esti Kornél rimei” [“Rhymes of Kornél Esti”] verse fragment and “Esti Kornél naplója” [“Diary of Kornél Esti”] essay in *Pesti Hirlap* in 1925 indicate an already existing literary character (Király 412-13). Eventually
Kosztolányi abandoned writing Mostoha31 and concentrated on developing the persona of Kornél Esti into a full story to which his frequent travels in Hungary and across Europe provided further ammunition. During these trips he sought out opportunities to chat people up; he also met Maxim Gorkij, Thomas Mann, visited the Pope in the Vatican, and spent time in all the great libraries of Europe (Levendel 175). Levendel suggests that most of the Esti stories are vignettes prompted by Kosztolányi’s life and travels (211). Furthermore, according to the Hungarian literary historian, István Király, in the figure of Esti, Kosztolányi finds the voice through which he best responds to many of his attackers (418-9). The book, Esti Kornél, is a result of these heterogeneous experiences with an underlying autobiographical essence.

While there is no straightforward plot, the stories are linked by the character of Kornél Esti. The title of the book refers to the name Kosztolányi gives to his hero: Kornél Esti.32 “Esti” stands for a family name, although an unusual one in Hungarian, which means something or someone belonging to the evening. The first name “Kornél” comes from the Latin “cornelian,” meaning “horn” and “centurion,” and I also see a play on the term to refer to something carnal. According to Levendel, Kosztolányi stated that a name and a character are always born together, and therefore, a writer cannot choose the names of his figures arbitrarily but always with forethought (164). Similarly, Szegedy-Maszák argues that after reading the text we might question whether Kornél Esti is really a personal name and whether “Esti was not…a character in the traditional sense but an epitome of the ideas” (EW 1240). In turn, Esti Kornél can be seen as a text that “creates rather than reflects meaning” (EW 1242). But who is Kornél Esti? Király suggests the answer can be seen in the particular attitude that Kosztolányi wanted to establish in an effort to identify himself as an artist (420). Each chapter takes the reader through experiences

31 This partial novel was published later by Pál Réz. Ed. Mostoha és más kiadatlan művek. Újvidék, 1965.
32 As I have suggested earlier Hungarian names appear with the family name followed by the given name, that is Esti Kornél. In this section I leave this order when referring to the title of the book and change it when talking about the character.
with Esti as relayed by the author or an unnamed narrator. On the exterior, the tall, blue-eyed and athletic Esti is confident, but on the inside he is soft and weak. He first appears as a writer, an old friend of the narrator, and next as a six-year old child attending his first day of school.

Kosztolányi contrasts the child with the adult Esti who alternates his perspectives according to his temporal experiences. Esti’s character is polyvalent; it adapts to each new situation. He is lonely and estranged, yet he is everyone’s friend. He lives alone and seeks out empty places, mostly in the evening or at night. Esti’s adventures take him from the coffee houses of Budapest, through rail journeys to Italy, Turkey and Bulgaria, to various hotels across Europe and on a final tram ride in the Hungarian capital. Further autobiographical elements can be found in the childhood location of Sárszeg (which represents Szabadka, as it did in *Pacsirta*, and *Aranysárkány*), and various foreign cities where Kosztolányi spent time and in the characters he encountered at these places. Esti, like Kosztolányi, speaks several languages, smokes “thirty cigarettes…and drinks nine black coffees a night” (*EK* 112), and enjoys eating—especially meat and sweets—taking hot baths, and riding in taxi cabs. Esti has enchanting manners (something Kosztolányi was renowned for) and an acute appreciation of basic ethical values. He embodies at once the bohemian artist and the orderly bourgeois.

*Esti Kornél* first appeared in sketches in *Nyugat* and *Pesti Hirlap* between 1925 and 1936. Several of the stories were released in a book under the same title in 1933 followed by a second collection of the series entitled, *Esti Kornél kalandjai [The Adventures of Kornél Esti]* in *Tengerszem [Tarn]* in 1936. I draw on the first book of the stories, *Esti Kornél*, which consists of eighteen chapters and is best known in Hungary. However, my analysis does not encompass all eighteen chapters but rather a selection of them, which helps me accentuate Kosztolányi’s epistemological dichotomy with regard to the agency’s linguistic and discursive possibilities. I make linkages between the book chapters and texts which appeared in *Nyugat*. My method yields
the proposition that we can read the *Esti* stories out of order or skip chapters altogether, which risks a misreading, but also enables the possibility of intercross-reading, as I do below. This method complements Wolfgang Iser’s concepts of “deliberate gaps” in the narrative which allows the reader to bring scenes and characters to life (*IR* 39). To account for the gaps I rely on a concept Iser calls the “liminal space,” which helps me “decide not only how the transposition of any interpretive act is executed but also how the subject matter to be transposed will be slanted or constituted for apprehension” (*RI* 146-7). The hermeneutic chaos becomes organized chaos, or rather order, whereby “the differential, having dissected the subject matter into a sequence of ever new scissions, continually makes them fold back on one another, thus allowing us to conceive what initially eludes cognition” (*RI* 147). The idea of liminal space offers a kind of interpretive freedom with rigour. Furthermore, my aim of reading *Esti Kornél* is also to problematize Kosztolányi’s search for self-identity as an individual affected by the trappings of modernity. However, his agency has remained in the milieu of fin-de-siècle Hungary, which is exaggerated by a lack of linearity in the spatio-temporal dimensions of the stories. Regrettably, *Esti Kornél* is not available in English. However, I make use of the French translation, entitled *Le double: les récits funambulesques de Kornél Esti*, by Péter Komoly, a 1967 Corvina Publishing House book, and I also provide my own English translation. The most recent analyses of *Esti Kornél* reflect a theoretical turn in Hungary that belatedly adopted the concepts of post-structuralism in the 1990s, while earlier studies are rooted in the classical German school of thought. I engage these heterogeneous interpretations for my study of *Esti Kornél/Le double*, and I also complicate my analysis with the concepts of Iser, Freud, Nietzsche, and Derrida.

The first chapter “introduces” and “reveals” the eponymous protagonist, the “singular hero” of the story, Kornél Esti (*EK* 9), and it explains the creation of the entire book. On a windy spring day the forty-year old anonymous narrator decides to look up his old friend, Esti. He
admits that he broke off his friendship with Esti ten years ago, because he had got tired of the
man’s “unconventionality” (EK 9). But occasionally his heart winces; he misses Esti with a deep
sense of nostalgia, the kind we will also find in Antal Szerb’s novel Utas és holdvilág [Journey
by Moonlight]. So he sets out to find Esti with whom only he is complete. The narrator and Esti
have known each other since birth: “Ma mémorie ne remonte pas aussi loin que notre amitié. Les
debut de celle-ci se perdent dans les ténèbres primitives de mon bas âge. Du plus loin que je me
souvienne, il fut toujours mon intime” (Ld 6). This means that Esti and the narrator were born on
the same day and in the same minute: “le dimanche des Rameaux, 29 mars 1885, à six heures
précises du matin. Cette mystérieuse coïncidence nous impressionna profondément” (Ld 11). They
resemble each other more than twins, both are poets and bound by a pact that they are to die on
the same day. They are interchangeable figures, since the two men are one and the same:
Esti=Kosztolányi/narrator and Kosztolányi=Esti/narrator. They exchange roles: both the narrator
and Esti are sometimes the main protagonists or secondary narrators, simply witnesses, or do not
even appear in a story. This technique encourages the reader to see and evaluate events through
the eyes of both the narrator and Esti as equals. In this sense, the reader is an active participant,
which Iser conceptualized as “the implied reader” who creates her or his own interpretation of
the literary work (IR). According to Iser, “the reader must be made to feel for himself the new
meaning of the novel via actively participating in bringing out the meaning” (IR 30). But it is
always the given protagonist’s (Esti or narrator) actions that provide the context for each story.
Esti is the one who draws the narrator into “all the mischief” (EK 12). Kosztolányi speaks
through Esti, and Esti embodies a certain Kosztolányiness. The two of them not only
ventriloquize each other, but they can also be understood to embody what Nietzsche formulated
in The Birth of Tragedy as the representative of the fusion of Apollonian control and restraint,
and Dionysian irrationality and passion, “of dreams and drunkenness”; the characters are the “psychological phenomena” of contrast (1).

Esti is, in fact, the double of the narrator as the French title, *Le double*, indicates. He is Kosztolányi’s *alter ego*, “a second self of the narrator” (Szegedy-Maszák, *EW* 1242), or his *Doppelgänger* alternating between what Freud conceptualized as the “Ich” and “Über-Ich” (Király 421), and his *Spiegelbild*, or mirror image (Németh G. 119; cf. Lacan). According to Szegedy-Maszák, Kosztolányi first discovered a childhood alter ego in his cousin, József Brenner (a.k.a. Géza Csáth): Csáth embodied the anarchist while Kosztolányi struggled with his dual personality, the in-betweenness of gentry and bourgeois ideals (*EW* 1232). In the *Esti* story, as a toddler the narrator/Kosztolányi recognized his other self:

Un soir d’hiver…j’étais encore en robe…Ma mère voulut me mettre au lit [et] elle envoya la nourrice me chercher…[quand] une voix se fit entendre dans mon dos, une voix inoubilable, la sienne. ‘N’ya vas pas !’ Je me retournai, ravi et effaré à la fois, et je l’aperçus. C’était la première fois que je le voyais. (*Ld* 7)

Kosztolányi describes the self-recognition of a child in what Freud and later Jacques Lacan conceptualized to be the “mirror stage,” that is, the gaining of a sense of the “ego” or the primary “I” as reflected through the mother/nurse. This self-differentiation, the initial break from the mother, is imposed by language. From then on, this “I” in the guise of Esti accompanies the narrator/ Kosztolányi: “he was there with me at home, at the table, in bed…I was afraid of him and attracted by him [at once]” (*EK* 11). Esti is the one who teaches the narrator/Kosztolányi to write poetry, to lie, to discover the joys of the body, and to realize that everything in life is contingent (*EK* 13). It is Esti who becomes the irresponsible and careless part of Kosztolányi, and “qui me conseilla de prendre la parti de ceux que la majorité conspue, jette en prison et fait pendre; lui qui proclama la mort éternelle…que Dieu n’existe pas…Il avait été mon maître” (*Ld* 11).
11). Nietzsche’s influence is obvious here, and like Zarathustra’s joyous affirmation of life, Kosztolányi’s Esti affirms living, although with an ever-present fear of death.

How can the two opposite characters, the bohemian and often cruel or jovial Esti, and the dutiful bourgeois narrator, be combined so that the lackadaisical sensibility of the artist turns into strenuous responsibility? Furthermore, how can one be free from the pressures of social conformity, of making money, of providing for the comforts of a bourgeois family, but also from the self-destructive elements of a freethinking artist? György Rónay argues that the problem is exactly that: how to remain free within these opposing spheres (177)? The duality of the character creates ambivalence, as the narrator/Kosztolányi explains: “Toujours devant moi ou derrière moi; toujours à mon côté ou s’opposant à moi. Je l’adorais ou je le détestais” (Ld 6). The theme of the dual-personality was also popular in the Western fin-de-siècle canon, evident in E. A. Poe’s short stories, R. L. Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray, among others. In this sense there is nothing new in Kosztolányi’s project: he makes use of the alter ego to bring the subconscious to the forefront. What gives originality to Esti Kornél is how Kosztolányi presents the notion of duality through a specific linguistic accuracy and stylistic creativity. Contrary to the psychological novel of his time, which posited thought occurring prior to language, Kosztolányi placed thought and language on the same plane (Szegedy-Maszák, “Esti” 104). The contradictory figure of Esti could not fit into the traditional psychological novel since in his subconscious language there is not only a regulation but also a creation of events. Kosztolányi developed Esti Kornél as an experiment in language, arguing “language is not a means of communication but a mode of human consciousness” (EW 1242). Such language-centredness was considered innovative in Hungarian literature at the time. Kosztolányi wanted his sentences to be understood immediately, thus he did away with multiple meanings and took effort to present spoken and vernacular language in Esti Kornél. His
sentences imitate live speech, because as Szegedy-Maszák explains in his study, Kosztolányi believed that the meaning of language was equal to its use value, and the written text is a replication of sound and speech (“Esti” 109). Kosztolányi’s language-centredness may seem to ignore necessary literary conventions. But in fact, literariness permeates the whole work, since Esti and the narrator are writers and their literary perspective(s) are present throughout the stories. Kosztolányi’s use of metaphors that depict analogy, synecdoche, and causational metonymy are important devices in the stories complemented by irony and allegory.

Most Esti stories begin and end with a description of the place in which the narration or action are inserted. The description of the narration is vital, which facilitates a link among the divergent stories, while the chronology of narrated stories is secondary. Kosztolányi scrambles and fragments linear spatio-temporal dimensions to create a particular order in the expressions of language that is most able to account for both the individuals’ psychology and for the external context they find themselves in. Kosztolányi purposefully mixes up the dimensions of time and space, essentially to state that there is no single linear story but rather multiple layers and meanings to follow. This undermining of linearity may be further emphasized by noting that Kosztolányi wrote this first chapter of Esti Kornél chronologically last, when organizing the stories into a book in 1933 (Kiss 444). There are no extant manuscripts of the specific stories, and the order they first appeared in Nyugat and Pesti Hirlap differs from the order of chapters in the book. Therefore the question arises: which are the authentic or original texts of Esti Kornél? The text that first appeared in Nyugat, other newspapers and novella collections but under different titles, or the book Esti Kornél, which contains some of the identical texts previously published along with variations of them? The Hungarian literary scholar Dóra Péczely explains, following Walter Wilson Greg, that it is the “archetype text” [“alapszöveg”] that counts.

33 The available sources make it a confusing and difficult task to unscramble a title for each story, and therefore I do not include them here.
as the chief text copy (178). In the case of Esti Kornél, we must account for two archetypal texts: 1. all the texts that include the character Kornél Esti as the main protagonist, but may not have been directly linked by a continuous fabula, and 2. texts in which Esti is the narrator, but may not be revealed as such or is disguised under another name; many of which had appeared in other print sources prior to the publication of the book. To this effect, Péczely argues that not only is the book, Esti Kornél, the only Esti-text Kosztolányi wrote, but many of his earlier works may also be considered as such, approximately 40 pieces (185). Esti Kornél is therefore regarded as a complex text which has puzzled scholars ever since its publication and prompted many divergent interpretations in Hungarian academia, some suggesting that more than the titled texts could be read as Esti-texts (Péczely 186). In addition, the multi-layered portrayal of Esti’s playful, contradictory or paradoxical character—he is sometimes rich, sometimes poor, a child or an adult, cruel or compassionate, etc.—the shifting points of view, the interchanging of the roles of the author-narrator, and the fragmented structure of the stories make interpretation and translation highly challenging. Texts most similar to the original are considered “critical editions” which are then published either generatively or synoptically but are still burdened with what scholars of New Criticism see as the “definitive publication” (Péczely 179). In this sense, we may consider the book Esti Kornél, written over many years, which Kosztolányi eventually organized into the semblance of a whole, as a definitive publication with a manifest open-endedness that can always be altered. In 1933 the Révai Publishing House in Budapest released Esti Kornél as a “collection of novellas” [“novelláskötet”] based on Kosztolányi’s own selection, order and title of the pieces (Péczely 181).

Kosztolányi diverted from traditional literary forms in Hungary and created an indefinable genre with Esti Kornél in which he negates the accepted norms of space and chronology in order to disturb the habitual reading methods of the text. Esti is a “text of
The “fragment” refers to something spontaneous, brief and unfinished, akin to the works of the Romantics and to Nietzsche’s aphorisms: playful sketches that bear the substance of deep Nothingness underneath. The aim of the sketches is the personification of the ideas and thoughts of different people—their dreams, desires and experiences—in different places. To this effect, Szegedy-Maszák defines Esti Kornél as Kosztolányi’s “anti-novel” that situates experimental elements within the traditional novel, including narrative innovations of digression to express the problems and intricacies of the author’s “double” or “split personality” (EW 1232). In fact, Szegedy-Maszák suggests that Esti Kornél “comes very close to the ideal of a plotless narrative” similar to Gustave Flaubert’s and Virginia Woolf’s works (EW 1243). Exemplifying the genre of paradox is the perpetual contradiction, inversion of the story’s beginning and end, and the mixing of subjective and objective time. Normalized by traditional chapter numbering and by the long headings typical of the earliest novels, Kosztolányi links the chapters seemingly haphazardly. But Ferenc Kiss argues that the stories of Esti are organic, structured around a specifically
ordered worldview and hierarchy of values (29). Kosztolányi also blends the tragic with the
comic and ironic, the serious with the playful. Playfulness then can be acknowledged as a genre
and a literary type that Kosztolányi zealously drew upon and developed further. To this effect, I
propose to see Esti as an inter-genre text where form, content, style, figures of speech, symbols
and the alternating characters, along with the gaps in time that separate the writing of many of
the stories all add to the hermeneutic problem of the text, its historical relevance, and
Kosztolányi’s autobiographical involvement. Kosztolányi’s refined style in Esti can be seen as
one of the best examples of literary innovations under the auspices of Nyugat.

The obvious metafiction in this chapter and throughout the whole book is not as much
Kosztolányi’s bow to modernist literary currents at the time, but more of a statement to deflate
the conventions of the narrative novel in exchange for emphasizing the degree of self-
consciousness “based on the hypothesis that language speaks for us” (Szegedy-Maszák, EW
1242). To this effect, the American comparatist scholar, Adrianna Varga argues in her analysis
of “Kornél Esti,” that one of the most important elements of the work is “the concern with the
linguistic construction of the subject who perceives the world” (118). Kosztolányi made
language a key character in his text by exploring, constructing and deconstructing various
linguistic and cultural identities (cf. Varga 2, 4). But contrary to his earlier emphasis on the
embellishment of language, his new aim was to find the most appropriate words and forms of
language to express context and characters; language becomes an organizing principle. In this
way, Kosztolányi’s text can be considered, following Jacques Derrida, “contradictorily coherent”
and by which its “anxiety can be mastered” (1117). This anxiety refers to the play of the
episteme that is based on the idea of “center [which] is, paradoxically, both within the structure
and outside it” (1117). Thought and language serve the binary for the within and outside of the
structure; they are the linguistic elements, as fragments, which constitute Kosztolányi’s story as a
whole. Language, following Derrida, “excludes totalization,” that is, the “field of...play...[becomes] a field of infinite substitutions” where the lack of a centre impedes substitutions, hence words as signs do not totalize but supplement meaning (1123). Meaning then is created through the tension, or the play of the within and outside, which in turn disrupts the presence: “Play is always play of absence and presence” (Derrida 1125). Derrida’s theory underlines Kosztolányi’s concepts about the signifying process whereby meaning making is constrained by the system and structure of language that has a centre that becomes ultimately self-referential. The centre as a governing element of the structure in fact evades structurality and therefore instigates and controls play, that is how signs themselves refer to something else while also referring to themselves. Play contains nostalgia/longing and affirmation for truth and something permanent, and also multiple truths and the provisional at once.

Play then is important for our understanding of both the structure of language at hand in the novella and the double character of Esti – the dialectics of good and bad, of life and death without synthesis. Already in the first chapter, we witness this play of language and character: the narrator/Kosztolányi finds Esti at last in the Hotel Denevér. He sits down in the fifth-floor hotel room and looks around, spots a face mask on the table and catches a glimpse of him(self) in the mirror: “C’est alors que je m’aperçus qu’il était là, en face de moi, assis devant le miroir” (Ld 15). The mask and the repeated mirror image also reconfirm Kosztolányi’s aim to simultaneously identify himself with the narrator and protagonist at once. In this way, he also lends unity to the stories. As the adolescent Kosztolányi and Brenner wrote together, so do the narrator and Esti agree on co-authorship, by meeting up regularly in the cafés, Torpedó and Vitriol. Writing and living at once seems an arduous task: “Un homme est trop faible pour écrire et vivre à la fois.

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34 “Denevér” means “bat” in English. Throughout the stories of Esti, Kosztolányi employs names of hotels, restaurants, cafés that carry connotations of night, loneliness, repulsion, and the like.  
35 One of their writing projects was the translation of Heinrich Heine’s poems.
Quiconque s’y est essayé, s’y est tôt ou tard brisé les reins. Seul Goethe en a été capable…” (Ld 17). Although their styles are distinct, with the narrator/Kosztolányi appreciating simplicity in language, and Esti/Kosztolányi preferring a rich and extravagant method, they agree to divide the responsibilities of writing: Esti will talk and Kosztolányi will note Esti’s words down in shorthand and erase five out of ten similes. Esti wants Kosztolányi to appear as the writer of their book, but with Esti’s name as the title: “C’est ça, c’est toi qui mettras ton nom dessus. Et le mien servira de titre. Les titres sont imprimés en caractères plus gros…C’est ainsi que ce livre est né” (Ld 19, 20). And this is how the figure of Kornél Esti and the entire book were born.

While the meta-narrative and alter ego create constancy among the chapters, Kosztolányi collapses the story teleologically: he portrays an older sophisticated adult Esti in the first chapter and a young and naïve Esti in the second, thereby destabilizing any kind of learning process and intellectual or spiritual development for the protagonist. However, this technique should not be understood as Esti’s decline but rather as an emphatic interaction with a perpetually changing world around him. Written in 1929, the second chapter draws on Kosztolányi’s childhood autobiography wherein “he goes to the “Vörös Ökör” [“Red Oxen”] on September 1, 1891, and learns about human society” (EK 23). The “Red Oxen” is an elementary school, named after the pub that stood in its place for many years. For the author, this school in a southeastern township represents his first shocking interaction with the outside world. Like a companion piece to his early poems, The Laments of a Small Child, Kosztolányi depicts a highly sensitive child who is overflowing with ambivalence, with anxiety over the possibility or losing his parents, and with the perpetual fear of death; he struggles to breathe whenever panic strikes him. He is not interested in school because he does not want to leave the comfort of his family; not to mention that he already knows how to read and write. In the classroom strange children who are cruel and devoid of empathy surround him.
As L. Rónay argues, “the evocation of the past is a defining element of Kosztolányi’s worldview” (46), a view he had already professed to Babits in 1904: “I don’t know why but I have become obsessed by the thought of passing time. Thoughts and moods torture me. I keep dreaming that I am a child…” (BJK L 57-8). But Kosztolányi does not simply reflect on childhood, explains L. Rónay, rather he evokes its elements through lyricism and language and makes us homesick for a paradisiacal experience (46-47). Kosztolányi lyricizes what Derrida conceptualizes as “an ethic of nostalgia for origins, an ethic of archaic and natural innocence, of a purity of presence and self-presence in speech” (1125). The child, as the narrator explains, cannot find a seat; none of the children make room for him, so he remains by the hearth. His withdrawal from the outside world is replaced by the creation of an inner linguistic world: “If they all knew what he knows…that there is writing and there is shorthand…that in America it is night now…” (EK 27). He cries and the children tease and laugh at him. The teacher tries to console him: “‘What is your name?’ he asks once more. ‘Kornél Esti’, answers the little boy, bravely and cleverly” (EK 30). With this depiction of the child, Kosztolányi identifies himself as Kornél Esti, and proclaims his own status as an outsider, a status he held throughout his life.

The narrative structure becomes confusing in this chapter, drawing attention to the ever-shifting voices of the narrator/Kosztolányi and Esti/Kosztolányi. In the majority of stories the inner objective narration is dominant. In the first chapter the narrator seems to appear as one of the main characters. In the second chapter, however, it is difficult to decipher who speaks: the narrator or Esti, or possibly someone else? A subjective voice appears in the singular third person. The narrator/Kosztolányi gradually melts into the background of the stories in order to create distance from Esti. Kosztolányi complicates the reader’s understanding of perspective by inverting the role of narrator and protagonist, thus emphasizing the double or split personality

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36 Nem tudom, miért, de én fanatikusa lettem az elmúlt időknek. Gondolatok és hangulatok bántanak. Mindég arról álmodok, hogy gyerek vagyok...
and in-betweenness of the character. Kosztolányi’s method parallels with the “split-level technique,” which, Iser explains, is a strategy to deliberately stop the reader from identifying her or himself with the characters and from taking part in the event; and to only allow a certain degree of character immersion to be absorbed before being pulled back to induce criticism from the outside (IR 112). This double perspective heightens the reader’s sense of insecurity. The stories about Esti become more fragmented with each chapter.

The third chapter first appeared under the title “Csók” [“The Kiss”] in the 13th issue of Nyugat in 1930; the two texts are identical. Kosztolányi dedicated this story to his mentor, Ernő Osvát, who died a few months prior to its release. The text again features the narrator who relays a pivotal experience of Esti: his first trip to Italy. This chapter is an eloquent example of how Kosztolányi expresses the Hungarian version of an interwar European intellectual bourgeois worldview (Németh G. 117). The eighteen-year-old Esti has just graduated from high school as “praecclare maturus” and his father asks him whether he would like a shiny bicycle or money for a trip anywhere he desires: “He decided to take the latter. Although not without hesitation and inner torment” (EK 31). The young Esti wants to see the world, “primarily he would like to see the sea…[so] he travels to Italy” (EK 31). Kosztolányi blends his autobiographical experiences by depicting Esti traveling first to Budapest after tearful farewells with his parents. The sights and scenes of the capital overwhelm the impressionable Esti. He considers people of [Buda]Pest cold and snobbish, but he writes to his parents on a postcard that: “Les gens d’ici ne sont pas grossiers, ils sont d’un certain point de vue plus fins, plus prévenants que ceux de Sárszeg” (Ld 31). Irony helps Esti overcome tremendous homesickness that suddenly overwhelms him in the evening among the strange “pillows of Pest” (EK 33; cf. Kaffka, CY 151). It is here that Kosztolányi calls Budapest the “modern Babylon” (EK 32); he maps out the places that become quintessential ingredients for Esti to identify himself as a Hungarian and, hence to preempt his
future nostalgia for the city: “Au Musée National…le perron d’où Petőfi avait declaime son poème historique: ‘Debout Hongrois!’…La carte de ‘Budapest, capitale et residence impériale et royale’ à la main, il trouva le Danube et le Mont Gellért” (Ld 30). Although Esti could have embarked on a train for Italy in his hometown (Sárszeg a.k.a. Szabadka), the detour to Budapest is a necessary element in the plot, because it grants Esti a context wherein he can develop into an adult character.

This adult character is a poet. We learn in the fifth chapter that he now lives in Budapest, as a bohemian artist. This story first appeared under the title “Budapest, 1909 szeptember 10” in the January 1929 issue of Nyugat. It encompasses Esti’s experiences in a typical day. Esti’s routine is to get up at eleven in the morning and go out for a meal with Sárkány, one of his friends. After a sumptuous lunch of venison in artichoke and strawberry sauce, and vanilla cream for dessert, they meet up with Kaniczky. The three of them comprise the “Balkán-egylet” [“Balkan Association”] (EK 70), a group Kosztolányi organized with Babits and Juhász during university for the purpose of inventing grotesque language games to shock people on the street and create slapstick comedy in public places (Levendel 69). Kosztolányi’s comic energy, however, found a new companion in Frigyes Karinthy, who inspired many comic adventures which later influenced those enacted by Esti and his friends. It is also in Kosztolányi’s and Karinthy’s favourite haunt, the café New York, that the friends spend their entire afternoon, writing poems, chatting with other young artists who read “Verlaine and Baudelaire in French,” debating with “neokantian” philosophers (EK 74), and parodying the elderly: “It was here in this noisy chamber of the busy café where they felt the rhythm of their lives; they are going somewhere, somewhere forward” (EK 73). In a nostalgic and self-ironizing tone Kosztolányi’s narrator reminisces about how “everyone who counted, was here…They all talked at once, about whether humans have free will, about the shape of the plague bacterium…[and] what Nietzsche
meant by ‘eternal return’…” (EK 75). After a long day at the café, Esti and his friends would enjoy loafing beside the riverbank of the Danube. At night, they would pull pranks in the quarters of the tradesmen’s lodges in Pest. Esti did not understand life’s grand questions, but he appreciated its minute details. And most particularly he inhabited the world of language and literature; before falling asleep he often categorized languages in his mind and as always, “he would recite the Spanish irregular verbs to himself” (EK 84). In this chapter, Esti makes excuses for not visiting his parents on the grounds that literature demanded all his time and attention: “A new literature is raging here. I must stay here, to be on guard…I am working” (EK 85). For the idealistic Esti, there was simply no better justification. This is Budapest, the city of literature piloted by Nyugat, which, the young Esti immediately sensed, would captivate him forever. But for now, he embarks on the train for Fiume.37

There is an attractive mother with a plain-looking teenaged daughter in the second-class compartment where Esti finds a seat, explains Kosztolányi in the third chapter. The journey takes twelve long hours and Esti wants to ignore his neighbours. He begins to read “Edmondo de Amicis’s Cuoré” (EK 34), which he understands perfectly despite his intermediate knowledge of Italian. Esti feels confident about himself; his outfit, a high collared shirt and white tie, gave him the look of a bohemian poet, or so he thought. But the young girl’s constant whispering, giggling and finger pointing disturb his plans for a relaxing train trip. Impatiently, he shuts his book and gives the girl a condescending glare. In her fright she runs out of the compartment with her mother in tow. Esti’s calm returns in their absence. However, when after almost an hour the pair fails to come back, Esti’s sense of anxiety revisits him. He wants to find out where they went, and more precisely who they were, but he does not dare touch the nametags on the suitcases. With that thought he began to make an assessment of his character, considering himself a “good

37 Fiume was Hungary’s only port city. With the 1920 Trianon Treaty it became part of Croatia and is now called Rijeka.
boy” [“jól nevelt fiu”], but admitted that he also had a wicked side: “Under certain circumstances, he could kill, like anyone else” (*EK* 42). On the one hand, Esti is dangerous and irrational; he believes in human freedom, anarchy and in the law of chance, and that life is an adventure, however blatantly hopeless. As Esti symbolizes repressed thoughts and feelings: “he represents the hidden desires of the ego, in a sense he is the embodiment of all those human impulses: senseless revolts, irresponsibility, or latent cruelty,” which everyone is reluctant to admit, explains Czigány (315). Sidestepping the traditions of novel writing, Kosztolányi empowered a lead protagonist whose character lacks unity and constancy. On the other hand, Esti is also Kosztolányi’s better self: “he rebels against hypocrisy…he does not believe in world-saving ideas [but] knows that truth is relative, and that heroic actions can be ridiculous; he realizes that man can only experience tiny segments of life, and that humanitarian intentions manifest themselves best in small deeds” (Czigány 315). Moral values in the conventional sense do not affect Esti. However, at the core he had what Király sees as Pascal’s “ordre du coeur,” an *a priori* set of values which is mixed with the typically Hungarian ethics of the Biedermeier [“jellegzetes magyar biedermeier morál”], that is of the mid-1800’s bourgeois celebration of life and family (457-58). Through Esti’s figure Kosztolányi stresses the importance of small things, the quotidian versus grand events and grandiose theories (Király 461). The “ethical viewpoint,” explains the narrator, “which Esti will have further defined in his subsequent works,” argues that: “we can help each other very little only, and in order to achieve happiness we inevitably also hurt others” (*EK* 42). One of his chief mottos is: “since we cannot be truly good to each other, at least let us be polite” [“mivel igazán jó úgyse lehetünk legalább udvariasak legyünk”] (EK 42).

Between deed or action and word, Esti considers words as more important: “In general, the word means more than deed” (*EK* 43).
Esti lulls in and out of his thoughts then goes for a walk in the train car. When he returns to the compartment the mother and daughter are also there. Suddenly, the teenaged Editke kisses Esti on his lips. The act confuses Esti and he begins to cry. This was his first kiss, and to receive it in such a way seems inexcusable to him. Only the mother’s simple apology—“Oh…forgive me. You see she is…” (49)—manages to assuage the feeling. Editke is ill, she does not know what is right or wrong. In order to alleviate the situation, Esti begins to write out loud a poem inspired by Xenophon. Drawing the character into a play with language provides the impetus for juxtaposing the experience of the kiss and his long awaited desire to see the Adriatic Sea:

“Thalassa, thalassa! Immuable, éternellement… Donne-moi le sein, offer-moi la rédemption, écarte de mois les cauchemars ! Refais de moi ce que j’étais à ma naissance !” (Ld 54). At last, they arrive in Fiume, and Esti and the mother bid each other farewell. He takes a seat in the first café he sees.

When an Italian waiter welcomes Esti in Hungarian—he knew that the Hungarian express had just pulled in—Esti answers him in Italian, “Si, una tazza di caffè,” to which the waiter responds as he would to a local: “Benissimo, signore” (EK 58, Italian in orig.). Esti felt happy that he was mistaken for someone else, “perhaps [an] Italian, but if nothing else, at least different, a foreigner, a man who can play a game of different roles and break away from the prison he was confined in since birth (EK 58)...Only they [the Italians] can cure him of his anxieties” (EK 59). While Esti lacks, what Király calls “basic personality,” a substance that would elevate him as a hero, he remains an anti-hero driven by “action gratuite” (423), his characteristics also comprise a “guest-identity” [“vendégléttudat”] (428). Kosztolányi formulated “guest-identity” from the metaphor of the kind of guest who has no home, is always on the road and at the mercy of the host’s kindness (Király 465). As a guest and perpetual tourist, Esti does not have to commit himself to permanency, he can levitate and drift weightlessly and it provides
him with a feeling of contentment. Esti is ecstatic upon hearing everyone speaking Italian around him, since he has been eternally longing to speak Italian with a real Italian. But when paying his bill Esti suddenly reveals himself: despite his perfect Italian he cannot figure out the numbers. Such a paradox postulates the question of identity. Origin and belonging hyperbolized by the litter, fruit peels, old shoes, and fish bones on the oily surface of the sea. In the end, Esti jumps in the water to unite with the sea; looking towards Venice he feels that “the kiss and this trip have baptized him, into someone” (EK 60). Kosztolányi does not give answers to social problems that affect the individual, but depicts them as conditions that prevail. Paradox and irony operate as structuring principles in the novellas, which I see also as Kosztolányi’s negotiation of the Hungarian subject’s position in interwar Europe.

For Kosztolányi, Hungarian identity embodies the concept of the self and other as belonging to different cultural and linguistic spaces, but which, when intersected, offer the possibility of transcending traditional borders – sometimes literally, as in chapter nine, “in which Esti chats with the Bulgarian train conductor and relishes the sweet terror of the confusion of Babelian languages” (EK 118)]. Through the narrator we hear Esti recounting his train travels across Bulgaria towards Turkey. Although Esti speaks ten languages fluently, Bulgarian is not one of them, and so he feels enthralled to try out the few Bulgarian words he does know with the train conductor. His smug confidence enables him to convince the conductor that he actually does speak Bulgarian, in fact, like a professor from the Sofia university: “I had to make him believe that I was a native Bulgarian” (EK 119). When the conductor begins telling Esti a long story, he feigns comprehension with perfect attention. As the train rushes through the dark landscape under the night sky, Esti listens intently to the conductor for hours standing and smoking in the corridor. Suddenly, the Bulgarian conductor gives Esti his notebook to read, filled with Cyrillic letters. Esti does not comprehend a word of it, but he keeps pretending. He
nods his head in agreement and says “yes” in Bulgarian to which the conductor then pulls out a picture of a dog and two green buttons from his coat pocket. Here, Esti barks like a dog to give the impression that he likes dogs. But to Esti’s surprise the conductor steps back and begins to cry. Esti grabs the conductor’s shoulders to console him and shouts in his ears in Bulgarian, “no, no, no” three times. Confused, Esti retreats to his compartment and sleeps until the next morning when the conductor wakes him up. Esti still does not understand what the conductor is saying but feels he must part on friendly terms; he shouts to the conductor “yes.” Besides the comedy of errors, Kosztolányi also emphasizes that what Esti first affirms and then negates only to affirm again can be understood as a struggle between communication and feelings of alienation (cf. Varga 120), but it can also be read as a transcendence of linguistic and cultural barriers.

In order to emphasize that it is a situation in which yes means no and no means yes, Kosztolányi interweaves the comic with the tragic, and at once sharpens and blurs the linguistic and cultural spaces between self and other. By creating a context in which neither Esti nor the reader can ever know what the Bulgarian conductor’s story was about, Kosztolányi wants readers to question Esti’s trustworthiness, since the speaker does not always appear equal with the spectator in the stories. Esti Kornél dispels the illusion of realistic and naturalistic novels and makes the reader attentive to the narrator’s primary role. Although Kosztolányi was criticized for his relativist views of language and for experimenting with genre forms, as Szegedy-Maszák argues, he never deterred from his aim to reject the “concept of the stable ego” (EW 1242) and to “question the identity of the speaker” (1245). Language is no longer a means of communication but rather an autonomous entity; it has its own creative force. Comparably, we can see four tightly linked linguistic concepts in the stories: 1. the individual’s sovereign right to create any sort of associative linkages; 2. the right to differentiate between thought and action (they might intersect each other, but each has its full value independently), 3. one’s inner and outer world are
equally important and indivisible from each other, and 4. absolute tolerance toward others (Németh G. 124-46). Chapter seven is another witty and wonderful example to express these points, in which Esti pays homage to Hungary’s Turkish language heritage.

In this chapter, Esti in first person tells the story of yet another train trip; this time on the Orient Express heading westward. He shares a compartment with three Turkish women: grandmother, mother and daughter; the latter he names “Kücsük.” They were very well-educated: “La fille parlait des vitamines B et C, la mère de Jung et d’Adler, des nouvelles écoles hérétiques de la pyChanalyse. Elles connaissaient parfaitement toutes les langues…On avait l’impression que leur ambition était qu’on les prenne au sérieux, et pour des Occidentales” (Ld 100). Kosztolányi collides East and West in this image, by locating Hungary or the Hungarian Esti in-between the two. While the mother is reading Paul Valéry, the young Esti courts Kücsük in the corridor:

[Kücsük], petite, ma toute petite, je t’aime. Naguère, a l’école, j’ai appris le désastre de Mohács, où les Turcs écrasèrent la Hongrie. Je sais que tes ancêtres ont fait couler le sang de miens, et nous ont tenus dans un esclavage ignominieux pendant un siècle et demi…Ecoute ! Faisons la paix. Je n’en ai jamais voulu à ton peuple, car nous avons reçu de lui nos plus beaux mots, ces vocables sans lesquels je serais malheureux. Je suis un poète, l’amoureux, le foud des mots. C’est vous qui nous avez donné le mot ‘perel’ [‘gyöngy’] et le mot ‘miroir’ [‘tükör’] et le mot ‘cercueil’ [‘koporsó’]…Je vous dois trois cent trente de nos vocables le plus fleuris…(Ld 101).

Esti may be in love with Kücsük, but he is enamoured even more by the language the young Turkish woman represents for him. He is thankful to her, to the Turks, for enriching the Hungarian vocabulary, so he kisses Kücsük three hundred and thirty times. By expressing his eternal gratitude for such linguistic legacy, which he calls “szókölcsön,” or in English “loanword,” that he wants to offer reimbursement for (EK 98), Esti/Kosztolányi also offers to resolve the so-called Hungarian-Turkish historical dichotomy. Kosztolányi considered language, as I have suggested earlier, a semiotic system that contains its particular culture, the imprint and
legacy of history, which can extend an individual’s life both to the future and back to the past. Language, for Kosztolányi, is a mode of behaviour, hence thinking is equal to language.

In chapter twelve, identical with the text from the February 1933 issue of Nyugat, Kosztolányi’s “Az elnök” [“The President”] further explores these notions. Esti talks about his years as a student in Germany and respectful love for Baron Wilhelm Friedrich Eduard von Wüstenfeld, who was famous for sleeping through all organized meetings. Esti’s story about Baron Wüstenfeld, the president of the association called Germania, and director and vice-president of many other literary, political and philosophical groups, is long and somewhat tedious, but it materializes one aspect of the story: that “the worst imprecation in the world is to organize, and real happiness is disorganization, chance and caprice” (EK 164). Baron Wüstenfeld, as Esti explains, embodied wisdom; all he did was sleep and nod his head at the most appropriate moments during the conferences, for which he gained everyone’s respect. Esti shares the Baron’s perspective, and tells his audience: “Don’t be surprised, my friends, to hear me talk so wisely now…I have learnt it from him…my beloved master, who would be asleep all the time out of wisdom…to let literature and science…take their own course at the mercy of chance” (EK 165). For Esti/Kosztolányi literature must be able to reign freely with its own internal rules with poets as the mitigators of language. This segment is also a reference to the insider politics of the Hungarian chapter of the PEN club, which, as I have pointed out earlier, almost destroyed Kosztolányi and from which he later rose with grace. He fought for the freedom of the artistic perspective. Esti, like Kosztolányi, believed that an artist must reject the conventions of his time and create his own, although often absurd, worldview and actions, enabled by and for language.

“My appointment was for three o’clock past midnight at café Torpedó…Esti, who was already telling a story, looked at me with disdain…,” explains the narrator in the opening of the
chapter (EK 148). Here the narrator, through whom the reader learns of another Esti adventure, transforms himself into the audience at the café: “‘Well then’, continued Esti” (EK 148), is the phrase that provides the transition from the narrator to Esti’s first person account. With this technique of shifting the use of first person singular, Kosztolányi once again wants to create the sensation of immediate speech, and also to make the subject’s inner monologue audible. With language as the replica of speech, Kosztolányi also forces readers to render their own particular interpretations. The style of live-speech and addressing of the reader aims to break the distance between author/narrator and audience, leaving it up to the reader to produce meaning for her or himself (cf. IR Iser 46). Iser argues that shifting perspectives make the reader feel that the novel is true to life, hence enabling various levels of interpretation (IR 288). From here on we learn from Esti how, after studying in Paris for four years, at his father’s request he moved to Germany to take up scientific subjects instead of literature. Although he had “already heard about Germany…one of the greatest nations of the world that has given music and ideology to humanity,” he felt distressed about the change. In Darmstadt Esti found lodgings with the family of a kind but strict cooper. He read Hegel in the library and when he was really sad he hummed “Bach fugues” and recited “Goethe lines” to himself (EK 149). His chief ambition was to learn German very well: “I greeted three-year old children with respect because they knew German better than I did, even though I was reading Kant’s Prolegomena in German and understood it” (EK 153). After a night out on the town, when a taxi car driver cursed Esti for misunderstanding the fare price and coming up short in the payment (as he did for his coffee in Fiume), all Esti could do was marvel at the driver’s “excellent use of irregular verbs, [and] how masterfully he conciliates subject verbs, [through] his rich vocabulary,” which he quickly noted down to the driver’s astonishment (EK 154). Esti associates the lives language represents in each culture he encounters. He uses languages with the assumption that language does not depend on the
speaker’s intentions, but how well he is able to acquire the rules of the particular language within a particular culture. This perspective does not lead to a denial of linguistic values, but rather fosters an appreciation of dialects and also of one’s mother tongue within the context of all the languages of the world (Szegedy-Maszák, “Esti” 144). Furthermore, it helps Kosztolányi create linguistic and aesthetic loci for multiple possibilities of human existence and action (Németh G. 21). Esti admits to his listeners that he respected Germans the most out of all nationalities: “I would often tell myself that I would only want to be sick and die among the Germans. But I’d like to live somewhere else: at home, and in my free time, in France” (EK 153). “Home” is, of course, Hungary for Esti/Kosztolányi. Despite delighting in frequent travels across Europe, Kosztolányi’s enthusiasm for Hungary and the Hungarian language never weakened.

Although Kosztolányi considered Esti Kornél as a uniform story (L. Rónay 245), in the final analysis it can be understood as a series of fragments. That is why the stories leave the reader with a feeling of the unfinished, without resolution; they compel the reader to view things for her or himself and discover their own reality (cf. Iser, IR 120). Indeed, the first cycle of Esti Kornél does not achieve a happy ending because Kosztolányi could not find, or more likely purposefully did not secure a unifying force of order, leaving the story open-ended. The Esti Kornél novella cycle is a linguistic experimentation for encountering different languages and cultures within and outside Hungary, which in turn reveals the complexities of communication and of cultures. As I was trying to show in the previous section, Kosztolányi viewed texts as things that could not be translated into another language but only recreated or re-experienced. I consider reading the Esti Kornél novellas as emblematic of the problem of linguistic divisions at the point where the Hungarian subject has found himself: at the junction where the separation of languages occurs behind national borders. Kosztolányi offers this in-between subject a way to transcend linguistic and cultural binaries. He wants his readers to take charge of their meaning.
making, to read against traditional assumptions. Furthermore, Kosztolányi sees the task of the poet to create beauty and also in loafing and idling, a concept he learnt from Bertrand Russell’s *In Praise of Idleness* (Király 407-8). Furthermore, he emphasizes that neither the artist nor his art can serve political means, especially at a time when fascism was rising in Germany and also in Hungary with Gyula Gömbös’s new nationalist party. Kosztolányi turned inward and suggested that the artist must escape the horrors of reality by finding a safe inner haven in aesthetics (L. Rónay 263). Consequently, the figure of Kornél Esti became the hero of subculture in early 1940s Hungary. As Király explains, for his generation’s members, Esti was a role [“Esti-szerep”] and an example of nihilism and rebellion through which they emphasized their agency while turning away from society; they adopted the “Esti Kornél spirit” [“Esti Kornél-lelket”] (19). This Esti persona was typically a Central-European, Király argues, if not entirely a Hungarian experience that rebelled against the estranging effect of modernity (29). However, celebrating and negating life at once, as Esti does, was no longer acceptable in the mid-1930s. Many of Kosztolányi’s critics warned that the Esti-like figure who resisted taking part in and responsibility for society and cooperation is dangerous, especially at the rise of fascism and WWII (Király 410). Irony and grotesque self-mockery are not enough in the struggle against destruction. But by the 1970s, *Esti Kornél* once again set an example for the generation of postmodern writers, argues Szegedy-Maszák, such as Dezső Tandori and Péter Esterházy, who broke out of the existing traditions of Hungarian prose because of its “deep structure” and took Esti Kornél as a starting point for their deconstructions of narrative continuity (*EW* 1244-8).

Following the publication of *Esti Kornél*, Babits wrote a condescending review in the June 1933 issue of *Nyugat*. He had previously welcomed Kosztolányi’s *Esti Kornél*, most of which he had already encountered in *Nyugat*, he explained. Babits was ill at the time and so the volume helped him recall old memories of friendship but also “lulled [him] into forgetting”
He was also critical of Kosztolányi’s style, calling it an “atelier regény” [“artist novel”], which speaks of a “writer’s life and soul,” without achieving depth. Babits did not share Kosztolányi’s relativist views about language and failed to see the intentional language-centredness that serves both content and form. He separated the two components, while Kosztolányi strove for no differentiation between them, that is, between surface and depth. Babits also considered Kosztolányi’s literary perspective in Esti a dishonest guise, “since [Kosztolányi] is a lyric poet and not a prose writer.” Similarly, Schöpflin deemed Esti Kornél “too light and haphazard” in his review in Nyugat. He saw Kosztolányi as reveling in his own art, but also saw him as being constrained from fulfilling his purpose. Schöpflin warned against the figure of Esti: “he tricks, you, too, oh reader…his mirror distorts, so look at his image carefully” (“Esti Kornél”). Babits’s attack affected Kosztolányi so seriously that he contemplated leaving Nyugat altogether (Király 411). But at last he responded to Babits with the poem “Esti Kornél éneke” [“Song of Kornél Esti”], published in Pesti Napló on June 25, 1933, which is also a clue to unravel the Esti Kornél mystery (Király 403): “like nothing/you are everything” [“légy mint a semmi/te minden”]. In the poem Kosztolányi elaborates on what he sees as a work of art, and how style must always be governed by the economy of “a semblance of depth,” [“mélységek látszata”]. Kosztolányi refers to this symbol, because it also expresses the two authors’ contrasting worldviews: Babits believed in an objective ethical ideology, while Kosztolányi saw the world around him as polyvalent steeped in aesthetics and the sovereignty of the individual. Upon reading the poem and hearing about Kosztolányi’s distress Babits wrote another article in the next issue of Nyugat, but he was nonetheless just as righteous about his views as before. Babits lacked the sense of humour Kosztolányi exuded so easily. Esti Kornél was not simply a spark of an idea for Kosztolányi but rather a linguistic exploration of existentialist and aesthetic concepts developed and expressed in literature, and for which Nyugat
provided an inspirational outlet. In contrast, the younger generation Nyugat member Antal Szerb, who admired Kosztlányi, described him as the most suggestive Hungarian author (Mi 516), the one who defines best the subject’s inner thoughts. Szerb’s insights about his older colleague and the Nyugat provide a curious point of view for my analysis, which I shall elaborate on in the next chapter. There I also discuss Szerb’s influential role in the journal and engage his novel Utas és holdvilág [Journey by Moonlight] to illuminate another aspect of the Generation West.
CHAPTER FOUR

Antal Szerb and the Nyugat

“I feel uncomfortable when people describe me as a theorist of literary history. I am a writer whose theme was literary history provisionally,” stated Antal Szerb in a 1943 diary note (SzN 280).

In Hungary Antal Szerb, the second generation Nyugat author, is best known as a literary historian and novelist with a vast breadth of knowledge and an original style. Szerb’s volumes of Magyar irodalomtörténet [The History of Hungarian Literature] (1934) and A világirodalom története [The History of World Literature] (1941) have provided most high school and university students in Hungary, including myself, with fundamental knowledge throughout the years. As the Hungarian literary historian and Szerb specialist György Poszler points out in his 2002 English language article, “The Writer Who Believed in Miracles,” Szerb belonged to the “brilliant essayist generation” of Nyugat: “he believed in scholarship, but he doubted his own accomplishments” (Poszler 19-20). Szerb brought an all-important scholastic perspective to Nyugat. In this chapter I discuss the second and third periods of Nyugat through a focus on Szerb’s works and efforts to modernize the study of literary history in Hungary, and on the reciprocal influence of the author and the journal. I also aim to contextualize Szerb’s significance within his and subsequent generations by engaging his most prominent novel, Utas és holdvilág from 1937. Utas és holdvilág is considered a subculture classic, a book that I devoured in my early twenties, now available in English translation as Journey by Moonlight.

As with Kaffka and Kosztolányi, very little has been written about Szerb in English; much of it is in the form of short reviews of his translated works —Journey by Moonlight (2000), “A Martian’s Guide to Budapest” (2005), The Pendragon Legend (2006), and Oliver VII (2007). But there is a

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1 “Kellemetlen, ha azt mondják nekem, irodalomtörténész vagyok. Én író vagyok, akinek a témája átmenetileg irodalomtörténet volt.”
series of articles about Szerb in the peer-reviewed journal, The Hungarian Quarterly, which I draw on for my analysis and extend with a sample of the many studies in Hungarian.

Antal Kristóf Szerb was born into a comfortable assimilated Jewish family in Budapest, on May 1, 1901. He was the first son of Elza Herzfeld and Károly Szerb, the manager of the Globetrotter travel company’s Budapest branch. Károly Szerb actually Hungarianized his name from Stern to Szerb in 1899, and he and his family converted to Catholicism in 1907 (Wágner, “Egy” 219). In a brief Curriculum Vitae, Antal Szerb emphasizes his involvement in the Boy Scouts and other student associations, and the education he received at the Piarist Gimnazium, the most prestigious Catholic high school in Budapest, under the tutelage of Sándor Sik, a legendary pedagogue, priest and poet (“SzA k” 195). An emotionally and intellectually supportive family background and a vast library at home set Szerb on a course of life-long scholarship (Poszler, SzA 11). These stimulating conditions, however, also contained contradictions for Szerb. Throughout his life he sought to denounce bourgeois life and reconcile his devout Catholic upbringing and Jewish ethnicity. Similarly to Kaffka and Kosztolányi, Szerb experienced a particular in-betweenness. Poszler characterizes Szerb as a person driven by dichotomies; “he spent his entire life in a feverish, agitated state of mind, in [intellectual] purgatory” (“Writer” 19). In his diary entry dated March 30, 1918, Szerb explained that he suffered from a particular condition: “Yesterday a fever came over me…The fever of an intellectual, drunken with desire for knowledge, desire for the beauty of arts and aesthetics” [“Tegnap este egy más láz jött rám…az intellektuel láza, a megrészegülás a tudásvágytól, a művészetek, az esztétikai szép vágyától”] (SzN 40). Szerb was a thin, anaemic child but an eminent and successful student, reading all the European classics from Goethe to Balzac, while his classmates adventured in Karl May’s books (Wágner, “Maratoni” 10). “April 26 [1918]. I

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2 Szerb used his middle name, Kristóf [Christopher] for his early writings, but from the early 1920s on he went by Antal Szerb.
have won the Greek rhetoric competition (10-12 K)…I have also won the Lord-Prize for the best essay. 60 K,” he exclaims, “The boys gave me a huge ovation… I am now a famous person…” (SzN 44, italics in original).³ He enjoyed his academic success as it gave him further impetus to study even more earnestly. His aim was to become a writer: “I want to write… as to what, I don’t quite know yet, but I must [write]” [“Irni akarok… hogy mit, azt még nem tudom, de kell”], he declared in an October 1917 diary entry (SzN 29).

Szerb’s intellectual anxiety had led him on a quest for modes of lyric expression and sincere community participation, first with naïve teenage poems inspired by his Catholic upbringing and Boy Scouts’ experience. A 1918 diary entry also reveals that he was reading Freud and texts on literary history, and that he was writing “a Boy Scouts camp song” (45). There is no further evidence of this song, but I have found a long verse in a summer diary note of the same year, entitled “Gyönás előtt” [“Before Confession”]. I translate the first quatrains to provide a glance at the young Szerb’s outlook and emerging style:

…then I take a step over there,
where the priest is sitting,
and all that is sinful in me,
becomes cleansed. (SzN 62)⁴

In terms of the metre, it is difficult to convey the abab Hungarian rhyme scheme, therefore “Before Confession” in English seems like a free verse. This is not a bad thing, considering that Szerb experimented with avant-garde styles later on. To me the poem seems to carry a sense of faith with a hint of irony. Catholicism captivated Szerb with its contradictory aspects of spiritual faith and grandiose wealth, and inspired his simultaneous soul-searching and physical penitence.

³ Április 26. Megnyertem a görög pályázatot (10-12 K)... Megnyertem a Lod-féle díjat a legjobb dolgozatért. 60K*. A fiuk őriási ovációnban részesítették… nevezetes személy vagyok… (* K stands for korona, Hungarian currency).
⁴ …aztán odalépek,
hol üldögél a pap,
s ami bennem vétek,
tisztulást kap.
Further evidence of Szerb’s deep emotional and intellectual experiences appears in his November 28, 1918 diary entry, which divulges his adolescent self-portrait in 21-points. I think this psychic inventory also foreshadows the kind of person he had become as a writer and scholar. I quote and translate some of the points here:

I have been contemplating pro and contra for a long time now as to whether I am decadent or not; and I can’t tell anymore…

a) As a child I already took joy in repulsion…
b) I have always liked cats more than dogs.
c) My whole childhood is full of weirdness. There was a time when my obsession was wiping my mouth, other times to constantly fix my shoelaces…I have never been without kinks.
d) I have lived entirely in a dream world.
e) Every experience has left a deep impression on my imagination…
f) I always think.
g) My parents marvelled at my memory and intelligence from early on and they showed me off as their wonder kid…
h) I have always been very afraid of people. I have always been introspective, and I have always been a loner…

i) I have always loved poison…
o) I don’t want to write about how much I was in love with a boy in first grade, because I think it is almost natural.

v) I have always been a hypochondriac; I am always searching for illness in myself. (SzN 59-60)

These details, although very personal, are pertinent to my attempt to provide a more complete picture of Szerb and his works, in particular his involvement with Nyugat and his partially autobiographical novel, Utas és holdvilág [Journey by Moonlight]. It is also curious to compare Szerb’s personal attributes with those of Kosztolányi and Kaffka, all of who seemed to have suffered from various obsessions, anxieties (hypochondria) and feelings of in-betweenness, and rejoiced in their decadence, sexuality, child-like wonderment and cerebral passion for literature.

After graduating magna cum laude from high school, Szerb spent almost a year in Graz, Austria to polish his German language skills (Poszler, SzA 49). He began his university studies in Budapest in September 1920, majoring in Hungarian and German literature, and he also enrolled
in English and Russian language courses. He immersed himself in his studies, but his biggest complaint was that he could never find glasses that fit since the ones he had worn seemed to slow down his reading (Wágner, “Maratoni” 9). Like Kosztolányi, Szerb’s thirst for language and literature was insatiable; frequently he would fall asleep with a dictionary in his hand (Németh 314). His philosophical outlook also began to change; he wrote in his diary on December 26, 1920 that he is “entirely a formalist…relativist,” that he believes in “antiquity,” and he is “grounded in tradition” (SzN 84). On the same page he also explicates that “communism corresponds with the beliefs of the New Man” since “it rejects ownership…it can bring love to humans” (84). These statements reflect Szerb’s persona: shy and humble, community oriented with a belief in humility, someone who enjoyed being part of a close-knit group of friends.

Szerb’s diary also suggests that he had a romantic side: he fell in love easily and suffered from love or lovelessness, which played a significant part in his experiences throughout his life, and reverberated in most of his works. A selected correspondence of Szerb reveals that even when fuelled by love, an intellectual self-examination was always present as this letter to Dóra Schultz, a university flame, indicates: “…do I deserve my youth, since my life revolves around books? Will I one day regret that I love reading so very much, sunken deep and half asleep in my armchair?” (Szvl 20).5 They both adored Paul Claudel, which inspired Szerb to dedicate a poem to Schultz, entitled “Violaine.”6 But literature was not enough to bring the two of them together; Szerb’s crush on his schoolmate did not come into fruition since Schultz chose to spend several semesters in Paris.7 For many years, Szerb lived as a bachelor, with fleeting affairs, until he met and married Klára Bálint8 much later, in 1938.

5…de vajon megérdemlem, könyvekből sarjadó, könyvekből élő ember, a fiataláságomat? Nem fogom egyszer nagyon megbánni, hogy úgy szerettem olvasni és elsüllyedve, félállomban ülni a karosszékemben?
6 Paul Claudel (1869-1955) wrote the drama, Le jeune fille Violaine, in 1901.
7 Dóra Schultz (1989-1996) became a teacher, and she also achieved success with her paintings and poetry. She was part of the 1920s and 30s Hungarian circle of artists; a well-known and respected member of Hungarian women artists. As Schultz reveals in an interview, despite Szerb’s upbringing as a Christian, his Jewish ethnic background
In order to better contextualize the process of Szerb’s literary development as a member of the Generation West, I also want to highlight how his intellectual and artistic intensity escalated upon joining the Barabások. The Barabások was a group of enthusiastic young writers and artists who attempted to find a footing in the wake of World War I and the Post-Trianon calamities in decimated Hungary. They probed difficult questions about the role of literature and culture in Hungary and within Europe, and about the responsibility and mandate of writers (Poszler, “Writer” 20). Among Szerb’s friends in the group were the writers Lőrinc Szabó, György Sárközi and Gábor Halász. They experimented with each and every artistic wave and “-ism” with utmost curiosity, and took it upon themselves to continue building Hungarian literary modernity in the footsteps of the first generation Nyugat authors (Poszler, SzA 52). Szerb compared the Barabások to a “small sect” which believed conceitedly in its own power like a “stubborn Helicon” (“Könyvek”). Such overt self-empowerment was acceptable in 1920’s Hungary, after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Barabások members were influenced by Nietzsche, Freud, Bergson and Proust, French and English writers intimidated her, along with his insecure financial situation as a result of the collapse of his father’s business dealings (in Petrányi 325). Szerb’s greatest love at university was, in fact, Klára Lakner. She was impetuous and played hard to get, which caused Szerb a lot of pain. In the end, his adoration for Klára resulted in disappointment, and out of spite he married her younger sister, Lilla Lakner in 1925. They had a daughter, Judit, but they fought constantly and soon ended their marriage in divorce (Schultz in Petrányi 321; Wágner 12).

8 Klára Bálint (1913-1992) was the daughter of the Hungarian-Jewish writer and Nyugat journalist Aladár Bálint (1881-1925). She was born into a family of high cultural and artistic attainment. The writer Frigyes Karinthy referred to her as “the daughter of Nyugat.” Her uncle was Ernő Osvát, and her brother, Endre Bálint (1914-1986) was a renowned painter. She worked as a nurse for many years. Following Szerb’s tragic death in 1945, she worked at the Institute of Adult Education, and from 1959 until her retirement in 1973 at the Bibliographical Department of the Institute of Literature in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest, making every effort to bring recognition to her late husband’s works. She took part in the compilation of A magyar irodalmomtörténet bibliográfiája, 1905-1945 (The Bibliography of Hungarian Literature, 1905-1945). She never remarried but had a son, János, whom she brought up with the help of Antal Szerb’s aging parents. János Szerb (1951-1988) became a poet and respected Tibetologist in Hungary, but he committed suicide in Vienna. Klára Bálint (Mrs. Szerb) also carried out correspondence with Sándor Lénárd, the Hungarian writer living in Brazil, for many years with the hope of eventual marriage (information based on my personal conversation with Dr. György Poszler in Hungary on July 22, 2008).

9 The Barabások group named itself after a popular song of the time (Poszler, Sz A 52).

10 Lőrinc Szabó (1900-1957) was a Hungarian poet and translator. He translated many classic works in English, French and German to Hungarian, including the François Villon and William Blake poems that Szerb inserts in the first and second chapters in his Utas és holdvilág.

György Sárközi (1898-1945) was a Hungarian writer, translator, and second-generation Nyugat author. Gábor Halász (1901-1945) was a Hungarian essayist, critic, poet, and second-generation Nyugat author.
and German scholars, guided by their esteem for Mihály Babits and György Lukács. Szerb appreciated Lukács’s abstract speculations, which he saw as “full of vitality” (SzN 218). His enthusiasm for aesthetics and mysticism also gained momentum during this period (SzN 220). As for his studies, Szerb was working on his dissertation although not without minor setbacks, partially due to his complicated affair with the Lakner sisters. At last, he completed his dissertation on the poet Ferenc Kölcsey in 1924 earning a doctorate. Szerb was now interested in theatre and began studying dramaturgy at the Vigszház [Comedy Theatre] in Budapest under the tutelage of his uncle Jenő Faludi, the director of the theatre (Poszler, SzA 49). Already after a short time, he sensed an insecure financial life as a dramatist and he decided to pursue a teaching career, finding his first job at a high school on the outskirts of Budapest in 1925.

But it was Nyugat that proved to be the most fitting outlet for Szerb’s artistic and intellectual passions; it nurtured and instigated his boundless gift for expression and scholastic discovery. Similarly to Kaffka and Kosztolányi, it was a cousin in whom Szerb confided most often. Already in a letter from Maria-Trost, dated May 13, 1920, to his cousin János Faludi, Szerb confides that he is enclosing a poem he wrote when he was “a little bit inebriated (I drink a lot now in secret, since I am so alone)…make your own judgement, and if you find [the poem] good, take it to Osvát, but only if you truly find it worthy. But if it is not good, please tell me how I should make corrections” (Szvl 8). I could not find out whether this verse was among those which Ernő Osvát published in the February 1921 issue of Nyugat.

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11 He wrote in his diary entry on January 8, 1924 that he had “difficulties with his exams” and stopped working on his dissertation because “Professor Császár did not like it” (SzN 192). In his June 4, 1924 diary entry he wrote that he passed his “comprehensive examination yesterday” and that now his main concern was “the respect of forms and cadence” (“formák, a Mérték…tisztelete”) (251).
12 In the first part of the 20th century in Hungary, a doctorate could be earned after completing a four-year program in a given subject(s), which included studies from entry to graduate levels. However, in order to teach at university one had to pass accreditation examinations, which Szerb completed in 1935 at the university in Budapest.
13 ...biráljátok meg, és ha jönak találjátok, vigyétek fel Osváthoz de csak, ha jönak találjátok. Ha nem, írjátok meg, hogy hol javitsak rajta.
Szerb was not quite twenty years old when six of his poems, along with two more verses and two novellas a few months later, appeared in the venerated journal. Altogether I counted 106 works by Szerb in *Nyugat* between 1921 and 1941 on the *Nyugat Electronic Database*, which includes poems, essays, novella serials, criticisms, and book reviews. One of his first poems is “A tizenhat éves” [“The Sixteen Year-Old”], which articulates the sense of coming of age written in free-verse structure, supported by minimalist metaphors and abundant symbols:

You are a good boy.  
No longer will you build tunnels for sandcastles.  
.  
But soon:  
you will dance on factory chimneys with sandals on your feet,  
you will wave flags over nations,  
you, sixteen year-old, do not close your eyes  
if at Aphrodite’s birth  
the scaled sea blinks at you.\(^\text{14}\)

I have translated the first and last stanzas of the poem to offer a glimpse into Szerb’s emerging lyricism. The speaker in second person addresses the author or reader with an illocutionary force that asserts, promises and prepares one for the conditions to come. In my opinion, the performative utterances in this poem (cf. Austin) prefigure the kind of sensibility that mark Szerb’s later works, in both lyric and prose form. But Szerb’s forte was not poetry; “he was not a significant poet, he wrote verses out of a love for lyricism,” argues the Hungarian writer and Szerb’s friend, Dezső Keresztury (“Néhány” 191). He was, as Poszler puts it, “a scholar among writers and a writer amongst scholars” (“Writer” 20). Like most of his contemporaries, Szerb

\(^{14}\) Jó fiu vagy.  
Alagutakat már nem fursz a homokba.

De nemsokára:  
Könnyű sarukkal táncolsz gyárkémények ormán,  
Zászlókat bontasz országok felett,  
tizenhat éves, ne hunyd le a szemed  
ha Aphrodite születésekor  
felsillan előtted a pikkelyeshátú tenger.
was driven by feelings of anxiety and a ravenous thirst for literature and the arts, looking inward at Hungary and outward to Western Europe. He was part of the literary group—Nyugat—that formulated and furthered modernism in Hungary, although through widely divergent worldviews, interests and fates (Poszler, “Writer” 19). Shortly after the verses appeared in Nyugat, Szerb’s works also began to be regularly published in numerous other periodicals, such as the prestigious scholarly Minerva, and Új Idők [New Times], Válasz [Answer], even Cécile Tormay’s conservative Napkelet [Dawn], and much later in Magyar Csillag, the heir of Nyugat after 1941, along with the foreign language journals in Hungary such as Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie, The Hungarian Quarterly, and the German language Pester Lloyd. Szerb’s favourite haunt was Café Central [Centrál kávéház] in the heart of Budapest’s downtown (Wágner, “Maratoni” 12). Along with his coffee he consumed every newspaper in the café, and afterward would sit with his friends discussing literature and politics. Contrary to Kosztolányi, Szerb was not a bohemian artist; he was a serious scholar. Poszler describes Szerb as a “mild-mannered man with an ever-present sceptical smile” (“Writer” 20). Photographs depict a well-dressed averagely built man with combed back dark hair and a soft, smiling face with glasses.

In the spring of 1926 Szerb began working at the Vas Street high school, an established inner city polytechnical institute for boys, teaching Hungarian literature and English language (Szerb, “SzA k” 195). He enjoyed teaching and he was well loved by his students. But Szerb was also eager to escape the familial and social circumstances of bourgeois life. In 1928 Szerb’s parents moved to Paris15 for his father’s job, and Szerb spent five consecutive summers there, mostly in the vast Bibliothèque Nationale (Szerb, “SzA k” 195). In Paris he met many artists and scholars, among them the young Simone de Beauvoir, as he explains to Magda Tanay,16 an adored female friend he met on the train from Budapest to Zürich, on December 12, 1929: “I

15 Szerb’s parents returned to Budapest in December 1932 as a result of another failed business venture.
16 Magda Tanay (1901-?) was a teacher and a member of the Public Education Committee of Budapest.
have met many interesting folk, for example, a certain Simone de Beauvoir agrégée de la philosophie woman, a very intelligent woman, to whom I give German language lessons occasionally.” (Szvl 40). De Beauvoir recalled Szerb years later as “a very charming, humorous and intelligent man, who knew French and English literature, and the entire culture of Western Europe like only a Central European could” (in Wágner, “Hirek” 205). Szerb’s enthusiasm for literature manifested itself in a September 12, 1929 letter to Babits from Paris:

Dear Mihály,

…I have the best time in the library, where I spend my entire day. Everything is so wonderfully calming, like a new “Castle of Indolence.” The world’s most comfortable rattan chairs are here, and the smell of formaldehyde reminds one of the purity of the high science. And well, I don’t even attempt to describe my pleasure at finding all the books; I can caress the most exclusive volumes of first editions…I am reading old and new English writers, in large doses. I would really like to ask your opinion on them, but it is not possible to do this, only in person, and even then only very carefully…I am planning to cross the Channel in October. (It sounds like fun.) I will continue to read the books I am reading now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, in the British Museum Library…(Szvl 32-33)

Szerb had been part of Nyugat for over eight years at that point, and had found in Babits not so much a mentor as he did in Osvát, but an older colleague whose knowledge and opinion about literature he respected and sought out. Their friendship and respectful rivalry lasted a lifetime.

With the help of various research grants, Szerb spent a year in London from 1929 to 1930, looking for philological references on Hungary in the British Museum Library and also working on a monograph of English literary history, entitled Az angol irodalom kistükre [A Small Survey of English Literature]. He rejoiced in his research at the libraries, and became fascinated

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17 Rengeteg érdekes néppel ismerkedtem meg: pl. egy Simone de Beauvoir nevű francia agrégée de la philosophie nővel, aki rendkívül értelmes nő, és akinek olykor német órákat adok...

18 Kedves Mihály,

...a legjobban a könyvtárban, ahol jóformán egész napomat töltöm. Minden olyan csodalatosan megnyugtató, mintha egy új Castle of Indolence volna: a világ legkényelmesebb nádszékei itt vannak, a széthintett formalímszag a tudományok fennkőlt tisztaságát juttatja az ember eszébe: és hát meg sem próbálom leírni azt a gyönyört, hogy minden könyv megvan, és a legexkluzívebb első kiadásokat simogatom...Régi és új angolokat olvasok igen nagy mennyiségben. Nagyon szeretném a véleményedet kikérdezni róluk, dehát ezt nem lehet, csak beszélgetésben, és akkor is csak óvatosan...Októberben készülök átkelni a Csatornán. (Nagyos jól hangzik.) A British Museum könyvtárában folytatni fogom a könyvet ott, ahol abbahagytam a Bibliothèque Nationale-ban...
with William Blake, the Tudors and the treasures of the British Museum. Eventually, he met and made lasting friendships with other Hungarians, and also artists and intellectuals from around the world, such as the Greek-Romanian classical scholar, Dionis Pippidi with whom he corresponded for years. Szerb wrote to Pippidi from Paris on July 30, 1930, that he has “started his excursions to the B. N. [Bibliothèque Nationale] anew,” but he has not seen any of their “old colleagues; there is a new group of people [“garnitúra”], many Hungarians” (Szvl 61). After returning to Hungary from his scholarship, Szerb travelled in Europe often during the 1930s, while waiting for his habilitation as private lecturer at the University of Szeged. His favourite destination was Italy; he cherished the Italian landscape, language and arts, which influenced his novel, *Utas és holdvilág*, as I will discuss later.

After years of financial and artistic struggle, in the mid-1930s Szerb became a well-known writer and scholar. His first novel, *A Pendragon-legenda* [*The Pendragon Legend*] in 1934, inspired by the many months he had spent in London, is a mystery, woven through with humour and self-reflection. Szerb was a genuine anglophile, and he was fascinated by the history and customs of the British, which he attempted to replicate in this work. Moreover, like Kosztolányi, and even Kaffka, Szerb enjoyed toying with the idea of a literary alter ego. Szerb personified himself in the figure of the novel’s main protagonist, János Bátky, a mild-mannered and timid scholar studying seventeenth century English mystics and the Knights Templar in the library of the British Museum, who gets entangled in the wealthy Pendragon family’s inheritance battles. János Bátky appears two more times as Szerb’s double: in his essay “Gondolatok a könyvtárban” [“Thoughts in the Library”] published in the magazine *Tükör* [*Mirror*] on April 1, 1934, and also in his novella “Madelon, az eb” [“A Dog Named Madelon”] in the September double issue of *Nyugat* the same year. In “Gondolatok,” the scholarly Bátky is doing research in the libraries of Paris when he falls in love with his colleague, a beautiful Hungarian woman, and
believes that through this encounter his dream has come true although with much suffering.

Comparably, in “Madelon” János Bátky, now a “Ph.D.,” chances upon love in a London park by what he considers a miracle. Two lines from Mihály Vörösmarty’s long love poem “Csongor és Tünde” [“Csongor and Tünde”] serve as the epigraph, interpellating and encouraging the reader and Bátky to watch out for that “Unattainable, oh human desire” (29). In this excerpt, which is available in English in *The Hungarian Quarterly* (Autumn 2002), we meet Bátky who is in the midst of ending a failing affair with Jenny, the antique shop girl:

He had been reflecting on how his whole life has been wasted on a series of horrid little Jennies, while ever since he was a boy he had yearned for a Lady Rothesay. For him history possessed an eroticism such as others found in the dressing rooms of actresses, and the true, great love of his life would have to have at least several centuries of history in her family tree. (“A Dog” 30)

 Bátky, the story’s hero, sets out for a Sunday morning walk in Regent’s Park, feeling “depressed by his aristocratic solitude,” only to see his desire actualized by a serendipitous encounter with a fascinating black dog, named Madelon (31). Since the animal “went through a series of most peculiar contortions,” Bátky offered its owner, an elegant young lady, to “take care of the dog” (30). He took Madelon home. Next afternoon he was woken by the doorbell: “Bátky shook himself out of his reverie about the middle class and opened the door. The lady, herself, stood in front of him” (32). It was Lady Rothesay, “the wife of a young but prosperous tobacco merchant” (33). They pursued a short love affair over afternoon tea, which ended in Bátky’s sentimental and nostalgic recounting of Budapest, “where the cafés cast cozy light upon the pavement, the waiters know exactly which newspapers you prefer to read, and mysterious indigents shovel the white snow at night” (34). Typical of Szerb’s prose fiction are the subtle and sudden shifts of events in the plot that encourage the re-reading of a sentence before moving on to the next. These elusive transitions enable the spatio-temporal dimension to remain smooth, and the character’s loss is enacted in what seems like a long moment. In this story Szerb not only
reflects on his own failed love affairs with Klára Lakner and Dóra Schultz, as I mentioned earlier, but he also provides an ironic critique of bourgeois sentimentality by juxtaposing his/Bátky’s enthusiasm for anything English with the quotidian and intimate images of Budapest. Szerb’s enthusiasm for Budapest was already evident in a letter to his friend, Pippidi, on September 15, 1930: “…Budapest is beautiful, I can’t even tell you how beautiful it is! Since I have returned, I have been rejoicing in the beauty of my birth town. And the people here are intelligent, although malicious and cynical, too” (Szvl 63). The city of Budapest is a central image in many of Szerb’s works, such as his January 1935 Nyugat essay titled “Budapesti kalauz Marslıkók számára” [“A Martian’s Guide to Budapest”].

“A Martian’s Guide” is a twenty-three part cultural-historical and lyrical guide framed by quotations from Hungarian poets’ works, and it takes its reader through the different neighbourhoods of the capital, from Buda to Pest. But why a Martian visitor? As the Hungarian literary scholar Géza Buzinkay explains, “the Martian was a favourite symbol of Szerb’s” because as an external entity the Martian can have an impartial and objective viewpoint of people and places (33). Through a confessional and witty style, Szerb animates the imaginary figure of a Martian, who “turned up in Budapest, took a room in the Bristol Hotel, brushed the stardust from his suit and telephoned to inquire if I might show him round the town” (“Martian” 38). The Martian can bear witness and pass fair judgment on the current conditions of the Hungarian metropolis. By the mid-1930s, Hungary has been affected by fascist currents, which Szerb observed with anguish, and Budapest transformed itself from the nation’s hub of literature and art to a political maelstrom. Like Kosztolányi in his nostalgic poems, such as “New York, te kávéház,” so too does Szerb, as the guide for the Martian and the narrator of the story, ardently portray Budapest with an underlying sense of melancholy and nostalgia. I highlight some of the

19 …Budapest gyönyörű, el se tudom mondani, mennyire az! Mióta hazajöttem, állandóan örvendezem szülővárosom szépségén. És az emberek intelligensek, bár malciózusak és cinikusak.
work’s details in Len Rix’s translation of “A Martian’s Guide,” which was published in The Hungarian Quarterly (Winter 2005):

I shall acquaint you with a city where, in my opinion, the beings that really matter are the houses. Or rather, not the houses but the erotic way they beckon to one another, with their displays of manly strength or feminine grace; the fevered traffic; the charged atmosphere around the statues in the squares...even the bus-numbers are imbued with obscure literary references—or some such thing. But you know what I mean. (38)

Szerb compares Budapest to Paris, where “people...are dull and unattractive” (38), while showing off the Hungarian capital to the Martian visitor. Although Pest is closer to Szerb’s heart since he grew up around Deák Square, just outside the main Jewish quarter, he presents the Martian with the usual tourist sights of Buda. But instead of an emphasis on historical interests, Szerb frames the tour in poetic references. A poem by the mid 1800s poet, Emil Vidor a.k.a. Frigyes Kerényi, who staged a poetic contest with Sándor Petőfi, inaugurates the new Chain Bridge over the Danube:

…The ancient river, so mighty and so proud,
Shall bend its neck in stooping subjugation
As patriot-poets hymn their praises loud,
And all men bow before the Mind’s creation. (38)²⁰

The romantic charm of the poem does not cloud Szerb’s next description of the river banks of the Danube, where: “In those days you could still half-expect the Serbian tugboats to smash up against the tramway railings as they came in to moor, just as they did decades earlier, when Councillor József Ürményi bathed his old aching feet in the water and chatted away with the smooth tongued Ferenc Kazinczy” (40). The image of the linguist, Kazinczy, is just as significant for Szerb as it was for Kafka and Kosztolányi who also described Hungary in a literary context. Tabán, a neighbourhood at the foot of the Buda Castle not only evokes Petőfi’s

²⁰ Nyakát a’ vén folyam békén lehajtja,
Melly oly sokáig déleeg ’s büszke volt,
A honfiak nagyobbat ünnepelnek:
Az ész előtt egy nemzet meghajolt.
mentor, Imre Vahot, but also Szerb’s contemporary novelist, Gyula Krúdy (41). Tabán, a favourite with artists and writers (also the area where Kosztolányi purchased his first home), was undergoing redevelopment during the time Szerb was writing his “Guide.” Many of the old buildings, where Vahot or Krúdy had left their marks, were bulldozed, leaving only memorial traces for the keen eyes of the literary researcher.

Buda was also the inspiration, as Szerb tells his Martian visitor, for the eighteenth century sentimentalist poet monk, Pál Ányos, the novelist Count József Gvadányi, and the much revered Benedek Virág who transfigured folk poems into classical Hungarian odes during the late 1700s. But foremost, stresses Szerb, the Martian visitor should learn about Mihály Vörösmarty, “that wonderful liberator of the Hungarian language,” who as Szerb explains, best described “the whole landscape of Pest, with a somber dignity that can never be taken from him”:

Infant streams set out with a leisurely babble:
The country-long Danube roars as it gathers them in
Transforming their diffident ooze to a fearsome flood.
The heavens gaze down with a hundred glittering eyes
As it flows ever onwards, bearing them down to the sea,
And with them, borne on its transient waves,
Time itself, lest it ever turn back. (43)^21

Vörösmarty is one of the most important Hungarian poets for Szerb, a resident of Pest, whom Szerb considered his literary grandfather. Óbuda, or Old Buda, was the ancient residence of the first Jewish settlers in Hungary, “Once the Twelfth Tribe of Israel lived here…[but] no Jews live there now. The only person left is the reclusive essayist Gábor Halász” (45-46), explains Szerb with a reference to his friend at Nyugat. With a short detour to Pest, Szerb finishes his tour with the Martian on Margitsziget [Margit Island] in the middle of the Danube, where the late

^21 A kisded patakok lassú csörgéssel erednek,
Harsog az országos Duna, tétova felszedi őket
S a folyamok vizeit s iszonyúra nevelkedik árja.
Száz ragyogó szemmel belenéz a mennyei térség,
Nem szűnik ő, lemegy a tengerhez veszni, veszendő
Habjaival lemegy a nagy idő, hogy vissza ne térjen.
nineteenth century poet, János Arany wrote in his “leather-bound book with a lockable clasp… his *Little Flowers of Autumn*” (48). “A Martian’s Guide to Budapest” is Szerb’s obvious homage to Hungarian poets and writers, and also to his birthplace, which he commemorates once again in his nostalgic 1937 novel, *Utas és holdvilág*. “A Martian’s Guide” was also published as a book a few months after its release in *Nyugat*, decorated with the Hungarian painter Sándor Kolozsváry’s black-and white *fin-de-siècle* inspired drawings.

In the October 1938 issue of *Nyugat* Szerb published his seminal essay on literature and language, entitled “Könyvek és ifjúság” [“Books and Youth”]. Addressed to an anonymous friend in a foreign city Szerb begins:

> My dear Friend, Forgive me for troubling you with trivial affairs, like I have been doing since my youth, and expecting you to give me answers to my questions which have been bothering me for months now. Please do not be alarmed! It is, of course, about literature. What else could it be?! I turn to you because you can see the situation clearer in the midst of things in a big foreign city than me here bound by my moth-eaten dusty intellect, quietly and also distressedly only with my distant memories about Western Europe.22

“Könyvek és ifjúság” is a confession, a memoir, an ironic elegy, and a scrupulous study of modernism and its influence on Hungarian literature. I try to convey the multiple styles in my translation of the essay by which Szerb commemorated his discovery of literature and within it his veneration of Babits and *Nyugat*:

> It all began…or rather, it never really began, because I have always read and written, almost from the moment I was born (I was the spectacled kind of baby, you know); so it is difficult to say when exactly it all began. But I clearly remember the moment of initiation; so I begin with that. It was the last year of the First World War, I was seventeen, spending a summer holiday in Mária-Besnyő. One day I realized that I succeeded in writing a poem, which—I figured—imitated the sound and rhythm of Mihály Babits’s early poems. I knew that the poem was not good and that I am not a poet. Yet, an ecstatic happiness came over me…I was born that day…

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22 Kedves Barátom, ne haragudj, hogy ifjúkoromból maradt szokásomhoz híven Hozzád fordulok ügyes-bajos dolgaimmal és Tőled várokkal feleletet egy kérdésre, amely az utóbbi hónapokban egyre jobban zavar és nyugtalanít. Ne ijedj meg, természetesen irodalomról van szó, mifől is lehetne szó egyéből. Hozzád fordulok, mert Te a nagy idegen városban, a dolgok közepén, talán világosabban látod a helyzetet, mint én itt, tízéves nyugat-európai emlékeim közt, elporosodva, kissé már molyette intellektussal, csendesen és riadtan.
While Szerb admits his inadequacy for writing poems, he nostalgically offers a genealogical survey of the literary currents, theories, and linguistic transformations that affected him and shaped his perception. He describes his discovery of Nyugat and through it Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Swinburne, Wilde, and Baudelaire, and sees his own coming of age as analogous with that of modern literature. Modern literature, he explains, was a revolt, “an amoral rebellion…the search for a new ethos” [“amorális lázadás volt…egy új ethos keresése”]. Despite the horrors of the war, it was the poetry of Babits, the philosophy of Nietzsche, and the vision of impressionist paintings, which all contributed to the formation of Szerb’s intellectual identity: “I was part of them” [“én is azok közé tartoztam”]. But in the wake of the war and subsequent break up of Hungary a new discourse became necessary:

We figured, the new world must speak a new language…We looked at every text, which gave way to the vernacular and normative expression, with disgust. Everything needs new expressions, we exclaimed…the image only, the hieroglyph is the real…By this time my works had appeared [in Nyugat] and I was proud that Ernő Osvát was encouraging me with the nod of his head…We were a small sect, proud, with an adoration for each other, and a fantastic and stubborn Helicon before us…We were deeply serious…

It was during these early post-war years that Szerb first encountered “new literary studies” with their reinvigorated vocabulary of “Schicksal,” “Ehrfrucht,” and “Gestalt,” which gave him a renewed sense of purpose. As a consequence, explains Szerb, he also had to start to learn literature all over again, with language being the central experience. Although Szerb does not mention Kosztolányi by name, there is an implicit reference to him:

…Yes, this is it, I thought, I have to learn this [new language], this is our calling, the new Nyugat generation’s [új nyugatosoké] voice, to disrobe Hungarian literary ideology of its dignified and outdated outfit and teach it to wear colourful yet soft shirts…

Kosztolányi’s elegant and playful tone resonates in Szerb’s lines that enact a search for precision and attentiveness to words. Ushering in a new literary language was also motivated by the
German school of intellectual history (*Geistesgeschichte*) influence, which Szerb enthusiastically welcomed, but which had by the time of writing of this essay saturated the language, allowing in its place “nothing.” This “nothing” is what caused Szerb concern:

...Now I am looking around in our language and in the field of great languages with worry, searching for something new, something that I have to learn again...We hoped for Hungarian literature to become classic. It seems our wishes have come true...Now we write what we have learnt from the greatest first generation of *Nyugat*...And yes, here is the newest and very talented generation...but where is their defiance, their sect, their sign, trance, their “mania”? Why do you accept what I accept, why don’t you enrage me with a sudden foolish brilliance, a linguistic magic act? (*Nyugat Electronic*)

Szerb’s provocation, aimed at the new literary generation, is at once his self-criticism. His “brilliant essayist generation” (Poszler, “Writer” 20) seemed to have reached its zenith and now stagnated under the weight of the trends, ideologies and concepts that had created them and which they expanded. By the late 1930s, the avant-garde and the idea of *l’art pour l’art* could not fulfill the demands of popular culture anymore. Instead, a turning back to the original starting point, a revival of classical literature in modernism became the motif of the last generation of *Nyugat* under Babits’s leadership. Szerb felt helpless in such a literary and linguistic context, since he had always longed for something innovative and grand in literature, like a redemption, which he hoped would arrive any moment. He never achieved this redemption, but spent his entire youth in “a happy purgatory” (“Könyvek”). This “happy purgatory” resulted in a productive life as a scholar and writer, until his devastating final years during WWII.

Beside books containing essays, short stories and verse collections, and studies in literature, Szerb wrote four novels, including *Oliver VII* (1941) and *A királyné nyaklánca* [*The Queen’s Necklace*] (1943). He received the prestigious Baumgarten Prize for his literary contributions to Hungary in 1935 and 1937. While he was teaching at the Vas Street School, Szerb kept a busy schedule not only as a writer but also as a public academic figure thanks to his *Magyar irodalomtörténet* [*The History of Hungarian Literature*]. From 1934 he regularly held
lectures that were aired on Hungary’s national radio station, gave talks at various cultural forums and associations, and also founded the Association of Literary Science [Irodalomtudományi Társaság] (Wágner, “Maratoni” 11). In September 1934, encouraged and supported by his professors Sándor Sik and Béla Zolnai, Szerb applied for the private lecturer position at the University of Szeged. In a May 1, 1935 letter to Magda Tanay Szerb writes that his interview was successful:

…the professors were very kind to me, especially Antal Horger. (Did you mediate my case secretly?) My trial guest lecture will be tomorrow morning…They say that I can count on a large audience. This opportunity, that allows me to present my lecture already, came suddenly and surprisingly. I am in the middle of making my preparations for it. (Szvl 89)

In his introductory lecture at the university in May 1935, entitled “The Tasks and Methods of Comparative Literature” [“Az összehasonlító irodalomtörténet feladatairól és módszereiről”], Szerb discussed the “myth of writing” in divergent cultures for which he gained praise from the hiring committee (Wágner, “Az író” 197). While the university hired Szerb, the final decision had to come from the State Secretary, Kálmán Szily. Szily delayed Szerb’s appointment under the influence of the right-wing conservative literary critics who considered Szerb’s Magyar irodalomtörténet too radical. Szerb explains in a January 5, 1937 letter to Dionis Pippidi: “I am not a great man yet. I have been habilitated as private lecturer, but the Ministry has not granted the permission, because I am not a loyal son of the country…”(Szvl 96). As I shall explain in the next section, Szerb took an unusual methodical turn in his sweeping study of Hungarian

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23 Tanay may have assisted in furthering Szerb’s job application for the position at the University of Szeged.

24 Antal Horger (1872-1946) was a Hungarian linguist professor at the University of Szeged. It was Horger whose now (in)famous criticism of Attila József, for his poem “Tiszta szívvel” (“With Pure Heart”), resulted in József’s expulsion from the university in March 1925.

25 A professzorok nagyon kedvesek voltak hozzám, leginkább Horger Antal. (Nem lépett Maga itt közbe titokban?) Holnap d.e. lesz a próbájom…Ez hirtelen és meglepetésszerűen jött, hogy holnap már elő is adhatok –most kezdülök rá.

26 Még nem vagyok nagy ember. Habilitálták Privatdoczentnek, de a minisztérium nem adta meg az ’affidavit’-et hozzá, mert nem vagyok jó hazafi…
literary history, which old scholars with views cemented in the tradition of positivism, rejected. Furthermore, the fact that Szerb’s teaching position was not officiated by the Ministry can also be viewed partially in light of the forthcoming Jewish Laws of Hungary, which constrained Jews’ employment opportunities. But finally in March 1937, after three years of appeals, Szerb was granted a position as a Professor of Literature at the highly regarded University of Szeged. He was also the keynote presenter at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences’ 1938 Byron conference, which György Lukács opened (Wágner, “Hirek” 204). Driven by interest, and partially by financial necessity—he was paying alimony to his ex-wife and child—he translated more than twenty books into Hungarian, including Somerset Maugham’s Theatre [Színház] (1938), Anatole France’s Thais (1943), Johan Huizinga’s The Waning of the Middle Ages [A középkor alkonya] (1938), among others (Wágner, “Maratoni” 12). His second marriage to Klára Bálint brought him a happy stability. The couple moved to a posh neighbourhood in Buda on Hidegkúti Road, near Ferenc Herczeg’s villa, where they hosted many gatherings for artists, writers and scholars.

As I have suggested earlier, Szerb was eternally caught up in a search for identity. Numerous times he went back and forth between living his life as a Christian or as a Jew. In 1919, in the wake of the defeated communist revolution, Szerb described himself as a Jew, but when Horthy’s radical nationalist government blamed the ill-fated commune on Hungary’s Jewry, Szerb felt it was wise to renounce his Jewish heritage, and he rejoiced in his Hungarianness, declaring that the national identity of Hungarians was also his (SzN 93). With fascism looming on the horizon in Hungary, Szerb once again sought to find a path to Judaism,

27 In Hungary the First Jewish Law was introduced in 1938, which curtailed Jews’ employment in business and financial sectors to a maximum of 20%, followed by the second Jewish Law in 1939, and the third in 1941 which focused racial division and discrimination prohibiting Jews to work in educational and artistic fields.
28 That György Lukács was present at the Byron conference is a curious piece of information disseminated by the daily paper, Népszava in 1938, since Lukács left Hungary in 1919, settling in Moscow, and supposedly did not return to Budapest until the end of WWII in 1945.
while remaining in an interstice wrought with confusion. Only in 1944, upon giving a speech on
the occasion of the March 15th celebrations at the request of the Hungarian Israelite University
and College Students’ Association he declared: “[The Jews] want global revolution not to raise
the lower classes, but to erase the difference between Jew and non-Jew…I have found the
definition: I am a Jew of Hungarian mother tongue” [“[A zsidók] nem azért akarnak
világforradalmat, hogy az alsó osztályoknak jobb legyen, hanem azért, hogy megszünjék a
különbség a zsidó és nem-zsidó között…Megtaláltam a definiciót: magyar anyanyelvű zsidó
vagyok.”] (SzN 279). He titled his speech “Mit mond nekünk a magyar irodalom?” [“What does
Hungarian literature say to us?”], a most timely and poignant question where the objective
pronoun “nekünk” [“us”] is emphasized without direct reference to Jews. However, because of
the purposefully non-specific objective pronoun, Szerb, who had already produced one of the
best studies about Hungarian literature, was able to call attention to both Hungarian and Jewish
identities.

With Hungary joining WWII, men of eligible age were conscripted. Those who were too
old, unfit, convicted of certain crimes, or Jewish, were not accepted into the army but were
instead sent to labour units (road-building, ditch-digging, etc.). Although Szerb was a practicing
Catholic, he “was considered a Jew under the anti-Jewish laws” of Hungary, and consequently
“was called up to do several stints in a labour battalion” (Poszler, “Writer” 28). Along with
several old Nyugat members, Szerb also wore the yellow star on his overcoat; his works were
blacklisted, and in 1944 he was fired from his teaching post. His labour unit duties began in 1943
with the periodic unloading of barges in Budapest until he was permanently deployed to the
western borders of Hungary to dig anti-tank trenches to defend territory from the advancing
Russian army (Poszler, “Writer” 28). Despite the circumstances, literature was constantly on his
mind and he continued working zealously on a bilingual anthology, entitled Száz vers [One-
Hundred Verses]. As he was unable to do research in libraries any more, he asked friends, including the young poet, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, to assist him in finding texts, as his October 6, 1943 letter indicates:

…I was supposed to have a day off, so that I could look up things on my own, but I did not get the day off, and now I place all my confidence in you. I would need the following poems’ original texts:
Laforgue: “L’hiver qui vient
Poe: Ulalume
This will be easy; you can find these in the University Library. But, here comes a very difficult task. Please look for the following poems’ original texts, which I know only from Kosztolányi’s translation:
V. Hugo: Az éj, az éj, az éj [La nuit, la nuit, la nuit] (it is in Illyés’s anthology)
Carducci: Ritoner
(It goes like this: Ó sápadt orgona [Oh pale lilac],
A csillagok a tengerárbá hullnak [Stars are falling into the sea tide]
S kihül szívem a vágyak otthona [And my heart dies, the home of the spirits], -that is all). Dear Ágneske, on top of it all, I need these things fairly urgently…By the way, the news is, and I really hope it is so, that we will be discharged soon…(“Levelek” in Wágner 354)29

Like Kosztolányi before him, Szerb wanted to compile the one hundred most beautiful poems of the international canon. Szerb admired and respected Kosztolányi; on one occasion he asked him how many sketches he could write in a day, and he felt triumphant when Kosztolányi’s answer was indecisive and full of complaints about writer’s block (in Bóka xxv). Szerb wanted to rework some of the verses Kosztolányi had translated, predominantly to imbue the poems with more accurate meaning, which Kosztolányi, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, often

29 …Úgy volt, hogy egynapi szabadságot kapok, és magam elintézhetem ezeket a dolgokat, de nem sikerült a szabadságot megkapnom, és most Magában van minden bizalmam. A köv. versek eredeti szövegére lenne szükségem:
Laforgue: ”L’hiver quie vient
Poe : Ulalume
Ez eddig nem nehéz, ezt könnyen megtalálja az Egyetemi Könyvtárban. Na de most jön a nagyon nehéz : Keresse meg a köv. versek eredetijét, amelyeket én csak Kosztolányi forditásában ismerek :
V. Hugo : Az éj az éj, az éj (bent van az Illyés-féle antológiában is)
Carducci : Ritoner
(Igy hangzik : Ó sápadt orgona,
A csillagok a tengerárbá hullnak
S kihül szívem a vágyak otthona, -ez az egész.)
Kedves Ágneske, és mindezt ráadásul élleg hamar kellene nekem…Egyébként úgy hírlik, és nagyon bizom benne, hogy rövidesen leszerelnek bennünket…
overlooked in favour of their aestheticism. In the anthology, Szerb included what he considered the greatest poems of the world, the ones that were also “closest to his heart” (Poszler, “Writer” 21). He arranged the poems thematically, such as, “loners, lovers, sorrows, nights, visions,” in a way, as Poszler contends, that provided Szerb with a self-portrait, a “veiled and bashful confession” (“Writer” 28). Nemes Nagy must have been successful in finding the material Szerb requested; *Száz vers* was published early in the winter of 1944, containing the best Hungarian translations by many *Nyugat* authors of Greek, Latin, English, French, German and Italian poems (Nagy, *SzAb* 21).

It became more and more difficult for Szerb to get weekend leave, and in his letter to Klára from August 6, 1944, he tries to console her and make sense of his circumstances: “My dear Bucus, unfortunately this situation may last for a while, although each day I have to spend away from you is a painful waste, and I don’t know how I am going to endure it” (*Szvl* 119). He encloses a poem which he admits is “not a good one, but I wrote it, and the first which I dedicate to you since I have been married to you” (118). I quote the last two tercets of his “Orpheus az Alvilágban” [“Orpheus in the Underworld”], and juxtapose it with my translation:

És Orpheus csak ment, magábahullva, And Orpheus kept going, sunken into himself, 
A pusztulás nagy leckéjét tanulva, Learning the grand lesson of devastation, 
Mely gyötörött szédülésbe merevíté. Which bound him to a terrible dizziness, 

Mig végre naptól felfénylett egy oszlop. At last sunshine has brightened a column, 
Orpheus megfordult és szertefoszlott Orpheus then turned around and so vanished 
Tündérfehér árnyékként Eurydice. Eurydice like a fairy white shadow. (*Szvl* 119)

Szerb dreamt of summer holidays with his wife and he steadfastly promised to keep up his strength like his friend, Miklós Radnóti, who was driven by “faith and fear” [“hűség és

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30 Édes Bucusom,* sajnos ez az ügy eltarthat még egy ideig, pedig minden nap fájdalmas véteket, amelyet töled távol töltöd, és nem értem, hogy fogom kibírni. (*Bucus is a popular Hungarian term of endearment for loved ones.)
31 “Nem jó, de viszont én irtam es az első vers, amelyet fennállásom óta hozzád intéztem.”
32 The Hungarian-Jewish poet and third generation *Nyugat* author, Miklós Radnóti (1909-1944) was also conscripted for labour duties at the Ukrainian front. When his unit was assigned to the Serbian copper mines in August 1944,
félelem”) (Szvl 119). But there is a premonition of a fatal end in this poem, which he calls a “Heredia-sonnet,” after the Cuban-born French poet Jose-Maria de Heredia whose sonnets gained popularity in the late 1800s, being circulated in manuscript forms. Szerb’s sonnet in his letter to Klára is just such a manuscript during his descent to Hades.

Since Szerb’s friends from Nyugat, Gábor Halász and György Sárközi, were also in the same division, they were able to engage each other in lively discussions about books and authors. Szerb was reciting Shakespeare and the poems of the late Attila József33 on New Year’s Eve, 1944 at the labour unit in Balf (Wágner, “Maratoni” 12), but his body had weakened and his legs could not hold him anymore, his fingers froze and he had no appetite. He could not perform labour anymore. His hopeful tone was eventually displaced by his “physical deterioration and spiritual surrender” (Poszler, “Writer” 28). In his last letter home, dated December 6, 1944, Szerb sensed the lurking abyss that awaited him:

...My dear ones, I am infinitely saddened; not only that your plan failed, but I did not even get the parcels. In general, the place where we are now, Balf, is awful, and we are in dire straits in every regard. I have no more hope left, except that the war will end soon; this is the only thing that keeps me alive. It is getting dark now and I am really not in the mood to write more. All of you, have faith that we shall see each other soon, and love your unfortunate Tóni. (Szvl 124; cf. in Poszler, “Writer” 28)34

I hear in his letter the hallucinatory forewarning that was present in his first poem in Nyugat, “on corners stand silent towers/ you are startled in front of the guard” (“The Sixteen-year old”).

Radnóti, along with thousands of other Jews in the unit, was force-marched to Central Hungary. During his service Radnóti, like Szerb, kept on writing. He was caught scribbling and severely beaten by a militia man. Weak from the injury, Radnóti was unable to continue marching and was shot dead and buried in a mass grave near Abda in northwest Hungary on November 10, 1944.

33 The Hungarian poet, Attila József (1905-1937), was briefly part of the Nyugat, until he founded the journal Szép Szó with Pál I gnos (son of Hugo Ignotus, the editor of Nyugat) in February 1936. He was mentored by Kosztolányi, Lukács and Balázs, and gained popularity in some circles, however, he was marginalized in general. He suffered from depression and committed suicide near Lake Balaton on December 3, 1937.

34 Édeseim, végtelenül szomoru vagyok; nemesak tervetek nem sikerült, még a csomagokat sem kaptuk meg. Általában ez a hely, ahol most vagyunk, Balf, átkozott egy hely, és minden tekintetben nagyon rosszul megy nekünk. És most már nincsen más reménységem, mint az, hogy a háborúnak nem sokára vége lesz; csak ez tartja még bennem a lelket. Most már sötét is van, meg hangulatom sincs, hogy többet irjak. Bizzatok benne ti is, hogy nemsokára találkozunk, és szeressétek szerencsétlen Tónitokat.
Szerb’s “figure disappears in the night” (Poszler, “Writer” 28). Poszler’s eschatology points out that despite efforts to rescue Szerb from the labour unit, “something must have gone astray in Balf” (28). As Poszler explains, two high-ranking officers of the Hungarian military, Guido Görgey and Jenő Thassy, attempted to have Szerb released from Balf by using false papers that they presented to the camp officers (SzA 438).35 But Szerb refused to leave without his friends, Halász and Sárközi. Thus the attempt failed, and Szerb was savagely beaten by one of the guards, which led to his subsequent death on January 27, 1945. Dated January 31, 1945, Halász’s letter with Sárközi’s postscript to the young poet of Nyugat, Sándor Weöres, explains further:

Dear Sándor, for just this once I turn to you not with a literary problem in mind, but with an urgent personal need. I have been called in to dig trenches here in Balf (near Sopron), cut off from home and from any kind of reinforcement completely. Tóni Szerb was here with me, but sadly, he is no longer with us; we buried him the day before yesterday. Gyuri Sárközi is also here and he will join me in this appeal: please send us some money by way of a loan, which we shall pay you back as soon as it becomes possible. The best thing would be, of course, something in kind of amenities (food), but I am afraid that the package would get lost, and they [lager guards] seem to forward money more or less. I am sorry to bother you with a request such as this, but we are at the end of our ropes. With many thanks in advance, embracing you: Gábor Halász...

Sanyikám, de profundis... help us, please, if it is possible and if you can. Embracing you: Gyurka Sárközi. (in Poszler, “Writer” 27-28)36

I cannot think clearly but I can feel, feel the shivers and convulsions of Szerb, and of Halász and Sárközi who perished shortly after him. It is unknown whether they received any money from Weöres, and even if they did, it seems that it was futile. Szerb was dedicated to his family and friends (his brother was also in the labour unit), and to Hungarian literature so thoroughly that even in the face of death he still declined his rescue which included an invitation to lecture at

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35 Information also obtained through a personal conversation with Dr. Poszler in Hungary on July 22, 2008.
36 Kedves Sándor, most az egyszer nem irodalmi kérdésemben fordulok hozzáad, hanem nagyon súlyos egyéni kérdéssel. Sáncmunkára vagyok beosztva Balfon (Sopron mellett) othontól és minden utánpótlástól teljesen elzárva. Velem volt Szerb Tóni is, de sajnos csak volt; tegnapelőtt temettük el. Itt van Sárközi Gyuti is, aki majd estalakozik kérésnél; küldj valami pénzösszeget kölcsönképpen, amit alkalomadtnál majd visszafizetünk. A legjobb lenne persze a természetbéli segítség (élelmiszer), csak félek, hogy a csonag elvész, pénzt állítolag inkább kézbesítenek. Ne haragúd, hogy ilyen kéréssel zaklatlak, de igazán a legvégsőről van szó. Előre is hálás köszönettel ölel Halász Gábor.
Sanyikám, de profundis...Segíts rajtunk, ha lehet és ha tudsz. Ölel Sárközi Gyurka (in Tobias xix).
Columbia University in New York, because he argued: “it would be bizarre to be teaching students who were not able to read Vörösmarty” (in Buzinkay 33). Szerb’s devotion to his friends and homecountry, and his tragic death at Balf, in Poszler’s words, “betrays much about Hungarian history and literature in the first half of the 20th century, and about the triumph and failure of the assimilation of Jews” (“Writer” 20). Szerb, along with half of the Nyugat generation, perished as a stigmatized outcast three months before the end of the war.

When Szerb’s body was exhumed at Balf in October 1946, Klára found the bent frames of his glasses and parts of the manuscript to Száz vers in the pockets of his worn out overcoat (Wágner, “Maratoni” 13). In a long and detailed letter, dated September 29, 1965, to Sándor Lénárd, the German translator of Szerb’s novel A királyné nyáklánca [The Queen’s Necklace], Klára explains how she organized the exhumation of the Balf mass gravesite:

…Then came that sudden speechlessness in April, about which I still cannot bring myself to speak, and the madness of having to bring Tóni home, because I couldn't possibly leave him there, where he had been murdered...Balf is a long way—near the Austrian border—and opening up a mass grave meant procuring authorisation, an endless round of bureaucratic things-to-be-done, and the intervention of several administrative organs [organizations] and institutions. And of course a great deal of money to pay for labour and transport. Naturally, the government consented to Tóni's exhumation—[Dezső Keresztury was the Minister of Education and Religion at the time—they even gave me some money, but, and here comes the but: the Jewish community dug in their heels, and let it be understood that this was not a personal, private matter, but a public one. About

37 It is a hauntingly similar story to Radnóti’s: when his body was unearthed eighteen months after his death, in the front pocket of his overcoat the small notebook of his final poems was discovered. Radnoti’s body was also later reinterred in Kerepesi Cemetery.
38 Sándor (Alexander) Lénárd (1910-1972) was born in Budapest and moved to Vienna with his parents in 1918. After completing his medical studies in Vienna he practiced medicine in Austria, Germany and Italy. Between 1946-1949 he served as the physician to the Hungarian Academy in Rome. Lénárd eventually immigrated to Santa Catarina in Brazil. His main literary works include The Valley of the Latin Bear (1965), which he rewrote in Hungarian as Völgy a világ végén (1973). It was the widowed wife of Antal Szerb, Klára Bálint, who discovered and introduced Lénárd to Hungarian readers, after he contacted her to translate Szerb’s A királyné nyáklánca [The Queen’s Necklace] from Hungarian into German in 1965 at the request of the German publisher Hildegard Grosche. Between 1965 and 1972, Klára Szerb and Sándor Lénárd exchanged 997 letters, many of them available in the Archive of the Petőfi Literary Museum. As Péter Siklós explains: “The effect Lénárd had on Klára Szerb’s life can be seen in their correspondence. She threw herself into ‘researching’ Lénárd. She asked Hildegard Grosche for information, she enquired about Lénárd [by] asking common friends and acquaintances. She first approached Magda Kerényi, who happened to be translating Szerb’s Journey by Moonlight into German for Grosche at the time” (45). In my chapter I rely on these original letters obtained from the PLM and also on a sample of translated letters published in The New Hungarian Quarterly (Spring 2008).
560 men had been buried there, and I was either to bring them all back, or leave Tóni in the mass grave… I knew it would be hard enough just to see it through, once we were there, in Balf… I knew where I would find Tóni, because Antal Lukács (de genere Baron Kohner) had been there with him, and though he had not helped him, he had known, as he says, that he had to note down everything about Tóni, “for posterity.”… I had only four days to do the job, because in the meanwhile at home that miserable community, who would not do a thing until I started threatening them with an interpellation in parliament, had organized a demonstrative funeral with much military pomp and circumstance for Sunday morning… The monster funeral was to be on Sunday morning, Tóni’s funeral was to take place two days later, in the Kerepesi Cemetery. He was to be buried in a special grave granted at public expense. And on Saturday morning we found another mass grave—quite by chance—the seventh one. So we dug that up as well, and Saturday night found us still at Balf, still filling and nailing down boxes by the light of pitch-torches… It was raining, a strong wind was blowing terrible end-of-October weather… The tractor with Mr. Roth sitting on the spare tire, pulling two wagons behind us with the five hundred boxes. It was so unbelievably infernal that today I can hardly believe it really happened… Then in the morning I handed over my consignment at Rákoskeresztúr, and Tóni at the Kerepesi Cemetery. I went home, had a bath, and went back for the special funeral. But I felt nothing… (in Siklós 57-60) 

Antal Szerb was buried in the Kerepesi Cemetery in October 1946, where Kaffka and Kosztolányi had been laid to rest earlier. Neither Nyugat nor Magyar Csillag existed anymore. Babits had died after a long illness in August 1941 and many members of Generation West passed on, unable to withstand the ravages of war, while others emigrated. At Szerb’s funeral his remaining friends and colleagues bid him farewell. Dezső Keresztury, the Minister, whom Klára Szerb mentions in her letter, described Szerb in his eulogy as the person who,

Knew his way around world literature like not many others, but who was always able to return to the Hungarian poets… He saw the world perhaps too much with the eye of a literati… He knew Hungarian literature and lived in it like very few others could, and that is why he was able to depict it with such liveliness and brightness, like no one else before him. (“Szerb” xxi)

When Szerb died the entire writing community in Hungary mourned him. György Lukács, who had just returned from a twenty-seven year exile in the Soviet Union, was not present at Szerb’s memorial. However, he visited Klára Szerb shortly after, as she recalls: “to tell me how much he

39 I do not reproduce the original Hungarian text of Klára Szerb’s letter here due to space constraints. It is available in the Archives of the Petőfi Literary Museum, folio number V.5415/116/9-39.
was shaken by the death of Antal Szerb whom he considered the most exciting and important Hungarian intellectual figure, and whom he envisioned to become his debating partner, if he had stayed alive” (“Lukács” 398). Klára Szerb offered to send Lukács the posthumous first edition of *Gondolatok a Könyvtárban* [*Thoughts in the Library*] (1946), a collection of literary criticism essays Szerb had written throughout the years, titled after his initial essay. In a letter dated November 13, 1946 Lukács thanks Klára Szerb for forwarding him the book, and once again he expresses his sincere regret that he could not meet Szerb anymore, because:

> It would have been Antal Szerb whom I wanted so much to accept my current works, as he did with my early texts, written under a completely different ideological context…Could you, my dear lady, help me acquire a copy of *Magyar Irodalomtörténet* [*The History of Hungarian Literature*] and of *Hétköznapok és Csodák* [*The Quotidian and Miracles*] from the publisher? As it is very difficult to find [Szerb’s] books, it would be gravely important for me to have his seminal texts as part of my work tools. (Archive of PLM) 40

Szerb had many plans for future studies, leaving behind a stack of unfinished manuscripts. But it was not until the “Sixties when his works were once again allowed to appear,” thanks largely to the efforts of Klára Szerb, who became his literary executor (Siklós 47). Szerb’s scholastic and literary influence, as part of the Generation West, has left a lasting legacy in Hungary.

**Stories and Histories of Literature**

Szerb is one of the figures of the *Nyugat*-generation who examined Hungarian literature and illuminated a Hungarian experience in its European context (Czigány 439). He was a passionate reader; “literature was not an object of study for him, but part of living” (Poszler, “Writer” 20). He devoted his life entirely to literature; Szerb “felt happiest when he was in a

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40 Éppen Szerb Antal lett volna az, akinél a legnagyobb súlyt helyeztem volna arra, hogy ma is, egészen más szellemben készült írásaimat ugyanazzal a megértéssel fogadj, mint amit a régieknél tanúsított…nem tudna Asszonyom a kiadónál közvetíteni, hogy a Magyar Irodalomtörténetből és a Hétköznapok és Csodák kötetből egy-egy példányt kapjak? Nagyon nehéz megszerezni Őket, pedig nekem fontos lenne, hogy állandó munkaeszközeim között Szerb Antal legfontosabb írásai meglegyenek.
In fact, Szerb dedicated several essays to the theme of the library, including “Gondolatok a könyvtárból” [“Thoughts in the Library”] (1934), and “Nyaralás a könyvtárban” [“Holiday in the Library”] (1943). *Gondolatok a könyvtárban [Thoughts in the Library]* also became the title of Szerb’s posthumous collection of literary studies, published by Révai in 1946, the very same book Klára Szerb gave to György Lukács. During his scholarship in London between 1929-30, Szerb was searching library archives for his paper entitled “Hungary in the Older English Literature” (Beck 74). A recent discovery of three of Szerb’s typewritten pages of this essay by the Hungarian arts critic, András Beck, reveals that Szerb was looking for depictions of Hungarians as portrayed by the English throughout the centuries. In fact, Szerb wanted to draw out the idea of “imagination” and “wonder” about Hungarians by the English, a study he had already begun in a 1926 essay entitled “The Mythic Face of the Hungarian Nation” (Beck 74). The image of Hungary in the international context was a curious and important project for many of Hungary’s liberal leaders during the interwar years, especially in the hope of gaining interest and support from England and America against the growing domination of fascist powers (Beck 62, 64). In Beck’s view, Szerb’s essay, written in English, was meant to further these efforts. For Szerb the peculiar idiosyncrasies of a culture were important, not its dry statistical data. As Beck explains, “academic muscle flexing was alien to Szerb’s nature,” at the same time “he was thorough almost to the point of pedantry” (66, 75).

Szerb’s essay sounds almost diffident:

As a person is inevitably much interested in the question: what is the opinion of other persons about him, how do they see him – in the same manner a nation is always curious, how it is considered by its fellow-nations. Therefore it is one of the most interesting parts of the comparative history of literature which deals with the opinions of one nation about another nation.

What did the ancient English know about Hungary? What was e.g. the opinion of Shakespeare’s age about Hungary?…(in Beck 76)
During the intense months of research on English text sources in the grand library of the British Museum, Szerb discovered and identified 150 works with Hungarian references dating from the late fourteenth century to the eighteenth century (Beck 68). But eventually, he abandoned his study of Hungarology (reasons for which I could not find specific information). Szerb expressed his feelings about his project in a letter to Dionis Pippidi, written on June 4, 1930: “for my part, Anglo-Hungarian literary contacts have made me seasick…Instead I am reading a great deal, particularly the novel cycle about Amadis de Gaula and his lover, the beautiful Oriane” (Szvl 59). Shortly after this letter, Szerb returned to Budapest.

His interest in Hungarian literature back home, however, did not wane. He wrote and published numerous articles and books on the topic, including *Az ihletett költő: Berzsenyi Dániel* [The Inspired Poet: Dániel Berzsenyi] and *Magyar preromantika* [Hungarian Pre-Romantics] in 1929, *Vörösmarty-tanulmányok* [Vörösmarty Studies] in 1930, *A kuruckori költészet* [Poetry of the Kuruc Era] in 1935, and eventually returned to the theme of an English-Hungarian literary link in his “Captain John Smith in Transylvania” published by *The Hungarian Quarterly* in 1941. Szerb of course was not alone with his interest in Hungarian literature. In the post-Trianon 1930s several book-length studies appeared about Hungarian literary history. Also, Hungarian literati in the lost regions were desperate to maintain a relationship with the homeland. After the collapse of historical Hungary, the task and duty of intellectuals was indeed to suture together the torn linkages. In 1930, the *Erdélyi Helikon*, a reputable journal in Kolozsvár (Cluj), Transylvania, held a competition, presided over by Mihály Babits, for a new study on the history

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41 Ami engem illet, az angol-magyar irodalmi kapcsolatoktól tengeribetegséget kaptam…Ehelyett sokat olvasok, és tanulmányozni kezdtem az Amadis de Gauláról és szerelmeséről, a szép Oriane-ról szóló regénciklust.
42 “Kuruc”—likely originating from the Turkish word “kurudz” meaning “insurgent” or “trouble maker”—were the rebellious Hungarian soldiers in the army of Ferenc Rákóczi II against the Austrians, who were called “labanc,” which means “coward” in English—derived from the German “Lauf Hans!” expression. The “Rákóczi szabadságharc” (“Rákóczi-war of liberation”) lasted from 1703 to 1711, culminating in the defeat of the Hungarian “kuruc” freedom-fighters, and Rákóczi’s forced exile.
43 Hungary’s lost regions included Erdély [Transylvania], Bánság, Bukovina, Burgenland, the Fiume port, among others, all of which became part of Romania, Yugoslavia, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Poland.
of Hungarian literature, which intended to bond Hungarian with European literature while depicting unique Hungarian traits (Poszler, “Writer” 22). Szerb submitted his study and in fact, won the contest by beating out eleven other competitors. In his announcement of the winner, Babits considered Szerb’s study innovative because it “experiments with new categorizations evocatively, even if it is not always convincing” [“új csoportositásával kisérletezik, mindig gondolatébresztően, még ahol nem is teljesen győz meg”] (in Poszler, SzA 147). Szerb received the prestigious prize of 100 000 lei44 and was awarded a contract to turn his study into a book, which he titled Magyar irodalomtörténet [The History of Hungarian Literature]. 45

His two-volume Magyar irodalomtörténet was published in 1934 and gained instant attention from every literary camp in Hungary (Poszler, “Writer” 22). In a letter dated June 21, 1934, Szerb wrote to Babits enquiring as to whether he received the copy he had sent him:

…About two weeks ago I sent a signed copy to your apartment by way of one of my students. According to my student, your sister-in-law was there to receive it. Perhaps ask her for it, please. In any case, I beseech you to let me know whether you have received it or not, because I am worried about it…(Szvl 80)46

For Szerb, it was of foremost importance that Babits read his Magyar irodalomtörténet because he knew that the majority of critics would not accept his work, something he relayed to Dionis Pippidi in a letter dated November 2, 1934:

I think I have become who I always wanted to be: an accomplished man. My Literary History is an amazing success: the first edition (3000 copies) is all gone, which is a big deal, since it cost eight ‘pengő’. The moral success is even greater: I have received completely all-negative criticism. The most distinguished literary board has lashed out to strategically ruin me, and the university professors are warning students against the

44 Lei is the currency of Romania.
45 The word “történet” means “story” in English, but depending on the context it can also be translated as “history,” hence the translation of the titles of Szerb’s Magyar irodalomtörténet and A világirodalom története are ambiguous.
damaging influence of my text. But on the other hand, my habilitation as private lecturer at Szeged University has begun. (Szvl 85)\(^{47}\)

The sale of 3000 copies of his book was a relatively high number in the post-Depression era, likely due to the low price of “eight pengő.” However, Szerb downplays the desultory reception of his *Magyar irodalomsztoriténé* with light-hearted humour and irony. The conservative literary camp rejected his study, criticizing it for being “disrespectful,” “flippant” and “unscrupulous” (Poszler, SzA 7). In opposition to the predominantly negative views was Aladár Schöpflin’s encouraging evaluation in the July 1934 double issue of *Nyugat*, which welcomed Szerb’s book. Schöpflin congratulates Szerb for his courage to produce the kind of literary history study that no other Hungarian scholars have previously attempted: “In Antal Szerb’s book we can see for the first time the resolute use of style and conceptualization of modern literary history…he drops pathos, which was typical of his forerunners, and speaks about literature in a direct and light tone” (“Szerb”). Beginning with ancient Hungarian mythologies and folktales then moving to the first poem written in Hungarian, the “Ómagyar Mária-siralom” [“Old Hungarian Mary Lament”], through the Hungarian language reformers, Kazinczy and the romantic poets, Vörösmarty and Petőfi up to his contemporaries, Szerb’s account offers a jocular yet decisive survey of Hungarian literature, closing with an analysis of *Nyugat*. Dedicating the review’s success to Ernő Osvát’s keen editorship whose main interest was to support talented writers, Szerb explains that,

The real significance of the *Nyugat* phenomenon was that it did not have a repressively Hungarian orientation; it was not chained entirely to a Hungarian past. It had a European perspective, which diluted traditions, bringing in a breath of fresh air and space, for a new kind of Hungarianness [magyarság] within which Ady and Móricz could gain validation. The result, which *Nyugat* achieved in its greatest representatives, did not make Hungarian literature more Western, but made Hungarian literature deeper and freer. (484)\(^{48}\)

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47 ..azt hiszem, az lettem ami mindig is lenni akartam: beérkezett ember. Irodalomtörténetem elképesztő sikere: az első kiadás (3000 példány) csaknem elfogyott, ami nagy szó, mert nyolc pengőbe kerül. Az erkölcsi sikere még nagyobb: abszolút megemelésű kritikát kaptam, a legdisztingváltabb hivatalos iradalmi korporáció intézkedéseket foganatosítatott ellenem, és az egyetemi tanárok elővígyszatra intik tanügyvaikat felforgató hatásom ellen. Másfélől a szegedi egyetem privátdezentjéként megindult a habilitációm.

48 A nyugatos orientáció igazi jelentősége az volt, hogy nem volt zsarnokian magyarsor orientáció, nem volt teljesen a magyar múlthoz hozzááncolva, európai szemént szemléletével megoldotta a hagyományokat, levegőt, teret
Szerb discusses *Nyugat* in the past tense; in a sense, he canonizes it, so that its importance can be located in a historical presence. In his Introduction, he refers to Babits, which, as Mihály Szegedy-Maszák argues, means that Szerb, in fact, took *Nyugat* as his guiding principle (247). Szerb was the first to conceptualize *Nyugat* in a literary historical context. “It is a strange feeling,” explains Schöpflin in his review of *Magyar irodalomtörténet*, “to see one-self as part of history, during one’s lifetime, in the eyes’ of the next generation...[that is], the endeavours and achievements of Nyugat in the context of literary history” (“Szerb”). Schöpflin’s only criticism was that Szerb did not stress Ignotus’s role in *Nyugat* enough. Indeed, Ignotus’s name appears only in a footnote in Szerb’s study. We have to remember that it was Ignotus who, in his introductory editorial in the first issue of *Nyugat* in January 1909, emphasized the link between Hungarian and Western European literature. Indeed, Szerb developed his own literary perspective under the aegis of *Nyugat* that had synthesized the Hungarian with European literature, and he continues this program in his study.

Schöpflin also refers to Szerb’s style as being different from the older literary historians’, Pál Gyulai, Zsolt Beöthy or János Horváth, because he employs irony and a “new attitude,” a more direct approach, towards literature (“Szerb”). This “new attitude” as Schöpflin explains, is a method that Szerb “grounded in the science of intellectual history [Geistesgeschichte].” Szerb’s methodological approach has set a new course for literary studies in Hungary. As Szerb explicates in the Introduction of his study, he has written his book for adult readers who will find “literary history...different than they might have learnt it in school” (33). His ideal was, as

49 Pál Gyulai (1826-1909) was Hungarian literary historian, critic, and university professor; a leader of the late 1800’s Hungarian literary scene.
Zsolt Beöthy (1848-1922) was Hungarian literary historian, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He was known for his conservative views about literary concepts and movements.
János Horváth (1878-1961) was a Hungarian literary historian.
Poszler argues, “heavy-weight scholarship – wrapped in a light, elegant style [with] ease of phrasing and wit…to move towards pathos and irony” (“Writer” 21). Against mainstream positivism Szerb developed a method of telling stories instead of conceptualizing literary movements, figures and their works, a technique that was considered radically new at the time in Hungary. In his teens, Szerb was influenced by Walter Pater’s Renaissance (SzN 41), and he rejoiced in Goethe’s Bildungsideal, which he interpreted already in his April 17, 1923 diary entry as wanting “to use every conscious moment; in order to be perfect one reads, thinks thoughts, envisions a perspective. At night I felt the hours of sleep wasteful, I dreamt about books and about the virtuous and contingent solutions to the problems of the science of the history of thoughts” (SzN 111). Wilhelm Dilthey and the German Geistesgeschichte school, and the study of psychoanalysis, both Freudian and Jungian, provided the foundations for his endeavour. He combined these schools of thought in his work to form a comparative method, although without abstract and speculative ideologies, which he claimed, he “felt repulsed by” (SzN 220). He extended these with the sociology of literature that resulted in “his own distinctly individual style” (Poszler, “Writer” 21, 23): the “three-fold method,” which Szerb argued in his Introduction, “literary studies must employ” (Mi 38-39). Within this context of problematization, Szerb equated Hungarian literature with European literature: “Hungarian literature is the miniature copy of European literature,” that is, Hungarian literature produced everything that much larger cultures had produced at the apex of development (Mi 41). “The Hungarian literary value is also European literary value” (Mi 41), argues Szerb. It is its very marginality that fosters the dialectic of differentiation and synthesis, of integration in the development of Hungarian literature: “difference” is what bestows Hungarian literature with energy and enables it to evolve (Poszler, “Writer” 23). Szerb was also inspired by János Horvath and Tivadar Thienemann,\(^{50}\) the

\(^{50}\) Tivadar Thienemann (1890-1985) was a Hungarian literary historian and language psychologist. He had a large
older Hungarian literary historians, who contended that “literature is a spiritual community of
writers and readers mediated by written works” (Poszler, “Writer” 23). Like Kosztolányi, Szerb
saw the value in a linguistic cultural identity: “to be Hungarian today does not mean to belong to
a state, but a specific mode of feeling and thinking which has filtered down from the values of a
thousand years…Until we remain disloyal to our culture, we are also unable to be loyal to
ourselves” (Mi 31).51 Such cultural determinism was a necessary overtone to provide links for
Hungarians within and outside its borders. But this sentiment must not be understood as
nationalistic or conservative. Szerb does not present a unique Hungarian culture as being
different from European but rather exposes the similarities that have developed over the course
of human history (Poszler, SzA 151): “…Hungarian literature, like the German or
French…cannot be defined on its own, but only within its European development, since it does
not contain its own metaphysical meaning but relies on the context of a European sensibility”
(Szerb, Mi 39).52 Szerb’s synthesis emphasizes the unity of Hungarian literature with European,
and within it exhibits Hungarian characteristics (Poszler, SzA 152). In the legacy of Ferenc
Kazinczy, who fought against the feudal mentality he called “the moustached Hungarians”
[“bajuszos magyarság”], and of the Nyugat generation which set out to bring down provincial
literature [“magyar ugar”] (Poszler, SzA 158), Szerb argues for a Hungarian culture as belonging
to the grand narrative of Europe, upon which he gazes with inspiration and nostalgia.

Endorsed by the Romantics, he was driven by his own disposition of in-betweenness,
which Poszler describes as a “struggle between the conscious and the subconscious…[in] a
fertile duality of irrationality and rationality, inspiration and irony, constantly provoking and

influence on the reformation of Hungarian literary history studies. He emigrated to the USA in 1948.
51 Magyarnak lenni ma nem állami hovatartozást jelent, hanem az érzésnek és gondolatnak egy specifikus modját,
ami ezer év értekeiből szűrődott le: kulturát...Amig kulturánkhoz hűek maradunk, önmagunkhoz vagyunk hűek.
52 ...a magyar irodalom is, mint a német vagy a francia...önmagából nem lehet jelenségeit megmagyarázni, hanem
csak az európai fejlődésből, és talán végső, metafizikai értelmét sem önmagában hordja, hanem az európai kultúra
rendeltetésében.
correcting one another” (“Writer” 22). Szerb also relied on the force of intuition, which could only lead to a “possible…understanding of a unique author’s given work” (23). He rejected any positivist, nationalist and conservative perspectives, along with the traditional spatio-temporal ordering defined in other branches of art such as baroque music or painting, but which does not necessarily correspond with literature. Instead, methodologically Szerb proposes to systematize literary history based on the sociological concept of class structure, which also allows him to examine the relation between writers, publishers and readers, which are the material-technological-social spheres of literature:

1. Literature of Religion (from the beginning to the mid 13th century)
2. Literature of Feudal Landlords (from Balassa to the Reform Era)
3. Literature of the Nobilities  
   a) Purely noble Literature (until Petőfi)  
   b) Literature of the nobility and the folk (the era of Petőfi and Arany)  
   c) Literature of the nobility and the bourgeois (gentry) (between Arany and Ady)
4. Bourgeois Literature (from Ady). (44)53

Szerb’s classification is unusual but not completely novel since he tapped into some of the key ideas Lukács had developed in his *History and Class Consciousness* just ten years prior. Szerb admits that his proposal would demand further development but he hopes that the study would provide an illumination of the sociological concepts by unifying the ideologies and styles of any given period’s literature: “The writer of these lines wishes to free his work from all the old phrases and to transport the history of literature into an era of new terminology, which has grown out of the German intellectual history [szellemtudományos] revival in Hungary, but has not

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53 1. Az egyházi irdalom kora. (A kezdetektől a XVIII. század közepéig.)
2. A főúri irodalom kora. (Balassától a Felüjulásig.)
3. A nemesi irodalom kora.
   a) Tisztán nemesi irodalom. (Petőfiig.)
   b) Nemesi-népi irodalom. (Petőfi és Arany kora.)
   c) Nemesi-polgári (dzsentri) irodalom. (Arany és Ady közt.)
4. A polgári irodalom kora. (Ady fellépésétől.)
Szerb did not write a theoretical study, but rather formulated a concrete synthesis of Hungarian literature. Psychoanalysis and the history of ideas help him draw effective portraits of literature, exposing the struggle between reason and instinct. *Magyar irodalomtörténet* is not considered a difficult reading (Poszler, “Writer” 21); indeed it is more of the “story” than the “history” of Hungarian literature. Szerb intended to provide an outline of the continuum in literature. Perhaps it was one of the reasons why the conservative Ministry of Culture banned *Magyar irodalomtörténet* in 1943; libraries and schools had to take it off their shelves, and Szerb’s name and works were blacklisted (Tobiás ix). During the dark years of fascism, followed by Stalinist-communism, Szerb’s works were prohibited but students memorized and recited his lines for their examinations as a protest against official proscription (Zolnai xxiii). Only with the cultural reforms of the 1960s were Szerb and his books rehabilitated, and since then his literary history studies have been part of all university literature curricula (Wágner, “Maratoni” 11).

Following *Magyar irodalomtörténet*, Szerb set out to survey the international canon. Already having written a study on William Blake (1928), and *Az angol irodalom kisükre* [*A Small Survey of English Literature*] (1929), he now examined the modern novel drawing on the examples of French, English, German and American post-WWI authors and their novels in his *Hétköznapok és csodák* [*The Quotidian and Miracles*] (1936) (Nagy, SzAb 17). *Hétköznapok és csodák* is grounded in Lukács’s theories about the novel (*The Theory of the Novel*, 1920), and in the concepts of the Hungarian religious historian Károly Kerényi.55 Through these concepts

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54 E sorok írója azt szeretné, ha sikerülne művét minden régi frázistól megszabadítani, és az egész irodalomtörténetet átteneni abba az új terminológiába, mely a nagy német szellemútudományos megújhdás nyomán minálunk is kifejlődött, de még nem nyert teljes polgárjogot.

55 Károly (Karl) Kerényi (1897-1973), classical scholar, historian of religion. György Lukács opposed Kerényi’s concepts, accusing him of promoting fascist views, and in turn forced Kerényi to leave Hungary. He emigrated to Switzerland in 1943, was guest professor at several universities and became a colleague of C.G. Jung. Antal Szerb was part of his circle in the 1930s. It is quite ironic that Szerb would combine the concepts of the two theorists who were each other’s foes.
Szerb argues that the individual whose existential quest, was earlier expressed through lyric narratives, Greek tragedies and the myths of Odysseus, now reappears in prose but is reduced to the narrative of a bourgeois adventure story (cf. Poszler, “Writer” 25). To this effect, I see *Hétkoznapok és csodák* as the theoretical or conceptual basis for Szerb’s 1937 novel, *Utas és holdvilág* [*Journey by Moonlight*]. Szerb’s interest in contemporary European authors also resulted in essays in *Nyugat* about Katherine Mansfield and Aldous Huxley, among others, around the time when Babits first introduced his *Az európai irodalom története* [*The History of European Literature*] in *Nyugat* in 1934, and later as a full book version in 1936. In his *Az európai irodalom története*, Babits takes Goethe’s concept of the unification and integration of national literatures into a world literature, and proposes that “diversity [will] emerge from unity” (in Poszler, “Writer” 24). Babits examines a select group of works, those he considered best represented the liberal humanist traditions universally separate from those that contained any nationalist or even racial elements (Poszler, SzA 357). Szerb respectfully welcomes Babits’s study, and writes him the following on August 31, 1935:

> Dear Mihály,  
> …I am certain that the method you apply in your book will have a productive effect on Hungarian literary studies…Thienemann has encouraged the writing of a few papers and a dissertation already, which offer a cross-section of specific years. And now your book will sanction the method of research.  
> The only thing that I regret from a didactic perspective is that you did not mark each chapter with a year…I have read through your book with an inborn sardonic eye, looking for inevitable mistakes, and I have looked up some suspicious things, but to my great surprise, I could not find any faults. I don’t understand how you did it. There is one thing, however, which I would like to draw your attention to, strictly between the two of us in light of the second edition of your book: on page 343 you write: he ([Joseph] Conrad) wrote the greatest novel of the post WWI era, *Lord Jim*. I have checked it out; *Lord Jim* was not created after the war but in the early 1900s.  
> Please forgive me for bothering you and keep me in your goodwill, yours  
> Antal Szerb. (“Három” in Wágner 206)56

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56 Kedves Mihály,  
…Biztos vagyok benne, hogy könyved módszere termékenyítően fog hatni a magyar irodalomtudományra…Thienemann már iratott egyéb szakdolgozatot és diszertációt, amelyek egy-egy év irodalmi keresztmetszetét adják. Most a te könyved által ez a kutatásmód megkapja a szankcióját.
Szerb’s tone might sound bold, but by this time he had gained the respect of Babits and many of the other Hungarian literati in order to be able to confidently make such statements. Babits’s study propelled Szerb’s later works which focused on the international canon.

Inspired thus by both Goethe’s theorem and Babits’s example, Szerb set out to develop his study of *A világirodalomb története* [The History of World Literature]. As in *Magyar irodalmotörténet*, *A világirodalomb története* does not so much reflect Szerb’s own views but rather those of the *Nyugat* generation he belonged to. Similar to Babits, he too sees world literature emerging as a synthesis of the greatest works. In his Introduction Szerb apologizes for his arrogance: “I write the whole of literary world history by myself” [“egyedül irom meg az egész világirodalom történetet”] (*Vit* 7). In Szerb’s study, “world literature” meant European and North American literature; he left out a large segment of literature from the rest of the world. He intended his study to be an “enjoyable popular lecture” that was mindful of the “crisis philosophies fashionable between the two world wars [that claimed]…living cultures could become dead civilizations” (Poszler, “Writer” 24). Szerb’s anxiety about the project is also an excuse to follow in Babits’s tracks, or rather to find a midway between Goethe and Babits in order to present the idea of world literature as being free of nationalistic and social determinism. In Szerb’s view:

…world literature is not so big after all. If we look at strictly those authors and works which count as the most significant literature of the world, then the seemingly endless
material suddenly shrinks. Real world literature, we might say, fits into a home library, its volumes can be placed along the walls of a larger home office. (Vit 7)\textsuperscript{57}

Szerb could afford such a conceited tone because he was a master of interweaving theory with the language of storytelling. As his contemporary, László Németh points out, Szerb possessed both a sense of deference and irony which enabled him to wink at the reader while explicating serious concepts (315). He developed an anecdotic, story-telling style with the intention of provoking conservative Hungarian scholars deeply mired in the tradition of positivism. In Németh’s view, A világirodalom is also Szerb’s noble pre-emptive revenge on the culture he loved and revered so much and which so brutally disowned him in the last instance (314). Instead of depicting separate literatures of specific nations as existing independently from each other side-by-side, which can then be unified into a universal phenomenon, Szerb provides an overview of literatures which have grown out of a dialectical process of interactions.

As did Babits, Szerb also locates world literature in the axis points of Ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, London, Paris, and Weimar. The concept of experience serves as his basis for the organization of the material (Poszler, SzA 367). While a sociological orientation remains in this work, Szerb replaces the concepts of class in favour of such categories as the “baroque,” “the Enlightenment,” “romanticism,” and “realism” wherein he situates portraits of writers and stories about their works. Poszler argues that although Szerb might have been affected by Heinrich Wölfflin’s theories of art history and the study of literature, his synthesis is far less scrupulous or even orthodox (SzA 373). Intellectual history is still his grounding principle, but this time, Szerb overtly draws on Oswald Spengler’s 1918 book, entitled Der Untergang des Abendlandess: “At large I have followed him, wherever it was necessary to provide the history of philosophical

\textsuperscript{57} ...a világirodalom nem is oly nagy. Ha szigoruan csak azokat az alkotókat és alkotásokat vesszük számításba, akik és amelyek igazán világirodalmi jelentősegűek, a végtekenek látszó anyag megdöbbentően összezsugorodik. Az igazi világirodalom, azt lehetne mondani, előre egy jól megválogatott magánkönyvtárban, kötetei elhelyezhetők egy nagyobb terjedelmű dolgozószoba falai mentén.
concepts. As I did with the sociology of literature, I also tried to make unforced use of the Spenglerian ‘morphology of culture’. I am also aware that the infinite wealth of phenomena would not fit into any one system” (*Vit* 10). Szerb shifts perspectives from section to section thereby creating tension almost to the degree of making it difficult for the reader to entirely grasp the clear contours of divergent literary movements. Indeed, mixing artistic styles with socio-philosophical concepts such as the Enlightenment, resulted in condemnation of Szerb because he neglected to draw out the philosophical aspects of literature, as in the works of Aristotle and Plato. As Poszler argues, Szerb’s study pertains to the organization and systemization of information around literary theories and genres [“irodalomelméleti…műfajelméleti”] (*SzA* 371).

The structure of Szerb’s study is built on the organization of the history of styles. Szerb begins with Homer and the great epic, and then continues with ancient Byzantine and Islamic literatures, which he calls “magical cultures” [“mágikus kulturkör”] (*Vit* 149). He depicts the medieval period as a unified era, in light of Johan Huizinga’s *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1919), which he had translated a couple years earlier (*Poszler*, *SzA* 372, 376). Huizinga argued that the divide between the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Baroque cannot be clearly drawn. To this effect, Szerb includes (German) Classicism in the same chapter with the Baroque and the Romantics, in a way merging the currents, and hence problematizing the traditional system of periodization. Contrasting Realism with Romanticism becomes Szerb’s synthesizing model, which broadens into his ultimate typologizing concept. Romanticism appears as the dominant current for Szerb, which also enables him to engage psychoanalytical concepts to further deepen his ideas about the struggle between mind and spirit, thinking and feeling, reason and instinct (*Poszler*, *SzA* 383). Of course, in such an endeavour we

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58 Nagyobbára öt követtem ahol szükségessé vált a jelenségek történetfilozófiai rendezése. De mint az irodalomszociológiát, a spengleri “kulturmorfologiat” is igyeksztem minden erőltetés nélkül alkalmazni. Nagyon is tisztában vagyok vele, hogy a jelenségek végahlen gazdagsága nem fér bele semmiféle rendszer keretei közé.
have to recognize Szerb’s own characteristics of in-betweenness, his own battle with reason and passion, which is the result of his social circumstances, his humanist education, his spirit of the collective in contrast with his inclination for immersing in the subconscious. The travail with psychoanalytical concepts did not offer salvation for him but at best some remission from a lifelong struggle. Throughout his life, Szerb longed to find unity between these forces, and perhaps in *A világirodalom története* he was best able to approximate such unification. Finally, Szerb provides a simple chronology of twentieth century literary currents including Russian, Polish and Scandinavian authors and their works. By defining a common foundation through the heritage of Greco-Roman Antiquity, Judeo-Christian Scriptures, and the advancement of Romance, English and German literary canons, Szerb strove to capture the most important works, he deemed of the best quality, in eleven chapters:

I would like to pass on a little something from that beauty, amazement and obsession, which I have felt when reading the various works…I wish that my book helps promote and strengthen the albeit small confraternity of today’s readers, when the Muses are mute, and they will huddle together in respect for the Muses. Because the world desperately needs a little goodness today—and whoever likes books cannot be a bad person. (Szerb, *Vit* 12)

I see Szerb’s work as an attempt to rescue a humanist spiritual dream during a period of the Goethean culture’s demise by bringing together and telling the story of world literature. His study is a discourse of contradiction and nostalgia which lends cadence to the subject’s existential angst framed by the ceaseless breaks of history; a brave venture which serves as a methodological shield in the middle of World War II.

*Journey by Moonlight: A Generation’s Nostalgic Search for the Self in Budapest and Italy*

Following a trip to Italy, which fascinated Szerb, he wrote the novella “A harmadik torony” [“The Third Tower”]. It appeared in the October 1936 issue of *Nyugat*. In this travelogue
Szerb conceptualizes his search for an identity while trying to make sense of the present during the rise of fascism and the Spanish Civil War. As he explains, he wanted to go to Spain,

But Spain, in the most horrible summer of its history, did not seem hospitable, and two of its radio stations were screaming concurrently for the destruction of the very things one would want to go to Spain for…Then suddenly I realized that I must go to Italy instead, while Italy is still in its place, and while I can still go to Italy. Who knows how much longer I can go to Italy; how much longer can I go, can we go anywhere at all [?]…

(Nyugat Electronic)\textsuperscript{59}

Szerb describes his travels in the various Italian towns, the dark alleys, and also his fear and loneliness while weaving a historical and cultural account of his trip. It is in San Marino that he finally finds solace for his ruptured soul and anxious premonition:

There, at the foot of the Third Tower I saw everything clearly at last:…I wanted to retain my loneliness from them, from Europe’s future, which they [the Italians] symbolized for me. I wanted to retain my happiness in loneliness from their herd-like happiness, since they are stronger. (Nyugat Electronic)\textsuperscript{60}

Szerb’s is a historical consciousness that foresees the ruin of old Europe. At last when he arrives in Trieste—a place that reminds him of Hungary—he is confident that he can return home knowing that he has found the Third Tower. The Third Tower is a sanctuary that serves as a metaphor for happiness in the midst of impending horror. Szerb links the topography of the city with the fate of the individual, the fleeting experience of existence in it, which he already senses here and further develops in \textit{Utas és holdvilág}.

This journey to Italy, which resulted in Szerb’s travelogue, is also the basis for his second novel, \textit{Utas és holdvilág}, as he explains in his January 4, 1937 letter to Dionis Pippidi:

I spent a few months in Italy last summer: Venice, Ravenna, Verona, Lago di Garda, Bologna, Ferrara, Rimini, Trieste. This was my third time there. For a while now Italy is

\textsuperscript{59} Spanyolországbra szerettem volna menni, de Spanyolország, történelmének ezen a legszörnyűbb nyarán, nem mutatkozott vendégszerető országnak, és két ellentmondó rádiója váltakozó buzgalommal süvitette a világba azoknak a dolgoknak a pusztulását, amelyekért az ember Spanyolországbá szeretne menni…. Akkor eszembe jutott, hogy okvetlenül Olaszországba kell mennem, amíg Olaszország még a helyén van, és amíg Olaszországbá mehetek. Ki tudja, meddig mehetek még Olaszországbá, meddig mehetek, mehetünk még egyáltalán valahová…

\textsuperscript{60} Ott, a Harmadik Torony alján megértettem mindent’ …A magányomat feltettem tőlük és az európai jövőtől, amit a számonra szimbolizáltak. A magányos boldogságomat feltettem az ő csordai boldogságuktól, mert ők az erősebbek.
my only love...And how about the women? I have a “popolana,” or rather I have found my “popolana” two and a half years ago. It seems we suit each other. Apropos, I went to San Marino, too...and have written an excellent essay about this adorable city. Now I am writing a novel about nostalgia. It will be something like Le Grand Meaulnes and Les Enfants terribles. The plot will take place in Italy, of course. Assissi, Gubbio. Have you been there before? (Szl 96)

But instead of a manifestly political tone, which he pursued in “A Harmadik Torony,” Szerb contrives a romantic and nostalgic story about Hungarians, set in the Italian landscape in Utas és holdvilág, published by Révai in 1937. He portrays his generation by reflecting on and usurping a particular Central European worldview in which both Budapest and Italy represent a type of civilization, where harmony and dissonance unite and collapse, and where the old does not decay but shimmers. Although the words in the title Utas és holdvilág mean ‘Traveler and Moonlight’, the Zimbabwean-born translator, Len Rix’s creative adaptation gives the English title of the book as Journey by Moonlight, first published by Pushkin Press in 2000. I draw on Rix’s translation of Journey by Moonlight to transmit the delicate and all-so-difficult linguistic turns and cultural metaphors contained in Szerb’s novel. Rix’s translation offers a great emulation of the original Hungarian text, although he structured the chapters into continuous numbers from I-XXV instead of Szerb’s technique of separate episode numbers for each new part, which makes the comparative parallel reading of the English and Hungarian texts somewhat convoluted. In my analysis I elaborate on Szerb’s perspectives about nostalgia that contextualize the Hungary of the Generation West. Although Utas és holdvilág was not published in Nyugat, it functions, as I shall demonstrate in the following, within the discourse of Nyugat providing us with a persuasive example of reciprocal influence between the author and the journal. The numerous Hungarian analyses of Utas és holdvilág employ a range of concepts from linguistic to psychoanalytic and socio-historic. I rely on many of these perspectives for my analysis and also draw on György

61 Szerb refers to Klára Bálint as his “popolana.”
62 This city is depicted in his essay, “A harmadik torony.”
Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel* which operates with a double-function: theoretical/methodological basis for the novel and for conceputalizing *nostalgia* as a hermeneutically legible concept.

The novel’s hero is Mihály, a Hungarian businessman in his mid-thirties, who is searching for his true identity while honeymooning with his beautiful wife Erzsi in Italy. Mihály seeks conformity in marriage while Erzsi desires to break free from it through Mihály. They are in Ravenna when he begins to tell Erzsi the story of his friendship with a special circle of friends of his youth in Budapest, Tamás and Éva Ulpious, János Szepetneki, and Ervin, a Jewish boy who converted to Catholicism. Mihály’s strong and relentlessly nostalgic memories urge him to set out alone and reunite with these beloved friends. In the small town of Terontola, Mihály misses the train which would have taken him and Erzsi to Rome. Now separated from Erzsi, but also liberated, Mihály continues his travels in Italy while Erzsi, feeling humiliated and betrayed, goes to Paris to meet up an old school friend, Sári. Mihály falls ill; his malady is nostalgia and he comes under the care of an English doctor, Richard Ellesley. Meanwhile, Erzsi’s ex-husband, the wealthy Zoltán Pataki, competes with Mihály, and for a brief interlude joins Szepetneki in an attempt to gain Erzsi back. After a fleeting affair with an American art student named Millicent, and with the help of Dr. Ellesley, Mihály not only meets Ervin, now a Franciscan monk in Umbria, he also reconnects with an old university friend, Rudolph Waldheim in Rome, a world famous religious historian with hedonistic habits. It is Waldheim who provides Mihály with theoretical explanations for the Etruscans’ celebration of death. At last, Mihály meets Éva but Ervin dies in Umbria. After learning that Tamás committed suicide many years earlier, Mihály too wants to kill himself, but his attempt fails when the sensuous young Italian waitress, Vannina, takes him to her nephew’s baptism. In poor health and financially destitute, Mihály returns to Budapest under his father’s guardianship. Despite his efforts, Mihály cannot break out
of his bourgeois milieu. His failure is caused by the complex entanglement of contradictions – between his inner emotions and the world around him.

Influenced by Alain Fournier, Jean Cocteau, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, and his Hungarian contemporaries, Sándor Mária and András Hevesi, Szerb’s *Utás és holdvilág* is one of the best Hungarian representations of twentieth century modern literature (Poszler, *SzA* 332). What differentiates Szerb’s novel from his contemporaries’ is how it “transcends them by looking back on adolescence, rather than going back to it, and by saying a painful farewell” (my italics, Poszler, “Writer” 27). In Poszler’s description, the novel is “a gently poetical, lyrico-epical masterpiece about the dilemma of someone not wanting to grow up but not being able to go back either” (27). Like Kosztolányi’s *Esti Kornél*, Szerb’s novel is also a loose autobiographical fiction and a story of travelling. Szerb journeys from and to himself through a topographical metaphor where the landscape of Italy and the cityscape of Budapest help him connect the past with the present (Poszler, *SzA* 327). The correspondence between Klára Szerb and Sándor Lénárd further illuminates the characters in *Utás és holdvilág*. In his letter to Klára, dated July 2, 1965 from Brazil, Lénárd accurately identifies some of their mutual friends:

Dear Donna Klári,

It is unnecessary for me to tell you that *Journey by Moonlight* is a wonderful book, but may I just say it has totally bedazzled me! Did your good husband write this book for me? I dare not believe that he did; he wrote it for the Kerényis too, and also for the Kerényi’s neighbour Elisabeth (you have heard of her?)—but he did write it for a very small circle of people who know their way around the Palazzo Falconieri, who have taken the local train to Perugia, who have picked strawberries by Keats’ grave, and seen the prison named Regina Coeli—and who all profess that “the practical career is a myth, a humbug invented to cheer themselves up by people who aren't capable of doing anything intellectual.”

Mihály’s adventure was no more distant from 1938 than the necklace trial was from Bastille Day. He returned to practical life, into reality. Into that tangible, not dreamlike reality where “Ervin’s family was exterminated, the "Ulpius" flat bombed, his factory and Pataki’s business ruined. Rome remained...but the dead did not pass gently from the tomb of Cestius down to Orcus, but to the accompaniment of machine-gun fire, and it was

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there that the German invasion broke in on September 12, 1943…(in Siklós 53-54; PLM Archive)

As Péter Siklós argues, Lénárd understands *Utas és holdvilág* as a “roman a clèf,” recognizing the figures who must have supplied inspiration for Szerb (54). With keen awareness Lénárd expresses the “common trauma of their generation” (in Siklós 54-55). In her reply to Lénárd on July 27, 1965, Klára Szerb confirms Lénárd’s suggestion about the real people behind the novel’s characters and Szerb’s affection for them and also for Budapest and Italy:

…Tóni wrote his novel primarily for himself: the “Ulpiuses” and Italy were relevant, fundamental experiences for him…Italy: there were years when he [Antal Szerb] travelled to Italy whenever he could spare five minutes. During the war he missed Italy terribly, utterly. He dreamt of Italy every night, the landscape or the back-street alleys. And he wept as he dreamt, because he knew he was only dreaming. Whether he ever wrote about this to Károly and the others, I don’t know. Károly refused to talk to Tóni for over a year because of the novel. He took umbrage. He thought Tóni had made him look ridiculous in the figure of Waldheim. Though he knew very well that Waldheim was based on him, Altheim and our friend Béla Zolnai…Ervin was the Szedő boys, together. Three Jewish brothers and cousins, converted to Catholicism; one of them became quite a good poet, all three joined religious orders…And the one I knew went about his business wearing a star, a yellow star, and had a hard time of it with the others…(in Siklós 55; Archive PLM)

While Klára Szerb posits that Szerb wrote the novel for and about himself, Szerb’s contemporaries see it as a generational novel (Halász; Gy Rónay; Sőtér). *Utas és holdvilág* also has a cult status due to both its ethereal characters that are nourished simply by nostalgia, and by their implicit hetero- and homosexual associations, incest, necrophilia, suicide and revolt against the bourgeois lifestyle. Szerb resorts to nostalgia not as a leitmotif of repetitive decoration and illustration, but as a means to give cadence to an existential angst about repressed emotions. As a

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64 Károly is Károly Kerényi. His wife, Magda Kerényi, translated *Utas és holdvilág* into German at the same time as Lénárd was translating *The Queen’s Necklace*, both translations were commissioned by Hildegard Grosche.

65 Béla Zolnai (1890-1969) was a Hungarian literary historian, Szerb’s professor at the University of Budapest. Franz Altheim was Szerb’s classics professor in Graz. Szerb combined their figures, along with Kerényi’s, to create Waldheim (Siklós 55).

66 Mihály Szedő, Hungarian poet, translator, and Franciscan friar, who died in 1983. His brother, Lászlo Szedő, was a Carmelite friar and his religious name was Pater Severinus, the same as Ervin’s in the novel. Furthermore, Zoltán Pataki’s figure incorporates many features of Szerb’s classmate, Gusztáv Engel (Siklós 55).
student of *Geistesgeschichte*, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis, Szerb is eager to take the reader on a journey of investigating nostalgic emotions and the psyche suffering under the pressures of bourgeois realism. Structurally, it is a *Bildungsroman*, but Mihály’s reversion to a childlike state in the last instance destroys its form. To this effect the problem of narration can be illuminated for which I discuss how nostalgia serves as both the structuring element of the novel and the embodiment of the main protagonist, Mihály. Szerb links floating dream images with anxiety, irony, and satire, passivity with humour and hedonism, and classical lyric poetry with life-like vernacular, a technique which results in intertextuality, or rather in “insectional elements,” a point which I elaborate on as my analysis progresses. The Italian landscape through Umbria and Tuscany, and cities like Venice, Ravenna, Assisi, and lastly Rome provide the background to the characters’ psychological and emotional setting, while Budapest is kept in the foreground. Szerb organized the story into four distinct parts, giving titles to each that signal the forthcoming events: “Honeymoon,” “In Hiding,” “Rome,” and “At Hell’s Gate.” An epigraph appears under each title to suggest the theme of the section, and to further provide a lyrical frame for the novel, such as François Villon’s poem “Ballade des Contre-Verites,” in Part I, which denotes Mihály’s character as belonging “in a world that accepts and rejects [him]” (*JM* 7). Villon’s poem also serves as a projector for the theme of the novel where the concept of contradiction structures an underlying aspect of the mode of narration in relation to Mihály’s ontology.

“On the train everything seemed fine,” explains Szerb in the opening sentence of *Journey by Moonlight*: “The trouble began in Venice, with the back-alleys” (9). Although Mihály has travelled in England and France before, it was his first visit to Italy. He and his new bride Erzsi “had decided on the conventional Italian holiday for their start to married life” (9). Mihály seeks conformity because he is full of fear, fear of “strong sunlight, the scent of flowers, and extremely
beautiful women” (JM 9). Not unlike the then-popular Baedeker travel guide for bourgeois well-to-do Hungarians, Szerb vocalizes the compulsory sights of Italy which Mihály and Erzsi search out or sometimes pretend to. But it is after running into János Szepetneki at a café in Ravenna that the couple learns: Ervin is living in Assisi. Mihály realizes why he had to come to Italy: to evoke the past, “the happiest time of his life” (JM 29). But most specifically, Italy is important for Mihály because Tamás Ulpius liked it:

        For Tamás what was old was natural, and what was modern was strange and foreign. He constantly yearned for Italy, where everything was old and right for him. And well, here I am sitting here, and he never made it. (JM 25)

Tamás Ulpius was Mihály’s teenaged friend, a person under whose spell Mihály has been living his life, and now in Italy, he feels he can find Tamás’s ghost by telling Erzsi the story of his adolescence with the Ulpius siblings in Budapest: “I need a drink. Because I have to tell you who Tamás Ulpius was, and how he died.” (JM 19). The third-person narrative here becomes complicated by Mihály’s first-person reminiscing which creates a parallel structure of storylines allowing the protagonists to present the story from their point of view. That is, we also learn about Mihály’s past from the perspective of a contemporaneous narrative situation which delays or altogether negates his personal formation as a hero.

The original idea for Journey by Moonlight can be found in the novella, entitled “Hogyan halt meg Ulpius Tamás” [“How Tamás Ulpius Died”]. As Klára Szerb explains to Lénárd: “Among his manuscripts I found a notebook containing ‘The Death of Tamás Ulpius’. He must have been about 19 years old when he wrote it” (in Siklós 55; Archive PLM). In this unfinished story Szerb describes his friend at high school, Benno Térey,67 a fragile, tall, blonde boy with effeminate features and an everpresent streak of melancholia, in the character of Tamás Ulpius

67 Benno Térey was the son of Gábor Térey, curator of the Old Masters Gallery in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest.
(Nagy “Töredékek” 303; Poszler SzA 40). As Térey was a delinquent student, Szerb tutored him in several subjects (303). Szerb developed an intense homoerotic attraction for Térey (Nagy, “Töredékek” 301), describing his relationship in a diary entry dated March 28, 1918 as: “I couldn’t sleep at BT’s, because of sexual reasons, love or whatever…” (SzvI 38). Szerb and Térey only kept in touch until the early 1920s, but the figure of Térey remained important for Szerb throughout his life. Szerb kept a photograph of his friend in the notebook which contains the novella (Nagy 302). Térey emigrated to America in the mid-1920s, and it is likely, according to the literary curator, Csaba Nagy, that he committed suicide around 1936, news which could well have led Szerb to draw on Térey’s character for Tamás Ulpius again (305). Although, Szerb had made plans to write a novel based on the life of József Eötvös, entitled “A fiatal ország” [“The Young Country”], he could not carry on with it until he worked out his teenage memories, and in a way finish the initial story he had begun, although with many changes (Nagy 301).

As Mihály explains to Erzsi, he first met Tamás Ulpius during one of his walks in Buda:

When I was at High School, my favourite pastime was walking…I explored all the districts of Pest. I relished the special atmosphere of every quarter and every street...But best of all I loved the Castle Hill district of Buda…I often saw Tamás Ulpius on Castle Hill, because he lived up there. (JM 20)

There is a particular feel to the city of Budapest, and to each of its districts, that those who grow up there associate with people they know and the ways their lives are intertwined. As I have shown earlier, Szerb had already declared his enthusiasm for his birthtown in his “A Martian’s Guide to Budapest,” where he waxes nostalgically when describing the Tabán, the hills that led up to the Castle. In Journey by Moonlight, it is Mihály who strolls around the Tabán on his way to French or fencing lessons and during these walks he experiences the sensation of “whirlpools”

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68 TB-nál nem tudtam aludni, akkor azt hittem ez a nemi vontakozás miatt van, szerelem vagy mi…
at his feet threatening to pull him down into a bottomless void. Tamás Ulpius rescued him during one of these episodes:

And then the whirlpool actually reached me. The ground opened under my feet and I hung there in space…Then I became aware that Tamás Ulpius was standing beside me. “What is the matter?” he asked, and put his hand on my shoulder. In that instant the whirlpool vanished, and I would have collapsed with exhaustion if Tamás hadn’t caught me up…I don’t know how it was: within seconds he had become my best friend, the sort of friend you dream about, as an adolescent, with no less intensity, but more deeply and seriously than you do about your first love… (JM 22)

Mihály’s feeling of the vortex disappears exactly when he catches a glimpse of Tamás. The whirlpool, in the Lacanian sense, then is the mirror, which provides Mihály with self-recognition. Being with Tamás and his sister Éva gave Mihály access to a mysterious world he had until then only imagined. Contrary to his family’s home, at the Ulpius house his fears disappeared:

With them I found my real self. I remember why I always felt so ashamed of myself, so much an outsider, in my parents’ house. Because there, facts were supreme. At the Ulpius house, I was at home. I went there every day, and spent all my free time with them. The moment I came into the atmosphere of the Ulpius house my chronic sense of shame vanished, as did my nervous symptoms. (JM 28)

Seemingly unaware of Mihály’s homoerotic attractions for Tamás, Erzsi suspects that his adolescent emotions must have had to do with Éva:

“Tell me, were you in love with Éva Ulpius?”
“No, I don’t think so. If you really must know if I was in love with anyone, then it was more like Tamás.” (JM 31)

Similar to his novella “Hogyan halt meg Ulpius Tamás,” where Szerb presents a female character—Ferenc János’s sister who is in love with Tamás—as the mediator of his love for Tamás, so does he create Erzsi’s and Éva’s figures, as “dramaturgical additions and erotic tools,” explains Nagy, for Mihály’s love for Tamás (303). Indeed, the female characters in both works are presented more or less as sex objects orbiting around a libidinous male hero, Tamás. In Journey by Moonlight, Éva and Tamás also seem to be androgynous or even twins. Their names
in Aramaic refer to this doubly lived life, with Tamás meaning “twin” and Éva meaning “life” or “living.” Szerb’s homosexuality is rarely discussed in any of the Hungarian studies. However, when reading Journey by Moonlight it is not difficult to spot the special attention Szerb gives to the creation of the male characters’ relationships to each other and to their female counterparts, which speaks to homo- and also heterosexual affinities.

As Gábor Halász points out in his review of Szerb’s novel in the November 1937 issue of Nyugat, all the accumulated emotions, eroticism, mysticism, memory and nostalgia, and the visions of life and death of Szerb’s adolescence burst through on the pages of Utas és holdvilág. The novel, argues Halász, has a pulp-fiction-like [“pongyolaság”] artificiality, which Szerb employs in an attempt to materialize a lighter voice, or a seemingly childish tone. I have to agree with Halász that perhaps this childish tone is what saves Szerb’s novel from pathos and sentimentality. What comes to the forefront is the notion of nostalgia, a longing for his adolescence, as Mihály explains: “if some smell or effect of the light stirs up the memory of it, I still experience the same rapturous deceptive, elusive happiness” (JM 29). Following their accidental separation, Mihály continues his trip without Erzsi, convinced now that he wants to rediscover this happiness. Mihály’s existential quest through the Duce’s Italy does not go unnoticed. A young man in Mussolini’s fascist uniform recognizes Mihály from the picture of the newspaper which Erzsi has posted after their parting, and consequently wants to hand him over to the authorities: “‘You’re Hungarian’, the little man beamed up at him. ‘Si, si’, said Mihály, smiling. In that instant the fascista seized him by the arm, with a strength he would never have thought possible in such a small person” (JM 73). Mihály escapes before the police find him. While Szerb’s reference to the rise of fascism is short and somewhat inconsequential, it is a noteworthy aspect of the novel that demonstrates his heightened attentiveness to politics. It is not useful to speculate how much Szerb sensed his own tragic fate at the writing of this novel,
but the trauma of 1930’s Europe, and particularly Hungary, triggers in him the condition of nostalgia.

When Mihály arrives in Foligno he falls ill. His illness, as the kind English doctor Ellesley diagnoses, is nostalgia; a desire to return to the Ulpius House. Nostalgia is an elusive concept. In general, and certainly for Szerb’s novel, it can be understood as a longing for the past that is attached to childhood and youth. Szerb, along with Kaffka and Kosztolányi, engages childhood as a decisive period, because, as I have argued in Chapter One, it contains the mysterious and irrational experiences which adulthood reflects. In order to explore Mihály’s nostalgia, I first draw on the Russian literary scholar, Svetlana Boym who, in her book, *The Future of Nostalgia*, considers nostalgia “a historical emotion” (xvi) that refers to a “dislocation in space” and “the changing conception of time” (7). By tracing the etymological and historical genesis of nostalgia through a concept Johannes Hofer, a seventeenth century Swiss doctor developed, Boym links two Greek words, *nostos* meaning a return home, and *algia* expressing longing and suffering (3). Hofer’s notion, Boym explains, intended to diagnose a disease. Mihály is suffering from such a disease. Through Mihály’s nostalgia Szerb illuminates and responds to his generation’s experience of the loss of childhood, and with it the loss of the effervescent *fin-de-siècle* existence Budapest stood for with *Nyugat* as its leading light of literature and culture. Szerb has written this book about the Generation West and as György Rónay suggests, “his novel is grounded in the praxis of *Nyugat*” (325). Szerb signals this notion by referring to Endre Ady and Mihály Babits in the novel when describing his experiences with the Ulpius siblings.

I also want to connect the idea of nostalgia in Szerb’s novel with some of the concepts György Lukács developed in his *The Theory of the Novel*. Lukács defines nostalgia as “a mood of permanent despair over the state of the world” (“Preface” *TN* 12). This can be effectively compared to what István Sötér observed in his 1937 review of *Utás és holdvilág*, that is, that
Szerb’s novel epitomizes the desperate longing of his generation, a nostalgia for a Hungary that does not exist, and in turn, the place of classicism—Italy—fills the void of imagination and expresses his generation’s feeling of homelessness (193). Comparably, Lukács explains that nostalgia is a substance which derives from the “archetypal home: love, the family, the state” (33). With the rise of individualistic novels, this collective substance that safeguarded the “archetypal home” has been dismantled for the sake of the individual. In the modern novel, as Lukács argues, man has irretrievably lost his home and is forever trying to find his way back. While the ancient Greeks in their epics were able to express the “transcendental essence of their life,” modern humans are unable to do so, and thus “have invented the productivity of the spirit” (Lukács 33). This spirit is the mediator in the novel, argues Lukács, for the “expression of this transcendental homelessness” (41). Szerb articulates this metaphysical homelessness which is a hallmark of his generation. In Journey by Moonlight, Mihály wants to find a home for his soul. He is looking for his lost childhood home that combines both his own comfortable bourgeois family and the mysterious and unconventional Ulpius siblings’.

After his initial surge of nostalgia in Italy, when he sets out alone to see the famous Byzantine mosaics one morning, he is reminded of the book on the Ravenna mosaics he used to admire with Tamás and Éva:

Once in the Ulpius house he, together with Ervin, Tamás and Tamás’s sister Éva, poring over these mosaics in a large French book, had been seized by a restless and inexplicable dread...Within the Byzantine pictures there was something that stirred a sleeping horror in the depth of their souls...Then Éva fainted, the only time her nerves ever troubled her. (JM 14)

Szerb masterfully keeps this moment of fear and nostalgia at bay for the reader, playing with the opposite forces of sobriety and surprise in preparing Mihály for his nostalgic pilgrimage to the mosaics. He unleashes Mihály’s surge of nostalgia right at the instance of seeing the mosaics in Ravenna. The word ‘mosaic’ comes from the same word stem as ‘museum’, which is a place or a
house that holds works of art, and also of ‘muse’, the (female) figure who inspires artists to create their work (Schneider Adams 282). The mosaics at once represent and evoke for Mihály homesickness for the house and muse(s) of his adolescence. The Hungarian literary historian Franciska Skutta explains that “the ‘museum’ in which the Ulpiuses live forms the ideal setting for people who do not feel at home in their own time,” like Mihály “who comes from [a] respectable bourgeois family” and is “enchanted by this old house [because] it enables him to escape an everyday reality that intimidates or disgusts him” (65-66). The room that Tamás and Éva share reflects their “contempt for order and various norms (chaotic room, rejection of school and ‘honest’ work, indifference towards money and concomitant passion for theft); a desire for isolation and enclosure in an imaginary world externalized in theatre, and lastly, a fascination with morbidity and poison” (Skutta 64). Skutta suggests that Szerb purposefully creates a spatial complement “between place and characters” to express their complex relationships metaphorically, but also to structure the novel, through the “metonymy” of the word “house” (65 italics in original). The room in the Ulpius house then symbolizes the “rupture, or opposition, between inside and outside” (Skutta 66). Stepping into the room of the Ravenna mosaics has now enabled Mihály to “rediscover the liberating spirit of the only room in which he has really felt at home” (Skutta 68). As if he has just been waiting for the moment which has been suppressed for many years, he awaits the arrival of nostalgia with anticipation:

That profoundly submerged episode now re-surfaced in its entirety, as he stood there in the cathedral of San Vitale before the miraculous pale-green mosaic. His youth beat within him with such intensity that he suddenly grew faint and had to lean against a pillar. But it lasted only a second, and he was a serious man again. (JM 14)

The sensation of being in the body of his youth, although now an illusory shell containing his memories, also represents the *house or home* for Mihály. He longs to come home to rest in this projected, imagined and ghostly shell of his own body.
Longing as part of anticipation can be defined, according to Boym, by the “loss of the original object of desire, and by its spatial and temporal displacement” (38). Nostalgia then expresses defiance of progress. Boym also elaborates on the “the interrelationship between individual and collective remembrance” (41), and formulates two concepts: restorative and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia draws out the idea of nostos, or the home, which seems to have been lost or possibly never existed, and now has to be recovered. Its emphasis is on restoration, on the “total reconstruction of monuments of the past” (41). Customs and traditions are summoned in an effort to re-establish “social cohesion” and to offer “multiple imagined communities” that are often underpinned by nationalistic images (42). Mihály achieves restorative nostalgia by connecting his memories to the Ulpius family. On the other hand, reflective nostalgia inhabits the notion of algia. It focuses on the act of remembering instead of rebuilding. Reflective nostalgia, suggests Boym, “lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history” (41). It acknowledges finitude without trying to restore the past through a flexible “meditation on history and [the] passage of time” (49). The emphasis is not on the recovery of a collective history, but rather on the individual’s connection with cultural memory. It provides an individual with “multiple planes of consciousness” for linking the past and present (50). Individual recollections complement collective memories and together they constitute frameworks for everyday life that allow manifold narratives focused on loss and recovery. Frameworks of reflective nostalgia also contextualize what Freud conceptualized as “mourning and melancholia.” In Mihály’s case, we can supplement what Boym suggests with that of passivity and desire. In fact, Mihály’s is a nostalgia that is steeped in the desire of desire:

Cor magis tibi Sena pandit. Suddenly he was seized by a mortal yearning, the kind of yearning he had felt only as a young child. But this was both more specific and more urgent. He now yearned for that same childhood emotion, with such intensity that he had to shout his feelings aloud. (JM 96)
While hiding in Siena, which “was the most beautiful Italian city Mihály had even seen” (*JM* 95), his nostalgia continues to escalate causing him to realize that he can only live through the memories of his youth.

Lukács suggests that it is in the novelistic condition that “man became lonely and could find meaning and substance only in his own soul, whose home was nowhere” (103). This is another expression of “transcendental homelessness” (Lukács 41) in the “human order of social relations” (61). Memory, or rather the act of remembering and forgetting, according to Lukács, is the “affirmative experience of the life process”; one’s “living present has grown from the stream of his past life dammed up within his own memory” (127). Lukács sees nostalgia that feels itself and its desires to be the only true reality (70). It is a sensation that is conditioned by the “pseudo-lyricism of the novel,” where “disillusionment betrays itself…by the fact that subject and object are sharply separated in the experience of remembering” (127-28). In turn, what we find in Mihály’s experience, although it is alienated in the final moment, is what Lukács explains as the subject’s return home, to itself, just as the anticipation of this return and the desire for it lie at the root of the experience of hope (128). It is this return home that, in retrospect, completes everything that was begun, interrupted and allowed to fall by the wayside—completes it and turns it into rounded action. The lyrical character is transcendent in the atmosphere of experiencing this homecoming because it is related to the outside world, to the totality of life.

Comparably, in the development of the genre of the novel, Lukács believes in “looking back” in order to mediate a “subjective attitude and objective reality” (12). This looking back constitutes *nostalgia* for Lukács, a homesickness (29), and he argues that the “created reality of the novel” is an abstraction (70). The self in the modern novel, according to Lukács, is eternally homeless and thus, forever nostalgic. It longs for its home; the soul’s “selfhood is its home” (Lukács 87). To overcome this abstraction the characters of the novel develop nostalgia for a “utopian perfection”
Szerb solves this dilemma with the structure of his novel through Mihály’s first person narrative.

Mihály’s reminiscing about his adolescence with the Ulpius siblings, Szepetneki and Ervin in Buda, can also be seen as an insert, although a long one which penetrates the entire length of the novel. There are particular coordinate clauses in the novel’s structure, which the contemporary Hungarian literary scholar György Eisemann calls “insectional elements” [“betétszerű elemek”] (210). The insectional elements are partially composed from the fabula—the raw narrative events presented in chronological order in the syuzhet—which fill the story in such a way so as to scramble the linear spatio-temporality of the plot. The whole story and the insectional elements metaphorically complement each other, while the relationship of parts to the whole makes the novel seem fragmented (as in Kosztolányi’s Esti Kornél). The narrative of Journey by Moonlight therefore is not the linear-metonymical organization of events, but it is built through the relationship of intertextuality. To this effect, Mihály’s first person narrative about his childhood functions as an insectional element, however, it should not be understood as a sub clause but rather as the lead story within the plot. Furthermore, the various foreign language insections, e.g. Italian, French, German, Latin, (and English in the original Hungarian text), imbed a further narrative layer. Juxtaposed with the Hungarian, or with the translated English version, the inserted foreign words’ intertextual effect also encourages a geographical and cultural discourse, which Szerb employs in order to connect Budapest and Italy. The Italian language and landscape represent the fulfillment of desire for Mihály, in which rebirth through death would become realized for him:

…the Italian cities once again began to press their sweet, terrible claim that he should see every one of them and experience their secrets before it was too late. As at the start of his honeymoon, he again carried inside him the mystery Italy stood for, like a great delicate treasure he might at any moment let slip from his hands. (JM 93)
Italy and the Italian language operate as insectional elements which reflect Mihály’s nostalgic desires. The plenteous Italian words Szerb employs throughout the novel, such as *fiaschetterie, macchia, aranciata, bambino, signora, arrivederci* and many more, carry Mihály on his quest. Italian is the metalanguage of Mihály’s nostalgia. Through the Italian language, Mihály tries to find himself (as does Esti in chapter three in Kosztolányi’s novella), a person he thought he could be or at least the one who can retain the memories which once fuelled the image of Italy.

Lastly, I want to point to the lyrical insections; citations of poems by Villon, Goethe, Rilke, Byron, or from the Greek and Roman mythologies, such as the epitaph on Byron’s tomb or the golden shoot and Minerva via Goethe, which Eisemann constitutes as historiological and literary associations of the novel’s chief protagonist in an erotic context (211). Mihály’s romantic and poetic view of Italy reminds him of Shelley, Keats and Byron, along with Goethe, who found solace there, against the fright of the Faustian world. In a cemetery in Rome he recites Goethe’s lines: *“Die Pyramide vorbei, leise zum Orcus hinab”* when he stumbles upon Keats’s tomb (*JM* 140). Suddenly, his eyes become filled with tears: “So here lay Keats, the greatest poet since the world began” (*JM* 140). The insertion of the line provides Mihály with an emotional association to link together poets and himself. To further accentuate this point I draw on Stephen Guy-Bray’s *Loving in Verse* in which he proposes that poetic influence can be erotic (xii), and it demonstrates a homoerotic relationship between poets of the past and present. Already in Tuscany, Mihály revelled in the emotionally saturated scenery prompting him to recite Rilke’s poem, “The Archiac Torso of Apollo”: *“Denn da is keine Stelle/ Die dich nicht sieht. Du musst dein Leben andern”* (*JM* 96). The poem and the purple-golden skyline of the Tuscan landscape conjured up a longing in Mihaly for his youth and he suddenly understood that he must “change [his] life.” These poems are insectional elements as part of the novel’s intertextuality. By these poetic inserts I see Szerb presenting not only his adoration of a poet, but following Guy-Bray, a
“relation between a living author and a dead, one as a ‘profound kinship’ and...as ‘a peculiar intimacy’” (89). Guy-Bray emphasizes a “family romance,” after Freud, which conceptualizes authors as thinking of their predecessors as fathers (92). Rilke’s poem brought about an affinity in Mihály, an erotic association that Szerb achieves through the insertion of the lyric element. Insertion as part of intertextuality then can be understood as “a personal relationship: between an author and another author,” one which can also yield homoeroticism (Guy-Bray 97). Insection operates as a network of cultural sign systems in relation to other systems of signifying practices, which allows the interaction of divergent codes, voices and homosocial associations occurring within Szerb’s text, including affiliations between poet fathers and the protagonist of the novel. While structurally the insectional elements afford the main protagonist with an additional dimension of communication, in the last instance, however, they do not offer a solution for his ailment.

Mihály now knows that his “little adventure, his return to the vagabond years, was merely a transition, a step leading him downwards, and backwards, into the past, into his private history” (JM 96). But the thought of continuing his life, now as a failed businessman, and without finding the lost happiness he knew in his adolescence, drives Mihály to the idea of wanting to die. He wants to die like Tamás. The hero protagonist of the novella “Hogyan halt meg Ulpius Tamás,” suffers from an inner crisis between disavowing life and finding pleasure in death. In Journey by Moonlight Szerb continues exploring a Freudian linking of eroticism with the death drive. Suffering is integral to living, for Szerb, and it provides a further sexual experience that reaches its climax at the point of no return: at death. Struggling is the purpose of life, and defeat is the symbol of death, where defeat, giving in and submitting to suffering and subsequently to death also provide the most fulfilling erotic pleasures. The pleasure of defeat symbolizes the triumph of death over life, which, for the eighteen-year-old Szerb, meant the ultimate sexual freedom.
Death and dying are determining themes for the Ulpius siblings. Tamás has attempted to kill himself on several occasions:

“Tamás was dangling beside the little round window, about a metre off the floor. He had hanged himself. Éva shrieked, ‘He’s still alive, he’s still alive’, and pressed a knife into my hand… I jumped on the trunk, cut the cord, supported Tamás with my other hand and slowly lowered him down to Éva, who untied the noose from his neck… In due course I asked, rather guardedly, why he had done it. ‘I just wanted to see…’, he replied, with indifference’. ‘And what was it like? Asked Éva, wide-eyed with curiosity. ‘It was wonderful’. ‘Are you sorry I cut you down?’ I asked. Now I too felt a little guilty. ‘Not really. I’ve plenty of time. Some other time will do.’” (JM 40)

And on another occasion, during one of their walks in Buda, Tamás presents Mihály with thirty centigrams of morphine that he obtained with Éva’s help. They decide to take it together in a “blaze of happy emotion,” that was heightened by the fact that it was Éva who enabled their act (JM 42). Their attempt fails when János Szepetneki intervenes by calling the ambulance, and Mihály’s and Tamás’s stomachs are pumped in the hospital. Now in Rome, when Éva appears in his hotel room, after so many years, Mihály wants to learn how Tamás died so that he can die the same way:

“Éva, you killed Tamás.”
“No, Mihály, I swear I didn’t. It wasn’t me that killed him… you can’t see it like that. Tamás committed suicide. I told Ervin, and Ervin gave me absolution, as a priest.”
“Then tell me too.”
“Yes, I’ll tell you. Listen, I’ll tell you how Tamás died.”
“Tamás wrote a farewell note, in meaningless phrases, giving no reasons. Then he asked me to prepare the poison, and to give it to him…” (JM 206-8)

Tamás Ulpius killed himself in Hallstatt. Mihály’s mimetic desire to die like Tamás can be understood as an expression of rivalry, although tangential, that has grown around a love object. The love object is based on a double entity: Tamás and Éva, as mediators of each other, who for Mihály become one. René Girard’s theory on desire in the novel suggests that the mediator is enmeshed with a rival and is motivated by vanity (7). While the mediator desires the object, Girard explains, it is in the eyes of the subject, in this case Mihály, that his object becomes “infinitely desirable” (7). The mediator takes on the “role of model” and that of “obstacle,” and
thus we are always confronted with “two competing desires” (Girard 7). A physical or geographic gap along with a primal spiritual distance exists between the mediator and the desiring subject (9), which fosters the feeling of anticipation. This yields a triangular desire, whereby the “mediator’s prestige is imparted to the object of desire and confers upon it an illusory value” (Girard 17). This illusion, according to Girard, is “a living being whose conception demands a male and a female element” (17), hence, the binary between Tamás and Éva. But Mihály’s imitative desire, that is, to be like another, to be like Tamás, is based on a primordial metaphysical desire (cf. Girard 83). As Girard argues, the hero’s desire in the novel is variable, and it “depends on the degree of ‘metaphysical virtue’ possessed by the object, [and] this virtue, in turn, depends on the distance between object and mediator” (83). In Tamás’s death, his “metaphysical” role usurps a greater desire for Mihály, while his physical existence diminishes in importance.

As if all this desire included a hopeless search for a metalanguage, or what Eisemann calls a “mirror language” [“tükörnyelv”] by which its subject could decipher himself and his identity outside of language (219). Death is outside of language, a zone that Mihály has been longing to reach through Tamás. He recognizes this when Rudolph Waldheim, the now famous religious historian, whom he looks up in Rome, explains the ancient tradition of celebrating death. In Waldheim’s messy room, littered with slices of salami and manuscripts, Mihály spots curious little figurines:

“What are these?” Mihály asked in amazement.
“That’s death,” said Waldheim…Or rather dying…The male demons take the women, and the female demons the men. Those Etruscans were perfectly aware that dying is an erotic act… The fear of death and the desire for death were intimately juxtaposed in their minds, and the fear was often a form of desire, the desire a form of fear…The death-yearning was one of the strongest sources of myth.” (JM 155-57)
At Waldheim’s explication of the death-drive, Mihály, with a shiver, realizes that Tamás, in his youthful enthusiasm for the Etruscans and Celts, had already known about a desire he could experience only through dying. While religion and the civilizing process had succeeded in suppressing the human death instinct, explains Waldheim, “the counter-instinct breaks surface in times of decadence...[for which] the most current example today are the Hungarians of Transdanubia...” (JM 160). Mihály is not interested in suicide statistics and responds curtly that he knows “rather more about this whole business” (JM 160). He has made up his mind about his own suicide, because he knows that “there is no cure for nostalgia” (199): “Perhaps I should never have come to Italy. This country was created out of nostalgia...” (JM 199). Erzsi, who has come to look Mihály up in Rome, with a sober and bourgeois realism begs him to give up on his past, to snap out of his nostalgia: “Oh, Mihály, the world won’t tolerate a man giving himself up to nostalgia” (JM 199). But the speaking subject, as Eisemann, contends, cannot eschew his own language, or rather he becomes the shadow of his own language (291). In a reverie, exhausted from his journey, Mihály finds this shadow in the Borghese gardens of Rome:

The mood of the landscape was ominous and heavy with mortality. Mortality hung over the tiny figure, the traveler, who, leaning on his stick, made his way across the landscape under a brilliant moon. He knew that the traveler had been journeying through that increasingly abandoned landscape, between tumultuous trees and stylized ruins, terrified by tempests and wolves, for an immense period of time, and that he, no one else in all the world, would roam abroad on such a night, so utterly alone. (JM 204)

Until the very end, as this quote indicates, Szerb holds out the possibility for Mihály to experience a death like Tamás. The moonlit landscape acts as a resourceful force by which Mihály, the traveler, can relate his lonely existence. Mihály’s dream takes place between Ervin’s death and Éva’s visit to Rome. It, too, functions as an insert, that is, an insectional element in a semantically strategic location whereby Szerb reveals the link between the book’s title and motivation for the narrative. The text this way can be read as a product of an unconscious
discourse. Mihály’s experiences can be seen as those of the relations between life and death driven by desire and nostalgia, but which ought to be exorcised.

On the final page this exorcism takes place. Szerb denies Mihály his desire of dying; his fate is to conform: “There was no escaping…He would have to remain with the living” (JM 236). The novel captures the psychic suffering of the subject under the pressures of bourgeois realism and hence, points to the limits within capitalism of imagining alternative futures. However, the suspense, which Szerb maintains throughout the plot, also enables the ending of the book with an affirmation of life: “while there is life there is always the chance that something might happen” (JM 236). I think that Szerb’s avowal of life offers Mihály another chance to experience nostalgia. And through nostalgia Szerb also hopes to find cures for the ails of his time.

Szerb’s novel not only encompassed his generation, the Generation West, but also has had a significant influence on many subsequent generations of Hungarian writers and readers; Utas és holdvilág has been “everybody’s secret favourite” in Hungary (Buzinkay 31). Indeed, Utas és holdvilág is considered a subculture classic because of its overt endorsement of revolting against established norms and embracing the decadence of nostalgia. Although it is rarely on the syllabus of literature courses, this coming-of-age novel continues to influence generations of Hungarian adolescents, contributing to their cognitive and emotional development. The novel’s legacy is also extended by one of the publishers in Budapest named, Ulpius Ház [Ulpius House].

In conclusion, I propose to consider Szerb’s novel, written in the praxis of Nyugat, as part of the foundation of Hungarian collective memory in the twentieth century. In turn, Nyugat can be seen as having formed a collective memory of and for Hungarians through the modern novel. In his seminal work, On Collective Memory, the German sociologist Maurice Halbwachs identifies a key link between individual and social memories, and argues that “individual memory is…a part
or an aspect of group memory, since each impression and each fact, even if it apparently
cconcerns a particular person exclusively, leaves a lasting memory only to the extent that one has
thought it over – to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the
social milieu” (53). What is particularly important in Halbwachs’s theory for my analysis is the
element of putting ourselves in the position of others so as to foster an empathetic commonality
and community. In Halbwachs’s words, “in this way, the framework of collective memory
confines and binds our most intimate remembrances to each other [yet] it is not necessary that
the group be familiar with them” (53). Although one does not have to be Hungarian to enjoy
Szerb’s novel, or any of the Nyugat authors’ works, one cannot ignore their lasting impact. The
Nyugat generation created an experience that has shaped its writers’ and readers’ worldview, and
when they meet others who also have come under its influence, they know that they share a
special connection. Szerb is their Hungarian godfather. Halbwachs’s concept on the collective
memory of the family helps illuminate my argument: “the members of a family will realize that
the thoughts of the others have developed ramifications that can be followed, and the design of
which can be understood, only on condition that one brings all these thoughts closer together and
somehow rejoins them” (54). The impact of Nyugat continues. In my concluding chapter I
consider the contemporary significance of the Nyugat review.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Centennial Celebrations of Nyugat

In the previous chapters I illuminated the similarities and differences in points of view that Nyugat both contained and fomented with regard to modernism by teasing out details about the course of the journal and the lives and works of Margit Kaffka, Dezső Kosztolányi and Antal Szerb. From its inception, the Nyugat journal became a cultural institution in Hungary and to this effect I want to elucidate how this reputation became canonized over the past more than sixty years. In this epilogue I wish to advance and extend my discussion about Nyugat and about Kaffka, Kosztolányi and Szerb by highlighting their legacy in Hungary up to the present day and by drawing attention to some of the aspects that have been pertinent to the journal since its dissolution. To this effect, I offer an overview of the centennial events that took place in Hungary in 2008 in order to comment on how a modernist literary journal has become an integral part of Hungary’s collective memory. The sheer amount of material I was able to find is overwhelming and therefore I provide a selective summary supported by ideas about memory, commemoration and museum theory.

In the summer of 2008, I set out in search of Nyugat’s legacy in Hungary. My field study included archival research of the journal and of the lives and works of Kaffka, Kosztolányi and Szerb, and also observations and analyses of the 100-year anniversary celebrations of Nyugat. I was curious about how the past was to be re-constructed for the centennial interpretation of the journal, how the collective memory of Hungarian society would mobilize a knowledge of literature to make it relevant to both scholarly works and to everyday lives. The Nyugat was memorialized through a variety of documents (print and virtual) which, to paraphrase Foucault, can be seen as an instance of history transforming documents into monuments of memory. Throughout this ordered and catalogued historicization of Nyugat a form of cultural and social
memory was assembled and deployed. In preparation for the Nyugat centennial events several books, memoirs, and biographies written by Nyugat authors were republished and new studies about the Nyugat-generation appeared. Besides these documents, Nyugat was celebrated through an array of events on television and radio, at concerts, plays, conferences, museum exhibits, and on the Internet. Above all, two main institutions paid homage to the journal’s heritage: the exhibitions and commemorative on-line databases organized and created by the Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (OSZK) [National Széchényi Library (NSL)] \(^1\) and the Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum (PIM) [Petőfi Literary Museum (PLM)] in Budapest.

During my research trip in Hungary I spent numerous hours at the National Széchényi Library in search of material related to Nyugat. The collection of the NSL contains the bound copies of all the original issues of Nyugat on the seventh floor where three main adjoining reading rooms, a catalogue room and circulation desks await visitors. Once inside the Library accessing the Nyugat copies was therefore not a very difficult task. They are organized by year on the open shelves in the News Media Reading Room [Hirlap Olvasóterem] among the many other old, bound and new, current unbound journals of literature, culture, sociology, philosophy, film, theatre and more. The copies are on permanent display and can be read in the Library only after reserving a reading table at the Circulation Desk. I considered it imperative to try to study

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\(^1\) Count Ferenc Széchényi (1754-1820) was one of the most prominent and patriotic Hungarian aristocrats; he donated his own books, which he collected through his studies and travels across Europe, to establish Hungary’s first national library. He founded the National Library on November 25, 1802, which now bares his name. His donation comprised 11,884 pages of printed material, 15,000 books, and 1,152 manuscripts. Later Széchényi added 6,000 lithographic prints and another 9,206 books from his private library at his Nagycenk residence to the National Library’s growing collection. He also created the catalogue of the new Library. The Library’s original location was in Pest where it shared space with the Hungarian National Museum, which was founded shortly after the Library at Széchényi’s initiation. At this time the two institutions joined and operated as the national depository of written and printed material and historical artefacts of Hungary. They shared administration until 1949. In 1985 the Library was moved to its current home in Building “F” of the Buda Castle Palace. As per the 2006 data, the National Széchényi Library has 8 million units in its collection including over 2 million books, 300,000 periodicals (newspapers and journals), 1 million documents [manuscripts], 200,000 maps, 270,870 lithographic prints, 2.5 million printed posters and flyers, 16,000 audio recordings, and 220,000 microfilms occupying eight floors.
as many of the works of Nyugat authors in their original as I could. This was one of the reasons why I wanted to look at the Nyugat copies in person.

Reading the original Nyugat copies also helped me complement the virtual database that I had been using, the Nyugat folyóirat (1908-1941) – elektronikus változat: Nyugat Elektronikus Adatbázis [Nyugat Electronic Database] at http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/nyugat.htm created by the National Széchényi Library. This site contains the electronic version of almost all the articles which appeared in Nyugat. Throughout my discussion of the works by Kaffka, Kosztolányi, Szerb and others in Nyugat, I rely primarily on this website. NSL also produced its own Nyugat commemoration homepage, Nyugat 1908-2008, 1908-1941 100 éves a Nyugat - Ünnepi Honlap, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár [Nyugat 1908-2008, 1908-1941 The 100-Year-Old Nyugat - Celebratory Homepage, National Széchényi Library] at http://nyugat.oszk.hu/. It is an impressive website with its first page displaying a digitally replicated image of the inaugural Nyugat issue, but not as a new copy, rather as it would look today with torn and yellowed pages, falling off their spine. This homepage contains related bibliographic and research material [“Szakirodalom”], a sample of Nyugat covers, photographs of the authors, and links to the Széchényi Library’s commemorative events and other official organizations that created anniversary websites, such as the Petőfi Literary Museum, a site that I shall discuss below, and Hungarian Television [Magyar Televízió]. The NSL Nyugat homepage also includes an audio archive with recordings of Babits and other Nyugat members. During the anniversary year the NSL’s Nyugat site regularly updated the list containing various cultural events not only in Budapest but across Hungary offering information about theatrical performances, poetry recital contests, music concerts, exhibits, the unveiling of sculptures or commemorative sites of Nyugat and its writers, and academic conferences among others. While neither NSL database is entirely complete, they provide a simple and clear compilation of the contents of Nyugat and related
materials accessible anytime and anywhere in the world. All that is required is patience to sift through the collection. My main concern is that the website is not available in any other languages besides Hungarian. Obviously, translating all the articles of *Nyugat* would be a massive undertaking. On the other hand, providing a translation of the main page and interactive titles would be helpful, offering a sense of the organization of the virtual *Nyugat* and its contents.

In addition, there is another digital database of *Nyugat*, released by the Hungarian Arcanum Adatbázis company in 2000. It includes the full version of each copy of *Nyugat* from 1908 to 1941 in CD-ROM format. Although I have relied on this source, the cumbersome interface along with the sheer amount of material and the method of their organization made it challenging to effectively navigate through the digital pages. This CD also contains an audio recording of Erzsébet Vezér’s 1970 interview with Miksa Fenyő, which I have made use of in Chapter Two.

As part of its legacy with the National Museum [Nemzeti Múzeum], the Széchényi Library also hosts exhibits. It has three permanent exhibits, “Part of the World Heritage” [“A Világörökség része”], “Introduction to the National Széchényi Library” [“Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár bemutatkozik”], and “The Library of the Nation – The Workshop of Service” [“A nemzet könyvtára – a szolgálat műhelye”], along with numerous temporary exhibits, such as the “Nyugat kiallítás” [“Nyugat exhibit”]. This “Nyugat exhibit” was held in a
small venue and included a compilation of material from the National Széchényi Library’s own collection. The display opened on November 26, 2007 to coincide with the launch of the Library’s Nyugat websites. Moreover, the Library celebrated the 200-year anniversary of its founding in conjunction with Nyugat’s birthday. The Library’s was one of the first of a series of events in a yearlong celebration of the 100-year anniversary of Nyugat. According to the information on this website, the opening gala included an award ceremony, a poetry recital contest, a book fare, wine tasting, and also a music concert entitled “Fejtörő felnőtteknek” [“Word Game for Adults”] with two of Hungary’s best known folk-pop groups, Kaláka and Mistrál (“Nyugat-Únnep”). While I was not able to attend any of these events, fortunately the small “Nyugat exhibit” was still on at the Library.

The objects on display in the NSL anniversary exhibit conveyed the common-sense experience of museums with a simple display of Nyugat copies, hand-written letters, manuscripts and photographs. The exhibit did not attempt to simulate the lives of the authors and to create the feeling of their accessibility; the objects were not animated by lighting effects or tactile experiences. I was the only person in the exhibition room at that time. It was a rather dark room with panelled walls and a sense of flatness emanated from the display cases. As I entered, Gábor Halász’s bronze relief plaque caught my attention. Below it, in the first display case, a letter of introduction for the visitors among pages of handwritten old letters and a bound book of Nyugat were carefully arranged. Photographs of Dezső Kosztolányi, Ernő Osvát, Endre Ady, and Margit Kaffka predominated most display cases of the exhibit. Some of Ady’s letters to the editors of Nyugat made me smile and Kosztolányi’s original handwritten poems gave me goose bumps. Kaffka’s serious wide-eyed picture stared at me with humility and pride from among her manuscripts. Osvát’s photo reflected an elegant yet humble and quizzical demeanor as if sensing his distressed future that ended in suicide. As the signs indicated, many of the exhibit’s material
came from the Osvát-folio that is in the Library’s archival collection. Looking at the photos and reading these old manuscripts and letters had a considerable affect on me, making me feel that I had gained somewhat of an entry into the authors’ private lives.

18. Bronze relief of Gábor Halász
19. Ernő Osvát: *Collected Works*; a photo of Osvát
20. Photo of Kosztolányi surrounded by his manuscripts
21. Photo of Kafka surrounded by her manuscripts

The NSL’s collection of *Nyugat* copies and the small centennial exhibit provided me with useful information about the journal and the Generation West which I have incorporated in my dissertation. It also helped me formulate my personal experiences of the journal as part of memory production. Maurice Halbwachs suggests that “there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory,” and by our thoughts finding their ways into these frameworks they participate in this memory which is “capable of the act of recollection” (38). Memory can be understood as a form of personal and collective self-consciousness. In Halbwachs’s words, “we preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated” (47). People who
have never seen or heard of one another, yet who regard themselves as having a common history, share national memory. Legacies of written texts are among the most important and influential features of the creation of collective memory. The construction of common history is recorded and preserved for posterity by such institutions as the NSL. In this way, I understand the NSL to fulfill the role of a national depository of Hungary’s textual and material memory, such as the material of Nyugat. Along the same lines, John R. Gillis argues that we do not think about identities and memories except through commemorative activities. Commemoration has become a national pastime for almost every society in the world: “never before has so much been recorded, collected; and never before has remembering been so compulsive” (Gillis 14). The anniversary celebration of Nyugat was a state-sanctioned nation-wide event which offered evidence that explained how Nyugat is part of the Hungarian nation’s memory. I see Hungary’s celebration of Nyugat as a circular or interrelated process which operates when, as Halbwachs argues, “the individual call[s] recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory,” in a way that allows society to exist “only if there is a sufficient unity of outlooks among the individuals and groups comprising it” (182). Society, however, does not just serve as a storage of memories, but it rearranges its recollections so as to reconcile them to new conditions while maintaining equilibrium. The centennial of Nyugat has brought about a similar reordering of Hungarian society’s memories in its anniversary celebrations.

The commemoration of Nyugat was both metaphoric (or socially constructed and ideological) and performative (displayed and enacted through multiple media). One of the best examples of this was the Nyugat centennial exhibit of the Petőfi Literary Museum (PLM) in Budapest. The PLM opened its exhibition to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of the

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2 The Petőfi Literary Museum is a central hub of high culture in Budapest, named after Sándor Petőfi (1823-1849), Hungary’s most revered Romantic poet. The Museum is considered a national institution of great importance for the preservation and exposition of Hungary’s national literature and literary scene. Its history dates back to 1909 when
foundation of Nyugat in March 2008. The aim of The Petőfi Literary Museum’s “The 100-Year-Old Nyugat” [“100 Éves a Nyugat”] exhibition was to memorialize the history of the journal with its many contributors through paintings, photographs, letters, manuscripts, personal memorabilia of the authors, audio recordings as well as archived films. Material for the exhibit was sourced both from the Museum’s own collection and from private donors. With regard to the selection of the material of the exhibition, it is important to consider how it also contains within itself the ideological and economic forces the museum staff and museum visitors are subject to. What is represented and what is not represented or hidden from view is dependent in the last instance on the curators of the exhibit. They organize collections historically or comparatively, and hence the objects are subordinated sequentially or by ordered equivalence so that they acquire their meaning in relation to the other objects according to the purposes of the representation. Drawing on British museum theorist Janet Marstine’s argument, I would suggest that the decisions museum staff make “reflect underlying value systems that are encoded in institutional narratives” for the “packaging of culture for our consumption” (50). Thus, “it is our [i.e. visitors’, scholars’] job to deconstruct this packaging so that we can become critical consumers” (Marstine 5). As the chief curator, Ágnes Kelevéz explained to me, the hope of the PLM with the material of the Nyugat exhibit was also to challenge visitors’ knowledge about the

Petőfi’s house became an exhibition and research centre. Eventually, the need for more space became obvious. In 1954 a new and independent national literary museum opened in the Károlyi Palace Building in downtown Budapest with the aim of preserving, processing and continuing to collect material related to Hungarian literature. According to the PLM’s website “the neoclassical building as we see it today was built by [the order] of Count György Károlyi (1802-1877). The widely travelled, open-minded aristocrat was a close friend of István Széchényi’s and Miklós Wesselényi’s, and supported their reform policy. He was a founder of the Hungarian Learned Society (Hungarian Academy of Science), took an active part in the work of Parliament as a delegate for Szatmár, and in 1848 became Lord Lieutenant of Szatmár County. He associated himself with every issue that served progress and the interest of the country. His moral and financial support assisted the establishment of the Chain Bridge, the National Theatre, the National Conservatory, the Kindergarten system, the Hungarian National Agrarian Association and the Arts Union of Pest.” Following the renovation and reconstruction of the Palace by the respected architect Henrich Koch (1781-1861) in 1832, the Károlyi palace became renowned for its splendid evening parties. Today the building of the Károlyi Palace serves as the Petőfi Literary Museum fulfilling three main functions: exhibitions, research and processing work including archives, and organizing literary and cultural events.

http://www.pim.hu/object.EDA790EA-DFC5-4869-B8E6-B6814B65E9DE.ivy. PLM website is available in Hungarian, German and English at http://www.pim.hu/.
journal, its members and culture. An important aside is that museums also rely on corporate donors and sponsorship which in turn influence exhibit production. The \textit{Nyugat} exhibit at PLM lasted over one year and the displays expanded across four rooms.\footnote{\textit{Nyugat} exhibit was held at the Petőfi Literary Museum [Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum] from March 28 to first December 31, 2008, then extended until April 16, 2009 at 16 Károlyi Mihály Street in Budapest.}

I have visited the Petőfi Literary Museum on several occasions before. I first looked at Petőfi’s relics as a child during school visits to the Museum. Later, I attended various temporary exhibitions and enjoyed the gardens of the Palace that feature a restaurant and lively literary events during warm summer evenings. And in July 2008, I spent several mornings in the PLM’s library and the manuscript archive exploring the Szerb-folio, and once again visited the Museum, first in the company of Professor Stephen Guy-Bray, then a couple more times on my own in order to gain familiarity with the material of the PLM’s \textit{Nyugat} exhibition. The first room contained József Rippl-Rónai’s\footnote{József Rippl-Rónai (1861-1927) was a Hungarian painter. After obtaining his degree in pharmacy in Budapest he travelled to Munich to study at the Academy. He also spent several years in Paris where he met members of Les Nabis. Influenced by Gyula Munkácsy, painters of Les Nabis and others, Rippl-Rónai’s first success arrived with his} pastel portraits of the ten main figures of \textit{Nyugat} including,
Móricz, Osvát, Babits, and a self-portrait of the painter. Against the vivid red and brightly lit walls these expressionist paintings portrayed the stern faces of the men of Generation West, depictions that had become well-known, in a sense typifying them into icons through reproductions appearing in various publications over the years, beginning with the ones on the pages of Nyugat itself. Large informative inscriptions on the walls next to the paintings gave a helpful introduction to the exhibit, the Nyugat in general and to Rippl-Ronai’s work. The descriptions were well organized and the texts provided a smart and simple summary, in Hungarian. Once again, no foreign language translations were available. This is problematic because non-Hungarian speaking visitors to the Museum could not gain a full understanding of the exhibit.

25. The “Welcome Note” and József Rippl-Rónai’s painting of Osvát

In the second room, visitors were welcomed by the round marble coffee tables and chairs, and a vintage coat stand holding an overcoat, top hat and walking stick that might have belonged to Babits. Adorning the walls were photographic reproductions of old cafés (New York and Centrál), and one depicting Frigyes Karinthy with another man reading a copy of the Nyugat. Drawings and caricatures of the Nyugat members by some of the best-known Hungarian artists of the early twentieth century hung on the walls, and covered one of the coffee table tops. I noticed that one of these coffee tables also had an inset computer. It seemed to demystify the painting entitled “My Grandmother” in 1894. His Hungarian recognition came with an exhibit in Budapest in 1899-1900. He began painting the portraits of Nyugat members in 1923.
sense of old in this room by inviting visitors to take a virtual tour of Nyugat on its screen. Already on the main floor, before going upstairs to the exhibition rooms, I noticed several computers with the PLM’s Nyugat exhibit displayed on the screens. The computer gave visitors a brief digital introduction to Nyugat. Upstairs in the exhibit proper this site could be revisited. An old desk and a wooden office chair, belonging to Zsigmond Móricz, were tucked in the corner. On the desk an old black rotary telephone and Móricz’s typewriter with a “Nyugat” letterhead paper rolled in it, a desk lamp and an oil lamp, along with manuscripts and copies of Nyugat presented the simulacrum of the original atmosphere. Against the back wall stood a magnificent bookcase with glass doors, and on its shelves were a sample of books from the Nyugat Publishing Company.

The British Cultural Studies scholar Michelle Henning’s idea of “illusionistic exhibits,” which present a simulacrum or imitation, can illuminate these personal experiences in the rooms. Articulating a lived experience is most often achieved by creating illusions, staging a simulated version of by-gone reality. Unlike movies and advertisements which interpellate their subjects by way of unconscious identification and (mis)recognition, museums encourage visitors to “enact the exhibition narrative” by capturing visitors’ shorter attention spans and recreating a virtual
world (Henning 100). Mimetic displays or simulacra aim both to entertain and educate visitors at once. To this effect, a contemporary museum exhibit is designed to incorporate sensationalistic displays that use computers and video clips among other audio-visual devices. But what we have to keep in mind is that the playfulness of an exhibit that creates the real is preconditioned by the loss of that real that it tries to recreate while inducing visitors to pose as voyeurs or trespassers. While we were circling the rooms of the exhibit, we encountered elderly attendants who began talking to us about aspects of the exhibit. Although they could not tell us with certainty whether an overcoat actually belonged to Babits, their winks invited us to use our imagination. Exhibit attendants in Hungary often serve as guides, approaching visitors and giving explanations about the exhibit or about certain pieces on display. Many of them are older retired people and are employed on a part-time basis. Their job descriptions may or may not include the role of educating the exhibit visitors. More often than not I have found this gesture helpful and even endearing. I believe that the objectivity and exactitude of facts and artifacts of museum exhibits ought to be complemented with the interpretation of lived and subjective experiences. On the other hand, as Henning points out, we have to be aware of how the exhibit display “puts objects to work and overcomes them, establishing new kinds of relationships to museum visitors” (37). Such devices and techniques as labelling, colouring, fabrics, frames, lighting, and access have carefully been designed to guide and elicit museum visitors’ sensations and interpretations.

Upon entering the third room a whole new perspective opened up in front of us. Larger-than-life sized photo replicas of a few Nyugat writers were carefully arranged in rectangular groupings across the room. These giant panels contained a brief summary of each of their lives and works, validated by their replicated signatures. Henning helps me articulate the meaning of these photos: “Photography doubles the museum effect, taking the already decontextualized museum objects and equalizing them through enlargement and reduction, the loss of relative
portion, and similarities in lighting, cropping and photographic composition” (134). Moving closer to the display cases we noticed Kosztolányi’s photo album, although to our regret it was closed. Nearby was Osvát’s cigarette case, a beautiful wooden box decorated with Greek ornamentation on its sides. Another case safeguarded Móricz’s signature pair of brown leather boots. A collage of photos, manuscripts, letters, telegraphs, bills, Nyugat covers, flyers, transit passes and notepapers ornamented the walls of the room. From this photo collage a pair of eyes stared at us; I was trying to guess in vain whose they were, next a hand then lips; the photographs of Nyugat writers were stylistically cut up into curious parts to draw attention to their detail. The image of dismantled body parts, as Lacan suggests in the concept of the “corps morcelé,” that is, the “fragmented body-image” (4), is the opposite of a narcissistic self-identity that strives for unity by way of the mirror image. The body parts refer to the subject’s primary experience. It was shocking to see how these body parts played off each other, as if we had caught them in their most primal state of development. A map was available upon entering this room of the exhibit and it assisted us in identifying the photographs, but not always the body parts. Flashcards placed under the pictures offered quotes by Ignotus, Kosztolányi and others of the Nyugat-generation. I grabbed one of each for keepsakes before exiting the room (and include them in Appendix C).
The word “Nyugat” in various sizes, fonts and colours appeared like a leitmotif among the photos across the wall. Nyugat’s founding letter sent to Budapest’s mayor was centered among the photographs on the main wall. The well-known image of Margit Kaffka’s profile was placed next to Ady and his young lover, Csinszka. A telegraph sent by Ady, Menyhért Lengyel, Anna Lesznai and Hatvany addresses Móricz inviting him to a dinner at Kaffka’s home (“29 Márvány Street at 7pm on May 23”—no year). I finally found an image of Szerb’s calm familiar face among a group photo of Babits, Osvát, Kosztolányi, and Móricz and his wife. Then, I noticed a blown-up section of a postcard; it implied that Kosztolányi’s home address was “Korona Kávéház, Budapest, Andrássy út 12” [Café Korona, Budapest, 12 Andrássy Road]. I was drawn to an enlarged reproduction of Gábor Halász’s anxious figure in a tuxedo. His picture was not placed next to Szerb’s but near Aladár Schöpflin’s passport. Then I noticed a smiling photo of Kosztolányi at his desk with a massive collection of books behind him. Lastly, Illyés’s handwritten list of possible names for the “new Nyugat” was at the end of the last wall. The list of the titles also included two underlined words, “Magyar Liget” (or Lélek?) [“Hungarian Grove” or “Soul?”] and “Magyar Csillag” [“Hungarian Star”]. Drawing on Henning, I understand artefacts in arrangements such as these to take on meaning through “culturally determined acts of interpretation [which] enable us to distinguish the significant from the insignificant” (7). Museums not only comply with visitors’ new ways of looking but they also control them by producing certain modes of spectatorship and in turn engage with them by making them “docile spectators” rather than “passive gawkers or distracted drifters” (Henning 53). The purpose of the exhibit’s design is to engage, organize and control visitors’ viewpoints by guiding them through the arrangement of material in a designated and planned space.
In the last room the exhibit focused on the interrelations of the arts in Hungary and the role of Nyugat in the formulation of modernism. On the right, the first display case featured photographs, librettos, articles and pictures of actors and writers portraying the revitalized theatre world in Budapest and its connections with Nyugat. It was in Nyugat that the need to explore modernism on stage was argued for most ardently. Behind another glass display the pictures of musicologist-composers Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály looked out at us. They were part of the close-knit circle of Nyugat and their works (music sheets) were featured on its pages.

Photographs and paintings by Hungary’s young modernist artists of the time, István Csók, Gyula Derkovits, Lajos Gulácsy, József Egry and others hung on the walls. On the floor glass boxes were filled to their rims with books published by the Nyugat Publishing House. When we turned around we noticed the wall to the left of the entrance was inscribed with the names: Shakespeare, Goethe, Tolstoy, Baudelaire, and many more. In fact, it was a complete list of the international canon that Nyugat presented on its pages. Finally, we stopped at a screen displaying short archived films depicting some of the Nyugat members: a lively gathering of Móricz and his friends, a burlesque of Kosztolányi with his wife and teenage son, and finally Karinthy with his young son, Ferenc and his adopted son having a snowball fight on a cold winter day in Budapest.
I argue with regard to my experience at the exhibit, that museums turn things into objects of memory and commemoration in a way that the relationships between humans and objects are reconstructed with new meanings. The display vitrines encase the artifacts so as to single out each object and enhance its unique significance. The arrangement of objects in an exhibit represents and also embodies culture, nation and its history. Henning notes that objects in the museum display cases come to life while they also become commodified by the “arrangements, techniques and acts of attention” the museum musters in order to make them into “meaningful objects” (8). In doing so, the museum fetishizes its objects on display. Henning compares the glass museum display cases to those of store windows to emphasize how “glass is the perfect fetishistic casing, isolating displays from time itself, and dissociating them from the human social activities which made them meaningful and valuable in the first place” (148). Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism offers a curious analogy to museum objects on display. As Marx explains, the “mystical character of commodities does not originate…in their use-value,” but in the social relation of production between a person’s labour and the “product of that labour” (435-36). Artefacts of an exhibit carry such commodified use-value. Similarly, Marstine, in referring to museums as places of “sanctuary removed from the outside world,” argues that “museum collections are fetishized; the museum as shrine declares that its objects possess an aura that offers spiritual enlightenment” (9). It is through repeated and legitimized “acts of attention” that museum objects can “retain their value” (Henning 109). The glass display cases capture the visitors’ attention while fulfilling an “aestheticizing tendency in museum display” (Henning 148). Glass cases, spotlights, backgrounds, panels, walls and textiles all isolate and hence promote the singularity of the artefact, reinforcing its fetishistic sense. This sense of the fetishization of objects became more enhanced in the museum gift shop.
While modern metropolitan museums often corral visitors towards the museum gift shop after exiting the main exhibit rooms, at the PLM one actually has to look for it. Tucked away in the main floor hallway a small well-stocked gift shop sells goods related to the exhibit, including a number of books, folders, photo albums, and audio recordings published by the Petőfi Literary Museum. I found a copy of *Szerb Antal válogatott levelei* [Antal Szerb’s Selected Letters], and a replica of Kosztolányi’s original photo album which was encased upstairs. Other *Nyugat* souvenirs included T-shirts and tote bags with many of the *Nyugat* writers’ signatures, mugs with individual signatures, pens and pencils imprinted with the word “Nyugat,” the exhibit’s now-familiar posters, and also postcards that depict some of the childhood-pictures of the *Nyugat* writers, among them are Szerb’s and Kosztolányi’s. To make sense of these impressions I draw on Henning again who suggests that in the gift shop market and museum come together: “the shop legitimizes the museum by inserting its objects into the world of taste and fashion, giving them a new life in reproduction, and returning them to the world of commodity circulation” (36). That is, museums emerge and produce new kinds of relationships with artifacts of the exhibit and fetishized commodities that visitors can actually take away and add to their collectibles or wearables, almost as tokens or badges of their presence at and experience of the exhibit.

With this descriptive walk through the PLM *Nyugat* exhibition my objective has been to illustrate how the production and distribution of memory about *Nyugat* is also achieved through the effort of social groups. Institutions, such as the Petőfi Literary Museum and the National Széchényi Library, where the major commemorative events surrounding *Nyugat* took place, became part of the creation of collective memory and sites for acts of remembering. As such, these institutions corroborated memory with history. Following Henning, the museums provided the “technical means by which societies remember, devices for organizing the past for the purposes of the present,” and they perpetuated a certain “historical consciousness…which treat
material things as evidence or documents of past events” (129). Museums also shape people’s attention, and hence they bear the burden of ideology formation and roles of communication. I want to emphasize the collective function of memory creation whereby, as I have pointed out through Halbwachs’s ideas, the individual’s memory is dependent on others’, that is, on the group’s memory; hence, memory is a collective function. Individuals obtain, locate and maintain their memories through their membership in society, through its social agents of, for example familial, educational and class affiliations. According to Halbwachs, memories often lay latent in an unconscious state in the mind and they become conscious again only when recollected in the social life of the present. The 100-year commemoration of Nyugat produced such conscious recollection and recognition across Hungary during 2008.

With this argument in mind I also want to assert that memorial places only gain meaning by having people visit them: “it is only through being repeatedly viewed and experienced that they gain cultural significance” (Williams 5). Collective memory can then also be understood as a compilation of interdependent knowledge which relies on the actions of individuals within society that become ritualized over time through repetitions which often result in commemorative performances. To this end, I draw on the British sociologist Paul Connerton’s concepts to argue that rituals can be seen as exercising cognitive control over the official version of the political structure with symbolic representation. According to Connerton, societies remember the past, its images and knowledge through ritual practice and performance of the body. Through rites and celebrations the body gains a central role by such performances as “re-enactment” in which the body performs the “prototypical” and thus can be understood as the original in historical and mythological sense (Connerton 61). Consequently, “performative memory…is bodily” (71), and “bodily social memory” is constituted by “habitual memory [where] the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body” (72). To this effect, the 100-year Nyugat
celebrations can be understood as such performances and rituals. Besides the exhibits the many theatrical performances, poetry recitals, concerts, scholarly conferences, and festivals among others, all testified to the performative collective memory of Nyugat and the Generation West for today’s generation of writers, artists, and the public in Hungary.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Petőfi Literary Museum also launched a website to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of Nyugat. The Nyugat site was part of PLM’s homepage, and thus it could be accessed at www.pim.hu during the centennial. The PLM website contained the “100 Éves a Nyugat” link, which after the closing of the exhibit, was renamed as the “PIM Virtuális Nyugat-kiallitás” [PLM’s Virtual Nyugat-exhibit’]. I mention the PLM’s “100 Éves a Nyugat” main page for a couple reasons. First, it presented a link to the webpage of the “Nemzeti Sírkert” [“National Cemetery”], a curious but all the more relevant component of the commemoration events featuring a virtual tour of the Kerepesi Cemetery in Budapest where many of the nation’s writers, poets, artists and politicians are interred. The “Nemzeti Sírkert” web page offers a virtual walk-through of the “National Pantheon,” marked as a memorial site of Nyugat, to visit the graves of Ignotus, Ady, Radnóti, Kaffka, Kosztolányi and Szerb among others. There are altogether twenty-one Nyugat members buried close to each other at the Fiumei Street Kerepesi Cemetery. Besides virtual tours the page invites teachers to sign up for real tours of the cemetery for their literature and history classes. The cemetery tour then becomes an instructional method to help overcome the distance between the names of the Nyugat authors and the actual people who once lived and worked. I see the purpose of such pedagogical tools also in creating a sense of intimacy between strangers—the Nyugat authors and the reading public—between people whose lives have been lived in isolation. It facilitates a particular experience of linking the past with the present.
On the other hand, there was also a sense of the *ludic* in the PLM’s *Nyugat* commemoration. The PLM invited visitors to its website to register for the “Nyugat-játék” [“Nyugat game” or “Nyugat contest”], and to follow the route of the “Nyugat 100 busz” [“Nyugat 100 Bus”]. In the interactive “Nyugat game,” called “Szerkesszünk együtt egy Nyugatot!” [“Let’s Make a *Nyugat* Together!”], the public was invited to choose their favourite pieces published in *Nyugat*: fifteen poems, three short stories, one novel, and three articles. After registering, a participant could create her or his own customized version of this *Nyugat*. The objective of the game was not necessarily to create a proto-typical issue of the journal, but to compile an issue which would contain pieces that have the most meaning for readers today. At the end of the centennial year the contest organizers compiled a final version of *Nyugat* based on the contest results. In the category of poems, Dezső Kosztolányi’s “Hajnali részegség” [“Dawn Drunkenness”] received the most votes by the public. In the category of articles, Ignotus’s piece, entitled “A fekete zongora (Ady Endre verséről)” [“The Black Piano (About Endre Ady’s Poem)”] placed first with Antal Szerb’s “Budapesti kalauz Marslakók számára” [“A Martian’s Guide to Budapest”] following as the second most popular work. Kosztolányi’s *Édes Anna* [Anna Édes] took first place in the novel category, which is not surprising to me, since this novel is still widely taught in secondary schools. In the short story category Zsigmond Móricz’s “Hét krajcár” [“Seven Pennies”] won; it is a beloved tale about poverty, illness and triumph for most Hungarians. I was sad to see that none of Margit Kaffka’s pieces made it onto any of the lists; in fact, there were no woman authors represented. It is a curious outcome, which would be worth exploring at a later time.

The mobile counterpart of the PLM’s *Nyugat* exhibit was the “Nyugat 100 Bus.” This mobile exhibit was launched in June 2008 with the aim of touring across Hungary, thereby bringing a smaller version of the exhibit from the metropolis to the countryside. The PLM’s
Nyugat exhibit logo along with 300 photos decorated the outside of the bus. Inside, a miniaturized version of the PLM exhibit invited visitors aboard offering not only pictures and descriptions but also interactive audio-visual presentations with the material on display beside several computer stations linked to the PLM’s and the National Széchényi Library’s Nyugat web pages. I did not have a chance to get aboard the “Nyugat 100 Bus” but the website explains that the exhibit was free to the public. For five months the bus had a scheduled route reaching 82 locations in Hungary, connecting with various festival sites across the country, and hosting more than 40,000 visitors (PLM Virtual). An extensive photo gallery is accessible on this page which portrays the different locations of the “Nyugat 100 Bus” and images of the mobile-museum.

The Petőfi Literary Museum featured many more events related to the Nyugat centennial throughout 2008. These included the series called “Felolvasó színház” [“Reading Theatre”], which presented, for example, the works of Margit Kaffka and Anna Lesznai, entitled “Krizis: In memoriam Kaffka Margit és Lesznai Anna” [“Crisis: In memoriam Margit Kaffka and Anna Lesznai”], based on Kaffka’s Állomások [Stations] (1917) and Lesznai’s much later work, Kezdetben volt a Kert [In the Beginning was the Garden] (1966). Written by the young woman writer Katalin Thúróczy, the play encompassed the two authors’ life-long friendship and their experiences as women in the Nyugat-generation during the most creative and progressive years of Hungarian culture. Another series was “LégyOtt” [“BeThere”], which featured discussions with leading literary scholars about a specific author of Nyugat. The third “LégyOtt” evening presented the work of Antal Szerb and the sixth featured Dezső Kosztolányi with guests from
Hungary’s literary circles. In addition, three academic conferences were held at the PLM during 2008 with invited scholars and doctoral students of the ELTE⁵ and the PLM. Among the events were also special retrospectives, such as the “Móricz Matiné,” roundtable talks, live broadcasting of the inauguration of the special “Nyugat” issue in HolMi [WhereWhat] magazine, the PLM Nyugat exhibit opening, and the “Nyugat Maraton” which featured noted actors, writers and scholars reading from and talking about the Nyugat for the entire day of May 17, 2008. After a summer break these events resumed with an additional program titled “Múzeumok Őszi Fesztiválja-Nyugat Fesztivál” [“Autumn Festival of Museums and Nyugat Festival”]. One of the festival’s events was the “Nyugat-koncert” [“Nyugat Concert”] with music by Zoltán Kodály, Béla Bartók and their contemporaries on October 3, 2008. In addition I have to mention one more curious program of the Autumn Festival of Nyugat, which was a day of chess matches under the title “A Nyugat és a sakk” [“Nyugat and Chess”], where visitors were invited to play a game of chess with the Hungarian Sándor Orgován, an international chess master on October 11, 2008. I was not able to find out the significance of this event other than knowing that some of the Nyugat writers were avid chess players with games taking place in various cafés.

In conjunction with the PLM and the National Széchényi Library anniversary events, websites and exhibits, Hungarian Television (MTV)⁶ launched its “Nyugat Literary Year,” which premiered with a gala ceremony broadcast on January 22, 2008. The “Nyugat Literary Year” on Hungarian television stations included the series “Fogadj örökké” [“Adopt Me”], broadcast on the last Monday of every month during 2008. This program engaged the legacy of Nyugat with host Balázs Lévai and guests, and it presented accurate dramatizations of the lives of Nyugat

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⁵ ELTE stands for Eötvös Loránd Tudomány Egyetem [Eötvös Loránd University of Science]. ELTE, founded in 1635 in Nagyszombat (now in Slovakia), is the central university of Hungary, located in Buda(pest) since 1784. It was called Budapesti Egyetem or the University of Budapest until 1921 when it was named after Péter Pázmány (1570-1637), the Hungarian theologian. The University changed names once again in 1950 after Loránd Eötvös (1848-1919), Hungarian physicist, the son of Count József Eötvös.

⁶ The Hungarian Television (Magyar Televízió [MTV]) has two main publicly funded stations, M1 and M2. The Nyugat anniversary series were broadcast on these two channels.
writers. Similarly, the “Nyugat est” [“Nyugat Evening”] series focused on particular authors in each of its episodes. The “Nyugat-mesék” [“Nyugat-tales”] began in February of 2008, and highlighted lesser-known aspects of the Nyugat writers through clips, photomontages, and archival films. Another series took place every second week, featuring an interactive game, called “Nyugat 100 – A vetélkedő” [“Nyugat 100 – The Contest”], inviting contemporary figures of the Hungarian cultural and literary scene to test their knowledge of “everything Nyugat.”

Finally, Hungarian Television broadcast some of the events that took place at the Petőfi Literary Museum, such as the “LégyOtt” evening on Antal Szerb, entitled “Ki az a Szerb Antal?” [“Who is this Antal Szerb?”]. At the same time, the Hungarian Radio (MRT) also launched several programs and series for the Nyugat anniversary in 2008. On January 1, 2008 Radio Kossuth7 opened its anniversary year with a gala evening program called “Nyugatosok” [“Westerners”] (the official nickname of Nyugat-members). This program included a series of readings based on Antal Szerb’s epistles from his Selected Letters publication, edited by Csaba Nagy. The Hungarian Radio also developed a series entitled “Rádiószínház: Nyugatosok” [“Radio Theatre: Authors of the Nyugat”], which regularly aired selected works of Nyugat writers as read by well-known Hungarian actors.

In addition to all these events, new editions of the Nyugat writers’ books to new studies on Nyugat, and new audio recordings of the writers’ works, to manuscripts, posters, reprints of the review cover pages, and a postcard print series of the review’s figures, were all part of the substantial memorabilia supporting Hungary’s celebration of Nyugat. The nation’s major print media, the daily papers of Magyar Nemzet, Népszabadság and Népszava all had lead articles about Nyugat and the anniversary events that took place during 2008. Hungary’s main weekly literary and cultural paper Élet és Irodalom [Life and Literature] had numerous editorials about

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7 Hungary has four publicly funded radio stations including Radio Kossuth which features news, literary and cultural programs, classical, folk, and jazz music.
the centennial celebrations of *Nyugat* including two lead pieces. Cultural guru Miklós Tamás Gáspár’s article “Mi változott?” [“What has changed?”] looks to *Nyugat* as a means to differentiate Hungary from other East-Central European countries, including Austria, then and now, and suggests that the review’s “significance cannot be overestimated” (9). But today, as Tamás Gáspár argues, Hungarian culture has fallen back on the kind of nationalist rhetoric that the writers of *Nyugat* purposefully avoided in order to promote an alternative cultural existence and experience of life without prejudice: “We are much worse off now than one hundred years ago” [“E tekintetben sokkal rosszabul állunk, mint száz évvel ezelőtt”] (9). Tamás Gáspár considered *Nyugat* Hungary’s greatest heritage of the twentieth century. In a similarly critical article entitled “Nosztalgikus vizió” [“Nostalgic Vision”], György Poszler, however, cautions against seeing *Nyugat* as the quintessential motivator of a swift paradigmatic shift in Hungarian literature and culture. Rather, as Poszler argues, *Nyugat* ought to be understood as a metaphoric orientation towards the West, Hungary’s “nostalgia for the cultures of the West” as it realigns itself in modernity: “The People of the East look towards the West, they head to the West” [“Nosztalgia a nyugat kultúrája iránt. Kelet népe nyugatra néz, nyugatra tart.”] (17). What ought to be recognized about *Nyugat* today, Poszler points out, is the responsibility and commitment it established for Hungarian literature and readers with a particular kind of social sensibility. It brought the world and Hungary into synchronicity on its pages. This social commitment, Poszler explains, coupled with an “anxiety for the need of completeness,” or in other words, “a literary unity that can be recreated” is what we must value in *Nyugat* (17). Both writers underline the instrumental role of *Nyugat* in society and culture during its time, which in spirit and in praxis seems to have been lost, or which is unparalleled among other literary journals in contemporary Hungary as a result of stultifying party politics and rampant consumerism. While the legacy of
Nyugat today is well celebrated, it has been more difficult to live up to its literary and cultural commitment.

**Auxiliary Notes: Nyugat Then and Now**

As I have tried to demonstrate above, the list of events including exhibitions, news media, broadcast television and radio, theatre shows, and online databases which refer to the Nyugat centennial is vast. I encountered very few stumbling blocks or bureaucratic holdups in my effort to find information and record aspects of the centennial celebrations related to my research. While my summary of it is not complete, my aim has been to provide my readers with a fairly comprehensive overview of the material surrounding the Nyugat centennial in Hungary that I saw and experienced, as a way of accentuating the significance of Nyugat and the Generation West.

As if in a delayed catharsis, the 100-year anniversary of Nyugat seemed to infuse the entire nation of Hungary with a spirit of exuberance and remembering. With commemorations of the review and its authors, the nation appeared to pride itself on a cultural past and instigated a “remake” of itself in the image of Nyugat. With respect to Nyugat an interesting facet pertinent to the country’s process of transformation since 1989 can be noted: the notion of a rupture with history which contains processes by which the past is erased and remade. While many elements of the more than forty years of socialism have been erased in the official and institutional doctrine of present-day culture in Hungary, the nation often seems to be remaking itself in the image of the millennial past, or in the memory of such image. A continuation with the national past is both a symbolic and a materialized force in Hungary. Part of the process of remake includes many of the cultural aspects of the pre-communist past, for example, the rejuvenation of
old coffee houses along with the opening of new ones and the revitalization of the cultural atmosphere of the Dual Monarchy.

I suggested earlier, following Paul Connerton, that we can understand the *Nyugat* anniversary as performative: “If there is such a thing as social memory…we are likely to find it in commemorative ceremonies; but commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they are performative” (4-5). An approach to social memory as performative complements Halbwachs’s ideas about the social construction of the mental images of the past. As such, the social construction of a society’s memory is largely conditioned and controlled by power and economic structures. For example, the storage and organization of information, as turned into collective memory, often through technology, directly bears on the question of the control and ownership of this information. Agents of socialization, such as educational institutions have played a significant role in controlling and disseminating such knowledge and transmitting culture. Hungarian schools included *Nyugat* as an important subject of study. The copies of original school curricula that I was able to obtain from the Országos Pedagógiai Könyvtár és Múzeum [National Library and Museum of Pedagogy] in Budapest provide a fascinating wealth of material which transport the themes addressed by *Nyugat* dating from 1941 up to the present. They suggest an unwavering interest in and sense of importance of the journal and its writers. Hungarian school literature curricula⁸ (primary and secondary)⁹ have included studies of *Nyugat* since 1941 by focusing most often on many of its authors.¹⁰ But it was not

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⁸ The modern Hungarian school system was developed by Count József Eötvös in the Public Education Act of 1868 which made elementary education compulsory for all children aged six to fifteen. The Eötvös Act was the most advanced educational measure in Europe at the time – even in England compulsory education was not introduced until 1882.

⁹ As Károly Szabó of the Library and Museum of Pedagogy informed me in an e-mail dated October 6, 2008, between 1867 and 1945 there were approximately 17 different types of schools in Hungary from religious to secular, from prep to technical. Similarly, today, there are several kinds of primary and secondary educational institutions. Most of them have literature courses, and they inevitably contain topics on Hungarian literature, including the *Nyugat* journal.

¹⁰ E-mail received from Mr. Sándor Brassói’s of the Ministry of Education and Culture [Oktatási és Kulturális Minisztérium] on September 16, 2008: “A magyar nyelv és irodalom tanítása során a Nyugat folyóirat elsősorban
until after 1945, following the centralization of curricula, that schools began teaching Nyugat as a distinct unit. For example, the 1941 high school curriculum pairs Endre Ady with the beginning of the Nyugat around which the most prolific Hungarian writers gathered. The grade four curriculum from 1965 emphasizes the importance of teaching works by the poets of the “great Nyugat-generation.” Lastly, the 2004 curriculum for eighth graders urges students to draw a parallel with the first generation writers of Nyugat and fine arts studies accompanied by other subjects. Similarly, Hungarian university curricula has focused on Nyugat during the same period with the leadership of such eminent scholars as the late György Rónay and Erzsébet Vezér, and also György Poszler, Béla Pomogáts, Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, Ágnes Kelevéz and Zoltán Kenyeres among others. As Kenyeres explains, he has been conducting research on Nyugat with his students for many years: “I am trying to create the foundations of a structured methodology of Nyugat-research. There has never been such an influential literary review anywhere in Europe, and we still know so little about it” (in Szirák 157).

The Institute of Literature at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences [Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Irodalomtudományi Intézet] along with the Petőfi Literary Museum (as I indicated above) have also been conducting research on and archiving Nyugat material since the late 1950s. Across the country museums and libraries have

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11 E-mail received from Mr. Károly Szabó of the National Library and Museum of Pedagogy in Budapest on October 11, 2008: “A középiskolákban, líceumokban és gimnáziumokban 1941 illetve 1942-től tananyag Ady és a Nyugat. -Ady és a Nyugat egybefüggőtt. Majdnem minden egyes Adyval foglalkozó fejezet említést tesz a Nyugatról kisebb nagyobb mértékben. - A polgári iskolákban és az elemi iskolákban 1945-től kerül a tananyagba a Nyugat. A tantervek csak 1945 után térnek ki egyértelműen a Nyugatra. Az államosítás utáni tantervek kifejezetten érdekesek (erőteljes ideológiai megközelítés)”

12 “Megpróbálom lerakni a szervezett és módszeres Nyugat-kutatás alapjait. Az egész európai irodalomban nem volt ilyen hatású, ilyen jelentőségű irodalmi folyóirat. És mennyi mindent nem tudunk róla!”
dedicated permanent and temporary exhibits to the authors of the Generation West for the past half century.

Furthermore, I want to point out that in Hungary during the Kádárist-socialist period between 1959 and 1989 the publication of numerous books attested to the nation’s continued propagation, criticism and veneration of Nyugat, including analyses by György Lukács.\(^{13}\) Lukács was a member of Nyugat until his forced exile in 1918 and when he returned to Hungary in 1945 he wrote studies about his old colleagues with renewed interest. Studies, essays and biographies about the individual authors, including Endre Ady, Mihály Babits, Margit Kaffka, Dezső Kosztolányi, Antal Szerb and others, were also published prior to 1989.\(^{14}\) Commemorative events about Nyugat during the 1960s and 1970s were also held in Hungary; academic conferences and related publications marked the journal’s 70th and 80th anniversaries. Admittedly, since 1989 many more publications have become available in Hungarian about Nyugat and its contributors. As I have explained in Chapter One, after Nyugat ceased to exist several attempts were made to revive it. One of them was Magyar Csillag, a short lived publication that was able to recover some of Nyugat’s legacy. With the political thaw in the early 1960s, many new literary and cultural journals were launched. Some tried to adopt the name “Nyugat,” indicating the right to succeed the revered periodical, but eventually withdrew from the process out of respect. By the late 1990s, the title “Nyugat” became legally protected and inaccessible as a name for other journals. Despite the profusion of high-quality literary magazines and scholarly journals, contemporary young Hungarian writers still hunger for an outlet similar to their grandfathers’. In July 2007, a group of them initiated megint nyugat [once again nyugat], a colourful literary magazine. Their ars poetica declares that they do “not simply want to copy, continue or revive [Nyugat], since that would be impossible and insolent,” but

\(^{13}\) I include a selective list of books about Nyugat that appeared between 1959 and 1989 in Appendix B.

\(^{14}\) In my previous chapters I used several texts about Kaffka, Kosztolányi and Szerb published prior to 1989.
rather to counter the spread of mass culture and “carry the voice of contemporary literature” (Mártonyi 60). Their point is not to erect a monument to Nyugat but to bring it back to life so that contemporary writers can create their own tradition and spirit. Perhaps the lower case title also expresses a respectful bow to their giant predecessor: megint nyugat is not a continuation but a seemingly happy beginning for a new generation of young Hungarian writers. They started with a 15-30,000 print-run, giving most of the copies out for free across the country. Yet despite a successful first year of growing readership, the further financial resources could not be secured, and megint nyugat folded in the summer of 2008. Its timing could not have been more unfortunate, since 2008 was officially designated as the centennial of the foundation of Nyugat.

I embarked upon this project with the aim of exploring the Hungarian literary review, Nyugat and its authors, the Generation West. My research did not engage the entire canon of Nyugat, and its scope encompassed only the discussion of a few of its contributors with a focus on Margit Kaffka, Dezső Kosztolányi and Antal Szerb, and their works in the context of modernism. These three authors represented the three periods in the life of the journal and they each depicted their particular vision of Hungary, Hungarian identity (Hungarianness) and modernity in their novels: Színek és évek [Colours and Years], Esti Kornél [Le double], and Utas és holdvilág [Journey by Moonlight] respectively. They experienced a distinctively Hungarian sense of in-betweenness which was part of their generational existence, and they expressed it by writing about the nation, nostalgia, melancholy, suicide, and maudlin merrymaking [sirva vigadás], often through depictions of Hungarian landscapes, cityscapes, music, literature, and even cuisine. While these notions may have appeared as stereotypes, making the assessment of the qualitative differences they conceal an arduous task, I tried to show how and why they can be

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15 “Nem újra- vagy újjáéleszteni, folytatni vagy másolni kivánunk, az egyszerre lenne képtelenség és szemtelenség”… “Ahogy az igénytelen tömegkultúra sem magától terjedt el, úgy az igényes kortárs irodalom sem juthat el a szélesebb közönséghez, ha nem viszik. Mi visszük.”
seen as meaningful for an analysis of Nyugat and the Generation West. Under the aegis of Nyugat these authors were inspired by Hungarian and European modernism which they also furthered with their own styles and voices. Following the positive effects of the Dual Monarchy and Millennium celebrations, the epoch in which Nyugat operated, 1908-1941, is the most crisis-laden period in the history of modern Hungary. Nyugat existed in the historical context framed by two world wars, two revolutions, the loss of two-thirds of Hungary’s land and people, and ultimately hampered by the Great Depression. Against all odds, it was during such difficult times that Hungarian modernism flourished through the leadership of Nyugat which fought against the conservative elements of literature and culture represented by the folk and right-wing nationalist and political forces. Nyugat adopted the perspectives and practices of Western European modernism while fostering three generations of Hungarian artistic and intellectual talents. The divergent styles, ideas and the inner conflicts among the journal’s members never prevented them from standing in unison against external attackers. The secret of Nyugat’s success can be located in how it sustained itself as a relatively unified bastion of Hungarian literature and culture within such a turbulent historical context and was able to forge patterns of Hungarian modernism that still serve as guiding principles in literature and culture today.

From restlessness to familiarity, I have endeavoured to bring attention to Nyugat, making it more accessible in English while preserving a sense of its distinctiveness as contextualized in Hungarian literature and culture. It is tempting to end a story on a sense of loss; if for nothing else than for the possibility of a new beginning. This beginning may be kindled by new experiences for which, I hope, my dissertation offers an invitation to see Nyugat as a central part of modern Hungarian literary scholarship. The output of Nyugat, as I have emphasized, is on par with the best of what world literature had to offer in the twentieth century and deserves our attention in recognizing its unique and important contribution to European modernism.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

A selective list of Ph.D. dissertation and other publications about Nyugat in English:


Appendix B

A selective list of Hungarian publications about Nyugat between 1959 and 1989:

Dombi, P. Erzsébet. Őt érzek ezer muzikája: A színesztézia a Nyugat lirájában.
Appendix C

A sample of collectible cards with quotes by Nyugat members placed along the walls of the third room of the PLM’s Nyugat exhibit.

The artistic program of the Nyugat periodical: “to create Hungarian literature with European standards, to foster the voices—without regard to political beliefs—that express the most evocative artistic forms. In sum, to develop our aesthetic culture. Nyugat-Library book series advertisement, 1910

Nyugat did not stand for a definitive literary direction, rather it relied on the love of literature which we demanded of ourselves as writers. Dezső Kosztolányi, 1929

Nyugat never had a specific aesthetic or theoretical worldview, which would have limited its writers. Its singular chief belief was: to defend the writer’s freedom of speech against any attack. For someone to become a member of Nyugat depended on one thing only: talent. The Editors of Nyugat, 1937

The course of Nyugat and the significance of its role is now part of literary history. It won’t be forgotten that in and through Nyugat a unique and talented generation prospered. And it is thanks to Nyugat that these writers could exist in the midst of a hostile environment. Aladár Schöpflin, 1941

We writers and editors always considered the name Magyar Csillag to be temporary because we wanted to continue with a renewed commitment what Osvát, Ady, Móricz, and Babits created with Nyugat, and which the dying Babits beseeched us to carry on. Gyula Illyés, 1955

The chief and almost singular objective our movement is to give unconditional respect to all writers who convey respect to literature. Ignotus, 1913