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THE *NYUGAT* PERIODICAL

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ALEXANDER LIBRARY has acquired a complete set of one of the most important literary journals published in Hungary between 1908 and 1941, the *Nyugat* [West]. The journal was a faithful mirror of the modernization of Hungarian literature. But it was more than that; it reflected the struggle between social reformers and conservatives, especially during the eventful years immediately preceding World War I.

If there was a general tendency in Hungarian literature during the nineteenth century, it was that, up to the early 1880's, it served as a means of nationalistic propaganda. It reflected a romantic, populist orientation, glorifying the gentry and the "sober Hungarian peasant" at the expense of the national minorities of the country. This was a committed literature, playing an important role in the national awakening of the early nineteenth century as well as in the revolutionary events of the late 1840's, and even more so in the post-Ausgleich period.¹ After the 1880's, however, Hungarian writers were becoming followers of an increasingly rationalistic tendency in literature, partly as the result of increasing urbanization and partly because of the impact of Western, mostly French, literature. By the mid-1890's there appeared a widening gap between the followers of the old, nationalistic traditions in literature and an increasingly vocal

¹ See Georg Bárány, *Stephen Széchenyi and the Awakening Hungarian Nationalism* (Princeton, 1968); Jenő Pintér, *A magyar irodalom története* (Budapest, 1942), 2:467-476; Tibor Klaniczay, József Szauder and Miklós Szabolcsi, editors, *History of Hungarian Literature* (Budapest, 1964), 77-178.

minority of writers who were seeking new, modern ways to communicate with their readers. It was inevitable that the two camps would become involved in bitter controversy over literary values and their disputes were also to reflect the deep divisions in Hungarian society over questions of modernization and social reform.

The conservative writers were led by Jenő Rákosi. He was not only an outspoken opponent of the younger generation of writers, but also of the long overdue social and political reforms in Hungary. He was the editor-in-chief of the influential *Budapesti Szemle*, and his editorials were poisonously antagonistic to the aspirations of the young writers as well as to those of Hungary's minorities. Ferenc Herczeg, founder and editor of the journal *Új Idők* [New Times], as it was ironically called, was an important member of Rákosi's circle. He sponsored a gentry-oriented literature whose major contributors included Kálmán Mikszáth and Géza Gárdonyi. The latter was the author of several best-selling historical novels while Mikszáth wrote in the manner of the gentry of the countryside.

The older writers, with few exceptions, continuously criticized the works of their younger colleagues and their attacks were increasingly becoming political in content as the century came to its end. Their opponents were forced by these attacks to seek out each other's company and soon to establish their own literary circles. Two of these circles, one in the Transylvanian city of Nagyvárad and the other at Budapest University, became the kernels of a new literary movement that was destined to revitalize Hungarian literature.

The Nagyvárad circle found its natural leader in the poet Endre Ady. He was a most disturbing young man, openly and outspokenly contemptuous of the gentry-oriented literature and of Hungary's outdated social and political institutions. He was deeply convinced of his own divine mission as *the* poet of the young generation. For him the art of poetry was only one of the means in the struggle for a new, full life against all that seemed to be standing in the way of the fulfillment of the destiny of modern, urbanized society. His passion for the poor of the cities, his deep patriotism that was, at the same time, free of all traces of chauvinistic nationalism, his criticism of the Hungarian aristocracy's handling of the peasant and nationality questions, made him a genuine tribune of the people. He soon became a symbol of the impatient young men of the cities, deter-

I. ÉVFOLYAM

1908 JANUAR 1

1. SZÁM

NYUGAT

A "FIGYELŐ" UJ FOLYAMA

FŐSZERKESZTŐ: IGNOTUS

SZERKESZTŐK: FENYŐ MIKSA ÉS OSVAT ERNŐ

Ignotus: Kelet népe. — Elek Artur: Arturo Graf. — Jók Dániel: Hajnali madár-ék (novella). — Lengyel Géza: Tárlatok és kép-raktárak. — s. g. Endre: A magyar Pimodan. — Szini Gyula: A mese „alkonya“. — Révész Béla: A völgyben (novella). — Szász Zoltán: Sully Prudhomme. — Ady Endre, Kemény Simon, Ignotus: Versek. — Greiner Jenő: A modern banküzletről.

Figyelő: Szini Gyula: Teilibi (Fenyő Miksa); Szabolcsai Mihály: A magam ösvényén (Gellért Oszkár); Kosztolányi Dezső: Nagy fal között (Fröhlichné Kaffka Margit); Arany János egy éjszakai levele (Fenyő Miksa); Amatőrök. Téli kiállítás (Lengyel Géza); A Vigaszínhárról (Fenyő Miksa); „A dada“ (Ignotus) Éjszakai esztétizálás (Csáth Géza); Gondolatok (Gellért Oszkár). A címlapon reprodukált érem Beck O. Fülöp műve.

ELŐFIZETÉSI
ÁRA
EGY ÉVRE
30 KORONA
FÉL ÉVRE
10 KORONA



EGYES SZÁM
ÁRA
1 KORONA
MEGJELENIK
MINDEN HÓ
1-ÉN ÉS 15-ÉN

Kiadóhivatal: II. Tudor-utca 6.

mined to do away with the outdated institutions of literature as well as of society. He was converted to Marxian socialism and welcomed the emergence of radical and revolutionary movements in Hungary. Members of his circle included Mihály Babits, Margit Kaffka and others, all destined to play leading roles in the *Nyugat* as well as in modern Hungarian literary life.²

The young writers living in Budapest gathered in the literature classes of Professor László Négyessy at Budapest University. There was a circle dedicated to self-education and self-improvement. Their leader was Ernő Osvát.³ They read their poems and stories to one another under the watchful eyes of the professor who often disapproved of the innovative styles of the young writers but who, at the same time, encouraged them to smooth out the rough edges of their creative geniuses. What made this circle so important was that it was there where the first works of such authors as Gyula Juhász, Dezső Kosztolányi, Árpád Tóth and others were presented.⁴ These young people were determined to establish their own journal, mainly because they wanted to overcome the silence imposed on them by a conservative press that simply ignored their activities. But their first efforts were unsuccessful.⁵

Finally, Osvát and Ignótyus⁶ succeeded in establishing a journal

² Ady published his first works as a journalist. He was born of impoverished, Calvinist gentry parents, visited France where he became a follower of impressionism in literature, and died of syphilis in 1919. The literature dealing with his life is enormous; some of the most important biographies are: Jenő Dóczy and Gyula Földessy, *Ady-muzeum* (Budapest, 1925-1926), 2 vols.; Aladár Schöpflin, *Ady Endre* (Budapest, 1934); György Bölöny, *Az igazi Ady* (Budapest, 1947); Lajos Hatvany, *Ady* (Budapest, 1959), 2 vols.; Zsófia Dénes, *Élet helyett órák* (Budapest, 1966). His works include: *Új Versek* 1906; *Vér és arany* 1907; *Az Illés szekerén* 1908; *Szeretném ha szeretnének* 1909; *A halottak élén* 1918.

³ Osvát was also a journalist before he became editor of the *Nyugat*. He committed suicide in 1929, and he burnt all his papers relating to his editorial activities before his death. His earlier critical articles were, however, collected in *Osvát Ernő összegyűjtött írásai* (Budapest, 1964). See also: Piroška Reichard, "Osvát Ernő jegyzetei," *Nyugat*, 1933, 2:381-399; about his work as the editor of *Nyugat*, see: *Nyugat*, June, 1923; Dezső Kosztolányi, *Kortársak. Kosztolányi Dezső hátrahagyott művei* (Budapest, n.d.); László Németh, *Két nemzedék. Tanulmányok* (Budapest, 1970), 140; Aladár Komlós, *Gyulaiól a Marxista kritikáig* (Budapest, 1966), 135-136.

⁴ See Aladár Schöpflin, *A magyar irodalom története a XX. században* (Budapest, 1937), 104-105.

⁵ They tried to take over an established journal, *Magyar Génius*, that failed in a half a year; to establish a journal called *Figyelő* with similar results, and to lure subscribers without success.

⁶ Ignótyus, another journalist, was a colorful character. The *Nyugat* devoted its June,

which they called *Nyugat*. Editor-in-chief was Ignotus; editors were Miksa Fenyő, later also Ady and Lajos Hatvany.⁷ Their first contributors included Margit Kaffka, the first truly great woman writer of urban Hungary, the poet Anna Lesznay, later to become the wife of Oszkár Jászi, György Lukács who was already showing signs of his later fame as a Marxist thinker, and many others. They were to face several serious challenges—mostly political in nature—before they were able to establish themselves as great writers and thinkers. Most of the steps in this struggle had been recorded on the pages of their journal.

The contributors of *Nyugat* were a heterogeneous lot. They professed contradictory and even opposing religious, political and ideological convictions, and they disagreed upon their approaches to literature. Some of them were avant-garde, others retained a good dose of traditionalism in their works. There were Marxists, Christians, Jews, elementary school teachers, journalists, university students and even medical doctors among them. Despite their heterogeneity as a group, they did succeed in creating a new literary movement. The very title of their journal provided them with a program; they considered it to be their task to “catch up” with Western ideas of freedom for the individual, of social equality and of international brotherhood. They all regarded the “official” Hungarian literature sponsored by the Academy of Sciences and literary institutions such as the Kisfaludy Society as being out of touch with existing realities in the country. Some of them called for revolution in Hungarian intellectual life by transforming it to serve the needs of a developing urban middle class; others went further by advocating social revolution on behalf of the workers of Hungary. The editors declared their full support for the freedom of literature from out-

1924, issue to an evaluation of his work. See also Miklós Béldy and György Bodnár, *A magyar irodalom 1905-től napjainkig* (Budapest, 1967), 3:36-38; Klaniczay, et al. *History*, 191. Ignotus' works include: *Olvadás közben* 1906, *Kísérletek* 1910; *Színházi dolgok* 1910; *Feljegyzések* 1909.

⁷ See Miksa Fenyő, *Feljegyzések a Nyugat folyóiratról és környékéről* (Toronto, Canada, 1960). The journal was issued in twenty-four yearly issues between 1908 and 1941, except in 1919, when only 12 issues came out. The *Nyugat* usually operated with a deficit budget; this was made up, until 1912, by Baron Lajos Hatvany, rich scion of a Jewish-Hungarian industrialist family, and Ferenc Chorin, one of the richest capitalists of Hungary. See Ferenc Galambos, *Nyugat repertorium* (Budapest, 1959), and Ignotus, “A pártfoglaltak céhe,” *Nyugat*, 1910, 2:1001-1003.

side interference, but they also promoted the “right” of the authors to intervene in politics through their works. They also encouraged their contributors to set new standards for moral, ethical and social values.⁸

The editors and contributors of *Nyugat* were quite conscious of their role as the agents of a new literature in Hungary, although they were understandably unsure of the significance of their individual contributions. But if the social and political reform-programs of their liberal-radical counterparts, of the Jászis, the Mihály Károlyis and others, floundered upon the rock of conservative-nationalistic public opinion, the renovation of Hungarian literature did succeed. In this success the *Nyugat* played a decisive role.

* * *

At the turn of the century only “classical” Hungarian authors—and journals such as *Uj Idők*—were able to attract the attention of a sizeable reading public. Their contributions, in general, sang about the gentry and catered to the syrupy, gentle romanticism of their women. Naturally, when the *Nyugat* first appeared, the reading public that idolized the works of Jókai, Gárdonyi and Mikszáth, was baffled by it. Few of the conservative literary critics were alert enough—or had the courage—to notice the quality of voices coming from the journal. However, the openness by which the young authors treated such sensitive subjects as patriotism, public and private morals, soon aroused interest—and indignation—among the official guardians of Hungarian literature. Béla Tóth of *Pesti Hírlap* fame had already had an argument with Ady as early as 1906, when the poet’s first controversial volume entitled *Uj Versek* [New Poems] appeared. The critic was appalled by Ady’s unconventional poems and labelled him a decadent young man.⁹ This label stuck; the entire generation of *Nyugat* writers were to be called decadent by their opponents for decades, an ironic, pre-Orwellian twist of existing realities.

The attacks on the young generation were intensified when, in

⁸ They introduced a column entitled “Disputa” in which current political questions were openly discussed. Ignóty also wrote a column dealing with politics. See, for instance, “A politika mögöl,” *Nyugat*, 1911, 1:94-96; “Háboru,” *Ibid.*, 1914, 2:129-132, etc.

⁹ Schöpflin, *A magyar*, 128.

1908, the Nagyvárad circle brought out the first volume of a two-volume anthology, *A Holnap* [Tomorrow]. It contained poems by Ady, Babits, Kaffka and others.¹⁰ Now the hunt for the young writers began in earnest; Ady was accused of subverting the morals, language and values of Hungarian society. Above all, the contributors of *Nyugat* were accused of being unpatriotic because they dared to attack Hungarian social and political institutions in their works. Gyula Vargha, the secretary of the Kisfaludy Society, pledged his association's uncompromising struggle against the young writers;¹¹ Jenő Rákosi declared that the new poetry was not understandable for normal people. He suggested that the young poets were either crazy or consciously destructive, the followers of equally mad foreigners, especially the French.¹² Rákosi's personal friends included István Tisza, the archconservative prime minister of Hungary; he, too, stepped into the fight by writing several articles—one under a pseudonym—in which he denounced the young writers as enemies of the Hungarian nation.¹³

Rákosi and Tisza were, of course, right. The contributors and editors of *Nyugat* did reject their definition of what constituted the Hungarian nation. While Rákosi and his friends decided to support a chauvinistic-nationalistic political and social program and hoped to strengthen Hungary internally by setting up an intellectual censorship, the *Nyugat* generation spoke of the urban masses as the backbone of the nation, demanded intellectual freedom and reconciliation with the minorities as the way to modernization in Hungary.¹⁴

Perhaps the most poignant summary of the differences between the two sides was written in *Nyugat* by Dezső Szabó, a populist writer who eventually was to die of starvation in Russian-besieged Budapest in 1945 as he remarked:

¹⁰ *A Holnap* (Nagyvárad, 1908-1909), 2 vols. Babits was a teacher at Fogaras in Transylvania when he was discovered by Osvát. In 1930, in turn, he became editor-in-chief of *Nyugat*. Margit Kaffka was the first notable woman novelist in Hungary. See Árpád Tóth, "Kaffka Margit új regényeiről," *Nyugat*, 1917, 1:372; György Bodnár, "A publicista Kaffka Margit," *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* (Budapest), 1961:233. Her major works include: *Színék és évek* 1912; *Hangyaboly* 1917.

¹¹ See Lajos Kéky, editor, *A százéves Kisfaludy Társaság, 1836-1936* (Budapest, 1936), 211.

¹² "Q"—(Jenő Rákosi)—"A Holnap," *Budapesti Hírlap*, 1908, Dec. 20, 3.

¹³ István Tisza, "Szabadgondolkodás," *Magyar Figyelő* (Budapest), 1911, April, 1-4; "Rusticus"—István Tisza—"Levél a szerkesztőhöz," *Ibid.*, 1912, September, 7.

¹⁴ Lajos Hatvany, "A magyar irodalom a külföld előtt," *Nyugat*, 1910, 1:275.

Anyone possessing five-, ten- or I do not even know how many thousands of acres of land, and is going to those who are suffering of starvation, saying "Do not bother with the acquisition of material goods but go on starving in the interest of the homeland," is truly anti-national. He is anti-national because he is compromising the idea of the homeland.¹⁵

The arguments over the value of the new literature were becoming more and more entangled in fundamental disagreements about the organization of Hungarian social and political institutions. Even some of the conservative critics who were willing to examine the production of the *Nyugat* generation on the basis of its literary merits, came under fire. The case of János Horváth was typical. Horváth wrote a book in 1910, in which he attempted to evaluate Ady's poetry from a conservative point of view, but on its literary merits. First, he was warned by Tisza himself to leave the subject alone. When Horváth refused to abide by this warning, his subsequent writings were rejected by the conservative journals.¹⁶

Dávid Angyal, another supporter of Rákosi and Tisza, charged that the quality of works published in *Nyugat* was too shallow and superficial to be called literature.¹⁷ Others joined in the chorus of condemnation and the struggle continued on up to the First World War and even beyond. After the revolutions of 1918-1919 and the collapse of Hungarian society that followed, the *Nyugat* was accused of having prepared the way for these events. Again, the accusers were right; but they forgot that the writers of *Nyugat* began their labors as social and literary reformers, and that they were eventually driven by the conservatives into a corner from which the only way out was to appeal to revolution.

The *Nyugat* generation represented a paradox in Hungarian history. Its members were deeply conscious of the dangers inherent in social revolutions, yet they could not avoid becoming the intellectual

¹⁵ Dezső Szabó, "Válasz Nagyméltóságú Gróf Tisza István volt miniszterelnök nagybirtokos urnak," *Nyugat*, 1911, 1:809-812.

¹⁶ See János Horváth, *Ady és a legújabb magyar líra* (Budapest, 1910); on Horváth's blacklisting see Schöpflin, *A magyar*, 132.

¹⁷ Dávid Angyal, "Jelentés a Greguss-jutalomról," *Budapesti Szemle*, 1913, January, 117-153.

forebears of such a revolution in Hungary. The *Nyugat*, therefore, became more than just a literary journal; it became the focus of an intellectual movement, eventually changing the character of Hungarian intellectual life.

After the first heroic years of its existence, however, the *Nyugat* generation calmed down. Many of its original members were dead; Ady died in 1919, Osvát committed suicide in 1929. Some of the lustre and controversy that surrounded the journal have disappeared. Kosztolányi, Babits, Árpád Tóth and others who were so deeply involved in the first struggles of the *Nyugat* became the respected doyens of Hungarian literature. But the editors of the journal continued to seek out new talents and were responsible for the discovery of such great writers as Gyula Illyés and Attila József, who were to become the stars of Hungarian literature in the 1930's and 1950's, respectively. The subsequent numbers of *Nyugat* continued to record the advance and modernization of Hungarian literature.