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A HISTORY OF HUNGARIAN LITERATURE

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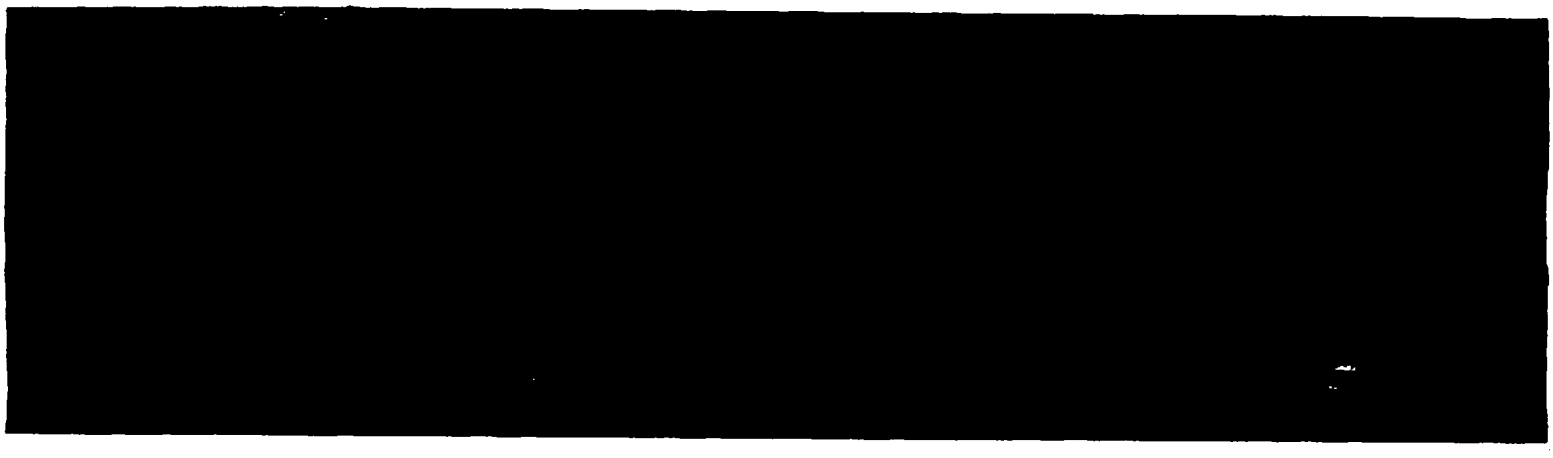

writing was based on his determination to assert relative as opposed to values, values which maintained the judgement. The most different cat- nd sets of values were combined and reconciled in his work, which caused ɔe frequently accused of frivolity. Papal infallibility and abortion, the : magnificence of Giotto and the misery of the peasants along the Danube, dity of army officers and the love-affairs of the Royal Family jostled one in the same article, paragraph or even the same sentence. Some of his an be regarded as regular short stories, while other writings combine the e editorial, the short story, personal confessions, or diary. High-flown bombast intermingled with city slang; French, English and German ıs with pithy folk-sayings. And all was marked by a pleasure in the very act ɔn, by the hedonistic happiness of a person thoroughly enjoying himself. impact was tremendous: the middle-class public devoured the literary criti- duced by Ignotus and his colleagues. It gave the *coup de grace* to con- populist taste. The writers working at *A Hét* cleared the way for the rapid ance of Secessionist influence, to usher the great period which followed, he way clear for the untrammelled development of the new prose realism z, Babits and Kosztolányi and the poetry of Ady, Babits and Kosztolányi.

Conclusions

-century, during which realism finally came into its own, could hardly be golden age. The truly outstanding writers of the first half of the period, ıd Jókai, belonged to the previous era of *népies* Romanticism. The second ıe century produced only one writer of comparable quality: Mikszáth, and importance and status is still a matter of argument. But as a stage of devel- he period is significant. During these years the time-lag between Hungarian ɔpean cultural developments disappeared. Not in every field of literature, : in the sphere of prose Hungary managed to keep pace with the rest of Nor is it without importance that it was during this period that Hungarian bsorbed the classic works of old Hungarian and foreign literature, and made organic part of its intellectual landscape. Literature, which had formerly concern of a small literate stratum of society, became a social necessity. And om this background that, around 1905, emerged the next great literary he second golden age of Hungarian literature. The period under review simply transitional; it was rather preparatory. It produced many of the : and means needed for the next great literary period; all that was left for gence of a new, great literary era were the social and cultural conditions ould breed new talents and open up new opportunities.

Years of the Nyugat (1908-1941)

46 A Country of Contradictions

Around the turn of the nineteenth century Hungary developed more and more into an organic part of contemporary Europe. A comparatively advanced industry was rapidly evolving; the country was crisscrossed by a dense network of railways, and there was a marked increase in the numbers of office workers. And at the same time the contradictions characteristic of a modern world power became increasingly apparent. Rather like the busy centres of colonial power, benefiting from technological advances on the one hand and the exploitation of their enormous colonies on the other, Hungary was made up of the capital city on the one hand—its population tripled over the past forty years to almost a million, and had taken the European character of Vienna as its model—and, on the other, the backwardness of the greater part of the country. The enormous eclectic buildings of the 1890s gave a distinctive character to the inner districts of the capital. The Parliament building compared in size and structure with those of the European powers, and the first underground on the Continent ran under Andrássy Avenue with its imposing Renaissance-style mansions. Mascagni and Puccini themselves conducted the first performances of their works in Hungary, Mihály Munkácsy won general acclaim for his paintings in Paris. And yet, down in the villages quacks were still selling their cures and the stewards of the great ecclesiastical estates were exercising their legal right to beat their servants. There were forged trials of Jews for the ritual murder of children, and the paintings of Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka, undoubtedly the greatest Hungarian painter of the time, were being sold off as late as 1920 as sacking material. While the chauvinist Jenő Rákosi (already mentioned as a dramatist), the chief propagandist of gentry interests, was dreaming of a Hungary with a population of thirty million, almost a million and a half landless peasants in those twenty years emigrated to America, and the phenomenon of the only child emerged: the process of the self-destruction of the peasants began. Modern machinery, it is true, was used in agriculture, but there were still places where the peasants harvested with sickles. While Leó Frankel, a member of the 1871 Paris Commune, was on a visit to his homeland organizing the workers' party, Prince Pallavicini was permitted to pull down the houses of peasants unable to pay their debts, with the aid of gendarmes. Great battles were

Parliament for more independence for Hungary within the Dual Monarchy, ame time that same Parliament put up a stubborn resistance to the demands ıy national minorities in the country. Despite the fact that in many places e stirrings of socialism in the countryside, upper classes, together with developed middle class, regarded socialist ideas as alien infiltrations. They to cling to their fanciful picture of the peasant, a picture born of a fusion ic and early nineteenth-century German ideas. The musical taste of the entry, now in a state of decline, was satisfied by tunes layed by Gipsies re little relation to either to Gipsy or Hungarian folk music. In the towns operettas coloured with Hungarian motifs, more modern and of a some- ıer standard but artistically of no importance, were popular. The Social ic Party had already gained a strong hold among the workers in large urban s, and the seemingly cloudless and cheerful world of pre-war days was by strikes demanding universal suffrage and the secret ballot as well as eases. In 1912 there were even outbreaks of fighting in the streets.
l conditions in Hungary around this time indeed fostered the new forces ere to bring the second proletarian state in world history into existence. lishment, however, continued its attempts to preserve a social system long moded by disguising its essentially conservative character under a mask nism.

A Cultural Renewal

ainst this background of contrasts and contradictions that what might be as the greatest generation of men in the cultural life of Hungary up to first emerged. Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály were among those who eir careers at this time. There were also the historian Gyula Szekfű, the Zoltán Gombocz and the literary historian János Horváth (1878–1961). Lukács devoted himself to the study of aesthetics, a subject long neglected ıry, and working in cognate disciplines were Lajos Fülep, the art historian, Balázs, an early pioneer in film aesthetics. Film producers such as Sándor ir Alexander Korda) and Mihály Kertész (Michael Curtis) were to find ne abroad, as were many scientists born about this time, such as the math- ı Lipót Fejér, the physicist Leó Szilárd, the psychologists Géza Róheim, erenczi and Géza Révész. There were whole groups of distinguished writers ts. The group known as the "Seekers" was formed in 1909. This group garde painters looked for something beyond both the accepted conservative and Impressionism. It included Róbert Berény, Béla Czóbel, Dezső Károly Kernstok, Ödön Márffy, Dezső Orbán, Bertalan Pór and Lajos From 1911 on these painters organized their exhibitions under the name

of "The Eight". These men, however, were not condemned to the role of lonely and neglected geniuses, as the remarkable scientists, the two Bolyais, father and son, embittered in their Transylvanian isolation, for they found favour in the eyes of a bourgeoisie which, although still relatively undeveloped, already exercised a substantial influence. The cultural needs of organized labour as it began to develop also provided a field for their activities, for which the previous generation had partly prepared the way.

These years also saw the appearance of a number of journals and reviews in Budapest, as in other large Western European cities, and some of them provided fairly extensive opportunities for the writers of the time to make their work known. But the establishment of a literary review which was to represent and express their beliefs and aspirations was left to the writers themselves. In 1908, after several unsuccessful attempts, they succeeded in setting up *Nyugat* (The West), a fortnightly review designed to meet the needs of an educated and intellectual readership, and providing a forum for works of a high and demanding standard, as opposed to the "family" weeklies with large circulations. In 1908 and 1909, with the financial help of Lajos Hatvany, the literary son of an industrial magnate and a historian, a a two-volume anthology *Holnap* (Tomorrow) was published in Nagyvárad (now Oradea, Rumania), the provincial city where the new bourgeois influence was probably strongest, which provided a second forum for the new literary revival.

The majority of the intellectuals most receptive to new ideas lived in Budapest. Yet in addition to the capital some of the towns in the provinces enjoyed an active cultural life. For the rest, only odd teachers and doctors living scattered in the country gave weak but increasingly felt support for these new impulses.

In the dozen or so theatres of the country, apart from the "plays about peasant life" and operettas, third-rate romantic and society plays filled the stage. Nonetheless, in the first few years of the twentieth century it was an expression of the cultural revival taking place that the works of Strindberg, Hauptmann, Ibsen, Gorki and Chekhov were already being played at the Vígszínház in Budapest as well as by some of the smaller companies. These companies included the short-lived Thalia Company, which had established contacts with workers, and the reactionary press promptly responded to these performances by attacking them. The first Hungarian performance of Gorki's *Lower Depths* was one of the earliest in the world, as was the publication of *The Mother*, an indication of the interest shown in Russian literature, reinforced by a certain similarity in conditions in the two countries at the time. Generally speaking it was around this period that the substantial publication of foreign works began.

Several groups had already attempted to win to themselves the radical intelligentsia which had emerged in the first twenty years of the century. The need to abolish the relative time lag between Hungary and the more developed European

s and catch up with them was strongly felt, accounted for by the fact that mination of the views of Darwin and Einstein, Bergson and Spencer, came y shortly before the acceptance of the teaching of Marx and Engels, and the Nietzsche and Freud.

e result of the interest in modern foreign literature, and especially poetry, the majority of the finest Hungarian poets turned their hand to translation. ly of work translated from foreign tongues into Hungarian, already substan- v proliferated, maintaining an extremely high standard; indeed, ever since e many of the best poets have made translation into Hungarian part of their

Directions in Art and Literature

ırtists discontented with the cultural establishment of the time sought guidance ırious periods and movements. Artists revolting against the painters who d the Munich historical school and who had produced prettily popular pic- still life turned to Constructivism (József Nemes Lampérth) or *art nouveau* Rippl-Rónai), the latter leaving its mark on the taste of the whole period eview. Other trends, *plein air,* Impressionism and early Expressionism, also d very shortly afterwards. There were also realist painters with a strong psy- al tendency (László Mednyánszky) and others more objectively inclined (János Balogh). Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka produced an original style of his own g and remaking the characteristics of various trends. The group who called ves "The Eight" went beyond Impressionism. They took Hungarian painting r step forward under the inspiration of Cézanne on the one hand, and the porary avant-garde, the Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism and Futurism.

e same thing was happening in literature. Symbolism, Impressionism, Natu- *art nouveau,* Expressionism, even if they did not all make their appearance neously, were all regarded as new and exciting at much the same time. Even lication of the principle of *l'art pour l'art* was considered an act of bravery at a hen nationalist and religious-ethical literary values were dominant, and when in sympathy with the working class were voicing their commitment to the esponsibility of art. It was mainly the daily paper of the Social Democratic *Népszava* (The Voice of the People), which provided a platform for such and it was paradoxical that both these attitudes on the social commitment of ld have seemed to be the new direction for a young beginner in their common ion to official, dogmatic views on the function of art and literature.The offices in the Academy, the literary organizations and the educational world lled by men who subscribed to the official view.

ugat embodied the many different aspirations of new movements not free of

contradictions of their own. The editors adopted a broad, liberal line in their direction of the review. The staff of *Nyugat* included Ernő Osvát, blessed with a great deal of literary sensitivity and a passionate love of the arts, the experienced critic and journalist Ignotus, as well as the literary patron and writer Miksa Fenyő. Lajos Hatvany, another enlightened patron and prominent figure in cultural life, who had an influence on the review, shared the views of its editors. The most important writers associated with *Nyugat,* however, Endre Ady and later Zsigmond Móricz, were concerned to make it a mouthpiece for the expression of radical social views.

The Revolutions

The First World War destroyed the superficial tranquillity of Hungarian life, bringing the hidden trends inherent in the entire imperialist system to the surface. But at the time it was the progressives who were defeated. This was partly due to the fact that at the beginning the Social Democratic Party, in their opposition to the Czar and imperialist Czarism, had supported the war. By the third or fourth year of the war, however, it was not only the best of the workers and intellectuals who opposed the war. The enormous sacrifices of lives, the increasing privation, the enormous gains of the war profiteers had a revolutionary effect in much wider circles. The revolution broke out in 1918.

The "aster" revolution, named after the asters worn by the revolutionary crowds in their caps, produced what was largely a bourgeois transformation. The desire for peace and opposition to the war were the main causes of the outbreak. But the process of radicalization which was affecting a substantial number of intellectuals also played a part, and the revolutionary leadership also opted for national independence. The Government vacillated, incapable of meeting the peasants' clamour for land and the demands of the workers fired by the example of the Russian revolution. Nor was it capable of defending the national frontiers or the revolution itself, when the Entente powers answered its peaceful approach with further territorial demands. As a result the Government resigned in March 1919 in favour of a Socialist Democrat and Communist coalition, the parties of the organized proletariat, and the Republic of Councils came into existence, only to be defeated after four months, outnumbered by foreign troops, Rumanian, Czech and French, who were aided by the counter-revolutionary movement then in the process of formation.

It was during this revolutionary period that the progressive Vörösmarty Academy was set up and began to function. Among its members were the best writers of the time. Mihály Babits, Lajos Fülep and Géza Révész were nominated to university chairs. György Lukács became a People's Commissar, and Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály and Zsigmond Móricz played an important part in the organization

ral life. Only a few really understood the full implication of the revolutionary uggle of the modern working class, but the events which had wrought such und change in the life of the people left a deep impression on the thought ·ceptions of many, even after the success and stabilization of the counter- on, even though this awareness was not without its own contradictions.

The Nyugat and Its Significance

·eriod following the victory of the counter-revolution in 1919, the contents ıracter of *Nyugat* underwent certain modifications, but did not change in ls. The double tendency in its editorial policy it had earlier manifested con- ınder the joint editorship of Mihály Babits and Zsigmond Móricz. Ignotus ced into a long exile from Hungary; Osvát died in 1929; the poet Oszkár continued rather longer with the editorial board. As the times changed, vriters with different ambitions were given opportunities to express them- ı the review, but it still remained primarily the platform of the "great" ion of intellectuals who had begun their careers together. During the first he review played an important role in publishing work untrammeled by the ıary political attitudes then current, and even the work of writers espousing views of society. After the twenties, however, it failed to maintain the position :rship it had so unhesitatingly enjoyed in the past *vis-à-vis* other reviews of standard which provided greater freedom for the expression and the artistic itical aspirations of the time. In the end it was only known to a tiny section ɔopulation; its subscribers numbered around a thousand. It ceased to appear , during the Second World War, when Babits died, when the reactionary nent of the day refused to renew its licence to print.

ring its life the review not only provided a platform for new writers but · critics as well. These were for the most part the writers and editors them- They all had one characteristic in common, a general, humanistic view of :ld in opposition to the reactionary and parochial views held by the great the conservative critics of the day. They respected the personal and subjec- tudes of the artist, adopting indeed such a stance themselves, and above all manded a high literary standard. But in the same period, especially between wars, other and completely different critical trends of no less weight emerged. in all, the *Nyugat* was more than just one important review among many. : is inseparably linked with those of the writers of the first, "great" generation, ısequently with a broadly-based literary movement. It was this movement, .eration which brought Hungarian literature into the European mainstream : its own valuable contribution.

47 Endre Ady (1877-1919)

One of the most influential, and perhaps one of the most complex characters in Hungarian poetry was born into this period of tension and internal contradictions at the turn of the century. He was Endre Ady.

His Life

Ady was born in a village in the border zone between Hungary and Transylvania. His family was Protestant, of the lesser nobility or gentry, reduced to poverty, in which opposition to Habsburg rule was traditional, as was a certain somewhat Calvinist mode of liberal thinking. Against the wishes of his father he became a journalist, first in Debrecen and later in Nagyvárad. His articles expressed a patriotism increasingly tempered by a passionate rejection of the excesses of nationalism, and an unqualified support for freedom of thought.

He very soon realized the importance of the strong mass movements of the world, and drew adequate conclusions. His first volumes of poetry show the traits of neither a novel nor an original poet, and do not display a radical outlook or an understanding for timely problems, so typical of his articles. The decisive change in his art, germs of which only can be found in his early poems, came about in the wake of a private experience. In 1903, he made the acquaintance, in Nagyvárad, of a cultured lady of the bourgeoisie, Adél Diósi who, till 1912, meant "the great love" for Ady. The woman, sung of in Ady's poems as Léda (anagram of Adél), and the great experience of Paris are inseparably bound up for Ady who sojourned in the French capital as a correspondent of the newspaper *Budapesti Napló* (Budapest Diary), and who came to see Paris as Life and Light, the breeding ground of modern art, of radical ideas and of revolutionary tradition. He became deeply rooted in Paris as in a second homeland; nevertheless, he often returned to his mother and to the village. The way there led him, from time to time, through Hungary's bleak fallow, through morass and desolation. The two experiences—Paris, where Ady observed not only throbbing, pulsating life but also the disease germs of modern capitalistic

by's father. The novel *Elza, the Pilot, or the Perfect Society* (Elza pilóta vagy a s társadalom), 1933, belongs to the genre of fantasy novels fashionable at the carries the reader into the world of an imaginary Second World War and im- totalitarian states. *The Sons of Death* (Halálfiai, 1927) comes closest to the refully constructed and mature of Babits's poems. This realistic novel of fortunes, of the transition between different generations and different ages, ed by excellently characterized Hungarian types. It also carries on the themes *Stork Caliph* and of *Virgil Timár's Son*. Babits's prose, however, is a little as though the poet, used to the discipline of verse, had failed to discover the nore recondite discipline of realistic prose. That which seems natural in anguage is likely to seem mannered in prose. Indeed, Babits's far-reaching dge and vast culture is seen to best advantage in his essays. In addition to ys and criticism dealing with contemporary Hungarian literature and with f the great historical figures of Hungarian literature, an extremely important : *The History of European Literature* (Az európai irodalom története, 1936). proclaimedly no systematic literary history, but rather a history of ideas in n of a chronologically arranged set of essays worked into an organic whole.

The Translations

played an important part in raising the standard of Hungarian literary trans- o its particularly high level. At first he tended to produce work *based* on the l, but he later concentrated increasingly on giving a faithful rendering of both m and the content of the original, in order to reproduce the total experience by the poem. One of the towering achievements of his prolific career as a or of both the ancient and modern classics (Sophocles, Shakespeare, etc.) is slation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, for which he received the San Remo Prize. bits's work and the part he played as a leader in the world of literature ed its main influence on the bourgeois tendencies of Hungarian poetry. How- ne generation which followed him and which tended to Classicism was also ced by his verse. Babits's place is among those twentieth-century poets desiring te order in the face of chaos and dissolution. His work is a link between the exponents of this trend and its more modern representatives. In recent times have increasingly come to recognize his kinship to T. S. Eliot, more on the ls of a common view of the world and their perceptions of human action n the basis of formal similarities.

50 Dezső Kosztolányi (1885–1936)

The other important figure, in addition to Babits, among the "bourgeois" group of *Nyugat* contributors, those furthest from the revolutionary–popular leanings of Ady and Móricz, was Dezső Kosztolányi. Although his writing does not possess the depths of Babits's best work, the rich variety of literary forms in which he achieved excellence assures his place amongst the greatest figures of his generation. He first came to the attention of the public as a poet, but his interestingly contradictory work played just as important a part in the development of prose.

His Life

His father was a secondary school teacher, and he himself took an arts course at the University of Budapest, where he met Babits and Gyula Juhász. Leaving his studies uncompleted he began a career as a journalist, which offered him both an easier life-style and greater chances of success. He settled in the capital and wrote for both left and right-wing papers. *Nyugat* published his poems from the start and also published his short stories regularly. In contrast with Babits's *homo moralis*, Kosztolányi took *homo aestheticus* as his model. He attacked the great poet of his age, Ady, after his death, but at a later point in time came out in support of the socialist poet Attila József. He was the first chairman of Hungarian PEN and he maintained a relationship with many foreign writers (as for instance, Thomas Mann and Gorki, whom he visited). He also translated the work of a great many foreign poets into Hungarian, aided by his knowledge of languages and his wide cultural attainments. He was a prolific author, and succeeded not only as a poet and imaginative writer but also as a strongly impressionistic critic and essayist, a man interested in the development of the Hungarian language and an all-round journalist.

His Poetry

:t Kosztolányi began, as did Babits, with the spectacular attempts to impress. irst volume he set out to express the philosophy of Nietzsche in verse; to the emotionalism popular at the turn of the century; to proclaim clamor- :e right to suicide; to encapsulate Hungarian heroes in the space of a sonnet; gure revolution in the symbol of black factory chimneys. He did all this arvellous ease, but the slight theatricality of a large number of the poems s a still half-adolescent attitude. In his early volumes, *Autumn Concert* (Őszi , 1911), *Mágia*, 1912, etc. a strongly decadent influence can be felt.

this period his most genuine and authentic poetry appears in the verse-cycle *or Child's Complaints* (A szegény kisgyermek panaszai, 1910). The child was to live in Kosztolányi to the end found its voice naturally in the recol- of years gone by. The wonder at the world springing from childhood ex- : and the attitude which finds a secret hidden behind all things, here connect ves spontaneously with Impressionism and Symbolism.

e rather more sober, unadorned titles of Kosztolányi's later work indicate :ess of change in his life and work, as in, for instance, *Bread and Wine* (Kenyér 1920), *Naked* (Meztelenül, 1929), *Accounting* (Számadás, 1935). The First War also played a part in stripping Kosztolányi's work of its poses and giving er depth. *How Close* (Milyen közeli), dealing with the spectacle of a young, deserter shot in the street, is saved from superficial morbidity by the con- :ss of the mass killing going on. The words of mourning for the dead youth filled with that compassion for the common man which is an essential element :tolányi's work.

ıe events of the time involved Kosztolányi more closely with the actualities vorld. Particularly important in this respect is the volume *Naked,* which bears f the influence of the *neue Sachlichkeit* (and to a lesser extent Expression- :osztolányi, however, does not deal with the lives of men in the mass, but trates on the small human tragedies which break in on everyday life. He il- tes these, without drama, in simple, restrained language. In *Anna* he concen- ıe lost dreams of an office-girl into five lines. In *Execution* (Kivégzés) he notes ly, accurately the signs of old age indicating the imminence of death. Or again, ients the figure of a conductor sitting down in the half-empty tram, who, ly, is now seen to be "human, like a passenger" (*The Conductor* — A kalauz). period of his life Kosztolányi often wrote in free verse, but the inner struc- the verse is under rigid control.

: other times he juggles with rhyme and rhythm with marvellous dexterity, asion in sheer delight, on occasion with ironic overtones. The music of poetry with "playful ease" through the "gymnastics of the mind". This music

"hums as it soothes... and quenches sorrow with a pleasing rhyme". There are times when he makes a song out of trifles, out of nothing at all. In *Flag* (Zászló) he celebrates the fact that flags transcend the wood and linen of their composition. In *The Song of Kornél Esti* (Esti Kornél éneke) he praises "saintly, empty foolishness" in a playful, whimsical manner. But in *Marcus Aurelius* he declares unrhymed that he only respects the man who "is in contact with the earth, who experiences with courage the stony terror of Medusa-reality, and affirms that 'there is this' and 'there is not this', 'this is truth', 'this is reality'." In Kosztolányi's novel *Nero* different viewpoints are expressed in the different poems which round off the sections of the novel. For Kosztolányi truth is terrible: it is the complete fragmentation of the world (*Despair* — Kétségbeesés) or even death (*Funeral Oration* — Halotti beszéd).

In *February Ode* (Februári óda), however, he is no longer content to record everyday manifestations, imminent death, or wifely devotion, in a "workmanlike, objective" fashion. He is concerned to create the eternal image of human action in an ordered verse form which always ends emphatically with a Sapphic line. This poem is no longer akin to the bourgeois decadence prevalent at the turn of the century, it is much closer to the characteristic voice of the twentieth-century socialist poets speaking for humanity, the voices of Eluard, Hikmet and Aragon.

The modern immediacy of the poems does not prevent them from achieving the heights of more traditionally conceived poetry. "I would tell you this—I hope it won't bore you," begins one poem, "Last night..." the poet opens another of his notable achievements (*Daybreak Drunkenness* — Hajnali részegség). The prosaic present, the childhood enhanced in remembrance, the objective vision free from illusion, the unfettered imagination, all merge in one great poem which is in essence a passionate affirmation of life.

Just as some of the themes of Kosztolányi's poetry recur again and again in the course of his poetic career with always deepening significance, so we find the full flower of his maturity in some of his late poems.

The Short Stories

There is a strong *art nouveau* influence in his early short stories, as in the work of many of the writers around 1900. There is also an atmosphere of unreality in them, a sense that, indeed, the visible world is illusory. In Kosztolányi's tales the influence of E. T. A. Hoffmann's Romanticism as well as overtones of Hofmannsthal, Maeterlinck and others can be felt. The stories are based on the bourgeois life of Kosztolányi's own time, and deal with the ruined and oppressed of that world. These early stories suggest the effervescence of the poetry of Babits and Kosztolányi when

in both decorative quality and their stylized language. There is a deeper
ş in most of the events and actions portrayed than appears on the surface.
atmosphere of the stories which is most appealing.
t, like the development of his poetry, there is a growing tendency toward
realism in Kosztolányi's prose. What remains of the fantastic helps to show
realism of the rest of his work by contrast. A mourning bridegroom, for
, is visited by his dead bride, resurrected for an hour, and the "great reunion"
nds in yawning boredom. In his last tales, the fantastic element is reduced
st nothing. Traces of it in the author's otherwise astringent style are only
ıle at dramatic or exciting moments, in the use of an "exaggerated" sentence
ıe. He possesses the power of capturing a whole hidden life in a gesture, or
actions that would appear to the casual observer to be insignificant in them-
an agonizing toothache intruding upon the marriage night, or the restless
s of a judge who is accidentally shut into his room for an hour. Kosztolányi's
ıries often deal with the lives of men as they turn to ashes, losing all import-
l meaning. His sense of compassion and his disillusioned irony merge in his
:d and disciplined style. An old man comes to look for his old file in an
office, and has finally to be bluntly told that he never wrote the short story
which he had woven the paltry legend of his past (*An Old File* — Egy
i tárca). A clerk is raised for a moment from insignificance by an appen-
r, and subsequently comes to cling more and more desperately to the
r of this event *(Appendicitis)*. His characterization of men and women is
:ent of Chekhov and Pirandello in its precision, intellectual flexibility, and
ly dispassionate ease of style. Sometimes it is not a situation, but an object,
ı Chinese jug, a clay angel, or a lost walking-stick, around which he builds
with effortless economy.
ıztolányi is a ruthlessly accurate observer of men's spirit, of their thoughts
ions, of their timid impulses and their suppressed hatreds. His whole con-
of the psyche was influenced by Freudian theory. But his psychological
often develops into an analysis of society, and the author often turns his
ı the inhuman relationship existing between the oppressors and the oppressed,
he hypocrisy of human relationships in general.

The Novels

n number of Kosztolányi's late short stories are set in distant times and
uch as ancient Rome, and centre on abstract philosophical or moral issues,
uestions of power and morality, wisdom and justice. His first novel, *Nero,*
-stained Poet (Nero, a véres költő, 1922) is of this type. The chief character is

the poet-emperor who compensates for his lack of talent by striking poses of genius and terrorizing the society around him. First among those who oppose him is Seneca who represents the dignity of intellect. Here we have the open debate, and more often, the intellectual tension that exists between two mutually incompatible views of the world which provides the life of the novel. The fundamental issues are poetry and politics, and morality and action. In an indirect manner the novel directs itself towards the danger of the irrationalism of the age and the release of the powers associated with that irrationalism. "Every truth is two-faceted and I saw both at once..., I held all truth in my possession, they could not have endured it... I protected the only life I had, the life which would never return, in an age in which it was not natural to be alive;" says the dying Seneca. The short novel *The Lark* (Pacsirta, 1924) is a more constricted but faultlessly written work. The central character is a girl who has never married and who has gradually become the tyrant of herparents through her incessant care and supervision. In the account of her parents who escape her overpowering solicitude for a few days, Kosztolányi succeeds in displaying the trivia of everyday life with compassionate irony. *Anna Édes* (Édes Anna) concentrates on the part played in life by unconscious passion and on the inhumanity latent in the social order. In this novel with its coldly ironic "scene-set", a peasant girl, after the victory of the counter-revolution, ends up in a gentleman's household. Obedient and all-enduring, she becomes the proud possession of the lady of the house as a "perfect servant". This state of affairs continues until one night, apparently without explanation, her long suppressed resentment erupts and she kills both master and mistress, an act subtly presented by Kosztolányi as inevitable.

Kosztolányi's particular qualities in his stories can be seen in his larger works as well. His realism is, in fact, of a highly stylized kind. His compact construction and style are suffused by a kind of restless energy.

Perhaps the novel with the widest range and compass is *The Golden Dragon* (Aranysárkány, 1925). Here the author catches the atmosphere of a small Hungarian city at the beginning of the century in a subtle piece of writing, free from all illusion. It deals with the tragedy of a high-school teacher, buried in his scholarly pursuits. The epilogue in particular lays bare the sterility of this small-time world. The daughter of the teacher who had been nearly driven to suicide by the agony of young love has now, only a few years later, recovered, to live the life of the petty bourgeoise, just like all the others.

There is a more direct treatment of the hopelessness of life in the sequence *Kornél Esti* (Esti Kornél, 1933). This fantastic-satiric, now symbolic, now amusing work declares in effect that actions which seek to change "the course of things" make no sense. The city where the truth is invariably told is even more intolerable than the world of customary hypocrisies. The man who has been saved from drowning gradually

s the tyrant of his saviour who in the end is forced to toss him back. The ıds the whole inner life of a Bulgarian conductor opening out before him ı a touchingly bizarre conversation, in which he can only contribute two ›f Bulgarian. Their relationship is nevertheless no better and no worse than :others who have the language at their fingertips. In creating Kornél Esti the created his alter ego; the anarchic, cynical, Bohemian version of himself. e books Kosztolányi wrote in his maturity influenced later writers. The , more clearly intellectual literary products of the twentieth century were due to their influence.

51 The Nyugat Poets

The Two Opposites

One can more or less distinguish the whole of the poetry of the review *Nyugat* as lying between Ady and Babits. The works of the one are by and large marked by a vigorous and open commitment to the masses, the other to a bourgeois humanism, passive until forced in final desperation into action. In the one a contemporary spirit of emotional self-expression plays the larger part, in the other a concentration on formal considerations and the demands of art. In Ady, a desire to change predominates; in Babits, it is the permanent qualities of life persisting within change which prevail. Yet it is hardly possible to divide the poets of *Nyugat* into different groups on the basis of these attitudes. Neither in their lives nor in their activities did they polarize into different groups, styles or trends. Gyula Juhász and Árpád Tóth are closest to Ady. This is especially true in their more emotional verse taken up with conditions in Hungary. This poetry, in identifying with the oppressed and exploited poor, occasionally even reaches revolutionary fervour.

Gyula Juhász (1883–1937)

While at the university, both Babits and Kosztolányi revered Gyula Juhász whose poetry was already greatly admired. In later years they occasionally gave material aid to the poet out of esteem and friendship, but also with a certain condescension, when the poet remained buried in the countryside. The change of attitude was due both to Gyula Juhász himself and to external circumstances. He was born in Szeged, in 1883, into a petty bourgeois family. He first enrolled in a seminary to train as a priest, but later turned to teaching. After a year spent teaching in the more lively atmosphere of Nagyvárad, he was transferred to smaller towns, then back to Szeged. By this time he was writing as a journalist, devoured with love for an insignificant actress who did not love him. The *Nyugat* often published his poems, and the local press various other pieces. He took part in the 1918–19 Revolution, for which he was fiercely attacked afterwards, was forbidden to teach, and forced into obscurity for the rest of his life. He was very neurotic, a state of affairs which had begun in his