

Hungary's 'West':
Literature and Culture at the Centenary of *Nyugat*

Exhibition notes
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Nyugat

1908

The first issue of *Nyugat* from January 1908 in facsimile form.

The first article, 'Kelet népe' (People of the East), by Ignotus (b. Hugo Veigelsberg, 1869-1949), is well-known as an articulate rejection of the provincialism of small countries, and of 'the East' as spiritual or aesthetic model. Ignotus was editor-in-chief of *Nyugat* from its first issue in 1908, until November 1929.

See also exhibits of *Kelet népe* (1935-42), a journal established as something of a rural counterweight to *Nyugat*.

1908

Original issues of *Nyugat* from the second half of 1908.

The 'Figyelő' (Observer) section contains reviews.

Contributions include discussions of the Renaissance; a translation of Molière's *Le Misanthrope*; Georg (György) Lukács on Stefan Georg; Jenő Heltai on Aristophanes; Zsigmond Móricz's famous short story 'Hét krajcár' (Seven kreuzers); Béla Révész on socialism; and poems by Endre Ady and Árpád Tóth.

Nyugat

1909, 2 volumes

The first volume contains more from Endre Ady; Mihály Babits's translations of Edgar Allen Poe and Babits on George Meredith; Lukács on Thomas Mann; Géza Csáth's novella *Opium*; Frigyes Karinthy's 'A mozgóképek metafizikája' (The metaphysics of moving pictures); articles on graphics; articles on nineteenth-century heavyweights Sándor Petőfi and Pál Gyulai; poems by Anna Lesznai; and, in the reviews section, Maupassant, George Bernard Shaw, and Béla Bartók. Contributors are already responding to each other in print.

The second volume contains translations of Poe; Endre Ady on Anatole France; articles on János Arany, Ibsen and Shaw; Ignotus on Tennyson; Lajos Hatvany (one of *Nyugat's* founders) on western culture; as well as poems by Ernő Szép.

Nyugat

1910

The second volume is on display here not only for its beautiful cloth binding, but also for the breadth and quality of its contents: Ady's poem cycle 'A minden-titkok verseiből'; Miksa Fenyő on Jenő Heltai's novella collection *Írók, színésznők, és más csirkefogók* (Writers, actresses, and other scoundrels); painter Károly Kernstock on fine art; short stories by Zsigmond Móricz, Géza Csáth; and critical texts by Ignotus, Lukács and film theorist Béla Balázs.

1911 & 1912 for aesthetic/visual purposes

Two years of particularly lavish illustration and presentation. A high point in the journal's early aesthetic.

Nyugat

1915

The Secession is over: a general austerity and dearth of decoration is visible, while controversies continue over anti-war poems by Ady and Babits published in *Nyugat*.

1915 issues often opened with 'Háborus jegyzetek' (War notes).

Nyugat had already been associated with a lack of patriotism and amorality in general by, most notably, Ferenc Herczeg, editor of *Új Idők* (New Times, the most popular interwar cultural publication), and in *Budapesti Hírlap* (Budapest News, also on display here).

Ady mocked his imitators in an *Új Idők* article entitled 'A duk-duk affér', which alienated him from Ignotus and Hatvany. Hatvany's letter to Ady can be found in issue no. 16 on p. 871.

Nyugat

1924

The first volume includes: Babits on Tennyson; Ady's famous article 'Korrobóri' on the relations between Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians (see page 3); Pál Gyulai's unpublished letters; and Lajos Kassák's autobiography *Egy ember élete* (Life of a Man).

The second volume contains a portrait of Ignotus on p. 659; essays on Ignotus by Babits, Aladár Schöpflin, Fenyő and Jenő Dóczy, plus sketches by Dezső Kosztolányi and Jenő Józsi Tersánszky; and further instalments of Kassák's autobiography.

There are some particularly attractive advertisements from p. 730 onwards.

1931

Nyugat had been edited by Zsigmond Móricz and Mihály Babits since 1929.

Note the different emblem of the *Nyugat* Barátok köre (Society of Friends), the invitation to a literary salon led by cabaret star Endre Nagy. Participants in the *soirée* included Frigyes Karinthy, Dezső Kosztolányi, and Vilma Medgyaszay, a popular chanteuse singing Jewish folk songs.

1939

In June, *Nyugat*, was still edited by Mihály Babits, Oszkár Gellért, Aladár Schöpflin and Gyula Illyés. By October, however, and following the introduction of the Second anti-Jewish Law (based on the Nürnberg Laws), Gellért's name had disappeared.

Much attention was paid to Gyula Farkas's 1938 monograph *Az asszimiláció kora a magyar irodalomban, 1867-1914* (The Age of Assimilation in Hungarian Literature), in which Farkas argues that post-Compromise assimilation had produced an alien capital city and literary elite. Aladár Schöpflin's article on Farkas's *Assimilation* is in the May edition, Farkas's response appears in the June edition (p. 369), and an article in Farkas's defence by Zoltán Szabó was published in the June 1939 issue of *Kelet Népe* (on display here).

First editions

Babits Mihály, *Az európai irodalom története* (The History of European Literature), n.d. [1934]

A charming illustration of a 'modern' English bookshop can be found on p. 9

Illyés Gyula, *Oroszország* (Russia), 1934

Together with Lajos Nagy and André Gide, Illyés attended a writers' symposium in Moscow in 1934; this is his reportage of the trip. Necessarily flattering at times, although Illyés was underwhelmed by the quality of Soviet coffee.

Mihály Babits (ed.), *Új antológia. Fiatal költők 100 legszebb verse* (New Anthology: 100 young poets' most beautiful verse), 1932

Poets include Lőrinc Szabó, Sophie Török, Andor Németh, Gyula Illyés, László Mécs, Tibor Déry and József Erdélyi

Schöpflin Aladár, *Magyar írók. Irodalmi arcképek és tollrajzok* (Hungarian Writers: Literary portraits and sketches), second edition, 1919

First Nyugat editions

Mária Rédey, *Kassainé ifjasszony. Jászai Mari és Kassai Vidor szerelmi regénye. Kiadatlan levelek és naplók alapján*, n.d.

Rédey's love story between actors Mari Jászai and Vidor Kassai: at the pulp fiction end of Nyugat's publishing spectrum.

Kassák, *Munkanélküliek*, 2 volumes, 1932

Kassák's two-volume work *The Unemployed* was not published by Nyugat, but represents another sort of 'sociography' (the graphic depiction of social problems).

Other periodicals

A Toll, 1929-38

(The Pen)

Edited by Béla Zsolt, and another *urbánus* (roughly, metropolitan) literary publication.

Kelet népe, 1935-42

(People of the East)

A journal of qualitatively different concerns to those of *Nyugat*. The journal published 'sociography', village research and reportages, and was clearly not intended as an *objet d'art*.

Issues from **1938** include depictions of brick workers' and peasant families' lives, and a number of pieces by József Darvas, a prominent public intellectual in the years immediately following 1948.

The **1939** issues include Zsigmond Móricz's 'Tiszta falvak' (Pure villages), articles by the left-leaning Populist Péter Veres on nationalism, and discussion of the 'egyke' (the single-child families of the agricultural poor). Note the preponderance of ideas connected to the countryside, and not to 'the West'. Very little literature other than interpretations of Ady. *Kelet népe*, in terms of its subject matter and rhetorical style, might be viewed as a precursor to post-war State Socialism.

Other periodicals

Szép Szó, 1936-39

(Kind Word)

Edited by Pál Ignóty (Ignóty's son) and Attila József (until his death in 1937), and to be regarded as one of the prominent *urbánus* journals. Pál Ignóty's article 'Vissza az értelemhez' (A return to sense) in the March **1936** issue is often cited as one of the milestones in the 'népi-urbánus vita', the interwar dispute between Populist intellectuals (many of whom contributed to *Kelet népe*) and their critics, such as Pál Ignóty.

The December **1937** issue is a tribute issue to Attila József, whose 'Ázsia lelke' (The Soul of Asia) can be found on p. 289 of the March **1936** issue.

Having fled to London prior to the outbreak of World War Two, Pál Ignóty's, 'Angol viselkedés, brit erkölcs' (English behaviour, British morals) can be found on p. 179 of the **1939** volume.

Other periodicals

Válasz, 1934-

(Response)

The early post-war year issues include poems by Lőrinc Szabó, 'Tücsökzene', (Cricketmusic, **1946**, vol. 1), and István Bibó's article 'Békeszerződés és demokrácia' (The Peace Treaty and Democracy)

1948 issues include articles by István Bibó, including 'Zsidókérdés Magyarországon 1944 után' (The Jewish Question in Hungary after 1944), and by Géza Ottlik and Imre Sarkady. By **1949**, however, a rather different set of writers are published, dealing with more cautious (if not conservative) themes.

Magyar Csillag, 1942-44

(Hungarian Star)

Edited by Gyula Illyés.

Note in particular the article by Elek, 'Schöpflin Aladár és a *Nyugat*', 1942, p. 265, and on p. 189 a Móricz commemorative issue with pictures and heavy attention paid to Transylvania.

And also ...

Frigyes Karinthy, *Így írtok Ti* (This is How You Write, 1912-)

Karinthy's well-known parodies of literary heroes probably did much to popularise many of the early *Nyugat* writers. He continued to revise these and other sketches until he fell ill in 1934, when he declared that he was no longer a 'humorist' but a 'tumorist'.