

## “NYUGAT-100” AT THE NATIONAL SZÉCHÉNYI LIBRARY



Among the cultural highlights of the year, in 2008 the National Széchényi Library paid special attention to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Nyugat* periodical. The topical webpage and two of its exhibitions were both associated with the “**Nyugat 100**” series of events. The journal, which became virtually one with the birth and burgeoning of Hungarian literature, was launched after the termination of a number of short-lived publications - *Magyar Génius* (1892–1903), *Figyelő* (1905) and *Szerda* (1906) – whose editors and writers made up the core staff of the new publication. Up to 1929 the

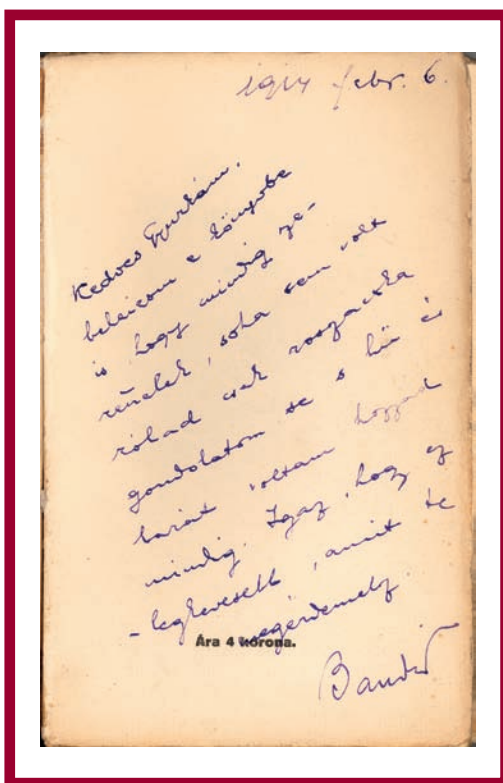
*Nyugat's* editor-in-chief was Ignotus, the former editor of *Szerda*, while its two editors were Miksa Fenyő, who had published in *Magyar Génius* and *Figyelő*, and Ernő Osvát, who had edited *Magyar Génius* and *Figyelő*. Among the first contributors, we find Endre Ady, Gyula Szini, Artúr Elek, Béla Balázs and Oszkár Gellért. According to the title page, the first issue came out on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1908, but in fact it had been issued at Christmas 1907, with the Mikes plaque designed by Fülöp Ö. Beck, which remained the journal's icon and symbol to the end. Aladár Schöpflin, a later authoritative critic described the launching year in his synthesis called *Hungarian Literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*:

“In 1908 the over-eighty Pál Gyulai was living his last year of life, his followers were celebrating Zsolt Beöthy's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his professorship, Ferenc Herczeg was working on his novel *Lovers*, Géza Gárdonyi was publishing his novel *Prisoners of God*, Jenő Rákosi was fighting against universal suffrage on the side of Prime Minister István Tisza, and the publication of Zoltán Ambrus's complete works was underway while he was also editing the *Classical Novel Collection*. This is the year when *Nyugat* was launched on the first of January. [...] Within a single year the company had been formed,

embracing all those who stayed loyal to *Nyugat* for many years to come, some even to their death, establishing its spirit and air.”

Meaning “West” in Hungarian, *Nyugat* was their spiritual compass, of which Miksa Fenyő related to Miklós Móricz, the writer's brother: “The title *Nyugat* comes from Osvát: In fact, Osvát read out quite a few catchy titles, of which I went for *Nyugat*. For some time we still wavered between *Nyugat* and *Disputa*, but finally stayed with the former. Ignotus's brilliant inaugural

article simply meant that the people of the East stood up for the West.” Even in the best years of its thirty-three year existence, the journal never had a circulation higher than a few thousand copies, unlike the conservative *Vasárnapi Újság* [*Sunday News*] (1854–1921) and *Új Idők* [*Modern Times*] (1894–1949) that sold tens of thousands of copies. Nevertheless, *Nyugat's* impact has been much stronger: its authors were the revivers of our literature, later growing into classics, whose oeuvres were developing in this medium - in constant fight with official literary forums. *Nyugat* owed its existence to its patrons, especially Lajos Hatvany's family and, through Miksa Fenyő's contacts, to the National Association of Industrialists. For financial reasons and following similar journals' exam-



ENDRE ADY: *Who has seen me?* (inside, with an autograph dedication to György Bölöni); Budapest, Nyugat Literary and Publishing Ltd., 1914.

ples, in 1910 the *Nyugat* Publishing House was set up, launching the *Nyugat* Library series which, although under different names, for over thirty years produced the books that first appeared in the journal. From the 1910s onwards, the journal came out with the most precious gems of modern Hungarian literature in instalments. (Margit Kaffka: *Mary's Years*, 1912; Béla Balázs: *The Wooden Prince*, 1912; Mihály Babits: *The Stork Caliph*, 1913; Zsigmond Móricz: *Poor People*, 1916; László Cholnoky: *Prikk's Heavenly Journey*,



ÁRPÁD TÓTH, FÜLÖP Ö. BECK, DEZSŐ KOSZTOLÁNYI, MIHÁLY BABITS,  
ERNŐ OSVÁT and OSZKÁR GELLÉRT in the Budapest Museum Gardens  
(Budapest, 30th May 1923),

Photo: Sophie Török; a digital image made from the original damaged glass negative  
National Széchényi Library/ Manuscript Collection: Fond III/2332/41.

1917, and *Nyugat* was the publisher of poetry volumes by Mihály Babits, Endre Ady and Gyula Juhász with covers drawn and painted in the style of *art nouveau*, the best known of which is perhaps the “envelope” *Who has seen me?* made by Anna Lesznai.) By the beginning of the 1910s the first generation had gathered, including the above authors as well as Géza Csáth, Árpád Tóth, Géza Laczkó, Lajos Bíró and Frigyes Karinthy. At the end of the decade, however, Endre Ady’s death was a serious loss, as his main forum was *Nyugat*, which provided the unfailing supportive background to his fight for getting his innovation in content and expression accepted. Fellow writers paid their tribute to their late colleague in the double issue in February 1919. The periodical survived the war. From the 1920s onwards, under the editorship of Babits and Osvát, *Nyugat* started introducing the newly discovered members of the so-called second generation: Lőrinc Szabó, Gyula Illyés, László Németh, Sándor Márai, György Sárközi and Andor Endre Gelléri. At the same time, first generation contributors also appeared with their new work: Kosztolányi’s *Skylark* (1923) and *Anna Édes* (1926), Móricz’s *Be Faithful Unto Death* (1920) and Mihály Babits’s novel *The Son of Virgil Tímár*, which outraged Ignotus.

From the 1920s, the journal was trying to open up more towards the general public: Organised by Oszkár Gellért, Aladár Schöpflin and Artúr Elek, *Nyugat* get-togethers as well as authors’ evenings were becoming

regular features. On the twentieth anniversary of its start, the editorial office gave a commemorative evening at the Academy of Music, which was later to become a tradition repeated every five years. These events are significant not only for their content, but also for their visual and audio records, several of which are preserved in our library. They are primary documents for our *Nyugat* research.

At the end of the decade, the journal suffered more blows. In 1928 Árpád Tóth died, and in 1929 Osvát, the founder of the journal, committed suicide. At that point, Zsigmond Móricz and Mihály Babits took over as editors, the former taking charge of the fiction section, while the latter of poetry, reviews and studies. Móricz threw himself into

the task of advertising the periodical outside Budapest and the national borders. The circle of *Nyugat*-friends was created, thus somewhat raising the circulation. In 1931 Babits compiled the New Anthology out of the poems of poets who were launched by *Nyugat*. At this point, the third generation was already emerging: Zoltán Jékely, László Kálnoky, Géza Képes, Sándor Weöres, István Vas, Zoltán Zelk and Antal Szerb. After debates concerning editing policies, in 1933 Móricz quit as editor.

Writers’ forums were becoming more and more regular in the thirties, suggesting and discussing a given issue in sociology or politics in the columns of the journal, as e.g. addressing the question if Hungarians will disappear, or what the writer can do in face of war. The end of the decade saw more losses: in 1936 Dezső Kosztolányi died, and in 1938 Frigyes Karinthy followed him. Aware of his condition, in 1938 Babits published his *Book of Jonah*, possibly the last major creed of his literary profession. As his condition was deteriorating, in 1940 Gyula Illyés took over editorship of *Nyugat*, which was terminated with Babits’s death on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1941. The September issue did not come out because publishing permit for the periodical was in the Babits’s name. After 1941 authorities refused to grant further permission for *Nyugat*. With Gyula Illyés as editor, almost all of the staff continued work under the name of *Magyar Csillag* (1941–1944), carrying forward the *Nyugat* legacy.



AT THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF NYUGAT – IN THE ARTISTS' ROOM OF THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC  
 (Photo detail) Ernő Szép, (behind him) József Erdélyi, (next to him) Oszkár Gellért, Zsigmond Móríc, Géza Laczkó, Mihály Babits,  
 Aladár Tóth, Sophie Török, Aladár Schöpflin, Milán Füst, Dezső Kosztolányi and Frigyes Karinthy  
 (Budapest, Academy of Music, 10th January 1932),  
 Photo: *Turul* Photo Reportage Office - Szécsi  
 - National Széchényi Library/ Manuscript Collection: Fond III/2260/57

Although a brief article can hardly offer sufficient scope for describing the history of a publication and a related publishing company, it is still worth remembering, as even today it is surprising how many of our writers were associated with *Nyugat* and, what is more, owe their discovery as writers to Osvát, and later to Babits and Schöpflin. The most comprehensive image of the journal is perhaps reflected by the visual, written and audio material of the *Nyugat* webpage, which heavily relied, especially in its images, on the *Nyugat* exhibitions of the National Széchényi Library, which intended to introduce and process the journal's history and the unparalleled material available in the national library's collections.

The first exhibition was arranged in twelve cabinets from December 2007 to March 2008 in the library's

seventh floor catalogue space. This was constructed primarily from the core collection's material concerning *Nyugat*. A copy of each of the *Nyugat*'s precedents was on display, as well as the journal's graphically different covers varying with editors, however emphasizing that despite all the changes, Fülöp Ö Beck's Mikes emblem carried permanence. Editors' and critics' syntheses were placed into separate cabinets; their literary histories and collections of essays were mainly the first editions produced by the *Nyugat* Publishing House: Lajos Hatvany's and Mihály Babits's collections of essays and papers, Aladár Schöpflin's and Mihály Babits's literary histories, repeatedly underlining the fact that literary revivers were also builders of canons. We intended to introduce *Nyugat*'s three generations through their first publications in the journal, ensuring that the typographically valuable volumes were



represented by the covers that Anna Lesznai, Elek Falus and Lajos Kozma had designed. Thus both a vertical and a horizontal cross-section of the journal were demonstrated. Special thematic issues in honour of *Nyugat* authors and editors or produced on their death were also displayed. *Nyugat* celebrations and authors' tours were also evoked, mainly with the help of the Manuscript Collection's photographs. In addition to showing issues of *Nyugat* and certain volumes of books, high-quality autographs and photos, also borrowed from the Collection of Manuscripts, added to the complexity and variety of exhibits. In this way, a copy of the manuscript of the *Book of Jonah*, its text in the journal, the volume of a similar title published by *Nyugat* Publishers and a contemporary photograph of the poet are presented together. The enlarged images in the Babits bequest made from so-called glass negatives formed an especially interesting section of the exhibition. Specialists in the Hungarian Electronic Library first scanned in these images from the glass negatives, and after careful retouching and cleaning enlarged them. Two of them were blown up to poster-size and placed by the cabinets: the first shows Árpád Tóth, Fülöp Ö. Beck, Dezső Kosztolányi, Mihály Babits, Ernő Osvát and Oszkár Gellért; the second is Sophie Török's photo, which is familiar from Hungarian school-books, portraying Babits, Kosztolányi and Gyula Juhász by the River Tisza. (This chamber exhibition was introduced in the *Nyugat* program of *Duna Television*, and *Lánchíd Radio* also highlighted it in its cultural broadcast.)

The idea of the second exhibition about *Nyugat* and most of its actual realization is owed to Erika Nemeskéri, who in the Manuscript Collection had been the guardian and processor of *Nyugat* authors' bequests for decades. Her research into documents and manuscripts has reconstructed how a precious group of manuscripts, which is labeled as the *Nyugat* editors' donations, has ended up in our library. It needs to be added that Gyula Sebestyén, the former head of our Manuscript Collection, had addressed a letter to Ady's widow, asking her to let the library have the late poet's manuscripts, because his autographs were "immeasurable values" of modern Hungarian literature. A copy of the letter sent to Berta Boncza-Ady is kept in our library's Document Collection. However, there was no answer, or perhaps it was lost. However, in a letter dated March 1919, Gyula Sebestyén expresses his gratitude for the *Nyugat*

Publishing House's present. Presumably, Csinszka had passed on Gyula Sebestyén's request to the journal's editors, and subsequently sent a number of Ady's articles (e.g. *The Hungarian Pimodan* and *My Calvinism*) and short-stories (e.g. *The Tilala Lake and Anitta, the Fortune-teller*) autographs, as well as the somewhat fragmented manuscripts of Ignóty's study, *The Black Piano* and Dezső Kosztolányi's verse cycle *The Complaints of the Sad Child*. Since the editorial office was constantly moving and struggling for survival, whatever manuscript has survived is thanks to public collections and the editors' own contacts. Another pillar of the exhibition came from the Osvát bequest. In the 1920s Ernő Osvát already left the burden of editing to Mihály Babits and Oszkár Gellért, as due to his family's and his own health problems, he had less time for managing the journal, and started disposing of the manuscripts accumulated in his home. In 1924, he sent one of Ady's letters to our Manuscript Collection, and in 1929 manuscripts of Margit Kaffka's poems, which had been published in Osvát's *Magyar Génius* in 1902. Besides the several dozen manuscripts, original photos and illustrations of the authors' fonds were also exhibited, as well as some of the more valuable pieces of the *Nyugat*-friends circle's original series of postcards. Finally, it is worth noting that *Nyugat* had personal contacts with our library, as a number of literary historians who contributed to the journal had jobs in the National Széchényi Library of the National Museum, as for example Tivadar Rédey and Mária Hoffmann, and at a later stage, Gábor Halász, all of whom did a lot for extending the unparalleled stocks of the Manuscript Collection. "Nyugat 100" does not put an end to working with the journal. The stock protection digitization of the Babits bequest has been launched this year, but this is hoped to be only the first step in saving this invaluable original material.

The two exhibitions:

*The history of Nyugat as reflected by its publications*  
(The exhibition was produced by Zsuzsanna Rózsafalvi.)

*The Nyugat editors' donation to the National Museum's Library*  
(The exhibition was produced by Erika Nemeskéri, with contributions made by Zsuzsanna Rózsafalvi.)

Zsuzsanna Rózsafalvi