

“REVOLUTION OF HUNGARIAN SOULS”

A HOLNAP IS 100 YEARS OLD



The chamber exhibition realised in the co-operation of several sister institutions was on display in the sixth floor reconstructed ‘Manuscriptorium’ exhibition hall of the National Széchényi Library until 20th November 2008, paying tribute to the *A Holnap* [Tomorrow] anthology /anthologies that appeared a hundred years ago and to the Literary Society bearing the same name.

Parallel with the *Nyugat* centenary, the one hundredth anniversary of *Holnap* was celebrated in September 2008. Although it has received less attention, the society started in Nagyvárad and its two anthologies (in 1908 and 1909 with contributions by Endre Ady, Mihály Babits, Béla Balázs, Ákos Dutka, Tamás Emőd, Gyula Juhász and Jutka Miklós) proved to have a more profound impact on contemporary literature and society and, in some respects, even beyond. These two strongly related, though occasionally competing groups of Hungarian literature, which later even had a number of identical members, emerged at practically the same time. Nevertheless, attacks against the new literature of the early 20th century were primarily targeted against the *Holnap* group. In a sense therefore *A Holnap*

acted as a protective screen for *Nyugat*, even if it did not intend to, as Mihály Ilia has recently argued.¹ The first anthology, a genuine literary sensation, was followed by unusually heated debates in the press. The poetic trend standing up against the so-called conservative literature, but also opposed to the capital’s literary centralization, or using Ady’s succinct summary,

the “revolution of Hungarian souls” was faced with extremely vile debates, where political views rather than aesthetic evaluations clashed. *Holnap* members were fighting for their life under the shower of adjectives and accusations like “un-Hungarian”, “artsy”, “decadent”, “incomprehensible”, “immoral”, “eccentric” or even “sick”. In 1909 the regular Almanach of the Budapest Journalists’ Association – where Ady’s summary line was included – devoted virtually the whole volume to *A Holnap*, and in connection with

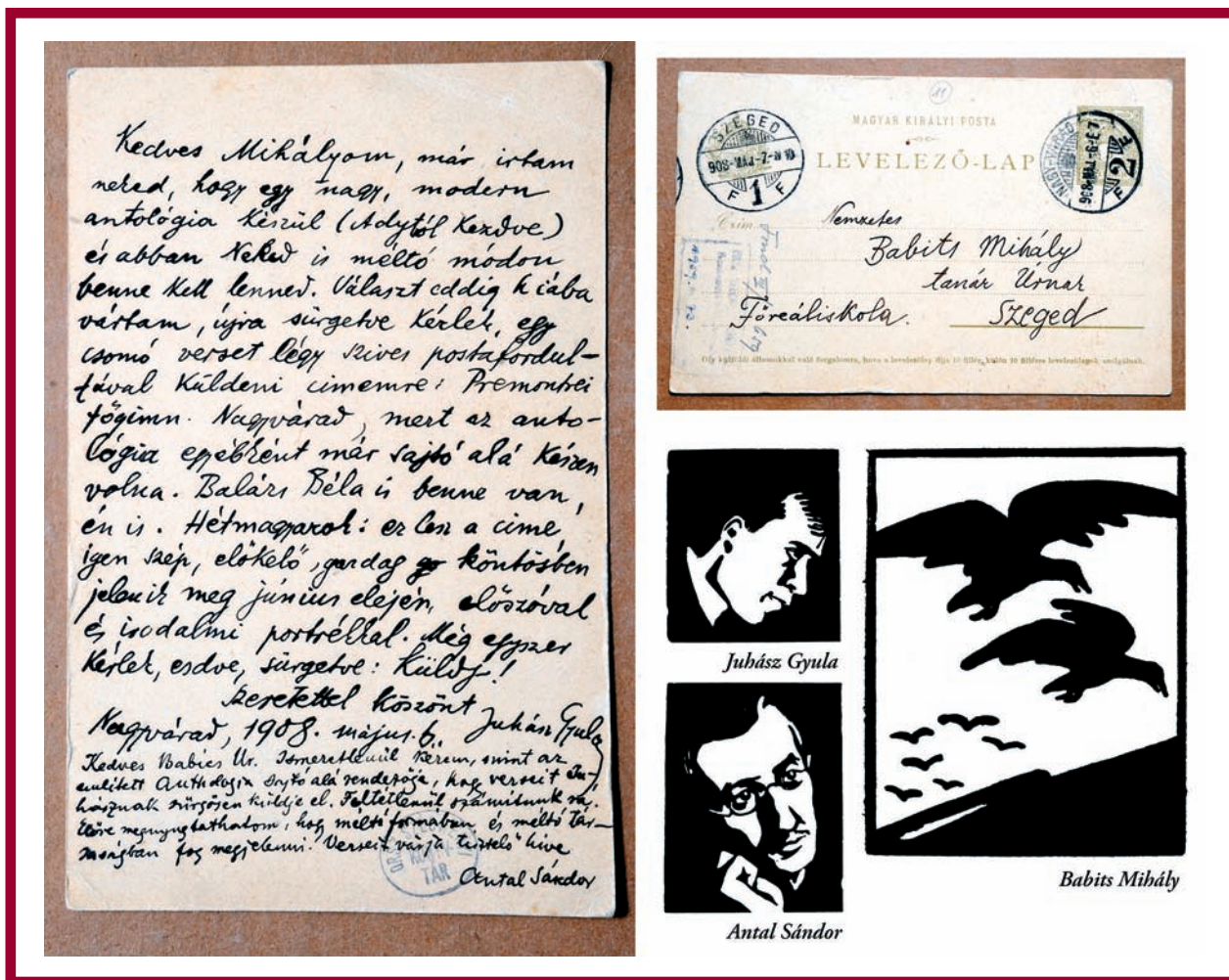
the anthology, to the polemics surrounding “modern literature” in the autumn of 1908. Zuboly (Elemér Bányai) declared straight in the prologue to the volume – written already at Christmas 1908: “The states that flood our social and literary life these days are referred to as fermentation (...), and in literature the brutal fighting is centred around modernity.”² It is a fact that the debate and the poems the controversies were based on did not grow out of the actual poems; it was not the poems that led to the “brutal fighting”. The poems were not usually directly known from the anthology, but much rather indirectly from vicious ironic verses, humorous vignettes and various volumes

of parodies (as for example, Károly Lovászy’s *Tomorrow never come...*), popular satirical magazines (e.g. *Borsszem Jankó* and *Ústökös*) or perhaps from outraged writings published in press organs that favoured conservative literature. The some six months preceding the publishing of the second *A Holnap* anthology (in which, as it is little known, they intended to have a



¹ Cf. Mihály Ilia: *Irodalmi ünnep. [Literary celebration.]* Bárka, 2008/2. 72–73.

² Zuboly (Elemér Bányai): Prologue, In Sándor Szerdahelyi (ed.) *A Budapesti Újságírók Egyesülete Almanachja [Almanach of the Budapest Journalists’ Association]*, Bp., 1909. 1-3.



Gyula Juhász's postcard written to Mihály Babits, with lines added by Sándor Antal; and lithographs by Nándor Honti made for the first anthology of *A Holnap* [Tomorrow]. (National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection)

prologue written by *Anatole France*) was tense with outside attacks, fights, national scandals and also internal breaches (including the so-called “*duk-duk affair*” in which Ady was bashing the *Nyugat* group!). Nevertheless, the quieter period afterwards was the most prolific time in the life of the *Holnap* Literary Society and the *Holnap* movement growing beyond it.

Irrespective of the polemics and bitter social disputes, the impact and significance of the anthologies of *A Holnap* a hundred years ago cannot be ignored in literary history. This is partly because it was through this stormy reaction – which saw and presented those who teamed up with the leader as belonging to one camp – that the conservative literature recognized Ady's epoch-making poetic significance, and partly because it was through the first anthology that the literary elite, among them the *Nyugat* editors, as well as the wider public familiarized themselves with the name of Mihály Babits or that of Béla Balázs. It also has to be

acknowledged that *A Holnap* was the first to appreciate János Vajda's lifework and achievement. (They were dedicating their anthology to him at a time when contemporary literary historians seemed to be forgetting about Vajda.). Moreover, the Society's first public appearance was also a Vajda memorial evening. In addition to replacing the initial idea of launching a new literary journal in the provinces, challenging the power of Budapest cafés, with a more modest project of two anthologies, a number of art performances, reading sessions, exhibitions and theatre shows are associated with the *A Holnap* movement, which at the time counted as a positive cultural revolution. Inspired by it, literary societies were formed everywhere in the country, and that is when joint matinees, building on the trio of literature, art and music became fashionable, which were continued successfully by *Nyugat* when *A Holnap* was dying down. Under the aegis of *A Holnap*, several such events were held, in which the authors or actors read out poems,

musicians played their compositions and graphic artists presented their most recent creations, while young lawyers, journalists and intellectuals discussed issues of art, philosophy and science. *A Holnap* often held joint picture exhibitions and matinees with Hungarian painters and with members of the Circle of Hungarian Impressionists and Naturalists (MIÉNK) as well. For example, when they performed at Nagyvárad, the introduction was written by Ady with the title *A faint bugle-call*. Due to György Bölöni, the exhibitions of modern painters were also often positive combinations of art and literary and theatrical productions. The *Holnap* matinees were continued also at Kolozsvár, Arad and Temesvár; and in Várad *Nyugat* and *A Holnap* held a joint matinee in the autumn of 1909. Despite the tentative steps taken towards each other, reservations and initially even some competition stemming from earlier conflicts remained characteristic all through. In some cases, theoretical differences also stood in the way of a long-term alliance, which in retrospect would seem so natural to us. Following the joint matinee mentioned before, Ady is definitively associated with *Nyugat*; within a few years of the dying down of the *A Holnap* movement, the best of its poets were also supporting *Nyugat*. Nevertheless, the years Gyula Juhász spent at Nagyvárad may perhaps be considered as the most successful not only in his own career but also with regard his fellows at *A Holnap*, defining the start of an era and thus their later careers as well. As it transpires from the chronology, summarized for the first time at the exhibition, Juhász's arrival in 1908 and his departure in 1911 gives *A Holnap's* colourful movement a frame.

The unique exhibition was the first to collect original manuscripts, portraits, volumes, letters, postcards and memoirs, as well as the abundant press material of the polemics around the anthology. In addition, fine art

and music were also introduced, evoking the atmosphere of contemporary matinees. The exhibition tried to visually represent Nagyvárad of the day with its social background as the scene of the departure, and to sum up precedents and causes. Following the chronology of the movement's brief but dense life, it placed individual authors' portraits, position and their role into it, giving an insight also into their further careers.

The exhibition was the joint product of the National Széchényi Library, the Petőfi Museum of Literature, the Hungarian National Gallery, the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Endre Ady Memorial Museum from Nagyvárad [Oradea]. The exhibition was opened by József P. Kőrössi and László Boka, guests were shown around by Erika Nemeskéri. This was followed by the thematic introduction of an issue of *A Holnap* in the monthly cultural periodical *Várad*. First, an excerpt from the television interview about the role and significance of the periodical (conducted by József P. Kőrössi and László Boka) could be viewed, and then editor-in-chief László Szűcs introduced the particular issue of *A Holnap* (<http://www.varad.ro/index.php?u=0&m=156&sz=200807>)

The exhibition was organized by the writer of the present article, with professional contribution from Erika Nemeskéri, Zsuzsa Rózsafalvi and Csaba Andor, as well as valuable assistance from colleagues in the Photo-laboratory, the Department of Restoration and the Bindery, the Hungarian Electronic Library and the Music Collection.

László Boka
boka@oszk.hu

