Introduction

I

The modern period of Hungarian literature begins at the turn of the 19th century. The previous century had been one of stagnation, relieved only by sporadic and isolated attempts to break through the apathy fittingly expressed in the statement 'extra Hungariam non est vita: si est vita, non est ita'. Hungary was a country without a centre. The diet met at Pozsony (Bratislava) on its western frontier and within easy reach of the long arm of Vienna. The largest market was at Pest, a small, predominantly German-speaking town which had recently gained a potential cultural centre in the former university of Nagyszombat (Trnava), refounded there in 1784. The Hungarian language was very restricted in use. Latin was the official medium, and German was spoken in those circles which could afford to take an interest in literature, which meant that any new ideas were transmitted in these languages, while Hungarian was almost incapable of carrying them. Publishers were few and scattered; they were intimidated by a far-reaching censorship, ever on the watch for anti-Viennese or revolutionary tendencies. Even if these difficulties were surmounted and a book published, there was a dearth of readers and virtually no criticism to stimulate or reprove.

In these unfavourable circumstances literary activity was necessarily restricted, and new ideas penetrated the country exceedingly slowly. French enlightenment and German classicism found a few champions like György

Bessenyei (1747–1811), who with his companions at the court of Vienna attempted to transplant into Hungarian some of the ideas they found there, but with little success. It needed a political shock to wake language and literature into new life. The impact of Joseph II's reforms and the disturbance of the French revolution suddenly produced a new force—nationalism, which provided a springboard for linguistic and literary growth in Hungary. The Martinovics conspiracy, which came to light in 1795, numbered writers as well as revolutionaries in its ranks. The renewed restrictions it brought in its wake might well have stifled the new movement. Instead, one of those who took a minor part in the conspiracy and suffered lengthy imprisonment returned in 1801 to become the architect of modern Hungarian literature.

This was Ferenc Kazinczy (1759–1831), a scholar devoted to German classicism. He had the jndgment and tenacity to build a firm foundation for the new literature, and at first was assisted by the linguistic reformation preached by the fiery Miklós Révai, professor of Hungarian at the new university. The death of Révai in 1807 and the subsequent appointment as his successor of the least competent applicant for the post left Kazinczy champion of both linguistic and literary reform. He quietly assumed the role of literary dictator, a post he held almost unchallenged for fifteen years.

Kazinczy was a methodical worker. Organisation and discipline, the discipline of severe classicism, were fostered under his strict guidance. He himself provided a centre of criticism, and slowly but surely drew a number of writers into his circle. He wrote little original work, but conducted a vast correspondence. He bullied and cajoled, meted out praise and blame, and argued the cause of Hungarian literature to all who would listen. Originality was of less

importance at this early stage than classical form and strict composition; nationalist feeling—a potentially dangerous element—was projected into the past, as befitted the classical structure. It was an age of imitation, and translations of foreign, mainly German, authors provided the models. The poems of Dániel Berzsenyi (1776–1836) represent the highest achievement of the period. Under Kazinczy's guidance he combined patriotic sentiment with classical form and careful use of the rejuvenated language.

Kazinczy's patient labour wrought a remarkable transformation. By 1820 the majority of writers had been drawn into his sphere, and the old isolation broken down. A critical periodical was regularly published.[1] A close and lasting connection between linguistic and literary studies, still a notable feature in Hungary, had been established. But there were still many problems for him to face. Not all writers wished to submit to the overriding authority of the dictator. There were still very few readers and publishers in the country, and the language still had to compete with Latin and German. The way had been cleared, however, for future progress, whose very rapidity was a tribute to the perseverance of its pioneer.

II

The steadily rising tide of nationalism, assisted by a period of absolutism which lasted from 1812 to 1825, could not be kept within the limits imposed by Kazinczy. Nor was the younger generation of writers content to look to the past for inspiration and to the dictator for guidance. In 1821 there appeared an almanach, *Aurora*, produced by a group of younger anthors in Pest. It was a small, well-

[1] *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* (1817–41).

illustrated volume with a judicious selection of verse and prose designed to attract the reader. Although it numbered among its contributors some of the pioneer friends of Kazinczy, its mood was predominantly nationalist and romantic, and its further issues emphasised this change.

Among the young writers who now began to make themselves known was Vörösmarty, who came rapidly to the forefront. His 'Flight of Zalán', whose closing lines form the earliest passage in this collection,[1] was a national epic showing clearly that a new master of the language had arrived. It was classical in form and metre, yet flexible enough to allow the language to display hitherto unsuspected power and majesty. Vörösmarty was acclaimed by most of his contemporaries—even though few of them actually bought and read his epic—but Kazinczy wrote with the bitterness of a deposed dictator:

> 'I am not ashamed to confess that I shudder at those who flatter *párducos Árpád* and I count it a disgrace to be regarded as their companion. I do not know what great sin that honourable man can have committed against the gods, that after being allowed to rest in his grave for a thousand years he is now dragged out by everybody who can make others believe that he too can hammer out an hexameter and scribble something like an epic.'[2]

'The Flight of Zalán' reached the heights of the Hungarian classical epic and at the same time sounded its death-knell. It was even in 1825 an outdated form. Vörösmarty turned to lyric poetry, like a true romantic, and found it more suited to the expression of his deepest feelings. He sang of love and death, patriotism and pessimism relieved rarely by a mere glimmer of hope. He was the first of the great

[1] P. 9. [2] A. Szerb, *Magyar irodalomtörténet*, 1943 edition, p. 271.

giants of poetry who stride across Hungarian literature of the modern age: Vörösmarty, Petőfi, Arany, Vajda and Ady all rise far above the contemporary scene. Of all of these, Vörösmarty is the most elusive. His greatness lies not merely in his mastery of language, or in his philosophy, neither in his classical equanimity nor in his romantic outbursts and echoes of folksong: it is in the rare combination of all these qualities that the essentially tragic greatness of Vörösmarty must be sought.

It was once customary to show the parallel and intertwined development of literature and politics by pairing Vörösmarty with Széchenyi and Petőfi with Kossuth. Neither comparison can be pursued very far. Széchenyi's 'Credit' was the result of economic and social study, like his gift towards the foundation of the Academy in 1825. He had little knowledge of Hungarian literature; as a magnate, he thought and wrote naturally in German. 'Credit' was a remarkable contribution to Hungarian prose. It proved beyond doubt that the language could now transmit new ideas. Its style was not that of a textbook; it was didactic and rhetorical, and demanded action. Its closing words[1] poured scorn on those who saw only the hopelessness of the present, and pointed to a happier future. Széchenyi was a man of action, not merely of ideas, and neither Vörösmarty nor any of his poet-contemporaries commanded the means or the power to break through the inertia of the tradition in which they had been born. 'If only the Hungarian would do something for his country' wrote Vörösmarty in his 'Song of Fót' in 1842, while Széchenyi had already acted with his large-scale plans for economic improvement, his steamboats, horse-breeding, bridge-building and other interests. It is significant that the most sympathetic recognition of Széchenyi's task came

[1] P. 1.

from the almost-forgotten pioneer Kazinczy on the eve of his death.[1]

Hungarian prose, which had been somewhat neglected, reacted more quickly to Széchenyi. His ideas were propagated in short stories and sketches rather than in lengthier works, with the exception of Fáy's social novel 'The House of Bélteky' (1832). The improvement of communications and the impact of social movements in the West brought French and English authors into the country to take their place beside the well-established Germans. Hugo and Scott became great favourites. Two novels, both showing the new literary trend, appeared almost simultaneously in 1836. The first, Gaal's 'Ilona Szirmay', was a lively historical romance, whose rapid action more than compensated for its loose construction.[2] This novel has always suffered unjustly by comparison with its contemporary 'Abafi',[3] a tale with a moral. Its author, Jósika, probed far deeper into the details of his story of a prodigal son than did Gaal. His characters were meticulously drawn and his situations built up with great care, to the detriment of the action. 'Abafi', however, won immediate popularity with all except its author, who later considered it one of his weakest works.

The pace of literary development quickened as the political tension grew. *Aurora* gave place in 1837 to *Athenaeum* which appeared twice weekly instead of annually, and gave space to the best scholarly articles in addition to prose, verse and critical reviews. The Academy slowly began its course as custodian of national ideals in many branches of learning. The use of Hungarian spread more widely than ever before; not only literary disputes, but political differences also began to be fought out in

[1] The unfinished poetic epistle 'To Count István Széchenyi' (1831).
[2] P. 28. [3] P. 4.

pamphlet and journal. Prose in its various forms—novels, short stories, articles and orations—developed rapidly, and Hungarian verse became more widely read. In 1837 the opening of a national theatre in Pest offered drama a chance to take its place with the established literary forms, and incidentally served to emphasise the emergence of that city as the new centre of the country.

III

The years immediately before the revolution of 1848 were dominated by the figures of Kossuth and Petőfi. In politics Kossuth swiftly achieved the popularity which Széchenyi, however greatly respected, could never attain during his lifetime. In literature the dynamic personality of Petőfi, the poet of the people, overshadowed all others.

Kossuth was established as editor of the 'Pest News' (*Pesti Hirlap*) at the beginning of 1841 and straightway proclaimed himself the champion of constitutional liberty. He needed very little effort to sweep away Széchenyi's cautious and calculated ideas of reform with the hope of complete independence. He was a propagandist in the modern sense of that term; his articles and speeches all show that he knew how to arouse precisely the emotions he required. His speech at Szeged in the critical time of revolution[1] is a masterpiece of this style, and lest it should be thought that both orator and audience were carried away by the events of that period, we may recall that a speech of his in English at Manchester in 1859 was accorded a similar reception by an English audience. If political journalism and oratory were Kossuth's main direct contribution to the literature of his time, his thoughts and ideas were reflected by almost every writer of repute.

[1] P. 20.

Petőfi's brief and dazzling appearance in Hungarian literature was like that of a comet. He was a genius, whose every feeling found its true expression in poetry, without any of the restraint shown by his predecessors. Love, patriotism, revolution—and Petőfi was by far the most revolutionary figure in Hungary at this time—pastoral scenes and prophecy can all be found in his works matched with an incomparable lyric genius, as those who later tried to imitate him quickly discovered. Vitality was the keynote of his poetry. The restraining bands of Kazinczy's classicism and the graceful, polished idiom of Vörösmarty gave way to the sheer energy of Petőfi. His brief lyric love poems display every shade of feeling from tenderness to passion, without any striving after effect. Vörösmarty's 'Reverie'[1] foreshadowed the language of Petőfi, but there is an immense difference between his cautious conditional aud the direct indicative of the latter's 'I'll Be a Tree',[2] and between what Vörösmarty doubtless felt to be somewhat daring epithets and Petőfi's almost savage language. The younger poet never toned down his emotions, nor did he have to force them into metrical form. Rhythm and rhyme were natural aids to him, not hindrances. The traditions of folk-poetry in him were no longer evoked as mere experiments, but reached real and lasting synthesis with the main stream of literature.

The vitality of Petőfi was not confined to love poetry alone. National aspirations called forth an immediate and vigorous response. Like Széchenyi he could aim merciless satire at the present and past,[3] but he possessed a far richer and rougher vocabulary with which to do so. 'The Hungarian Noble'[4] was mild indeed compared with the fury he

[1] *Ábránd*, p. 13. [2] *Fa leszek, ha . . .*, p. 60.
[3] E.g. 'Nightingales and Skylarks' (*Csalogányok és pacsirták*).
[4] *A magyar nemes*, p. 61.

unleashed during the revolution. Mere patriotism, however, was not the full extent of his vision. In the remarkably prophetic 'One thought torments me',[1] he dreamt of world freedom, a concept considerably in advance of his age, when the independence of Hungary bounded most horizons. He loved his country and knew how to portray its landscapes and its people, as for instance in 'The Alföld' and 'The Inn at the End of the Village'.[2] The sprightly humour of 'It's Raining'[3] is perfectly matched by its brevity. It would be wrong, however, to imagine that Petőfi's feelings were all on the surface. He had occasional flashes of deep insight, expressed, for example, in 'Grief'[4] or his justly famous 'At the End of September'.[5] He became a legend among people who had previously had little or nothing to do with literature, and his fame spread far beyond the bounds of Hungary.

It was only to be expected that others would be caught up in the whirl of national optimism of this era. The heights of this optimism were reached by Petőfi himself, who wrote: 'If the earth is the hat of God, our land is the garland on it'.[6] In this atmosphere the serious novel had less chance of popularity than the short humoresques and sketches which flooded the literary scene, much to the disgust of the earnest reviewers. Nevertheless many of these stories showed early appreciation of the difficult art of the short story. Eötvös was one of the few authors who successfully used the form of the novel to throw vivid light on the social problems of his age. His 'Village Notary'[7] expressed his belief, inherited from Hugo, that literature was of value only if it strove to right wrongs and to fight for the highest

[1] *Egy gondolat bánt engemet*, p. 62.
[2] P. 58 and *Falu végén kurta kocsma*, p. 65.
[3] *Esik, esik, esik*, p. 60. [4] *A bánat?*, p. 61.
[5] *Szeptember végén*, p. 66.
[6] 'The Hungarian Nation' (*A magyar nemzet*, 1846). [7] P. 31.

ideals of its age. Eötvös attempted to weave as many social abuses as possible into his tale, and the result is an uneven work, hindered rather than helped by the ponderous style and didactic tone he adopted. But certain scenes stand out vividly, like the picture of the election included here, and the reaction of some of his readers showed that Eötvös had touched many raw spots; one critic declared that it was no more than an eight-volume leading article from Kossuth's paper.

Vörösmarty, too, now numbered among the older generation, was sufficiently aroused by the events leading up to 1848 to write his bitter 'Parliament House',[1] but, as always, his was a passing mood. His 'Poor Woman's Book',[2] written at the same period, shows him at his most delicate and sympathetic, and is far removed from the bustle of the contemporary scene.

When revolution came, heralded by Petőfi's 'National Song'[3] and fanned by Kossuth's blazing oratory, it was natural that writers should support it in word and deed. The first steps were taken in Pest by a literary group; at the same time the Diet in Pozsony was scared by the rumour that Petőfi had put himself at the head of a band of 40,000 peasants. For a brief period action was the key-note; it seemed at last that the national ambitions of Hungary were to be fulfilled.

IV

1849 brought swift and shattering death to the high hopes of the previous year, and ushered in yet another period of absolutism, which was now all the harder to endure with the memory of those hopes still in mind. The

[1] *Országháza*, p. 14.
[2] *A szegény asszony könyve*, p. 15.
[3] *Nemzeti dal*, p. 68.

great figures of the immediate past had gone away; Kossuth was in exile, Petőfi had disappeared in battle, Széchenyi's mind gave way beneath the strain of self-torture and Vörösmarty retired, a sick and broken man. Others, like Eötvös, were in exile or hiding from a regime which was determined to bring all revolutionaries to account and imposed a fierce censorship on all literary activity.

The first dumbness of defeat was followed by recrimination. The process can be seen at its best in Arany, who had leapt to fame with his *Toldi*, a national epic in Hungarian idiom, before the revolution. During 1848 he wrote little; he supported the movement out of duty and not from conviction—his 'What Shall We Do?'[1] is an extraordinarily bloodthirsty poem for one of his disposition. 'I Lay Down the Lyre'[2] expressed the immediate reaction to defeat, while recrimination appeared in his ruthless caricature of revolution, 'The Gipsies of Nagyida',[3] for which he later apologised and which to this day has never been discussed fully. In prose, Zsigmond Kemény also sought to blacken the character of the great figures of the revolution. Both writers were seeking a new path for national literature. The best solution to the problem of national ambition had been attempted and had failed; now an alternative had to be sought, which at most could only be second-best. It is this thought which underlies the main stream of Hungarian literature until the *Ausgleich* of 1867.

The reconstruction of Hungarian literary life to this new, less inspired pattern was a difficult process, but was attempted with success by a group of writers who could speak with the authority of the Academy and at the same time support the policy of Deák. 'Peragit tranquilla potes-

[1] *Mit csináljunk?*, p. 46.
[2] *Leteszem a lantot*, p. 46.
[3] *A nagyidai cigányok*, 1852.

tas, quae violenta nequit' was the new slogan. Of this group, Arany became the accepted 'poet laureate', Kemény the chief publicist and novelist, and Pál Gyulai (1826–1909) the official critic. All were ripe in experience, if not in years. Once more classical discipline and restraint became the order of the day, and few indeed were the authors who could afford to ignore it.

Arany was the giant poet of this period; he ranks as the greatest of all epic and ballad writers in Hungarian literature. His doubt of himself and his ability was combined with a scholarly approach to the problems of verse, which enabled him to flourish within the restrictions of his time. He was for ever ailing, both physically and mentally, for the scars left by the revolution did not heal in him, yet he turned his moods into humorous self-reproach, where Petőfi would have proclaimed them for all to know. He was ever conscious of the failings of his country—the theme of national sin constantly creeps in. Like his contemporary, Kemény, he could be silent where Kossuth and Petőfi would have spoken, and he constantly proclaimed that he had finished writing—neither 'I Lay Down the Lyre' nor 'Epilogue'[1] was his last verse. He was even disciplined enough to write the most polished verse without the least inspiration; his Széchenyi ode of 1860 is the classic example of this. Arany typified the mood of the time, but unlike most of his fellow-poets, was able to produce the best from what he knew within himself to be only second-best inspiration.

It is very difficult to capture the real merit of his epics without considerable study of background and detail; these have therefore been omitted from the present collection. But his ballads show his mastery of brief, vivid style and rhythm. 'Mátyás's Mother'[2] is a model of brevity,

[1] P. 54. [2] *Mátyás anyja*, p. 48.

while 'The Bards of Wales'[1] would appear at first sight to be a translation, like his brilliant version of 'Sir Patrick Spens'. In fact it is allegorical, and was written for the visit of Franz Josef to Hungary in 1857,—a fine example of 'tranquilla potestas'.

Kemény also portrayed the inner conflict of the times in his huge and gloomy novels. Like Jósika before him, he owed much to Scott for the setting of his works, but his deep researches into the problems of the human soul were far more important than mere historical background. The extract from 'The Fanatics'[2] displays his style at its best; the action was always slow and inexorable, the dialogue elementary, but the host of torturing, unanswered questions, self-condemnation and doubt were all the more effective. It is not surprising that he became mentally deranged. As a publicist he had far greater popularity; his deliberate silences on matters of important policy were often far more effective criticism than the expected tirade. This too was in accordance with the discipline of the time, and it was not without reason that the friends of Arany, Kemény and Gyulai were termed 'the literary Deák-party'. Deák himself was a philosopher-statesman of a very different calibre from that of Kossuth or Széchenyi; his early 'Letter to a Friend's Son'[3] shows his nature at a time when others were being swept off their feet by the rapidity of events.

It was unfortunate that Gyulai insisted in his much-feared criticisms that younger poets should model themselves upon Arany. If they obeyed, they became mere echoes; if they did not, they were outcasts. There were some who in their day were regarded as great contemporaries of Arany and Petőfi merely because they were their

[1] *A walesi bárdok*, p. 51. [2] *A rajongók*, p. 36.
[3] *Levél egyik barátja fiához*, p. 24.

friends. Among these was Tompa, who displayed considerable delicacy and skill in verse of the folksong type, but lacked fire. He will always be remembered for his allegorical poem 'The Bird to her Young',[1] addressed to the poets silenced and benumbed by the collapse of the revolution. Another, very much longer-lived follower of Arany was Lévay, most of whose works are now forgotten; he captured a moment of sheer beauty in his *Mikes*.[2]

The outcasts had to fight stern battles for recognition. Jókai was by far the most successful and prolific of those who were castigated by Gyulai. He was blessed with a fertile imagination—the main cause of the critics' assaults,—a facile pen and a delight in telling stories for their own sake. Always an individualist, he took not the slightest heed of the angry pronouncements of the literary Deák-party, and to their chagrin won increasing popularity in Hungary and abroad. His childlike optimism, romantic plots and frequent escapism seemed the very antithesis of the national literary need; the feeling of the day was perhaps best expressed by Arany in his 'Cosmopolitan Poetry'.[3] Jókai derived his style not from the Jósika-Kemény tradition, but from the lighter sketches and short stories which had displeased critics in the age of Kossuth. No other Hungarian writer has ever reached the extraordinary breadth of his fantasy, which ranged from prophecy to the semi-scientific fiction familiar to the readers of Verne, from local scenes in Hungary to the uttermost parts of the earth and from ancient history to future events. 'Which of the Nine?'[4] is one of his earlier tales, but displays all the characteristics which endeared Jókai to his wide audience.

Vajda was also disowned by official circles, but unlike Jókai had to fight a losing battle and never reached real

[1] *A madár fiaihoz*, p. 44.
[2] P. 77.
[3] *Kozmopolita költészet*, 1877.
[4] *'Melyiket a kilenc közül?'*, p. 73.

recognition during his lifetime. He retained the fiery spirit of the revolution long after it was officially dead, and added to this the bitterness of disappointment in love and a desperate longing for peace with the world and himself. He had much more in common with Arany and Kemény than had Jókai, but instead of restraining his feelings he declared them with a passionate intensity which surprised and shocked them. He was a lonely giant and made himself the centre of every experience. His powerful language had a far wider range of expression than that of his contemporaries, and his tortured imagination evoked pictures which would not have been out of place in the works of his greater successor, Ady.

In 1867 there came the *Ausgleich*, the compromise solution to the Austro-Hungarian problem, largely engineered by Deák. But it was not heralded with songs and verse like the revolution, even by the supporters of Deák. We may suspect that their silence cloaked their real feelings.

V

After 1867 a period of relative stagnation ensued. Kemény died in 1875 and Arany, after a sudden burst of unwonted energy, followed him in 1882, thus leaving the fate of national classicism in the firm but uninspiring hands of Gyulai. But important social and economic movements were afoot, and the literary pattern began to change in accordance with them. Budapest grew with astonishing rapidity as foreign capital and new industry—belatedly—arrived in the country, and the sharp distinction between city and country life began to show itself in literature. It became increasingly common for writers to hold some official post; in short, literature became an accepted part of Hungarian life, and poetry in particular displayed a dull

respectability when it followed the approved Academy line. There was no dearth of moderate writers, but originality was chiefly to be found in those who rebelled against authority.

It was during this period that Mikszáth began to win well-deserved popularity. He wrote of the society he knew and understood best—the decaying gentry and minor officials of the Hungarian countryside, debt-ridden and anachronistic, yet real and colourful. He knew how to tell a story and point a moral without the heavy-handedness of his predecessors. In language he used dialect words freely. 'The Blacksmith and the Cataract',[1] one of his non-political sketches, shows his method at its best. Mikszáth's picture of society was sympathetic yet critical; he revealed its weaknesses and laughed at them, a method later applied with deadly accuracy to literature itself by Frigyes Karinthy.

Towards the end of the 19th century a new generation of writers began to appear. They had missed the revolution, and were far more conscious of their own surroundings than of the glories of the past. Zoltán Ambrus (1861–1932) began the modern trend in literature, and Herczeg quickly became the favourite author of the high society he depicted in his novels and plays. His polished elegance and sure touch were allied with restrained irony as befitted the editor of a modern conservative periodical, 'New Times' (*Új Idők*), which he started in 1895, and which had a great vogue until the second world war. Herczeg was cosmopolitan and shone in the society of the capital, whose intrigues and whims he depicted in his works. 'The Frogs'[2] displays his mastery of the short story.

Herczeg's great contemporary, Gárdonyi, turned to the

[1] *A hályog-kovács*, p. 82. [2] *A békák*, p. 94.

country for his inspiration. At a time when the romantic, singing peasant was fashionable on the Budapest stage and Mikszáth's impoverished country-nobility was equally popular, he wrote of village life with its realities in a curiously stifled style which appears to leave much unsaid. His brief and almost forgotten 'Childhood Memories'[1] contain much of the dispassionate observation that gives Illyés' 'People of the Pusztas' its distinctive quality. 'The Stars of Eger',[2] one of his popular historical novels, again emphasises the role of the Hungarian villagers. Herczeg peopled his historical works with lords and ladies; Gárdonyi with peasants. Both were beginning to make themselves known in Hungarian literature at a time of new experiment, and both were quite suddenly pushed into the background by the arrival of the most controversial figure of modern times, the poet Ady.

VI

Ady burst in upon Hungarian literature with an impact that shattered its previous structure and immediately made him the centre of controversy. Even to-day, although his greatness is established, he remains a much-disputed figure. Critics have regarded him as a belated representative of the European *fin-de-siècle*, as a revolutionary, prophet or mystic, as a sensual lover, an austere Calvinist or an ardent nationalist, but the real Ady was made up of all these often contradictory traits. To the readers of the staid poets of the late 19th century his violent language, weird imagination and haunting fears seemed incomprehensible; Vajda, had he been alive, might have understood something of this new poet, who declared

[1] *Gyermekkori emlékeim*, in 'Jövendő', 1903. See p. 93.
[2] *Egri csillagok*, p. 89.

openly in his first important collection of verse[1] that he would write new songs for new times,[2] whatever the personal cost.

The selection of his verse given here merely shows some of his many characteristics. Such impressionist poetry as Ady's can rarely be translated adequately, but its beauty and astonishing strength can at least be sensed. 'Autumn Walked in Paris'[3] was written during one of his many pilgrimages to that city, where so many modern Hungarian authors have found inspiration. Its colourful epithets and restless mood differ greatly from 'The Peacock Rose Up',[4] which starts with a folk-song and develops into a thunderous prophetic threat. 'Alone with the Sea'[5] is one of Ady's many love poems to 'Léda', a series of swift pictures with a spell-like rhythmic refrain. The Bible and fatalism stand out in 'Elijah's Chariot',[6] and Ady's ever-present fear of death in the extraordinarily beautiful 'Death's Horses'.[7] The picture of his birthplace[8] borders on the cynical and despairing, while the 'Poem of the Proletarian Boy'[9] displays the revolutionary Ady. One of his finest poems in mystic vein, and indeed one of the greatest poems ever written on the outbreak of the first world war is 'Memory of a Summer Night'.[10]

All Ady's work, prose and poetry alike, was intensely subjective. His whole life was an unplanned succession of vivid experiences which found their way into writing, and it is impossible to make him the prime advocate of any

[1] New Verses (*Új versek*), 1906; he had previously written two volumes (*Versek*, 1899 and *Még egyszer*, 1903) which gave little indication of what was to come.

[2] *Góg és Magóg fia vagyok én*, p. 106.

[3] *Párisban járt az Ősz*, p. 107.

[4] *Fölszállott a páva*, p. 107.

[5] *Egyedül a tengerrel*, p. 108.

[6] *Az Illés szekerén*, p. 109.

[7] *A Halál lovai*, p. 110.

[8] *Séta bölcső-helyem körül*, p. 110.

[9] *Proletár-fiú verse*, p. 111.

[10] *Emlékezés egy nyár-éjszakára*, p. 113.

particular cause by emphasising one part of his strange character to the detriment of the rest. He must be accepted as an individual author who broke through the conventions of his age and heralded the modern, 20th-century period of Hungarian literature.

The development of individual characteristics became very much more marked during the early years of the present century. The literary periodical 'West' (*Nyugat*) became a rallying-point for a new generation of writers whose desire was to be linked with West European thought, but it did not stifle individual ability. The Ady-controversy provided a fruitful source of literary criticism, and the coffee-houses of Budapest became the usual haunts of literary circles, whose members frequently wrote for the national press. It was a time of extensive creativeness, thought and criticism, and it produced a number of brilliant writers.

Of the *Nyugat* circle, Babits strove to achieve a synthesis between Hungarian traditions and the wider European and classical ideals. He was a humanist of wide scholarship —his 'History of European Literature' pays remarkable tribute to this—and a poet with an unrivalled mastery of sound and rhythm, which could occasionally carry him away. His work was just as subjective as that of Ady, but contained an element of polished dignity and nobility which befitted the translator of Dante and lent him a certain reserve. His spiritual pilgrimage was a long and complicated journey, from the formal verse of his early years through the first world war and the various fashions of the post-war period to the prophetic majesty of his 'Book of Jonah'.

Kosztolányi, Babits' contemporary, started with the same formal delicacy, but achieved a direct simplicity of language which is looked upon to-day as a model for

would-be writers. As a poet he was popular and wrote with deceptive gracefulness which often cloaked his real feelings. His prose works, and in particular his short stories, are models of clarity and precision. His role was a very necessary one in the world of Ady and Babits, both of whom played successfully with language which might well have proved dangerous to less daring writers; Kosztolányi was less subjective and nearer to the life of the world around him. Though he struck a perpetual pose, the real Kosztolányi breaks through, as for example in the tragic little verse 'I've Learnt it All'.[1]

Among the prose writers of this circle, Móricz soon rose to prominence, and with his coming the idea of the romantic peasant died. He did not scorn the use of dialect as he described the harsh reality of peasant life in the lowlands, and his careful description, vivid contrasts and robust language invested his work with the stamp of genuineness and certainty. 'The Bursary'[2] shows his method. With Mikszáth there was social criticism, but it could be overlooked in the fun of the tale; Gárdonyi gave a dispassionate account of the Hungarian village, but Móricz demanded continual attention to the problems he described with first-hand knowledge.

It is natural to mention Móra after Móricz, although he was not one of the *Nyugat* writers. Móra remained a provincial author, and yet achieved widespread fame throughout the country. His knowledge of the Szeged area, where he lived and died, was unparalleled, and allied with keen observation, gentle humour and a touch of lyricism, it made him popular with adults and children alike. His immediate predecessor, Tömörkény (1866–1917), had travelled a similar road, but without achieving the

[1] *Már megtanultam*, p. 149.
[2] *A stipendium*, p. 132.

recognition Móra commanded. 'Confessional Dinner'[1] is a delightful tale, skilfully and simply told, and with an unexpected final twist that shows the mastery of its author. It was no small achievement to obtain a place among the great writers in an age when recognition almost inevitably depended upon residence in the capital and contribution to its literary life.

When we turn from the realism of Móricz and the scholarly prose of Móra to Krúdy's romantic prose-poetry, it is hard to realise that he was their contemporary. Krúdy was stirred by elusive moods and memories, which he moulded into a unique style. The countryside in a romantic past age appealed to Krúdy far more than the reality of the present. Plot mattered little and time not at all, but mood meant all the more to him; in this magic, half-expressive, dreamy world the author himself lived and won admirers. He rarely emerged from it; indeed the posthumous publication of his *Dudoraszi* in 1948 caused considerable surprise, for it showed that there had been times when he had approached the realistic outlook of his contemporaries.

The ever-increasing spell of Budapest and city life soon produced a number of cosmopolitan authors whose urbane comedy and characters would not have been out of place in any other European literature. Herczeg has already been mentioned. With him there grew up Heltai, the master of light verse, comedy and prose. He owed much to French inspiration, and his delicate wit has become well-known beyond his own country. His colloquial style and economy of expression are well suited to his themes, which may seem slight to portentous critics, but nevertheless make good and enjoyable reading.

It was Ferenc Molnár who succeeded in invading the

[1] *Vallató vacsora*, p. 125.

fashionable European and American world with his dramas, but in Hungary, where critics inherited the anti-cosmopolitan views of the previous century, his children's classic 'The Boys of Paul Street' (*A Pál-utcai fiúk*, 1907) established his fame. In this collection, however, Molnár appears in a different light. His 'Memoirs of a War Correspondent'[1] include passages which have rarely been matched in their graphic simplicity; this one describes the same time as Ady's 'Memory of a Summer Night'[2] and catches something of the same mystical mood, but in prose.

Equally cosmopolitan, yet very different in style and subject, was Frigyes Karinthy. It would be easy, yet quite wrong, to dismiss him merely as a humorist whose sketches are similar in style to those of Stephen Leacock. Karinthy used his gift of parody to pour ridicule on the excesses of his contemporaries. This was, in fact, a form of criticism which was far more to be feared than a mere unfavourable review, and it extended beyond the bounds of literature. 'The Psychology of the Revolutionary Movement'[3] is a vigorous attack on Marxist practice, and the glorious absurdity of the 'Art of Translation'[4] contains much more than humour. It is not surprising that Karinthy wrote a continuation of 'Gulliver's Travels'. Certainly no other Hungarian author has attempted this unusual literary role with such outstanding success.

The complex situation in Hungary between the two world wars and the clash of political, social and economic views of this feverish age saw the rise of even greater literary variety, with the passing fashions fleetingly reflected in its works. Although *Nyugat* still commanded respect, it had to contend with rivals of all kinds. Among the numerous

[1] *Egy haditudósító emlékei*, p. 121.
[2] P. 113.
[3] *A forradalmi mozgalom lélektana*, p. 166.
[4] *Műfordítás*, p. 168.

poets of this time Juhász and Tóth stood far above their contemporaries. The former led a tortured, hypochondriac life, at odds with everyone, including himself, yet never able to break through his passivity. His verse can be deceptively calm and beautifully phrased, yet the fears which continually beset him are never far away. Where Ady would have burst into fury, Juhász is resigned. Tóth, who also had to fight for life against tuberculosis, was by far the most brilliant artist of his time. His discipline of form and language made every poem a gem, and his many translations are astounding examples of that very difficult art. Neither he nor Juhász experimented with new forms or strange language for the sake of effect.

If these two poets are regarded as of the left wing, so too was Kassák, whose chief title to fame must still rest upon his lengthy autobiography, and not upon the free verse which was popular at one time. Almost, but not quite, the proletarian author, his literary progress followed the varied fashions of the age, from expressionism and futuristic verse to the stark realism of his autobiography, where he reveals himself as a keen observer of industrial life.

The true proletarian poet was Attila József, who unlike Kassák, was born and bred in the utter poverty of industrial Budapest. His verse varies from thunderous denunciation of capitalism to the gentle melancholy of hopeless poverty, and once again echoes the fashions of the time—and more particularly Freudism. József, however, was just as much an individualist as Ady; he was far more limited by his circumstances and has had to wait for posthumous fame. In his unusual verse, mystery, horror, strange fears and obsessions are mingled with everyday scenes, interpreted by a remarkable intellect in lyric poetry of such ease that it sometimes seems ill-matched with its subject. The three poems included here display utterly different

moods; the 'Kings of Bethlehem'[1] contains a mixture of Christian and pagan lore in folksong style, 'Suburban Night'[2] is both strange and graphic, and his 'Welcome to Thomas Mann'[3] achieves a classical solemnity.

Gyula Illyés is one of the few established Hungarian writers who have survived the second world war. 'People of the Pusztas'[4] raised him to the front rank. It is an objective account of his own previously neglected strata of society and combines the interest of a good autobiography with the detail of a documentary novel. His verse has been of a more conventional 'social lyric' style.

Like Illyés, Lőrinc Szabó has survived the last war. A former follower of Babits, he broke away from his master and followed his own restless, sensitive path. The story of the relationship is told graphically in 'Babits'.[5] His verse has remarkable poise without perhaps reaching great depths of feeling. Szabó, however, is a master of the brief sketch and can capture the momentary scene in brilliant colour.

Among the many regional writers of the most modern times, Tamási must be included as a representative of Transylvania, where a lively Hungarian literary tradition was maintained after its incorporation in Rumania. Abel,[6] the Székely lad with his picturesque language and sharp wits, is his most outstanding character.

Of the authors who now live outside Hungary, Zilahy is perhaps the best known. He writes with ease and prefers action to psychological problems. His ability to tell a good story has gained him a large audience outside his own country. 'The Windmill with Silver Sails'[7] is an early short story, set in Hungary and delicately told.

[1] *Betlehemi királyok*, p. 192.
[2] *Külvárosi éj*, p. 193.
[3] *Thomas Mann üdvözlése*, p. 196.
[4] *Puszták népe*, extract, p. 186.
[5] P. 181.
[6] P. 176.
[7] *Az ezüstszárnyú szélmalom*, p. 171.

Márai, on the other hand, delves very deeply into the soul of his own decaying middle-class. Despite his elegant style, the irony and disillusionment for ever present in his novels make them uneasy reading. In other works, however, such as the essay 'Star'[1] included here, he becomes less subjective and far more approachable as a writer.

VII

The modern age of literature contains so many varieties of all kinds that it has been impossible to mention more than a mere handful of its authors; moreover the period from Ady onwards is too close to be seen in true perspective. But it is at least possible to realise what an immense advance has been made during the period covered by this anthology. Despite the catastrophe of 1849, the division of Hungary after 1919 and the death of so many leading authors during the time of the second world war, Hungarian literature has continued to flourish. In this post-war age, it has necessarily widened its bounds, and works are published in the language in all parts of the world—a tribute to its virility. In Hungary proper, the catastrophe of the war and the establishment of a totally different regime seem to have retarded growth for the present, but there is no doubt of the interest in literature and its problems shown by a very large proportion of the present generation; this is sufficient to arouse hope for the future.

[1] *Csillag*, p. 182.