

Undoing the Collective Amnesia: A Brief Discussion of Feminism and Women Writers in Hungary

Agnes Vashegyi MacDonald, University of British Columbia, was born in Budapest, Hungary, and she moved to Canada in 1991. Her PhDs is in Comparative Literature and her research interests include twentieth century Central European culture with a special interest in women authors.

Abstract

This paper expands on current studies that examine the history of Hungarian feminism while making links with the discourse of late nineteenth and early twentieth century women writers. Issues of suffrage, public health, prostitution, and the challenging of patriarchal ideologies and structures were key subjects for feminists and women writers in Hungary.

Résumé

Cet article élabore sur les études courantes qui examinent l'histoire du féminisme hongrois tout en faisant des liens entre les discours d'écrivaines de la fin du dix-neuvième siècle et du début du vingtième siècle. Les questions de suffrage, de santé publique, de prostitution, et les idéologies et les structures patriarcales compliquées étaient les sujets clés pour les féministes et les écrivaines en Hongrie.

Woman authors in Hungary in the early part of the twentieth century made a significant impact on Hungarian literature, culture and society. Many of them were affected by and also influenced the early feminist movement in that country which emerged as a result of rapid social and political change triggered by industrialization and urbanization. Following the 1867 Compromise between Austria and Hungary, which placed the two powers on more or less equal political footing within the Habsburg Monarchy, the women's movement and women's literature began to burgeon in the region ushering in cultural modernity. As Judith Szapor explains, "women's movements, including a full-fledged feminist movement, were an integral part of the rich and colorful political spectrum of turn-of-the-century Hungary" (Szapor 2004, 191). However, neither then nor during the following one hundred years have scholars paid much attention to the many and rich documents and sources available about women authors and feminism in Hungary: "the history of women's movements is a sadly neglected field in Hungarian scholarship" (Szapor 2004, 189).

The few noteworthy studies about Hungarian women are exceptions to the rule. As Agatha Schwartz explains in her book, *Shifting Voices*, an ongoing prejudice in Hungary proclaims "feminism [as] foreign to the Hungarian tradition" (2008, 13). Hungarian feminists' and women writers' contributions have been undervalued or misinterpreted in terms of quality, aesthetics and reason both in Hungary and internationally (Schwartz 2008; Szapor 2004). In accordance with Szapor and Schwartz, the Hungarian feminist scholar Judit Acsády elucidates that feminism as a social movement was considered to be a

"brutal attack on respected traditions in Hungary" (Acsády 1999a, 59). During her research in the 1990s, Acsády met several scholars in Hungary who denied the history and existence of a women's movement in Hungary, or who argued that feminism should not be considered part of mainstream Hungarian history. These perspectives, based on the legacy of over forty years of communist dogma, which alleged women's equality and consequently afforded no special recognition, and of patriarchal traditions of the past centuries, have all marked and damaged feminist efforts. Thanks to the research of Szapor, Schwartz, Acsády and their colleagues in and outside of Hungary, several important documents, periodicals and books dedicated to Hungarian feminism and women authors have been uncovered in library archives and private collections in the past decade.¹ This paper endeavours to complement these scholars' works by bringing attention to the interconnectedness of Hungarian feminism and women writers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to stretch the boundaries and seek a forum of diversity in feminist history.

We ought to understand the development of the Hungarian women's movement in the context of Western feminism and also as specifically situated in order to foster the desire for diversity and to respond to the issue of omission within feminist inquiry. Exposing the structure of patriarchal society, its oppression of women, and finding ways to overcome women's subjugated position, thereby (re)constructing women's history and participation in society, politics, sciences, arts and literature, have been the chief aims of both Western and Hungarian feminists. In this respect, Western feminist critique investigates biological determinism *vis á vis* the social construction of gender, along with androgyny, language, and cultural imperialism as some of the main tenets in order to seek out an alternative feminist epistemology. From the first wave of feminism that fought for universal suffrage and demanded the equality of the sexes, to

more recent feminisms that have more directly addressed questions of class, race and sexual orientation, the project of feminism historically and contemporarily is to connect theory with practice.

Women's literature and canon formation have been hampered by women's imposed social position, sex-role stereotypes, and the widespread notion that they are less creative than men. They have had the formidable task of overcoming their role as objects of art and subjects of literature, produced by men, and taking charge of writing about their experiences. Western feminist criticism considers Virginia Woolf's literary work probing the idea of women's difference as inscribed in their writings as a touchstone of modern feminist thought. Following Mary Jacobus and other Anglo-American contemporary feminist scholars I pose the following questions about Hungarian women's literary works: "what is the nature...of women's writing?" and furthermore, "can women adapt traditionally male dominated modes of writing and analysis to the articulation of female oppression and desire?" (Jacobus 1986, 30, 32). To this effect, I see Hungarian women's literature between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as diverse and sometimes contradictory in its affiliation to feminist ideology, for which a conceptual framework that allows for gaps and inconsistencies ought to be further developed. Most of the material available concerns the lives and works of Hungarian bourgeois and noble women authors and feminists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries without including the existence of working-class and Roma women's efforts and contributions. While the middle- and upper-class women authors most certainly represent a privileged group and an elitist culture, we ought to acknowledge their struggle in breaking through the androcentric barriers of Hungarian patriarchy and literary modernism.

In the late 1800s, access to and the improvement of women's education became a priority for many in Hungary and this issue

was contextualized in a rhetoric of national independence from the Habsburg House. In her weekly journal, *Családi kör* [*Family Circle*], established in 1860, Emilia Kánya, a middle-class writer and divorcée, spoke out against women's oppression and lack of education. As Schwartz explains, Kánya "without challenging women's role of wife and mother...demanded the opportunity for unmarried or widowed women to make an income" (2008, 14). At about the same time, the progressive Hungarian education reformer Count József Eötvös urged the establishment of teacher training colleges for women. However, he also expressed conservative views about girls' upbringing and training in accordance with "the feminine vice" (Szegevári 1981, 126). Also, several women's organizations formed in an effort to fight for women's education, such as the *Mária Dorothea Egyesület* [*Maria Dorothea Association*] in 1885, *Országos Nőképző-Egyesület* [*National Association for Women's Education*] in 1868, *Országos Nőiiparegylet* [*National Women's Employment Association*] in 1879, and *Nőtisztviselők Országos Egyesülete* [*National Association of Women Office Workers*] in 1897. Due to the efforts of Pálné Veres major improvements were also made in women's educational opportunities by the late 1890s, resulting in women's enrollment in university arts and medical science programmes, including pharmacy (Fábri 1996).² As Schwartz observes, it took the "initiative of courageous women and the clout of organized women's groups at the end of the nineteenth century to claim...existing rights and push for the realization of others" (2008, 35). Their battles and achievements were noted among women and also some progressive men within the country. In December 1896, a ministerial decree opened the university faculties of medicine and arts for women at last (Szapor 2004). There were close to 800 women's organizations in Hungary by the late 1800s (Schwartz 2008, 21). While most of these early groups made no claims for political rights nor had any links to Western women's movements, and they did not mobilize women on a larger scale,

they can nevertheless be considered the forerunners of women's political organizations in Hungary.

Three main branches of the women's movement had formed in Hungary around the turn of the twentieth century: bourgeois feminists, socialists, and Christian conservative women's organizations (Szapor 2004, 192). Besides making way for ideas of suffrage, they also addressed social problems, workplace conditions and educational opportunities for women (Acsády 1999b, 246; Szapor 2004). The first generation of Hungarian feminist leaders came from the *Association of Women Clerks* who formed the *Magyar Feministák Egyesülete* [*Hungarian Association of Feminists*] in December 1904. The majority of them were middle-class educated urbanites from assimilated Jewish families, some married and others single, and included such prominent leaders as Rózsa Bédy-Schwimmer (1877-1948) and Vilma Glücklich (1872-1927) (Szapor 2004). They believed in an "új típusú nő," that is, a "new type of woman," an educated and independent person with a professional public livelihood (Szapor 2004, 198). Socialist women were associated with the Social Democrats who were active among factory workers. Tied to party and union rhetoric, their efforts in the beginning emphasized the advancement of the class struggle. Their leader, Mariska Gárdos (1885-1973) advocated that women would gain voting rights sooner through universal suffrage and she saw danger in allying with bourgeois women's efforts (Szapor 2004; Szegevári 1981). While bourgeois and socialist feminists did not agree on every aspect of the advancement of women's rights, they recognized that they were makers of a social, political and cultural turn in Hungary in a new century, and they fought together for a democratic society carving out loci for the independent working woman. They also emphasized that they wanted to maintain their differences from men as a basis from which to regenerate culture and society, while seeking equality with men on other levels. By

linking equality and difference, Hungarian first-wave feminists had already expressed a key notion that became the platform for the second-wave feminists in Western Europe and North America.

In 1913, the bourgeois Feminist Association in Budapest hosted the International Suffrage Alliance's 7th Congress which afforded Hungarian women's efforts a wider international recognition. At this time, the chief themes of women's groups, internationally and in Hungary, were public health, workplace safety, prostitution, illegitimacy, child welfare, the protection of mothers and newborns, and the exploitation of domestic servants and also suicide (Szapor 2004). Middle- and upper-class Christian women's associations in Hungary shared some of these grievances and fought for solutions affecting women. While they were driven by conservative ideals about women's independence and suffrage, their charity organizations, especially during World War I, contributed effectively to relieving some of the ailments women faced, such as gender, sexual and class discrimination, oppression and marginalization. In the fall of 1918, a new independent Hungary under the leadership of Mihály Károlyi's liberal democratic government reinitiated the topic of (literate) women's right to vote (Tóth 1975). A communist political takeover that resulted in the Republic of Councils in 1919 further promoted women's participation in politics; hence, all women eighteen years and older were granted the vote as long as they were members of the Workers Party. But when the Republic was defeated their voting rights were revoked and radical feminism in Hungary died.³ The bourgeois and socialist feminists lost power in the women's movement, defeated by the ever-increasing influence of Christian women's groups which advocated the ideal woman as a mother and wife and declared women's emancipation immoral (Szegvári 1981). Indeed, their goals corresponded with the platform of the interwar conservative government, led by Miklós Horthy. Hungary's loss in territory, population and international political rights after the

Versailles Treaty in 1920 resulted in the establishment of a right-wing political regime, which promoted nationalist, anti-Semite and chauvinist ideologies, turning the clock back on women's emancipation. It is interesting to note, though, that as a result of the international committees' pressure, Hungarian women achieved the right to vote in 1920, even if only for a short time (Szapor 2004). With the escalating rise of conservative and fascist forces, the Hungarian women's movement lost its avatars of bourgeois and socialist feminists. The issue of women's rights did not become part of the political agenda again until after 1945.

The peak of the Hungarian women's movement was between 1896 and 1914, a period of intense social and cultural modernization (Szapor 2004). It had a close affinity with Western women's movements in its pluralistic and democratic goals and praxis. The battle for women's access to higher education, professions, and to end discrimination against women at work took place not only in the different feminist organizations but also in everyday life. As Szapor explains, forward-looking women advocated a change in the "socially accepted image of the bourgeois woman not through politics but by way of their lifestyle, [for which] they found a nurturing environment in the circle of the progressive intellectuals" (2004, 202). Next to Vienna, Budapest flourished as a cultural hub attracting young artists, writers, poets from across the country who gathered in cafés along the boulevards and in salons at home and lived a bohemian life. In such intellectually and artistically conducive environments, women, primarily from the middle- and upper-classes, "found the courage to make a living from their literary work" (Szapor 2004, 203). While women involved in the feminist movement, such as, Rózsa Bédy-Schwimmer and Mariska Gárdos, wrote in several journals such as the *Munkásnő* [Working Woman], *Nő és a Társadalom* [Women and Society] and *Egyesült erővel* [With United Force], other women became full-time journalists, poets and novelists. One of the first female

journalists was Anna Szederkényi who initiated a permanent column for feminist thought in the *Pesti Hírlap* [*Pest Newspaper*] in 1910. The early feminist movement and women writers symbiotically influenced each other in Hungary.

Women Authors and the Feminist Movement: An Organic Link

In Hungary the earliest advocates of women's rights and emancipation were poets and writers, and members of the educated nobility - both men and women - throughout the centuries (Szapor 2004). The roots of early feminism and literature were intertwined as part of organically embedded social, political and cultural developments (Szapor 2004, 192). One of the first concrete examples of such a link is Éva Takáts's 1823 article, entitled "Egy két szó..." ["A Few Words..."], on marriage, women's education and intellectual equality with men, which was, not surprisingly, vehemently criticized by patriarchal officials and literati (Acsády 1999a). In comparison, during the same time in Western Europe, women's literary works were widely popularized, such as those by Jane Austen, Mary Godwin-Shelley and Mme De Staël. In fact and sadly, writings of these European women were available only to those few Hungarians who could read them in the original; translations did not become available until the 1920s. But by the late 1800s, like their Austrian contemporaries, many Hungarian feminists "conducted their activism not on the streets but through their publications and speeches, as well as their counseling services for women," for example, in legal, employment, and childcare facilities (Schwartz 2008, 15). They stood against all odds enduring ridicule, discrimination and oppression in an unsympathetic patriarchal society by taking part in public life through their writings and making their voices heard.

The literary historian Loránt Czigány suggests that in Hungary "it was a social necessity that the appearance on the scene of emancipated female creative writers should coincide with the emergence of the feminist movement" (1984, 333). The "concept of

Modern Woman, with its moral, social, human, and vocational implications," according to Czigány "was part of the social progress by middle-class radicalism" (1984, 333). Janka Wohl (1846-1901) who founded and edited such magazines as *Divat* [*Fashion*], *Nők Munkaköre* [*Women's Work*] and *Magyar Bazár* [*Hungarian Bazaar*] was one of the earliest feminist poets. Her works also included advice books for women, such as *A modern asszony breviária* [*The Modern Woman's Breviary*] in 1895 and the *A női szépség fenntartásának, ápolásának és növelésének titkai. Irta egy nagyvilági hölgy* [*The Secrets of How to Achieve, Maintain and Improve Women's Beauty. Written by a Modern Woman*] in 1885. Wohl was also the first woman to receive the prestigious Golden Cross of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1897 for her literary work (Sárdi and Tóth 1997). Janka, along with her sister Stefánia, who was also a writer, ran a literary salon and welcomed many women writers and also such eminent guests as Franz Liszt. In her 1887 novel *Aranyfüst* [*Golden Smoke*], Stefánia Wohl (1848-1889) depicts modernization during the Dual Monarchy in Hungary and women's position and role in the process. She was attacked with such severe criticism, as Schwartz explains, that she became "discouraged from further writing until shortly before her death" (2008, 32). Hungarian feminist writing was not curtailed, however, and numerous women followed in the footsteps of the Wohl sisters.

As I have pointed out, most Hungarian women authors came from the elite; they were from the privileged class, received good education, were able to travel and socialize which granted them a wider perspective along with time to write. Countess Sarolta Vay (1859-1918) was one of these upper-class female authors. She came from an old noble family, studied at university, took part in duels, wore men's outfits, and in fact wrote most of her works under male pseudonyms, such as D'Artagnan and Sándor Vay (Fábri 1996, 169).⁴ She frequently published in such reputed papers as *Vasárnapi Újság* [*Sunday Paper*] and *Új Idők*

[*New Times*], and earned her living entirely from her writing. While often masculine in tone and style, it is not clear whether Vay's work included manifestly lesbian lyricism. Schwartz argues that the bourgeois women's movement did not examine lesbian love and homosexuality, and "even in women's fiction, lesbian love [was] only rarely addressed" (2008 56). Gay and lesbian literature was not part of mainstream publications but a literary subculture likely existed while feminist voices became ever more laudable. Also, until the beginning of the twentieth century feminist discourse rarely expressed sensuous love, sexuality, or homosexuality. Nevertheless, leading feminists did criticize existing marriage practices and social problems.

One of the most ardent critics of society was Countess Sándorné Teleki, née Juliska Kende (1864-1937) who also wrote under the pen name, Szikra.⁵ In her first novel, *A bevándorlók* [*The Immigrants*] (1898), Szikra spoke for the oppressed - a commitment she was devoted to throughout her life. The sex trade, illiteracy, high divorce rates and the devastation of tuberculosis were some of her main concerns. She agreed with many of her feminist contemporaries on the point that women's education is above all an economic question and necessity. Szikra was also highly critical of the decadent lifestyle of the urban gentry and bourgeoisie, calling Budapest "Sznobopolisz" (Fábri 1996, 171). She edited the feminist movement's journal, *A Nő* [*The Woman*], and she was the president of the International Suffrage Alliance's 7th Congress held in Budapest in 1913. Szikra's was one of the most well known literary salons in the capital with such members as the woman writers Fruzina Szalay, Minka Czóbel and Emma Ritóok.

The Hungarian feminist scholar Anna Fábri explains that Fruzina Szalay (1864-1926), the daughter of a middle-class bourgeois family, disregarded the then popular themes of love and nation and instead expressed a Secessionist contrast between nature and urban settings with an underlying irony in her poems. Her unusual lyricism drew the attention of the respected

editor József Kiss who frequently published her works in his journal *A Hét* [*The Week*]. On the other hand, Minka Czóbel (1855-1947), who came from an aristocratic family, was considered one of the most philosophical poets of her time. She was influenced by Catholicism and by existentialist philosophy, German and English Romanticism, and Buddhism. Like her contemporaries outside Hungary, the Austrian Ada Christen and the Italian Ada Negri, Czóbel discussed social issues in her essays, such as the plight of the working class and the right of women to claim an independent life. Emma Ritóok (1868-1945) gained recognition on the Hungarian literary scene with her 1897 essay "A természettudományi irány a szépirodalomban" ["The Natural Science Stream in Literature"] and popularity with her 1905 award-winning novel *Egyenes úton egyedül* [*Alone on a Straight Road*]. Ritóok attended universities in France and Germany; she was one of Georg Simmel's students in Berlin, and earned a doctorate in philology. She also became a founding member of Georg Lukács's Sunday Circle in Budapest. However, she eventually turned away from the metaphysical outlook of her contemporaries and developed a feminist critical standpoint as demonstrated in her 1921 novel, *A szellem kalandorai* [*The Adventurers of the Spirit*].

By the end of the 19th century, Hungarian women writers had established themselves in the literary scene, at least to the extent that their critics no longer expressed merely patronizing tones or treated them as a novelty with a focus on their appearance instead of their output. In the early 1900s, women writers' works proliferated on the pages of the popular journals, *Új Idők* [*New Times*] and *A Hét* [*The Week*]. The well-regarded editor Ferenc Herczeg, in his journal *Új Idők*, published close to two hundred pieces by women writers between 1894 and 1913 (Fábri 1996). Similarly, from its inception the most prominent Hungarian review of literature and culture, *Nyugat* [*West*], also promoted women writers, initially Margit Kaffka and Anna

Lesznai.⁶ Margit Kaffka (1880-1918) came from a middle-class family in Transylvania. She earned her teaching degree in Budapest and was among the first woman teachers achieving not only a reputation as a pedagogue but also as a prolific writer. She is best known for her prose; she produced eight volumes of short stories, one volume of fairy tales, two volumes of children's stories and four novels while also publishing primarily in *Nyugat*. Her 1912 novel, *Szinek és évek [Colours and Years]*, which depicts the transition from traditional feudal to bourgeois society in the late 1800's Hungary through the reflections of the book's heroine, Magda Pórtelky, is considered the first feminist modern novel in Hungary. It was with Kaffka that literary critics first recognized a Hungarian female author as equal to the best of male authors; as Fábri points out, "it was in [Kaffka's] case that literary criticism first dismissed the need to differentiate between 'literary' and 'women's literary' works" (1996, 186).⁷ Kaffka was well known for her fiercely manifest opinion about marriage practices and she also spoke out against misogynistic texts.

By the early 1900s, in response to feminist writers' efforts, a growing number of misogynistic arguments surfaced in Hungary with the aim of keeping "women in their 'natural' place and role" (Schwartz 1999, 87). When the Hungarian translation of Otto Weininger's 1903 book *Geschlecht und Charakter [Sex and Character]* was published in 1913, many feminists fought outspokenly against it and other misogynistic texts. Margit Kaffka was one of the writers who openly condemned Weininger's text, comparing it with the Hungarian author, Zoltán Szász's misogynist book, *A szerelem [Love]*, in a 1913 article in *Nyugat*:

From [Szász's] stance, some statements are problematically daring and funny for a woman reader. Since a woman's sense and ability of judgment is smaller, in love she "idealizes more." It is a funny thing to read Weininger's similar passage on

the same day, whose young and lyrical love-hating arsenal, at the misfortune of the woman, of course, states that "only men can idealize" and are capable of true love. And that "woman's love is more joyful (?), only because man's higher status elevates her," and that "her subordination and dependence is joy." The opposite of these lighthearted and chatty observations could be proven just as well. Most likely the author has not heard timid, pious wives talking about men "among themselves," in the intimacy of sisterhood.

("Szász Zoltán: A szerelem," *Nyugat Electronic*)⁸

Kaffka's ironic tone pokes fun at both Szász's and Weininger's books, while cleverly making a demand for women's voices to be heard. But it was particularly with her literary works that Kaffka exposed women's struggles, contributing to the definition of a "new type of woman" ["új típusú n"] (Fábri 1996, 185). In her 1913 "Az asszony ügye" ["In Woman's Matters"] published in the journal *Világ [World]*, Kaffka paints the image of a "higher female being whose life should move in the direction of 'professions, work, love, creation, battle, action, and learning'...not merely into how to please a man," while also stressing that a woman should "try to get closer to herself" (Schwartz 1999, 84). Kaffka believed in a "new type of woman," not simply as an ideal but as a flesh and blood reality, which she herself embodied with all the struggles and joys that a woman's role as lover, wife and mother brings. Her concepts about women's roles, rights and prospects, depicted in her texts, were fundamental for the development of subsequent feminist discourses in Hungary. Before her sudden death in 1918, Kaffka wrote two more novels, *Hangyaboly [Ant-heap]* (1916) and *Állomások [Stations]* (1917), and several novellas such as *Mária évei [Years of Maria]* (1912), "Lirai jegyzetek egy évről" ["Lyrical Notes about a Year"]

(1915), and "Két nyár" ["Two Summers"] (1916), which all promoted feminist perspectives. Kaffka is one of a handful of canonized female Hungarian authors from the twentieth century.

Another strong voice of misandry - a hatred of men - was that of the Jewish-Hungarian Renée Erdős (1879-1956). Erdős achieved success with her novel, *Leányálmok [Girl's Dreams]* in 1899. Her prose and lyricism articulated rarely expressed female eroticism, employing unusual, sensuous and grave words to speak about relationships between men and women (Fábri 1996). She engaged the topic of male hatred most critically in her 1922 novel *A nagy sikoly [The Big Scream]*. Her focus on feminism and women's eroticism was also a critique of patriarchal morality. She joined the women who openly engaged in debates about femininity and masculinity in their articles and fiction, and also projected their own ideas and desires onto men, while reflecting on the female condition (Schwartz 2008). Psychoanalytical concepts about sexuality, the subconscious, sex drives, women's "frigidity" and the "fallen woman" had become quickly acknowledged and disputed. Erdős was an avid supporter of Sigmund Freud's concepts. Interest in her work grew quickly, earning her large honoraria from the journals in which she published. Freud's discoveries had a potent impact on male and female writers alike, and in Hungary his ideas became popularized through his student Sándor Ferenczi. Even before Freud, Ferenczi recognized the influence of social agents and conditioning, that is, education and upbringing, on women's sexuality, and he advocated women's right to sexual pleasure in and outside marriage. However, many feminists criticized the "Freudian concepts and sexual practices based on the moral double standard and the marriage of convenience" (Schwartz 2008, 56). As Schwartz points out, "Hungarian feminists had an additional reason for caution when it came to attacking attitudes with respect to sexuality and marriage, namely 'fear that sexual radicalism would undermine the success of

the suffrage campaign'" (2008, 57). At the same time, other critics of misogyny, misandry and views of feminism also gained force.

Anna Lesznai (1885-1966) shared many of her feminist friends' ideas. Lesznai was born into an old, ennobled, provincial Jewish family, hence themes of the land along with nature and folk traditions were ingrained in her writings, illustrations and embroideries. As Fábri notes, contrary to many of her female contemporaries' beliefs, Lesznai claimed that love was the only and true grounding force in women's lives (1996, 187). The *Nyugat* editors, Osvát and Ady, recognized Lesznai's lyricism early on and published her works frequently in the journal, mostly in the form of poems and cover illustrations. She was part of *fin-de-siècle* Hungarian intellectual circles, having married the well-known sociologist Oszkár Jászi. Her main talent, however, was writing children's stories. She published five books, and her most popular novel just before her death in 1966, entitled *Kezdetben volt a kert [In the Beginning was the Garden]*, was based on her own experiences as a woman writer and artist. It was Kaffka who introduced Lesznai's first volume of poems in her 1909 *Nyugat* review, and the two women became friends and collaborated on articles. Indeed, between 1909 and 1941, *Nyugat* published numerous women authors' works, including prominent young talents, such as Zseni Várnai (1890-1981) and Sarolta Lányi (1891-1975). Both Várnai and Lányi actively took part in the early working-class movement in Hungary, and became best known for their feminist communist lyric poetry.

Following World War One and the defeated democratic and communist revolutions in Hungary, women writers tended to turn to more traditional ideals and promoted conservative cultural models, losing such avatars as Kaffka who died in 1918, Lesznai, who immigrated to America, and Lányi who moved to the Soviet Union with her husband in 1922. It was in such a post-war revisionist historical context that the ultra conservative female author, Cécile Tormay's

(1875-1937) 1922 *Bujdosó könyv* [*An Outlaw's Diary*] became the most popular text as a form of regression to conventional beliefs.⁹ Her novels, including the 1914 *A régi ház* [*The Old House*], were translated into several languages, and she was also nominated for the 1937 Nobel Prize for Literature, but her untimely death prevented her from receiving it. In 1922 she became editor-in-chief of the *Napkelet* [*Dawn*] journal, which was founded to counter the progressive views of *Nyugat*. While *Napkelet* promoted conservative political values, it also published approximately three hundred articles by over one hundred women authors between 1922 and 1937. During the same period, *Nyugat* published only about sixty women authors' works, many of those by the lovers or wives of the journal's writers, such as Sophie Török, Piroska Reinhard, Szefi Bohuniczky, Mária Kovács, Kosáryné Lola Réz and Erzsébet Kádár (Fábri 1996). However, it would be misleading to imagine that women writers enjoyed an overall parity and equality with male writers at any of the journals or publishers. Many (male) critics of the various papers drew on chauvinist stereotypes, accentuating women's fragility and emotionality, or they simply denied the existence of their intellect. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that many women writers in Hungary during the early part of the twentieth century had produced a relatively large volume of works and had gained an audience, and in turn played a role in advancing feminist discourses.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated in this article, Hungarian women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fought for suffrage and emancipation on the streets and in their writings, similar to their contemporaries across Europe and America. Inspired by feminist movements, women authors gained attention and appreciation on the literary scene, and most of all, they spoke on behalf of millions of women in Hungary. Their works were often marked by anxiety about the self, gender, sexuality and even authorship while

writing from and against their subjugated position. They had the thorny double task of both subverting their oppressive situation and conforming to it in order to stay alive. Importantly, several women writers, among them Szikra, Renée Erdős, Margit Kaffka and Cécile Tormay "enjoyed considerable fame and respect, not only from readers but also from critics and fellow writers, both female and male" (Schwartz 2008, 4). Between 1931 and 1943, a growing number of texts about woman authors appeared, among them Margit Bozzay's 1931 book *Magyar asszonyok lexikona* [*Hungarian Women's Lexicon*], and Sophie Török's essay of "Nők az irodalomban" ["Women in Literature"] in *Nyugat* in 1932. Hungarian feminists' and women writers' battles and achievements contributed to Hungarian modernist culture and literature and advanced democratic progress despite all odds in the tumultuous historical context of the region. Lastly, I respond to my questions about the nature of Hungarian women's writing by adopting Jacobus's (1986) suggestion to recognize that there is no innocent attempt to mark female differences in the text because it also leads to inscribing women as fiction. In other words, women wrote what men were unwilling or unable to write and in so doing they recreated themselves through fiction with a desire for a better and egalitarian reality. By illuminating how Hungarian feminism and women authors were interlinked at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries I hope I have been able to contribute to both women's writing and writing about women as "rewriting of these fictions" (Jacobus 1986, 40). What the next step in uncovering Hungarian women's contribution to society and literature ought to be is the study of women artists from various class and ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations.

Endnotes

1. For additional scholarly sources about Hungarian feminism in English see, for example, Ablovatski, E. "Between Red Army and White Guard" (2006); Kovacs, M. "Ambiguities of Emancipation" (1996); Pető,

A. and J. Szapor, "The State of Women's and Gender History in Eastern Europe: The Case of Hungary" (2007); Zimmermann, S. "How They Became Feminists: The Origins of the Women's Movement in Central Europe at the Turn of the Century" (1997-98); Zsuppán, F.T. "The Reception of the Hungarian Feminist Movement 1904-14" (1989).

2. Pálné Veres (née Hermin Beniczky) (1815-1895) discussed the first all-girls' secondary school in Hungary in an article in the journal *A Hon [The Homeland]* in 1865, which is considered the beginning of the Hungarian feminist movement. In May 1868, Mrs. Veres with a handful of other women founded the *Országos Nőképző Egyesület [National Women's Education Association]* with the aim of elevating women's basic education and opportunities for higher education.

3. The Republic of Councils was the first communist government in Hungary from March to August 1919, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution.

4. Publishing under pseudonyms seemed to be an accepted practice.

5. The Hungarian word "szikra" means spark.

6. *Nyugat* was the most prominent review in Hungary between 1908 and 1941. Its editors, Ernő Osvát, Miksa Fenyő, Oszkár Gellért, Count Lajos Hatvany, Endre Ady and later Zsigmond Móricz and Mihály Babits brought a new vision and discourse to Hungarian literature, culture and society that today is known as the era of high modernism in Hungary.

7. Az ő esetében tette félre először a kritika az 'irodalmi' és nőirdalmi' kettős mércét. (All translations from Hungarian to English are by the author of this article).

8. Ebből a megkötöttségből néhány furcsa - asszonyolvasó szemében problematikus merész és mosolygató - kijelentése származik. Hogy - mert a nő bíráló érzéke és tapasztalata kisebb - azért "jobban eszményít" a szerelemben - mulatságos dolog véletlenül ugyanazon a napon olvasni Weininger megfelelő passzusával, kinek fiatalos, szinte szerelmesen lírai gyűlölete arzenáljában szerepel, természetesen a nő rovására, hogy "csak a férfi eszményíthet

igazán" és képes igazi szerelemre. Hogy: "A nő szerelme boldogabb (?), mert a férfi magasabbrendűsége révén ő a szerelemben emberi emelkedéshez jut" - és hogy: "Az alárendeltség és függés öröm a nőnek" - csupa könnyű fajsúlyú, causeur-i megállapítás -, melyek ellenkezője éppúgy bizonygatható volna. A szerző nyilván nem hallott még szelíd, megadó feleségeket "maguk közt" férfiakra beszélni - nőtestvéri intimitásban például.

9. The adjective "conservative" is insufficient for describing the right-wing views of Tormay, one of the leading lights and early proponents of Hungarian racist ideology that emerged around 1918. Tormay's notoriously anti-Semitic book (*An Outlaw's Diary*) and her political activities were largely responsible for the post-war period's adoption of racist discourse and various clauses and laws restricting access to higher education for Jewish students.

References

Ablovatski, E. "Between Red Army and White Guard," N. Wingfield and M. Bucur, eds. *Gender and War in the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, pp. 70-89.

Acsády, J. "Remarks on the History of Hungarian Feminism," *Hungarian Studies Review* 26.1-2 (1999a): 59-64.

_____. "A magyarországi feminizmus a századelőn" ["Hungarian Feminism at the Turn of the Century"]. *Politika, gazdaság és társadalom a XX. századi magyar történelemben [Politics, economy and society in 20th century Hungarian history]*, L. Püski, L. Timár and T. Valuch, eds. Debrecen: KLTE Történelmi Intézet, 1999b, pp. 295-11.

Czigány, L. *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature: From the Earliest Times to the Present*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

Fábri, A. "A szép tiltott táj felé": A Magyar irónők története a két századforduló között (1795-1905) ["To the Beautiful and Forbidden

Land": The History of Hungarian Women Writers Between the Turn of Two Centuries (1795-1905). Budapest: Kortárs, 1996.

Jacobus, M. *Reading Women: Essay in Feminist Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Kafka, M. "Szász Zoltán: A Szerelem," *Nyugat* 6.15 (July 1913). *Nyugat Electronic Database*.
<http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/nyugat.htm>

Kovacs, M. "Ambiguities of Emancipation," *Women's History Review* 5.4 (1996):487-95.

Pető, A., and J. Szapor. "The State of Women's and Gender History in Eastern Europe: The Case of Hungary," *Journal of Women's History* 19.1 (2007): 160-66.

Sárdi, M., and L. Tóth. *Magyar költőnők antológiája [Anthology of Hungarian Women Poets]*. Budapest: Enciklopédia, 1997.

Schwartz, A. "The Image of the 'New Woman' in Hungarian Women's Literature at the Turn of the Century," *Hungarian Studies Review* 26.1-2 (1999): 81-92.

_____. *Shifting Voices: Feminist Thought and Women's Writing in Fin-de Siècle Austria and Hungary*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill University Press, 2008.

Szapor, J. "Sisters or Foes: The Shifting Front Lines of the Hungarian Women's Movements, 1896-1918," *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century: A European Perspective*, S. Paletschek and B. Pietrow-Ennker, ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, pp. 189-205.

Szegvári, K. *Út a nők egyenjogúságához [Road to Women's Emancipation]*. Budapest: Kossuth, 1981.

Tóth, M [Bné]. *A magyar nők jogainak fejlődése [The Development of Hungarian Women's Rights]*. Budapest: Táncsics, 1975.

Zimmermann, S. "How They Became Feminists: The Origins of the Women's Movement in Central Europe at the Turn of the Century," *CEU History Department Yearbook*, 1997-98, pp. 195-236.

Zsuppán, F. T. "The Reception of the Hungarian Feminist Movement 1904-14," R. Pynsent, ed. *Decadence and Innovation: Austro-Hungarian Life and Art at the Turn of the Century*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989, pp. 61-65.