

## Order and Adventure – Hungarian Literature in Former Yugoslavia

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The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 and the subsequent Treaty of Trianon in 1920 have not only created new national states in the Danube Basin, but have also put an end to the unity of Hungarian national literature with Budapest as its centre. After the period of World War First a **separate literary tradition** exist in Romania (Transylvania), Slovakia (Felvidék), Yugoslavia (Délvidék) and in West emigration.

The identity in the separate minority of Hungarians was changed. The 100 years is a very long time; it was certainly long enough for the emergence of an almost autonomous Hungarian literature in Yugoslavia, the northern part of which, comprising the Bácska and part of the Bánát, has a Hungarian population of over 500,000. Known now as Vajdaság (formerly Délvidék) in Hungarian, it was the birthplace of many excellent authors.

In the late 1920s a local literature began to emerge. A literary life, however, began to take shape with the launching of „**Writing from Vajdaság**” (**Vajdasági Írás**, 1929-30) and its successor **Kalangya** (1932-44), both magazines edited by **Kornél Szenteleky** (1893-1933), who, in addition to being largely responsible for the organization of literary life, was the best local author. His novel *Isola Bella* (1931) is a series of impressionistic vignettes united by a central idea.

Publication of books by local authors started in 1933, and in 1934 a new periodical, **Bridge (Híd)**, 1934-41, 1945- ) was established. The belletristic significance of Bridge emerged only in the late 1950s, because the pre-war Bridge was mainly concerned with non-fiction and in any case it did not boast a circle of talented fiction writers. As Yugoslavia launched out in 1948 on its own road to socialism, there was no Stalinism there with its ugly side-effects for literature. In addition, the Hungarian ethnic minority gradually acquired all the rights pertaining to its status. Milestones of this development in cultural affairs were the establishment of a department of Hungarian studies at the University of Novi Sad (1959) at Újvidék, which became the centre of Hungarian cultural life. The Forum Publishing House (1957) publishes a great number of books which are also avidly read in Hungary, as the Yugoslav interpretation of socialist doctrines has left a much broader scope for diverging opinions than has the Hungarian or that of any other socialist regime.

A major figure of Vajdaság literature was **Ervin Sinkó** (1898-1967), who was professor of Hungarian literature at the University of Novi Sad. He started his career on the fringes of Kassák's circle, writing avant-garde poetry, and shared the fate of the communist expatriates after the revolution of 1919. He lived in Vienna, Moscow, and Paris. His main work, written in the 1930s, is the novel *Optimists* (1955), describing the 1919 revolution. Hailed as a major socialist novel, he was invited to the Soviet Union with a view of publishing the manuscript there. No publication was forthcoming; but what the visit did produce was Sinkó's day-to-day account of his negotiations with Soviet apparatchiks, a significant document on Soviet cultural life in the mid-1930s (*The Novel of a Novel*, 1961); it is a detached account of the catastrophic collapse then taking place in the Soviet literary life, and is one of the few

eyewitness accounts ever to come forth from the hermetically sealed world of Stalin's dictatorship.

The new period of Vajdaság literature started with the foundation of a new periodical, **New Symposium (Új Symposion 1964-1983)**, which launched many promising young authors whose significance is no longer regional. The profile of New Symposium has been shaped by the neo-avant-garde experimenting of its contributors. Both Bridge and New Symposium have also secured contributors from Hungary; consequently manuscripts which are unlikely to be published by Budapest periodicals for political reasons get a chance to appear in print.

Writers already with a reputation include the poet **Ottó Tolnai** (1940- ), whose experimental texts (*The Death of Gogol*, 1972) show ingenuity, and the novelist **Nándor Gion** (1941-2002), whose „*Flowery Soldier*” (1973), shows marked originality, in spite of its traditional narrative form.