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“Everything Whole Has Come Apart”

This lecture focuses on the strong sense of social crisis that led to the creation of the journal, *Nyugat*, in 1908. As the famous poet, Endre Ady, described it: “Everything whole has come apart,” a sentiment echoed in the works of Anna Lesznai, Margit Kaffka and Mihály Babits. While literary historians have examined how this crisis forced *Nyugat*’s poets and authors to break with tradition—resulting in the creation of modern literature in Hungary—less attention has been paid to how this crisis affected the journal’s critics. It is therefore my intention to examine *Nyugat*’s critical practice in order to ascertain how this phenomenon may have influenced impressionistic critics such as Miksa Fenyő, a *Nyugat* editor who often expressed his opinions concerning “traditional” critical theory at the time.

Due to the constraints of time, my examination will be limited to articles published in *Nyugat*’s first year. Literary impressionism will be discussed within the context of how impressionistic critics reflected upon and differentiated themselves from what they held to be traditional or “mainstream” critical practice. While this difference frequently led to heated debate between the followers of both literary groups, I argue that *Nyugat*’s critics did not refute traditional critical practice to the extent literary history frequently suggests; my lecture would therefore like to demonstrate how tradition was adapted for modern literature’s alternate purposes.

Any discussion of literary impressionism must also address the thorny question of what precisely this term means. Until now, literary historians have analyzed this particular style of literary criticism from the point of view of one *Nyugat* critic, Ignotus, who argued that an impressionistic critique could be written without adherence to any kind of previously established rule or criteria. Instead of debating the plausibility of this statement, I choose to place the issue of literary impressionism into the context of the time and examine it from the standpoint of various critics—with an emphasis on Miksa Fenyő—rather than concentrating solely on the role of Ignotus. While defining the exact nature of literary impressionism may not be possible, my research indicates that critiques written in the impressionistic style offer a valuable glimpse into how *Nyugat* critics addressed the perception and transmission of knowledge at this crucial point in the life of a journal that would eventually define modern Hungarian literature.