



Kafka's (1880-1918) Life Writing and Objection to the War

Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek

Purdue University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), [Reading and Language Commons](#), [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#), [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), [Television Commons](#), and the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

Recommended Citation

Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Kafka's (1880-1918) Life Writing and Objection to the War." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 17.3 (2015): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2912>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2912)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 239 times as of 11/07/19.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 17 Issue 3 (September 2015) Article 19**Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek,****"Kafka's (1880-1918) Life Writing and Objection to the War"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/19>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 17.3 (2015)**Thematic Issue ***Life Writing and the Trauma of War***. Ed. Louise O. Vasvári and I-Chun Wang<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/>>

Abstract: In his article "Kafka's (1880-1918) Life Writing and Objection to the War" Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek discusses the Hungarian author's poems, diary entries, and fictional texts. While Kafka's importance as one of the most influential writers in modern Hungarian literature is recognized, her oeuvre as proto-feminist writing has only been studied only since the 1990s. Further, Kafka's anti-war writing has not been explored except in a few isolated instances. Tötösy de Zepetnek elaborates Kafka's objection to the war as seen in her poetry published in 1914 and in her diaries and correspondence and argues that Kafka's objection to the war as early as in August 1914 is significant because in most instances the war was embraced by Hungary's educated strata including its leftist circles. Thus Kafka's modernist writing including her proto-feminist, anti-war, and in a few instances erotic writing is an exception in modern Hungarian literature.

Steven TÖTÖSY de ZEPETNEK

Kaffka's (1880-1918) Life Writing and Objection to the War

The study at hand is intended to draw attention to the work of a woman author who is little known outside of Hungary and thus did not gain relevance in "world literature" in English (see, e.g., Damrosch; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Mukherjee). Although Margit Kaffka [de Tarcafalva] (1880-1918) is recognized in Hungarian literary history as a prominent modernist writer, the significance of her proto-feminist writing has only been rarely recognized until after 1989 (end of communism in Hungary) (see, e.g., Bodnár; Boode; Braunauer; Czigány; Földes; Fülöp; Hendry and Uglov; Nemeskürty; Reményi; Szabolcsi; note that from Kaffka's oeuvre English translations exist only of her novels *Színek és évek* [*Colours and Years*] and *Hangyaboly* [*The Ant Heap: A Novel*]). In addition to the importance of her oeuvre in modernist writing, she was also — along with Renée Erdős (1879-1956) — a forerunner of erotic writing which in Hungarian literature was rare in her time, especially by women writers (see, e.g., Nyilasy; Szapor; Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Eroticism," "Hungarian"; Vashegyi MacDonald; Zoltvány). It has been only in the past few decades that scholars have started to analyze Kaffka's work in the context of feminist writing with regard to her narration of women's subordinated situation in Hungary's patriarchal society and its practices (see, e.g., Acsády; Bárczi and Petres Csizmadia; Borgos; Borgos and Szilágyi; Higonnet; Pécsi; Petó and Szapor; Riez; Schwartz; Séllei; Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Kaffka Margit," "Margit Kaffka," "Women's Literature"; Zsadányi). This remains the case and Kaffka's significance as the first feminist writer in modern Hungarian literature continues to be resisted along with feminist theory and criticism altogether (see, e.g., Horváth; Kádár).

Based on a selection of material in Kaffka's diary, personal letters, and poetry, in this study I focus on how she experienced and perceived the impact of the war on her personal life and on society at large. In Kaffka's oeuvre, particularly in her diary *Lírai jegyzetek egy évről* (1915, Lyrical Notes about One Year), in her novel *Két nyár* (1916, Two Summers), and in the short story *A révnél* (1918, At the Ferry), in her poems "Záporos folytonos levél" ("Continuous Stormy Letter") and "Imádkozni próbáltam" ("I Attempted to Prey") — both published in 1914 — and in her personal letters there are numerous references to the war including her emotional situation about the separation from her husband because of his war service (in particular "1914 Augustus" ["August 2014"]).

In a book review article of 2013 about several newer editions of Kaffka's diary and correspondence, Lajos Sipos writes that Kaffka's concerns were mostly "the war, illness, new start, the everyday problems of subsistence, and the worry about each other's lives [i.e., herself and her husband]" ("A front, a betegség, az újabb indulás, a mindennapos nincstelenség, az egymásért való aggodalom életük legszemélyesebb és állandóan jelen lévő részévé teszik a háborút")

(<<http://www.kortaronline.hu/2013/03/arch-magantortenet/15862>>) and in her 2011 *Lélek a háborúban. Szerepek és változataik: Kaffka Margit, Balázs Béla és Bauer Ervin a Nagy Háborúban* (The Soul in War: Roles and Versions of Margit Kaffka, Béla Balázs, and Ervin Bauer in the Great War), Eszter Edina Molnár writes that "Margit Kaffka had to battle altogether with her being afraid for her husband at the front, her commitment as a mother, and to provide for their financial existence" ("Kaffka Margitnak egyszerre kellett megküzdenie a frontszolgálatot teljesítő férj féltésével, helytállnia anyaként, valamint biztosítania megélhetésüket" [6]). Molnár argues that Kaffka described life in 1914-1918 not only with regard to herself, but of women in general including those belonging to several social strata, rural and urban. In another book review article about the 2006 volume *A te színed előtt. Kaffka Margit szerelmei* (Facing You: The Loves of Margit Kaffka), a collection of texts by Kaffka and studies about Kaffka's life and work, Andrea Ekler writes that Kaffka's letters

express the history of an internalized battle, in truth showing the reader as a spiritual and intellectual point of meeting the fate of the at times lost in lilac fog and somewhat blue-stockinglylike (although even then sympathetic, with elegant style, educated) heroines of English novels of adolescent girls. At the same time already as a young writer her writing is of self-irony who describes herself beyond the usual rebellion and experiments as a mother and partner with great sacrifices who arrives — in addition to daily work and employment — to be a creator, to creation ... It is in the second part of the collection where we read in the letters mostly evoking her personal experiences about her opposition to war and her pacifism ... The war is for her incomprehensible terror in which everyone is a loser, an obstacle, a cause of lack, and the murder of physical, intellectual, and ethical values. The war separates her from everyone and everything, whom and what she loves, her partner, her child, her friends, from her books, from inspiring and relaxing travel, and acceptable physical existence. She sees this with luminous intellect and deep empathy and suggests in her letters not only aspects of her personal life, but the tragedy that affects the world. (58-60; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine)

Kaffka's early opposition to the war is significant because the outbreak of World War I was embraced in all participating countries and few politicians or intellectuals voiced opposition and this was the case also in Hungary not only in the leading strata of society, but also in the general population (see, e.g., Purseigle; Verhey; with regard to Hungary specifically see Geró

<<http://elsovilaghaboru.com/centenariumiemlekbizottsag/hu/sajto/204-gero-andras-nemzeti-delirium>>; Sked

<http://www.histoire-politique.fr/documents/22/dossier/pdf/HP22_Dossier_Alan_Sked_def.pdf>). In 1914 Hungary, there were few in the upper and/or intellectual strata of Hungarian society who opposed the war although many who initially embraced the war, for example, Endre Ady (1877-1919) and writer Lajos Kassák's (1887-1967), by 1915 revised their opinion. Further, there were translator Ilona Duczyńska (1897-1978) from the Hungarian branch of an aristocratic Polish family and spouse of sociologist Karl Polanyi (1886-1964), poet Géza Gyóni (1884-1917), novelist Mihály Babits (1883-

1941), and baron Lajos Hatvany de Hatvan (1880-1961), the founder of the influential modernist periodical *Nyugat* (West) published 1908-1941 where Kafka was welcome to publish her work. Kafka and her son László died during the influenza epidemic in December 1918 (László was Kafka's son by her first husband Brúnó Fröhlich [1879-1939] whom she married in 1905, a forest engineer and ministerial councilor (who later changed his surname to Nagyszalánczy).

Kafka came from a family of minor nobility whose members on both her father's and mother's side served as is usual in such families as government and county administrators, lawyers, and army officers and as such endorsed the war enthusiastically. Kafka rejected her family's value system, as well as that of the social class her family belonged to (for the genealogy of the family, see Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Records*; note that Kafka did not use the family's *praedicatum* of nobility "de Tarczafalva"; see also Rolla). Thus Kafka's pacifist and ideological position put her in conflict with her family and we find this expressed, for example, in one of her diary entries from 1917: "my relatives do not belong to 'culture.' They prefer Marlitt as their principal reading and only seldom, with difficulty, and slowly do they write letters, for example. Instead they think of Ady among themselves as crazy and do not understand Schöpfung" ("csakhogyan az én rokonaim nem 'kultúrkör.' Marlitt a főolvasmányuk és ritkán, tehát nehezen és lassan művelik a levélírást is például. Viszont Adyt magukban bolondnak tartják, Schöpfung nem ösmerik ki") (*A lélek stációi* 164). At the same time, Kafka nurtured contact with some members of her family, such as her cousin Hedvig Szabó de Nemestóth (1878-1971), although their correspondence ceased in 1903 (see Kafka, *A lélek stációi*). In her novels, Kafka often used autobiographical references and went even as far as using surnames of family members. For example, in *Színek és évek* (*Colours and Years*) the protagonist of the novel, Magda Pórtelky, was in real life Ilona Jurenák whose complicated marriage to the ministerial councilor and sabre fencer László Porteleky de Porteleky (1870-1953) is fictionalized and whom Jurenák divorced in 1905. Interestingly ironic is Kafka's use of a family member's surname because the meaning of Pórtelky is "owner of peasant's land" while Porteleky means "owner of dusty land"). What this suggests is that Kafka was not afraid to expose matters private and just like her anti-war stance went against her family and class, an exceptional way of behavior by a woman of her time (see below with regard to Kafka's *Színek és évek*).

Another particular aspect of Kafka's intellectual, ideological, and political position was that she opposed the negative perception of the Hungarian Jewry who by 1917 were accused of profiteering (and that continued after the war and culminated in the 1944 Holocaust of Hungarian Jews [see, e.g., Braham]). On the personal level that she married Ervin Bauer (1890-1942) who was of Jewish background — secularized as most of the Hungarian urban Jewry — would not have met with enthusiasms in her family, let alone the fact that Bauer was ten years her junior. With regard to Kafka's education in particular, it is important to note that she is the only Hungarian woman writer of the nineteenth century whose educational history is known not only with regard to where she went to school and what she studied — she attended a Catholic boarding school and obtained a degree to be a teacher — but she also fictionalized her experience in several of her texts, for example in the Bildungsroman *Hangyaboly* (*The Ant Heap: A Novel*) (see Kádár, *Engedelmes Lázadók* [Obedient Rebels] 99-100).

Kafka's first published text against the war appeared in December 1914 in *Nyugat* with the title "Imádkozni próbáltam" ("I Attempted to Pray"):

See, now everyone in uniform garb and uniform steps marches on your infinite roads of wasteland and explodes murderous clouds obediently against your other young's youths? The sons of other lands' lives. Do you like this, Lord? ... I am a woman, Lord, and never even killed one of your caterpillars! Because thus prowl caterpillars and your heaven's luminous butterflies to impregnate the earth where their sons will find food at Spring although they will not enjoy it! How intelligent is every female animal's doing on earth? — And although your men judge me a speaker of nonsense, I, womanly human, admire your eternal wisdom in my involuntary doings. But do you, God of Men, find wisdom in what your men are doing? — Oh, more ancient Womangod, hundred breasted, earthly Gaia, why did your reign end?

Lám, most mindegyik egyforma gúnyában, egyforma lépéssel jár végtelen és pusztá utaidon, és egyforma szóra engedelmesen robbant gyilkos felleget más ifjú fiaid élete felé. Tetszik-e ez neked, Uram? ... Asszony vagyok, Uram, és soha még egy hernyódat sem öltem! Mert ímhogy sűrög a hernyó s egeid pillangó bogara, hogy petét rakhasson oda, hol élelmet találnak fiai tavaszkor, bár önmaga nem látja örömét annak! Mily értelmes minden asszonyi állat tevése a földön? — S bár férfiaid értelmetlen beszédűnek ítélnék, én, asszonyi ember, a te örök értelmeket csudálom akaratlan cselekedeteimben. De talál-e értelmet, férfiak Istene, abban, mit férfiaid cselekszenek? — Ó, ősbibb asszonyisten, százezerlábú, gyökérszálú Gaea, miért is múlt el a te országod? (305-06).

Kafka expresses her pain at women's fate during war including her own situation and thus opposes the war when everyone else greets it with enthusiasm, including her colleagues at *Nyugat* such as cinematographer Béla Balázs (brother of Kafka's second husband Ervin Bauer, Gyula Halász, István Kertész, Géza Lengyel, József Jenő Tersánszky, Géza Csáth who were otherwise left-leaning intellectuals and writers (see Molnár 40). Interestingly, at the end of the text we also find—although not the usual essentialist expression of "Hungarianness" (*magyarság*) — yet a nod toward Hungary's age-old perception about its disadvantaged history because of foreign occupations and wars: "You [God] will send a Messiah (you sent a message in writing) — when the peoples of your earth curve swords to scythes and everyone can find their peace under fig trees — If you consider this land, your land, Supreme Seigneur — do not forget that my people, the Magyar, can help you in this" ("Messiást akkor küldesz (üzented írva) — ha földed népei kaszává görbítik a kardokat, és ki-ki békében pihen az ő fügefája alatt. — Ha gondold netalán még ezt az országot, a te országodat, Legfőbb Hűbérúr — ne felejtse el, hogy abban még kezredre járhat az én fajtám, a magyar!" [305]). What this passage sug-

gests is that while Kafka rejected nationalism and the war and thus "Hungarianness" and its exclusionary ideology and politics (which cannot but result in conflict), her ideology was that an inclusionary and non-essentialist ideology and politics should be the case instead together with the awareness of and knowledge about the country's history (on this see Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári, "Introduction").

Published also in 1914, in her poem "Záporos folytonos levél" ("Continuous Stormy Letter") Kafka expresses her objection to the war, including its reasons of nationalism framed in poetic images some explicit and some implicit:

How many your are! ... / A million little soldiers wade / Now in a bloody fog, on frozen swamp, in smog and soot on wounded roads, — (In the wild valleys of the mountains the cold wind already blows,) / Their rhythm of two-step is dazed, their garb is uniform gray! The life of cornucopia! One or the other of barbaric superiority, / In their dizzy being as a crowd they cannot ask where to? / They only walk without knowing and what pushes them forward, — madness, / To leave home, hearth, and work and worry to walk on the roads of destroyed villages in bloody fog, on frozen swamps / And when they are called to kill with a horrible crash. — / Because a neighbor from another land and another tongue does the same with them, / They want to come over to call the land "theirs," / (When land belongs forever to those who work it and whose lives depend on it).

Mily sokan vagytok!... / Milliő kis katona gázol / Most vérkődben, fagyott mocsáron, füstpernyés, fölsebzett úton, — (A végek vad völgyein át már fújdogál a hideg szél,) / Oly kábán egy-ritmusú léptük, oly egyszínő gúnyajuk! Élet töméntelene! Durva fölösség porszeme egy-egy, / A szédült sokaságban nem kérhetik hova, merre? / Csak mennek, bár nem értik, mi sodorja őket, — a tébolyt, / Hogy tűzhelyet, műhelyet hagyva otthoni szokást és gondot, / Járjanak dült faluk útján, vérkődben, fagyott mocsáron / S ha kiáltanak nekik, öljenek szörnyű robajjal. — Mert másmezű, másszavú szomszéd ugyanezt műveli velük, / Túl akar jönni, hogy nevezze "enyém"-nek a földet, / (Bár azé örökre a föld, ki túrja s rátapad élete). (119)

Kafka's objection to the war is also evident in her diaries written between August 1914 and November 1918 and, for example, there is the following entry about an experience on the first day of the war on 1 August 1914 when Kafka was with her second husband on their honeymoon in Perugia (Italy): "We argue with the telegraph clerk who gabbled, explained, and attempted to be authoritative and we understand only that he would not send the telegraph. Suddenly we realized why when he used a word repeatedly and that others in the queue also echoed, 'la guerra'... What? What are they saying? We call the waiter in our hotel Belle Arti who speaks German: can this be true? Can this be possible? ... Slowly anxiety gripped us" ("Küszködtünk a telegráfisttzel, hadarva beszélt, bizonykodott, magyarázott—azt értettük csak, hogy nem veszi fel a sürgőnyt. Végre megütött egy szava; többször mondta, a közönségből is hümmögték: 'la guerra'... Mi ez? Mit mondanak? Hívtuk a Belle Arti némettudó pincéret. Hát igaz? Hát lehetséges? ... lassankint tette torkunkra kezét az aggodalom" [Kafka, *Lírai jegyzetek egy évről* 49]. And in 1916 Kafka wrote in a letter to her mother Margit Uray de Ura (1860-1934) that "My Ervin [her husband Bauer] is beginning to look better. Only if they would not send him to the front in the summer, may god damn this long war!" ("Ervinem is kezd jobban kinézni. Csak nehogy most harctérre küldjék a nyáron, verje meg az isten ezt a hosszú háborút!" [A *lélek stációi* 175]) and based on her relationship with her family whose members endorsed the war, what she wrote suggests that she did not spare her mother's feelings with her condemnation of the war. The same condemnation appears in a letter written in 1918 to her friend baron Lajos Hatvany de Hatvan about her financial situation that "Just like myself you are no cause of this [i.e., her detrimental financial situation]: the cause is the war we both hate" ("Maga éppúgy nem tehet a viszonyokról, mint én; s a mindkettőnkől gyűlölt háború az oka" [A *lélek stációi* 222]).

Interestingly, with regard to Kafka's eroticism mentioned above, in "Záporos folytonos levél" in subsequent sections she explores the situation of women who when their husbands are called to war are left behind to fend for themselves and their children under strained financial circumstances and loneliness. For example, with regard to herself and her husband she writes: "I am your mate! Your harmony! Your first good and happy love! / Who when touching each other's heart 'one matter' — we said / Who embraced each other in awe: 'shameless love!' / Hear my love! This hurricane *does not happen* to us" (Társad én! Harmóniád! Első jó és boldog szerelmed! / Kik tapintva egymás szívét: 'Egy matér! — szoltunk, / Kik ámulva öleltük egymást: 'Szégyentelen ölelés!' / Halld életem! E mai orkan *nem történik* mivélünk" (120; emphases in the original). The phrase "shameless love" refers to the exceptional circumstance of her husband being ten years her junior which at the time for a woman to marry a younger man would have been considered at least inappropriate and for many "shameless" because what was considered standard and expected was for a woman to be about 5-10 years younger than her husband. Relevant is that Kafka's expresses her personal circumstance together with the social and political environment she objects to. This is relevant because Kafka was not only the first writer in Hungary who objected to the war, but because it suggests her exceptional stand against the mores of her time and the two aspects together places her in a unique situation in modern Hungarian literature.

Kafka's world view and actions are underlined in her fiction, too, and a good example is her novel *Színek és évek* about Magda Pórtelky in the gentry environment of then Hungary where a woman's only choice was marriage and resignation to patriarchal values. Although the story of Magda is not Kafka's, it is "autobiographical" in the sense that it is about a distant relative of hers, Ilona Jurenák, who married in 1899 László Porteleky de Portelek I mention previously: the Porteleky-s and Jurenák-s were families who lived near the Kafka-s and all belonged to the minor gentry and country intelligent-sia (see Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Records*). Magda's disillusionment with her life begins with the realization that the initial "game of the sexes," the dance of conquest and submission (i.e., social and sexual), is disproportionate to the aftermath, the reality of the woman's submission in marriage (78-79). After a

match proposed by her parents does not work out, her grandmother orchestrates another, now with a socially inferior, but financially acceptable suitor, Jenő Vodicska. Magda's immediate relationship with her "chosen" is confused. The young man, who realizes her qualities albeit still in the context of male superiority, attempts to comfort her. Yet Magda's struggle against the imposition of women's codes and behavior, throughout her life, here and later, is always bound to universal codes, which most of the time work in support of the codes and required behavior she is struggling against. In the narrative there are few references to eroticism in their relationship, but the prominence of the realities of married life imposed on women manifest themselves: "My husband just got up ... the man smells of cologne and fine soap ... And now he will leave, a gentleman, after breakfast, satisfied, and smiling, while I clean the junk he leaves behind, make the bed, put away yesterday's dirty laundry, and do the dishes ... And this will continue. How long? ... For as long as we live!" (112-13). Her only "remedy" is total commitment to the household. Her mother, again, attempts to give her view of the wife's duties and ways of successfully combining the demands of marriage and social standing: "In a marriage a little cunning is the most important ingredient. Don't notice things and be sweet to him, and you can do whatever you want. The important thing is not to win verbal battles but to remain free inside yourself, and that you can live smoothly. Deceive him a little out of love, that's why he is a man!" (117). why is the original Hungarian not here? I thought if a primary text it had to be?

The relationship between Magda and Jenő undergoes further deterioration when an admirer sends a love letter to her. She refuses the advances and destroys the letter and its contents. Jenő observes the burning of the letter and questions Magda: when she refuses to divulge an explanation, he hits her. Interestingly and tellingly, when she goes to her grandmother to talk and to seek some assurance and support, she cannot speak about it and their talk turns into a discussion about a suitor of her mother, who is a dreamy and unsuccessful social reformer. The situation of abuse, as often, turns into the husband's demonstrations of remorse, his promises, Magda's desire to believe, and finally the birth of their child. Yet, the continuation of their relationship after this incident appears to stabilize in the sense that Magda lets her aspirations and rebellion go underground. Jenő advances professionally and financially and Magda somehow manages to enjoy her life mainly by letting herself be caught up in provincial politics through her husband and by a total commitment to her household, both traditional parameters of a wife's and mother's existence. Nevertheless, the descriptions in the narrative which demonstrate the continuing marital and social demands, do not diminish her innate objection and struggle against these impositions, even if at times they retreat into the background of her awareness. Perhaps the single most powerful male utterance of position-taking, as well as a paradigmatic view of society of women and that Kafka refers to poignantly in the novel occurs when one protagonist, an otherwise socially progressive man as Kafka describes him, expresses the following after Magda speaks about her beliefs concerning the situation of women:

All this is the mania of the uneducated, it has no base. The female animal will always remain inferior, it cannot be otherwise. Three thirds of her life span is taken up by the unconscious, animalistic care and the constraints of procreation, and her mind is governed by instincts. If she liberates herself from this, she will become a degenerate figure, without direction, without a place, idiotic and unhappy. The woman is a blind instrument of nature's purposes, she has not achieved consciousness. She is a still rooting, plant-like being, whose total value is unintentional grace and beauty, like those of flowers and their seeds' expecting, voiceless, and wantless unwanted? fertility. All philosophers, Plato, Spinoza, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, agree on this. Only today's sick games of education labor with the idea that a woman should be taken seriously. (287) same question here

This ferociously patriarchal view as is recorded by Kafka underlines her courage to manifest the male voice and then the description of the results of the male voice speaking for society: Magda's response, although not in tangible action as far as she herself is concerned, is again and again directed towards hope, even if restricted to her daughters: "My darling daughters, you must learn, you must study! At all cost! You do not need to do any chores around the house. I will cook and clean. It does not matter any more for my rough hands, my neglected and deformed body. You must prepare yourselves for a more beautiful, triumphant, and independent life, not to be humiliated by a man, not to become his defenseless dishwasher and maid, his dog he kicks around. Study! Everything, even if I have to sell the shirt off my back!" (289).

In conclusion, Kafka's oeuvre is not only important because of its impact on Hungarian modernist literature and because it continues to have influence on Hungarian literature in general and on women's literature in particular. It is important because Kafka's oeuvre and views on society suggest that were she not taken early in life by the influenza epidemic in 1918, modern Hungarian literature would have gained a voice against her contemporary and later generations committed to essentialism and this is no small import with regard to what happened in Hungary during Kafka's time, in the interwar period, and what is happening again in today's Hungary (i.e., the rise of anti-other sentiments and essentialism, the diminishing of civil rights, etc., see, e.g., Marsovszky; Tötösy de Zepetnek, "The Anti-Other"). Kafka's oeuvre represents cultural and literary importance that ought to contribute to change in a society like Hungary where essentialism and patriarchy continue to rule today. While this argumentation appears to be towards the discredited approach of *littérature engagée* (or that of socialist realism), Kafka's writing altogether and her life writing in particular remain relevant not only as evidence of a voice different from her contemporaries, but in its importance as a pedagogical aspect about society and culture in Central and East Europe, an area neglected in scholarship in Hungary in particular and in Central and East Europe in general. This is the more important because one of the (anonymous) experts who reviewed my study criticized the paper claiming that Kafka was not the first who objected to the war and that it was Kassák: regardless of the fact that this, as sources suggest, was not the case, the reviewer made no distinction as to the

issue of gender, namely that Kafka was a woman and Kassák a man in at the time extreme patriarchal society and that thus even if it were true that Kassák's objection would have been "first," the aspect of gender remains relevant the reviewer appears to have paid no attention to.

Works Cited

- Acsády, Judit. "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 twentieth-century Hungarian History). Ed. Levente Puski, Lajos Timár, and Tibor Vlach. Debrecen: U of Debrecen, 1999. 295-311.
- Bárczi, Zsófia, and Gabriella Petres Csizmadia, eds. *Narrative Construction of Identity in Female Writing*. Budapest: Eötvös Lóránd UP, 2013.
- Bodnár, György. *A "mese" lélekvándorlása. A modern magyar elbeszélés születése* (Soultravel of the "Fairytale": The Birth of Modern Hungarian Writing). Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1988.
- Bodnár, György. *In memoriam Kafka Margit. Színek, évek, állomások*. Budapest: Nap, 2005.
- Bodnár, György. *Kafka Margit*. Budapest: Balassi, 2001.
- Boode, Hanneke. *Turning the Prism: Modernist Approaches in the Short Stories of the Hungarian Writer Margit Kafka*. Aachen: Shaker P, 2013.
- Borgos, Anna, ed. *A te színed előtt. Kafka Margit szerelmei* (Facing You: The Loves of Margit Kafka). Budapest: Holnap, 2006.
- Borgos, Anna, and Judit Szilágyi. *Nőírók és író nők. Irodalmi es női szerepek a Nyugatban* (Women Writers and Women Who Write: Literary and Women Roles in Nyugat). Budapest: Noran, 2011.
- Braham, Randolph L. *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*. 2 vols. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
- Brunauer, Dalma H. "A Woman's Self-Liberation: The Story of Margit Kafka (1880-1918)." *Canadian-American Review of Hungarian Studies* 5.2 (1978): 31-42.
- Czigány, Lóránt. "Women in Revolt: Margit Kafka." *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature*. By Lóránt Czigány. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. 333-36.
- Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.
- Ekler, Andrea. "Örökkön a mérlegen" ("Always on the Scale"). Rev. of Margit Kafka, *A Lélek stációi. Kafka Margit válogatott levelezése* (Ed. Zsuzsa Simon. Budapest: Nap, 2010.). *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* 10.6 (2010): 55-61.
- Földes, Anna. *Kafka Margit. Pályakép* (Margit Kafka: Curriculum Vitae). Budapest: Kossuth, 1987.
- Fülöp, László. *Kafka Margit*. Budapest: Gondolat, 1988.
- Gerő, András. "Nemzeti delírium." *elsovilagaboru.com* (2014): <<http://elsovilagaboru.com/centenariumiemlekbizottsag/hu/sajto/204-gero-andras-nemzeti-delirium>>.
- Hendry, Maggy, and Jennifer Uglow. "Kafka Margit (1880-1918)." *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Women's Biography*. By Maggy Hendry and Jennifer Uglow. London: Macmillan, 2005. 306.
- Higonnet, Margaret R. "The Great War and the Female Elegy: Female Lamentation and Silence in Global Contexts." *Globalization and the Future of Comparative Literature*. Ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski and Alfred J. López. Special Issue *Global South* 1.2 (2007): 120-136.
- Horváth, Györgyi. "Hungarian Literary Criticism and the Memory of the Socialist Past." *Comparative Hungarian Cultural Studies*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Louise O. Vasvári. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2011. 89-101.
- Horváth, Györgyi. "Női irodalom a magyar századelőn. A női irodalom szerepe Kafka Margit *Színek és évek* című regényének kritikai megítélésében" ("Women's Writing at the Beginning of the Hungarian Century: The Role of Women's Literature in the Critical Reception of Margit Kafka's Novel *Színek és Évek*"). *Sárkányfű* 4 (1999): 54-66.
- Kádár, Judit. *Engedelmes lázadók. Tutsek Anna, Lux Terka, Tormay Cecile, Erdős Renée, Kafka Margit, Kosáryné Réz Lola* (Obedient Rebels: Anna Tutsek, Terka Lux, Cecile Tormay, Renée Erdős, Margit Kafka, Lola Kosáry Réz). Budapest: Jelenkor, 2014.
- Kádár, Judit. "Feminista nézőpont az irodalomtudományban" ("The Feminist Point of View in Literary Study"). *Helikon: Irodalmi Folyóirat* 4 (1994): 407-16.
- Kádár, Judit. "Miért nincs, ha van? A kortárs nyugati feminista irodalomkritika hatása Magyarországon" ("Why Is There None, When There Is? The Impact of Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism in Hungary"). *Beszélő* 11 (2003): 100-07.
- Kafka, Margit. "1914 Augusztus" ("August 1914"). *Az élet útján. Versek, cikkek, naplójegyzetek* (On the Road of Life: Poems, Articles, Diary Entries). By Margit Kafka. Ed. György Bodnár. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1972. 403-20.
- Kafka, Margit. *A lélek stációi. Kafka Margit válogatott levelezése* (Stations of the Soul: Selected Letters of Margit Kafka). By Margit Kafka. Ed. Zsuzsanna Simon. Budapest: Nap, 2010.
- Kafka, Margit. *Az élet útján* (On the Road of Life). Ed. György Bodnár. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1972.
- Kafka, Margit. "Imádkozni próbáltam" ("I Attempted to Prey"). *Az élet útján. Versek, cikkek, naplójegyzetek* (On the Road of Life: Poems, Articles, Diary Entries). Ed. György Bodnár. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1972. 305-06.
- Kafka, Margit. *Lírai jegyzetek egy évről* (Lyrical Notes about One Year). Budapest: Nyugat, 1915.
- Kafka, Margit. "Záporos folytonos levél" ("Continuous Stormy Letter"). 1914. *Kafka Margit összes költeménye* (Margit Kafka's Collected Poetry). By Margit Kafka. Budapest: Mercator, 2006. 119-22.
- Marsovszky, Magdalena. "About Antisemitism in Post-1989 Hungary." *Comparative Central European Holocaust Studies*. Ed. Louise O. Vasvári and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2009. 28-39.
- Molnár, Eszter Edina. *Lélek a háborúban. Szerepek és változataik: Kafka Margit, Balázs Béla és Bauer Ervin a Nagy Háborúban* (The Soul in War. Roles and Their Versions: Margit Kafka, Béla Balázs, and Ervin Bauer in the Great War). Honors thesis. Budapest: Eötvös Lóránd U, 2011.
- Nemeskürty, István. *Diák, írj magyar éneket. A magyar irodalom története 1945-ig* (Student, Write Hungarian Songs: History of Hungarian Literature to 1945). Budapest: Gondolat, 1985.
- Nyilasy, Balázs. "Udvarlás, asszonytudomány, erotika Kafka Margit szépprózai műveiben" ("Courting, Women's Knowledge, Eroticism in Margit Kafka's Prose Writing"). *Kortárs: Irodalmi és Kritikai Folyóirat* 1 (2005): 96-102.
- Pécsi, Emőke. "Kafka Margit, avagy a 'kivételes nőíró' a kritikai diskurzus retorikájában" ("Margit Kafka as the 'Exceptional Woman Writer' in the Rhetoric of Critical Discourse"). *Alkalmazott Nyelvészeti Közlemények* 3.1 (2008): 123-31.
- Pető, Andrea, and Judit 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.

- Purseigle, Pierre. *Mobilisation, sacrifice et citoyenneté. Des communautés locales face à la guerre moderne. Angleterre-France, 1900-1918*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013.
- Reményi, Joseph. "Margit Kafka, Poet and Novelist, 1880-1918." *Hungarian Writers and Literature*. By Joseph Reményi. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1964. 284-91.
- Riez, Moni L. "Budapest and the Great War: An Overview." *War, Virtual War and Society: The Challenge to Communities*. Ed. Andre R. Wilson and Mark L. Perry. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 45-59.
- Rolla, Margit. *A fiatal Kafka Margit* (The Young Margit Kafka). *A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtárának Közleményei* 10 (1980): 1-173.
- Rolla, Margit. *A fiatal Kafka Margit. Út a révig*. Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1983. 2 Vols.
- Schwartz, Agatha. "Two Hungarian Narratives by Margit Kafka and Anna Szederkényi." *Shifting Voices: Feminist Thought and Women's Writing in Fin-de-Siècle Austria and Hungary*. By Agatha Schwartz. Montréal: McGill Queen's UP, 2008. 99-107.
- Séleli, Nóra. "A Hungarian New Woman Writer and a Hybrid Autobiographical Subject: Margit Kafka's 'Lyrical Notes of a Year.'" *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930*. Ed. Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham. London: Routledge, 2004. 35-48.
- Simon, Zsuzsa, ed. *A lélek stációi. Kafka Margit válogatott levelezése* (Stations of the Soul: Selected Letters of Margit Kafka). Budapest: Nap, 2010.
- Sipos, Lajos. "Magántörténet és köztörténelem. Kafka Margit: *A lélek stációi, Napló, Lírai jegyzetek egy évről.*" *kortaronline.hu* (2013): <<http://www.kortaronline.hu/2013/03/arch-magantortenet/15862>>.
- Sked, Alan. "Austria-Hungary and the First World War." *histoire-politique.fr* 22 (2014): <http://www.histoire-politique.fr/documents/22/dossier/pdf/HP22_Dossier_Alan_Sked_def.pdf>.
- Szabolcsi, Miklós, ed. *A magyar irodalom története 1905-től 1909-ig* (History of Hungarian Literature from 1905 to 1909). Budapest: Akadémiai, 1965.
- Szapor, Judit "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*. Ed. S. Paletschek and B. Pietrow-Ennker. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004. 189-205.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Eroticism, Sexuality, and Pornography in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-century Hungarian Literature." *Cowrie: A Journal of Chinese Comparative Literature Studies* 2 (2014): 1-18.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "The Anti-Other in Post-1989 Austria and Hungary." *Comparative Hungarian Cultural Studies*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Louise O. Vasvári. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2011. 332-43.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Hungarian." *Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature*. Ed. Gaëtan Brulotte and John Phillips. London: Routledge, 2006. Vol. 1, 650-54.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. *Records of the Tötösy de Zepetnek Family / A Zepetneki Tötösy család adataira* <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/totosyrecords>>. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2010.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Kafka Margit prózája. Az irodalmi feminizmus kezdete Magyarországon" ("The Prose of Margit Kafka: The Dawn of Feminism in Hungarian Literature"). *Régi és új peregrináció. Magyarok külföldön, külföldiek Magyarországon* (Pregrinations Old and New: Hungarians Abroad and Foreigners in Hungary). Ed. Imre Békési, József Jankovics, László Kósa, and Judit Nyerges. Budapest: International Association for Hungarian Studies, 1993. Vol. 2, 1185-94.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Margit Kafka and Dorothy Richardson: A Comparison." *Hungarian Studies* 11.1 (1996): 77-95.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Women's Literature and Men Writing about Women." *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, and Application*. By Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998. 173-214.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven, and Tutun Mukherjee, eds. *Companion to Comparative Literature, World Literatures, and Comparative Cultural Studies*. New Delhi: Cambridge UP India, 2013.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven, and Louise O. Vasvári. "Introduction to *Comparative Hungarian Cultural Studies.*" *Comparative Hungarian Cultural Studies*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Louise O. Vasvári. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2011. 1-8.
- Vashegyi MacDonald, Agnes. "Undoing the Collective Amnesia: A Brief Discussion of Feminism and Women Writers in Hungary." *Atlantis* 35.1 (2010): 108-18.
- Verhey, Jeffrey. "'War Enthusiasm': Volunteers, Departing Soldiers, and Victory Celebrations." *The World War I Reader*. Ed. Michael S. Neiberg. New York: New York UP, 2007. 148-57.
- Zoltvány, Irén. *Erotika és irodalom* (Eroticism and Literature). Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 1924.
- Zsadányi, Edit. "Impersonal Narration in the Prose of Margit Kafka, Emma Ritoók and Jolán Földes." *Hungarian Cultural Studies* 4 (2011): <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5195/ahca.2011.41>>.

Author's bioprofile: Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek taught comparative literature at the University of Alberta 1984-2000, communication studies at Northeastern University 2000-2002, and comparative media and communication studies at the University of Halle-Wittenberg 2002-2011, and as (distinguished) visiting professor at universities in the U.S. and Asia. He works since 2000 at Purdue University. In addition to 200+ peer-reviewed articles he published three dozen single-authored books and collected volumes in various fields of the humanities and social sciences. His recent books include the edited volumes *Digital Humanities and the study of Intermediality in Comparative Cultural Studies* (2013) and *Companion to Comparative Literature, World Literatures, and Comparative Cultural Studies* (with Tutun Mukherjee, 2013).