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27,00 euro

# «QUELLA TERRA CHE 'L DANUBIO RIGA»

DANTE IN UNGHERIA

a cura di

Éva Vígh, Eszter Draskóczy

«QUELLA TERRA CHE 'L DANUBIO RIGA». DANTE IN UNGHERIA a cura di Éva Vígh, Eszter Draskóczy

ARACNE

Il volume, concepito per commemorare il settimo centenario della morte del Sommo Poeta, riunisce contributi di studiosi dei più diversi campi della scienza: italiani, storici e filologi della letteratura ungherese, comparatisti, filosofi, nonché uno storico dell'arte e un musicologo, dimostrano in questo modo tanto la storia dell'influenza di Dante quanto la situazione delle odierni ricerche in Ungheria. Il libro è bipartito: la prima parte raccoglie gli studi di italiani che studiano le fonti della Commedia e le interpretazioni del linguaggio (verbale e gestuale) e analizzano alcuni loci danteschi e contesti letterari topici. La seconda unità è dedicata alla ricezione di Dante nella letteratura ungherese antica, moderna e contemporanea, nella musica e nelle arti.



## DANTE NEL MONDO

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Collana diretta da ANTONIO LANZA

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# «Quella terra che 'l Danubio riga»

Dante in Ungheria

a cura di  
Éva Vígh  
Eszter Draskóczy

ARACNE



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# INDICE

<i>Premessa</i>	11
I. STUDI SU DANTE	
<i>La concezione di Dante sulla lingua come strumento di potere</i> di JÁNOS KELEMEN	27
<i>«Con un sol cenno» (Par. xxii 101). Il linguaggio dei gesti nella Commedia</i> di ÉVA VÍGH	17
<i>I modelli della Commedia: visione e viaggio. (Tipologie e considerazioni generali)</i> di ESZTER DRASKÓCZY	55
<i>Poeticamente sulla poesia: alcune questioni metapoetiche nei canti xxiv e xxvi del Purgatorio</i> di BÉLA HOFFMANN	83
<i>«Excusatio meretricum». Topoi of Lovers Old and New, from Dante to Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini</i> di ÁGNES MÁTÉ	103
<i>Lectura Dantis: Canto ix of the Purgatorio</i> di JÓZSEF NAGY	125

## II. DANTE NELLA CULTURA UNGHERESE

<i>Great-grandfather. The Dantean apparatus for the portrayal of Miklós Zrínyi in The Siege of Sziget</i>	137
di LÁSZLÓ SZÖRÉNYI	
<i>“Nella roccaforte di Dante”. Il sostegno morale di Dante al suo traduttore ungherese, Mihály Babits durante la Prima Guerra Mondiale</i>	149
di PÉTER SÁRKÖZY	
<i>A poetic journey through Inferno and Purgatorio. Structural parallels of Mihály Babits’s volume of poetry. Nyugtalanság völgye and Dante’s Divine Comedy</i>	163
di ZOLTÁN SZÉNÁSI	
<i>La vita e le opere di Dante nella poesia ungherese moderna: János Arany, Endre Ady e Dezső Kosztolányi</i>	177
di LORENZO MARMIROLI	
<i>Dante nell’Ungheria del 1921: politica e religione</i>	205
di JÓZSEF PÁL	
<i>The translations of Dante’s Comedy made by Mihály Babits and by Ádám Nádasdy. Amendment to Ádám Nádasdy’s criticism on Sándor Weöres</i>	249
di NORBERT MÁTYUS	
<i>La traduzione dimenticata della Vita Nuova di Jenő Koltay-Kastner</i>	269
di MÁRTON KAPOSÍ	
<i>Dante’s Vita Nuova in the context of modern Hungarian Poetry (Lőrinc Szabó e György Petri)</i>	283
di KORNÉLIA HORVÁTH	
<i>Dante polifonico. Interpretazioni di Dante in Ungheria</i>	289
di TIBOR SZABÓ	

INDICE

<i>Lo spirito del Paradiso di Dante nel Palazzo del Primate d'Ungheria ad Esztergom</i> di MÁRIA PROKOPP	313
<i>«Vexilla regis prodeunt». The Closer Union of Music with Poetry in the Inferno Movement of Liszt's Dante Symphony</i> di ADRIENNE KACZMARCZYK	331
<i>Note biografiche degli autori del volume</i>	351
<i>Indice dei nomi</i>	361



## Premessa

In Ungheria, definita dal punto di vista geografico da Dante come «Quella terra che ‘l Danubio riga / poi che le ripe tedesche abbandona» (*Par* VIII 65-66), la presenza del Sommo Poeta è documentabile a partire dalla metà del XIV secolo. Risale infatti agli anni 40 del Trecento un codice riccamente miniato della *Commedia*, trascritta in un dialetto settentrionale di area veneta che, oggi, dopo lunghi e intricati secoli, è conservato nella Biblioteca dell’Università ELTE di Budapest. Il primo segno certo del culto di Dante invece è rintracciabile dall’inizio del Quattrocento: durante il concilio di Costanza, Giovanni Bertoldi da Serravalle, esortato in tal senso dai delegati umanisti, tradusse in latino la *Commedia* (1416) per renderla comprensibile agli altri popoli, nel cui elenco gli *ungari* occupano il quinto posto. Una copia contenente la traduzione e un ampio commento alla *Commedia* fu regalata e dedicata al re ungherese Sigismondo di Lussemburgo dallo stesso traduttore: questo codice – uno dei tre ancora esistenti – si trova nella Biblioteca della diocesi di Eger.

A parte questi primi segni, l’*oeuvre* di Dante appare nel pensiero letterario-artistico del nostro paese come modello di autorialità e di identità intellettuale a partire dalla fine del XVI secolo. La forza ispiratrice di Dante, oltre a diversi esempi letterari sporadici, diventa evidente nell’arte e nella letteratura ungheresi dalla metà del XIX secolo in poi. Fra i diversi poeti e letterati è necessario menzionare il poeta János Arany, che scrisse un’ode all’Alighieri e la inviò a Firenze per il seicentesimo anniversario della nascita del Poeta. Anche nella musica possiamo trovare importanti esempi: Ferenc Liszt, ad esempio, compose una sinfonia in due movimenti, una sorta di commento soggettivo alla *Divina Commedia*, che presentò in anteprima nel 1857.

Nella letteratura e nelle arti del XX secolo e nella cultura contemporanea troviamo una grande varietà di opere ispirate da Dante: i temi, le strutture narrative e gli episodi della *Commedia* sono un punto di riferimento,

una fonte ispiratrice, un ipotesto documentabile fino ai giorni nostri nelle opere di poeti, di romanzieri e di artisti moderni. La *Commedia*, dalla fine dell'Ottocento a oggi, è stata pubblicata in Ungheria in una decina di traduzioni, contando solo le trasposizioni integrali e quelle in cui è stata edita almeno un'intera cantica. Tali abbondanza e frequenza di traduzioni di un'opera sono comparabili solo alle edizioni in ungherese di Shakespeare e della Bibbia.

Uno dei compiti principali dello storico della letteratura è la ricerca della storia della ricezione, usando il termine e il concetto gadameriano della *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Quanto alla ricerca sistematica della fortuna di Dante in Ungheria, tale lavoro è stato iniziato nel 1911, attraverso una ponderosa monografia, da József Kaposi (*Dante Magyarországon* [Dante in Ungheria]), e continuato fino ad oggi grazie a diverse ricerche svolte in vari campi. Teoria e storia della letteratura, pensiero filosofico, storia dell'arte, traduttologia e comparatistica costituiscono gli spazi di pensiero in cui vengono sempre verificati nuovi approcci e attinenze, anche rispetto alle ricerche in contesto internazionale.

Il presente volume, concepito per commemorare il settimo centenario della morte del Sommo Poeta, riunisce contributi di studiosi dei più diversi campi della scienza: italiani, storici e filologi della letteratura ungherese, comparatisti, filosofi, nonché uno storico dell'arte e un musicologo, dimostrano in questo modo tanto la storia dell'influenza di Dante quanto la situazione delle odierne ricerche in Ungheria. Il volume risulta essere bipartito: la prima parte raccoglie gli studi di italiani che, presentando le ultime ricerche, studiano le fonti della *Commedia* e le interpretazioni del linguaggio (verbale e gestuale); altri analizzano alcuni *loci* danteschi e contesti letterari topici. La diversità degli approcci rispecchia le modalità di trasmissione della lettura di Dante negli studi di italianistica, di filosofia, di teoria letteraria e di comparatistica.

La seconda unità è dedicata alla ricezione di Dante nella letteratura ungherese antica, moderna e contemporanea, nella musica e nelle arti: un panorama invero ampio e diversificato illustra attraverso saggi di analisi comparate, in italiano e in inglese, come il pensiero poetico, filosofico e politico del Sommo Poeta pervada la lirica ungherese in generale e, in modo particolare, penetri nei componimenti di alcuni rinomati poeti. La varietà degli approcci e dei temi dimostra l'approfondito interesse degli intellettuali ungheresi per Dante: vi è presente uno sguardo retrospettivo

sul contesto politico e ideologico degli studi danteschi ai tempi delle commemorazioni di cento anni fa; un esteso saggio presenta l’evoluzione degli studi danteschi in Ungheria attraverso una concisa analisi delle opere degli studiosi; ai poeti-traduttori (come per esempio Mihály Babits) sono dedicate pagine molto suggestive, mentre questioni ancora attuali, sia teoriche che pratiche, relative alla traduzione del poema, sono messe a fuoco usando il pretesto del commento alla traduzione incompiuta del poeta Sándor Weöres; analisi di storia dell’arte e di musicologia dimostrano il fatto che la fortuna di Dante, ovviamente anche nella cultura magiara, va oltre i confini della letteratura.

I curatori del volume mirano ad offrire ai lettori e agli studiosi del Sommo Poeta, nell’ambito della prestigiosa collana “Dante nel mondo” diretta da Antonio Lanza, una raccolta di studi maturati tramite i viaggi intellettuali nell’opera dantesca, affrontati con impegno e passione. Prima di congedare queste pagine, riteniamo doveroso segnalare che il percorso, compiuto nel 2021 per forza delle commemorazioni, continua, perché «mai non si sazia nostro intelletto».

Szeged–Budapest, 2021.

Éva Vígh–Eszter Draskóczy

A poetic journey through Inferno and Purgatorio  
Structural parallels of Mihály Babits's volume of poetry  
*Nyugtalanság völgye* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*

ZOLTÁN SZÉNÁSI

*È un dato ormai acquisito l'importanza dell'influsso dantesco sulle varie attività del suo traduttore congeniale, Mihály Babits. Eppure pare che rimangano ancora terreni da esplorare. Neanche il presente contributo si può prefiggere l'obiettivo di dare un esaustivo quadro d'insieme sulla questione, si accontenta invece di richiamare l'attenzione sui paralleli strutturali tra la raccolta Nyugtalanság völgye [Valle dell'inquietudine] di Babits e la Divina Commedia. L'autore sostiene che a dare forma poetica ai riferimenti estetici, poetici nonché biografici, della cornice narrativa della raccolta è appunto il viaggio ultraterreno di Dante. Accettando l'ipotesi si deve concludere che il periodo della stesura delle liriche – dal 1915 al 1920 – viene sentito, presentato e narrato come l'epoca della discesa agli inferi e del desiderio della purificazione.*

Although Dante's *Divine Comedy* has been translated into Hungarian by many, it is very likely that today's readers pick up a Mihály Babits translation when they want to read this masterpiece of medieval literature. Babits was an important figure of literary modernity in Hungary, working in almost every genre, yet it was mostly his poetry and his translations that have had a major impact on Hungarian literature. For Babits, Dante was particularly important in the history of European literature, and not only did he translate Dante's main work, *Divine Comedy*, but he also considered its author the greatest individual of modern poetry, along with Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup> Although talking about Dante's importance in connection with Babits's essays and literary works seems evident, the historiography of literature has not yet examined the history of Dante's influence on Babits thoroughly. In this paper I draw attention to the similarities between Babits's volume of

1. M. BABITS, *Dante. Bevezetés a Divina Commedia olvasásába*, [Dante. Introduction to the Reading of Divine Commedia], Budapest, Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1930, p. 4.

poetry, *Nyugtalanság völgye* [Valley of Unrest], published in 1920, and *Divine Comedy*. Following Benedetto Croce,<sup>2</sup> I differentiate between the structure and poetics of the works (in this case between the exploration and interpretation of intertexts), and I will only present the structural parallels here.

## Babits and Dante

Babits defined his approach to Dante's work in the study *Dante fordítása* [Translating Dante], published in 1912, as follows: «Pitched in it here and there, for years. And in the final year, the poet in me got disheartened. Literature disheartened him. Now I am building a castle around my soul from Dante's rocks. My poor instrument had been made abominable. So when I had to say something that can only be expressed with music, I picked up Dante's great harp of a hundred strings. And this harp had a string to resonate with my voice.»<sup>3</sup> Beside his poetry, Dante's career was also an influential model for Babits. In his 1919 essay *Magyar költő kilencszáznévenkilenben* [Hungarian poet in nineteen-nineteen], in addition to Catholicism, the motif of political exile gives Babits a basis for identifying with the Italian poet, even quoting a few lines from Inferno as justification. Babits was not forced to leave his country like Dante, but after the fall of the Republic of Councils he was under severe attack for collaborating with the Communist regime, as well as for the statements he made during the revolution, so in a way he invoked Dante's story also to comfort himself.

The influence of the historical correlations of «mutual» resonance<sup>4</sup> has already been highlighted by György Rába, although he interprets the poems in their chronological order. In addition, even though Rába pays special attention to the ideological influences inspiring the evolution of the

2. B. CROCE, *The Structure and Poetry of the Comedy*, in Id., *The Poetry of Dante*, trans. A. Douglas, New York, Mamaroneck–Paul P. Appel, 1971, pp. 73–101.

3. M. BABITS, *Dante fordítása. Műhelytanulmány* [Translating Dante. Working paper], in M. BABITS, *Esszék, tanulmányok* [Essays, studies], ed. Gy. BELIA, Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1978, p. 285. Since to my knowledge the essays and poems quoted here do not have literary translations, the quotes here are my own translations.

4. Gy. RÁBA, *Dante és Babits. Dante hatása Babits költészettelére* [Dante and Babits. Dante's Influence on Poetry of Babits] in Id., *Szép hűtlenek. Babits, Kosztolányi, Tóth Árpád versfordításai* [The Pretty Unfaithful. Verse Translations of Babits, Kosztolányi, Árpád Tóth], Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969, pp. 112–124.

poems, he does not analyse the principles of composition in *Nyugtalanság Völgye*, and so he does not perceive a connection between the two works. The fact that Babits was working on the translation of the *Comedy* at the time the poems were written, and that *Purgatorio* was published in the same year as *Nyugtalanság Völgye* should have aroused suspicion. Moreover, a connection between the two books may have been clear for contemporary audiences. For example, Alajos Zambra states in his short review on *Purgatorio*: «Every line of the translation reveals that Babits likes *Purgatorio* the best, that *Purgatorio* is the closest to the poet of *Nyugtalanság Völgye*.»<sup>5</sup>

The intertextual relations between the Babits volume and Dante's *Comedy* are of course not as obvious as in *Nunquam revertar* in *Szimbólumok* [Symbols] (where Babits makes Dante say the Latin phrase highlighted in the title), or in the poem *Dante*, probably dated to the summer of 1921.<sup>6</sup> An interpretation of the Babits volume, however, can reveal innumerable, mostly structural, and thus intertextual parallels between *Nyugtalanság völgye* and the *Divine Comedy*.

### **The place of the volume in Babits's poetic career**

*Nyugtalanság völgye* occupies an exceptional place in Mihály Babits's career; reception places the volume at the close of his first and the opening of his second poetic period. According to Ágnes Nemes Nagy, «middle Babits can be dated from *Nyugtalanság völgye* (1917–1920), [...] he moves in two directions from his previous lyrical position. He moves back and forth: back to the subjective, personal poetic stance, and forth to disharmony, to a prosaic tone, to a certain unconventionality»<sup>7</sup>. The presentation of subjectivity and putting forward biographical events as the organizing principle of the

5. A. ZAMBRA, *Dante: A Purgatorium. Fordította Babits Mihály* [Dante: Purgatorio. Translated by Mihály Babits], Egyetemes Philológiai Közlöny, 1920, p. 68.

6. More about the poem *Dante*: E. DRASKÓCZY, “Nessuno ci sta più vicino, e nessuno ci sta più lontano!”: *Momenti e aspetti della fortuna di Dante nell’Ungheria interbellica*, in \**Tra una guerra e l’altra: Incroci fra Italia e Ungheria: storia, letteratura, cultura, mondo delle idee (1921–1945)*, a c. di R. RUSPANTI – Z. TURGONYI, Budapest–Roma: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont–Centro Interuniversitario di Studi Ungheresi e sull’Europa Centrale e Orientale (CISUECO), 2018, pp. 316–319.

7. Á. NEMES NAGY, *A hegyi költő. Vázlat Babits lírájáról* [Mountain poet. Draft of Babits's Lyric Poetry], Budapest, Magvető Kiadó, 1984, pp. 120–121.

poems and volumes already appears in the critique published by Lörinc Szabó in *Nyugat*. «Every poem here is biographical data»<sup>8</sup>, writes Szabó, who at the time was a close friend of Babits and possibly a witness to both the birth of poems and the compilation of the volume. Unsurprisingly, his statement is in line with Babits's own interpretation: «In *Nyugtalanság völgye* the way is lost: we all are straying in this valley, all of Hungary, Europe, and each and every disturbed soul alone. A spiritual account of recent years this is, disturbed spirit, disturbed forms; *maybe a secret development to something new that must come*»<sup>9</sup>.

The autobiographical inspirations behind the poems of the volume can sometimes be observed directly. The poems evoking Szekszárd, Babits's birthplace, belong here, or the great anti-war poems which document the poet's adverse feelings towards war. When the volume was published, readers may have remembered the resounding success of *Húsvét előtt* [Before Easter], but also the fact that the 1917 issue of «Nyugat» was confiscated for featuring the poem *Fortissimo*, and a legal procedure began against Babits, accusing him of religious misdemeanour.

Nevertheless, due to their structural similarities with the *Divine Comedy*, the poems of the volume can also be interpreted in a narrative structure where the poet arrives at the mount of Purgatorio through the horrors of war. From the foot of the mountain, the poet looks up and sees the stars of Paradiso. Babits, however, did not proceed any further from here. I will illustrate this narrative structure below.

### The hidden cyclical structure of the volume

The manuscripts of *Nyugtalanság völgye* in the Petőfi Museum of Literature include a handwritten page of contents prepared for the publishers, which, in my opinion, shows that Babits arranged the poems in this volume so that pairs form a hidden cyclical structure, similarly to the composition of his previous volumes.<sup>10</sup> Although the order of titles in the contents shows

8. L. SZABÓ, *Nyugtalanság völgye* [Valley of Unrest], Nyugat, No. 1., 1921, p. 51.

9. M. BABITS, *nyilatkozata* [statement], Színházi Élet, No. 5., 1922, p. 28.

10. T. GINTLI, *Kompozíciós elvek Babits első két kötetében* [Principles of Composition in the First Two Volumes of Babits], in Id., *Irodalmi kalandtúra. Válogatott tanulmányok* [Literary Adventure.

some important differences to the published volume, it essentially displays the final volume structure. Noting down the sixteen titles on the contents page, Babits left a larger space after the fifth and thirteenth titles, so the poems visibly form three groups. The first group includes *Előszó* [Foreword]; *Bilincs ez a bánat* [Shackles is this Grief]; *Szekszárd, 1915 nyarán* [Szekszárd, in the Summer of 1915]; *Szálló nap után* [After the Setting Sun]; *Nincs lámpa* [No Light] (final title in the volume: *Éji út* [Night Ride]). The second group contains *Háborús anthológiák* [War Anthologies]; *Strófák egy templomhoz* [Stanzas to a Church]; *Carmen novum* (final title in the volume: *Egy filozófus halálára* [On the Death of a Philosopher]); *Kakasviadal* [Cock-fight]; *Detektívhistória* [Detective Story]; *Szent Mihály* [Saint Michael]; *Bénára mint a megfagyott tag* [Numb like a Frostbitten Limb]; *Új esztendő* [New Year]. The third: *Fortissimo*, *Zsoltár gyermekhangra* [Psalm for a Child's Voice], *Zsoltár férfihangra* [Psalm for a Male Voice]. The spacing between the lines of the 22 titles, as written down in the folio version, does not show any groupings similar to the recto version, yet based on the thematic connection among the poems we may suppose that the arrangement in the recto reflects the hidden cyclical structure of *Nyugtalanság völgye*. This cyclical structure also must have applied to the second part of the volume, although Babits did not indicate this with extended spacings (he may have had to list too many titles, without enough space).

Reflecting further on the composition outlined in the recto of the autograph volume, I suppose that *Nyugtalanság völgye* reflects the composition of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, although it only establishes a 2 x 3 structure instead of the triple composition of the *Comedy*.

My hypothesis for the structure of the volume is that *Nyugtalanság völgye* has three basic pillars, three ars poetica poems which, having references to earlier periods of poetry, place the volume in Babits's career and state his new poetic programme. These ars poetica poems are: the opening *Előszó* [Foreword], the eighteenth poem, near the middle of the volume, *Az óriások költögetése* [Waking up Giants], and the last poem of the volume, *Csillagokig!* [To the Stars!]. Between the three pillars, the poems can be divided into three subgroups. The first unit of three poems is basically the

Selected Studies], Budapest, Magyar Irodalomtörténeti Társaság, 2013, pp. 67–81; Á. KELEVÉZ, *Új Forrás a fiatal Babits költszerkesztési módszeréhez. Előkerült a Levelek Iris koszorújából kötet szerzői kézirata* [New Sources of Volume Editing Method of Young Babits. The Author's Manuscript of Leaves from Iris's Wreath Discovered], Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények, No. 4., 2019, pp. 507–532.

same as that of the recto of the handwritten contents page. The second half of the volume after *Az óriások költögetése* [Waking up Giants] can be further divided into three thematically different groups of poems. First: *Emlékezés* [Reminiscing]; *Egy perc, egy pille* [A Minute, a Moth]; *Szerelmes vers* [Love Poem]; *Énekek éneke* [Song of Solomon]; *Dal, prózában* [Song in Prose]; *Két nyári vers* [Two Summer Poems]; second: *A régi kert* [The Old Garden]; *Szüret előtt* [Before Harvest]; *Őszi pincézés* [Cellaring in Autumn]; *Régi, friss reggeleim* [My Fresh Mornings of Old]; *Reggeli templom* [Church in the Morning]; *Korán ébredtem* [Woke up Early]; *Reggel* [Morning]; *Könyvek unalma* [Boredom of Books]; third: *Szíttál-e lassú mérgeket?* [Hast thou smoked slow poisons?]; *Szaladva fájó talpakon* [Running with Hurting Soles]; *A könnytelenek könnyei* [The Tears of the Tearless]; *Isten fogai között* [In God's Teeth]; *Csak a dalra* [To the Song Only].

### Getting lost in the inferno of war

The first textual unit following *Előszó* [Forward] includes four poems: *Bilincs ez a bánat* [Shackles is this Grief]; *Szekszárd, 1915 nyarán* [Szekszárd, in the Summer of 1915]; *Szálló nap után* [After the Setting Sun]; *Éji út* [Night Ride]. These poems describe the shaken state of mind the speaker of the poem is in, and the desire to find a way out of this situation. All this goes together with stepping out of the pre-war time-space coordinates, through the experience of time standing still and mouldering space: «Time stands still and moulders Space, / nineteen-fifteen →» (*Szekszárd, 1915 nyarán* [Szekszárd, in the Summer of 1915]), or: «look, here, the clock's a guard on this cool wall / the hand stands still» (*Szálló nap után* [After the Setting Sun]). It will be essential in light of this perception of time that Babits indicates the date of creation or publication in the titles or subtitles of many of his poems, including his earlier ones such as *Szent Mihály* [Saint Michael] and *Egy perc, egy pille* [A Minute, a Moth], making the contrast between the personal story of his life and an out-of-joint time sharper.

Katalin J. Soltész originates the title of the volume from Edgar Allan Poe's poem, *The Valley of Unrest* and remarks that «[the title] does not fit the content of the volume thematically, only in its mood». Although Poe's inspiration in title selection cannot be excluded, I think that the title of Babits's volume can be explained more easily if we interpret the first tex-

tual unit through the topic of losing one's way in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and its fictitious topography:

I cannot well repeat how there I entered,  
So full was I of slumber at the moment  
In which I had abandoned the true way.

But after I had reached a mountain's foot,  
At that point where the valley terminated,  
Which had with consternation pierced my heart,

Upward I looked, and I beheld its shoulders,  
Vested already with that planet's rays  
Which leadeth others right by every road.<sup>11</sup>

Babits's own explanation quoted above supports the suggested interpretation: «In *Nyugtalanság völgye* the way is lost: we are all straying in this valley, all of Hungary, Europe, and each and every disturbed soul alone». This individual, national, and universal going astray is the basis of the irony at work in the volume. Despite the fact that in *Nyugtalanság völgye* the earlier, stricter poetic form obviously loosens up, the poem nears free verse in several cases, the poetic language nears the vernacular register, and the exact opposite of poetic endeavours (simplicity, a lack of rhymes and rhythm promoted in *ars poetica* and considered fundamental to poems) takes place: the stricter form remains (for instance, the sonnet), the musical features of language are overused, often bordering on parody. Consequently, what Tibor Gintli interprets as «ironic unsettling» in connection with the poems *Levelek Irisz koszorújából* [Leaves from Iris's Wreath] and *Aliscum éjhajú leánya* [Aliscum's Daughter with Hair of Night] applies to several poems of *Nyugtalanság völgye*: «The apparently light, not really significant poem questions the validity of the lyrical conduct of the volume through a radical gesture»<sup>12</sup>.

Contrasting the big city (Budapest, where Babits lived at the time) and his place of birth (Szekszárd, where his family lived and where he frequent-

11. I quote Dante's *Comedy* in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow' translation.

12. T. GINTLI, *Kompozíciós elvek Babits első két kötetében*, cit., p. 71.

ly visited) plays an important role in the constructed space engineered in the volume. Although György Rába believes that «Babits [...] identifies with Dante in the dramatic arrival to homecoming»<sup>13</sup> regarding the poem *Dante*, comparing the two places of birth, Szekszárd and Florence in this respect should not be reinterpreted. In his study, intended to be the prologue to Dante's work, Babits states that the Italian poet was also nostalgic about his birthplace at the end of his life,<sup>14</sup> although his relation to Florence was much more complicated than Babits's relation to Szekszárd. In Babits's case, the Szekszárd poems of the fifth textual unit of *Nyugtalanság völgye* (*A régi kert* [The Old Garden], *Szüret előtt* [Before Harvest], *Őszi pincézés* [Cellaring in Autumn]) connect his former home to the image of *Paradiso*, «the garden of lost innocence»<sup>15</sup>. This makes the poem *Éji út* [Night Ride], narrating the experience of a train ride to Szekszárd, symbolic: its time index, also marked in the title («night»), and its scenic arrangement (lack of light) present the journey home as the journey in Dante's *Inferno*, from which Babits thinks of his family with affection.

*Éji út* [Night Ride] also contains the theme of war, which becomes a determining motif in the poems of the next larger textual unit and provides a new frame of interpretation, as in the case of *Szent Mihály* [Saint Michael]. The fact that *A jóság dala* [Song of Good] is placed in this unit requires explanation because the poem itself does not contain the topic of war, whereas marking the time of the poetic speech does («the war roars out there»). Positioning the poem in the second group of texts was a deliberate decision Babits made, since *Song of Good* followed *Az óriások költögetése* [Waking up Giants] on the volume's handwritten content page, and it was later placed in its final place among the poems of war, immediately preceding the poem *Új esztendő* [New Year], a poem of «apocalyptic music of the nerves». Presenting hope in the inferno of war might have been the intention behind this editorial decision. In addition, evoking “Sacred Love” in the fifth poem also prefigures love, the topic organizing the cohesive theme of the bloc following *Az óriások költögetése* [Waking up Giants].

The next three verses, *Fortissimo*, *Zsoltár gyermekhangra* [Psalm for a Child's Voice], and *Zsoltár férfihangra* [Psalm for a Male Voice] form a

13. Gy. RÁBA, *Dante és Babits. Dante hatása Babits költészeteire*, cit., p. 114.

14. M. BABITS, *Dante. Bevezetés a Divina Commedia olvasásába*, cit., p. 79.

15. Ivi, p. 76.

separate group of texts. This is partly explained by the poems' history of creation and the intratextual relation between *Fortissimo* and *Zsoltár gyermekhangra* [Psalm for a Child's Voice]. A year may have passed between writing the two *Psalms*, since we know of a draft of *Zsoltár gyermekhangra* [Psalm for a Child's Voice] that can be found on the recto of the draft of the poem *Háborús anthológiák* [War Anthologies], published in the 1 April 1917 issue of «Nyugat» (OSzK Fond III/1818/A 4). This version of *Zsoltár gyermekhangra* [Psalm for a Child's Voice], dated March 1917, shows the palpable effect of the scandal surrounding *Fortissimo*. The early draft contains word-for-word references to the charge of blasphemy put forward by the prosecution prompted by *Fortissimo*, whereas the later version only refers to the scandal provoked by the poem by interpreting his earlier remark from behind a child's mask.<sup>16</sup> The two *Psalms* create a counterpoint after the powerful tone of *Új esztendő* [New Year], closing the previous bloc, and *Fortissimo*; in other words, the volume is "retuned" in these poems.

### Celestial and mundane love

The thematic organizing principle of the first textual unit following *Az óriások költögetése* [Waking up Giants] is love, which also reveals a number of connections to Dante. According to Rába, *Emlékezés* [Reminiscing], the poem opening the bloc, was inspired by the death of Babits's former love, Böske Kiss, in May 1917.<sup>17</sup> The figure of the dead girl is associated in the volume with Beatrice guiding Dante through Inferno. This is not the first time Babits depicts his feelings towards Böske Kiss in Dantesque parallels. He wrote a poem in 1911, probably not long after the short love affair, which remained among his manuscripts until it was published by György Rába in 1982.<sup>18</sup> In this poem, Babits addresses Böske Kiss as «Pargoletta» – that is [little girl]. The poem recalls and transcribes the story of Pia del Tolomei, a fe-

16. Cfr. G. BALOGH, *Jog és költészet a magyar irodalmi modernségen. Babits Mihály: Fortissimo* [Law and Poetry in the Hungarian Literary Modernity. Mihály Babits: Fortissimo], Irodalomtörténet, No. 3., 2018, pp. 257–258.

17. Gy. RÁBA, *Babits Mihály költészete. 1903–1920* [Poetry of Mihály Babits. 1903–1920], Budapest, Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1981, p. 538.

18. Gy. RÁBA, *Babits és a "mindennapi kislány"* [Babits and the "Everyday Girl"], Irodalomtörténet, No. 3., 1982, pp. 661–672.

male figure of *Purgatorio*. The addressing («Pargoletta») is taken from canto 31 of the *Divine Comedy*, where Beatrice reproaches Dante for taking so many years to find her:

Thou oughtest verily at the first shaft  
Of things fallacious to have risen up  
To follow me, who was no longer such.

Thou oughtest not to have stooped thy pinions downward  
To wait for further blows, or little girl,  
Or other vanity of such brief use.<sup>19</sup>

The 1911 poem reflects Babits's broken heart, which explains the negative presentation of the girl; however, in *Emlékezés* [Reminiscing], Babits affectionately remembers the girl, the «young girl» whose inclusion in the composition exalts her to Beatrice.

The volume's poems on the topic of love are characterized by a duality: the opposition of mundane and celestial love. *Szerelmes vers* [Love Poem], written in 1908, might have been inspired by Emma, a confectionery assistant from Fogaras, making a real but past experience of love the background of the poem. In contrast, the “sweet dual” of *Dal, prózában* [Song, in Prose], according to Rába, is mere fiction,<sup>20</sup> although the wording of the poem does not exclude the possibility that the «dear» addressed in the opening lines might be a female member of the Babits family, perhaps his younger sister. *Két nyári vers* [Two Summer Poems], a two-part poem also contrasts two kinds of love: the Italian titles present two timelines: carnal love (out of wedlock), considered sinful by the social conventions of the eighteenth century (*Settecento*), and the sensuality open to the “Sacred Love” of the poem's present (*Oggi*, i. e. today). The erotic description of the female body at the closure of the poem takes an unexpected turn, and the mundane desires are placed in a transcendental dimension. The binary opposition of mundane and celestial love may have been the reason why *Song*

19. In the original: Ben ti dovevi, per lo primo strale / de le cose fallaci, levar suso / di retro a me che non era più tale. / Non ti doveva gravar le penne in giuso, / ad aspettar più colpo, o pargoletta / o altra novità con sì breve uso. (*Purg.* xxxi 55–60)

20. Gy. RÁBA, *Babits Mihály költészete*, cit., p. 549.

*of Solomon* is included in the volume, which was later also included in *Erato*, i.e. among Babits's translations of the masterpieces of erotic world poetry. The Old Testament book attributed to King Solomon is also a key text of the mysticism of love, also referring to ideal love through the allegorical interpretation of physical love.

This textual unit closes with *Két nyári vers* [Two Summer Poems], with the 'garden' motif already appearing in its closure, and the new bloc opens with *A régi kert* [The Old Garden]. In this case, the transition is not only motif-related, it is also of a hidden nature that is created through the *Song of Solomon* of the *Old Testament*, providing yet another argument for including the poem in the volume. Solomon compares Sulamit to a «garden locked» in *SoS* 4:12. The meaning of love takes a new direction through this biblical allusion, since the thematic focus of the volume is now on the garden of the family house and on the homeland. This is significant for two reasons. First is the longing for one's place of birth, which can be seen as a Dantesque parallel, and which was already mentioned in connection with the volume-opening *Szekszárd, 1915 nyarán* [Szekszárd, in the Summer of 1915]. Second, the expression of his longing for the homeland is Babits's answer to the accusations of him being unpatriotic because of his writings and his actions as a public figure. Connecting the motifs of "love" and "garden" is also revealed by the lines of *Költészet és valóság* [Poetry and Reality], which remembers Böske Kiss and was written around the time the volume was published. This piece – recalling the months of Babits's relation with Csinszka, Endre Ady's widow between 1919 and 1920 – also illustrates what the memory of the deceased girl meant to Babits in those years:

«I might have loved a deceased girl at the time and seen an old garden, in a summer evening, in the year of the comet, a July, an August, long walks, under shooting stars. How brightly the stars shone! How loudly the crickets chirped in black velvet bushes! The ordinary young girl was gently weeping on my shoulder – oh, how much her tears burnt! I held the fright of a gentle and delicate girl in my arms».<sup>21</sup>

21. M. BABITS, *Költészet és valóság. Élettörédek* [Poetry and Reality. Life Fragments], «Nyugat», No. 1., 1921, p. 44.

In this context, once we are past the painful and nostalgic phases of reminiscing, the lyrical self that speaks through the lines of the poem is recreated in the intimate atmosphere of privacy. The defining motifs of the poems include the vision of 'resurrection' connected with hot wine (*Őszi pincézés* [Cellaring in Autumn]) and the motif of 'morning' symbolising resumption (*Régi friss reggeleim* [My Fresh Mornings of Old], *Reggeli templom* [Church in the Morning], *Korán ébredtem* [Woke up Early], *Reggel* [Morning]).

The last poem in this textual unit is both a reference to earlier works as well as a transition to the next bloc. The basic situation of *Könyvek unalma* [Boredom of Books] develops, similarly to previous poems, from the image of the «strange thoughts» illustrated by the simile of seductive young girls. This recalls the phraseology of *Song of Solomon* again on the one hand, while on the other hand, read through the poet's biography, it can be understood as a self-critical confession. The closure of the poem projects the central problem of the last textual unit: «Alas, how shall I found my way / among the old crowd?» Since the bloc starting with *Szíttál-e lassú mérgeket?* [Hast thou smoked slow poisons?] draws the linguistic-poetic consequences of the war and revolutions. More precisely, it ascertains the insufficiency of a language worn out by propaganda (*Szíttál-e lassú mérgeket?* [Hast thou smoked slow poisons?], *A könnytelenek könnyei* [Tears of the Tearless]), while it states the desire for being annihilated and recreated by the divine grace that is won through repentance (*Szaladva fájó talpakon* [Running with Hurting Soles], *Isten fogai közt* [In God's Teeth]). Furthermore, in *Csak a dalra* [Only to the Song] Babits hastens to justify his own earlier public activities.

The title selection of the poem *Csillagokig!* [To the Stars!], which ends the volume, becomes meaningful through the structural parallels with Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The poem, in this intertextual space, can be understood as a reference to the stars in Paradiso, as in the first canto of Inferno: «I looked at the mountain and saw that its ridge / had dressed in starlight / which is a dear guide, a treasure for some.» To this point (i.e. to Paradise), however, the speaker of the poems in *Nyugtalanság völgye* does not get: he has been through Inferno, has arrived at the foot of the mount of Purgatorio, but he does not walk the path leading to Paradiso and is merely allowed to look at its stars.

## Conclusion

As a volume of poetry, *Nyugtalanság völgye* by Babits can be interpreted in the intertextual space detailed above as a work of art that has a unified composition with poems that had been individually published in periodicals before. Nevertheless, the volume is an autonomous work, and the relation between the two textual compounds is not primarily created by the barely analysed Dante quotes present in the Babits volume, but through the structural parallels of the two literary pieces.

Thus, based on Gérard Genette's concepts, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Babits's *Nyugtalanság völgye* develop a hypertextual relation similar to that between Homer's epic poem and Joyce's *Ulysses*, or that between Dante's *Comedy* and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The operation of a similar narrative model progressing through *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* can be observed both in Eliot's and in Babits's work. The difference between Eliot's work of 1922 and Babits's compilation from two years prior to that is that while the speaker in *The Waste Land* can be identified as Virgil, the subject of *Nyugtalanság völgye* can undoubtedly be identified as Dante.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, *Nyugtalanság völgye* as hypertext has the *Divine Comedy* as its hypotext; the former develops from the latter through "direct transformation", the same way as Joyce in *Ulysses* subtracts a plot and a pattern of relations among characters from *The Odyssey*.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, based on the evidence above, I think the story of Dante's journey in the otherworld provides the narrative framework for the biographical and poetic references of the poems in *Nyugtalanság völgye*, and for the stronger subjectivity compared to earlier Babits poems. This way, the period in Babits's life during which the poems were written, between 1915 and 1920, can be narrated as a journey through hell and a desire for redemption. The volume can be read as a conversion narrative in the sense Babits described Dante's *Purgatorio*: «Purgatorio is the most human part of the great poem. It is the country of Freedom, illustrating the sacred option of the human soul: to rise above through toilsome struggles the filth

22. A. KAPPANYOS, *Kétséges egység. Az Átokföldje, és amit tehetünk vele* [Doubtful Unity. The Waste Land, and What We Can Do With It], Pécs, Janus–Osiris Kiadó–Balassi Kiadó, 2001, pp. 249–250.

23. G. GENETTE, *Palimpsests. Literaure in the Second Degree*, trans. Ch. NEWMAN– C. DOUBINSKY, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1997, pp. 5–7.

of this world which pull us down into Inferno, the country of Captivity. Purgatorio is the place of pains and hope, like life itself. The soul grown heavy from its entanglement in sins plods the paths of the sacred mount.»<sup>24</sup> This broken narrative of an unfinished conversion story can be connected to the interpretation of the *Divine Comedy*, which reveals the *Confessions* of St Augustine in the background of Dante's work, which was also defining for Babits.<sup>25</sup> *Nyugtalanság völgye* is therefore clearly a volume of transition, and it becomes an important piece of Babits's work for its poetic reflection on his personal life and his poetic career.

In 1920, after a disciplinary procedure began against him for his public activities during the revolution and the Republic of Councils, as well as for his receiving a university professorship, Babits was excluded from the Petőfi Society and was harassed by the police. Thus, it was not possible for Babits to write about his entrance to Paradiso, the story of the self's salvation. In this sense, this volume remained unfinished, but exactly because of the structural parallels developed with the *Divine Comedy*, the hope of completion remained.

24. M. BABITS, *Dante. Bevezetés a Divina Commedia olvasásába*, cit., p. 75.

25. J. FRECCERO, *Dante: the poetics of conversion*, Cambridge–London, Harvard University Press, 1986; J. KELEMEN, *A conversio poétikája. Dante* [The Poetics of Conversio. Dante], in "Conversio", ed. B. DÉRI–Cs. DEZSÖ–M. I. FÖLDVÁRY–Sz. R. KOMORÓCZY–Z. SZOMBATHY–B. VARGA–Á. VÉR, Budapest, ELTE BTK Vallástudományi Központ, 2013, pp. 33–39.