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The Process of Making Our Top 10 List

The authors we chose—Miklós Bánffy, Gyula Krúdy, Margit Kaffka, Dezső Kosztolányi, Kálmán Mikszáth, Ferenc Molnár, Gyula Illyés, and Ádám Makkai—and their books struck us as the best place to start. Of course, other notable books could have been selected.

The Top 10 were, however, handpicked from the many books of the period. The final list includes (and they are not in any priority list here):

- ✦ *Anna Édes* by Dezső Kosztolányi
- ✦ *The Devil* by Ferenc Molnár
- ✦ *The Adventures of Sinbad* by Gyula Krúdy
- ✦ *The Transylvania Trilogy* by Miklós Bánffy
- ✦ *People of the Puszta* by Gyula Illyés
- ✦ *Colours and Years* by Margit Kaffka
- ✦ *In the Quest of the Miracle Stag: The Poetry of Hungary* by Ádám Makkai
- ✦ *A Strange Marriage* by Kálmán Mikszáth
- ✦ *The Paul Street Boys* by Ferenc Molnár
- ✦ *Songs of the Wheatfields* by Ferenc Molnár

The compilation was conducted by Minted Prose with curation assistance from Judit Kádár, Budapest literature scholar and Associate Professor in the English Department of the University of West Hungary, and Richárd Bogdán, Director of ZoOm Hungary, a Budapest-based travel company.

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116 Books To Start

We first approached Judit about this project in the summer of 2015 with an initial list of 116 Hungarian books, which I had compiled and collected while writing *The Memory Book*. I thought that eventually I might produce a list of great Hungarian books to share.

However, I didn't realize at the time how ambitious a project building such a list would be. Still, I should have known that, given it took me nine years to write *The Memory Book*. In retrospect, combining the language, the people, and the history into a unified list was going to be complex.

Judit said that many books were translated during the Socialist era by Hungarian translators and some of those translations were not the best. I could fully understand that since one of my main sources about Szolnok, the hometown of the owner of the memory book I found in the Budapest antique store in 2005, was a book written in Hungarian during 1975 called *Szolnok Város Története* (History of the City of Szolnok). The translator I engaged said that this book elucidates internationalist solidarity during the time of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. And, by the way, *Anna Édes* by Dezső Kosztolányi, our first pick, starts with the collapse of the Soviet Republic in 1919.

Judit also pointed out that in some cases the American version of a book could be different from the original Hungarian text. In addition, modern translations made in the last twenty-five years were good, but some excellent authors and books had not been translated yet, or they were not on our list because their books were not widely available.

Down to 27 Books

Judit then culled from our list and added new books to create a list of about forty plus books. After that, we trimmed it to 27 because many of the books were not readily available in English on Amazon. From there, we applied the final test: the book had to be as relevant as possible to the period of *The Memory Book*. This meant it needed to deal with the cultural, economic, and personal issues of the times, not just be a good book from the same period.

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I would have liked to have kept all 27 on the list but after further discussion, we finally agreed on 10. Judit reviewed the final list and offered a final thought for consideration: perhaps Anna Leznai's 22 page fairy tale, *The Wanderings of the Little Blue Butterfly in Fairyland*, should be included. It combined art nouveau and Hungarian folk art in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, while the book was beautiful (we at Minted Prose bought a copy), there were just two copies available on Amazon, each at over \$50. In light of the cost and availability issues, the book was not included on our list.

Literature and Budapest 1900

We are confident that the readers will like the books that we have selected to represent turn of the century Budapest. They sparkle like the time period from which they came, when Hungarian literature and the city of Budapest were so entangled it would be hard to think about one without the other. For more on this period, I highly recommend a book called *Budapest 1900* by John Lukacs. It was one of my favorites as I worked on *The Memory Book* and I read it through and through, absorbing the nuances of the city, the people, the art, and a long lost generation that became my world for nearly 10 years.

Stories created back then evoked sensitivity, love, pride, abuse, politics and more; universal themes that resonate and allow for connections in the mind even today. We'll be posting them one at a time as news items over the course of the year. By the way, we had originally thought to put the list with descriptions and author bios in an app for you but we were afraid the app would be lost in the deluge of apps already available. In the end, we decided our website and social media channels provide a better forum.

So we ask you to time travel with us. Cozy up on the couch or put your feet up in bed, with a steaming cup of tea or coffee at your side. In 1900 there were several hundred coffeehouses in Budapest, a hotbed for literature, discussion, and Turkish coffee. So make it 1901 as we add your coffeehouse to their thoughts and times while you luxuriate in the ambience of old Hungary.

—Linda Fischer

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