

A Woman's Self-Liberation: The Story of Margit Kaffka (1880-1918)

Dalma H. Brunauer

Ellen Moers, in *Literary Women*,¹ commented on the importance of money and jobs in the lives of female authors. Margit Kaffka's career offers a good example of this observation. Her story also traces the role of husband and environment in the day-to-day activities of a working woman. Further, the lives of Margit Kaffka and Willa Cather, the American writer, present many similarities, although any suggestion of "Parallel Lives" is unintentional. But chiefly, Margit Kaffka's professional history reveals the crucial function of at least *one* sympathetic editor — Miksa Fenyő — and of at least *one* truly superior publishing outlet — *Nyugat (West)*.

Back in 1910, when Willa Cather was managing editor of *McClure's*, she had herself photographed. With her good figure, attractive face, poise, self-confidence, and the sumptuous hat which only a woman of the world would have dared to display, she presented the very image of the successful career woman. She was thirty-seven, and — having enjoyed a respectable journalistic career — she had authored just one slim volume of poetry and some short stories. But soon thereafter, in the spring of 1912, Cather took the plunge, encouraged by changed circumstances at *McClure's*. She resigned her position which had ensured worldly success and financial security, and staked her future on her ability to write and publish fiction. Her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*, appeared in 1912.²

During the same period the Hungarian authoress, Margit Kaffka, endured both similar and different experiences. She had also begun writing poetry, and she continued producing short stories. Her first novel, *Színek és évek (Colors and Years)*,³ was also published in 1912, though it had appeared serially in 1911. The other works followed in rapid succession; by the end of 1918, when Cather had just begun to taste success with her fourth novel, *My Antonia*,⁴ Kaffka, who was seven years younger, had published five novels and one novelette.⁵ She was

enthusiastically planning a *magnum opus*, which unfortunately never materialized.

Born in 1880, Kaffka was descended, on her mother's side, from generations of by then impoverished Hungarian gentry. Her father, a lawyer of Moravian ancestry,⁶ died when she was six. Kaffka obtained training as a teacher by exchanging a tuition-free education for promising to teach gratis for one year.⁷ Subsequently, she enrolled at one of Hungary's finest women's educational institutions, the *Erzsébet Nőiskola* in Budapest. She obtained a certificate enabling her to teach at the *polgári iskola*, an institution designed to provide a solid, practical, secondary education to middle class children. Altogether, she devoted more than fifteen years to full-time teaching; Cather abandoned *that* grind after only five years.⁸ While studying for a higher degree, Kaffka started writing poetry; her editor, Oszkár Gellért of *Magyar Gênioz* (*Hungarian Genius*), collected and published her poems, apparently without even consulting her!⁹ A similar "trick" was perpetrated on Cather. She was a young pre-medical student at the University of Nebraska in 1891, when one of her professors, Ebenezer Hunt, submitted her essay on Carlyle to a local newspaper. The shock and pleasure of seeing her name in print as an author lost the world a female doctor but gave it a great writer.¹⁰

Soon after obtaining her advanced degree in the fall of 1903, Kaffka began teaching at the provincial Hungarian town of Miskolc. Like Cather, she was loved and respected by her students. She attracted a small coterie excitedly discovering Endre Ady, whom Kaffka had known in their native Eastern Hungary. This predated Ady's appearance on the Budapest literary scene by three years. She met and in 1905 married a young forestry engineer, Brunó Frólich, who became the father of her only child, Lacika. (In this respect she differed from Cather, who had vowed never to marry and kept her resolve.) But in the same year, Kaffka wrote a spirited essay defending a woman's privilege *not* to marry.¹¹

That year witnessed a very remarkable event. This young woman with a demanding career, and a husband and a household to look after, might have been satisfied being moderately successful as a "poetess" of charming though rather old-fashioned lyrics. But Kaffka became obsessed with the ambition to produce better prose than had any other Hungarian woman before her — and she succeeded. Within five years, she had completely altered not only her literary style, but her lifestyle; in the process she became "liberated." This came about because her dislike of living in Miskolc prompted a move to Budapest. One of her earlier biographers described this period in her life:

In Budapest a different kind of life awaits them (her husband gets a job in the Ministry), and this life is more disorganized, hectic, demanding. They move to Újpest, because this is where she is teaching. Living in a big city brings to the surface previously hidden emotional conflicts, makes them conscious of the fact that they are incompatible. Being both intelligent, sober human beings, they separate in peace and quiet. . .¹²

This was all the outside world knew, all it was permitted to know until very recently. The actual process of Margit Kaffka's "liberation" was not so simple. Now we know much more about what transpired than either Ágoston or anyone else could have known then, thanks to the recently published correspondence of Miksa Fenyő, former editor of the journals *Figyelő* (*Observer*) and *Nyugat* (*West*).¹³ After a long and productive career as a Hungarian businessman and as one of the world's most prominent literary editors, Fenyő fled the Nazi tide. In 1944, the daily papers revealed that his former home had been searched and his collection of manuscripts confiscated. After the war, in 1945, he recovered the collection but many irreplaceable pieces had meanwhile mysteriously disappeared. In 1948, he left Hungary for Paris, and eventually arrived in the United States. He wrote: "When we moved from Paris to New York, in the sixth-rate hotel, where we stayed, we were checking our luggage, when we discovered with horror that the case with the letters in it was missing. . ." "With sorrow and shame I am contemplating my loss, the loss of Hungarian literary history. . ."¹⁴

But buried among the copious notes of a recently published book was the following information:

The story of the "lost" manuscript was told in 1970 by M. Fenyő in the following words: "When we arrived in New York and were settled in the Hotel Wales, I noticed that the suitcase filled with manuscripts is missing. I telephoned all over, but it did not turn up. Three days later, we found it in the hotel basement, where there were hundreds of stray pieces of luggage. Oh yes, but by then the story had gotten out that the suitcase was lost. Then I said, "Let's keep up this myth; otherwise, once word gets out that it turned up, we'll never have a moment's peace. Journalists will come and make demands — and rightfully so — and articles will be published, all in the name of literary history. Let's leave it at this, that it is lost, and when the time comes, we'll come before the public with it." The time came (comments the editor of Fenyő's literary estate) in August of 1970. The whole collection was placed in the Petőfi Literary Museum.¹⁵

Only one side of the Kaffka-Fenyő correspondence is available because Fenyő failed to copy his own letters. Thus, we are unaware how

the letter exchange started, only that he had initiated the correspondence. She was encouraged by his letter, as her reply of June 11, 1905, suggests, but was concerned whether she would be able to write anything "good." She lamented her ignorance about getting her stories published; she had enough material for a volume. But she had absolutely no access to good books in the cultural wasteland of Miskolc and solicited Fenyő's help and advice. She signed her name, "Fröhliczné" (Mrs. Fröhlich). Most of her subsequent letters soon after her marriage were signed similarly, with a sprinkling of "Fröhliczné Kaffka Margit."

Fenyő's advice and help must have kept her ambition alive. Within two weeks, she had written three more letters. On June 27, she mentioned, as an interesting fact, that she had never been compensated for her author's expenses, such as paper and stamps, although she had published in newspapers commanding sufficient funds. "I'm doing it for the pleasure of it — but I would love to be able to buy an occasional not-budgeted-for 'silly' thing — take a coach-ride, buy a nice fan, book, or picture without being considered an extravagant spendthrift by my husband and by others."¹⁶ In referring to her husband, she never used the literal equivalent *férjem* but the semi-feudal *uram*, "my lord," and sincerely, seriously, as befitted a good Hungarian wife. She described their married life as "not bad," adding, "both of us are working at steady jobs, and 'my man' (*az emberem*) is thrifty, home-loving, but still young, a beginner, and he would feel obliged to object to this sort of thing, were I to use regular funds for it. . ."¹⁷ She was also upset because a submitted work of hers was left unacknowledged for a whole week! She mentioned her husband fondly, telling of their occasional walks in the early morning, his "dear, layman's clinging to beautiful and good things in spite of his being a scientifically trained person."¹⁸ Apparently, he tried to shelter her from the effects of exposing her inner feelings in public, for she wrote: "My husband is right; poems written to please strangers aren't worth what they cost in loss of health."¹⁹

She continued hating Miskolc with a passion. Asking Fenyő to visit them, she wrote:

Please come, for I am so frustrated with this limited, uncouth, backward and miserable backwater (*ebbe a korlátolt, otromba, elmaradt és nyomorult Mucsába*) that I'm a nervous wreck. . . Even writing nauseates me. In the school, my colleagues, the good mummies, are always sounding off, saying that every woman writer would do better if she would pluck chickens or embroider pillowcases instead. . . Please come and bring news of the outside world. . .²⁰

She begged Fenyő to arrange for payment *now* — she wanted to use the money for a trip “up” to the capital, trying to arrange for a transfer to a Budapest school. (Budapest is always “up” in Hungarian idiom.) She penned this revealing passage:

Your sober arguments, dear friend, did not ruin my determination, I *must* go up, and I *will* go up, whatever the cost. I'm glad I see clearly and that you were so frank (presumably trying to warn her of the possible consequences of her planned trip) but I will go up, for this here is worse. If my husband loves me truly, he will not stay here out of sheer prejudice. Maybe my fate will take a turn for the worse, but isn't life like that? An alternation of good and bad. Your part in the tragedy is an elegant one: you are the 'warner' before the crisis, making the audience believe that it is possible for the heroine to turn back. But I must take flight now, or else the door may open too late, when I no longer will have wings to fly with.²¹

This letter was dated January 8, 1906 — barely six months after the start of their correspondence. Apparently, in all this time, she never met Fenyő in person. As “corresponding editor” of *Nyugat*, he had become her faithful confidant, a position of honor, incidentally, which he held for many other authors as well, both male and female. And he did all this while occupying a full-time position as a member of the Hungarian business elite.

In February of 1906, she congratulated Ady on his epoch-making volume, *Új versek* (*New Poems*), and asked for a copy. On August 2, 1906, still from Miskolc, she notified Fenyő of the birth of her son. In September, she was hatching plans to further the cause of her Budapest transfer. By now, she believed that spending another year in Miskolc would drive her mad. She knew she would inevitably be disappointed, but “that's how it must be.”²²

But her husband, Brunó, dragged his feet. On September 20, 1906, we read:

My dear hubby is giving me much trouble now. He has excellent connections (in the Ministry) and could easily get transferred . . . but he is hesitating, saying that in Budapest I will be even less of a wife to him than here . . . that he will lose his travel allowance, and that it makes no difference to him that *I* will make more money there. He has no inclination to reduce his own expectations of life to suit the ideas of another person, ideas which mean nothing to him — all this is natural and understandable.²³

But she hated her job and knew she could not continue in it. By January 2, 1907, Brunó had decided to transfer. She hoped *he* might precede her— she was not worried lest another woman snag him in the big wicked city. Although not jealous, she was far from indifferent; she spoke fondly of him now. She wrote proudly of her little son, and discussed books avidly. By March 6, 1907, Brunó had moved to the capital.

Her last letter from Miskolc was written in the spring of 1907. She was happy to be able to work with Fenyő again. Her request for sick leave had been rejected, and she quoted the letter from a councillor notifying her of this fact: “It’s nice to be scribbling some verses, but one can’t get leave of absence while one is healthy.”²⁴ But she was *not* healthy; her difficult pregnancy and delivery had impaired her health, and she had the medical reports to support her claim. Yet her *real* need was of the soul. “How can I write? Three classes, with seventy papers in each, every two weeks.”²⁵

The next letter came from Újpest, a Budapest suburb, in January of 1908. She was loaded down with work. She planned to write for *Nyugat*, which had just started operations. (Her previous correspondence with Fenyő was written while he was still editor of *Figyelő* [Observer].) Then in October, she complained that for the past two months she had not even taken pen in hand, partly because of illness, partly because of overwork. Anticipating Virginia Woolf by twenty-one years, Kaffka wrote wistfully: “Maybe now it will be a little better; my grandmother will come to keep house, and in the new apartment I will have four walls of my own, (each of them one meter long!) among which I can huddle with some sense of privacy. . .”²⁶

In November of 1908, she provided the following insight into her life, presumably in response to Fenyő’s reproach that she was neglecting the journal: “As for your accusations, nothing interests me more than *Nyugat* — and the only reasons I’m not present every third day and in every other issue are household cares, paper-grading, the task of moving house, and other beauties in life. . .”²⁷

Late in 1909, Kaffka wrote to Fenyő: “I’m so glad about my book,”²⁸ which was published in 1911 and may have been at the printer’s. Henceforth, she signed her name as plain “Margit Kaffka.” Her divorce came in 1910, but just at this time, an interval of several years interrupted the correspondence, except for a few lines written in August of 1911. Full connections resumed in March of 1913. No wonder she lacked time for letters. This was her most fruitful period: she published

two volumes of poetry, two collections of short stories, and two of her best novels, *Színék és évek*²⁹ and *Mária évei*.³⁰

This copious output was produced — in contrast with Cather's relative leisure as a freelance artist — under adverse conditions which stagger the imagination. Kaffka left a vivid account in her poem, "Örökkön a mérlegen" ("Forever in the Balance").³¹ Each of its three longer stanzas describes one of the three careers she was trying to pursue simultaneously, balancing them like a juggler. The first stanza evokes the soul-killing robot of her daily travel to school, teaching the unruly youngsters, and dragging herself home again in the afternoons. The second stanza records the conflict between her attempts to write and her desire to spend time with her son. The third stanza provides a moving insight into her writing career. It shows her struggling with difficult materials late into the night, until her strength gave out. The poem ends abruptly with a couplet:

*Sötét hajnalba ébresztőóra csereg.
Robotolni megyek.*

*In the dark dawn an alarm-clock rings,
I go off, roboting.*

In a letter to Ady, written during this period, she complained: "For five months now, I've been getting four hours of sleep nightly."³² Luckily, in 1912, she was granted a two-year leave of absence at the behest of the renowned mayor, István Bárczy, of Budapest.

After four years of solitary living and caring for her boy, she met her only great love. In 1914, she fell in love with Ervin Bauer, the younger brother of Béla Balázs, one of her literary friends. The young man was a medical doctor and several years her junior. Like a schoolgirl in love, she let herself be swept away to Italy. Her next letter to Fenyő, written on July 20, 1914, from Florence mentioned her third full-length novel, *Állomások* (*Stations*),³³ published serially in 1914, but in book form only in 1917. Two collections of short stories had appeared in between. The outbreak of World War I a week later found the pair in Perugia.

In her poem, "Záporos folytonos levél" ("Rain-like, Continuous Letter"),³⁴ she recalled the sequence of these events:

"Most boldog vagyok!" — ott mondtam; te tudod, hogy először
/ mondtam.

Te szeretőn betakartál, mert hirtelen zizzent hűvös szél;
És reggelre jött a hír, menned kell, zajlik a világ,

Lavina indul, orkán zúg, delirizál az élet.
(Lásd, szó köztünk maradjon: megmondom, mért volt az egész,
Mert életemben egyszer én: "Boldog vagyok!" — ezt mondtam.)

"Now I am happy!" — I said it there; you know that I said it
for the first time.

Lovingly, you covered me, for suddenly hissed a cool wind;
And in the morning came the news, you must go, the world erupted.
An avalanche rolls, hurricane swirls, life suffers deliriums.
(Please, keep my secret! I'll tell you why it all happened.
Because for the first time in my life I had said, "I am happy.")

Ervin was immediately mobilized. They returned home, married in August of 1914, but had only a few days together before he went on active duty. Twice, he was returned home wounded; on both occasions she hurried to his bedside and nursed him back to health but suffered agonies of worry. These concerns are documented in her short novel, "Lírai jegyzetek egy évről" ("Lyric Notes About a Year")³⁵ a little masterpiece much ahead of its time. Another anti-war novel, *Két nyár* (*Two Summers*), was published in 1916.³⁶

Toward the end of the war Ervin was transferred to a Temesvár military hospital and she joined him there whenever she could. In his laboratory, where she liked to assist him, the couple had themselves photographed. The officer's insignia are protruding over the collar of his medical smock; she is gravely, expertly adjusting a microscope. (Like Cather, she was fascinated by medicine.) The white smock covers all but her beautiful, eloquent hands and her lovely, serious face. In her last letters to Fenyő, she mentioned her husband's medical discoveries in the same breath with her own plans for her last full-length novel.³⁷ Her husband was doing important work on the adrenal gland; if she sold her new novel, she would buy a good, genuine Zeiss microscope for her poor "lord." Love, money worries, concerns about obtaining food, were all blended with admiration for Mihály Babits' translation of Tennyson's "Maud." Grief over dead friends and relatives, and hopes for the coming of peace dominated her letter, but now, at last, she had some free time in which to write. She was more businesslike now; she knew her worth.³⁸

Her last letter to Fenyő was dated April 23, 1917, a year and a half before her death. It was all hurried business about a projected collection of poems; one publisher, the best (Kner), had no paper . . . Translations of her works into German were proceeding . . . She stopped, as if for a pause — and that ended her letters to *Nyugat*.³⁹ For the rest, we must turn to other sources. We know that finally, in the fall of 1918, just a few

months before the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Margit and Ervin moved to Budapest. Little Lacika, then twelve, went to live with them. (He had been in a Transylvanian boarding school.) During this time she dedicated some of the most beautiful love poems in Hungarian literature to her husband.⁴⁰ Ervin was assigned to the new Pozsony clinic, but before he had a chance to assume his new duties, the Czechs occupied the city. So, torn between hope and discouragement, they anticipated war's end.

On the last Sunday of November, 1918, Aladár Schöpflin, the renowned literary critic, visited Margit Kaffka at home. She welcomed him hospitably. For the first time in her life she was approaching a "still point," her marriage happy, her son with her, the war, with its terrors, over. She eagerly anticipated the future. An ambitious novel about Josephus Flavius had been fully researched and only needed to be written. While they were conversing, Lacika complained of a headache, and his mother immediately put him to bed. Schöpflin left the Kaffka home with a wonderfully warm feeling. She was so happy, so serene. . . The next day, he and their literary friends were shocked to learn that mother and son had been hospitalized with a raging fever. It was the dreaded Spanish influenza. Exactly a week later, the sad news reached the authors assembled for the founding meeting of the Vörösmarty Society: Margit Kaffka was dead. Lacika followed the next day.⁴¹ The funeral was held at Farkasrét Cemetery in the afternoon of December 4. One of the farewell addresses was to be delivered by Dezső Kosztolányi. At one o'clock he and his wife were both felled by the epidemic, which nearly claimed their lives.⁴³ Endre Ady, Hungary's great poet, was on his deathbed and died during the next month. Kaffka's funeral orations were delivered by Hungary's two most prominent literary figures who were not themselves sick, the poet Mihály Babits and the novelist Zsigmond Móricz.

When Kaffka died, Cather still commanded only a relatively small audience. *My Antonia*, eventually a recognized classic, had a poor sale.⁴⁴ Success was still remote, awaiting the publication of *One of Ours* in 1922, and the Pulitzer Prize in 1923.⁴⁵ Thereafter, Cather enjoyed more or less clear sailing. She wrote seven more novels, several more collections of short stories, and reached a serene, prosperous old age, with death claiming her at seventy-four.

It is idle to speculate what Kaffka might have achieved had she lived longer. At the time of her death she was only thirty-eight. Yet some of Hungary's most prominent writers had recognized her as their equal, and as Hungary's most talented female author. With her modern,

impressionistic style, she had re-vitalized the Hungarian novel at a time when all her male contemporaries, with the exception of Zsigmond Móricz, were still shackled by old-fashioned nineteenth-century models.⁴⁶ Now, almost seventy-five years after her first appearance on the literary scene, her reputation in Hungary is as solid as it is shining. Her novels have been translated into four languages, some of her stories into seven. Regrettably, English is not among them.⁴⁷

NOTES

1. (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1976), "Money, the Job, and Little Women: Female Realism," Chap. 4, pp. 67-89.
2. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912).
3. (Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, 1912).
4. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918).
5. *Kaffka Margit regényei (The Novels of Margit Kaffka)*, (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1968).
6. The word "Kaffka," originally spelled "gawga" and more frequently "kafka," means "magpie" in Czech.
7. At a charity convent at Szatmár and Miskolc. Her student years form the basis of her novel *Hangyaboly (Ant Colony)*. See note 37.
8. E. K. Brown, *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 95.
9. *Verseik (Poems)*, (Budapest: Róbert Lampel, 1903).
10. Brown, *Willa Cather*, p. 57.
11. *Hullámzó élet (The Waves of Life)*, (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1959). That essay, her maiden effort in journalism, would do credit to any feminist author writing today. ("Azért sem az utolsó szó." "No, not the last word").
12. Julián Ágoston, *Kaffka Margit*, (Budapest: J. Heinrich, 1934), p. 4.
13. All of Kaffka's letters are cited from this edition. The story of these letters is so interesting that it will be worth a digression to piece it together here from scattered notes throughout the recent book, Erzsébet Vezér, ed., *Feljegyzések és levelek a Nyugatról (Notes and Letters Concerning Nyugat)*, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1975).
14. He indulged in another paragraph of breast-beating. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
15. The book was published in 1975, and I was able to obtain it in 1976. There were hundreds of letters, from practically every major contemporary literary personage, but my discussion will be limited to the treasure trove of Margit Kaffka's letters to Miksa Fenyő. *Ibid.*, p. 468.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 391. His monthly salary of 80 forints was considered excellent pay for those days.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 392.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 395.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 397.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 401.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 402.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 406.
25. *Ibid.*,
26. *Ibid.*, p. 409. Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* was published in 1929.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 440. Ellen Moers quotes a similarly revealing letter by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Moers, *Literary Women*, pp. 3–4.
28. M. Fenyő, *Feljegyzések*, p. 411. Presumably, Kaffka meant her first volume of short stories, *Csendes válságok (Quiet Crises)*, (Budapest: Politzer, 1911).
29. See note 3.
30. (*Mária's Years*), (Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, 1912).
31. *Válogatott művei (Selected Works)*, (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1956), pp. 52–53.
32. Jenő Dóczy and Gyula Földessy, eds., *Ady-Múzeum (Ady-Museum)*, (Budapest, Athenaeum, 1924–25), pp. 11 and 202.
33. (Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, 1917).
34. *Válogatott művei*, pp. 72–76.
35. *Nyugat* (XIX, 1915).
36. (Budapest: Nyugat, 1916).
37. *Hangyaboly (Ant Colony)*, (Budapest: Nyugat, 1917).
38. M. Fenyő, *Feljegyzések*, p. 418.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 424.
40. “Záporos folytonos levél,” “Te színed előtt,” “Litánia,” Kaffka, *Válogatott művei*, pp. 72–77 and 80–81.
41. Aladár Schöpflin, “Kaffka Margit most tíz éve halt meg,” (“Margit Kaffka Died Ten Years Ago”), *Nyugat* (XXI, 1928), 710–712.
42. Her husband left Hungary in 1919 and moved to Leningrad. His successful biomedical researches have brought him belated recognition. He disappeared during the Stalinist purges. (Personal communication to author by György Bodnár).
43. Mrs. Dezső Kosztolányi, *Kosztolányi Dezső (Dezső Kosztolányi)*, (Budapest: Révai, 1938), p. 227.
44. Brown, *Willa Cather*, p. 213.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
46. This passage was translated by the author from Dr. György Bodnár's Postscript to the 1973 paperback edition of *Színek és évek*. Dr. Bodnár, member of the Institute for Literary Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, is an authority on Kaffka.

In the longer prose genres, the Hungarian literature of the turn of the century reached only an experimental stage. . . . The true turning point in this genre (the novel) was represented by Zsigmond Móricz, simultaneously with Margit Kaffka. I want to anticipate the charge of hairsplitting, and my witness is Zsigmond Móricz himself who received *Színek és évek* with the enthusiasm of a brother. He was the first to declare about it, “A critic of society can draw many more conclusions from it about the workings of society than from life itself.” Thus, the steps taken by these two in the writings of novels must be considered a contest among comrades, not antagonists. In this spirit, we can state objectively that *Színek és évek* was preceded (among the novel of Móricz) only by *Sárrany* (1910), retained in memory as an immature masterpiece. The first full-valued novel of Móricz, *Az Isten háta mögött*, appeared in 1911, at a time when Kaffka's great novel was already published serially in *Vasárnapi Újság*. . . . Of course, the value of *Színek és évek* is not determined by its chronological precedence — that

would merely ensure it a place as a pioneering historical document. Even a reader who is ignorant of the context of literary history recognizes this novel as one which is both rich and perfect (pp. 239–240).

Nothing was further from my mind than to imply that Kaffka was a better novelist than Móricz. Móricz was the most illustrious novelist Hungary produced in the twentieth century — possibly ever. I was merely stressing Kaffka's chronological precedence.

47. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Hungarian Educators Association at the University of Indiana, Bloomington, Indiana, in April, 1977. The following questions regarding Kaffka have been asked of me since:

Q 1 /What work or works of Kaffka ought to be placed into the hands of the English-speaking reader first? A. The ideal solution would be a modest volume, *The Portable Margit Kaffka*. This should include, first and foremost, *Színek és évek*, in a good translation, followed by the other members of the trilogy, either *in toto* or in generous excerpts (*Mária évei*, *Állomások*). Secondly, absolutely essential is *Lírai jegyzetek egy évről*, a pacifist and feminist document of the first order of magnitude. The other short novels are optional. Thirdly, I would include her free-verse poems — or at least some of them — and perhaps a few others in the traditional modes, for comparison. Lastly, a number of short stories and a few essays. . . a much needed volume.

Q 2 /With what other twentieth-century woman writers can she be compared? Specifically, which of her works would most nearly parallel which works of Cather? A. There is — to my knowledge — no twentieth-century woman writer with whom Kaffka could be compared without doing injustice to both. The references to Cather were made to provide contrast as much as to provide comparisons. Cather was so much more *fortunate*, having lived in America, than a Hungarian, before and during an eventually lost war. Specific comparisons between individual works may be made, always keeping in mind the differences, however. Of Cather's books, the one closest to *Színek és évek* would be *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940). Only toward the end of her long life did Cather reach back into the history of her family — mother, grandmother, great-grandmother — ; Kaffka did it in her first book. Consequently the effect is very different. Cather's is the final note of summing up, Kaffka's the clarion call, the hoisting of the flag. Similar comparison-contrasts may be made with *The Song of the Lark* and *Állomások*, and several other pairs of works as well.