Myth and feminine self-expression in the poetry of Anna Lesznai and Anna Hajnal

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The hidden tradition of women's literature, alongside the forgotten feminine language which needs to be rediscovered and brought back up to the surface, is often metaphorically compared to a subterranean stream which, trickling barely audibly below ground, still carries liberating energies (Menyhért 2013, 20). In an essay by Hélène Cixous, the embodiment of the frightening power of silenced feminine culture is Medusa, a mythological creature who petrifies men who look at her (Cixous 1976, 875–893). Luce Irigaray also based her discussion on the break from female lineage on Greek mythology (Schwab 2010, 79–92): Hestia, guardian of the hearth, also protected women's loyalty to their own identity and lineage, but by neglecting Hestia, we turned to the veneration of male deities (Irigaray 1998, 51–59).

In Hungarian literary criticism, French feminist theories based on psychoanalysis and its criticism had less influence than the more pragmatic school of women's studies urging the bringing to light of the forgotten feminine tradition. In recent years, this has led to the exploration of women's literature and its reception, which had been hiding under the surface of mainstream literature. The research is centred on the work of female authors connected to the journal *Nyugat* (West, 1908–1941), which had a key role in the rise of Hungarian modernism. Due to the changes in social and ideological circumstances in the years preceding *Nyugat*, women appeared in artistic and professional fields in larger numbers and the presence of women in literature became more and more accepted in the 1910s (Borgos – Szilágyi 2011, 8).

In literary research, particular attention is paid to the history of reception, but the characteristics of women's writing, alongside the characteristics of female subjectivity, female role models and self-constructions, are also analysed. The diversity of approaches is not only a consequence of different theoretical bases but also of the fact that the term "women's literature" should be viewed as a collective category covering a multitude of literary phenomena (Menyhért 2013, 23). In the era of *Nyugat*, a positive interest was taken in female authors: male editors "expected women to reveal a world unknown to them" (Borgos – Szilágyi 2011, 11). However, double standards were employed, as the gender of the author had primary influence on literary esteem (L'Homme 2003, 178). During the first half of the 20th century, the general consensus in the reception discourse was that "female authors should speak honestly, while at the same time depicting themselves as the chastely silent subject

of desire, while keeping sexuality, as a traditionally central element in constituting femininity, as taboo" (L'Homme 2009, 67). In contrast with this, present-day researchers of women's literature speak more about the diversity of "women's discourse and communicative practices rather than homogenous 'femininity'" (Mekis D. 2009, 11). In my paper, I relate to this research while, starting from myth as an energy reaching back to women's own identity and lineage, I also rely on the results of the French feminist school. I analyse the poetry of two poetesses connected to Nyugat, Anna Lesznai and Anna Hajnal, from the perspective of myth as a means of feminine self-expression.

ANNA LESZNAI AND ANNA HAJNAL IN HUNGARIAN LITERATURE

Anna Lesznai (1885–1966) belonged to the first, while Anna Hajnal (1907–1977) belonged to the third generation of the journal Nyugat. Lesznai was "the characteristic representative of the passage between different creative activities, as well as different intellectual groups" (Borgos 2007, 105) – an applied and fine artist, poet and prose writer. Her poems had already appeared in the first issue of *Nyugat*, which remained her most important forum for publication until her emigration to America in 1939 (Borgos – Szilágyi 2011, 81). In her poetry, as well as in the tales or her grand novel, which can be regarded as a summary of her oeuvre, a "'feminine' – empathic viewing of the soul" is combined with an analytic tendency (Kőbányai 2015, 649). Her intellectual and work journal notes (of which only a selection have been published so far: Török 2010) reveal a person who is open and free of conventions, who is at the same time insightful both philosophically and politically, and an avid searcher for logical, cause-and-effect relationships (Török 2010, 8–9). Her poetry is centred on love and children, and albeit her critics often interpret this as the manifestation of "Womanhood wanting to bear fruit, to give birth and to reproduce, an all-desiring Womanhood, the ancestral Womanhood, the ancestral Mother" (Fülep 1923), this is not a sign of a lack of reflection but rather the "result of an attitude with a strong philosophical basis" (Földes 2009, 348).

Anna Hajnal is a member of a generation that originated in the 1930s, which withdrew into the traditions of antiquity "like into the protection of a virtual island" (Rónay 1986a, 288). Between 1937 and 1938, together with classical philologist Imre Trencsényi-Waldapfel, she edited the journal *Argonauták* (Argonauts), one of the goals of which was to demonstrate the inspiring energies of antiquity in times that were becoming more and more troubling (Trencsényi 1996, 392–401). The primary field of her art was poetry. She rarely wrote prose, mostly on request (Steinert 1980, 672), and only completed a short fragment of her autobiographical novel intended for children (Hajnal 1983). Her work also included children's poems and literary translations. In her poetry, "fine details and virgin forests, intimacy and large spaces" alternate and flow into one another (Nemes Nagy 1983, 105), "antique tastes, elements reminiscent of folk poetry, biblical-prayer texts and old Hungarian poetry" (Koczkás 1986, 564) are mixed. Her poetry is determined by a "pantheistic fever advanced to a life programme" (Szakolczay 2014, 188), the reverence of life as the highest value (Alföldy 2006, 108), the combination of familiar solemnity and childlike joy (110), as

well as by the experiencing of infertility as a universal deprivation (Szakolczay 2014, 190), along with "women's dignity" helping to endure the suffering (193).

Although of different mentalities, both poetesses belong to the common stream of Hungarian women's literature, and they were also friends. According to Petra Török, Anna Hajnal "had been brought very close to Lesznai by the cosmic atmosphere of her poems searching for wholeness, creating an independent mythology" (2010, 507). Anna Hajnal also refers to their kindred spirits; in her writings about Lesznai, she compares her poetic predecessor to an ancient plane tree with its roots and crown extended, who gripped the earth widely and reached for the skies in titanic tension (Hajnal 1980, II., 183–184). The plane tree, as will be discussed later, is one of the characteristic motifs of Anna Hajnal's poetry, as well as a symbol of her own fate as a woman and poet. In her essay, the mythological soil of Hungarian women's poetry becomes a natural meeting ground for life works.

MYTH AND FEMININE SELF-EXPRESSION

In defining one of the key terms of my paper, myth, I will use as my starting point the interpretation of religious historian Károly Kerényi (1897–1973), who was "one of the most important forces of inspiration in Anna Hajnal's poetry" (Rónay 1986b, 358). According to Kerényi, mythology is a way of thinking and expression, and "for those who think accordingly and express themselves through it, it is also a way of life and action" (1939, 16–17). Myth and language are closely linked: quotations, references and fragments of old poems are built into utterances. It is necessary for this that the self be open to the past, searching for examples in things of old and thus becoming their bearer, making them present again (17). As one of Kerényi's students, János György Szilágyi, wrote, it is possible "to interpret myths, which had been created several millennia ago or thousands of miles afar, even outside of myth-creating and primarily myth-cognitive cultures, anywhere and anytime, for example here and now with the intention of seeking their message relevant to us" (1982, 217).

Although Kerényi did not employ gender perspectives, his concept is compatible with that of Alicia Ostriker's, who studied the connection between myth and women's self-expression. According to Ostriker, myth on the one hand is an element of education and high culture conveyed by authority, and on the other it is an essentially intimate thing, the territory of dreams and supressed desires, of all things that are alien to rational thinking (1982, 72). For women's poetry, besides anti-rationalism, creating myths is also a territory of self-projection and self-discovery – the representation of woman finding something divine or demonic in herself (73). This entails the correction of gender stereotypes encoded in myths (73–74).

"Of all the mythologies of different peoples, Greek mythology is our closest friend", wrote Kerényi (1939, 8). This tradition grew into Anna Hajnal's poetry with self-evident naturalness and was combined with motifs from the Old Testament. In Lesznai's poetry, the Greek legacy does not appear so transparently, but elements of ancient mythology shine through medieval European and oriental ones.

Kerényi, who viewed Greek deities as eternal figures and spiritual realities, emphasized the multifaceted nature of goddesses in his papers. The three forms of

the great goddess (maidenhood: παῖς, female fulfilment: τελεία and widowhood: χήρα) encompass the whole of female existence (1941, 32). The mythology does not speak about three consecutive phases of life, but different aspects of a whole. Demeter as a mother, struggling to get her daughter back is characterized by the state of τελεία. However, in a version of the myth, while searching for Persephone, she also falls victim to rape just as her daughter did (34). Like a παῖς, she too cannot avoid Poseidon, who has his way with the mare-goddess in the form of a stallion (Kerényi 1977, 123). She arrives in Eleusis broken, deprived of all her joy, as χήρα, disguised as an old woman, sits down by a well under an olive tree and offers her services to the daughters of Celeus (Kerényi 1941, 109). The existence of these three forms, their overlapping and disjunction and their mythological parallels, can also be found in the oeuvres of the two studied poetesses. For Lesznai, the most important is the time of fulfilment, τελεία, fertility and the blessed state of motherhood, whereas her lost maidenhood and widow-like feelings of pain and deprivation also emerge in her poems. At the beginning of her career as a poet, Anna Hajnal depicted the beauty of the intact maiden with parallels from Greek mythology, and later on, the childless poetesses found solace in revealing the essential identity of the maiden and the widow forms.

Mythological figures are not the only symbols of female existence in the work of the two poetesses but also those of cultural marginalization feature: their Jewish roots, being torn from their family traditions and homeland, and their childhood years as an idealized, primeval state are important motifs for both of them. After the falling apart of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, both of them were separated from their birthplaces. After 1920, Anna Hajnal never returned to Gyepűfüzes[1] again. Between the two world wars, Anna Lesznai visited Körtvélyes (which belonged to Czechoslovakia at the time) from Vienna and Hungary,[2] but after 1939 she never saw her home village again either. Distance added to the strong mythization of childhood landscapes, and in their works, spaces of personal memory were connected to the wider dimensions of cultural memory, and actual landscapes were washed together with mythical and Biblical landscapes.

MELUSINE AND THE EARTH-MOTHER: THE MEETING OF MYTH AND FAIRY TALE IN THE POEMS OF ANNA LESZNAI

A key element of Anna Lesznai's poetry is the world of fairy tales. A fairy tale heroine is often evoked in her poems (for example: Melusine or Scheherazade), and in her works of manifold and complex metaphorics, the mode of existence of fairy tales and myths cannot always be differentiated. According to Kerényi's theory, tale and myth cannot be differentiated on the basis of their material or form, the sole difference between them being the attitude towards the story: "if life pours into the passed down material without inhibition" then it is a myth, but if the story shrinks to "recital, listening and finally, mere reading" without it changing one bit in content, then we have a tale (1939, 20–21). In Lesznai's poetry, in this sense, motifs borrowed from tales are also mythicized, as in her poems she demonstrates how stories become the primary forms of experience in life.

The mythicality of Melusine, one of Lesznai's characteristic alter egos, is strengthened by motifs in the background which originate from Greek mythology. Melusine is an active and energetic female figure of medieval times, which are often regarded as male-centred. Jacques le Goff points out that in antique mythology, the stories of Eros and Psyche, Zeus and Semele, and Numa and Egeria are parallel to the tale of Melusine (Le Roy Ladurie – Le Goff 1971, 596–597). According to medieval texts, fairies are the descendants of the ancient Parcae (their French name, *fées* stems from the Latin *fatae*; Le Goff 2012, 169), and thus they have a determining role in the weaving of human (primarily male) fates. According to tradition and especially Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Melusine is similar to a demi-goddess, an ancestor of a great line (Dumiche 2010, 220) who, like Camoena, has a fortune-telling function (222).

Melusine is a hybrid female figure, bearing both animal and human traits (most commonly a mix between a woman and a snake or dragon), akin to the figure of Echidna, as described in Hesiod's Theogony, according to Arlette Bouloumie (2001, 9). In antiquity, the snake had been a positive image (it brought prosperity to the community under its protection; 9), but in Christianity it was identified with Satan, who tempted Eve to sin, and Melusine was related to Lilith. In medieval depictions, Melusine is the hybrid of a woman and a snake or a winged dragon (Clier-Colombanie 2001, 21–34).

The story of Melusine has countless variations, but they have a common core: the fairy brings prosperity and an abundance of children to the man who marries her, whilst there is an air of some pagan secrecy and the forbidden about her (for example, her husband must never see her naked or in her transformed shape). If the husband or another family member breaks the prohibition, Melusine leaves once and for all, leaving her children and family behind. Lesznai was captured on the one hand by the energy of the male-female relationship, a woman's special abilities, her key role and initiative in the story and on the other hand by the strength of the mother-child relationship and longings driving the mother away from child-rearing, her responsibility for her family and the denunciation thereof.

The Melusine poems finally matured into a cycle in the poetess's third book *Eltévedt litániák* (Lost Litanies, 1922) and Lesznai inserted a few pieces from her preceding two books, *Hazajáró versek* (Haunting Poems, 1909) and *Édenkert* (Garden of Eden, 1918) into the cycle, tailoring some of the poems ex post to fit the Melusine narrative (Vezér 1979, 90). According to Erzsébet Vezér, the figure of Melusine is Lesznai's "most fitting self-imitation" (58), and it originates from the feeling of displacement and a lack of roots in the big city. The image of Melusine is constantly refined in Lesznai's poetry, following the stages of the poetess's life. The poetic figures and worldview of the poetess, coming from a Jewish land-owning family and moving to Budapest from the countryside (her original name was Amália Moscovitz), were determined by the features of the village, the rural chateau and its garden. One of the attributes of Melusine, wealth, may be paralleled in the financial status of the family. The abandonment of family and children bears likeness to her biography, too: it is a reference to her first marriage and divorce prior to the birth of her child, to the artistic career of the young, divorced woman (which, in a sense, was the abandon-

ment of her child and the dereliction of her maternal duties), and also to the failure of her second marriage with the left-wing thinker Oszkár Jászi (Borgos – Szilágyi 2011, 94–99).

In Lesznai's poetry, Melusine flies away from her family not in the form of a dragon but a bird, the description of the donning of feathered clothes evoking Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the home world seen from a bird's-eye view invoking the take-off of Daedalus and Icarus, while the ripping out of Melusine from the human world also parallels the crucifixion of Christ. In the poem *Meluzina dalol* (Melusine Sings, Lesznai 1985, 72–74), Melusine's feathered clothes hidden in the chest of seven drawers come to life, the lock snaps, and the feathered clothes flutter out. Melusine flies away through the opening window, and her two arms form a soaring cross. In the poem *Megtérő Meluzina* (Melusine Returning, 1985, 82–83) the snow-white feathered clothes are red with blood: blood is a symbol of suffering but also of bodily passion. Melusine's "journey was for naught"; in vain did she try to fly high as a bird, which is to say, return to the heavenly heights, the abyss pulling her back. At the same time, however, taking off is also equivalent to approaching superficiality, and the narrator of the poem prompts the "gloomy bird" to fall back into her own depths where the "mirth of deep consolation" will await her.

In Lesznai's poems, Melusine is often related to the wind. This is probably an influence of Slavic folklore. For example, Meluzina in Czech mythology is a demon of the wind (Brückner 1923, 237). In Slovak meluzína means "whirlwind" (Kačala 1989, 197) and the wailing of the wind echoes the cries of Melusine grieving the loss of her family. In the poem *Idegen testvéréhez szól Meluzina* (Melusine Speaks to her Strange Brother, Lesznai 1985, 75–77), the fairy addresses her former partner, a man regarded as stranger and brother at the same time. Melusine states that her eyes are blind to human things and her ears deaf to human voices, yet she can hear the grass growing and see the future, the "chalices" growing on the "naked" arms of the trees. Not only do her senses function differently, but she also expresses her feelings in a different manner; therefore she cannot understand why humans cry, nor can she cry with them, but she surmises "why the dew cries" and why the bushes sigh when the wind has wounded them. "My breath blends with the air", says Melusine as she parts with her beloved and rediscovers her own self and body. The motif of the wind appears at different points in the poem: once it is denoted as "destroying" and at other times as "hiding". The two contradictory adjectives reveal two opposing viewpoints: for man, the wind is "destroying" (in the poem, it deflects the arrow shot at Melusine by her beloved), but for Melusine, it is "hiding". The cool autumn mentioned in the last stanza is a time of estrangement, "troubled words", arguments and barren fields, but it is also a time when the cries of Melusine, longing for but never returning to her beloved, are best heard.

Melusine is strongly bound to her children, who inherited something of her elven restlessness, yet she must part with them so as to blend back into nature. The heroine of the poem *Bolyongó Meluzina* (Wandering Melusine, 1985, 78–79) returns to the forest panting, she can almost feel her body reach for the sky as a slender tree and her fingers await sprouting when it dawns on her that there is no coming home as the

forest has cast her out. "You shan't again stand in line with the pure poplars" – the judgment is passed – for "you have embraced a man" (78). So there is no return from the phase of τελεία to παῖς; her lost purity cannot be regained. However, fulfilment is also temporary; Melusine turns into a "lonely, wandering, spirited wraith" (79) deprived of joy like a χήρα. In her conjugal and maternal pain, she most resembles Demeter mourning the loss of her daughter. The Demetrian myth represents the inevitable sacrifice of self that biology demands of women (Castro 1990, 133). This is also parallel with Melusine's bird form as, according to the Homeric hymn, hearing the cries of the abducted Persephone, Demeter rushes to her daughter's rescue like a bird (σεύατο δ' ὥστ' οἰωνός; Kerényi 1941, 104).

In the poetry of Anna Lesznai the voice of Nature and the voice of Woman are the same. Flying up as a bird, Melusine sees the country below as the Earth-mother: the hills of the homeland are "teat-shaped" (1985, 73). Metaphors of the Earth-mother appear in other poems by Lesznai as well. In the poem *Kert* (Garden), she also speaks of a "teat-shaped hill" and the blessed bosom of the earth (47) and in *Dolgok öröme* (The Joy of Things) of the bosom-like hills of the earth (55). In *Egyszerű dal* (Simple Song), stroking the sweet-scented earth is like stroking the female body, and as a woman, the earth, too is "pregnant" (35). In *Hazavágyás* (Nostalgia), "the earth's green hips are trembling" (42). In the long cycle *Miatyánk* (Our Father), which "dissolves every sentence of the prayer into pleading, lament, faith and rebellion in a poem each" (Vezér 1979, 199), the perspective is turned: the earth becomes a giant, helpless baby, who at the same time is "cradle and nursling" (Lesznai 1985, 99). The narrator of the poem calls her fellow women to help her take care of this baby she has been charged with, for the earth is thirsty, and heaven above is infertile. The womanly task grants power as well as validation for desire, but the cosmic expectations require a grandiose womanly unity. It is as if at some points in Lesznai's poem, avant-garde activism and Lajos Kassák's rhetoric of dissolving the self into the collective individuum appeared in its own female version.

ARTEMIS THE LIGHT BEARER AND DAPHNE ENCRUSTED: MYTHOLOGY AND SELF-EXPRESSION IN ANNA HAJNAL'S POETRY

"She sought to express the cosmic fullness of existence in her myth-creating poetry", writes Ádám Makkai of Anna Hajnal's poetry (1996, 689). According to Jenő Alföldy, Anna Hajnal is a daughter of Orpheus, who "not only *writes* about nature as poets usually do, but nature itself is manifest in her poems" (2006, 105). Alföldy associates periods of the poetess's career with Greek deities, taking Artemis and Aphrodite for patrons of her youth and regarding Thanatos, the god of death as her inspiration in later life (110–111). Behind the mythological names appearing in Alföldy's essay are specific Hajnal-poems. In *Orfeusz* (Orpheus, 1980, I. 99), Anna Hajnal slides Greek mythological and Old Testament elements into each other. The mythical bard shepherds the beasts, like a flock of sheep, with the sound of his flute, but their marching is similar to the Jews' wandering in the wilderness. Orpheus, like Moses, strikes water in the desert and then crosses the sea (albeit not by parting the waters but by stretching a bridge upon the back of the sea). The story, some elements

of which appear, proceeds backwards: the shepherd, whom we first saw with his flock in the wilderness, after giving water to his people, leaves, crossing the sea alone, and only his flute is washed ashore. The flute, which no one dares touch with their lips, bears the ancient mythical power that became the inspiration of the poetry of later ages. A special role is attributed to the colour green in the poem: the back of the sea is greenish, and the flute washed ashore is also green. As green is the colour of awakening nature, in the landing of the green flute we may discover a symbol of rebirth along with the resurrection of a poetic tradition.

The goddess of love is invoked in the poem *Őszi himnusz Afroditéhez* (Autumn Hymn to Aphrodite), written in October 1936 (190–192). The poem is about the surfacing of a column sunk into the sea. Long years of patient waiting mean a long time spent without love, but the waters will one day ebb and the column may once again rise up in the expansion of space. This can be interpreted as a reference to the poetess' life; as compared to the custom of the age, Anna Hajnal married relatively late, at the age of 30 (her husband was also a literary scholar, the writer and critic Imre Keszi). In the next stanza, the object dug out of the sand appears not to be a column any more, but a woman-shaped statue adorned with gems, which speaks of its yellow opal forehead and chrysoprase fingers in the first person singular. This immobile shape of woman had been buried deep by shame, but will once again be uncovered for her precious ornaments. The statue emerges from the waves like Aphrodite Anadyomene in mythology, and longs for goddess-like dimensions, wanting to grow and reach into the sphere of stars so that the kisses, which do not fit on its tiny stature, would have more space. She addresses the goddess Aphrodite in the last stanza, and asks her to free her from her shell, awaken her, and make her grow in love. The awakening is like a grandiose metamorphosis, the animation of a statue, as if this time it is not the sculptor Pygmalion but the statue of the girl made by him that has spoken and asked the goddess of love to bring her to life.[3]

The poem *Tavaszi himnusz* (Spring Hymn, 195–197), invoking Artemis, is a response to the Aphrodite-hymn, whose time is the autumn following a summer wasted in slumber. The goddess addressed in the poem this time is a "sky maiden", a "quick-stepped virgin" who had slept through the winter in a "hard, frozen bed". In the spring-bearing goddess, we may recognize Artemis by her attributes, the bow and the crescent moon. The goddess is a "chaste maiden", and sleeps among flames guarding her virginity, like Brunhilde, but after her awakening, she brings magic and change, and attraction and order to the world. She is the light in the wake of whom thick groves spring up and trees behold the sky with green eyes. In the poem, Artemis is a cosmic phenomenon; her power does not only invigorate the whole of human life but also reaches the groves at the end of the world, and the "world's knees" also bow before her. As the moon goddess, she is mistress over the ebbs and flows and all. She is followed by two rivers, which rush forward as a black and a white brocket – sibling rivers, like the worms chewing at the tree of life in the medieval parable, the symbols of days and nights consuming lifetimes (Schnur 1978, 274–275). Although Aphrodite and Artemis are rivals in antique tradition (see Hippolytus by Euripides), in Anna Hajnal's poetry their figures, just as in Kerényi's essay entitled *Protogonos Kore*, blend

together. Artemis is fertile as a virgin in that she revitalizes nature; the poetess revisits this motif later, without mentioning the Greek goddess by name, in her poems on infertility. In Anna Bóna's selection, these poems are arranged in a separate cycle with the title *A gyermektelen anya* (The Childless Mother, Hajnal 2014, 65–105). According to Bóna, Anna Hajnal "watched life through a mother's eyes" (1981, 77). In the poem *Ének a síkságon* (Song on the Plane, 1980a, I. 537–538), the childless woman roaming God's lands alone is filled with joy while watching the many great sons and daughters of God, the countless species of animals, and walks among them as if in Paradise.

Viewed in her classic form, Artemis "is present in the unbrokenness of young animals as well as in the horror of giving birth" (Kerényi 1941, 11); in her we can see the borderline of motherhood and maidenhood, and in her figure are equally present the "virginal intactness and the horror of giving birth – the powers of a purely natural, female world aspect" (14). This Artemian duality, intertwined with the unsupressable energies of Aphrodite, is depicted in a number of Anna Hajnal's poems with different poetic figures. The subject of the poem *Végre is…* (*After all*,[4] Hajnal 1980, I. 646–647) compares herself to an algid island floating in slush ice, in which something boils darkly until a geyser erupts. The chaste, cold shell keeps her captive for long, but its wild energies cannot be frozen forever: "What boils in me darkly, / bubbling, swirling upward, / melting my thick cover: / the firmament may blanche / while being sliced upward to its lap / by a foaming, vapor-tressed head / ragingly crying: the geyser" (George 1993, 243).

According to a Homeric Aphrodite hymn (Kerényi 1941, 99), at the moment when a nymph is born, great blossoming trees are born. These stand in the grove of the sky-dwellers, and are never touched by an axe. At the moment a nymph dies (according to the hymn, nymphs are not immortal: they belong neither to mortals nor the sky-dwellers but enjoy longevity and feed on divine nourishment), as the Moira of death stands before the nymph, first the tree withers, its leaves shrivel, its branches fall and its soul leaves daylight along with the nymph's.

Several of Anna Hajnal's poems speak about the perishing of trees that have a soul and body parts akin to a human's. In her poem *Kivágott platán* (The felled plane tree, 1970, 20), the tree's "soul flows" and flies away, and silent crying is heard in the meantime. Lying on the ground, the tree is like a corpse, its branches are "broken silver arms", its locks are mixed with mud, its long-lashed eyes are closed, its giant head "dropped" and "sunk to the ground". The poem *A fa* (The tree) also depicts the death of a plane (30), where the tree is linked to a nymph, a Dryad, and is given feminine attributes. The poem can be divided into three parts. In the first part, the narrator of the poem hears a ghost tree cry in front of her window as a dying Dryad has just left it. The plane is described as having "died" and been "killed" like a person, and it is given a feminine character in a simile: "it was twenty years old like a girl". In the second part, the narrator places herself in the role of the tree, having been cut around with a sharp knife penetrating to her core.

In the third part, this train of thought is extended with a new aspect, when a matron who lives in a tree addresses a man. This is not about the felling of a tree

and a nymph dying at the same time, but about Daphne who, as a virgin, had once fled from Apollo and been encrusted in a tree and grown old as a "stiff old tree". The solid waistline of the tree hides its once girlish slimness and the grey foliage the once girlish locks. The theme that an old woman carries her present as well as previous self within her often recurs in Anna Hajnal's poetry. She addresses the youthful Little Anna in several poems, such as *Kis Anna hova lettél* (Where are you, Little Anna, 1985, 53–54) and *Kis Annához* (To Little Anna, 128–129). Her ageing body is marked on the knee by a star-shaped scar proving that she is the self-same Little Anna who had once hurt her knee. In her poems, her transformations, such as her girly locks turning white, are controlled by mythical forces just like the metamorphoses told by Ovid.

The poem *Két nő az utcán* (Two women in the street, 1970, 48–49) describes the meeting of two women with dyed brown hair, who are like "two mysterious mummies" with their clothes and bodies like bandages or, in another simile, a cello case hiding a "strung […] tensely vibrating slim body" within. These poems deal with the basic questions of the relationship between one's identity and body: "metamorphosis is not an event of solidification but much rather a symptom of the uncertainty of self-identity and the uncontrollability of fate" (Bényei 2013, 23). Ageing, just like mythological transformation, is the final leaving behind of a previous physical state – in a sense, a pathway to annihilation. However, something essential remains of the identity, even if it is not visible to the naked eye. Anna Hajnal conceives of and extends the mythological metamorphosis as an allegory of self-history, a state "when the subject's internal image and sense of self are radically juxtaposed with her external physical form" (25). However, instead of writing about the astonishment of the self when faced with a bodily image it does not recognize as its own, nor feel at home in, Anna Hajnal concentrates on the soothing power of the stigmata that seeps through even a transformed body image.

Jenő Alföldy mentions the death-god Thanatos because of the poems of mourning and lamentation as well as those expressing a sense of approaching death, which proliferate in the last period of Hajnal's poetry (in the 1960s and 1970s). These, however, are not connected with the concept of death in Greek mythology but are based on the Jewish tradition. The narrator of the poem *Makpelah* (1980, I. 686–688) is a woman who laments the death of her husband. The title refers to the Cave of the Patriarchs, the burial site of Abraham and Sarah, according to the Zohar (2011). The deceased lies "in princely snow-whiteness" under deep layers: "In there, deep down / between the sheets / the body dressed all in white",[5] on a "sacred earth-filled cushion". His widow trusts that "your cave of Makpelah grave / you'll with me share soon".

To describe widowhood, Anna Hajnal also recalls the images of Greek mythology. In the poem *Fuvolaének* (Flute Song, 689–690), her husband, who died three years prior to her, becomes a "Boy-Eurydice", whom his loving wife tries to bring back to the world of the living with a gentle flute tune like Orpheus. Anna Hajnal, as for example the American poet Muriel Rukeyser, rejected the traditional division of myth from a woman's subjectivity (Ostriker 1982, 71). The poem *Óh régi június!* (Oh, June of Old, 1978, 25) tells the story of Philemon and Baucis. In Ovid, Baucis

is already a matron and her husband an old man when they entertain the gods. They ask Jupiter to let them die at the same time – a wish that is granted: they both turn into a tree simultaneously (Ovidio Nasone 1994, 324–330). In Anna Hajnal's poem, the eternally young Philemon leaves Baucis the old woman, who will then forever be looking for her mate. In their youth, they had been gentle roses embracing each other, but the wind has turned them away from each other and dead petals are now whirling around Baucis.

CONCLUSION

In the works of Anna Lesznai and Anna Hajnal, the uncovering of the mythical layers of poetry is intertwined with the modes of expression of female identity. Lesznai dampens subjectivity with the help of role lyrics: for her, life is a woman's task requiring strength. The central character of her poetry was raised to be a giant girl by mother earth and after she herself became a mother, the earth is also in need of her care. Although there is no passage between the maiden and the mother – the mother cannot get back her maidenly innocence – their roles can sometimes be reversed. Lost maidenhood is akin to feelings of exclusion and homelessness. Lesznai's typical alter ego, Melusine, who is not accepted back by nature, breaks from her partner as well as her children and becomes similar to Demeter, the widowed Greek goddess who is forever searching for her daughter in a state of deprivation.

For Anna Hajnal, it is also her childlessness that inspires her tender loving care embracing animals as well as plants. In her poetry, images of tucking in and (breast) feeding abound, usually separated from the self and transformed into natural phenomena, intertwined either with the theme of love or with animal and plant motifs. Anna Hajnal melds together the Greek and Jewish traditions, making Greek deities a part of her own private mythology. For her, Artemis is a spring goddess bringing the proliferation of nature, whose figure combines untouchable chastity with passionate wildness. Anna Hajnal's poetry can be outlined on the basis of the archaic Greek goddess Protogonos Kore, as defined by Károly Kerényi, whose aspects span the whole of female existence. Anna Hajnal describes ageing on the model of transformation myths, and the comforting serenity with which she writes about old age, mourning and other tragic themes, stems from the knowledge that, after leaving one's bodily form, something of the identity can remain.

NOTES

[1] Today: Kohfidisch, Austria. Here, Anna Hajnal grew up in a German community and German was her second mother tongue (Hajnal 1983,103).

[2] Today: Nižný Hrušov, Slovakia.

[3] See Ovid's original text and the reception of the Pygmalion story in the next volume (Aurnhammer – Martin 2003).

[4] Translated by Juliette Victor-Rood (George 1993, 243).

[5] Translated by Kenneth McRobbie (Makkai 1996, 696).

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Myth and feminine self-expression in the poetry of Anna Lesznai and Anna Hajnal

Women's literature. Hungarian literature. Mythology. Feminine self-expression.

The author in this paper analyses the poetry of two Hungarian poetesses, Anna Lesznai and Anna Hajnal, from the perspective of myth as a means of feminine self-expression. Anna Lesznai (1885–1966) belonged to the first, while Anna Hajnal (1907–1977) belonged to the third generation of the journal *Nyugat* (1908–1941). The theoretical background relates to women's studies, while, starting from myth as an energy reaching back to women's own identity and lineage, also relies on the results of the French feminist school. In the works of Anna Lesznai and Anna Hajnal, the uncovering of the mythical layers of poetry is intertwined with the modes of expression of female identity. Lesznai's typical alter ego, Melusine, who is not accepted back by nature, breaks from her partner as well as her children. Anna Hajnal melds together the Greek and Jewish traditions, making Greek deities a part of her own private mythology.

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