

## Materiality and Making Meaning

### *The Publication History of Mihály Babits's Poem "Fortissimo"*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** In recent decades, scholars working in the realm of the metaphilology have focused increasingly on the materiality of texts; that is, the material aspect of texts in the making of meaning (cf. Jerome McGann's "bibliographic code"). This article sets out by clarifying what we mean by the materiality of a text; it does so by outlining and discussing the ideas advanced by George Bornstein. Applying the methodology of historical bibliography, it then examines how the changing material context of the poem "Fortissimo," by one of Hungary's towering early twentieth-century literary figures, Mihály Babits, influenced that poem's interpretability from the first stage of its existence to its multiple republications. This poem's publication history is exceptional from several perspectives. The March 1, 1917, issue of the journal *Nyugat* was confiscated because of the poem, and its author was prosecuted for blasphemy. But the poem was published in French the same year, and in two anthologies in German the following year. "Fortissimo" became available in Hungarian again only after the Aster Revolution of 1918, in the volume *A diadalmas forradalom könyve* (The Book of the Triumphant Revolution), alongside works by many other authors, and, within days, once again in *Nyugat*.  
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## Introduction

"If the *Mona Lisa* is at the Louvre, where is *King Lear*?" George Bornstein asks the question already posed by others in the introduction of his study "How to Read a Page?: Modernism and Textuality" (Bornstein 2001: 5). It is possible, of course, to apply his question not only to Shakespeare's work but also to Mihály Babits's famous 1917 antiwar poem "Fortissimo," which caused a serious scandal, and whose publication history offers a differentiated answer. The essence of Bornstein's question—which explores how the material contexts in which literary works appear determine the meaning making of the works—may be relevant to "Fortissimo." After all, if we accept that "the literary work might be said to exist not in any one version, but in all the versions put together" (Bornstein 2001: 6), then the textual versions available to us offer a wealth of material and at the same time very different contexts for interpretation. In other words, there is not just one "Fortissimo," but, rather, a series of typed and printed versions in addition to the draft manuscript, all of this collectively allowing us to explore the multiplicity of variants of the poem and the possible dispersal of meaning that this diversity reveals.

I use the concept of material context in the sense that it is used in historical bibliography. One of its influential representatives is Donald Francis McKenzie, who sought to rethink the disciplinary framework of bibliography and broaden the self-definition of the so-called analytical bibliography in his book *Bibliography and Sociology of Text*. In contrast with the approach that limits the research area of bibliography to examining the nonsymbolic function of symbols and the description of their material characteristics, McKenzie extends the limits of the discipline of bibliography to the examination of text as a set form as well as the processes related to its transmission, and the production and reception of books (McKenzie 1999: 12–13). As he puts it regarding books in another study:

Its presentation in different formats and typefaces, on different papers in different bindings, and its sale at different times, places, and prices imply distinct conditions and uses and must vary the meaning its readers make from it. In that sense, the text as an unstable physical form in its descent through successive versions is the more valuable in offering ubiquitous evidence for [the] 'history of the book' as a study of the changing *conditions* of reading and the construction of meaning (McKenzie 2002: 268).

McKenzie and Jerome J. McGann had two key research objectives starting in the 1980s. On the one hand, they wished to go beyond the bibliographic practice that was limited to describing the material characteristics of texts, as well as the publishing practice that would record the ultimate intention of the author and the concept of text behind it. On the other hand, they also took on the task of interpreting the creation, production, circulation, and reception of works, thus aiming to incorporate the historical context into an American practice of interpretation that was

overwhelmingly defined by poststructuralism and deconstruction (Hume 2005). McGann, who considers change the only "immutable law" of the textual condition,<sup>2</sup> puts it this way:

Every text enters the world under determinate sociohistorical conditions, and while these conditions may and should be variously defined and imagined, they establish the horizon within which the life histories of different texts can play themselves out. The law of change declares that these histories will exhibit a ceaseless process of textual development and mutation—a process which can only be arrested if all the textual transformations of a particular work fall into nonexistence (McGann 1991: 9).

Using the theoretical background described above, this article will focus on Mihály Babits's 1917 poem "Fortissimo" to demonstrate how the material contexts of different editions of a literary text can modify the basic meanings of a poem. György Rába has described the poem as a "frenzied appeal against war and for peace" (*lázás szózat a háború ellen és a békéért*) (Rába 1981: 516). While I cannot undertake in this study to describe in detail the material characteristics of every book and journal in which the poem was published before 1920, in terms of paper quality, typography, price, and so on, I will look at these as factors determining the material context of the text and how these, together with the poem's changing "sociohistorical conditions," modify the potential meaning of its text.

### **Mihály Babits and "Fortissimo"**

Babits was one of Hungary's most important poets, writers, and translators in the first part of the twentieth century, a key figure in the nation's path of literary modernism. "Fortissimo" is one of his most famous antiwar poems. Since I am unaware of a previously published English-language translation, here is a translation by Miriam Grunwald.<sup>3</sup> The original Hungarian text appears below that.

Fortissimo

God is crossed; and is fretting and fuming,  
or perhaps just asleep in the sky,  
feigning or dead even, –  
who shall wake him, people?  
Mothers, weep louder:  
will he, that scores of canons cannot wake,  
not stir by your gentle tears?  
And do not weep by any tears,  
for all they do is fall to the ground:  
cry aloud up to the sky,

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<sup>2</sup> In the introduction to his book, McGann defines "textual condition" as follows: "Both the practice and the study of human culture comprise a network of symbolic exchanges. Because human beings are not angels, these exchanges always involve material negotiations. Even in their most complex and advanced forms—when the negotiations are carried out as textual events—the intercourse that is being human is materially executed: as spoken texts or scripted forms. To participate in these exchanges is to have entered what I wish to call here the "textual condition." (McGann 1991: 3)

<sup>3</sup> Published with the permission of the translator.

cry merciless: and not as sweetly  
as the babbling fountain spring,  
not musical as the summer storm,  
unlike the ancient Niobe:  
but boundless like a river flood  
cry, or like an avalanche of boulders,  
weep ice, and fire like lava!  
Your dear sons are falling  
in blood onto the snow day after day,  
do not let anyone fall asleep:  
those quiet, evil, or cowardly today,  
but is a life in fear worthwhile  
and worthwhile still to be alive?  
O why aren't your voices heard?  
Go to the marketplace and cry,  
scream inside churches you women  
of the wild, snug in mad, maddening frantic prayer!

And if it is no use  
to pray to cry: we still can cuss  
aloud, us men! We now believe  
in the cuss-worthy heights  
that rest in Fate  
Let us litter onto his dreams  
a loud hail of blasphemies!  
How does he exist if he is not present?  
Is he, or isn't he? If so, or if not, why?  
Let us deny him, maybe he wakes up!  
Let us manhandle him; beat him with words!  
Like a master snoring in a burning  
house – God's own deaf ear!

Deaf ear! Deaf ear!...

O how splendid it would be  
to turn a deaf ear like God today!  
Deaf is the land, it cannot sense  
armies drum insult on its back.  
It would rather sprout as mutely  
as a flower bulb underground:  
the ever-deaf ground, in God  
where only man was disconnected  
from the Deaf God into horrors  
issuing forth like maggots,  
God's vermin, into itchy  
seething, to hurt-for everything  
other than deaf God: is pain,  
until it dies back into God!

—*Mihály Babits (1917), translated by Miriam Greenwald*

Fortissimo

Haragszik és dül-fül az Isten  
vagy csak talán alszik az égben,  
aluszik vagy halott is épen -  
ki költi őt föl, emberek?  
Anyák, sírjátok hangosabban:  
akit föl nem ver annyi ágyú,  
rezzenti-é gyenge sírástok?  
És ne is könnyel sírjátok,  
mert a könny mind csak földre hull  
hanggal sírjátok föl az égre,  
sírjátok irgalmatlanul:  
ne oly édesen mint a forrás,  
ne oly zenével mint a zápor,  
ne mint a régi Niobék:  
hanem parttalan mint az árvíz  
sírjátok vagy a görgeteg  
lavina, sírjátok jeget,  
tűzet sírjátok mint a láva!  
A drága fiúk hullanak  
vérben a hóra napra-nap.  
Ne hagyjatok aludni senkit:  
ki ma csendes, gonosz vagy gyáva,  
de érdemes-e félni még?  
és érdemes-e élni még?  
Ó, mért nem hallani hangotok?  
Menjetek a piacra sírni,  
sikoltsatok a templomokban  
vadak asszonyai, vadakká  
imuljatok őrijtő, örült  
imában

És ha hasztalan  
ima, sírás: - mi káromolni  
*tudunk* még, férfiak! Ma már  
hiszünk káromlani-érdemes  
alvó magasságot a Sorsban.  
Hányjuk álmára kopogó  
bestemmiáknak jégesőjét!  
Mért van, ha nincs? Mért nincs, ha van?  
Tagadjuk őt, talán fölébred!  
Cibáljuk őt, verjük a szókkal!  
mint aki gazda horkol égő  
házban - a süket Istenét!

Süket! Süket!...

Ó ma milyen jó  
volna süketnek mint az Isten!  
Süket a föld, nem érzi hátán  
hadak alázó dobogását.

Jó volna süketen csirázni  
mint virághagyma föld alatt:  
minden süket, földben, Istenben  
csak az ember szakadt ki a  
süket Istentől iszonyokra  
kikelt belőle féreg-módon,  
Isten férgének, viszkető  
nyüzsgésre, fájni - mert ami  
nem süket Isten: fájdalom,  
míg az Istenbe visszahal!

—*Mihály Babits (1917)*

Including several biblical and literary allusions, “Fortissimo” identifies God’s inertia as the cause of the war raging through Europe at the time. The poet “speaks” like an angry orator encouraging his audience (both women and men) to call out for peace to a sleeping, deaf, or possibly dead God. At the time of its initial publication, as World War I was raging, the poem not only went against the official wartime propaganda but also offended contemporary religious feelings, which was why the poet was prosecuted for blasphemy following its publication.

### **The First Material Context of “Fortissimo”: The Periodical *Nyugat***

If we examine the textualization of “Fortissimo,” then its first site is the author’s manuscript. The pencil draft can be found in the manuscript archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Babits, “Manuscript of ‘Fortissimo’”). Jerome McGann differentiates between the “linguistic code” and “bibliographical code” of a literary work (McGann 1991: 52), and in terms of its function, a manuscript documents how the “linguistic code” of a poem is developed and the text is created. The material characteristics of the draft of “Fortissimo” and the specific textual context of the examined manuscript in the author’s own handwriting primarily provide information on the date the manuscript was created or perhaps on the psychological state of the poet at the time. “Fortissimo” expresses strong emotion, while the manuscript indicates that Babits wrote the poem in almost finished form. The handwriting suggests focused, methodical creative work. Although he crossed out lines 4–7, his corrections appear to be largely stylistic and insignificant compared to the final version. The biggest difference compared to the poem’s canonical version is the absence of lines 26–27 (*Menjetek a piacra sírni, / sikoltsatok a templomokban*) (Go to the marketplace and cry, / scream inside churches), which Babits must have inserted at a later stage of the text’s genesis.

The second site of the textualization of “Fortissimo” is the March 1, 1917 issue of the periodical *Nyugat* (West), a commemorative issue for the centennial of the birth of János Arany, a major nineteenth-century Hungarian poet who was particularly important to Babits. It included Babits’s essay “Arany életéből” (From the Life of Arany) and “Emlékezés egy nyár-éjszakára” (Memory of a Summer Night), which was to become one of Endre Ady’s most well-known wartime poems. *Nyugat* was the most influential periodical in Hungarian literary modernity. It launched in 1908 as a low-circulation literary journal that signaled its cultural orientation not only through

its content but also through its name, and its circulation increased steadily, reaching 4,000 copies by 1918 (Szegedy-Maszák 2007: 705). It was initially published every two weeks, and, when financing became more difficult, once a month. *Nyugat* was guided by purely artistic considerations, its authors holding a range of social and political points of view. Still, the editors' and authors' network of social relationships and their consistent rejection of conservative literature that tended to reflect the moral values and worldview advocated by the government meant that *Nyugat* came to be associated with the liberal left. This became its political space. In addition, regarding the war, at least from the autumn of 1915, *Nyugat* increasingly represented a position favoring peace. After paying a fee to the state in 1916 mandated for "political" papers, the number of articles it ran on politics increased (Kenyeres 2004: 64–67).

The fact that "Fortissimo" was to be published in *Nyugat* seems to be self-evident, since by this time Babits was one of the journal's regulars, along with Ady; however, the poet's publication practices around this time show that during the year at issue, 1917, he published the same number of poems in *Nyugat* as in Lajos Hatvany's daily newspaper *Pesti Napló* (Pest Journal), five poems in each. If Babits had wanted to emphasize the political aspect of the poem through the act of publication (as if through a performative act), he would have published it in *Pesti Napló*. In contrast, in the essay he wrote while the administrative procedure involving the blasphemy charge was going on, he defends himself by saying that the poem "was published in a periodical whose audience is looking only for literary perspectives" (*oly folyóiratban jelent meg, melynek közönsége egyedül irodalmi szempontokat keres*) (Babits 1978: 471).<sup>4</sup>

After the poem's publication in its pages, *Nyugat* may have been reported to the authorities stemming from a previous, political conflict. Back in October 1915, Jenő Rákosi, editor in chief of the pro-government *Budapesti Hírlap* (Budapest Gazette), had launched a media campaign against Ady and Babits, as a result of which Babits was temporarily relieved from his teaching duties.<sup>5</sup> Babits suspected Rákosi of also being behind the prosecution launched against him in 1917 because of "Fortissimo" (Boros 1918: 1106). While the procedural action may have been different, in 1917 a court decision ordered the incriminated issue of *Nyugat* confiscated by the authorities the day after its publication. Following a hearing scheduled for March 6, the court lifted the ban, and *Nyugat* could be circulated again, although without "Fortissimo." The censors deleted the poem from the issue, leaving a blank space where it had been, as had been standard practice in other such cases of censorship during the war. Thus, even though the text itself was

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all such quotations in this paper have been translated by the author.

<sup>5</sup> After the suspension, Babits was transferred to work in an educational administrative office (Budapesti vidéki Tankerületi Főigazgatóság), but he was unable to work there, so after a few days he was sent on leave (Róna 2014: 107). At the end of the year, he reassigned as a teacher, this was done with the mediation of the renowned writer Ferenc Herczeg. His new workplace was a high school, the VI. kerületi [6th District] Főgimnázium (today Kölcsey Ferenc Gimnázium) (Róna 2014: 168).

not visible to the reader, the blank space of censorship was there for all to see as a warning sign.<sup>6</sup> Although the poet had been accused of a religious infraction—this being but one of several such examples in Hungary at this time and between the two world wars—this form of censorship was part and parcel of wartime propaganda, whose fundamental goal was to strengthen public commitment to the war. Intellectuals played an especially important role in this propaganda. In this light, “Fortissimo” can be considered antipropaganda in nature, with good reason (Visy).

On March 3, the day after *Nyugat* was seized, the daily papers reported the event, and the leftwing media made it clear that they knew the poem. *Világ* (World) wrote, “The poem is imbued with a warm, lyrical tone and it is among the exceptional poet’s very beautiful works. True poetry resides within it, and it is in no way is blasphemous.” (*A költeményt meleg lírai hang üti át, és a kiváló költő egyik nagyon szép alkotása. Igazi költészet van benne, de semmi esetre sem istenkáromlás*). *Népszava* (People’s Voice), on the other hand, reported: “[W]e have read the poem: it is a bitter, brooding poem on the evils of war, and it searches for the Steward [sic] who looks after his servants thus.” [*a verset mi olvastuk: keserű, elgondolkozó poéma a háborús gonoszágok fölött és kutatja az Intézőt, aki így tud vigyázni cselédjeire.*] Lajos Hatvany, author and patron of *Nyugat*, as well as the owner of *Pesti Napló*, defended Babits in an essay published in his March 5 column *Glosszák* (Commentaries) in *Pesti Napló*. In the article’s introduction, Hatvany—noting that the confiscated issue of *Nyugat* was a commemorative issue marking the centennial of the birth of the great nineteenth-century Hungarian poet János Arany—described Babits as “János Arany’s chosen son” (*Arany János választott fiát*). He compares the poem’s manner of speech to Job’s lament in the Old Testament, quoting several passages from it (even if somewhat imprecisely) (Hatvany 1917b: 5). Hatvany revisited the matter two days later, again in *Pesti Napló*. Refuting the accusation of blasphemy, he argued that the poem was embedded in a tradition of religious diction, and he spoke up for the freedom of thought and art (Hatvany 1917a). Thus, contemporary newspaper readers not only learned that *Nyugat* had been seized due to the Babits poem, but, even if they could not read the entire work, they gained some idea of the topic and tone of “Fortissimo.”

Banned by wartime censorship, the poem was disseminated through other channels, in manuscript and typewritten formats, instead of the traditional forum of the public sphere. Despite the seizure, the poem was circulated widely, and the Babits estate includes several letters written to the poet asking him to send a copy of his banned poem (Babits 2011: 58; 59; 60–61; 173). The news that the periodical had been seized and that the poem had been deleted because of the censors was good publicity for “Fortissimo,” so, even those who would otherwise not have noticed the poem were now likely to read it. However, those who turned to Babits came from

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<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Attila Buda, we can still get an idea of what the first publication of the poem might have looked like. In the archives of Hungary’s National Széchényi Library he found a proof copy of *Fortissimo* (OSzK Fond 471.) with Babits’s handwritten corrections.



among the readers of *Nyugat* and admirers of Babits's poetry; that is, who were positively predisposed toward the unknown work in the first place.

The censorship of "Fortissimo" thus decisively reshaped the poem's dissemination, imparting on it a particular aura. Bornstein, following Walter Benjamin, argues that the aura of a literary work is created from the text's material characteristics: "The original sites of incarnation thus carry with them an aura placing the work in space and time, and constituting its authenticity as well as its contingency" (Bornstein 2001: 7). According to him, what makes all this possible is the fact that the recipient is able to reflect on the inherited nature of the text—namely, that the text "passes through several hands," and so writer's original traces are replaced by the tradition that attributes the text to the given author. "The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition," says Benjamin (Benjamin 2007: 223). However, in the case of works of fine art, this embeddedness always relates to the unchanged identity of the unique object (e.g., the *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre), while in the case of a literary work, this objective existence exists in a different context of the ontology of art exactly because, as per a quotation in this paper's introduction, text is "an unstable physical form" (McKenzie 2002: 268). Destroying the only, original copy of a statue or painting means the work of art is permanently destroyed, while burning or pulping a book or a periodical, due to its different type of existence, rarely means the permanent destruction of the literary work in the modern age, since it usually exists in countless reproductions, often in more than one version of the text. Along with many similar examples, the publication history of "Fortissimo" shows that this kind of technology of power is virtually impossible to implement in the twentieth century.

### **The Other Material Contexts of "Fortissimo"**

"Fortissimo" was disseminated not only in Hungarian, but not long after its ban it was also published in other languages, thus in this sense it changed languages ("linguistic code" by McGann) and mediums at the same time. In June 1917, the poem, translated by Ádám Lovag, was published in French in the second issue of the short-lived progressive Swiss periodical *Le plus grand monde*. The journal's international team of contributors included several Hungarians: Lovag (as both a translator and as coeditor); poet and translator Artúr Keleti; the popular writer Frigyes Karinthy; and the journalist Lajos Bíró. Hungarian newspapers reported on the launch of *Le plus grand monde*. Lajos Kassák's Hungarian avant-garde periodical, *MA* (Today), even published a selection of that issue of the Swiss journal, compiled by Mátyás György titled "*Une anthologie de douleur et revolte*" (An Anthology of Pain and Revolt). This selection featured not only a translation of Pierre Jean Jouve's poem *Danse de morts* (Dance of the Death) (György 1917) but also—among a group of pacifist poems that also included works by two French poets, as well as the Hungarian poet Artúr Keleti—the translation of "Fortissimo."<sup>7</sup> That second issue

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<sup>7</sup> Artúr Keleti's poem, which appeared in the 1916 Hungarian volume entitled (*Angyali üdvözlét*) (Angelic Greetings), is similar to Babits's "Fortissimo." A recurrent motif in both poems is the call on their audience to cry.

of *Le plus grand monde* also featured a discussion of the Russian Revolution, with contributors from Germany (Max Beer), Austria (H. Alfred Fried), France (Romain Rolland and Jouve), Italy (Lucio Bugelli), Hungary (Ádám Lovag<sup>8</sup>), Poland (Léon Klimecki), Russia (Boretzky-Bergfeld, Dr. Roubakine, Anatoly Lunatcharsky), and Ukraine (Dmitry Manulisky). The French translation of "Fortissimo" had therefore been published in a very strong political context, in which the banning of the poem in Hungary may have played a part.

Still during World War I, the German translation of "Fortissimo" received attention in Hungary. Indeed, it is clear from Babits's correspondence that some Hungarians read the poem in German before they did so in Hungarian. Following the ban, that is, "Fortissimo" was published in German in two different anthologies, translated by Henrik Horvát, a friend of Babits.

The literary and political context of the poem's first publication in German is similar to that of the French version. *Die Aktion*, a journal of German expressionism, had already published the international anthology *Das Aktionsbuch* in 1917 (Pfemfert 1917). The antiwar nature of the selection is demonstrated by the fact that works by French, English, and Russian authors are presented beside German writers and authors from nationalities among the Central Powers in the war (Czechs and Hungarians), including not only contemporary authors belonging to expressionism but also some from the nineteenth century (e.g., Balzac, Baudelaire, and Tolstoy). Beyond representing contemporary Hungarian lyric poetry, this international compilation foregrounded those aspects of the poem that can be considered expressionist (Tverdota 2016: 237). This is also interesting because Babits cannot be considered an avant-garde author; not much earlier he had strongly criticized the Hungarian avant-garde movement, led by Lajos Kassák.

From today's perspective, it is also remarkable that Babits's poem was published in an anthology of works by notable contemporary artists (Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Léon Bloy, Franz Werfel, Iwan Goll, Gottfried Benn, and Kurt Pinthus) that also included illustrations by Hans Richter, Egon Schiele, and Pablo Picasso. The selection also has a clear political orientation, thanks to the writings of Ferdinand Lassale, Alexander Herzen, and Mikhail Bakunin. So despite the fact that the anthology's readers, in Germany and Austria, were certainly unaware of the scandal surrounding "Fortissimo" in Hungary, and the German translation did not have the "aura created from the original site of incarnation," the poem was placed in a remarkable world literary context. In addition, Ferenc Csaplár argues that the placement of the poem in this anthology in last place, just before Franz Pfemfert's afterword, is in fact an expression of appreciation for Babits (Csaplár 1983: 178–179). Another important consequence is that although the historiography considers Hungarian wartime censorship—at least initially—less strict than German or Austrian censorship (Bihari 2008: 172–173), *Die Aktionsbuch* was allowed to be

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<sup>8</sup> Lovag reported on the Hungarian press coverage of the Russian Revolution.

published, while in Hungary Kassák's journal, *A Tett* (The Action) was banned for a similar international selection.

The other German-language anthology "Fortissimo" appeared in was *Neue Ungarische Lyrik* (New Hungarian Poetry), which presented Henrik Horvát's translations of contemporary Hungarian verse, showcasing the revival in the genre that had taken place in Hungarian literature around the turn of the century. Most of the poems included were by *Nyugat* contributors and others who had paved the way for the literary modernity they represented: János Vajda, Jenő Komjáthy, and József Kiss, although Gyula Reviczky's name is missing. The largest number of poems by a single author in the anthology were, indeed, written by Babits—fifteen in total. Most of those came from the poet's first volume, *Levelek Iris koszorújából* (Letters from the Wreath of Iris), and the fact that "Fortissimo" was included in this anthology is noteworthy in terms of representing Babits's latest poetry.

Not long after the end of the war and the Aster Revolution<sup>9</sup> of October 1918, "Fortissimo" was republished twice in Hungary within a short period of time. First, it was published at the end of November 1918 in *A diadalmas forradalom könyve* (Book of the Triumphant Revolution), edited by Oszkár Gellért, a *Nyugat* contributor. The book contains contributions by members of the new government, others who had participated in the revolution, and seventy-five Hungarian writers. The publication lists Babits among the writers who had participated in paving the way for the revolution, along with Endre Ady and Zsigmond Móricz. Babits's pacifism was well known. He was a member of the antiwar intelligentsia, and during the summer of 1918 he played an active part in founding a society of radical intellectuals, Európa Lovagjai (Knights of Europe), whose aim was to end the world war and create a new, European form of government (the United States of Europe) that would ensure peace on the continent. They had planned to publish a manifesto addressed to European intellectuals, coauthored by Babits. By the time the manifesto was completed, however, the war had ended. Although Babits was attacked for his pacifism on several occasions during the war, it is no coincidence that *A diadalmas forradalom könyve* included the very poem of his that the censors had banned a year and a half earlier.

The poem's and its author's politics are ever at the heart of the material context of the publication trajectory of "Fortissimo." Hence, a revolutionary transformation of Hungary's sociopolitical circumstances can be understood to have been a precondition of the poem's more entrenched, long-term publication. The political significance linked to "Fortissimo"—which, as seen above, could still be noticed when the translations were published—continued to define its publication and reception in some contexts. Although many in Hungary clearly remembered the "Fortissimo" scandal of the previous year, the editors of *A diadalmas forradalom könyve* devoted but a footnote to remind readers of the cover-up.

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<sup>9</sup> During the revolution of October 1918, soldiers supporting it donned an aster instead of the royal insignia on their caps and joined the revolutionary masses. After that, this flower became the symbol of the revolution.

The December 1, 1918 issue of *Nyugat*, published a few days after *A diadalmas forradalom könyve* also reprinted "Fortissimo." Here, a note appearing beside the title drew attention to the poem's unique publication history: "From an old issue of *Nyugat*, which was confiscated because of this poem" (*A Nyugat-nak egy régi számából, melyet e vers miatt elkoboztak.*) Thus, this republication of the poem in *Nyugat* was not only a symbolic gesture but also a performative act of a sort different from that of the anthology, which was more focused on the political context. The fact that the poem was published again signaled that the war was over, that the political authorities were no longer limiting the freedom of artistic expression—that the new, postrevolutionary political system would no longer incriminate the Babits poem based on religious or any other grounds. From the point of view of *Nyugat*, all this also meant that the gap represented by the blank pages in its March 1, 1917 issue was now filled with content once again, marking a resumption of the original state of affairs and suggesting that the conditions were now in place for the autonomous functioning of literature.

Reprints of "Fortissimo" in the years to come appeared in volumes of Babits's work: first in *Nyugtalanság völgye* (Valley of Unrest), followed by Babits's collected poems in 1928 and his complete works in 1937. These stages in the poem's publication history no longer occurred against the backdrop of wartime censorship. In the 1920 volume, the poem directly precedes the poems "Zsoltár gyermekhangra" (Psalm for a Child's Voice) and "Zsoltár férfihangra" (Psalm for a Man's Voice) in the middle of the book, amplifying the religious aspects of the poetic processing of historical events, far (at least given its placement in this volume) from works reflecting on current events of the day such as "Háborús anthológiák" (Wartime Anthologies) and "Strófák egy templomhoz" (Stanzas to a Church). Therefore, the composition of the volume also implies that by this time Babits might have wanted to blunt the poem's earlier, clear-cut political edge. What could be the reason for this? Perhaps it was Babits's disappointment in the failure of the revolution and the political attacks on him after autumn 1919. The war had ended, the social context had changed, and the poet no longer wished to emphasize the earlier political aspects of "Fortissimo." However, this also validates George Bornstein's thesis that every sheet "on which we read any poem is a constructed object that will encode certain meanings even while placing others under erasure" (Bornstein 2001: 31).

## Summary

According to Bornstein, every publication of a literary work has its own context due to the materiality of the text, which also defines how we read a given page in a book. In his study *Textual Space*, Joseph Grigely comes to a similar conclusion: "[T]he space of [a] literary text cannot be read apart from a social space, whether the space is the author's, the editor's, or the reader's. When looking at art, we are often particularly aware of what we might call concrete, or material, contexts and backgrounds" (Grigely 1995: 122). I hope the brief overview above has shown how, during the various publications of "Fortissimo," a literary work with a unique publication history, the poem's original, antiwar purpose assumed new aspects of meaning depending on the new material contexts in which the poem was published (i.e., in a periodical or

anthology, or as political propaganda). All this of course can also be explored and described with the help of traditional philological methodology, but the historical bibliography represented by McKenzie, McGann and Bornstein offer an approach that puts the different textual histories into new contexts; from the genesis of the works to their reception, so they may offer new perspectives for philology.

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