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NAGY SÁNDOR: LIFESTYLE REFORM – AND SYMBOL

*Pre-Raphaelism – Tolstoyism – Gnosticism –
Vegetarianism: Elements of the Worldview of Sándor Nagy*

For a long time the work and theoretical resolve of the artists of the Gödöllő Artists' Colony (1901- 1920), the Hungarian studio of the secession, remained unexplored. Art history evaluations have been published recently (Gellér K.–Keserű K, 1987; Géczi J. ed., 1999; Gellér K.–G. Merva M.–Őriné Nagy C. ed. 2003) on the achievements of this international group of artists at this applied art colony fashioned after the English model and established around a textile studio (1905, led by Léo Belmonte). Also published was an evaluation of the intellectual movement endeavoring to harmonize the wide horizon of often extremely divergent directions of the period. Additionally, an attempt was made (Szabó K. A., 1999) to describe the mentality of the colony, imbued with modern and traditional mysticism and science, and emphasizing folk culture, while at the same time keeping an eye on contemporary developments elsewhere in Europe – which latter similarly resurrected handicrafts tradition. The group's ethical resolve in its artistic programs has national and international features; however, the *fin-de-siècle* artistic experiment which it successfully represented and which its community accomplished by emphasizing the principles of new life reform, is also of importance to the history of education and culture. A neo-romanticist worldview served as the foundation for all this, which did not separate the methods, forms and subjects of art and science inquiry – the artists themselves thought this to provide the means for obtaining 'complete life'. Researchers' attention may be drawn to the fact that the two leaders of the group, Sándor Nagy and Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch, produced similar art teaching methods which were widely published and which were elaborated on reflection of contemporary education policy.¹ For the narrow circle of experts, it is obvious that the theoretical elaboration and practical application of an ethically and philosophically defined yet eclectic life reform program took place in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and first two of the twentieth, with values both similar and contrastive to international efforts. The unfavorable judgment of the secession and the neo-Catholicism of the Gödöllő colony have caused these to remain largely concealed to social science researchers.

Keywords: art history, Gödöllő Artists' Colony, Sándor Nagy, the secession, art teaching methods

¹ Comp. GOPCSA, K. 1999. *Nagy Sándor írásai* [Writings of Sándor Nagy]. In: GÉCZI (1999) 167.

1. ART AND EDUCATION

*“In love we raise our children, and for this reason we make artistically illustrated books for them; painting fine pictures, designing fine houses, drawing fine furniture and weaving fine carpets so that everything we have should be beautiful, and that we people should be unable to behave otherwise than beautifully, and have good thoughts as well as emotions; that ultimately all people should be able to create, the worker becoming an artist,”*² writes Ervin Szabó in a newspaper article on Walter Crane in *Népszava* summarizing the role of education at the turn of the century. The connection of Nagy with *Népszava* and Szabó is known, and he has also been shown to have been influenced by Crane.

The education ideas of Nagy – and the Gödöllő colony – held the world to be improvable by art. This art education philosophy was founded on their neognosticism. Social reform was unsuited for the transformation of conditions; rather, it should come from self-improvement deriving from man’s internal needs, resulting in the creation of a pure intellectual being. The close combination of work, lifestyle and art shape this new, self-forming type of man – for the creation of which a number of experiments were produced throughout Europe (comp. the Hamburg school, Vogeler’s Worpssweide work community, and the Ascona “ethical-social-vegetarian-communist” society).

The Gödöllő artists (including Nagy) in every possible manifestation – their fine art and applied art, their theoretical writings and debate articles, academic studies, popular education, illustrations for children, actions in public life, organization work and so on – created their aura and the set of conditions for their activities. Through their contacts both the applied arts colony and the fine arts group and their members enjoyed state support – for the most part the artistic groupings urging lifestyle reform included individuals for whom Hungarian circumstances posed no difficulties in finding sponsors and receiving commissions.

Their regularly expressed ideas on education – through the auspices of Nagy and Kriesch – apply to art education. Their philosophy-derived aesthetics and education strategy extended just as much to popular education as it did to the institutionalized forms in kindergartens, elementary schools and high schools, as well as art teacher and artist training. The ethical nature of their motivation is indicated by the fact that they go beyond the subject area of fine art to speak on the material culture of everyday life, discovery procedures of related sources of knowledge, and the possibility of creating a culture of free spirit. In consequence, they also redefined the nature of the teacher – holding him simultaneously to be a prophet, artist and instructor (NÉMETH A. 2004).

² SZABÓ, Ervin: *Walter Crane: Egy szocialista művész* [W. C.: A Socialist Artist]. *Népszava*, Oct 20, 1900, 3.

The use of this reformed education method in art and the fact that it was of breakthrough importance in personality shaping influenced not only the technique of creating works of art but also the symbology. Important now were the patterns and symbols which had tradition but could be imbued with new content and which summarized the ideals represented.

2. THE MEANING OF THE ROSE

The graphic piece bearing the title *Home* or *Hearth* was produced in Sándor Nagy's home in Veszprém around 1905.³ It depicts the living-room/kitchen of the Galamb Street home of the artist and his wife, the place where they lived and worked the most. The painter sits at a book-covered table behind the stove and looks fondly at his wife, who stands in front of the stove and handles the stem of a potted rose. The outside world can be seen in the window: the setting sun over Veszprém's castle hill, with the bishop's palace. The work contains a number of traditional symbols, all symbols of the universe. Fire, the rose and the book are all signs of the macrocosm in the European worldview, as emphasized by their combined presence. Moreover, inasmuch as Veszprém is a Catholic diocese whose cathedral and bishops played an important role in the formation of the nation-state, all of which is invoked for the initiated in the scene, a second, Catholic, worldview is implied. Is the contrast of internal and external world, micro- and macrocosm, alien to the reading of this Hungarian secessionist work? Surely not.

On the left side of the vertical axis of the picture are the customary masculine symbols: the fire in the stove warming the house, the books providing tradition-based guides to manly knowledge, the sunlight illuminating the world; while on the right are the signs of charitable femininity: a rosebush growing in a heart-shaped pot and bending toward the church and sunlight, over which stands the woman dressed in folk clothing.

Is this a simple decorative allegory or an elaborately interwoven life philosophy? Is the symbolism a one-time instance in Nagy's oeuvre, or in the works of the group which Nagy once led, and are there identifiable contemporary parallels?

Our Garden (1902)⁴ presents a folk-idyllic setting where the owner works in his garden amid tame animals. The woman is surrounded by roses, lilies, and other attributes of the Virgin Mary as she glances at her resting husband. In

³ Copperplate, 195 × 127 mm, Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest, Inv. nr.: Krtf. 1489.

⁴ Mixed technique, wood, 37.5 × 50 cm, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, Inv. nr.: 7638.

the watercolor *Ave Myriam* (1904)⁵ a male angel with the facial features of the artist holds the heart-shaped root of a rose stem in his hand. The angel stands high on a rocky, grassy plateau, having just arrived in great haste, as indicated by the smoke and light trailing from the meeting-point of the heart-shaped root and the rose stem. To this work Nagy added the annotation: “in *place of lily rose is fine*.”⁶ To a second picture, *Holy Expectancy* (1904),⁷ the artist and pregnant wife is a dual image which may be interpreted allegorically – “*new bud of the rose*.”⁸ In its emphasized position, the rose indicates a life value. The rose also appears as the flower of mourning and death and of the completion of a full life in the woodcut *In memoriam Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch* (1922), where the plant covers the sepulcher over the deceased.

A similar mass of symbolic roses rich in formal meaning is found in Körösfői-Kriesch, Mrs. Sándor Nagy (née Laura Kriesch), Mariska Undi, Rezső Mihály, Miksa Róth, István Zichy and others; that is, the works of all the direct and indirect associates of the Gödöllő Artists’ Colony which played a significant role in the rejuvenation of turn-of-the-century Hungarian art.

Further, if one studies the photographs documenting the everyday life of the Gödöllő artists, it is striking how often the rose with its implicit value appears to decorate home interiors, to complete the splendor of outdoor gardens, and in illustrations of children’s books. However, this may be self-evident, as the rose cult was characteristic of the period for the peasantry, the middle class and the economic elite alike, and its depiction was popular both in academic art and in secessionism with its aestheticism and frequent allusions to romanticism.

The artists who lived in Gödöllő studied at a wide variety of locations in Europe and North America, and included some non-Hungarians; their open community life made possible the brief presence and work by numerous foreign visitors. Their international movements and contacts were determined by Tolstoyan philosophy, which was extremely popular at the time, a belief in reflection on mystic, religious and philosophical questions and in the identity of the charismatic personality. They reported on the achievements of contemporary artistic science, and education and art education; their efforts stemmed from the same root, with a distinct, intellectually and emotionally outlined selection of values.

The answer to the question whether the rose has additional meanings compared to previous periods or other contemporary art groups can be found in the masterpiece by an author in Austrian realism. Published in 1857, Adalbert

⁵ Watercolor on canvas, 89 × 60 cm, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, Inv. nr.: 6524.

⁶ GELLÉR 2003: 20.

⁷ Watercolor, gesso, wood, 29.5 × 42.5 cm. Sándor Nagy House, Gödöllő

⁸ GELLÉR 2003.

Stifter's *Nachtsommer* was a novel of direction responding to the mentality of this period.⁹ Stifter was not interested in exposing social and political causes; rather, he spoke of how to remedy the proliferation of problems. This is a novel of development, with the focus on physical and spiritual improvement, and emphasizing that it is human passion which is responsible for decadence, not society, and especially not politics, which it considers moral. Personal self-discipline, maturity for freedom, and improvement (*Bildung*) are the tasks of man, and can be brought about by the conscious integration of the human character and its environment, resulting in goodness and justice, and the unification of intelligence and emotion.

Nachtsommer's protagonist is the son of a merchant who organizes the life of his family and employees along patriarchal/petty bourgeois principles. The son, however, devotes his life to a higher level of culture and becomes expert in science and the arts. The father's life is guided by property, and the son's by culture – understandably, Heinrich abandons and ignores family norms and strives to obtain higher civilian values and gain greater independence, yearning for wider horizons. In his wanderings – the second stage of his development – he encounters Nature and the creatures of God, who show him the proper path: attention to details is motivated by science, and the acceptance of it all by art. The advance of the unification of Nature and culture takes place at the third stage: on a model country farm.

“Rosenhaus” was situated on a hilltop and was covered by roses, all blooming at once in striking radiant colors and clouds of fragrance. This truly Eden-like house and garden was created by human intellect and artistic gardening, for the self-fulfillment of its inhabitant in order that he might have every chance of becoming intellectually noble. The house and garden, despite all their beauty and splendor, are not items of luxury. In the viewpoint of the author, Nature infused with culture is the proper medium for the development of the human spirit.

The creative desires of the owner of Rosenhaus are characterized by openness to history. As the creator of his own future, he wishes to know the past, appreciating antique furniture and art objects, making no distinction between the products of fine art and those of handicrafts, preserving all of it as passionately as a museum caretaker.

In an analysis of this novel and especially the objects of furniture in Rosenhaus, Carl E. Schorske summarized the protagonist's characteristic features and essentially describes the unique traits of adherents to life reform. The cultured turn-of-the-century citizen of the mentality represented by the novelist “*moves petty bourgeois economy to aesthetic selectivity: art replaces religion as the*

⁹ Comp. SCHORSKE, C. E. 1979.

source of the chief meaning of life, and in it appears the tendency to social mobility and cultural acquisition which is directed toward the destruction of the results of [unquestionably traditional – C.E.S.’ remark] ...universal moral culture.” (SCHORSKE, C. E. 1979: 259.)

Whether one considers the social resolve of the spokesmen for lifestyle reform, or the participants, or the changes represented by the artists, the above quote is astonishing. So is the fact that in the Hungarian language area the Gödöllő artists – who happened to be nearly identical in ethnic origin, education, and social situation – undertook the formation of an alternative lifestyle.¹⁰

3. THE FLOWER AS AN EVALUATION OF LIFE

What is that makes the rose so emblematic, and stressed in picture after picture? Could the reason be that the intellectual profile of the secessionist artists in their efforts to synthesize life and art was shaped by remnants of the romanticist worldview, by the English pre-Raphaelites, by allegoric French symbolism, and by Tolstoyanism and contemporary gnostic and theosophic teachings centering on one’s own divine reality, by vegetarianism and naturalism, both enjoying great popularity in Europe at the time, and the series of laical ideas on education and art education; and that the rose had a role as emblem in all of these, both in its botanical existence and as a symbol of dual values? Is it sufficient explanation for the rose use of Nagy and the Gödöllő artists as a central category that the international cultural movements enumerated above turned to objects, ideas and actions expressible by this flower at precisely the time when education directed at the “complete life” was their objective? The Gödöllő group was far from alone in wanting to be more than just artists: they considered their lives and body to be creative media, and attempted to show by example a model for mankind to follow.

The Gödöllő group created a unique mixture of turn-of-the-century ideas of life reform in which the rose was of a mystic character. The chromatics they created supports this conclusion. For them the rose was a plant of light, symbolizing their shared views of the world, a complex, somewhat eclectic form of mild radicalism.

¹⁰ SZABÓ, K. A. 1999: 92–93.

4. SOME ELEMENTS OF SÁNDOR NAGY'S INDIVIDUAL WORLDVIEW

4.1. Nazarenes

In all likelihood, Sándor Nagy became acquainted with the Nazarene movement in Hungary through Ferenc Szoldatics, and his interest in puritan/romanticism principles increased when he met a number of admirers of Raphael at Szoldatics' studio while on fellowship in Rome.

The Nazarenes recruited their numbers from peasants, craftsmen and industrial workers; they took the commandments of the Sermon on the Mount literally, living pious lives in which they did not drink or bear weapons, and they maintained strong personal and correspondence contacts. However, they did not have a significant structural organization, or priests, and it was the enclosed internal life of the groups which was important to them.¹¹

After Rome, Nagy studied in Paris at the Julian Academy. At this time, 1892-1900, he was in contact with virtually every movement which promoted philosophical, aesthetic or lifestyle renewal in some way. He was influenced by the Franco-Belgian occult Rosicrucian group, who performed their symbolist idea-painting by mystic transfiguration and preached the role of the artist as prophet – the prominent position of art in understanding the world. Nagy's writings testify that he was also affected by Buddhism and theosophy. He did not reject any turn-of-the-century philosophy or life reform movement which placed individual development at the center, emphasizing the individual worldview over community, God-centered cosmologies – their influences were rather accumulated, and the ideas of various philosophical definitions did not cancel each other. Understandably, during this time Tolstoyism, which combined socialist and Christian ideals, and a version of anarchy linked to Jenő Henrik Schmitt (a Tolstoyist), which urged social reform through the improvement of man and rejected the state as depersonalizing people in the name of government, were other movements which became important to Nagy.

4.2. Pre-Raphaelites

The return to the ideals of Italian painting before Raphael both intellectually and artistically was encouraged by the mid-nineteenth century Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. They were characterized by a preservation of simplicity and hand-craft traditions, meticulous artistry in the shaping of their objects, attention to

¹¹ Cf. Eötvös Károly munkái IX. *A nazarénusok* [Works of Károly Eötvös IX: *The Nazarenes*]. Budapest, 1904.

the spiritual content of things, and a concept of the combination of art and labor as a single unity – and they had many followers. To accomplish all this in artistic communities was of even greater importance, and they featured utopian notions which many received as yearned-for ideals.

The Pre-Raphaelites' model of self-organization was the Nazarenes, a group of Germans living in Rome who sought the joining-place of Christian belief and archaicism (their name was from the earliest Christians) – and it was Ford Maddox Brown who created the connection between the Nazarenes and the pre-Raphaelites. Echoing medieval ideals of common labor and learning from one another thereby, the group's members adored romanticism and were believers of Johann Jakob Wirz (1778–1858). Wirz claimed to be a reincarnation of Christ and found many followers in the regions of Elberfeld and Barmen. This new religious movement came to the Carpathian Basin through Switzerland (1839) by means of János Denkel, a Hungarian student of Heinrich Samuel Fröhlich, and it enjoyed the support of several highly influential Hungarian intellectuals.

William Morris' social sensitivity became a model: the concepts of spreading the teachings of Christ, helping the poor, and practicing a combination of self-moderation and craftsman's labor led to expression of the belief that art was a vital necessity, and the performance of work considered to be artistic was a liberating obligation of all men. The restoration of the value of craftsmanship derived from a revival of the medieval practice of self-sufficiency in which everyone produced for himself the objects needed for his life, whereby his very existence took on object form. The one-time unity of life, labor and art emerged anew, albeit as a potential only. In 1871 Morris visited Iceland, on the influence of which he formed the ideas of the *island of complete life*, later writing his novel on the perfect future, *News from Nowhere* (1890). This book largely anticipated the life of the Gödöllő colony: everything it held of value – labor, intellectual values, sport, self-sufficiency, dress, construction, the nature of social life, a natural lifestyle, a reshaping of male and female roles, and child-raising ideals – all became (almost) a reality twenty years later.¹²

The religious image of art of the popular socialist Morris as well as that of Ruskin, who was thoroughly familiar with Marx, is a late continuation of the romanticist worldview. Profession of the dual – scientific and artistic – experience of the universe offered opportunities of implying individual mystic efforts. Although the Gödöllő artists had no personal contact with the Pre-Raphaelites, their two leaders did know the Nazarenes. In fact, Kriesch and Nagy first met at the home of Nazarene painter Ferenc Szoldatics (1820–1916) in Rome (GEL-

¹² It would be interesting to compare the novel with Kálmán Konopi's *Az ember és szerelme* [Man and Lovers] (1907), a novel about the inhabitants of the Gödöllő colony.

LÉR K. 1987: 25) – Nagy had met Szoldatics earlier, on a vacation at Csopak after his fourth year at the Model Drawing School. Szoldatics was one of the ones who encouraged Nagy to make a study tour of Rome – “*assuming you do not want to deal with profane art.*”¹³

On the model of the pre-Raphaelites they were encouraged to adopt the ideal of art with moral content from the English and realize it in Gödöllő, creating a workplace (and thereby an ideal and community) for handicrafts inspired by Hungarian folk art, thus serving the everyday realization of the ideal. In the environment of the workplace the inhabitants of the Gödöllő artists’ colony lived not only in an open artistic environment but also in a loose family-based life environment, establishing multi-functional areas for collective living and organizing a series of community events – thereby coming closer to the collectively realized, socially defined society in which mutually accomplished work is also a value.

4.3. Tolstoyism

With the formation of nation-states, nationalist artists broke with the ideas of works filling an “aesthetic” function of the pre-Renaissance and -Enlightenment periods as well as with artists’ functionalist attitudes. At the end of the 19th century, the Pre-Raphaelites and Nazarenes detected this hiatus and considered it their goal to maintain continuity. Parallel to the principles of Ruskin and Morris, occasionally independently, ideologies appeared which, although not always based on fully elaborated philosophies, served as guidelines for a kind of practical life emphasizing ethics. Tolstoyan art and philosophy, like gnosticism, emphasized the maintenance of continuity – and did not renounce the nationalist character endangered by industrialized society even when it alluded to transnational ideals (for example, the idea of education not directed by the nation-state).

L. N. Tolstoy’s interest turned toward education in the 1870’s, and after meeting Sutaev, the founder of an agrarian denomination, he also became an opponent of modernization and a spokesman for early Christianity and a simple, rustic lifestyle. His works, particularly for their resounding with a number of ideals for improving the people, were known throughout Europe. Kriesch became a follower in the late 1880’s, and at Diód established an artists’ colony based on Tolstoy’s philosophical, ethical and lifestyle principles, while Nagy also participated in the organization.

Like Ruskin, Tolstoy viewed the utility of art to lie in the fact that it is able to create a community whose members profess very similar ideas of society. It does this in order to speak to as many people as possible, and for them to under-

¹³ GELLÉR, K. 1996, 5., quoting a manuscript by Nagy, n. d. Budapest, private ownership.

stand it and consider its ideals appropriate. Tolstoy considered folk art and the mentality of the medieval guilds – and not incidentally their creative techniques – worthy of continuation. In the Russian author’s philosophy, social and artistic motives were welded together, and this was a starting premise for Nagy as well as the artists of Diód and Gödöllő. This may explain why Nagy and his followers had such interest in the peasant culture of Kalotaszeg, and later in Hungarian folk culture and art in general. They attempted to explore the ancient culture-tied, art-creating lifestyle which promised self-fulfillment to all its members and offered the opportunity of becoming an “inner man” based on self-development and one’s own will.

Tolstoy denounced and rejected contemporary developments in high art – and did not understand them. The basis of his criticism was what he considered the elitist demeanor of the symbolists and impressionists: in his view, that which cannot be understood by everyone is to be rejected, as it is unusable as a means of self-improvement. He believed in higher appreciation of the role of art based on universally accessible Christian perspectives, and claimed ethics developed therefrom to be the basis of community.

Jenő Boér and his son acquainted the Diód group with the Tolstoyan (and gnostic) principle of art as improver. Boér received Kriesch as guest at his Diód residence, and together they read German translations of Tolstoy and worked on the summer placement of the art colony. In addition to Boér, the gnostic Jenő Schmitt also contributed to the spread of these ideas, his books having an influence on Nagy in particular, no doubt, because he discovered the similarity between their teachings. Tolstoy himself also had an interest in Schmitt.

The combination of Tolstoyan moral and social reforms with pre-Raphaelite teachings using the concept of beauty in the medieval sense implied that the changing of circumstances was primarily the individual task of all men, which made Tolstoyan artists somewhat open to the socialist movement. Rejecting radical social actions and professing the idea of inner revolution, these anthropophilic artists felt closer to the ideal of the Enlightenment wherein the individual was capable of changing his fate himself.

The Gödöllő artists’ ideas of art education followed from their understanding of Tolstoyan art tenets based on original sources. The popularization of their own works (as well as the abundant use of genres and the discovery of children as art lovers), as they acknowledged, was important because it initiated a wide audience into their ethical ideas and could make them knowledgeable adherents.

4.4. *Neo-Gnosticism*

Familiar with Tolstoyanism and its combination of social and Catholic traditions and a believer of Jenő Henrik Schmitt, Jenő Boér was the source not only of vegetarianism, love of Nature, and folklore, but also of gnostic ideas for friends Kriesch and Nagy.

Schmitt elaborated his neo-gnostic ideas based on Tolstoy's populism, becoming a philosopher who rejected social radicalism. He enthusiastically published Tolstoy's writings in his German-language periodical, although he did not accept every precept. Schmitt believed man was not the result of the outflow of spirit, and thus its humble follower, but rather the self-aware developer of spirit. The individual's self-knowledge is the Archimedean lever which can move an unmoving world.

Gnostics held God to be perfect light. Ever-deleterious matter is capable of receiving light particles originating from him. The body of Christ was one such recipient of this spiritual light – and the task of man is to achieve transfiguration through the example of Christ.

For this reason Schmitt preached inner development and claimed the possibility of self-salvation – that is, the idea that man can become divine. And, as art is the primary motivator of this self-transformation in man, it is the method with whose guidance anyone can enter the path of purification and truth.

For Nagy and his friends this raised the suggestion that man can be shaped by aesthetics. Self-formation contributes to improving the world, and art provides the altar on which the results of self-knowledge, the created work, may be offered as a sacred object, as it were, to the community. Aesthetic creation – especially if it is saturated in mythic/religious content – improves man.

Expressing his views in Germany and in Budapest, Schmitt's anarchism preached non-violence. Further, a collective of individuals having undergone appropriate self-development would transform society without revolution. Social development could be achieved by individual development – and this was the proper behavior. Only the artist is able to shape this attitude – and therefore must be considered a kind of prophet. (Nagy's painting *Master, Where Dweldest Thou?* expresses this idea: St. John the Baptist is followed by figures – for whom Nagy's painter friends happened to serve as models – as they set out to find true Christianity.)

It was Schmitt who first recognized the light-related symbols of gnosticist and theosophic teachings in Nagy's works. He believed the master to have undertaken the depiction of pure spirit, expressed by the saturation of the bodies in light, the soul appearing in a body swimming in light. Schmitt listed Nagy's light-figures as examples arguing in favor of gnosticist self-deification.

*“The ubiquitous rays and light-figures presumably appeared in Sándor Nagy’s graphic works on the influence of Schmitt’s writings, which are considered the theoretical ignition point of Hungarian presymbolic efforts,”*¹⁴ writes Katalin Gellér while researching the components of the painter’s cosmic life-sense and light symbolism, also pointing out the extent to which this all fit in with the Nietzschean cult of that period, and not incidentally parallels the theosophy of Rudolf Steiner. This enraptured belief in the self and cult of light as the source of all life is not unique in the intellectual and artistic life of Europe or Hungary¹⁵ – in appearance and expression it is of neo-Platonic (and Socratic) ideology.

Thus, the gnostic (or gnostically interpretable) symbols such as light, the Sun, and fire contribute to the visual expression of Nagy’s professed role as moral teacher. Without question, the mass of (often not clearly interpretable) hermetic signs rendered the artistic and literary dissertations didactic. This illuminates the extent to which the symbolism of the secession, with its agglomeration of contemporary philosophies, was suggestive, self-emphasizing and programmatic, and that it spoke to the initiated.

Nagy’s symbolism – except in his final period – always remained gnostic, alluding to the possibility of self-knowledge and self-fulfillment. For example, on one of his stained-glass paintings in the neogothic chapel in Lipótmező (1913–14) Nagy depicts roses as floral ornaments by right of both Christian tradition and secessionism. The medium of glass – an opportunity which the painters of gothic windows also exploited – enables the materialization of gnostic ideas, presenting the environment of Mary. The roses surrounding the female figure grow to Christ towering on high, where they become thorny branches. Hitherto featured as separate formations in the mysticism of Mary and Christ, the flower in this case stems from a single root, as both the rose and the twisting, winding thorny branches are both set in glorious light. The gnosticism of Nagy’s old age, meanwhile, is characterized by the light-saturated, light-valued figures of his fresco in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Pesterzsébet – and the bramble of roses linked to them.

4.5. *Vegetarianism*

Thematization of the relationship toward the eating of meat predates the 19th and 20th century. Rousseau and numerous other philosophers of the Enlightenment preached abstention from food of animal origin (although only for the

¹⁴ GELLÉR, K. 1987: 102.

¹⁵ Comp. Nietzsche’s citations of Zoroastrianism, or Rudolf Steiner’s theosophy (which also alludes to Goethe’s light and plant cult) and his anthroposophy elaborated later, or the Hungarians: Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka, Jenő Komjáthy, Endre Ady, Gyula Juhász, Sándor Sík, Jenő Komjáthy, and others of similar objective resolve.

more cultured classes), but it is clear that both Christianity and the cultures of antiquity confronted alternative nutritional methods. The consumption of meat and other products of animal origin offered the path to proper enjoyment of life as regulated by the ancient pathology of humors and subsequent worldviews based more or less thereon. Nineteenth-century vegetarianism, as Massimo Montanari points out, was merely a by no means new version of a continuously existing European tradition in which each of the selected and laudable principles of nutrition is traditional, but now interpreted with the support of modern scientific teachings (MONTANARI 1996: 178–180).

The first vegetarian society was founded in London in 1848, and soon afterwards the now-institutionalized movement attracted attention (though only in Europe) with its moral standpoint and emphasis on health, rather than by the originality of its successfully principles. Meat is poison, they claimed, undertaking a biological and sociological explanation of this statement supported by numerous examples. The benefit of foods of plant origin, however – this likewise was an idea resurrected by the Enlightenment, with its precedents from the Renaissance – was supported by the “theory of signatures” based on the discovery of analogies, which held not only that external appearance is an expression of internal content, but also that the qualities of the food eaten influence the qualities of the eater. In addition to all this, contemporary and earlier scientific and philosophical thinking and a host of everyday ideas combined to create the behavior pattern of which vegetarianism is part. Moreover, as with all mass movements, the spread of vegetarianism was aided by the fact that cosmological principle, arguing in generalities with allusion to personal experience, concealed its internal inconsistencies.

For the vegetarian, food of plant origin provides naturalness which is a process of everyday sustainment of life as part of the proper lifestyle. Food of plant origin is a condition for naturalness, simplicity and non-violence – and also their symbol. Maintenance of the body is a necessity, of course, but the ultimate goal is not momentary gastric pleasure; rather, it is the attainment of a higher goal and the long-term enjoyment thereof. This form of nutrition is a source of happiness whose undemanding norm promotes the opportunity of experiencing a rationally operating universe.

Vegetarianism is a philosophy which the layman can practice – and which is a criticism of society (and science). It simultaneously serves the holistic needs of periods unable to feel the fullness of the universe and of people overwhelmed by the details, as well as providing individual opportunities for their satisfaction. If one examines the symbolic level out of the possible meanings of vegetarianism, the most important aspect seems to be self-identification with the plant: identity with Nature, patience and humility, perseverance of presence, tranquil-

ity and acceptance are symbolized in a variety of forms, including the ethical. At the same time, this eating habit provides instruction on lifestyle: creation of a simple, undemanding life (accomplished with rustic/folk naturalness), served by asceticism and in fact suggesting developed intellectualism (aided by a little mysticism and cosmos-oriented philosophy/theology/theosophy), rationalism (as a criticism of the ruling social, ideological and political order), and voluntary renunciation of individual extremes in the interest of the community (developed social sensitivity).

With the help of vegetarianism, the need for moderation created a connection between 19th-century proponents of dietary reform and early Christian tradition. However, references to the Middle Ages suggest an incongruity: feudalism was not a mentality characterized by plants and rejection of animal-origin food; it was not an era of phytomorphic anthropology. There is a different explanation why the 19th-century alternative lifestyle made this reference all the same. An examination of the views on the division of labor and its interpretation in the attitudes formed on art appears to offer an answer.

In vegetarianism, everything that transcends nutritional practice is utopianism. But is this true for all regions of Europe? The eating of foods of plant origins finds a series of varying explanations in different cultural periods of Europe, but in essence, it became consistently utopian in only one region – the area where Western or Roman Catholicism is located. Of the thinking patterns created through the great cultural schisms of Europe, Greco-Roman paganism, Islam, Greek and Oriental Orthodoxism and the last-formed Protestant Reformation all accepted this dietary habit more or less, with no need for complex explanation. For Christians of Papist Catholicism and later Western Catholicism, both in wholly Catholic communities and in populations with mixtures of the canonized Catholic worldview, inasmuch as the limited access to the goods of society and nature required explanation, these utopias offered the cessation of these differences, both in the early periods of its development and in the Renaissance and afterwards. Vegetarianism undertook an active part in the restoration of social equity – and it is this aspect which must be stressed for both the Gödöllő artists and contemporary European lifestyle reform movements.

5. VEGETARIANISM IN GÖDÖLLŐ

Of the inhabitants of the artists' colony, three families were vegetarians, while others were only temporarily or never, even on community influence. Nagy probably became vegetarian during his stay in Paris. Whether this aspect of the reform lifestyle coincided with his discovery of Tolstoyanism, or his studies of Buddhism, or as a consequence of the one or the other, cannot be determined

due to the absence of sources. Sickly from childhood, Körösfői-Kriesch became a believer and follower of natural medicine and moderate nutritional habits at an early age. Nagy and Körösfői-Kriesch, the leading figures of the Gödöllő artists' colony, were consistently vegetarians by Diód, before the formation of the group – their similar philosophies may well have contributed to the foundation of the colony and the shaping of its spirit. The two families used the 1895 Hungarian translation of a book by Louis Kuhne, a natural medicine practitioner from Leipzig, in shaping their lifestyle (SZABÓ 2003: 44). According to this teaching, the cause of disease was the eating of meat, which therefore should be avoided. Meats were responsible for obesity and digestive disorders, which in turn became the causes of other physical and spiritual disorders. The three daily meals were based on seeds, vegetables and fruits and supplemented by honey, butter, plant oil or milk, but fresh or dried spices, sugar, alcohol and narcotics – alcohol, coffee or cocoa – were not allowed. Along with the French-style light dishes supplemented with desserts and pastries, folk dishes were also added, however – the Nagy family often ate *puliszka* (cornmeal grits) for breakfast.

The records indicate that this vegetarianism had a number of reasons besides its effect on health: first of all, that cooking should not take up too much time for the wives, who were already artists in other genres. Meals were generally prepared with the participation of the entire family, and the main meals, except for breakfast and family occasions, were open affairs where friends and guests might sit at an abundant, diverse meal set with special care to be natural yet aesthetic. Festiveness, however, was avoided. The intimacy of sitting to table – the ritualization of the event – contains signs both of a rustic/folk nature (simplicity) and of the bourgeois (social life form).

This heterogeneity signifies the members' freedom from orthodoxy and tolerance of each other. Everyone could decide on the meal for himself in accordance with his attitudes and principles of life, but the frequency of the meals and their role and social function in family life can be considered middle-class.

Vegetarianism was but one element of the complex lifestyle philosophy which the leaders of Gödöllő professed. Their eating habits included non-vegetarian elements such as rustic and bourgeois dishes, community-forming social togetherness, and less time away from artistic creation, which collectively indicate the participants' lives were organized according to higher goals. At the same time, it is also true that, like dress habits, sports, and functional mapping of the open and enclosed living areas, it served to protect health in both the physical and spiritual sense.

6. SUMMARY I: THE ROSE

The rose in the Nagyian interpretation was gnosticism's flower of light. Likewise connected with light was the Gödöllő artists' heart motif – which they held to be the center of the human soul, or of the microcosm, which they hoped to make more moral by gentle perseverance. Understandably, light, light-emitting objects, celestial bodies, metaphysical beings associated with light, and objects directly touched by light such as the rose or created by light such as vegetarian meals were all separately and collectively emphasized in the life of the Gödöllő artists and left a mark in their highly allegorical works. The beautiful flower of light is an attribute of the light-figures, and occasionally even their surrogate.

The rose symbols were deeply Christian in content, their red color alluding to blood and expressing submission. At the same time this color also suggests a high degree of saturation of the soul.

The rose is created as a result of self-formation; thus, one who wears it may surely say his work was successful. Also, in keeping with European traditions, this rose bears the meaning of Mary and Christ. One who can produce such a flower is acting in the interest of the community as well as himself; while renouncing his individual interests and living by the criteria of his fellows, he sacrifices himself on the altar of community. The rose is the symbol of the desire for knowledge and self-formation – in Nagy's works it means no less than the fulfillment of his reform lifestyle with its complex turn-of-the-century philosophical background.

The philosophical and ethical content of the rose is also emphasized by the figure or situation with which it is fit. Without exception, it is the attribute of the personality of prophet/artist/teacher, or a decorative sign of allusions to values represented by such a personality.

7. SUMMARY II

For Nagy the interesting intellectual movements were those which believed in art's obligation to improve people. This principle made Pre-Raphaelism, symbolism, Nazarene tenets, Tolstoyism, gnosticism and vegetarianism (which was less philosophically linked to lifestyle reform) all acceptable and reconcilable. From this myriad of intellectual components comes a worldview necessarily unified with a mystical mentality, as the source of wholly non-violent human self-liberation and -education. A unique feature of the reform lifestyle is its admixture of a number of worldviews as well as the fact that it advocated practical activity more than it did a crystal-clear explication of its theoretical background. Education of self and community would be a precondition for the fulfillment of the practice.

The Gödöllő artists – by establishing a fabrics manufactory, creating an artists' colony and participating as an art society in Hungarian and international artistic life – had uniform views on the ethical importance on national and folk art, and formulated very similar ideas and practices in self- and group education, which they also followed in child-raising and works of art intended for children; without question, they brought about a utopia. The expression is intentional: the majority of their utopian ideas were realized, as proven by their writings, by outside reports on them, and by photographs which show their life ready to reach fulfillment anywhere, from home to monumental spaces. Each of them considered the personality created by their lifestyle reform to be a work of art – and this is the reason for their strikingly prophetic behavior pattern and the demand for their works. Although perhaps disconcerting for the art historian, for the education historian it is a mentality to be studied.

According to primary-source evidence, the teacher was expected to be a mental example to the students, as desirably and exemplary teacher qualities became increasingly important from the end of the nineteenth century on. For this reason, an increasing number of educational movements have liberated themselves from canonized expectations and expressed new behavioral models – whether national, or higher in nature – the transmission of which appeared as an unaccustomed task. Identity between institutional and non-institutional forms of transmission gained value, and the teacher's child-perspective, beyond the transmission of social norms, encompasses a deep – usually sympathetic – identification with the child, despite generational differences, emphasizing human similarities. That a single narrative is possible for childhood and adulthood, although a consequence of the historical perspective of the Enlightenment, is suggested by educational efforts to discover the analogous circumstances of child and adult. A result of this was the transformation of teacher behavior. The utopia of Gödöllő is proof of this new teacher mentality: reshaping themselves on the basis of new ideals, they point to the operational conditions of a better society.

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NAGY SÁNDOR: REFORM ÉLETMÓD ÉS SZIMBÓLUMA

Preraffaeliták – Tolsztojizmus – Újgnoszticizmus – Vegetárizmus: Nagy Sándor világgképének elemei

Az utóbbi időben egyre több olyan, az ember teljes életére kiható életmódot változtató programok váltak nyilvánossá, amelyekre a nem intézményes tudásátadás kutatói is érdeklődéssel figyelhetnek (SKIERA, E. 2004). Ezek a holisztikus elemekben gazdag reform életmódjavaslatok azonban nem előzmény nélküliek. Először s tömegesen az 1880-as évek közepén tűntek fel azok a mindennapi életvitel javítását szorgalmazó elképzelések, amelyek a lakás, az öltözködés, a táplálkozás, a természethez való újfajta viszony, a test, az anyagforgalom stb., továbbá a szellemhez fűződő teozófiai, filozófiai és teológiai mentalitás átalakítását, továbbá a nem európai civilizációk értékelt eredményeinek átvételét szorgalmazták. A 19. századvégi–20. századelői életmódreformok összegzésére és terjedésére először Edward Carpenter vállalkozott. Az 1889-ben kiadott kötet, a *Civilisation its Cause and Cure* utóbb nemcsak a kortárs reform életmód-törekvések összefoglalója, de érthetővé tette a hamarosan kialakuló reformpedagógiák megjelenését és a céljait is. A mozgalmak áttekintése ezért több szempontból indokolt, hiszen nem csupán a századforduló (kései romantikus, materialista és pozitivisták) világgképei által előhívott ember- és műveltségképekről adnak fölvilágosítást, de tudósítanak a 20. század pedagógiáit átalakító törekvések kialakulásáról is. Végezetül az akkori és a mai, az egész életet befolyásoló nevelési rendszerek azonos és eltérő vonásainak összevetésére is lehetőséget ígérnek.

A Kárpát-medence magyar nyelvterületén az életmódreformok sajátos vegyülésével Gödöllőn született meg s egyszíntűlt néhány évig az a „teljes élet” program, amelyet,

még ha vázlatosan is, tanulmányozásul választottunk. A hazai szecesszió néhány művésze – európai tájékozottsága révén – olyan telepet hozott létre, amelyen fenntartók és alkalmazottak együttesében egyfajta univerzális személyiségkép formálódott. Noha a gödöllői telepnek mára szinte csak a művészeti jelentősége ismert, kétségtelenül egyéb, a források gazdagsága révén művelődés- és neveléstörténeti értékei is vannak.

A gödöllőiek arculatformáló személyiségei közül e tanulmány Nagy Sándor tevékenységére s egyik legfontosabb szimbólumára fókuszál, mivel ő az, aki a pedagógiai, azon belül főként a művészetpedagógiai nézeteit rendszeresen és hosszú időn keresztül kifejthette.

Kulcsszavak: művészettörténet, gödöllői telep, Nagy Sándor, életmódreform, művészetpedagógia