

**The First Nyugat Generation and the Politics of Modern Literature:
Budapest, 1900-1918**

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2009

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the connections between arts and politics in fin-de-siècle Hungary, as expressed in the writings of the First Nyugat Generation. Various elements of the cultural debate in which the Nyugat writers participated can illustrate the complexities of this relationship. These are the debate over the aesthetics of national literature, the urban-versus-rural discourse, and the definition of the national community.

Through close reading of the Nyugat group's writings on these topics, two themes are explored, relating to the ambivalence with which the Nyugat writers implemented their project of westernizing Hungarian culture. The first is the dominant presence of the nationalist discourse within an ostensibly cosmopolitan endeavor. This fits in with a general artistic trend of Hungarian modernism, and can be explained with reference to the ambiguous position of Hungary within Europe and the subsequent complexities present in the national discourse. A second theme is the fragmentation of identity, and the contradictory impulses present in the literature. Endre Ady, the greatest poet of the group, embodied these contradictions and thus expressed the available options to Hungarian society through his poetic personality.

Acknowledgments

To Professor Gábor Gyáni, for his supervision, without which this thesis would not exist. To Professor Matthias Riedl, for his support and guidance throughout the entire year. To Professor Tibor Frank, for participating in my thesis workshop. To those who also provided suggestions during this project: particularly Professor Balázs Trencsényi, Professor Miklos Lojkó, and Professor Marsha Siefert. To Professor Constantin Iordachi, Anikó Molnár, and Professor László Kontler, for their understanding and help during a time of duress. And finally, to my friends Anna Pervanidis, Zoltan Gluck, and Mary Kate Donovan for their help, academic and otherwise.

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Introduction

The literary journal *Nyugat* was founded in 1908 by a group of like-minded writers and intellectuals. As its name (“West”) suggests, the editors and contributors of the journal intended to bring contemporary Western artistic and intellectual currents to the fore in Hungary. In short, writers like Endre Ady, Mihály Babits, and Dezső Kosztolányi wished to modernize Hungarian literature by embracing trends such as symbolism, and to generally renew Hungarian culture through modernism.

Of course, it is impossible to divorce the aesthetic project of the so-called “First *Nyugat* Generation” from the political climate of early twentieth-century Central Europe. As soon as the journal was first published, it was engaged in a cultural struggle with the defenders of Hungarian traditionalism. In fact, many of the writers of the generation--especially Ady, who started his career as a political journalist--explicitly engaged with the political and cultural elite of the time. Also, the *Nyugat* writers formed a part of the progressive “Second Reform Generation,” which included intellectual groups surrounding Oszkár Jaszi and György Lukács. The *Nyugat* project of modernizing Hungarian literature was thus inseparable from a progressive, indeed subversive, political stance.

The writings of the First *Nyugat* Generation thus offer unique insights into the relationship between arts and politics in the modern East-Central European context, as well as the political and cultural climate of Hungary around the year 1900. The period was one of intense modernization and intellectual activity, for Europe in general and the Habsburg monarchy particularly. Hungarian artists confronted a dizzying array of aesthetic choices, while Hungarian society faced a similarly diverse number of political

and social alternatives. While the writers of the First *Nyugat* Generation held a variety of political views, as a whole they represented those Hungarians who wanted to expand political and civil rights, in opposition to the elitist political regime of the time, which they viewed as archaic and feudalistic.

This thesis thus attempts to explore some specific aspects of the debate, as they were expressed by the writers of *Nyugat*. The focus is on those times when the writers chose to energetically defend their political and cultural opinions, and to confront explicitly their ideological opponents; however, literary analysis will form a large part of the argument. The intention is to reconstruct the thought behind the move towards a more modern literature, as well as the writers' self-image. That is, the thesis seeks to understand how the *Nyugat* writers conceptualized their project, as well as their role in society.

In order to successfully tackle these rather large and unwieldy questions, the thesis is split into sections dealing with specific thematic elements of the debate. The first chapter, after giving an overview of Hungarian arts and politics, explores the basic elements of the *Nyugat* generation's cultural conflict with the establishment. It focuses on the question of how literature was connected to the national community, revealing the basic elements of the relationship between culture and politics in the Hungarian context. The next chapter discusses the attitudes of the *Nyugat* writers with respect to both Budapest and the Hungarian countryside. This section is meant to elaborate on the relationship between a group of sophisticated, westernizing urban artists with a largely rural, agricultural society. The last chapter focuses explicitly on politics, discussing the progressive intellectual circles in Budapest, one of which was the *Nyugat* group.

Specifically, it focuses on their attempts to redefine the national community in a way that would encourage democratization, and how they used the emancipatory aspects of the national discourse in their progressive political assertions.

Thus, one of the central themes of this thesis relates to different ideas of national and political communities, and the position of cultural producers within them. As shall be demonstrated, the *Nyugat* writers, in spite of their westernizing project, were deeply informed by the nationalist discourse. In other words, they did not embrace cosmopolitanism, which certainly could have been a result of their aesthetic orientation. They fit into a general trend in Hungarian modernism, which employed folkish imagery in order to establish an authentic basis for art using western formal elements. This tendency was most famously exemplified by the avant-garde composer Béla Bartók, although it was present in other media as well. The *Nyugat* writers, largely from the provinces, still felt that a connection with the primordial substance of their people's history was necessary in order to create legitimately *Hungarian* modern literature, even if they definitively rejected the nationalism and cultural tastes of the establishment. Endre Ady, the greatest poet of the generation, displayed this tension most clearly, and resolved the contradictory impulses through the evocation of an eastern nation moving to the west.

This leads directly to the second important theme of the thesis, which is contradiction and the fragmentation of identity. This was a characteristic element of Central European modernity. The idea of confused and contradictory identities looms large in many interpretations of the cultural flourishing of the late Habsburg Monarchy, which produced such influential intellectual developments--and beautiful works of art--in

an age of political, social, and even spiritual crisis. As shall be shown, the *Nyugat* writers expressed these contradictions in a variety of ways--not only through their westernizing and nationalist impulses, but also through their ambivalent relationship to the city they inhabited. This ambivalence and contradiction can be partially explained by the ambiguous position of the Hungarian national community, both internally (with respect to their Austrian partners, and the minority nationalities) and externally (within the European cultural space, where Hungary had a relatively marginal position). One area where the *Nyugat* writers were less ambivalent, however, was their stance of democratic nationalism, and their use of the emancipatory elements in Hungarian national discourse. Ady was the prime example of all these tendencies, and his importance can be explained by the way in which he embodied the various directions and possibilities available to the modern Hungarian artist, and to a modernizing Hungary.

Literature Review

After the publication of Carl Schorske's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, there was a significant rise in scholarly interest in Central European modernism. Many scholars elaborated on or challenged the Schorske thesis regarding Viennese modernity (this shall be discussed in the theoretical approaches section), and some revisited other centers of creativity around the year 1900. Budapest was no exception. Scholars employed a variety of methods and approaches to the topic of Budapest modernity. One was cultural history in Schorske's mode, and the prime example of this was Peter Hanák's *The Garden and the Workshop: Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest*. The book contains important sections, both on

the general characteristics of Hungarian cultural modernism and Endre Ady's literary career.¹ The entire book, however, is imbued with a sense of nostalgia for the period; as Hanák himself notes, the book was written as the Communist regime in Hungary became more tolerant of the slightly subversive topics covered by Hungarian modern art.² Hanák was thus free to finally write about a period of art which he had admired. His enthusiasm is both a benefit and a problem--the interpretation is sometimes partisan. The same is true for Mario Fenyő's "Literature and Political Change: Budapest, 1908-1918," a monograph which was published by an American journal.³ This is the most in-depth treatment of the First *Nyugat* Generation, using a literary history approach. It is a tremendous resource, but the author's father Miksa was one of the founders and main financiers of the *Nyugat* itself. It is thus biased as well. A final monograph using the approach of cultural history is Judit Frigyesi's *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest*, which attempts to put the composer in a cultural context. Frigyesi is a musicologist, and her treatment of Endre Ady is rather laudatory.⁴ It seems that her goal, besides an analysis of Bartók, was to prove that he did not emerge out of a sterile cultural environment. This is an admirable sentiment but it renders her analysis partisan as well.

Others have approached the topic using social history. These attempt to provide a more complete sense of the city itself as it was experienced by its inhabitants, while

¹ Peter Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop: Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 63-97, 110-134.

² Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop*, xiii.

³ Mario Fenyő, "Literature and Political Change: Budapest, 1908-1918," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 77, no. 6 (1987): 1-156.

⁴ Judit Frigyesi, *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 168-195.

still exploring the arena of high culture. One such example is John Lukacs' *Budapest 1900: A History of a City and Its Culture*.⁵ As the title suggests, it is a rather impressionistic treatment, and is apparently meant for popular consumption. A more scholarly social history of the city around the year 1900 is Gábor Gyáni's *Identity and the Urban Experience: Fin-de-Siècle Budapest*. This monograph deals with a variety of urban history topics, before addressing the cultural scene through the lens of personality and identity in an urban context.⁶ While less comprehensive than Hanák or Fenyő, it is also less partisan.

Mary Gluck's various treatments of turn-of-the-century Hungarian culture also display less bias. Her book on Lukács, *Georg Lukács and His Generation, 1900-1918*, is only relevant to a small part of this study, however. Nonetheless, her essay on Ady is one of the more insightful recent treatments of the poet. While dealing with many of the same topics of this paper, it focuses on the characteristics of Ady's poetry, rather than the *Nyugat* generation in general.⁷ Other relevant secondary literature has been collected in volumes edited by Schorske and Thomas Bender,⁸ and György Ránki.⁹

⁵ John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture* (New York: Grove, 1988).

⁶ Gábor Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban Experience: Fin-de-Siècle Budapest*, trans. Thomas J. DeKornfeld (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 207-222.

⁷ Mary Gluck, "The Modernist as Primitive: The Cultural Role of Endre Ady in Fin-de-Siècle Hungary" *Austrian History Yearbook* 23 (2002): 149-162.

⁸ Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske, eds., *Budapest and New York: Studies in Metropolitan Transformation: 1870-1930* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1994).

⁹ György Ránki, ed., *Hungary and European Civilization* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989).

Methodological and Terminological Remarks

This thesis mainly concerns the literature of turn-of-the-century Budapest, and as such it is based upon close reading of the texts by the relevant writers. There are two problems with using such an approach in English--one is the number of translated sources, and the other concerns the use of translated literature as a historical resource. As regards the former, it is fortunate that the *Nyugat* generation is one of the most celebrated and influential groups in Hungarian literary history. All the major authors have at least some poems translated, and Endre Ady has many. In addition, some of his journalism has been translated. Still, it is a limited source base, and one should keep in mind while reading the thesis that it represents only a small slice of the expressive capabilities of the *Nyugat* writers. Nonetheless, a first-rate poem can often reveal more about an artist and his social context than a large body of mediocre literature, which is a fortunate characteristic of cultural history. Of course, this complexity can be distorted in the process of translation, which leads to the second problem. Firstly, the present study cannot address the question of aesthetic merit--the general consensus that these writers produced literature of the highest quality must be accepted. Secondly, and more importantly, caution is necessary in determining the political or cultural implications of translated literature. Yet it is possible, with the help of secondary literature, to make historical assertions--regarding the use of certain symbols, for example, or participation in a discourse. This thesis is based on this idea, although tremendous caution has been used.

Most terms, unless specifically defined in the text, are used holistically. For example, "modernism" is used as a blanket term to cover the various artistic and literary

trends which arose around the turn of the century in Europe, and which were characterized by experimentation or “radical aesthetic autonomy.”¹⁰ “Traditionalists” simply refers to those individuals who opposed modernism in art, generally in favor of a nineteenth-century academic classicism. They were most often supporters of the established political and social order, and are thus called “conservative” in secondary literature. They generally represented nineteenth century liberalism, however, so the label can be misleading. While the modernists were often liberals themselves, they favored democratization and egalitarianism. Thus, the term “elitist” is generally employed to describe the socio-political attitudes of establishment actors, while “progressive” describes the *Nyugat* group and its allies. The terms listed above thus convey general attitudes or orientations rather than specific ideologies or artistic movements.

¹⁰ Gluck, “The Modernist as Primitive,” 151n. Gluck likewise uses the term in a broad sense.

Theoretical Approaches: Culture, Politics, and Nation

The primary theoretical concern of this thesis is the connection between arts and politics. To encounter a cultural artifact and attempt an interpretation based upon its political and social context can be a daunting, complex task. One is vulnerable to facile explanations, which do damage to the singularity of a piece of art by forcing it into a political interpretation. Multiple factors have shaped the text in question, including the biography of the author, large-scale structures or processes in the author's society, and immediate historical events. One must consider all these factors and suggest certain political implications of a text without asserting a causal relationship, unless evidence suggesting as much is present.

Fortunately a large corpus of literature dealing with the connections between arts and politics in the *fin-de-siècle* Central European context exist, which suggest approaches to this elusive task. Much of it was inspired by Carl Schorske's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (as was this thesis). Although studies exist on the turn-of-the-century culture of almost all major Central European cities, the bulk concerns Vienna, which was admittedly the cultural capital of the region. Nonetheless, for the purposes of theoretical considerations, studies on Vienna are applicable, as they deal with similar interpretive problems in a comparable historical context.

A second area of theoretical interest is that of the nation, which was the dominant communal concept in the political discourse of *fin-de-siècle* Budapest. A major theme of this study is the profound ambivalence Hungarians felt about the political and social position of their national community. Most political debate was predicated on the existence of a Hungarian nation, and political appeals generally made reference to

national concerns. A specific definition and understanding of the concept of “nation” is thus essential to an interpretation of Hungarian arts and politics. Special consideration shall be given to the theoretical work of Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Katherine Verdery on this topic.

Arts and Politics in Fin-de-Siècle Central Europe: Modernization and Insecurity

The starting point for the interpretive framework of this thesis is the pioneering collection of essays by Carl Schorske on *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. In those studies, he presents Viennese cultural output as a product of insecurities and ambivalences resulting from modernization processes. That is, in each essay he investigates a specific area of culture “in its own terms,” while drawing attention to the “synchronic relations” among fields caused by “a shared social experience in the broadest sense.”¹¹ He argues that the bourgeois generation which erected the *Ringstrasse* and its buildings as a monument to the triumph of its liberal values found itself surrounded by hostile social and political forces shortly after its ascendancy.¹² Rather than adopting liberal values, the new political forces of social democracy, slavish nationalisms, and (most notoriously) anti-semitic Christian Socials asserted political claims totally unacceptable to the bourgeois elites.¹³ The twin processes of industrial modernization and expanding suffrage brought about the failure of liberalism, rather than the expected outcome of continued social “progress.”

¹¹ Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), xxii-xxiii.

¹² Schorske, 24-115. Schorske calls the Ringstrasse “a visual expression of the values of a social class.”

¹³ Schorske, 117. Anti-Slavic German nationalists were also a problem for Liberals, who favored compromise with Slavs (especially Czechs) on many issues.

The subsequent generation of upper-middle class urbanites surveyed the ruins of their fathers' political project and, according to Schorske, radically rejected the worldview of political liberalism. Schorske calls this an "oedipal revolt," which highlights his use of Sigmund Freud, the defining thinker of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, as the basis of his interpretation. This internal symmetry continues in his discussion of the major artistic figures of the city; just as Freud discovered/constructed the ahistorical psychological man and the irrational subconscious, Viennese artists turned their attention away from the world of politics and bourgeois moralism, refocusing on internal psychic states and the vicissitudes of emotional and carnal impulses.¹⁴

Schorkse thus emphasizes that the historical experiences of a specific group (here, the Vienna bourgeoisie) should serve as the basis for an interpretation the artistic output of individual members of the group. Other scholars have elaborated the interpretation, most notably Jacques Le Rider in *Modernity and Crises of Identity*. In that work, Le Rider focuses more closely on the personal anxieties experienced by the Viennese cultural elite as a result of social and political changes. He thus makes the important contribution of bringing attention to the roles of Judaism and gender in the *fin-de-siècle* cultural phenomenon. Specifically, he argues that tensions arising from the "redistribution of gender roles," and the ambiguous assimilation process of Austrian Jews, exacerbated the confusion regarding identity during modernization.¹⁵ That is, Viennese artists and thinkers were not only distraught over their tenuous place in the political world, but also unsure of their status in a shifting sexual climate, and (if they

¹⁴ Schorske, 203.

¹⁵ Jacques Le Rider, *Modernity and Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 5.

were Jewish) ambivalent about their acceptance into mainstream society. Thus the pervasive sexual anxiety and retreat from the political world, present in everything from Freud's self-analysis to Gustav Klimt's painting. He takes the critical standpoint of Viennese cultural producers to modernity and argues that they represented an important intellectual precursor to postmodernism.¹⁶

It must be noted, however, that Schorske's book is several decades old, and that subsequent scholars not only elaborated, but also challenged his thesis. It is no longer tenable to uncritically transpose Schorske's interpretation to a different context, not least because the psychoanalytical methods often employed are now out of vogue. Steven Beller collected many new approaches to *fin-de-siècle* Vienna in his 2001 volume, *Rethinking Vienna 1900*. The book articulates many theoretical and empirical problems with Schorske's interpretation, including the argument that liberalism's failure was not as great as Schorske supposed, and furthermore that the liberalizing impulse in Austrian society came as much from the imperial state as the newly enfranchised bourgeoisie.¹⁷ Essays in the volume challenge Schorske's use of simplistic dichotomies,¹⁸ and question its applicability to other Central European contexts.¹⁹ The theoretical implication for the present study is that one cannot apply a single social/political explanation to an entire generation of artists; rather, the complexities of the situation and the particularity of each artist/work should be embraced, not elided.

¹⁶ Le Rider, 28.

¹⁷ Steven Beller, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Vienna 1900*, ed. Steven Beller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 1-24.

¹⁸ Scott Spector, "Marginalizations: Politics and Culture Beyond *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*," in *Rethinking Vienna 1900*, ed. Steven Beller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 132.

¹⁹ Ilona Sármany-Parsons, "The Image of Women in Painting: Cliches and Reality in Austria-Hungary, 1895-1905," in *Rethinking Vienna 1900*, ed. Steven Beller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 221.

In spite of Sármany-Parson's assertion that the Hungarian cultural scene was too marginal to be considered as a true companion to the Austrian case, several authors have applied variations of Schorske's thesis to the Hungarian context. One example is Mary Gluck, who in *Georg Lukács and His Generation* describes the Sunday Circle's cultural outlook in terms of a generational conflict, with early twentieth-century intellectuals rebelling against the liberalism of their predecessors.²⁰ The animating impulse of the book is to portray the pre-Marxist Lukács as something other than a mere precursor to his later career--she asserts that his sense of cultural crisis did not lead inevitably to his embrace of Communism during the post-war revolutionary period.²¹ Pre-War Hungarian culture is thus presented on its own terms. She also emphasizes, even on the first page of her book, that the Hungarian intellectual scene was in part defined by its relative marginality in European culture--that even the most modern Hungarian intellectuals were "slightly out of step with Western developments."²²

There have been several other attempts to apply a Schorske-like thesis to *fin-de-siècle* Budapest, which have already been mentioned in the literature review. Peter Hanák's comparison of Vienna and Budapest is the most relevant to the theoretical discussion at hand. His book was written under the direct inspiration and influence of Carl E. Schorske, who wrote a forward for the book after Hanák passed away before publication. The theoretical framework of this thesis is in many ways an elaboration of Hanák's approach, based as it is on a comparison with Vienna. His central proposition is pair of opposing metaphors that defined the *fin-de-siècle* cultures of the twin cities;

²⁰ Mary Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation: 1900-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 44.

²¹ Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation*, 2-6

²² Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation*, 1.

while the Viennese bourgeoisie retreated to an aesthetic “garden” after the failure of their liberal political project, the Budapest bourgeoisie “had nothing to withdraw from” and instead went to the “workshop” of cafes and editorial offices in order to articulate a new, post-liberal political critique of their still “semi-feudal” society.²³ Since a theme of this essay is that progressive Hungarians were responding to an ambivalently modernizing society, the metaphor is apt and useful. Furthermore, Hanák offers some reflections on the problems of cultural history which are applicable to any context, and which sum up the necessity of embracing complexity: he points out that “politics and culture are interpenetrating realms of human creativity and destructiveness.”²⁴ The relationship of culture to the political/social context is not merely reactive; rather, a work of cultural history must reflect the manifold relations among cultural and political discourses. There are two important differences between this thesis’ and Hanák’s theoretical approaches; one is the amplified role of the nationalist discourse as a lens through which culture and politics were viewed. While Hanák certainly acknowledges nationalism’s importance, this thesis treats the national discourse as a primary basis of interpretation. The second difference is that this thesis employs Le Rider’s model of fragmentation much more than Hanák’s idea of a cultural “synthesis,” which is rather celebratory and fails to express the contested and conflicted nature of the literature in question.

²³ Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop*, 67.

²⁴ Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop*, xix.

Nationalism: Delusion, or Discourse

As shall be shown below, the political discourse of early twentieth-century Hungary was dominated by the concept of the nation. No alternative visions of community existed that could supplant the Hungarian nation as the constitutive body which legitimated the state. Marxist class politics were not yet prevalent, in part because Hungary was relatively less industrialized than its Western neighbors. Also, the dynastic patriotism displayed by so many bourgeois Viennese was less present in Hungary.

A definition of nation and nationalism is thus in order. The operative definition of nation for the purposes of this thesis is a hypothetical group with a shared language, culture, and historical experience. (There are other criteria for national identity but these three are the most salient in Hungary's case.) By hypothetical, I mean that "nation" will be treated here as an intellectual construct, rather than as an objectively existing historical actor. Nationalism entails belief in the existence of the group in real terms, the assertion that loyalty to that particular group represents the highest political affiliation, and the subsequent conclusion that states and nations should overlap--that is, that a state is legitimate insofar as it represents the corporate will of its constitutive nation. A further elaboration of the concept is that nations and nationalisms as intellectual constructs were in fact systems of symbolisms and areas of discourse, within which political or social positions were made intelligible and justified.

These key definitions are based on the work of scholars such as Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson. All are, to some extent, critical of the national idea, both in terms of its intellectual validity and historical effects. Gellner is the most critical, suggesting that the concept is more or less philosophically barren, and is

moreover “dangerous... because of the self-evident status which it ascribes to itself.”²⁵

He emphasizes the logical leaps and evasions required to justify nationalists assertions--especially in order to explain the fact that national sentiment, supposedly the dominant form of political identity in human history, has been absent throughout most of civilization.²⁶ Gellner dismisses the explanation of the “dormant nation” as a crude circumvention of historical realities, although he takes care to be as critical of the Marxist idea of “false consciousness” as an explanation for the relative unimportance of class conflict in history.²⁷ Gellner’s arguments are strong indeed. It is striking to read almost any turn-of-the-century European nationalist with him in mind--there is an absence of reflection about the intellectual processes required to even define a nation, let alone assert its rights.

For the purposes of this paper, however, it would be meaningless to dismiss nationalism as a delusion. In trying to reconstruct the intellectual debates of the time, one must take seriously the worldview of the participants. One can appreciate the assumptions and even illusions of historical actors without bringing judgment to bear. That is, it would not be particularly enlightening for a historian to declare that Endre Ady was a fool for assuming the existence of a Hungarian “nation” or “people.” Strongly critical work like Gellner’s may shed light on nationalisms in general, but not on individual nationalisms or nationalists.

²⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London: Orion, 1997), 7. Of biographical note is that Gellner grew up in interwar Prague, and came from a secularized Jewish background. His and his parents’ life experiences probably taught him both the fluidity of identity and the dangers of national thought, although he did claim to understand and even feel the appeal of national sentiment. See “Preface.”

²⁶ Gellner, 8.

²⁷ Gellner, 22.

Therefore, Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined community" and Eric Hobsbawm's concept of "invented tradition" function better in this context. Both scholars are Marxists and thus critical of nationalism--Anderson makes reference to its "philosophical poverty and even incoherence."²⁸ And yet they seek to explain the rise of nationalism and its continued impact on human events by identifying the historical factors which brought it about, in materialist and cultural terms. For example, Anderson notes that the birth of nationalism coincided with the "dusk of religious modes of thought," suggesting that the new ideology provided a replacement in creating a sense of continuity and belonging.²⁹ It is these two benefits--continuity and belonging--which are the most important products of the construct of the nation in Anderson and Hobsbawm's analyses.

Conceptualizing nationalism as a discourse has been one of the more important advances in theories on nationalism in recent decades. Katherine Verdery outlined such a conception in her 1993 essay, "Whither 'Nation' and 'Nationalism'?" The reason it is relevant is that it shows how nationalism as a discursive space, or as an ideological construct, is a flexible entity which may be used to legitimate "numerous social actions and movements, often having very diverse aims."³⁰ It is a system of significant symbols, then, which may be employed by various actors; it is *not* a monolithic "force" which suddenly arose in the nineteenth century to destroy the old Central European order of multinational empires. This definition also does away with Hobsbawm's problematic

²⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 5.

²⁹ Anderson, 11.

³⁰ Katherine Verdery, "Whither 'Nation' and 'Nationalism'?" *Daedalus* 122, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 38.

separation of nationalism into “civic” and “ethnic” varieties, by acknowledging that both strains are present in the discourse and may be dominant at different times.³¹ Verdery asserts that when talking about nationalism and nationalists, “we should ask: What is the global, societal, and institutional in which different groups compete to control this symbol and its meanings?”³² With this in mind, one may investigate the ways in which both traditionalists and progressives employed the nationalist discourse in their cultural/political debate, and avoid simplifying it as a contest between nationalist conservatives and cosmopolitan progressives. Participation in the nationalist discourse on the part of the *Nyugat* writers should *not* be seen as a sign of intellectual poverty--in this case at least, a form of nationalism inspired first-rate literature.

Obviously, Michel Foucault's work on discourse is in the background. To summarize, a discourse may be seen as a medium for the activity of power relations, and also as a space where individual actors encounter long-term structural factors in history. Therefore, an interpretation of the cultural debate in *fin-de-siècle* Hungary can reveal certain insights into the social and political dynamics of the period. An argument over language can be a window into the power relationships among different members of society. Thus, the use of a discursive definition of nationalism serves as a theoretical bridge between the topics of Hungarian cultural and political history--the nationalist discourse imbued them both in this period and shaped their interrelations.

³¹ Alexei Miller, “Nationalism and Theorists,” *CEU History Department Yearbook* (1994-1995): 209.

³² Verdery, 39.

Chapter 1: Budapest Arts and Politics, 1900-1914: Ambivalent Modernization

The Hungarian society which produced the First *Nyugat* Generation was defined by change and anxiety, much like the Viennese case explored by Schorske and others. A cultural explosion was coeval with the stresses of social change and political turmoil. Scholars of *fin-de-siècle* culture have often linked the extraordinary artistic achievements of the period with the breakdown of the liberal vision of progress, and the march of supposedly rational European civilization towards the cataclysm of World War I. Hungary is in many ways a case in point of the phenomenon, with some important differences. The war ended in catastrophe for the Hungarians, perhaps more so than any other national community. The pioneering work of many Hungarian artists, and especially *Nyugat* writers like Ady, prophesied the coming disaster with their reflections on the decadence of Hungarian society. The Hungarian political system was typically Liberal after the 1867 Compromise, with its elitist voting rights, focus on individual over collective rights, and friendliness towards industry. On the other hand, the national situation stymied further development of the political system in the twentieth century, as Hungarian politicians sought to preserve homogeneity in government. Because political progress had not completed its triumph in Hungary, Hungarian artists could not respond to its failures with as much force as their Western contemporaries.

This section provides an overview of the Hungarian political and artistic environment in the early twentieth century, with a special focus on the themes of modernization and ambivalence. That is, it presents Hungarian society as undergoing a number of social and political changes, while acknowledging the deep ambivalence with which the political system dealt with progress, specifically in terms of social and national

equality. The major artistic movements of the period responded to this situation--which they often viewed as conservative or even semi-feudal. The national discourse is essential to understanding the way in which Hungarians viewed both political and artistic questions, and will thus play a role throughout. The ambiguity of Hungary's position among nations was a determining factor for political and (to a lesser extent) artistic trends. Memories of the 1848 Revolution and ambivalence about the 1867 Compromise characterized the national discourse.³³ Hungary's existence as a theoretically sovereign and equal partner of Austria, paired with its effective status as the less powerful member of the Dual Monarchy, led to a unique mixture of triumphalist pride and defensive insecurity. As this section shall demonstrate, this ambiguity shaped the way Hungary would approach modernity in the political and artistic arenas.

Politics: Liberal Elitism and the National Community

Hungary participated in the widespread national-democratic revolutions of 1848, in fact sustaining the longest struggle against monarchical power and national subjection in Europe.³⁴ The Austrian Habsburgs finally ended the revolt in 1849, with Russian help. The experience, however, did not end Hungarian aspirations of independence, even during 18 years of repressive autocratic rule from Vienna. Nor did the 1867 Dual Compromise, which granted Hungary its own parliamentary government and sovereignty with respect to internal issues--the Hungarians and Austrians would

³³ Alice Freifeld, *Nationalism and the Crowd in Liberal Hungary, 1848-1914* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 223. Freifeld discusses the relationship between commemoration of the failed revolution and celebrations of Franz Josef's coronation as King of Hungary.

³⁴ István Deák, "The Revolution and the War of Independence, 1848-1849," in *A History of Hungary*, ed. Peter F. Sugar (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 209-234.

share Foreign and Military Ministries, and Franz Josef was crowned as King of Hungary in addition to his title as Emperor of the Austrians.³⁵ The Compromise represented a deeply ambivalent triumph for the Hungarian national movement, and split it into a moderate side which supported accommodation and a radical side which could not accept anything less than full independence.³⁶ The relationship with Austria was always controversial, causing political turmoil and exciting nationalist passions. This was especially true when the government would deal with shared financial and military obligations; concessions to the Austrians in terms of tax and customs severely weakened the powerful Liberal Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza in 1875, for example.³⁷

Another obstacle was the continued dominance of elitist forces in political life. As mentioned above, the Hungarian franchise was particularly limited at less than ten percent.³⁸ Kálmán Tisza's government was dominated by his Liberal Party, and was conservative in its social politics. The classes which held the franchise, especially the gentry, combined Liberal elitism with a national pride, putting them at odds with the lower classes, national minorities, Austrian counterparts, and sometimes even the Liberal Party.³⁹ Following the period of Liberal Party dominance, beginning roughly around the time of the millennium celebrations, Hungarian politics went through a series

³⁵ Tibor Frank, "Hungary and the Dual Monarchy," in *A History of Hungary*, ed. Peter F. Sugar (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 252.

³⁶ Andrew J. Janos, "The Decline of Oligarchy: Bureaucratic and Mass Politics in the Age of Dualism (1867-1918)," in *Revolution in Perspective: Essays on the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919*, ed. Andrew C. Janos and William B. Slottman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 25.

³⁷ Peter I. Hidas, *The Metamorphosis of a Social Class in Hungary During the Reign of Young Franz Joseph* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 77.

³⁸ Janos, 6. He gives the franchise for the House of Representatives at the time of the Compromise as approximately six percent.

³⁹ Hidas, 77.

of crises.⁴⁰ Fights over the franchise, economic and social issues, and the status of Hungary within the Dual Monarchy drove political change, although Tisza's son István reestablished firm Liberal Party control in 1913. And, as Mary Gluck notes, the Hungarian political system was relatively stable, compared to Austria.⁴¹

Alice Freifeld, in her analysis of liberal Hungary and the nationalist discourse of the time, makes a number of important points about the political regime. First, she acknowledges that the narrowness of the voting class “became a major impediment to subsequent democratization.”⁴² This would be a central point of contention between the established elites and the Modernists and progressives in *fin-de-siècle* Budapest. Secondly, she emphasizes that it was the national factor, in addition to the limited franchise, which ensured Liberal dominance throughout most of the Dualist period. By mobilizing nationalist passions through a “martyrology of of revolutionary defeat,” they effectively associated conservatism with the “alien royal court.”⁴³ Finally, they successfully avoided the fragmentation experienced in the Austrian half of the monarchy due to “generational and ethnic tension.”⁴⁴ The political establishment was thus associated with the legacies of both the 1848 Revolution and the 1867 Compromise--a complex set of symbolic meanings, indeed. While they were certainly successful in preserving their political power and bringing about a large degree of modernization in the country, the Liberals in the early twentieth century found themselves exposed to attack from the left for elitism, and saddled with a deeply ambiguous national-symbolic

⁴⁰ Miklós Molnár, *A Concise History of Hungary*, trans. Anna Magyar, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 235.

⁴¹ Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation*, 53.

⁴² Freifeld, 229.

⁴³ Freifeld, 229.

⁴⁴ Freifeld, 229.

heritage which could be mobilized against them. The *Nyugat* writers, other modernists, and progressives were the ones to mount this challenge.

Hungary's political life was thus torn between opposing trends of liberalization and conservative self-preservation. This tension was also to be found in the most pressing issue confronting Hungarian politicians--the fact that Hungarians were in fact outnumbered by minority nationalities, most notably Romanians, Slovaks, and Serbs.⁴⁵ Hungarian politicians were faced with an obvious contradiction--by asserting national rights for themselves they released an ideology which could threaten the existence of the multinational Kingdom.

On the one hand, the Parliament passed a minority rights law in 1868 which was in fact quite extensive and ahead of its time.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the law itself was consistently ignored in practice, and the government pursued a policy of seeking to encourage national homogenization.⁴⁷ This was the hotly debated project known as "magyarization," which has also been presented as an example of forced assimilation. The project entailed suppression of minority educational opportunities and the forced use of Magyar as an administrative language--though Hanák passionately argued that the demographic "gains" made by the Hungarians in the period were largely from the Jewish and German communities, and was therefore largely voluntary.⁴⁸ The drive for

⁴⁵ The Croats had a special autonomous relationship with the Hungarian kingdom and were thus a less pressing problem.

⁴⁶ Lee Congdon, "Endre Ady's Summons to National Regeneration in Hungary, 1900-1919," *Slavic Review* 33, no. 2 (June 1974): 302.

⁴⁷ Congdon, 302.

⁴⁸ Peter Hanák, "A National Compensation for Backwardness," *Studies in East European Thought* 46, no. 1/2 (June 1994): 38-39. Linguistic difficulties were mainly imposed upon the Slovaks and Romanians, not Germans and Jews. As the state only

magyarization in late-nineteenth-century Hungary displays the complexities of the national discourse; while it was as chauvinistic and dismissive of minority culture and language, it was also assimilatory, emphasizing that anyone could “become” Magyar by participating in the Hungarian political nation. It thus disturbs Hobsbawm’s dichotomy of “civic” and “ethnic” nationalisms. Clearly, ethnic and civic elements were part of the national discourse, which was shaped not only by an internal ideological logic but also by external circumstance--insecurity and competition with respect to the Austrians, and the problem of minority nationalities.

Arts: Modernism and Folk Continuity

It was in this context that a new generation of Hungarian artists and writers engaged in experimentation and exploration which embraced all media. It was an inherently complex phenomenon, both in terms of the variety of expression and the unique qualities of each participant. Thus, the goal here is to point out some general characteristics which relate to the question of arts, politics, and the national community. As shall be demonstrated, the salient artistic trends were characterized by two common themes. First, artists consistently looked to the West for aesthetic inspiration, with France serving as the ultimate source of role models. Secondly, in spite of emulation of Western styles and a general modernizing impulse (i.e., a desire to discover new modes of expression, and the explicit rejection of old modes), Hungarian Modernists tended to rely on the Hungarian peasantry and countryside for inspiration. This was the case for many of the leading composers, painters, and architects of the period. It suggests that

controlled education above the basic level, it was unable to force largely rural minority populations to learn Magyar.

Hungarian cultural modernism, although a transgressive and experimental phenomenon, expressed a desire for continuity with the past. That this continuity would be based upon Hungarian land and blood in turn suggests a nationalistic impulse, although it was one which would subvert many elements of the established national idea. This implies a tension in the artistic and literary scene of *fin-de-siècle* Budapest, especially given the critical and adversarial relationship between many of its leading lights and mainstream traditionalist national opinion.

One of the paradigmatic figures of the Budapest *fin-de-siècle* was Béla Bartók. This is partially because he created music which could transcend linguistic boundaries, making him more famous than his colleague, Endre Ady. Also, more importantly, his work more than anyone else's expressed the tension between Modernity and continuity in art. As Judit Frigyesi argues, Bartók's project was to produce a new musical idiom capable of producing high art, which was nonetheless based on peasant musical traditions. This was done in order to base his art music with an autochthonous musical substance which had a closer relationship with nature than the existing musical idiom, which was supposedly exhausted of expressive potential.⁴⁹ In order to do so, he went on ethnographic trips with his colleague Zoltán Kodály, creating a library of peasant songs, whose tones and structures he would use in his compositions.

Bartók was criticized by his contemporaries, who claimed he simply borrowed peasant melodies and used them in a typical Western composition. These criticisms came especially from the Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg, whose work reveals the disparities between the modernist movements of the two cultures. Without getting

⁴⁹ Frigyesi, 119-167.

too much into musicological detail, Schoenberg's twelve-tone serial method was far more deconstructive than Bartók's strategy, and produced music which was more shocking. Bartók's aesthetic experimentations thus show an increased desire for continuity with the past, and a more organic rather than mathematic relationship with nature. This trend was carried out in other media of expression.

For example, the painter's group "A Nyolcák" ("The Eight") expressed a desire for continuity. On the one hand, they explicitly followed French trends in post-Impressionistic painting. Two of Dezső Czigány's paintings from 1910 display this characteristic strikingly. One of them, *Burial of a Child*, employs the compositional and tonal style of Paul Gauguin, while his *Still-Life with Apples and Oranges* quite clearly follows in the footsteps of Paul Cézanne:



Dezső Czigány: *Burial of a Child* (1910)



Still-Life with Apples and Oranges (1910s)

In *Burial of a Child* the compositional flattening and vivid use of color evoke Gauguin. Though the tonal range is certainly more earthy, this is understandable; after all, Gauguin went to Tahiti, while Czigány went to the Hungarian countryside. Besides the obvious similarity in subject matter, Czigány's still-life follows Cézanne's explorations of the picture frame and perspective. The subject matter itself is less important than the

attempt to create spaces and volumes on a two-dimensional plane. The two paintings thus demonstrate an essential trend in the Hungarian arts scene; while there was generally a lag of a decade or two, Hungarian artists were enthusiastic in their embrace of Western art trends.

On the other hand, they felt that it was only possible to pursue their aesthetic explorations outside of the city, withdrawing from Budapest to the countryside.⁵⁰ Like Bartók, they sought inspiration from nature and simple lifestyles. In other words, they chose not to respond to the specific problems of modern life in their modernist art. They apparently did not feel that the substance of modern society could inspire true art. Hanák himself mentions The Eight in his discussion of “avant-garde” art in turn-of-the-century Budapest, in which he describes the relationship as a “synthesis” of new artistic approaches to a “pure source” of subject matter.⁵¹ It may be true that Hungarian artists found a solution to the task of creating authentic modern art through Hanák’s “cultural synthesis.” But the nearly universal phenomenon of using folkish and “archaic” elements in modern art suggests a tension between the imperatives of national interests and the process of modernization, here construed as an embrace of the West. That is, there is different relationship to modernity than that of Schorske and Le Rider’s Vienna. Rather than a critical response, the response is ambivalent.

⁵⁰ Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban Experience: Fin-de-Siècle Budapest*, 216.

⁵¹ Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop*, 87.

The Foundation of Nyugat and Cultural Conflict

Hanák defines the period 1906-1908 as a major turning point in the Hungarian arts scene, when there was a general shift towards “Modernism” and Western trends. The two major events in this period are the publication of Endre Ady’s *Uj Versek* (New Poems) in 1906 and the founding of *Nyugat* in 1908.⁵² We should thus see the advent of *Nyugat* not only as a product of Hungarian modernism, but as an essential producer of it. Oszkár Jászi, a member of the Budapest progressive scene himself, said in 1914 that “the future historian will study Ady if he is seeking to understand the great spiritual crisis of twentieth-century Hungary.”⁵³ Mario Fenyő’s *Literature and Political Change* more or less equivocates the First *Nyugat* Generation with the wave of progressivism which culminated in the post-War revolutions. Thus, although the journal was outside of the establishment, many scholars and witnesses agree that its writers offered insights into the national situation, and into the relationship between arts and politics. As shall be demonstrated, the *Nyugat* writers combined an enthusiasm for Western trends and modernization with deep ambivalence about their applicability to the Hungarian context.

It should be noted that the first issue of *Nyugat* in fact “hit the stands” on December 28, 1907, although 1908 is almost universally given as the year of founding because it was a “January 1908” issue.⁵⁴ The founding editors were Ignotus (born Hugo Veiglesberg), Ernő Osvát, and Miksa Fenyő. Its first issue contained pieces by Ady, Kosztolányi, and Géza Csáth--later on the journal would publish writings by Babits, Juhász, Béla Balázs, and Árpád Tóth. These writers would later prove to be the defining

⁵² Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop*, 86.

⁵³ Fenyő, 9.

⁵⁴ Fenyő, 35.

literary group of the period, and one of the most renowned groups in Hungarian literary history.

The motivation behind the foundation of *Nyugat* was to foster modern, especially French-inspired literature in Hungary.⁵⁵ As Mary Gluck puts it, “The members of the Nyugat movement challenged the anachronistic ideals of a state-supported national classicism in the name of *l’art pour l’art* and complete aesthetic freedom for the artist.”⁵⁶ In addition, there was a competitive aspect to the creation of *Nyugat*. At least, there was a desire to prove, both to the West and the Hungarian establishment, that “good literature” was possible in Hungary. Ignotus clearly had something to prove when he wrote in 1912, “We know that it is possible to make literature, meaning good literature, the foundation of a publishing house in Hungary, and it might not even be bad business!”⁵⁷ There are two sides to this quote. Firstly, Ignotus believes that “good literature” means modern literature, and that Hungarian writers are capable of producing producing literature that is *both* authentically modern and Hungarian. Secondly, he believes that a public exists for modern Hungarian literature, making the journal a profitable venture. However, his insistence belies the “mixed successes” experienced by the company in the early years of existence.⁵⁸ It is clearly a defensive statement, which suggests doubts about the viability of the project.

Possibly these doubts were raised not only by financial difficulties, but also by the vociferously negative reaction against the *Nyugat* by the literary and political establishment. This was to be expected, given the iconoclastic nature of many of the

⁵⁵ Fenyő, 30.

⁵⁶ Gluck, “The Artist as Primitive,” 158.

⁵⁷ Fenyő, 54.

⁵⁸ Fenyő, 54.

central figures of the group, and was caused by a number of factors. One was that, although the journal was theoretically a purely literary affair at first, it dealt with politics from the start. The *Nyugat* writers were of course highly critical of contemporary Hungarian society, which made them enemies of establishment culture. Babits wrote of his nationalist critics that “They began to regard me as unpatriotic, which I was proud of, considering its horrendously wild, base mouthpieces.”⁵⁹ Babits made his reputation as “unpatriotic” by publishing poems such as the 1914 anti-war “Fiatal katona” [Young Soldier], which laments that a soldier will never know if his side triumphs, for he “must die.”⁶⁰ Later on during the war, he wrote a poem where he declared “I will sing no paean to victory,/ the rough-shod iron tread of trampling triumph/ is paltry to me/ as the deadly mill of the tyrant.”⁶¹ This outright opposition to the chauvinistic impulses which led to the war both made him the enemy of the establishment and prefigured the coming rejection of those responsible for the war by large segments of the Hungarian population--as evidenced by the assassination of István Tisza in the beginning of the 1918 revolution.

This critical stance was tempered with a strong patriotism held by many members of the *Nyugat* group. In fact, social critique and patriotism were inseparable for writers like Ady, who wrote, “I am very strongly Hungarian, it is true, though naturally I pursue this characteristic of mine with ruthless criticism.”⁶² In spite of his constant attacks on Hungarian society and his participation in a supposedly “cosmopolitan”

⁵⁹ Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop*, 84.

⁶⁰ Fenyő, 71.

⁶¹ Mihály Babits, “Before Easter (1916),” trans Peter Zollman, in *In Quest of the ‘Miracle Stag’: The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996), 531.

⁶² Endre Ady, “A Confession Concerning Patriotism,” in *The Explosive Country: a Selection of Articles and Studies, 1898-1916*, trans. G.F. Cushing (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1977), 277.

literary endeavor, Ady's poetry abounds with images of primordial "Hungarianness." In one poem, he writes, "If you should see on Magyar mead/ a bloody stallion flecked with foam,/ cut loose his lariat, for he is/ a soul-- a somber Magyar soul."⁶³ Firstly, his verses create a continuity between the nomadic past of the Magyar tribes and the national present. It uses the image of the proud barbarian, here exemplified by the horse, in order to emphasize that the Hungarian people are *primordially* free. Second, the elegiac tone acknowledges the "tethers" holding the Hungarian nation back and preventing them from fulfilling their natural potential. It is undeniable, yet rarely acknowledged, that these are elements of ethnic nationalist discourses which are associated with conservative movements. Ady, however, is not engaging in ethnic nationalism; in fact he is subverting it in the name of progress. This topic is discussed further in the third chapter--the important point here is that his modernizing, supposedly cosmopolitan literature is infused with a primordial sense of connection with the Hungarian people.

Ady, like many others in the First *Nyugat* Generation, came from a provincial background to a city that was ambivalently moving toward modernity. He moved to a capital city that was ambivalently modernizing. In spite of his and other *Nyugat* writer's explicit endorsement of Western, modernist trends, it is fair to posit that the generation was limited in its ability to fully embrace styles like decadence or symbolism, which implied total withdrawal from political subjects. This takes nothing away from their achievement, as any transposition of an artistic style requires modification in order to accommodate local traditions and concerns. But to say that the *Nyugat* writer's project was a "synthesis" of Western modernity with Hungarian tradition, and an unprecedented

⁶³ Endre Ady, "The Tethered Souls," trans. Anton N. Nyerges, *In Quest of the 'Miracle Stag': The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996), 403.

triumph at that, makes more sense in the sphere of literary history, which looks back and judges literature on its inherent “value.” If one focuses on the intersection of culture and politics, it is clear that the *Nyugat* writers were engaged in a difficult cultural battle. They struggled with obstacles creative choice (i.e., the difficulty of writing modernist literature in the Hungarian context), a public that was only partially open to their work, and most of all the guardians of establishment culture. The most prominent members of the political elite engaged in this cultural warfare; István Tisza himself helped found the *Magyar Figyelő*, which was envisioned as a conservative counterpoint to *Nyugat*. The aesthetic and the political were thus inseparable. While the *Nyugat* writers would eventually become accepted as the best writers of the period, to say that *fin-de-siècle* Budapest was simply a friendly environment for artistic experimentation only captures half of the picture.⁶⁴ As Oszkár Jászi observed the wreckage of the Habsburg state from America, he said “few keen observers realized that there was something distinctly pathological in the splendor because this hyperintellectualism and hyperaestheticism of the few thousands was confronted by the unculture and intellectual destitution of the vast majority.”⁶⁵

At the most basic level, the *Nyugat* writers were challenged by critics over the merit of their writing. Dezső Szabó, who began writing for *Nyugat* during the war but later became famous for his anti-semitism, once summed up criticism of the *Nyugat* style of writing. One of the main areas of attack was the writers’ freedom with respect to

⁶⁴ This was a long and variegated process which cannot be covered here, although it began as early as the post-revolutionary reestablishment of elite control in 1919-1921.

⁶⁵ Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), 325-326.

language.⁶⁶ That this claim was connected with claims that truly Hungarian literature should use the language of nineteenth-century poets like Petőfi and Arany, and that the journal itself was a front for nefarious Jewish interests, reveals that the criticism had an ethnic-conservative component as well.⁶⁷ Language, one of the essential signifiers of national identity, had been a politicized subject for a long time. Already in 1872, a journal called *Magyar Nyelvőr* (Hungarian Language-Guard) had been founded in order to combat *nyelvújítás*, the process by which the language was “adulterated” by foreign words and influences.⁶⁸ János Horváth, described as the “mildest of the conservative critics” by Fenyő, claimed that the journal was an “organ of the educated Jews” and asserted that many of the *Nyugat* writers were simply incapable of writing in good prose.⁶⁹ The irony here is that Sándor Petőfi, one of the heroes of the conservative critics, was in fact criticized in his time for his prosaic, folksy, direct language.⁷⁰

Transgression was also a major topic in the cultural battle between the *Nyugat* writers and the establishment. The writers often dealt with erotic themes, as well as other topics unacceptable to polite society. *Magyar Kultura*, a conservative cultural journal (note the contrast in journal titles), openly called *Nyugat* pornographic.⁷¹ Endre Ady, for one, was totally unfazed by such criticisms. In an article for the *Pesti Napló*, published in October 1910, he addresses a scandal involving an English publishing house that has been punished for publishing supposedly pornographic literature. Ady

⁶⁶ Fenyő, 121.

⁶⁷ Fenyő, 121.

⁶⁸ L.G. Czigány, “Hungarianness: The Origin of a Pseudo-Linguistic Concept,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 52, no. 128 (July 1974): 334.

⁶⁹ Fenyő, 125-126.

⁷⁰ G.F. Cushing, “The Irreverence of Petőfi,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 52, no. 127 (April 1974): 174.

⁷¹ Fenyő, 124.

vociferously attacks the “Puritanical” morality which caused the scandal, concluding that Hungarians should “rejoice if so-called pornographic literature at least breaks us slowly of the habit of lying.”⁷² The article is a condemnation of bourgeois morality; the British courts are hypocrites as they “ardently desire to restrain their contemporaries and descendants from the sins they themselves commit.”⁷³ They thus openly flouted current social conventions, an attitude which extended to many of their lifestyles.

One especially illuminating example of the transgressive impulses among *Nyugat* writers was Géza Csáth (the pen name of József Brenner). Although he worked primarily as a doctor, he was also a published writer--with an essay on Opera (“Ejszakai eszetetizálás”) in the first issue of *Nyugat*. He was the cousin Kosztolányi, who informs us that he was a playwright, poet, short story writer and essayist.⁷⁴ He was also an inveterate womanizer (Arthur Phillips calls him “an unredeemed bastard”⁷⁵) and eventual victim of the ravages of morphine addiction. His diary was recently translated, and provides a vivid picture of an early twentieth-century Hungarian bohemian. Obviously, the diary was not meant for publication, and thus cannot be used to illuminate the debate surrounding literature in the period. Also, Csáth was of secondary importance in the literary scene. But his life does illustrate the kinds of lifestyle choices which opened up to the adventurous artists of the *Nyugat* generation--choices which were totally out of the mainstream.

⁷² Endre Ady, “The Crime of the Firm of Heywood,” in *The Explosive Country: a Selection of Articles and Studies, 1898-1916*, trans. G.F. Cushing (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1977), 248.

⁷³ Ady, “The Crime of the Firm of Heywood,” 246.

⁷⁴ Dezső Kosztolányi, “On the Illness and Death of Géza Csáth,” in Géza Csáth, *The Diary of Géza Csáth*, trans. Peter Reich (Budapest: Angelusz & Gold, 2000), 164.

⁷⁵ Arthur Phillips, “Introduction,” in Géza Csáth, *The Diary of Géza Csáth* (Budapest: Angelusz & Gold, 2000), 11.

Often the diary reads as a chronicle of romantic conquests, many of which border on rape. His misogyny is on display throughout. The language is often euphemistic, but the overall tone comes off as blunt, even to contemporary readers: “and there, on the examination table, I attacked, standing up. As much as she was able, she lifted her chalice to serve me better... her entire ugly being went through a peculiar transformation which excited and fascinated me.”⁷⁶ Soon after that affair he “penetrated” a young virgin in his office “*sans* condom” after she had just refused his advances, claiming that she “only protested out of propriety.”⁷⁷ These are two of the less graphic episodes, although they illustrate Csáth’s disregard for conventional morality well enough.

There was also the matter of his drug addiction, which further demonstrates the transgressive lifestyle choices of some *Nyugat* writers. He injected morphine for the first time in 1908, after learning that he had symptoms of tuberculosis.⁷⁸ His 1909 short story *Opium* “brilliantly promotes the Romantic transgressive ideal lurking in aggressive drug use.”⁷⁹ His diary, which covers the period 1912-1913, displays his struggles with addiction and attempts to quit. He chronicles his habit, using increasing doses over time. All the same, he desires to quit: in the entry of January 9, 1913, he gives himself a list of priorities. Along with “New morning coat” and “Coitus every other day,” he lists “Detoxification. (Habituation to one dose per day, no matter the amount of suffering.)”⁸⁰ Csáth had clearly moved on from his earlier endorsement of drug use. And of course, Kosztolányi bemoans his friends addiction in his essay on Csáth’s eventual death by

⁷⁶ Csáth, 55.

⁷⁷ Csáth, 57.

⁷⁸ Csáth, 176.

⁷⁹ Phillips, 17.

⁸⁰ Csáth, 125.

suicide.⁸¹ But not at any point does Kosztolányi condemn Csáth in moral terms. In spite of both Csáth and Kosztolányi's eventual revulsion at the effects of morphine, neither seemed to mind the transgressive aspect of Csáth's choice. It is not surprising that the drug destroyed Csáth, and that he recognized the fact. What is interesting is the acceptance among *Nyugat* writers (even non-users like Kosztolányi) of transgressive lifestyles.

In terms of transgressive lifestyles, it was Ady who was paradigmatic, as he was in so many ways. Frigyesi alleges that the "reminiscences of his contemporaries fill thick books" with tales of his excess.⁸² She alleges that his image was poetically exaggerated, though she musters no evidence to support her claim. This implies that she is engaging in apologetics where none are necessary; Ady indeed did lead a transgressive lifestyle, which was inseparable from his poetry and politics. One "reminiscence" discussing his decadence comes from Gyula Krúdy, writing in 1925. The changed political climate, as well as Krúdy's personal attitudes, probably informed the negative portrait of Ady in the piece. But the description of his alcohol consumption is most likely accurate, as when he describes their night at a dank tavern which Ady favors: "At Kovács's tavern the length of the stay or the quantities consumed made no difference: Ady's coterie had a running tab here, like an account at some financial institution where a large amount has been deposited."⁸³

⁸¹ Kosztolányi, "On the Illness and Death of Géza Csáth," 161-172.

⁸² Frigyesi, 176.

⁸³ Gyula Krúdy, "My Adventures with the Poet on the Crooked Sidewalks," in *Krúdy's Chronicles: Turn-of-the-Century Hungary in Gyula Krúdy's Journalism*, trans. John Bátky (Budapest: CEU Press, 2000), 101.

Unlike Frigyesi, most scholars confirm that Ady was transgressive in his habits, mainly in the fields of alcohol consumption and love. For example, he carried on an affair with a married woman (“Léda”) for many years, then married a much younger woman, which Joseph Remenyi described as an expression of his “opposition to the interests of the Hungarian ruling class” as much as a personal decision.⁸⁴ Also, Remenyi notes that “With a cursing madness he at times turned to sensuality and alcohol.”⁸⁵ A poem of his, entitled “The Kinsman of Death,” exemplifies the decadent thematic trends in much of his work: “I am a kindred spirit to Death,/ I cherish love in tired decay.”⁸⁶ That he would embrace transgression and decadence on the one hand seems to suggest the artist’s secession from society elaborated by Schorske. At the same time, it implies an engaged attack on the morality of “the ruling classes,” as Remenyi puts it. In addition, there is a religious/moral sentiment that imbues all of Ady’s work, so it is impossible to simply describe his transgression in isolation. His hedonistic and ethical impulses were united into his poetic personality, which was engaged in a quest for new aesthetic and social possibilities. The way in which Ady embodied this contradiction is illustrated by one couplet in “On New Waters,” when he says, “You bards of faded grey will not inspire me,/ let tavern-stench or Holy Spirit fire me.”⁸⁷

Whether it came from hedonistic decadence or divine revelation, Ady’s task of renewal

⁸⁴ Joseph Remenyi, “Endre Ady, Hungary’s Apocalyptic Poet (1877-1919),” *Slavonic and East European Review. American Series* 3, no. 1 (May 1944): 91.

⁸⁵ Remenyi, 94.

⁸⁶ Endre Ady, “The Kinsman of Death,” trans. Peter Zollman, in *In Quest of the ‘Miracle Stag’: The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis, 1996), 491.

⁸⁷ Endre Ady, “On New Waters,” trans. Anton N. Nyerges, in *In Quest of the ‘Miracle Stag’: The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis, 1996), 490.

and rejuvenation was aimed squarely at dismantling the established aesthetic, cultural, social, and political standards of his time.

Hungarian society and culture was thus characterized by ambivalence, ambiguity, and contradiction with respect to social modernization and cultural modernism. A restricted political system was influenced by the unique position of the Hungarian nationalist movement, which had only partially achieved the goals of 1848. Elitist forces, especially from the gentry and higher aristocracy, jealously guarded their traditional prerogatives. Those artists who attempted to renew the Hungarian cultural scene through the use of western artistic trends were prevented from engaging in a fully cosmopolitan project due to their “embeddedness” in a collective Hungarian identity.⁸⁸ They thus turned to folkish sources for inspiration, indicating a merely partial “secession” from society that characterized the artistic movements that inspired them. The *Nyugat* writers produced, and participated in, this cultural scene. Their work was certainly transgressive and modern, causing an outcry from the traditional establishment, but their constant political engagement suggests that the ambivalently modernizing environment within which they worked had conditioned their use of western trends. This ambivalence characterized the “local dialect” of modernism that arose in turn-of-the-century Hungary.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Gluck, “The Modernist as Primitive,” 150. She is discussing Hanák’s thesis.

⁸⁹ Gluck, “The Modernist as Primitive,” 150.

Chapter 2: Capital and Province, Art and Nation

The debate over language and literary merit mattered because language and culture expressed the essence of the national community. The connection to politics was implicit, but important enough to attract serious attention. In order to draw a closer connection between culture and politics, one may turn to the role of artists and places of creativity within a country. The debate over Budapest and its status within the Hungarian nation concerned national literature's function in society, and the artist's relationship to the larger community. The city was a locus of intellectual and creative activity--whether one embraced or rejected Budapest reflected one's attitude with respect to those activities. The countryside which surrounded Budapest and other urban creative centers (such as Nagyvarád) in turn represented the essence of the Hungarian nation, which writers were supposed to convey. In discussing the various opinions on urbanity and provinciality, this section attempts to unravel the problem of an urban group of westernizing writers struggling to renew a national literary scene which was so connected to the countryside.

Unsurprisingly, traditional conservatives held the capital in disdain, asserting that it was an immoral and unhealthy place. Less expectedly, many writers in the first Nyugat generation agreed with the description. Although they had moved to capital and embraced a metropolitan lifestyle, they too saw the city as dangerous, filthy, and dominated by commercialism.⁹⁰ Where the traditionalists and Nyugat writers diverge was their description of the provincial countryside. While conservatives--especially

⁹⁰ Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban Experience: Fin-de-Siècle Budapest*, 217.

landowning aristocrats and provincial gentry--portrayed the countryside as the “real” Hungary, *Nyugat* writers like Ady brutally criticized Hungarian provincial life.

This section argues that, in fact, it was the differing attitudes about Hungarian provincial life that revealed the logic behind the debate on city and countryside in Hungary. For the downwardly mobile conservative gentry, preference for the countryside revealed a deep distrust of modernization. The attitude of the progressive *Nyugat* writers was more complicated. Endre Ady at least seems to have internalized Western Orientalist notions of backwardness and applied them to his home country. Depictions of Hungary and Hungarians as “eastern” was obviously a common trope of art across the political spectrum, given the Asiatic origins of the ancient Magyars. But Ady uses Orientalist themes to critique Hungarian society, rather than praise its heroic origins. The use of such critiques gave coherence to his demands for westernization of Hungarian society. In this sense, an application of the idea of internalized Orientalism can elucidate the familiar label of “critical patriotism” given to the early *Nyugat* writers. In Ady’s identity as a man from a provincial East, yearning for Western civilization embodied his vision for a Hungary which was rooted in its origins yet moving toward modernity.

Budapest and the Urban Critique

The traditional view of the city was that it was a “spoiler of innocence and decency,” where good people were exposed to manifold dangers.⁹¹ These included vice, health hazards, and the spiritual danger of materialism. What distinguished the

⁹¹ Marianna Birnbaum, “Budapest in the Literature of the Fin-de-Siècle,” in *Hungary and European Civilization*, ed. György Ránki (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989), 334.

traditionalists from the modernists, who seem to have largely agreed with this view, is that the traditionalists emphasized the ethnic “otherness” of the city. Budapest had been a largely German-speaking city, until nationalization in the course of the nineteenth century lead to the predominance of Hungarian.⁹² But Budapest retained its image of foreignness, in large part due to the predominance of Jews in finance and other commercial endeavors. While the downwardly mobile gentry had taken up many middle class occupations, they still associated capitalism and bourgeois lifestyles with Jews.⁹³ The moral critique of the city thus took on an ethnic tinge: the countryside was not only the setting for wholesome lifestyles, but this wholesomeness was associated with ethnic purity.⁹⁴

It is curious that the Hungarian modernists would fail to fully embrace their metropolitan home in their art, when they had so clearly done so in their lifestyles. The cultural core of Budapest was made up largely of Jews from the city and Hungarians from the countryside. Once again, Ady is paradigmatic, having come from an impoverished noble family of Calvinist faith from Eastern Hungary (now Romania). Once reaching the city to pursue their artistic careers, they formed a loose network of groups, including artists, journalists, and political thinkers. They met in coffee houses and held exhibitions. It was in every way an urban phenomenon. Gyula Krúdy’s essay about carousing with Ady describes the way in which the *Nyugat* generation formed a loose urban network. The coffee houses and pubs served as nerve centers for the cultural

⁹² See Robert Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest* (Chicago: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), for an in-depth discussion of these changes.

⁹³ Fenyő, 24.

⁹⁴ Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban Experience: Fin-de-Siècle Budapest*, 212.

scene.⁹⁵ “Journalists are arriving from nearby all-night cafés, with the latest news scribbled on their shirt cuffs. News flash from from the Café Helvetia: Dr. M., the well-known encyclopedia editor, has just eloped with one of that café’s lady habitueés.”⁹⁶ In addition to financial matters--it is simply impossible to sustain an cultural environment without patrons, who were generally educated, bourgeois city-dwellers⁹⁷--it was this kind of interaction that made large cities like Budapest sites of creative fermentation.

And yet, most scholars agree that the *fin-de-siècle* literature of Budapest lacks urban themes, which makes it similar to painting, which was dominated by the anti-urban Nagybánya school.⁹⁸ While Fenyő claims that the literature of *Nyugat* was fundamentally cosmopolitan or the “literature of Budapest,” actual depictions of the city itself are conspicuously absent.⁹⁹ Marianna Birnbaum sums up the scholarly consensus when she says that in *fin-de-siècle* literature “Budapest is rarely mentioned, and when it is, the capital’s image conforms to the provincial stereotype of the ‘wicked city.’”¹⁰⁰ That is, they largely *agreed* with the conservative view. One *Nyugat* writer, Akos Dutka, even said that the “city was made up of alcohol, gold, and epidemics.”¹⁰¹ This characterization lists three central aspects of the conservative urban critique--that it is a site of vice, base greed, and an unhealthy place to live. Those who covered the city in

⁹⁵ Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop*, xix.

⁹⁶ Krúdy, 96.

⁹⁷ Fenyő, 40-52. This chapter gives a detailed explanation of the “financial context” within which *Nyugat* operated.

⁹⁸ Eva Forgács, “Avant-Garde and Conservatism in the Budapest Art World: 1910-1932,” in *Budapest and New York: Studies in Metropolitan Transformation: 1870-1930*, ed. Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1994), 322. This school included The Eight, which was discussed in the previous chapter.

⁹⁹ Fenyő, 121.

¹⁰⁰ Birnbaum, 338.

¹⁰¹ Birnbaum, 339.

more depth generally came from outside the *Nyugat* circle and had more variegated views. For example, Ferenc Molnár's *The Boys of Pál Street* in a "warmly familiar" way, while acknowledging an "awareness that Budapest is the big city of a basically provincial country."¹⁰² For the avant-garde and socialist Lajos Kassák, Budapest was "not modern enough."¹⁰³ In concluding, Birnbaum says that in fact the positive associations of the Budapest *fin-de-siècle* are all in fact retrospective and nostalgic, not reflecting the real views of Budapest's modern artists.¹⁰⁴

Árpád Tóth's impressionistic "Dawn on the Boulevard" provides some insight into the *Nyugat* writers' attitudes about cities. The city itself is unidentified but the imagery suggests a large, industrial metropolis. As the sun rises, "sleepy sub-caretakers crept by the doors/ Of tenements sweeping at dusty floors/ Of cobbled streets like grim dwarves."¹⁰⁵ Industrial drudgery has dehumanized the inhabitants of the city. In the middle of the poem, he offers some hope that the rising sun will bring life to the urbanity: "The street stood amazed. A starved acacia drank/ The precious sunlight as if intoxicated."¹⁰⁶ But in the end, the machinery of modern industrial capitalism awakes, indifferent to the magnificence of the sun, and the mysteries of the natural world: "A melancholy factory hooter blew,/ A tram creaked round a rusted metal bend:/ Day came, the machine of reason drew/ Up and no one noticed how the sun blew/ Kisses of gold at

¹⁰² Miklós Lackó, "The Role of Budapest in Hungarian Literature: 1890-1935" in *Budapest and New York: Studies in Metropolitan Transformation: 1870-1930*, ed. Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1994), 356-357.

¹⁰³ Forgács, 319.

¹⁰⁴ Birnbaum, 340.

¹⁰⁵ Árpád Tóth, "Dawn on the Boulevard," trans. George Szirtes, in *In Quest of the 'Miracle Stag': The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996) 604.

¹⁰⁶ Tóth, 604.

a passing shopgirl's hand."¹⁰⁷ The tone is calm, and lacks the vociferousness of conservative attacks on the city. But Tóth evokes the image of the city as an unnatural entity which has severed man's connection to the rhythms of nature.

Nonetheless, Endre Ady's writings on Paris reveal that at least some modern artists from Hungary were fully appreciative of the modern city's creative influence. Ady displays a deep affection for the city--he always experiences it as an outsider, and yet he feels that this status enhances his emotional connection to Paris: "None but I can love, can understand and feel in all your magnificence."¹⁰⁸ Later in the same essay, he imagines a Parisian girl talking about him, referring to the Hungarians as "barbarians from the east."¹⁰⁹ He is thus an intruder, who must appreciate the city's splendor as a visitor. To visit Paris, the capital of Europe, is a personal revelation: "Through you I was able to catch sight of my soul. And beautiful it was, and how beautiful it might have been--planted elsewhere."¹¹⁰ The statement illustrates many common themes in Ady's dealings with setting and art. One is that, as always, Ady experiences Paris as an extension of his own psyche--he does not analyze the differences between French and Hungarian society, instead poetically illustrating the impact of Paris on his soul. Secondly, the quote illustrates the dilemma of the modern Hungarian artist, who is not fully at home in his home country but cannot fully be himself anywhere else. His response to Paris is thus revelatory and tragic.

¹⁰⁷ Tóth, 604

¹⁰⁸ Endre Ady, "Letter From Paris," in *The Explosive Country: A Selection of Articles and Studies, 1898-1916*, trans. G.F. Cushing (Budapest: Corvinus Press, 1977), 44.

¹⁰⁹ Ady, "Letter From Paris," 46.

¹¹⁰ Ady, "Letter From Paris," 47.

Elsewhere, Ady makes more explicit the civilizational differences between Paris and his home country. In his essay, "The Statue of Life," he discusses the public's dislike for their public statues:

"Paris and Budapest have one thing in common: they both detest their public statues. Nevertheless the fortunate Parisians can find ten or a dozen Lots in the Sodom and Gomorrah of the statues they have in their riches. We can hardly find a single one at home."¹¹¹

Paris is thus portrayed as superior in cultural terms to Budapest. This is not a surprising evaluation at all, as hardly anyone would have denied Paris its preeminence in European culture. It is rather the negative feelings for Budapest that are noteworthy. Ady here reveals that it is not urbanity as such, but Budapest's relative backwardness that causes his disdain.

The Countryside: Authenticity and Orientalism

Different views of the Hungarian countryside offer a counterpoint to the urban discourse. It seems that both traditionalists and modernists saw the city as a decadent and dangerous place; furthermore, they both set the city against the countryside, which supposedly represented the "true" essence of the Hungarian nation. Thus, the view of the countryside reveals the logic behind the dichotomy of city/province. Interestingly, both sides preferred to view the countryside as static and "behind" the city in temporal terms. This is a recognizably Orientalist analysis, and suggests that Hungarians had internalized Western critiques of Central European society.

The idea of Orientalism comes from Edward Said, originally a scholar of British literature. He argued that Westerners essentialized the "Orient," here meaning the

¹¹¹ Endre Ady, "The Statue of Life," in *The Explosive Country: A Selection of Articles and Studies, 1898-1916*, trans. G.F. Cushing (Budapest: Corvinus Press, 1977), 51.

Middle East or Islamic world, as a static, uncivilized “other” against which Europeans could define themselves¹¹². This would justify both their feelings of cultural superiority and their material domination of the region. Later, scholars further elaborated on the theory to argue that elites in less modern areas, especially in the Eastern, multinational empires, adopted some aspects of the discourse. Notable examples have been Maria Todorova’s discussion of Russian Orientalism¹¹³, and Ussama Makdisi’s essay on Ottoman Orientalism. Makdisi begins his article by saying that in “an age of Western-dominated modernity, every nation creates its own Orient.”¹¹⁴ He argues that Ottoman political elites created an Orient out of their own Arab periphery to legitimize their rule, both to their own subjects and to their European economic and military rivals. Eastern Orientalisms thus display a dual orientation: insecurity with respect to the West, which manifests either as defensiveness or self-criticism, and the creation of an internal Orient, a site of barbarism which establishes the actor’s cultural affinity with the West. While the conservative view of the countryside was more Romantic than Orientalist, that of the *Nyugat* writers (especially Ady) displayed the same kind of logic and critique. This in turn reveals the artistic implications of the urban/rural debate--while conservatives thought that a national art should reflect folkish tradition and ethnic authenticity, the *Nyugat* writers thought that artists should act as a vanguard, leading the nation into modernity. This is the most important way in which they modified the already existing “east-versus-west” debate in the Hungarian national and literary discourses.

¹¹² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 5.

¹¹³ Maria Todorova, “Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul? A Contribution to the Debate Between Nathaniel Knight and Adeeb Khalid,” *Kritika* 1, no. 4 (2000): 717-727.

¹¹⁴ Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002): 768-773.

In spite of Budapest's impressive growth after an imperial metropole, Hungarian society was still very much agrarian in the years before World War I. Le Rider notes in his book that in 1910 69% of those employed worked in agriculture.¹¹⁵ It was still not so agrarian and backward, however; Molnár points out that Hungary was in the middle of the European spectrum in terms of agricultural employment, even rating "above" Italy.¹¹⁶ The constant portrayal of Hungary as a totally conservative, semi-feudal society should thus be treated partially as a cultural construct.

Conservatives and traditionalists embraced the image of the unchanging countryside as a Romantic refuge from the social and political threats of modernization. As Frigyesi notes, the gentry in the later nineteenth century took to portraying themselves as the only legitimate representatives of the "folk," or as bearers of ethnic authenticity.¹¹⁷ This was a response to the above-mentioned devaluation of the social and economic status in the course of the century. In this sense, it is the traditionalist side of the debate which can be better explained using a "Schorskean" analysis. That is, the anxieties and stresses associated with modernization deeply affected the way a certain class of people understood the world and their place in it; and this in turn informed their views on the proper role and characteristics of art. For the threatened gentry, this meant an embrace of folklorism in art--whether that meant gypsy music or Romantic poetry celebrating Hungarian country life.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Le Rider, 19.

¹¹⁶ Molnár, 218.

¹¹⁷ Frigyesi, 53.

¹¹⁸ Frigyesi, 53. She emphasizes that the focus was on superficial ethnographic elements.

For Endre Ady, the countryside was a site of barbarism and a target for his criticisms of Hungary's backwardness. In one essay, he describes a festival which marks the occasion of an election; while it is a time of extraordinary social mixing, he takes it as an opportunity to note the uncritical nationalism of both the provincial gentry and the peasantry: "If anyone has ever seen a tipsy Hungarian crowd of peasants sprinkled with gentry, as mixed as they could possibly be, he has seen the biggest accumulation of self-respect in the whole wide world."¹¹⁹ Ady's political writings abound with denunciations of the aristocratic and clerical structures that dominate Hungarian provincial life. (It is noteworthy that even today many scholars describe the socio-political situation in the pre-WWI Hungarian countryside as "feudal," even though that term is totally anachronistic. Although structures of power were largely traditional and conservative, the term is out of place and serves to portray Hungary as both static and "behind" the West in temporal terms--these are essential characteristics of Orientalist discourses.) He also often laments the primitiveness of Hungarian sensibilities, although it is usually clear that he blames Hungary's lack of sophistication on the political subjugation of the masses.

Elsewhere, Ady engages in some reductive nationalist description; this was certainly not an unusual practice in the early twentieth century, but his description of the Hungarian national character is telling: "The Hungarian psyche is slower on the uptake and more sluggish than the Slav, and it has still managed to retain from its erstwhile wanderings in the East something of the Turkish 'kief,' which is worse than the Slavic

¹¹⁹ Endre Ady, "The Hungarian Pimodan," in *The Explosive Country: A Selection of Articles and Studies, 1898-1916*, trans. G.F. Cushing (Budapest: Corvinus Press, 1977), 169.

'kief.'¹²⁰ Ady thus Orientalizes the Hungarians, by associating them with the Ottoman heritage. He is not struggling to justify political rule, as was the case with Ottoman Orientalism, but rather sets up the dichotomy in order to give his criticisms coherence. And the idea of Hungarians as an "eastern" nation was certainly not new. *Nyugat* represented a project of embracing Western Modernity in arts and politics. Ady thus portrayed his own country as Oriental in order to justify his goal of "Occidentalizing" Hungarian society.

His poem, "The Magyar Fallow," gives artistic expression to his rural critique. He essentially describes the Hungarian countryside as a dusty, sleepy backwater, which is stifling in its passivity. He asks, "Hey, skyward groping seedy weeds,/ are there no flowers here?"¹²¹ Nature has lost its allure and creative potential; here there is only ugliness and stillness. "Silence. I am dragged down and roofed/ and lulled in burdock and in mallow."¹²² The land, supposedly the wellspring for national art, is in fact an obstacle to the poet. The image of a society as a "fallow" field highlights Ady's use of passivity and temporal distinction, which creates a coherent counterpoint to the modernizing, progressive ideal of the *Nyugat* writers.

Novels written by members of the *Nyugat* generation also contain some critiques of Hungarian provincial life, focusing on the characteristics of small towns, rather than the land itself. Here the "Asiatic" imagery from Ady is absent, and the writers are far less radical in their criticisms. Margit Kaffka, for example, wrote a novel titled *Colours and*

¹²⁰ Endre Ady, "Spiritual Elephantiasis," in *The Explosive Country: A Selection of Articles and Studies, 1898-1916*, trans. G.F. Cushing (Budapest: Corvinus Press, 1977), 202.

¹²¹ Endre Ady, "The Magyar Fallow," trans. Anton N. Nyerges, in *In Quest of the 'Miracle Stag': The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996), 482.

¹²² Ady, "The Magyar Fallow," 482.

Years which focused on the lives of a few generations of women living in a small provincial town, presumably based on her own experiences. The novel is a coming-of-age story, and there is a constant sense that as the young subject of the novel (it is written from her point of view) matures, she is stifled by the social limitations of provincial life, especially on a young woman. But the critique is mostly gentle. In one episode, she receives a glamorous dress from Pest, which is itself an event, and wears it to a ball. She enjoys herself but knows that observers think she is being provocative--the only thing keeping the judgments unvoiced is the presence of several male relatives prepared to fight a duel for her honor.¹²³ The novel is filled with the kind of name-dropping and status-comparison reminiscent of *Pride and Prejudice* (though of course Kaffka's style is fully from the twentieth century), and Kaffka subtly mocks gentry pretentiousness at points.¹²⁴

Kosztolányi's *Skylark*, published in 1924 but set in 1899, contains similar critiques of provincial lives, especially their pretenses at achieving cosmopolitan sophistication. For example, there is an episode where a large group of individuals from Sárszeg, the setting of the novel, gathers for the arrival of a train from Budapest, for no particular reason:

“Meeting this train was a favourite pastime of the Sárszeg intelligentsia, whether they were expecting someone or not. They simply came to observe the passengers and, for a few short moments, to immerse themselves in the alluring glamour of metropolitan life.”¹²⁵

¹²³ Margit Kaffka, *Colours and Years*, trans. George F. Cushing (Budapest: Corvina, 1999), 48.

¹²⁴ Kaffka, 42.

¹²⁵ Dezső Kosztolányi, *Skylark*, trans. Richard Aczel (Budapest: CEU Press, 1996), 188.

Their pretense is quickly deflated by the look on a metropolitan passenger's face as she peers out of her window during the short stop: "What a godforsaken hole, her expression seemed to suggest."¹²⁶ In its humor, the episode mirrors Kaffka's gentle attacks on provincial life in Hungary. While the towns in *Skylark* and *Colours and Years* may be pleasant enough places to live, they are incapable of providing the culture and excitement of the metropole.

The sophisticated, urban writers of the *Nyugat* movement thus had criticisms for social, political, and cultural environment of the Hungarian countryside and provincial towns--though the criticism was often mild or even affectionate, which is perhaps a reflection of the writers' provincial backgrounds. They may not have fully embraced their new identity as denizens of Budapest, at least in their literature, but their attitude with respect to non-urban Hungarian society suggests a perspective of urban superiority. Endre Ady's attitude especially indicates an attempt to embed his criticism of Hungarian society within a discourse of Hungary's "eastern" backwardness. He does not draw any simplistic dichotomies. Nonetheless, his obvious love for Paris, coupled with his subversion of traditional Hungary-as-Asiatic tropes, suggests an implicit critique which employs familiarly Orientalist themes. In other words, he embodied the identity crisis which faced the *Nyugat* writers, who were both proud and ashamed of the city's qualities.¹²⁷ He furthermore embodied the westward-moving, yet eastern-rooted Hungarian position that was both an attempt to resolve the ambivalence of identity in

¹²⁶ Kosztolányi, *Skylark*, 189.

¹²⁷ Gábor Gyáni, "Budapest Beyond Good and Evil" *The Hungarian Quarterly* 46, no. 180 (Winter 2005):76-77.

fin-de-siècle Budapest, and a justification for their leading role in politics and culture.¹²⁸

This is evident in “Spiritual Elephantiasis;” after condemning the Hungarian “psyche” and placing it in an eastern context, he asserts that “Literature naturally takes its stand in the front rank of this sacred and curious revolution,” whose goal is to solve the “problems which the more fortunate west has long solved.”¹²⁹ The *Nyugat* writers’ urban sophistication was a factor in their self-justification as prophets of progressive politics. That is, their role as urban aesthetic innovators in the national capital justified their role within the nation as progressive social critics. Their participation in the wider progressive political movement, and its nationalist context, is the subject of the next chapter.

¹²⁸ Gluck, “The Modernist as Primitive,” 156.

¹²⁹ Ady, “Spiritual Elephantiasis,” 202-203.

Chapter 3: The National Community and Progressivism

Having already discussed the debate over the qualities of national literature, and the relationship between centers of creativity and the wider nation, this final section discusses the question of the national community as such. Of course, the political engagement of the *Nyugat* writers has already been demonstrated--they were critics of the status quo, which made them enemies of the establishment. This section deals specifically with their attempts to define the Hungarian nation; their writings on the topic convey a much more progressive vision of the nation than that of traditional elites.

This topic of discussion requires the inclusion of some new characters. The *Nyugat* writers were part of a wider cultural scene, as was shown in the first chapter. There was a progressive political segment of Budapest's intellectual boom as well, with groups of scholars and scientists analyzing society from a critical standpoint. Oszkár Jászi, a sociologist who became leader of the Bourgeois Radical Party¹³⁰, is the most important figure here. Another participant of interest is György Lukács, who later became one of the most famous Marxist philosophers of the century--in this period, he was not yet a Marxist but rather a radical cultural critic, and leader of the Sunday Circle of like-minded thinkers. Finally, there was the figure of Sándor Ferenczi, disciple of Freud and leader of a group of psychoanalysts. These groups had variegated relationships with one another which were complex, and cannot be comprehensively detailed with the sources at hand. Suffice it to say that these sometimes overlapping

¹³⁰ While the party was miniscule, it was a part of the ruling coalition in the first stage of the post-War revolutionary period, along with Károlyi's National Committee and the Social Democrats.

groups, along with the *Nyugat* writers, defined the intellectual environment of progressive Budapest. This chapter attempts to outline some of their political positions, especially as it related to conceptions of the national community.

This chapter shall first provide a short history of the Hungarian national idea, through the eyes of Jászi, the most incisive social critic of the period. It inspects the development of the national community, from the *natio hungaricum* of the *ancien regime* to the national consolidation of the Dualist period, and finally describes some of the challenges Hungarian conservative nationalism. Later the *Nyugat* group and other writers are discussed. I shall demonstrate that both radical sociologists and modernist writers used the national discourse and symbolism in order to give their progressive political goals coherence and force. Here, the attitude of the *Nyugat* generation was less ambivalent; they were engaged in a direct contest to define the nation, and attempted to attribute ownership of national qualities to the masses yearning for emancipation. They were one part of an intellectual generation which pressed for democratization, a process already underway in other parts of Europe.

Oszkár Jászi: Radical Social Scientist

There can be no doubt that Jászi and his circle of fellow sociologists should not be considered as a separate phenomenon from the First *Nyugat* Generation. When Jászi first read Ady's poetry, he said, "This is our poet, lads!"¹³¹ While he identified with the cultural and political attitude of the young writers from the provinces, he himself was from an urban, secularized Jewish background. His colleagues were similar. He worked for a journal entitled *Husztodik Század* (Twentieth Century) with other social scientists.

¹³¹ Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Corvina, 1999) 73.

As the title suggests, they strove to bring Hungarian society into progressive modernity, just as the *Nyugat* writers westernized Hungarian literature. Their followers, however, represented an even smaller portion of Hungarian society--they were a very small group of urban intellectuals, half of them Jewish.¹³²

The *Huszadik Század* scientists thus faced the same challenges as the *Nyugat* writers. They struggled with an uninterested public, strident opposition from establishment conservatives, and doubts about the viability of their thoroughly Western project in supposedly infertile Hungarian soil. An older social scientist, Ermine Vámbéry said to Jászi, ““Young fellow, this will come to no good. Proclaiming Western Social Policies in Hungary is like trying to open a pork butcher’s shop in Mecca.””¹³³ Once again an Oriental comparison is employed, although the significance is ambiguous here. Vámbéry’s point was that the Hungarian political regime would reject any attempt at democratization, an attitude which reveals the deep pessimism of progressive Hungarians, who saw only stagnation and no progress in their country at the turn of the century.

A lengthy analysis of Jászi’s social and historical thought reveals the logic behind his critique of Hungarian society, and his use of the national discourse’s emancipatory elements--a tactic also present in the period’s literature. The main text under discussion shall be his post-mortem of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, titled *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*. It was written in the twenties, when Jászi was already in exile in America, and the intellectual-cultural florescence of the *fin-de-siècle* had gone the way

¹³² Molnár, 239.

¹³³ György Litván, *A Twentieth-Century Prophet: Oscar Jászi, 1875-1957* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006), 19.

of the multi-national Empire. Thus, the present discussion should not be seen as a reconstruction of intellectual activity undertaken during the period in question. The political situation was far more conservative, and the nationalist discourse had been redefined by independence and the loss of territory due to the Treaty of Trianon.¹³⁴ As an exile, Jászi was not participating in a Hungarian intellectual environment.

Nonetheless, the text is a wonderful resource in that it illustrates Jászi's position of democratizing liberalism, as refracted through a national prism, albeit at a later point in his intellectual development than the period in question. Thus, this section provides a radical-progressive view of the history of the Hungarian national idea. This conception exemplifies the political assertions of *fin-de-siècle* progressives, who supported a variety of modernizing projects, from democratizing liberalism to revolutionary socialism.

Though the book is now 80 years old, Jászi at times provides striking insight which prefigures contemporary understandings of the region's history. For example, he criticizes Hungarian nationalist claims of antiquity and continuity in terms that mirror those of Ernest Gellner:

“there can be no doubt that the modern national idea, the effort toward the unification of the masses akin in language and culture and toward economic and administrative unity, was absent from Hungarian history until the end of the eighteenth century as completely as from the history of other Central European peoples.”¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Mária Ormos, “The Early Interwar Years, 1921-1938,” in *A History of Hungary*, ed. Peter F. Sugar (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 323-329. Ormos details conservative consolidation of power through electoral manipulation, the “regression of intellectual activities,” and changes in foreign policy in these pages. Regarding the last point, Hungary's position was totally changed; rather than ruling a country with significant minorities, Hungarian politicians now had several neighboring nation-states with large Hungarian minorities in their borders. The situation eventually led to an alliance with the National Socialists of Germany in the name of revanchism.

¹³⁵ Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 298.

He is aware, in other words, that nationalism is a relatively novel intellectual construction. Moreover, he understands that nationalist projects are often used by specific groups as a tactic of political assertion; that is, nationalism movements have less to do with reconciling ethno-cultural and political realities, and more to do with embedding self-interest in a legitimating discourse.

Perhaps Jászi had access to this insight because of the particulars of Hungarian history. Before 1848, the Hungarian nation, or *Natio Hungaricum*, was a political concept which described those Hungarians who held constitutional rights. These were the nobles, who held traditional rights (such as tax exemptions) and were the only participants in the political process.¹³⁶ As Jászi notes, this was a group of 136,000 in a country of eleven million individuals.¹³⁷ He continues to say that “in such social surroundings the national idea could manifest itself at best as a solidarity with the interests of the nobility... or as a hatred of the serfs, especially those of a foreign tongue.”¹³⁸ He focuses on class-based conflict and solidarity in order to prove his point. To be sure, he was not a materialist historian; he once called Marxism a “Messianic creed,” surely a grave insult coming from a social scientist.¹³⁹ He notes that in early modern Transylvania, almost all conflict set Magyar and Romanian peasants against

¹³⁶ Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 298.

¹³⁷ Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 299.

¹³⁸ Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 299.

¹³⁹ Oscar Jászi, “Dismembered Hungary and Peace in Central Europe,” *Foreign Affairs* 2, No. 2 (December 1923): 274. In addition to his intellectual attitude, Jászi had personal reasons to denounce Marxism--the progressive government in which he served during the post-war revolution was replaced by a Communist-Socialist coalition, led by a Bolshevik, Béla Kun. Mihály Károlyi, the provisional President of the newly independent state, had been sympathetic to socialism, which caused Jászi to leave the government. He addresses the failure of the revolution in this text.

Hungarian nobles, Székely small nobles, and Saxon town-dwellers.¹⁴⁰ In part because the Dózsa rebellion of 1514 had instilled such a strong sense of horizontal allegiance and vertical antipathy, these social and political fault lines persevered into the nineteenth century. Despite the best efforts of Count István Széchenyi and the Reform Generation,¹⁴¹ Hungarian nationalism was used by the nobility for two purposes, resisting Habsburg power and “diverting the economic and social dissatisfaction of the masses in another direction.”¹⁴² Regardless of the validity of his historical assertions--the style is polemical, and the text contains few footnotes, although he includes an extensive bibliography and uses tables and statistics frequently--he views the national idea as a tool which can serve certain social interests.

Later, Jászi discusses nationalism in the Dualist era. As mentioned earlier, the newly-formed Hungarian Parliament passed a nationalities law in 1868.¹⁴³ His explanation for the widespread non-compliance with the law squarely places the blame with the subsequent political generation, which was dominated by Kálmán Tisza and the gentry.¹⁴⁴ The political tendencies of this regime have already been discussed in the first chapter. The dominant conception of the national community was defined by the self-interest of the narrow political elite, which was expressed as anti-Austrian fulminations and chauvinism with respect to the national minorities--in least in the view of Jászi, who differentiated little among those who were to his right on the political spectrum.

¹⁴⁰ Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 300.

¹⁴¹ The term “Second Reform Generation” is sometimes used in reference to the subjects of this thesis.

¹⁴² Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 302.

¹⁴³ Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 315.

¹⁴⁴ Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 318.

Jászi's solution to the national problem was the most prominent progressive alternative to the establishment stance. (His Austrian counterparts were the Social Democrats Karl Renner and Otto Bauer.) This was evidenced by his brief and futile elevation to the position of nationalities minister in the 1918 revolutionary government of Mihály Károlyi. His solution was similar to that of Renner and Bauer in that it called for a maximum of cultural-linguistic autonomy within a economically and militarily coherent multi-national state or "superstate." Specifically, Jászi supported the idea of a "federation of autonomous Danubian states," which would have ensured cultural rights for the nationalities while maintaining the economic and military security of the large multi-national empire.¹⁴⁵ He published this plan in a 1918 book, *The Future of the Monarchy, the Failure of Dualism and the Danubian United States*. He called for a "pentarchy" consisting of the "historical nations" as an alternative to the Dualist system.¹⁴⁶ Towards the end of his book on the dissolution of the Empire, he blames the rigidity of the Dualist system for the exacerbation of national conflicts, and eventually the fall of the empire.¹⁴⁷ In spite of his skepticism regarding the idea of nationalism, he was nonetheless aware that the minority nationalities' demands for collective rights should have been accepted.

This is because the national idea was a communal identity which could raise political consciousness and bring about social progress. In his final suggestions regarding an improvement of the post-war situation, he links the freedom of individuals from centralizing states with guarantees of cultural rights for the newly-created

¹⁴⁵ Lee Congdon, 177.

¹⁴⁶ Nándor Dreisziger, "Oscar Jászi: Prophet and Danubian Federalist," *Hungarian Quarterly* 47, no. 181 (Spring 2006). The book itself is not translated.

¹⁴⁷ Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 451.

minorities.¹⁴⁸ His idea was to maximize local control of government--thus individual civil rights and collective cultural rights would be protected from the power of the bureaucratic state, which in the Hungarian case had been socially elitist and chauvinistic toward the nationalities. The scale of a community of political participation, in his mind, should be small. The economy and military affairs, on the other hand, should be handled collectively, on a large scale and without reference to national issues. And it seems that he would have preferred for the citizens' main loyalty to be directed at the supranational state, for in the beginning of the book he wishes that "the Habsburgs would have surpassed the narrow limits of the nation state and would have proved to the world that it is possible to replace the consciousness of national unity by a consciousness of a state community."¹⁴⁹

Other Progressive Circles in Fin-de-Siècle Budapest

There were two other important intellectual groups operating in Budapest in the early twentieth century, György Lukács' Sunday Circle of radical aesthetes and Sándor Ferenczi's psychoanalysts. Both leading figures were from Jewish backgrounds, as was Jászi, so the relatively Jewish character of the progressive intelligentsia outside of the cultural sphere should be acknowledged here.¹⁵⁰ While they engaged in disparate fields, the three figures typify the responses available to modernity. As detailed above, Jászi became a radical progressive. Lukács tried, and failed, to extricate himself from the

¹⁴⁸ Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 455.

¹⁴⁹ Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop*, 173. here marvels that "traditional social strata" were so important to Budapest's cultural scene, in contrast to the Jewish, bourgeois character of Viennese modernity. In other areas of intellectual activity, however, Budapest apparently was closer to the Viennese case.

political sphere. Ferenczi engaged in the quintessential intellectual endeavor of his time, which entailed the discovery of the “psychological man” and the internalization of political issues. While the available sources do not indicate much about their thoughts on the national community, they both asserted progressive political positions. As will be demonstrated, however, their attitudes towards a liberal project of democratization were rather ambivalent.

György Lukács had a long and storied career, which cannot be summarized here. Before his conversion to Marxism after World War I, he was a cultural critic who led the “Sunday Circle” of radical aesthetes, until the group fragmented during the war.¹⁵¹ He was very much a part of the cultural scene in Budapest at the time—for example he recalls being “close friends” with the painter Czigány, and published “an attack on Gauguin” in the *Huszadik Század*, although he had “no personal relationships with the leading members of either *Huszadik Század* or *Nyugat*.”¹⁵² Because his career as a Marxist philosopher overshadows his pre-War intellectual production, little from the period has been translated. However, a number of secondary sources deal with his early career, putting his aesthetic thought in the social and cultural context of *fin-de-siècle* Budapest. Gluck describes Lukács’ central breakthrough as the result of a crisis he experienced in 1910-11, “after which he definitively rejected Impressionism and aestheticism,” which matched his colleagues’ “longings for unity, affirmation, inner truthfulness, and simplicity, after what they perceived as the excessively negative

¹⁵¹ See Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation, 1900-1919* for a detailed narrative of the group.

¹⁵² Georg Lukács, *Record of a Life: An Autobiographical Sketch*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1983) 41.

cerebral, and individualistic temper of the late nineteenth century.”¹⁵³ She describes Lukács’ group in Schorskean terms, as a rebellion of post-liberal sons against the liberalism of their fathers.¹⁵⁴ Gyáni disagrees, arguing that the available sources suggest a deep ambivalence about the extent of their “secession” from society and liberalism.¹⁵⁵

It was Lukács’ admiration for the poetry of Ady that best showed his tendencies of political engagement. His esteem for the man is still evident in his “autobiography,” which was composed from taped interviews in the late sixties and early seventies, just before his death. He recalls being taken to meet Ady by Czigány at a restaurant, but failing to converse with the poet as he was surrounded by friends. But asserts that he was not disappointed, saying, “My lifelong attitude to important men has been that of Goethe’s Philine: ‘And if I love you, what concern is that of yours?’”¹⁵⁶ The reverence with which he viewed the poet implied an understanding that Ady in some sense embodied the cultural situation in Hungary, and furthermore implied some sense of participation in the politically engaged sector of Hungarian literature. Lukács’s biographer sums up the two thinkers’ intellectual relationship by saying that “Lukács gave intellectual and conceptual rigor to Ady’s lyrical assaults on an ‘Asiatic’ nation, assaults inquisitive concerning things Western.”¹⁵⁷ Lukács thus associated his intellectual project with that Ady’s poetry, just as Jászi did. In the case of Lukács, however, it forced him out of an ambivalent withdrawal from politics. Gyáni quotes Júlia

¹⁵³ Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation*, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation*, 76-105.

¹⁵⁵ Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban Experience*, 219-220.

¹⁵⁶ Lukács, 40.

¹⁵⁷ Arpad Kadarkay, *Georg Lukács: Life, Thought, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 64.

Bendl at length to show how Ady's poetry caused Lukács to at least partially engage in the politically liberal or progressive world of *fin-de-siècle* Budapest:

“In a number of ways he profoundly despised this world which according to him was threadbare, provincial, gentrified and liberal. The only exception he made was Ady. It should also be noted that for Lukács ‘liberal’ was a dirty word. Yet, he could not, nor did he want to remain outside this world.”¹⁵⁸

Ady thus was able to reconcile in Lukács the fragmented and contradictory impulses which caused his disgust for bourgeois society, which would manifest itself throughout his life in various forms, from aesthetic withdrawal to revolutionary Marxism.

Sándor Ferenczi features less prominently in the literature on *fin-de-siècle* Budapest, and is usually discussed in the context of Jewish Budapest modernity. For example, Frigyesi mentions him in along with other important Jewish intellectuals of the time, and says that he “introduced many of Freud’s ideas to the Hungarian public.”¹⁵⁹ This is a simplification, as he played a far more important role than that--he was the primary figure in a group of Hungarian psychoanalysts, and a close disciple and friend to Freud. The correspondence between the two, which spans a period of 25 years, attests to that fact. The correspondence has been translated and published by Harvard University Press, and fills three volumes, the first of which covers the period 1908-1914. Most of it concerns theoretical questions about their burgeoning field, as well as the administrative tasks of organizing psychoanalytic societies, but the conversation occasionally turns to politics.

One letter in particular illustrates Ferenczi's ambivalent progressivism. It should be noted beforehand that he was offered a professorship by the Soviet government in

¹⁵⁸ Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban Experience: Fin-de-Siècle Budapest*, 220.

¹⁵⁹ Frigyesi, 81.

1919, so surely he had a progressive reputation.¹⁶⁰ In the letter, from February 1910, Ferenczi speculates on the possibilities offered by a society informed by the new science of psychoanalysis:

“Once society has gone beyond the infantile, then hitherto completely unimagined possibilities for social and political life are opened up. Just think what it would mean if one *could tell everyone the truth*, one’s father, teacher, neighbor, and even the king. All fabricated, imposed authority would go to the devil--what is *rightful* would remain natural... a more purposeful, less costly, and in every respect more economical reconciliation of individual interests with the common good would ensue.”¹⁶¹

Ferenczi seems to be psychoanalyzing society. The transgressive spaces opened up by the field are extended to a social level, and the generational conflict central to Freudian thought becomes an anti-authority rebellion.¹⁶² Like Jászai, Ferenczi argues that society and morality should be re-calibrated to reflect scientific progress, and furthermore that a just sociopolitical order solves the conflict in liberalism between individual rights and the common good. Of course, their different scientific fields lead to divergent political orientations.

The extent of their divergence is revealed later in the letter, when Ferenczi says, “I do not think the ψ α [psychoanalytic] worldview leads to democratic egalitarianism; the *intellectual elite of humanity* should maintain its hegemony; I believe Plato desired

¹⁶⁰ Tibor Hajdú and Zsuzsa L. Nagy, “Revolution, Counterrevolution, Consolidation,” in *A History of Hungary*, ed. Peter F. Sugar (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 305.

¹⁶¹ Sándor Ferenczi, *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi: Volume I, 1908-1914*, trans. Peter T. Hoffer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 130. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶² In Schorske’s analysis, political conflicts are internalized. Here, they are externalized in turn.

something similar.”¹⁶³ This is a surprising sentiment, and because it is fragmentary it is hard to ascertain specifically what he means by it. Apparently, he has either retained some semblance of liberal elitism, or he has something altogether new in mind.

Whether his position was direct result of his scientific research is also unclear; it is merely apparent that his idea of a more just society was not an egalitarian one. Also, the national issue does not arise--perhaps it is understandable, given Ferenczi's background, and the international character of the psychoanalytic movement. Ferenczi thus offers a counterpoint to those Budapest progressives who marshaled the idea of the national community in the name of democratization of society.

Nationalism and Progressivism in Nyugat Poetry

The portion of *Nyugat* poetry which alluded to political issues was often explicitly progressive. To be sure, much of it dealt with the kind of psychological self-exploration typical of the symbolists they admired. But when they did approach politics in their art, they did so through a nationalist prism. Like Oszkár Jászi, they attempted to capture the emancipatory elements of nationalist discourse, constructing a narrative in which Hungarianness expressed itself as a yearning for freedom and justice. Again there is a sense of ambivalence, with the “Eastern” qualities of the Hungarian people and their homeland standing in the way of energetic Western progress. Nonetheless, they are consistent in their denial of the gentry's claims of ownership of nationalism, reorienting the national idea around the suppressed masses, and especially the peasantry, which had been exploited by the *Natio Hungaricum* throughout history.

¹⁶³ Ferenczi, 130. Emphasis in original.

Gyula Juhász was among the more explicitly progressive *Nyugat* poets, tending towards socialism in his politics.¹⁶⁴ This was all the more evident during the war, when the workers' movement gained strength due to a radicalization of Hungarian society. In 1918, with the political, social, and military situation verging on chaos, Juhász wrote a poem speculating on the coming fury of the Hungarian nation against its oppressors. Employing familiar imagery of Oriental laziness, but with an added element of revolutionary potential, he wrote, "In Eastern laze the Magyar summer dozes./ What will it be like when the haystacks' mire/ Will catch a spark, putting the world on fire?/ When tired of it hundred lazy warlords/ The Magyar summer plows a storm with warped swords?"¹⁶⁵ The metaphor of a sleepy agrarian countryside (common in Hungarian literature) catching fire, and transforming docile plowshares into retributive swords, unites a traditional "blood and soil" national idea with a radically progressive political agenda. The old elites, once owners of the national idea, have lost their legitimacy due to the ravages of war. They are reduced to "lazy warlords" whose tenuous status will soon come to an end.

The time for revolution would come in the fall of 1918, at the end of the war. The result of the social and political upheavals would not fulfill the *Nyugat* writers' expectations, however. After a short coalition of Károlyi's progressives, Jászi's radicals, and the Socialist Party, an even shorter-lived "Soviet" government took over. This experiment collapsed in the face of an invading Romanian army. Finally a conservative-nationalist, anti-semitic counter-revolutionary government was established which would

¹⁶⁴ Makkai, 553.

¹⁶⁵ Gyula Juhász, "Hungarian Summer [1918]," trans. Adam Makkai, in *In Quest of the 'Miracle Stag': The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996), 555.

last into the final year of World War II. The old elites were able to reassert control after the humiliating territorial concessions and the failure of the revolutionary governments to establish order. They even called the newly independent Hungary a kingdom, though they denied Carl IV his throne. As mentioned above, the political and social situation was totally changed, which conditioned the artistic possibilities open to Hungarian poetry. Juhász's dejection at the situation was evident in a poem called "One for the 'Ancient Gypsy'..." He laments that "within my homeland, I've become a stranger."¹⁶⁶ The failure of progressive politics in Hungary becomes a personal identity crisis for the poet. The project of linking national character to political emancipation was an illusion, and now Juhász no longer feels a sense of belonging.

Some *Nyugat* poets were more or less indifferent to the dramas of nationalism and politics, Kosztolányi being the most prominent example. He even described himself as a *homo aestheticus* to contrast himself with Ady, whom he called *homo moralis*¹⁶⁷. In one poem, he shrugs, "I am Magyar, because I write in Magyar/ and muse on Magyar words like milk or bread."¹⁶⁸ His interest in the Hungarian language is limited to its capabilities for wordplay. He also had doubts about politics. He wrote a group of three satires of certain social types--the first two are about upper-class figures, and Kosztolányi ridicules them enough to prove that he is no conservative. The last, however, is called "The Revolutionary." He reserves special scorn for this type, calling

¹⁶⁶ Gyula Juhász, "One for the 'Ancient Gypsy'...", trans. Adam Makkai, in *In Quest of the 'Miracle Stag': The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996), 557.

¹⁶⁷ Makkai, 565.

¹⁶⁸ Dezső Kosztolányi, "I am Magyar, Because I Write in Magyar," trans. Peter Zollman, in *In Quest of the 'Miracle Stag': The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996) 581.

him a hypocrite whose devotion to the betterment of mankind is nothing but a posture, belied by his comfortable lifestyle and mistreatment of his wife.¹⁶⁹ The poem contains no reference to nationality, but it is clear that Kosztolányi is more of the cynical observer than passionate participant.

Again, one must turn to Ady, master of the *Nyugat* circle, for the most incisive treatment of nationalism and progressivism in literature. In his poetry, patriotic sentiment and a progressive, critical impulse are most intimately linked--also, Ady's personal spiritual quest is linked to the "spiritual crisis" of the *fin-de-siecle*, giving vivid life to the "beautiful decay" of late Habsburg society. His poem "A Peacock Takes its Perch, is so illustrative that it is worth quoting at length:

"A peacock takes its perch upon the county hall--
a sign that freedom comes to many folk in thrall..."

Let the proud, frail peacock, whose feathers dazzle the sun,
proclaim that tomorrow here all will be undone.

Tomorrow all will change, be changed at last--new eyes
in new battles will turn with laughter to the skies.

New winds will groan laments in the old Magyar trees,
while await, await new Magyar mysteries.

Either we are all fools, and to a man will die,
Or else this faith of ours will prove it does not lie.

New forges and new fires, new faiths, new holy men,
either you'll come to life, or be nothing again.

Either the ancient hall will fall from the flames' stroke,
or our souls will rot here, bound in their ancient yoke.

Either in Magyar words new meanings will unfold,

¹⁶⁹ Deszö Kosztolányi, "Three Satires: The Revolutionary," trans. Peter Zollman, in *In Quest of the 'Miracle Stag': The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996), 589-591.

or the sadness of Magyar life will linger as of old.”¹⁷⁰

The opening line quotes a traditional folk song.¹⁷¹ The poem is animated by an almost eschatological sense of expectation. Social and spiritual transformation, however, can only be coherently visualized through the symbolism of folk continuity. Ady conceptualizes his own spiritual and political sentiments as part of a national drama which is unfolding throughout history.

To call such literature “cosmopolitan” ignores the symbolism at work. When in “The Song of a Hungarian Jacobin,” he asks, “Will from a thousand sluggish longings/ be born at last one mighty will?” the only cosmopolitan element is his acknowledgment that “Vlachs and Slavs” share the Hungarian predicament.¹⁷² This does not mean that Ady was an ethnic nationalist, and does not detract from his artistic accomplishment. Anti-German and anti-Semitic sentiments are totally absent from Ady’s poetic and journalistic output, separating him from ethnic nationalists. The point is merely that Ady gave meaning and coherence to his social critique through reference to a national discourse. That he constantly questioned whether any emancipatory project would come to fruition on Hungarian soil suggests, once again, the persistence of national stereotypes and ambivalence about Western modernity characteristic of the First *Nyugat* Generation.

¹⁷⁰ Endre Ady, “A Peacock Takes its Perch,” trans. Sir Maurice Bowra, in *In Quest of the ‘Miracle Stag’: The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996), 483.

¹⁷¹ Makkai, 483n.

¹⁷² Endre Ady, “Song of a Hungarian Jacobin,” trans. Sir Maurice Bowra, in *In Quest of the ‘Miracle Stag’: The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996) 498.

The use of nationalist discourse, however, is always in the name of progress. His poem, "The Grandson of György Dózsa," illustrates this point. The poem refers to the leader of a sixteenth-century peasant revolt, and his Transylvanian origins add to Ady's sense of identification with the man. Though Dózsa's noble-status is unclear, Ady also calls him a peasant-noble, which is similar to his own background. The poem speaks to the revolutionary potential of the Hungarian peasantry: "I, the grandson of György Dózsa,/ a sad peasant-noble, must cry out for my people's lot./ Ah, you masters, great landlords, perhaps you would speak/ to my scythe-bearing people--for the summer is hot."¹⁷³ Ady endorses Dózsa--killer of many nobles--as the true representative of the Hungarian people. Written in the middle of his career (in *Az Illés Szekerén*, published in 1908), the poem already displays revolutionary tendencies. He identifies himself with the common people of Hungary, and thus with the political project of democratization.

His journalistic writings confirm this assertion. For example, he identifies the obstacles to democratization as the aristocracy and the Church, foreign elements which have subdued the Magyars' essential freedom-loving ways. He laments that, early on in Hungarian history, "a few hundred aggressive families dominated... [and] nominated themselves Hungary, and in the sacred name of Hungariandom made bargains and wrecked everything for the sake of some small injury to their pocket."¹⁷⁴ The historical assertion is also an attack on the self-interested politics of the Hungarian nobility, which is all the more interesting, given Ady's gentry background. Ady combined a love for

¹⁷³ Endre Ady, "The Grandson of György Dózsa," trans. Sir Maurice Bowra, in *In Quest of the 'Miracle Stag': The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Adam Makkai (Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996) 484.

¹⁷⁴ Endre Ady, "The Explosive Country," in *The Explosive Country: a Selection of Articles and Studies, 1898-1916*, trans G.F. Cushing (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1977), 249.

Hungarianness with a hatred for those who claimed to represent it. Many scholars thus interpret Ady as a prophet, calling on Hungarians to renew their ancient greatness through political and social modernization. Lee Congdon exemplifies the “critical patriotism” understanding of Ady and the *Nyugat* generation when he says that Ady ruthlessly criticized Hungary while celebrating a proud Hungarian past “in order to create in Hungarians a belief in the *possibility* of a new Hungary.”¹⁷⁵

In his 1913 *Szabad Gondolat* (“Free Thought”) article “A Confession Regarding Patriotism,” discussed earlier, he describes himself as someone who considers himself a “representative of his race,” but then asserts, “apart from Oszkár Jászi there can be few people more gentle and affectionate towards the minorities.”¹⁷⁶ Clearly, for him there was no contradiction between ethnic identification and a progressive stance regarding the nationalities issue. In “The Explosive Country,” he says, “If the famous historical class parades history before us, we shall boldly cry out that we do not desire to continue the history of our slavery and penury.”¹⁷⁷ Ady thus deflates the traditional claims of the ruling classes through a moral appeal. He predicted the coming rejection of the existing political order, based on a limited conception of the political community. Of course, this would occur only after the cataclysmic Great War, and would end in failure. More importantly, in his mind he embodied the yearnings of the Hungarian nation, which aimed at westernization and democratization. There was less fragmentation of identity or contradiction in this case; Ady, along with others in his

¹⁷⁵ Congdon, 305.

¹⁷⁶ Ady, “A Confession Regarding Patriotism,” 277-278.

¹⁷⁷ Ady, “The Explosive Country,” 251.

generation, stridently asserted a national idea which would extend and deepen the political and social rights of liberalism.

Conclusion

Though it focused on disparate areas of debate, hopefully this thesis has traced lines of relationships between arts and politics. Firstly, the aesthetic and thematic qualities of a work of art almost always contain reference to the cultural discourse from which they emerge, and thus to the social and political context from which the discourse emerges. This is true even if the art strives for secession and individuality. This in turn makes the aesthetics of art a political question, which is often debated openly. This is particularly true in “small nations” like Hungary, a fact which is exemplified by István Tisza’s direct participation in the cultural debate surrounding *Nyugat*. As has been demonstrated, *Nyugat* literature, while diverse, expressed in part the ambivalence in Hungarian society between westernizing progress and traditionalist authenticity, which was often expressed in terms of Hungary’s eastern roots. *Nyugat* thus fit into a general trend of Hungarian modernism which energetically embraced western artistic trends while drawing on Hungarian “folk” elements for a primordial inspirational substance.

Secondly, the same ambivalence emerged in the image of the city and countryside. The *Nyugat* writers did not adopt an urbane, cosmopolitan identity, clearly retaining some amount of pride in their provincial roots. Without displaying embarrassment for coming from the countryside, the *Nyugat* writers did critique the countryside from a position of urban sophistication. While this criticism of the Hungarian countryside was certainly expected of westernizing artists, their failure to embrace an urban identity once again suggests ambivalence about modernization. Nonetheless, as this area of debate regarded the position of artists and centers of creativity within the

national community, the *Nyugat* writers unambiguously asserted their role as cultural and political leaders, drawing the rest of the country with them into modernity.

This confidence was also present in the final discursive topic, which was the definition of national community and the socio-political order within it. Though they represented various political orientations, the *Nyugat* writers confidently articulated a democratic vision of the national community. It would be more egalitarian, both vertically (in terms of the lower classes) and horizontally (with regard to the minority nationalities). Certainly, some of the best writers in the group, most notably Kosztolányi, were more interested in the aesthetic aspect of modernity. Overall, however, the *Nyugat* writers were very much a part of a general progressive-nationalist tendency which characterized the intellectual currents of *fin-de-siècle* Budapest. The writers were only ambivalent about the prospects of success for such a project--rightly, as it turned out.

It was Endre Ady who best expressed these doubts, just as it was Ady who embodied the contradictions and tensions of Hungarian modernity better than anyone else. If anything this thesis should have shown that this quality, in addition to the aesthetic merit of his work, is the reason Ady is enshrined as the prime literary figure of his age. The contradictions contained within his life and work--sensuality and religiosity; east and west; modernization and continuity; fatalistic pessimism and revolutionary optimism--expressed the crisis facing Hungarian society and the available solutions. His own fragmented identity embodied the ambivalence with which Hungary proceeded into modernity. His poetry was thus not a synthetic solution to the problem of creating Hungarian modernism but the expression of ambiguities relating to the prospects of modernity. That a single poet could capture and reflect the national situation with such

effectiveness is unthinkable in a large country such as America, but Ady's poetry, along with a consensus of secondary literature, affirms that this was the case.

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