

me a much more aware, self-reflexive and flexible instructor.

While it might sound clichéd, I truly can say that my Hungarian students have been the best teachers I could have asked for. Today, nearing the end of my second semester teaching, when I turn that beginning question of *what do you think?* to my classroom, I get a much more lively answer — a change that has as much to do with their hard work and willingness to try new learning styles as my own planning. And, in addition to the more formal, professional lessons I am taking away, the wonderful relationships I have formed with Hungarians have also expanded my thinking and opened my mind, be that the evenings I spent discussing literature with my Pázmány colleagues over wine or the lunches I have shared with the Fulbright Center staff. I feel I am leaving Hungary having made progress with many Hungarian students — and having made much personal progress as a teacher.

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# The Social Context of a Modernist Poet: Endre Ady

Maxwell Staley

*At-Large*  
San Francisco, CA  
[maxstaley@gmail.com](mailto:maxstaley@gmail.com)

Central European University  
Nádor u. 9., 1051 Budapest, Hungary  
[www.ceu.hu](http://www.ceu.hu)  
Adviser: Matthias Riedl

*The article addresses the social milieu from which the poet and journalist Endre Ady emerged. In doing so, it explores the possibility of applying an interpretation to Hungarian Modernism similar to that of Carl Schorkse and later scholars of fin-de-siècle Vienna. The question is whether the shared historical experience of a Hungarian cultural elite can serve as an interpretive starting point for Ady's writing. In order to answer the question, the paper first discusses the preponderance of downwardly mobile provincial gentry and Calvinists in the Hungarian intelligentsia. It then explores the work of Ady, who was from a Calvinist, gentry background himself, arguing that Ady's unique blend of iconoclasm, patriotism, and spirituality may be seen as a result of his social origins.*

## Introduction

Endre Ady, the most influential poet of the pre-WWI period, came from an impoverished Protestant gentry family in the East of Hungary. How, then, can this fact be seen to have affected his journalistic and poetic output, which so polarized

his country? Without a vast array of biographical materials, this is a difficult question to answer. It is interesting, however, that Ady was not alone in coming from the gentry, or from a Protestant background, among his contemporaries in the Hungarian cultural elite. In fact, individuals with this pedigree were rather over-represented in his generation, which emerged in the early twentieth century as a powerful voice condemning the status quo.

It would be interesting, therefore, to investigate the the histories of the various social categories--gentry, Protestant, intelligentsia--from which Ady the individual emerged. To do so, even without finding causal relationships, could provide insights into both Ady's work and the phenomenon of Hungarian modernism as a whole, although the latter obviously involved individuals from many other backgrounds. Also, such a project would be similar to Carl Schorkse's in *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna*, a paradigmatic study of Central European modernism. In fact, it is that work, as well as later responses to Schorkse's thesis, which provide the theoretical framework for the project.

This paper, after a preliminary discussion of the Schorske thesis and its possible ramifications for research on Hungarian modernism, explores the social history of the Hungarian intelligentsia. It discusses the role of the gentry, and especially their predominance in middle-class positions after the Compromise of 1867. It also investigates the role of Protestants in the gentry and intelligentsia, as well as the relatively

marginalized progressive sector of that group. Following that is a discussion of Ady's work, including journalism and poetry. The focus is on his political progressivism, religiosity in his work, as well as his unapologetic (though still left-wing) nationalism. Overall, preliminary research suggests that the enhanced role of the partly Protestant gentry in the Hungarian modernist arts scene (as opposed to the Viennese case, which was dominated by the Jewish bourgeoisie) did affect the manifestation of modernism in Hungarian art. This influence can be seen in Ady's work--not only because he was the leader of his generation of writers, but also because his works combination of progressivism, religiosity, and nationalism may be interpreted as an expression of the social and political makeup of Hungary's intelligentsia.

## 2. Theory: The Schorske Thesis and Beyond

Any work dealing with Central European modernism must at some point deal with the Schorske thesis and its implications. His book, *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna*, is actually a collection of essays discussing the different manifestations of Viennese modernism. It is both a biography of the city itself, and a group biography of the Viennese

liberal bourgeoisie, whose "triumph" in the middle of the nineteenth century (fatefully later than in the French and British cases) quickly gave way to crisis, when the ascendant group found itself surrounded by hostile forces. Their opposition was both social (especially in the form of Social Democracy) and ethnic (both Slavic and German); in essence, the groups which the bourgeoisie wanted to "educate" and turn into good liberals took power before their education was done'. The most shattering result was the rise of Karl Lueger's anti-semitic Christian Social Party, which took power in the capital itself, despite imperial resistance. Schorske argues that the aesthetic phenomenon of Modernism was the Viennese bourgeoisie's response to that crisis.

Perhaps the two most important essays in the volume are the chapters on the Ringstrasse and on Freud. The former portrays the city during the height of bourgeois ascendancy, when the triumphant liberals rebuilt the city in their image--curiously through the use of historicist architecture. As Schorske says, "The practical objectives which redesigning the city might accomplish [i.e. the rationalization of city planning, or bringing the city into capitalist modernity] were firmly subordinated to the symbolic function of representation."<sup>2</sup> The second essay crystallizes the generational revolt that occurred after the liberals'

precipitous fall from power--the sons of the builders of the Ringstrasse rejected political liberalism and turned inwards towards their psyche. Thus Freud's discovery of the ahistorical "psychological man" mirrored the development of arts that explored the subtleties and intensities of psychic states. His idea of oedipal revolt<sup>3</sup> also mirrored the generational revolt against the liberalism manifested in the Ringstrasse<sup>4</sup>. Overall, the book places Viennese culture in a politico-historical context, while giving a psychological interpretation to the individual manifestations of Modernism.

The Schorske thesis was highly influential, not least because of its attractive internal symmetries. It would be tempting to simply try to apply it to the Hungarian context--perhaps the downwardly mobile gentry provided the intelligentsia with whatever insecurities it needed in order to challenge the aesthetic status quo. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the challenges to the Schorske thesis that have arisen in more recent scholarship. Much of this scholarship is collected by Steven Beller in *Rethinking Vienna 1900*. His introduction to the collection describes a number of criticisms, both theoretical and empirical, that have been made against the thesis. For one, he says it is "surprisingly clear that Schorske's idea that Austrian liberalism had 'failed' was far too pessimistic."<sup>5</sup> On the theoretical side,

1 Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna*. New York: Vintage Books, 1981. 117.

2 Schorkse, 26.

3 Schorske, 183.

4 Schorske, 25.

5 Steven Beller, "Introduction," in Steven Beller, ed., *Rethinking*

he challenges Schorske's "ironic dialectic" by pointing out that much of the drive towards modernization came from the state, which was supposedly the opponent of the fin-de-siècle bourgeoisie: "Vienna 1900 becomes thus the beginning of a new century rather than the final crisis of the old, and the relationship between politics and culture a far more positive one" than in the Schorske model<sup>6</sup>. Lastly, Beller suggests that the ideas of the "failure of liberalism" and the inward turn make sense mainly within the smaller context of the Viennese Jewish intellectual elite, although Schorske obviously had more general aspirations in his work<sup>7</sup>. Despite all the criticisms contained in the book, however, all the authors share with Schorske the common project of placing Modernist art in a political and social situation, which is not always typical for cultural or art history, which can often be (and sometimes has the right to be) solipsistic.

Schorske's thesis, as well as the modifications contained in Beller's collection, give some clues for moving forward in a political and social analysis of Hungarian Modernism. In fact, Ilona Sarmany-Parsons' essay on the depiction of women in art, which is contained in the Beller volume, directly deals with the problems of applying the thesis to other centers of Modernism in the region. In the essay she points out that earlier scholars of Czech, Polish and Hungarian modernism have focused too narrowly on their own national context, and have thus overemphasized the French rather

Vienna 1900. New York: Berghahn, 2001. 13.

6 Beller, 14.

7 Beller, 19.

than Austrian influence on their art<sup>8</sup>. Her central point is that depictions of women in Hungarian art were mainly positive and traditional<sup>9</sup>--in sharp contrast to the sexual anxiety revealed by the "demonic" women of decadent art and the connection between "terror and female beauty" in Schorske's interpretation of Gustav Klimt<sup>10</sup>. The implication is that Hungary was too marginal, in both socio-political (the progress of women's rights lagged) and cultural (ignorance of Western trends) terms. Thus, a direct transposition of the Schorske thesis, or of any interpretation of Viennese modernism, is entirely untenable.

Nonetheless, many authors have tried to develop similar studies of Budapest around the turn of the century. Peter Hanak's work is the most prominent example, although his work was mainly comparative<sup>11</sup>. It nonetheless contains important research, such as an examination of Budapest's urban reconstruction project, which followed the Viennese example but had its own implementation. Another example is Judit Frigyesi's *Bela Bartok and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest*, which is, as the title suggests, more of an attempt to put the composer in context than to comprehensively interpret Hungarian Modernism as a historical phenomenon. It is admirable for its reconstruction of the radical intelligentsia in Budapest

8 Ilona Sarmany-Parsons, "The Image of Women in Painting: Cliches and Reality in Austria-Hungary, 1895-1905," in Steven Beller, ed., *Rethinking Vienna 1900*. New York: Berghahn, 2001. 220.

9 Sarmany-Parsons, 228.

10 Schorske, 221.

11 Peter Hanak, *The Garden and the Workshop*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

which produced Bartok, but many of its sections on topics other than music have been seriously questioned. The general reaction has been that, while a gifted musicologist, Frigyesi makes generalized, uncritical, or unsupported assertions about topics such as the political context and the poetry of Ady<sup>12</sup>. Nonetheless, Frigyesi's discussion of organicism and the use of folk culture in modern art is essential to an understanding of the theoretical background of Hungarian Modernism<sup>13</sup>. Still, a comprehensive interpretation of the socio-political situation that produced the movement as a whole is missing--perhaps because the attempt is futile. And yet, in spite of the limitations suggested by earlier research into Central European Modernism, placing Endre Ady's social background in a historical context can be useful. That is, it is important to historicize the meaning of Ady's noble, Calvinist, and progressive identifications, rather than simply looking for signs of them in his poetry. This implies that a social history of the Hungarian intelligentsia is in order.

### 3. The Hungarian Intelligentsia: Gentry, Protestants, Progressives

To be sure, Ady's singularity makes it difficult to reconstruct the social milieu from which he emerged. For example,

12 Mihaly Szedezy and Mihaly Maszak, "Bartok's Place in Cultural History," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, T. 41, Fasc. 4 (2000), pp. 457-465.

13 Judit Frigyesi, *Bela Bartok and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. 30.

simply writing a history of the gentry in the nineteenth and early twentieth century would not be sufficient to explain Ady's background. In short, no analysis of a single "identity" belonging to Ady would do justice to the complexity of his work. Nonetheless, a historical analysis of the Hungarian intelligentsia reveals some interesting connections. In short, the gentry and Protestants were over-represented in both the political and cultural elites of Hungary. While this is perhaps predictable, given the historically superior position of the nobility, what is interesting is that in Hungary the gentry eventually occupied roles in society normally associated with the bourgeoisie. It seems that the relatively unique social structure of Hungary--nearly five percent of the population was noble, comparable only to Poland and Spain<sup>14</sup>--played a role in the formation of the class which would produce Hungarian Modernism. Since the intelligentsia was not an exclusively bourgeois, largely Jewish group, it is natural that artistic Modernists would not express the same kind of anxieties about their political context.

As stated above, the gentry took up many intelligentsia positions normally associated with the upwardly mobile bourgeoisie. Earlier in Hungarian history (i.e. before the revolution of 1848), the entire nobility, including both the landed aristocracy and the less privileged gentry, constituted the entire *Natio Hungaricum*<sup>15</sup>. In Peter's words, the provincial gentry

14 Laszlo Peter, "The Aristocracy, the Gentry and Their Parliamentary Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Hungary," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (Jan., 1992), pp. 77-110. 79.

15 Frigyesi, 51.

formed the “backbone of the nation.”<sup>16</sup> However, after the abolition of official feudal privileges in the 1848 revolution, as well as due to economic trends, a large proportion of the lower nobility found itself in a downwardly mobile trend, and thus began to fill the growing middle ranks of the modernizing society<sup>17</sup>. One such spot was the rapidly expanding state apparatus, and the nobility quickly filled the ranks of the bureaucracy<sup>18</sup>. Meanwhile, the entire nobility more or less rejected commercial endeavors, leaving that sector of society open to the urban minorities in Budapest--so much so that they viewed capitalism as an essentially Jewish concept<sup>19</sup>.

Besides their economic and social roles within Hungarian society, the gentry had a specific cultural and political status as well. As Peter I. Hidas points out, the upper sectors of the untitled nobility, which he calls “gentry” to differentiate them from impoverished nobles, were among the better educated members of society, and were more “susceptible” to Western ideas. Furthermore, this was the segment of the nobility that was most Protestant.<sup>20</sup> Hidas seems to hint that this segment of the nobility was simply closer in mentality to the bourgeoisie

than to the stereotypically extravagant, Catholic upper aristocracy. This does not mean, of course, that the gentry supplied Hungary with its entire intellectual class, and a number of caveats are in order. In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the cosmopolitan city of Budapest still had an “overwhelmingly Jewish and German intelligentsia,” as well as a petty bourgeoisie that was culturally vibrant<sup>21</sup>.

A second caveat is that the gentry certainly did not wholeheartedly embrace the radical artists of Hungarian modernism around the turn of the century--in fact, they were rather more likely to reject it. As Fenyo says, the gentry were far more likely to identify with Istvan Tisza’s conservatism than with radicals such as Oszkar Jaszi or even progressives like Mihaly Karolyi<sup>22</sup>. In fact, Frigyesi alleges that the lower echelons of the nobility, with their nostalgia for their past social preeminence and aggressive defense of their status as the truest members of the nation, represented best the chauvinistic and Romantic tone of conservative Hungarian politics<sup>23</sup>. People like Endre Ady were thus the exception to the rule. Nonetheless, it must be significant that the nobility, which had once constituted the entire political “nation,” now dominated much of the middle sectors of society. Additionally, the fact that many middle-class positions were filled through downward rather than upward mobility surely had an effect on

16 Peter, 77.

17 Mario Fenyo, “Literature and Political Change: Budapest, 1908-1918,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 77, No. 6 (1987), pp. 1-156. 15.

18 Fenyo, 16.

19 Fenyo, 24.

20 Peter I. Hidas, *The Metamorphosis of a Social Class in Hungary During the Reign of Young Franz Joseph*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977. 64

21 Frigyesi, 49.

22 Fenyo, 129.

23 Frigyesi, 52.

the political and cultural environment. Possible implications of these conditions on the work of Modernist artists, and Ady specifically, will be explored below.

It is significantly more difficult to find sources on the role of Protestantism in the Hungarian intelligentsia. There is no English language treatment about Hungarian Protestantism as such, or on Protestant educational tendencies, which seem to have been more rigorous than those of Catholics, as the above reference from Hidas suggests. Nonetheless, it is clear that many of the most important Hungarian figures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came from the Protestant (especially Calvinist, as the Lutheran community was mainly German<sup>24</sup>) minority. In addition to Ady himself, Hungarian Protestants could claim as their own such figures as Lajos Kossuth and Sandor Petöfi. As Joseph Remenyi says, “among the political leaders of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, some of the most resourceful were associated with Protestantism.”<sup>25</sup> And, as Peter points out, Protestantism was predominant in only one group--the lower nobility, especially in the Eastern regions of the country<sup>26</sup>. Given the enhanced role of

the gentry in the middle classes, as well as the apparent intellectual strength of the Protestant minority, it is no wonder that Ady emerged from provincial poverty to become the leading light of Hungarian literature. Determining how his background influenced his work, however, is a thornier, complex question.

The final important aspect of the Hungarian intelligentsia is its role within the Hungarian political scene. As stated above, the gentry represented a rather conservative sector of society--an important fact, considering that the nobility as a whole essentially dominated Hungarian politics right up to the end of World War I--another significant contrast with Austria. A detailed exposition of the Hungarian political situation around the turn of the century is not necessary--suffice it to say that it was conservative and ethnically chauvinist. Frigyesi’s contention that Hungary was “relatively liberal”<sup>27</sup> compared to Germany, Italy, and Austria is baffling--perhaps she used the absence of mass conservative parties in Hungary as the criterion, rather than the extent of the franchise, which was quite limited in Hungary. Not only was the government unrepresentative, but opposition within Parliament was difficult. The only way opposition could function within Parliament was through obstruction--so whenever a seriously contentious issue arose, government business was simply paralyzed<sup>28</sup>. It was in this context, and indeed in response to the

24 see Robert Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest*. Northern University Press, 2005, for a discussion of the ethnic makeup of the various confessions in the Hungarian capital.

25 Joseph Remenyi, “Endre Ady, Hungary’s Apocalyptic Poet (1877-1919),” *Slavonic and East European Review, American Series*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (May, 1944), pp. 84-105. 87.

26 Peter, 95.

27 Frigyesi, 52.

28 Peter, 86-87.



situation, that the radical intelligentsia emerged in urban centers around Hungary.

One of the most famous manifestations of radicalism in early twentieth-century Budapest was the “Sunday Circle” of intellectuals that organized around Gyorgy Lukacs during the war. Lukacs is best known as one of the foremost theorists of Marxism, but he only committed to that orientation towards the end of the war. His pre-Marxist career is the subject of a full-length, English-language monograph by Mary Gluck. She describes the activities of Lukacs and his colleagues as a “cultural rebellion.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the group focused on aesthetic criticism for the most part. Other figures, like Oszkar Jaszi, were working on politics from a radical perspective, but it is Lukacs’ group that has gained more attention over the years, probably due to Lukacs’ later prominence. What is interesting is that Gluck describes the group, with its Modernist yet anti-Positivist orientation, in terms similar to Schorske’s portrayal of their Viennese contemporaries. For example, she has an entire chapter devoted to an analysis of the phenomenon of cultural radicalism as a generational rebellion, with the “post-liberal” sons rejecting the philosophy of their liberal fathers<sup>30</sup>. Finally, she describes the “inward turn” towards aesthetics of the group as a result of a combination of political commitment and social alienation: “Liberal beliefs in Hungary represented the disembodied ideals of

a marginalized and dislocated social group, not realistic alternatives to actual government policy.”<sup>31</sup> Gluck’s analysis makes it seem as though something very similar to the Viennese case was occurring in Budapest.

But the Sunday Circle was mainly a group of urban, bourgeois intellectuals--a group more relevant to the current analysis is the first generation of *Nyugat* writers, of which Ady was the most prominent. It was a literary journal founded in 1908, partially by Ady himself. It is difficult to express the importance of the journal--which means “West” in Hungarian--to Modernist Hungarian literature. Indeed, Fenyo says that *Nyugat* was more or less “identical” with the “artistic revolution” in early-twentieth century Hungary<sup>32</sup>. The writers of *Nyugat* set out not only to challenge existing aesthetic norms and bring Hungarian literature into the twentieth century, but also to rebel against the established political order. Gluck quotes the writer Ignatus as calling the quest of the *Nyugat* writers a “war of freedom... from a political regime which attempts to justify its intrusion into literature with the catchword that it is protecting the inner purity of Hungarian art.”<sup>33</sup> While Ady has been described (and called himself) a decadent<sup>34</sup>, it is clear that the writers of the *Nyugat* were intimately engaged with the realities of Hungarian political life. Fenyo has a telling quote in his monograph: “Aladar Schopflin was to comment:

31 Gluck, 105.

32 Fenyo, 10.

33 Gluck, 113.

34 Fenyo, 30.

29 Mary Gluck, *Georg Lukacs and His Generation: 1900-1919*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985. 10.

30 Gluck, 77.

“Nobody had more to do with the revolution of the Hungarians than Ady, not even those who made it.”<sup>35</sup> Aesthetics and politics were thus fundamentally connected. Frigyesi described the core of the writers’ project as the “search for an art that would express moral essence.”<sup>36</sup> This idea was borne out in the journalism and poetry of Endre Ady.

#### 4. Ady: Criticism, Religiosity, Patriotism

It would be unwise, within the limitations of this essay, to be too intrepid in asserting a causal relationship between Ady’s social context and the content of his literary output. It is enough to suggest that Ady was no cosmopolitan aesthete, rather an intensely spiritual, devoted patriot, and that this seems like a natural response to the political and artistic situation in Hungary, given his background. While participating in a marginalized progressive sector of the Budapest intelligentsia, he nonetheless constantly asserted his own “Hungarianness;” although he constantly criticized the religious authorities, spiritual symbolism imbued his poetry. In Ady’s work there exist intimate connections between his calls for progressive change, his own religiosity, and his patriotism (which occasionally made use of “proto-Magyar” legend). As Lee Congdon says, “Ady’s mission... was to summon his countrymen to national regeneration and to present

them with a vision of the new Hungary.”<sup>37</sup> This regeneration would be both spiritual and political, and it would preserve rather than diminish the Hungarian national character.

The most notable aspect of Endre Ady’s journalism is its consistent progressivism and criticism of the status quo. Ady’s vision of Hungary comes across as altogether negative. For example, in one article on a recent speech by a conservative Hungarian, he marvels, “Is such delicious, reactionary audacity possible today anywhere in Europe outside Russia?”<sup>38</sup> He constantly calls for political change, looking to the West for inspiration--the title of *Nyugat* encapsulates that tendency best. In general, he compares his home country to the West (especially in his articles written in Paris), and finds Hungary backwards. Most interestingly, he constantly berates the ruling classes of Hungary, in spite of his own noble background. Later in the same article, he criticizes the nobility while insisting that they are on the wrong side of history: “The real state of affairs is that not even the thousand-year-old bias, savagery, foreignness and brutality of the Hungarian ruling classes have been able to defraud the Hungarians of Europe and of history.”<sup>39</sup> Complaints about the backwardness of the nobility can also be found in his poetry, particularly in

37 Lee Congdon, “Endre Ady’s Summons to National Regeneration in Hungary, 1900-1919” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Jun., 1974) pp. 302-322. 317.

38 Endre Ady, “The Domain of Magnates and Bishops,” *The Explosive Country: a Selection of Articles and Studies, 1898-1916*. Trans. G.F. Cushing. Budapest: Corvina Press, 1977. 189-193. 189.

39 Ady, 191.

35 Fenyo, 104.

36 Frigyesi, 114.

“Song of the Hungarian Jacobin.” In it, he laments, “How long must we be ruled by blackguards,/ poor, chicken-hearted millions, we?/ How long must the Hungarian people/ like caged and captive starlings be?”<sup>40</sup> This excerpt reveals that, despite his criticisms of the status quo, he believes in Hungary’s ability to rise out of backwardness. Thus his condemnations are not aimed at the Hungarian nation as a whole, but at those who have held it back. Indeed, as the article above shows, he regards such reactionary forces as “foreign.”

A second important characteristic of Ady’s writing, which may have been connected to his Calvinist background, was its religious content. While it is difficult to find explicit references to Ady’s personal religious beliefs in his journalistic writings, it is clear that he was a deeply spiritual individual. His poetry teems with religious symbolism and spiritual fervor. The religious importance of his work was clear to his contemporaries, with Bartok calling his work “prophetic poetry.”<sup>41</sup> Remenyi says that, despite all the sensuousness of his work (and life), “his yearning for God shows a stormy soul in search for peace.”<sup>42</sup> In this sense, the religious aspect of Ady’s poetry is simply a personal spiritual quest, or another aspect of Ady’s famous intensity.

The case is more complex, however, as Ady consistently uses religious symbolism

40 Endre Ady, “Song of a Hungarian Jacobin,” *In Quest of the ‘Miracle Stag’: The Poetry of Hungary*. Trans. Sir Maurice Brown. Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996. 413-414. 414.

41 Frigyesi, 170.

42 Remenyi, 92.

and language throughout his work, even in explicitly political or patriotic works. For example, in “The Magyar Messiahs,” he compares the plight of the Hungarians to the passion of Christ, only without a point: “A thousand times the perish,/ unblest their crucifixion,/ for vain was their affliction,/ oh, vain was their affliction.”<sup>43</sup> Such a religious/nationalistic metaphor was common in the region--especially Poland--but Ady’s point is less to sanctify the nation than to lament the uselessness of the suffering in Hungarian history. Thus, his political iconoclasm and critical patriotism (discussed below) are combined with religious language. On a more optimistic note, Ady often used religious language to animate his poems about hopes for both personal renewal and a progressive future for Hungary, for example in “On New Waters:” “You bards of faded grey will not inspire me,/ let tavern-stench or Holy Spirit fire me.”<sup>44</sup> The juxtaposition is meant somewhat humorously, but the point here is that Ady, in spite of his anti-clericalism, in fact identified spiritual renewal with national rebirth and progressivism.

Remenyi says that, because Ady “was a Calvinist, his deviation from inherited values and from the accepted design of contemporariness was unpleasing, often repugnant to the people to whom he belonged by tradition and upbringing.”<sup>45</sup>

43 Endre Ady, “The Magyar Messiahs,” *In Quest of the ‘Miracle Stag’: The Poetry of Hungary*. Trans. Anton N. Nyerges. Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996. 412.

44 Endre Ady, “On New Waters,” *In Quest of the ‘Miracle Stag’: The Poetry of Hungary*. Trans. Anton N. Nyerges. Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996. 408.

45 Remenyi, 87.

Indeed, Ady was constantly attacked by defenders of mainstream values. Apparently, they missed one of the most essential characteristics of Ady’s corpus, which is its consistent allegiance to the Hungarian people. As we have seen above, his progressive attacks were aimed at “foreign” oppressive elements, while his unorthodox aesthetics and religious language were meant to bring about positive change and “regenerate” the nation. Thus, the last aspect of Ady’s work to be explored here is nationalism--a quality which separates Ady from other aesthetes, decadents, and cosmopolitan Modernists.

Of course, Ady’s nationalism was highly self-reflective and critical, as he flatly states in a confessional article: “I am very strongly Hungarian, it is true, though naturally I pursue this characteristic of mine with ruthless criticism.”<sup>46</sup> His Hungarian identity and patriotism are inseparable from his progressive spirit. Nonetheless, one should not fall for the temptation of assuming that he was a pure progressive, who loved his country only insofar as he wanted to improve it. In fact, Ady consciously used nationalist language in an attempt to fuse ideas about the primitive origins of the Magyar people with Western freedoms and culture. As Congdon says of Ady’s co-optation of “ancient” Magyar songs in the name of his political ideas, “the courage and spirit of the proto-Magyars would invigorate the progressive Western ideas of which

46 Endre Ady, “A Confession Concerning Patriotism” *The Explosive Country: a Selection of Articles and Studies, 1898-1916*. Trans. G.F. Cushing. Budapest: Corvina Press, 1977. 277-279. 277.

he sang.”<sup>47</sup> Whether such a project is at all tenable is up to debate. Still, it does not seem that Ady wanted to justify such an attempt through a coherent intellectual argument. It was enough to produce poetry of symbolic and emotional power. In one poem, he compares the Hungarian soul to that of a wild stallion, an apparent reference to the nomadic origins of the Magyars: “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.”<sup>48</sup> (403) The tone is elegiac, not chauvinistic, and it emphasizes the bonds limiting the Hungarian people--and those bonds are in fact the conservative elements who *are* chauvinistic nationalists. Elsewhere, Ady denies the nobility’s right to exclusive Hungarian identity, saying that “They nominated themselves Hungary,” but that they “wrecked everything” due to their arrogance and greed<sup>49</sup>.

Thus, Ady’s central argument was that the true spirit of the Hungarians lay with the common people, and progressivism was good for the common people--thus, to be progressive was in fact to be a true Hungarian. In addition, he often spoke of both Hungary’s current situation and coming change in religious terms. Ady was a Calvinist of gentry background, participating in the progressive part of an intelligentsia with a large number of

47 Congdon, 309.

48 Endre Ady, “The Tethered Souls” *In Quest of the ‘Miracle Stag’: The Poetry of Hungary*. Trans. Anton N. Nyerges. Chicago: Atlantis-Centaur, 1996. 403.

49 Endre Ady, “The Explosive Country,” *The Explosive Country: a Selection of Articles and Studies, 1898-1916*. Trans. G.F. Cushing. Budapest: Corvina Press, 1977. 248-251. 249.

Protestants, and living in a society where a downwardly mobile nobility occupied many middle-class positions. May we apply a Schorske-like interpretation to this artist and his environment? For one, Ady's Calvinist upbringing surely influenced the religious content of his work, in a way that might have not been the case for someone raised in the mainstream Catholic Church. Secondly, the aesthetic turn of the *Nyugat* writers

bears resemblance to their Viennese counterparts, although Ady's insistent nationalism and use of proto-Magyar myths suggests a less cosmopolitan response to the dual challenges of aesthetic frustration and political marginalization. Demonstrating that this is the result of the intelligentsia's more noble, and less Jewish, makeup would require more research.

# Photographic Journey through Time and Space

Shandor Hassan

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*At-Large*  
Brooklyn, NY  
*hatzelplotz@hotmail.com*

*Mai Manó Ház*  
1065 Budapest, Nagymező u 20.  
*www.maimano.hu*  
Advisor: Orsolya Kőrösi

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*As a photographer in Budapest Hungary I have worked on several projects that reflect my continued interest in the development and transformation of Urban space and the relation to culture, society, architectural space and its histories. Also by looking at the history of Hungarian photography and artistic activities, particularly of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, I have traced roots of my own artistic expression and the influence that art and artists in Hungary (and tangential movements in Europe) have influenced the arts in the United States.*

## Introduction

The time as a Fulbright student/researcher has been focused on the continuation of my photographic and artistic work. The photography and artistic activity that I have done here involve several modalities or approaches to making works, four of which I will present in this writing and talk, all are part of my continued exploration of the making of images and art works with photography as well as instillation and multi-media.