The critic might discover difficulties when trying to define the Hungarian reception of Byron’s poetry. Most of the documents mentioning or analysing Byron or his poetry are more informative about nineteenth-century Hungarian literary criticism than about the English poet himself. Naturally, this is not entirely unexpected since, in the history of his reception, the ‘Byron phenomenon’ marks a totally separate chapter in other nations’ literatures and is not simply about how the works of an English poet were received.

For this reason it would not be instructive simply to list all nineteenth-century Byron interpretations to create a kind of annotated bibliography passing for literary history. The ‘real content’ of these writings is not Byron, but a number of the history of literary criticism and approaches towards literature in Hungary. The subject of interpretation does not seem to be Byron; on the contrary, in most cases Byron is the illustration, a mode of reasoning to something else, to something entirely different.

To make this ‘something else’ apparent the process of Byron’s reception in the Hungarian literary consciousness must be traced.

In the steps of Childe Harold

Essays dealing with Byron’s influence in Hungary often mention that Byron’s name and deeds became well known in Hungary at an early date. The first newspaper article in 1819 reports Byron’s swimming across the Hellespont as a novel escapade.1 At the beginning of the 1820s, several articles reported the Greek War of Independence and Byron’s role in it.2 These articles often had political overtones since, at this time, Hungary was a part of the Habsburg Empire, in many respects an Austrian province itself. Thus the Greeks’ struggle was often subject to allegoric interpretations; by the liberals as an example or by the conservatives as a potent warning.

Many anecdotes about Byron’s private life appeared in the 1830s in the so-called ‘Modejournals’ (magazines devoted to the fine arts), which gained popularity at that time. These articles continue to reappear later, though less than in the 1830s. While at first Byron’s admirable or less admirable eccentricities were the main subjects of these articles, by the turn of the century the poet’s impetuous love affairs were more often discussed. Byron’s personality and actions played at least as large, perhaps even a larger part, in forming the nineteenth-century Hungarian intellectual elite’s way of thinking, than did his poetry. By this time a special, local version of the so-called Grand Tour had become fashionable among the sons (sometimes daughters) of the Hungarian aristocracy.3 In the so-called ‘reformist age’ of Hungary’s history, between the middle of the 1820s and the end of the 1840s, the aim of these tours, besides the improvement of foreign-language skills and seeing the world, was to gain experience abroad, to witness Western European political and economic conditions and, if possible, to adapt those experiences to their home environment. Young travellers of the 1830s and 1840s often used Byron’s Childe Harold as a guide book literally: they visited the places where Childe Harold or his creator had stayed. In 1823, for example, the young, later famous, novelist Baron Miklós Jósika wrote that he would prefer to follow his idol, Byron himself, and fight side by side with him for Greece’s freedom, where many only dog the poet’s footsteps. Bertalan Szemere, who would later become the Prime Minister in the first independent (from Austria) national government in 1848, also encountered Byron’s works while travelling abroad. These had such an enormous influence on him that he visited many places preserving Harold’s footsteps during his travels and, when forced into exile after the failed revolution (1848–49), he set off once more in Byron’s footsteps to visit Constantinople, Greece and Thrace. Childe Harold’s figure and voice haunt most of his poems.4 Ferenc Pulszky’s travel guide was also Childe Harold; his admiration in his youthful years for Byron is clear. He includes quotations in his diary and records his splen. He confesses that he had not only devoured the Lord’s works but ‘even followed Byron’s advice when conversing with women’.5 Perhaps one of the most outstanding figures of the age of Hungarian Reform, Count István Széchenyi, followed Childe Harold’s path almost step by step while making his first visit to Italy (as he

1. ‘Úszás’ (Swimming), in Hasznos Mulatáságok (Useful entertainments), I 1819: 149.
2. E.g. Hasznos Mulatáságok 1821, Hazai és Külföldi Tudósítások (National and foreign reports) 1821, 1823 and 1824. Byron was mentioned in Magyar Kultúr (Hungarian

3. For example, Countess Blanka Teleki, who founded a modern boarding school for girls in Hungary in the 1840s and her younger sister, Emma, later wife of the French historian August de Gerando, herself a writer, improved their knowledge of European culture and languages on a long Western European tour at the end of the 1830s.

4. Bertalan Szemere, Egy számúzott gondolatai (An exile’s thoughts), Búcsú Magyarországtól (Farewell to Hungary), or Lázló emlékezete (László’s remembrance), for example.

5. ‘még a nőkkel is Byron előírása szerint társalkodott’ (quoted in Morvay 1913, 300).
fact that, besides Paris, London was gaining importance as the capital for the European elite. London gradually became the new centre of an elegant society, which attracted the upper classes of Hungarian society too. The positions of honnés and finomelné were often taken over by misés in the Hungarian aristocratic households. This trend had a positive effect on the Hungarian reception of English, an interest initiated by the upper classes. Those who had the opportunity to visit England had brought back—among other things—Byron’s verses. They were often the members of the highest aristocracy and the more distinguished (thus more contemporary educated) nobility. The special structure of Hungarian literary and cultural life at the beginning of the nineteenth century also contributed to the rapid dissemination of Byron. Since the lines between the social and the intellectual aristocracy were not so sharply drawn in the Pest literary salons in the 1820s (most of the representatives of the intellectual elite were themselves of the nobility) the common cause of the struggle for the development of a national culture further united the educated and progressive layers of society. Besides, the Anglo-Saxon world with its English language and culture became elegant and fashionable. Naturally, this interest, sometimes amounting to Anglomania, was fostered by other factors. First, in Protestant circles good relationships with England and Scotland had had a long tradition, even among the lower levels of society. For example, many students from the Transylvanian Reformed Colleges had managed to travel to England. In the early nineteenth century, several members of the circle who had gathered around the aesthetic-literary and critical journal Erdélyi Múzeum (Transylvanian museum) possessed an English orientation as well as a German one. Later in 1843, an English Reading Club was formed in Kolozsvár. The group, besides having several members and sympathizers of noble origin (Báthory Zsigmond Kemény, Baron Miklós Josika, Countess Blanka Teleki among others), also had many members from the lower strata, the talented female member Luiz Malom among them. She had read Byron in the original and translated Bulwer-Lytton’s Eugene Aram into Hungarian. This group’s principal aim was to promote English literature, mainly prose, in its original language.

Another source for this revival was the sympathy towards English political structures. The English political system was traditionally regarded as a more successful equivalent of the constitution of the Hungarian nobility. In the age of reform this made England a model for political reorganization, an example for the principle that political and economic reforms became inseparable. Development, improvement and modernization were impossible dreams without a cooperative and modern economy. England offered a model for these complicated reform programmes and held out the hope that they could also be adapted to Hungary.

Hungarian travellers often sought and found such models while visiting England, sometimes even against their inclinations. Jenő Horváth (1926, 203) emphasizes this: the decisive effect of István Széchenyi’s first visit and asylum has been an important landmark in the history of the translation of the English language into Hungarian. He notes that the young cavalier officer, who had arrived in England in 1815, had begun to show interest in English literature, perhaps much to his own surprise.
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The Reception of Byron in Europe

with a rainy steam engine in his luggage (giving a considerable headache to the customs officers), which, according to Horváth, would later become the metaphorical seed to a whole newly established Hungarian industry. More importantly, the Count’s adoration for the noble Lord was reinforced by his acquaintance with Lady Melbourne in person, but also managed to make the acquaintance of Lady Caroline Lamb, who had played such an important part in Byron’s life. In his diary, he wrote, as did many Hungarian aristocrats of his era, in German, there are many references to his experiments in translating Byron: excerpts from CHP in a German prose translation, accompanied by a commentary (Gyula 1925–39).

Gyöző Morvay, author of a historical summary of Byron’s Hungarian reception, generally regarded as the most thorough so far, suggests that the impact of CHP was enormous (Morvay 1913). His essay, published in 1913, defines two great periods in Byron’s Hungarian influence. The first is Childe Harold’s age of Hungarian Wellschmerz (a magyar világdíjjalkoszló, ‘the age of Byron’s korszaka’), from 1822 to 1845. This age is significant first and foremost for the less important poets (labelled by Morvay as ‘pseudo- or semi-melancholic’ (‘il-vagy feládalmadosok’)) and those having real Byronic spirit but considerably less talent than their idol. At that time, they literally flooded the Hungarian literary journals with their books and verses. This first group’s main characteristic is the formal imitation of Byron’s adjectives and wording. The content is basically determined by a fin-de-siècle Wertherian Wellschmerz and by a considerable influence of Ossianism, literary modes which, by the 1820s, had already lost their originality, depth and coherence. An ‘affected sentimentalism flirting with passion’ (‘negédés, szevedélyekkel kárcskódó szenzimentálmisús’) had taken its place, one which follows Byron as much as Goethe’s Werther, piling up cliched images. They expressed their personal pain and anguish in uncontrolled terms, a rhetoric which had very little to do with genuine Wellschmerz (Morvay 1913, 316). Their poems’ ever-occurring refrains: endless sufferings, resignation, disappointment, faithlessness, lost hopes, sad, dying life, bural, joyless fading, crying from a thousand eyes, misery, curses, deceiving dreams, sorrowful night of the soul, severe death’ match their pen-names which were similarly grave and tragic. The many emotive laments of

According to Morvay these early poets are: Ferenc Barkóczy, Daniel Győri, József Kollár, Endre Kunsos, László Lakner, Imre Matic, Soma Orlai Petrics, Gábor Perláky, János Sebestyén, Antal Suján, Gyerőy Uraly, etc.

Morvay lists, among others: József Gáll, Antal Zichy, Kálmán Lísznyai, Lajos Széleszty, Gyula Sárosy, Károly Bérczy, Imre Nagy, Boldizsár Horváth; and, although having a somewhat higher opinion of them: Pál Bozay, Zsolt Bezdány, ‘versekben öröks erőf jvén: végese köszödés, lemondás, csalódás, hűttetség, szenzimentális remény, bős, halkoló élet, mesterséges hervadás, szerelmől sira, nyomor, átok, családok, lelli bő éjszaka, zordon halál’ (quoted in the Büvölogyi, Büshegyi, Bástai, Búhalmi, Büvöly, Tündély and Sirvöngy were considered damaging not only by Morvay, but also by contemporary critics. This tendency was regarded by nineteenth-century literary critics as pernicious and would become a principal target of their pens. In the mid-century it was to produce numerous critical debates. Later, in the second half of the century, it provoked an upsurge of essays on literary theory and aesthetics. All these were strongly connected with the programme of an interpretation of the social role of Hungarian literature. According to the most widespread and influential idea of the time, literature should ideally play the role of the nation’s conscience, be a ‘guaridan soul’, the nation’s representative and thus the basis for the foundation of the national culture. Perhaps this idea represents the central aspect of the debate since its role is to bind the nation together and give it life. This resulted first in a general expectation of a moral sense and a commitment to the nation’s education and progress through literature and its creators. Second, since a national literature was clearly public property, in that the poet, however indirectly, spoke as the community’s representative and embodiment (as its advocate or even as its leader, as a prophet or as a pharos or beacon), creative activity was a serious enterprise.

Poets making a cult of their personal pain were found wanting in talent, aesthetically weak, and seen to have wronged the ideal of the 1830s and 1840s. They wrote about their own sorrows (occasionally showing foreign influence), rather than working towards the creation of a genuine Hungarian literature, one corresponding to and representing the nation’s true character. Instead of stirring the nation’s enthusiasm, they drowned all hopeful sparks in a sea of tears, inducing a pessimistic, melancholic and helpless atmosphere, which might, it was feared, lead to indifference, moral deterioration and, finally, to the death of the nation. If they wanted to find a theme of anguish at any cost, it was asked, why did they not turn to Hungarian history for subject matter? They might find there more than a sufficient number of tragic events so that, in an appropriate artistic mode, they might revive a great heroic past and pay tribute to the heroes of former times. They might bring the growing national consciousness to life, they could urge the nation to action for the future. Before attempting to detail this process, we might consider the era regarded by Morvay as the second period of Byron’s influence in Hungary.

Don Juan

In the era ‘between 1848 and today’ (the turn of the nineteenth century), writes Morvay, almost all of Byron’s works had had an influence on Hungarian writers (1913, 327). In his opinion, the main reason for this was that

12 These pen-names contain paronomasia and play with the fashionable namings of the contemporary sentimental novels. In rough translation they would be something like Sorrowdale, Sorrowmount, Sorrowlake, Sorrowhill, Grieveborough, Pondersson, Tombdale.
Nevertheless, Byron’s reception is not without criticism at this time and his direct influence is mediated by that of other poets who themselves had started their artistic careers following the traces of Byron. Others mentioned in Moore’s essay are Pushkin, Lermontov, Hugo, Musset, Poe or Leopardi. As Morvay’s essay had already emphasized, later echoed by other critics, Lord Byron’s influence in Hungary became significant from a literary point of view in the second half of the nineteenth century. The reception of his epic works forms the first phase. Among them Don Juan is given the greatest emphasis. If we labelled the former period the era of CHP, the second half of the century must be seen in terms of DJ.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the theoreticians and critics of national literature were primarily interested in epic works, especially epic poets. They regarded the epic as the most representative genre of a nation’s literature. The most crucial questions raised were how the epic might be modernized and the nature of its relation with other literary genres. The era’s leading literary critic, Pál Gyulai, believed he had found a possible solution in the development of the so-called narrative poem and a merger with the epic, artificially creating a naïve, popular/folk epic with a national consciousness. His example was the period’s greatest and, according to Gyulai (1908a and 1933), its most representative poet, János Arany (who, incidentally, found the role he was cast in by Gyulai extremely embarrassing). His award-winning epic poem, Toldi, published in 1846, was a model for others to follow. Arany later, mostly with the encouragement of his friends and fellow-poets, finished two further parts of the work, entitled Toldi estéje (Toldi’s evening) and Toldi

13 ‘a szabadágharc után nagyobb figyelem irányul feléje s a politikai elnyomatában benne talált meg az érő, a harci kedvét, a szenvedelmi s a hazaí fúi benne szeretett elmerülni. Az írók értekebb megértéssel fordultak hozzá, mert a sötét viszonynak inkább megétereztek velük felületesen gondolatait és komor alakjait. A világjátszás világízetet mellett lassan a pessimistikus terjed el, a melyet a barátnak evében Schopenhauer ismerete, később Hartmann és Nietzsche tanai. az indus bölcsész ezerjégrése elősegítették és ez étlettadás, meg az élet cézalásainknak eszméi mélyebben nyomultak a költő közutadba’ (Morvay 1913, 327-28).

14 Morvay regards this as a common tendency of the time in the appreciation of Byron, referring to Carlyle’s, Macaulay’s and Gervinus’s negative opinions.

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szeretnic (Toldi’s love). He thus created a full-scale trilogy from the Toldi story relating the main character’s whole life (Gyulai 1952). Yet, in a certain sense, the most influential poetic epic work of the second half of the century would not be Toldi, but Arany’s other poetic novel, Bolond Istók (Istók the fool), published in 1850 (Gyulai 1952). This work contradicted Gyulai’s expectations in almost every way and, in many respects, with its form, narrative structure, point of view and strong (self-ironic) tone, the work reminds the reader of Byron’s DJ. Like the latter it was never completed.

Bolond Istók is not a Romantic, impoverished nobleman who undertakes various adventures; he is more of a ‘village fool’ and does not even have a prestigious literary origin, rather that of a commonplace anecdote.

Neither DJ nor Bolond Istók had had much effect until the arrival of Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin. Subsequently, in the 1870s, this trilogy was followed by a glut of novels in verse. This is not merely Byron’s influence, as László Imre (1990) has pointed out. While the ‘importation’ of genres is a difficult and multi-layered procedure, the Byronic form and method still had a considerable role in the shaping of the genre’s form in Hungarian. Native authors used the traditions of English literature that had shaped their own new genre. Indeed, the verse novel had already become part of nineteenth-century Hungarian prose. But Byron was clearly influential.

What really can be regarded as ‘Byronic’ in the poetic novel of this period is the genre itself, the genre’s supposed aim and its appearance. According to László Imre, DJ is a modern version of epic poetry, one which gave shape to the ‘scpticism and ideological unease of post-Napoleonic Europe’ (‘a napoleoni háborúk utáni Európa szkeptizét világízését bizonytalanná, öntötte művészeti formálba’, Imre 1990, 14). This scepticism was not a mere political mood, nor even a personal one, but one which also involved the problems of literary form. For Byron and his contemporaries, ‘traditional literary genres not only proved inadequate, but literary forms became questionable as a whole since the universal order and the foundations of the old world view were being shaken’ (‘nemcsak a tradicionális irodalmi műfajok bizonytalálatát elégeltennek, hanem általában az irodalmi megformálás változását, mivel az egész világrend, a hagyományos világízést alapja rendeltetik meg’, 1990, 14). This general sense of uncertainty, László Imre went on, and this loss of validity was accentuated in the new genre, since it combined the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the popular carnival forms of the Renaissance, the sentimentalism and cult of the personality and emotion of Romanticism with the Sternean grotesque and Classicism’s general ideas about the human, combined with liberalism’s range of thoughts (14). It was an eclectic form in every respect.

Hungarian literary history further expresses another insistent theme in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially after the Compromise of 1867 between Austria and Hungary. The Hungarians’ position was somewhat similar to that of post-Napoleonic Europe in respect of a generalized sense of lost values and disillusionment. The collapse of the 1848 revolution had not only resulted in the devaluation of democratic ideas but it had also undermined illusions based on the Romantic picture of a nation with a national culture set on the foundations of a united people. All classes would preserve their positive features (presuming that all qualitatively different social
part in the transformation of the poet into an emblem for the genre. Byron the
ten conceptually became the center of any discussion on literary matters
and art. The ‘ideal’ author’s life corresponded with his works, did not
contradict his art and, if it did, then in a paradoxical way, the contrast
provided the necessary congruence between life and art; one the positive
life and work can overlap as much as possible. The poet even plays off the role
he has created and which is expected by the audience against tradition. All
Byron’s Hungarian critics emphasized this aspect. The process is an offspring
moment of the reception of this basically moral theory was consolidated by
the Romantically oriented theory of poetry and criticism and, but interestingly, the real
nothing less than the emerging Positivist aspect of literary history and national
philology.

Byron’s reception plays an important, if not an exclusive part in this process.
The foregoing examples also demonstrate this process, especially where one of
the first Hungarian examples of the linking of a poet’s biography with critical
literary history employs Byron’s persona on a number of occasions. Pál Gyulai
wrote of Byron:

In his mood, what gentle and mild, pathetic and ridiculous elements are
moulded into another, and this also runs through his poems. When we
read his works, the poet is always on our mind. His personality, like magic,
covers all bis poems, filling their shortfalls, emphasizing their beauty. We
are enchanted and surrender to the sickness of criticism, we forgive him
more than we would forgive anybody else, and we entirely give ourselves
up to the emotions aroused in our sympathy for the writer.15

Yet, these lines were about Sándor Petőfi rather than Byron. And his poetry
was quite different from Byron’s. The basis of their similarity is the ‘law of
congruence’ mentioned above. Consider the following:

[He is] like Byron, whose life did not occupy the world’s sympathy before
his death. And how their fates resemble each other! Both young and at the
zenith of their fame they die struggling for their ideals and with their own
death conclude their enemies and confirm the poetic standpoint they
represented.15

Of course, critics were not only seeking to establish such relationships: after
all, the emerging Positivist theory of literary history emphasized the research
of influences as one of the most important methods of interpretation. Such an

15 ‘Kedelyén különös vegyében olvass ezt össze mi gyöngéd és vad, magasztos és
nevetséges, ez elhúzódik költeményem, potolja hiányait, emel szépséget. Meg
vagyonuk bűvölege, leszünk a kritikai szorgot, többet elhinni nekünk, mint birkát, és
egészen átadjuk magunkat az érzéseknek, melyeket a kőtő iránti részvét felkölönt
(Gyulai 1908c, 18).

17 ‘Epen mint Byronnál, kinek élete nem kevésbé vette igénybe a világ részvétét,
mint halála. S mint hasonlít egymáshoz soruk is: Mindkettőn őt, hírők
délpontján, eszméirként közödve, szállottak sirba, halálukkal engesztelve ki
ellenőrzéseket s pocséteve meg azon költői kijelentést, melven dalokai valának
(Gyulai 1908c, 19).

Methods of interpretative comparison

In nineteenth-century Hungarian literary theory Byron was the most
important, almost emblematic, embodiment of modern man. Gergely
Czaczor, from whom this essay’s title is drawn, did not stand alone in his
opinion that the ‘spirit of the times’, one of the most significant attitudes
of the century, had spoken through Byron.

Byron’s life and his personality offered a perfect basis for this interpretation
(matching every aspect of the oeuvre and biography) and they played no small

15 ‘ami Byronnal romantika és klasszicizmus párhadala volt, az Aranynál a
forradalmi népesség, sőt a liberális eszmekőr látszolagos bukását követő
embrundóknak magától az irodalomtól megsommorló nihilizmusa lesz’ (Imre
1990, 123).
approach can be found in Gyulai's essay, one which went as far as suggesting
the influence of Byron and Shelley on the Hungarian poet, although the
author, Pál Gyulai, was not specific on the point. In an assessment of Petőfi's
Felhők (Clouds) cycle, written in 1846,18 Gyulai argues that it is less significant
than Petőfi's other works. He does note, however, that the cycle was written
while the poet was living in retreat from the world, reading Byron and
Shelley.

From the turn of the century, the new Positivist critics tended to describe
influences affecting certain authors and works as fully as possible. They also
traced Byron's influence on nineteenth-century Hungarian authors, which
trend was encouraged once more by the emerging discipline of English
studies in Hungarian centres of learning at the outset of the twentieth century.

Jenő Péterffy, for example, in his essay on József Eötvös's technique of novel
writing, analyses the similarities between Byron's Manfred and Eötvös's novel, A
Kartházi (The Cretan), written in 1839.19 Frigyes Riedl had pointed out a
thematically resonant resemblance between Byron's The Siege of Corinth and
Mihály Vörösmarty's small heroic poem titled Eger (Riedl 1912). Gyöző Morvay
found even more Byronic features in the works of Vörösmarty, a writer whose
attention was drawn to Byron by the Greek War of Independence and who had
already read several of Byron's works by the early 1820s (in German translations,
possibly the Zweikau Schumann version). He cited, for example, the
descriptions of battles and landscapes common to both writers. Morvay,
however, discovered exact correspondences between hisr Dešzeg (Isle of the
South) and The Giaour. He also mentions the two poets’ common pattern of
readings (the Arabian Nights, and the works of Moore, Tasso and Ariosto),
examples which emphasized the similarities between them. Morvay also
demonstrated the impact of Byron on the Byron-worshipper Miklós Jóska,
especially in his short stories. Héllének and Herculanum show similarities with
Byron's Heaven and Earth, but he also had composed a draft entitled Diamante,
which was to have taken place in Albania and whose main character would have
been Ali Tepeleni (Morvay 1913, 54), which suggests an acquaintance with
CHP. The influence of Imre Mádách’s drama Az ember tragédija (The tragedy of
man),20 which unites the features of Faustian dramatic verse and the poème
d’humanité, can, according to several critics, be linked to Byron, especially to
M and Cim. Sándor Fest, one of the pioneers of English Studies in Hungary, also
studied the Byronic reminiscences of Hungarian literature (Fest 1913; 1917).

It is interesting (yet unsurprisingly in the context of nineteenth-century
Hungarian literary theory and its traditions) that while there appeared detailed
critical essays on Byron’s epic works, the impact of his lyrical works was, apart

18 First published in Pest, 1847. The best critical edition is in Petőfi Sándor összes
mérete (The complete works of Sándor Petőfi). Felhők is in vol. 2 (1845–46),
19 ‘Bíró József Eötvös mint régényiro’ (Baron József Eötvös as a novelist), in Péterffy
(n.d., 68–70).
20 The first edition was published in Pest in 1861; the second revised edition, Mádách
Imre: Az ember tragédija (Imre Mádách: the tragedy of man), was published in Pest
in 1863.

from some rare examples, barely analysed at all. The study of his lyrical works
was restricted to comparison of colours and moods; the ‘grave magic’ (komor
varázx), the spleen, misanthropy, tedium vitae and the never-satisfied
eagerness to act all become the ‘trademarks’ of Byron. The so-called
‘Byron phenomenon’ itself is much more complex: it marks the problem
which captivated the labours of nineteenth-century Hungarian literary critics.
This explores the nature of the influence, how and why literary and cultural
receptions happen, how they affect society and what role they have in its
development. Yet, it remains puzzling that the nineteenth century would
‘find its voice in Byron’, as Gergely Czuczor has put it (1835).

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The Byron phenomenon or Byron syndrome? (An attempt at
identification)

The history of reception offered by Morvay begins with a strange ‘Byron
definition’. As if identifying a scientific subject, he describes the ‘essence’
of Byron and what the name ‘really signifies.’ According to recent scholarly
opinion, Byron stands for the concept of a suffering personality, pain caused
by the imperfection of an ever-changing world.1 This far-reaching phenomenon,
argues Morvay,21 means, from a historical point of view, the
realization of a set of seminal ideas emerging in the eighteenth century on a
theoretical level and identified with writers like Rousseau, Young, Voltaire
and Kant: the adoration of nature, lyric consciousness, scepticism, the desire
for freedom, scathing irony, a restlessness that seeks to discover the final
questions of existence. On a logical level the adoration of nature harmonizes
quite well with the emotional and intellectual superiority of art. Another
important part of the theory is the subversive Radicalism which idolizes
freedom, which desires a republic in place of limitless despotism and
established tyranny. Here the Christian, the pagan and the primitive are united
and the collapse of this heroic ideal signifies and yields up a new ‘truth’ that
the world order is without harmony (Morvay 1913, 295–96).

The ‘Byron phenomenon’ had been described by many before Morvay in an attempt to answer the question
concerning the circumstances in which the phenomenon emerges and the
consequences it might bring about. It seemed a complete phenomenon
and had great influence; it could not simply be rejected by judging it as morally
harmful. As an ideological trend, it remains uncertain whether one could set it
aside. Others, in return, thought the opposite: a thorough examination of the
‘phenomenon’ revealed positive features which should be welcomed. The
question is how could positive features prevail without the disadvantages? In
the context of this dilemma nineteenth-century Hungarian critical essays are
most instructive; they attempt to map the preconditions of the Byronic by
placing Byron on the English intellectual horizon.

21 ‘Byron a mai tudományos fel Fogás szerint az a fogalom, mely mindazt kifejezi, a
mi szenvédő egységéért jelent: faculty’s a tökéletlen világ és örökös változás
miatt’ (Morvay 1913, 295).
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is Dickens, whose works have had such a great effect on the reader that it makes you really feel like you are inside the work of art, even if you don't read it in the original language. Dickens is known for his ability to create a world that is both believable and imaginative, and his works have a lasting impact on readers around the world.

A reasoned explanation for national character can also be found in Morvay's essay. He explains Byron's enormous influence in Eastern Europe by the fact that nations living there could often recognize themselves in Byron's exotic features and locations. Hungarians were attracted by the descriptions of a 'warlike' national character, the mention of a glorious name, the poet's aristocratic emotions ever opposing all his democratic, ruthlessly scathing authority with sarcasm, and his hatred of Austrian despotism.

The themes of life-likeness and the ambivalent relation between word and action, are among the most important points of discussion of nineteenth-century literary theory and they recur many times in connection with Byron. As Ferenc Pulszky puts it:

The world is too wide and too complicated to be described in a single line. The response to Byron's works is a complex one, involving a range of emotions and interpretations. The themes of life-likeness and the ambivalent relation between word and action are central to this response. The effects of Byron's works on readers are both positive and negative, and they reflect the complex relationship between literature and the world.

Another important element of the Byron phenomenon is its topicality, its modernity. In the travel diary quoted above, Pulszky, personifying the era's ambiguity, tensions, changeability and unpredictability, compares the spirit of the age to Byron's heroes, taking him as the era's dramaturge, or at least as its most perfect means of expression: 'our time is similar to Byron's heroes, silent outside, storms inside, the river's clean ice covers the foam's giant congestion.'

22 'után értelmesen tova halad, az idegten ugy ideomajít, mint azt magára nézve jónak találja, ki ősi intézményeihez er sen tapad, míg az ellenkező szükséget nem tapasztalja, és akkor is inkább lelkét, szellemét javítja, mint sem az írás formáikkal és ösziinnyvival törődik, mely legvilágosabb zölgő mindenhol talpra esett jellemének' (az angol ezen től fakadt szellemet különösen az, melyet őt az

23 'az ábrázolt faj harcász és büszke muvóta és egy-egy dicső névnek feltételese vagy megnézésre, a költő ragyogó, keleti elemekein dús képlete, versének szónokias fensége, mélábusz és lázongó fájdalma, szabadásiértete, legenda hőséssze, a hatalmat maró gúnyával kimeletlenül oroszózt minden demokratizmus mellett aristokrata érzelmé, az osztrák despotizmus győzlete vonzotta' (Morvay 1913, 298).

24 'A szó letörli a gondolat lepkeszárnyairól az iranyport, elemzési leggyengédebb illatát, gyengédi legőrösíbb bőréjét, 'ha szépségét meghajtja, jósváltás hibája,' eredte ezt Byron, ezen tekettek vagyó útján, 's ki lehetne olly dura, kiben szánaikozást ne gerszteszene ő, mikor az életbe ki nem törtörhet ugyelsod' belső vitájában felkáltott' (Pulszky 1914, 45).

25 'időnk hasonlít a Lord Byron' hőséhez, kivülről csend, belülről vihar, a 'folyó' felületének tusza jege elrejt a 'hárok' hatalmas torlódását' (Pulszky 1914, 45).
One could almost say that Byron forms the central structure of Gergely Czaucor's summary of English literary history: through the figure of Byron one could see that a great change was setting apart the old and the new, one which proceeded in European history and societies as well as in English literature (Czaucor 1835). One of Byron's translators and his first Hungarian monographer, Lázár Petrichevich Horváth, wrote:

Lord Byron is one of those men who will not be disowned by our age: for (since he is conceived in the marrow of this age) he is praised, glorified, his principles are admired and his genius is flattened by his contemporaries. He is one of the impassioned leaders of recent literary doctrines and political opinions. The whole civilized world recognizes him in this. The gloomy complaints of Byron's lyre would take the fancy of the nation, whose main characteristic is gloom, of a nation which was transfigured into a nation under such severe circumstances.

To play with this metaphor, we might say that the 'Byron phenomenon' offers a function intersecting at the concurrent point of a horizontal and a vertical, a synchronic and a diachronic axis. While the 'horizontal axis' is composed of individual and national psychic features and characteristics, the 'vertical' is made of the atmosphere, the Zeitgeist, the interpretations of the strains of the concrete moment. Both the 'characteristics' and the 'ages' can 'speak' only at the concurrent points. The authors cited regard Byron as such a concurrent point, a 'speaking point', at the same time considering this as the secret and explanation of Byron's extraordinary influence.

It seems to be the result of exactly this peculiar function-logic that Byron appears mostly as an illustration rather than the subject of analyses in the essays devoted to English literature or directly to Byron. A significant majority of the nineteenth-century critics and theoreticians of literature strove to find the means to create a modern, up-to-date literature in accordance with their national character. To answer this question, they had to know whether, indeed, the character of the Hungarian nation could meet the requirements of the modern age, or whether modernization might inevitably lead to the disappearance of the national character. So they looked for the 'speaking point', the self-manifesting point of the Hungarian nation and its literature. And the 'Byron phenomenon' often provided an appropriate argument in this process. This can be illustrated by an article adapted from the Edinburgh Review and published in the Hungarian journal Athenaeum. This article concerns English literature, but it can be read allegorically, in terms of Hungarian literature. Athenaeum was an important forum of the so-called programme of the popular/folk trend in literature which, in turn, was regarded as a medium of wide-ranging influence on national building. At the same time it might ensure the viability and modernity of the 'idea' of the nation. At the end of the eighteenth century English literature 'succeeded to the feebleness of sensibility that English literature 'succeeded in rejuvenating, regaining youths's strength sources', the literature of democracy, legends and ballads, so that this poetry, voice is as familiar with every ear'. There were two further elements to the high religiousness and philosophy with refined sense' by using 'the apparent misanthropy, who displayed 'intimate sympathy' with the whole of The article suggests that if Hungarian literature followed the English example spirit and returned to its 'original principles' – to the people, to the poetry of the people – composing in this way a new, national poetry, then literature would rejuvenate itself and gain in strength, as the phoenix of legend could do (to borrow a popular metaphor from the rhetoric of national renewal).

But, Hungarian critics insist, many damned the 'modern', individual reader who wants only to enjoy and not to make literature. They will be overcome by Byron's 'sombre, but irresistible magic' ('komor, de ellenállhatatlan varázsnak') and they will follow his 'unequalled and even his lovable faults' ('hasonlíthatatlan és még hibáján is szeretetemelő'); they will be guided wherever he leads them. When the poet-guide disappears, 'the reader returns, as if after a magical experience, to sober and rational life' ('viszat, mint valamely varázstörténet után, a jövő életéhez') (Bajza 1899, 259). A trace of his experience remains, even if he examines his guide with a more critical eye, a guide who,

created only one man and one woman. The man should be called Harold, Conrad, Lara, Manfred or Cain: he is proud, sullen, cynical, lustful. The woman, Zuleika as much as Julia, Haidec, Gulnare or Medora, is gentle, kind, she wants to be loved and is loved and is flattering in her passion. That man is Byron himself and the woman is the one his pride desires.
And if the reader would still prefer to read his diaries and letters, because here stands before our eyes 'a true and great man with all his everyday pettiness', then we see how he increases his incredible irritability further by starving, being so afraid of gaining weight; we see what a devoted friend and lover he can be, but also how he yawns, without the smallest trace of the Byronic pose, in the middle of the greatest love; we see his true loneliness free from any pathos, and above all, we see how honestly his heart could ache for the sufferers and the oppressed, that the idea of freedom is not just an empty literary theme for him, but a central reality penetrating all his being.30

30 'ez az igazán nagy ember ... mindennapi kicsinyességeivel együtt'; 'látjuk, hogyan ássa alá szervezetét, hogyan fokozza amúgy is rendkívül ingerlékenységét azzal, hogy éhezett magát, mert fél a hizástól; látjuk, milyen odaadó barát és szerető tud lenni, de azt is, milyen őszintén, byroni póz nélkül ásit olykor egyetegyet a legnagyobb szerelem közepén; látjuk igazi, pátoszmentes magányosságát és főképp azt, milyen őszintén becsületesen fájt a szíve a szenvedőkért és elnyomottakért a szabadságeszme mennyire nem üres irodalmi téma számára, hanem egész lényét o a átható, középponti valóság' (Szerb 1941, 468).