

VÉGH VERONIKA:

FRAGMENTED FORMS IN EUROPEAN ROMANTICISM:  
THE ENGLISH AND THE HUNGARIAN FRAGMENT POEM

THESES

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## **Theses**

### **I Introduction**

The first subchapter of the introduction titled “Romantic fragment?” discusses the challenges of definition. According to my definition, the Romantic fragment is a text that is not whole due to the non-realization of compositional norms, in which fragmentariness does not produce an unsuccessful or second-rate work of art, but one of full value. Being intentionally fragmented is an important characteristics of the Romantic fragment. It is not only the general possibility of a whole utterance that is challenged here, the concept also states that the most appropriate means of expression is its own. The fragment, therefore, performs the unspeakable, the non-narratable. The receptivity of the

fragment is another highly significant feature, since the fragment relies more heavily on the recipient than whole texts due to the absence and the non-realization of expectations, as the vacuum requires a more active presence on behalf of the reader.

The presence of intended literary fragments is not limited to the age of Romanticism; a certain fragmentariness is an innate characteristic of literary texts in general, since no one can “say the whole”. A significant critical direction suggests that the Romantic fragment is the embodiment of a six-century-old mixed genre that has its origins in Francesco Petrarca's poetry.<sup>1</sup> The dissertation states that the age of Romanticism is an undeniably important phase in the history of the deliberate fragment, an era that witnessed the immense popularity of the fragment in the whole European literary and artistic scene, though with differing intensity, reception and theoretical background. Furthermore, the fragment is deeply connected to the ideas of Romantic irony and sublime; the study considers these points of view when relevant.

There is no critical agreement concerning the definition of the Romantic fragment. The subchapter “Definition and Critique” emphasises my understanding of the fragment as a spectrum rather than a binary entity and also the deep conviction that to study it primarily in relation to totality and wholeness is not fruitful, as the fragment denies the possibility of restoration. As there has been a heightened interest and definite change in the critique of the fragment in the last three decades, I review the most important works and critical paths featuring the authors I think of as prolific scholars of the field, such as Marjorie Levinson, Thomas McFarland, Anne Janowitz, Balachandra Rajan, Alexander Regier, Camelia Elias, Mark Sandy, and Christopher A. Strathman in the English-language scene. The Hungarian critical literature has yet to produce a comprehensive study of the fragment, although there are substantial studies, such as the works of Mihály Szajbély, György Eisemann, and Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, or the deKON series volume on Vörösmarty's poem “A Rom”.

The next subchapter (“Material, Criteria, Method: the Romantic Fragment as Tapestry”) anchors the central thesis of the dissertation. The thesis is that fragmentariness is often conjoined with well-definable states of existence, ontological observations and it is frequently the product of a certain metaphysical encounter. The major task of the dissertation is to find and record certain patterns of these co-occurrences. Studying the pieces of English and Hungarian literature in a comparative manner offers the opportunity to draw conclusions related to the Romantic fragment that may stand above the specifics of a national literature. As for the texts that can enter the research, one of the major criteria was that the poem chosen for discussion had to be a deliberate fragment. The text must also answer at least one out of a set of requirements: 1. fragmentariness is recorded in a paratext (title, subtitle, preface etc.); or 2. fragmentariness can be detected in the

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Wanning Harries: *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century*, Charlottesville and London, Virginia University Press, 1994, 12-34.

structure of the sentences or stanzas, or in other linguistic terms; or 3. fragmentariness is either the result of the non-realization of metric, genre-related, cause-effect presumptions, or the absence, gap, break, pause are dominant sources of meaning.

## **II Friedrich Schlegel and the German Romantic fragment**

For the early Jena Romanticism, the notion of the literary fragment had vital importance. Friedrich Schlegel, A.W. Schlegel, Schleiermacher and others referred to the *Fragment* as an independent genre in itself. The second chapter discusses the aesthetics of the German Romantic fragment that had a unique and unrivalled theoretical foundation. *L'Absolu littéraire*, a study of great influence by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy refers to Jena Romanticism as an „auto” movement, one that forms, defines and dissolutes itself and the texts it produces.<sup>2</sup>

“A fragment, like a small work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog.” The second part of the chapter discusses the most well-known piece from *Athenäum*, Fragment 206, making an intertextual attempt to understand the basis of comparison between the fragment and the hedgehog by listing and examining other literary or philosophical hedgehogs by Archilochos, Schopenhauer, Isaiah Berlin, and Derrida.

## **III The Romantic fragment and the ruin**

The fragment and the ruin are deeply interrelated concepts, on the one hand, due to the bound of part-whole problem in their deep structures, and, on the other, as a result of the presence of an increased sense of temporality in both. The heightened interest in the ruin made way to the cult of the fragment, since the audience that had seen the ruin as a non-deficient form became more receptive and towards the fragment, an entity not fulfilling the traditional compositional expectations. The chapter compares two ruin paintings, then discusses the ruin as both the means and the source of inspiration. The picturesque, the sublime and the antiquarian movement are also covered in this part of the study. The next subchapter discusses the forms of *Ruinenlust*, the interest in antique ruins, local ruins, exhibited ruins, and follies in order to gain a better understanding of the aesthetics of the ruin. It closes with the comparison of the temporality of the ruin and that of the fragment while exploring the hierarchical possibilities.

The second, text-focused part of the chapter discusses three poems, “The Ruined Cottage” by William Wordsworth, “Huszt” by Ferenc Kölcsey, and “A csárda romjai” by Sándor Petőfi. The analysis covers the available versions of the poems (if applicable) in order to find the traces of fragmentariness. The ruin has diverse role in these poems; it is strongly metonymical in “The Ruined Cottage”, a means of contrast of Romantic irony in “Huszt” and the part of a cosmic image

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy–Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: *The Literary Absolute: The Theory in Literature in German Romanticism*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1988, 92.

in “A csárda romjai”. A transcendental, sublime-inducing presence can be detected in all three poems; the all-encompassing Nature and the late Margaret's vivid figure, the Gothic spectre with its message cold as marble, the personified mirage of the Puszta. The temporality of the ruin is a central issue in all the poems, as well as the complex, multi-directional and multi-layered concept of absence. The most important gap, though, is that of the ruin, an object that actively contributes to our understanding of the poems as Romantic fragments or to read them in the context of the fragment.

#### **IV Fragment and crisis**

There are three poetic fragments in the centre of the chapter discussing fragmentariness and career crisis. In Byron's “A Fragment”, the title creates a field of performative tension that is further enhanced by the oscillation of the differing notions of the prophecy and the epitaph. In Vörösmarty's poem, the complex construct of time is the most gripping feature; the rearrangement of the chronological spiral leads to a dwindling narrative. The text is a fragment, because the spiral is not whole due to the chronological rearrangement, which is a means towards openness. A comparison with “A vén cigány” aims to highlight the journey towards the fragment, which is a process further emphasised by the drained vocabulary. “Miért van így?” written by Júlia Szendrey mirrors the crisis of the everyday. The discussion of the poem is preceded by revising her professional turning points, her literary journal entries and the passionate debate on women poets in 1858. Offering cultural, even biographical context may seem superfluous in a text-based research, but, in this case, it is very much needed. First, Szendrey's literary work is still hardly known and second, her crisis is strongly related to gender. In all three poems, fragmentary expression is inevitable, as crisis deconstructs whole utterances.

#### **V Fragment and memory**

The subject of inquiry in this chapter is the co-occurrence of fragment and remembrance. Memory-focused poems are likely to be written in the fragment form because of the recognition that the fragmented utterance mirrors how memory works. The poems in the chapter are “Nutting” by Wordsworth, “Music shen soft voices die...” by Mary and Percy Shelley (followed by poems by Flóra Majthényi and Eliza Acton), and “Emlékezet...” by Sándor Petőfi. The study of the different versions of the texts is again an important perspective that offers a key to fragmentariness, especially in Wordsworth's and the Shelleys' poem. “Music shen soft voices die...” is discussed as the product of two artists, Mary and Percy Shelley. In “Emlékezet...”, another vital perspective can be observed, the peculiar nature of the metaphor depicting memory as a piece of wood from a shipwreck. Another common characteristics of the poems is that all of them experience the fleeting

mature of life. Tastes, smells, sounds are often connected to memories – the concept of losing these basic senses invokes death, the final fracture.

## **VI The supernatural and the fragment**

In the next part, two profoundly important Romantic fragments, Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and Vörösmarty's "A Rom" are discussed to illustrate the co-presence of the fragment and the supernatural in Romantic poems. In the English poem, not only the gaps within the text, but also the fragmentariness of the reflexive paratexts are seen as sources of fragmentation, which makes the preliminary versions all the more important. The varied nature of the critical literature concerning "Kubla Khan" is seen in the study as the consequence of the receptivity and openness of the fragment. Many of the ideas related to Coleridge's poem are revealed in the subchapter concerning Vörösmarty's poem, since the comparison can be more easily drawn this way. The attributes of dreaming and the sublime are focal points in both poems effectively contributing to their fragmentariness. The sublime, a concept closely related to the notion of the Romantic fragment, is detectable in the creative power of the god Rom and Kubla Khan. It is also there in the strength of the nature images, in the gaps within the dream sequences and in various forms of vacuum, hiatus and loss in both poems.

## **VII Closing: what is the Romantic fragment?**

The closing chapter circles back to the problematic definition introduced in the first chapter and proposes to study a *connotative* meaning in addition to the *denotative* meaning. To be able to do so, I study the self-reflexive utterances of Romantic poets – the perception of the fragment in the letters, prefaces, and journal entries of two poets, Lord Byron and János Arany. The comparison works as a case study suggesting that the dictionary meaning of the word *fragment* gained a new field of meaning carrying a sense of intention, the value of absence and the recognition of a certain inevitability. I close the chapter and the dissertation with sketching some of the possible new directions.