

NOTES ON THE LYRICAL POETRY OF JÁNOS ARANY 1848–1849

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1. Two types of confusion tend to foreclose the possibility of a detailed reading of Arany's literary/political productions of 1848–49. Firstly they may be marginalized as significant only to the poet's *life work* – usually to corroborate delineations of a valorized post-Világos Arany – and secondly they may become the objects of a polemic surrounding the poet's *reputation*. In the first case it is necessary to remember that a "complete works" is always a precariously synthetic unity, affording a comparative context never more than partly accessible to the writer himself. When the author is overvalued as a received category, criticism approaches a form of biography in which individual texts and their proper conditions of production are displaced by a preoccupation with *character* and *intention*. In the second case, character and intention themselves become the objects of a polemic in which conflicting aspects of the author's work are adduced to refute, modify or retrieve given formulations of his place in the broader literary canon: here criticism is primarily concerned with the writing of its own history. While there is no question of ignoring this polemic – which constitutes a significant part of the texts' material life in history – nor of neglecting continuities and discontinuities in Arany's poetic career, the main aim of these notes will be to offer an analysis of his lyric poetry of 1848–49, which appears to have suffered unduly from critical neglect.

2. We may identify a coherent poetic discourse in the revolutionary years 1848–49; a system of meanings upon which each individual utterance draws, but which none in itself may be said to have brought into being. These notes aim to show Arany's distinctive and problematic relation to such meanings.

This discourse of revolution is constituted around certain key interdependent values, which form the material foundations of most of the period's popular poetry, identifying and locating specific productions within a known system. Such values include „szabadság” (liberty), „haza” (homeland), „vér” (blood), „ősapáink” (our forefathers), „Rákóczi” . . . etc. It is crucial to recognize that these do not necessarily signify by proposing a referent in the „world of objects”, but more precisely by internal, complementary reference – the denotation of their own system. Thus Rákóczi, rather than primarily denoting a specific historical figure – reluctant patriot, poor speaker of Hungarian – implicates other values in the system, such as „szabadság” and „ősapáink”. For Petőfi he is „Hazánk szentje, szabadság vezére” (The saint of

our homeland, the leader of liberty – *Rákóczi*), for Lisznyai „Szabadság és testvériség volt forradalmi jelszava” (Liberty and fraternity were his revolutionary watchwords – *Rákóczi és Brankovics*). Each value, above all else, implicates and pays homage to the network of meanings which authorize its presence in the text. Even „isten” (God) is modulated by the discourse of revolutionary national identity as „a magyarok istene” (The God of the Magyars) or „a szent szabadság” (sacred liberty). Not only are these values characterized by a potential interchangeability – „Ha vér vagy oh szabadság” (If you are blood, oh liberty) in Csomaközy’s updating of the rhetoric of *Fa leszek* – their lateral relation also displaces the concrete with the ideological; they are above all signs of unity and shared belief. Thus in Petőfi „vér” joins contemporary tasks with the heroism of the past: „Régi jó magyar vér” (Good ancient Magyar blood – *Lenkei százada*), „Magyar vér szerezte e dicső hazát” (Magyar blood won us this glorious homeland – *A magyar nép*), while in Czuczor „Oh drága véreim” (Oh, dear kinsmen of my blood – *Riadó*), or Garay

Fel hát magyar nép a szabadságra,
Fel testünk teste, vérünk vére, nép.

(*Szabaddá lettél. . .*)

(Arise then Magyars to liberty; arise people, body of our body and blood of our blood.)

blood signifies a unity of brotherhood of the present.

3. Literary statistics are, like any other, to be treated with caution, but no reading of the period could fail to recognize the ubiquity of the word „szabadság”. It appears fifteen times in Petőfi’s lyrics between 15 March and the end of April 1848 (in contrast to five instances of „vér”), while at the other end of the rhetorical spectrum, even Pál Gyulai has „szabadság” three times in the three short stanzas of *Szabad sajtó*, and the opening poem of *Nép Barátja* (The People’s Friend), Czuczor’s *Beköszöntő* has „szabad” and „szabadság” fourteen times in its first eleven lines. Such figures are quite typical of contemporary poets from Károly Szász to Hiador (Pál Jámbor), from János Vajda to László Szelestey – the most interesting exception being Arany. In all his lyrics of 1848, Arany has only five instances of „szabadság” against twenty-one of „vér”. These figures, indicating the quantitative inverse of a poet like Petőfi, will also be seen to constitute crucial qualitative distinctions.

4. It is customary to consider Arany’s seven poetic contributions to *Nép Barátja* as hardly more than expressions of that paper’s editorial policy, or at best as „period pieces” more characteristic of their time than of Arany’s literary authenticity. Thus Dezső Keresztury claims that these poems:

mind tárgyban, mind modorban szorosán a cikkekhez kapcsolódnak. Ugyanúgy követik az eseményeket; velük együtt élesedő hangon szólnak.

(are both in object and in style closely related to the articles. They follow the events in the same way as the articles and join them in employing ever sharper tones.)

and later:

Ilyen verseket akkor minden, a forradalom igazságát valló, céljaival egyetértő s a szabadságharc felelősségéből, küzdelmeiből részt vállaló költő írt: Vörösmarty, Czuczor, Garay, Erdélyi, Vajda s még annyian mások.¹

(At that time poems like these were written by all those poets who believed the revolution to be justified and agreed with its aims, and who took a share in the responsibilities and struggles of the War of Independence: Vörösmarty, Czuczor, Garay, Erdélyi, Vajda and so many others.)

A comparison of Arany's contributions with the poems which precede them in *Nép Barátja* will show that this collapse of poetry into a metalanguage of intentions and beliefs obscures or ignores Arany's distinctive and troubled poetic position. Arany's *Nép Barátja* poems differ decisively from the contributions of Czuczor, Vajda, Garay and Székács which precede them, and it is their specificity which resists such a metalanguage.

The first poem of *Nép Barátja*, Czuczor's *Beköszöntő* (4 June 1848), apart from its general representation of the key values of the period's popular discourse, comes far closer to journalism than Arany in the line „Földiim, köszöntlek, s figyelmet kérek.” (I greet you my countrymen, and beg your attention). Czuczor also formulates a key sentiment of the paper's policy – later to be developed by Arany in his article *Segítsünk a hazán* – in the phrase „Köz anyánk a haza” (The homeland is our common mother). Similarly, Vajda's *Adjon Isten* (NB 11 June 1848) employs Gereben Vas's notorious rhetoric, „Én édes atyámfiak szólnék egy keveset” (I, my sweet brethren, would speak a little), and goes on to celebrate the nation's newly won freedom and glittering future in terms reminiscent of Vas's article *A képviselétről*, which had appeared in the paper's previous number:

Mert eddig a szegény magyar
Ha valami baj akadt,
Panaszkodhatott magának
Szólani nem volt szabad!

(For until now, if the poor Magyar met with troubles he could only complain to himself and was not free to speak out!)

And here in Gereben Vas:

De most édes Atyámfiak – most... más világot élünk; az ajtó nyitva van, csak be kell sétálni, a szegény embert szívesen hallgatják, azért nem kell himezni-hámozni, hanem ha baj van, ki vele! Nem kell a bajt a szűr ujjába kötni, hanem rázzák oda a zöld asztalra.

(But now my sweet brethren – now... We live in a different world; the door stands open and you have only to walk in and they will gladly listen to the poor; so you do not need to beat about the bush, but rather, if you have a problem, out with it! You don't have to sew your troubles under the sleeves of your coat: just shake them out onto the green table.)

Vajda's second poem in *Nép Barátja* is equally resolute closing:

Van még egy pár csöpp magyar vér,
Élni fogsz, míg benne tart!

(*Ki bánt?*)

(There are still a few drops of Magyar blood left: you will live on as long as they remain!)

and employing precisely the positive value of „vér” which will distinguish it from Arany’s metaphors. This is followed in the next number by Garay’s *Szabaddá lettél elnyomott magyar nép* – containing, as mentioned, the positive blood-value of „vérünk vére” – and Székács’s *Honvéddal* which looks back to Arany’s *Nemzetőr-dal*, and articulates the paper’s emphasis on recruitment (as in Arany’s article *Önkénytes sereg* in the previous issue).

Arany’s first poems to appear in *Nép Barátja* are *Egy életünk egy halálunk* and *A legszebb virág*. The first takes its epigraph from Petőfi’s *Katonaélet* but distinguishes itself sharply from the optimism of this latter. Petőfi offers his soldiers an “aranyélet” (golden life) and concludes:

Ha pedig az idő lejárt,
Obsitot kapsz, de mekkorát!
S tudod, mért kapsz ilyen nagyot?
Hogy legyen itthon paplanod.

(When your service is up, you’ll get a pension, and what a pension! And do you know why you’ll get such large one? So that you shall have a quilt at home.)

while Arany offers no such vision of the future, and, looking back into the past can promise at best the nation’s heroic death:

Nem lesz magyar, az meglehet,
De titeket még eltemet.

(It may be that no Magyars will survive, but first we’ll bury the lot of you.)

The revolutionary struggle can guarantee the glory, but not the life of the nation.

If the absence of utopian speculation in this poem differentiates it from the confidence of Vajda, Garay and Székács, *A legszebb virág* embodies a still more characteristic distinctiveness. It breaks completely with the conventional order of its predecessors by virtue of its internal preoccupation with *metaphor in its own right*. Its coherence is achieved by means of the relations of the parts to the whole, rather than that of the whole to a prior system of meanings which the poem rehearses. The first two stanzas are united in their negation of images in a quest for purity. The negations of the first move from the material rose to the abstract relation of „virág” (flower) and „a haza szent szerelme” (the sacred love of the homeland):

Szép virág a rózsa, hát még a bimbója!
Mert az ég harmatja mindennap mosdatja:
Szép virág a szüzlyány inepnapra leve:
De legszebb virág a haza szent szerelme.

(The rose is a fair flower, and so is its bud, for they are washed daily by the dew of the heavens. The virgin is a fair flower dressed up for a holy day; but the fairest of flowers is the sacred love of the homeland.)

while those of the second reobjectify this abstraction in terms of the human heart and, in the third stanza, of blood:

Nem terem az kertbe', a fekete földbül,
Sem a virággyból soha ki nem zöldül:
Csak terem az épen az ember szívében,
Az ember szívének legislegmélyében.

A gyökere pedig vértől nedvesedik,
Ha lankadni kezd is vérrel öntözgetik:
Öntözzük, locsoljuk ezt a szép virágot!
Ez gyümölcsöz nekünk édes szabadságot.

(This does not grow in gardens, in the black soil, nor will it ever grow green in a flower bed. It only grows fully in a man's heart, in the very depths of a man's heart.

Its roots are moistened with blood, and if it droops it is watered with blood. Let us water and sprinkle this fair flower! For it will bear us the fruits of sweet liberty.)

The "fruition" of the poem is the sum of these movements, the joint product of all three stanzas: the first identifying the flower, the second, its place of growth and the third, the conditions of its cultivation. This is not, of course, to suggest that the poem's meaning is self-sufficient, that its signification does not also depend upon another wider discourse. The point is rather, that this wider discourse, the competence the poem addresses, is not the same as that interpellated by the works of the other *Nép Barátja* poets. The reader of *A legszebb virág* must do more than combine a series of crucial values to reproduce a known ideological moment, he must engage in the particularly *literary* function of identifying relations of metaphor, an altogether different kind of conventional practice. This literary quality serves as more than merely an aesthetic "additive" in the production of a more "picturesque" revolutionary poetry; it embodies, as we shall see, some significant aspects of Arany's problematic relation to the key values of the period.

It is not only this formal coherence which distinguishes the poem from the poetic norms of *Nép Barátja*. The metaphors are also exceptionally graphic, displacing the poem's positive thematic elements – the conceptual „haza szent szerelme” and „édes szabadság” – with the very materiality of image. „Vér” in the first three lines of the third stanza is hardly the symbolic value with which the period was familiar, implicating others in its self-referential chain. On the contrary, the proposed (and conventional) relation of „vér” and „szabadság” in this stanza is interrupted by the graphicality of the former. „Vér” is concrete, predicated with „nedvesedik”, „öntözget”, „öntöz”, „locsol”, whereas „szabadság” is abstract, a „given”, known value, and the imbalance of the two risks a sense of pathos in the poem's last line.

A similar, if not greater, intensity of contrast is seen in *Mit csinálunk?*, in the following number of *Nép Barátja* (9 July 1848). Again the blood images are concrete and material:

Megmártjuk kaszánkat
Ellenség vérében.

Szép piros harmatban
Fürösztjük kaszánkat:
Övig-övig vérben
Védjük jó hazánkat.

(Let us dip our scythes in the blood of our enemies.

Let us bathe our scythes in fair scarlet dew. Up to our belts in blood, let us defend our good homeland.)

and the poem's sole positive value — „a haza” — is ventured precariously in the last line. Blood does not corroborate the poem's communication but *dominates* it, transforming its object. The theme of recruitment and alarm is subordinated to the liveliness of the metaphor, and it is this latter which makes the poem memorable.

If this blood is still presumably that of the enemy, the intensification of the defence crisis changes the subject, while maintaining the metaphor. *Mit csinálunk?* appears in *Nép Barátja* on 9th July 1848, four days before Parliament discusses granting troops to Austria for the suppression of rebels in Lombardy: *Él-e még az Isten?* and *Az örökség* appear in the same paper in the second half of October, by which time the Defence Commission had become the dominant element in the national government. *Él-e még az Isten?* ends with the lines:

Harcra hát, magyar nép! Isten a vezéred:
Diadalmat szerez a te hulló véred
Minden ellenségen.

(To battle then Magyar people! God is your leader: your flowing blood will bring glory against all enemies.)

and *Az örökség* begins:

Azok a magyarok, kik e hazát
Véren vették, vérrel ótalmazák

(Those were the true Magyars who won and defended this homeland with blood.)

and later, reminiscent of *Mit csinálunk?* :

Vérökben a rudját hányszor megfereszték
Régi ősapáink!

(How many times did our forefathers bathe their lances in their blood!)

Az örökség has five instances of „vér” (that is as many as references to „szabadság” in Arany's lyrics of the whole of 1848) without idealizing the blood image into a conventional value. It is „a zászló” (the flag) which is the valorized object of the „örökség” (inheritance) associated with such values as forefathers and, in stanza 8,

God, while the blood once again runs too thickly in the poem to be conceptualized at the level of a system.

The same is still true of *Haj, ne hátra, haj előre*, circulated in the pamphlet *A szabadság zengő hárfája* in 1849. Here Arany returns to the metaphor of *A legszebb virág* and again „győzelem” (victory), the poem’s single positive value, is displaced by the blood metaphor which dominates all three stanzas. The nature of such victory is always left unspoken. „Győzelem” signifies the end of an apocalyptic struggle, rather than the birth of a new social order. Thus the promise of *Losonczi* can be no more than one of honour and glory. Its eighty stanzas develop images of (courageous) death and hopelessness culminating in the fall of its hero:

A derék Losonczi legtovább kiállta,
Végre szive táján átveré egy dárda,
S elterüle azon teshalomra, hanyatt,
Mely a viadalban omlott lába alatt.

(The brave Losonczi was the longest to endure, until finally a spear broke through the regions of his heart and he fell on his back upon the mound of bodies which had collapsed beneath his feet during the battle.)

while the poem closes with the narration’s one element of affirmation – the consolation of Losonczi’s wife – in a single line:

... hazájáért halt férje dicső halált.

(her husband died his glorious death for the homeland)

Again the imbalance, both formal and thematic, constitutes a somewhat uneasy call to arms.

In these examples the primacy of concrete metaphor overshadows, even works against, the *practical* essence of the poetry. This formal tension between image and theme instils the poems with a sense of doubt. We are not presented with the life-giving blood of Petőfi’s *15-dik március, 1848*:

Szivedben a vér megindul,
S éled a félholt tetem.

(In your heart the blood starts up, and the half-dead corpse returns to life.)

but with „a te hulló véred” (your flowing blood). Supposedly this flowing blood is to cultivate the flower of liberty. But such an articulation of the metaphor attributes to it a teleology which deforms its material presence in the poems. The object, the preoccupation of the poetry, is after all the blood and not the flower.

5. If the notion of „szabadság” offers direction to popular poetry in this period, the value „isten”, or more properly „a magyarok istene” serves as the most comprehensive moral and historical justification for that direction. The period’s invocations of God are rarely spiritual, theological or ethical, but rather adduce an essentially *historical* phenomenon responsible for the nation’s existence and well being. In strictly theolo-

gical terms the phrase „a magyarok istene” might be suggested to borden on heresy, and is properly seen to belong primarily to the discourse of nationalism, rather than that of profound religious faith.

This characteristically 19th century notion becomes something of a literary commonplace after Petőfi's *Nemzeti Dal*. Arany's *Él-e még az Isten?* again shows his equivocal relation to the leading values of the period. János Horváth emphasizes the influence of Petőfi's *A magyarok istene* and *A XIX. század költői* on this poem, considering it unrepresentative of Arany's tone.² This juxtaposition is significant, but the identification is misleading. Consider, for example, the contrasting historical notions of Canaan in *A XIX. század költői* and *Él-e még az isten?* In Petőfi, Canaan is a land of the future, a political destination towards which poets must lead the nation (stanza 2); to suggest that Canaan has already been reached is to belong to the „hamis próféták” (false prophets) of stanza 4. In Arany, on the other hand, we have:

Él-e még az isten – az az isten él-e,
Ki e dús Kánaán országba vezérle
Mint Izraelt hajdan,
Hozván őseinket füstnek fellegében,
Égre fölpirosló tűz-oszlop képében,
Véres viadalban?

(Is God Still alive – the God who led us to this rich Canaan, as he once led Israel, bringing our forefathers in cloud of smoke, in the image of a pillar of fire shining red up to the sky, in bloody battles?)

Here Canaan is a point of departure, a historical presupposition, an achievement to be defended rather than a goal to be reached. Implicit here are two conflicting historiographical positions. Arany looks back to the past, repeatedly, to adduce standards and principles of present action; history is constituted in that selection of past moments, triumphs, glories which justify the direction and action of the present. Arany's lyrics are devoid of utopian vision. Petőfi looks forward to the new world, the “republic”; history is the arena of the present, and, furthermore, its *product*, Canaan is to be created.

És addig? addig nincs megnyugvás,
Addig folyást küszködni kell.

(*A XIX. század költői*)

(And until then? Until then there will be no peace, until then we must struggle ceaselessly.)

Other characteristic tensions trouble Horváth's proposed relationship between *Él-e még az Isten?* and Petőfi's *A magyarok istene*. The latter begins with the defiant statement:

Féltre kislelkűek, akik mostan is még
Kétkedni tudtok a jövő felett

(Away with all those faint of heart, who even now harbour doubts about the future)

while Arany opens with a question:

Él-e még az Isten . . . magyarok Istene?
 Vagy haragra gerjedt népének ellene,
 És elhagyta végkép,
 Hogy rabló, zsvány had, bérbeszedett csorda
 Égesse, pusztítsa, öldökölje sorba
 Régi kedves népét?

(Is God still alive . . . The God of the Magyars? Or has he turned his wrath upon his people and left them forever to be burnt, ravaged and butchered by a pack of villains, a herd of mercenaries?)

This question is posed five times in the poem's six stanzas, outweighing the affirmation offered in the sixth stanza at least in *formal* terms. The answer is in any case somewhat hazardous:

Él még, él az isten . . . magyarok istene!

(He's still alive, God's still alive . . . the God of the Magyars!)

the modulation of question into answer being so slight – the modification and reinsertion of a *single morpheme* – as to emphasize, above all else, the critical contiguity of the two, and the repetition of „él” in the affirmation acknowledging the profundity of the doubt. The answer continues:

Elfordítva sincsen még e népről szeme,
 S az még, aki régen:
 Harcra hát, magyar nép! isten a vezéred:
 Diadalmat szerez a te hulló véred
 Minden ellenségen.

(His back is still not turned upon his people and he is still the God of old. To battle then Magyar people! God is your leader; your flowing blood will bring glory against all enemies.)

God is alive but there can be no assurance as to the future of the nation, whose blood must be sacrificed in the defence of its former glory. In direct contrast Petőfi's poem closes:

A magyar nemzetnek volt nagy és sok vétke,
 S büntetéseit már átszenvedte ő;
 De érénye is volt, és jutalmat érte
 Még nem nyert . . . jutalma lesz majd a jövő.
 Élni fogsz hazám, mert élned kell. . . dicsőség
 És boldogság léssen a te életed . . .
 Végetér már a hétköznapi vesződés,
 Várd örömmel a szép, derült ünnepet!

(The Magyar nation had committed many grave sins, and for these she has suffered punishment; but she had virtues too, and for these she is yet to be rewarded . . . the future will be her reward.)

You will live, my homeland, for live you must . . . your life will be all glory and happiness. . .
Your everyday strife is coming to an end, await with joy the fair and bright festival!

Él-e még az Isten? is also the formal inverse of Czuczor's popular *Riadó* whose refrain, forming almost every second stanza, begins „Él még a magyarok Istene!”. Because Arany cannot adopt the period's clichés without qualification, the confident statement becomes a question whose repetition is more than merely a rhetorical strategy serving the triumphant release of the poem's affirmation. The delicate and perilous modulation of „Él-e még az Isten . . . magyarok Istene?” to „Él még, él az isten . . . magyarok istene!”, a play on the level of the signifier, is a real and *material* object of the poem, refusing the reduction of equivocation into naïve certainty. (The same is true of the bivocality of *A rabelkek*, where the ironized voice is nonetheless allowed to plead a coherent case which is to be rejected rather than ridiculed, and of the frequent use of dialogue in Arany's *Nép Barátja* articles where the presentation of the arguments to be refused in itself shows that Arany too had entertained such ideas quite seriously.)

6. To continue an earlier quotation from Keresztury:

A *Nép Barátjában* közzétett két vers mind tárgyban, mind modorban szorosan a cikkekhez kapcsolódik. Ugyanúgy követik az eseményeket: velük együtt éleledő hangon szólnak. *Az Egy életünk, egy halálunk, A legszebb virág:* a haza és szabadság védelmére hív fegyverbe; a haza védelmében életét is feláldozó hős történelmi példázatával buzdít a *Losonczy István*; a *Lóra* már a rónalakó magyarok ellen zendült szomszédságról szól; a *Mit csinálunk?* -ban, az *Él-e még az Isten?* -ben a szabadságát kaszával-karddal védő nép jelenik meg.³

(The seven poems published in *Nép Barátja* are both in object and style closely related to the articles. They follow the events in the same way as the articles and join them in employing an ever sharper tone. *Egy életünk, egy halálunk* and *A legszebb virág* serve as a call to arms in the defence of liberty and the homeland; similar encouragement is offered by the heroic historical example of *Losonczy István* who sacrificed his life in the country's defence; *Lóra* speaks of those neighbours who have risen up against the Hungarians of the plains; in *Mit csinálunk?* and in *Is God still alive?* the people are shown defending their liberty with scythe and sword.)

These equations dissolve Arany's poetry into the very discourse it resists. It is in the signs of this resistance, the marks of the subject's troubled utterance, that Arany's political identity may be sought. What appears, above all else, in these poems is not a nation fighting for liberty, but the traces of a poetic subject struggling to find a credible voice in the confusion of battle, perpetually meeting contradictions, qualifying his objects, shifting his position in discourse. Political intention – the call to arms, the analysis of situation – is always problematized by the material suggestiveness of the poet's medium; the syntagmatic continuities of political statement are persistently interrupted by a paradigmatic movement of associations and qualifications.

Lóra, magyar, lóra! most ütött az óra,
Nem is óra ütött: vészharangot vernek:

(Lóra. .!)

(To horse, Magyar, to horse! Now the hour has struck. It is not even the hour striking: but the bells of danger tolling:).

In place of the constant subject of syntagm, we have a multiplicity of subject positions, a slippage across proposed voices, each one disinherited by the next, with no final identification. When for the first time in the period Arany produces a poetic „I” intended to be identified with its author in *Álom-való*, at the end of 1848, it bears all the scars of this struggle:

Fekszem kínos ágyon. Minden tagom össze-
Zsibbadoz fektemben, mintegy lekötözve.
Csak tompán sajog a fájdalom, nem éget;
Homlokomon érzek hideg veritéket.
Minden pehelyszál nyom, mint egy-egy kődarab,
Akadoz eremben a vér, s el-elmarad;
S míg legyez szárnyával borongó pillámon,
Körmével szorítja keblemet az álom.

(I lie on a bed of agony. My every limb stiffens where I lie as if tied down. The pain does not burn but throbs dully; I feel a cold sweat on my brow. Every feather of down weighs upon me like a stone, my blood clogs up in my veins and keeps stalling. And while fanning my gloomy eyelashes with its wings, reverie squeezes my heart with its nails.)

In this painful resort to the stable lyric subject, doubt is promoted to the level of conscious theme, where before it had plagued poetic statements through tensions of association and form. Perhaps, in Arany's own terms, this signifies a degeneration: „Így lettem én, hajlamom, irányom, munkaösztönöm dacára, subjectív költő”.⁴ (Thus I became, in spite of my every predisposition, leaning and instinct, a subjective poet.) The richness and beauty of *Álom-való* and *Válság idején* would suggest not, but clearly we are dealing with a different poetic problematic. These latter poems constitute a breakdown in the proposition of (supposedly opportune) personae, and release the implicit tensions and frustrations of their predecessors. It is unwise, however, to seek the subject where he is most eloquent, at the place in which he claims to reveal his identity. Rather, it is in his moments of uncertainty that he should be sought – where his discourse fails to fulfill its own promises of closure.

7. Doubt is most active when least articulate. When it finds logical formulation it simply tends towards dissent. In *Egyesülés* doubt is a fact of the poem's production, not its confident object. János Horváth sees in this poem the influence of Petőfi's *Két ország ölelkezése* rather than the true voice of Arany. He claims that, in contradistinction to *Egyesülés* and *Él-e még az Isten?*, „Több darabjában azonban itt is saját hangjára ismerünk” (In several pieces, however, we can recognize his own voice), singling out *Mit csinálunk?* and *Az örökség*.⁵ It has of course been popular to adduce the influence of Petőfi in this period, whether to excuse or celebrate Arany's political involvement, to excuse or celebrate poetic naiveties, or simply to indicate the profundity of their friendship. Whatever position we choose to adopt, it will never be sufficient to make any specific poetic production evaporate into an expedient version of history.

Egyesülés “celebrates” the union with Transylvania of May 1848. Arany, for sure, had a deeper understanding of the problems of such union than Petőfi, and thus good

reason for tempering the enthusiasm of the latter in his poem, As Keresztury notes, *Egyesülés* seems to anticipate the later *Erdély* in which Arany bitterly describes the fate of Transylvania some months later. After the confident hope of the former first stanza:

Az többé nem álom, nem kétség homálya:
Ismét egy a magyar kettévált hazája

(It is now no longer a dream nor the darkness of doubt: united once more is the divided Magyar homeland.)

we have the doubtful third stanza:

Oh, ki tudja, nincs-e bennünk
Rejtve már a mag –
Hogy a csak most egyesültek
Együtt haljanak.
Mint egymásra ismert ölelő testvérek,
Kikben hatni elkezd a lappangó méreg. . . ?

(Oh, who can tell if the seed is not already hidden within us – that those who have only now united will die together, like familiar brothers embracing, in whom the lurking poison starts to take effect.)

The movement is characteristic – from „rejtve” (hidden) to „lappangó” (lurking); „mag” (seed): to „méreg” (poison). Doubt is not discussed, argued, but is more actively effective in the modulation of signifiers. The radicality of the answer:

Nem, nem! – Élni fog a nemzet,
Amely összetart:
Kit önvétke meg nem hódít,
Nem hódítja kard.
Mebünhödtük ősapáink
Vétkét súlyosan;
Napjainknak, a jelenben,
Csak érénye van,
S az érényes nemzet jutalma nem égi:
Földön jut dicső és hosszú élet néki.

(No, no! – The nation which stands together will live on. He who is not vanquished by his own sins will not be vanquished by the sword. We have been punished heavily for the sins of our forefathers; but today in the present we know only virtue, and the virtuous nation is rewarded not in heaven, but is given a long and glorious life on earth.)

is again eloquent testimony to the profundity of the uncertainty embodied in the question. The effect of the repetition of the negation (the double „nem”) is not to refute but to *refuse* the doubt of the preceding stanza. The closing couplet is quite exceptional in Arany's poetry of the period; nowhere else does he suggest a promise of long life to the nation. The function of this rhetorical extremity („nem égi” but „földön jut dicső”) is to counter the troubling burden of the doubt. It is of no small

significance that this poem was not published along with the others during the revolution but had to wait until 1880 to see the press for the first time.

It is here perhaps that the literary achievement of Arany's "revolutionary" lyrics is most apparent. The poet relies neither upon thesis, nor upon a conventional system of known meanings, but rather forges a richly equivocal communication, through a most sensitive and profound exploitation of the material potential of his medium. While the result necessarily constitutes a loss of certainty, of political direction, the poetry generally transcends the limits of commonplace, offering a more complex version of the relation of the poetic subject to the dominant values of his age. If the search for Arany's political identity in the events of 1848–49 is to be anything more than a wild goose chase after conflicting quotations from formally incompatible sources, it is in this problematic relation that we must seek our object. The problems of politics – as later that of the belief itself – becomes for Arany primarily a problem of writing.

8. Firstly, however, a problem of reading.

A forradalomnak egy ideig csupán távoli szemlélője voltam, s a Vasárnapi ujságnak, melynek szerkesztésével megkínáltatám, csupán nevemet kölcsönöztem oda, mint szerkesztő társ, (azaz csak dolgozótárs) – magam folyvást Szalontán maradván.

(Autobiographical letter to Pál Gyulai 7 June 1855)

(For a while I was merely a distant observer of the revolution, and as to the Sunday newspaper which I was asked to edit, I merely lent my name as an editorial assistant – that is, as a contributor – while I myself remained in Szalonta.)

Arany's retrospective disinterest in his involvement in *Nép Barátja* has exercised a considerable influence upon critical attitudes towards his work of this period. It was in the 1880s that attention was first paid both to the paper and to his contributions as a whole. Béla Váli's article on *Nép Barátja* („Egy hirlap története 1848-ben”, in *Nemzet* February 7 and 8 1883), primarily concerned with Gereben Vas, offers a defence of Arany's populism, while Imre Visi's „Arany János a forradalom alatt” (*Nemzet* 1882 November 15) republishes Arany's *Nép Barátja* poems as a group for the first time. Visi poses the problem of the intentionality of the replacement of „Nép Barátja” with „Vasárnapi ujság” in the above quoted extract from Arany's autobiographical letter to Pál Gyulai:

Valószínű, hogy a levél e részében tollhiba van.

(It is probable that this part of the letter contains a slip of the pen.)

Then on reconsideration:

Nem lehetetlen, hogy Arany közönség elé szánt életrajzához akarva írta e sorokat ily szövegezésben, nem kívánván, hogy amaz idők sajátos viszonyai közt bárki utána keressen akkori működésének, a miből . . . akkor bizony könnyen kellemetlenségei támadhattak volna.

(It is not impossible that Arany chose to word these lines in this way because, intending his autobiographical statement for publication and considering the atmosphere of the age, he did not want anybody to check up on his earlier activities for from this . . . all kinds of difficulties might easily have arisen.)

If the miswriting constitutes a slip of the pen, the slip is a rich one: not only did *Nép Barátja* appear on a Sunday, but „Vasárnapi” also contains its editors name. The paper has nothing to do with Arany, it is the work of Vas.

Such questions of opportunism and intentionality are intensified in Arany's earlier Kőrösi autobiography. Here the dissociation from revolutionary politics becomes a complete rejection. The significance of this rejection is, of course, circumscribed by the conditions of its writing. Arany successfully applies for a teaching post while so many of his contemporaries are completing sentences in prison.

My point is not to elaborate a theory of biography and textual criticism, but to insist upon a certain semantic openness manifested by these texts. Any reading of the Kőrösi autobiography which effectively fixes its subject as moment of political reaction, confirms only one of the text's possible messages. Consider one sentence from the autobiography:

Ezekben és a Népbarátban közlött verseim némelyikében, nem tagadom, hogy lehetnek itt-ott olyan célzások, melyek mostani szempontból tekintve forradalminak bélyegeztethetnek: de tekintve az akkori körülményeket és még azt, hogy én egyszerű falusi ember az egész forradalom leküzdéséig oly helyen éltem, mintegy elszigetelve, hol a cs. kir. hadseregek egyszer is meg nem fordultak, hova semmi hirdetés, proclamatio vagy más ilyen egész 1849-ik évi Augusztusig teljességgel nem jutott, értem Bihar megyének azon déli szögét, hol Szalonta fekszik, s melyen az egész forradalom utoljára ottan összpontosult, — tekintve, mondom, e körülményeket, egyedül csendes, higgadt kedélyemnek köszönhetem, hogy a forradalom árjától százsorta jobban el nem ragadtattam, és ez idő alatt kelt verseimben is meglegedtem némi elfátyolozott célzásokkal nem az uralkodó ház ellen, hanem bizonyos alkotmányos féltékenységből eredet-
tekkkel, akkor és ott, amikor és ahol merészebb fellépések tapsokkal jutalmaztattak volna.⁶

(I do not deny that in these and in some of my poems published in *Nép Barátja* one may find here and there such allusions as might be considered revolutionary from today's point of view, but bearing in mind the circumstances of the time and the fact that I lived in isolation as a simple villager right up until the end of the revolution in a place where the k.u.k. army did not even once appear, and where not a single declaration, proclamation or anything else of the kind ever arrived right up until August 1849, by which I mean that southern corner of Bihar county where Szalonta lies, and upon which in the very closing stages the whole revolution was concentrated — taking into consideration, as I say, these circumstances, I have only my quiet and sober temperament to thank for the fact that I didn't get a hundred times more deeply caught up in the revolutionary tide, and that in my poetry of the time I was contented with no more than a few obscure insinuations, directed not against the sovereign, but originating from certain fears for the constitution, at a time when a more daring intervention would have been rewarded with far greater applause.)

Retrospectively the communication of the sentence lies less in its abstractable statement — a rejection of the politics of 1848 — than in its length and syntactic complexity. The constituent elements of its logic are recognizable from elsewhere:

Itt, hová csak későn, csak nagy-néha téved
A hír szózatának egy muló viszhangja

(*Válság idején*)

(Here, where no more than a fading echo of news ever strays from time to time and much belated:)

Bújdosom, szétömlött árjait kerülvén:
Hullámzása alig tetszik a víz-szélén.

(*Válság idején*)

(I hide avoiding the flooding tides: the waves are hardly noticed at the water's edge.)

while its laboured construction and self-qualification embody the tensions of its occasional production. Speculations of cowardice or political fidelity are little to the point here; indeed the whole question of sincerity is forced into a more workable perspective.

It has often been argued that Arany always remained faithful to the ideals of 1848 (eg. Keresztury, *Új Irás*, January 1983). But these ideals do not constitute an unequivocal, rehearsable system, and it is precisely Arany's assimilation of them which, as we have seen, most richly reproduces their equivocality. The importance of a text like the Kőrösi autobiography is that it resists a binary reading, the fusion of sincerity and writing. The kinds of question it demands are not „what kind of man was Arany, coward or revolutionary” but „how do these utterances produce meaning, how do they relate to other homologous productions?” We read the Kőrösi autobiography and, say, *Nemzetőr-dal* side by side, not merely to gauge Arany's personal development between 1848 and 1853, but to explore ways in which the one set of signs qualifies and mediates the other. The result is not the interpretation of a single new meaning – the same type of closure, merely on a more complex level – but a recognition and enumeration of the range of the text's possible, and even contradictory meanings. Thus the kind of reading the Kőrösi autobiography demands, offers as useful a model for the reading of Arany's poetry. When we finally tire of hunting an elusive subject, of fixing the source of the poetic voice firmly within one or another single ideological position (Arany the revolutionary, the traitor to his class, the true voice of the peasantry, the flatterer of Petőfi), we may begin to feel the full weight of his „revolutionary” lyrics. As the subject shifts, as form contends with theme, as metaphors sow the seeds of their own degeneration, we begin to recognize a richly contradictory – but for that very reason, full and sensitive – picture of the complex hopes and fears, struggles and failures, enmities and allegiances of 1848–49.

9. In most of the poetry considered so far, a popular political enthusiasm has been articulated through a mediating and self-censoring preoccupation with the material aspects of the poet's medium. Metaphor, image and device have been seen to qualify and problematize the confidence of political message. *Április 14-én* differs from such poetry in that it is the closest Arany comes in the period to a definitive, discursive, political statement in verse:

Egy a pálya, egy a végcél:
Élet, vagy dicső halál:
.....
Függetlenség! Ez a jelszó,
És szabadság a nagy cél:
Teljes független szabadság; –
Nem kell semmi, ami fél.

(One the path, and one the final aim: Life or glorious death . . . Independence! That's the watchword, and liberty the great aim: complete and independent liberty; – no half measures will do.)

However, in the light of our previous section, such a statement cannot be taken at face value. Indeed, critical responses to this poem bear testimony to its potential ambiguities:

Az *Április 14-én* nem tartozik a költő jelentős munkái közé: a trónfosztást népszerűsítő egykorú publicisztika hatásos megverselésénél aligha több.⁷

(*Április 14-én* does not belong among the poet's significant works; smacking of all the publicism of its age, it is hardly more than a popularization of the dethronement in verse.)

De a lelkesedés olyan óráiban is, melyek *Április 14-én* (1849) jutnak osztályrészéül, erkölcsi elvként már a későbbi, a Bach-korszakban annyira helyénvaló jelszót mondja ki, mely a *Tragédia* Ádámjának is éltetője, elégtétele lesz: „Csak az boldog, aki küzd”.⁸

(But even at such moments of enthusiasm as that experienced in *Április 14-én*, Arany employs, as a moral principle, the slogan which would later become so appropriate to the Bach era, and which informs Ádám's notion of life and atonement in *The Tragedy of Man*: “Only he who struggles is happy”.)

Költészete ez irányú fejlődésének záróköve az *Április 14-én* című vers: a trónfosztás napjával kapcsolatban a nagy döntés felszabadító hatását s a mindvégig való helytállásnak hősiességét szólaltatja meg.⁹

(The apex of this aspect of his poetry's development was the poem *Április 14-én*: referring to the day of dethronement, it celebrates the liberating effects of the great decision and the heroic impetus of unflinching resistance.)

Ebből világosan látható, hogy Arany számára a nemzeti költészet a politikai tartalommal telített népi költészetet jelentette. A nemzeti költészet megvalósulását a nép nemzeté emelkedésétől várta.¹⁰

(From this it can clearly be seen that for Arany national poetry meant popular poetry filled with political content. National poetry was to be achieved by raising the notion of the people to the level of the nation.)

Aranynak említett költeményéről azt hallni itt-ott, hogy valószínűleg a kormánynak, azaz Szemere Bertalan belügyminiszternek ösztönzésére, „megrendelésére” készült. Ez mindennek-előtt nem egyeztethető össze Arany jellemével. . . aki a *Nép Barátja*ban megjelent verseket és cikkeket írta, annak nem kell főnöki megrendelés, hogy az *Április 14-én*-t megírja, elég neki a maga „függetlenség” önérzete s azoknak a napoknak a forró hullámai.¹¹

(Here and there one comes across the argument that this poem was written on the prompting of, or even to the order of, the government, that is to say of Bertalan Szemere, the Minister of the Interior. This argument is, however, above all incompatible with Arany's character. . . the author of those poems and articles published in *Nép Barátja* needed no order from his superiors to make him write *Április 14-én*; his own “independent” self-respect and the stormy current of the times provided quite sufficient inspiration.)

The poem's very single-mindedness — „nem kell semmi, ami fél” — produces uncertainty in the reader familiar with Arany's other poetry of the period. The three instances of „szabadság” in stanza two, the word „jelszó”, and the „nagy” of „a nagy cél” are so untypical of the cautious, deliberating Arany as to risk a sense of self-parody. We are certainly presented with an idealized subject in the speaking voice of *Április 14-én* quite distinct from that of the self-conscious, reflexive narrator of *Az elveszett alkotmány*, who could not have let such phrases pass without sardonic qualification. Consider also how viciously Arany turns upon such rhetoric in *Vojtina Ars poeticája* (1861):

De a *hazáról*. . . Ugy van, a haza!
Zengjen felőle hát a dal, nosza! . . .
Késő ez is: mi haszna lelkesül
Az ember, ha középben belesül!

De meg, mit érne gyöngéd szó nekik,
Midőn a hont ordítva szeretik? —
Midőn a legszebb virág a mályva-ruzsa:
Köténybe rejti kis bokrát a muzsa.

(But about the *homeland*. . . that's it, the homeland! Come on, let the song resound It's too late for that: what's the use of enthusing when you get stuck half way.)

But what's the use of the gentle word to those who only know how to love the homeland with yells? When the fairest flower is the hollyhock and the muse hides its little bushes in her apron.)

or in the still later *Demokrata-nóta* (1867):

Deák Ferenc! Megélünk mi
Kend nélkül;
Kivánjuk a szabadságot
Rend nélkül.

(Ferenc Deák! We'll get by without you; we desire liberty without order.)

It is impossible to attribute to *Április 14-én* a fixed ideological position because it at once celebrates the spirit of the dethronement, while implicitly criticizing the naivety of the terms of this celebration. Whether or not this poem was tailored to the requirements of Bertalan Szemere there is no knowing; but a sense of bitter resignation and implicit irony can certainly be gleaned from the text when seen in relation to Arany's other productions. It is as if Arany adopts this confident political voice at will — when the situation demands such a role of him — and then rehearses its discourse so competently, so fluently, as to make the *fact* of acting more conspicuous than the message of the act itself.

Two other poems in which a distinctively popular subject position is adopted should be mentioned here, *Nemzetőr-dal* and *Beállottam*. Both propose a fictional first person affording the poet a freedom of identity with which to approximate the dominant values of the period, and in both, Arany comes closest to the popular lyrical

poetry of 1848–49. Flower images, for example, work independently of Arany's dominant metaphor of the „vér–virág”:

Süvegemen nemzetiszín rózsza

(*Nemzetőr-dal*)

(In my cap a rose of the national colours),

Ez az ősi vitézségnek virága

(*Beállottam*)

(This is the flower of ancient valour)

belonging to a positive and generative system of values. The new recruit is assured the admiration and affection of women:

Ajakamon édes babám csókja

(*Nemzetőr-dal*)

(Upon my lips my sweetheart's kiss),

. . . . veres zsinórt veszek rá,
Hogy a világ minden lyánya nevet rá.

(*Beállottam*)

(I shall attach a piece of scarlet cord, and win the smile of every girl in the world.)

a value which reappears in Arany's first article in *Nép Barátja*, „Önkénytes sereg”:

Ezután így szól a magyar lány: Biz én nem megyek kendhez, Istók bácsi; nem mert kend beállni az önkénytesek közé, s az ólpadláson hortyogott, míg a többi legények a hazáért viaskodtak!

(Then the Hungarian girl will say: I'll not marry you for sure, Master Steve; you didn't dare join up with the volunteers, and just lay there snoring in the loft above the pigsty while all the other boys went off to fight for their country!)

These poems embody a received masculinity and morality fitting to the author of *Toldi*. Indeed the closing stanza of *Nemzetőr-dal*:

Olyan marsra lábam se billentem,
Hogy azt bántsam, aki nem bánt engem:
De a szabadságért, ha egy iznyi,
Talpon állok mindhalálig vini.

(I never joined any army march to harm anybody who had not harmed me: but for the merest taste of freedom I would fight upon my feet till death.)

is clearly reminiscent of

Senki nem állhatott ellent haragjának,
De ingét is odaadta barátjának,
S ha nem ellenkedett senki az országgal,
Örömet tanyázott a vig cimborákkal.

(*Toldi*)

(No one could withstand his rage, but to a friend he'd give his very shirt; and if nobody rose up against his country, he'd gladly pass the time among his merry pals.)

Here, the cause of revolution is morally, as well as historically, just.

In proposing the persona of the patriotic recruit, Arany heals the deep contradictions of his own attitude to the revolution. Arany himself finds it difficult to contribute to the revolutionary effort: he turns down the offer to stay in Pest to edit *Nép Barátja* because

Ily ingatag alapra nem fogom építeni magam és családom jövődjét, kivált a mostani zavaros világban.¹²

(I shall not build my own and my family's future upon such unstable foundations, especially in today's confounded world.)

He can speak unequivocally and single-mindedly, adopting the popular values of the struggle, only if the voice is not his own. Again accusations of opportunism or insincerity – whatever their status in terms of biographical description – bypass the cumulative communication of his lyrics of this period. Revolution, the „mostani zavaros világ”, is approached from a multiplicity of conflicting angles, and appears as a historically contradictory reality. As Arany does not pledge fidelity to any one version of this reality, his lyrics manifest a deeper and more necessary sincerity to the form of its contradictions themselves.

10. On 1st April 1848 Arany writes to Petőfi:

Jól tudom, hogy sem időd sem kedved mostan ily közönös dolgokkal vesződni, mint például ezen simplex költemény.

(I know full well that you have neither time nor inclination at present to bother about such trivial things as this simple poem.)

and later in the same letter: „ugylehet, ez utolsó költeményem”. Arany's first response to the revolution is to stop writing. It is, after all, primarily Petőfi's affair: „vedd szíves kézsorításomat polgári dicső küzdelmeidért”¹³ (accept my hearty handshake for your glorious civil struggles).

When Arany does write, his work bears the marks of a shifting subject, unable to find a fixed and satisfactory position. Petőfi had created the illusion of a natural language, naturalizing the discourse of the revolution, making it vital and immediate. Arany denaturalizes this discourse, making it markedly literary, a language among languages, rather than a spontaneous necessity. As suggested earlier this leads to a loss of active political certainty, but at the same time to a poetry capable of articulating historical contradictions on both a thematic and *formal* level. It is here that we may locate the essence of the poetical contribution of Arany's lyrics of the revolutionary period – and indeed the core of the poet's modernity. The resistance of a fixed subjectivity coupled with a discriminating responsiveness to the material suggestiveness of his language, produces a particularly full and complex picture of the tensions of

1848–49. It is perhaps true that Arany „sohasem jutott el az emberi lét egységes értelmezéséig” (never arrived at a unified interpretation of human existence), and „nem hozott létre önálló poétikát” (did not produce an independent poetics. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák in *Az el nem ért bizonyosság*), but if so, then for good reason. Arany was too acutely sensitive to the very structures of signification which facilitate even the contemplation of such interpretations, to bind himself to any single system of values, requiring a multiplicity of open literary forms to exploit the full and contradictory nature of his objects. If in *Az elveszett alkotmány* Arany had experimented with those forms of narrative reflexivity which would later play such a significant role in works like *A nagyidai cigányok* and *Bolond Istók*, it was in Arany’s political poetry of 1848–49 that the lyric too became reflexive, laying the foundations for the agile poetics of the great lyrics of the fifties.

Notes

1. Keresztury Dezső, *S mi vagyok én?* Budapest 1963, p. 243.
2. Horváth János, *Tanulmányok* Budapest 1956, p. 435.
3. Keresztury, op. cit., p. 243.
4. Preface to *Elegyes költői darabok*, quoted from Arany János *Összes Művei* Volume I, Budapest 1951, p. 403.
5. Horváth, op. cit., p. 435.
6. In Törös László, *Arany János Nagykőrösön* Nagykőrös 1974, p. 41.
7. Keresztury, op. cit., p. 247.
8. Sőtér István, *Nemzet és haladás* Budapest 1963, pp. 190–91.
9. Barta János, *Arany János* Budapest 1953, p. 72.
10. Hermann István, *Arany János esztétikája* Budapest 1956, p. 30.
11. Tolnai Vilmos, *Arany János: Április 14-én in Irodalomtörténet* 1928, Vol. XVIII, No. 3–4, p. 45.
12. Letter to his wife, Ercsey Julianna, May 18, 1848, in *Összes Művei* Vol. XV, p. 209.
13. Letter to Petőfi, March 26, 1848, in *Összes Művei* Vol. XV, p. 196. (My emphasis.)