

## The “Giant Role Model”: the “Serbian” Petőfi

Katalin HÁSZ-FEHÉR

University of Szeged, Department of Hungarian Literature

[haszfeher@gmail.com](mailto:haszfeher@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4349-1658>

### ABSTRACT

The reception of Sándor Petőfi's poems and the critical discourse on them in German by bilingual German poets and publicists in Hungary began during the poet's lifetime and ran parallel to the development of his career. In the same period, however, from the mid-1840s, a very intense interest in his person and his poetry, which was even deeper and more diverse than in German, was awakened in southern Slavic, especially Serbian, literature. This paper explores the possible reasons for his integration in Serbian poetry and public poetry. Among the most important factors is the fact that in the 18th and 19th centuries, strong centres of Serbian culture developed in Hungary, including Buda, and that in the northern part of present-day Serbia, in Vojvodina, the population had for centuries been of mixed nationality, including Serbs, Hungarians and Germans. As a result, a large part of the Serbian intelligentsia spoke Hungarian, and many of the Hungarians in Vojvodina had spoken Serbian since the last century, so they could read each other's literature in the original. Petőfi's poetry, like much of 19th century Hungarian literature, was translated by renowned authors, sometimes of European quality, and his poetry was an inspiration for Serbian Romanticism in terms of form, theme and poetics (Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Đura Jakšić). Finally, it is worth mentioning the historical circumstances, the fact that, although the two peoples were on opposite political sides in the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848 and several times later, Petőfi's figure transcended political differences and his reception remained unbroken even in the most difficult periods. The belief that Petőfi, who originally went by the name Petrovics, was of Serbian origin – a belief that is difficult to verify biographically – and which dates back to Petőfi's own time, has contributed to this. The layers and trends in the history of Petőfi's reception in Serbia also shed light on the mechanisms of intellectual relations in the common cultural space of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans.

**Keywords:** Central and Eastern European and Western Balkan Romanticism, 19th century Hungarian and Serbian poetry, Sándor Petőfi, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Đura Jakšić

The Serbian reception of Petőfi and his poetry is a well-established subject in both Hungarian and Serbian literary history, even if the research is limited to a narrow professional arena: the publications of former and

current lecturers and researchers at the Hungarian Department in Novi Sad/Újvidék,<sup>1</sup> Serbia, the studies of scholars investigating Hungarian–Serbian contacts in Hungary, and the writings of a few Serbian literary scholars with closer ties to Vojvodina and the Novi Sad/Újvidék academic society, Matica Srpska, are the most important sources on the complex and multifaceted mechanism through which Petőfi gained a place in Serbian poetry.

However, compared to the intensity of the research and the number of translations, the results seem to be poorly known both among the Hungarian and the southern Slavic literary public. This is illustrated, among other things, by the reception of a 1973 edition of a selection of Petőfi's works in Serbian, published jointly by Matica Srpska and Nolit in Belgrade (Petefi 1973). The volume was compiled for the 150th anniversary of Petőfi's birth by Mladen Leskovic, a literary historian from Sivac/Szivác in Vojvodina, former director of the Matica Srpska and member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, and includes, in an appendix, a bibliography of Petőfi's translations and publications in Serbian/Croatian by Desanka Bogdanović. This list shows clearly that Petőfi was a constant presence in Serbian literature almost from the beginning, from the 1850s, and that his texts were translated and his poetry was studied by such renowned poets, writers, literary scholars, and historians such as Đura Jakšić, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Veljko Petrović, Jovan Popović, Dobrica Cesarić, Danilo Kiš, Ivan V. Lalić, Mladen Leskovic himself, and many others, up to the present day. One of the most renowned Serbian translators of Hungarian literature, Sava Babić, the founder of the Department of Hungarian Language and Literature in Belgrade, in his review of the volume, pointed out that Petőfi, in his versatility and completeness, was only partially received in Serbian literature, despite the large number of translations. He saw the virtue of the jubilee selection precisely in the fact that it showed all the facets and features of the oeuvre in a chronological overview – from naive, cheerful play to tragic tone, from genre scenes to real, serious poetry, from poignant self-portraits to fervent patriotic poetry or role-playing poetry (Babić 1973, 21-22).

At a conference held in 1973 at the Hungarian Language and Literature Department and the Institute of Hungarian Studies of the Faculty of Humanities in Novi Sad/Újvidék, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Petőfi's birth, János Bányai came to a very similar conclusion as Sava Babić based on the bibliographical material of the same jubilee volume (Bányai 1973). The first Petőfi poem to appear in print, *The Ruins of the Inn*, was translated by Jovan Jovanović Zmaj in

1 Names of places of Hungarian cultural and/or historical relevance that are outside the political borders of modern Hungary are given in two variants throughout this paper: first, in their official present-day name, and, second, in their traditional Hungarian name.

1855 (Petefi 1855),<sup>2</sup> and from then on some two hundred and fifty of his poems were published in South Slavic by various translators, all of them being reprinted several times, some of them up to 10 to 15 times in different publications. Although the translated poems include *End of September*,<sup>3</sup> *The Song Calls for Funeral*,<sup>4</sup> *One Thought*<sup>5</sup> and many other masterpieces of Petőfi's poetry, scattered in journals or anthologies, they did not give a complete picture of him. Before the mid-20th century, only *John the Valiant*, translated by Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, appeared in book form (Petefi 1860).<sup>6</sup> The first edition of Petőfi's poems was published only in 1946; this volume of about 150 pages contained mostly translations by Zmaj and another important Petőfi translator, Blagoje Brančić, but it was a highly thematic selection, focusing on the (world) revolutionary and patriotic aspects, in keeping with the post-war situation, together with the complete publication of *The Apostle* (Petefi 1946).<sup>7</sup> In 1969 a new, much thinner volume was published under the title *Sloboda i ljubav* [Freedom and Love], edited by Ivan Ivanji, a writer, poet, and literary translator born in Veliki Bečkerek/Nagybecskerek (today's Zrenjanin/Nagybecskerek, Serbia), who aimed to present Petőfi in a more nuanced way, with three themes (homeland, love, and freedom), but this booklet of barely ninety pages was clearly inadequate for the task (Petefi 1969). Finally, the 1973 jubilee volume followed, which also contained few poems, only forty-one of them, mainly from among the more recent translations. According to János Bányai, it was primarily intended to show the modernity of Petőfi's poetry, but at the same time, as Bányai puts it, the undertaking provided a “relatively reassuring insight” into Petőfi's oeuvre (Bányai 1973).

The three editions also show that Petőfi's Serbian translation history – though it has waxed and waned in waves – has been continuous and always updated, according to the historical circumstances, cultural impulses, poetic trends, and academic interests at the time. As far as I know, after 1973, a single volume of Petőfi's poetry was published, translated by Miklós Maróti (Petefi 2009), but it did not meet with any response. At the same time, new translators in journals and anthologies have constantly attempted to render Petőfi's texts into Serbian, and Sava Babić wrote his doctoral dissertation on the history, nature, and poetics of these translations in 1981, which was published four years later in book form (Babić 1985).

- 2 *A csárda romjai*; Serbian translation as *Razorena čarda*. Translated into English by William N. Loew. Throughout this paper, titles of Petőfi's poems in English and/or Serbian are given together with the translator's name if they have been published in translation before, and without it and in square brackets if they have not.
- 3 *Szeptember végén*; English translation by George Szirtes, and also, as *At the End of September*, by William N. Loew.
- 4 *Temetésre szól az ének*; English translation by Sándor Főfai.
- 5 *Egy gondolat bánt engemet*; English translation by George Szirtes.
- 6 *János vitéz*; English translation by John Ridland.
- 7 *Az apostol*; English translation by Victor Clement.

However, Petőfi's reception in Serbia, despite its partial and variable nature, can be measured not only in terms of the number of translations but also in terms of its impact. As a result of the work of the greatest translators, especially Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Petőfi became, so to speak, an integral part of Serbian literature, his poetry influencing the whole of southern Romanticism, its themes and forms, as well as entering Serbian popular poetry, and Petőfi himself became a model and inspiration for the use of folk elements in Serbian poetry in the 1850s. In his study, Imre Bori, for example, points out that in addition to the adoption of the Serbian ten-syllable narrative form, the *deseterac*, in Hungarian poetry and its use in Vörösmarty's historical and fairy-tale romanticism, the Hungarian *felező tizenkettes* "half-twelfth" verse became established in Serbian poetry as the *dvanaesterac* following the poetry of Petőfi and Arany, becoming the basis of "epic poetry with a folk spirit" associated with the folkloric movement of Vuk Karadžić (Bori 1973).

If we look for reasons as to how Petőfi could have made such a deep impression on Serbian contemporaries and posterity – before any great Western European culture could – three arguments emerge almost immediately from this very complex process. One concerns the mixed ethnic and cultural relations that had characterised the history and society of these peoples for centuries. It is well known that in the 18th and 19th centuries, a large part of the Serbian intelligentsia was brought up in Hungarian centres and schools, as well as in Vienna. In Buda, a Serbian scholarly society, the *Matica Srpska*, was founded in 1826 and operated here until its move to Novi Sad/Újvidék in 1864, together with a boarding school for Serbian speaking students, the so-called *Thökölyanum*, founded by Száva Thököly-Popovics. Serbian scientific, and literary journals, and newspapers were also published in Hungary around this time. As a result, the Serbian intelligentsia knew Hungarian and German well, and Hungarian literature was read, known, and popularised in the original. Knowledge of the Hungarian language was a characteristic feature of this intelligentsia until the end of World War I, and in some cases even between the two world wars, even after the cultural centres were moved to Novi Sad/Újvidék and then to Belgrade. However, quite a few Hungarians, especially in the South, spoke Serbian, and their numbers increased after WWI and then after WWII, as political borders changed. Bilingualism among Serbs, Croats, and Hungarians had thus been ongoing for centuries, mutually enabling their cultures to have direct access to each other's intellectual products. But while Serbian literature was little integrated by Hungarian intellectuals in Hungary, despite its extensive translation, Serbian/Croatian literature developed a "genetic connection" with Hungarian poetry, to use István Fried's turn of phrase (Fried 1984, 677). Of the greatest figures of Serbian romanticism, there are numerous parallels with Vörösmarty even in the works of Branko Radičević, who studied in Sremski Karlovci/Karlóca and presumably did not know Hungarian (Veselinović-Šulc 1975).

The other reason is that Petőfi, whose original surname was Petrovics, was believed by many of his contemporaries – Hungarians and Serbs alike – to be of Serbian origin, based on his own comments. He was described as characteristically Serbian in appearance and temperament by the Hungary Serbian writer Jakov Ignjatović, who met him in person in early 1848, although he was not enchanted by him (Ignjatović 1973, 57-60). Describes him as a Serb Jovan Jovanović Zmaj (Petefi 1855) and Anton Hadžić in his preface to Jovanović’s translation of *John the Valiant*, in 1860 (Hadžić 1860, XXXV-XXXVI). The belief was so widespread that Blagoje Brančić, in his 1900 study of Petőfi written in Serbian, writes almost apologetically that Petőfi was of Slovak origin but does not deny that if the Serbian people believe him to be their own, he must remain so. He concludes in a section of his paper that the name of “Šandor Petrović” is as well known among the Serbian people “as that of any other Serbian poet” (Brančić 1900, 5-7). Despite the biographical facts, which have since been clarified and which allow only a vague assumption of the southern Slavic origin of the paternal line (Kerényi 2008, 16), it is interesting that both Croatian and Serbian Wikipedias, and many other online sites in their wake, still claim with certainty that Petőfi was of Serbian origin.

Perhaps the most important factor in Petőfi’s establishment in the Southern Slavic world was the fact that – in addition to translations of extremely high quality – two great figures of Serbian Romanticism, Đura Jakšić and Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, integrated his entire poetic program and oeuvre into their own poetry. Both were a decade younger than Petőfi: Jakšić was born in 1832, Zmaj in 1833, and both were still teenagers in the mid-to-late 1840s. Jovan Jovanović completed his secondary and part of his university education in various places in the Habsburg Monarchy, in Pozsony (Pressburg, today’s Bratislava, Slovakia), Pest, Prague, and Vienna; from 1863 he was director of the Serbian Thököly Institute in Buda, and, as a result, spoke Hungarian and German well. His translations of Petőfi, János Arany, Mór Jókai, Imre Madách, János Garay, Gergely Czuczor, Károly Szász, and Kálmán Tóth are more or less recorded in the literature (Popovics 1913; Póth 1972; Csuka 1938; Babić 1984; Veselinović-Šulc 1984; Fried 1987, 1988; Németh 2014), but there are also many quotations of and allusions to Hungarian poetry in his works. For example, in his love cycle *Roses* (Đulići), published in 1864, various themes, motifs, and verse passages from Petőfi’s poetry can be recognized, and later, in *Starmali* [“Little smarty-pants”, in contemporary translation], a humorous children’s magazine he edited, in one of his poems from 1882 *Spram meseca* [Facing the moon]<sup>8</sup> he also sketches Petőfi’s figure, or, more precisely, the statue inaugurated at the time, as well as his own relationship to him: “Šešir skidam – ne pred kipom / (Na kipu je dosta mana), / Šešir skidam pred spomenom / Uzorita velikana.” [“I raise my hat – not to the

8 Vol. 5, no. 28 (10 October 1882).

monument / (I find too many faults in the statue), / I raise my hat to the memory / Of the giant role model”]. Petőfi’s words resound in Zmaj’s patriotic poetry, for instance, elements of Petőfi’s cycle *Felhők* [Clouds] in his elegies.

He lived in Pest until 1870, when he completed his medical studies, and from then on he worked as a doctor in various villages and towns in Vojvodina and Serbia, including Novi Sad/Újvidék, Pančevo/Pancsova, Futog/Futak, Kamenica, and Belgrade, in addition to his literary, editorial and translation activities. He edited several satirical and children’s magazines and took the last name *Zmaj* (Dragon) in 1864 when he launched his satirical magazine of the same name. In 1872, his life took a tragic turn: he lost, to illness, four of his five children as well as his wife Euphrosina, or Ružica as he called her, to whom he wrote his cycle *Roses*. Zmaj was left alone with their fifth child, the infant Smiljka, and two adopted daughters, but when he moved to Futog/Futak in the mid-1870s, Smiljka also died. Years after this tragic event, in 1882, he wrote the second part of his earlier love poetry, the elegy cycle titled *Đulici uveoci* [Wilted roses].

His work as a translator as well as his versatile poetry was highly appreciated by the Hungarian literary life of the time. In the commemorative album published in 1874 on the occasion of the quarter-century anniversary of his literary work, there are letters of greeting from János Arany, Pál Gyulai, and Kálmán Tóth (*Album* 1874, 53-55); Hungarian newspapers regularly reported on him and occasionally published translations of his works, and he was elected an external member of the Kisfaludy Society, which congratulated him on the occasion of his 40th anniversary as a writer. In 1883, the literary daily newspaper *Fővárosi Lapok* [Capital City Newspaper] emphasised that Zmaj was a poet of European spirit and importance. Despite all this, the only Hungarian-language selection of his works that was published in the 20th century was an anthology edited by Károly Ács and with an introduction by Mladen Leskovic, entitled *Hol megálltam...* [Where I Stopped...] (Jovanović 1983).

Đura Jakšić and Zmaj are often compared by historians of Hungarian–South Slavic relations to the Petőfi–Arany poet duo. This parallel is true in the sense that Zmaj was more serene and pursued a middle-class lifestyle, and his poetry was more complex but also more meditative and elegiac, not built on the momentary heat of intense and exciting experiences but using many shades of naive and bitter humour, and, through his editorial work, he was also known as the father of Serbian children’s literature. He was also, indeed, much more open-minded and viewed the diverse, multi-ethnic, mixed-culture world of the Habsburg Monarchy perhaps with more enjoyment than Jakšić, and, in this respect, was like Arany, but in many respects also like Mór Jókai. His knowledge was also broader than Jakšić’s; his intertexts, references, and translations include German, French, English, Russian, Polish, and other European authors, and in 1861 his own first volume was entitled

*Istočni biser* [The pearl of the East], in which he translated into Serbian the poets of Hafiz, Mirza Shaffy and other Arabic and Persian poets. In the late 1840s, he also discovered Petőfi earlier than Đura Jakšić, but, as Sava Babić points out, he could not identify with the revolutionary layer of his poetry. It is clear from his translations that he stopped in late 1847 and early 1848, this being the limit to which he could follow the thoughts of his favourite poet. “The last poems that Zmaj translated reflect the moderate Petőfi”, writes Babić, although he also points out that Zmaj could only become acquainted with Petőfi’s post-1848 poems much later (Babić 1993, 27).

In contrast, Đura Jakšić, who also did not have the opportunity to read all of Petőfi’s revolutionary poetry, seems to have had an instinctive grasp of this layer. Jakšić’s affinity with Petőfi was first pointed out by Blagoje Brančić in his aforementioned study of Petőfi, written at the turn of the century. He attributed the similarities in their poetry to their shared spirituality, eruptive temperament, sincerity of feeling, depth of ideas, and the power of their poetic imagery and language, and believed that this was the reason why, especially in their patriotic, freedom-fighting poems, there was often a similarity of thought and expression, and, as he puts it, “Jakšić and Petőfi are comparable” (Brančić 1900, 28). From this point of departure, the later researcher of the parallels between the poetry of the two of them, Magdolna Veselinović-Šulc, juxtaposes several texts and passages by them: in Jakšić’s version of Petőfi’s *Freedom and Love*,<sup>9</sup> the main idea changes to *Srbin, sloboda* [Serbs and freedom]; but motifs from the *National Song*,<sup>10</sup> *Föl!* [Up!], and *A nemzethez* [To the nation], as well as from his love poetry, lyrical poetry, and “wine songs” appear in Jakšić’s texts (Veselinović-Šulc 1973).

This may be due to their similar living conditions. Both were constantly on the move, Jakšić’s personality, like Petőfi’s, was “shaped by student life, cafés, pubs, and the life of a wanderer. They went to school little and travelled a lot, they wandered, and deprivation was their constant companion” (Veselinović-Šulc 1973, 195).

Jakšić was born in Srpska Crnja/Serbcsernye, not far from Kikinda in the present-day Banat/Bánát region, and his father was a Serbian priest. He completed the first three years of his schooling here, but from then on he, like Petőfi, moved frequently. He studied in Szeged beginning with 1842, in Timișoara/Temesvár (today in Romania) in 1846, in Pest for a short time in 1847, and in Veliki Bečkerek/Nagybecskerek after his military service in 1848. In the latter, he studied drawing and painting, which also raises another parallel with Hungarian literature: it recalls the dilemmas of the young Jókai between painting and literature, and his later, novelist’s fascination with painting topics. Unlike Jókai, however, Jakšić stuck to the fine arts, and in the process became a poet, sometimes working in parallel, with brush and pen at the same time. Among the two hundred or so of his surviving paintings, the best known and most

<sup>9</sup> *Szabadság, szerelem*; English translation by Leslie A. Kery.

<sup>10</sup> *Nemzeti dal*; English translation by Alan Dixon.

beautiful are his portrait of Mila Popović, the daughter of a Kikinda innkeeper and later Belgrade actress *The girl in blue* (1856), and a love song written to/about her titled *Mila*, one of the most widely loved love songs in Serbian literature.

From 1851 to 1853 Jakšić continued his studies of painting in Vienna and then in Munich, returning to Kikinda in 1855 not staying long. In 1857 he worked as an art teacher in various Serbian villages and towns. He married in Požarevac, but his wife and three children did not bring peace to his life. He spent his later years as a teacher, and when he was dismissed from his state post in 1871, he worked as a proofreader at the state printing office in Belgrade and was a regular visitor to the inns, leading a bohemian lifestyle, until he died in 1878, ill, but as a direct result of physical revenge from an insulted general mocked by him in a pub. In his last days, his doctor and poet friend from his young days, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, tried to cure his illness and injuries. The biographies also tell us that Jakšić lived in constant financial difficulties and debt, and in his last years in a state of poverty: his life was thus similar to that of Pusztafi, a fictional Petőfi-like character who (would have) survived the War of Independence, as depicted by Mór Jókai in his 1862 novel *Politikai divatok* [Political fashions].

Jakšić's literary oeuvre consists of some fifty lyrical and epic poems, about forty short stories, a few dramas, and an unfinished novel (Đurić 1984). His turn to poetry in the early 1850s is documented as being due to Petőfi's influence. He met Jovan Jovanović Zmaj in Vienna, where the latter was also studying at the time, and, as a letter from Zmaj attests, they shared a room and read Petőfi together in the original, presumably the second edition of the *Complete works* of 1848: the first volume of Zmaj's copy is still in the library of Matica Srpska in Sad/Újvidék, with Zmaj's translator's notes and comments (Kovaček 1973).

Jakšić's first poetic experiments, as mentioned above, were written in the spirit of Petőfi's poetry. His poems were first published in 1853 in the Matica Srpska journal *Letopis*, but shortly before that, in October 1852, he sent his father a letter in which he sent a Petőfi translation, 'a short poem' (quoted from the correspondence of Jakšić's, which was prepared for publication by Milan Kostić in 1951, see Veselinović-Šulc, 1973, 94). From then on, the Petőfi experience would define him for the rest of his life. In the many hundreds of pages of Jakšić's bibliography, prepared by Silvija Đurić in 1984, several of the entries quote his recollections of 1848–49, addressed to Jovan Jovanović Zmaj in 1871, in which he also mentions Petőfi: "[...] Oh how beautifully this sad nature matches the sadness of the human heart, as rendered so beautifully and poetically by Petőfi in one of his poems:

A szomorú égen űz  
Csepp cseppeket  
Az én sápadt arcomon  
Könny könnyeket...



[In the sad sky  
 Droplets of droplets  
 On my pale face  
 Tears of tears...]  
 Now I have no Petőfi – I have lost him...”<sup>11</sup>

In his study, István Póth lists other passages from Jakšić’s prose that might be evidence of his experience of Petőfi, but this quotation takes their relationship further towards another, more political, problem. It is well known that in 1848–1849 Serbs and Hungarians confronted each other and fought bloody battles in Vojvodina as part of the failed Hungarian War of Independence. But the 1850s brought sad disappointment and difficult years of reprisals for both peoples. In his memoirs of 1848–49, Jakšić provides a detailed sketch of the upsurge that inspired the Serbs to fight for their independence, and which was followed by the great disillusionment that followed in 1849. In the text quoted above, Jakšić paints a picture of his broken father, a priest from Srpska Crnja/Szerbcsernye who, on hearing of the death of a friend, a fellow prisoner and fellow sufferer, said the following bitter words: “Ah, how we have fallen and suffered – and what we have received for it!... Our brothers and our children have dived into blood to fish out for their posterity the most precious pearl shell – only ... instead of freedom they have received [bullet] pierced coats and bronze crosses ... Oh, oh, oh! What a sacrifice, and what a reward!” (Jakšić 1978, 87)

Although Jakšić wrote down his memoirs two decades after the War of Independence, in his changed circumstances, it is a fact that in 1848, at the age of 16, he volunteered to join the Serbian army rebelling against Hungarians, and it was pure chance that he did not have to face Petőfi in these battles, as he did, for example, face János Vajda in the battle of Srbobran/Szenttamás, in which both of them took part and in which Jakšić was wounded. There is thus a great contradiction between his early, poet’s enthusiasm for Petőfi and his young, almost childish Serbian patriot’s armed struggle against Hungarians. In their attempts to resolve this contradiction, literary historians argue that Jakšić was not yet familiar with Petőfi and Hungarian poetry at this time. The conditions and events of the Hungarian War of Independence, his misunderstood and mismanaged nationalist policies, and even the Serbian principality’s conflicting public and background political intentions may explain this confrontation, and Jakšić himself offered a key to understanding his youthful stance in retrospect when, in his memoirs, he highlighted the disappointment, misguidedness, and fatal features of the imperial policies of both nations concerning this period.

11 Translated by Vujičić D. Stojan, quoted in Póth 1973. Although this part of Jakšić’s letter and the “Petőfi” poem is cited by many literary historians, it should be noted that such a text does not exist in Petőfi’s oeuvre. Jakšić may have misremembered and read or heard this poem somewhere else. Based on my research, however, no such poem can be found in the middle of the 19th century, not by any author.

A contextualised view of the early years is thus as necessary as a historical background for reading Jakšić's later poems, which have Petőfi parallels, but also for his oeuvre as a whole. From the 1850s onwards, Petőfi's freedom-fighting poetry and his role as a Tyrtaean poet became topical for Serbia, and thus for Jakšić himself, on several occasions, as Serbia continued to struggle for three more decades for liberation from Turkish occupation and for an independent Serbian state, while internal dynastic political conflicts flared up repeatedly. Despite the apparently neutral policy of Prince Aleksandar Karađorđević, who had estates in Pest and Timișoara/Temesvár, among other places, and who had managed the rebellion against the Hungarians in Vojvodina in 1848, Serbian units were partly involved on the side of Russia in the Crimean War of 1853–56, and partly, using the conflicts between the great powers, the fight against the Turks became a topical issue for Serbia once again. Later, under French and Sardinian encouragement, the Serbs also contacted Kossuth and the Hungarian emigration. After the ousting of Prince Karađorđević in 1858, Miloš Obrenović was restored to power, and between 1860 and 1868 his son Mihajlo was enthroned as prince, who in 1866 established a short-lived anti-Turkish Balkan alliance; from 1876 onwards, battles with the Turks followed, and in 1877 the Russo–Turkish War broke out, in which the Serbs again fought on the Russian side. At the same time, not only under the pretext of the connection with the Kossuth emigration but also due to other circumstances, there was a Serbian–Hungarian rapprochement in the late 1850s and early 1860s, which has been discussed in detail in several studies (see, for example, Ress 2004, esp. 164–168).

The main reasons include the rise to power of Miloš and Mihajlo Obrenović in 1858 and 1860, respectively, who spent part of the preceding period, i.e. part of their exile, in Vienna. It should be noted that in 1848 both of them used all their power and influence to prevent a Serbian uprising against the Hungarians. In 1853, Mihajlo married the Hungarian Countess Júlia Hunyady of Kéthely, and from then on he lived on his Hungarian estate in Ivanka/Ivánka, near Pozsony/Pressburg (today's Bratislava, Slovakia). In this way, he maintained direct contact with Hungarian aristocratic circles and saw a much better chance for the independence of Serbia and Vojvodina in an alliance with Hungarian policies opposed to absolutism than in a reconciliation with imperial centralism. It is known, however, that Prince Mihajlo was assassinated in 1868 and succeeded on the throne by his cousin Milan, barely fourteen years old, who effectively took over from the regents appointed to his side in 1872. It was during his reign – and in the year of Đura Jakšić's death – that the Berlin Peace Treaty of 1878 declared Serbia's independence and ended the Russo–Turkish War. Jakšić survived the peace treaty of July 13 by barely half a year, dying on November 16, and thus did not live to see Serbia become an independent kingdom in 1882, through a secret agreement with the

Austro-Hungarian Empire, with King Milan I at its head and politically and economically connected to Austria–Hungary.

Many of Jakšić’s poems explicitly reflect on internal political events, the battles with the Turks, and the independence struggles in Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Bosnia. In the 1873 edition of his poems, he addressed the dedicatory poem to Milan Obrenović, followed immediately afterward, in a separate chapter, by poems welcoming Miloš Obrenović at the change of prince in 1858, a poem mourning Mihajlo Obrenović, and then again poems welcoming Milan, who began to rule in 1872 (Jakšić 1873). His long poem *Prve žrtve* [The First Sacrifices] dates from 1860; in 1862, he wrote a series of poems on the clashes with the Turks, in 1867 the poem *Jevropi* [To Europe], in 1871 *Bojna pesma* [Battle Song] and *Straža* [Sentry]; later poems include the 1875 *Karaula na Vučjoj poljani* [The Watchtower on Vučja Poljana] – (see Jakšić 1882, II, 140-146) and *Pozdrav* [Salutation] (Jakšić 1882, I, 107), both reacting to the Serbian–Turkish battles of 1876, which preceded the Russo–Turkish War. One of his last poems, written in 1878, is *Straža* [Guardian] (Jakšić 1882, II. 126-131), a poem of extreme disillusionment, presumably in response to the Berlin Peace, which supposedly thwarted the unification of the southern Slavs and recognized the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which he called Europe a “deformed creature”.

Among the poems of the period – which also outline the Serbian, Hungarian, and European history of the time and are only listed selectively here, and which strongly evoke Petőfi’s political poetry – are such wonderfully beautiful pieces of private and mood describing lyricism as the aforementioned poem *Mila* from 1856, *Through the Midnight Air*<sup>12</sup> and *The Stream Flows*<sup>13</sup> from 1862, *Na Liparu* [On the Lipar] from 1866, to mention only a few of the texts that were translated into Hungarian. A new layer of his poems is formed by the impersonation songs and those diary-like, self-portrait-like works which – as in Petőfi’s case – document his wanderings, changes of place, snapshots of his life: *Spomen* [Remembrance], *Na noćistu* [Place to Stay for the Night], *Putnik* [Wanderer], *Još* [Another]; self-metaphorical or ars poetica-like poems: *Ja* [I], *Orao* [Eagle], *Ja sam stena...* [I am a Rock]; the representation of mystical stories of folklore: *Put u Gornjak* [The Road to Gornjak], *Noć u Gornjaku* [Night in Gornjak]; narrative poems of shorter or longer length, sometimes bearing Byron’s influence, sometimes referring to other versions of European ballad and legend literature, or satirical stories, life images, and epigrams (Milosevits 1998, 170-184).

Đura Jakšić is a powerful, autonomous poetic personality, and it is no coincidence that works on the history of Serbian literature or on its Hungarian relations emphasise that Petőfi was his inspiration rather than his model, which is why it is so difficult to find concrete parallels or intertextual links between their art. Jakšić, however, could in his

12 *Kroz ponoć*; English translation by Pavle Ninković.

13 *Potok žubori*; English translation by Gordana Janjušević-Leković.

“own right” be of interest to Hungarian readers and literary scholars. Apart from a few anthologized Hungarian translations, his poems are hardly available in Hungarian. In 1998, Károly Csala published a selection of his poems (Jakšić 1998). This booklet of barely sixty pages is itself partly based on a 1972 Serbian anthology for Yugoslav schoolchildren and hardly reflects the poet’s original beauty. These translations can only capture elements of Jakšić’s mastery of form, the musicality and wit of his poems, his visuality reminiscent sometimes of Rembrandt, other times of Biedermeier style, his descriptions referring to Dürer’s brutality, his realism reminiscent of Netherlandish painting, his romantic horizons, his misty and mystical scenes, the pastel-like colouring of his lyrical poems, and his almost impressionistic features. Almost none of his narrative poetry or prose is available in Hungarian.

(Translated into English by Anna Fenyvesi)

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### **Author's profile**

Katalin Hász-Fehér was a lecturer at the University of Novi Sad (Serbia) until 1993, and since then she has been an Associate Professor at the Department of Hungarian Literary Studies of the University of Szeged. Her main research interests are the history and relations among Hungarian and Southern European literary cultures and world literature in the 18th and 19th centuries. She is a research fellow in several projects at the Institute of Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, where she is working on the oeuvre of János Arany, as well as on philological issues and press history research.