

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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*Enthusiast of Arts: Lázár Petrichevich Horváth
An Oeuvre through the Prism of Cultural Studies*

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1. Research topic

The thesis endeavours to look at the previously unexplored oeuvre of Lázár Petrichevich Horváth (1807–1851) from the perspective of cultural studies, on account of the diversity of his works. Culture is regarded hereunder as a complex and dynamic set of events created by social practices and the semiotic dimensions associated with them. As a consequence of the said research method, the comprehensive subject question of my thesis is how the different theories of art (e.g. the Romantic movement), forms of the (socio)cultural system (e.g. Biedermeier), the socio-historical processes (e.g. urbanisation, travelling habits, the Reform Diets), and the changes in the media (forms of publicity, expansion of the press), are reflected in Petrichevich's creative solutions, in the scope of his activities and his ideas of criticism/ideas as a critic.

In other words, the main purpose of my thesis is to investigate in what forms of text and cultural practices Lázár Petrichevich Horváth, the name in the focus of the thesis title, can be captured.

2. Notes on the research method

Lázár Petrichevich Horváth came into contact with the evolution history of music, fine arts and literature of the Reform Era probably on the widest surface amongst his contemporaries. Therefore the juxtaposition of the most diverse scientific disciplines in my thesis is justified by the great variety of activities and interests pursued by

Petrichevich. The versatility and interdisciplinarity of his career inspired me to show the diversity of cultural practices and at the same time to organize the various forms of art into a coherent line of argument.

Petrichevich's career provides a rare opportunity for a cultural studies approach, as with a sure instinct for quality and an intuitive understanding of the era, he could deeply immerse himself in the various disciplines. Considering the social consequences of art, the Reform Era, Petrichevich's time was an extraordinary period when the professionalising and institutionalising processes of the Hungarian theatre, opera and fine arts could also be observed.

In the Reform Era, National identity had been created predominantly by cultural practices, (drawing on Benedict Anderson's nationalism-theory), language as a marker of nation, identity as a result of cultural products were being constructed rather spectacularly. The period was characterized by identity formation, especially in terms of language, therefore I had an unrelenting focus on the narrative techniques of Petrichevich's works. With respect to the discourses embracing his entire oeuvre, a close examination of the appearance and transformation of classic Fin de siècle narrative forms and collocations related to national identity proved a productive method. The language usage in Petrichevich's literary, journalistic and critical writings could contain certain revelations about the identity patterns of our present age. Relying on the results of the most recent researches of the history of ideas, I strived to discuss the dynamically changing linguistic-intellectual forms of the era, the modifications in

the ideas of state and tradition, the shifts in consciousness and national consciousness, or the latest trends in the modernizing of the political vocabulary in the Reform Era, the contrasts in the language of republicanism and that of the “politeness”.

Among the various theoretical and methodological approaches I have also made use of the results of microhistory-writing and the history of mentality. Dealing with an oeuvre as peripheralized and shunned as that of Lázár Petrichevich Horváth, it seemed worthwhile to examine the interaction between the micro- and macro levels of the period, to point out the fragmentation and polyphony of a historical epoch instead of its coherence, to highlight the network of connections instead of the canonized biographies, to delineate the complex textures of the social, political and artistic life, and look for reference points in the Reform Era previously unknown. Microhistory writing focuses increasingly on the minor figures and the Petrichevich oeuvre turned out to be particularly illuminating with respect to the era under consideration. From his previously unknown writings emerges a new, approachable, human-scale segment of the reform age; a keen thinker open to innovation and responsive to new ideas, whose scope of activity can be outlined more accurately than the metaphorised life of a genius.

Examining the institutionalisation processes is another highly useful aspect of a socio-historical analysis of Petrichevich’s career, because his life was closely intertwined with the genesis of such cultural cornerstones as the professionalisation of the National Theatre, the diversification of Hungarian journalism, the

institutionalisation of Hungarian painting and music, the formation of cultural-civil associations, or the travelling habits of the nineteenth century. All this could throw a new light on the Petrochevich oeuvre; instead of contrasting (and discrediting) his authorcraft or „the immanent values in his writings” – in Márton Szilágyi’s words – with those of the Petőfi oeuvre, this approach could better highlight the significance of his works in a social and cultural space.

Textological and narratological methods have also been crucial to my examinations. With close reading technique, I entered into a dialogue with Petrichevich’ fictions, literary letters and travelogues, and discovered the poetic challenges, linguistic changes, genre development processes.

3. Academic Achievements

In my thesis I attempted to reinterpret a disparaged or rather forgotten oeuvre of the reform era by studying sources previously unconsidered or peripheralized. For this purpose I scanned through the materials of several archives, manuscript repositories, libraries and art collections. In addition to rare books such as private publications by Petrichevich, I could explore previously unpublished works, and furthermore discover such treasures of cultural history as a song by Franz Liszt dedicated to Petrichevich, or a quartet composed by the virtuoso pianist on a poem chosen by Petrichevich. Another fascinating discovery was to examine the aquarelle-collection painted

by János Horváth Petrichevich, Lázár's brother, at Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

By means of this research, I have managed to delineate Petrichevich's place in the history of literature, culture and mentality, his attitude to the intellectual, stylistic, and aesthetic patterns of the era. The attempt to show the inherent values of the oeuvre produced significant gains in terms of methodology and culture history. On the one hand, the cultural studies approach could be adopted in a complex fashion, and I was able to suggest new sources and interrelations for various other disciplines, such as music and art history.

The Petrichevich career used to be labelled as conservative, and I have, most importantly, redetermined its position in the history of mentality, thus lifting it out of its constructed opposition to Petőfi, and applied the dynamic model of the polyphonic discourse to describe his oeuvre. Based on previously unexamined sources of literature and beyond, I was able to discover new aspects of the critical, political and ideological connections between Petrichevich and Petőfi. In my thesis, their conflict dissolved, as I examined the transition between generations and the poetic differences between literature inspired by folk poetry and the reviews of the *Honderű* journal from Petrichevich's point of view, disregarding the retrospectively constructed dichotomy.

Petrichevich choices and social mobility had been largely influenced by his Transylvanian ancestry, therefore I have taken the idiosyncratic meanings of this locality and its geopoetical dimensions (in Kornélia Faragó's phrasing) into consideration, and strived to

interpret Petrichevich's worldview and the semantic structure of his text in the context of his native country. The introduction of the Petrichevich Horváth family, previously unknown in Hungarian cultural history, as well as the examination of his oeuvre from the point of view of the local idiosyncrasies of the Transylvanianness could reveal surprising interrelations which should be of interest for various segments of Hungarian scientific disciplines.

It might be owing to the previously mentioned interdisciplinary point of view that Petrichevich's career was leading me to new discoveries in the history of music. Through the investigation of the cultural practices of Petrichevich Horváth Lázár I have gained additional information on the composers Franz Liszt, Franz Erkel and even Berlioz. Petrichevich took active part in the most significant events in Hungarian music history, leading to a systemic change in it. He played a key part in organizing the visits of Franz Liszt to Hungary in the Reform Era, hence some new details on the genesis of the Rhapsody No. 6. At the same time, I revisited the issue of national identity in the Reform Era and the impact of the virtuoso pianist on it, as the narratives on the Hungarian tours of Franz Liszt shed a new and controversial light on self-knowledge and identity-construction, absolutely essential to the era.

The narrative of a conservative Petrichevich had been most seriously challenged perhaps upon learning the historical fact that he participated in the most productive of the Reform Diets (1839-40) as Lajos Batthyány's secretary and Hungarian translator. After investigating into his years spent in Transylvania, it became clear

immediately that he interpreted the turning points of the period from the point of view of a reform-opposition, but his political activities in the circle of Batthyány or Deák were definitely of historic significance, which earned him a place among intellectuals dedicated to emphatically progressive discourses. The previously disregarded private writings of Petrichevich proved a valuable source of knowledge about the epoch-making organizations of the reformist nobility, these personal texts – more than official records – provide important insights in the informal events which had strongly influenced the history of the period.

Strongly linked to the foregoing practices are Petrichevich's achievements as an organizer of cultural events, and his involvement and participation in the civic-minded movements and in various associations in the 1840's. As a dandy, Petrichevich devoted his salons to the „emancipation of thought” and to the „anti-feudal” ideas; and his salon life offered new insights into the artistic and social forms of the Biedermeier period, thereby further improving our knowledge about the culture of objects in the Hungarian Biedermeier, and drawing our attention to the unexploited opportunities of the Hungarian Biedermeier research against a backdrop of the corresponding international efforts

Petrichevich's contribution to civic associations was common practice among the self-conscious, civil-minded, art-loving citizens, who were eagerly responding to the social and artistic phenomenon of the era. In my thesis, I strived to emphasize Petrichevich's up-to-date and intensive participation and position in

these institutional formation, breaking free from the state and at the same time initiating the transformation of society (formation of civic society); in an organization of the citizen breaking loose from the traditional estates of society, on their way to individualisation.

Studying the travelogues of Lázár Petrichevich Horváth provided more than just philological discoveries, it also offered an opportunity for discourse analysis and for the examination of modern travelling which distinguishes between travelling and tourism. In addition to his experiences in France which would continue the tradition of the „Grand Tour”, Petrichevich’s excursion to Felvidék exemplified the characteristic phenomenon of the era called „Home Tour”, which aimed at getting to know the regions of the homeland as well.

In addition to looking at the results of my analysis from a historical-social perspective, I have also conducted stylistic and narratological research, which served the purpose of contextualization in my thesis. I have tied Petrichevich’s “silver folk” novel (*The Disowned or a Winter in a Capital*), a forgotten achievement of Hungarian prose fiction, to the Biedermeier style, closely examined it the light of contemporary criticism, brought its narrative solutions under a current textual analysis.

Further enhances the significance of the Petrichevich oeuvre in the history of literary criticism that he had written the first Hungarian language biography of Byron, including interpretations of several of his works, and he had been the first to publish Hungarian translations of Byron in a volume. The nature of this biography

provided an opportunity to highlight the poetic formations of biography writing in general, inasmuch as it concerns an author who had begun constructing his own biography during his lifetime: again, Petrichevich was the first to address in Hungarian language this unique phenomenon of narrative formation. It should be underlined, that this volume, which in turn was one of the first attempts at the Hungarian Byron-reception, challenged the dominant voice of contemporary criticism, and took into account not only the poet's eccentric character and non-compliant behaviour, but also his unconventional artistic achievement, when discussing his oeuvre. Petrichevich's text is a „theoretic work, uncritically singing out the cult of Romanticism” – says István Margócsy, meaning that it is as good as a manifesto, the declaration of the objectives of the said stylistic period.

Literary correspondence played a considerable role in the Reform Era, from literary, critical as well as social perspectives, and the *Kaleidoskop* by Petrichevich is definitely a representative collection of that genre. Not only is it an integral part of the development of the genre, starting from Kazinczy's letters functioning as a means of publicity, through the written exchange of Bajza and Toldy recording institutionalization processes, to the stylistic brilliance of the private correspondence between Arany and Petőfi, but it also occurs as a unique combination of these three types of different intention and function, a crossfading of the three distinct styles.

The most extensive, most remarkable and most consequential cultural practice of Petrichevich's career, also the accomplishment

most acknowledged by literary criticism is undoubtedly the founding and editing of the cultural journal *Honderü*. In addition to differentiating the epoch-making quality of the journal from the perspective of the history of mentality and diversifying our knowledge about its literary material and text universe, I have also attempted to prove – drawing on the findings of the pictorial turn – that the visual content of the *Honderü* constituted an organic unity with the textual substance of the journal.

In the library of the Romanian Academy of Sciences in Kolozsvár (Klausenburg, Cluj Napoca) there are four albums containing hundreds of caricatures, genre and milieu drawings, political portraits by János Petrichevich Horváth from the period between 1824 and 1864. The most remarkable works in the albums are the caricatures, which makes scholarship revise the beginnings and history of the genre in Hungary. Though the first half of the 19th century is regarded as a period of rudimentary attempts in Hungarian caricature history, the unfolding of the genre being dated to after the Compromise (1867), the albums of János Petrichevich Horváth render the Hungarian manifestations of the genre commensurable with the European crop of the genre at an earlier date. Of course, Hungarian art struggling with several problems of (self)definition, institutionalization, lack of infrastructure, etc. did not have a James Gillray (1756-1815) regarded as the “father of political caricature” or an Honoré Daumier (1808-1879) yet, but Petrichevich’s works do add several hues to the general tone of backwardness. Thus his works can be taken as the start of Hungarian political and cultural caricature

whose artistic rendering and embarrassing sincerity project to us a different picture of the Reform Age clad so far in the veil of the golden age or of the customary image of the imperial forces as devilish impostors.

My thesis introduced Petrichevich from various aspects, from the perspective of diverse professions and art forms, hence its polyphonic structure, by means of which I could elevate Petrichevich's figure from the presumed conservative, old-fashioned „kleinmeister”, who dismissed all that was modern, to one of the most noteworthy innovator of his age. As an author, his oeuvre can't compare with the poetic accomplishment and position of his contemporaries (Jósika, Vörösmarty), but by virtue of the cultural studies approach, emerged a different Petrichevich from my thesis, who definitely made his mark as an inventor of artistic and critical ideas.

4. Relevant Publication

- „*Verses regény*” – *egy fogalom története a 19. században, Irodalomismeret*, 2013/2, 73-80.
- *Az Abafi kontrasztív kontextusa – a biedermeier regény szövegvilága. Petrichevich Horváth Lázár: Az elbujdosott vagy egy tél a fővárosban = ItK*, 2016/1, 98-111.

- *Európai hazánkfia: Liszt Ferenc és a reformkor = Identitás, emlékezet, történelem*, szerk., BOLDOG-BERNÁD István, SZABÓ P. Katalin, TANOS Márton, DOSZ, Budapest, 2016, 29-44.
- „*kit e kor megtagadni nem fog*” *Az első magyar Byron-monográfia és romantikus portré: Byron lord élete s munkái (1842)* = Filológiai Közlöny, 2016/3, 223-237.
- „*amaz ösmeretesb műszer, a minden fordultával újabb alakokat mutató*”. *Petrichevich Horváth Lázár irodalmi levelei: a Kaleidoskop (1842)* = Irodalomtörténet, 2017/1, 3-15.
- *A magyar politikai-kulturális karikatúra ismeretlen kezdete: Petrichevich Horváth János rajzmappái* = Művészettörténeti Értesítő, 2017/1, 53-67.