

# SARTORIAL HEROISM AND NATION-BUILDING: FEMALE CROSS-DRESSING IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY HUNGARIAN FICTION (A CASE STUDY)\*

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The article investigates the uses of the motif of the Warrior Women in János Arany's epic poetry. The author of the article claims that the motif of the Warrior Women in Arany's poetical discourse stemmed from the romantic literary tradition of the 1820–1830s. Furthermore, she argues that an old Scottish ballad, purportedly known by János Arany, provided the pattern that had been imitated by the Hungarian poet. Hence, the romantic image of the Hungarian Warrior Woman has become a highly symbolic and propagandistic content in Arany's poetry during the 1850s. It reveals a genuine nineteenth-century endeavour of the nation-building process in order to promote the nation's ready-to-fight patriotic women as models to be followed.

**Keywords:** Romantic nationalism, Hungarian nation-building, Female Warrior motif, cross-dressing

## Introduction

In 1847 the prestigious Hungarian Kisfaludy Society (a literary society named after the dramatist Károly Kisfaludy) invited applications for historical narrative poems about one of the notorious female protagonists of early modern Hungarian history: Mária Széchy. The call has been announced as part of a series of other requests concerning narrative poems about adventures and deeds of famous Hungarian women due to propagandist endeavours to mobilize women to take part in nationalist movements of the Hungarian Reform Era. Indeed, historicist inquiry and historicist genres have become a favorite topic for analysis in nationalism studies. That is to say, scholars have recently followed a clear approach to dealing with the cultural dimension of nineteenth-century European nationalism.

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Furthermore, the conceptual splicing of Romanticism and nationalism has also become increasingly widespread. For Romantic nationalism, according to Joep Leerssen “is the celebration of nation (defined by its language, history and cultural character) as an inspiring ideal for artistic expression; and the instrumentalization of that expression in ways of raising the political consciousness” (Leerssen, 2013, 9). Leerssen also asserts that Romantic nationalism opposed to social and political analyses concentrates on the process of the “cultivation of culture” during the first half of the nineteenth century. In his approach among the investigated cultural fields language, the discursive realm of literature and learning, the material culture and various cultural practices receive special attention. In addition, cultivation is the equivalent of intended instrumentalisation of the national culture by means of three types of endeavour: salvage, fresh productivity, and propagandist proclamation (Leerssen, 2006, 569–570). Moreover, he considers Romantic nationalism to be a truly international European phenomenon. Finally, Leerssen concludes that it should be studied as part of a comparative cultural history (Leerssen, 2013, 566).

Although considerable research has been devoted to the conceptualization of cultural and Romantic nationalism, there is still much to be done in understanding specific cases of its manifestation. The aim of the present paper is to illustrate how the motif of the Female Warrior in János Arany’s epic poetry has become a symbolic marker of Hungarian Romantic nationalism in the 1850s. János Arany, who was regarded and promoted as Hungary’s national poet during the second half of the nineteenth century, also relied on this topos in some of his epic poetry of patriotic content after the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849. Again, it was the motif of the Female Warrior that became a symbolic representation of love, heroism and patriotism with propagandist targeting during an extremely difficult period of Hungarian political history.

This article intends to investigate the uses of the motif of the Female Warrior in János Arany’s epic poetry. I will establish that the aforementioned motif stems in Arany’s poetical discourses from the romantic literary tradition of the 1820–1830s. Furthermore, I will claim that an old Scottish ballad, purportedly known by János Arany, has provided the pattern imitated by the Hungarian poet. Hence, the romantic image of the Hungarian Female Warrior becomes a highly symbolic and propagandistic content in Arany’s poetry during the 1850s. I will conclude by stating that the use of the topos consists of a genuine nineteenth-century endeavour of the nation-building process in order to promote the nation’s ready-to-fight patriotic women as models to be followed.

### Warrior Women in János Arany's Epic Poetry

The image of the Female Warrior appears in János Arany's three narrative poems, all of them written during the 1840s and 1850s. While the first one was conceived as a result of the Kisfaludy Society's call for historical narrative poems about Mária Széchy, the second and the third poems were written posterior during 1853. This chapter provides a detailed analyses of the occurrence of the motif in Arany's above-mentioned poems and also reflects upon those Hungarian and Anglo-American traditions that the topos of the Female Warrior stemmed from.

Széchy Mária's figure could hardly have been familiar from historical sources to those intending to respond to the Kisfaludy Society's call at the time of its announcement. For the historical biography written about her life based on archival sources was only published later during the second half of the nineteenth century (Acsády, 1885). Moreover, the quasi-historical narratives of the siege of Murány castle thoroughly imbued with fictional elements appeared mostly in the period following the Kisfaludy Society's call. Indeed, the contemporary version of the famous assault unfolded by the French Jean le Laboureur is unlikely to have been an easily accessible item in the mid-nineteenth-century Hungarian environment (Laboureur, 1647, 83–99).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, János Kemény's autobiography mentioning the adventurous surrender of the Murány castle came out in print only in 1856 (Szalay, 1856, 368–369). Finally, the work of Georg Kraus, a Transylvanian Saxon historian also relating the siege of the Murány castle was published only in 1862 (Kraus, 1862, 144–147).

However, the occupation of the Murány castle conjoined with a thrilling love story was widely known in the first half of the nineteenth century from a grandiose baroque literary account written by István Gyöngyösi and entitled *Márssal társolkodó Murányi Vénus* [Mars Joining Venus of Murány] (Gyöngyösi, 1998).<sup>2</sup> The work of Gyöngyösi was widely known in Hungary during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its first edition in 1664 was so popular that all the exemplars were ruined because of the frequent usage. Only two copies survived up to the present day. Its second edition issued in 1702 was followed by five more publications during the eighteenth-century. As a consequence of its multiple release and fame the Hungarian Reform Era also revealed special interest towards the story. When responding to the Kisfaludy Society's call for historical narrative poems, besides Gyöngyösi's baroque poem, one could most easily choose for help one of the story's adaptations written in the 1840s: either a drama (Kisfaludy, 1820) or a romantic historical short-story.<sup>3</sup>

Before discussing the relationship between János Arany's work and the sources available at the time, I will briefly sum up the story of the siege of Murány. It was the story of a successful military and love campaign whereby the castle of Murány, which at the time of the action was under the rule of György Rákóczi I,

Prince of Transylvania, had been handed over by Mária Széchy to the royal troops led by the Captain of Füle, Ferenc Wesselényi. In the aftermath of the siege Mária Széchy married Wesselényi. In 1663 the poet István Gyöngyösi became the man of trust of his new patron, Ferenc Wesselényi, by that time Palatine of Hungary. Gyöngyösi intended to comply with the requirements of the baroque representation when immortalizing the story in his poem. He enhanced the cunning takeover of the strategically insignificant castle and the story of this marriage of convenience turning it into the tale of his patron's heroic actions.

Indeed, the poet Gyöngyösi's intention was primarily to record the story. He narrated the story of the castle's handover entangled into personal life situations, circumstances and interests. The widow Mária Széchy at a certain moment found herself in quite a difficult financial situation because of her relatives. Consequently, the alliance with Wesselényi became her life-belt. Wesselényi, on the other hand, wanted to do the king a service and increase his funds. Their alliance thus provided a satisfactory solution for both sides. However, Gyöngyösi's poem does not mention that the woman handed over the castle to Wesselényi as commander of the fortress. Nevertheless, she found the solution to her vulnerable situation by means of a stratagem. For Gyöngyösi's poem strongly emphasized the rational character of Mária Széchy's and Ferenc Wesselényi's alliance.

The image of Mária Széchy as commander of the fortress of Murány has been an additional construction in the Hungarian literary tradition, its appearance dating back to the period of the Reform Era. The primary objective of the baroque poet was to preserve the romance for posterity transforming at the same time his patron's deeds into heroic actions. On the other hand, the story's adaptations from the Reform Era concentrated on the figure of Mária Széchy. The leading idea of the drama and the short-story mentioned earlier were focused on the transformation of the masculine woman. That is, in these works the valiant, soldier-like woman playing the role of a man overwhelmed by love becomes aware of her womanliness and returns to her own gender. Consequently, the adaptations of the Reform Era present Mária Széchy as crossdressed with a helmet on her head, sword in her hands and armour covering her body.

János Arany used only two sources to write his version of the story: Gyöngyösi's baroque poem and the short-story conceived during the Reform Era. In other words he elaborated the concept of his own version on the basis of the available fictional narratives. That is he employed fiction to create another fictional narrative to adjust it to external influences and to update it to present requirements. Hence, the image of the soldier-like, warrior Mária Széchy should be regarded as a fiction that emerged from the Reform Era, and its genesis originating from a Romantic tradition.

After having seen the Hungarian romantic tradition from which the motif of the Warrior Woman stemmed out in János Arany's poetry, I intend to introduce

another relevant tradition that clearly influenced the poet's writings. János Arany relied upon the topos of the Female Warrior two more times during the 1850s in his ballads entitled *Rozgonyiné* [Mrs Rozgonyi] and *Az egri leány* [The Girl from Eger]. The former unfolds the story of a woman named Cecilia Rozgonyi, who joins the battlefield against the Ottomans on her husband's side. The latter relates the adventures of a Hungarian girl who has taken revenge on the murderers of her lover during the accession to throne of Ulászló I, king of Hungary.

It is well known from János Arany's correspondence that the Hungarian poet possessed thorough knowledge about the tradition of the Scottish ballads. For instance, he was familiar with Thomas Percy's collection entitled *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. After its first edition in 1765, the collection had been reissued several times during the first half of the nineteenth century, thus became an easily accessible item in the Hungarian environment as well.<sup>4</sup> Besides Percy's collection Arany also made use of Walter Scott's collection of ballads entitled *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. Moreover, he was also in the possession of the anthology called *The British Classical Authors*.

Previous research has already proved that János Arany's model in writing his ballad *Rozgonyiné* [Mrs Rozgonyi] was one of the ballads published in Thomas Percy's collection, the one entitled *Mary Ambree* (Elek, 1912). However, ulterior interpretations and even the notes of the critical edition of János Arany's works have assigned little attention to these remarks, whereas the similarity between the two ballads is quite striking. Mary Ambree, like Mrs Rozgonyi was a valiant, warrior woman. According to Thomas Percy, her heroism cannot be certified with historical sources despite the fact that she has become a source of inspiration of many literary works. The subject of the ballad has most probably been connected to the events of the year 1584. At that time the Spaniards under the command of the prince of Parma began to gain great advantages in Flanders and Brabant by recovering many strong holds from the Hollanders as Ghent and Antwerpen. When preparing for the siege of Ghent, the bravest soldiers were selected among which Mary Ambree proved to be the best (Percy, 1846, 164–167).

Mary Ambree became a soldier so that she could revenge her lover killed before her eyes. She dressed in armour with a helmet on her head, gauntlet and sword in her hands. She encouraged enthusiastically her soldiers to destroy the lines of the enemies. When being betrayed, she withdrew with her troops into a castle. When the troops of the enemies sieged the castle, the reckless girl carried on fighting bravely. Her enemies thought her to be the commander of the fortress, but she finally revealed herself to be just a simple English girl. The uncovering of her true gender filled with admiration even her enemies. The prince of Parma, when hearing about her bravery, rewarded her richly and asked her to marry him. However, the girl, claiming that her honour was not for sale, rejected him.

But, according to the ballad, her heroism has been regularly immortalized in various literary works ever since.

The resemblance of János Arany's ballad *Rozgonyiné* [Mrs Rozgonyi] to *Mary Ambree* may be identified in three respects. The preparation for the battle, the presentation of the heroine's valour and the spread of the fame surviving the heroine are central structural elements in both texts. In addition, Mrs Rozgonyi wears the same fighting equipment as Mary Ambree: helmet on her head, armour on her body and sword in her hands. The epic punch of the heroine's praise in the lines concluding the writings is also quite striking in both ballads. On the other hand, János Arany's aforementioned ballad, *Az egri leány* [The Girl from Eger] does not bear the same similarities with *Mary Ambree* as the ballad relating Mrs Rozgonyi's deeds. However, it resembles the Scottish ballad in its pattern regarding the girl's revenge for her previously murdered lover.

Consequently, in the light of these similarities it is now possible to claim that János Arany has successfully connected the Romantic tradition of the Female Warrior (most possibly itself an adaptation of an international topos) with the tradition of a specific Anglo-American corpus. All in all, the ballad entitled *Mary Ambree* has played an outstanding role during the development of this tradition. For it was this ballad that initiated the bequest of the motif of the Warrior Woman in the Anglo-American popular balladry from the Renaissance up to the Victorian Era.

### ***Mary Ambree* and the Female Warrior motif in the Anglo-American Tradition**

Having examined the significance of the Female Warrior motif in János Arany's epic poetry, I will now describe the Anglo-American tradition to which it might presumably be connected as well. According to Dianne Dugaw the broadside and chapbook literature operating with the motif of the Female Warrior surfaced in the street literature of the British Isles and North America at the turn of the seventeenth century. By the Restoration Era the motif became a conventional pattern of commercial streetsongs. The Female Warrior motif had a lower-class provenance. That is, the typical audience for broadside and chapbook literature were the semi-literate lower classes. Romantic narratives like the Female Warrior ballads constituted the favourite reading material for apprentices, servants, farm-workers, laborers, soldiers and sailors. The typical composer of a Female Warrior ballad was generally a professional hack employed by the street-ballad publishers (Dugaw, 1989, 15–30).

As for the conventional characterization of the ballads' heroine the composers portrayed her both romantic and heroic, as the embodiment of Venus and

Mars at the same time (Dugaw, 1989, 31). Dianne Dugaw convincingly argues that the Female Warrior motif in English popular balladry has begun with the ballad of *Mary Ambree* (Dugaw, 1989, 32). The text of the ballad plays out the preoccupations and structure of the entire Female Warrior motif. The necessary and conventional ingredients of the literature elaborating upon this topos are the heroic poles of Love and Glory; the separation of the lovers which prompts the heroine's valor; proofs in action of her "womanly" love and "manly" courage; a final courtship episode; and a celebratory ending. The congruence in the heroine of both "Mars" and "Venus" constitutes the key feature of the Female Warrior ballads. On the other hand, however pugnacious and daring Mary Ambree may be, her "valorous" deeds result ultimately from her love. Passion becomes thus the heroine's ultimate motive in venturing to find or to accompany a lover (Dugaw, 1989, 35–36).

The events in *Mary Ambree* are directed unmistakably by the gendered oppositions of Love and Glory, of heroic womanliness and manliness. Moreover, the pivotal preoccupation of the entire Female Warrior motif has been the separation of these categories and their characterization by means of distinctive "costumes". This duplicity has been the essential element in the functioning of the masquerading heroism. For this gender-conflating double identity is crucial to the Female Warrior topos. For the truth of the matter, the ballad of *Mary Ambree* shows how the Female Warrior motif negotiates gender as a bipolar system of costuming. In addition, the motif's heroine plays out this system precisely because it costumes the heroic ideal, the forms of worthy manners. The Female Warrior is in fact a model for heroic behaviour. Therefore her figure encompasses in her heroic cross-gendering both sides of the heroic ideal: Love and Glory, woman and man (Dugaw, 1989, 40–41).

By the eighteenth century the subject of the Female Warrior became a regularized and coherent motif. In fact, some one hundred new ballads operating with this topos came into print between 1700 and the middle of the nineteenth century. However, with the emergence of new Female Warrior ballads, interest in *Mary Ambree* took a new turn. For the old ballad suddenly became the subject of antiquarian study. Thomas Percy's collection also known by János Arany played a major role during this process. Percy, once chaplain to George III, then Bishop of Dromore published his collection of archaic songs and romances entitled *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765. The collection contained in its second volume a version of the ballad *Mary Ambree*. He claimed to have acquired the ballads from an old manuscript. However, Dianne Dugaw presumed that a significant number of the "reliques" had probably come from outdated broadsides and chapbooks purchased by Percy earlier (Dugaw, 1989, 49).

Indeed, Percy highly stressed the antiquity of his ballads in the introduction written to the volume. As a result of his endeavour the collection became un-

questionably one of the most influential books of the late eighteenth century. As Dugaw claimed, it marked the point at which an interest in antiquities and in the common people swept literary circles. In addition, Percy's collection also began the "museum life" of *Mary Ambree*. Consequently, as an antique, the ballad was also considered "worthy". By the second half of the eighteenth century the female soldier or sailor became a regular motif of polite songs of elite literary circles and of the theatre. The topos becoming highly symbolic by that time, also portrayed stirring examples of both love and patriotism (Dugaw, 1989, 50–52).

On the other hand, the "museum life" of *Mary Ambree* signaled at the same time the waning of the Female Warrior idea and of the ballads operating with this motif. The once normal topos became increasingly curious, rare, exotic, archaic and almost extinct. By the mid-nineteenth century Female Warrior ballads almost entirely vanished from the popular market. At the same time, new permutations of the motif and parodies both of individual ballads and of the topos showed unmistakable signs of the erosion of the Female Warrior as an ideal of heroic behaviour (Dugaw, 1989, 65–90).

### **Fact and Fiction: Warrior Women, Cross-Dressers in Early Modern Europe**

After I have provided an evaluation of the Female Warrior motif in a well defined Hungarian oeuvre and its possible Anglo-American connections, this chapter discusses the social historical context which has led to the appearance of the topos in various literary works. The ballads operating with the Female Warrior motif confront their readers in fact with a distinctly pre-modern conception of female identity. As Dugaw pointed out, they also integrate three important features of early modern social history. First, the age in which the ballads flourished required from women the same physical toughness and energy that characterized the female warriors of the ballads. These expectations were especially natural in case of lower-class women. Second, the constant warfare of the period and the conditions of that warfare made women's participation in military activities in many cases a necessary part of survival. And third, the early modern period itself, during which the ballads flourished, showed particular interest, in fact obsession with disguise and cross-dressing (Dugaw, 1989, 122).

The business of war in the early modern era also made possible such "border crossings". That is, war was by modern standards a decentralized and very differently organized affair in the eighteenth century. This system did not yet segregate the civilian from the soldier, nor to some extent women from men. The bureaucracy of military service was also significantly different from later, post-Napo-



leonic proceedings. For instance, there were no such strict medical inspections that could have easily made possible the disclosure of the women dressed as men (Dugaw, 1989, 128–129).<sup>5</sup> For in the early modern period women often cross-dressed to work as soldiers or sailors. Among their motivations one could usually find romantic, patriotic and economic reasons. In many cases cross-dressing provided the only possibility to remain with their families or lover. (Following her husband was in fact Mrs Rozgonyi's motivation in János Arany's ballad as well.) Among patriotic reasons defence of the fatherland had the utmost importance. In other cases economic motivations, that is poverty, made women cross-dress and join the army. In other words, by becoming a "man" they could much easily find work than otherwise (Dekker, 1989, 27).

Nevertheless, there were also women who went to battle and to sea undisguised. But making her way in the military environment thus, a single woman was subject to harassment and violence. Furthermore, by being a soldier's wife she neither was financially independent. Therefore, cross-dressing was the only means for women to move about in the military space with safety and freedom, and to get paid for their services as well (Dugaw, 1989, 130).

Under these social and historical circumstances, no wonder that the process of gender coding became one of the pivotal preoccupations of the Female Warrior motif. On the other hand, the perception of gender as cultural construct also had another wider social context in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Fashions at that time by their very nature exploited the transforming properties of apparel. Wigs and tinted facial powders equally used by women and men could significantly alter appearance. The decisions made in the morning regarding the toilette often affected the recognizability of the respective person during the day. These metamorphosing powers of dress haunted the imagination of the entire eighteenth century. Therefore, in this period also called "the age of disguise" pervasive metaphors of masquerading conditioned the terms in which people thought and behaved. Consequently, it was certainly not an accidental development that the flourishing of the Female Warrior ballads coincided with a special cultural interest towards disguise, performance and potential discrepancies between appearance and reality. The ballad heroine, as Dugaw established it, dramatizes only one aspect of this preoccupation with cross-dressing, the one regarding gender identity and eighteenth-century codes for women's behaviour (Dugaw, 1989, 132).

In view of these developments it is possible to conclude that in England preoccupation with the semiotics of gender started to influence behaviour early in the seventeenth century. At that time not only practical reasons (for example traveling at liberty, without requiring masculine guardianship) explained the frequency of cross-dressing. Masquerading, disguising was in itself a popular social practice during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Carnival celebrations,

for instance, were common and extremely popular forms of entertainment for all levels of society at that time. In other words, as Dugaw stated it, disguising as cultural phenomenon could be regarded a social fad, a literary trope and a settled and continuing way of conceptualizing behaviour during the early modern period (Dugaw, 1989, 135–139).

However, the nineteenth century put growing emphasis on the fictional character of this masquerade, carefully demarcating it from “real life”. With the spreading of a polarized perception of gender-roles cross-dressing became an increasingly disturbing phenomenon at the end of the eighteenth century. Consequently, the separation of fiction and reality in the interpretation of literary works became more and more accentuated. For instance, the readily accepted cross-dressing on the stage, which routinely occurred in the theatre, became a disturbing spectacle by the end of the century. For the phenomenon started to be interpreted as an obvious challenge to the rigid binary system (men vs. women). The potential dangers of cross-dressing concerned critics and moralists alike. They considered its utmost danger the experiencing of the condition of liminality, a voyage towards an uncharted bourne from which no (female) traveller returns unchanged. As a result, critics made significant efforts to deny even the possibility of androgyny by emphasizing the audience’s shared awareness of the absurdly fictional status of the woman-as-man.<sup>6</sup> The disappearance of the Female Warrior motif was of course also influenced by the changing social conditions. An agenda of centralization and reorganization significantly transformed military life during the nineteenth century. The modern army has not left spaces in the system anymore for women to easily become “soldiers”. Real-life Female Warriors became much less tolerated, much less possible, thought of as not entirely impossible during the nineteenth century (Dugaw, 1989, 140).

It should also be noted that the phenomenon of cross-dressing presented above mainly in a Western-European context has not been studied by Hungarian historiography so far. Nevertheless, cross-dressing could not have presumably been present to such an extent in early modern Hungarian culture than in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century northwestern countries: the Netherlands, Germany and England. It is also questionable whether further research would eventually reveal occurrences of Hungarian cross-dressing. However, it is quite remarkable that Hungarian cultural memory also preserved its female warriors’ nineteenth-century fiction playing an important role during this process. It is surely not a coincidence that all three of János Arany’s examples were provided by early modern Hungarian history. It could also be possible that the phenomenon of cross-dressing appeared mainly only in fictional works in the Hungarian culture. In any way soever, its occurrences and meanings may only be reconstructed in specific historical contexts. That is why before a systematic investigation of the phenomenon the article may only formulate hypotheses.

### **János Arany's Warrior Women and Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Nation-Building**

Having seen the presence of the Female Warrior in János Arany's works, its Romantic and Anglo-American roots, as well as the social historical context the motif stemmed out of, it is now possible to identify how this topos has become part of the nineteenth-century Hungarian nation-building process. The Kisfaludy Society's call for application provided a suggestive example of the Romantic nationalist cultivation of culture. The aim of the call can hardly be regarded an unbiased one. It has not even called into question whether Hungarian history has its notable female figures. In addition, its obvious purpose has been to place these prominent female figures in the foreground of Hungarian cultural memory. Thus its utmost motivation may be regarded as a preserving one. Furthermore, the call also attests to a consciously planned (re)production of culture. Finally, the appeal made for noble efforts and fervent participation to Hungarian women of the Reform Era demonstrates a strong belief in the nationalist passion-building role of poetry.

The appointed historical subject has imposed a suggestive example of Romantic nationalism's historicist inquiry. The literature depicting famous deeds of women from the past is meant to connect the present with its own historical roots. Literature thus becomes a suggestive expression of a mental continuum between the nation's present and its past, this continuum also expressing and constituting the nation's enduring identity.

The presence of the Female Warrior in János Arany's epic poetry besides preservation also provides illuminating conclusions regarding fresh productivity by means of fiction. The call for application launched by the Kisfaludy Society did not contain instructions concerning the figure of Mária Széchy. However, at the time of the announcement alternative interpretations of Mária Széchy's character were in circulation. Her soldier-like, warrior figure was in fact a fiction dating back to the Reform Era. Neither the story's first interpretation, István Gyöngyösi's baroque poem, nor Mária Széchy's later biography did support her warrior-like presentation.

Moreover, neither the portayal in armour of Cecília Rozgonyi with helmet on her head and sword in her hands was influenced by historical sources. The sources only mentioned her bravery against the Ottomans during the siege of Galambóc castle in 1428 (Zlinszky, 1900, 273). Her depiction in full military pomp, the detailed account of the process of her cross-dressing in Arany's ballad was again influenced by the same Romantic tradition that played a crucial role in Mária Széchy's presentation. Cross-dressing with its obligatory accessories (helmet, armour and sword) becomes thus the symbol of ardour and of activity in both cases.

János Arany has successfully interwoven the Romantic heritage of the Female Warrior with the tradition of a specific Anglo-American corpus of texts. Cross-

dressing in the presentation of female heroism played a crucial role in both cases. On the other hand, Thomas Percy's collection that reevaluated and familiarized elite literary circles with the ballad of *Mary Ambree* has been the expression of the same Romantic nationalist endeavour resembling the many folklore collection projects of the Kisfaludy Society. The language seen as the essential soul of a nation's identity and position in the world played a crucial role during this process.

The Romanticism's urge for authentic simplicity led to the appreciation of the vernacular and of folk poetry and to the use of the literary registers of lyricism and balladry. Arany reflected on the key position of the language in *Murány ostroma* [The Siege of Murány] when he attempted to create an epic poem between the educated writer's and that of a powerful folk language's (Arany, 1975, 172). In *Rozgonyiné* [Mrs Rozgonyi] the poet expressed his same intention by the imitation of an authentic folk genre, the ballad.

At the same time, the Female Warrior topos in Western Europe had its serious social historical background. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of early modern Hungarian cross-dressing has not been studied so far. Although Hungarian cultural memory also preserved its warrior women, among which Cecília Rozgonyi was one of the most famous, historical sources did not document the fact that they were real cross-dressers. However, it is quite striking that all János Arany's examples were provided from the early modern period.

It seems that the legacy of the early modern period and that of the Napoleonic wars for the nineteenth century was that the female soldier carried with her overtones of radicalism. Before the end of the eighteenth century the world turned upside down with its cross-dressed women could be imagined as a social reversal without wider political consequences. After 1793 individual gender revolt corresponded to some kind of revolution in the state as well as in the home. As a result, every period of revolutionary turmoil witnessed the re-emergence of the motif of the Female Warrior amongst the consumers of popular culture (Hopkin, 2009, 88). János Arany's *Murány ostroma* [The Siege of Murány] also appeared in 1848 and his two other ballads after the failed Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849, in 1853. Thus the Female Warrior motif conjoining Love and Heroism, and patriotism as primary motivation of cross-dressing became a highly symbolic and propagandistic content in Arany's poetry during the 1850s.

It seems plausible to conclude that the history of Mária Széchy and Cecília Rozgonyi's deeds and the objective of the Kisfaludy Society's call consisted of a genuine nineteenth-century effort of the nation-building process in order to promote the nation's ready-to-fight patriotic women as models to be followed. In this process, the various fictional narratives written and circulated during the nineteenth century had crucial importance. Moreover, the phenomenon had also been reinforced by the fine arts. For illustrations of János Arany's ballads were also produced

during the nineteenth century. Two outstanding examples were the illustrated albums of Arany's ballads published on the occasion of two highly symbolic and ritual events: the first one in 1868 after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 (*Arany Album*, 1868), the second one in 1894 on the eve of the Hungarian millenium celebrations in 1889 (Arany, 1894). When the latter appeared, its introduction did not fail to emphasize that the ballads together with the illustrations belong to the best of the Hungarian intellectual creative power. The illustrated albums celebrating two special events of the Hungarian nation also provided visual evidence for their readership of the existence of the nation's ready-to-fight patriotic women.

### Conclusion

The aim of the article has been to contextualize the uses of the Female Warrior motif in János Arany's poetry. I have demonstrated that the motif of the Warrior Woman rooted in Arany's poetical discourses originates from the Hungarian literary tradition of the 1820–1830s and an old Scottish ballad that constituted one of its most significant sources. Consequently, the romantic image of the Female Warrior became a highly symbolic and propagandistic content in Arany's poetry during the 1850s. It is this Female Warrior topos that fulfilled the function of promoting the nation's ready-to-fight patriotic women as elevated conduct patterns to be imitated during the second half of the nineteenth century.

### Notes

- 1 Laboureur was a member of the embassy accompanying the French bride of the Polish king to the city of Warsaw at the end of 1645. Upon her return in the spring of 1646 the Queen spent four days in Bratislava with Laboureur. They heard the story of this exceptional enterprise from Wesselényi himself.
- 2 István Gyöngyösi. 1998. *Márssal társolkodó Murányi Vénus*. [Mars Joining Venus of Murányi] Ed. József Jankovics. Budapest: Balassi. Régi Magyar Könyvtár. Források 8. This particular version of the text edited by József Jankovics follows the editio princeps of 1664.
- 3 Mednyánszky's short story was first published in a collection containing German legends in 1829: Alois Freiherrn von Mednyánszky. 1829. *Erzählungen, Sagen und Legenden aus Ungarns Vorzeit*. Pesth: Konrad Adolph Hartleben, pp. 194–209. (*Die Brautwerbung*). The Hungarian translation of the collection came out in 1832: Alajos Mednyánszky. 1832. *Elbeszélések, regék 's legendák a' magyar előkorból*. [Stories, Tales and Legends from the Hungarian Prehistoric Times] Transl. Nyitske Alajos–Szebényi Pál. Pest: Hartleben Konrad Ádolf, pp. 139–152. (*Mátkásítás*) [Engagement].
- 4 Percy's collection had been reissued several times during the nineteenth century; see the editions of 1803, 1806, 1810, 1812, 1839 and 1846. I've made use of the following: Thomas Percy. 1846. *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of old heroic ballads, songs, and*

- other pieces of our earlier poets, together with some few of later date.* Vol. II. London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street.
- 5 Regarding the late occurrences of female soldiers see: David Hopkin. 2009. “The World Turned Upside Down: Female Soldiers in the French Armies of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars” In: *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians. Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790–1820.* Ed. Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall, War, Culture and Society, 1750–1830. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 77–95. Concerning the journal of a Russian woman officer in the Napoleonic Wars see: Nadezhda Durova. 1988. *The Cavalry Maiden. Journals of a Russian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars.* Transl., introd., notes Mary Fleming Zirin. Bloomington–Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. Although the phenomenon was primarily relevant during the early modern period, one could also find examples of its late exceptional occurrences. For instance, the military service of the Romanian Ecaterina Teodoroiu during the First World War. (See: Maria Bucur. 2000. “Between the Mother of the Wounded and the Virgin of Jiu: Romanian Women and the Gender of Heroism during the Great War” In: *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 30–56.)
- 6 For the interpretation of eighteenth-century cross-dressing in the theatre see: Jean I. Marsden. 1993. “Modesty Unshackled: Dorothy Jordan and the Dangers of Cross-Dressing” In: *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, Vol. 22, pp. 21–35.

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