

The “Year Without a Summer” in Hungarian Literature

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Abstract. Today, thanks to the climate change and the bicentennial, the 1815 eruption of the Tambora volcano and its effects on the Western World is a fairly well-researched topic. However, looking at Hungary, almost nothing is known about the impacts of the Tambora eruption, nor the cultural impacts of it. In this study, after listing the (mainly English) literary reverberations of the Tambora eruption, I deal with such works from Hungarian literature. Two contemporary and two classical authors’ works can be linked to the “Year Without a Summer”. In Janka Fábrián’s historical novel, *The Lovers of the Anna Ball*, I present the determining role of weather and the appearance of further effects of the volcanic eruption. I briefly touch on the *Villa Diodati Fragment* cycle of the volume *The Atlantis Tram* by Zoltán Attila Pap, as it shows the atmosphere of the 1816 summer. In the case of the Eskimo scene of *The Tragedy of Man* by Imre Madách, I describe the play’s connection with ‘Darkness’ and thus with the “Year Without a Summer” as a mistake. Finally, I discuss in more detail two late apocalyptic poems by Mihály Vörösmarty and their peculiar reception history, arguing that ‘The Old Gypsy’ and the ‘Prologue’ can be linked to the “Year Without a Summer” of 1816 for several reasons.

Keywords: “Year Without a Summer”, the literary reverberations of the Tambora eruption, ecocriticism, George Byron, ‘Darkness’, Janka Fábrián, *The Lovers of the Anna Ball*, Mihály Vörösmarty, ‘The Old Gypsy’, ‘Prologue’

Literary Echos of Tambora

Volcanic eruptions are so powerful and destructive that they have always attracted people’s attention. Theodore Ziolkowski wrote in his 2017 paper “Volcanic Eruptions and Their Literary Reverberations” in the introduction that today the “Internet provides numerous sources where the curious volcanophile can not only find lists of the most destructive volcanoes in specific countries or worldwide but can also determine according to the Volcanic Explosivity Index (VEI)” various data like “how much material specific eruptions produced, to what height, and for what duration”. But there is hardly “any information concerning the cultural and specifically literary

impact generated by these volcanoes and their more violent eruptions.”¹ Of course, he adds certainly, there are a few notable exceptions. For example, thanks to Barbara J. Silverstein’s 2009 book *The Parting of the Sea: How Volcanoes, Earthquakes, and Plagues Shaped the Story of Exodus* “the great Minoan eruption on the Mediterranean island of Santorini around 1500 BCE, which has been analysed imaginatively to explain the biblical plagues that struck Egypt and precipitated the Exodus.”²

Ziolkowski takes into account four volcano literary reverberations, in alphabetical order: Aetna, Chimborazo, Tambora and Vesuvius. Tambora is out of the line because its effects were widely detected, but “at the time were not recognized as having being caused by a volcanic explosion”³ so far away. The development of the science of volcanology,⁴ and the emergence of climate research has enabled us to coherently explain the global consequences of the Tambora eruption: the Indonesian volcano in April 1815 spewed volcanic ash and sulphur particles into the air, causing the “Year Without a Summer” in much of Europe and northern parts of America in 1816, and then the bad weather led to famine. “However, the cultural effects were immediate and can now be appreciated as indirect results of the huge volcanic explosion.”⁵—writes Ziolkowski. We can discover these cultural influences today in contemporary painting, literature and music. Some paintings by Caspar David Friedrich and William Turner are commonly associated with the “Year Without a Summer,” some works by the Shelley–Byron circle from English Romantic literature and some songs of the younger Schubert, the composer.⁶

1 Ziolkowski, “Volcanic Eruptions and their literary reverberations,” 793.

2 Ziolkowski, “Volcanic Eruptions and their literary reverberations,” 793.

3 Ziolkowski, “Volcanic Eruptions and their literary reverberations,” 805.

4 In 1913, William Jackson Humphreys described that ash particles entering the atmosphere during volcanic eruptions exert an inverse greenhouse effect—he was the first to suggest that the Tambora eruption could have led to colder and wetter weather in the northern parts of the Earth; in the 1970s, this was understood more precisely through the analyses of Hubert Lamb, and only after the turn of the millennium did research into the climatic effects of volcanic eruptions begin. See about this and the entire scientific history of 1816: Bodenmann et al., “Perceiving, explaining, and observing climatic changes.”

5 Ziolkowski, “Volcanic Eruptions and their literary reverberations,” 805.

6 The influence that appears in music is rarely discussed. The curator Ian Richie wrote in the promotional article of London’s Kings Place program in *The Guardian* on 16 June 2016 about the influence of the weather to 19-year-old Schubert. In “1816, his prodigious output included two symphonies, choral music, chamber works and more than a hundred Lieder. Almost all of these songs reflected not only the wandering, wondering and passionate romanticism of the age but also the coldness and darkness of this mysterious period. In some of them we can clearly hear presentiments of what was to come much later in *Winterreise*, his great song cycle, in which Schubert captured the frosted landscapes that were a recurring feature during the Year Without a Summer and the remainder of that uniquely cold decade.” (Richie, “How the Year Without a Summer gave us dark masterpieces”).

After the two paintings, Ziolkowski brings up from English literature only the two most famous Tambora influenced works, ‘Darkness’ by George Byron and Mary Shelley’s novel, *Frankenstein: Or the Modern Prometheus* (1816). In addition, he presents two similar examples from German literature. “Goethe’s brief poem ‘März’, completed in March 1817, speaks of the unusual weather—a late snow, false sunlight, fewer swallows than usual.” “Another example is evident in Clemens Brentano’s poem ‘Die Erde war gestorben’ (1817), where the hidden sun is mentioned.”⁷

Around the bicentenary of the Tambora eruption, two monographs were published that dealt with the multi-level and broad-spectrum effects of it. *Tambora: The Eruption that Changed the World* by Gillen D’Arcy Wood was published in 2014 and Wolfgang Behringer wrote an independent volume on the subject as well: *Tambora and the Year Without a Summer: How a Volcano Plunged the World into Crisis*, originally published in German in 2015, and four years later in English. Both have collected an impressive amount of literary and fine art works that can be connected to the Tambora eruption. D’Arcy Wood added an Asian literary work to the list, which consists mainly of European works. In chapter five he deals with the Seven Sorrows by Li Yuyang:

“[...] the ancient poetic mode of Seven Sorrows enjoyed a renaissance in China in the Tambora period of 1815–18 because it captured so well the human suffering wrought by three successive years of climatic breakdown. A forgotten Chinese poet named Li Yuyang, [...] spoke as movingly as anyone for the weather-devastated world of the late 1810s.”⁸

David Higgins’s book, *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene: Writing Tambora* (2017) approaches the topic from a different angle. He writes about material ecocriticism by selecting “only” three case studies to focus on: the official narrative of the eruption compiled by the British administration in Java; the 1816 writings of Byron and the Shelleys; and political periodical writings regarding the ‘distresses’ of 1816 and 1817. Nevertheless his chapter on the Diodati Circle “brings together texts that have previously been linked to Tambora, such as ‘Darkness,’ *Frankenstein*, and ‘Mont Blanc,’ with a number that have not, such as *Manfred*, *Ernestus Berctold*, and *The Prisoner of Chillon*.”⁹

Some later literary works can also be connected to the Tambora eruption. D’Arcy Wood writes for example about Mary Shelley’s cholera novel: *The Last Man* (1826), and *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine* (1847) by William Carleton.¹⁰

7 Ziolkowski, “Volcanic Eruptions and their literary reverberations,” 808.

8 D’Arcy Wood, *Tambora*, 11.

9 Higgins, *Writing Tambora*, 10.

10 See D’Arcy Wood, *Tambora*, 95–96, 173–76.

Contemporary texts, however, have not yet been included in the list of works written under the influence of Tambora. There are several historical novels from Europe and the USA as well, mostly belonging to youth literature, fantasy, or pulp fiction.¹¹

Tambora's marks on Hungarian literature

Tambora left its mark on Hungarian literature as well. Unfortunately, we do not yet know any outstanding work created during the “Year Without a Summer” and describing it. However, we can consider—two contemporary and two classical—Hungarian authors’ works to be somehow influenced by the effects of the Tambora eruption. Among the works are those in which we only see some extraordinary, extreme weather phenomena while in others, some events of the “Year Without a Summer” directly appear. I discuss them starting, from those directly linked to the Tambora eruption to those vaguely related.

Today's Tambora works

The Lovers of the Anna ball

1816 plays a role in a popular Hungarian historical novel, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei* [*The Lovers of the Anna ball*] by Janka Fábíán, published in 2021. The story begins in May 1816 and presents twenty years in Balatonfüred. Chapter I takes place in May and July 1816. The novel begins—let me borrow D’Arcy Wood’s words—“as all Tambora stories must, with the Frankenstein weather of the Year Without a Summer.”¹² The first sentence of the text immediately introduces the weather:

“Not a single ray of sunlight penetrated the leaden grey tapestry of the sky, even just clouds were not visible, which would have offered at least some faint hope that sooner or later the sun would emerge from behind them.”¹³

11 *The Year Without a Summer: a story of 1816* was published in 1945 by Ethel Parton (1862–1944)—a youth novel. In 2009 Alice Hoffman published a New England short story “The Year Without Summer” in *Harvard Review*. This story is about “a killing frost in New England that summer and a big blizzard. [...] This one is also a story about loss—about a family who loses a child. But it’s also a story about escape.” (Thompson, “An interview with Alice Hoffman.”) In 2013 the American Mary Robinette Kowal published a fantasy novel, *Without a Summer*. The English Guinevere Glasford’s second historical novel, *The Year Without Summer*, (2020) “is a novel of climate crisis, set in the aftermath of the largest volcanic eruption in modern times.” (<https://guinevereglasford.com/books/>) The American Andrea R. Piper also published her sixth novel, *The Year Without Summer*, (2020), and American Stephanie Baron wrote the *Jane Austen Mystery* series in 15 volumes. The 14th book title is *Jane and Year Without a Summer* (2023).

12 D’Arcy Wood, *Tambora*, 174.

13 Fábíán, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 7. All translations from Hungarian are by the author. Exceptions are indicated.

The second paragraph runs through the period from the previous autumn to the current spring, outlining the poor state of agriculture, and Kálmán Györöky's answer to his daughter's question about the reason for the snowfall in May:

“Well... I don't know why it's snowing now and why it's so cold, but there must be some natural explanation for it.”¹⁴

So at the beginning of the novel it snows in May, and we get a detailed description of the bleak and grey garden, where “the leaves on the branches of the trees were shrivelled, and if a few flowers opened with great difficulty in the beds, the night frosts persisting throughout the spring and the harsh, windy days destroyed most of them.”¹⁵

Part 2 of Chapter I takes place in July and the text repeatedly brings up the elements that must be linked to the “Year Without a Summer”. The narrator later records the unusually unfavourable weather again and again: the continuous rain and the lack of sunshine.

“The sun seldom came out, as if someone had stretched a dirty grey curtain over the sky, which the life-giving rays of the sun could not penetrate. Biting winds were constantly blowing, furious storms were raging, or small, treacherous rains were falling, covering the roads everywhere with deep, sticky mud.”¹⁶

The novel mentions the special lights that accompany sunsets as well:

“We can see a real burst of colour as if there were some gigantic fireworks in the sky in the evening... of course, when thick clouds do not cover this evening spectacle.”¹⁷

In favour of the text, we can say that the characters take into account the heavy snowfall in January:

“We had a hard winter here too. At the end of January, a several-day snowstorm almost buried us alive. Lake Balaton had already frozen over, and due to the snow that had fallen on it, we couldn't even see where the land ended and where the lake began. Several people were hit by the storm and frost on the way, for example, a group of people on their way home from a wedding, not far from here, all lost their lives. Some were not found until days later... they were blown away by the wind. But many animals also died, and houses and stables were damaged by the vermin. In some villages, the church tower also fell, fortunately, this did not happen here.”¹⁸

14 Fábíán, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 11.

15 Fábíán, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 14.

16 Fábíán, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 18.

17 Fábíán, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 26.

18 Fábíán, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 25.

Most likely, the main feature of the “Year Without a Summer” was the unpredictable weather. In North America, there were three cold waves, but between them, there were better periods, for example in June “four weeks of good growing weather followed except for the province of Quebec”—wrote Joseph B. Hoyt—and then “on July 8th a new cold wave appeared”.¹⁹ From Antal Réthly’s collection—weather events and natural disasters in Hungary in the 19th century—, we know a longer-term description of the year from the Great Plain. Accordingly:

“In the autumn of 1815, due to the many mice, many farmers only sowed in November, and this sowing only came up in the spring, and it remained, although the early sowing was lost by the hard frosts. In the spring of 1816, it was not possible to plough or sow in the flat areas due to snow and rainwater. March and April passed without rain, the last half of May was also dry, the spring sowing and hay grass were left far behind,—there was little hay in the regular haylofts, but some wild hay came from the frost-harvested wheat fields.—It rained for 40 days between June and July, where hay was brown and weak, on July 10–11 it was very hot, and the ears of wheat were hit by the heat.—From mid-August to mid-September, it rains again continuously.”²⁰

Therefore it also seems to follow what is written in the sources, that the characters in the novel have sunny, warm summer days as well. In Füred in July there was one day “as if summer had magically arrived. The sun came out, the grey clouds moved away, and it was so hot during the day that Kálmán took off his hat and wiped his sweaty forehead with his handkerchief.”²¹ In the nearby fields, “the serfs of the area were working hard, trying to make up for the shortfalls due to the terrible weather so far.”²² A few pages later, Ilka also bathes in Lake Balaton, but then in the afternoon a big storm hits, which also brings ice the size of pebbles, but “some of them have the size of hen’s eggs.”²³

The people of the village have an obvious explanation for the fact that May also arrived with gloomy, windy weather: “they started mentioning some kind of curse, which afflicts them more and more cruelly.”²⁴ On the other hand, it is unrealistic that Györöky, countering the father’s prediction of the end of the world, answers his coachman with a rational and sophisticated explanation:

19 Hoyt, “The Cold Summer of 1816”, 122.

20 Réthly, *Időjárási események és elemi csapások Magyarországon 1801–1900-ig*, 2:1252.

21 Fábrián, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 37.

22 Fábrián, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 38.

23 Fábrián, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 57.

24 Fábrián, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 8.

“I think, my son, that something may have happened in the world, far from us, that we don’t even know about, but it still affects our lives in some way. A great catastrophe could have occurred somewhere, that’s why this huge cloud covers the whole Earth. The summer is just as strange elsewhere, I read in the newspapers from Vienna and German cities. In London and Paris, they are praying in the churches so that the rain will finally stop. The whole world is suffering and no one knows exactly why this is happening to us. Even scientists are only speculating.”²⁵

That is also important: the noble landowner father of the main character, Ilka, Kálmán Györöky fears famine several times, even if he hides his worries from his daughter. Even with the arrival of good weather, his mind is immediately on the property:

“In the previous couple of years, the harvest was not plentiful, especially last autumn’s rains which made it difficult for us. I was already afraid that even if this summer comes nothing will save us from starvation. [...] if from now on we have such or at least similarly nice weather, we can catch up and escape.”

Finally, it must be mentioned that cholera arrives in Transdanubia in the later part of the novel, while the epidemic that reached from Asia to Europe is one of the last impacts of the Tambora eruption.²⁶ In chapter 7, set in the summer of 1831, the opening of the permanent theatre is the most outstanding event. However, the preparations for the inauguration of the theatre were overshadowed by the fact that:

“Ominous news about the protracted Russo-Polish war had been coming for weeks; a new infectious disease reared its head, mercilessly decimating people, regardless of gender, age and rank, and spread rapidly towards the west—i.e. Hungary. It was called cholera morbus or in Hungarian bile disease, Asian vomiting, and so far there was no cure for it.”²⁷

Many people catch the disease, Ilka also gets infected, but she recovers; others die.²⁸

“The Fragment of Villa Diodati”

At least one lyrical work consciously takes into account the “Year Without a Summer”: an entire cycle of the 2018 volume *Az atlantiszi villamos* [*The Atlantis Tram*] by Zsolt

25 Fábíán, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 19.

26 See D’Arcy Wood, *Tambora*, 72–96,

27 Fábíán, *Az Anna-bál szerelmesei*, 354.

28 Janka Fábíán published in 2023 – by overhearing the 2020 COVID pandemic – *Kolera-napló* [*Cholera-diary*] a short novel. *The Lovers of the Anna Ball* was expanded into a series, the second part was published in 2022: *A szabadság szerelmesei* [*The Lovers of Freedom*] it takes place during the 1840s years including the revolution and freedom struggle of 1848–49.

Attila Papp from Transylvania. The second cycle of the volume is entitled “A Villa Diodati-töredék” [“The Fragment of Villa Diodati”].

The time and locus of the poems show beyond question that they are connected to the year without a summer. According to the criticism written by Béla Márkus in the November 2020 issue of *Kortárs* dedicated to the “Year Without a Summer:”

“[...] the lyrical subjects of the poems, in different situations—sometimes reporting, sometimes remembering, sometimes monologuing, sometimes initiating a dialogue—are afflicted by the feeling of catastrophe, and mainly ponder over the meaning and effect of art. [...] A story recorded in the chronicles of world history: in Switzerland, on the shores of Lake Geneva, the guests of the Diadoti [sic!] castle in the town of Coligny who wish to have a vacation—incidentally, the authors of the second generation of English romanticism such as Byron, Shelley, Mary Shelley, Percy [sic!]
[sic!]—are not allowed to leave their room from the perpetual rain and the darkness of the day.”²⁹

Márkus describes the distant eruption of Tambora as the cause of the strange summer weather and highlights the cycle’s poem ‘Jég’ [Ice]—without warning of the anachronism of the text’s speaker, who can be identified as Byron—which “gives an account of this as a report.”³⁰

“The cursed, year without a summer,
the wind carries volcanic ash
from Indonesia to us closes
the Villa Diodati. In such
Junes, Julys
—as prisoners of our own stories—
we fear God ungodly.
It’s snowing outside, here
we sit around the fireplace,
with our self-domesticated ghosts.”³¹

19th century works related to the “Year Without a Summer”

‘Darkness’ and Tambora (part I)

The 19th century Hungarian literature works, that could be related to the “Year Without a Summer” are included among the literary reverberations of the volcano’s

29 Márkus, “az emlékezet útvesztőiben,” 93.

30 Márkus, “az emlékezet útvesztőiben,” 93.

31 Papp, “Jég,” 32.

eruption not by themselves, but through Byron's poem 'Darkness'. Therefore, before I turn to them, I can not omit the connections between the most famous literary work related to the Tambora and the "Year Without a Summer."

The idea that 'Darkness' and Tambora are related somehow first appeared at the time of the "nuclear winter". In the 1984 March issue of *Scientific American* in the column of "Science and the citizens" one could read about the global destructive power of nuclear weapons: "Recent atmospheric studies indicated that if fewer than a third of the nuclear bombs now in existence were detonated, even in an attack without retaliation, the dust and smoke that would be injected into the atmosphere would give rise to a catastrophic »nuclear winter.«" At the same time, the eruption of two volcanoes was also taken into account. In 1983 "was the 100th anniversary of the eruption of the volcano Krakatau, whose atmospheric effects were observed around the world, and 1982 saw the eruption of the Mexican volcano EI Chichón, which also has had worldwide effects."³²

This article reported a forum on the effects of nuclear war in December 1983, where Russian Sergei Kapitza cited Byron's 'Darkness' and the "Year Without a Summer" in the context of the "nuclear winter":

"In December, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D., Mass.) and Senator Mark O. Hatfield (R., Ore.) organized a forum in the Senate Caucus Room on the effects of nuclear war. Among those who spoke was Sergei Kapitza, a well-known Russian physicist. Kapitza called attention to the 1815 eruption of the Indonesian volcano Tambora, which had the greatest atmospheric effects on record. [...] The lost summer of 1816 seems to have depressed and disturbed many people in ways beyond the obvious. Kapitza cited a poem, »Darkness«, written by Lord Byron in June, 1816. The poem is known to many Russians, Kapitza said, because it was translated into Russian by the novelist Ivan Turgenev."³³

This is consistent with Jonathan Bate, the first critic to discuss the significance of Tambora in 'Darkness', beginning his analysis (the first version was published in 1996³⁴) by saying that he first encountered the poem in the early 1980s. At that time he "heard it quoted by the then leader of the British Labour Party, Michael Foot. The party was avowedly in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament; [...] and scientists were telling us about something called »nuclear winter«."³⁵

32 Anonymous, "Resonances," 74.

33 Anonymous, "Resonances," 74. See also Anthony Rudolph's essay which is accompanied by the full text of Byron's poem and Turgenev's translation (Rudolph, "Byron's Darkness: Lost Summer and Nuclear Winter," 3.)

34 Bate, "Living with the Weather," 431–47.

35 Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 95.

Although it is undoubtedly possible to connect “nuclear winter” and the ‘Darkness’ for political reasons, as literary scholars we must of course view this with scepticism. Just like Jonathan Bate did:

“The Romantic in me was uplifted by Foot’s futuristic reading. The literary critics was more sceptical: the poem could not really be about nuclear winter.”³⁶

After the politician’s futuristic rhetorical interpretation, Bate mentions the results of literary studies to decipher the poem. The Oxford 1986 edition of Byron’s *Complete Poetical Works* headnote to the poem “consist principally of a catalogue of possible literary sources”, for example *The Last Man*,

“[...] which was an anonymous translation [...] of a French novel by Cousin de Grainville; »various apocalyptic passages in the bible«; Burnet’s *Sacred Theory of the Earth*; »various commonplaces of Enlightenment science«, to be found in Buffon and Fontenelle; the conclusion to the *De rerum natura* of Lucretius.”³⁷

However, Bate also has a problem with this rich list: “The politician’s rhetorical appropriation propels the poem into its future; the scholar’s elucidation of sources fossilizes it in its past.” Meanwhile, none of the readings responded to the “obvious questions: what led Byron to write a poem about the extinction of sunlight in the summer of 1816 and what would have come to the minds of his readers when the poem was published”?³⁸

After the future and the past, Bate focuses on the poem’s present. Citing the Oxford edition, he notes, that the period of composition can be narrowed to five weeks, between July 21 and August 5, 1816, and believes: the “key which unlocks the impulse behind” ‘Darkness’ is the summer weather of Lake Geneva, which “is always variable, but in 1816 Byron found it particularly irksome,”³⁹ so it was the very “Year Without a Summer.”

In the following, I will examine three classical Hungarian works, a play and two poems, which can be linked to the “Year Without a Summer” through the poem ‘Darkness’.

The Tragedy of Man

It seems that Sergei Kapitza’s citation of Byron’s ‘Darkness’ in the shadow of “nuclear winter” also had an impact in Hungary. However, the most well-known Hungarian drama, *Az ember tragédiája* [The Tragedy of Man] (1861) by Imre Madách was linked once to Byron’s ‘Darkness’, as the cold sun appears in both.

36 Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 95.

37 Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 95.

38 Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 96.

39 Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 96.

In the daily *Népszabadság*, on October 27 1984, Valter Endrei wrote an article about utopias and counter-utopias in the Saturday issue. The title of the second part of the article is “Darkness and Tragedy.” In the beginning, the article brings up Shelley’s famous horror novel, tells about the unusual circumstances of the writing of *Frankenstein*, and then notes that Byron also wrote ‘Darkness’ at the same time: “‘Darkness’ is the description of a terrible dream, which shows the destruction of humanity in the wake of the cooling and disappearing Sun”. Endrei then talks about the volcanic eruption and the “Year Without a Summer” as “today we already know”, and in the next paragraph he turns to Imre Madách’s dramatic poem of 1861:

“The first large-scale utopia of our Hungarian literature is linked to this strange experience of humanity—and probably to Byron’s vision: the penultimate three scenes of the *Tragedy of Man*. Already in the phalans-tery scene alien because of Fourier’s ideals, the Scientist predicts that “After four millennia the Sun will cool down”, in the next scene we witness the futile attempt to conquer outer space, and then the Byronic vision becomes foggy in the Eskimo world: »The Sun stands like a bloody rayless ball among wisps of fog” above the equator.«”⁴⁰

The problem is that the theme of the cooled Sun entered the works of Byron and Madách for different reasons (and Endrei does not write about how Madách, born in 1823, could be connected to the “Year Without a Summer” of 1816). In the Eskimo scene of Madách’s play, the cooled Sun can be seen in the distant future (four thousand years later), while in Byron’s poem, the—for an unknown reason—cooled Sun is in the very present. Therefore, unfortunately, *The Tragedy of Man* was by mistake linked to ‘Darkness’, so to the “Year Without a Summer.” Regardless, from a political perspective, Endre Walter could find the “nuclear winter” in the extreme weather of the Eskimo scene during the Cold War in the 80s.

‘Darkness’ and Tambora (part II)

As I wrote above, Jonathan Bate’s main thesis that the weather plays a decisive role in Byron’s poem:

“»The key which unlocks the impulse behind« ‘Darkness’ is the summer weather of Lake Geneva in 1816, which »is always variable, but in 1816 Byron found it particularly irksome«.”⁴¹

But it is also particularly important for Bate that the poem can be interpreted in multiple ways, that different interpretations can coexist. He sees the greatness of the poem in that: it is connected to the past (apocalyptic), to its present (apocalyptic weather), and to the future (nuclear winter of the 1980s or climate change of our time):

40 Endrei, “Utópiák és ellenutópiák,” 11.

41 Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 96.

“The poem is as contemporary as it is apocalyptic. The first referent for any reader of the poem in 1816 would surely have been not Lucretius or de Grainville’s novel *The Last Man*, but the sunless summer they had just undergone and the fear of famine brought with it.

But contemporary as it was, the poem remains powerfully prophetic: how far the nuclear forebodings of the Cold War seem now, how near the vision of a world seasonless, herbless, treeless, the rivers, lakes and oceans silent. When Michel Foot read ‘Darkness’ he had in his mind the Mutually Assured Destruction of the Cold War. When we read ‘Darkness’ now, Byron may be reclaimed as a prophet of [...] ecocide.”⁴²

Two late poems of Mihály Vörösmarty (1800–1855), the Hungarian romantic poet, can be placed next to ‘Darkness’ from this perspective. We can perceive parallels between Lord Byron’s and Mihály Vörösmarty’s poems: in ‘Darkness’, in ‘The Old Gypsy’ and in ‘Prologue’ we get lines and images with apocalyptic visions; these can be considered prophetic, their contemporaries could read something different from them than what posterity saw in them, all three poems are rooted in the past (biblical and mythical as well), mercilessly contemporary, but at the same time they foreshadow the future.

‘The Old Gypsy’

In Mihály Vörösmarty’s last finished poem, ‘A vén cigány’ [‘The Old Gypsy’]⁴³—which was published in the June 28, 1855 issue of the *Pesti Napló*—the presentation of the environment does not play a central role, but there are some traces, a few

42 Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 98.

43 Let me present an 1860 unknown English translation of the these two stanzas:

“Let thy blood boil like a whirling gulf’s flow
Roused up and be shaken thy brain’s marrow,
Like the blaze of a comet thy eyes glow
Strains more fierce than storm’s rage from thy chords flow
And with the hardness of hail down beating
Alas! People’s crops lay crushed – All went ruining...
Play, for who knows how long yet mayst thou play
When will thy bow be threadbare worn away,
Cup and heart filled high with wine and sorrows
Play bohemian and never mind the woes.
Learn a song from the tempest when raging
From it moans, wails, groans, howls and its roaring
When it’s uprooting trees and ships wrecking
Killing man and beast, human lives ruining...
War is going on in the world all round...
God’s Sepulchre trembles in the Holy Ground...
Play, for who knows how long [...]”
(Vörösmarty, *The Old Gypsy*, 1.)

more marked than others. The most striking is that in the second and third stanzas of the text, the speaker of the drinking song urges the addressed old gypsy to make his music similar to a wild storm, to be so wild and crazy, and he also suggests that he should learn his song from the reverberating thunderbolt and identify with the environmental element. Anita Szécsi pointed out in her 2021 thesis:

“[...] natural images are present in the text from the second stanza, in the form of metaphors and next to imperative verbs [...] In this typical piece from the period of romanticism, it is explained how the first addressed person should act. Of course, this is not a literal request either, as it encourages the stimulation of life functions that cannot be influenced. The third stanza is where the apocalyptic spectacle unfolds before the recipient, there is no shortage of natural images here. The image of a resounding thunders-torm appears, uprooting trees and breaking ships, suffocating life.”⁴⁴

The generation of the *Nyugat*, first Aladár Schöpflin, then, and mainly, Mihály Babits, and alongside them Antal Szerb, brought a turn in the evaluation of the poem after the incomprehension and lack of interest by Vörösmarty’s contemporary receivers, primarily Pál Gyulai. However, in the conclusion of Babits’s essay in the *Nyugat* in 1911, although he saw the text as “holy madness”,⁴⁵ he did not perceive anything other than a series of crazy confused images. After Lajos Csetri’s 1975 analysis emphasizing the structureless of the poem, more authors of the *Liget* workshop explained the system in madness (surprisingly without essentially paying attention to the environment) between 1991 and 2001, closer to our time, Csaba Kabai attempted to describe the poem’s “crazy” structure in 2007 in *Kortárs*.

From an ecocritical point of view, Miklós Mezősi’s 2021 study “The Storm as the Handmaiden of Philology” interpreted the poem and brought a system into Babits’s idea of the poem as a holy madness. Mezősi thinks the poem is interesting in itself because of the particularly extreme storm that appears, and I would add that, like ‘Darkness’, it is prophetic: for the 21st-century reader, it shows the increased extreme weather phenomena due to climate change, and it is suitable for sensitizing towards human ecological problems. It also includes the creation of something new (“The sixth stanza continues a biblical-mythical thread of the fifth stanza and floats a new Noah’s ark out of the big picture of cleansing from sins by seawater”⁴⁶) thanks to the appearance of a vision with hallucinatory sound effects.

44 Szécsi, *A Vörösmarty lírájában előforduló apokaliptikus képek*, 18–19.

45 Babits, “A férfi Vörösmarty,” 1061.

46 Mezősi, “A vihar mint a filológia szolgálóleánya: Vörösmarty: *A vén cigány és a Lear király fordítás*,” 60.

Bate tied Byron's 'Darkness' to the time of the creation of the text, and since such context of well-documented in the case of 'The Old Gypsy' as well, Vörösmarty's storm is also worth analysing from this point of view. We know that the poet's last finished poem is set in the context of the Crimean War. The 25th line of the poem after the storm ("War is going on in the world all round"⁴⁷), according to the decoding of Vörösmarty's biography first published in 1866 by Pál Gyulai, is connected to the beginning of the war:

"He wrote 'The Old Gypsy' at the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war, which became European and which he believed would influence the fate of Hungary. His poetic spirit, which was nourished by patriotism and consumed by patriotic grief, once again makes a strong statement. No longer able to speak to his nation, he addresses himself: he is the old gypsy, the ageing poet."⁴⁸

A severe storm is associated with the Crimean War: on the night of November 14 1854, the united Anglo-French fleet was destroyed in the Balaklava Bay off the Crimean Peninsula in a few hours. However, the defeat was not inflicted by the Tsarist warships, but by a sudden and devastating storm. According to a contemporary newspaper report, this storm was also observed in Pest at the beginning of December⁴⁹—yet this is quite hard to believe because of the distance and the direction. However, the poet wrote the poem a few months earlier. The notes of the critical edition mention that Gyulai also marked the "autumn of 1854" as the time of creation, but more precisely, the end of summer is likely, based on Ferenc Baráth's recollection: "we can put the probable time of the poem's creation at the summer of 1854, July–August."⁵⁰

In his reminiscence published in the thematic Vörösmarty issue of *Vasárnapi Újság* on December 2, 1900, Ferenc Baráth also gave the place where was written the poem. The poet

"[...] was the guest of Sámuel Egressy Galambos on his barren land in Szentkirály, near Laczháza, which is still in the hands of the family. During the conversation over lunch, his friends who were present gently urged the poet to write something since the nation needs great poetic consolation the most in such sad times. Right after lunch, Vörösmarty retired to a side room, and there he wrote the first three stanzas of 'The Old Gypsy', which he later completed at home."⁵¹

47 Vörösmarty, "The Old Gypsy," 1.

48 Gyulai, *Vörösmarty életrajza*, 303.

49 See Anonymous, "Ama viharos éj..." 361.

50 Vörösmarty, *Kisebb költemények III. (1840–1855)*, 576.

51 Baráth, "Vörösmarty és a forradalom," 794.

From Antal Réthly's collection of the weather events and natural disasters in Hungary in the 19th century, we know weather observations from 1854 on Dabas, not far from Szentkirály (this is more of a coincidence: the data are sporadic in terms of time and place).

“László Zlinszky, the former chief engineer and director general of roads in Pestvár County (b. 1801), regularly kept his weather records from 1821 until his death on December 11, 1862. The place of record was Dabas village (Pest County) until November 1851, Gödöllő and partly Pest until 1855, and from 1856 onwards the Ordasháza near Dabas.”⁵²

László Zlinszky noted a storm in the summer of 1854:

“From July 1st to the 11th, the days are very hot. On the 11th, there was a terrible wind, heavy rain, ice and thunder. After that, it's dry and hot all the way. Augustus. It's quite unusual, it didn't rain except on the 15th. Wind every day. The evenings and nights are so cold that they all had to put on winter coats.”⁵³

This summer storm in the area of Dabas on July 11, 1854, is more likely to have inspired the poem than the storm in Balaclava only because of the appropriate date. Perhaps behind the storm scene of ‘The Old Gypsy’, we should suspect a greater natural phenomenon, namely the “Year Without a Summer.” Gillen D’Arcy Wood writes a sentence about Charles Dickens that could be very useful here: “The 1810s also marks Charles Dickens’s first decade of life. His deep body memory of a volcanic childhood infuses his fiction: think of the »cold, biting weather: foggy withal« of *A Christmas Carol*.”⁵⁴ Mihály Vörösmarty was born in December 1800, so the 1810s marked his second decade of life, and the snowfall of January 1816 was an outstanding and very damaging event that affected the life of the entire Hungarian society. Perhaps we can think that for people born before circa 1810, the storm meant 1816 *ab ovo*.

‘Prologue’

Of course, if an educated Hungarian person today sees the word *storm* next to Vörösmarty’s name, s/he probably does not think of the storm scene of ‘The Old Gypsy’ at first, but of another late poem of his, the ‘Prologue’. I present the very different readings of the storm of this poem that have appeared in the reception so far, arranged they ultimately lead to an ecocritical reading of the lines which present the catastrophe. Finally, in addition to the storm in the poem, I will highlight another phenomenon that may connect the text to the “Year Without a Summer.”

52 Réthly, *Időjárési események és elemi csapások Magyarországon 1801–1900-ig*, 2:1225.

53 Réthly, *Időjárési események és elemi csapások Magyarországon 1801–1900-ig*, 2:1232.

54 D’Arcy Wood, *Tambora*, 40.

This poem was not published during the poet's lifetime. Following József Waldapfel, the critical edition dates it to the winter of 1850–51. However, in the light of recent research by Róbert Milbacher, the time of its composition has been questioned. Thus, of course, we can not look into any inspiring weather phenomenon. We can only state that even a more brutal storm appears in 'Prologue' than the one in 'The Old Gypsy'. It is more precisely a Disaster. (The seasonal cycle of spring, suspected summer, winter, and autumn, invoked with grey hair colour, plus the storm—these are the environmental elements of the poem.) The "allegorical symbolic"⁵⁵ meaning—declared since Dezső Tóth's 1957 monograph on Vörösmarty—of the storm or disaster can be decided by the reader.

Contemporaries knew almost nothing about the 'Prologue'.⁵⁶ It was published for the first time by Pál Gyulai in the *Complete Works of Vörösmarty* in 1863–64, which he edited, and in his note, he wrote:

"Whether this was a prelude to a work that had already been completed or just one that was yet to be completed, it is impossible to know. Among his documents, I did not find a single completed larger work, only fragments of a couple of smaller poems and drafts of one or two larger works, among which »The Eternal Jew« is the latest. He may have written the prologue to »The Eternal Jew.«"⁵⁷

"The poem is not mentioned in Gyulai's biography."⁵⁸—so say the notes of the Hungarian critical edition.

55 Tóth, *Vörösmarty Mihály*, 549.

56 Let me present a modern English translation by Peter Zollman of the now important lines:
 "The tempest broke. Its blood-congealing hands
 Were lobbing human skulls up in the sky,
 Its feet were wading deep in human hearts,
 And life was wilting in its baneful breath.
 The torchlight of the spirit died away,
 And on the fading forehead fo the sky
 A lightning etched the otherworldly lines
 Of hostile gods in black bloodthirsty temper.
 The tempest blasted, bellowed like a madman,
 A rabid monster, raging at the world,
 And where it went, along the bloody way
 The curses of a butchered populace
 Are rising from the steaming hecatombs,
 And devastation rests her weary head
 On grey incinerated city ruins.
 It's winter now and death and snow and stillness."
 (Vörösmarty, 'Prologue', 83.)

57 Vörösmarty, *Minden munkái*, 2:313.

58 Vörösmarty, *Kisebb költemények III. (1840–1855)*, 558.

The late poems, and thus the ‘Prologue,’ were discovered by Aladár Schöpflin in *Nyugat*. In 1908, Schöpflin read the text as an allegory in his essay “The Two Vörösmartys” (according to him, “the ‘Prologue’ is the preface of ‘The Old Gypsy’”), he saw in the poem the time of Vörösmarty’s life allegorically. In his opinion the poem’s

“[...] effect is downright horrible if we consider it a reflection of the poet’s mental state at the time. No matter how much we want to put the uniform of romanticism on his fantastic pictures, Vörösmarty was a romantic even before that, but this [sic] sky-scraping voice is not the Vörösmarty of the 40s. The person who wrote this poem is a depraved soul, with a sick imagination that is almost close to the depths of madness. As he encapsulates the great national destruction in symbols, it is no longer a fantasy, but a terrifying nightmare. And at the end, there is such a bitter, perverse mockery, such a provocation of everything he once held something for, such a choleric outburst of unrestrained agony, that the whole poem sounds like a hoarse howl. Vörösmarty, who has grown out of himself, whose voice is drowned in screams under the strain of the final agony, who is pounding the sky with his fist!”⁵⁹

In his 2007 analysis, András Kappanyos thoroughly explains the text’s incomprehensibility: “The poem contains many visual and logical inconsistencies, instances that are difficult to neutralise, empty spaces that are too »wide« in the eyes of contemporaries, and difficult to connect.” According to him, nothing logically precedes the outbreak of disaster following the spring festival, and thus “the allegory is very difficult to fit into the framework of logic: a continuous, laborious value-accumulating activity (development) reaches a climax, and instead of the expected fulfilment, a collapse, a catastrophe, the release of destructive forces follows.”⁶⁰

After Aladár Schöpflin, it is Mihály Babits, who takes a significant step forward in evaluating Vörösmarty’s late apocalyptic poetics. Babits did not only wrote about the poet in 1911 (with his studies “The Young Vörösmarty” and “Vörösmarty the Man” in *Nyugat*) but also gave a festive speech in 1935 on the 135th anniversary of the poet’s birth. The title of Babits’ speech is telling: “Today’s Vörösmarty.” He primarily highlighted in his speech the fact that the evaluation of the romantic poet has changed in recent years due to the changes in the world:

“In addition to the traces of his old century, he bears the marks of this terrible last quarter of a century. It’s as if he also went through the world war and all the crises of humanity that we belated readers understand.

59 Schöpflin, “A két Vörösmarty,” 582.

60 Kappanyos, “Egy romantikus főmű késedelmes kanonizációja,” 347.

His face is beginning to resemble more and more the portrait that the last Vörösmarty's poems themselves paint of their poet, and which Gyulai never dared to see and authenticate. This was the face of the poet who got to the bottom of everything and learned the true colour and value of everything human. The face of the "old gypsy" who is over the intoxication of all wines and music, no longer even plays music himself, lets the world speak and knows very well that the refrain of the world's song is: *There is no hope!*"⁶¹

Babits saw Vörösmarty's change in the light of the First World War. Although he was talking about late Vörösmarty's poems, he did not quote the 'Prologue' in his speech, so we cannot say that the destruction in the text directly meant the horrors of the Great War for him (but it seems likely). A subsequent generation also perceived the dreads and horrors of their lives clearly from the images and lines of 'Prologue.' In her 1988 essay, Ágnes Nemes Nagy already talks enthusiastically about the image of the disaster in 'Prologue.' In her opinion, the poem's escalation to infinity already reaches amazing heights, and their circle envisioned the Second World War in the poet's apocalyptic poetics.

"Vörösmarty's visions [...] are not so tormenting and grand because [...] they arise from a great imagination [...], but because they have a high degree of authenticity. [...] What a picture, for example, of this Misery, as its giant, sprawling figure falls and lays its defenceless head on the ashes of bombed-out ruined cities of a continent, like a homeless person on a stone with a burnt smell! What an attributive, for example, is this helpless! After the mythologically murderous violence, weakness and heartbreaking vulnerability suddenly appear through him, and with it the poet's sympathy, not sympathy: his participation in the unfolding fate of the vulnerable."⁶²

In his 1975 analysis of the poem, András Martinkó, like Nemes Nagy, writes about the text enthusiastically. He describes the middle part of the 'Prologue' as an astonishing vision of incomparable beauty, which, on one hand, evokes the "scenario tableaux" of romantic paintings and, on the other hand, brings out the rebellious, dramatic musical works. "As here »disaster roars«, »like a monster enraged«, as the people curse from the »heaps of bones«, you can hear the world-shaking music of Liszt and Berlioz, but above all, the world-shaking music of Wagner, the titan of »gesamntes Kunstwerk«."⁶³ While I think, Martinkó's association of two complementary forms of art are relevant, his analytical comments on the text (because

61 Babits, "A mai Vörösmarty," 401.

62 Nemes Nagy, "Vörösmarty Mihály: Előszó," 276–77.

63 Martinkó, "Vörösmarty Mihály: Előszó," 358.

“of course, Vörösmarty does all this with the tools of the art of language”) are also important and more interpretative than Nemes Nagy’s comments:

“The first thing that strikes you in this linguistic art is the astonishing inner energy of the words, their opposing extreme power and expansive richness of content: disaster has a »blood-congealing hand«, lightning draws divine wrath with »wild light« »on the fading forehead of the sky«, a madman is »a rabid monster«, [»]along the bloody way / The curses of a butchered populace« are heard... It can be observed as well that this energy charge—in true romantic fashion—is carried by adjectives mostly, the tools of language painting. But the verb is the word of drama. There is no drama without dramatic verbs. But here it is: »The tempest *broke*, [«] its feet *are raging* in human hearts, life *has withered*, »The torchlight of the spirit died away«, the divine anger drawn by lightning, »The tempest blasted, bellowed like a madman,« etc.”⁶⁴

János Barta wrote a study on Vörösmarty’s patriotism in 1950, reviewing his entire oeuvre. Unexpectedly, in this paper, the allegory of the ‘Prologue’ was put into a wider than national perspective:

“Vörösmarty’s myth-making imagination magnifies the struggle for freedom into a vision of a huge, cosmic catastrophe: the storm that broke out spoke to the whole world, and the earth became empty in its wake. The poetic imagination, by increasing the proportions and suggesting universality, already guesses that what happened was not only a Hungarian affair but that the downfall did not affect a single nation.”⁶⁵

In her 2021 thesis, Anita Szécsi, relying on Barta’s explanation, added that “[...] the work could not lose its topicality because it contains eternal, universal motifs that have a different meaning in every environment. The extreme natural disaster that appears in ‘Prologue’, like in ‘The Old Gypsy’ spreads over the entire planet in the form of a huge storm. [...] approached from the side of nature, we can witness an all-encompassing natural deterioration when the poet mentions cities and peoples in the poem.”⁶⁶

The storm of ‘The Old Gypsy’ can be associated with summer. We have a more difficult task with the storm of the ‘Prologue’. The poem begins by recalling the spring of the past, but by the storm’s end, it is winter in the present. The 34th line of

64 Martinkó, “Vörösmarty Mihály: Előszó,” 359.

65 Barta, “Vörösmarty patriotizmusa,” 26.

66 Szécsi, *A Vörösmarty lírájában előforduló apokaliptikus képek*, 30.

the poem, the representation of winter, is one of the best known lines of Hungarian literature, according to Ágnes Nemes Nagy, “it is the greatest verse in Hungarian poetry”.⁶⁷ András Martinkó also mentions the height of cosmic realism, linguistic and poetic art:

“Winter is coming. With a single sentence, the poet says, or perhaps his voice is just a suffocating, dying sigh, telling that »weary devastation« laying its head on the ashes of cities establishes the gloomy, unchangeable fate: »Most tél van és csend és hó és halál« [It’s winter now and stillness and snow and death]. Repeated »és« [and] three times with only *one word* each, it indicates what »tél« [winter] is for the ears, the eyes and life. It identifies and separates: each »és« [and] by itself tells the whole »tél« [winter], and together the whole winter of world and Hungarian history, and the winter of Vörösmarty’s life, and at the same time the failure of all these condensed into a single word with dying strength.”⁶⁸

Ágnes Nemes Nagy explains the great line of poetry in this way:

“One can only wonder how Vörösmarty was able to put this on the table like this, how he was able, for example, to compose this ultimately tragic sentence from almost only monosyllabic words in our Finno-Ugric language, which rolls long words. There is only one two-syllable word here, the final word, »halál« [death], which is also emphasised. Due to the ever-accumulating effect of the »and«s, the line seems to stutter, as if it approaches the heavy breathing of a patient who wants to say something again and again, but his sentences are already half-conscious. He only knows connecting conjunctions, always the same »és« [and], which constantly inserts small pauses between serious nouns, driving the increasingly difficult-to-pronounce word line, which reaches the last breath of the letter h, towards deeper and colder images. »Most tél van és csend és hó és halál.« [It’s winter now and stillness and snow and death.] These are the last words of a dying man.”⁶⁹

In addition to the storm, there can be another phenomenon in the poem that connects it to the period of 1816: the famine.

Wolfgang Behringer thinks the “influence of the Tambora event on art is just as ambivalent as in literature”⁷⁰ It seems that the reason for his ambivalence about literary works is that the members of the Byron–Shelley circle were insensitive to social problems:

67 Nemes Nagy, “Vörösmarty Mihály: Előszó,” 277.

68 Martinkó, “Vörösmarty Mihály: Előszó,” 361.

69 Nemes Nagy, “Vörösmarty Mihály: Előszó,” 277.

70 Behringer, *Tambora und das Jahr ohne Summer*, 276.

“From the diaries and letters, it is clear that Byron and the others were deeply impressed by the climatic events. However, the social hardships and the widespread famine in Switzerland either escaped the aristocratic troops completely, or they did not consider them worth mentioning simply. After an excursion to Mont Blanc that began on July 29, Shelley only described the devastation caused by the rain-induced floods: vineyards and fields had slipped and bridges destroyed, the wheat was rotting in the fields, and rain and fog hampered the excursion.”⁷¹

Gillen D’Arcy Wood is of the opposite opinion: he believes that the hunger and misery they saw also influenced the Circle:

“On the thunderous night in Geneva that first inspired her ghost story, Mary Shelley pictured Frankenstein waking from a nightmare to find his hideous creation at his bedside, »looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.« The description is reminiscent of Percy Shelley’s encounter with »half-deformed or idiotic« beggar children, presumably deranged with hunger. Numerous similar impressions could be cited. Another English tourist, traveling from Rome to Naples in 1817, remarked on »the livid aspect of the miserable inhabitants of this region.« When asked how they lived, these »animated spectres« replied simply, »We die.« Rural Europe in 1816 descended into a land of the living dead. If their imaginations had not been exhausted by the creation of Frankenstein and the vampire, someone in the Shelley Circle would surely have invented the zombie.”⁷²

Perhaps in Vörösmarty’s ‘Prologue’, in addition to weather, specifically winter, we can suspect another trace of the effect of the “Year Without a Summer”. When it comes to disaster in the poem, we probably think primarily of war and destruction. But the misery, which “lays its defenceless head on ashes of cities,” could have been inspired in the “old man’s” (as his friends called Vörösmarty) late poem by the starving people he may have met during the “Lean Years” of the second half of the 1810s.

After the parallels drawn between ‘The Old Gypsy’ and ‘Darkness,’ Jonathan Bate’s sentences about ‘Darkness’ seem transferable to ‘Prologue’ as well. The poem is as contemporary as it is apocalyptic. Furthermore, as contemporary as it was, the poem remains prophetic: how far the great crises of the past seem, “and how close the world seasonless, herbless, treeless, the rivers, lakes and oceans silent.” If we read ‘Prologue’ today, we can even consider Vörösmarty “the prophet of ecocide.”⁷³

71 Behringer, *Tambora und das Jahr ohne Summer*, 261–62.

72 D’Arcy Wood, *Tambora*, 65–66.

73 Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 98.

Conclusion

In the case of both recent works, our situation is almost clear. There is no doubt that the “Year Without a Summer” is an important part of the texts. In fact, without knowing this, they cannot be interpreted. In Janka Fábíán’s novel, an editor’s note briefly informs about the eruption of Tambora and the sustained change of the climate. If we know what phenomena the “Year Without a Summer” were associated with, we should identify several elements of the novel as such. The title of Attila Zsolt Papp’s cycle cannot be understood without the biographical background of Byron and his companions, in the poem ‘Ice’ we can read the words “year without a summer” literally. Both works were not only created when the events of the “Year Without a Summer” were already widely known, but in the Anthropocene, and when climate change is also undoubtedly present. And these two reasons may be behind the fact that these works evoke two hundred years old historical events.

In the case of the three classical Hungarian works, the situation is obscure. Meteorological phenomena also play a special role in them, but by these, the why and the what for purpose questions are much more complex. Their authors found a different explanation for the special weather phenomena in the texts than we can explain today. And thus they and the later readers were able to draw different conclusions than we do. *The Tragedy of Man* was mistakenly placed alongside ‘Darkness’ and *Frankenstein*, this work was not affected by the Tambora eruption. The Eskimo scene is set in the distant future, with scientists predicting that the Sun will cool in 4,000 years, while the darkness and lack of sunlight in ‘Darkness’ are very contemporary. Regardless, of whether nuclear winter or global warming is in our mind, climate change in the Eskimo scene can help us to think about such problems. In two of Vörösmarty’s late apocalyptic poems, ‘The Old Gypsy’ and ‘Prologue’, we read about extreme weather phenomena. The poet probably experienced the events of the “Year Without a Summer” as a blow from God, but he must have experienced them in fact when he was young. Therefore storms of 1815 and 1816 in Hungary may have inspired the storms of his poems written in his later years. All the more because the horror of famine also appears in the ‘Prologue’. So these two great strange poems can be classified as literary works of the “Year Without a Summer”. In the past hundred and fifty years completely different interpretations have emerged regarding the extreme weather phenomena appearing in the ‘Prologue’, hence we have a legal basis to look at and rethink Vörösmarty’s apocalyptic images in the light of the climate change of our time.

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