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The Poet as a Volcano: The Case of Byron

Abstract

One of the most memorable metaphors depicting Byron's poetic process comes from his 1813 letter to Annabella Millbanke, where he refers to poetry as 'the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake'. As Susan Wolfson has noted (*Romantic Interactions* 278–280), volcanic imagery also frequently appeared in the early nineteenth-century writings on Byron even before Byron's self-reflexive image became generally known, and this can be linked to the recurrence of volcanic tropes in Byron's poetry. A closer examination of the metaphorical discourse of the period, however, reveals that Byron, his admirers and his critics drew on the stockpile of images popular at the time. This article proposes to examine some of metamorphoses of this imagery from its appearance in Byron's writings to the image of Byron's poetry not as "the lava of the imagination" but the lava of the turbulent turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Mickiewicz's essay on Byron and Goethe.

Keywords: Byron, Mickiewicz, metaphor, volcanic imagery.

One of the most memorable metaphors depicting Byron's poetic process comes from his 1813 letter to Annabella Milbanke, where he refers to poetry as "the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake".¹ As Susan Wolfson has noted, volcanic imagery also frequently appeared in early nineteenth-century writings on Byron even before Byron's self-reflexive image became generally known, and this can be linked to the recurrence of volcanic tropes in Byron's poetry.² A closer examination of the metaphorical discourse of the period, however, reveals that both Byron, his admirers and his critics drew on the stockpile of images popular at the time. Volcanic tropes were also used in the debates on Byron's poetry on the continent. This was partly owing to Francis Jeffrey's 1816 influential review of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, which served as a springboard

¹ 29 November 1813, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. L. A. Marchand, vol. 3, Cambridge, Mass., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1974, p. 179. Hereafter referred to as BLJ.

² S.J. Wolfson, *Romantic Interactions: Social Being and the Turns of Literary Action*, Baltimore 2010, p. 278–280.

for the first of the articles on Byron in the Geneva-based *Bibliothèque universelle*, through which many Continental readers became introduced to Byron. The trope was used by Byron's admirers and detractors alike and can be seen as emblematic of the contemporary response to Byron's poetry, showing how each side adapted it for their purposes. This paper proposes to examine some of metamorphoses of this imagery from its appearance in Byron's writings to the image of Byron's poetry not as "the lava of the imagination" but the lava of the turbulent turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Mickiewicz's essay on Byron and Goethe.

The eighteenth century was the period of the awakening of great interest in geology, which was to culminate in the first decades of the nineteenth century in the works of Georges Cuvier in France and Charles Lyell in Britain.³ In 1776 Sir William Hamilton, the British ambassador to Naples, published his *Campi Phlegraei* [Flaming Fields]: *Observations on the Volcanoes of Two Sicilies*, where he presented the account of the recent eruptions of Vesuvius. Basing on his knowledge of the landscape around Naples, he argued that volcanic activity was not only destructive, but also had numerous long-term beneficial effects. Lava led to the formation of basalt rocks, and volcanic ash provided for fertility of the soil; on the whole, volcanic eruptions shaped the picturesque landscape south of Naples. Hamilton's book was illustrated with ornamental plates by Anglo-Neapolitan artist Peter Fabris, which were popular in their own right and served as souvenirs for tourists on the Grand Tour.⁴ Expeditions to volcanic craters became fashionable, and watching volcanic explosions was regarded as one of the most sublime experiences. With the recurring eruption of Vesuvius, Aetna and Hecla in the course of the century various new theories of volcanic activity developed. As the compiler of a list of volcanoes in "The Edinburgh Magazine" of 1786 noticed, "the doctrine of volcanos [sic] [was] one of the most fashionable speculations with modern philosophers".⁵

As a result of this interest, by the late eighteenth century, "the volcano [had come] to symbolize three explosive processes central to Romantic concerns, revolution, passion and poetry".⁶ Volcanic tropes often tended to be used with negative connotations by magazine writers. In literary texts, however, they often acquired complexity and ambivalence, often drawn from contemporary geological knowledge. As Ferber notices, Byron deployed volcano imagery in all the three instances. By 1823, however, at least for him, it had become so commonplace

³ J.A. Secord, *Geology, An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, ed. I. MacCalman et al., Oxford 1999, online version 2012. *Oxford Reference*, 29 Nov. 2013. For an overview of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century studies of volcanic activity, see G.M. Matthews, *A Volcano's Voice in Shelley*, "English Literary History" 1957, September, vol. 24, no 3, p. 191–228. 26 March 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2871972>.

⁴ E. Cole, *Sir William Hamilton: Campi Phlegraei, Book of the Month*, Glasgow University Library, Special Collections Department, October 2007. 29 Nov. 2013. <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/month/oct2007.html>.

⁵ *List of Volcanos* [sic], "The Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany" 1786, June p. 429–431 (p. 429), *British Periodicals*.

⁶ M. Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, Cambridge 1999, p. 225–227 (p. 226).

that he referred to the volcano as a “tired metaphor” in Canto XIII of *Don Juan* (36. 285).

Before discussing the function of volcanic imagery in Byron’s writings, it is worth examining typical appearances of volcanic tropes in the decades around 1800. The image of revolution as an eruption of a volcano was used both by the opponents of the French Revolution and political radicalism, and by the radicals themselves. For instance, the review of John Bowles’s *Reflections on the Political and Moral State of Society at the Close of the Eighteenth Century* published in the “British Critic” in February 1801 described the previous decade as the time “when a volcano of impiety has burst forth in France almost ‘frightening the isle from its propriety’, and actually convuls[ed] the continent to its very centre”.⁷ Among the radicals, the revolutionary volcano had positive connotations: Blake’s Orc in *Vala, or the Four Zoas* (1797–1807), and Shelley’s Demogorgon in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) are both associated with volcanic processes.⁸

Perhaps the most common was the use of the volcano trope in reference to emotional and/or rhetorical outbursts. In Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) a young lady refers to Margaret Delacour as “the volcano”: “I’m sure I am never in her company without dreading an explosion.” Mrs Delacour’s explosions produce only “a tremendous noise, fire, and smoke, and rubbish”, so calling her a “volcano” is an expression of contempt. Lady Anne, however, points to the presence of “precious minerals [...] among the rubbish”.⁹ Lady Anne is obviously knowledgeable about the contemporary vulcanology. Following Hamilton, she suggests the possible advantages of an emotional volcanic eruption and turns the term of abuse in Mrs Delancour’s favour.

Romantics tended to reevaluate and / or draw on the ambiguity of volcanic imagery. Perhaps the most telling in this respect is Mme de Staël’s *Corinne*, where the protagonist explicitly states that:

The Neapolitan countryside is the image of the human passions: sulphurous and fertile, its dangers and pleasures seem to stem from these flaming volcanoes, which give the air so many charms and make the thunder rumble beneath our feet.¹⁰

The term “volcano” was not limited to feminine outbursts of passion but also used to describe public speakers. The *Anti-Jacobin* in its 1805 review of John Wilkes’s *Life and Correspondence* referred to John Wilkes as “that extinguished volcano”, binding together the ideas of rhetorical flourish and political radicalism.¹¹ Maria Edgeworth used the word in this meaning in *Patronage* (1814): “She [Caroline] thought highly of Lord William’s abilities and character – She saw, as she had once said to lady Jane, ‘signs which convinced her, that this volcano covered with snow, and often enveloped in clouds, would at some time burst

⁷ *Reflections on the Political and Moral State of Society*, “The British Critic” 1801, February, vol. 17, p. 144–149 (p. 144). *British Periodicals*.

⁸ On Shelley’s use of volcano imagery, see G.M. Matthews, op. cit.

⁹ M. Edgeworth, *Tales and Novels*, vol. 11: *Belinda*, New York 1858, p. 97. Google eBook.

¹⁰ Madame de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, transl. S. Raphael, Oxford, 2008, p. 234.

¹¹ *Poetry*, “Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine, or, Monthly Political, and Literary Censor, 1798–1810” 1805, March, vol. 20, p. 332, *British Periodicals*.

forth in torrents of fire”¹²; that is, one day, he will become a great parliamentary speaker.

In Hazlitt’s writings we come across all the three uses of the volcano metaphor listed by Ferber – Hazlitt applied the volcano comparison to John Thelwall as an orator,¹³ wrote of “the volcano of the French Revolution [...] seen expiring in its own flames”,¹⁴ and compared speeches of Lear to volcanic outbursts.¹⁵

So when Byron wrote to Caroline Lamb:

Then your heart – my poor Caro, what a little volcano! that pours *lava* through your veins, & yet I cannot wish it a bit colder, to make a *marble slab* of, as you sometimes see (to understand my foolish metaphor) brought in vases tables &s. from Vesuvius when hardened after an eruption.¹⁶

he deployed a common metaphor. It was a back-handed compliment and actually aimed at explaining why he needed to cut himself off from Lamb. It was both patronising and yet affirming kinship, as he thought of his own passions as lava, which is testified by his use of the metaphor in the letter to Annabella quoted at the beginning of this article, where poetic outpourings are clearly presented as therapeutic.

Byron’s statement that an eruption may prevent an earthquake sounds baffling but was actually grounded in the science of the period. G.M. Matthews points out that it was widely believed at the time that volcanoes functioned as “vents” for “pent-up vapours” “raised from [subterranean] fires”, which would otherwise result in earthquakes. He suggests that Byron might have found this idea either in Humphrey Davy’s writings or Humboldt’s *Personal Narrative*.¹⁷ I would like to add to these sources a contemporary account of volcanic activity in the Azores, which Byron may have read in “The Edinburgh Annual Register” for 1811 (a copy of which is listed in the 1816 sales catalogue of Byron’s books¹⁸). The description of the nightly eruption of an underwater Volcano in São Miguel Island stresses the sublimity of the experience.¹⁹ The local population regarded

the opening of this Volcano in the sea as the most auspicious and providential thing that could have happened to the Island, and that [would] have the effect of relieving [them]

¹² M. Edgeworth, *Patronage*, 1814, Paris, 1841, vol. 2, p. 152. Google eBook.

¹³ W. Hazlitt, *The Plain Speaker: Opinions on Books, Men, and Things*, London 1826, vol. 2, p. 169. Google eBook.

¹⁴ W. Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits*, 2nd ed., London 1825, p. 215. Google eBook.

¹⁵ W. Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays*, 3rd ed., London, 1838, p. 164. Google eBook.

¹⁶ [April, 1812?], BLJ vol. 2, p. 170.

¹⁷ G.M. Matthews, op. cit., p. 202. Matthews points out to a 1760 essay by John Michell as the original source of this theory.

¹⁸ Lord Byron, *The Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. A. Nicholson, Oxford 1991, p. 235.

¹⁹ *Volcano in the Sea. Extract of a Letter from St. Michael’s 7 Feb. 1811*, “The Edinburgh Annual Register” 1811, vol. 4, p. 59–61 (p. 60), *British Periodicals*. (The third eruption much stronger than the others, “ascended like a host of sky-rockets to an immense height, and the burning fluid or lava was not extinguished till it plunged again into the water.” (p. 60).

from earthquakes in time to come, in the same time as was formerly experienced, when the caldeiras [hot Springs] of the Furnas broke out.²⁰

Thus if an outburst of an underwater volcano could protect an island from an earthquake, bursting forth of poetry as the lava of the imagination might protect a poet from constantly threatening throes of madness. And it also offered a fascinating spectacle for others to observe.

While the passages from Byron's letters were not known to his readers at the time, they would have been familiar with numerous volcanic tropes in his poetry, where passions tend to be represented as lava-like. The Giaour confesses that his love "was like the lava flood / That boils in Aetna's breast of flame" (1101–1102).²¹ The image is strongly erotic through the implicit need for eruption, and, simultaneously points both to the strength and destructiveness of his feeling. Besides, if indeed the volcanic eruption may prevent an earthquake, it reveals self-destructiveness of his passion.

The image of the blood of lovers as lava recurs in the description of Juan and Haidee's lovemaking in *Don Juan*: "And the blood's lava, and the pulse a blaze, / Each kiss a heart-quake" (2. 186. 1486–1487). In Canto IV of *Childe Harold* Venus is imagined showering Mars "[w]ith lava kisses melting while they burn, / Showered on his eyelids, brow, and mouth, as from an urn!" (51. 458–459), which seems to transform the divine lovers into marble sculptures. This image echoes the facetious comment from the letter to Lamb quoted above on the lava of passion transformed into marble. More seriously, however, it also points to the potential of passion of being transformed into art.

The poet as a volcano also keeps reappearing in Byron's poetry. As Alan Rawes has noted, in the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron both affirms and mocks the idea of poetry as emotional outburst.²² In *The Prophecy of Dante* (1821) volcanic poetry is juxtaposed with the perfection and poise towards which Dante aspires:

The Alp's snow summit nearer heaven is seen
 Than the volcano's fierce eruptive crest,
 Whose splendour from the black abyss is flung,
 While the scorch'd mountain, from whose burning breast
 A temporary torturing flame is wrung,
 Shines for a night of terror, then repels Its fire back to the hell from whence it sprung,
 The hell which in its entrails ever dwells (3. 186–193).

When in 1815 Byron received a medal of the Legion of Honour found at the battlefield of Waterloo from Caroline Lamb, this sparked off a chain of associations and reflections on Napoleon and human aspirations for freedom. The star of the Legion of Honour, which replaced the traditional cross of earlier orders, and is seen as the first order based on merit and not on social status, in

²⁰ Ibid., p. 61.

²¹ All quotations from Byron's poetry are from *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. J. J. McGann, 7 vols., Oxford, Oxford University Press 1980–1993.

²² A. Rawes, *Byron's Poetic Experimentation: Childe Harold, the Tales, and the Quest for Comedy*, Aldershot, 2000, p. 1.

the poem becomes the “Rainbow of the free”. Its passage is violent like that of a meteor, which “[rose] in Heaven to set on Earth”, which may be associated with the Great Comet of 1811, traditionally seen as portending Napoleon’s expedition to Moscow and also points to the disappointment of revolutionary hopes. Yet like the star of Bethlehem, it seems to announce the beginning of a new era. The very appearance of the star / meteor is presented using volcanic similes:

And thy light broke on human eyes,
Like a Volcano of the skies.

Like lava rolled thy stream of blood,
And swept down empires with its flood;
Earth rocked beneath thee to her base,
As thou did’st lighten through all space

The similes link the appearance of the star of liberty with the French Revolution and the progress of Napoleon, who himself apparently claimed that “Great men are meteors designed to burn so that earth may be lighted”.²³ Both images of a meteor and a volcano, which Byron deploys in this poem thinking of liberty, the French Revolution and Napoleon, were to become common similes used in the descriptions of his own poetry.

While Byron tended to use volcanic imagery to depict the passions of his characters, the violent course of history and his own poetic process, his admirers and critics often reached for seismic tropes to refer to him. As Wolfson noted, the image recurs in the response of Letitia Elizabeth Landon to Byron’s poetry.²⁴ While Wolfson observes the deployment of the image in Landon’s later poetry (*The Portrait of Lord Byron at Newstead Abbey*, 1840), for my purpose even more noteworthy is an early poem by Landon entitled *The Poet*, which appeared in “The Literary Gazette” for August 1822. L.E. L. enters in this poem the debate on the sincerity of Byron’s poetry, fiercely defending the authenticity of passion depicted in his verse. She does so by alluding to the images Byron uses in *The Prophecy of Dante*:

It is not the Alpine hills rich with the ray
Of sunset can image the soul of the bard;
The light of the evening around them may play
But the frost-work beneath is, tho’ bright, cold and hard.

‘Tis the burning volcano, that ceaselessly glows,
Where the Minstre [sic] may find his own semblance pourtray’d’
The red fires that gleam on the summit are those
That first on his inmost spirit have preyed.²⁵

²³ C.F. de Méneval, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Napoleon I from 1802 to 1815*, New York 1894, vol. 3, p. 485. *The Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/stream/memoirsillustrat03mn#page/n9/mode/2up> (access: 1.10.2015).

²⁴ S.J. Wolfson, op. cit., p. 273–278.

²⁵ L.E.L., *The Poet*, “The Literary Gazette: A Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts” 1822, April, no 275, p. 264. *British Periodicals*.

Landon actually questions the aspirations of Byron's Dante towards "Alp's summit", reaching towards heaven, and asserts the superiority of the volcanic poet of passion, whom she sees represented in Byron.

Landon's less enthusiastic contemporaries did not subscribe to such glorifications of poetic volcanic activity. In April 1817 "The Theatrical Inquisitor" complained, "The mind of Lord Byron, like a troubled volcano bursts upon us with periodical effusion and throws up its very dust, its rubbish and its lava in a glare of impressive brilliance".²⁶ In his 1816 review of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto III, Francis Jeffrey uses the volcanic eruption trope to refer to Byron's creative process: "In Lord Byron we have [...] a perpetual stream of quick coming fancies [...] which seemed called into existence by the sudden flash of those glowing thoughts and overwhelming emotions, that struggle for expression through the whole flow of his poetry".²⁷ This naturally seems to echo Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and Byron's own phrasing. As Wolfson (p. 279) has noticed,²⁸ Jeffrey's metaphor next evolves into a reflection on the role of the poet in society:

A great living poet is not like a distant volcano. He is a volcano in the heart of our land, and a cloud that hangs over our dwellings; and we have some cause to complain, if instead of genial warmth and grateful shade, he darkens and inflames our atmosphere with perpetual explosions of fiery torrents and pitchy vapours. Lord Byron's poetry, in short, is too attractive and too famous to lie dormant or inoperative; and therefore, if it produce any painful or pernicious effects, there will be murmurs and ought to be suggestions of alteration.²⁹

In this passage Jeffrey seems to be drawing on the contemporary use of volcano imagery in reference to great orators as illustrated by the examples from Edgeworth and Hazlitt rather than on Byron's writings known at the time. The ambivalence in Jeffrey's use of the trope is illustrative of his attitude towards Byron's poetry. First, for Jeffrey there is no doubt as to Byron's greatness and presence in British literature. Though Byron is in Italy, and hence, I think, the appropriateness of the volcanic metaphor, he is not distant like Vesuvius or Aetna, but a living presence. Jeffrey seems to be imagining a volcano first in terms of landscape painting – thus the mention of idyllic warmth and shade it may provide. I believe he is thinking very much in terms of Hamilton's argument and Fabris's plates in *Campi Phlegraei*. This indeed appears to Jeffrey to be the role of poetry, which he very much understands as the classical "to instruct and to delight". But this image deconstructs itself because it is in the very nature of the volcano to be threatening with its dormant subterranean energy, so there is no point in complaining about its occasional eruptions. While Jeffrey complains of potential moral danger of Byron's poetry, which to him lies in blending great virtues with great

²⁶ Rev. of *Manfred, a Dramatic Poem*, "Theatrical Inquisitor, and Monthly Mirror" 1817, August, vol. 11, p. 120–27 (p. 120). *British Periodicals*.

²⁷ [F. Jeffrey], Rev. of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto the Third*, "Edinburgh Review" 1816, December, vol. 27, no. 54, p. 279–309 (p. 278). ProQuest 2008.

²⁸ S.J. Wolfson, op. cit., p. 279.

²⁹ [F. Jeffrey], op. cit., p. 280.

moral flaws in the characters of the tales, he still believes that a great poet must be a volcano, and thus brimming with passion and potentially explosive .

A Swiss man of letters Charles Pictet de Rochemont falls back on Jeffrey's review in his influential article on Byron in *Bibliothèque universelle*.³⁰ Although Pictet does not directly refer to Jeffrey's article, he draws on Jeffrey's volcanic metaphor in order to question its appropriateness and to warn against prospective long-term pernicious effects of Byron's poetry on the Continent:

A great poet has always a great influence on human opinions and sentiments. If the tendency of his works is morally wrong, his existence should not be compared to natural incidents which cause local or transitory evils. A volcano is only dangerous for the surrounding area; great natural disasters rarely occur and are separated by healing intervals; but at the time when everyone reads, works whose character is attractive and which flatter secret likings of our nature have a certain kind of universal impact, and if they flatter secret leanings of our nature, this impact may last through centuries.³¹

For Jeffrey, Byron was a British poet potentially dangerous for the British reading public; in Pictet's article Byron becomes a universal writer, actually more pernicious than the volcano from Jeffrey's review: Pictet anticipates that neither space nor time, neither language nor historical distance is likely to weaken the effect of his poetry.

Whereas Pictet de Rochemont did not find Jeffrey's volcanic trope satisfactory to describe Byron's potential cosmopolitan impact, the poet's detractors further questioned the potency of the volcanic image. In 1826 in his introduction to a collection of Slavonic folk songs, a Polish poet and critic Kazimierz Brodziński complained about the impact of Byron's poetry on the contemporary literature, while advocating the significance of folk literature:

Today's spirit of poetry which from Byron has crept up even to France is neither the image of the natural state of society nor of the aspirations for it. "These fashionable products, says Szafarik, the editor of Slovak songs, are Parnassian volcanoes which with their blaze and rumble blur our vision and stun us, but finally only cover us with ashes".³²

³⁰ For the attribution of the articles to Pictet de Rochemont, see P. Cochran, *From Pichot to Stendhal to Musset: Byron's Progress through Early Nineteenth-Century French Literature* [in:] *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, ed. R.A. Cardwell, pbk ed., London, 2014, vol. 1, p. 32–70 (p. 40).

³¹ "Un grand poëte a toujours une vaste influence sur les opinions et les sentimens des hommes. Si la tendance de ses ouvrages est moralment mauvaise, son existence ne sauroit être comparée aux accidens naturels qui causent un mal local ou passager. Un volcano n'est dangereux que pour la contrée qui l'avoisine; les grands fléaux de la nature sont rares, et séparés par des intervalles réparateurs; mais dans un temps où tout le monde lit, les ouvrages dont le coloris est attrayant, qui flattent les penchans secrets de notre nature, ont une action en quelque sorte universelle; et s'ils sont marqués au coin du genie, cette action peut se prolonger pendant des siècles" [Pictet de Rochemont], *Chile Harold's Pilgrimage. Canto the Third. Le Pèlerinage de Childe Harold. Troisième chant. Par Lord Byron*, "Bibliothèque universelle" 1817, vol. 5, year 2, Litterature, p. 72–100 (p. 75). All translations in this article, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

³² "Ten duch poezji dzisiejszej, który od Bajrona do Francji nawet się zakradł, ani jest obrazem naturalnego stanu społeczeństwa, ani też dążeniem ku niemu. 'Te modą sławne płody, mówi wydawca pieśni Słowaków, Szafarik, są to parnaskie wulkany, które nas swym blaskiem i hukiem ćmią i głuszą, ale w końcu popiołem tylko zasypują'". *List do Redaktora Dziennika Warszawskiego o pieśniach ludu*. "Dziennik Warszawski" 1826, vol. 4, no 12, p. 173–184 (p. 177) <http://ebuw.uw.edu.pl/dlibra/>

Brodziński erroneously invoked the authority of Pavel Jozef Šafárik, a Slovak and Czech historian and Panslavonic activist, who was soon to become famous as the author of *Slavonic Antiquities*. Brodziński actually confused Šafárik with Ján Kollár, another eminent Czech and Slovak man of letters and Panslavonic activist, who in the introduction to his collection of Slovakian folk songs *Pismě světské lidu slovenského v Uhřích* (Songs of the Slovak People in Hungary, vol. 1: 1823),³³ did not directly refer to Byron, but to fashionable foreign literary works in general. Like Kollár (and Šafárik), Brodziński advocated the value of national folk poetry and juxtaposed it against damaging influence of German and English's writings. I am not able to prove whether Kollár knew Pictet de Rochemont's articles on Byron in *Bibliothèque universelle*; Brodziński may have known them as the Swiss journal was a source of many articles in the periodicals which he edited. What Kollár and Brodziński shared was their distrust of new literary fashions coming from Germany and Britain and, for Brodziński, Byron epitomized these trends.

Brodziński's attack on Byron deeply disturbed Adam Mickiewicz, who held Brodziński in high esteem both as a poet and one of the first proponents of the ideas of Romanticism in Poland.³⁴ On 18 October 1826 Mickiewicz complained to his friend Antoni Edward Odyniec:

I cannot believe that what [Brodziński's article] says about Byron and in general his comments on German and English poetry express Brodziński's poetical faith. I do not know who that Mr Szafarik, the one who calls Byron a volcano that only sends sparks and covers [us] with ash, is. Those smokes, ashes, phantasmagoria, satanism are observed in Byron's poetry by journalistic critics, who try to explain with the multitude of words the image that is dark to them; it is high time they were replaced more profound comments. No one denies that in Slavonic songs one can find Anacreon's sweetness, delicacy and joy, but can Anacreon's songs be made to restrain literature, particularly in the times that have seen Goethe, Schiller, Moore, and Byron?³⁵

doccontent?id=93217 (access: 1.10.2015). For the identification of the author to whom Brodziński referred, see A. Mickiewicz, *Dziela* vol. 14: *Listy. Część pierwsza 1815–1829*, ed. M. Dernałowicz, E. Jaworska, M. Zielińska, Warszawa 1998, p. 372, footnote 5.

³³ Kollár's original preface reads: "Ba i milovníci básnictví a krasovědných plodů vůbec v takovýchto zbírkách začasté zdravější pastvu naleznou, nežli při mnohých parnaských vulkánech, kteří nás obzvláště v těchto časích svým praskem a třeskem téměř ohlušili, svým popelem a skálím téměř zasypali". *Ján Kollár: Piesne svetské ľudu slovenského v Uhorsku*. 1. Diel. Digitalizátor: Tomáš Ulej, Peter Kohaut, Viera Studeničová, Michal Garaj, Katarína Tinesová, Slavomír Kancian, Daniel Winter, Bohumil Kosa. *Zlatý fond denníka SME*, 2010. http://zlatyfond.sme.sk/dielo/111/Kollar_Piesne-svetske-ludu-slovenskeho-v-Uhorsku-1-diel/1#ixzz2iiq83g (access: 1.10.2015).

³⁴ S.S. Łanda, *Zagorzaly bajronista (Do genezy artykułu Mickiewicza "Goethe i Byron")*, "Przełąd Humanistyczny" 1990, vol. 5/6, p. 135–142.

³⁵ "Nie mogę wierzyć, aby to, co tam o Byronie powiedziano, i w ogólności zdania o poezji niemieckiej i angielskiej były wyznaniem wiary literackiej Brodzińskiego. Nie wiem, co zaczął ów pan Szafarik, nazywający Byrona wulkanem, który tylko błyska i popiołem zasypuje. Owe dymy, popioły, fantasmagorie, szataństwa, upatrywane w poezjach Byrona przez krytyków dziennikarskich, którzy mnóstwem wyrazów chcą objaśnić wyobrażenie dla nich samych ciemne, czas, aby już ustąpiły gruntowniejszym uwagom. Nikt nie zaprzeczy, że w piosenkach słowiańskich oddycha prawdziwa słodycz, delikatność i wesołość Anakreonta; ale czyliż Anakreonta pieśniami ograniczać należy lite-

As befits a poet, Mickiewicz would not let go the volcanic trope, and in his unfinished 1826 essay *Byron and Goethe* he consistently deployed volcanic imagery.³⁶ Like Jeffrey, he first uses it referring to Byron's poetic process, ("It was during his voyage to the East that Byron turned out to be a poet, pouring out all his feelings [...] and thoughts").³⁷ From this image of poetic creation as an outburst of the poet's mind, he moves to the image of Byron's poetry as an eruption of the spirit of the age:

American Revolution and the long and continuous war with France, party divisions among the English themselves – all that preoccupied the public; there emerged a great number of new conceptions, ideas and emotions; however, there was no poet to express them. That was an enormous mass of combustible subterranean materials, searching for a new crater in the local mountains.³⁸

Mickiewicz conflates the image of political and poetical volcanoes into the image of Byron as a new volcanic crater; thus Byron's poetry becomes not the lava of an individual poetic imagination, but, in accordance with historicist thinking characteristic of Romanticism, a violent expression of intellectual and emotional concerns of the time. By using the trope of the volcano, Mickiewicz equals Byron's poetry with intellectual and artistic revolution itself.

In Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, Part III, the volcanic simile appears as the image of the Polish nation:

Our nation is like a living volcano:
The top is hard and cold, worthless and dried,
But boiling, fiery lava seethes inside.
One hundred years of cold won't cool its breath:
Spit on the crust – come, we'll plunge to the depths.³⁹

Mickiewicz has Wysocki, the leader of the plot of the cadets to kill the Russian Duke Constantine which sparked off Polish rising of 1830, pronounce these words. They are expressive of the hopes of radicals for the involvement of common people in the struggle for national independence, which links this simile to conventional imagery of revolutionary volcanoes. Yet at the same time the image is reversed – the eruption does not seem to be produced by subterranean forces but sought for by patriots.

raturę, i jeszcze w czasach, które widziały Góthego, Schillera, Moora i Byrona?" 6/18 October 1826. A. Mickiewicz, op. cit., p. 370.

³⁶ As suggested by Łanda, who erroneously states that Brodziński's article was published in "Gazeta Warszawska", S.S. Łanda, op. cit., p. 136. See also M. Strzyżewski, *Mickiewicz wśród krytyków. Studia o przemianach i formach romantycznej krytyki w Polsce*, Toruń 2001, p. 106–107.

³⁷ "okazał się poetą, wylewając wszystkie uczucia [...] i myśli", A. Mickiewicz, *Goethe i Bajron* [in:] *Dziela*, vol. 5: *Proza artystyczna i pisma krytyczne*, ed. Z. Dokurno, Warszawa 1999, p. 171–179 (p. 176).

³⁸ "Rewolucja amerykańska, uporczywa i długa wojna przeciw Francji, stronnictwa dzielące opinią samych Anglików, wszystko to zajmowało publiczność; wyrobiła się wielka liczba nowych wyobrażeń, myśli i uczuć, brakują tylko poety, który by je wyśpiewał. Była to ogromna masa palnych, podziemnych materiałów, szukająca w okolicznych górach nowego krateru". Ibid., p.175–176.

³⁹ *Dziady (Forefathers' Eve): Dresden Text*, transl. C.S. Kraszewski, Lehman, PA 2000, scene VII, p. 99.

Volcanic imagery recurred in nineteenth-century criticism of Byron and through its ambiguity became emblematic of the debate over the significance of Byron's poetry in Europe. It drew both on the tropes from Byron's poetry and on the rhetorical discourse of the time, becoming part of the poetical and ideological debate in which the involved parties rewrote each others' texts to advocate their own views on literature. In the discussion on the merits of Byron's poetry the image of a volcano was used to warn against potentially dangerous influence of his writings, assert their power and question their impact. But while the image long persisted in critical discourse, Byron himself offered its most memorable questioning in *Don Juan* Canto XIII (1823):

(Now for a common place!) beneath the snow,
 As a Volcano holds the lava more
 Within – *et cetera*. Shall I go on? – No!
 I hate to hunt down a tired metaphor:
 So let the often used volcano go.
 Poor thing! How frequently, by me and others,
 It hath been stirred up till its smoke quite smothers (13. 282–288).

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