

Zsolt Győrei

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## The Reviewer and the Poet

In 1817, Ferenc Kölcsey criticized Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's lyrical oeuvre in a harsh critique: from the condemnation of his slavish adoption of foreign influences, through unfavourable comparisons with the performance of his contemporaries, to the accusation of rusticity, the review is an overarching, but overall biased, dismissive review – a somewhat too loud, too impatient self-justification of a poet and literary man who was a Csokonai fan in his adolescence. The attacked poet was not given the opportunity to defend himself: he had been dead for twelve years – a fact that casts a shadow over Kölcsey's highly offensive, at times even personal, writing.<sup>1</sup>

The idea has already occurred to me before that a response to Kölcsey's critique would be worthwhile on two levels: on the one hand, arguing with the perceived angular statements of the review with reference to Csokonai's lyricism and the accompanying studies and poetic notes of his own; on the other hand, attacking the ad hominem criticising reviewer in an outspoken, youthfully crude style that, according to the recollections of some, was also characteristic of Csokonai, who died at the age of only thirty-two. In other words, pointing out the one-sidedness and under-argued nature of criticism in the context of literary history, as a counter-review, and seeking, in a literary context, to make amends for the unjust insult to the poet through strong, almost mockery-like comic devices.

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<sup>1</sup> The next time Kölcsey criticized Berzsényi with similar harshness, who was still alive and defending himself

These two demands came together in this writing (for the second time)<sup>2</sup> of a difficult-to-define genre – half essay, half dramatic monologue – in which I respond to Kölcsey's criticism in the first person, in the name of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, reviving his style to the best of my ability. The result is a counter-review by a young but self-respecting personality, aware of the value of his own accomplishments, full of anger and mocking play, following the structure of the original critique and arguing against it point by point. In its argumentation and linguistic phrases, it is emphatically not only intended as fiction, but I have hidden as many original quotations from Csokonai in it as I could: ideas on the one hand, and unique images and metaphors on the other. Thus, my evocation of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz stands up for itself with its own sentences and texts, and I hope that the finished work will successfully fuse the original Csokonai implants with my insertions, which weave the quotes into a coherent thread of thought. I intended this counter-review to be both a literary work and a work on literature, a poetic polemic and an evocation of what we still perceive a brilliant and lively spirit – but above all, a homage, a professional tribute to the much admired, beloved and equally playful poet-genius.

*Given the archaic nature of the writing, we do not publish it in English (– the editor).*

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2 The idea became a reality for the first time when I was in my second year of humanities studies. The *Csokonai Vitéz Mihály: Kölcsey Ferenc: Csokonai Vitéz Mihály munkáinak kritikai megítélése című munkájának költői megítélése* was first published (without mentioning my name for the sake of playfulness) in Pompeii in 1992. ([http://acta.bibl.u-szeged.hu/9049/1/pompeji\\_1992\\_002\\_035-044.pdf](http://acta.bibl.u-szeged.hu/9049/1/pompeji_1992_002_035-044.pdf)) The second time, under the same title, but now with my name, as one of the winners of the Contemporary magazine's Apocryphal Short Stories competition in 1996. ([https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Kortars\\_1996\\_1/?query=Csokonai+1W+Mih%C3%A1ly&p-g=196&layout=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Kortars_1996_1/?query=Csokonai+1W+Mih%C3%A1ly&p-g=196&layout=s)) My current work is based on this draft, which I have finally completely rewritten.