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Géza Balázs **THE DRAMATIC LANGUAGE OF CSOKONAI**
in the Comic Epic Dorottya vagyis a dámák diadalma a Fárságon (Dorottya or the Triumph of the Ladies at the Carnival)

Tamás Gajdó **THE AWAKENING OF MIHÁLY VITÉZ**
On the Premieres of the Plays of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, 1911–1948

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Greetings to the Reader

Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, one of the early masters of Hungarian dramatic writing and a courageously innovative creator, was honoured by the University of Theatre and Film Arts with a series of events on the occasion of his 250th birthday in November 2023. In addition to a unique, artistically inspired commemoration, our aim was to showcase the creative and artistic achievements of our university. We organised the celebration in Debrecen, Csokonai's hometown, using the inspiration and tools of our faculty and students.

The conference, titled "*Kincsek negédes csűre*" ("*Sweet Barn of Treasures*"), embraced both an academic and an artistic-creative approach, and featured lecturers and guest speakers from the university, offering a more complete understanding of Csokonai's oeuvre and legacy. In this issue, we have edited a collection of publications based on these lectures and the stage works presented during the celebrations.

Géza Balázs's study *Csokonai's Dramatic Language – Dorottya or the Triumph of the Ladies at the Carnival* presents, based on this comic epic, the numerous explanations the poet included in footnotes, making the language of the plays difficult, mostly only understandable in the given period. All this yields a wealth of cultural history references, which the poet regularly explains in his notes, while others are for us, the posterity, to discover. The author's analysis of *Dorottya* provides some examples of this.

Tamás Gajdó's study *The Awakening of Mihály Vitéz – On the Premieres of the Plays of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz between 1911–1948* states that Csokonai's plays were only discovered by theatre-makers at the beginning of the 20th century. The first comedy to be staged was *The Widow of Mr Karnyó and the Two Rascals* in 1911 at a matinee of the literary journal *Nyugat*. In addition to discussing the performance, the paper shows how the trajectory of the Debrecen writer's plays continued in Hungary between the two world wars.

András Timár's essay *Revival of A' özvegy Karnyóné (The Widow of Mr Karnyó) – A Survey of József Ruszt's Interpretation of Csokonai* explores the topicality of the director's reading of Csokonai through the (re)construction of the production performed at the University Stage in 1965. The focus of the work is on the extent to which life on stage can be a determinant of the freedom movement

of the language of theatre; and how the Universitas Ensemble's performance worked with a form language that circumvented the realistic-naturalistic canon of the time, and how the performance became one of the company's greatest successes.

Ferenc Veress's study, *The Pantheon Concept from the Renaissance to Romanticism – Reflections on the Background of Statues of Csokonai by Ferenczy and Izsó* analyses the tribute that brought about the rise of the cult of famous people through the examples of ornate tombs and statues of the period. According to the author, István Ferenczy's bust of Csokonai, which the sculptor intended for an imaginary national pantheon, and Miklós Izsó's full-figure statue of Csokonai commissioned by the Debrecen Memorial Garden Committee fit into the humanist tradition.

Zsolt Antal's essay, *Csokonai and Education – The Harmony of Science, Art and Life-Sustaining Human Relationships*, presents the poet's views on education and his work as a teacher. As an educator, Csokonai attached great importance to nature-centredness, a curriculum tailored to the needs of pupils, community organisation based on group dynamics, the transmission of values, and the harmony of science, art and life-sustaining human relationships.

In 1817, Ferenc Kölcsey criticised the lyrical oeuvre of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz in a harsh critique. In his defence of the poet, Zsolt Győrei points out the one-sidedness and under-argued nature of the criticism in the context of literary history, as a kind of counter-review, as well as in the context of fiction. "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."

The final event of the Csokonai festival, organised by our university, was the production of *Tempefői*, adapted and staged by our students. The original play was written by Csokonai when he was barely twenty years old and was a student at the Reformed College in Debrecen. Perhaps that is why the spirit of *Tempefői* was such a "good fit" for them, writes Attila Szabó in his review of the play, titled "There are an overwhelming number of books here...".

Zsolt Antal
Editor-in-Chief

Géza Balázs

The Dramatic Language of Csokonai

in the Comic Epic *Dorottya vagyis a dámák diadalma a Fárságon* (*Dorottya or the Triumph of the Ladies at the Carnival*)

Abstract

The language of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's plays is complicated by a number of allusions, most of which can only be understood in the period in which they were written; this also poses a serious interpretative challenge for the staging. The poet tries to help with explanations in footnotes (e.g. folk custom, regional word, word for language reform, foreign word, scientific notion, geographical name). All of this provides a wealth of cultural history benefits, and the poet regularly refers to these in his notes, while others must be investigated by us, the descendants (this *Dorottya* analysis provides a few examples). The uniqueness of Csokonai's style, its modernity and its validity to this day, is manifested in: the playful, joyful lightness of the Rococo; its folkloricism; its folk humour (outspokenness), its treatment of taboo subjects (emancipation, sexuality); its support for national feeling and language reform. Csokonai's drama poetry language is colourful and varied.

Keywords: Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, *Dorottya*, comic epic, folkloricism, folk humour, language reform

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Prologue

It was always customary to have a prologue at the beginning of a work of fiction. A kind of apology, “excuse for myself”, explanation. Csokonai wants to interpret his work in a prologue, and ironically, in a preface speech to the prologue. (And now I am writing the preface speech to the prologue to the prologue.) It is as if even at that time – more than 200 years earlier, in 1798 – there were already art-theoretical, aesthetic expectations to be met, and the writer would like to conform to them. Csokonai’s prologue sets out the expectations of the prologue in bullet points. The author writes a prologue because he either wants to praise himself for the work he has put into the work, or he wants to humble himself, as he learned from ancient rhetoric (*captatio benevolentiae*, i.e. to win goodwill) with a little humiliation. But Csokonai does not want to be either vain or self-indulgent. He also refers to the reader’s attitude with a certain self-irony: the reader does not read such texts, either because he is bored or because he finds them unnecessary. Knowing this, Csokonai admittedly structures his prologues in the following way: to appeal to the intellect and the emotions.

Csokonai comments extensively on his text not only in the prologue, but also in his notes on the page. He is simultaneously a historian, philosopher, physicist, botanist, ethnographer and a bit of a linguist. From his footnotes we can learn about *carnevál* (carnival masquerade ball), *Witz* (wit), *levegőbeli hajó* (airship), *etézia* (wind in the heat), *kráfli* (doughnut), *trompóz* (trompeuse, occasionally transposed into Hungarian as immaculate mound, bait dress that erotically highlights the nipple¹).²

It explains place names (*Kaposmérő*, *Nagybajom*, *Zákány*), historical persons (*Kupa herceg* – Prince *Kupa*), special animals (*hyena*, *sloth*, *baléna* – *bálna* or *whale*), folklore phenomena (*garabonciás diák* – student, “*igazi*” *magyar tánc* – ‘true’ Hungarian dance, *paszit* – *paszita*), groups (*toponári azzáfok*, i.e., *musician Jews*) and words (*bászli* – *pipogya*, *avar* – *száraz gyepfű*, *keletső* or *napkeletső* – *keleti* or *napkeleti*, *élvény* – *vivacious*). The setting is Somogy county, “the blessed

1 “This *Trompóz*, *trompeuse* in French, in Hungarian *bait dress*, such an *immaculate mound*, which are put on their bosoms by such ladies, who have nothing to show there. I think it is right! [...]” (*Dorottya*, note 10; Csokonai 1985, 24)

2 The sources of linguistic examples and quotations can be found and checked in the electronic library of the OSZK: (*National Széchényi Library*): <https://mek.oszk.hu/00600/00635/00635.htm#n10>

country" (Somogy is indeed called *Somogyország – Somogyland*). The places can be identified: Lengyel + Tóti, Zákány, Nagybajom, Toponár, Kaposmérő, Kapos (today Kaposvár, the county seat), the five districts of the magistrates: Kapos, Marcali, Igal, Sziget, Babócsa. The place names also include: Fejérvár, Veszprém, Szala, Tihany. The persons are also real: Eszterházy dominion, Széchényi bailiff.

"Kapos is the capital of the Somogy border
 And the dominion of Prince Eszterházy,
 Which was overjoyed last summer,
 Embracing so much gentry,
 Who to the great Széchényi bailiffs
 With unheard-of splendour and light they court,
 Kapos, where else, to do justice
 The county officers used to get together,
 Kapos was also the destination of the merry Carnival,
 Where the Prince's castle became their lodgings." (Csokonai 1985, 22)

Among the many ethnographic tidbits, the specific name of the Hortobágy appears in one of the footnotes (44): Tiszaszakadék: "near the so-called Hortobágy river, i.e. Tiszaszakadék"; and in the same place, the hat or hat dregs: "it is the custom of some mischievous people *to put hat or hat dregs in their pipes*, the smoke of which, if the gulya smells it from far away, runs all over the place" (Csokonai 1985, 54). This is how it appears in the text of *Dorottya*:

"Like in the fat green fields of the Hortobágy
 The naughty rogue, when the wind blows
 Burning hat dregs on straw or pipe,
 He himself moves on foot or on horseback;
 In vain the bagpipes and flutes sound,
 All the cows dry, the herd runs away..." (Csokonai 1985, 54)

The comic epic shows the movement between cultural strata: it characterises early folkloricism and its opposite process, the popularisation of folklore. In the case of Csokonai, László Lukács (2007) has devoted a separate book to this latter process, although he does not mention *Dorottya*. The *Dorottya...* is a comic epic or farce as defined by Csokonai: its "strange valiant verse", "hero-

ico-comicum") is in itself a fine example of folklorism: a humorous folk custom dating back to the old agrarian past, the carnival stump-pulling (here, drawing stumps³) and at the same time the folklorisation, i.e. the literary description, the drama's reappropriation into the present-day (Kaposvár, urban) folklore. Many have already written about Csokonai's folklorism, about the mockery of a Somogy carnival spinster (e.g. fake wedding, stump pulling) (Ujváry 1990, 116; Ujváry 1991, 217). And we also know that in the centre of Somogy county, Kaposvár – for tourism reasons – the old maid's trick has been revived for decades in connection with Dorottya, and a whole Dorottya cult has developed⁴, i.e. Csokonai's *Dorottya* has come from folklore, with some Csokonaisian additions, and is now back in today's folklore.

My study attempts to analyse the little-discussed style and language of the *Dorottya*... comic epic, in order to bring the work closer to today's readers, performers and spectators.

The uniqueness of Csokonai's style, its modernity and its validity to this day, can be grasped in the following: (1) The pathetic, serious and heavy style of the Baroque contrasts with the playful, joyful lightness of the Rococo. (2) This Rococo style draws heavily on the folkloricism, from its highly outspoken expressions. (3) Folk humour, the richness of humour forms. (4) Discussing taboo topics. The topic is even sensitive, as it raises issues of emancipation and even sexuality (in a humorous guise, of course; which the second edition has tried to sharpen even more). (5) It is a clear statement in favour of national sentiment, which, although it is already emerging in the period, is far from being fully developed. (6) A clear position in favour of language reform. Of course, what I have just dismantled is presented in *Dorottya* in a synthetic way, as you would expect in an authentic work.

3 "STUMP-PULLING. – It is customary in many places, when the carnival is over, to have some piece of wood or stump, with unmarried young men and unmarried maidens, raised for a laugh, or carried from one place to another.. The prettier ones put a small chip, splinter or shingle in the pocket of such a person, and even put the affair in leaves and slips of paper. What makes the most fun at this time of the year is how strange people are so crafty, how they take care of themselves, how they are mocked and so on." (footnote 40; Csokonai 1985, 48)

4 Dorottya House, Dorottya Hotel, Dorottya Days, Dorottya Ball (Kaposvár)

(1) The lightness of the Rococo in contrast to the pathetic nature of the Baroque

Csokonai's style is defined by a poetic-linguistic programme. The list of classical allusions in the work is still reminiscent of the Baroque, Gábor Oláh (Oláh 1928, 195) mentions them as Latin and Greek ballasts, but the dethronement of the Baroque, the earthquake of ancient mythology, for example, the arrival of Citére (Venus) at the ball, is already beginning. We consider Dorottya to be more of a Rococo work. The characteristics of the Rococo are: lightness, meticulousness ("miniaturisation"), linguistic playfulness and mischievousness derived from the world of folklore and school drama; the linguistic manifestations of all these: lighter and shorter, structured text and sentence structure, enumeration, diminution, and vocabulary that even goes as far as disfamiliarsation (blasphemy), since Csokonai's conscious aim is to entertain. A splendid example of miniaturisation: *"Béonthetem tüzem egy férgeskébe is, / Bár kicsiny a szíve, s hideg a vére is, / Sőt bogaracska nősz másik bogaracskán, / Sok millió nemzik fiat egy fogacskán"* ("I can pour my fire into a worm, / Though his heart is small and his blood is cold, / And a little bug grows on another little bug, / Many millions breed on a little tooth.") (Csokonai 1985, 82).

Csokonai's unusual adjectives and rich colours are also Rococo features: csonka panasz, üveglő zúz (mara), tornyodzó remény (truncated complaint, a glassy crush [marai] towering hope). According to Gábor Oláh (Oláh 1928, 200), Csokonai's poetry has a pinkish tone, and I would add yellow, red and the compound pale blue and purple colours: lángok, égi lovak, szikrádzott nap, tűz; bíborba borult ég, bíbor ruha, bíbor szín (flames, celestial horses, sparkling sun, fire; a sky covered in purple, purple clothes, purple colour). In particular, this colour experience is served by the rose images: harmatos rózsa, öszverózsásodott, rózsa ajakotok, felderült ajakán friss rózsák nyitának (dewy roses, got rosy, rose lips, fresh roses opening on her pouting lips).

The Rococo is characterised by a total sensory effect, in this case the operation of five or even six senses. Even Csokonai calls the attention to the 'five sense': fény (sight), lassú zengzetek, mennyei / Karoknak hallattak édes koncertjei (slow chanting, heavenly / Sweet concerts of choirs) (hearing), Gangesi kellemes szag (Gangesi's pleasant smell) (scent), száján ambrózia, later: muskotály csókotok (ambrosial on her lips, later: your musky kisses) (taste), "Téjszín combján játszik nyilazó kis fija" (Little son with arrow on her cream white thigh" (it is about

the goddess of love; *touch*). The sixth sense ("feeling") is the sweet desire, the coming of love. Today we would call it "chemistry", or there is a scientific basis for the effect of the hormones that flow in our bodies, such as oxytocin, which is the chemistry of love.

The rich decoration of the real world is also a characteristic of the Rococo. Such are, for example, the lines in Book IV of *Dorothy* describing the end of the night of the ball, the period from night to dawn, the struggle between the candle flame and the dawn light:

"As the dewy rose-clad dawn,
Had risen among the stars,
And, taking strength on the night that is already out,
It hit the east window of the ballroom:
The miserable light of the candles faded,
Mirror, wall and vessel got rosy.
With the silvery world of the beautiful Phosphor
[note by Csokonai: dawn star]
Playing with the crimson sky bottom." (Csokonai 1985, 80)

Rococo is clearly a style of *joie de vivre*: "*Örült minden lélek, s örömét mutatta / Örült, s örömének okát nem tudhatta*" (Csokonai 1985, 80), "*Ti, ki lecsaljátok mennyből a vígságot, / Hogy paradicsommá tégye a világot*" (Csokonai 1985, 81), "*kívánt örömet hozzak le azoknak*" (Csokonai 1985, 83), (*a szerelem istennője*) "*éltető örömet lehelle beléjek...*" (Csokonai 1985, 86). "*Every soul rejoiced, and showed its joy / Rejoiced, and could not know the cause of its joy*" (Csokonai 1985, 80), "*You who lure down the joy from heaven, / To make the world a paradise*" (Csokonai 1985, 81), "*I bring down the desired joy to them*" (Csokonai 1985, 83), (the goddess of love) "*breathe into them the joy of life[...]*" (Csokonai 1985, 86).

The ancient tool of verbal art, alliteration (a case of iconic alliteration) and rhyme: *hulló hó kebletek* or the iconic alliteration of p's and s's, for example: *poszog már sok asszú pöfeteg*. And alliteration evokes musicality. "Csokonai listened very much to Gyöngyösi's poetry-music, and this early influence does not pass without a trace: his Hungarian twelfth lines flow with such perfect articulation and lightness that he can be said to be the first true artist of this poetic form. What can be achieved by contrasts of style, by intensifying words and thoughts, by piling up adjectives, by flashing images, metaphors, questioning

and responsible dramatic verve: he does it all, so that his long lines are melting, musically catchy, melodious”, writes Zoltán Oláh (Oláh 1928, 199).

However playful, light-hearted, cheerful and sometimes mischievous Csokonai’s Dorottyia is, the classical allusions, the “Greek and Latin ballasts” make the text a little unwieldy for today’s eyes. For example, the 18th century French, German’s word-laden conversational language (a few examples beyond those not mentioned above): *ágin, assamblé, azsáf (toponári Azsáfok) frizérozó vas, dezentor, fraj, freycor, frizérozó, kanafória, minét, pázsi, puderman-tel, pulider, slepp, Springer, szalup, szála, trupp, trompóz, hárnádel, strikknádel, ördögpokol nádel, viganó*, or the cumbersome Latinisms: “I’m also assecuring you in advance” (Csokonai 1985, 83).

(2) Folkloricism

Although Kazinczy and Kölcsey despise provincialness (folkloricism), “Csokonai is the first great figure of national poetry who, alongside and even above the alien imagery of Berzsenyi, Kazinczy and even Kölcsey, sets his own radically Hungarian poetic world, which is one with the national core, the folkish. He consciously draws from the stream of folk poetry; he consciously collects songs and dialects: he wants to enrich the material of the art from which he forms his visions, feelings, thoughts, he wants to enrich the neglected Hungarian language” (Oláh 1928, 196). Dialectal features are most visible in dialects and idioms, but also in (‘heavy’) folk humour. A striking dialectal feature is the elongation of consonants between two vowels: *elbeszélésemet, rólla, árrával, közzétek jöttem olyan véggel, zuzzájok, pellikánok*. Since this phenomenon (gemination) is common to the Transdanubian region (i.e. Somogy), in the case of the elongation of l is also common in the East (Kálmán 1977, 48), Csokonai probably did not consider it dialectal or regional, and therefore used it boldly. There are plenty of dialects (two old *zsanas*), and the vernacular time is also used: *hatvanötöd-fű* (65th year). “We dare to say that no Hungarian poet other than Arany has drawn as much from the hidden treasures of the vernacular as he did.” – writes Gyula Gesztesi (Gesztesi 1910, 23–24).

(3) Folk humour, the richness of humour forms

Another manifestation of folkloricism is the humour of the comic epic, reminiscent of fairground folk plays. One such example is the mockery that is part of folk humour, which was accepted in the era. The *Dorottya* is full of different forms of humour, and in Book I it is called by its name: *Fársáangi víg hűmor*; or in the page-end note 20 the German Witz, the French bon-mot transposed to Hungarian: *elmésség, hirtelen találó ész, elmés mondás, talányos fejelet (wit, sudden wit, witty saying, enigmatic answer)* (Csokonai 1985, 31). The tone of humour is set by the humorous, tautological tone of the introductory prologue: "Prologue speech of the prologue". Talking names are a form of humour: Serteperthy, Koppóházy, the oxymorons (a pun on the name of the settlement): merrily to merry Nagyabajom. A linguistic invention is the double sound imitation *zörömböl (rattling)* (from the words "zörög" and "dörömböl") or *poffang* (the cooked porridge would "poffang"). The sayings in *Dorottya* are also forms of humour. For example, he mocks the pronunciation of old Dorottya like this: She pronounces *hamu* (ash) as *mamu*, *szösz* (fluff) as *pösz* (the beginning of the saying is still widely known).

This saying metaphor goes back to an old anecdote: "*Úgy pislog béhullott szeme két tájéka, / Mint a kocsonyába fagyott varasbéka*"; ("*The two corners of their sunken eyes blink / Like a frog frozen in jelly*"); which is still kept alive by the legend of the Miskolc jelly, but apparently may have been more widely known earlier: Blinking like the Miskolc jelly, Blinking like a frog in the Miskolc jelly, Blinking like the frog in the Miskolc jelly.⁵

The fire spreading in Book IV is a folkloristic traveller's anecdote in Gergő's good-humoured, funny narrative (A version can be found in Jókai's collection of anecdotes under the title *Mi hír otthon? [What's the news at home?]*): 'There's a fire! there's a fire in the courtyard' (Jókai 1992, 216–217). Gergő's slow-witted narrative: *gyertya > Lizi szoknyája ég > lehullott róla a tűz > parázs a Pámpám hátára > kifutott a szénára > ég a széna > Laci eloltotta a tüzet (candle > Lizi's*

5 In 1848, a member of the Miskolc Parliament – who is not mentioned by name in the sources, perhaps Palóczy or Szemere? – was eating jelly in a cellar of the Avas, according to the story: "In 1848, an MP who was at home was served jelly by his host in the lobby of a cellar in Avas. The wine slides better on cold food, someone said. He picked up the jelly from a brick next to the barrels and froze it there beforehand. In the half-light of dusk, the representative poked the piece of meat with his cutlery and was horrified and disgusted to see that it was a frog frozen in jelly, because the piece of meat began to blink" (Dobrossy 1985, 132).

skirt is on fire > fire fell from her > embers on Pampa's back > she ran out on the hay > hay is on fire > Laci put out the fire).

(4) Taboo topics: emancipation, sexuality

According to Gábor Oláh (Oláh 1928, 199), Dorottya is characterised by the most daring, the most resourceful folkloricism, and in this the use of eloquence plays a great role. Dorottya's motto is a quote attributed to Ennius⁶, anticipating a shift in the traditional understanding of male and female roles: *Vos etenim, iuvenes, animos geritis muliebres: Illa virago viri* (For there is a woman's heart in you, young men: And this virgin has a man's heart. János Nagyillés in the translation by László Szalay (1857) gives a slightly different, but the same meaning: *"Ti, ifjakul, asszonyi szívvvel birtok, férfiéval ama szűz"* ("You, young men, with a woman's heart, that virgin with a man's")⁷

At the carnival, roles can occasionally be reversed. How many boys today would welcome the custom offered as a solution by the Prince of Carnival two hundred years ago – but it could also be seen as an early example of the struggle for male-female emancipation: *"Béhozom szokásba (sok már csinálja is), / Hogy legényt megkérni merjen a dáma is"* "I'll make it a habit (many already do), / To dare a lady to propose to a lad" (Csokonai 1985, 84). It is also an emancipatory manifestation that the mockery of spinsterhood is one-sided, but this is due to the unmarried man, who is also to blame: *"valakik most nőtelenek, / Minket solenniter mind megkövessenek"*. ("those now unmarried, / All of us solenniter be apologised". Common in folktales, but here there is a sexual purpose to the body transformation (not yet by cosmetic, aesthetic, intervention, plastic surgery, but by magic): *"E szókra a felhő őket beteríté, / Tetszetes ifjakká tevé s megszépíté"* ("On these words, the cloud covered them, / Made them handsome youths and beautified them") (Csokonai 1985, 87), and in the course of this he lists the details of "rejuvenation": wrinkle removal, 32 teeth grown, lips brightened, grey hair turned brown, body renewed, rounded buttocks bulging out.

6 Quintus Ennius (239 BC–Rome, 168 BC) was an ancient Roman poet who also wrote tragedies based on Euripides.

7 Nagyillés János. 2016. Anna Maria van Schurman: Értekezés arról, hogy illik-e egy keresztény nőhöz a tudományok tanulmányozása. 231–246. https://acta.bibl.uszeged.hu/61903/1/antikvitas_es_reneszansz_003_231-246.pdf

The big age gap was definitely a taboo subject in the time of Csokonai, and today it is a favourite topic of gossip and tabloid discussion in the male-female relationship. Dorottya, the 65-year-old spinster, wants a man. That's the starting point, with some weak rhymes: *"Dorottya az egyik öreg kisasszon, / Ki méltó, hogy reá örök párta asszon..."* (*Dorottya, on her own one of the old misses, / Who is worthy to remain her eternal partner...*) Two hundred years ago, it could have been even more striking: *"idős létemre / Erővel is ifjat keríték kezemre"* (*Even being old / Even by force I will find a young man*) (Csokonai 1985, 46). The portrayal of Dorottya as a young lady i.e., an old woman, lacks the minimum of political correctness: *Kitördelte kettőn kívül a fogait: / Úgyhogy ha bélottyant ajakit kifejti, / A hamut mamu-nak, a szöszt pősz-nek ejti. / Akár nézz elaszott bőr és csont karjára, / Akár két, irhával bévont rakoncára. / Lohadt mellyén csomó ruhák tekeregnek, / Mellyek közt elhervadt csecsei fityegnek"* (Csokonai 1985, 28). The spinster mockery is a well-known folk art, and was obviously laughed at in the past; today it is hardly possible to make fun of someone's age, lack of teeth, pronunciation, withered skin, sagging breasts in public. The spinsters sell the parsley together at the Kaposvár carnival: *"Mellette aki ül, az öreg Orsolya, / Bíz az is csak olyan elcsiszolt korcsolya"* (*The one sitting next to her is old Orsolya, / She is just sort of worn-out skates*) (Csokonai 1985, 28) – perhaps this rhyme developed later into (old) 'csoroszlya'.

The 1804 edition in Nagyvárad and Vác (500 copies) was followed by several editions during the poet's lifetime, but in the notes of the volume published by the teachers of Sárospatak, there is a warning, that not everything before was what it is now, or has been since. Let's see the previous and the current (today's) text:

Previous Hungarian text	Later (current) Hungarian text
„De abban őrajta sem vág ki Dorottya, / Hogy néki is tetszik Ádám állapotja”	„De abban őrajta sem vág ki Dorottya, / Hogy néki is kedves még az Ádám botja”
„Igazán, hogy vén lyánt s vén asszonyt a manó / Olly helyre is viszen, ahol nem volna jó”	„Igazán, hogy vén lyánt s vén asszonyt a manó / Olly helyen is teker, ahol nem volna jó...”
„Aki az időnek e két pontja közt él, / Az a férfiképtől holdvilágon sem fél”	„Aki az időnek e két pontja közt van, / Annak mint megannyi angyal, olyan a kan. / Legyen kicsiny vagy nagy, szelíd, vad, vén vagy hűlt, / Mégis elvágja az, hidd, ameddig megsült”
„Mosszió! az Úr is csak oly életet él”	„Mosszió! az Úr is csak kan-életet él”
„A házban lévőket tűzzel felvetették”	„A dámák ruhája alját felvetették”
„Míg Ferkó egy lészán hortyog s nyújtja bőrét / A cafjához kötnek egy nagy kancsó lőrét”	„Míg Ferkó egy lészán pihenteti magát / Kettémetszik lopva a gatyamadzagát”
„Eltapodta őtet az Ámor szekere, / Összejáratott mellye s minden ere”	„Eltapodta őtet az Ámor szekere, / Átjárta szép mellyét, szép hasát kereke”

It can be seen that in the later edition Csokonai intensifies the erotic, sexual character, probably to enhance the effect. This is how Adam's "állapotja" (*condition*) becomes Adam's "bot" (*rod*), the word "teker" (*roll*) (still used in slang) appears, the "férfikép" (*male image*) is replaced by "kan" (*male*), they look under the dresses of the ladies, they also undress the men, and the "driving" of Cupid's chariot has become much clearer. There are many other sexual references in the comic epic. Csokonai defines the beginning and end points of female sexuality: "Akik már tizenkét esztendő elhadtak, / Hanem hatvannégyet még meg nem haladtak: / Mert ez a két határ amaz epochában, / Mellyben már s mellyben még van tűz a dámában" ("Those who have passed twelve years, / But have not yet passed sixty-four: / For these are the two boundaries in that epoch, / In which there is already and in which there is still fire in the lady.") (Csokonai 1985, 33). The depiction of sexuality is outspoken: "és magát a nimfa megadta, / Tudván, édes iga nyögni alatta"; "Csak kurafijoknak szoktak ők duggatni"; "Ihoptak-vihogtak, nyakunkra tódúltak; / Megkövetem – még a nadrágba is nyúltak"; "egy kur-

vától én ezt fel nem veszem”, *“Didergett a kurva, majd hogy meg nem fagyott”; “Van-e olly rejteke az asszonyi nemnek, / Amellyben nem nyílnék rés a szerelemnek”* (“and the nymph herself gave in, / Knowing sweet yea to moan beneath”; *“They only fuck whores”; “They moaned and moaned, they came on our necks; / I followed them – they even reached into my pants”; “I wouldn’t take that from a whore”, “The whore was dripping, and then she froze”; “Is there any hiding place for the female sex, / Where love would not open a hole*) (Csokonai 1985, 56–74). The love gap remains orphaned because the gentlemen are doing their business elsewhere: *“mert az Urak mind csak kákompillik! / Magok elcsergetik másutt sugárjukat, / S itthon még csúfolják a szegény lyányokat”* (because the Gentlemen are all just a bunch of cuckolds! / They themselves are wasting their rays elsewhere, / And mocking the poor girls at home) (Csokonai 1985, 57).

The expression “spinster’s sigh” keeps recurring in today’s (cabaret) jokes: *“Húshagyó! Húshagyó! engem itthon hagyó! / Mivel érdemeltem? Egek! Ugyan mivel? / Lám lett volna mivel, csak lett volna kivel”* (“Meat leaving! Meat leaving! leaving me at home! / What have I done to deserve this? Oh, Lord! With what? / Well, there would have been with what, but there would have been with whom) (Csokonai 1985, 45). At the carnival, a flirtatious exchange between a man and a woman begins, and Dorottya blurts out what she wants: *“Midőn A! Kit szeretsz? ez a játék jára, / Reá megy a kérdés egyszer Dorottyára. / A! Kit szeretsz? – Felel: Akárkit szeretek. / Mit adsz enni? – Annyit, amennyit vehetek. / Hová viszed? – Ágyba.”* (When A! Who do you love? is the game, / The question goes to Dorottya. / A! Who do you love? – She says: I love whom I please. / What will you feed me? – As much as I can buy. / Where are you taking her? – To bed.) An outspoken statement, but Dorottya is only humiliated: *“In the coffin! half her leg is there anyway”* (Csokonai 1985, 41).

Young men who have “little fire” for girls-women, i.e. little interest in them, will by magic have a much greater sexual drive, will be *“megvőlegényell”*, i.e. become a bridegroom in one go: *“És azok az ifjak, kik most csekély tűzzel / Látatnak traktálni akármelyik szüzzel, / Jövő idén, mintha nem is ők vólnának, / Úgy nekidühödnek ők is a dámának”* (And those young men who now with little fire / Are seen to dally with any maiden, / Next time, as if they were not themselves, / They too will rage at the lady) (Csokonai 1985, 84).

In the context of vocabulary, the word urination (peeing) is used both concretely and colloquially. It is a familiar custom to pee on the fire: *“Éris, s áldozat tűzét elpeselte”* (Peed on the fire of sacrifice) (Csokonai 1985, 49). Csokonai also

uses peeing in a specific sense elsewhere: *“Minden bolond helyt ne peselj!”* (*Don't pee in every foolish place*) (1793, quoted in Büky 2018, 223). But it also appears in the *Dorottya* in a figurative and today quite enigmatic meaning: and pees in the ear of every maiden today. (57) What does it mean to pee in someone's ear? The saying occurs in Mihály Fazekas, also from Debrecen (*“Pees in their ear today”*) 1804, MNSZ⁸). Variant: *“pees on nettles”*, for example in János Arany's *“a letter with a nettle-peed mood”* (1847, MNSZ). The meaning of pee in the ear is probably: to speak into the ear, to whisper; and the motive of the utterance may be similar to the metaphorical representation of speech as related to selection: to flush the words (flush of words) ~ to pee in the ear (to pee, quasi *“to pour”* the words).

(5) National sentiment

In *Dorottya*, Csokonai's national sentiment is clearly expressed, especially his demand for Hungarian customs to be given prominence:

“Gentlemen! the Gentlemen would consider Hungarian
Themselves: but some are Tót, some are German, some are Hanák.
Why the English, the French do not dance Hungarian?
Only the Hungarians need other nation's fashion?
This is how we lose our homeland at our own expense,
With foreign dance, tongue, habit, dress.” (Csokonai 1985)

There is a special focus on dance, Hungarian dance. Hungarian dance is Asian, but it is becoming an asset to Europe. And what is Hungarian dance like? *“Bennek a rátartós gőgje Ázsiának / Díszít át Európa csinos módijának.”* (*In them the arrogance of Asia's / Decorates Europe's pretty fashion.*) He emphasises the ancientness of the dance and the language, its Asian character: *“Nemes magyar táncom! ki ősi nyelvünkkel / S ruhánkkal jöttél ki dicső nemzetünkkel!”* (*My noble Hungarian dance! who with our ancient language / And with our clothes you came out with our glorious nation*) (Csokonai 1985,40). Speaks out against foreign fashion: *“Ragadós a módi, kivált ha francia, / Pedig a magyarnak árt az ő módija.”* (*The fashion is sticky, especially if it's French, / But their fashion*

⁸ Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Nyelvtudományi Intézet <http://mnsz.nytd.hu/>

is bad for the Hungarian.) The same values are expressed in one of his poems against the neologue language reformers: “*Uj magyarok lettünk; mert ázsiabeli szokásunk, / Régi ruhánk, nyelvünk már kudarcra került*” (*We have become new Hungarians; for our old customs, / Our old clothes, our old language have already failed*) (Purgomák; quoted in Gesztes 1910, 7).

(6) The language reformer

Csokonai sticks to the tradition, but he is also in favour of the language reform, but he denounces neologue excesses. He stands in the middle, as does Kazinczy, although for Kazinczy and Kölcsey he is too folksy. Csokonai uses innovations boldly. “Where imagination is rich, language is not poor”, writes Gábor Oláh (Oláh 1928, 194). Csokonai’s principles on language reform appear scattered throughout his works, but it is in Dorottya (note at the bottom of the page) that he takes a clear stand: “Those who can’t tolerate new words should give up new ideas. The Caspium⁹ sandbox is quite spacious. There they never hear a new word in their life” (note 81; Csokonai 1985, 87). However, it must be emphasised that the language reform is not just a mere word-production, but part of the process is the marketing of archaic and folk words, and Csokonai also played his part in this.

He creates the adjective “*élvény*” (*lively*) after the model of “*halvány, halovány*” (*pale*), and defends it militantly in a footnote: “With the student these are the grades: *vivens, vivus, vividus, vivax*; with the Italians these are the same; with the French *vivant, viable, vif, viace*; with the Germans *lebend, lebendig, lebhaft*. In our language, we have so far only used these two weeds: *living and lively*. If we want to be ahead in the sciences, in music, in picture-writing in the future: we must acquire many words and words with definite meanings. To our two old words “*élő és elven*” [living and lively, B.G.] let the *élvény* be added, against which nothing can be raised other than being new . [...] as from the root *fél* (*afraid*) comes *félénk*, so *élénk* (*lively*) comes from the root *él* (*lives*). Let us add this to the others, and we too will have four gradual words for the idea of life, like the nations brought forth here” (note 81; Csokonai 1985, 87). He is bold in creating analogies. If there is *túl – túlsó, innen – innenső, vég – végső, hátul – hátulsó, elő – első, utol – utolsó, közép – középső*, then there should be

⁹ Caspium: The Caspian lowlands (desert)

keletső, napkeletső (Eastern), moreover, also *északső, délső, napnyugatső*, “Especially that *só* and *ső* suffixums always stick to words meaning places” (note 70; Csokonai 1985, 79). “What Endre Ady did at the beginning of the 20th century to reform the Hungarian poetic language, Csokonai did at the end of the 18th century. (Ady knew this well, and that is why he loved Csokonai so much, for he was indeed his predecessor.) We used to say that Vörösmarty was the creator of the Hungarian poetic language, but without Csokonai’s example, Vörösmarty would not have succeeded in creating this unparalleled wealth.” – writes Gábor Oláh (Oláh 1928, 192). “In the comic battle of *Dorottya*, women fight with eye arrows, kissing picks and smiling fringes. The *gyöngyhó, kartácsvilág, hústorony, bagolyvakbuzgóság* (*pearl snow, the world of the lever [the Napoleonic Wars], the meat tower, the owl’s blind zeal, respectively*): all are Csokonai’s creations” (Oláh 1928, 197).

Csokonai is also an aesthetic innovator – rather in his other works, but in the preface to *Dorottya* he makes such remarks (e.g. *mesézet – fabula, tale*), and in fact he gives an aesthetic analysis (explanation) of his work, which is also a fine example of our critical literature. He boldly uses Hungarian aesthetic terms: *előbeszéd, előbeszél, festés, foglalat, mellékkép, mellékszemély, rajzolat – prologue, prologues, painting, occupation, secondary image, secondary person, drawing* respectively (Gesztési 1910, 27–28), and in 1798 he uses the word *vígjáték* (*comedy*), which was hardly used at that time.

In his *A magyar nyelv feléledése* (*The Revival of the Hungarian Language*) (1797), Csokonai advocates the Hungarian language in the spirit (and even in the words and expressions) of the Enlightenment, the Age of Reform and the language reform: “The sweet mother tongue recovers its just words: oh my Hungarians! who shall not rejoice among you? So far we have been speaking in the language of the dead [...] And we have begun to learn our national language together with speech.”¹⁰ This is followed by a beautiful lyrical confession to the Hungarian language: “Hungarian Language! the Language of my sweet Nation! by thee I first heard the sweet motherly name, by thee the sweet motherly name first sounded in my ears, by thee the air around my cradle, which I first breathed, trembled, and thou didst fill it with the wooing of my tutors, my countrymen, and those who loved me; by thee did my infant mouth ask for the

10 Csokonai Vitéz Mihály. *A magyar nyelv feléledése*. https://deba.unideb.hu/deba/csokonai_muvei/text.php?id=csokonai_tan_11_k

very first Hungarian food, by thee did the first ideas of my childish mind begin to grow on the chopped up taste-buds of thine, like the tiny rays of the dawn when the light begins to be.¹¹

Csokonai was in favour of the emancipation of the Hungarian language and people, as well as the classical language reform, just like his contemporaries, even if not everyone understood it at the time. “The Kazinczys knew what language reform, was; Csokonai showed it in poetic practice” (Oláh 1928, 203).

Summary

The language of Csokonai’s plays is complicated by a number of allusions, most of which can only be understood in the period in which they were written; this also poses a serious interpretative challenge for the staging. The poet tries to help with explanations in footnotes (e.g. folk custom, regional word, word for language reform, foreign word, scientific notion, geographical name). All of this, however, provides a wealth of cultural history, and the poet regularly refers to these in his notes, while others must be investigated by us, the descendants (this analysis provides a few examples). “If we want to characterise his language from an aesthetic point of view, we can say that it is musical, colourful, strong, contrasting, dramatic and fresh; and that, despite its Latin or Germanic flaws, it is still Hungarian, half or thirdly folksy” (Oláh 1928, 198). Mihály Csokonai Vitéz’s art of writing, which feeds on 18th century culture, is varied and complex. His style ranges widely: he still has traces of Baroque’s sometimes heavy-handed over-ornamentation, but his most favoured style is the meticulous, kindly, subtle, playful tone of Rococo, spiced with a jocular, sometimes heavy folkloricism. Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy writes about it in summary: “Csokonai was not so much interested in the ideal of closed taste or fixed grammar as in the linguistic horizon that he could explore and present in literature. Within these boundaries, both his poetics and his poetic meanings and phrasing are colourful.”¹² Csokonai’s fresh, innovative language, his cultural, emancipatory and modern-

11 Csokonai Vitéz Mihály. *A magyar nyelv feléledése*. https://deba.unideb.hu/deba/csokonai_muvei/text.php?id=csokonai_tan_11_k

12 Tolcsvai Nagy Gábor. A nyelvi és irodalmi ízlésvita nagy, nyilvános szakasza 1813 Mondolat. In *Magyar irodalomtörténet. Új- és legújabb kor*, szerkeszti Margócsy István. <https://f-book.com/mi/index.php?chapter=M114TOLCANYE>

ising aspirations are still alive today. Just like this sentence from *Dorottya*: “Why is coffee and sugar so expensive?”

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Tamás Gajdó

The Awakening of Mihály Vitéz

On the Premieres of the Plays
of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, 1911–1948

Abstract

Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's plays were only discovered by theatre-makers at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first comedy to be staged was *The Widow of Mr Karnyó and the Two Rascals* in 1911 at a matinee of the literary journal *Nyugat*. It was on this occasion that Endre Ady wrote his ode *The Awakening of Mihály Vitéz*. Placing Csokonai in the limelight was clearly an act of literary politics at the time. In addition to examining the first performance, the paper shows how the trajectory of the Debrecen writer's stage works continued between the two world wars. Although Csokonai's dramatic works did not make it to the national repertoire, occasional performances of *Mrs Karnyó* have repeatedly proved that the former school play offers a great opportunity to develop a new, bolder style of play. It should also not be overlooked that the performances of 18th-century plays in the 20th century became part of the political and theatre policy battles.

Keywords: Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, literary journal *Nyugat*, youth performances, National Theatre

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Despite their publication in 1844, Mihály Csokonai Vitéz' plays did not become part of the Hungarian theatre repertoire. There is also no direct record of István Balog's small company performing the play *Az özvegy Karnyóné s két szeleburdiak* (*The Widow of Mr Karnyó and the Two Rascals*), although a manuscript, drawn copy of it can be found in the theatre director's estate (Haraszty 1957, 5–6). It was only from the beginning of the twentieth century that Csokonai's plays were discovered by theatrical performers, mainly because the poet's personality and the message of his works fitted in well with the theatrical and literary aspirations of the turn of the century. Official literary historiography tried to take an objective approach to the works of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, but Endre Ady played a much more important role in this process, who, in 1905, on the centenary of the poet's death, praised the Debrecen poet in a long article in the *Budapesti Napló* (*Budapest Journal*): "How Hungarian you were, how Hungarian. Oh, painfully Hungarian. [...] For all this, he was bitterly satiated. He was a lurk, a vagabond, uneducated, rude and a peasant. He was the most European man in this country at that time" (Ady 1966, 170).

It was from this personal opinion that six years later Lajos Hatvany, the editor of the *Nyugat* (*West*), took the initiative to consider Csokonai a forerunner of modern Hungarian writers, and planned to publish a Csokonai issue in his honour. The idea was not supported by Ernő Osvát, but he did not prevent the *Nyugat* from holding a Csokonai matinee in the *Vígyszínház* (*Comedy Theatre*). The conflict between Hatvany and Osvát is well characterised by the fact that Hatvany's *Mit hagyott ránk Csokonai?* (*What Csokonai left us?*), which the author read out at an event in the *Nyugat* on Sunday morning, 29 January 1911, could only appear in the *Magyar Hírlap* (*Hungarian Newspaper*) (Hatvany 1911, 1–2).

Hatvany gave a thorough explanation of why he believed that the artists who had joined the *Nyugat* regarded Csokonai as their predecessor: "Csokonai thought of the great Western states with avidity: he greedily absorbed all Western influences, he turned away from the self-absorbed Hungarians of his time with disgust, but he wanted to express the feelings that filled the world in Hungarian, the West in Eastern way, and the East in the Western way" (Hatvany 1960, 332). But he also explained why they had chosen to put on the poet's theatrical play *Az özvegy Karnyóné és két szeleburdiak*: "We surround everything he touched with awe, even the student prank that has never been seen in the theatre before, and which the excellent actors of the *Vígyszínház* are preparing to perform today. [...] And we present Csokonai's play in the frisian form

in which he wrote it for the students of Csurgó. Kölcsey saw in Karnyóné only degradation, Hanswurstiada – we do not want to overestimate this mischievous game, but the wonderful good-heartedness of the dialogue also brings to life the distorted image, especially the almost tragic figure of *Karnyóné*, the old woman in love” (Hatvany 1960, 333).

The programme of the matinee proves that the performance of contemporary works was just as important as the theatrical play. Vilma Medgyaszay recited Endre Ady’s poem *Vitéz Mihály ébresztése* (*The Awakening of Mihály Vitéz*), written for the occasion, while Zsigmond Móricz himself read his new – according to the *Népszava’s* (*People’s Voice*) colleague – “witty and warmly humorous presentation of the milieu”. According to the journalist, “the charming, beautiful writing characteristically and aptly paints a picture of the company of the wine drinking, fat and stiff-necked Hungarian gentlemen who surrounded the great poet with bewilderment and despice” (Ism, 1911c, 5).

Little is known about the performance. The cast was published in the 29 January 1911 issue of the Magyar Színpad (Hungarian Stage).¹

The *Pesti Hírlap* (*Pest Newspaper*) drew attention to the casual nature of the play. And the fact that one cannot expect the quality of the other productions of the *Vígyszínház* to be the same: “Csokonai ‘composed’ this play 110 years ago in a short one-night session, tailored to the students of Csurgó as amateur artists. This play was born out of Csokonai’s student’s cheerfulness, and the directors of the matinée, by staging it, certainly wanted nothing more than to document the attachment of the ‘ones at the *Nyugat*’ to the first Hungarian literary innovator of the 19th century” (Ism, 1911b, 9).

Menyhért Lengyel wrote much more warmly about the performance in the *Nyugat*. The playwright began his criticism by stating that the theatre people “should really have noticed how much cheerfulness lurks in *Karnyóné* and how much theatrical life radiates from it, despite all its divine naivety. The man who does not hear the buoyance of life in the dialogue of *Karnyóné* is a man with a deaf ears, and he has little imagination who does not see at first reading that out of this confused story and the series of figures that are thinly drawn, a whole group of figures that are just right for the stage comes to life in a plastic way

1 Karnyó – Jenő Balassa, Karnyóné – Hermin V. Haraszthy, Samu – Rezső Harsányi, Lázár – Zoltán Szerémy, Tiptopp – Frigyes Tanay, Lipitlotty – Gyula Csontos, Kuruzs – Ferenc Vendrei, Boris – Rózsa Pallai, Tündér – Margit Makay, Tündérfi – Irén Csáki

[...]” Lengyel noted that “not a single line of the text was left out, almost no changes were made to it”, and all the actors’ performances showed that they “love the thing” and “were keen to serve Csokonay [sic!]”. He praised the scenery and costumes of Elek Falus, because the designer “created something that was half realistic, half fantastic and Hungarian as a whole” (Lengyel 1911, 305).

Elemér Bányai was the only one who pointed out in the *Magyar Nemzet* (*Hungarian Nation*) that the merit of the performance was not only that it did justice to Csokonai, and that after a hundred and twelve years his play was performed “in a real theatre, the likes of which the poet of the Debrecen people had never dreamed of”: “The *Vígszínház* performance of the writers’ society of the *Nyugat* is of great importance, especially from the point of view of literary history. The verdict made about Csokonai must be revised after yesterday’s performance, because *Karnyóné* and the other Csokonai plays have a quite different significance in the development of Hungarian drama than has been established so far. At the premiere it became clear that the language of the stage in Csokonai’s dialogues already represented the stage of development that would appear in Károly Kisfaludy’s work two or three decades later, and that in *Karnyóné* there is not only an attempt at a Hungarian bourgeois comedy, but also elements of the singing farce, operetta and folk theatre” (Bányai 1911, 1).

The greatest benefit of the presentation, without any doubt, is that the text of *Karnyóné* was published in the *Nyugat Könyvtár* (*Nyugat Library*) immediately after the matinee, together with Ady’s poem. The book was already advertised in the 31 January 1911 issue of the *Pesti Hírlap*. A week earlier, around 26 January 1911, Csokonai’s work was published in the *Modern Könyvtár – Magyar Színműírók* (*Modern Library – Hungarian Playwrights*) series. “The publication of the book is timely because *Az özvegy Karnyóné* is currently being performed at the *Vígszínház*. And Gerson du Malheureux is one of the most popular subjects in the literary history of our secondary schools”, reported the *Ellenzék* (*Opposition*) (Ism, 1911a, 3). What this sentence might refer to, we do not know. As we understand it today, no literary work can be the subject of a secondary school curriculum without a popular edition. However, Mór Jókai’s recollection suggests that copies of the text of the work may have been circulated, as Gerson du Malheureux was performed in the mid-1830s at the Reformed secondary school in Komárom: “It was only later, when I was at school, that I had the unforgettable classroom experience of going to a performance given by the ‘insiders’ in the large hall of the college. The play *Gerson du Malheureux* by

Csokonai was performed. Mr Pápay, the chaplain, was the officer, Mr Harmati, the cantor, was the haunting spirit, and uncle János Szarka (then – and still now – the most lovable young gentleman in Komárom) – was the funny gypsy. The audience applauded him most of the time; and they were not satisfied with Mr Pápay, they said that he played as if he were preaching” (Jókai 1904, 252).

One might think that the publication of the Modern Könyvtár (Modern Library) gave Jenő Janovics, director of the Kolozsvári Nemzeti Színház (National Theatre in Kolozsvár), the idea to include this play by Csokonai in his cycle of Hungarian drama history series performances. All the more so because this edition is in Janovic’s library.² In his introduction before the premiere on 30 October 1911, however, the director said that he had compiled the text for the theatre production from three surviving copies of the drama.³ And he also explained why Csokonai’s farcical joke was put on stage: “The characters that Csokonay [sic!] brought to the stage have lived and live on the Hungarian stage in various versions for more than a hundred years. Look today at the cunning, crafty, self-interested failing Jew, the know-it all, classic schoolmaster, the cowardly gypsy, or the brassy-voiced, János Háry-like lieutenant, and think how many comedy writers and folk theatre authors have used these figures in different versions over the last hundred years” (Janovics 1913, 27). He also drew attention to the fact that Csokonai could not be held accountable for not being familiar with “the rules and laws of dramatic composition”, since he had no models and had no opportunity to “become acquainted with these rules and try them out”. And he considered its triviality and everyday rudeness to be a fault of the period (Janovics 1913, 27).

2 The collection of Jenő Janovics is kept in the *Kolozsvári Állami Magyar Színház Dokumentációs Tára* (Documentary Repository of the Hungarian State Theatre in Kolozsvár).

3 Janovics’s statement is somewhat contradicted by the fact that the copy of the prompter’s copy marked Sz/1130 in the *Kolozsvári Állami Magyar Színház Dokumentációs Tára* is a copy of the text published in the *Modern Könyvtár*. Only one entry guides the researcher: on the last page is the signature “Szigetvárij”, that of József Szigetvári, a prompter who worked at the theatre until his death in 1933. It cannot be ruled out that the copy in question was made for the 1924 reproduction, because the earlier one was lost. But it is more likely that it was used in 1911 and 1924. (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz: *Gerson du Malhereux vagy Az ördögi mesterségekkel találtatott ifjú* (*Gerson du Malhereux or The youth with devilish arts*). Prompter copy. Kolozsvári Állami Magyar Színház Dokumentációs Tár SZ/1130.) I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Tünde Kocsis, head of the *Kolozsvári Állami Magyar Színház Dokumentációs Tára*, for her selfless help.

It is strange that Janovics suddenly discovered Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, whose name we search in vain for in his book *A magyar dráma irányai* (The Directions of Hungarian Drama), published in 1907.

In his report on the premiere in Kolozsvár, a journalist of *Az Újság* (*The Paper*) emphasised that the performance of the “never before performed” comedy was “laughed at by the audience”, and “applause broke out several times in the audience” (Ism, 1911d, 4). While the journalist of the Kolozsvár-based *Ellenzék* stressed that, although Csokonai “wrestled feebly with the tasks of dramatic writing”, his work “has the merit that all its characters are Hungarian”. He found its comic “a little crude and naive, but enjoyable, and, as a sign of his great literary power, he drew his characters with so many characteristic features that they have not faded away, nor have they died to this day” (Sebesi 1911, 5).

Csokonai’s work was performed by the artists of Kolozsvár on 4 May 1912 in Budapest, at the *Magyar Színház*. Also staged were Mihály Sztárai’s play *Igaz papság tüköre* (*The Mirror of the True Priesthood*), the Pauline interlude then known as *Omnia vincit amor*, later as *Kocsonya Mihály házassága* (*The Marriage of Mihály Kocsonya*), and György Bessenyei’s drama *A filozófus* (*The Philosopher*). The newspapers wrote about *Gerson* almost exactly the same as after its premiere; it is true that the *Pesti Napló* criticised the play’s obscenity (Ism, 1912, 15).

Mihály Babits in *Nyugat* and Dezső Kosztolányi in *A Hét* (The Week), wrote about the performance of the Kolozsvár performers in Budapest and the revival of old Hungarian plays. Kosztolányi was enthusiastic about the actors from Transylvania, which had a strange air. He wrote: “illusion surrounds them. They exude atmosphere. [...] We received them as if they had hidden treasures in their pockets, but all they brought was Hungarian poverty, an orphaned Hungarian past, a few avatars of our lost culture, a few weak dramatic pieces. Yet they are the richer.” However, he finished off the *Gerson* in one sentence: “Csokonai’s play looks like nothing” (Kosztolányi 1978, 432–433). On the same by Babits: “And the comedy chosen from Chokonai is very primitive” (Babits 1912, 893). Babits also believed that it was not the works performed that were important, but “the piece of life that came on stage with them, the old Hungarian life, which no one has ever dared to stage with such naturalism.” He praised Janovic because the costumes, the movements, the dialect of the actors “showed the healthiest naturalness”, and the performances showed a perfect sense of style: “With this great lifelikeness, we have indeed managed to evoke a single

piece of old Hungary. I have never felt the end of the eighteenth century so much," he confessed. Babits also used the critique to clarify the relationship of the generation grouped around the *Nyugat* to old Hungarian literature, and to reject the accusation of cosmopolitanism: "The auditorium was filled with writers, the new Hungarian writers, who, after a magnificent revolution, now feel more than ever their connection with the great Hungarian past" (Babits 1912, 893).

The indirect influence of the Kolozsvár performance can also be traced: Ödön Faragó, who played the role of the Jew Abraham, became theatre director in 1914 in Kassa, where he staged a cycle of classical writers in the first season, and on 21 November 1914 he staged the Pauline interlude *Omnia vincit amor* and Csokonai's *Gerson du Malhereux*. Before the performance, Jenő Janovics gave the introductory remarks, and we even know that the performance brought in 511 crowns. [In contrast to the 700 crowns of *Tatárjárás 700* (Tartar Invasion 700), and the 936 crowns of the war play *Mindnyájunknak el kell menni* (We All Have to Go), advertised as a novelty.]⁴ According to a preview in the *Felvidéki Újság* (*Felvidék Paper*), "[b]oth farces were a frenetic success in Kolozsvár and Budapest, where the Kolozsvár company performed them" (Pres, 1914, 4).

Unexpectedly, on 19 April 1919, Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's play *Az özvegy Karnyóné s két szeleburdiak* was staged again in the *Vígyszínház*. A contributor to the *Színházi Élet* (*Theatre Life*) praised the choice of play, pointing out that the work "is free of all foreign influences and brings to the stage the social Hungarian comic characters that have lived on the stage for almost a hundred years. Particularly characteristic among them are a politicising shop-boy of 'Tót' nationality and a maid, in whom we must respect the first Hungarian subrette." (Ism, 1919a, 16). This was the first time that a work by Csokonai was not performed as a matinee, an occasional performance, an illustration for a literary programme or a drama history series. Of course, it had something to do with the theatre policy of the Soviet Republic, as it introduced the working class to the plays of the great Hungarian literary artist. But we only find traces of this in the aforementioned article in *Színházi Élet*, the author of the review in the daily newspaper *Az Újság* recorded the exuberant joy of the new, naive audience: "This old comedy,

⁴ The playbook of Ödön Faragó. [Kassa, 31 October 1914–Budapest, 1 May 1958] [2.] [2.]*Országos Színház-történeti Múzeum és Intézet Kézirattár* (*National Museum and Institute of Theatre History Manuscript Archives*) inventory no. 80.134

a vaudeville full of merriment, and especially its parodic second act, amused the audience, who laughed a lot and applauded the main characters enthusiastically. Hermin Haraszty, who played the fake widow with very impressive comedy; the splendid Tanay, who also sang lovely old songs; Kardos [sic!], who played the other fiddler beautifully; Kemenes, who could even be charming and endearing as the widow's grocer's dumb son; Vendrey, who played a quack reading fate from the palms of his hands in an interesting way; and Szerémy, who was very amusing as the shop-boy and directed the play well. I also liked Irén Csáky and Alice Rónai in two small roles, as well as Ella Gombaszögi, who played the role of a devious little maid" (Ism, 1919b, 8).

The actor Géza Kardoss, the impersonator of Lipitlotty, also mentioned in the review, became the director of the Debrecen theatre at the beginning of 1920, and on 17 November 1920, in commemoration of the "birth anniversary" of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, he staged a gala performance in the theatre.⁵ At this commemoration, the director staged the play by Csokonai, *Özv. Karyóné és két szeleburdiak* following the premiere at the Vígyszínház. Although the performance was repeated on 3 December, there was little critical response. According to the article in *Egyetértés (Consensus)*, "Géza Kardoss was brilliant as Lipitlotty. [...] He was extremely well-liked and applauded in the open." The rest is not worth quoting, the journalist only listed the names of the actors. And he concluded by writing: "The careful, colourful setting and staging of the evening praise the fine sense of director Kardoss" (Ism, 1920b, 2).

Even less was written in the *Debreceni Független Újság (Debrecen Independent Newspaper)*: "We have no space to praise this memory of our colourful literature, fresh and alive with its archaic flavour, but only the performance; we highlight the perfection of the performance following the direction of the Vígyszínház in Budapest. The genius of the modern director has brilliantly made up for what Csokonai could not have known in the infancy of Hungarian theatre. The performance was one of the rare cases in which all the actors were in their place and the harmony of the basic style prevailed throughout, despite the different personalities" (Ism, 1920a, 4).

⁵ The festive evening was introduced by a speech of the Secretary of the *Csokonai Kör (Csokonai Circle)*, Dr. Ferenc Papp. This was followed by Dr. Kálmán Kőrösi's dramatised version of *Csokonai halála (Csokonai's Death)*, and then the dramatised poem *A falu végén kurta kocsmá (The Short Tavern at the End of the Village)*.

As a minority theatre director, Jenő Janovics did not forget Csokonai either. On the 150th anniversary of the poet's birth, in 1924 (a little late), he staged a play entitled *Csokonai halála (Csokonai's Death)* by Aladár Kuncz, which was known to the Budapest audience as *Vitéz Mihály a halál révén (Mihály Vitéz on the Ferry of Death)*; the play was performed at the Writers' Demonstration Theatre on 15 April 1923. In addition to the one-act play, something else had to be added, so *Gerson du Malhereux* was staged again "with Lajos Cselle, László Kemény, Ödön Réthely, Mihályfy, Ihás, Leövey, Izsó in the leading roles" (Ism, 1924, 6). The performance was repeated a week later, but Csokonai's work was not part of the repertoire in Kolozsvár.

The premiere of the Új Színház (New Theatre), which together with the public play *Omnia vincit amor* was first performed on 13 April 1929, is part of the history of the performance of *Karnyóné*. We cannot talk about the critical response, only short reviews of the performance were published.⁶ The theatre critic of the Új Nemzedék (New Generation), Jenő Gergely, however, argued why it is not advisable to give the youth Mihály Csokonai's *Vitéz*: "they are so fond of crude, even brutal ridicule, and some of their remarks are so offensive", was the reasoning (Gergely 1929, 7). But it is also clear from this outraged writing that "the theatre company may have performed the comedy out of overzealousness or misdirection, with a more burlesque distortion than burlesque". And what was the conclusion? "If the Új Színház wants to stage youth productions, it should stick to patriotic plays, because the curved mirror of satire is not always and not everywhere suitable for the hands of the student youth" (Gergely 1929, 7).

The movement called the *Független Színpad (Independent Stage)*, organised in early 1937 under the leadership of Ferenc Hont, was associated with the presentation of Mihály Csokonai *Vitéz's* drama *A méla Tempefői, avagy Az is bolond, aki poétává lesz Magyarországon (The Melancholic Tempefői, or Fool*

6 "The dress rehearsal for the press of Csokonai's *Özvegy Karnyóné* and *Omnia vincit amor* was held at the Új Színház on Tuesday afternoon. The two plays will be presented in a series of performances for the youth, but will also be performed in the evening. The dress rehearsal proved to be a success. Among the performers, Paula Bacányi, Rezső Harsányi, László Keleti, Elemért Baló, Margit Kolos and Anikó Törs should be highlighted. [...] The performance was directed by József Baróti" (N. N. 1929a, 10).

"The healthy and abundant, pure humour, the raving, muscular Hungarian satire, which flows so freely from our two literary-historical memories of the play, was stylistically, in its unadulterated integrity and yet in accordance with today's taste, fulfilled in the careful performance of the *Új Színház*, under the skilled director József Baróthy" (N. N. 1929b, 13).

Is Who Becomes a Poet in Hungary). The premiere was held on 28 April 1938 at the Erzsébetvárosi Színház (Erzsébetváros Theatre).

The unfinished drama was adapted for the stage by Gyula Schöpflin and András Benedek: they made a three-part version of the five-act work; they eliminated the epic character of the last acts; they extended the song settings with Csokonai songs. The music for the performance was composed by conductor and composer Sándor Vándor, the set was designed by Károly László Háý, and choreographer Aurél Miloss also participated in the work.

The script of the original première has not survived, but when the play was presented by the *Nemzeti Színház* (*National Theatre*) on 27 May 1948 under the direction of Dénes Rátai, the play was adapted by András Benedek (who was then already playwright of the *Nemzeti*) and Gyula Nagypál (the writer's name of Schöpflin). The stage manager's copy of the production is kept in the library of the *Nemzeti Színház*.⁷ A single scene from the 1938 performance was published in the *Független Színpad*, issue 4–5 1938. If we compare this with the 1948 text, we see that only minor changes were made in this scene. In the reviews published in 1948, however, it is written as if it were a completely new adaptation...

In 1938, the dramaturgical team of the *Független Színpad* reported on how they had coped with the most difficult of these; that is, how they had managed to make the play enjoyable for contemporary audiences. Fortunately, the first two acts held up almost without further ado, only the third and fourth acts had to be reworked because they were almost "entirely episodic, repetitive", and only a few scenes advanced the plot (*Working Community of the Független Színpad* 1938, 11). But they could not ignore the need to preserve the spirit of Csokonai without distortion and falsification. The scale of the work was described in their writing in this way: "Playwright, director, literary historian, set designer, musicologist, we sat together for long hours, debating the importance of a scene, its belonging, its plot, searching for the writer's true intention, which is manifested in the tendency of his play. With much thought and deliberation, we have tackled the thorny issues of the inevitable omissions, altered scene connections, text fidelity, obsolete expressions, and weak dialogue pas-

⁷ Mihály Csokonai: Tempefői. Prompter copy of the 27 May 1948 premiere at *Nemzeti Színház*. Library of *Nemzeti Színház* IV-5/857. I would also like to thank Ágnes Kamondy, Head of the Library of the *Nemzeti Színház*, for her selfless help.

sages; with hard and conscientious work we have rebuilt the play, imagining ourselves in the role of an imaginary dramaturg of the time of Csokonai, who, according to the eternal rules of the stage, is forced to suggest changes to the submitted play" (Independent Stage Working Committee 1938, 11).

And with what success? The review of the company states that excellently: "They managed to accomplish this task so perfectly that not a single foreign sentence was included in the piece. The grouping of the scenes was done without prejudice to the original text, in such a way that the audience will be able to watch three staged acts of perfection instead of disjointed scenes. The working community has also composed some of Csokonai's couplet songs and poems into the piece, and these are accompanied by music composed by Csokonai himself. The music will be accompanied by an orchestra of period instruments. Clavicembalo, viola de gamba, viola d'amore, flute and children's choir will underline the first premiere of the great Hungarian poet, which he managed to earn almost one hundred and fifty years after his death" (Újvári 1938, 4).

But the adaptation was much more than that, and not just because they were trying to curry favour with a twentieth-century audience. It is clear that Dorottya (instead of the original Eve), whose dialogues were edited from the lines of Csokonai's comic epic, was placed on stage as the second female character, following the dramaturgy of the period's hit plays. While the heavy-handedness of the work and the naïve plot complexity were counterbalanced by the adaptors' attempt to fill the work with Csokonai poems.

Writer and poet Andor Németh, criticizing the interpretation of director Ferenc Hont, wrote in the newspaper *Újság (Newspaper)* that the reworkers of the play recited Csokonai's most beautiful poems with Tempefői: "However enjoyable, this is actually a cheat, since the hero of the play is Tempefői, not Csokonai, and what makes Tempefői pathetic is precisely that he is not an exceptional genius as a creator, but a seer among the erring, who is closer to the poor than to the lords and who awaits salvation from below, because he only meets with incomprehension above. He is not at all a "flaming poet", as romantic souls imagine him to be; only a modest literary man, who already in this nationless, foreign-obsessed age realizes that as long as literature is not the work of the community, as long as the class walls of society do not come tumbling down, poetry will remain the narcotic, the painful private affair of unhappy eccentrics" (Németh 1938, 3). Németh projects this lesson of the work to the present, and at the end of the work he again emphasises that "salvation can only come from

below, from the poor – and until we realise this, the word and power belong to the Csikorgós, the breast-beaters and the lovers, from whom the poet inspired by God can indeed hang himself” (Németh 1938, 3).

Andor Németh also pointed out that the production won the audience’s sympathy already with its subtitle – “fool is who becomes a poet in Hungary” – and another witness confirmed that the play was a huge success because the Hontes found a parallel between current public events and the world of the play. According to Andor Becsky, “the staging seized the slightest opportunity in the play to emphasise the principles of the popular front politics. The curtain was still down, but workers’ movement songs were being sung in the rows of the audience, and throughout the performance there was an enthusiastic, fervent, protest-like atmosphere. The presentation was attended by well-known representatives of popular front politics, with village researchers and writers of the March Front seated in a box. In those days they were tried and convicted (21 April 1938).⁸ When it was said on the stage that “...prison is no disgrace if there is no vice with it...” and the stage direction flooded the box of those sentenced to prison with a spotlight, the audience jumped up as one and greeted those sentenced for the common cause” (Becsky 1961, 90).

The importance of the scene is well illustrated by the fact that this scene of the play was published in full in the *Független Színpad* (Csokonai 1938, 13–14).

Tempefői was transferred to the *Józsefvárosi Színház* (*Józsefváros Theatre*) in mid-May, and was performed at the end of the month and in early June at the *Márkus Parkszínház* (*Márkus Park Theatre*). It was played in several cities in the countryside, but the mayor of Szeged did not give permission for the planned guest performance.

Gyula Ortutay’s letter to Mihály Babits of 16 June 1938 contains interesting details about the circumstances of the performance. In it he asks the poet to support Ferenc Hont, who turned to the Baumgarten Foundation for help: “Since I know that you enjoyed watching the *Tempefői* lecture and saw the

⁸ The five leaders of the March Front were prosecuted for their article “What do the Hungarian people want?”, which was part of the Manifesto of the March Front. “The court found the five defendants guilty of national defamation and therefore sentenced Gyula Illyés, György Sárközi and Imre Kovács to 1-1 months in prison, Ferenc Erdei and Géza Féja to 2-2 months in prison, 1 year deprivation of office and the suspension of their political rights for the same period. According to the reasoning of the judgment, the facts of the article are untrue and are capable of diminishing the esteem and damaging the credibility of the Hungarian nation” (N. N. 1938, 11).

great struggle with poor and humiliating opportunities, I have taken the liberty of writing this letter. Ferenc Hont now stands before the public as the successful director, even though *Tempefői* only brought income to the owner who rented the theatre, and only a deficit for him. Besides, the play was not allowed to be performed in Szeged, although he hoped it would turn his fortunes around. The unfortunate man is now being squeezed by both bills and rent at the theatre school where he and all his fellow teachers (e.g. Ascher too) have been dismissed. At the moment he has not a penny of income and hope: nothing" (Ism, 1983, 64).

Although the success of the Csokonai premiere was essentially driven by its political intent, the artistic impact of the performance was also appreciated by critics. This is what *Népszava* wrote after the outdoor premiere at the *Márkus Parkszínház*: "The secret of this new success, beyond the immortal art of Csokonai, beyond the relevance of the poignant satire of *Tempefői*, which will be revived today, one hundred and fifty years later, is the great work of the cast. These excellent and largely young artists: Erzsi Hont, Klári Szánthó, Endre Gellért, László Bánhid, Miklós Harsányi, Kálmán Halász, István Kalla, Bihary, Darvas, etc. fully embraced the progressive aims of the IFüggetlen Színpad, and enriched Hungarian acting with a completely new – but at the same time subtly matching the atmosphere of the patina play – unified style of acting" (cf. 1938, 7).

On 14 May 1939, Mihály Csokonai Vitéz' play *Az özvegy Karnyóné s két szeleburdiak* című was staged at the *Nemzeti Színház* in the exam performance of the *Színművészeti Akadémia* (*Academy of Dramatic Arts*). *Pesti Napló* reported on the event with unusual enthusiasm. He wrote that the acting academy's "final exam performance was a pleasant surprise for the audience – from two aspects. Firstly, because Tibor Hegedűs, the Academy's new teacher, dared to bring out Csokonai's *Özvegy Karnyóné* with his students, which until then had only been known to literary historians as a "wry, heavy humoured antiquity". And the spectators were surprised by the uninhibited, resolute skill of the play, the safe artistic delicacy, which more than once delighted the audience with roaring laughter and deserved applause" (Ism, 1939, 14).

We know from the Academy's newsletter that Sándor Galamb wrote a prologue to the play, which not only told the story of the work's creation, but also listed the characters. The atmosphere and style of the play is perhaps somewhat evoked by the prologue:

“(From the right, Karnyóné drops in.)

Prologue: Behold, Karnyóné, the widow!

Talking in a whisper, coming and going.

Her face is wrinkled, her teeth are wrinkled,

But she is nice to guys.

She thinks her husband is dead,

And would tie her life to another.

(Karnyóné comes in front of the curtain.)

Prologue: But suddenly from Mantua

Karnyó arrives home.

What the poor man finds at home,

It’s probably better not to talk about it.” (Galamb 1939, 46–47).

It is interesting that the most talented student of the exam performance, Zsuzsa Lengváry, who played the role of Karnyóné, “an extremely difficult role – that of an old woman who loves men – with a thousand nuances and a sparkling humour”, did not stay on the stage for long, while Lajos Rajczy (Karnyó), Gyula Benkő (Samu) and Sári Feleki (Boris) became the leading artists of the post-1945 era (Ism, 1939, 14).

There is no record of whether this performance influenced Tamás Major’s decision to stage it as part of a youth performance at the *Városi Színház* (City Theatre) on 9 October 1939. These performances were organised by the Public Education Department of the City of Budapest, under the leadership of Tamás Major’s mother, Mariska Majorné Papp. Little is known about Major’s first production of *The Özvegy Karnyóné*, which was repeated twice more (on 10 and 11 October), apart from the cast.⁹ The two-page flyer of the performance also informs that the music was composed by Mihály Turai, the conductor of *Nemzeti Színház*; and that it was performed together with Ferenc Herczeg’s *A holicsi Cupido* (*The Cupid of Holics*).¹⁰

⁹ Karnyó: Bodnár Jenő, Karnyóné: Gobbi Hilda, Samu: Apáthi Imre, Lázár: Rajczy Lajos, Tiptopp: Várkonyi Zoltán, Lipitlotty: Ungvári László, Kuruzs: Tapolczai Gyula, Boris: Olthy Magda

¹⁰ [Városi Színház, 9, 10, 11 October 1939. Performances for the youth]. Flyer. [3–4.] Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet Kisnyomtatványtár

In this brochure, the organisers seem to be making excuses: “Karnyóné is not a first-ranked work by Csokonai. If art criticism and taste found something to criticise or judge in his major works, it may be more true of his minor works. If the harsher features of the 18th century, in spite of the softening, disturb our taste for art, let us attribute it to the age, but let us admire it all the more, and enjoy the ingenious freshness of comic force and the subtle variety of shades of amusement.”¹¹

The premiere, which took place three years later on 27 October 1942, brought a much greater resonance. At that time, the façade of the theatre building on Tisza Kálmán tér was already emblazoned with the *Magyar Művelődés Háza* (*Hungarian House of Culture*). But the cast of the production has also changed a bit in three years.¹² And by then Csokonai’s play was already performed with music by Gyula Dávid. Moreover, György Lőrincz planned a choreography for it, but reading Tamás Major’s memoirs, the public could only learn about this much later: “There are all these miracles in the play, that the angel comes in at the end and solves the thing. And when she thinks she has drunk poison and dies. And the coming home of the insane Karnyó. These cannot be played in a naturalistic way. Such things were solved brilliantly by György Lőrinc. It helped us a lot to find this way, the coexistence of realism and pantomime. We played the realistic one at a time, and that the joke and reality should be together” (Koltai 1986, 38).

“On Tuesday afternoon, Csokonai’s satirical comedy “*Özvegy Karnyóné*” was presented at the Hungarian House of Culture in the framework of a youth performance, which was an extraordinary success on the first day” – reported the critic of the *Újság*. – “Some parts of the first act and a short part of the third act are a bit of a stumbling block, but the experience of the second act, the result of Tamás Major’s excellent direction and interesting artistic conception, and the quite magnificent performance of Hilda Gobbi, is such a first-class theatrical event that we will deal with it in more detail in the Friday issue of our newspaper” (h. s. 1942, 8).

11 [Városi Színház, 9, 10, 11 October 1939. Performances for the youth]. Flyer. [1.] Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet Kisnyomtatványtár

12 But the cast of the production has also changed a bit in three years: Karnyó: Bartos Gyula, Karnyóné: Gobbi Hilda, Samu: Lázár Gida, Lázár: Ungvári László, Tiptopp: Apáthi Imre, Lipitlotty: Szabó Sándor, Kuruzs: Balázs Samu, Boris: Olthy Magda, Tündér: Eőry Kató, Tündérfi: Pásztor János.

In the Friday's issue, Sándor Barcs, later CEO of the *Magyar Távirati Iroda* (*Hungarian News Agency MTI*), wrote about the performance under the title *Karnyóné feltámadása* (*The Resurrection of Karnyóné*). A few days earlier, the publicist had proposed the idea of a "theatre of the excellent". The essence of his proposition was that a theatre company should be created which would apply only strict literary criteria in its programme, and whose performances would be attended primarily by an educated audience (Barcs 1942a, 5). Barcs discovered this theatrical idea a week later in the *Nemzeti Színház's* youth production of the *Özvegy Karnyóné*. And he wrote about Tamás Major's direction and Hilda Gobbi's portrayal of Karnyóné in the highest possible terms: "The way the director – Tamás Major – shakes the thick layer of dust off the whole piece, the way he shakes the characters out of their corpses, the way he makes the plot interesting, and the way he presents the pantomime-like solution of the second act, is art – art at its best. And the way the actress – Hilda Gobbi – who is growing big in this very performance, brings out the tragicomic figure of the widowed Karnyóné's aging, ugly but conceited female, who is running after the favours of young men, the way she warms one and cools the other, the way she clownishly fills the spectator with horror and pity – even children cannot laugh at the grotesque dying scene – Chaplinian heights!" (Barcs 1942b, 5)

Although there were rumours about it, Antal Németh did not let Mihály Csokonai Vitéz into the country's first theatre. However, it helped the young members of the theatre, led by Tamás Major, organised by the *Magyar Gyár-iparosok Országos Szövetsége Gyári Szabadidő-szervezetek Központja* (*National Association of Hungarian Industrialists Centre of Factory Leisure Organisations*) to tour Tatabánya (23 July), Pént (27 July), Diósgyőr (29 and 30 July), Salgótarján (31 July), Ózd (1 August) and Csepel (2 August) in the summer of 1943. The ensemble's fee was set at seven hundred and fifty pengős. This amount also included the cost of the costumes for the actors and the piano accompanist. In places far from Budapest, accommodation, travel and meals were reimbursed.¹³ A newspaper report says that on Saturday, 7 August 1943, the factory workers of Kőbánya were able to see "Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's musical comedy *Özvegy Karnyóné* on the Dreher-Haggenmacher open-air rock stage" (Ism, 1943, 8).

¹³ Letter from the *Magyar Gyár-iparosok Országos Szövetsége Gyári Szabadidő-szervezetek Központja* to Tamás Major. Budapest, 19 July 1943. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet Kézirattár Itsz. 2016.129.3

We know of only one performance that ended in failure: On 20 July 1943, only a quarter of the full-house audience gathered in Nagyvárad, allegedly because there was a circus performance in the city that day. *Népszava* recalled the most laughable moment of the performance: “A few months ago, in the two-thousand-seat auditorium of the Hungarian House of Culture in Budapest, high school students laughed themselves to tears for three afternoons at the tragicomic case of the old woman grocer, and indeed they watched with bated breath, heartbroken, when Karyóné, in her love sorrow, drank the cup of poison (which though contained only laxative), rang the bell of the shop door like a bell of the soul, and lay down on the counter, on her mortuary made by herself” ((-lgy-) 1943, 10).

It is interesting that the same scene was recalled decades later by Tamás Major: “in this, as in all Csokonai’s works, there is something moving. For example, when Hilda Gobbi, who plays Karyone, is left by Lipitlotty, whose debts she has forgiven, he nevertheless leaves her, and even mocks her with lines like “Your excellency is a violin so battered and worn out that even the devil could not canaphorise on it”,¹⁴ as Gobbi listened to it, it was as if she was playing Phaedra, and when she sat on the counter afterwards, it brought tears to everyone’s eyes, she sang so movingly: “Oh hopes dashed, oh lads, oh lads...”, that the audience was almost moved, but at the same time you had to laugh, because to counterbalance the tragedy, Gobbi’s two curved legs were dangling under the counter, and you had to laugh at that. The whole performance was like that, I think it was the biggest success of Gobbi’s life...”¹⁵

The commemoration reveals that the performance was initiated by the composer Béla Reinitz, however, Major did not say why this was the first premiere in the *Nemzeti Színház* after the siege of Budapest. It must have been a factor that the roof of the *Nemzeti Színház* was severely damaged by gunfire; the ceiling of the theatre was lowered by half a metre; and the floor of the auditorium collapsed over a large area. Therefore, the first performance had to be held at the *Kamaraszínház* (*Chamber Theatre*) on Andrásy út. Mihály Csokonai Vitéz *A’ özvegy Karyóné ’s az két szeleburdiak* was performed on 28 February 1945

14 Correctly: “and Your ladyship is a 60 year old battered, worn-out violin that even the devil could no longer canaphorise”. (Act II, Scene III)

15 Major Tamás: Csokonai Vitéz Mihály. [1970s]. Typewritten. 3. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet Kézirattár ltsz. 2017.150.1

at 2:30 in the afternoon. The title role was played by Hilda Gobbi, accompanied by Gyula Bartos, Zoltán Várkonyi, Ferenc Ladányi, László Ungvári, Tamás Major, Erzsébet Somogyi, Kató Eöry and János Pásztor.

Only a few articles were written about the performance, but these faithfully reflect the fact that Tamás Major and his colleagues have made their mark with this production, and have demonstrated that from now on the *Nemzeti Színház* will not be characterised by a faint-hearted respect for the classics. In the summaries of theatre history, it was often omitted that Tamás Major recited Csokonai's poem *Az este (The Evening)* as an introduction – in the words of Aurél Kárpáti “with deep feeling and perfect artistic expression” (Kárpáti 1945, 4). According to Géza Staud, the poem “mixes melancholy sentimentality with harsh revolutionary colours, and precisely because of its bold social purpose it has not been possible to tell it in Hungary” (Staud 1945, 3).

The most political report of the opening performance was written by Sándor Barcs, which appeared in the Communist Party's newspaper, *Szabadság (Liberty)*: “Tamás Major has finally reached where his talent and almost fanatical love of his profession should have taken him long ago, the freedom to recite without censorship, without police watchdogs watching – what a great thing! – Csokonai's century and a half old poem, and the fact that this innocent, naive little play, *Karnyóné*, could finally be presented to the Budapest public at all, is the fulfilment of a symbol of which a year ago we could only dream, and for which a year ago we could only fight with clenched teeth” (Barcs 1945, 2).

But even though this play became the symbolic play of the opening of the new era, and even though it was the most notable production of the youth performance series at the *Városi Színház*, in April 1945 the Lord Mayor of Budapest, János Csorba, decided that it could not be performed in an organised form for the youth of secondary school. In fact, the *Nemzeti Színház* “agreed with the public education department of the capital to make the ten houses of *Karnyóné* available to secondary schools for youth performances” (Ism, 1945, 2). According to an article in *Népszava*, Csorba refused to allow it because he considered the play “outdated, tasteless and crude”. The *Népszava* journalist tried to refute the mayor's statement: “There is no doubt that *Karnyóné* does not represent the superficial and empty bourgeois spirit of the recent past. However, its heavier, healthier folk humour is more in keeping with the spirit of the new times. Youth will not be harmed if it tastes human and folk phrases instead of whiny, sentimental, bourgeois romanticism. One of the principles of the new

pedagogy is to bring youth closer to the realities of life. Even the squeamishness of the mayor will not prevent this principle from being enforced” (Ism, 1945, 2).

However, the newspapers did not report that on 13 April 1945 Tamás Major asked the *Vallás- és Közoktatásügyi Minisztérium* (*Ministry of Religion and Public Education*) for a statement on whether the play could be performed for secondary school students according to the original plans despite Csorba’s ban (Dancs 1989, 34-35). The very next day, the reply arrived, a letter from the Ministry with the following text: ‘I inform the Sender that I have no objection to the performance of Csokonai’s play *Özvegy Karnyóné* for the learning youth. I would, however, prefer that the passages of the play listed below be omitted in youth performances, as these details may offend contemporary taste, but do not affect the structural unity of the play, its literary and artistic values.’ And three suggestions as to where and what should be deleted (Dancs 1989, 36).

The resolution, also dated 14 April 1945, stated that “there is no doubt that *Karnyóné* is not the most suitable type of youth drama” (Dancs 1989, 36.)

The interesting part of the story is that Mariska Majorné Papp, who tried to continue organising youth performances with the support of the City of Budapest, thought that Lord Mayor János Csorba’s action was a personal attack. In a letter to her son, she wrote: “My Tomi! *Karnyóné* – cannot go. After the three deputy mayors Jámbor [Péter], Bechtler [Péter] and Morvay [Endre] – especially the former – had negotiated and signed it with the greatest enthusiasm, the great dummy – the mayor – yelled, scolded and slammed down *Karnyóné*. Partly to me, partly by phone – today – to Jámbor. He also has a problem with me – with my person. I can feel t[hat] that the Arrow Cross feet were sawed off by Ernő Füle, who was bending down to earth to lick them. A bloody rat – today a member of the certifying committee. Apparently he’s talking to you tonight – the mayor. (He said this to Jámbor.) For once, please try to enlighten that stupid pre-10-year-old mentality a little. If I could – I would retire today. Although I was so eager to prepare. The finances were discussed with Bechtler on the old basis. He agreed on everything. This horse has been gelded by someone.

Of course, we were too late. This takes 25 + 45 thousand pengő out of the *Nemzet’s* pocket. It doesn’t matter to him, of course.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Letter by Mariska Majorné Papp to Tamás Major, [Budapest, around 10 April 1945] Országos Színház-történeti Múzeum és Intézet Kézirattár I. sz. 2014.182.3

This is how the performance of *Karnyóné* became a political issue in Budapest, which is on the road to democratisation. And when on 1 May 1945 the actors of the *Nemzeti* performed the play in the *Városliget* (City Park), Jenő Pataky – as proclaimer – mentioned the unprecedented incident. In her book *Közben* (*In Between*), Hilda Gobbi has recorded some extracts from the text:

“Hey, hey, here! Audience, Soldiers,
 Hey, stop, why are you going on?
 Here is Karnyóné, it is here only now!
 It was disliked by Aunt Csorba.
 Wicked play, but a good laugh!
 ... Can be watched here! Vow, what a woman!

Here is Hilda Gobbi,
 Who was banned for two years.
 Here you see the biggest embarrassment,
 Tamás Major plays here now.
 What will be here will be better than beans and gersli
 Apáthi, Ungvári, Erzsébet Somogyi.
 Come on, come on, does not cost a penny,
 And you can laugh at it widely.
 Come on, come and have fun, it is great,
 That Feri Kiss cannot ban this...” (Gobbi 1984, 217–218).

At the *Független Színpad*'s premiere of Csokonai in 1938, it was mentioned that the *Nemzeti Színház* premiered Csokonai's bitter satire *Méla Tempefői* on 27 May 1948. It is evident that the script of this performance was partly identical to the original performance, owing to the identity of the adaptors. Unfortunately, it is impossible to prove this today. But it is a fact that in 1948 the audience of the *Nemzeti Színház* saw a politicised play. While at Csokonai, Tempefői is accused of being a French spy – a theatrical cliché from the late 18th century – by 1948 he is already a republican French spy. And the drama, written in 1793, also contains references to the Hungarian Jacobin movement of 1794. Múzsai, Tempefői's friend, is part of the conspiracy, and at the end of the work he lists the imprisoned writers: “Kazinczy, Verseghegy, Szentjóni, these bright stars of our homeland, prisoners, are on their way to the dungeons of

Spielberg. The noble abbot, and his companions, who, with their eyes fixed on holy liberty, stand in the shadow of the gallows, Batsányi is in hiding beyond the borders of our homeland! And I, too, flee, followed by the gendarmes of Vienna.”¹⁷

The only mention of the political nature of the performance was in Miklós Molnár’s review in *Szabad Nép (Free People)*: “The mocking, grotesque happy end [sic!] is the subject of two excellent adaptations: Gyula Schöpflin and András Benedek added to the play, but Csokonai’s entire oeuvre is a testimony to the fact that he knew that there would be a continuation, a victorious conclusion to the struggle for a free, educated Hungary, Kazinczy, Bacsányi [sic!], Csokonai, Vörösmarty, Petőfi, Ady and Attila József fought for.” It’s true that Molnár also wrote that “the song inserts are sung by actors without voice or hearing. The whole performance is thus somewhat bland and sluggish, although some of the performers give the best of their knowledge and talent” (Molnár 1948, 8).

Other reviewers, however, praised rather than criticized the performance, although there were some statements that called it a stylistic parody (Balassa 1948, 7), and the director, Dénes Rádai, was criticised for failing to “unite heterogeneous elements: perfect poetry and experimental drama” (Hárs 1948, 4).

In a critical edition of the plays of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, Jolán Pukánszkyne Kádár recalled the premiere as follows: The title role was played by Ferenc Ladányi, Csikorgó by Gyula Gózon, and the actors and students who had just graduated from the College, barely rising above the standard of the exam performances. But no better performance could have coped with the inherent lack of colour, and the adaptation preserved as little of the original ideas as did the later stage adaptations. In all, it was worth sixteen performances” (Csokonai 1978, 264).

It should also be noted that in the years following the Second World War, the theatre in Debrecen staged a Csokonai play even on two occasions. On the anniversary of the poet’s birth, on 17 November 1947, *Karnyóné* was performed, and a few months later, on 28 May 1948, the audience was treated to *Méla Tempefői*. None of them have become the glory of the poet’s hometown, both performances were noted by the reviewers so that the theatre was not filled to capacity (Tar 1976, 160; Pósa 1948, 7).

¹⁷ Csokonai Vitéz Mihály: *Méla Tempefői*. Stage manager’s copy, [1948]. 83. Nemzeti Színház Könyvtára

The review showed that some of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz's dramatic works were discovered by theatre-makers in the first half of the twentieth century, but they did not become part of the national repertoire. These efforts were not entirely wasted, however, as they kept interest alive in the poet's most prominent works. The performance of *Az özvegy Karnyóné s két szeleburdiak* proved on several occasions that the former school play – in addition to entertaining the audience – offers a great opportunity to develop a new, bolder style of play. The most notable performance of this play by Csokonai was given by József Ruszt at the *Egyetemi Színpad (University Stage)* in 1965, marking the beginning of a new era in the history of the play's performance (Timár 2024).

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András Timár

Revival of A' özvegy Karnyóné (The Widow of Mr Karnyó)

A Survey of József Ruszt's
Interpretation of Csokonai¹

Abstract

József Ruszt was a significant theatre director, teacher and company organiser in the second half of the 20th century. It is the task of contemporary theatre historiography to study his life's work and his approach to theatre. In Ruszt's entire oeuvre, the programmatic staging of Hungarian dramas, including Csokonai's works, was of outstanding importance. As Ruszt explains: "I love old Hungarian literature. I do not only love its language and its intellectual landscape, but also its undertakings, which are unparalleled in Europe, and I feel that this undertaking is still relevant today, although not for the same reasons as back then." My research attempts to explore the *topicality* of Ruszt's reading of Csokonai through the (re)construction of his production of *The Widow of Mr Karnyó*, which was performed at the University Stage in 1965. My paper focuses on three aspects: What extent can university (stage) life be a determinant of the freedom movement of theatrical language? What kind of form language did the Universitas Ensemble's performance use, which circumvented the contemporary realistic-naturalistic canon of form? How did a performance of an 18th century Hungarian drama become one of the most successful and internationally acclaimed performances by the Universitas Ensemble?

Keywords: Csokonai Vitéz Mihály, Hungarian drama, Ruszt József

¹ In the preparation of this study, I was assisted by former members of Universitas, written contributions by Tamás Fodor and oral contributions by Katalin Sólyom, thanks for them.

József Ruszt was a theatre director, theatre teacher and theatre company organiser of the second half of the 20th century. It is the task of contemporary theatre history writing and teaching to understand his oeuvre and his approach to theatre. In Ruszt's entire oeuvre, the performances of Hungarian dramas were of outstanding importance and programmatic. And although in the reception of theatre history it is mainly the national drama productions of *Bánk bán*, *Csongor és Tünde* (*Csongor and Tünde*) and *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*) that have survived, stage productions of Csokonai's dramatic works also appeared several times in his oeuvre. This is how Ruszt described the works of the 19th century and earlier: "I love old Hungarian literature. I love not only his language and his ideas, but also – in European terms – his unparalleled commitments, and I feel that this commitment is still relevant today, although not for the same reasons as then" (Nánay and Tucsni 2013, 165).

My study attempts to explore the topicality of Ruszt's reading of Csokonai through the (re)adaptation of his production of *A' özvegy Karnyóné*, which was performed at the *Egyetemi Színpad* (*University Stage*) with the *Universitas* company in 1965.² The study focuses on three aspects, three questions: to what extent the university (stage) existence can be a determinant of the freedom movement of theatrical language use; what kind of formal language was used in the performance of the *Universitas Ensemble*, which circumvented the realistic formal canon of the time; how could a performance of an 18th century Hungarian drama become one of the most successful and internationally acclaimed productions of the *Universitas* company with such then almost unknown company members as set designer Attila Csikós, or Kati Sólyom, Anna Adamis, Tamás Jordán, Péter Halász, Pál Hetényi, Tibor Kristóf and Tamás Fodor?

The surprising success

As is typical of Ruszt's work, he staged Csokonai's *Az özvegy Karnyóné* (*The Widow of Mr Karnyó*), or as the original title reads *Az özvegy Karnyóné s a két*

² *A' özvegy Karnyóné*, date of the premiere: 11 April 1965, *Universitas Ensemble*, Budapest, Egyetemi Színpad, directed by József Ruszt, music editor: Gábor Baross, set designer Attila Csikós (f. h.), Karnyó: József Kelemen, Karnyóné: Katalin Sólyom, Samu: Tamás Jordán, Lázár: Péter Halász, Tiptopp: Pál Hetényi, Lipitlotty: Tibor Kristóf, Kuruzs: Tamás Fodor and Elemér Kiss (role doubling), Boris: Katalin Csaplár, Tündér: Anna Adamis, Tündérfi: Zsuzsa Nyujtó. For the data sheet of the performance, see <https://szinhaztortenet.hu/record/-/record/OSZMI60186> Viewed on 8 October 2023

szeleburdiak (The Widow of Mr Karnyó and the Two Rascals) at different times in his life, with different companies: after the 1965 performance at the *Csokonai Színház (Csokonai Theatre)* in Debrecen in 1973 with Magda Csáky in the title role,³ and in 1992 with the *Független Színpad (Independent Stage)* company at the *Merlin Színház (Merlin Theatre)* in Budapest (with Géza Kaszás in the title role).⁴ Of Csokonai's dramatic oeuvre, Ruszt was not only concerned with the *Karnyóné*, although obviously in connection with its outstanding success in 1965, he also staged *Gerson du Malheureux* two years later, in 1967, also with *Universitas*.⁵ Together with *Karnyóné* in Debrecen in 1973, they also played *Tempefői* on the same night,⁶ with Sándor Csikos in the title role.⁷

Ruszt graduated from the *Színház- és Filmművészeti Főiskola (Academy of Theatre and Film Arts)* in 1962 as a director. From the 1962–63 season he worked in parallel at the *Csokonai Theatre* in Debrecen and in Budapest with the *Universitas Ensemble* of the *ELTE University Stage*. Rust documented his productions constantly, both in his diaries and in letters he wrote to actors during rehearsals. Interestingly and regrettably, however, he made few records of the two performances he produced with *Universitas* in 1964–65, Aeschylus' *Oresteia (Oresteia)* and the *Karnyóné*.⁸

The premiere of *Karnyóné* was held on 11 April 1965 in the University Stage, a building of the former Piarist Gymnasium chapel on *Pesti Barnabás utca*. This is what Ruszt wrote in his diary after the premiere on 19 April: "Next year looks bad for the foreseeable future. I don't know what to do. For the time being, no flat [...]. The premiere of *Karnyóné* was a great success. The second and third per-

3 For the data sheet of the performance, see <https://szinhaztortenet.hu/record/-/record/OSZMI55448> Viewed on 8 October 2023.

4 For the data sheet of the performance, see <https://szinhaztortenet.hu/record/-/record/OSZMI26969>, the pre-premiere of the production was in the summer of 1992 at the *Esztergomi Várszínház (Esztergom Castle Theatre)*, see <https://szinhaztortenet.hu/record/-/record/OSZMI26392> Viewed on 8 October 2023.

5 For the data sheet of the performance, see <https://szinhaztortenet.hu/record/-/record/OSZMI60278> Viewed on 8 October 2023.

6 For the data sheet of the performance, see <https://szinhaztortenet.hu/record/-/record/OSZMI55445> Viewed on 8 October 2023.

7 In his biography, Sándor Csikos talks in detail about his working relationship with József Ruszt (Kornya 2021).

8 On the basis of Ruszt's letters, it is perhaps not unfounded to say that his attention was occupied by his deepening disagreements with the Debrecen director, Ferenc Taar and György Lengyel, the main director, around the time of the premiere. He wrote a long letter to Taar two days before the premiere (Nánay, Tucsni and Forgách 2012, 80).

formances were fine [...] I myself am amazed at the response from the audience. Of course, there is still work to be done, but the two rehearsals we are going to hold outside will be just enough" (Ruszt 2011, 90). The diary quotation confirms that Ruszt himself was surprised by the success of the performance, and that he had been preparing for a trip to Western Europe long before the premiere.

Following the staging of *Karnyóné*, the *Universitas* has made a series of so-called "forgotten dramatic memories" part of its programming policy.⁹ In 1967 he directed János Illei's *Tornyos Péter* (*Péter Tornyos*) and Csokonai's *Gerson*, in 1969 Kristóf Simai's adaptation of Molière's play entitled *Zsugori* (*Stingy*), and in 1971 Ruszt directed a performance of the passion play from the passion plays of Csíksomlyó, edited by Imre Katona, entitled *Passió magyar versekben* (*Passion in Hungarian Poems*).

The *Karnyóné* is regarded as a so-called double production, although according to the actors' recollections it was directed only by Ruszt, while the other one-act play, Béla Balázs's "dramatic ballad" *A kékszakállú herceg vára* (*Prince Bluebeard's Castle*), premiered on the same night, was staged by Vilmos Dobai, the founder and artistic director of *Universitas*.¹⁰ The same Vilmos Dobai (comrade, as the members of the company called him), who was also the main director of the *Pécsi Nemzeti Színház* (*Pécs National Theatre*) between 1962 and 1974.¹¹

According to the *Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet Színházi Adattára* (*National Museum and Institute of Theatre History Theatre Database*), *Karnyóné* was performed only three times between 1945 and the *Universitas* production: In 1945,¹² then in 1953,¹³ in the *Nemzeti Színház Kamaraszínház* (*National Theatre Chamber Theatre*) (both times directed by Tamás Major, with the "eternal old lady", Hilda Gobbi, only 32 years old in 1945, in the title role), and in 1957 in Debrecen (directed by György Thuróczy, with Éva Hotti in the

9 The two volumes of the *Régi magyar drámai emlékek* (*Old Hungarian Dramatic Memories*) published in 1960 had a major impact on the repertoire of Hungarian theatrical art (Kardos 1960)

10 For the data sheet of the performance, see <https://szinhaztortenet.hu/record/-/record/OSZMI60183> Viewed on 8 October 2023.

11 It should be noted that Ruszt was present at almost all the rehearsals of other *Universitas* productions, and Dobai also attended many rehearsals, so they mutually supported each other and the company.

12 For the data sheet of the performance, see <https://szinhaztortenet.hu/record/-/record/OSZMI105795> Viewed on 8 October 2023.

13 For the data sheet of the performance, see <https://szinhaztortenet.hu/record/-/record/OSZMI85275> Viewed on 8 October 2023.



Picture 1. Pál Hetényi (Tiptopp), Katalin Csaplár (Boris), Tibor Kristóf (Lipitlotty), József Kelemen (Karnyó), Tamás Jordán (Samu), Kati Sólyom (Karnyóné), Péter Halász (Lázár)

title role, and Zoltán Latinovits, a newly hired assistant actor, in the role of Lipitlotty).¹⁴ It is worth noticing the huge change in the canonisation of drama, which can be measured even in numbers: From Ruszt's production in 1965 to 2023, the Theatre Database lists almost forty performances of *Karnyóné*, as opposed to the three before.¹⁵

The upheavals by Ruszt

Béla Mátrai-Betegh writes about the 1953 performance of the National Theatre in the *Magyar Nemzet (Hungarian Nation)*: "Tamás Major, with the help of Hilda Gobbi, who is otherwise magnificent and who develops the inner and outer

¹⁴ For the data sheet of the performance, see <https://szinhaztortenet.hu/record/-/record/OSZMI85272> Viewed on 8 October 2023.

¹⁵ For the excellent study on the premieres of *Karnyóné* in 1911–1948, see this publication (Gajdó 2023).

characteristics of the character in depth and thoroughly, overemphasizes this widow at some points in the depiction of male hunger, almost to the point of distasteful naturalism" (Mátrai-Betegh 1953). Miklós Gyárfás calls Gobbi's transformation into the role "ugly sculpture" in his beautiful, role-analytical writing (Gyárfás 1958, 108). The invention of Ruszt's production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, in comparison, lies precisely in the fact that it seeks new formal possibilities for the playful freshness of a classic comedy for a young and brave audience of a company with a "playful freshness"¹⁶ and a "young and brave"¹⁷ approach. To repeat: all this in 1965.

In agreement with István Nánay, an excellent researcher of Ruszt's oeuvre, the *Universitas* performance departed from the canon of realistic-naturalistic comedy and the canon of folk theatre, which dominated the period of Hungarian theatre history under study. Above all, by beginning to experiment with the – supposed – tools of fairground theatrics and the formal language of *commedia dell'arte* in an amateur theatre setting.

The actors performed with great gusto in a very fast-paced production, in which the conventions of theatre are strongly subverted: historicism is constantly broken by jokes that refer to the contemporary, and the rules of realism are broken by a play that strives for stylisation. As Ruszt put it, "we were playing a living puppet theatre, [...] not psychological realism, but gesture realism".¹⁸ Years later, Ruszt says the following in an interview about his production of *Karnyóné* in Debrecen: "Thinking back to the performance of nine years ago, I was struck by the truth that the play must be even more exaggerated, even more illogical" (Ism, 1973). It is also worth recalling István G. Pálffy's remarks on the belated reception of Csokonai's dramas, such as *Karnyóné*, in literary history, which had serious consequences: "József Ruszt has a great merit in discovering the *Karnyóné* for the stage. For a generation that was not familiar with the post-war performance featuring Hilda Gobbi, he was in fact the discoverer. Before literary history or criticism had done so, he began to look for the tradition of Hungarian farce in Csokonai's student work. [...] *Karnyóné* is a fairground comedy. And Ruszt makes it played as one. [...] It is not a tragicomic love story of an old woman, but a story without any tragic overtones about an old woman who

16 From an interview with József Ruszt, *Universitas*, 2004 (documentary film, director: István Sipos)

17 Oral statement by Katalin Sólyom, Pécs, 13 November 2023.

18 From an interview with József Ruszt, *Universitas*, 2004 (documentary film, director: István Sipos)

is after a man, a “a violin so battered and worn out that even the devil could not canaphorise on it.” There is no characterisation, no dramatic hierarchy among the characters. Different amusing incidents occur between the characters, who are in various states of exuberance. This is why it is difficult for actors to play *Karnyóné*” (Pálffy G. 1974).

In one scene, the amorous Karnyóné forgives the debt of the swindler cavalier Lipitlotty, who, seeing this, uninhibitedly humiliates and abandons the widow.¹⁹ The staging in this single scene is a succession of jokes (which can also be seen as lazzis from the commedia dell’ arte): Samuka (Tamás Jordán) enters the stage, speaks with his mouth full to the squeaky wooden legged Lázár (played by Péter Halász, later known as the neo-avant-garde leader), and then, talking to the arriving Lipitlotty (Tibor Kristóf), keeps spitting the pieces of food into his face. Péter Molnár Gál interprets the “food spitting” punch line, which was also seen in the 1973 Debrecen performance that was eerily similar to the *Universitas* performance, in this way: “It’s a wild and tasteless joke, even if it has been a staple of the folk stage for thousands of years. And what makes it poetic is that the actor retains his inner seriousness in the meantime. He is not joking, but characterizing” (Molnár Gál 1973).

During the analysed scene, the actors often perform a series of brilliant movements that detach themselves from the meaning of the text, relying on repetition as a source of comedy: Karnyóné (Kati Sólyom) explains fervently, as she moves with the loved and hated Lipitlotty as if they were duelling or even dancing on a piste. Then, when the cheated woman is truly speechless with shock, Lipitlotty, for all his humiliating insults, instead of responding, she gives a big hiccup. And with her umpteenth, arguing claw thrust, she accidentally slaps Lázár, the shopboy, so hard that he falls off his chair. In the scene, Karnyóné repeatedly bends her body and talks to her partner’s genitals. Here, too, Ruszt’s range as a master of the game shines, since beyond the old-fashioned humour, we constantly sense how much vulnerable and unrealised sensuality and sexual desire there is in the abandoned woman. In the heat of the argument, Karnyóné falls on the squeaky wooden leg of Lázár, who of course

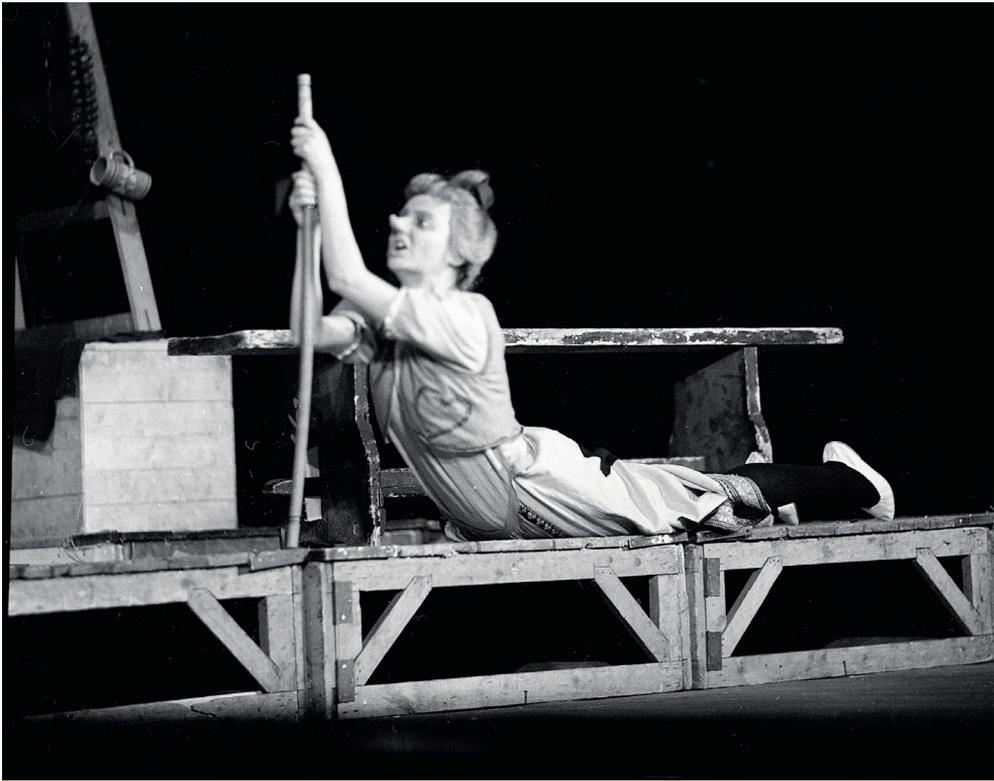
¹⁹ A 10-minute recording of the performance is available as a DVD supplement to the volume on the history of the University Stage (Nánay 2007). However, we know that *Magyar Televízió (Hungarian Television)* recorded the whole performance and broadcast it in prime time on 14 November 1965. However, the item is not available in the *MTVA Archívum (MTVA Archive)*.

is still sitting on the bench, and who almost holds the fragile actress in the air. From a long suspended, ungrounded state, the desperately wailing Karnyóné, then planning her death, leaning on a large stick, tries to rise from the ground for a long, unsuccessful struggle, while Lipitlotty jumps on a child's toy stick, and throws off the stage. The departure of the man not only evokes the playfulness of fairground plays and somewhat the language of puppetry, but also transforms the amoral and infantile personality traits of an adult male into a stage image.

None of the actors in their twenties have learned the tricks of the trade from the *Színház- és Filmművészeti Főiskola (Academy of Theatre and Film Arts)* of the 1960s. However, from the very beginning of his career, Ruszt taught the amateur theatre ensemble members he worked with, mainly from various faculties of ELTE, with whom he rehearsed nightly, often until dawn. "So many generations have grown up on Ruszt's theory and his theoretical practice," Tamás Fodor said in a documentary about *Universitas* produced in 2004.²⁰ The reviewer of *Magyar Nemzet* praises the performance and the company precisely from the point of view of leaving amateurism, understood as lack of skills: 'with the help of a few talented young directors, a group has grown up that can speak Hungarian well, knows the basic elements of the play and performs its educational task excellently. [...] Viewing Csokonai's play could even be a compulsory lesson for students' (G.I. 1965). The characters "were individualized in movement, costume and speech to the extreme, almost caricature-like, the director was not afraid of black humour or trivial comedy, and the dances and songs blended into the performance with a naturalness that was self-evident" – writes István Nánay (Nánay 2002, 21). The playful and funny music played by Gábor Baross' live orchestra and the Csokonai text inserts set to music divided the reviewers. While the reviewer of *Magyar Nemzet* said that the "music of the play was a great success, colouring the period and fitting the style of the play" (g.i. 1965), the reviewer of the magazine *Jövő Mérnöke (Engineer of the Future)* said that one cannot agree with the music of the performance, because "it is not the music of 1799 that is played at times, but the music of another century, which does not move the plot forward, but stops it" (A.P. 1965).

The performance of Kati Sólyom, the title character, is interesting for several reasons. She played Judith in *A kékszakállú herceg várá (Prince Bluebeard's*

²⁰ From an interview with József Ruszt, *Universitas*, 2004 (documentary film, director: István Sipos)



Picture 2. Kati Sólyom (Karnyóné)

Castle), and the press found the distance between the two roles in the same evening revelatory in terms of the acting, and of course the young actress' captivating beauty (we should recall her performance as Anni in the 1966 film *Apa (Father)* directed by István Szabó) and her masked, fake-nosed, ugly and ridiculous old woman characterisation. In this respect, the role assigned to the then 25-year-old Kati Sólyom is in any case contrary to the tradition of professional theatre acting, which assigns roles according to the rules of conformation, age and the prevailing rules of aesthetics. Just think of the casting tradition of the title role and its subtle modifications: Hilda Gobbi plays Karnyóné in the *Nemzeti Színház* in 1945 and 1953, then in 1979, also directed by Major, already Mari Törőcsik, in the great 1969 radio play *Manyi Kiss*, and in 1989 in *Kapocs*, directed by Imre Csiszár, Kati Berek plays the title role. How much this tradition, and the interpretative framework of the widow and the unfortunate old

woman's sorrows itself, changes, if we think of Ruszt's 1992 independent stage production, in which the maximally masculine Géza Kaszás was cast as the title character, or Bálint Szilágyi's direction, who, with excellent wit, harking back to the all-boys roles of the original premiere's school for boys, staged Csokonai's play with three young male actors in 2015, first at the *Szentendrei Teátrum (Szentendre Theatre)* and then at the *Mozsár Műhely (Mozsár Workshop)*.²¹

In Ruszt's oeuvre, for the first time, the construction of space can be seen "when a raised, distinguished part of the stage is able to organise the space by itself" (Nánay 2007, 23). On the platform in the middle of the stage was Karnyóné's shop, and all the other scenes outside the house were played around the podium. The idea was intended not only to increase the space, but also to allow more time for the play, as the actors coming from the director's left had to walk across the entire stage to the house entrance set on the right. According to Ruszt himself, this solution was actually the result of an accidental situation that had to be resolved during a stage rehearsal: "This inside-outside was not born out of a conscious, preconceived directorial concept, just as nothing in the theatre is born that way. At the rehearsal, Tibi Kristóf came in from the left as Lipitlotty, looked out at the audience, showed himself and then stepped up to the podium. It was bad. Short. And besides, we agreed that the entrance is on the right side of the podium. Kristóf understood, and with his typical posture, shoulders hunched, and steps pattering, he walked around, showing himself again and again, each time looking out into the audience. In doing so, he created space, time and a style in which the inner life of the figure and the detachment from the figure appeared together" (Nánay 2002, 20). This duality of the actor's experience and the theatricalisation of the play was one of the defining ideas of Ruszt's entire oeuvre, the "theatrical liturgy"..

The scenery avoided theatrical historicism as much as possible, in contrast to the scenery of the Major-directed productions at the Nemzeti Színház. And even if not abstract in its current meaning, the visual world of the Ruszt performance can certainly be considered puritan, fairground-like and stylised. The scene consisted of only a table, a bench and a stall, with two ladders in the background, on which an unpainted canvas was stretched as a backdrop. A special mention must be made of the ladders, which became an almost iconic and joked-about constant in amateur and then alternative theatre and

21 Oral communication by Bálint Szilágyi. Budapest, 14 November 2023.

later in Ruszt's performances at the *Universitas*. Ruszt also used the ladder – as a self-quotation – in his 1992 independent stage production. The props, the bunch of peppers on the ladder, the bowls and jars hung on the stage, were also just signs of the grocery shop.

As we can see from the descriptions of Géza Juhász's semi-disapproving review of 1965, the Ruzsts have also made major changes to the costume concept: the German-mimicking Lipitlotty appeared in Hungarian attire, with braided trousers and "a moustache so pointed that all the butlers of Swabian Pest would have run after him" (Juhász 1965), and the Frenchy Tiptopp "is so cosmopolitan that there should be a man on his feet who understands what the good-eyed Boris could have loved about this repellent Sanyaró Vendel" (Juhász 1965). According to the reviewer, Kuruzs looks like an Italian travelling comedian in his international costume, and he was not satisfied with the costume of Karnyó either, who came in at the end of the performance, as he found it incomprehensible how he could have run home with a huge, gaudy sword dangling over his dress and why he was not caught immediately. "What does it want to express? His militant counter-revolutionaryism?" – he asks in 1965 (Juhász 1965).

The superiority/primacy of cultural policy

One of the most, if not the most, significant events in the reception of this production was the fact that the preliminary selection of the World Festival of University Theatres²² considered that *Karnyóné* and *A kékszakállú herceg vára* were worthy of inclusion in the competition programme of the meeting held in Nancy. The international theatre meeting was held in France from 25 April to 2 May 1965. The main topic of the festival was the idea of "classics for today", and the performances of the twenty-five ensembles that took part in the festival were all related to this.

22 The festival was held for the second time in 1965 and was organised by Jacques Lang, later French Minister of Culture. The jury was chaired by writer Armand Salacrou and included filmmaker Julien Duvivier among its members, and Ferenc Hont also had a place, who was then Director General of the *Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum (National Museum of Theatre History)* in 1952-57. Hont reports in the *Esti Hírlap (Evening Newspaper)* about his trip to France, and from there to Hessen in West Germany for an international conference on actor education, where the most interesting speakers were Piscator and Barrault (K.K. 1965).

It is a fascinating question why the ruling (cultural) political elite allowed the performance to be performed abroad. Moreover, why Universitas was the first Hungarian prose ensemble that might perform in Western Europe in a long time. In István Nánay's opinion, the fact that not only music, folklore and film, but also theatre linked to language could now be represented at the festival is a consequence of the opening of Hungarian foreign policy towards the West.²³ In fact, they were given passports as an experiment, tightly controlled by the party-state, to filter the kind of reception they would get.²⁴

At the festival, the jury awarded two 1st and four 2nd prizes. Performed on the vast stage of the Opera House of Nancy, the production of *Karnyóné* was awarded 2nd place, praised by the French press and hailed as an outstanding achievement by leading Hungarian newspapers. On 12 June, Ruszt recorded some details from the French press coverage in his diary: 'ARTS, 12 May 1965. The Hungarians played an 18th-century farce... in a very likeable and lively way, without a hint of vulgarity throughout, with an actress who would make a wonderful Übü mama [...]; LES LETTRES FRANÇAISES May 19. Amusingly staged [...] a charming little world, without any forced efforts [...]; LE REPUBLICAIN LORRAINE, 3 May. The actors are excellent [...] The *Egyetemi Színpad* of Budapest captures our attention and makes us laugh, despite the fact that the comedy of the play's text is completely incomprehensible to us [...] LE MONDE, 4 May. If we were to reward this folkloristic genre, the lively farce of the Hungarians would have deserved a better ranking" (Nánay, Tucsni and Forgách 2012, 81). The success of the performance in France, according to the recalling members of the

23 "Foreign audiences who do not understand the text will surely miss much of the "naughty" flavours of the play, the words of the country bumpkins who monkey with the "latest Parisian fashions", the delightful characterisation of the shopboy's ignorant cluelessness, the tender dialogue between the widow hungry for love and her son always hungry for anything edible. But this lively comedy, because its subtle changes of tone and heavy humour can be interpreted by the acting, can still give a taste of Hungarian theatre culture" (E. M. 1965).

24 The following passage from the 1965 report of the *Egyetemi Színpad* tells us a lot about the expectations of the time: "This new body [i.e. the Cultural Committee] has already had a positive impact with the help it provided in the elaboration of the guidelines for cultural work in 1966-67. The material is the result of a meeting held with Comrade György Aczél, and, starting from an assessment of the present situation, it indicates the main aims and aspirations of the work, the areas in which it should have a radiating effect, the importance of ideological education, the broadening of general education, and the methods to be used. ... we need to shape our entire programme policy in such a way that our events have the desired balance between entertainment, education and direct political education". Draft programme of the cultural work of *Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem (Eötvös Loránd University)* for the academic year 1965/66. Archives of the *Egyetemi Színpad*, OSZMI, *Kézirattár (Manuscript Archives)*.

company, was mainly due to its playfulness, amateur theatrical flamboyance and juxtaposing jokes, which made it stand out among the happenings of the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s, which were fashionable but strange and little known to Hungarian participants.²⁵ The performance was “like a healthy sneeze in the slightly parched avant-garde,” Ruszt said in an interview.²⁶

The success was also congratulated by Károly Kazimir, Secretary General of the *Magyar Színházművészeti Szövetség (Hungarian Theatre Arts Association)*, who had earlier recommended *Universitas* for the Award for Socialist Culture, and also by István Sőtér, Rector of ELTE. We have detailed information on how the ensemble got back to Budapest from Nancy: they stopped in Paris to be the first Hungarian company to perform at the *Nemzetek Színpada (Stage of the Nations)*, *Théâtre Montparnasse-Gaston Baty*, then, at the request of the University of Vienna, they went to Vienna and performed *Karnyóné* and *A kékszakállú*.²⁷ Ruszt did not write any diary entries at all during his stay abroad, and only after his return home did he record a few rather painful sentences: “Well, back home [...] and with very mixed feelings and very mixed emotions. While I was out, I longed for home, and now that I’m back home, I would crawl back on my hands and knees” (Ruszt 2011, 90).

Not only the news reports of the time, but also the historians of the *Universitas* story that has come to an end, remember the *Karnyóné* as the greatest (or first greatest) success of the ensemble. It is easy to see that this was actually the time when *Universitas*, working in amateur, academic conditions, was clearly and – if the term can be understood in 1965 – definitively put on the map of Hungarian art. Directors, actors and reviewers began attending their performances, which were covered by the major cultural and political weeklies and dailies. Their influence can be detected in contemporary Hungarian theatre and film,²⁸ and became a prominent meeting place for artists in internal exile a few years after 1956.

25 István Petur, Director of the University Stage, said about this: “From classical tragedy to Bekettian [sic!] antidrama, we have seen a wide range of experimentation. The exaggerated, over-modernist aspirations naturally failed” (H. J. 1965).

26 From an interview with József Ruszt, *Universitas*, 2004 (documentary film, director: István Sipos)

27 A detailed account of the trip can be found in István Nánay’s book (Nánay 2007, 64).

28 Irén Psota and Tamás Ungvári saw here for the first time Garcia Lorca’s *Yerma*, directed by Vilmos Dobai. Through Psota’s intercession, György Aczél finally gave permission to the *Madách Színház (Madách Theatre)* to stage the production. *Universitas* was the first to stage Genet’s drama [*Cselédek (Maids)*, 1967, directed by

The success of *Universitas* contributed to the fact that several university theatre groups started to operate: from the mid-1960s, the *Szegedi Egyetemi Színpad* (Szeged University Stage) under the leadership of István Paál became an increasingly important experimental theatre, in 1968 the literary stage of the *Budapesti Műszaki Egyetem* (Budapest Technical University) changed its name to *S(z)kéné Együttes* [*S(z)kéné Ensemble*], and at the same time the construction of a permanent theatre space on the second floor of the University's Building K was started. But in 1966, the *Pince Színház* (Cellar Theatre), which had grown out of the *Budapesti Ifjúsági Színpad* (Budapest Youth Stage), also started operating at Török Pál utca 3, under the direction of István Keleti between 1969 and 1985. And it is obviously a measure of the success of the *Universitas* company and other amateur theatre ensembles that the boom in amateur theatre has been met with increasingly fierce resistance from professional theatres.

Of course, the Hungarian critical reception of *Karnyóné* was not unanimous, as several critics disapproved of the title change (instead *A' özvegy*, they requested back the 'z' of *Az özvegy*) They missed Csokonai's message, while the denunciation of the ideology of state socialism was called for. "Csokonai reflects here the most pitiful Hungarian world of his time: the small town in Western Transdanubia ... the beggaring nobility, which is either in the foreign monkey business or already beginning to alienate itself in its blood. The petty bourgeois couple are rivals in their admiration for aristocracy and German swagger. There are only two workers here, minor characters, but they are the only ones who show intellectual demand. World politics is of feverish interest to Karnyóné's assistant; it depends on his social position, a victim of the most inane whispering propaganda. And the maid is the only one with a demand for poetry; she cannot help it if she has to make do with Kuruzs" (Juhász 1965).²⁹ And although the company performed Illyés's adaptation of *Karnyóné*, the need for the text to be untouchable is still reflected in the reviews: "the deleted Csokonai song and the

József Ruszt] and Dürrenmatt's [*Pör a számár árnyékáért* (*Trial for the Shadow of the Donkey*), 1967, directed by József Ruszt]. István Szabó and several directors of the *Balázs Béla Stúdió* (*Béla Balázs Studio*) have selected the cast of their films from the *Universitas* company.

²⁹ The reviewer's train of thought is obviously not unique, and is very similar to, for example, Gyula Illyés's statement on the 1953 performance of the play that used his revised text: "We shall see how fitting this play, which mocks the moneymaking bourgeois as well as the wealthy nobleman, was for a respectable audience at a year-end celebration" (Illyés 1953).

poem insertion must be reinstated, but the *Dorottya* part can be omitted: the Lilla song is downright offensive as the parody of the *szeleburdi*" (Juhász 1965).

After the success of *Karnyóné*, the company was invited back to Nancy, however, the following year's production of Vilmos Dobai's *Egy szerelem három éjszakája (Three Nights of Love)*, was a just a bit successful, while Ruszt's twenty-minute *Impromptu du Nancy*, on a topic previously set³⁰, was not successful at all.³¹ The title character in *Karnyóné*, Kati Sólyom, was not allowed to go abroad after a shameful, blackmailing visit to György Aczél, typical of the psychology of the dictatorship. She could not act in the new productions either, as her sibling, who was working in Italy as a researcher and had accepted a US fellowship, was considered a dissident. The biggest problem in the life of the company, however, was that during the 1966 guest performance, "András Hajagos, a student at the Technical University, has disappeared in Nancy and apparently does not intend to return to the country [Hungary]."³² As a result, István Petur, head of the *Egyetemi Színpad* and secretary of the Cultural Committee, was dismissed, and the attempts of *Universitas* to become independent and its leaders' theatrical ambitions were radically curtailed. On 15 June 1966, barely a year after the great success of *Karnyóné*, István Sőtér, then Rector of ELTE, proposed the immediate dissolution of *Universitas* to the Rectors' Council.³³ Fortunately for us, the ensemble continued to exist, Ruszt worked with *Universitas* until 1973, and the company continued in various forms until 1991, when the chapel was returned to the Piarist order.³⁴

And although the authorities continued to be concerned about the international cultural involvement of university groups after the defection scandal,

30 The theme – ten years after the 1956 revolution – was the following: a revolutionary movement unfolds in a rural town, involving a young man who turns out to be an important functionary of the established order.

31 Tamás Fodor reports this in his letter of 2 May 1966: "[...] I am very, very nervous. In half an hour, we might be on stage with our obligatory twenty-minute piece, and we might be booed, and it might be a success. This is such a booing audience. [...] The obligatory piece was booed, they took it as a national insult. The *Egy szerelem (One love)* had a very good success. We were not awarded. The jury is the assembly of incompetent animals. We had a good laugh at the evaluations" (Nánay 2007).

32 *Verification report of the trip of the Universitas Ensemble of the Egyetemi Színpad to France and England from 20 April to 14 May 1966*. Archives of the *Egyetemi Színpad*, OSZMI, Kézirattár (Manuscript Archives).

33 *Minutes of the Rectors' Council meeting of 15 June 1966*. ELTE Archives. 1744/66

34 On the 10th anniversary of its premiere, *Karnyóné* was revived with the old cast for one performance only. This performance was seen by János Szikora, who was delighted by the charm and humour of the players. Oral statement by Katalin Sólyom, Pécs, 13 November 2023.

the *Karnyóné* was able to be performed, even if not in Western Europe, but was successful at the 1966 Zagreb and 1967 Wrocław festivals. In Zagreb, Kati Sólyom, who played the title role, won the award for best female performance, and the company applied for admission to the *Egyetemi Színházak Nemzetközi Szervezete (International Organisation of University Theatres)*, UITU. However, the 1967 festival in Wrocław, where the twice-performed *Karnyóné* received an 18-minute ovation, unexpectedly and almost radically changed the way Ruszt and the ensemble saw theatre: it was here that they first encountered Jerzy Grotowski and his *Laboratórium Színház (Laboratory Theatre)* production of *Az állhatatos herceg (The Tenacious Prince)*. The influence of Grotowski's ritual theatre was enormous, and in 1968 the *Pokol nyolcadik köre (Eighth Circle of Hell)*, written by Péter Halász and directed by Ruszt, was born from this inspiration from János Pilinszky's *Sötét mennyország (Dark Heaven)* oratorio.³⁵

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Ferenc Veress

The Pantheon Concept from the Renaissance to Romanticism

Reflections on the Background of Statues
of Csokonai by Ferenczy and Izsó

Abstract

The rise of the cult of famous people in the period of Renaissance was fostered by ancient examples, the biographies of Plutarch and Suetonius. The respect paid to contemporary poets, writers and humanists is considered as a Renaissance achievement, and the erection of ornate tombs as a typical expression of that. In Florence, the Basilica of Santa Croce has for centuries served as the burial place of great thinkers, from Leonardo Bruni to Vittorio Alfieri, and that is where Goethe, Foscolo and Stendhal paid their respect to them. In Hungary, István Széchenyi came up with the idea of the *Üdvlelde (a Salvation Park)*, a memorial park that would contain the graves of scholars who had served the nation's progress. It was up to the artists to realise the idea: István Ferenczy, who studied in Rome, created the busts of several Hungarian writers and poets, including Csokonai, as part of an imaginary national pantheon. When it commissioned a full-length statue of Csokonai from Miklós Izsó, the Debrecen Memorial Garden Committee imagined a park "where statues of great people of our homeland and science, especially of those who have made great contributions to our city, should stand [...]". The elite of the city of Debrecen thus updated an old tradition with its roots in humanism, a heritage that was still alive in the 19th century through the spirit of the Reformed College.

Keywords: statue of Csokonai, memorial park, pantheon, István Ferenczy, Miklós Izsó

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Introduction

"When the condottiere Carlo Malatesta knocked down the statue of Virgil in Mantua in 1397, saying that statues were only for saints and not for poets, the indignant Pier Paolo Vergerio hurried to explain that the latter were as entitled to honour as saints and generals. The citizens of Arezzo did not hesitate to welcome the returning Petrarch "as if a king had come" (in the words of Leonardo Bruni) and to declare his birthplace a memorial place, a privilege hitherto reserved for saints. The study from which I took the quotation shows how the humanist pantheon of outstanding men was gradually formed, mainly through the influence of biographical collections (Klaniczay 1985, 41–58).

Contemporaries of outstanding virtues (*virtù*) were honoured by their hometowns with ornate tombs, most notably manifested in the tombs of the Franciscan church of Santa Croce in Florence. For example, Leonardo Bruni (+1444), the Florentine chancellor and historian, was buried in the ancient manner: the corpse was dressed in a long toga-like dress, a history of Florence placed in his hands and a laurel wreath placed on his head. The sarcophagus of the Chancellor in Santa Croce (1445–1451) is decorated with a Latin epitaph which says that after Bruni's passing, historiography mourns, eloquence is silent and the muses (both Greek and Latin) cannot hold back their tears. The marble tomb, carved by Bernardo Rossellino, features a number of motifs that became a permanent feature of cemetery symbolism in later centuries: a triumphal arch-like architectural frame, lion's head and paws, eagle figures, winged geniuses, puttos holding a fruit garland, a garland of laurel leaves, etc. The portrait of the deceased was described as an example of calm, noble idealisation: "the head of Bruni, tranquil and idealized, is among the noblest creations of its time" (Pope-Hennessy 2002, 146).

In the course of time, the Basilica of Santa Croce became a national pantheon, where great figures such as Michelangelo, Machiavelli and Galileo Galilei were buried. At the end of the 18th century, the shrine of the famous Italian poet Vittorio Alfieri (1749–1803) was commissioned by his widow, Countess Luisa Stolberg d'Albany (Madarász 2003, 196–210). The artist commissioned, Antonio Canova, a sculptor of great importance in his time, prepared two designs for the monument. In the first (Possagno, Gipsoteca Canoviana), Alfieri's bust was placed on a column and was mourned by an allegorical female figure of Italy, with her right arm resting on the pedestal. Accompanying the female figure is

a winged youth, the Genius of Death, holding a torch upside down in his hand. The final version, erected in Santa Croce, a three-dimensional work in a chamber, was a much more monumental than the first relief. The sarcophagus rests on a double pedestal, and the cloak of the standing female figure (Italy) who mourns him curtains the bust of the poet in relief. Alfieri's genres are symbolised by the tragic masks of the lyric on the pedestal and the sarcophagus (Koomen, 1993, 192–220).¹

Alfieri's tomb, inaugurated on 27 September 1808, attracted many to Santa Croce: the great poet of the next generation, Ugo Foscolo, saw the tomb and paid his respects in 1812–1813, and in 1807 he already published his famous cycle of poems *Sepolcri* (The Tombs), in which the monuments of Santa Croce became symbols of transience and immortality. In his poem, Foscolo described our relationship to the dead as follows: "He who leaves no love here to inherit,/ Only his grave is sad... // For, alas, no flower/ Grows over the dead who are not praised,/ Nor honoured by a tear of love, nor of pain." According to Honour Hugh, these thoughts, that is, the grief of posterity, are visualised in the allegorical female figures on Canova's tombs (Hugh 1991, 147).

In his commentary on the poems, Foscolo explained that "Tombs that are useless to the dead are useful to the living because they awaken in them virtuous emotions left as a legacy by good men." In the case of great men and heroes, their legacy is that of the whole nation, in which the tomb of the hero develops a national awareness, a sense of belonging. Foscolo therefore encouraged Italians to worship the tombs of their fellow citizens, especially in Santa Croce, which he praised as a national pantheon: "You may be happy to keep in your church/ the past of this great people, alas, for there is no other left,/ since the chain of the Alps above does not protect you..." (Madarász 2002, 251).

Of course, it was not only Foscolo who was inspired by the tombs of Florentine great people, but others too. Madame de Stäel visited Italy in 1794, where she wrote her novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* (published in 1807), whose heroine found spiritual refuge from her love sorrow in the tombs of Santa Croce. In 1817 Lord Byron paid respect to the tombs, followed by Stendhal in the following year, and in their wake the whole of Europe came to know Santa Croce as a symbol

¹ Here I note that Alfieri's figure of Italy is continued in Ferdinand Vidra's Pannonia figure (1844, Hungarian National Gallery). Vidra studied in Rome with a state permit from 1843, and he painted the picture to express his gratitude for the scholarship (Szabó 1985, 170).

of Italy's sad fate (Koomen 1993, 215–218). At the same time, in 1791, during the French Revolution, Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, the friend of the sculptor Antonio Canova, was commissioned to turn the church of Sainte Genèviève in Paris into a national Pantheon, where French celebrities Rousseau, Voltaire and the heroes of the Revolution, Mirabeau and Marat, were buried.

The admiration for the heroes of the past fascinated the Romantics, as the diary of István Széchenyi, a leading figure of the Hungarian reform era, written in Athens (6 February 1817) shows: "Although I was all alone in Athens, and the memories of the former greatness, and the comparison of my youthful years, so ill spent, with those who had spent their lives in this holy land where I was, so gloriously, gave rise to all sorrowful thoughts – yet to part with this place I felt such a dull sorrow, such an incomprehensible protest, as if I could never again find such a serene, calm sky" (Széchenyi 1982, 96).

According to his diary, Széchenyi was familiar with the Walhalla monument in Regensburg, built between 1830 and 1842, and its designer, the Bavarian court architect Leo von Klenze, whom he met several times, and thus he could have heard the idea of the German national pantheon directly from him (Kovalovszky 1982, 32). Széchenyi himself also refers many times to the example of Valhalla when describing his thoughts on the national memorial place he called *Üdvlelde*: "...in the hills of Buda, in the centre of our country, and thus somewhat in the heart of it, we would erect a cemetery, a Salvation Park under the open sky. Let the better part of our blood be there as a reward [...] and let the brave find in this place the memorial-flowers of those left behind [...]" As he explained, regardless of religion, origin or social status, this open-air memorial place would contain the graves of those who "contributed to the glorification of the homeland and through it of humanity, and thus of the universe." In this way, following the example of Westminster Abbey in London, there could be a place for "the poet, the man of status, the champion who bled to death" as well as for "the fortunate user of steam power" (Széchenyi 1843).

Csokonai bust by István Ferenczy

According to his testimony, it was a trip to Greece that first made István Széchenyi receptive to the idea of the national pantheon, the *Üdvlelde*: "[...] I had long been carrying the idea of the Salvation Park in my mind, when all those years ago, around the old ruins of Ilion, and on the battlefield of glorious Marathon

and among the flowery meadows of heroic Sparta, not just one memorial pile, which I visited, was the object of my envy, because it covered so many noble corpses of people burned for the fatherland and honoured with final respect..." (Széchenyi 1843, 132).

Around the same time as Széchenyi's diary in Greece was written, in October 1819, a young sculptor living in Rome described the following vision to his brother István Ferenczy: "I saw myself in a quiet dream, and surrounded by a legion, all of them with a majestic look, but tired and trembling with much work, and covered with a veil, began to approach me, calling me by name and calling me son [...] One of the them, leaning towards me and lowering his head on his right shoulder, said in a smiling, quiet voice: 'Do you not know your ancestors? [...] I recognise the great Hunyadi himself, Zrínyi, Adam Horváth, Gyöngyössi, and others. They all cried out in one voice: Don't let me die. I promised to do my utmost to show myself worthy of those holy shadows. [...] Csokonai spoke more with his feelings and his eyes than with his mouth. He thanked me for the marble-carved bust I made [...]" (Wallentinyi 1912, 123).

The vision shows the young sculptor's literary sensibility: it is similar to the illustration Pálóczi made for Ádám Horváth's *Hunniás* in 1820, depicting János Hunyadi in the captivity of Dracula and visited by his family (Cifka 1978, 494–495). There is also a suggestive parallel with "*Osszián keservei*" (*The Sorrows of Ossian*), painted by Károly Kisfaludy around 1822 (Sisa 2018, 202–203), in which the legendary Celtic bard is illuminated by the moonlight and the figures of the legendary past appear to inspire the poet to perform his work.

István Ferenczy was staying in Rome, the Eternal City, at the time of the letter and illustration, on a scholarship from Palatine József. Having been rejected by Canova, the young sculptor, born in Rimaszombat and from a family of Debrecen, was accepted into the workshop of the Danish Bertel Thorwaldsen, probably because of his Protestantism. Here, after some minor works, he started in August 1818 to make a *bust of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz*, perhaps encouraged by his poet friend József Mátyásy (today in the Reformed College in Debrecen, *picture 1.*). Ferenczy may have come across Csokonai's name earlier, during his stay in Vienna (1814–1818), as he was in contact with the first publisher of the poet's poems, József Márton (Cifka 1978, 481). On the first page of that volume, published in 1816, was published the only known portrait of Csokonai, a dotted engraving by Friedrich John, which was based on a lost drawing by the poet's friend János Erős (Rózsa 1957, 151–152).

As he was noted, Ferenczy presented Csokonai's features in an idealised manner: 'he proportioned and regularised the details in such a way that "the pitiable puffball grown on horse's manure" finally approaches the ideally and geometrically regular head of the ancient statues of the gods. [...] This taste is also shown in the head posture: it is moved sideways and upwards only enough in relation to the shoulder to express not only the disciplined calmness of the mood but also the alert readiness of the spirit' (Cifka 1978, 485). Kazinczy wrote about the statue in 1824: "It is not Csokonai, and that is not necessary. [...] The plastica did not aim at similarity, but at beautification" (Csatkai 1983; Bódi 2021). The sculptor wrote in his letter to his brother: "[...] I made the breast of Csokonai in white marble, in the nice Hungarian robe" (Wallentinyi 1912, 117). The Hungarian attire thus became an expression of the identity of the sculptor and his model in the international context.

The cult of literary greats, the pantheon-idea, was a lively preoccupation of Ferenczy's contemporaries, including Ferenc Kazinczy, who was in correspondence with the sculptor. In a letter addressed to Ferenczy in January 1823, Kazinczy inquired whether the sculptor had a suitable book on Hungarian history in which he could find material on the deeds of the great Hungarian heroes. (Cifka 1978, 486). Kazinczy's conception of the portrait was characterised by a fluctuation between idealisation and emphasis on the typical characteristic features. Before describing the portrait of *Lőrinc Orczy*, he thus explained his views: "He who wishes to paint a portrait of a Great Man, in order to make it known for the future, must guard against two opposites: one is that he should not omit from the painting any trifling features for fear that they will damage the dignity of the picture; for it is precisely these trifling features which give



Picture 1. István Ferenczy: Bust of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz

Debrecen, Reformed Collection | Photo: Debrecen, Déri Múzeum

such portraits their greatest interest: and the other is that he should not add more to the picture than he ought, or the great man whom he has sought to make the object of public honour will become like one of us, and they will ask, why it was necessary to paint such an ordinary picture? " (Bódi 2021, 255–256).

It is also worth quoting Gábor Döbrentei, who also published a biography of Ferenczy in the 1815 booklet of the *Erdélyi Múzeum (Transylvanian Museum)*, who wrote that "the main purpose of biography is to make human nature known in its greatness and weakness; its use is to awaken to the good by noble examples and to frighten away from error" (Bódi 2021, 239). Similar thoughts, then, as we have seen from István Széchenyi's reflections on *Üdvlelde*: posterity should visit the graves of great ancestors in order to gather strength from their example and to follow the good.²

The tomb of Csokonai and the cult developing around it

The spirit of Antonio Canova's shrines was a fundamental influence on the tastes of István Ferenczy, who studied in Rome, and of his contemporaries. Kazinczy was enthusiastic about Canova's sculptures, inspired by his epigram *Psyché* with butterflies (1825), Dánielné Vay Eszter Wartensleben commissioned him to make a *relief* (now in the Reformed church in Gyömrő), and in 1805 the Italian sculptor was a guest of the Esterházy in Kismarton (Eisenstadt, Austria); they also commissioned statues from him, as did István Széchenyi, who commissioned a *female herm* for Nagycenk in 1819, and Archbishop János László Pyrker of Eger, who owned a statue of *Keresztelő Szent János (St. John the Baptist)* by Canova (Csatkai 1925, 131–133). István Ferenczy could not escape Canova's influence either: in 1829 he made a *shrine of István Kultsár*, the editor of the Hungarian Reports, based on the great master's steles (Budapest, parish church in the city centre, *picture 2.*, Sisa 2018, 234–235).

2 Due to lack of space, I will not discuss the equestrian statue of Mátyás Hunyadi by István Ferenczy returning to Hungary and the memorial to be placed in it, which was indeed ambitious, but due to the circumstances was doomed to failure. (See Kovalovszky 1982; Sisa 2018, 218–220; 408–413, 422–424; Szerdahelyi–Borovi 2022, 30–31, 43–46).

In the reform age, people were aware that one of the focal points of the cult of a great personality was their shrine, where posterity could pay respect. The erection of the shrine of *Csokonai*, who died in 1805 at the age of 31, and its inscription, was the subject of an interesting debate in the columns of the *Hazai Tudósítások* (*Hungarian Reports*) (Pál 1988, 158–169; Bódi 2021, 168–215), initiated by Ferenc Kazinczy, who, in his August 1806 article, suggested that the inscription “*Et in Arcadia ego!*” and the butterfly as a symbol of rebirth should have been engraved on the shrine. However, Kazinczy’s interpretation of the Latin phrase differed from that of Mihály Fazekas and Imré Kiss of Debrecen. While the latter drew attention to the negative connotation of the name Arcadia in the Greek tradition (desolate land), the former was concerned about the baroque symbolism of death in the motto. Kazinczy, following the example of contemporary French writers, went beyond the skull symbol hidden as a memento mori among the shepherds of Arcadia and interpreted the motto as follows: “I have been to Arcadia too.” This motto reminded Kazinczy of his favourite painter Poussin, as well as of his beloved fellow writers Schiller and others. His writings, which represent an optimistic reading of the motto, also contain the idea of patriotism, as Kazinczy’s lines show: “The rest of the world justly respects the pool of the song-poet, whom the muses themselves ordained as priests to teach the world morality and integrity. [...] And let this be said in place of all encouragement to those who love the nation and desire its increase in all that is good, good and true” (Paul 1988, 160).



Picture 2. István Ferenczy: Shrine of István Kultsár (1829-1832)

Budapest, parish church in the city centre | Photo: Márk Szerdahelyi

By the time the shrine of Csokonai (1836) was completed, based on a design by Pál Beregszászi, the college teacher of drawing, circumstances had changed. (*picture 3.*) The poet's popularity with the new generation was also fuelled by his expulsion from college, his disciplinary inspections, i.e., his defiant defiance of the norm. This type of respect for Csokonai was intensified by the *biography* published by Márton Domby (1817), which can itself be regarded as a cult object (Keresztesné 2000, 191). The respect for individuality and the cult of genius gave a new impetus to the respect for Csokonai among writers-poets who wanted something new, who urged a departure from the rigid, classicist tradition. This is why the representative of the old ideas, Pál Sárvári, the rector of Debrecen, was so puzzled by the design for a monument to Csokonai, and why the college's history teacher, József Péczely, supported the collection started by the students. Thus, in the 1830s and 1840s, a new literary canon was sanctioned with Csokonai's name (Lakner 2005, 21–23).

The tradition of Csokonai as a raving, amorous, wine-drinking man continued among the students and the wider public, and had a decisive influence on the poet's later life. Ferenc Toldy, in particular, was sympathetic to the popular Csokonai's personality and oeuvre. He considered popularity to be the hallmark of national literature, so his aesthetic perception differed from that of Kazinczy. For Toldy, the community-forming power of literature was more important than conformity to certain aesthetic standards. He was aware of the fact that, also because of the Arcadia case, a cult had been organised around the figure of Csokonai, which seemed to justify the importance of his life's work and its merit for inclusion in the *Nemzeti Könyvtár (National Library)* series. According to Toldy, writers and poets become celebrated heroes because they are educators of their people, but their life's work can only have an impact



Picture 3. Pál Beregszászi: Shrine of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz

if they have an audience that understands it. "The cult of poets, which is based on their educational role and their genius, can only become a reality through their audience" (Lakner 2014, 195).

The figure of the national poet: the statue of Csokonai by Miklós Izsó

Sándor Petőfi and his friend, the painter Soma Orlay Petrics, visited the statue of Csokonai six years after its erection in Beregszász, recalling the visit as follows: "Our journey through the dirty villages and agricultural towns of the plain offered nothing worth mentioning, except for the boundless dust that plagued us all the way to Debrecen, and if it had not been for the visit to the college and Csokonai's tomb, we would have had to be content with the pleasure we had already enjoyed on the journey. After the library and collections of the college had been willingly shown to us by an old student, we went out to Csokonai's iron pyramid tomb" (Keresztesné 2000, 191). Petőfi himself described his later visit (14 May 1847) as follows: "We arrived in Debrecen close to the evening. We passed the cemetery where Csokonai rests. The mist of twilight hung like an ash-coloured veil on the black iron statue of the poet; my eyes were fixed on it, and I thought deeply if any other traveller would think like that beside my grave" (Keresztesné 2000, 191).

In Petőfi's poem *Csokonai*, too, the figure of the wine-drinking, merry poet wonderer, perpetuated by student tradition, is reflected and has become iconic. It was Petőfi who influenced the poems of the Debrecen *Csokonai lapok* (*Csokonai journals*), which were launched in 1850, about Csokonai in an anachronistic spirit (Lakner 2014, 201). However, the canonisation of the figure of the folk poet is due to Pál Gyulai, who wrote the following in a work in 1855: "With Csokonai, the folk spirit spoke, unconsciously and shyly, yet giving a strong sign of life. [...] Born as a Hungarian folk poet, he had to submit to Greek, Latin, then German and Italian schools, and instead of speaking to the people, and being a servant of the folk spirit of which he was born, he had to sing at the parties of the aristocrats [...] so he sinned in secret, when he sacrificed to his ideal... from Dorottya and her folk songs, which are her best works, we can guess what he should have become and what direction he was destined to take" (Lakner 2014, 202).

Gyulai's characterisation of Csokonai is somewhat reminiscent of that of the sculptor Miklós Izsó, who was born in Disznóshorvát in Borsod in 1831 and whose career start was greatly influenced by István Ferenczy, who had retired to Rimaszombat. In the 1850s, the young Izsó became acquainted with the classicist tradition alongside the elderly Ferenczy, and continued his studies in Vienna and Munich (from 1859). The young Izsó also saw his task in capturing the great figures of the expanding national pantheon; he sent home a portrait of István Széchenyi from Munich in 1860 in response to a tender of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.³

During the period of authoritarian rule, decisive steps were taken to create a national pantheon: the *Nemzeti Képcsarnok (National Picture Gallery)* (1846, 1851) was established within the National Museum, which in 1868 boasted 115 works, including many portraits of "men who served their country" (Keserü 1985, 130-159). In the garden of the National Museum, a statue park was also established, which served as a memorial site: in 1860, a statue of *Dániel Berzsenyi* was erected there, followed by a statue of Ferenc Kazinczy in the following year. At the same time, in front of the old National Theatre, there were statues of *József Katona* (1857) and *Márton Lendvay* (1860).⁴ At the same time, the Dunakorzó gradually became a national memorial site, thanks to the statue of István Széchenyi, erected after much fuss, followed by those of *Ferenc Deák* and *József Eötvös* (Keserü 1985).

The erection of the statue of *István Széchenyi* was accompanied by enormous press coverage and tense attention. The President of the Academy, Emil Dessewffy, launched a collection for the statue, intended to be erected in front of the MTA, in 1861, the design contest was published in 1865, and the sketches were presented at an exhibition the following year. Twenty entries were received from fifteen sculptors, but none was deemed suitable for execution by the jury. The three winners: József Engel, Miklós Izsó, Miklós Vay and József Faragó were invited to submit new entries in a second round. Izsó, feeling offended by the procedure, did not participate in the second round, which was finally won by

3 The bust of István Széchenyi was modelled in 1858 by the Viennese sculptor Hans Gasser, who had a large group of Hungarian friends (Hungarian National Gallery), and Miklós Izsó, who was a student of Gassner, also made a copy of its (Szerdahelyi–Borovi 2022, 91–93).

4 After the demolition of the old National Theatre building, the statue of Lendvay, the work of László Dunaiszky, was moved to the Buda Castle, in Ország utca, where it can still be seen today (Szerdahelyi–Borovi 2022, 222–223).

József Engel, but the work with an academic approach was not unveiled until much later in 1880 (!). Engel's work was the subject of numerous criticisms, which, when read, clearly showed that his conception of the work was already outdated in the eyes of the public (Szerdahelyi–Borovi, 2022, 57–58).

In Engel's defence, there were several cases of public statues where the sculptor failed to express the "idea" in an appropriate way. Rudolf Züllich's statue of *József Katona* (1859) in front of the old National Theatre and the statue of *Károly Kisfaludy* in Balatonfüred became a subject of public ridicule because of their theatrical gestures, ridiculous attributes or mismatched proportions and had to be removed, so Miklós Vay made a new statue in 1877 to replace the latter. The statue of *Márton Lendvay* (1860), modelled by László Dunaiszky, was not considered worthy of the memory of the actor who played Bánk Bán either, and was therefore moved several times (Szerdahelyi–Borovi, 2022, 214–224). Miklós Izsó was not satisfied with the commission for the statue of Petőfi in Pest, which was awarded to him in 1871, because – after an excellent portrait and figure sketches – he was unable to finish the statue due to his death, so it was left to take its final form in the hands of Adolf Huszár (Szerdahelyi–Borovi 2022, 209–210).⁵

It was difficult to find the necessary expressive power and formal language for the idea, as this was most successful when the sculptor was personally touched by the subject matter beyond the technical means. Izsó had a direct experience of Petőfi, whom he had listened to as a student in Sárospatak and whom he finally modelled with his arms raised in calling for a revolution (Soós 1956, 335–343). Izsó was also close to the figure of Csokonai, the poet who became a cult figure in the writings of Petőfi and Gyulai, presenting him as a poet of drinking songs, the son of the people. Izsó's search for a path, his disillusionment led him back to the roots of the national character, in Fülep's words, "he instinctively sought something to cling to in the domestic world" (Fülep 1953, 13–21).

This is how he found his way back to the people in the form of the *Búsuló juhász* (*The Mourning Shepherd*) and later *Táncoló parasztleány* (*The Dancing Peasant Boy*). Lajos Fülep noticed the key role of the series of clay carvings of the Dancing Herdsman in Hungarian sculpture: "The lads of the Plain,

⁵ Adolf Huszár's statue of Petőfi was unveiled in 1882 on the Oath (later known as Március 15. tér). About the unveiling: Szerdahelyi–Borovi, 2022, 209–210.

in plain costume dancing a plain dance – and what happens to the miracle of genius? Their figures, their costumes, their dances are ennobled, their forms are exalted, the bright light of an artistic tradition thought to be dead radiates from them, their naturalism breathes the spirit of true plastic idealism that means life. An eternal sculptural problem in a particular Hungarian, national form, like that of the Greeks, in a peculiarly Greek, national form – in living reality, caught by the eye of Izsó” (Fülep 1953, 13–21; Keserü 1982).

Izsó modelled the figure of the dancing peasant in Debrecen in 1867, as he did *Csokonai's statue*, that of the “folk poet.” Just as Izsó had renewed the genre with his series of Dancing Peasant Lads, he was able to breathe new life

into memorial sculpture with the statue of Csokonai. (*picture 4.*) The statue was commissioned with the creation of the Memorial Garden Association on 20 October 1861. Founded on the initiative of the wealthy merchant József Csanak, the aim of the association was to “transform the college square into a place where statues of people who had made great contributions to the country and the sciences, especially to our city, could be erected [...]” (Balogh 1953, 100). In other words, the aim of the association was to create a modern, modern, representative main square of Debrecen, a national memorial park, and the Csokonai statue was one of the central elements of this memorial site. Negotiations with Izsó began in January 1866, the sculptor moved to Debrecen in December of that year, and by September of the following year he had completed both the small model and the large-scale clay work, ready for casting.⁶



Picture 4. Miklós Izsó: Statue of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz

⁶ The casting was finally made in Munich for 4,500 forints. The sample, packed by the sculptor, arrived in Munich on 20 April 1868, and the bronze statue was received by Debrecen in July 1870. The pedestal was made by Antal Wasserburger, a master stone carver from Vienna, for 5500 Ft (Balogh 1953, 103).

The difference between the small-scale sketch and the finished sculpture is often highlighted: most recently, Lajos Lakner reiterated Lajos Fülep's observation that the thin garaboncias-like figure of the small sample had been transformed into a fuller sculpture of the acclaimed folk-national poet in the finished work (Lakner 2014, 223–225). In 1871, the year of the inauguration, Tamás Szana described the finished sculpture in this way, almost instinctively linking Csokonai's figure with the dancing peasant figures: "[...] the sculpture depicts Csokonai in a standing figure. His head is raised, his left hand holds a lute like a cimbalom, his right is stretched half forward, his hand is in a position as if he were about to reach for the strings. The posture of the figure is light, as is the movement in which he stands, his left foot slightly forward so that the weight is rooted to the right foot. [...] But the power of formation swells in that natural movement which pours the life of action into the mass of ore. Anyone who stands on the side facing Darabos utca will be able to appreciate the powerful beauty of the statue most clearly. From there, one can see the starting point of the sculpture's movement of action, as the right hand prepares to catch the string of the lute. There can be no doubt that this is what he intends to do, nor even that he has just withdrawn his hand from the strings, for the whole right side of the figure is accompanied by this movement, which suggests a fierceness so well suited to the occasion. [...] As for the suit, the fur cloak, then fashionable, gave all that was necessary for the folds, and the figure emerges pleasingly from the folds of the cloak. Behind the left leg, the frilled leaves of a vine can be seen, curled on a trunk. The poet of the "foal-hide flask" deserves this staffage" (Szana 1871, 372–373).

According to Lakner, the most important difference between the *Csokonai portraits* of István Ferenczy and Miklós Izsó is that while the former portrays the poet who lives beyond space and time, who is eternally alive, who is far away from us and whom we must admire, Izsó portrays the poet "enjoying, amusing and amusing life on earth". The latter was easier for everyone to identify with, and therefore the poetic figure modelled by Izsó was popularised, appearing on many different objects (Lakner 2014, 225 skk.). I can only partially agree with Lakner's characterisation. On the one hand, he himself admits that Izsó's statue was intended to be part of the national pantheon, like Ferenczy's at the time, and on the other hand, the Hungarian costume on Ferenczy's work was intended to refer explicitly to the national character, which the sculptor expressed in direct lines in the letter quoted above: "[...] I made Csokonai's bust

of white marble, in the lovely Hungarian robe." This did not exactly correspond to Kazinczy's conception, but it could just as well have corresponded to that of the people of Debrecen. That the people of Debrecen could not have identified with the statue of Ferenczy, or that it could not have made an impact, is refuted by the fancy reception given to the statue and the book of poems published in its honour, which Lakner himself describes in such detail.

In my opinion, both Ferenczy's and Izsó's statues ultimately fit into the humanist tradition of "famous people" (Lővei 2000, 507–514; Szücs 2000, 689–694), which is why it is strange that the connection of Ferenczy, who studied in Italy, to the Renaissance portrait tradition has been less mentioned in recent research. One of the first portrait galleries of humanism was established in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, and, expanding over the centuries, it became a perpetuator of the nation's memory, as Ugo Foscolo's lines attest. In Debrecen, the humanist tradition lived on through the rigorous Greek-Latin studies of the Reformed College. The students there had to be familiar with the famous biographies of Plutarch, Suetonius and others, which inspired their imagination. It may be that some elements of this tradition became a restraint by the time of the Reformation, yet on the other hand they may have helped to develop the cult of national greatness, along the lines of Virgil and other ancient poets. Ferenczy's statue of Csokonai represents a successful synthesis of classical tradition and national awakening, and Izsó's statue (like later statues of Ferenc Medgyessy) explicitly showed the possibility of renewing tradition, so Debrecen was by no means left in the "captivity of Arcadia".

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Zsolt Antal

Csokonai and Education

The Harmony of Science, Art
and Life-Sustaining Human Relationships

Abstract

Mihály Csokonai Vitéz was one of the most significant poets of the Hungarian Enlightenment. In this essay, his views on education and his activities as a teacher are briefly presented. He had the opportunity to teach twice for a brief period in secondary schools: in Debrecen in 1794/95 and in Csurgó in 1799. As an educator, Csokonai – following one of his great role models, Jean-Jacques Rousseau – placed great importance on a nature-based approach, a curriculum tailored to the needs of the pupils, community organisation based on group dynamics and the transmission of values. During both of his teaching periods, he wrote and performed plays with his students. The conclusion of the essay is that, in the light of the facts it contains, we can state that Csokonai's pedagogy was characterised by the trinity of science, art and life-sustaining human relationships.

Keywords: Csokonai, poetry, cultural history, school performances

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Learning, knowledge, education, and erudition were traditionally present in the family of the poet, playwright and editor Mihály Csokonai Vitéz. His great-grandfather, Ferenc Csokonai, studied Reformed theology and worked as a pastor in the Transdanubian region, first in Győr and later in Alcsút. His son, the poet's grandfather László Csokonai, died young, but during his short ministry, he worked as a preacher in Győr. His son József, the poet's father, who remained in Orván, was no longer attracted to a church career, so he studied to become a barber at the medical school in Nagyszombat, and, in 1772, he opened a barber shop, first in Sümeg and then in Debrecen. At that time, barbers, also known as surgeons, performed not only haircutting, and shaving but also minor surgical operations requiring qualifications, as well as tooth extraction and bloodletting (Madarászné 2021, 325–366).

The mother of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, Sára Diószegi, always supported her son in becoming an intellectual and educated man. After her husband's early death, she helped her child's education even under difficult financial circumstances. Since she could not afford the tuition fees, she provided a single lunch a day for seven or eight students, in exchange for which Csokonai was exempt from tuition fees at the prestigious Debrecen dormitory.

Debrecen was the largest city in Hungary with about 30,000 inhabitants at the end of the 1770s. It was a commercial, cultural, educational, and religious centre, the "Calvinist Rome". Two of Csokonai's ancestors were directly connected to the public life of Debrecen and the bourgeoisie: his father, József Csokonai, was at one time the guild master of the barbers, while his maternal grandfather, Mihály Diószegi, was the head of the tailor's guild and a member of the twelve-member internal town council (in modern parlance, the town assembly), a member of the jury (Szilágyi 2014).

The fact that personal family examples were deeply embedded in Csokonai's identity is demonstrated by a letter written on 22 January 1798 to Count György Festetics, the founder of the Georgicon in Keszthely, the country's first agricultural school. Herein, he wrote: "I was born in Debrecen, in Bihar county, of a noble and learned father from Győr, of whom I was deprived when I was still uneducated" (Csokonai 1987, 395).

Csokonai began his studies at the Reformed College in Debrecen at the age of seven. At that time, as Márton Domby, lawyer, poet and friend of Csokonai, worded, "he passed from his mother's lap into the lap of much sweeter muses" (Bertók 1973, 29). At that time, there were three levels of education in the col-



Source: Wikipedia

Picture 1. The Debrecen Reformed College in the 18. century

lege: in the lower school, students were taught to read and write, to add and subtract; in the upper school, they were called gymnasium students, or Latinists; after that, they were called college students.

Csokonai was an excellent pupil, with above-average talent in many areas, which contributed to his teachers' individual treatment of him according to his temperament. His favourite teacher was József Kovács, who taught him the poetry class in the fifth grade, and by his own admission discovered his pupil's poetic talent. He later said of Csokonai: "He could never be forced to study, much less to write poetry, having learned which, I left him free to write or not to write when his fellow students were writing. He would even have liked complete freedom to do his homework. If he didn't sleep enough, he was moody all day: so, I ordered him not to come up for his six-o'clock lesson" (Bertók 1973, 24–25).

These personal "favours" from his teachers, given the strict timetable of the college, gave the budding creative person a great deal of freedom. According to the timetable, the students got up at three o'clock in the morning to ring the bell, cleaned up, had breakfast, and studied. At six o'clock the lessons began and lasted until ten o'clock. Lunch was at noon, then the lessons continued until

seven o'clock in the evening, followed by evening devotions until bedtime at nine o'clock.

Csokonai, a student from Debrecen, reached college level and wore the uniform compulsory for college students: a black robe down to the ankles, a dark-green toga with yellow trim, boots and a tall hat called a *sinkó*. This attire alone showed a sense of belonging to the college community and gave the wearer a certain social prestige.

In the year of the French Revolution (1789), Csokonai was ranked sixth among the best students. During this period, Csokonai was introduced to the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He read everything he could get his hands on. It was not difficult for him, of course, since he had mastered German, French and Italian in addition to Greek and Latin during his college years, and he and his peers formed a self-education group and contributed to German, French and Italian journals.

Csokonai quickly adopted Rousseau's views on education and adapted the principle of "natural education" to his work as an educator, i.e. the basic pedagogical principle that children should not be hurried in the development of their abilities, but that their independent thinking should always be developed according to their needs, starting from their talents and personality, bearing in mind that one of the most important missions of man is to be happy and free (Rousseau 1957). He also followed Rousseau in his appreciation and respect for nature. In a letter to Ferenc Széchenyi, he wrote: "I am a son, a friend and an admirer of nature. A fountain, a shady tree, an obscure garden or a forest I still esteem above men not only in my poetry but also in my heart" (Bertók 1973, 45).

Already during his college years, he had the opportunity to put the educational principles of Rousseau into practice, since "on 11 January 1794, after an extremely strict examination, the outstanding Mihály Csokonai, who was well versed in Greek, Latin, Italian and Hungarian poetry, and was especially well versed in aesthetics, a light and excellent poet, was put in charge of the poetry class" (Bertók 1973, 63).

In April 1794, he began teaching, his *preceptorship*. Although he arrived late on the first day to a class of forty-seven, he quickly became popular with the students, as he worked hard at community organisation as well as teaching. His teaching method was personal, and he considered his students, only four or five years younger than himself, his friends.

Following in the footsteps of the pedagogical ideas of Rousseau, whom he admired so much, he sought to capture and hold the attention of young people,

building on their natural curiosity. To this end, he held his lessons outdoors as soon as the spring weather arrived. He taught by walking in the Great Forest of Debrecen. By observing plants and animals, he introduced natural history, which had not been taught at the college until then. He also used the possibilities of experiential education – as we understand it today. Consciously experiencing the moment and placing oneself in the situation, moreover, acquiring and mastering the information and knowledge that emerged from the questions and experiences that arose from these experiences, were part of his pedagogical methodology.

According to the afore-mentioned Márton Dombó, the poet taught literature with such fervour that he almost acted in his classes, where his students attended as if they were going to the theatre. As he wrote in his book on Csokonai: “With such fire, with such vivacity, now dignified, now ridiculous, now indignant, now calm, he spoke, he taught: the character and the whole history and nature of the persons he followed were at once caught in the minds of his pupils, and his pupils, as opposed to being repulsed by the customary cold lessons, went to his school as to a theatre, with great excitement. His treatment of his pupils was also quite different from the traditional approach. A young man of 21 thought of young people who were almost his own age as his friends rather than as his pupils. He walked, amused himself, played games and, concealing nothing, often smoked pipes with them in a feeling of friendship that knew no abstinence, and, most of all, as he was accused, drank with them, too” (Dombó 1955, 21–22).

Csokonai also constantly integrated the results of his creative work into the teaching and learning process. In November 1794, in preparation for a Christmas performance, he began rehearsing one of his plays with his students. The rehearsals were held in the Poetry classroom, where Csokonai once arrived with a pint of wine and then drank, smoked a pipe and sang with the students. The incident went viral and caused consternation among the college administration. Partly because of his popularity among the students, and partly because of his poetic success (he was already enjoying the friendship and confidence of Ferenc Kazinczy, who had hailed him as a distinguished lyric poet a year earlier), the professors, who had ridiculed him, brought him before the college tribunal in December 1794. They reprimanded him, admonished him, and lowered his rank in the student ranks, threatening that if he did not bring them a medical certificate of his illness (because of which he regularly missed evening devotions and morning services) he would have to leave the college.

Source: Wikipedia



Picture 2. Students of the Debrecen Reformed College in their uniforms in 1775.

Insulted and disappointed, Csokonai was later subjected to further disciplinary action after a dispute with the college principal and his failure to give him due respect, after which he resigned from his teaching post and took off his college uniform. Although still on legation, he was sent on a fund-raising trip to Kiskunhalas and Szabadszállás, from where he did not return, but went to Pest and witnessed the execution of Ignác Martynovics and his fellow Jacobins.

On 15 June 1795, in front of about four hundred and fifty students, he said farewell in Hungarian, for the first time in the history of the college, with

the following words: "Noble Learners, in whom is the hope of science and of the fatherland is developing, whose joy is budding, whose cheerful dawn of future glory is radiant! You have known me well, my behaviour, the whole of my erudition; you have looked most closely on me in all my actions, I call you witnesses when a witness is no longer needed; but in the tribunal of hearts, before the judges of thought, where news is the torturing or liberating pestle, morality is the law, tongue is the sharp sabre to cut chains or necks, before this tribunal I call you as witnesses, whether I have ever been a school scoundrel with a bad conscience, even if I found it hard to learn a lot of things that that I had to learn here, whether I have been a debauchee, a waste of time, a testicle? Bear witness of this in your hearts, and before others, you whom I can neither harm nor be useful to. May the benevolent deity bless your present labours, may he give you a great spirit, so that you may be of more and more help to your fellow men for the greater perfection of yourselves, for the greater glory of our sweet country and our unhappy nation" (Csokonai 1987, 370).

In response to this, on 20 June 1795, the college tribunal decided to terminate his student status in its entirety, forbid him to enter the college, forbid him to associate with the students, and decided not to give him any certificate or recommendation for his studies and work up to that time. A few days later, Csokonai left the city and continued his studies at the college in Sárospatak, but after six months, he interrupted them.

A few years later, Csokonai was able to work as a teacher once more, but again, for a very short time. In April 1799, he was appointed deputy teacher of the newly established Csurgó Secondary School, for a few months while the appointed teacher, Pál Császári Lósi, was studying at the University of Jena. In May, he started teaching in the most beautiful – and only multi-storey – building in the municipality.

A week after starting his work, he wrote the following to István Sárközy, the Reformed diocesan administrator in charge of the area: “I take the Christian rule as the maximum (principle) of my position and I work as if I were always living by it, and I beg to the Lord this way, and I live as if I had to pass away from here any minute. *Vitae csurgóiensis summa brevis spem nos vetat inctorae longam!* (The short duration of a stay in Csurgó does not allow for the development of long-term hope!) But in the meantime, I shall endeavour to familiarise my students with the old mechanics, the modern teaching that thinks and reflects, the pedantry devoted to school and happy oblivion, the knowledge that shapes real men, what is Orbilius (the cruelly caning teacher), and what is the human-loving instructor, whom he wishes to pay off to young mankind with his usury (the treasure he has taken from his teachers, living or dead, and the debt he owes for it)” (Csokonai 1987, 404–405).

In the Csurgó secondary school, however, neither textbooks nor teaching materials were available, and there were only a good dozen pupils. His teaching method focused on developing the ability to think for oneself and aimed at imparting real and human-forming knowledge. László Gaál, a former pupil of his, and later collector of his writings and biographical data, recalled: “If his disciple was weak in perception, he would begin to enlighten him or her where he noticed his/her perception was stalled. And the disciple rejoiced at his guidance, and had no reason to be discouraged” (Bertók, 1973, 145).

He taught the otherwise traditionally boring Latin oratory in a humorous and entertaining way, as well as the other subjects, because he also taught botany, history, geography and natural history. He also introduced the latter subject in

Csurgó. For the July examination period, he taught his students one of his plays, a comedy entitled *Cultura* (Csokonai 1987, 191–219). In this way, he wanted to show that he was not only a teacher, but also a poet and playwright. He took his task so seriously that he appeared at the final examination on 12 July 1799 – bought with a thirty-forint advance – in a new coat, braided trousers and spurred boots. The examination went well, and the play was a success. During the performance, they also sang a Rákóczi song, which later became a problem for Csokonai, who left Csurgó in September when his substitute period ended – and with it, his teaching career, too.

As an educator, Mihály Csokonai Vitéz – in the literal sense of the word – attached great importance to nature-oriented education, a curriculum tailored to the needs of the pupils, and community organisation based on group dynamics and the transmission of values – in addition, of course, to the transmission of compulsory and prescribed knowledge. During both of his teaching periods, he wrote and performed plays with his students.

Therefore, I believe, perhaps not without reason, that the trinity of science, art and vitalizing human relationships characterised Csokonai's pedagogy.

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Zsolt Győrei

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.¹

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.

¹ 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)² 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).

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) 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) My current work is based on this draft, which I have finally completely rewritten.

Katalin Gyürky

“Be Mindful of Your Unleashed Desires”

About the Performance of Dorottya at the Csokonai National Theatre

“Csokonai guffaws to avoid crying. He creates relentless comedy, to drive away the lurking shadows of destruction that circle around him with loud merriment. He throws himself into the bustle of the masked ball to forget Lilla, to forget his failures, his humiliating search for patronage, the judgments of the foolish louts who considered him a good-for-nothing slacker, a histrion, even when they laughed at his stunts” – wrote Béla Horgas in the Dorottya chapter of his book on Mihály Csokonai Vitéz. In doing so, he put his finger on the tragedy buried deep in the soul of the Debrecen poet, who was described as a “poet of a cheerful nature”. It seems that the best way to conceal this tragedy was indeed to write a comic epic through which he could immerse himself in a “carnavalesque” state of being.

A twenty-four-hour carnival atmosphere, the ambivalent nature of which was also demonstrated by director István Szabó K. in his large-scale production for the poet’s 250th birthday, 17 November 2023 – in no other place than the Csokonai National Theatre, named after the poet. As if “listening” to Béla Horgas’ opinion, suggesting that when interpreting Dorottya – and thus also when staging it – it is worth first examining Csokonai as a person, his personal “motives” and the inner tension that is building up inside him.

Thus, when the young but already sufficiently broken Csokonai enters the stage, played by Bence Pálóczi, to interpret his Preface to Dorottya for himself, as a permanent epic characteristic in the play, Zsolt Prieger and his band

Photo: Vera Éder



Picture 1. Dorottya from the performance *Dorottya* (Director: István Szabó K.)

– “looking down” from above, i.e., indicating visually that they represent the poet’s “superego” – warn Mihály: “I will not be me”. In other words, it already signals to him and to us, spectators, that if someone, including the poet, throws himself into the bustle of the “carnival”, he should forsake all hopes, because he becomes part of such a state of being in which everything that has hitherto been familiar, including the norms of social hierarchy and status quo, will be subverted, the boundaries of the self will dissolve and become blurred in the mass festivities, everything will be turned inside out, and relativised.

Realising this, Csokonai announces to the audience that the “Preface” (‘előszó’) will from now on become a Live speech (‘élőszó’), i.e. the written literary text will become theatre. And the emphasis in István Szabó K’s staging, which overwrites all previous interpretations of *Dorottya*, is precisely that from now on what we witness is not a play imitating a “carnival” situation, but an adaptation in which Csokonai’s twenty-four-hour amusement grows into a carnival in the tradition of *commedia dell’arte*, into a kind of sensual rapture,

which, as we have known since Mikhail Bakhtin's brilliant reasoning, is "in itself a ritualistic, syncretic form of theatre". In other words: there will be theatre in the theatre, or if you like, carnival in the carnival, a kind of 'let your hair down' experience, valid only for the duration of the play, in which, as Ernő Verebes, the dramaturg, says in his wonderful rendering of Csokonai's archaic text, with embedded texts and humorous digressions and interjections, everything will be seen through a 'curvilinear perspective', i.e. 'deceptive optics'. The linearity of time being disrupted, time becomes circular, so birth – as we know from Bakhtin – becomes fraught with death, and death with rebirth, so we can safely obey Prieger's "higher" command "up, to death!". And we also have to come to terms with the sacred and the profane merging into one another, and although "there is no room here for religious philosophy", in the cultivation of fleshliness and lush eroticism "the clergy is also secretly having fun".

This means that a situation is created in which everything is allowed. It is also permitted to hold Csokonai's "carnival" in Debrecen instead of Kaposvár, to the delight of the people of the "Civic City", celebrating the poet's birthday, and it is even permissible to have Dorottya's (Dorothy's) part not be played by an ageing actress, but an actor, Árpád Bakota, who in this case, by "remaining unmarried", symbolizes Csokonai as a person, the life situation he experienced with Lilla, i.e. the origin of the writing of *Dorottya*.

However, the director also made sure that the historical elements of Csokonai's *Dorottya* should not suffer any detriment in this carnivalesque expansion of the "carnival", in this inverted world, i.e. that they should be present in a consistent way, bowing before the greatness of the poet. In other words, anyone who longs for a classic work will not leave the theatre feeling the play was somehow lacking in classic features. Because after István Szabó K, starting from the realistic space and life situation – a pub interior – and following Carneval (a person played by János Mercs), almost imperceptibly leads the spectator into the surreal space of the merriment, while respecting the characteristics of epic, we also get the most important nodes of the plot. We leave the perpetually drunk character of the pub (Dániel Takács), who subsequently makes constant and futile attempts to enter the carnival scene with his profuse "I do apologise", but the rejection of the "carnival participants" indicates that from then on he is seen as an eccentric, misplaced character, and even his constant drunkenness is not enough of a "different state" to integrate him into the carnivalesque state of being. Thus, he is excluded from the enumeration,

the obligatory catalogue of the epic genre, during which the participants of the funfair step out of a wagon from the days of Csokonai and present themselves. Seated in front of Carnival, Dorottya's main enemy, they quickly abandon the "regular seating arrangement" and begin their dance to the tunes composed by Zsolt Lászlóffy, which are reminiscent of a fairground bustle, to the classical music performed by the choir of the Csokonai National Theatre, or to the modern, innovative yet catchy sound forms of Prieger's band. This dance also plays an important role in Csokonai's comic epic, but here we see a carnivalised version of it, not without sultry eroticism. Where, again, everything is permitted, even women's breasts can be touched. The women – or more precisely, the matrons, Adelgunda (Anna Ráckevei), Rebekka (Sándor Csikos), Martha (Anna Vékony), Orsolya (Zsuzsa Oláh), alongside Dorottya – from then on fight a constant battle for the register of births possessed by Carneval and for their own honour, and do so embedded in the women's cooperation, alliance and warfare of Csokonai's work.

Photo: Vera Éder



Picture 2. Stage design of the performance *Dorottya* (Director: István Szabó K.)

All this is a little – or a lot, depending on your perspective – different. The war between the two sexes – which is, in my opinion, the most powerful scene of the performance – becomes nothing more than a kind of group sex, an orgy, beautifully stylized by István Szabó K, because it is envisioned in a sunken "pool", in which the not-so-distant meaning of killing ('ölés') and embracing ('ölelés'), beautifully expressed in Hungarian, is also represented. After the orgy, the characters, who may or may not have come to their senses, rightly declare: "God forgive us, for we will not forgive ourselves".

But since it is a carnival, and the sacred and the profane are intermingling, the gods and demigods who wander freely among the revellers – Venus (Imelda Hajdu), Cupid (Máté Gergely Kiss) and Hymen (Zsolt Csata) – are happy to do so. In fact, not only do they exonerate the participants of the orgy, but to ensure that they never forget this perhaps never-to-return state of being, Venus also captures various segments of the debauchery on camera.

It is Eris, the goddess of strife and discord, who mingles only once in the crowd – as a kind of prefiguration of the doughnut to be eaten by Dorottya (Dorothy) and the "furiousness" thus instilled in her – to then also watch her from the gallery as a "superego", or more precisely to cheer on and direct the events from there. But Eris's intrigue, complete with eerie melodies, in Kinga Újhelyi's marvelous performance – as everything is turned inside out at the carnival – will also ultimately turn out differently. After a bit of 'interlude', following the ingenious 'almost-burial' scene of Dorottya (Dorothy), injured in the melee, Eris's intercession will ensure – instead of the demise of Dorottya or the men – their well-being after they return to their normal way of being.

It offers them rejuvenation, opportunities and love. In other words, they are restored into the familiar and realistic atmosphere of a small pub, where "time is set right", but where, in the light of what we have seen, we know how much we have to "be mindful of our desires". Because we so rarely get to live them. But thanks to István Szabó K's direction and the entire Debrecen company performing in the play, we will never forget about these and the exceptional options to experience them.

■ **Mihály Csokonai Vitéz: Dorottya (Miss Dorothy)**

Comic epic as rewritten by Ernő Verebes

Cast list: Bence Pálóczi, János Mercs, Árpád Bakota, Zsolt Csata, Kinga Újhelyi, Imelda Hajdu, Gergely Máté Kiss, Anna Ráckevei, Sándor Csikos, Zsuzsanna Oláh, Anna Vékony, Artúr Vranjecz, Zsolt Dánielfy, István Papp, Richárd Kránicz, Eszter Balázs-Bécsi, Tamás Garay Nagy, Zsófia Wessely, Kíra Nagy, Julianna Horváth, Ibolya Mészáros, Klári Varga, Hella Tolnai, Bence Gelányi, Dániel Takács, Vivien Edelényi; *With the participation of* the Choir of the Csokonai National Theatre and PR-Evolution Junior Debrecen Dance Company; *Director:* István Szabó K.; *Dramaturg:* Ernő Verebes; *Costume:* Erzsébet Rát-kai; *Design:* Balázs Horesnyi; *Live music of the performance composed by:* Zsolt Lászlóffy; *Contributing from recording:* Zsolt Prieger and his band; *Choreography:* Gábor Katona

Attila Szabó

There are an Overwhelming Number of Books Here...

Csokonai 250: *Tempefői* Performed
by the Second-Year Class of Acting



Photo: Milián Kovács

Picture 1. The premiere of *Tempefői* at the Csokonai National Theatre in Debrecen (Csokonai 250 event series of the University of Theatre and Film Arts, Debrecen 2023)

Mihály Csokonai Vitéz wrote his first, unfinished, play at the age of 20, as a student at the College of Debrecen. The second-year students of acting at the University of Theatre Arts (the class of Frigyes Funtek and Konrád Quintus) are in fact the same age as the poet, which is perhaps why the spirit of *Tempefői* is such a "good fit" for them. Debrecen's theatre, renewed in both its building and its management, together with the University of Theatre Arts, dedicated a three-day celebration to the poet, who was born two hundred and fifty years ago. On 15th November, students of directing and dramaturgy together with students of Ady Endre High School of Debrecen dramatised the poet's well-known and lesser-known poems: the little etudes, starting from the "Orpheum" of Csokonai Forum, travelled in a staged manner through several locations of the city: from the dormitory to the wine bar – truly in the spirit of Csokonai. The young people acquitted themselves well, breathing life into the sometimes difficult, archaic texts: helped by music, theatrical ingenuity and, above all, the student's quick wit that always shone through the allegorical poetry. The following day, a professional conference was held on Csokonai's dramas and various adaptations of his oeuvre, and in the evening the event series culminated in an adaptation of *Tempefői* by the second-year class of acting, directed by Benedek Csáki, also in "Fórum's" chamber hall.

The script was written by third-year dramaturgy students Apolka Bakos, Noémi Orosz-Bodgán, Zsófia Pálfi, Ágota Szalánczi and Rudolf Varga-Amár, who, having picked up Csokonai's original play, saw immediately that they could only stay true to the spirit of the work if they put aside all its letters and compiled a completely new play. Not because the original would not have been a great literary history treat, but because the young student-author's impetuous and often cheeky satire was fundamentally based on a critique of the current 'trends' of his time, which can only be viable on the contemporary stage with equivalent replacements. And the roars of laughter from the audience confirmed that they were: printer Betrieger's original bestseller was about "new French compliments and greetings, English boots, frock coats and coiffures," while the rewritten version features "a social psychology textbook for civilians, with lifestyle advice that comes with "recipe supplements" offering health food for every mood. Although the equestrian theme remains a symbol of one-upmanship in the contemporary version, dog breeding, pipe smoking, card playing and "crude compliments" are replaced by mobile phones, star signs, jogging and "intermittent fasting" to represent the ostentatious fashion mimicry of our times.

Photo: Milián Kovács



Picture 2. Ádám Garamvári (Fegyverneki),
Alexandra Seres (Rozália)

Either way, the parallels are a given: in Csokonai's Hungary, reading was not yet popular, and today it is already not popular. At least reading the high poetry that Tempefői, Múzsai or Rozália represent. Tökkolopi wraps a pack of cards in the paper of Ádám Pálóczi Horváth's epic poem, and the more sophisticated lyrical works are mostly used for pipe-lighting. In the production, directed by Benedek Csáki, the centrepiece of the set is a background wall made of brightly coloured foam toy

letters, which does not only provide a variety of humorous play opportunities, but can also refer to our communication tools that have degenerated to the level of emojis and one-line messages. This playfulness is echoed in the colour and style palette of the costumes. From the costume collection of the Debrecen theatre the students chose a mixture of Biedermeier-style men's and women's costumes, with frilly hair, striped "Carmen dresses" and other nineteenth-century costumes, complete with contemporary dressing gowns and sunglasses. A further pair of quotation marks lies in the fact that, regardless of the rich clothing, everyone is barefoot.

Our Tempefői (Gábel Horváth) is anything but dreamy here. He could hardly afford this luxury: if he wants to succeed as a budding poet, he has to write a proposal for a competition, found his own journal and raise funds to print his first volume. On top of that, it would not hurt to marry well, i.e., to marry Pap Fegyverneki's elder daughter Rozalia, who, as an exception, is not a parvenu snob, but a true connoisseur. Our poet of course makes the mistake of ordering the printing of his first volume from the printer before the official results of the 'young writing talent' competition are made public. Csokonai's poet hopelessly trusts in the help of the emerging Hungarian patronage, and then is always left in the lurch, and today, in the absence of private patronage, gov-

ernment support may be the only way forward. “I’ve got a pretty sure tip from Múzsai,” exclaims Tempefői (Gábrriel Horváth) enthusiastically, but we already know from Csokonai to Ibsen that taking out a loan on such promises is irresponsible at the very least. The often ungrateful role of “countess” Rozália, who is originally attracted to poetry rather than our poet, is given the intelligence and playful eroticism of a modern liberal arts girl by Alexandra Seres. They have already progressed beyond a cautiously budding relationship described by Csokonai: in a silk dressing gown borrowed from Rozalia, the slightly naive, dishevelled but lovable Tempefői, stands up on the red sofa, already making serious plans: “I’ll have an editor’s job, a journal, I’ll be known in the profession, I’ll publish my volume [...] forty years, and with plenty of money we can have a thirty-square-metre bedsitter of our own!” The familiar morning scene of the secret lovers is followed by another great etude. The younger Fegyverneki girl, Éva (Mária Rigó) and her little friends (Zita Nadrai, Annamária Tabajdi), make fun of the chatter of the spoiled young ladies in a much more exaggerated acting style. In their opinion, reading is not cool because there are too many letters, although opinions are divided on Vuk: the story of the little fox would be fine if it was not so depressing. Éva hopelessly pines for the love of Gedeon Serteperti (György Veress), who woos her sister “Rose” instead. Here, Szusz-

mir is not a smoky, unkempt stove burner who entertains the younger girl with his never-ending tales, but a pretty, Latin-tempered nail technician (Adrienn Kern) who also offers astrological and life coaching advice. The four girls revel in the parodies, obviously because they can look at these familiar behavioural patterns from a distance. And because they depict the world of the silly girls with remarkable acting seriousness and a great deal of relish, we tend to cheer them on in the context of the

Fotó: Kovács Milán



Picture 3. Anna Tabajdi (Hajni),
Zita Nadrai (Ivett), Mária Rigó (Éva)

theatrical situation, as opposed to the serious and somewhat dull Rozalia. The sarcastic critique of public taste creates theatrical situations worthy of Molière's pen. Seeing such sensitivity and enthusiasm for comedy, the theatre history teacher may (also) feel some self-justification: perhaps it was not completely useless to look at many adaptations of Molière during the semester, to talk through the different acting solutions. Serteperti and Éva's "armchair scene" is another comic highlight of the performance, mainly due to Mária Rigó's girlishly probing but intense infatuation, which is ignored by Serteperti, the well-coiffed pretty boy who matches her character.

Fegyverneki (Ádám Garamvári), who speaks with an aristocratic rhotacism, is also only willing to read a book about horse breeding and of course insists that his daughters marry well, i.e., not in any way below the rank, for example to a "useless little liberal arts student majoring in Mickey Mouse studies". In a great etude, he challenges Mátér Köteles (Kira Ábrahám), who is not an enlightened Franciscan friar finding a spiritual companion in Tempefői, but a disciplinary delegate of a private church school, about the way his hyper-sensitive son, Petike, who makes impertinent remarks about the teachers, is treated at school: "We put him in private school so that this kind of thing wouldn't be a problem," the good family man exclaims, thus completing the picture of the pathology of the nouveau riche family then and now. Meanwhile, the young people are celebrating Rozália's name day, where the poet-aster Csikorgó (Bálint Laczkó) also appears. The turbo disco-paced Hungarian mulatós [turbo folk] dance tunes, accompanied by the corresponding lighting effects and exuberant choreography (lighting designer: Barnabás Nánási) are a perfect match for the atmosphere and the values skewered, but it's a pity that the rap song of Csikorgó, who is dressed up in a white suit with a bow tie, is drowned out by the pub tune "Pub door opening onto the street." In Csokonai's text, the poetry duel of the two poets is more pronounced, and this could have been intensified here as well. In Csokonai's play they are playing the "chair of shame" game, while in the performance there is a quiz game, the substantial prize money of which would come in handy for the indebted Tempefői, except that unfortunately it is Koppóházy who wins and not him. Marcell Kirády is very entertaining as the muscle man with a one-but brain who knows everything about 'horses, dogs, mouflons' and 'other alpha males,' and it seems that in this company that is more than enough for him. To quote Múzsai from the original text, "I see now that to be a virtuous Hungarian is nothing but to dress in

clothes that are thrown out, to keep lots of beautiful hounds, to jump on magnificent horses, to swear periodically, to eat and drink, to watch others work, to hate sciences and to help the learned to starve.”

The initial cheerfulness soon turns to sorrow as the hopelessly cornered Tempefői says no to Fegyverneki’s humiliating job offer. Rozália defies her father, giving the players a chance to show more dramatic tones: alongside our protagonists, the also bankrupt Múzsai (Domonkos Lajcsik), who is less stubborn than our poet and would rather shovel shit than starve (he even turns up in the finale in a denim outfit, stinking of manure, with a big shovel on his back). Printer Betrieger (Máté Hostyinszki), with the help of two goons in sunglasses, is about to beat our hero to a pulp when he receives the shocking news of Tempefői’s origin by phone. In the unfinished fifth act, Csokonai may have intended the poet to be of aristocratic origin, and here, as we learn, he is the son of ‘Muki, the Muki’, the powerful Ártány (suspected to be the local oligarch). The hypocritical and servile Fegyverneki and his entire entourage swiftly turn and swirl around Tempefői admiringly, queuing up for his autograph, so the financial problems seem to be solved in one fell swoop.

The young actors and dramaturgs continue Csokonai’s unfinished play, and yet I am left with the feeling that the denouement does not provide closure. The morally disappointed Rozália and Tempefői stand in the light in tears, and as a final gesture, the disillusioned poet nervously slams his first volume – carefully unwrapped from its protective foil – to the ground. Meanwhile, the wild bang-bang rumbles. The dilemma that rightly preoccupies young people comes to a head: is it possible to make a living off of high art today in one’s own right, without any kind of internal conflict or nepotism? Behind the question mark of the final scene, I hope, lies the uncertainty of anticipation: judging by the effervescence, humour and vitality of the first (and let’s hope not premature) public performance of the second-year class of acting there is certainly reason for optimism both for them and for us.

■ **Mihály Csokonai Vitéz: Tempefői**

Cast list: Kira Ábrahám, Ádám Garamvári, Gábrriel Horváth, Máté Hostyinszki, Adrienn Kern, Marcell Kirády, Bálint Laczkó, Domonkos Lajcsik, Zita Nadrai, Mária Rigó, Alexandra Seres, Anna Tabajdi, Szabolcs Varga, György Veress; *Dramaturgs:* Apolka Bakos, Noémi Orosz-Bogdán, Zsófia Pálfi, Ágota Szalánczi, Rudolf Varga-Amár; *Visual designer, choreographer and director:* Benedek Csáki; *Lighting designer:* Barnabás Nánási

Eszter Ozsváth

“Autonomy Has No Objective Measure”

Review of the Book Entitled **The Problem of Theatrical Autonomy – Analysing Theatre as a Theatre as a Social Practice**

Published in 2016 by Amsterdam University Press, *The Problem of Theatrical Autonomy – Analysing Theatre as a Theatre as a Social Practice* analyses the ways in which theatre as a social practice is conceived, as well as autonomy itself as an organizing principle and a possible key concept for further research in the sociology of theatre. The editors, or rather co-authors, Joshua Edelman (lecturer at the Manchester School of Theatre and Manchester Metropolitan University), Louise Ejgod Hansen (research director at the Centre for Cultural Evaluation) and Quirijn Lennert van den Hoogen (editor-in-chief of the Dutch Cultural Policy Handbook and member of STEP, the Project on European Theatre Systems), were interested in studying art from a sociological perspective. The book was inspired by Hans van Maanen (former dramaturg and Professor of Art Society and Theatre Studies at the University of Groningen, Department of Art, Culture and Media Studies), whose main insight is that research from a sociological perspective needs to be complemented by philosophical

concepts in order to understand the meaning and social structure of the arts, especially theatre (art). His book *How to Study Art Worlds* (2009) can be seen as a precursor to the present volume, which is also the ideological-intellectual manifestation of the Project on European Theatre Systems led by van Maanen and Andreas Kotte. *Global Changes, Local Stages* (2009), the first co-edited, co-authored book of the organisation's "political section", is also a precedent for *The Problem of Theatrical Autonomy*. Considering that autonomy has no objective measure (29), this rich and witty volume is addressed to theatre scholars, practitioners and students, primarily in an explanatory (rather than normative) way.

The book promises a systematic comparison of theatres, or, to put it somewhat awkwardly, theatre systems, and also aims at a clear understanding of the concept of autonomy from an observer's perspective, as the first chapter indicates. The term "theatrical autonomy" implies, on the one hand, the independence of the theatre, the possible self-government of artistic and administrative affairs, even if the creation of the theatrical production has to be financed and the finished product itself has to be distributed, marketed, seen and understood, all of this also in relation to the outside world. In this light, the authors argue that although theatre autonomy is valued for its ability to promote artistic integrity and creativity, theatres may still have to (in the future) navigate among external factors such as government regulations, funding requirements and audience expectations. On the other hand, as the introductory part of the book emphasises, this kind of autonomy (rather proudly interpreted as something Western) can also be manifested in the act of recognising that the theatrical space is quite different from the milieu "occurring" in one's everyday life – but unfortunately, these different spaces and platforms of life are hardly ever put in relevant parallel in the book. Despite the fact that one of the possible results of the social sphere of theatre (although less autonomous in itself than poetry or music) is the transposition of experiences seen on stage into everyday life, this phenomenon is painfully neglected by the editors, and thus treated as a truly autonomous phenomenon in practice.

In the later chapters, the authors analyse the concepts of autonomy manifested in the internal dynamics and mechanisms of theatre life (chapters 1 and 2), then the volume focuses on the contemporary negation of this autonomy (chapter 3), while the final chapters (chapters 4-6) provide deeper analyses of the specific aspects and manifestations of autonomy. Willmar Sauter's (2000)

theatrical event approach is also reflected in these chapters, and its use in the book is partly justified by the need to adopt a broader and more nuanced social perspective, which seems essential to develop a more detailed and accurate picture of the everyday practices of theatre-making and theatre-going, as well as of the aesthetic quality and form of theatre. One of the strongest strands of interpretation in the volume revolves around the idea that the theatrical space is a meso-level milieu, situated between the levels of society (macro) and individual performance (micro). This concept is also the basis for defining how autonomy manifests and functions in different countries (with a particular focus on Western European societies) and social contexts.

The first chapter, "How can we define autonomy?", aims at and questions the use of the concept of "autonomy" within different disciplines and social spheres. In sociology, similarly to the arts, definitions are not considered definitive by the authors of the book, so there is no clear definition in this section (the Wittgensteinian concept of family resemblance is mentioned, however, drawing attention to the rather hastily defined possibility of autonomy having meaning and/or significance for those working in a given sphere). Fitting into the artistic-academic approach and framework of the volume, the authors instead offer a conceptual formula ("theatre is autonomous insofar as it follows its own value"), to avoid further confusion due to the lack of accurate definitions. By deconstructing this formula in the final segments of the chapter, it is also revealed that the conception of autonomy presented in this book is quite different from the Kantian conception linked to human will and the law of reason (28), while the volume offers other possible ways of interpreting the term "value" (Luhmann uses the term "function", Kant "interest", while in Schiller it corresponds to "impulse"). Moreover, in this sociological conception, the autonomy of the individual itself is ignored in order to shift the emphasis to the autonomous position that the individual can occupy within a particular social field.

At the same time, while the authors affirm that autonomy is not the same as creating art without the influence of political or ethical (or even capitalist) factors, they also suggest that autonomy is a structural property or quality of rather diverse, heterogeneous social fields (and not a social field per se). These fields do not, however, mean social milieus, but human activities that are manifested in the cooperation of social actors within a given social sphere in the collective pursuit of a common goal. Otherwise, the use of the term "field" also refers to Bourdieu's theory of space, in which these interconnected fields (worlds, net-

works, systems) have different positions that social actors can occupy. This is contrasted with the footnote on the critics of the French anthropologist and social scientist Pierre Bourdieu, including the theorists of the Actor-Network, and the chapters inspired by them (and subsequently discussed).

The sub-chapter "Actions of agents in theatre fields: position-taking" underlines that these agents (be they companies, collective agents, individual artists, artists working in the same style, genre or school, e.g. naturalists, symbolists, poets, or even non-human agents), or rather actors (in both the artistic and ontological sense of the word), always act in the theatrical fields in order to accumulate as much domain-specific capital as possible. In Bourdieu's definition of the fields (complemented by the works of Theodor Adorno, Christian Boltanski, Laurent Thévenot and Eve Chiapello, while also drawing on Bourdieu's intellectual precursors Wittgenstein, Lévi-Strauss, Durkheim, Marx and Pascal), the position occupied by the social actor is experienced by individuals in the form of motivation. The so-called "children's theatre", which is a prominent type of theatre in many European countries, is a striking example of the positioning and self-positioning in the book, while in other cultures it is still considered less valuable and "frivolous". In this respect, "children's theatres" or puppet theatres face much greater challenges when they want to pursue the very same values that other types of theatre are interested in, such as marketability, which is so often maligned.

As the authors of the book explain quite sharply and with great insight, autonomy is the essence that separates one (social) sphere from another. Since there is virtually no social field without a certain degree of autonomy, the so-called rights-based discourse (which roughly means that the definition of autonomy also questions certain rights of artists) conflicts with the rights of others, but also, on a larger scale, with the values of general justice or democracy. Despite this apparently neutral view of autonomy, the following unavoidable steps lead to the ultimate realization of theatrical existence: "(1) an initial degree of separation between the theatrical field and other fields is (2) a necessary precondition for perceiving and shaping theatre as art, which then (3) allows the creation of the specifically artistic results of theatrical systems" (26). However, these explicitly artistic results are defined in this chapter mainly as having an aesthetic quality.

The importance of social ties and their artworks and products (even if they are purely aesthetic) is further emphasised by the authors, who stress that value,

as such, must be recognised by other social actors in order to be valid. Here the authors examine the phenomenon in a Lacanian-Freudian context (while also referring to Slavoj Žižek), since the object of desire has a necessary element in the psychoanalytic unconscious (32), and thus the concept of autonomy is necessarily fluid, in which art must be separated from its social context, rather than growing out of that context. "Value" is used as a synonym for "capital" by Bourdieu (following somewhat in the Marxist tradition), whose insistence on using both terms in the plural (as values and capitals) highlights the fact that they may come from different sources but are not in fact interchangeable. The production of these values, no matter how ambiguous their relation to autonomy is in the volume, is cultural and not economic (although Bourdieu argues that it must ultimately be).

The second part of the first chapter aims to make the concept of individual capitals more accessible, integrating Bourdieu's example of the French literary field of the late nineteenth century – a social milieu that seems to have little to do with the central theme of the volume, contemporary European theatre. While contrasting economic, prestige-based and cultural capital, the authors pay particular attention to the romantic roots of the latter. This section contains the first concrete example from the world of theatre, focusing on the Netherlands, where there is a rich tradition of cabaret presenting political satire. Despite the fact that these productions are the second most popular category in Dutch theatre, as both the number of performances and the number of tickets sold account for sixteen per cent of the total Dutch theatre event arsenal (VSCD 2012), their genuine value lies in their political nature, which is neither a positive nor a negative phenomenon. This kind of "rebellion in the system" can be seen as somewhat paradoxical, since its structurally constructive power lies in its essentially destructive character.

After a first chapter, rather lengthy and convoluted in its theoretical apparatus, the following sections mainly dissect the concepts and problems already introduced, with various historical-contextual inserts. The above-mentioned value neutrality, for example, is further challenged in the chapter "The concept of artistic autonomy", which also presents the history of artistic autonomy, with particular reference to Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT), while the later section on the functional social perspective of Plato and Aristotle includes Aristotle's narrative representation of fact in testimony, philosophy or history (*diegesis*) and the aesthetic form of representation employed by artists (*mime-*

sis), and the role of the artist in society, as described by Plato in "The Republic", draws attention to the spectacularity (*hypocrites*) of the art of the actor. The concept of catharsis is seen here as one of the most essential forms of value or capital. The author of the chapter emphasises the differences between modern and ancient Greek conceptions of the relationship between (theatre) art and society, since for the Greeks, the primary concept of art, *techne*, is closer to the term "craftsmanship", which can give many a sense of unprofessionalism. Aestheticisation, as the key concept of the Enlightenment, is the next point of reference in the text, with the ideas of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich von Schiller (again), with a special focus on the reception of a particular work of art rather than its intensionality. After a moment's hesitation, the volume continues with Kant's own momentary understanding of the autonomy of art, reflecting on the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann's understanding of art as an (increasingly self-referential) system of communication, which already embraces the interconnected nature of art, which is thus hardly autonomous. Moreover, quite the contrary, as Luhmann sees it, "art became an autonomous system only at the moment when self-reference in artistic communication could take precedence over references to other kinds of communication" (59). To conclude the chapter, the theories of George Dickie, Arthur Danto and Howard Becker on art as an institution, Boltanski and Thévenot (and later Chiapello) on art and values, and their vision of ANT society are compared, citing examples from different (state) communities. These communities represent clear cases of divergent values that usually appear in mixed forms in the scenario of real life.

"Autonomy in the contemporary theatre" is the first chapter that focuses only on theatre as an art form, and discusses contemporary forms of performance (such as documentary theatre and stand-up comedy) that are seemingly rejecting any claim to autonomy. The chapter opens with the exciting idea that the problematisation of autonomy is a key instrument for the development of the theatre sociological field. In exploring the role of autonomy in the wider social fabric, the authors raise further questions about the aesthetics of contemporary theatrical forms, and examine how they allow the actors (agents) in and around the performances to put their autonomy at risk. Their objection lies in the fact that while the concept of autonomy was a rather useful "instrument" in the past, it is simply not relevant in the world of theatre as it is today. This section focuses on the appreciation of specific theatrical practices (post-dramatic and immersive theatre, verbal and documentary theatre, and applied and

community theatre), for which the authors give great examples (e.g. how a fictionalised play format is enabled by the theatrical context within a theatre production). With recurrent, sometimes weaker, sometimes stronger counter-arguments, the chapter questions both the need for theatre autonomy and its mere existence. The weaker set of arguments includes the anachronistic notion of autonomy, in which autonomy is rather outdated (the parallel in the book is aristocracy) and represents an organisational pattern that is no longer relevant. However, reflecting on the ideas of Liesbeth Korthals Altes and Barend van Heusden (authors of the 2005 book *Aesthetic Autonomy: Problems and Perspectives*) the co-authors argue that autonomy is still a key concept when discussing the relationship of artists, ensembles, collectives or other bodies with society.

For comparison, the chapter "How agents in theatre fields make use of claims to autonomy" focuses on the social agents, i.e. the question of social agency itself, and whether these agents (or actors) are able to change the internal dynamics of the field at all, and how autonomy can be achieved (even in the case of a sub-field, as in the case of a sub-field such as children's theatre, which here arises in the context of the dissatisfaction between the fields of theatre and education), while the agents of the field strive for publicity, and how autonomy allows for political engagement outside the political field – all these questions remain unanswered. Consequently, in a sense, the main purpose of the volume is simply to ask questions about issues and phenomena of importance to society as a whole, rather than to provide clear answers to these questions.

The sections "How theatre organisation shapes claim to autonomy" (chapter 5) and "How claims to autonomy serve those outside theatre fields" (chapter 6) are quite similar in the sense that both are rather slogan-like, but very straightforward messages, in order to prove that autonomy is not opposed to society, since autonomy functions rather as a form of social operation. In this regard, Chapter 5 focuses on the changes in the organisational characteristics of theatrical fields, which can provide rich material for future research in the field of theatre sociology. Models of funding systems and public funding are also presented in this chapter (together with an in-depth analysis of the differences between cultural policy systems based on the four models developed by Harry Hillman-Chartrand and Claire McCaughey in 1989, namely the Patron, the Intermediary, the Architect and the Engineer), while in the turmoil of perspective in chapter 6, theatre is in fact moralised merely so that the art form (the field) can ultimately be exploited in a capitalist way.

Overall, therefore, it can be seen that *The Problem of Theatrical Autonomy* builds in part on the autonomous theatre as a Schillerian idea of moral goodness in its broadest sense (113). Partly, as is mentioned in several places, because the book itself cannot provide an in-depth analysis of any theatrical area or field, nor a systematic portrait of the autonomous relations inherent in them. Despite the authors' attempt to demonstrate the usefulness of autonomy, they hope that autonomy will be a useful tool in the future (even if it is not as relevant as it was before), the book is not exempt from weaknesses. It is somewhat ironically stated at one point that the examples given are justified because they illustrate the concept discussed in the book, however, these examples are far from systematic, e.g. the Eastern European countries are only mentioned in the context of the changes that took place in 1989, which also affected the relationship between theatre and society. Although many useful, easy-to-understand tables and figures illustrate the inner workings of the theatrical field (and/or sub-fields), the text is also riddled with misspellings (e.g. Romeo Castellucci's name is given incorrectly) and syntactically awkward sentences, while occasionally heavily colloquial expressions (such as the use of the words "things", "okay", etc.), while undoubtedly effective in conveying the message of the work, can leave a scar on the academic soul. Although at first glance the focus of *The Problem of Theatrical Autonomy* may seem too broad, its seemingly random but undoubtedly entertaining examples and parallels make it an important and enjoyable reading for theatre professionals and sociologists alike.

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Budapest: Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute; 2018. Színháztörténet nagyítóval. Források a magyar színháztörténet tanulmányozásához 1920–1949 (with Csiszár Mirella). Budapest: Petőfi Literary Museum–Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute.

Zsolt Győrei (born 1970):

writer, poet, literary translator, associate professor of the Németh Antal Institute of Drama Theory. His main field of research is Hungarian literature of the first half of the twentieth century. Main works: 2005. Heltai Jenő drámai életműve. Budapest: L'Harmattan Könyvkiadó; 2012. A Velemi Névtelen versei és a levelesládája. Budapest: Syl-labux Könyvkiadó; 2013. Emmuska. Budapest: Libri Kiadó; 2015. A szegény kisgyermek panaszai. Budapest: Kalligram Kiadó; 2019. Magyariné szeretője. Budapest: Kalligram Kiadó. His main play he wrote: Hamlear, a dán királyfiból lett brit király (Gyulai Várszínház, 2021), Vízkereszti Gritti, avagy a vérre menő játék (Kőszegi Várszínház, 2022.)

András Timár (born 1971):

theatre historian, literateur, adjunct professor of the Németh Antal Institute of Drama Theory. He is the manager of the literary publications of the KultUp sub-programme of the Déryné Program. His research area is the history of Hungarian drama and theatre, the interpretation and performance history of the national dramas, the methodology of teaching literature and drama. The topic of his doctoral dissertation is contemporary Hungarian theatrical reinterpretations and re-arrangements of national dramas. Main works. 2022. Nemzeti színháztörténet 1948–1996. Előadásrekonstrukciók. Budapest: Arktisz Kiadó, Theatron Műhely Alapítvány (könyvfejezetek); 2021. Mások akartunk lenni. A Szentendrei Teátrum története az alapítástól 2020-ig. Szentendre: Szentendrei Kulturális Központ.

Ferenc Veress (born 1981):

As an art historian, he works as an adjunct professor at the University of Theatre and Film Arts' Németh Antal Institute of Drama Theory, an instructor for University of Szeged's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, and an employee at the Museum of Sopron and the Diocese Collection in Szombathely. His areas of research are Renaissance and Baroque Art and contemporary art's dialogue with earlier periods of cultural history. His main works: 2021. The Dominicans and the Holy Blood: From Late Medieval Devotion to Baroque Piety. Cases in Austria, Hungary and Romania. Vienna: Österreichische Zeitschrift Für Kunst und Denkmalpflege; 2021. Román Viktor. A szoborba gyúrt lélek. (editor) Târgu Mureș, Romania: Mentor Kiadó; 2020. Egy dunántúli barokk művészpálya: az építész és festő Lucas de Schram. Sopron: Soproni Szemle; 2020. Az eucharisztia tiszteletének szimbolikus építészeti formái: Oltárarchitektúrák a Nyugat-Dunántúlról a 17. századból. Budapest: Építés-Építészettudomány; 2017. Michelangelo és a vatikáni Pieta: Hatások és követők. Budapest: Typotex Kiadó.

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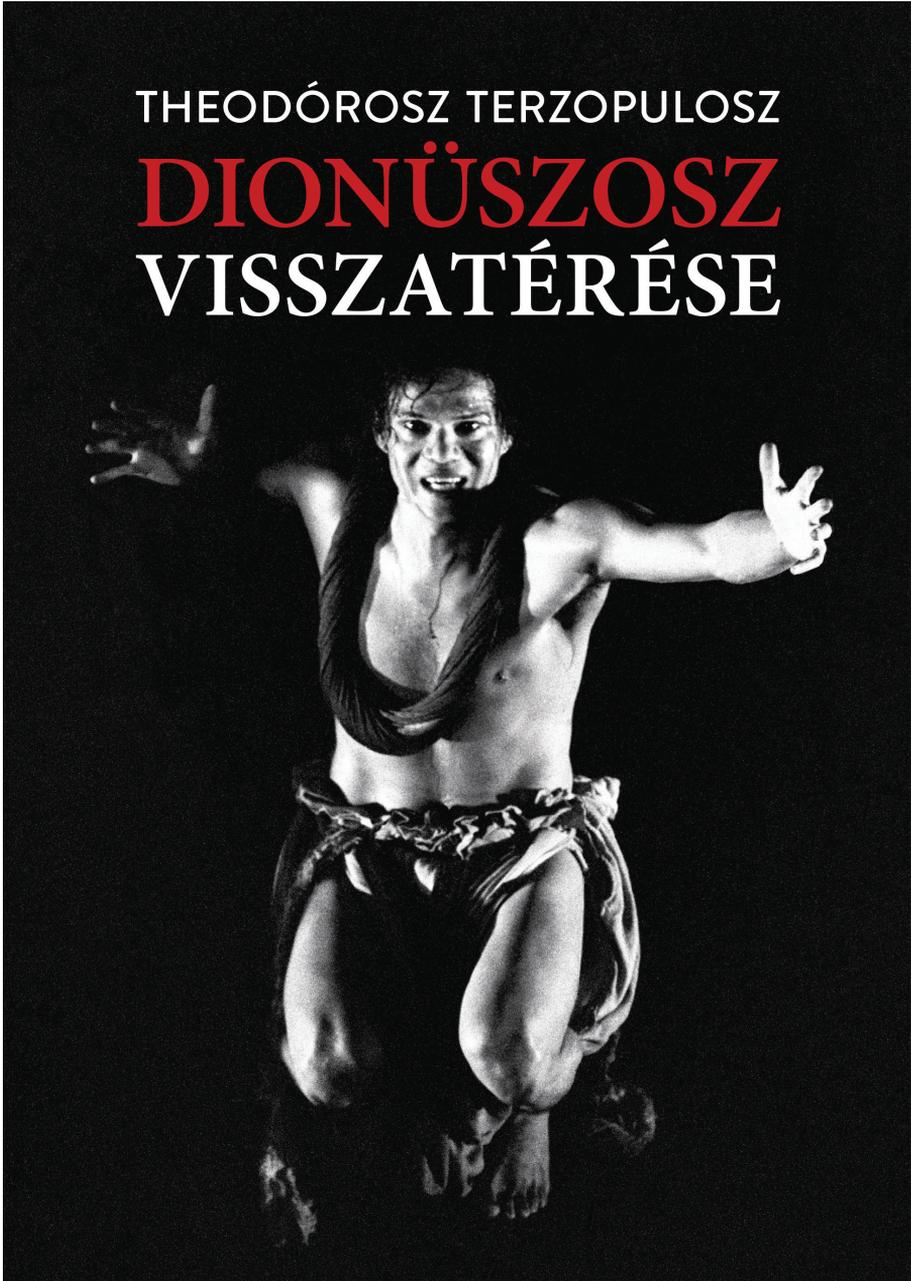
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