

Media and Literature
in Multilingual Hungary
1770–1820

Edited by
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Literary History as an Argument for the Existence of Literature

Miklós Révai's Call
in *Magyar Hírmondó* and *Költeményes Magyar Gyűjtemény**

Solitary

Literary historians agree that in the eighteenth century the system of *litterae* as episteme fell apart, and the group of texts we now call literature split from the rest of other sciences. Before this, sciences were seen as coherent systems of “things described”, but in early modern times the sciences started to become separate fields. At the same time, the arts also went in a separate direction. I call this differentiation “becoming solitary”.

This was not a quick process. In the nineteenth century, for the first time, people did not need theoretical training to identify a group of texts as being literature in our contemporary, modern sense. This was not possible before because literature had never been appreciated only for its aesthetic qualities and it was still part of other “scientific” disciplines. People that research early literature are often actually intellectual historians or historians of science and most of the texts they study would not be considered literature by today's standards, in terms of being aesthetically pleasing. And although the history of literature has been a separate field of study since the eighteenth century, what does and does not constitute Hungarian literary history remains a dilemma to this day.

The great change in the history of science in early modern times resulted in epistemology coming to the forefront. For a long time, epistemology *was* phi-

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losophy. In order to know and understand nature, it was necessary to specify exactly what the human mind could understand using the senses and sensitivities. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, following in the footsteps of Blaise Pascal, developed the most elaborate epistemological system.

However, knowledge is worth nothing if it cannot be communicated to others, i.e. through language. This was the basis for the great linguistic turn of early modern times, one sign of which was the sudden pervasive desire to write dictionaries. After all, one could only make a scientific claim if the meaning of each word is defined clearly in a dictionary. This led to a demand for specialized dictionaries and to people appreciating how scientific language was used. Language used in any other way, including literary language (literature having become solitary) was forced to measure itself against this. At this time, Pascal, Leibniz, and John Locke questioned the effectiveness of language and the role of the mother tongue gained importance in cognition. By the end of the eighteenth century, figurative language, which had long been thought of as a flaw, became a main characteristic of solitary literature. These changes in approach changed in Hungary in parallel with Western Europe.¹

However, to confirm the theory of a solitary literature, over and above uncovering the theoretical basis, we also need to use the texts themselves to prove that this literature, which gained a new function, exists. Put simply: theoretical texts dealing with literature are placed in focus.² The aim of this study is to interpret *Magyar Költeményes Gyűjtemény [Hungarian Collection of Poems]*. The Hungarian author Miklós Révai (1750–1807) also worked on this in a similar way and used it as a basis for legitimizing the independent new literature. I cover a project that includes announcements, theoretical texts in their original manuscripts, the constantly changing intentions of the publisher (mostly due to financial reasons), and the volumes that were eventually published.

- 1 See Béla HEGEDÜS, “Epistemologischer Hintergrund des Litterae-Literatur-Überganges im 18. Jahrhundert: Ein Versuch”, in *Germanistische Studien IX*, Hrsg. von Mihály HARSÁNYI, 49–57 (Eger: Linceum Kiadó, 2013); HEGEDÜS Béla, “A szimbolikus gondolkodás és az irodalom születése” [“The Birth of Symbolic Thought and Literature”], in *Stephanus noster: Tanulmányok Bartók István 60. születésnapjára*, ed. JANKOVICS József, JANKOVITS László, SZILÁGYI Emőke Rita and ZÁSZKALICZKY Márton, 383–393 (Budapest: reciti, 2015).
- 2 See HEGEDÜS Béla, “Érvek az irodalom léte és fennmaradása mellett: A fogság előtti Verseghy a »kompartiment«-ként értett irodalomról” [“Arguments for the Existence and Survival of Literature: Verseghy on Literature Understood as »Compartment«, before His Imprisonment”], in *Emlékkönyv a Szolnokon 2017. április 3–4-én rendezett tudományos konferencia anyagából*, ed. DONCSE CZ Etelka and LENGYEL Réka, In memoriam Verseghy Ferenc 7, 54–69 (Szolnok: Verseghy Ferenc Könyvtár és Közművelődési Intézmény, 2018).

The Collection

Miklós Révai is in some ways a typical character in Hungarian literary history. In other ways he is exceptional. Révai was a linguist, poet, translator, editor, Catholic priest and Piarist monk. His career was typical inasmuch he shared many of these pursuits with his contemporaries. But he is exceptional because although, like his contemporaries, some major symbolic events in Hungarian literary history can be linked to his work, interpreting these events still poses problems for modern historians of literature and language. In this study I examine the fate of one of his early projects, *Magyar Költeményes Gyűjtemény*. I also look at how a call and the announcements following it arguably led to people starting to collect folk songs and trying to establish a literary canon. It was also an act of legitimizing support for a literature that was increasingly becoming solitary.

It was the first Hungarian-language newspaper, *Magyar Hírmondó* [*Hungarian Herald*], published in Bratislava and edited by Mátyás Rát, which published advertisements for Miklós Révai's *Költeményes Gyűjtemény*. The first advertisement, which included an addendum written by Rát, is especially significant in the history of Hungarian literature. It was long believed that Révai, inspired by Johann Gottfried Herder's philosophy, encouraged people to collect folk songs in his call. The scholarly Rát, who had studied in Göttingen, took up this call, and it is no coincidence that his text framing Révai's advertisement later became the basis of the complete (two-author) interpretation of the text. This is how potential inspiration by Herder was also projected onto Révai's writing.

This call is possibly one of the most frequently misinterpreted symbolic events in Hungarian literature. So it is especially interesting to see what the great writers of Hungarian literary history have said about it. Ferenc Toldy (1805–1875), who was already considered the father of Hungarian literary history by his contemporaries, evaluated Révai's deed in his 1856 piece *Révai Miklós, "a nagy"* [*Miklós Révai "The Great"*]. In it he emphasized the greatest authors of early Hungarian literature, thus establishing Révai's role as a canon builder:

But Révai was the first to recognize the energizing power of our literature as a whole, and who wanted to give a new lease of life to its more noble fruits, hidden by the thick undergrowth. That is how the ideal of *Költeményes Gyűjtemény* was born, in which he intended to publish the works of Balassi, Rimay, Beniczky, Zrínyi, Gyöngyösi, and Faludi, beside contemporary writers, and to thus circulate

them again, [...] through which he also hoped to encourage reading among the public at large.³

For this reason, the list of authors to be published does not include folklore sources at all. Révai would have preferred to reproduce much older and rarer books, including those by Bálint Balassi (1554–1594) and János Rimay (1570–1631), who were master and disciple and the two best-known poets of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, with their influence extending to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Révai also would have liked to have reproduced books by Péter Beniczky (1603–1664) and Miklós Zrínyi (1620–1664), the two greatest Baroque poets of the seventeenth century. Beniczky is known for his Slovak and Hungarian connections and Zrínyi for his Croatian and Hungarian ties. István Gyöngyösi (1629–1704), a popular seventeenth-century epic poet, and the Jesuit priest Ferenc Faludi (1704–1779), who was popular in the eighteenth century were also targets for Révai's publications. This focus on older authors with significant legacies strongly hints at where Révai's priorities lay. János Horváth (1878–1961), the most influential Hungarian literary historian of the twentieth century, even states explicitly that although Rát's part of the call mentions the expression *Volkslied*, "as early as his proposal for the collection, Révai, under Herder's influence, was not thinking of collecting 'folk songs' as we understand them today, but of the old curiosities of Hungarian, secular poetry, including the 'popular songs' that were widely sung. He did not publish folk songs but 'artificial' (i.e. high-culture) poets."⁴ Horváth also noted that Révai did not fail to fulfil his proposal. He did not have to make do with the poems by well-known poets in the volumes he later edited and published, while having promised more rarities in his proposal. I do not need to go into the ideological reasons behind why it became important to assume that Révai wanted to collect folk songs. We do know though that Révai did not encourage potential collectors to gather songs while roaming among country folk, but to send him what they already had available. It is probably not too bold an assumption to think that he had the secular hymnbooks of popular poetry in mind, but we cannot answer that for sure here.⁵

3 TOLDY Ferenc, *Irodalmi arcképek [Literary Portraits]*, ed. LÖKÖS István, Magyar ritkaságok (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1985), 51.

4 HORVÁTH János, "A magyar irodalmi népiesség Faludtól Petőfiig" ["Hungarian Popular Literary Culture . From Faludi to Petőfi"], in HORVÁTH János, *Irodalomtörténeti munkái III*, ed. KOROMPAY H. János and KOROMPAY Klára, *Osiris klasszikusok: Horváth János összegyűjtött munkái*, 7–253 (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2007), 43.

5 See CSÖRSZ Rumen István, *A kesergő nimfától a fonóházi dalokig: Közköltészeti hatások a magyar*

In the recent literature on Révai,⁶ considerations of canon history put into focus again:

It was up to the authors of the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to create the modern forms, patterns, institutions, and readership of Hungarian-language literature, as well as to create a literary ranking of authors. This ranking structures the multitude of literary works, and in a slightly changed format later becomes the national canon, and as such the carrier and supporter of national self-expression and self-interpretation.⁷

This is an important conclusion. At the same time, in this case, we cannot assume that the creation of the canon legitimized contemporary events. Rather, it is easier to frame it as a puzzle piece in the arguments for the existence of a literature that was “becoming solitary” and ensuring its own existence.

Hungarian literary history also needs to revise its traditional stance that Révai was interested solely in curiosities and old poetry as a vehicle for the ideal state of the Hungarian language (compared to its state in Révai’s time).⁸ Around the same time cultural anthropology started to research ancient cultures by focusing on language. This is likely no coincidence and it started with Giambattista Vico’s *Scienza Nuova*. The concept of ancient poetry was popularised during the eighteenth century, exemplified by German author Karl Friedrich Flögel’s *Geschichte des menschlichen Verstandes*, which Révai often quotes in a manuscript on poetic theory.⁹ Here poetry is assigned an important role in a linguistically poor early environment. This is because despite the relatively primitive way in

irodalomban (1700–1800) [From Lamenting Nymph to Songs of the Spinning Mill: The Influence of Popular Poetry in Hungarian Literature], Irodalomtudomány és kritika (Budapest: Universitas Kiadó, 2016).

6 MEZEI Márta, *A kiadó “mandátuma” [The Publisher’s “Mandate”]*, Csokonai könyvtár 15 (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 1998); THIMÁR Attila, *Hős és áldozat: Révai Miklós és a klasszikus századforduló irodalomtörténete [Hero and Victim: Miklós Révai and the Literary History of the Classical Turn of the Century]*, *Historia Litteraria* 22 (Budapest: Universitas Könyvkiadó, 2007).

7 *Ibid.*, 40.

8 MARGÓCSY István, “A Révai-Verseghy vita eszme- és kultúrtörténeti vonatkozásai [“Aspects of Intellectual and Cultural History in the Révai-Verseghy Debate”], in *Klasszika és romantika között*, ed. KULIN Ferenc and MARGÓCSY István, 26–34 (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1990).

9 Karl Friedrich FLÖGEL, *Geschichte des menschlichen Verstandes*, 3. Auflage (Breslau: Meyer, 1776); in Hungarian: Karl Friedrich FLÖGEL, *Az emberi értelemnek természeti története*, transl. by TERNÁTONI Sámuel (Köszvár: Református Kollégium, 1795). I analysed Révai’s manuscript on metrics: HEGEDŰS Béla, „Révai Miklós verselmélete” [“Miklós Révai’s Poetic Theory”], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 104, No. 5–6 (2000): 759–775.

which language was used, it was still the most efficient way of developing human sensitivity. Although this opinion also subtly asserts the primacy of scientific language use, we can also interpret it as an argument in favour of modern poetry, which is similar to how Révai saw it.

I do not think that it is worth interpreting Révai's call on its own. Instead, we should interpret it in the context of other announcements and published volumes, as well as their accompanying texts. Let us go through the facts.

The Proposals

1.

The call in *Magyar Hírmondó* was published in the first issue of 1782, with Révai sending the text to the editors from Vienna. The announcement has two authors, since the editor of the paper, Rát, frames Révai's letter with his own comments:

I have decided that I should not be the only one to enjoy these [i.e. the collected poems], but that I should publish them. These are quite a lot of poems by Faludi that survived after his death [...] I have also decided to collect the poems of Beniczky, Gyöngyösi, and others, and to please my Sweet Homeland with new and as beautiful printings of these as possible, dividing them into as many Volumes as I later find appropriate.¹⁰

He also asked people who had similar old curiosities to send them to him so he could publish those. And he requested not only full printed or manuscript collections but “also the trifles, the little poems inserted here and there, copied from other books, which they might think I may not encounter; what is more, also the widely available humorous, teasing love songs.”¹¹

As far as collecting is concerned, he only writes, along with his Vienna address: “whatever poem is found either in books or in manuscripts, I highly ap-

10 RÉVAI Miklós and RÁT Mátyás, „Tudománybéli dolgok [Felhívás régi költői emlékek és népdalok gyűjtésére]” [“Scientific Issues: A Call for the Collection of Old Records of Poetry and Folk Songs”], in *Magyar Hírmondó: Az első magyar nyelvű újság. Válogatás*, ed. KÓKAY György, Nemzeti könyvtár, 361–371 (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1981), 369.

11 *Ibid.*, 369.

preciate if it is sent to me”.¹² So we can see that Révai really was interested in old curiosities, but it is too much to say that he launched a collection drive with an eye for the vernacular. In Rát’s case we can detect Herder’s influence, but Révai’s role model was more likely his friend Michael Denis, who was a royal librarian, monk, and poet in Vienna. In the *Vorbericht* attached to the first volume of his translation of Ossian he wrote:

Vielleicht, daß er [Ossian] dann wohl gar die Begierde erwecket auch die Barden unserer Väter zu kennen. Karl der Grosse hatte ihre Gedichte gesammelt. Sollten sie unwiederbringlich dahin seyn? Sollten sie nicht irgendwo in Bibliotheken und Manuscriptensammlungen stecken? Wenn man um begüterten Gönnern der Literatur den patriotischen Vorschlag thäte einen manhaften Preis für den Finder auszusetzen? – Welches Verdienst beym Vaterlande! welcher Anspruch auf die Unvergesslichkeit!

What if he [Ossian] will awaken our desire to get to know our fathers’ bards? Charles the Great collected their poems. Could they have disappeared forever? Are they not hiding in libraries and manuscript collections somewhere? What if at someone’s patriotic recommendation the wealthy patrons of literature offered a prize for those who find them? What a service that would be to the homeland! What a demand, never to be forgotten!¹³

Returning to Révai, he did not want to publish living poets, but the greats of the recent past and old times like Faludi, Beniczky and Balassi. He also mentions “others” possibly in the hope of finding treasures.

2.

Two years later, on January 1, 1784, Révai was already editor of *Magyar Hírmondó* when he lamented in his famous editorial: “whether I study Latin or read German or French, or peek into Italian, English, or the Greek, who used to thrive in the old times, I keep returning home, and oh! Oh! My God! Why

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Michael DENIS, “Vorbericht”, in *Die Gedichte Ossians eines alten Celtischen Dichters*, ed. James MACPHERSON, transl. by Michael DENIS, Vol. 1, 2r–4v (Wien: Johann Thomas Edeln von Trattnern, 1768), 4v.

are we not writing like this already? That is my frequent lament about it.”¹⁴ At the same time, after revealing himself (“Behold, it is me who is labouring on the Hungarian collection of poems. I have already taken this matter quite far, and with such beautiful results!”), he stated, somewhat contrarily: “We have poets, we have them, thank God; but they are still not enough to properly introduce our entire poetry.”¹⁵ It is difficult to decide if the present tense here (“we have poets”) refers to living poets, or if the army of poets also includes the departed. It would be very useful to determine Révai’s meaning here as it would allow us to see him and the canon of literary history hypothesized in connection with him more clearly. He continues his train of thoughts like this:

We still cannot clearly differentiate what is pastoral poetry, fairy tales, lyric poetry, heroic, instructional, or dramatic poetry. We don’t have a more sophisticated palate in all these yet. So that I can also shine a brighter light here, I have translated into Hungarian various relevant pieces, which I will insert here and there, such as the writing of Rollin, Fontenelle, Batteaux, Voltaire and others. [...] And all this is so beautiful that anyone I show it to is immediately full of joy and hastens their publication.¹⁶

Ignoring the overt self-promotion of the last sentence we can turn our attention to the part discussing the lack of theoretical knowledge. The lack or existence of theoretical texts is in direct proportion to the state of autonomous, solitary literature. Incidentally, Révai seems to be talking about translations that had already been completed, although we know of only one of these: he translated Charles Batteaux’s treatise *Définition de la Poésie Pastorale, et du Caractere des Bergers* in an appendix to his first Faludi volume.

3.

In 1785, Révai published *A Magyar Költeményes Gyűjtemény közre botsát-tatásának újonabb hírré adatása* [*Another Announcement of the Publication of the Hungarian Collection of Poems*] as a citizen of Győr rather than as an edi-

14 RÉVAI Miklós, “Új esztendőre való: Igen az elején, de azután egyéb is” [“For a New Year: Yes, for the Beginning, but Later on Something Else”], in *Magyar Hírmondó*, 61–71, 65–66.

15 Ibid., 68.

16 Ibid., 68–69.

tor. As if continuing what he was saying in his editorial preface he writes: “It is my intention to attach to all my Books to be published such a thing from the Speeches on the More Beautiful Sciences: so that our Hungarian Nation can also discuss these using its mother tongue and so a more sophisticated palate can develop more quickly, also concerning good judgment and the More Beautiful Sciences.”¹⁷ I will return to the issue of *belles lettres* and more specifically how they helped create a mode of discussion that also became important for literature. In this advertisement he lists the following planned publications:

1) He wanted to publish Ferenc Faludi’s annotated poems, plays, and his collection of proverbs in *Faludi Ferencnek költeményes maradványai* [*Ferenc Faludi’s Poetic Heritage*], with his own preface and Batteux’s piece on pastoral poetry.

2) He would then publish the poems of Péter Beniczky, Bálint Balassi and János Rimay, as well as Demeter Csáti’s song *Pannónia megvételeéről* [*On the Occupation of Pannonia*], in annotated format, with a foreword. (This lyrical text was written not long after the medieval Kingdom of Hungary fell apart in the sixteenth century. However, in the nineteenth century it was believed to have been written by an itinerant minstrel.) He would complement this with excerpts on lyric poetry from Batteux’s *Cours de belles-lettres, ou Principes de la littérature*.

3) “The third Piece includes the creations of my own Mind”, as well as poems addressed to him, and his treatise on the two modes of writing poetry, plus his enigmatic work *Magyar Írás Vizsontagságai* [*The Tribulations of Hungarian Writing*]. This manuscript could later have become the basis for *Deáki történet* [*Historia Litteraria*]. I return to his treatise on writing poetry later.

4) Only after these first three does he mention István Gyöngyösi and then Miklós Zrínyi, two giants of seventeenth-century Hungarian poetry: the former wrote many pieces of narrative poetry, while the latter wrote an epic. And he only planned to publish their works if his enterprise was successful.

Thus, it is clear that in contrast with his original plans, while the poets of earlier eras started to be squeezed out (and I firmly believe that Faludi was considered a contemporary poet), the theoretical accompanying texts started gaining importance.

17 RÉVAI Miklós, *A Magyar Költeményes Gyűjtemény közre botsátatásának újonabb hírré adatása* [*Another Announcement of the Publication of the Hungarian Collection of Poems*] (Győr: Streibig József, 1785).

4.

A Magyar Költeményes Gyűjtemény ki nyomtatására való ujonabb segedelem kérés [*Another Request for Help for Printing the Hungarian Collection of Poems*] was published at the beginning of 1786, and, as its title suggests, its content is not too novel. However, its publication and title both suggest that the collection was not shaping up as Révai had planned. Still, he confirms again that he planned to add the treatise on composing poetry as an appendix to his own poems: the third volume would be “my poems, with my other writings, mostly on Poetry.”¹⁸ It is interesting to note that he considers the paper his own rather than a translation.

5.

To my knowledge, there is only one surviving copy of his third independent announcement, printed in Győr in 1787, and published by Katalin Viola Szabó in 2000.¹⁹ As its title *A Költeményes Gyűjtemény állapotja* [*The State of the Collection of Poems*]²⁰ shows, it is actually a report rather than an announcement. By the time this was published, he had already published the first, two-volume version of the Faludi edition. Révai’s bitterness about his enterprise is clear, and he states several times that he planned to continue it “even if I lose”. However, he completely changed his publication plan. “The Pieces I am now publishing are all new. If I lose and cannot continue with the printing, at least I have done good by pleasing people with so far unpublished pieces. [...] Now I’m only doing what I can.”²¹ So at this point he knew for certain that he was going to publish contemporary poets (including himself). At this time he was planning to publish the following volumes, listed by title:

1) *Néhány nagyságos elméknek költeményes szüleményeik* [*Poetic Figments of a Few Great Minds*].²² This volume contains the poetic correspondence between a Hungarian Royal Guard in Vienna, Ábrahám Barcsay (1742–1806), and the influential Hungarian politician, Lőrinc Orczy (1718–1789).

18 RÉVAI Miklós, *A’ magyar költeményes gyűjtemény’ ki nyomtatására való ujonabb segedelem kérés* (Győr: Strajbig J., 1786).

19 SZABÓ Katalin Viola, “Révai Miklós harmadik híradása” [“Miklós Révai’s Third Announcement”], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 104, No. 5–6 (2000): 776–783.

20 *Ibid.*, 780–783.

21 *Ibid.*, 781.

22 *Ibid.*, 782.

2) *Költeményes holmi egy nagyságos elmétől [Poetic Stuff from a Great Mind]* He writes that this collection of poems by Lőrinc Orczy is “a beautiful piece”.²³

3) *Faludi Ferenc költeményes maradványi a Jegyző könyvvel együtt. Második meg jobbitott kiadás [Ferenc Faludi’s Poetic Heritage with Minutes. Second, Improved Edition]*.²⁴ This does not sound like a very sophisticated concept. And actually the circumstances did not make it possible for Révai to make a well-thought-out publication plan. From this edition he would already omit the “treatise on pastoral poetry”, but with good reason, as we will see.

4) The fourth planned publication, which, in contrast with those that came before it, was not realized, is a bit of an oddball, even compared to all his previous plans: *Jeles szépségű Zarándok Asszony: Franciából magyar versekbe foglalta Csízi István [Beautiful Lady Pilgrim: Translated from French into Hungarian Verse by István Csízi]*.²⁵ In 1782 Máttyás Rát, the *Magyar Hirmondó* editor, reported on the state of *Költeményes Gyűjtemény*, mentioning that a certain “Captain Csízi” had sent his poems and other works to Révai.²⁶ We can infer two things from this: István Csízi (1728–1805), whose life we know barely anything about, already considered Révai (or whoever had made the anonymous announcement) such an authority that he would be able to help him get his work published. He considered his own poems good enough to deserve a place in the *Gyűjtemény*. As Révai was having financial difficulties at the time, it is possible that he published Csízi’s poems to help bring in some much needed income. However, it is also possible that no other, more talented poet responded to the original call.

5) He planned to publish his own works again as *Révai Miklós Elegyes Versei, és néhány apróbb Kötetlen Írásai [Miklós Révai’s Miscellaneous Poems and Some Informal Pieces]*,²⁷ which would not have contained the theoretical pieces he had mentioned before.

6) Actually, he wanted to publish these pieces in a separate volume as *A Pásztor, és a Lantós Költésről való Oktatás, és egy Vetélkedés a Vers szerzésnek két különböző modjáról... A Magyar Költeményesség Tekélletességére tartozó Írások*

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 RÁT Máttyás, “[Révai Miklós versgyűjteménye és Csízi kapitány magyar nyelvű munkái. 1782/34. május 1., 266–268]” “[Miklós Révai’s Collection of Poems and Captain Csízi’s Hungarian-Language Works]”, in *Magyar Hirmondó*, 379–380.

27 SZABÓ, “Révai Miklós”, 782.

[*Treatise on Pastoral and Lyric Poetry, and a Debate on the Two Different Modes of Writing Poetry... Works on the Perfection of Hungarian Poetry*].²⁸

We can draw a number of conclusions from these points. Révai did not intend to publish older poets, and he did not even suggest that commercial success (which proved elusive) would make it possible for him to do so. The fact that Révai rounded off the list with a theoretical volume leads us to assume that by this point he had abandoned his earlier plans and would only publish these to keep his word. We know that of the six planned volumes, three were eventually published, which seems like a fair result.

Published Volumes

To enhance *Magyar Költeményes Gyűjtemény*, as the titles suggested, Révai published the first volume of *Faludi Ferenc költeményes maradványai* [*Ferenc Faludi's Extant Poems*] in 1786 in Győr. A second volume, also in Győr, was published in 1787.²⁹ It is important to add that along with the *Gyűjtemény*, now published in Bratislava, *Téli éjtszakák: Vagy is a téli est időnek unalmait enyhítő beszédek* [*Winter Nights: Or Speeches to Alleviate the Boredom of Winter Evenings*] was also published in 1787 with the printer Ágoston Patzkó. Révai also wrote a foreword to this, in which he inserted various excerpts from his theoretical manuscripts.³⁰ At the same time, Orczy's *Költeményes holmi egy nagyságos elmétől* [*Poetic Stuff from a Great Mind*] was published in Bratislava, but this time with Antal Loewe.³¹ Révai also published *Elegyes versei, és néhány apróbb köttetlen írásai: Függelékül hozzájuk adatnak másoknak is némelyly hozzá íratott darabjaik, végre néhány régiségek is* [*Miscellaneous Poems and Some Informal Pieces: With an Appendix of Some Pieces Written to Him by Others, as Well as Some Old Pieces*], which contained some of his own works.³² It also included some old curiosities, such as Demeter Csáti's song.

28 Ibid.

29 FALUDI Ferenc, *Költeményes maradványai: A Jegyző Könyvvel együtt* [*Poetic Heritage with Minutes*], ed. RÉVAI Miklós, 2. Edition, Magyar Költeményes Gyűjtemény (Pozsony: Loewe Antal, 1787).

30 FALUDI Ferenc, *Téli éjtszakák: Vagy is a téli est időnek unalmait enyhítő beszédek*, ed. RÉVAI Miklós (Pozsony: Patzkó Ágoston Ferentz, 1787).

31 [ORCZY Lőrinc], *Költeményes holmi egy nagyságos elmétől*, ed. RÉVAI Miklós, Magyar Költeményes Gyűjtemény (Pozsony: Loewe Antal, 1787).

32 RÉVAI Miklós, *Elegyes versei, és néhány apróbb köttetlen írásai: Függelékül hozzájuk adatnak másoknak is némelyly hozzá íratott darabjaik, végre néhány régiségek is*, Magyar Költeményes Gyűjtemény (Pozsony: Loewe Antal, 1787).

This suggests that over the years Révai's publication plans changed more for financial reasons than theoretical ones.

This is especially striking if we consider what others close to him were saying about his plans. Sámuel Gyarmathi (1751–1830) was a polyhistor and tutor to Count Ráday's family in Bratislava. In a letter to his employer, poet Gedeon Ráday (1713–1792) on March 17, 1784, he reports on Révai's enterprise (this is approximately three months after Révai's great editorial *in Magyar Hírmondó* was published):

[Révai] 1. He wishes to publish all the poems he can find, even if their authors are not as good a poet as Gyöngyösi – 2. Both new and old ones. – 3. Both long and short works. – 4. It will only consider the beauty of the poems, not if they contain Hungarian stories. In other words, it would be a kind of *Corpus Poetarum omnium Hungariae*.³³

As we now know, this came to nothing. Surprisingly, Gyarmathi's letter does not mention Révai's intention to accompany the planned volumes with theoretical texts, although he mentioned it prominently in his editor's foreword.

Poetry as Cultural Mission

It is a shame that the theoretical volume mentioned in his last announcement did not come to fruition. Révai ran into serious debt, and the publication of the *Gyűjtemény* was halted. Two manuscripts from it have survived though: the *Vetélkedés* on poetry and his educational piece on pastoral poetry.³⁴ From his references we can certainly conclude that he also completed the other translations and treatises, the manuscripts for which may be laying undiscovered somewhere. However, even after the termination of *Költeményes Gyűjtemény* he did not abandon his intention to put together a thematic volume of theoretical pieces. He writes to Lőrinc Orczy from Győr on 23 March, 1788:

33 CSAPLÁR Benedek, *Révai Miklós élete [The Life of Miklós Révai]*, Vol. 2 (Budapest: Aigner, 1883), 65.

34 The former in modern edition: RÉVAI Miklós, "A versszerzés két különböző módjáról" ["On Two Different Modes of Writing Poetry"], ed. HEGEDŰS Béla, in *Magyarországi gondolkodók: 18. század: Bölcsészettudományok*, ed. TŰSKÉS Gábor, Magyar remekírók, 1:529–540, 952–955 (Budapest: Kortárs Könyvkiadó, 2010); the latter in the first edition of Faludi published by Révai: FALUDI Ferenc, *Költeményes maradványi [Poetic Heritage]*, ed. RÉVAI Miklós, Vol. 1., Magyar Költeményes Gyűjtemény, 127–238 (Győr: StrajbigJózsef, 1786).

I am writing a larger piece with this title, divided into as many parts as possible: As a useful pastime for those who delight in reading. I will write it with the freedom fitting a rationally thinking philosopher. It will include all kinds: old curiosities, novelties, moral education, *belles lettres*, praise, reprimand and grading. In other words, everything, and of the kind that can teach our nation finer taste, and which can result in greater enlightenment, sometimes in verse, sometimes in prose.³⁵

The history of literary criticism has so far not focused on these plans of Révai. These are the words of one of the most learned authors and thinkers of the 1780s, and one of the era's greatest scholars of Western, German (Vienna) literature. Collecting and publishing these manuscripts would definitely be worth the effort.

Poesis

Révai also could never have abandoned his plans because nurturing and practising poetry, as well as defining its role, was closely linked to his linguistic project. He states the following surprisingly early, in his 1782 *Felhívás*, no doubt based on Flögel's theory which I mention above:

Anyone who looks at the blossoming state of sophisticated foreign languages, if only in passing, will immediately find that the first and most effective tool for this was writing poetry. And for every language all its beauty, pleasantness, and power grows there, as if breeding in a hotbed.³⁶

This is not Révai's invention by a long shot, since Rát himself had already stated in the introduction to *Felhívás*, referring to Révai's encouraging collection: "And these [Volklied] have been looked up and put to good use mostly since they have been using their own language, also visibly using it to discuss the beautiful sciences."³⁷ It is somewhat startling to see the use of the expressions 'ékes tudományok' or 'széptudományok' (*belles lettres*), but it also explains how they considered the acquisition of scientific knowledge as the aim of these disciplines.

35 SZILÁGYI István, "Révai Miklós levelei báró Orczy Lőrinchez" ["Miklós Révai's Letters to Baron Lőrinc Orczy"], *Figyelő*, 1882, 349.

36 RÉVAI and RÁT, "Felhívás", 362.

37 *Ibid.*, 361–362.

And the texts we today consider to be literature were also included here. The Hungarian language almost certainly adopted the French expression *belles lettres* with some help from the German (*schöne Wissenschaften*). An intermediary state in the differentiation of sciences is already apparent when the language based scientific disciplines, namely, poetry, historiography, classical philology, philosophy, and criticism, detach themselves from the disciplines of natural science, based in mathematics and algebra, as well as from theology, law, and medicine.³⁸ Both Révai and Rát used the expression in this sense.

In the end, it is difficult to decide what was more important for Révai: nurturing *belles lettres*, or publishing texts to create a library of historical evidence. What serves the interest of literature the most, what ensures its existence and survival? It is difficult to say. In any case, his theory of poetry, which remains in manuscript form today and is waiting to be published with annotations, was ready as 1781 turned into 1782, one month before his announcement about the *Magyar Költeményes Gyűjtemény*.

38 Stephan MATUSCHEK, "Literatur", in *Handbuch Europäische Literatur: Begriffe – Konzepte – Wirkung*, Hrsg. von Heinz THOMA, 335–343 (Stuttgart–Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2015), 337.