

Gábor Vaderna (Hg.)

The Culture of the
Aristocracy in the
Habsburg Monarchy,
1750–1820

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The Baronial Patrons of Miklós Révai*

Eighteenth century Hungarian literature was a multilingual literature. Just as many works were written in Latin and German as in Hungarian. Some authors wrote in several languages depending on the genre and their target audience, but as a result of discussions about the national language, the multilingual literary environment started narrowing towards Hungarian around the end of the century. At this point, the development of Hungarian as a language of science, the start of journalism in Hungarian and the dissemination of Hungarian literary works began.¹

Literary works came under the authority of authors, and the social status of those who created literature also changed. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the decisive elements of writers' social status and the social acceptance of literature started emerging. One of the definitive aspects of eighteenth century writing was amateur literature, which was not always published.² Reading habits also changed and more and more books were published in the second half of the century. Printers became business enterprises and their survival depended on the number of books sold and the number of subscribers they had.³ However, writers still couldn't make a living from writing. Most financing for writers came from private sources, which was linked to the development of large na-

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- 1 Márton Szilágyi and Gábor Vaderna: A klasszikus magyar irodalom (kb. 1750-től kb. 1900-ig) [Classical Hungarian Literature], in: Tibor Gintli (ed.): Magyar irodalom, Budapest 2010, p. 313.
- 2 Brigitta Pesti: Dedikáció és mecenatúra Magyarországon a 17. század első felében [Dedication and patronage in Hungary in the first half of the seventeenth century], Budapest–Eger 2013, pp. 50–51.
- 3 István Monok: Cultural Ideals. Changes in the Pattern of Knowledge (from the Point of View of Reading History), in: Hungarian Studies 31 (2017), pp. 251–270; Csaba Csapodi: Könyvtermelésünk a 18. században [Eighteenth-Century Book Industry in Hungary], in: Magyar Könyvszemle 60 (1942), pp. 393–398.

tional cultural institutions (for example, the foundation of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, previously called Hungarian Learned Society).

Miklós Révai was a characteristic writer from the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He was a teacher, a linguist and an organizer of literary activities, as well as a poet and an illustrator. His name is associated with such significant intellectual achievements including the 1790 proposal for an academy, which was founded as the Hungarian Learned Society in 1825, and his great *Grammatica*,⁴ in which he set out the etymological principle of our orthography. His cultural enterprises were supported by aristocrats with his patrons including the wealthiest lords in Hungary.⁵

Miklós Révai had three types of patrons: in the following, I explain, using their correspondence with Révai, the support he received from the head of the church János Szily, an aristocratic poet and friend Lőrinc Orczy, and a royal vice-chancellor of noble origins János Medgyesi Somogyi. These three connections span the range of personal relationships in literary patronage at the time. The role of the writer as independent of aristocratic patronage did not yet exist at the end of the eighteenth century in Hungary, and so volumes still contain letters of recommendation aimed at securing financial support. The aim of these letters was to obtain a recommendation from the patron or thank them for support they had already provided. Authors found themselves in ongoing or occasional relationships of patronage with the aristocrats that supported them.

Looking for a patron, as well as selecting and following it became a very significant issue. On the one hand, concerning the social status of literature: choosing a patron of high social status could also ensure a higher social status for the author, not to mention the support that could be expected. This uneasy relationship with patrons was also described by the English writer, Samuel Johnson in a double-edged definition in his 1755 Dictionary. After the words, “Patron: One who countenances, supports and protects,” he added, “Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence and is paid with flattery.”⁶

4 Miklós Révai: *Elaboratio grammatica hungarica. Ad genuinam patrii sermonis indolem fideliter exacta, affiniumque lingvarum adminiculis locupletius illustrata. 2 volumina, utrumque in totidem tomos subsidium*, Pesthini 1803–1806.

5 See Benedek Csaplár: *Révai Miklós élete* [Life of Nicolaus Révai], Vol. I–IV, Budapest 1881–1889; Attila Thimár: *Hős és áldozat. Révai Miklós és a klasszikus századforduló irodalomtörténete* [Hero and Victim. Nicolaus Révai and Literary History at the Turn of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries], Budapest 2007.

6 Paul J. Korshin: *Types of Eighteenth-Century Literary Patronage*, in: *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 4 (1974), pp. 453–454.

Miklós Révai's father was a lowly shoemaker, who first trained his son in his trade, and only later sent him to the Piarist school in Szeged. Révai entered the Piarist order in Kecskemét in 1769. He was ordained as a priest in 1778 in Oradea, where he first taught drawing, and then philosophy at the royal academy until 1781. Having grown bored of that, he took on jobs as a tutor in Vienna, Sopron, and later in Graz. During 1783–1784 he edited the first Hungarian-language newspaper, *Magyar Hírmondó* [*Hungarian Herald*] in Pressburg. His second volume of poetry was published in 1787, after which he was commissioned to head the drawing school in Győr. He labored on establishing a learned society with tireless dedication and in 1795 he resigned from his position, with years of peregrination following again. He visited several cities and took on jobs as a teacher and a tutor, but in 1802 his years of restlessness ended when he was appointed head the Hungarian department of the university in Pest.

His publishing activities were aided by his aristocratic patrons of the arts. In the spring of 1784 he arrived in Győr to publish all poems written in Hungarian that were available at the time in the series *Költeményes Gyűjtemény* [*Collection of Poems*]. This ambitious venture never came to full fruition due to its magnitude, although his supporters helped him publish several volumes.

The first volume of the series was a collection of poems by Ferenc Faludi, a Hungarian Jesuit poet.⁷ Révai asked for help from János Szily, bishop of Szombathely, to publish another Faludi piece that had remained in manuscript form. Bishop Szily came from a Transylvanian noble family. He became a Doctor of Theology and Philosophy in Rome, and the years he spent in Italy had great influence on his patronage of art and culture. He also dedicated a lot of his own assets to helping the ecclesiastic and cultural life of Vas county.⁸

Four letters written by Révai between 1787 and 1790, and one response by Szily have survived in the Szombathely archives.⁹ The letters mostly concern the publication of Jesuit poet Ferenc Faludi's *Téli éjszakák* [*Winter nights*], which contains short stories in a secular context that Faludi wrote as entertainment.¹⁰ It was Révai himself who emphasized Szily's merits

7 Ferenc Faludi: *Költeményes maradványi* [Ferenc Faludi's Poetic Heritage], ed. by Nicolaus Révai, Győr 1786.

8 Gyula Géfin: Felsőszopori Szily János [János Szily of Felsőszopor], in: Gyula Géfin (ed.): *A Szombathelyi Egyházmegye története*, Vol. I, Szombathely 1929, pp. 27–158.

9 See Gyula Géfin: Révai Miklós levelei Szily János püspökhöz [Letters of Nicolaus Révai to Bishop János Szily], in: *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 71.3 (1967), pp. 324–326.

10 Ferenc Faludi: *Téli éjszakák: Vagy is a téli est időnek unalmait enyhítő beszédek* [Winter Nights: Or Speeches to Alleviate the Boredom of Winter Evenings], Pozsony 1787.

in protecting the manuscript legacy of the poet, in the dedication of the volume that was published in Pressburg in January 1787 by typographer Ágoston Patzkó. “Not as I had hoped for but as it was possible, do I now publish Ferenc Faludi’s *Téli éjszakák* [...]. I was quite afraid that I would again be hindered by some unwished for hardship if I was late. I publish it under your esteemed name, as if giving it back to you, from whom I took these, as well as the rest of the remaining writings.”¹¹

In April 1787 Révai reported to Szily on the publication of *Téli éjszakák* and sent him copies of the volume. He presented his other work as a publisher, while soon he would send pieces from *Költeményes Gyűjtemény* [*Collection of Poems*], one of which was a volume of poems by Baron Lőrinc Orczy, dedicated to princess Maria Christina, while another volume was Faludi’s *Költeményes Maradványai* [*Faludi’s poetic legacy*]. He changed the format to be as small as *Téli éjszakák*, which was 18 cm long. He writes that it is quite beautiful, although the paper could be nicer. However, this way he was able to acquire it at a lower price and sell it for less as well. He made it clear that the question of whether he would be able to continue printing was contingent on the success of these two volumes, and he expressed a hope that the dedication to a high-ranking person would attract readers.¹² The importance of contemporary dedications is emphasized in an excerpt of a letter written by Révai to Lőrinc Orczy: “the Dedications can do a lot of good, especially in our Nation. I dare say that if we could publish more Books under the names of more of our Greats, the Higher Order would also appreciate our Language more, and the Lower Order would also virtually gobble it up.”¹³

In May 1787 we can find other Révai letters wrote reporting on the publication of *Téli éjszakák*: Révai also sent a copy of the volume to József Teleki, who is also one of Révai’s high-ranking patrons.¹⁴ Révai sent Szily another volume of *Költeményes Gyűjtemény* in November 1789, with the title

11 Ibid., b1.

12 Szombathelyi Egyházmegyei Könyvtár, Kézirattár, Íróasztalfiók, Jelzet nélkül [SZEK Kt. – Szombathely Diocesan Library, Manuscript Archive, Desk Drawer, Without Sign]. See: Géfin: Révai Miklós levelei (see fn. 9), 324–325.

13 Nicoalus Révai to Lőrinc Orczy, Pozsony, 1 May 1787, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Kézirattár (OSZK Kt. – National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection), Quart. Hung. 1524.

14 Nicoalus Révai to Count László Teleki, Pozsony, 1 May 1787, in: Béla Iványi: Irodalomtörténeti levelek a gróf Teleki-család gyömrői levéltárából [Literary letters from the archives of the Count Teleki family in Gyömrő], in: Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények 28.1 (1918), pp. 96–97.

Két nagyságos elmének költeményes szüleményei [Poetic inventions of two great minds]: “I hope that Your Eminence will accept this kindly, both because you welcome the enrichment of our language through such publications, but also because in this book Your Eminence can read things which only majestic minds attend to.”¹⁵ He wrote the last letter we know of to the bishop in June 1790, in which he wanted to gain goodwill for his Learned Society.¹⁶

When discussing the relationship between bishop Szily and Révai, the possibility of communication and cooperation between people from different social ranks comes to the foreground, as does how this possibility was extended through a common goal, and a shared literary taste and interest. From the first years of his tenure as bishop, Szily collected books and manuscripts and employed artists in the diocese, and the rumor must have spread quickly that the bishop was well-versed in literature and considered it important to support Hungarian-language literary works. He had a connection with Révai through their shared literacy and similar literary tastes, and as a result of this they had a shared goal of creating a culture in which more and more Hungarian-language books were published and accessible.

Lőrinc Orczy, another of Révai’s aristocratic patrons, who was also a poet, was born in 1718 with his father before him having acquired the title of baron. The family had already been faithful to the ruler in the past, and this tradition shaped Orczy’s way of thinking. He started his career as a soldier, eventually reaching the rank of general. After being discharged, he served his country in civilian offices, and he became *supremus comes* of Abaúj county. Throughout his life he remained a squire, who preferred to spend his time at his mansion in Tarnaörs. As a result of the provisions of the new ruler, Joseph II, in 1784 he resigned from his offices of public life.¹⁷

Orczy did not want to become a literary scholar. For him literature was not of the same value as politics, the military, or civil service. He was proud of his poems, but just and useful work as *supremus comes* was more important to him, as was his work on regulating the river Tisza, and managing the finances of his family’s estates. In this regard he is one

15 SZEK Kt., Íróasztalfiók, Jelzet nélkül [Desk Drawer, Without Sign]. See Géfin: Révai Miklós levelei (see fn. 9), p. 326.

16 Ibid.

17 See Elemér Császár: Orczy Lőrinc, in: Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények 26.1 (1916), pp. 403–440.

of the first Hungarian aristocrats who appeared not only as a patron but also as a poet with an audience. His poems were primarily distributed in manuscript form and his first volume of poetry was published by Révai. In Révai's first letter to Baron Orczy as his patron, he asks Orczy for financial support, but also to consent to the publication of his poems in his series *Költeményes Gyűjtemény*.¹⁸ In Révai's response written on 10 February, 1786, he expressed his gratitude for Orczy's support,¹⁹ but it was only on 24 July that he wrote a letter thanking Orczy for the poems he had sent.²⁰ He planned to publish Orczy's poems as the third volume of the series, with the title *Költeményes holmi egy nagyságos elmétől* [*Poetic material of a great mind*]. In this letter he wrote about how the publications had stalled, and he asked Orczy for a loan: "Already twice I was hindered in publishing my volumes at the time I had promised I would; for which reason I have lost credibility with the Hungarians. That is the reason why help is also only trickling very slowly at present. Thus, even now I am hindered, and I may even get stuck, unless the higher order provides me with assistance. Here I mainly appeal to Your Lord and humbly ask you to loan enough money, at least 50 gold coins, which would allow me to publish the remaining five volumes that I have promised for the Saint Leopold market."²¹

Révai later reported to Orczy that the volume had passed censorship, and Habsburg Archduchess Maria Christina had allowed him to dedicate the pieces in the series to her. In the bright series dedicated to the imperial family it was necessary for authors to step into the limelight. Orczy did not want this to happen. He wanted to keep his authorial name a secret. For him, publishing his poems with Révai was traditional Baroque patronage of literature rather than an investment. On the other side, Révai was burdened by financial pressure, since the name of an esteemed patron would have ensured higher circulation.²² Finally, accommodating Orczy's request, the volume was published in 1787 in Pressburg without Orczy's name, dedicated to Ferenc Barkóczy, the archbishop who died in 1765.²³ Barkóczy was a prelate who supported the Hungarian language,

18 Nicolaus Révai to Lőrinc Orczy, Győr, 24 January 1786, OSZK Kt., Lev. 1.

19 Nicolaus Révai to Lőrinc Orczy, Győr, 10 February 1786, OSZK Kt., Lev. 35.

20 Nicolaus Révai to Lőrinc Orczy, Győr, 24 July 1786, OSZK Kt., Lev. 1.

21 Ibid.

22 Thimár: *Hős és áldozat* (see fn. 5), pp. 33–34.

23 [Lőrinc Orczy]: *Költeményes holmi egy nagyságos elmétől* [*Poetic Piece of a Great Mind*], ed. Nicolaus Révai, Pozsony 1787.

and many works were dedicated to him between 1745 and 1764.²⁴ He was also Orczy's patron, and he encouraged him when he was first experimenting with poetry.

The relationship between the baron and the monk-teacher can be considered typical taking into account the literary conditions of the end of the eighteenth century, and the typical characteristics of the relationship can be seen in Orczy's actions as a patron. The correspondence is unique because Révai was the first to operate as a publisher and to publish other people's works. Orczy, for his part, was the first peer to also write poetry. At Lőrinc Orczy's funeral his sons offered continued support to Révai.

János Medgyesi Somogyi's father was general Ferenc Somogyi, and his mother was Viktória Festetics, a close relative of György Festetics, a peer from Keszthely, who was a patron of the arts and sciences, and also an eminent patron of ecclesiastic and secular institutions. After completing his studies, he worked in civil service administration and later became *vice comes*. After 1795 he became royal councilor, and in 1808 he became vice-chancellor. As a confidant of Francis I, he was considered the king's second in command. He spent the majority of his life in Vienna, Pressburg, Pest, and Veszprém. He visited his estates in Izsákfa and Patona four times a year, arriving on a barouche and entertaining Miklós Révai and others at his mansion. In 1804 Révai enjoyed the hospitality of his host in Izsákfalva for more than a month.²⁵

From their correspondence it is clear that Révai knew the aristocrat's family well. In their correspondence Somogyi always reports on the academic achievements of his children, taking pride in them in front of Révai, a teacher. To Révai's request relating to support for his collection of poems, he responded: "I am ready to do my utmost to enable the printing of those beautiful collections, God forbid that the enrichment of our mother tongue be robbed of such a treasure, this is how my dear Sir will make his own name immortal with our homeland, because as long as the Hungarian language survives, Miklós Révai will also always be mentioned in its glorious works with grateful affection."²⁶ In his letters he always

24 István Bitskey: Barkóczy Ferenc, az irodalmi mecénás [Ferenc Barkóczy, the literary patron], in: József Szauder and Andor Tarnai (eds.): *Irodalom és felvilágosodás. Tanulmányok* [Literature and Enlightenment. Essays], Budapest 1974, pp. 333–365.

25 Gyula Tungli: A király után a második. Gróf Medgyesi János emlékezete [Second after the king. The memory of Count János Medgyesi], in: [Veszprémi] *Napló*, 28 December 1996.

26 Count János Medgyesi Somogyi to Nicoalus Révai, Vienna, 23 August 1802, OSZK Kt., Quart. Lat. 2225/A-184.

spoke in an intimate tone with Révai, asking after his health and praising his oeuvre with great respect. Reading their correspondence, we can see that the higher-ranking Somogyi felt honored to have a personal relationship with Révai.

Beyond the patrons described above, Révai also corresponded with other supporters. Beside the existing patronage relationship, the loosening of the relationship of dependency can also be observed. The fact that Révai sent copies of the published volumes to several aristocrats, accompanied by virtually identical letters, hoping one of them would assist his future work as a patron supports this view.

Bishop Szily's support exemplifies how during this period high-ranking ecclesiastic leaders not only supported the publication of ecclesiastic authors, but were increasingly open to secular culture. They not only contributed money for the publication of the works but allowed their names to be used as well. Révai's relationship with Orczy shows how he convinced an aristocratic poet to leave his status as a manuscript poet behind and step in front of a wider audience with his poems. Their correspondence sheds light on the difficulties of publishing at the time: Orczy often needed an advance to be able to pay the printer, and if he could not release the book on time, his reputation was tarnished among his subscribers.

Finally, the patronage relationship with Somogyi shows how Révai, who was certainly not Somogyi's equal in social terms, does not brownnose the aristocrat. The councilor was delighted to spend his free time with literature, and he also hosted other poets besides Révai. Aristocrats acting as patrons of the arts, supporting literary scholars as a result of their personal interest, and holding literary scholars in high esteem, played an increasingly significant role in the patronage of the era.