

**Theses of Ph.D. dissertation**

**“LET ME START MY SONG...”  
OR CSOKONAI AND  
THE SENTIMENTAL SONG LYRIC POETRY  
OF THE END OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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## I. Subject and aims of the dissertation

On one hand the dissertation makes an attempt to reveal the musical poetry of Csokonai in its entirety, on the other hand it discusses the poetic, metric and cultural historical aspects of the contemporary Hungarian sentimental art song in connection with the previous item.

The selection of the subject is caused by the „lack” in literary history, that the sung poetry of the end of the 18. century is not worked up at all, neither in its genre, nor as a societal and cultural phenomenon, although from the 1770-ies the fashion of singing sentimental songs and writing or translating of those by the „reading public” and the literary men respectively, was a specific phenomenon of the literary and cultural life in Hungary. This „lack” of the history of literature and the limited acceptance of the genre in the critical discours evidently originates from the pluridisciplinary characteristic of the issue.

Although the sung poetry in consequence of its double mood of existence always was a stepchild of writing the history of literature, as from the very beginning, building on the mediality of the text, it could interpret the *lyrics singer* based on the intertwining of the text and the tune only with difficulties, the song poetry of the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was given very little attention, in a very paradox way, even in consequence of the preserved musical material. The songs of the ancient Hungarian literature (disregarding some exceptions) could be handled by the history of literature as pure texts, as the music had been lost, and from the 19<sup>th</sup> century the lyrics (disregarding some exceptions) turned into text verses. This happened even if in consequence of the fashion of „folk songs” a big part of lyric poems spread with tune and the metrics of lyric poems (as confessed by János Arany) were determined by the rhythm of certain tunes for long. On the contrary, the song poetry of the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, presentable by musical source material, is a neglected part of the Hungarian history of literature, probably due to „the fear of music”. The same time, in certain contradiction to the afore mentioned, a not secret aim of mine was to show, that the understanding of the role of this genre, standing on the border of music and literature, is not bound up with the knowledge of music. Partly because for its understanding it is necessary to put it in the context of a more general history of ideas, partly because for this very aim I speak of the music in the context of the history of concepts, that is I regard it as a phenomenon, the content of which is defined by its connection to the different traditions and schools and different philosophic systems and schools.

The intermediality of this cultural genre was one cause only for being disregarded by the literature-history writing. The second motive doing so may have been the widespread popularity of these mistrels, but their dependence on the contemporary elite’s social life as well being a manifestation form of it. This sentimental sung poetry had an important popularizing and

entertaining function in contemporary everyday life, which was not recognized by later literature-historians or they just ordered it under the simple text-poetry in spite of the musical notes found on some of the original manuscripts. The popularity of songs and its role in the sociability caused a problem from the very beginning in the canonization of the genre. One of the aims of the dissertation was to reveal the ways and references of the canonization of the genre by the introduction of the different discourses.

Concerning its ambitions of genre, the art song poetry of the end of the 18. century is a unique phenomenon of our literary history. The sentimental art song poetry, step by step gaining ground after the 1780-ies, detaches itself in a clear cut way both from the popular world of songs and its „higher style” predecessor, the gallant poetry characterized by the lyre of Faludi and Amade both in its aesthetical consciousness and definite orientation in principle. For the revelation of the features of the Hungarian art song poetry it was unavoidable, first and foremost, to make a short survey of the aesthetical, cultural historical and music historical background of the west-European sentimental art song literature. The materialization of the genre in Hungary can be described only in parallel with that, but at the same time distinctly separated of it. Singing songs was a societal fashion at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Hungary, which the literati were forced to „serve” by writing pieces proper for singing, but on the other hand they themselves tried to make use of this attitude of acceptance for the sake of the easier spreading of their poems. A consequence of this situation was the pressure for canonization of the „genre”, a claim for the systematization of the *singing* department and genre of *lyrics* and the demand for its incorporation into the canon of the genre which was done partly on the basis of the antique humanity and contemporary western european genre poetics (Baumgarten, Eschenburg, Sulzer), partly from the position of discourse of the scholarly patriotism. It resulted of the cultural conditions of 18<sup>th</sup> century that both canonization „methods”, in connection with the tradition of the *utile et dulce*, put a stress on the societal conduciveness of singing. In our country the background of history of ideas, which served the development and thriving of the genre and regarded the singing as one of the main manifestations of sociability in western-Europe, because it constituted the *gentleman* ideal, that is a part of *paideia* serving the evolvement of the human being, contributed to the canonization possibilities only after the years of 1810–1820. In its original form the singing of songs was a pure fashion, which flooded the Hungarian literature and culture without the background of the history of ideas existing in western Europe.

One of my aims was the presentation and description of the specific character and position of the Hungarian sentimental art song poetry at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although the research of the topic is made very exciting by the arborescent directions of the history of literature, ideas, culture, and music, at the same time this multitude of trends and mutual connections makes the

coherent interpretation of the „genre” very difficult. Having elaborated the issue I had to get to the conclusion that all the problems and developments of the Hungarian vocal song poetry are partly pluridisciplinary, partly, as a consequence of its cultural historical character, cyclic, but unceasingly pointing out of this concentricity. The fact is that although the problems of literature, music and history of ideas are closely connected and interwoven, each of them shows toward a segment of its own field of science and (also) helps its interpretation. All the same my priority purpose was to show that even against the ramifying system of interdependencies embedding the art song poetry; there exists a certain point of view, in which the genre can be contemplated in a relatively unified way. After having found this point in the principle of conduciveness, which – in connection to the „utile et dulce” maxim of Horatius – permeated all levels of contemporary thinking, approached the also the sung lyric poetry from the same direction. Among others my intention was to demonstrate that the vocal sentimental song poetry, in its reality, was a manifestation of the all embracing conduciveness idea of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as opposed to its apparent efforts to realize its inherent aesthetic (the topic of love, the melting mood of the heart).

The second chapter of the dissertation is dealing with the neologism in the verses originating from the practical realization of the sung poetry in close connection to chapter one, but completely separated from it, because it belongs to a completely different field of art notwithstanding the points of interconnection and has nothing to do with the essential features of the sung lyric poetry (*sung Lied or Ode*) described above. To understand this part, in opposition to the first one, the background knowledge of the theory of music is actually needed, or rather the previous musical knowledge can greatly help the everyday recipients in the structural analysis of the songs.

According to my view the translation of the newer, rhythmic Lieds and the verses written on fashionable western tunes were the inspiring factors of the renaissance of our system of poesy. The development of the so called double or west-European poesy, which in its age was called also the Ráday style, was, without doubt, the consequence of translating west-European Lieds. Not in the last place my aim with this strictly prosodic part was to expose an other possible source of the origin of west-European and simultaneous system of poesy in the Hungarian language.

Finally the third and fourth chapters are dealing with the revealing and interpretation of the sung poetry of Csokonai. As the material, intents and uses of the sung poetry of Csokonai are extraordinary heterogeneous and complicated, the issue required the description of a relatively wide background story on society and poetry. Namely a synchronous crossection of the lyrical poetry of Csokonai shows such coexisting dissimultaneities, which seem ununderstandable, incoherent, moreover casual phenomena without a profound study of the era. Apart the liedts continuing the traditions of the picant, popular manner (like the song insertions of *Karnyóné* or of the *Cultura*) the polite praising speeches of the representative baroque style are present in a natural way as the pieces

of the sentimental songs too, imported from the west. These different styles are held together as tight by the pragmatic way of thinking of Csokonai, that like in the case of the sentimental art songs, it seemed here too practical to approach the whole sung poetry of him from the „*utile*”.

## **II. Applied methods**

As some chapters of the dissertation interpret the different ways of apparition of the sentimental sung lyrical poetry, respectively after the disclosure of the essence of the intermediary genre, I shall present and interpret the whole of the sung poetry of Csokonai. My methods thereby have been many-sided.

Although one of the starting points of the research of the sentimental (sung) art songs was the framework of the genres, in a narrow sense I did not make investigations concerning poetics or the history of the genres, except the description of the phenomenon, for different reasons. Partly because I positioned the sentimental sung poetry as a genre from the beginning into the framework of wider ranging problems, partly because the genre questions of the 18. century have been already interwoven with the aesthetic discourse of the time, and in the case of the sung scenes of bucolic amour, the utility principle determining the canonization of the genre (too), has already been widely influenced by the nature of the moral-philosophy of the aesthetics of the 18. century.

About the character, the essence of the art songs in literature or its role in society, we are informed firstly by the intention of the authors. Therefore it was indispensable to include the uttering, declarations of those times about the genre into the dissertation and the intentional reading became very important. As the descriptions about music usually form a part of the general aesthetical analysis, I interpret the pieces along the interconnection points of music and literature in the first instance by the implication of the contemporary aesthetical discourse. In connection to the sociability I could not disregard the ethical aims of the sung song literature and the ones concerned with the public life in the course of the interpretation. As a matter of fact the distancing from the works was a necessity, as in the present case only this method, that is the expansion of the limits of the works over contexts out of literature can open up new layers of interpretation. So the involvement of researches in the field of the history of ideas was inevitable, as at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the cult of sensitivity had a significant influence on the development of the genre. This was not the less important cause of the fact that the Hungarian sung poetry (in parallel with the novel) became one of the most popular literary-musical genre of the cultural-historical phenomenon of sensitivity at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. I have been sketching this wider interpretational horizon, which in many cases refers well beyond literature for the sake of the deeper understanding of the

literary evolution and for the interpretation of that.

The same time, as if „in opposition” to the aforementioned I revealed the metrical and formal elements of the poems in a strict, structuralist description for the sake of revealing the essence of innovations in poesy. As in this case for the structural collating of the text and the tune it was necessary to analyze also the musical structures, I have applied both the notation used by musical sciences and a metrical marking, which differs a bit from the one in usage at present only for the sake of presenting in which way the rhythm of the sung poems transformed and renewed our versification.

### **III. Results and new scientific achievements**

1.) As it was necessary for the determination of the subject, I make it clear at the very beginning – as a theoretical introduction – that the sung poetry, which, strictly speaking, till now was basically handled in a uniform way, have – both in respect of the way of writing and historical – different forms of appearance, of which I separate five „historical types”.

2.) In connection with the trends of history of ideas and culture I introduced the term of the „sung lyric poetry” for the designation of the song poetry translated and written by the elite literary men, within the entirety of the sentimental sung poetry of the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Further I interpreted the genre and the societal phenomenon accompanying it, respectively, on the basis of literary and extraliterary (aesthetical, idea and music historical) contexts.

3.) I have shown that the morale phylosophy and easthetical discourse which backed the singing of lyric poems in western-Europe was almost completely missing from the Hungarian context till the 1810thies, although it was evidently inspired by the fashion of west-European *Klavierlied*. The research made evidently clear that Hungarian sentimental sung poetry, although it „seemed” to aspire for the autoprincipled aesthetics, in fact it was a relatively late canonized form of the „utile” way of perception permeating the contemporary way of thinking in each regard. It was so, even if the sung lyric poetry became the most typical genre of the „sensitivity cult”.

4.) Based on the contemporary utterances of literary men referring to the theory of verses and the strict structural analysis of some poems I expose that the development of the so called double, or West-European, which was called also Ráday-nem (genre of Ráday), was partly the consequence of the effect of the translation of west-European *Lieds*. By this ascertainment I cover up a new

possible source of the west-European and simultaneous versification system of Hungarian language, which was not reviewed till now.

5.) The sung poetry of Csokonai based on an exhausting research of the sources was not surveyed neither by the history of literature, or by that of music. The chapter of the dissertation dealing with Csokonai is founded on a previous research of sources, which were published earlier in the form of a list and the entirety of the resource material is before publishing in digital form together with the photocopies of the sources. The fourth chapter of the dissertation is basically an extract of the latter, a collection of data, which contains all the known pieces of the sung poetry of Csokonai in alphabetic order together with music. In the lack of space I name only the selected source, which I took the music from. I additionally give a short description concerning the genre and the history of its birth and show the construction of the given Lied by comparing the structure of the text and the tune in the form of a spreadsheet.

6.) The dissertation, based on the above mentioned publishing of sources and the primary context, systematizes the seemingly chaotic sung poetry of Csokonai as a first attempt, further on it denotes the pragmatic approach of the poet, which, as a starting point and with regard to its aim, makes this segment of the life-work of the poet a homogenous one, although, concerning its themes, style and way of appearance, it is very arborescent.

## **Publications**

### *Studies*

1.) *The tune following verses of Csokonai.* (ItK 2004/4, 466–482.)

2.) *The (old) lady flouting verses of Karnyóné looking at from the direction of the tradition of song poetry.* (Debreceni Szemle 2005/1, 97–105.)

3.) *The place and possible interpretations of the „verbunkos” in the poetry of Csokonai.* (In: „*Et in Arcadia ego*”. Szerk. DEBRECZENI Attila, GÖNTZY Monika, Debrecen, Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2005, 136–149.)

4.) *List of sources for the tune following verses of Csokonai.* (Könyv és Könyvtár 2005, 315–350.)

5.) „*Csokonai-tunes*” and their sources. (Magyar Zene 2006/3-4, 330-358, 440–481.)

6.) *Sung lyrical poetry in Hungarian language in Hungary in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.* (Magyar Zene 2007/3, 289–342.)

### ***Under editing***

1.) „*Sounding*” critical editon of the works of Csokonai. (before publishing on CD)

### ***Review***

1. *The poems of László Amadé*. (S. a. r. SCHILLER Erzsébet, AJKAY Alinka. RMKT XVIII. század VII. Balassi Kiadó, 2004) (Könyv és Könyvtár 2006, 365–367.)