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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 aszáfok*, 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 felelet* (*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 Nagybjom. 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 Dorottyja, / Hogy néki is tetszik Ádám állapotja”	„De abban őrajta sem vág ki Dorottyja, / 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 t 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 lányokat”* (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 tüzét 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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