

LATIN POETRY IN HUNGARY IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

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With this paper I shall attempt to introduce a group of poets — to date largely neglected by Hungarian scholarship — who, in the period of the Late-Renaissance, wrote mostly or exclusively in Latin. From among the rich but often hardly accessible material of Hungarian Neo-Latin poetry only four poets, who left considerable oeuvres, will be treated in some detail. As for the geographical scope, Hungary is to be understood as the historical *Regnum Hungariae* that fell into three pieces as a result of (1) the Turkish occupation of Buda (1541), (2) the establishment of the Principality of Transylvania, and (3) the entrenchment of Habsburg power in the northern and western parts of the country. It should be noted, however, that neither these weighty events, nor the cruel wars of religion, nor the so-called Fifteen Years' War, which made the division of Hungary last for almost another one hundred years, could demolish the common concept of a historically unified country.

The poets in question belonged to a distinct cultural layer of the same generation. Their homeland, or at least their place of residence, was North-East Hungary, though some were born in the western parts and others descended from families who had to leave their crofts in the South because of the Turkish conquest. Until 1600 almost all of them studied at the University of Wittenberg. The followers of the Swiss Confession soon moved over to the German academies in the West (Heidelberg), but as a result of the Thirty Years War they had to go even further, to the universities of the Netherlands. These poets emerged in the 1590s; the very last and most important publication of their generation was the collection entitled *Delitiae poetarum Hungaricorum* released by J. Ph. Pareus (1619). In fact, this editor published two entire poetical oeuvres in the work. These Hungarian poets deserve particular attention because they were succeeded by no other similar group during the 17th century.

Considering the era and the territory, one rightly expects that most of the poets were of Hungarian birth, while some were of German or Slovak-

ian origin. They spoke a number of languages and several of them wrote in two languages. This multilingualism made it possible for J. Filiczky, who was born in the Szepesség — a typical multilingual county of Northern Hungary — to undertake a private tutorship in a Czech family. The poetical witnesses of this multilingualism are poems, written often in two versions, sometimes in the same metre, e.g. hexameters.¹ The German speaking poets were either citizens of German towns founded in the Middle Ages and spoke the so-called main Hungarian languages (Hungarian, German, and Slovakian),² or they were new immigrants from Germany who served as clergymen and school-rectors in the German-inhabited areas. Around 1600, according to all indications, the number of foreign academics rose in Hungary. Except for a few, however, they did not stay in the country for very long. One such exception was the Silesian Johannes Bocatius, the most prolific poet among his contemporaries, who later became mayor of Kassa [Košice in today's Slovakia], and even served as a diplomat. The Hungarian community soon got to like him, and after marrying the daughter of a well-educated preacher who had previously been the pastor of the imperial embassy in Constantinople, he was considered a native Hungarian. Nevertheless he could never learn the language well. Once a foreign painter asked him why he decided to stay in Hungary; he answered with the following epigram, referring also to the classical *sententia*:

Plus patria doctis fauet exera terra poetis,
Hinc peregrina etiam me capit ora magis.³

Aside from the sense of historical unity, the Turkish danger, the Reformation, and the common humanist education, it was also a politically and historically interpreted tradition that connected these poets. The basis of this feeling was provided by the work of Janus Pannonius, which had been published a few decades earlier by Johannes Sambucus. The 15th century humanist poet and bishop of Pécs was not a Protestant, of course, but his epigrams against the popes have made him popular ever since. His poetical status was always unquestioned, and this is why he became the court poet of King Matthias, the last Hungarian-born king who founded a flourishing Renaissance culture in his royal court, while successfully defending his lands from the Turkish onslaught. Interestingly enough, it was Bocatius, the Silesian, who published a number of anecdotes on Matthias in verse, and later he also published the source of these anecdotes, a work of the Italian Marzio Galeotto, under the title *Salomon Hungaricus* (1611).⁴

The latter publication was achieved with the assistance of the Hungarian Palatine of the day, the highest dignitary after the king. Further literary models and authorities mentioned in the works of our poet-group were Georgius Sabinus, Georgius Fabricius, Petrus Lotichius, also Nicodemus Frischlin, Nicolaus Reusner, Friedrich Taubmann, and above all Paul Schede Melissus; here and there one even finds references to Justus Lipsius, Scalichius the encyclopedist, and Ramus the philosopher.

Among the poets, one can at first glance observe — except for Bocatius — the lack of love themes. Bocatius, being a scholar-tutor, did not at all represent more liberal moral principles or more open habits than the other significant personalities, who, as pastors and also often members of the town council were his superiors. It was rather a matter of his being the only one among his fellow-poets who, as poet, adopted the role of the perfect layman, and thus accepted and tolerated the traditional conceptions of love-poetry. His *Rubella*, for example, had originally been a creature of poetical fantasy according to classical patterns, and only later did the poet associate his love poems with his fiancée, who, of course, spoke no Latin.⁵ Furthermore, young Hungarian clergymen had the ability to write useful and suitably conventional love poems, if their patron requested them. Apparently, young barons did not care much about such poetry, but the author, the private tutor preserved it and passed it on in his works to posterity. Without commission, a clergyman would write at most for his own wedding, though it sometimes happened that the same poem, with minor alterations, served for two additional marriages and wives.⁶

When evaluating the literary topics of these Hungarian poets, it is crucial to consider the intellectual strata to which the authors belonged. They were generally students, or educators of young nobles, and, after graduating from their academic studies, some of them served as court preachers, others as clergy in small provincial towns and villages, where, far away from the foreign and internal cultural centers, their poetry was greatly influenced by the traditions of the village gentry and the church order. Bearing these factors in mind, one might reasonably ask to what extent were their literary themes determined by their personal backgrounds and by the tasks and interests of their audience.

Hungarian students typically attended the theological faculties of foreign universities with the support of a rich diocese or a noble patron; the peregrinants thus committed themselves to return the costs of their studies by serving in a school or a church. Students at foreign universities established an organization for themselves, the so-called Coetus with an elected

director who represented the group and had certain rights within this community. Under these material conditions and moral obligations the student fell under the influence of three factors: that of the patron, the Coetus and the university.

György Thury represents a typical case of a poet who developed in such a cultural context. His poems, together with the *Poemata* of Johann Philipp Pareus, appeared in the second book of the latter's *Carmina adoptiva*, and later in *Delitiæ poetarum Hungaricorum*.⁷

Thirteen of his elegies have survived. One of them was written in the name of the Coetus,⁸ two on the occasion of the Coetus-members leaving for home, three more as tributes to his Patron,⁹ and another three concerned to the sphere of university studies. One of these was dedicated to the birthday, the second to the death of Schede Melissus, and the third to the defunct pastor primarius of Heidelberg and professor of theology; one more elegy belongs to this group, written for two graduating Danish students.¹⁰ Finally, three more poems are characteristic, referring to the strata that promoted Latin poetry in the writer's homeland. The themes are: the death of a professor, and deceased sons of former students of Heidelberg.¹¹

György Thury's epigrams demonstrate the range of the young poet's cultural interests. Two thirds of his poems are addressed to poets and scholars, among others Justus Lipsius, Scalichius, and Paracelsus, and they often contain interesting information about his political opinions. On the other hand, names of students are mentioned in those epigrams that he originally wrote into thèses and dissertations and later decided to bring together here. His epigrams written to relatives and patrons show the same typology of themes and aspects as the elegies. These throw light not only on facts concerning the poet's biography, but also provide important data about the audience for Neo-Latin poetry in Hungary.

The second poet under consideration, János Filiczky represents the type of Praeceptor who for fifteen years served as a private tutor of the children of various Hungarian and Bohemian families and spent nearly half his life abroad. He descended from a family of the lower nobility, and he already spoke three vernacular languages in his childhood. His patrons sponsored the publication two collections of his poems (Prague, 1604; Basel, 1614), the latter being reprinted in *Delitiæ poetarum Hungaricorum*.¹² The first volume consisted of 30 poems, while the second, a much more comprehensive book, contained 140 poems. The first volume was sponsored by a Hungarian noble family, the Thököly, the second by a Bohemian, the Hodejovský z Hodejova. The most remarkable addressees of the first, the thinner volume, are Sebestyén Thököly and his son, István Thököly; a few other

families of the poet's homeland in the Szepesség, and a few school rectors who worked in the Protestant schools supported by the above mentioned noble families. Nine poems were addressed to the Thökölys, three to other magnates, as well as twelve to priests and schoolteachers. In the poems dedicated to his patrons, the poet often treated the topic of *vera nobilitas* and interpreted their coats of arms and emblematic symbols. The second group of the addressees expressed thanks for the education and help they had provided during the poet's studies. The volume published in Prague shows the distinct cultural contours of those gentry courts which flourished at that time and whose members, such as the members of the Thököly family, also patronized the Neo-Latin poets.

The author included his later poems in his second book published in Basel and grouped the material as follows: *Genethliaca* — *Novus annus* — *Gratulatoria* — *Sententiae parainetikai* — *Propemtika* — *Philothesia* — *Prosphonesteis* — *Epithalamia* — *Paramythica* — *Funebria*. The chapters created in this way embrace various situations of life from birth to death, which, according to the traditions of patronage, had to be praised with poems. Most of the occasions are obvious from the cited group titles, some chapters, however, need further clarification. The *Genethliaca* in this case, meant only Christmas poems; the rather comprehensive series, *Novus*, consists of New Year's greetings; the only poem of more than one part, entitled *Gratulatoria*, praises a schoolrector of Nassau and contains Latin and Greek epigrams in accordance with the addressee's education. The group *Propemtika* is notable for two of its epigrams which Filiczky took out of his own *album amicorum*. Under the title *Philothesia* there are poems that the author himself wrote into memorial albums. The title *Prosphonesteis* refers to poems which were written into academic theses and dissertations, as well as into books of friends at their request. With the label *Paramythica* Filiczky titled poetical exegesis of scriptural texts, which were popular even in the school curriculum.

If we review the addressees of these occasional poems, we can quite clearly see the relationship that developed between the praeceptor and his young pupil. It is only too obvious that Filiczky dedicated more than ten percent of his poems to the families of his tutorees, but it is conspicuous that only in a very few did he address university professors. When he dedicated a poem to a person associated with the university, he usually chose the prince of the land, or the rector of the institution, with whom his aristocratic student, according to his rank, had to make contact. What also becomes clear is the strategy by which the praeceptor chose his acquaint-

tances at a foreign university. There are surviving poems by various university members which were dedicated both to the private tutor and to his young lord. When escorting his pupil abroad, the Hungarian praeceptor looked for his equals, among the rectors and their associates of the Latin schools who were graduates and *mutatis mutandis* occupied a similar position in the hierarchy of academic life. All in all, we can expect the praeceptors to have had a certain status somewhere between the professors and the students. It is a fact, that they were not simply completing their studies but, as teaching assistants, also reviewed the lectures of the professors with their students.

It is the school rectors who belonged to the third group of Neo-Latin poets in Hungary. A typical representative of this group was the already mentioned Bocatius who held the post of *ludimagister* in two towns of North-East Hungary. The title of his first volume was: *Siracides vel Ecclesiasticus Iesu, filii Sirach, parainesis ad vitam bene beateque transigendam, in locos redactae et versibus elegiacis redditae* (Wittenberg, 1596). It is prefaced by Aegidius Hunnius, the famous theologian of Wittenberg, whose pedagogical belief was that the versified version of biblical texts would bring the sentences of the Holy Scriptures closer to the pupils, and thus making them more easily learnable. As he organized the biblical *sententiae* according to their topics, his work was useful even for clergymen, who, in search of authorities, used it while preparing for their sermons. Bocatius versified scriptural texts which today belong to the *Apocrypha* but were then appreciated as an important part of the curriculum for the first years of Latin studies. Considering that the addressees were pastors of six royal free towns, who constituted the local ecclesiastical leadership, we can complete the list of important sociological aspects of the book. Its usefulness seems undoubtable in a certain sphere and also characterises the author as a representative of school poetry.

His other, previously mentioned volume was dedicated to his noble patrons, the counts Zsigmond Forgách and Kristóf Darholcz. The son of the former addressee, Mihály Forgách became famous in Hungarian literary history at least in part for a letter he wrote while a student at Wittenberg, to Justus Lipsius. Lipsius' reply had been rendered into Latin distichs by Bocatius.¹³ This close relationship between the Forgách family and the poet can be demonstrated best by the brief letter Mihály Forgách wrote after his father's death and in two sentences asked for *Carmina funebria*: "Plange Bocati, amisimus heri heroem magnum, Hungariae solem, patrem meum. Plange Bocati et omnes Tuæ Musæ."¹⁴ Bocatius' Muses answered with ten

poems which appeared within three months of the funeral.¹⁵ István Drugeth of Homonna, another nobleman, writing a long letter in which he called Bocatius — according to the etiquette of the day — the best poet of North Hungary and also requested poems from him.¹⁶ Darholz, the other addressee, became acquainted with Bocatius through the preacher-poet, János Tolnai Balog. Both of them will be considered in greater detail below.

The four hundred page book, entitled *Hungaridos libri poematum libri V.* and the appendix of letters written to and from Bocatius, deliver a great deal of material reflecting on the relationship between a poet and his audience in the last decades of the 16th century. These letter-writing humanists, who occasionally wrote poems, too, were clergymen and school rectors. Their lowest stratum consisted of cantors. The town clergy who dealt with their steady and interested flock also as educators, and who sometimes also acted as poets, often appear as addressees and patrons themselves. It happened that two priests, after receiving their dedicated copies, sent gold coins to the author. In other cases, however, persons of the same rank expressed their applause with poems.¹⁷ The most financially promising patron was a nobleman, who, besides expressing his polite appreciation, showed his satisfaction by giving money. Significant positions among the patrons were held by the clerks of the royal finance administration: the counselors, the provisors, and the accountants.

The patron and the addressees of the occasional poems acted according to the requirement of their status and tradition, but the examination of the mechanisms of the patronage system have been neglected in Hungarian Renaissance scholarship and more thorough research is still badly needed. It was, of course, fairly common that the cost of printing was financed by a rich noble, especially in the case of large volumes. For example, István Illésházy, the later palatine, once sent a courier with 50 forints to a printing house in Wittenberg, the voyage of his servant cost him another 25. Bocatius had been backed in a similar way by a magnate when he submitted his book, *Salomon Hungaricus*, for publication. It is important to mention though, that in both cases only the cost of printing is known, the honorarium of the author still remains a mystery. Bocatius' *Carmina funeralia* belongs to the category of typical occasional poetry, in it he commemorated the deaths of Simon Forgách and István Drugeth of Homonna. Both collections were printed at the cost of the commissioner but there is no reference to any honorarium paid to the author. The town judges, town

clerks and senators almost always gave money to the poet, and gold coins represented the highest form of appreciation.¹⁸

It is remarkable how carefully Bocatius chose his patrons, how cleverly he kept himself away from the arguments over religion between the followers of Lutheranism and the Swiss Confession, and how he avoided confessionalism. It is also noteworthy that most of the time he relied on the high nobility and the patricians of the cities. Members of the lesser nobility (gentry) cannot be found among the addressees of his poems. The exceptions, however, are the families of Máriássy and Darholz. Bocatius was introduced to the Darholz family by János Tolnai Balog, his best friend, and also the most gifted poet among them all.

This poet represents the fourth type of Latin versifier of that day, namely the educated village preacher, who, together with his patron Kristóf Darholz, and a few little known poet-friends, formed a humanist group not far from Bocatius' home, at Kassa, and also enjoyed the friendship and hospitality of the Silesian. These relations and connections within the developing literary institution were quite complex, as this provincial Humanist group also had close contacts with contemporary vernacular Renaissance poets. Darholz financed the publication of a booklet in honor of the fallen Balassi brothers. In this Tolnai Balog wrote eight poems. One of them is an epigram that was later translated into Hungarian by János Rimay, thus becoming the best poetry *in memoriam* to the poet, Bálint Balassi.¹⁹ Tolnai Balog's social position was quite different from that of Bocatius. In a letter written to the Silesian, he referred to himself as a village clergyman and he obtained his patrons mostly from among the gentry. Thus while Rimay²⁰ was not mentioned in Bocatius well-known poems, he received an honorable place on the list of Tolnai Balog.²¹

At least by 1592 Tolnai Balog was serving as a clergyman in a village on the estates of the Darholz family. It was in that very year that his humanist group came into existence and held its occasional meetings in the castle of the Darholczes or in the vicarage. In the presence of friends and guests, Tolnai Balog wrote an epigram celebrating the marriage of Bocatius in his own garden. Bocatius must also have liked writing occasional poetry so spontaneously. Earlier he had produced a poem on the garden of an imperial clerk in a similar manner.²²

The humanist group of a village had an environment very different from that of the Silesian poet in the city of Kassa. Without wanting to idealize feudalism or rural noble life, it is easy to notice that the clergyman-poet and his patron saw each other quite often, and that even magnates and pastors attended the occasional literary meetings. It is also well known, how

this loosely organized group pioneered in appreciating poetry written in Hungarian. Darholcz wrote both in Hungarian and Latin, Rimay had also been introduced as a bilingual poet by Tolnai Balog:

*Praeterea gnarus patriis cantare Camoneis
Romanoque sono Rimaiensis erit.*²³

The group and the patron had occasional poems printed, though it would have been a much bigger venture to publish the collected poems of Tolnai Balog. In fact, Darholcz promised to do so but could not carry out for his promise for unknown reasons, maybe because of his untimely death. Soon after that, Tolnai Balog left his earlier residence and associated himself with the family Drugeth. They supported Latin poetry as much as Darholcz, and some members of the family wrote Hungarian poetry, too.

When Bocatius prefaced the poetry of his friend, Tolnai Balog, he used the phrases "gravitas moris et oris honor" and greeted in his personality "sacer Christi vates". Somewhere else he mentions an epic poem, written by Tolnai Balog in distichs ("canis heroo grandia gesta sono"), and other lyrical metres following the classical examples of Virgil, Ovid and Horace. Unfortunately, no epic poem by Tolnai Balog has survived and, even his poems in hexameters are rare.²⁴ The disappearance of so many poems can be explained by the system of their distribution. They were sent as splendid manuscripts to their addressees and as the planned volumes usually did not appear, we can only find them among the remains of the author or, through patient philological work, we can reconstruct them from archives.

Considering the literary activity of the persons dealt with so far, we can see that volumes of poetry could only be published under the right circumstances, with the assistance of a university professor abroad, or a magnate-patron at or from home. The gentry, the preachers, and the school teachers of provincial towns and villages could have their poems printed only in a few cases, and the likelihood of publishing their literary products in the form of a book was even more remote. On the other hand, it is by now beyond doubt that poetical activity was widespread in late-Renaissance Hungary and we can observe the rapid development of this literary institution during the period. Forms and opportunities were greatly determined by a system of tradition codified in school and church orders and by the traditions of the nobility and the urban middle class. Consequently, if we want to know more about the forms and norms of the poetry of this era, we have to take into consideration the socio-ideological factors treated in this paper.

Notes

1. *Régi magyar költők tára [Collection of old Hungarian poets], 17th century series (hereafter: RMKT XVII)*. Vol. 2: poem numbers 24, 26, 29, 34, 36, 38, 46; Vol. 6: Nos 183, 184.
2. The poet Bocatius' father-in-law spoke seven languages. Cf. Johannes Bocatius: *Hungaridos libri poematum V. Bartphae*, 1599, 426.
3. Bocatius, *op. cit.*, 375.
4. In an epigram, attached to the book, a friend of the poet wrote:
Ergo Pannonius tu nobis lanus es alter;
Pannonij haud Iani est laus tua, lane, minor.
5. Bocatius, *op. cit.*, 298.
6. RMKT XVII. Vol. 2: No. 16, 35.
7. J. Philippi Parei Poemata. In quibus Odarum Libri duo. Anacreon. Sylvae. Epigrammata. Liber adoptivus. Neapoli Nemetum, 1616, 296–350; *Delitiae Poetarum Hungaricorum ... exhibitae a Ioh. Philippo Pareo*. Francofurti, 1619, 311–354.
8. II. In obitum Iacobi Wagneri, scriptum iussu coetus. V. In discessum Balthasaris C. Debrecini. VI. Ad dominum Petrum P. Aluincium discedentem.
9. II. Ad generosum dominum Ludouicum Rakoci etc. Quum Begum Bacsensem Ibrahim vietum et vinctum adduceret Mense Iun. 1602. XI. Ad spectabilem et magnificum dominum ... Franciscum Mangoczi, etc. XII. In honorem nuptiarum ... Valentini Drugeth de Homonna ... et Elisabethae Rakoci.
10. X. In diem natalem Pauli Melissi Franci. IX. In obitum ... Pauli Melissi Schedii. VIII. In obitum ... Danielis Tossani, pastoris et professoris primarii in Academia Heidelbergensi. IV. In lauream magisterii Iani Zeuthenii et Iani Holmii Danorum.
11. Ad Basileum VV. Schepsinum, obitum filii lugentem. II. In obitum Thomae Fabricii. XIII. Ad ... Basilium Szabó ... obitum filiorum lugentem.
12. Xenia natalia etc. magnificis, generosis, egregiis, nobilissimis viris, prudentia, eruditione, maxima rerum experientia, et virtute praestantissimis, [...] ad edendum geni sui iudicium, animi grati testimonium, debitae observantiae monumentum, strenuae loco in recens ineuntis anni MDCIV. [...] ab Ioanne Filiczio Farkasfalvano Hungaro-Sepusio dedicata, consecrata et oblata. Prague, 1604; *Delitiae poetarum Hungaricorum*, 465–530.
13. *Forgách Mihály és Justus Lipsius levélváltása* [The correspondence of Mihály Forgács and Justus Lipsius]. Budapest, 1970. *Iusti Lipsii Epistolarum centuriae duae*, Lugduni Batavorum, 1951, II, No. 81; and *Opera omnia. Vesaliae*, 1675, 2:197. Bocatius: *Hungaridos libri poematum V. Bartphae*, 1599, 292–294.
14. Bocatius *op. cit.*, 460–461.
15. Musae parentales [...] Simonis Forgach [...] 20 Septemb. Anno 1598 demortui. Bartphae, 1598; and *Hungaridos libri poematum V. Bartphae*, 1599, 292–294.
16. Bocatius, *op. cit.*, 470–471.
17. *Op. cit.*, 447–448.
18. *Op. cit.*, 455.

19. The modern edition of Darholcz Latin collection of epicedia: Dézsi, Lajos (ed.). *Balassa Bálint minden munkái* [Balassi's collected works]. Budapest, 1923, 625–664. Rimay's translation was published in Eckhardt, Sándor (ed.). *Rimay János Összes Művei* [Rimay's collected works]. Budapest, 1955, 46. A reference of Bocatius about the Balassi family can be found in his *Hungaridos libri poematum V.*, 402.
20. A central figure in the post-Balassi Hungarian literary scene, a poet of gentry descent.
21. Bocatius, *op. cit.*, 499–505. Some of the gentry patron families Bocatius could have, but did not mention are the following: Petényi, Fígedy, Kapy, Pécsy, Berthóty, Rimay, Perlaky etc.
22. János Tolnai Balog, *op. cit.*; Bocatius, "Ad hortulum domesticum [...] Georgii Caproncai, praeceptoris caesarei Cassoviae", *op. cit.*, 217.
23. Darholcz's mentioned poetry cf. *op. cit.*, 502; Tolnai Balog of Rimay cf. *op. cit.*, 503–504.
24. Bocatius mentions Tolnai Balog's poems in *op. cit.*, 198–200.