

**Szakolczainé Lipp Veronika**  
**Georgius Belnay's historia litteraria**

**PhD-theses**

The main topic of the present doctoral thesis was originally intended to be a late 18<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian historia litteraria, which had been written in Latin by an academic teacher in Bratislava for his students.<sup>1</sup> The *Historia literarum bonarumque artium in Hungaria* can be perfectly interpreted in the scheme which was outlined by Margócsy István in 1984 when assessing the special characteristics of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century literary tradition.<sup>2</sup> Despite the differences in the content and also in the methods, the voluminous literary material is composed with striking homogeneity of approach: the fundament of each individual piece is the integration of the tradition of former historia litterarias without any criticism. Belnay published his book in 1799, when the traditional genre of historia litteraria was loosening. Only ten years later did Pápay Sámuel publish his work with the title *A magyar Literatura Esmérete*, where previous historia litterarias' endeavour to grasp the completeness of the literary material regardless the language of the works was replaced by the priority of the language: Pápay limited the context of Hungarian culture to the oeuvres which were written in Hungarian and all cultural phenomena of non-Hungarian language were omitted. Looking back from Pápay's approach, the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Historia literarum...*, which was published in 1811<sup>3</sup> seems anachronistic although it might have been used as textbook at the Academy of Bratislava even after Belnay's death.

In the course of collecting material for this thesis, it became clear that Belnay's critics hardly looked carefully at the source. This might led to the fallacy that Belnay wrote his radical pamphlet *as teacher in Bratislava* in 1790, though that time he was a law student at the University of Pest and it was not earlier than November 26, 1792, when he started teaching at the Royal Academy in Bratislava.

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<sup>1</sup> BELNAY György Alajos, *Historia literarum bonarumque artium in Hungaria*, Posonii, 1799. (hereinafter referred to as: *Historia literarum*).

<sup>2</sup> MARGÓCSY István, *Az irodalomtörténeti hagyomány helyzete a XVIII. század második felében*, Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények, 1984/3, 291–308.

<sup>3</sup> BELNAY György Alajos, *Compendium historiae rei litterariae in Hungaria a seculo XI. usque ad seculum XVIII.*, Posonii, 1811.

It is a mistake to say that Belnay had taught at the Royal Academy in Pécs from 1788, as it is not supported by any source. (True though, he submitted his application to a vacancy, but the position was granted to Delling János.)

Another fallacy is that his work with the title *Compendium* (published in 1811) would include the 18th century material, as it was mentioned by Kosáry Domokos. In fact, *Compendium* ended with the discussion of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, very much like *Historia literarum*. And finally, it is a mistake to say that Belnay reverted to the alphabetical order in *Historia literarum*.

Thus, the research had to be extended to the study of Belnay's other works as well to support the formulation of a more detailed and accurate picture.

It was a crucial moment in Belnay's career when in 1790 his anonymous pamphlet *Reflexiones* was published. It was later much praised by historians of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it could not have its way to literature. In addition, his successful participation at the essay contest, which was called for by the aesthetics department of the University of Pest did not draw much attention either, only Szauder József Joseph had some praising words about it in his study on the contest.<sup>4</sup>

The thesis provides a detailed analysis of his 1790 pamphlet and his essay prepared for the contest of the University of Pest. For the investigations about the contest, the original documents – the manuscripts, which are kept in the Hungarian National Archives and had been studied by Szauder József – were to be revisited. This investigation led to a hitherto hidden source, which is to rewrite the Belnay canon in a radical way. To his application to the contest, Belnay attached a thesis about the genre of song in Latin and in also in Hungarian language (the latter was prepared based on the Latin version). Since the Hungarian literature of the period is rather poor in literary theories on genres – only the ideas of Csokonai Vitéz Mihály and Földi János can be mentioned –, the reappearance of Belnay's essay after two hundred years is of great importance.

A review of the history of 18<sup>th</sup> century *historia litteraria* is followed by describing Belnay's activities at the Royal Academy of Bratislav. Finally the thesis gives a detailed description of the text and sources of *Historia literarum*.

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<sup>4</sup> SZAUDER József, *Az esztétika tanszék betöltésére kiírt pályázat és kritikai irányzataink 1791-ben*, Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények, 1971, 88, 98–99.