

# Personal relationship between Samuel Ferjenčík and Johann Wolfgang Goethe

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## 1 Introduction

Samuel Ferjenčík was an important Evangelical priest, writer, publicist, meteorologist, pomologist, friend of Ján Kollár and acquaintance of Johann Wolfgang Goethe. This contribution processes the testimonies about the mutual relationship between Ferjenčík and J. W. Goethe during his studies in Jena (1816 – 1818). It refers to their mutual interactions preserved in the individual sources and appraises their significance for further growth of Ferjenčík's personality.

## 2 The historical importance of Samuel Ferjenčík in the Slovak History and Literature

Samuel Ferjenčík (3/12/1793 Zvolen – 28/7/1855 Jelšava) was a Slovak Evangelical priest, publicist, meteorologist, pomologist, and enlightener. After finishing his theological studies in Bratislava, he continued studying at the University of Jena in 1816 – 1818, where, while taking theological courses, he attended lectures in natural sciences, mainly in mineralogy and astronomy, but also in natural philosophy, political theory, natural law, etc. In Jena, he obtained the diploma of an external, full-fledged member of the Mineralogical Society and its secretary for the Hungarian nation. After returning to his homeland, he was ordained a priest in 1818, and then he served as an Evangelical chaplain and a parish priest. From 1827 until his passing away, he lived in Jelšava, where he was a senior deputy of Gemer from 1836 and a senior priest of Gemer from 1853. He was the director of Cherry-Growers' Club in Jelšava (1841 – 47) and a member of the Tatrín Society. He held a doctorate in theology.<sup>1</sup> In 1842, he co-presented the message of Slovenský prestolný prosbopis/The Slovak Petition to the Throne of 1842 to the emperor as a protest against the national situation in the Kingdom of Hungary, along with the protest signatures. He participated in the general assemblies of Gustav Adolf's Foundation in 1851 in Mamburg and 1852 in Wiesbaden. In 1864, his widow Lujza established the Humanitarian Women's Society of Jelšava, probably the first women's society in Slovakia (the Živena Society originated in 1869), and then led it.

## 3 Ján Kollár on Ferjenčík's relationship with Goethe

After finishing his studies in Bratislava, Ferjenčík continued his studies in Jena, where Pavol Jozef Šafárik, Ján Kollár and Ján Chalupka studied at the same time, too. In relation to his arrival at the University of Jena, Ferjenčík (1848, p. 54) himself mentions "drahých rodákov našich, Šafárika a Chalupku" [our dear compatriots, Šafárik and Chalupka]. Regarding his

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<sup>1</sup> According to the data stated on the gravestone in Jelšava and information in Szinnyei (1894, coll. 424).

meetings with J. W. Goethe in Jena, Ferjenčík refers to his “verný priateľ” [loyal friend Kollár’s claim that Ferjenčík] (1848, p. 55) presented his compatriots to Goethe. In the interpretation of *Slávy dcera/The Daughter of Sláva*, Kollár (1832b, p. 351–352) actually states that he owes being presented to Goethe to Ferjenčík himself and recalls singing and guitar-playing that helped Ferjenčík become friends with the German writer.

“*Ferjenčjk*” Samuel, 1793, we Zwoleně; nynj kazatel v Gelšawě, wýborný, i přirozenjm i uměnjm uzpůsobený zpěwák a hudebnjk na kytare, který skladateli těchto básnj negednu hodinu v Jeně, kde spolu byli, osladil; s Göthem, práwě tehdáž národnj slowenské zpřewy hledagjcjm a překládagjcjm, ho obeznámil; s nim se o filosofických předmětech a čtených společně knihách často w přátelských rozmluwách hádal. Wydal několik káznj tiskem a má I vlastnj slow. Rukopisy.” [“*Ferjenčjk*” Samuel, born in 1793 in Zvolen, a preacher in Jelšava those days, an exquisite, skilled and naturally gifted singer and guitar player, who made many an hour of their encounters in Jena enjoyable for the composer of these poems, introduced him to Goethe, who was researching and translating the national Slovak songs back then. They often friendly discussed philosophical subjects and books they both had read. He had published several sermons in print and has his own Slavonic Manuscripts.] (Kollár 1832b, p. 351–352).

Kollár’s testimony is represented by the interpretation of the verses of *Slávy dcera/The Daughter of Sláva*, in which Kollár (1832a, sonnet 462, s. p.; 1845, sonnet 466, s. p.; 2001, sonnet 479, p. 282) places Ferjenčík into Lethe – the Slavonic heaven: “*Hleděla i na Seberiniho, / Palackého, Koiše, Pačiče, / Ferjenčjka jsem a Suchaniho: // Wšecy matka třjmá za swé děti, / Wšak co slastj gich se dotýče, / To zde nechci swětu wyzwáněti.*” [I was looking at Seberini / Palacký, Koiš, Pačič, / Ferjenčjk and Suchani: // The mother holds them all as her children, / yet as for their delights, / I do not wish to reveal them to the world.]

As for Kollár’s acquaintance with the patriarch of German literature, Kollár’s biographer Václav Zelený (1862, p. 17) also thematizes the mentioned circumstances and regards Ferjenčík as Kollár’s friend:

“*V Jeně poznal Kollár i některé jiné osoby, které se slavily po celém světě. Přední z nich byl ovšem patriarcha německé literatury, Goethe, s nímžto o slovenských zpěwankách rozmlouval. Jeviltě Goethe velikou touhu po slovenských písniích národních a Kollár mu musil některé přinesti. Ještě důvěrnější známost’ s Gothem měl však krajan a přítel Kollárův, Samuel Ferjenčík, dobrý zpěwák, jenž uměl zpěw svůj hrou na kytaru wýborně provázeti. Byltě to člověk čilý a schopný, ač se později jakožto farář evang. v Jelšavě pustil podivnou cestou k slávě — prorokoval počasí.*” [In Jena, Kollár met also some other people who became famous all over the world. The most important was obviously the patriarch of the German literature, Goethe, to whom he talked about the Slovak songs. Goethe was highly interested in the Slovak national songs and Kollár had to bring him some of them. However, Kollár’s compatriot and friend Samuel Ferjenčík, a good singer, who could excellently accompany his own singing with the guitar, had even closer relationship with Goethe. He was a sprightly and capable man, although later, as an Evangelical parish priest in Jelšava, he would choose an odd road to glory – he’d foretell the weather.]

Ferjenčík subscribed to several Kollár’s works, including *Národné spievanky/National Folk Songs*, he even collected folk songs for him and sent them to him (cf. Demmel 2008, p. 78; 86, note 9 and the sources stated there). Their bond is obvious also from Ferjenčík’s attitude in the polemics about the standard language and Kollár’s correspondence related to *Slovenský prestolný prosbopis/The Slovak Petition to the Throne of 1842*.

#### 4 Ferjenčík’s personal memories

Ferjenčík (1848) described his acquaintance with Goethe more in detail in *Domová pokladnica na rok 1848/A Household Treasury for 1848*; there, he mentions their meeting in baron Knebel’s house: how the music performance brought them closer, their conversation

about mineralogy, how he was awarded the diploma of the Mineralogical Society, or Goethe's farewell present (the work *Hermann und Dorothea/Hermann and Dorothea* with dedication); and the talk about the coming storm, which sparked Ferjenčík's future interest in meteorology (excerpts in "Hodža-Hattala's" standard Slovak language were published later by Podol'ský [Pauliny-Tóth], 1864, p. 183–184):

“Roku 1816 dňa 3 Rujna prišjou som na Universitu Jenánsku, kde medzi inšími krajanmi som aj drahých rodákou našich, Šafárika a Chalútku našjou. — Od začiatku roku 1817 i Goethe sa najvjac v Jene zdržovau, kde vjmúc dom prjaťela svojho Barona Knebela, rovne slávneho básnika, žjaden druhí ňenavštevovau. V dome Knebelovskom, v uťešenej záhrade ležjacom, preto že pani domová bola prjaťelkiňa spevu a hudbi, každí týžden bývalo dvaráz hudobnuo shromážděňa, pri ktorom vždi famílie Marezoll, Succov, Oken a t. d'. aj ňjektóri akademici boli prítomní. Moja gitarra a muoj spev, i mne tu mesto pripravili. Raz keď sme spjevali a hrali, vnišjou komorník do dvorani a oznámiu podla običajou viššich domou: že minister Goethe prichádza. V tom pribehla ko mne uťešená dcéra Professora Succova a žjadala ma, abi som ňjektorú z Goethových pjesní zaspjevau, a tú žjadost' i celá spoločnosť opakovala. Guitarru v ruke držjac som zaspjevau: “Was hör' ich draussen vor dem Thor, was auf der Brücke schallen, a t. d'. (Čo čujem vonku pred bránou, čo to za hluk na most'e.) — Po chvíli otvorili sa dvere, u slavný Goethe vnišjou. Po vzájemnom pozdraveňí prvá (Ferjenčík, 1848, p. 54) reč jeho bola: prosím, abi spevu tomu muoj príchod ňebou na žjadnu prekážku; tak teda pesen' započatá dospjevau sa do konca. Medzitím zpítau sa Goethe domácej panej — pri ktorej bou mjesto zaujav, kdo bi to bou, ktorí spjeva? a ona rjekla: je to akad'emik, Uhor. Goethe vstal a pristúpiu ku mne, vravjac: “ja vám d'akujem paňe! Vi s'te mi večer milí urobili; čujem že s'te Uhor?” — Odpoved': ano. Odkjal tam? — Odp.: Od banských mjest. Tedi počúvate na Uñiversite Mineralogiu?” Odp.: Áno. Prosím Vás navštvíte ma kedikolvek, to ma budeťešit'.” — Na druhí d'en poslau mi Diplom úda Jenánskeho tovarišstva miñeralogickjeho. Potom ako som sa časťejšje v dome Knebelovskom s ňím schádzau, tak som ho časťejšje i navštevovau, i krajanou mojich, ako to i verní prjaťel Kollár, ktorí r. 1817 na jar do Jeni prišjeu, vo Wykl. Slav. Dceri na str. 351 svedčí, som mu predstavovau.

Goethe keď som ho poznau, bou v 68 roku, osoba visoka, hrubá; keď po ulici šjou, sám so sebou sa shovárau; doma šatku na hrdle ňikdi ňemau, čo z príčini vivarovaňja sa porážki (šlaku) zachováavau; víno na obed zrjedka, pri večeri hojňejšje piu; do jedenáctej hore bývau, a o štvrtej zrána už bou v práci. Keď som z Jeni r. 1818 odchádzau, šjou som k ňemu, abi som sa mu za jeho prjazeň poďakovau, a od ňeho sa odobrau; ale — čo večne lutovať bud'em, ňenašjou som ho doma. Predca o d'evjatej večernej z Weimaru sa navráťiu, a keď mu komorník oznámiu: že som ho triráz hladau a že v noci ňeomilňe s deligencou (počtovským vozom) odíd'em: teda mi Goethe o desjatej hodňe svoje víbornuo d'jelo “Hermann und Dorothea” poslau, a vnútri vlastnou rukou napísau: “Dem Herrn Ferjentsik zum freundlichen Andenken des Aufenthalts im Saalthale, Jena 15. April 1818.” (Pánu Ferjenčíkovi na radostnú pamjatku jeho prebivaňja v doline Saalskej!) A hla, tento slávi muž vzbud'iu vo mne náklonnosť k Meteorologii. Raz, času jesenňjeho v sobotu popoludňi som ho navštvívu, kde ma on s tou olázkou prijau: “či id'ete do Weimaru?” on rozumeu do d'ivadla (theatru); — ja som mu odpovedau; že aňi ňeznám čo sa bude predstavovať. On reknuv: Titus, — v čase tom spevohra najpovestňejšja, a d'alej hovoriu: — to zaslúži abi s'te šli, ved s'te i tak ako vás znám prjaťel spevu. V tom ako prechádzali sme sa po izbe, zastaňe pri obloku, ktorí bou na západ obráťení k Weimaru, a povje: toho večera bude dážd'. Ja som sa ho chitro zpítau. že kde toho príčina? — Uvid'íte svedčiu d'alej; — lebo tej postavi a na (Ferjenčík, 1848, p. 55) tej straňe ležjaci oblak popoludňajší, vždi večer dážd' donáša. A potom ako to jeho običaj bola, obšírňe vipravovau, že kebi mladší bou, žebi i zelenajúcu sa, i ňebesú belasú prírodu, ešje vjac ako dosjal, hladau a lúbíu; hvjezdí, západ slnca, mesjac, farbi dúhovje, babilonsko-vážovjuo staváňja oblakou, jedným slovom, žebi Meteorologia bola bi jeho najmilšje štúdiu. Jeho reč ma tak preňikla, že som hñed' Astronomiu

počúvau, a mnohje jasnje noci na streche zámku Jenánskeho, na ktorom sú chodbi (gangi) s vistavenímí dalekohľadmi (telescop) som stráviu. A keď každý človek i ten najučenejší dajakú zábavku mať musí, teda i ja nikdy ňebud'em lútovať, že som si práve túto vivoliu." [On the third of October 1816, I arrived at the University of Jena, where I encountered, except for others, also our dear compatriots Šafárik and Chalupka. – From early 1817, Goethe was staying mostly in Jena as well, where he did not visit any other house than one belonging to his friend, the baron Knebel, also a prominent poet. In the Knebel family house, lying in a lovely garden, a musical reunion used to take place twice a week, where always the Marezoll, Succov, Oken families, etc., and some academicians were present, since the lady of the house was a patron of singing and music. My guitar and singing prepared a place for me here, too. Once, when we were singing and playing, a butler entered the hall and, according to the rules of nobler houses, announced minister Goethe's arrival. Then, professor Succov's lovely daughter came running and asked me to sing one of Goethe's songs, and the entire gathered society repeated the petition. Holding the guitar in my hand, I sang: "Was hör 'ich draussen vor dem Thor, was auf der Brücke schallen" ... (What do I hear outside in front of the gate, what noise comes from the bridge.) – In a while, the door opened and famous Goethe entered. After the initial greetings, the first thing he said was: "Please, pay no heed to my arrival, keep playing," – so the started song was sung until the end. Meanwhile, Goethe asked the hostess, next to whom he was sitting, "who is singing?" And she said: "He is an academician, a Hungarian." Goethe got up and came to me, saying: "I would like to thank you, sir. Thanks to you I have enjoyed this evening. I hear that you are a Hungarian?" I answered: "Yes." "Where are you from exactly?" I answered: "From the mining cities." "So, you study mineralogy at the University?" I answered: "Yes." "Please, visit me any time, I will be glad." – The next day, he sent me the Diploma for a member of the Jena's Mineralogical Society. Then, I would meet him more often in Knebel's house, I would also visit him more frequently and introduce my compatriots to him, like my loyal friend Kollár, who came to Jena in the spring of 1817, claims in the Explanations in Slávy dcera on the page 351. When I came to know Goethe, he was 68 years old and of a high, wide stature, when he walked down the street, he used to talk to himself. He never wore a scarf at home to avoid a stroke. He drank wine rarely at lunch, more frequently at dinner. He would stay up until eleven, and at four o'clock, he was already at work. When I was leaving Jena in 1818, I came to his house to thank him for his favour and then say goodbye, but – and I will regret it forever, I did not find him at home. However, he returned at nine in the evening from Weimar and when the butler told him that I had looked for him three times and that I would definitely leave with the stage wagon at night, Goethe sent me his exquisite work Hermann and Dorothea at ten o'clock and wrote in his own handwriting on the inside: "Dem Herrn Ferjentsik zum freundlichen Andenken des Aufenthalts im Saalthale, Jena 15. April 1818. (To Mr Ferjenčík in joyful memory of his stay in Saalthale, Jena 15<sup>th</sup> April 1818.) And behold, this famous man awakened an interest in meteorology in me. Once, on Saturday autumn afternoon, I visited him and he welcomed me by asking: "Are you going to Weimar?" He meant the theatre: – I responded that I didn't even know what would be performed. He answered: "Titus" – the most famous opera those days, and he continued: "You should go, since, as I know, you like singing." When we were walking around the room, suddenly, he stopped next to the window turned to the west to Weimar and said: "It will rain in the evening." I asked quickly: "Why?" – He claimed: "You will see." He kept on talking: "Because the afternoon cloud of that shape and lying on that side always brings rain in the evening." And then, as he used to, he talked extensively about the fact that if he were younger, he would seek and love the lush and heavenly azure nature even more than before: stars, sunset, moon, iridescent colours, clouds looming like a Babylonian tower, simply, that meteorology would be his most preferred object of study. His speech inspired me so that I started attending lectures on astronomy and spent many clear nights on the roof of the Jena castle, which has corridors with telescopes on display. And since

every, even the most learned person must have a hobby, I won't regret either that I have chosen this one.] (Ferjenčík, 1848, p. 56). The mentioned events are stated in more recent biographical sources, too (cf. Wurzbach, 1858, p. 186–187; Szinnyei, 1894, coll. 424); Karl Julius Schröer (1889, p. 7–11; mainly in 9–10) published, apart from their descriptions, also the facsimile and transcriptions of a number of related documents. Ferjenčík reproduces Goethe's words in the fateful discussion about foretelling the storm more in detail in *Orol Tatránsky/The Tatra Eagle* (1846–1847, 2/53, p. 415) from 1847;

“Podobne nikdy nezabudnem na slová, ktorje Goethe ko mne r. 1817 v jasennom jednom popoludní v Jeňe prehovoriu: “Kebich bou mladším, tak bi som zelenú a ňebovo svetlú prírodu ešče viac hladau a miluvau; v pravd'e hvjezdi, zori, mesjac, farbi dúhovje, oblakov na spu sob staveňja babilonskej veže sa kopeňja, jedním slovom: meteorologia bi bola moje najmilšje štúdiu!” [I will never forget the words that Goethe addressed to me in 1817 one autumn afternoon in Jena either: “If I were younger, I would, in fact, seek and love the lush and heavenly azure nature even more: stars, sunset, moon, iridescent colours, clouds looming like a Babylonian tower, simply: meteorology would be my most preferred object of study!”]

### 5 Karl Julius Schröer on Ferjenčík's relationship with Goethe

K. J. Schröer (1889, p. 8; see also Lyon 1889, p. 285–286 (698, 1817), p. 285–286 (698, 1817)) reproduces the conversation with some major differences, too. Allegedly, Ferjenčík ignored Goethe's warning, and after getting wet, he admitted his mistake the next day. Goethe supposedly told him: “Ja, Ihr jungen Leute, Ihr glaubt uns nicht! Wenn ich aber so jung wäre, wie Sie, da wüßte ich, was ich täte, ich würfe mich ganz auf die Meteorologie, da wäre noch etwas zu erreichen.” [Yes! You, young folks, you don't believe us! But if I were as young as you are, I would know what to do, I would get fully immersed in meteorology, and there would still be a thing or two to achieve.]

The preserved historical testimony about the relationship between Ferjenčík and Goethe is represented by Ferjenčík's diploma of an external, full-fledged member of the Mineralogical Society and its secretary for the Hungarian nation, signed, except for Goethe, by Friedrich Wilhelm Heinrich von Trebra, Johann Georg Lenz and Johann Friedrich Fuchs (cf. Schröer, 1889, p. 9).

### 6 Ferjenčík's meteorological initiatives inspired by Goethe

The interest in meteorology, awakened in Ferjenčík by Goethe, accompanied him his whole life. He did not publish only common journalistic and publicistic texts in contemporary Slovak, German and Hungarian periodicals, but also weather forecasts, meteorological characteristics and meteorological articles (*Orol Tatránsky/The Tatra Eagle*, year I, 1845–1846, no. 16, 18, 27; year II, 1846–1847, no. 36, 44, 52, 60, 61; year III, 1847–1848, no. 68); *Magyar Hirlap/Hungarian Gazette*, year 4, 1852, no. 679, 680; *Budapesti Hirlap/Gazette of Budapest*, year 1, 1853, no. 185–188; *Domová pokladnica/A Household Treasury* (a calendar), year II, 1848, etc.; *Gemeinnützige Blätter zur Belehrung und Unterhaltung/A Non-profit Newspaper for Education and Entertainment*, year 28, 1844 and the following<sup>2</sup>). He carried out instrumental, weather-related measurements, too.<sup>3</sup> In 1852, the Central Meteorological Institute in Vienna sent him meteorological instruments (Agné, 2004, p. 549); Krška – Šamaj, 2001, p.

<sup>2</sup> Ferjenčík had been publishing in Budapest's German newspaper *Gemeinnützige Blätter* since 1844; except with the stated section *Zlomka z meteorológie* from 1848, he contributed to *Domová pokladnica* with the section *Vysvetlivky slovenských pranosť/Explanations of Slovak Weather Sayings*; see Krška – Šamaj (2001, p. 136; 158).

<sup>3</sup> It is unknown which meteorological elements he measured or if his measurements were systematic; but in 1846, he definitely observed the air temperature, and precipitation probably as well (Petraš, 1974, p. 189).

158). Ferjenčík raised the idea of establishing a conference or a society of Austrian meteorologists (Petráš, 1974, p. 190). To the wider public, Ferjenčík was known as Jelšava's weather prophet; in this context, he appears in a poem by a renowned Hungarian poet János Arany (1883, p. 301–303) *Népnévelés/Vernacular Education* from 1855. His contribution to the development of meteorology is inevitably reflected in the current publications focused on the history of this science, too (Petráš, 1974, p. 169–204; Krška – Šamaj, 2001, p. 136; 158).

### Conclusion

Ferjenčík's personality has a considerable potential in terms of the development of the cultural heritage of the Gemer region. Its use could also be based on the acquaintance with J. W. Goethe and his remarkable interest in natural sciences (mineralogy, pioneering activities in the field of meteorology, pomology). In this respect, synergistic links can be drawn between his personality and the "father of the Slovak fairy tale" Samuel Reuss (1783 Slovenská Ľupča – 1852 Revúca), whose life is also inextricably linked to the present-day Revúca district. Reuss was only ten years older than Ferjenčík. They both studied in Bratislava, continued their studies at the University of Jena and later worked as evangelical priests. Both were active in literature and, in addition to the humanities, were active in the natural sciences. During their studies in Jena, both maintained friendly contacts with Goethe, of whom Reuss was a protégé; like Ferjenčík, Reuss was nominated by Goethe to be secretary of the Mineralogical Society. Reuss maintained a correspondence with Goethe even after his departure from Jena in 1806. These connections create space for cultural-historical research with social implications in the field of visibility of Slovak cultural heritage, its external contexts and determinants.

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## Summary

### Relationship between Samuel Ferjenčík and Johann Wolfgang Goethe

The article explores the relationship between Samuel Ferjenčík (1793–1855) and Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832). Ferjenčík was an evangelical priest, writer, publicist, meteorologist and pomologist, whose importance is underestimated by contemporary cultural history. He was a friend of Ján Kollár, who praised his abilities in various publications. He is recognized in Slovak history for his role in the delegation of the Slovak Petition to the Throne in 1842 and for his public activities, which at times sparked controversy due to his attitudes towards some of the activities of the circle around Ľudovít Štúr. In his era, Ferjenčík was a very influential figure in Slovak cultural life. During his studies in Jena (1816–1818), he became acquainted with Goethe. This contribution examines testimonies regarding their relationship, drawing from their recorded interactions in various sources, and assesses their significance for Ferjenčík's personal development. In this context, parallels can be drawn between Ferjenčík and Samuel Reuss (1783–1852), known as the “father of the Slovak fairy tale”, who was also a student in Bratislava and Jena and a mineralogy enthusiast with friendly ties to Goethe. The connections between Ferjenčík and Goethe are relevant for understanding the broader influences shaping Slovak culture and its external formative factors.

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