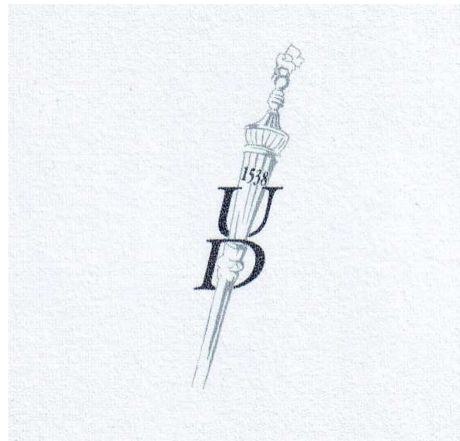


The Main Points of the Thesis

ON THE LITERATURE OF HUNGARIAN GYPSIES

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This thesis – as it will be further explained below – focuses on Hungarian-Gypsy written literature: approaches to it, and finding the theoretical foundation beneath these approaches. (Although I regard both folklore poetry not written by the authors and non-written folklore poetry as literature as well, this segment of Gypsy literature will not be discussed in this study. However, I am planning to include them in the book published based on this thesis in the future.)

1. Facts leading to the birth of this doctoral thesis, aims of the thesis

I became interested in the topic after my university studies, around the end of the '70s – early '80s, when I accidentally met with Gypsy artists and politicians: Attila Balogh, József Choli Daróczi, Ágnes Daróczi, József Kovács, Menyhért Lakatos, Tamás Péli and István Szentandrassy. It was only then that I started actively dealing with my cultural inheritance that I have already known about, ie. that my ancestors (through my father's family) were famous Gypsy musicians. I felt it an honour and my duty to as a literary scholar and critic start following the current and new progresses in Gypsy literature (Károly Bari's poem sequence, "*Holtak arca fölél*" was published in 1970, the novel "*Füstös képek*" by Menyhért Lakatos in 1975) and to participate in the forming Gypsy intellectual scene in the fields of arts and politics. Although the latter I could only do partially, I still felt an ever growing urge to write a summarizing literary history on the topic, and took it as my personal duty to write it. The final motivation came in the form of Csaba Dupcsik's excellent book, "The History of Hungarian Gypsies" (A magyarországi cigánység története, Budapest, 2009, Osiris). I thought and still think that my own work could be a counterpart of this book, hence the final, published form will get a similar title: "*The Literature of Hungarian Gypsies*" (A magyarországi cigánység irodalma). I had to give a slightly different title to this thesis ("*On the Literature of Hungarian Gypsies*", *A magyarországi cigánység irodalmáról*) because not all the portraits could fit in it. Although the formal requirements of doctoral theses at the University of Debrecen do not limit the length of the studies, I did not feel it appropriate to exceed 250 pages. (According to the formal requirements of ELTE doctoral theses, the submitted studies should not exceed 15 sheets, but the recommended length is 12-13 sheets. My study is ... sheets long.)

The "Handbook of Literary History", a new edition that is currently in the making at the Institute of Literary Studies with László Szörényi as main editor, intends to draw miniportraits and comprehensive portraits of particular writers. Following the pattern of this simple yet rather practical structure the second part of my book will contain ten extensive portraits of

certain writers and poets (János Balázs, Attila Balogh, Károly Bari, József Holdosi, Tamás Jónás, József Kovács Hontalan, Menyhért Lakatos, Béla Osztójkán, József Szepesi, Magda Szécsi) and twenty miniportraits (Gyula Balogh, József Choli Daróczi, Géza Csemer, Kálmán Farkas, Ernő Glonczy, Dezső Farkas Gyarmati, Gyula Horváth, Mónika Kalányos, Gusztáv Nagy, Jakab Orsós, Károly Beri Pongor, Jenő Pusoma, Lajos Rácz, József Rigó, György Farkas Rostás, Pál Ruva Farkas, László Surman, Zsolt Szolnoki Csanya, Ilona Sztokjó, Zoltán Farkas Vesho). Naturally, the first and most important aspect in selection was solely aesthetic. (The book is planned to be published accompanied by a textbook, as both Gypsy folklore poetry and high literature authors are only known by a very small audience and are hence rather inaccessible for the public.)

My study fits into a wider narrative that is, fortunately, continuously growing by the addition of new literary works. By this narrative I mean one that extensively contains Gypsy art, culture, virtually gypsiness in its entirety including writings on history, sociology, sociography, and cultural anthropology. In Hungary this narrative has started in the last two decades of the 19th century with the literary pieces of the so called first gypsyology triade, the archduke József, Antal Hermann, and Henrik Wlislócki. Surprisingly, even though several decades have passed since the beginnings, so far there is only one comprehensive survey on written Hungarian Gypsy literature: the outstanding and soon-to-be published PhD study written by Zoltán Beck at the University of Pécs. This, however, I would more consider a work on literary theory rather than one on literary history. Subsequently, my present study is the first exhaustive survey that, in its final form, is striving to cover the full literary scene (which, as I have explained above, cannot list everyone who has been trying to write verse or prose - for aesthetic reasons).

In my study I am describing the literary history of an ethnic group consisting mostly of people who are not familiar with their own literature, and they cannot be: they are busy with much more important things, struggling for survival day to day – similarly to plenty of other, non-gypsy people. On top of this, Gypsies are targeted by serious prejudice as well. A significant part of our majority society has a false perception of Gypsies, which is only strengthened by the one-sided, corrupted image the media projects on them. There are examples of scholars like József Vekerdi, who refused to accept that Gypsies may have their own culture.

Péter Szuhay ethnographer and cultural anthropologist, one of the most versatile researchers of Gypsies, wrote his study on “*The cultural integration of Gypsy ethnic groups in Hungary*”, and on the need for this integration, in 1995 (Péter Szuhay, “Gypsy Culture”. In

BUKSZ, 1995. 3/pp.329-341). The long-term aim, which is rather hard to achieve if possible at all, would be that Gypsy people can regard themselves an equal citizen of both Hungary or other particular countries, and, using the terminology of Benedict Anderson, also an equal part of the *imagined community* of Gypsy people or peoples – i.e. in our case, besides Hungarian culture, they are familiar with world Gypsies' and, within that, Hungarian Gypsies' culture, art, folklore, music, and literature. As there *is* such an art, folklore, music, and literature.

My work might help in achieving this aim.

The core purpose of my study, besides summarizing the history of and approaches to Hungarian Gypsy literature, is to strengthen the perception and acceptance of the fact that gypsies have, and have always had, their own culture (or rather their own cultures), thus they are just as much creating their culture as any other people and nations on our planet. Moreover, this culture they create is interesting, exciting, and valuable; worth knowing and preserving.

2. The Structure of the Dissertation, the Applied Methods

The structure of the dissertation serves this purpose. In my opinion, because of this and the unfamiliarity of the topic, it is necessary to have a relatively long theoretical and general part, a longitudinal section which gives an overall view about the topics related to the Hungarian Gypsy culture before the literary historical part which contains the portraits. I think only after that can the introduction of the artist continue, which due to the lack of space – except for the one chapter – is missing from this dissertation, but which will be the main topic of my future book.

The dissertation is divided into three parts. A theoretical part which divides into three big subchapters, a longitudinal section which has a closer focus on questions related to Gypsy literature and a fragmented cross-section which contains one portraits.

Part 1. The theoretical part starts with the big chapter 'Introductory Comments', in which I outline the topic of the dissertation, introduce the three big groups of Hungarian Gypsies, I mention the languages of the groups and lastly I will examine whether it is possible or not to consider Gypsy literature as the tool to create a national Gypsy culture. The effort to create the national Gypsy culture has been discussed as well as the question whether these efforts can be

successful or not. I already quoted Péter Szuhay's article from 1995 in which he writes the following (p. 333): *'To integrate the Gipsy ethnic groups it is necessary to evolve a more or less homogenic cultural language and to accept a commonly spoken cultural dialect. So, the foundation of the Gipsy culture which is acceptable for all the different groups of Gipsies and which they consider as 'mandatory' has to be created.'* Unlike the songs and folk-tales which were born in dialects; the lyric, dramatic and epic writings - which were written in Hungarian (understood by everyone) - could help theoretically to form a common 'us-consciousness', for which it is also necessary that the different groups know these writings. Theoretically this 'us-consciousness' could be meant for all the Gipsies in the world. But I share Mátyás Binder's opinion (*The Gipsy Nation-building – Historical and Cultural Cross-section, Eszmélet, 2008 Spring, p. 130-161.*) who doubts that *'among the Gipsies who are living in diasporas, on the edge of the European society, the national idea and identity can take roots in the foreseeable future'*.

In the second chapter of 'Introductory Comments' I will examine how much the Gipsy authors are involved in the representative literary history: in the academic literary history by Ernő Kulcsár Szabó, Tibor Gintli, in the overviews of Gábor Schein and Lajos Grendel and in the summaries of Mihály Szegedy-Maszák and Tibor Gintli. I will mention other popular works as well. In these books the Gipsy authors are quite underrepresented. I think this has two reasons. One of them is the literary paradigm shift in the 1970's. The Gipsy poets and writers were more connected to the old paradigms, for example (in the beginning) to the bard poet tradition or to the metonymical narrative. And an other reason for this omission can be the lack of aesthetics, completely valuable writings are still very rare. But this means that even more of them should have been mentioned, since something that is not completely valuable still can be worthy, and not only the most excellent writings get into the big overviews. (The critical reception of the authors was much better: the important writings did not stay unnoticed.) This is also a reason to write the Gipsy literary history.

In the third chapter I briefly mention the latest problems of literary history writing. The fourth is much more important in which I talk about the theoretical background of my work. My starting points are a few thoughts from Mihály Szegedy-Maszák's paper (*National and World Literature in the 21th Century. In Mihály Szegedy-Maszák: Understanding, Translation, Canon, Budapest, 2008, Kalligram, p. 99-121.*). Effected by these thoughts, the aim of my dissertation is to give an account of the Gipsies' cultural emancipation and literature from more than one angle. Moreover, I will not tell a complete, coherent story, but I will talk about writings and oeuvres as parts of a future story.

Formalism, structuralism, literary hermeneutics are part of my dissertation's theoretical background, just as cultural studies, which is called 'interart studies' lately – the former connects the art branches, the latter the different sciences, like literary science and cultural anthropology. (József Takács's paper: *Anthropological view and literary history writing In. József Takács: Familiar Strange Field. Literary Essays and Critics. Budapest, 2007, Kijárat. p. 29-54.*) From the branches of cultural studies (in Antal Bókay's very thorough overview their overall name is postcultural critics – *Introduction to the Literary Science, Budapest, 2006, Osiris, p. 273-293.*) postcolonialism interests me the most, the literature of which was introduced by Tamás Béneyi as one of the firsts (Postcolonial Literature, Helikon, 1996. Vol. 4. p. 520-527). I quote Fanon Frantz (*To Be Black In. Bókay-Sári-Szamosi-Vilcsek (edited): The Formation of Literary Science. From the Poststructuralism to the Postcolonialism. Anthology. Budapest, 2002, Osiris, p. 614-629, translated by Borbála Rohonyi.*) who writes about 'the look of the white man' which has been experienced by the Gypsies too. I consider the postcolonial literature as the primary virtual space for Gypsy literature and I find several similarities with literature and Afro-American literature, moreover, with the emancipation struggle of the Gypsies and the Afro-American. (Two excellent books has confirmed my thought: *Zsolt Virágos: The American Blacks and the American Literature, Budapest, 1975, Akadémiai* and *Enikő Bollobás: The History of American Literature, Budapest, 2005, Osiris*). Cultural anthropology, the study of describing the 'unknown' is also part of the theoretical background. One of its characteristics is relativism, which means that when the researcher studies a culture, he/she gives up the values of his/her own culture and accepts that other values can be valid too. When we read a literary work which introduces a strange culture – for example *Smokey Pictures* – this can be important.

In the actual analysis I will use the postcolonial and cultural anthropological views carefully - forcing it would just be harmful - but so would not considering them at all at least in the background. It is important to study how the Gypsies see and picture the non-Gypsies – in this case – the Hungarians. It is also important – what I want to discuss in my next book –, to see how the figure of 'the Gypsy' is represented in the European and Hungarian literature. (It appears as a romantic hero, the representative of freedom for example in Puskin's *Gypsies*, appears as a comic figure in Arany's *The Gypsies of Nagyida*, Gárdonyi's *The Stars of Eger* and finally as a real, not idealized, not underestimated figure, for example in József Balázs's *Koportos*. And these appearances have their own variants later on.)

The second big chapter's title is the 'Concept of Gypsy Literature'. At the beginning I already declared that I see the universal human culture as a texture, since everything is

connected to everything in it. If we pull a thread on one side, another one will move at an unexpected point, there is an invisible, mystical connection between them. I think it is also important to mention the well known fact that all humans belong to the same race – something that is good to emphasize in the time of the revival of the nationalisms. In the second chapter, I find it necessary to take a socialpsychological detour about identity, since this is an important problem in the Gipsy authors' works. And sometimes in our personal lives too: Károly Bari has always emphasized that he is not a Gipsy poet. His apprehension resembles to Miklós Radnóti's who also objected to be called a Jewish poet. (In my future book I want to discuss the phenomenon of stereotypes, since it influences greatly the behaviour of Hungarians and Gipsies with each other, furthermore, even the behaviour of Gipsies and Gipsies with each other. I connect identity with 'grasping instinct': Imre Hermann – the person who termed it this way – connects it to early infancy (*The Ancient Instincts of Men, Budapest, 1984, Magvető, especially pages 71-134.*), but in my non-professional opinion it can also be applied to adulthood, since adults want to grasp on something, someone too, for example on their identity, and if that is not successful, their personality will get irreparably damaged.)

In the next chapter I will analyze who can be considered as a Gipsy and as a Gipsy author. Science is not homogenic about this. There are sociologists (István Kemény) who think that a Gipsy is the person who is considered to be a Gipsy by the non-Gipsy environment, some argues with that and there are the ones (János Ladányi, Iván Szelényi) who are sceptical, saying that with scientific criteria it is not possible to tell who is Gipsy and who is not. By all means, a person can only be considered as part of a group if he/she thinks of him/herself as such and if this self-classification is accepted by group-members as well as people not belonging to the group.

After discussing a few literary historical basic terms in the fifth chapter I try to define Gypsy literature. There are several different answers to that, I review eight of them, which are partially covering each other. Mine is the following:

Gypsy literature is a collection of literature that is written in any language by an author who considers himself/herself a Gypsy. These pieces are naturally parts of the literature of the given language and the universal literature as well. Since folk poetry is always a part of literature, the Hungarian Gypsies had always had their literature, only their written literature started late, in the 1960's.

When talking about 'any language' Gypsy language is obviously considered as part of it: 'beás' and the Gipsy language, romani which is at the moment the complex of dialects. There

is an effort to form a Gypsy language which is above dialects and universal. I highly respect these efforts but I have doubt about the results. (Obviously if someone wrote a literary work in 'beás' or 'romani' language that would be the part of Gypsy literature, but the probability of that is small.)

I would like to emphasize again that I consider folk poetry as part of literature, therefore as part of Gypsy literature as well: a poem is still a poem even if we do not know its author. And folk poetry is not just the part of literature in its written form, but also in its imaginary, virtual, and unknowable forms as well. Art has always been part of humans' life. In this sense it is 'only' the written literature of the Hungarian Gypsies that started in the 1960's (which has a huge importance!), they have always had (obviously not just the Hungarian ones!) their literature, folk poetry, art. And this folk poetry is still alive, and grows, although not as dynamically as before.

After overviewing some basic terms of literary history in chapter five, I'm trying to define Gypsy literature. There are more definitions, I will mention eight, which partly overlap each other. Mine is as follows:

Gypsy literature is the collection of literary works written in any language by authors who identify themselves as Gypsies. These works are naturally part of the literature of the given language as well as universal literature. Since folk poetry has always been part of literature, Hungarian Gypsies have always had literature, only its written form started later, in the 1960s.

Obviously „any language” includes Beas, Gypsy and Romani, which at the time being is a collection of dialects – many are working on forming a universally spoken Gypsy language above dialects that can be spread all over the world. I fully respect these attempts, but I doubt its outcome. (Naturally, any piece of literature written by anybody in Beas or Romani would be part of Gypsy literature, but there is little chance for it.)

I underline again that I consider folk poetry as part of literature and so part of Gypsy literature: a poem is not only a poem if we know its author. Folk poetry is not only a written one, but also imaginary, virtual. Folk poetry is part of literature in a form we cannot always identify. Art has belonged to human existence since the very beginnings. In this respect, it is „only” the written literature that started in the 1960s (which is very significant!), Gypsedom (and not only the Hungarian!) have always had literature, folk poetry and art. What's more

this folk poetry is still alive, enlarging constantly with new pieces unless in such a great number as it used to.

Part 2. Out of the five big chapters of the second part titled *Longitudinal section* in the first I'm going to examine the recall of India's – which is considered to be the ancient home of the Gypsies – presence in Gypsy literature and in the so called naive science, which I'm going to mention later. The topic of the second is the appearance and consolidation of prejudices in Hungary – these prejudices appeared pretty early and are still alive. The next big chapter is about the start of the written literature and the rise of Gypsy intelligence which happened in parallel with the rise of the cultural emancipation closely connected with the political emancipation. The declaration of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party was issued in 1961 in which the national status of the Gypsies was denied and the entire assimilation was declared. This idea was supported by József Vekerdi in his shorter and longer works and books. The forming Gypsy Intelligence, which later split into more groups, had to define themselves politically as well as culturally. We can regard Gypsy literature as part of this cultural emancipation which is to prove the existence, the living nature of Gypsy literature similarly to Gypsy art and music. In two sub-chapters I'm going to outlook on the appearance or more precisely the latest development of the further beginnings of Romology and the appearance and reception of naive science. The representatives of naive science write about scientific questions like the origin of Gypsies, their wanderings, language and customs with the best intention, but without professionalism. Katalin Kovalcsik and Zita Réger (Science as naive art. *Kritika*, 1995. 2 p. 31-34.) found it harmful, others, like Peter Szuhay didn't. I don't agree with the latter in this respect. In my opinion irrelevant, inaccurate knowledge can do a lot of harm.

In the big chapter titled *The appearance and reception of the written literature* first I'm going to write about the most important 19th century ancestors who established the founts of Gypsy literature with writing a dictionary, making translations or creating their own works. I'm going to name three of them (by the name they called themselves) József Boldizsár, Jancsi Ipolysághi Balogh and Ferenc Nagy-idai Sztojka. There were some others, those who were literate, experimenting with dictionary making. It is worth mentioning the reception of Gypsy literature, the works by Károly Bari and Menyhért Lakatos: it reveals a lot about the relationship of the society and politics to the Gypsies. A projection of this relationship is shown very sharply by the attack of József Vekerdi against the anthology titled *Black coral*

edited by József Choli Daróczi. The article and the comments on the rising debate were published in *Kritika*.

In the end I think it is necessary to introduce the beginnings of the literature written in Gypsy (mainly translation literature) (the 3rd issue of *Nagyvilág* 1971. published the translation of Attila József's *Ars poetica* by József Choli Daróczi) and mention Zita Réger's view in connection with the language of translations in Gypsy language. In the fifth big chapter I'm going to present the most important newspapers, periodicals which consistently have been providing a home for Gypsy literature since the very beginnings. The first is *Rom Som, Romano Nevipe*, the newspapers published in the Kádár era, *Amaro Drom* which started after the changing of the system and *Cigányfűró* edited by Attila Balog, which unfortunately existed for only a very short period.

Part 3. The third part is *Cross section*, which is quite fractional for the time being. I think the written Gypsy literature started not so long ago and it hasn't got so many significant authors to be able to speak about history or schools, so I find that the most effective way is to introduce them in alphabetical order. The big portraits contain a short biography and bibliography, occasionally followed by a part named *Notes to the biography* with the introduction, analysis and evaluation of the works. The background of these analysis is structuralism and hermeneutics. The small portraits consist of a short introduction and characterisation of the authors and their works.

In the *Appendix* of my thesis I'm going to publish a self-complied bibliography which will contain the most important reviews, studies and the list of interviews made with the authors.

The style of my work is determined by the above mentioned goal. As I have already stated, my primary aim is to write not only to the narrow professional circle but to a broader public, with high professional standards. I would like to cite my former professor, my present consultant's András Görömbei's sentence from the introduction of the webpage of the Institute of Hungarian Literature and Culture of the University of Debrecen „*My ambition is to speak and write about the most complicated issues in plain, simple language.*”

3. The new scientific outcomes of my thesis

My thesis is the first bigger work, the length of a book in its final form, about Hungarian Gypsy literature. If in its present form it doesn't give a detailed introduction of every important author, it is going to show (in the first part) how Hungarian Gypsy literature appears in representative literary histories, in what theoretical background it is necessary to mention it with regard to postcolonial

theory and cultural anthropology and it gives a definition of Gypsy literature. It is also going to examine (in the second part) some important themes in connection with the topic that is about the cultural emancipation of Hungarian Gypsydom, the reception of the written literature and newspapers and periodicals where they were published. Finally (in the third part) I'm going to draw a portrait about some significant authors.