
OLOSZ, Katalin (ed.): Nagyszalontai népballadák és epikus énekek 1912–1919. [Folk Ballads and Epic Songs from Nagyszalonta 1912–1919]. 2018, Cluj Napoca: Kriza János Society. 474. ISBN 978-973-843-998-6

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This volume is an ethnographic collection based on an archival source, i.e., it actually exists in a dual mode: on the one hand, it is defined by the principles of preservation and rules of publishing of archival sources, and on the other, it provides a glimpse into an old ethnographic collection and the condition of the texts at that moment in time.¹ This hybrid phenomenon should not be too surprising as it is nothing new. Târgu Mureş's outstanding folklorist Katalin Olosz has recently published text editions that were the result of such salvage operations, all of them being ethnographic publications based on archival or database research, thereby outlining the format of a separate oeuvre. The number of these works has now been expanded by another piece, a volume that provides an opportunity to learn about the state of things from a century ago. Fortuitously aligned with the 2017 Arany anniversary, Katalin Olosz has now published an earnestly novel, nay – no exaggeration – sensational work: a collection that may owe its existence to Arany (more precisely, the Arany cult) but whose significance goes far beyond that. On the initiative of a high school teacher, Zsigmond Szendrey, and with the involvement of the students of the local state high school, a large-scale collecting campaign took place in Nagyszalonta between 1912 and 1919, primarily for the collection of epic folk poetry, which to this day has not been published in its entirety. This project has a special place in the context of ballad collection. After all, as noted by Katalin Olosz in the introductory study accompanying the book, such a large amount of epic folk poetry material has not been collected in any other settlement on the Great Plain, and Nagyszalonta would not have received such special attention if the village (which was not even a village...) had not had a famous son like János Arany. The fate of the collection clearly illustrates this untold provenance: after all, what was eventually published in the Hungarian Folklore Collection (for one volume was published as no. XIV in the series: *The Nagyszalonta Collection*, collected by the Hungarian division of Folklore Fellows in Nagyszalonta, edited by Zsigmond Szendrey with the assistance of Zoltán Kodály, published by the Kisfaludy Society, Budapest, Athenaeum, 1924) shows the result of a selection that sought to trace the precursors of Arany's ballads and poetry in the folk poetry material – i.e., only interested in the archaic. Consequently, almost all the material of the new-style ballads was left out of the volume, painting an uneven picture of Nagyszalonta's folklore. As a result of this solution, an important feature remained hidden, primarily because early 20th-century Arany-scholarship was interested in something else: at that time, the potential folkloric origins of Arany's works seemed very important, and that is

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what the contemporary scholars sought to present. Thus, they were looking for an old-style layer of ballads that might have influenced Arany, failing to pay attention to what seems to be really important from today's point of view and what this volume eloquently demonstrates: that Arany grew up surrounded by a living and productive folklore knowledge. Of course, folk ballads that could not have influenced Arany because they emerged around the time of Arany's death (or even after Arany's death), such as the ballad of the girl who fell into the thresher (pp. 307–309), may illustrate the process of the development of folklore, which also gives rise to important conclusions about Arany's earlier, childhood period: for Arany, the world of folklore was not an outdated world, a world that only existed in the stories of elders, but a living, constantly evolving and expanding, recent experience. Therefore, it is a very important development that Katalin Olosz is not presenting this material through such an ideologically grounded preliminary filter but by providing a glimpse of the former collection in its entirety, even embracing the contingencies resulting from the inexperience of the child-collectors and the 19th-century approach to folklore of their supervisor, Szendrey. It is a very significant revelation, even if it is understandable why the material remained unpublished at the time. Not only were those interested in the old-style ballads disappointed by some of the material that had been collected, the professionalism of the notation also left much to be desired. The accompanying study presents in a very thorough and convincing way how Zsigmond Szendrey, the initiator of the collection, tried to collect the epic poetry material in Nagyszalonta based on outdated principles, how unprepared and sometimes misguided his student collectors were, and how Kodály, who came to Nagyszalonta to supplement the collection, faced these shortcomings in the spirit of an entirely different concept of collection. And that the conflict between him and Szendrey eventually undermined the whole project. Of course, this was still the source of Kodály's material for his Nagyszalonta collection, which, fortunately, was published about a decade and a half ago: *Kodály Zoltán nagyszalontai gyűjtése* [Zoltán Kodály's Nagyszalonta Collection], compiled and edited for publication by Olga Szalay – Márta Rudasné Bajcsay, Budapest, Balassi – Magyar Néprajzi Társaság, 2001 (Magyar Népköltési Gyűjtemény [Hungarian Folklore Collection]. Új folyam. XV). And now that Szendrey's collection is finally published – despite its methodological inadequacies – the picture has finally become more complete. Katalin Olosz made a very good decision in publishing the collected material with the contingencies that Kodály had rightly criticized, for it is now an irreplaceable, long-lost folklore treasure.

The thorough text edition seeks to reproduce the textual state that the collector once recorded – though Katalin Olosz points out that Kodály's criticism was justified when he complained about the inaccuracies of the collection. Either because the amateur collectors were inaccurate in the dialectical rendition, or because they ignored the tune, and not only did they fail to record it but the text was written down based on prose dictation. Which, in fact, could result in serious rhythmic errors or text corruption. However, the editor did not try to correct all this – a hundred years later, it would have been a futile reconstruction effort anyway. After all, even Kodály, the contemporary did not succeed in making this correction.

The volume is accompanied by a very detailed and meticulous study, which describes a number of important and little (or inaccurately) known scientific historical contexts. From Zsigmond Szendrey's status to the ambitious but only partially realized plans

of the Folklore Fellows movement, or to such interesting dilemmas as to what led to the dramatic career collapse of Gyula Sebestyén, the editor of the Hungarian Folklore Collection, who played an important role in the publishing (or lack thereof) of this collection. I have already briefly mentioned one of the most important analytical aspects of the study: Zoltán Kodály, sent to Nagyszalonta to supplement the Szendrey collection, was supposed to supplement the missing tune collection, in which he did not succeed. Firstly, because it was already a methodologically highly problematic undertaking (retroactively searching for tunes of previously collected ballads), and secondly, because the different folklore perceptions and habitus of Szendrey and Kodály made collaboration almost impossible. Thus, Kodály's own collection paints a completely different picture of Nagyszalonta's folklore than the material published in this volume.

It is the publication's foremost value that Katalin Olosz is able to identify the students participating in the collection in the form of a database, and she even has information on some of the informants. This collection is a very important supplement to embed in any study, and similar virtues can be found in Katalin Olosz's previous editions (such as in the following: Sámuel Szabó: Erdélyi néphagyományok 1863–1884 [Transylvanian Folk Traditions 1863–1884], the scattered legacy of Sámuel Szabó and his collectors' circle collected, edited, introduced and annotated by Katalin Olosz], Budapest – Marosvásárhely, Európai Folklór Intézet [European Folklore Institute] – Mentor Kiadó, 2009).

The book also offers some major updates with respect to János Arany – just a bit elsewhere than the earlier scholarship was looking. A literary historian is perhaps most appreciative of these findings. Katalin Olosz's notes address Arany-related issues almost everywhere, but it may not be superfluous to comment on some of them, as these notes could have benefitted from a more deliberate engagement with the available literary history scholarship.

The Nagyszalonta collection includes the folk ballad *The Dead Groom* (pp. 115–116), which can be identified as a belief ballad and is partially in verse form with some prose bridges. In terms of its *sujet*, this is one of the important precursors of *Bor vitéz* [Wine warrior] – which, for example, is not mentioned in the notes. The text is a significant discovery because all parallels referenced to date in the available literature have their origins in literature (in fact, specifically world literature), a parallel in a local folk ballad, however, makes Arany's sensitivity to the subject matter more understandable. With the refined poetic form – unprecedented in Hungarian poetry – of the so-called “Malay pantun” that this ballad employs, Arany follows the example of Chamisso's poetry (i.e., a German literary model), and does not even attempt to follow the poetic form of fragmentary folk ballads or to imitate any form known in Hungarian folklore – that is, he considers the popular text merely as a starting point, not an end goal to be achieved. It would require a more critical comment to clarify whether Arany's poem can indeed be classified as a so-called Lenore type, as it is usually classified (although this is not a deficiency attributable to the volume, for *Bor vitéz* itself is not even mentioned at all). Namely, *Lenore*, having become a folkloristic type because of Bürger's famous poem, is only loosely related to Arany's poem (though it can be more accurately projected onto the folk ballad in this volume) and these differences deserve more careful consideration. After all, this is what allows us to grasp the individual, non-folklore-dependent character of *Bor vitéz* and thus bring us closer to Arany's poetic conception. I addressed this in a recent study (although the volume does not register this, yet it is not unsurprising, given

their parallel composition): Márton Szilágyi: Arany, Chamisso, Bürger: Arany János: Bor vitéz. In “Óhajtom a classicus írók tanulmányát”: Arany János és az európai irodalom [“I Desire the Study of Classical Writers”: János Arany and European Literature], ed. János Korompay H., Budapest, Research Centre for the Humanities – Universitas, 2017, 233–243. By the way, the emergence of this folk ballad is a major revelation as it suggests the likelihood of Arany’s familiarity with the adaptation of the topic in a *sujet* commonly referred to as the Lenore version, and that besides Bürger’s poem, this tradition may have been at his disposal as well – and in response, he created a completely unique ballad structure that is not even repetitive in itself.

The volume includes seven versions of the folk ballad *Three Orphans* (pp. 101–106). This could be a key to several Arany poems, and more specifically, it illuminates the psychological background of the texts that can be linked with Júlia Szendrey. It is very difficult to reconstruct Arany’s view of Júlia Szendrey in its detail and nuances, but it is certain that the poet judged her in the light of her relationship with Petőfi: he accepted her with profound compassion as the bride of his friend, and was disappointed by the news of her second marriage, not even trying to understand the woman’s arguments – not otherwise made public – for re-marrying. In any event, he never went as far as confronting Júlia Szendrey. (For more on this issue, see Emese Gyimesi: Szendrey Júlia és Arany János kapcsolata. “Összel”: Arany János és a hagyomány [The Relationship between Júlia Szendrey and János Arany. “In Autumn”: János Arany and Tradition], ed. Márton Szilágyi, Budapest, Universitas, 2018, 129–152.) Traditionally, literary history (and the wider literate public) has regarded the poem *The Soldier’s Widow* as a poetic reaction to the news of the marriage; however, it is important to note that Arany never published this work in any journal, nor did he include it in any of his volumes in his lifetime. There are only two poems in Arany’s entire oeuvre that may be related to this experience. On the one hand, the poem *Orphan Boy* (already included in the first, 1856 edition of *Minor Poems*), and on the other, the fragment called *The Widower’s Orphans*. The seven different versions, included in Katalin Olosz’s book under the heading *Three Orphans*, suggest that the folk ballad of children orphaned due to a new marriage was a well-known text in Nagyszalonta. These texts also clearly illuminate one of the aspects of Arany’s composition method. In fact, *The Widower’s Orphans* fragment shows that Arany made no attempt to imitate the form of the folk ballad, but instead wanted to attain a more detailed, epic narrative like the ones in his verse-tales. The work that appears to be related to these texts in its form and rhetorical structure, however, is *Orphan Boy*, which, in its content, is only loosely associated with the *sujet* of the folk ballad (according to its reception, no one considered this as a poem aimed at Júlia Szendrey, partly because of the recognizability of the folkloric precursor). So Arany was not actually attempting a precise imitation in this case either; rather, he immediately transformed a ready-made verse in order to create a different artistic structure. Regardless, a *sujet* familiar from the oral tradition may have very likely been helpful in composing a ballad that contains such a strong moral judgment.

The text of *The Husband Killer* (pp. 205–206) was already known, having been published by Zsigmond Szendrey at the time: *Sára néném* [Aunt Sára], *Ethnographia* 31 (1920), No. 1–6, 59–60. In this folk ballad, a woman named Sára tries to clean the bedsheets that were stained when her husband was murdered by ceaselessly washing them. It is not hard to recognize the ballad’s *sujet* as the precursor to *Ágnes asszony*

[Mrs. Ágnes]. But nothing more than that, because in this case, too, it is Arany's artistic and not at all imitative composition that catches the eye. In fact, even the title of Arany's ballad reflects the well-thought-out metaphorical construction here, for perhaps it is no accident that instead of Sára, Ágnes became the title character of the ballad. The name choice may be related to the etymology of the name, the Latin word *agnus* meaning "lamb", which can simultaneously convey the guilt and victimhood of the protagonist (for my interpretation of the poem, which this point fits perfectly, see Márton Szilágyi: "Mi vagyok én?" Arany János költészete ["What Am I?" The Poetry of János Arany], Budapest, Kalligram, 2017, 227–229).

And coming back to the fact that Arany had been surrounded by a living tradition in Szalonta: text 124, *Rózsa Sándor, Rózsa Sándor hova lettél* [Sándor Rózsa, Sándor Rózsa where did you go] (pp. 233–234), is a folklorized poem of Arany's unrecognized as such by the editor, so this connection is not mentioned in the notes. Albeit, the situation is very interesting, considering that Arany did not include this poem in any of his volumes but did publish it in a pulp magazine in 1848. It was included in the publication that Arany offered to Bertalan Szemere for distribution: *Szabadság zengő hárfája. A magyar fiatalásznak Arany János* [Freedom's Sweet Sound. To the Hungarian Youth, by János Arany], Debreczen: Lajos Telegdy, 1849. There were two poems in this publication: the ones starting with [Haj, ne hátra...] and [Rózsa Sándor, Rózsa Sándor...]. The booklet and the poems published in it were virtually excluded from his oeuvre in Arany's lifetime (in the absence of re-publication), but their contemporary publication may have had a greater effect; for this, see István Seres: *Karikással a szabadságért: Rózsa Sándor és betyárserege 1848-ban* [Bullwhip for Freedom: Sándor Rózsa and his Company of Bandits in 1848], Békéscsaba, Békés Megyei Múzeumok Igazgatósága, 2012, 168–170. I published the most recent autograph letter and its attachments that were sent to Szemere, although some of its elements were not previously unfamiliar: Márton Szilágyi: *Egy többször elfelejtett (s újrafölfedezett) Arany-levél és vers-mellékletei* [A Repeatedly Forgotten (and Rediscovered) Arany Letter and its Verse Attachments], ItK, 2018, Issue 2, 205–216. Therefore, in this case, the influence of pulp on the folklore of Nagyszalonta can be demonstrated from the perspective of half a century. It is also probable that, at least locally, it might have influenced Arany's attempt at popular education that he sought to accomplish at the time: to contribute sophisticated literary texts to the propaganda of the Revolution of 1848 and the ensuing freedom fight. It is also worth noting that what was current news at the time (in a peculiar and, of course, only temporary "about-face", Sándor Rózsa the outlaw becomes a freedom fighter) gets incorporated into folklore in a few decades' time as a quasi-outlaw poem, blending into the genre repertoire of the Great Plain bandit romance, as well as, of course, the by then concluded and legendized life story of Sándor Rózsa. This change of function is very interesting, even if the composition procedures of folklorization have left relatively little trace on this particular poem. And this process is greatly nuanced by the publication of prose narratives about Pista Fábíán, as well as the publication of Zsigmond Szendrey's hitherto unpublished paper on Nagyszalonta outlaw ballads as an appendix.

And this question, as well as the mention of Pista Fábíán, leads us to a very significant philological curiosity of the volume. Katalin Olosz rightly draws attention to the importance of Arany presenting himself to the public as a "collector of folklore" in 1851 (p. 349). He published a text called *Fábján Pista nótája* [The Song of Pista Fábján]

in the short-lived publication called *Remény* [Hope], edited by Imre Vahot (Vol. I, 1851, No. 6, pp. 334–336). István Fábrián was a locally famous bandit in Nagyszalonta, and in his note to the poems, Arany said that the second text had been dictated by Fábrián himself to a “town clerk” (i.e., town employee) after his capture, “as the communicator surely knows”. Katalin Olosz reasonably concludes that this might be referring to Arany himself, meaning that the “communicator” and the recording “town clerk” may have been the same person. Dictation-based notation, which the commentary emphasizes, makes Arany’s attempt comparable to one of the widely practiced but hard-to-define folklore collection methods of the era – after all, acquiring a text and retroactively writing it down from memory was one of the possible notation modes in the mid-19th century. Through the gesture of publishing, Arany made his direct connection to the outlaw ballads more apparent, even though there was virtually no trace of it in his oeuvre. The significance of Katalin Olosz’s edition is that the poem’s text itself and Arany’s commentary on it can finally be read simultaneously and in context – even the critical edition did not accomplish this. However, I did not find this little source information in the critical edition; Arany’s note (and only that) can exclusively be found in a rather obscure place, in the repository of the first volume of his correspondence: Arany János levelezése (1828–1851) [The Correspondence of János Arany (1828–1851)], ed. Györgyi Sáfrán – Gyula Bisztray – István Sándor, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1975 (Arany János Összes Művei [The Complete Works of János Arany], vol. XV), 887. The poems themselves were not reproduced in the critical edition, though this, too, would not have been irrelevant. Therefore, they should be included in the forthcoming new critical edition, in my view at least in the appendix to the first volume of the poems.

Of course, these few remarks could hardly exhaust all of the abundant lessons of the Nagyszalonta ballad volume. Indeed, that was not my goal. I merely wanted to draw attention to a publication which is probably one of the most valuable achievements of the Arany Memorial Year, and which will provide new ideas for understanding the complex relationship between János Arany and the tradition of folklore for a very long time.

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National Széchényi Library

The writings of the present volume are based on the papers of “The Magical and Sacred Medical World” conference organized by the Department of Ethnography of the University of Pécs in 2009. The aim of both the conference and the book was to give a more complete picture of the sacred and magical aspects of ethnomedicine. The subject areas of the studies embrace magical and religious concepts of health and illness, healing rituals, as well as divinities and places that carry a specific healing power. The authors examine the role these concepts play in society, religion and everyday life and their representations in folklore, art and literature; they adopt an interdisciplinary method,