

# Textual Concepts and Textological Practices in Hungarian Folkloristics

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## ABSTRACT

Focusing on the concept of ‘folklore text,’ the study surveys the textological dilemmas that a researcher faces during the collection, transcription, publication, and interpretation of folk poetry. Behind the development and implementation of strategies for text editing procedures lie complex cultural processes, which can be interpreted within the framework of the given discipline or placed within a broader cultural and technological historical context. The paper examines the methodological history of Hungarian folklore collections not only according to the theoretical concepts that define the research subject and research aspects but also based on the objective, technological conditions of the collection. The author proposes a folklore textological approach to the publication of texts that is much more conscious of the historicity and origin of folklore texts and considers their own philological-textological tradition. A new, process-based, and transcriber-centered concept of text would provide an intriguing direction for solving numerous folklore textological problems, which might show the role collectors and transcribers play in the creation of a text in a sharper and more nuanced light. The findings of the study are based on investigations carried out in the field of historical folklore text research, primarily on the examination of the methodological history of the collection and transcription of folktales; with certain restrictions, their applicability might be extended in terms of subject matter (to other genres) and time (even to the latest folklore phenomena arising in the digital medium), and they may also provide useful perspectives for representatives of other disciplines that study orality.

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## KEYWORDS

folklore, philology, textology, Hungarian folktale collections, methodology of folklore collection

The primary – and for the longest time only – way of acquiring ethnographic-folkloristic knowledge has been the textual recording, organization, and publication of data derived from

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living, oral tradition.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, folkloristics does not have an explicit and definitive concept of text. Instead, in practice, we find that the processes of recording and publishing folklore texts are characterized by peculiarly stratified, historically changing, and essentially intuitive text concepts and interpretation strategies. The inherent uncertainty surrounding the definition and understanding of a folklore *text* stems from the fact that the subject of investigation, the apprehensibility and reproducibility of the tradition preserved through orality, is in itself problematic. Based on this basic approach and focusing on the concept of text, in this paper I would like to describe the textological dilemmas that a researcher conducting fieldwork faces in the collection, transcription, publication, and interpretation of folklore. Raising theoretical questions regarding the concept of folklore text is timely because I am convinced that the reform of textual criticism is inevitable in Hungarian folkloristics. In the paper, I propose an approach that turns much more consciously than before towards the historicity and origin of folklore texts and considers their own philological-textological tradition. I would also like to argue that a new, process-based, and transcriber-centered concept of text would provide an intriguing direction for solving numerous folklore textological problems, which might show the role collectors and transcribers play in the creation of a text in a sharper and more nuanced light. Although my findings are based on research carried out in the field of historical folklore text research, and primarily the examination of the methodological history of the collection and transcription of folktales (summarized in: DOMOKOS 2015a), with certain restrictions, their applicability might be extended in terms of subject matter (to other genres) and time (even to the latest folklore phenomena arising in the digital medium), and they may also provide useful perspectives for representatives of other disciplines that study orality.

## THE VARIABILITY OF FOLKLORE TEXTS AND THEIR MANIFESTATIONS

In European culture, interest in texts preserved through oral tradition has been documented from the late 18th century. From the early 19th century, Hungarian folklore collections with the intention of preserving values were more and more consciously aimed at creating text corpora.<sup>2</sup> By the time Hungarian folkloristics became institutionalized at the end of the 19th century, the specific text handling procedures enforced in the documentation of the relics of orality, based on Western European models, had been taking shape for almost a century, which laid the foundation for, but also placed constraints on, the textual practice of professional folkloristics. As a starting point, it is worth defining the issues with writing down folklore texts, and the conceptual ideas that can be identified behind them. Capturing and interpreting the verbal level (text) of folklore can be achieved with the help of linguistic signs, but at the same time, folklore is not just a literary or linguistic phenomenon, but rather a complex social phenomenon (cf. NILES 1999:79–83; KESZEG 2018:68–205). The well-known, although by no means exclusive,

<sup>1</sup>The essay was originally written for a Hungarian academic readership as an introduction (DOMOKOS 2021a) to a research project (GULYÁS 2021b). This paper is a shortened and revised version.

<sup>2</sup>The best-known summary of the history of European folklore is still the classic work of Giuseppe Cocchiara, which unfortunately does not include Hungarian data: COCCHIARA 1981 [1952]. Essential summaries of the research history of Hungarian ethnography and folkloristics: e.g., VOIGT 1998; KÓSA 2001; GULYÁS et al. 2011. Summaries in English: e.g., ORTUTAY 1955; BALASSA – ORTUTAY 1974; SZEMERKÉNYI 1999.



characteristics associated with folklore/folk poetry<sup>3</sup> (oral tradition, variability, lack of authorship) basically stem from its oral and communal nature. Traditionally, folklore and literary texts have been distinguished along these characteristics. According to this hypothetical division of media, the literary text's turf is literacy, its creation being linked to an author, its form of manifestation being stable, while folk poetry is basically linked to orality, which is characterized by anonymity and an unstable text concept. The idea that there is a cluster that contains literary texts and another, separate cluster reserved for folklore texts only as a theoretical model (if it works at all); nonetheless, the interaction of the elements of the clusters has been apparent for a while now.<sup>4</sup> The distinction-based approach, however, has the practical utility of maintaining disciplinary frameworks and effectively facilitating the disciplines' self-conception. In the period before the institutionalization of Hungarian folkloristics in the late 19th century, the above-mentioned literary text concept functioned as a reference point for researchers of folklore. Folkloristics partly defined the subject of its interest and its medium-dependent features in opposition to the written nature of literary works, yet and aesthetic-based concept of folklore conceived in genres was still fundamentally guided by a literary art concept and text handling. Folkloristics developed its ideas about textual folklore based on the experiences gleaned from the study of literary texts, which is also indicated by its designation of folk texts as *folklore-type literature* (cf. VOIGT 1972). Moreover, the notion that orality is the defining feature of folklore is valid only under strict restrictions, because, on the one hand, orality is characteristic of not just traditional folk culture, and, on the other hand, folklore has a highly complex relationship with other media.<sup>5</sup> Given one of its characteristic features, folklore can also be examined outside of the relationship of orality and literacy: within the framework of a given manifestation (performance), different ways of self-expression (acoustic, visual, verbal) exist simultaneously in syncretic unity. Since its beginnings, however, the concept of text in folkloristics has been fundamentally determined by preconceived notions of the oral character of folklore and folk poetry within it. The special relationship between folklore and orality is characterized by the fact that oral transmission has been partly valorized precisely because phenomena that exist in a nonfixed, changing form are more ephemeral, and consequently they were considered endangered and in need of salvaging (GULYÁS 2015:15–17). Even before the intensive, institutionally

<sup>3</sup>For details on the distinction between folklore and folk poetry, see MIKOS 2010. In this essay, I often use these two concepts interchangeably, the main reason being that I want to leave the applicability of my findings open for the transcription of folklore phenomena other than folk poetry (e.g., folk custom, folk belief, or folk dance).

<sup>4</sup>The interaction between self-interpreting literature and oral folklore can be corroborated by the opposite processes of folklorism and folklorization, but perhaps the most obvious evidence of the untenability of this rigid distinction is provided by research on the popular literature of the 17th–19th centuries: Hungarian popular literature “was neither folk poetry nor literature but something inbetween. It was transmitted both orally and in writing, the authors of the texts were usually unknown or else their identity had become irrelevant in the course of transmission, and even texts with known authors existed in different versions” (MIKOS–CSÖRSZ 2019:275). A monographic survey of the connections between Hungarian popular literature and folk poetry based on old Hungarian secular literature: KÜLLÖS 2004. Review of the volume in English: VOIGT 2006.

<sup>5</sup>Instead of the simplistic concept of communication technologies in which orality and literacy are mutually exclusive and opposite, John Miles Foley's media-based approach, for example, provides a more nuanced modeling of oral tradition, which allows for the description of the interplay between the texts' different modes of existence. In this flexible media category system, Foley distinguishes three major “verbal marketplaces” of human communication (oral, textual, and electronic media). FOLEY 2010.



organized, large-scale Hungarian folklore collections of the 20th century,<sup>6</sup> János Honti pointed out that nonfixedness must not be interpreted only as vanishment, but his opinion was considered highly extreme and went largely unnoticed.<sup>7</sup> The initial task of ethnographic-folkloristic investigations has always been the documentation of the elements of folk culture deemed valuable and preservation-worthy. For this reason, the basic methodological concept of ethnography is *collection*, which denotes a specific act of reproduction, archiving, and documenting, the subject and methods of which are constantly changing. From a textological point of view, it is an essential factor that the medial and cultural shift that takes place during collection creates the folklore text that can then be studied. From the very beginning, folklore collections have been practically defined by the concept of the 11th hour, i.e., the assumption that the collector's task is to record a folk tradition that is vanishing but can still be documented at the last moment. The idealized-heroized image of the collector racing against time accompanies the entire history of folklore collection, but despite the call for urgent action resulting from this perception and the efforts to implement it, there was very little research attention paid to the interpretation of the collected data or the formulation of more general epistemological questions even in the 20th century. Reflecting the issues that arise during folklore inquiry is a particularly important and exciting task because folklore and folklore texts are already mediated in various ways. On the one hand, living folklore is not the same as its linguistically coded version, not the least because, as mentioned, it is not just verbal but also acoustic and visual in its original mode of existence.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, in the process of textualization in which representatives of the intelligentsia make works and phenomena considered folkloric scientifically studyable, folklore texts pertain to different media (orality/literacy/printing) and cultural environments (folk/elite). The basic epistemological problem of folkloristics is that the utterances of oral communication worthy of scientific interest can only be documented, retrieved, and analyzed if they have been recorded. All of this results in the collector being forced to construct his/her own subject of investigation.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>In Hungary, orally transmitted folklore was still a living tradition in rural communities in the 20th century, the collection and archiving of which was a priority for folklorists of the time. Most of the Hungarian folk prose narratives were published in the central publication series of Hungarian textual folklore, the New Collection of Hungarian Folklore, which was launched during the Second World War (in 1940). More on the series: [ORTUTAY 1972a:306–307](#).

<sup>7</sup>HONTI 1934. János Honti (1910–1945), Hungarian folklorist, folktale researcher, literary historian. In his above-mentioned essay, he stated that the *collection* of folk traditions is quite far from *salvaging* folk traditions. In his opinion, this project was based on three (questionable) assumptions: 1. folk tradition is vanishing, 2. its disappearance implies loss, and 3. the folklore collector is supposed to preserve it. On the paradigm of loss in folklore studies, see: [ANTTONEN 2005:48–51](#).

<sup>8</sup>In a given situation, the performer's vocal and facial expressions, gestures, movements, and use of space are also an integral part of the performance. In regard to storytelling, some have noted the importance of the visual elements of the story: András Béres said that "a good storyteller's delivery is at once a performance" ([BÉRES 1955](#)). Based on her collection experiences in Kalotaszeg, Ágnes Kovács called attention to the visual significance of a folktale's live performance. On the plot of the tale being intuitively interpreted by both the performer and the audience as a sequence of images, see [KOVÁCS 1943](#). Judit Raffai also sought to capture the visual elements of the tale with the help of a sign system designed for this purpose: [RAFFAI 2001:117–157](#).

<sup>9</sup>Péter Niedermüller sheds light on the historical ideological processes behind the philological issue through the 19th century texts produced for the creation of Hungarian national culture: [NIEDERMÜLLER 1990](#).



The greatest paradox of folkloristic textology is precisely the fact that the studyable, accessible, and reproducible folklore text is *created by the collector* him/herself during the recording of the text.<sup>10</sup> The folklore text becomes part of the scientific discourse through this transcription, hence the reader is presented not with the folklore text itself, but only with a transcribed, standardized version of it created by the transcriber (GAY 2000). It is worth clearly differentiating primary and secondary folklore texts, since an orally transmitted/performed text, accompanied by verbal and non-verbal means of communication, is never identical to its secondary, transcribed version taken out of its socio-cultural context. The consequence of the medium change(s) described above is that during collection, the primary text, i.e., the oral phenomenon, is definitively divorced from its fixed, materialized imprint, the secondary text. Although this distinction is not unknown in folkloristic theory, I feel that we have not realized sufficiently that what is being created by recording a text is a product of a different quality, a new entity.<sup>11</sup> The fact that there are no distinct terms to describe these two phenomena indicates the blurring of the boundary between the primary oral folk poetry and its secondary imprint in writing; folkloristics typically describes both with the same term (*folklore text*). The secondary text is dependent partly upon the original, primary text, but partly also upon the collector's current perception of his/her role, hence text is a historically changing relational concept in folkloristics. It is clear from the above that folkloristic textology begins with collection and/or with the editing of the text transmitted in the context of the collection. For a long time, the creation of a text has been legitimized as a valid textological procedure by the idea of a good collector, according to which a competent collector who is familiar with the community tradition is authorized to create the folklore text, within certain limits, sort of like a co-author.<sup>12</sup> Since the emergence of folkloristics as a discipline, this "creative" approach to the research subject has been interpreted as a practice that is detrimental to authenticity, and is therefore not allowed in principle; nonetheless, the concept of the role of the collector as co-author has, from a certain point of view (e.g., the ability to correct individual mistakes, censor inappropriate passages, etc.), not disappeared, and latently but very tenaciously, it persists to this day in a certain sense. The authentic documentation of folk poetry has always been the stated goal in folkloristic inquiry,<sup>13</sup> and even though this endeavor did not always or

<sup>10</sup>The same idea in the now classic words of Elizabeth C. Fine: "Surely one of the great ironies for the folklorist is the making of a folklore text" (FINE 1984:XI). On the authorial nature of anthropological-ethnographic descriptions, see, e.g., GEERTZ 1988; VAN MAANEN 2011; BÖNISCH-BREDNICH 2018. On the perspectives of the textualization of oral works: HONKO ed. 2000; MUNDAL – WELLENDORF 2008.

<sup>11</sup>Today, museology is facing a similar phenomenon when making digital impressions of cultural heritage. On the impact of digital technologies on the classic concept of cultural heritage, see CAMERON – KENDERDINE 2007.

<sup>12</sup>A powerful formulation of this idea comes from János Arany (1817–1882), one of the greatest poets of Hungarian literature, to whom a good collector had to be a good storyteller, delimiting text modification in the narration, yet considered content manipulation a violation of norms ("[...] in narration, the collector may emulate the freedom of a skillful storyteller, but not in writing") (ARANY 1968 [1861]). The son of János Arany, László Arany (1844–1898), poet and folklore collector, expressed the same idea when he stated that he does not consider the mistakes that deliberately evoke the vicissitudes of the spoken word to be a feature that should be necessarily reproduced in writing (-R. [ARANY László] 1894:476). For the approach of János Arany and his son, László Arany, to folktale editing, see DOMOKOS 2021b:66.

<sup>13</sup>The evaluation of authenticity in a historical context is important in folkloristics because the concept of authenticity has been the fundamental legitimation hypothesis of scientific discourse since its beginnings in the 19th century. On the role of authenticity in the folkloristic self-conception: BENDIX 1997.



necessarily result in authentic texts, it did very effectively relativize the concept of authenticity itself (HONKO 2000a:3). In the case of folklore texts, there can be no perfect reproduction, since the texts work differently in the written form than in the oral form, and the collector – at times intentionally, other times unconsciously, but always – modifies the folklore text to a certain extent in transcription. Through the collection practice that plays out in creative reproduction and varies from era to era, the collector inevitably writes him/herself into the folklore text in the process of transcribing. In creating the secondary text, opportunities for the collector to apply his/her creativity are available to various degrees, depending on not only the era but also the genre; in the case of works that exist in a more fixed form (e.g., folk song, ballad, proverb, riddle), there is obviously less room for the collector’s creativity, while in transcribing longer, fixed and nonfixed epic poetry (e.g., tale, legend), there is much more. But in transcribing any folklore phenomenon, there is always some room for the transcriber’s creativity between the interventions that are absolutely necessary and those that are still acceptable (for more: DOMOKOS 2015b). Thus, in folkloristic textological practice, text fidelity is a relative concept, applicable only conditionally, depending on the purpose and circumstances of collection, and determined by the concept of the ideal text in the given era, the genre characteristics of the primary folklore text (e.g., length, rhythmicity), and the available collection technology (audio and video recording). The minimum requirements for the textualization of folklore texts have become more and more specific since the institutionalization of folkloristics, but their implementation in practice demonstrates quite a few unique characteristics and fluctuating standards.<sup>14</sup> Interventions at different levels result in secondary texts of different authenticity status, the assessment of which changes from time to time based on professional requirements and technological capabilities, but their objective evaluation is almost impossible without detailed documentation of the principles of text recording and the circumstances of collection.<sup>15</sup> Yet, no matter how strict the requirements a collector abides by, he/she always remains an active player in the process of producing the folklore text. It is evident that the collector him/herself is an essential component of the recorded folklore text, just as the context of the collection and its documentation form an integral part of the text from a textological perspective. Ethnographic collection is not a one-time act of putting words on paper, but rather a process in which a number of text versions of a given, unique phenomenon is produced, often with the participation of several contributors (first draft, revised draft, fair copy, print copy, etc.). Behind the shortened, corrected, and edited folklore texts that we usually encounter in print form, there is a series of philological text variants whose relationship tends to be seen in traditional folklore textological practice as an evolutionary progress (since the collector always strives to create the most accurate, most complete version of the text). As a result of this approach, only a fraction of the folklore texts ever recorded are accessible, and no special efforts have been made to publish the surviving manuscript and typewritten texts (let alone audio versions recorded with a phonograph, gramophone, or tape recorder). However, if the philological text variants that can be lined up behind the given

<sup>14</sup>The guidelines for the publication of Hungarian folklore were published nearly half a century ago: VOIGT – BALOGH 1974.

<sup>15</sup>Guidelines for the critical edition of folkpoetry distinguish texts of several statuses according to the degree of authenticity, namely: “authentic text, text authentic in content, text transcribed in its linguistic form, inaccurately transcribed text, heavily modified text, mostly authentic text, text of partially dubious authenticity, etc.” However, it does not provide guidance on how a given text can be classified into individual categories. VOIGT – BALOGH 1974:26.



folklore text were not viewed in a hierarchical relationship but considered as equivalent versions, then the perspectives of genetic editions can open up for folklore textology.<sup>16</sup>

## PHILOLOGICAL AND FOLKLORISTIC TEXT VERSIONS

In the past, the exploration of philological text versions has not received methodical and conscious attention in folklore research because the focus was on a different type of version, the folkloristic version found in oral tradition. The peculiarity of the folklore text is that versions are created not only during collection and documentation (transcription, editing, publishing), where a change of medium is implemented, but even the primary text can only be transcribed in variants.<sup>17</sup> Variability as the essence of folklore is practically unrecordable in its diversity, so the medium-dependent variability of oral texts emerges as one of the fundamental problems in folkloristics. The text concept of folkloristics is essentially problematic because it aims to describe a quality that is characterized by a lack of text constancy, which is why the folklorist necessarily thinks in terms of *an unstable text concept*. Thus, traditionally, the focus of folklore textology is not on fixed, final, and closed texts but on works that exist in an open and constantly changing form maintained by tradition. Nonetheless, this generalized quality, understood as a typical manifestation of the community's creative power, lies in unique, variable, and changeable manifestations, and it is characteristic of the evaluation of the latter that it is never done on its own but always in relation to the general. The purpose of folklore collections was actually to grasp this abstract, general core by means of describing unique phenomena. The starting point of this paper was the absence of an exact folkloristic text concept. So far, however, there has been no mention of the fact that folkloristics lacks an exact and well-defined concept of text precisely because its understanding of text is structured around folkloristic and not philological versions. Folklore theory developed the concept of *variant* for the context-dependent, fleeting manifestation of folk poetry that change from performance to performance. Variability, existence in variants, is perhaps the most defining characteristic of folklore, so much so that the folkloric nature of phenomena without variants (invariants) should be questioned, or at least approached with some skepticism.<sup>18</sup> Although the "philology of oral tradition"<sup>19</sup> is structured around variants, this term is practically a self-contradiction from the point of view of folklore textology, because it is used to indicate a special text that is not interesting in itself but can only be of interest to collectors as a kind of host. In folkloristics, a variant is considered preservation-worthy only if it can encompass the presumed, abstract essence of folklore, the knowledge of the

<sup>16</sup>Well-known international examples of genetic text editions are the Grimm editions of Heinz Rölleke, who published the original manuscript texts of the Grimm collection and the authorized text versions side by side (RÖLLEKE 1975; RÖLLEKE – MARQUARDT 1986).

<sup>17</sup>*Philological versions* are the different written (handwritten, typed, printed) versions of a text that has been transcribed. *Folkloristic versions* are the various records that "come from the transmission of a work on different occasions or by different performers." (VOIGT – BALOGH 1974:25).

<sup>18</sup>The folkloristic evaluation of variants and invariants was the subject of Gyula Ortutay's inaugural lecture at the Academy in 1959, a summary of which was delivered in German that same year at the Kiel-Copenhagen congress on folk tale research under the title *Begriff und Bedeutung der Affinität in der mündlichen Überlieferung* (ORTUTAY 1959).

<sup>19</sup>Gyula Ortutay's term, pointing out the differences from literary philology: ORTUTAY 1959:196.



community. The variant always emerges as the concrete variation of something (melody, type, motif, etc.); therefore, the relationship between the variant and the type or the variant and the motif can be described with the concrete-abstract relation. In addition to the contradictory nature of the text created by the collector, the other great paradox in folklore textology is that collection actually strives to grasp the abstract quality through the concrete variations.<sup>20</sup> The long-standing, common publication practice of folklore texts, intended to present types and motifs, has adapted to this, which on the one hand resulted in already known or fragmentary works not being deemed worthy of publication, and on the other hand, the collector wanting to reproduce an ideal version of the text instead of the unique text and doing everything in his/her power to do so. Although the principle of *ultima manus* is completely pointless in folkloristics in terms of concrete texts (who can be considered the author and which is the last authorial version?), it can still be mentioned in the context of the describability of the abstract type. From this perspective, the published text is intended to represent a kind of communal authorial intention, as opposed to individual characteristics, the reconstruction, adjustment, and restoration of which is not only an opportunity but also an obligation for the collector. Perhaps this goes to demonstrate that the role the collector plays in recognizing, selecting, and formulating variants, motifs, and types worthy of preservation is quite significant. Foregoing further analysis of the issue, I would like to conclude by calling attention to the fact that a more stable, process-based concept of text that emphasizes the creation of written texts would represent a new direction for a folkloristic textology that takes the restoration of oral texts into consideration and was developed along this approach. Such an approach may help make the process of text construction visible and thereby the role of the collector/transcriber as text creator/editor more precisely outlined.

## THE TEXTUALIZATION OF HUNGARIAN FOLKTALES FROM COLLECTION TO PUBLICATION

### 1. “Untamed rural rascal” or “noble beast”?

In the foregoing, I have tried to determine the main characteristics of the creation of folklore texts and its basic dilemmas (multiple types of mediatization, medium-dependent variability). In the following, narrowing down the investigation to a single genre (genre group), I would like to provide an insight into the textological history of the collection and publication of Hungarian folktales in order to get an idea of the practical implementation of issues related to the creation and publication of texts. The valorization of the genre of folktale and the acceptance of the efforts towards its conscious collection can only be found in Hungarian culture from the second third of the 19th century, which shows a considerable delay compared to the folk song.

<sup>20</sup>The bases of systematization in folkloristic textology are genres and the various type and motif indices, the latter turning unique phenomena into metatexts, which are then arranged by genre and/or theme. The current international index of folktale types was compiled by the German folklorist Hans-Jörg Uther, which he created by revising the previous indices associated with Antti Aarne (1910) and Stith Thompson (1928, 1961) (UTHER 2004). The first version of the motif index was published in the 1930s (1932–1936), followed by an expanded and revised version in the 1950s (THOMPSON 1955–1958). Additionally, there has recently been a strong demand for a multidisciplinary reassessment of the folkloristic concept of genre: KOSKI et al. eds. 2016.





In the previous era, random and incidental text recording was typical, the evaluation and interpretation of which as folk poetry is characterized by cautious uncertainties.<sup>21</sup> György Gaal published his *Mährchen der Magyaren* collection in German in 1822, which the history of folkloristics considers to be the first collection of Hungarian tales and also the first book of folklore (GAAL 1822).<sup>22</sup> When dated from here, the publication of our folk and fairy tale texts has a tradition that is nearly two centuries long, yet there is still no established practice of publishing critical editions of historical folklore texts.<sup>23</sup> The reason for this conspicuous discrepancy lies, on the one hand, in the fact that historical studies have never been a truly fruitful research direction in Hungarian folkloristics, and on the other hand, that until recently, fairy tale researchers dedicated their attention to other, much more urgent tasks (collecting tale texts, cataloguing).<sup>24</sup> We do not have exact data on the number of recorded or accessible Hungarian folk tales. Ágnes Kovács, in her statistics based on a review of fairy tales published up until 1956, referred to approximately 3,000 published and another 3,000–4,000 manuscript Hungarian folktale texts (KOVÁCS 1956a). Decades later, Vilmos Voigt was already able to consider the findings of several collections of the performer-centered school of narrative research; according to his estimate, the number of recorded Hungarian folktales is around twenty to twenty-five thousand (VOIGT 1998:242).<sup>25</sup> The folktale is the longest prose epic genre in Hungarian folklore, the memorization of which is aided by numerous formal and structural features, but recording exactly what was said is one of the most difficult tasks of textualization. It was with this in mind that Sándor Solymossy claimed the fairy tale was the folklorist's "noble beast."<sup>26</sup> In the history of folklore

<sup>21</sup>The only collection of folktale texts in Hungarian from the 18th century, which was later published in print, can be found in the Sárospatak manuscript text corpus from 1789. For a selection, see: FAZEKAS – BENEDEK 2004. However, this edition was not based on the manuscripts, but on the truncated source edition of József Gulyás (GULYÁS 1931). The most recent summary of the appreciation of the narrative genre of oral tradition in Hungarian culture: GULYÁS 2021a.

<sup>22</sup>This collection of seventeen texts, published in German, served the purpose of providing non-Hungarians a representative selection of Hungarian folk prose epics in a revised form. The collection on which the volume is based consists of more than a hundred manuscript texts, primarily folk and fairy tales, which György Gaal collected from Hungarian soldiers stationed in Vienna in the first decades of the 19th century. A monograph on the early history of Hungarian folktale collection: DOMOKOS 2015. An English-language summary of the history of 19th-century Hungarian folklore collections has also been published recently: SZAKÁL 2021.

<sup>23</sup>A number of Hungarian manuscript folktale collections are still unpublished, entirely or partly. (To mention only a few major 19th century collections: manuscripts of the collections of György Gaal, János Erdélyi, János Kriza, and Gábor Kazinczy can be found in various Hungarian archives). For a good deal of Hungarian folktale texts, not only critical but no edition exists at all; in fact, there is a significant amount of material that has not even been identified yet, waiting for knowledgeable researchers in manuscript libraries and archives.

<sup>24</sup>There were still active storytelling communities in the Hungarian-speaking area in the second half of the 20th century, and the documentation of live storytelling obviously took precedence over the discovery and publication of historical text corpora. Furthermore, since 1953, the volumes of the *Catalogue of Hungarian Folktales* have been edited and published for decades under the direction of Ágnes Kovács, in which the editors classified and organized the published and discovered manuscript Hungarian folktales by type (MNK 1982–2001). For a summary of the work on the Hungarian folktale catalogue, which was still underway at the time, see: KOVÁCS 1955.

<sup>25</sup>For the time being, the uniform and complete archival systematization of this huge text material and the new, updated, and revised catalogue of Hungarian folktales is still a very distant goal. More on this: MAGYAR 2018.

<sup>26</sup>"Finding and accurately recording a folktale requires a higher level of research, skill, and calling. This is the true 'noble beast' of the folklorist—the effort put into tracking it down and salvaging it is a worthwhile and gratifying profession." (SOLYMOSSY 1914:283–284).



(mainly concentrated around paradigm shifts), polemics about the authenticity/inauthenticity of the records have flared up from time to time. In the case of prose epic genre groups, questions about *subjective* recording often arise regarding the degree of text fidelity prior to sound recording becoming common.<sup>27</sup> Starting in the first half of the 19th century, folklore collectors looked for tales that were structurally sound, complete in content, well-rounded, and deemed valuable from an aesthetic point of view, as they believed these reflected more authentically (from the perspective of nation-building) the folk culture they envisioned than did the fragmented or less characteristic text variants.<sup>28</sup> One of the main issues in the history of collecting Hungarian folktale texts has been the faithful documentation of the texts from oral tradition without negatively affecting the aesthetics of the tale. The problematic nature of the simultaneous application of the two aspects is clearly indicated by the fact that it was already raised in connection with the earliest Hungarian folktale genre anthology, János Erdélyi's volume *Magyar népmesék* [Hungarian Folktales] (ERDÉLYI 1855).<sup>29</sup> Arnold Ipolyi, who himself conducted an extensive folklore collection in the Hungarian-speaking area in the middle of the 19th century in order to reconstruct Hungarian mythology, stated in connection with Erdélyi's process of folktale text publication that, in addition to fidelity to orality and the preservation of vernacular peculiarities, he considered the "smoothness" of the texts essential when publishing tales, and for this reason, when it came to disjointed, fragmentary versions that make the narrative "obscure" and "unnecessary," he clearly advocated for editors making modifications to the collected text (IPOLYI 1855).<sup>30</sup> Ipolyi formulated the principle that later became programmatic in János Arany's highly influential criticism of László Merényi's folktales, according to which, when publishing fairy tale texts, the narrative style of "better and more fluent" storytellers should be followed. János Arany's concept that is based on associating a good tale collector with a good storyteller coincides with Ipolyi's point of view, although according to János Arany, and later László Arany, Merényi already violated the other aspect, authenticity, by intervening excessively in the formulation of his tales.<sup>31</sup> Searching for and delivering texts that were adequately narrated and considered authentic presented early collectors with a challenge that remained a serious issue in scholarly collections. To overcome this, the solution tale collectors settled on was that only the repertoire and performance style of exceptionally gifted storytellers was considered as the baseline in collecting and publishing the tales, and the raw material was adjusted every time,

<sup>27</sup>The best-known debates of this kind took place in connection with the tales of János Kriza and Elek Benedek, for their summaries, see KOVÁCS 1961, 1982; GULYÁS 2011. János Kriza (1811–1875), Unitarian priest, bishop, folklore collector, editor of *Vadrózsák*, a collection of Székely folk literature (KRIZA 1863). Elek Benedek (1859–1929), writer, journalist, folktale collector. The folk and fairy tales of "Elek apó" ["Grandpa Elek"] were already widely folklorized in his lifetime; the Day of the Hungarian Folktale is celebrated on his birthday (September 30).

<sup>28</sup>Behind the idea lies the Grimmean mythological concept of fairy tale prevalent at the time, according to which fairy tales were once myths, and the ancient mythological system can be reconstructed based on the epic corpus of oral tradition. The most well-known Hungarian mythological systematization created in this spirit: IPOLYI 1854.

<sup>29</sup>János Erdélyi (1814–1868), poet, philosopher, editor of several anthologies of Hungarian folk poetry.

<sup>30</sup>Arnold Ipolyi (1823–1886), Catholic priest, bishop, historian, art historian, collector of folklore. Ipolyi and his fellow collectors mostly recorded only the outline of the folktales, their manuscripts were revised and published by Lajos Kálmány (IPOLYI 1914). The complete edition of Ipolyi's manuscript folklore collection was also published: IPOLYI 2006.

<sup>31</sup>László Merényi (1837–1907), clerk, collector of folktales, published six volumes of Hungarian folktales in the 1860s (MERÉNYI 1861, 1862, 1863–1864). Reviews of his folktales were published by both Arany: ARANY J. 1968; Y. I. [ARANY L.] 1864. On László Merényi: DOMOKOS 2007.



so that “the little untamed rural rascal would appear more polished.”<sup>32</sup> In the early stages of collecting fairy tales, authenticity was interpreted not in relation to the narrated text but in relation to the imagined, ideal-typical version of the tale. In her re-evaluation of Elek Benedek’s folktales, Ágnes Kovács clearly pointed out that the projection of scholarly expectations onto previously written corpora leads to utterly ahistorical and fruitless debates about authenticity, because all folktale collectors active in the 19th century produced reworked, transformed, supplemented, or stylized tale texts – albeit following different ideas (KOVÁCS 1961).<sup>33</sup> By comparison, the text concept of folkloristics was considered a novelty, which, although continuing to value exceptional storytellers and permitting certain editions to the text, did not regard the text as a raw material that needed enhancements, but instead embraced the “noble beast” with a strong documentary objective.

## 2. Textological paradigms and the technological possibilities of text recording

Behind the development and implementation of strategies for text editing procedures lie complex cultural processes, which can be interpreted within the framework of the given discipline or placed within a broader cultural and technological historical context. On the one hand, the text handling practices are determined by the concepts of folk poetry (e.g., nation-building), but on the other hand, the perception and understanding of the text and the changes in collection methodology are greatly influenced by the technological tools available for recording texts. Although undistorted recording is not possible, as we have seen, folktale research has been striving to produce authentic texts since its beginnings. Folkloristic text recording can also be thought of as an effort to create a perfect reproduction (cf. BENDIX 1997); this requirement, however, is met quite differently from era to era. Lauri Honko distinguished three stages in the history of folklore textological paradigms according to what European collectors focused on (HONKO 2000b:6–15). This periodization is also suitable for describing the history of the textualization of Hungarian folktale texts, according to which, in the first period, collectors typically focused on the presumed essential content (folk spirit) of the folk poetry, and the text was seen only as an ideal-typical representative of this. In the case of the collection of prose epics, this was achieved by focusing on text types that were more structurally complete or of particular importance to national self-representation. This early, *pre-textual* phase lasted until the institutionalization of folkloristics at the end of the 19th century. It should be noted, however, that text treatment procedures cannot be considered uniform even within this era. The procedures of László Merényi, for example, were not the same as the ideas of János Kriza or Gábor Kazinczy, active in the same period. Superficially, the different text-shaping practices were determined by the different concepts of folklore texts, but another essential aspect was how much the given text’s editor-publisher knew about the collected text. The early, typical text collection method was building and operating a network of collectors, and the top intellectual coordinating the collection and collecting the transcribed texts was canonized as the *collector* who was able to create extensive collections by mobilizing his/her own network of connections. With regard to the textology of folktale texts, this had the important consequence that the publishers of

<sup>32</sup>Sándor Dömötör (1908–1986), Hungarian ethnographer, said this in connection with the characterization of the text editing procedures of early folklore collectors: DÖMÖTÖR 1943:87.

<sup>33</sup>On the transmutation of the oral tradition, see also: NILES 1999:91–94.



folktale texts were often far removed in time and space from those who transcribed these texts; the actual collector recording the texts and the editor publishing the transcribed texts played separate roles in the collection process, and they each had their own text concept, familiarity with the material, and principles of collection and text editing.

In the following era, the texts and their variants were already clearly at the center of investigations. This concept was defined in its approach by the historic-geographic method, and in practice it is characterized by the large-scale collection and exploration of sources, the systematization and comparison of a series of variants. In the third phase, which prevailed from the second half of the 20th century, the focal point shifted sharply again: instead of the text, it was the performer and the context of the performance that came into focus. This paradigmatic shift, called the performative turn in international scholarship, resulted in researchers looking at folklore not (or at least not exclusively) as artistic manifestations of the past but rather viewing it in a distinctive cultural context and interpreting it as part of a dynamic communication process. This approach radically transformed and essentially relativized the text-centered folklore concept of folkloristics: instead of capturing verbal features, the emphasis shifted to a complex description of the condition and context of the performance. Despite the fact that this turn really brought about a significant shift in the interpretation of text, the text as the subject of investigation did not disappear from field research.<sup>34</sup> Here I must point out that in the Hungarian context, the trend of analyzing the socio-cultural embeddedness of storytelling developed earlier, starting in the 1930s, in the spirit of the Budapest or performer-centered school of narrative research associated with Gyula Ortutay, which defined the main direction of Hungarian tale research and publication for decades.<sup>35</sup> It should also be noted that the above-mentioned paradigms do not replace each other in scientific history, but to a certain extent their commixture and coexistence can be observed instead.

## THE TECHNOLOGICAL HISTORY OF FOLKLORE COLLECTIONS

As mentioned, in addition to the theoretical concepts that designate its research subject and investigation aspects, the methodological history of folklore collections has a much more practical, technological historical aspect. There are numerous historical surveys of Hungarian folktale collection and research in Hungarian (some partial summaries are also available for international readers: DÉGH 1965; KOVÁCS 1966; ORTUTAY 1972a; GULYÁS 2021a; SZAKÁL 2021; DOMOKOS 2021b); at the same time, an objective, historical survey of the technological conditions of documentation is sorely missing. A summary with such a technological-methodological

<sup>34</sup>So much so that, according to some researchers, even after this turn, the process of constructing a folklore text followed the previous text editing tradition, aimed at creating a standard text, and only the nature and number of commentaries were affected by the change (GAY 2000:107; KATAJAMÁKI – LUKIN 2013:8–17). On the scientific trend known as the ethnography of speaking as a possible way to supersede previous approaches to collection: KESZEG 2018.

<sup>35</sup>ORTUTAY 1940, 1972b; DÉGH 1989, 1995. Gyula Ortutay (1910–1978), ethnographer, folklorist, politician. Minister of Religion and Education, professor in the Department of Ethnography at Eötvös Loránd University, director of the Institute of Ethnology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His best-known student was the Hungarian-born, later Bloomington (Indiana)-based folklorist, Linda Dégh. Dégh's work was fundamentally defined by her field experiences in Hungarian villages in the second third of the 20th century, under the guidance of Ortutay: e.g., DÉGH 1942, 1955.



approach may also be very instructive for fairy tale textology, because the available recording tools not only set the framework and possibilities of text recording but also have a fundamental impact on the development of text fidelity awareness, which is a cardinal issue from the perspective of authenticity.<sup>36</sup> Due to the differing features of orality and literacy, a recording that is faithful in the modern sense is not feasible without the technological possibilities of sound recording in the case of long, prose epic genres such as folktales or legends. However, what is less obvious is that our ideas about text fidelity also depend on how we perceive, or rather, whether we perceive at all the differences between the original and the “reproduction.” To identify differences in the texts, it is necessary to be able to compare these texts. In the methodology of folklore collection, this becomes possible with the emergence of practices that enable scientific text recording concurrently with the narration and when subjective transcription or intended reconstruction is replaced by an interest in conscious documentation. The methodology of folktale collection is fundamentally defined by the concept that folktales do not have a permanent form, therefore documentation that follows the fleeting performance and exhibits the contingencies of live speech (e.g., omissions, slips of the tongue, mistakes) is not suitable for representing the folk narrative style. The methodological expectations of collectors only begin to change perceptibly in the second half of the 19th century, when subjective, recollective-reconstructive collection begins to be replaced by objective documentary collection. In the history of collecting Hungarian folktales, the two earliest used text recording (and at once text editing) procedures were *transcribing from memory* and *dictation*. Although the former yielded a uniform style, it involved a violation of the documentation principle; by comparison, sentence-by-sentence transcription produced a more accurate text in terms of what was said, but it was less likely to meet aesthetic requirements. Moreover, the dynamics of the presentation also change in an artificial, slowed-down speech situation, therefore it demonstrably changes (simplifies, shortens) the oral folktale in the case of lengthy prose epic genres. By the beginning of the 20th century, the viewpoint that a story must be heard from the same narrator repeatedly in order for the collector to create an authentic reproduction has been established as a methodological principle, thus dictation was preceded by rough notes taken at first hearing of the story.<sup>37</sup> In the history of Hungarian folktale collection, until the second half of the 20th century, when tape recording became common, the most widely used technique for collecting fairy tale texts was transcribing the live performance by ear. However, one of the first major turning points in the paradigm shift towards documentary collection was not sound recording but the spread of shorthand, which made it possible to write down longer texts verbatim.<sup>38</sup> In the last decade of the century, Lajos Katona, who laid the foundations for comparative folklore text research, elaborated the professional and methodological requirements he considered essential for the collector and the collection of fairy tales. According to this, collection must begin with acquiring preliminary knowledge; however, thorough knowledge of the subject of investigation is merely a prerequisite for adequate data recording, while the main requirement is to use

<sup>36</sup>On the awareness of text fidelity in orality, see, e.g., RITÓK 2003:29.

<sup>37</sup>In the early 1910s, the Hungarian Department of Folklore Fellows gave educational lectures and published detailed guides on collection methods: SEBESTYÉN Gyula – BÀN Aladár 1912; SOLYMOSSY 1914.

<sup>38</sup>In 1834, the German stenographer Franz Xaver Gabelsberger developed the method that Iván Markovits applied to the Hungarian language. GOPCSA 1917.



stenography, a recording method that is also suitable for reflecting the dialect (KATONA 1891). Based on the writings of the German folklorist Robert Petsch, Katona summarized the new methodological rules expected of the fairy tale collector once again in 1900, this time in a more elaborate form, the essence of which was the prohibition of arbitrary modifications and *verbatim et literatim* transcription: “Nowadays, the collector must put his self, his own aesthetic and moral understanding completely aside and *with slavish loyalty record everything he hears and exactly how he hears it*. With this, we have already expressed the requirement that the individual items must be recorded *with fidelity to the dialect*. Where the collector hears a mere fragment, he should in no way supplement it with a parallel item based on his own prior knowledge; where the storyteller interpolates individual, personal matters, the collector should not delete these from his performance, because scholarship can make good use of such details and consider them according to their value (...) Literal fidelity that reflects the folk performance style while preserving the pronunciation of the individual narrator is absolutely essential (...)” (-A. [KATONA Lajos] 1900:424).<sup>39</sup> The two markedly different points of view regarding the recording of folktales (literary vs. folkloristic or aesthetic vs. documentary) are based on differing conceptions of the folktale text: one camp rejected shorthand, because, representing the former conception, it claimed that since the folktale has no permanent form, therefore the collector must create the structurally complete and aesthetically valuable, ideal version of the text based on known variants. By contrast, folkloristics, having just been institutionalized, took the position that the verbatim recording of a sufficient number of variants of a given type produces the abstract framework of the tale type, which it ultimately considers permanent and worthy of studying. These two concepts were present concurrently in Hungarian culture at the turn of the 20th century. When Lajos Katona formulated the scholarly methodological requirements for collecting folktales, it was already common knowledge in professional circles that Béla Vikár, who was well-versed in shorthand and practiced it at a high level (he also worked as a parliamentary stenographer), has been successfully collecting folk poetry using this method for years.<sup>40</sup> Prior to the development of the scientific methodology (concurrent with recording), the goal of collecting was to capture the ideal-typical features of the folk culture and a good collector was a literary stylist with a keen eye, whereas since the institutionalization of folkloristics, the basic tenet became empirical data collection fieldwork and the truthful documentation of unique, specific phenomena. In the history of fairy tale text collections, text fidelity was given substance only after this paradigm shift, at the turn of the century, when the practices that were still generally accepted in the 19th century (moral-aesthetic text editing, completion of fragments) were already considered unacceptable. Béla Vikár played a distinguished role in the introduction of empirical folkloristic fieldwork in the modern sense. In the collection of fairy tales, this not only brought about stricter requirements for text recording, which changed with the use of shorthand, but the text concept that considered the data relating to the informant and the place and time of collection to be an inseparable part of the work in the publication of a collection of folk

<sup>39</sup>On the scientific historical role of Katona: LANDGRAF 2021.

<sup>40</sup>Béla Vikár (1859–1945), poet, translator, ethnographer, collected folk poetry in Hungarian villages in Southern Transdanubia in the 1880s, during which he recorded a significant number of prose epic texts verbatim using this method. VIKÁR 1899:26. In his account of his field research, he emphasized that he consciously broke with the previous approach to collecting that allowed stylization and instead sought to document the live performance verbatim: VIKÁR 1891:119. On Béla Vikár’s collecting principles and practice: LANDGRAF 2020.



poetry was also Vikár's innovation.<sup>41</sup> Vikár was also a pioneer of data recording supplemented by image and sound recording. His introduction of phonograph-aided collection was a breakthrough in the field of ethnomusicology (cf. MIKOS 2018); the wax cylinders that allowed the recording of only a few minutes of material are of lesser importance in the collection of fairy tales, but his experiments with the sound recording of prose epic material certainly had an impact on the development of tale text fidelity awareness.<sup>42</sup> Due to the technological features of the phonograph (short, unclear recordings, the fragility of the wax cylinder, having to perform in an unnatural posture), it did not become a commonly used tool in folktale collection. The gramophone, used for folkloristic sound recording from the 1930s, was similarly not included in the general methodological toolkit of tale collection, and it could not bring a breakthrough in on-site collections either; the historical significance of the few precious extant recordings of folktales is that they are our earliest complete audio fairy tales.<sup>43</sup> After the Second World War, the collection of texts with a *tape recorder* began to spread in Hungary, which became common in the 1960s, thus bringing another turn in the history of recording folktale texts (Fig. 3).<sup>44</sup> Ágnes Kovács said of the methodology for transcribing the then still novel tape-recorded material: "Professional tale collectors tend to write down everything phonetically – as much as this is possible in a handwritten transcription – they edit this first transcript and then they or a linguist reduce the text according to today's orthographic rules, which means that they transcribe it verbatim, but not with phonetic fidelity" (KOVÁCS 1956a). According to the guidelines, the form of the word and the order of the words could not be modified in the transcription, but certain non-arbitrary modifications were still allowed. In general, the tale collections of the second half of the 20th century are characterized by the fact that the original, more authentic recordings and their edited versions intended for publication diverged, the latter being characterized by a kind of reduced text fidelity, cursory phonetics, the annotated rectification of mistakes and errors, and the omission of inappropriate text passages. All in all, it seems that in professional collection methodology, when it came to folktales, text-shaping procedures did not disappear, they just got restricted by regulated frameworks. There are different editorial

<sup>41</sup>He consistently enforced this textological approach in his published collection (VIKÁR 1905).

<sup>42</sup>In 1896, Vikár began collecting folklore with a phonograph in Csincsetanya (Borsod county) in northern Hungary; the wax cylinders held in the Museum of Ethnography (Budapest) include some recordings of fairy tales, too, besides numerous folk songs. Two short excerpts from the unspecified collections are also available online (Néprajzi Múzeum Hangtár [Museum of Ethnography, Budapest] NM H 441, 2:35 s; NM H 442, 2:28 s). It should be noted here that we owe Vikár not only the earliest recording of a storyteller's voice but also the first photographic documentation of the storytelling event. With the help of his wife, during their collection in Somogy, he took a photo of an informant in the Zselicség (Southern Transdanubian part of Hungary) telling a story to his audience. By the way, this visual recording is also the first photographic documentation of not only Hungarian storytelling but also tale collection, as it depicts the collector, too. Figure 1.

<sup>43</sup>In the late 1930s, the Museum of Ethnography and Hungarian Radio began a joint venture to produce large-scale audio recordings (Patria Hungarian Ethnographic Recordings), including twenty folktale recordings from various parts of the Hungarian language area (Fig. 2). The radio recordings were originally to be published along with written documentation, but these tale recordings have not been transcribed (VOIGT 2010).

<sup>44</sup>Lajos Hegedűs, who developed the methodology of spontaneous speech recording for dialectological research, was the first to regularly use the tape recorder (KOVÁCS 1956b:184). The linguistically and folkloristically valuable recordings in the Lajos Hegedűs Archive, recorded in the 1940s and 1950s, should be also mentioned, which include, for example, the tales of the Bukovina Székely storyteller Józsefné Palkó (her tales were published by Linda Dégh: DÉGH 1955:1).





**Fig. 1** Ferenc Farkas relates tales; on the right side of the picture, the folklore collector Béla Vikár is taking notes. Zselickisfalud-Szilvásszentmárton, Somogy County, Hungary, 1891. Photo by (Julianna Krekács/Mrs Béla Vikár/). Museum of Ethnography, Photograph Collection, Budapest, Nr. F1581

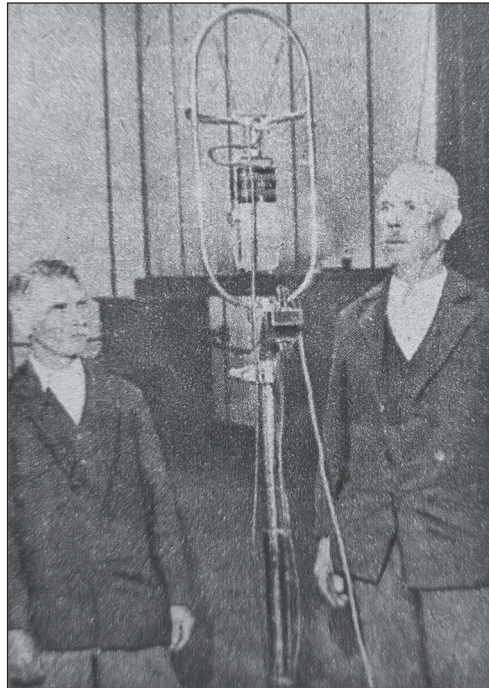
requirements for the collection/recording and publishing of the texts, and this aspect should also be considered when interpreting all published folktale texts.

## TEXT PUBLISHING PRACTICES AND THE GENETIC APPROACH

In the foregoing, I tried to show how the prevailing general folklore conception, the principles and techniques of collecting, as well as the individual interest and competence of the collector determined the text corpus constructed from recorded folktales. With regard to the textology of published Hungarian folktales, this is not the space for a detailed description of the publication practices of the past two centuries, so I would just like to mention a few features, as well as some of the more significant works from the philological-textological point of view (see VOIGT 1982 for more details). In the 19th century, the benchmark for European folktale text publishing was the *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, which after its first publication saw many additional editions with varying content during the brothers' lifetime (GRIMM 1812/1815). The Grimmean model served also as a guide for Hungarian tale collectors; their work inspired György Gaal, János Erdélyi, and Arnold Ipolyi, among others, and for many, the narrative style created by Wilhelm Grimm represented the ideal of fairy tale style (DOMOKOS 2021b). The publication of fairy tales annotated with scholarly commentary was also the







**Fig. 2.** Linda Dégh's informants from Sára (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, Hungary) tell stories in the building of Magyar Rádió [Hungarian Radio], Budapest. József Fejes, town crier, and János Nagy, fisherman, 1943. Photo by MFI. Image source: [ORTUTAY 1943](#)

Grimms' innovation, which in the second half of the century became an integral part of Hungarian scholarly publications of folktales. In their notes on the tales, the brothers methodically indicated the sources they used and the text modifications they made in composing the tales. In the history of Hungarian folktale-publishing, the first collection in which folktales were accompanied by notes was the Székely (Szekler) folklore collection of János Kriza ([KRIZA 1863](#)). Only twenty tales were published in *Vadrózsák* (which is but a fragment of the manuscript material), and in his notes, Kriza mentioned the previously published Hungarian variants of the tales, and, unprecedented at the time, he even mentioned certain storytellers by name ([Fig. 4.](#)). In Kriza's collection, the texts are listed by genre, the tales ordered by region, and there is more emphasis than ever before on the representation of the peculiarities of the Szekler dialect. Kriza's endeavor was of outstanding significance in his time, but, unfortunately, the planned second volume of *Vadrózsák*, which was to present prose epic genres, was never completed. By the time Kriza's anthology was published (1863), the first representative source publication series of Hungarian folklore, the Magyar népköltési gyűjtemény (MNGy) [Collection of Hungarian Folklore], eventually started in 1872 under the auspices of the Kisfaludy Society, was already in the





**Fig. 3.** Gabriella Kiss records the tale of storyteller József Koncz with a tape recorder and by handwriting, 1961, Nyögér, Vas County, Hungary. Photo by Tamás Fényes. MTVA Press and Photo Archive, Nr. MTI-FOTO-828759

works, and it included works collected from various parts of the Hungarian-speaking area. The series, which by 1924 saw the publication of 14 volumes, included the collections of folk poetry published according to various collection-editorial concepts, arranged by region and by genre.<sup>45</sup> Within this series, the expectations regarding the scholarly publication of tale texts were developed and established, even though stylization and rewriting were still very characteristic in the text editing practices of the first volumes. Although only three volumes specifically focusing on the folktale were published in the MNGy, almost all volumes of the series contain more or less folktale texts selected from contemporary or historical material. In general, it can be said that, besides aesthetics, the main aspect for selecting from the collected tales for publication was novelty: subgenres, types, motifs, or linguistic expressions that were less represented in previous Hungarian-language publications were prioritized. (This explains why editors set aside a considerable part of the manuscript – and largely still unpublished – transcripts of tales created by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century collection movements). Starting with the first volume, there was an expectation for

<sup>45</sup>The editors of the MNGy were initially Pál Gyulai and László Arany, the latter being responsible for the prose material; starting with the fourth volume, editorial duties were assumed by Gyula Vargha, and later Gyula Sebestyén.



**Fig. 4.** Gergely Gotthard (nicknamed Puczok Geczi), the most famous Szekler informant of János Kriza. The photo was probably taken in 1866, which is our earliest known depiction of a storyteller. Photo by Count József Haller) Székely National Museum, Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania, catalogue no.: 668, inv. no. F443

representing dialect and vernacular features (which, however, could not always be consistently implemented), as well as for providing notes on the texts' place of origin and diffusion. Béla Vikár's already mentioned volume from Somogy represented a novelty, firstly because he made sure to consistently mention the name of the informant in addition to the place of collection for all tales, and, secondly, because with the help of innovative collection methods, he assuredly strove for verbatim text fidelity. The special feature of the tale collection of János Berze Nagy that represented ethnic-regional characteristics is that most of the published Palóc texts came from a single village, Besenyőtelek in Heves County (the collector's native village). The collector-editor was methodical in trying to specify the social status and occupation of his storytellers, but he was less consistent in his transcription technique.<sup>46</sup> The central publication series of 20th-

<sup>46</sup>"Most [of the tales - DM] were written down immediately after hearing them, on the spot, the rest I wrote from memory." (BERZE NAGY 1907).



century folklore texts is the Új Magyar Népköltési Gyűjtemény [New Collection of Hungarian Folklore] launched by Gyula Ortutay in 1940, which typically contains prose folklore (mainly fairy tales and legends) (after Ortutay, its editors were Ágnes Kovács and later Ilona Nagy). The 27 volumes of the series published to date reflect the approach of the performer-centered school of narrative research, and its major innovation is that, in addition to the previously emphasized regional-ethnic collections, they strove to present the entire repertoire of individual performers. Based on the method developed by the Budapest School for recent folktale material, the publications are accompanied by more extensive studies than ever before, which include descriptions of the performer's personality, life path, world view, residence, and socio-cultural environment. In these volumes, the earlier literary and later linguistic expectations of tale text publications are complemented by the sociographic approach, whereby the accompanying notes refer to the tales' domestic and international parallels, origins, and peculiarities. The collections published in the series revealed a huge amount of new material, but with the exception of the first volumes, they do not really represent methodological innovation.<sup>47</sup> In 2001, under the editorship of Zoltán Magyar, a series of publications called Magyar Népköltészet Tára [Collection of Hungarian Folk Poetry] was launched, which in its approach continues the text publication traditions of the *New Collection of Hungarian Folklore*, but in addition to recent collections, this series also provides space for historical tale materials, which is noteworthy because the conceptual edition of historical prose folklore texts is one of the great shortcomings of Hungarian folkloristics. As it has been pointed out, there is no established tradition of the scholarly publication of historical folktales in Hungary—the majority of the few existing publications are either source editions that do not consider critical aspects or informational texts lacking even the most elementary philological data.<sup>48</sup> That is why I would like to bring up one aspect, the extension and methodical application of which might be useful in formulating and implementing plans for future folktale text publications. Although the approach that considers the *creation* of folklore collections was not applied at all in Hungarian historical folktale text publishing until recently, I would like to argue that the genetic approach is not completely alien to folkloristic thinking. The first critical edition of Hungarian folk poetry, edited by Gyula Sebestyén, was published in 1911, on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of János Kriza, which was the second edition of *Vadrózsák* (KRIZA 1911). Sebestyén regarded the first edition of *Vadrózsák* in 1863 an “untouchable canonical text,” which he supplemented with a preface and scholarly notes, and also published Kriza's biography, portrait, and some of his correspondence about folk poetry. In his introduction, he described at length the history of the creation of the collection, and the letters published as an appendix were also seen as documents of Kriza's textological procedures in the context of the creation of the volume. With this practice, Sebestyén established a tradition, and in later publications (unlike other corpora), the collections of János Kriza were published along with items of folkloristic interest from the

<sup>47</sup>The programmatic first volume of the series: ORTUTAY 1940. The introduction is also available in English: ORTUTAY 1972b. Among other things, the Kalotaszeg collection of Ágnes Kovács (KOVÁCS 1943) and the Kakasd collection of Linda Dégh (DÉGH 1955) were also published in this series.

<sup>48</sup>An exception is the legacy of Sámuel Szabó and his collectors' circle, reconstructed by Katalin Olosz with exemplary editorial attention, which, although not a fairy tale collection, contains significant folktale material transcribed by 19th-century student collectors (SZABÓ 2009).



collector's correspondence.<sup>49</sup> In my opinion, the biggest challenge in the publication or republication of the Hungarian historical folktale corpora, especially classic Hungarian folktale collections, lies in forging this genetic approach into a methodology, and its consistent textual application. Using a more stable folkloristic text concept reveals the process in which collectors and editors produced written versions of folktales through the application of various text editing procedures. With the synoptic-genetic edition of *Eredeti népmesék* [Authentic Folktales] published in 1862 under the name of László Arany and the manuscript collection of folktales of the Arany family, we attempted to identify the text editing strategies behind the creation of one of the classic 19th-century collections of folktales in Hungarian culture (DOMOKOS – GULYÁS 2018).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>A Kriza anthology was compiled from the manuscript legacy of János Kriza, the appendix of which included not only a selection from Kriza's correspondence but also extended to individual collectors in his network of collectors. The editors of the volume also considered it important to publish the journal entries of Sándor Ürmösi, one of Kriza's prominent collectors, as an appendix to the collected texts, thereby calling attention to the active contribution of collectors in the context of the creation of the collection (KOVÁCS — GERGELY 1956). For a collection of the documents of Kriza's folklore collecting activities, see SZAKAL 2012. In the latest publication of Kriza's scattered legacy, Katalin Olosz reflected much more consciously on the role of individual collectors: KRIZA 2013. It is not surprising that recent efforts at the more accurate and more complete exploration of the operation of collection networks also grew out of this tradition of Kriza-perception (SZAKAL 2020).

<sup>50</sup>On folktale text editing practices, see also DOMOKOS 2022a, 2022b.



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