

# Interpretation, Influence, Reception: Historical Folklore Studies of 19th-Century Hungarian Folk Poetry

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The authors of the thematic block are all researchers of the Institute of Ethnology at the Research Centre for the Humanities. The institute is a Centre of Excellence of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The institution's Folklore Department employs a total of 10 folklorists, who conduct both historical folklore research and contemporary research. They collect, systematize, and analyze the traditional genres and transitional forms of folklore, but they also record and analyze the folklore phenomena of the digital world and the Internet. The priority plan of the Department is to compile a new handbook of folkloristics, the *Encyclopaedia of Hungarian Folk Poetry*, which has been in the works for several years and is ready to be published as soon as possible. The endeavor's professional foundation lies in the fact that a significant part of the Hungarian scholars of textual folklore work here. One of their aims is to provide a modern, 21st-century interpretation of the basic concepts of folkloristics, such as folklore, folk poetry, tradition, oral tradition, orality, folklore collection, archives, authenticity, etc. Another aim is to produce encyclopedia articles summarizing the latest Hungarian and international research results on the most important issues in folklore, genres such as folk songs, fairy tales, legends, ballads, anecdotes, jokes, proverbs, riddles, etc., the most significant types, motifs, and performers, as well as the most prominent scholars in the field (cf. [SZE-MERKÉNYI 2013:9-36](#)). Decades have passed since the publication of the handbooks summarizing Hungarian folkloristics; the five volumes of the *Encyclopaedia of Hungarian Ethnography* ([ORTUTAY 1977-82](#)) and the *Folk Poetry* ([VARGYAS 1988](#)) volume in the *Hungarian Ethnography* series. Since then, new folklore phenomena and new research findings have emerged, new topics, methods, and approaches have gained ground, and the ideology of the era in which they were produced has left its mark on the interpretation and use of concepts in those previous summaries. These circumstances prompted the idea of writing a new handbook.

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In the thematic block of *Interpretation, Influence, Reception: Historical Folklore Studies of 19th-Century Hungarian Folk Poetry*, six studies provide an insight into the historical textual folklore research of the Folklore Department, a significant research direction for the folklorists of the research institute. In the last two decades, at the intersection of literary historiography with a sociohistorical orientation and historical folkloristics, research of 19th-century Hungarian textual folklore genres, especially the fairy tale, legend, and riddle, has intensified. This was actually quite expedient because a significant part of the corpus of Hungarian folklore had been collected in the 19th century, yet folklore research is significantly delayed in the processing, publishing, and interpretation of this corpus, especially in terms of prose narratives. By studying the editing principles and text formation practices of early folklore publications, the researchers focused primarily on the issues of authenticity, textualization, and copyright. An important question is whose storytelling and folklore knowledge is ultimately reflected in the folklore texts amassed from the 19th century, in non-verbatim transcripts, often only as synopses, and without the context of collection: the presumed informant, the collector, or the intellectual, scientific elite that determined and governed the work of collectors? Another important area of research in the Folklore Department is the analysis of the influence of 19th-century popular literature – such as chapbooks, almanacs, the illustrated press, and schoolbooks – on oral phenomena. They also study how folklore has been integrated into education over the past 150 years, how it is present in written and electronic media, how it relates to popular culture, how it appears in today's festival programs, how it is integrated into the protection of intangible cultural heritage, and from what and by what means its practitioners want to “save” folklore.

The following studies reveal how professional Hungarian folkloristics developed since the first calls for the collection of folklore and the emergence of interest in folklore at the beginning of the 19th century. One of the central issues in all these studies is the 19th-century interpretation of the concept of folk poetry and its changes. They ask questions like: who were the collectors of the era, what was their social background? Which genres attracted their attention, which ones did they consider worthy of recording? What expectations did they set for collecting folklore? How did the canon of collecting folklore develop? What text formation and publishing practices did the editors of the popular publications of the era follow? What principles did they formulate and adhere to? By the 1860s, folklore publications were already following well-defined principles in terms of publishing folklore texts, and *Magyar Népköltési Gyűjtemény* [Collection of Hungarian Folk Poetry] series, launched in 1872, provided the institutional framework for the implementation of all these principles. As Anna Szakál's study, *Collections of Hungarian Folk Literature from the 19th Century and Their Canonisation*, points out, the publishers and editors of 19th-century Hungarian folklore collections were fundamentally governed by an aesthetic ideal. They wanted to publish folklore texts that were refined and essentially characteristic of a phenomenon or a type of text, and this is what governed how they formed and stylized the collections. Nonetheless, there were differences in how each publication tried to accomplish this.

Four of the present studies – Judit Gulyás's *The Collaborative Folktale Project of a Family: The Synoptic Critical Edition of a 19th-Century Hungarian Folktale and Riddle Collection*, Mariann Domokos's *The Influence of the Grimm Tales on the Tale Textology of László Arany*, Katalin Vargha's *Riddles in the Manuscript and Print Version of a 19th-Century Collection*, and Ágnes Eitler's *The “Re-Tuning” of János Arany's Life and Work in the Popular Education of the 1950s* – are closely related to the Arany Family's folklore activities and their perception of folklore collection. The father, János Arany (1817–1882), was a poet of superior skill and



influence in 19th-century Hungarian literature whose extremely rich and diverse oeuvre is inevitable in Hungarian folklore research because he utilized and adapted many folklore subjects and motifs in his works, but his theoretical views on folk poetry also had a great impact on his contemporaries. His son, László Arany (1844–1898), was a poet, collector of folklore, translator, economics and politics writer, and lawyer. He edited the 1862 volume *Eredeti népmesék* [Authentic Folktales], still one of the most significant and influential collections of Hungarian folktales. His contemporaries, and later ethnographers, too, responded to the volume with unanimous approval. They praised the work of the collector-editor László Arany for his authentic reproduction of the Hungarian folk narrative style, even though he, too, adapted the texts according to contemporary literary tastes.

In 2017, on the 200th anniversary of János Arany's birth, the Folklore Department organized a conference, the proceedings of which were published in a volume (BALOGH 2018 ed. in chief), and a review of which is included in this issue (TÖRÖK 2021). In addition to the anniversary, another reason for the event was the fact that the synoptic edition of the Arany Family's manuscript tale collection (DOMOKOS – GULYÁS eds. 2018) was completed around the time of the conference. The aim of the pioneering endeavor was to publish the transcripts of the tales along with the emendations to the manuscript side by side with the text versions published in the book *Eredeti népmesék* [Authentic Folktales] edited by László Arany. This allows the reader to observe the process of textualization, that is, how a tale text was being shaped in the process of transcription or publication, and what changes the editor made to the manuscript texts. A critical edition of the Arany Family's collection of tales and riddles, in addition to making this valuable material accessible, can facilitate the (re)interpretation of 19th-century folklore collections and publications, as well as the concepts and procedures that produce them. It can encourage a rethinking of not only historical prose folklore but, more broadly, the textological practice of folklore text publications, and even the publishing principles of recent collections. The volume was edited by Judit Gulyás and Mariann Domokos. Their studies are also included in the thematic block and provide an idea of both the principles of publishing the volume and László Arany's text formation practices.

Katalin Vargha's study is organically related to this topic. It provides an overview of the 19th-century Hungarian history and interpretation of folk riddles based on the Arany Family's manuscript collection of tales and riddles, as well as the texts found in *Eredeti népmesék* [Authentic Folktales]. The final essay related to the folklore activities of the Arany family is a study by Ágnes Eitler, who talks about the recasting, adaptation, and interpretation of the oeuvre of János Arany in Hungarian popular education of the 1950s from the period of communist dictatorship. The concluding study of the thematic block (*At the Eleventh Hour. The Principles of Folklore Collection in the Scholarly Oeuvre of Lajos Katona and in Hungarian Folklore Studies at the Turn of the 20th Century*) is authored by Ildikó Landgraf. Through the oeuvre of Lajos Katona, a prominent scholar of Hungarian folkloristics – which became an independent discipline at the end of the 19th century – she seeks to demonstrate the changes that took place at the turn of the 20th century in the principles of folklore collections and text publications.

A significant and not yet sufficiently explored part of Hungarian folklore are the texts of 19th-century folklore collections that are manuscript and found in early collections. Readers of the thematic block will gain insight into this exciting material, as well as into an important area of historical textual folklore research at the Institute of Ethnology of the Research Centre for the Humanities.



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