

## Just Pure Music? Franz Liszt's Book on the Relationships between the Hungarian and Rroma Music \*

LEVENTE SZABÓ

In 1859 Franz Liszt finally finished writing a book on the Rroma<sup>1</sup> presenting them as not only the performers, but also and foremost as the creators of the Hungarian national music. Originally the work was published in French, but had soon been translated into German, then into Hungarian<sup>2</sup>, but even before being published in Hungarian in 1861 it elicited a bitter debate with its basic propositions.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout this paper I would rather approach the work and the debate it led to as exemplifying the concepts of the time that stood at the basis of interpreting the Rroma in general and the different ethnic groups in particular than as describing some sort of "real", mimetic, verifiable characteristics of the mid-nineteenth century Rroma. So the narrative position that offers itself along this analysis will not look for the veracity of Liszt's utterances and will not have a stake in confirming or refuting his arguments, but will try to view the work and the debate at issue as a process that imagines and thus constitutes both the Rroma and the communities viewing it: it endows the Rroma community with such qualities and characteristics that point at the culturally embedded views, habits, categories, stereotypes and anxieties regarding the community in question and thus can be cross-examined also on the self-view of the one uttering it.

---

\* This work was supported by the Research Support Scheme of the Open Society Support Foundation, grant no.:818/2000.

<sup>1</sup> Franz Liszt, *Des Bohémiens et de leurs musique en Hongrie*, Bourdillat, Paris, 1859.

<sup>2</sup> The work was translated into Hungarian by József Székely: Ferenc Liszt, *A cigányokról és a cigány zenéről*, Heckenast, Pest, 1861. In the following I will quote from this edition. For the philology of the publication and the antecedents of the book see Franz Liszt, *Briefe aus ungarischen Sammlungen* 1835–1886, gesammelt und erläutert von Prahács Mária (1966), Akadémiai Publishing Company, Bp., in particular the letters numbered 52 and 115, respectively their notes (Idem 105–106, 311–313).

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Kálmán Simonffy, *Dr. Liszt Ferenc és a magyar zene* [Dr Franz Liszt and the Hungarian music] I–II, Pesti Napló September 6, 1859:2; Pesti Napló September 7, 1859:2; Kálmán Simonffy, *Dr. Liszt és a magyar zene*, Pesti Napló September 14, 1859:2–3; Gusztáv Szénfy, *Liszt a cigány zenéről* [Liszt on the Hungarian music], Pesti Napló September 14, 1859:3; Sándor Czeke, Hölgyfutár 1858:154; Rózsaági, Szépirodalmi Közlöny 1858, II:6–10.

Therefore one of the problems to be treated will tour the anthropology of the Roma as imagined in Liszt's book. The second issue to be raised is connected with the reception of *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie*. Even before being published Liszt's book – apart from insignificant exceptions – encountered an extreme animosity and it proved both challenging and raising extreme emotions even far after its publication in Hungarian: Sámuel Brassai's book-length polemical critique (Brassai [1861]) was followed by dozens of reviews that reflected on the work that associated the origins of the Hungarian national music to the Roma.<sup>4</sup> This reception gives another perspective for the approach when – in its second half – the questions to be posed will be: which are those norms (strengthened by consensus) of the Hungarian national culture that seem to be infringed by several of Liszt's affirmations and what kind of historical perceptions of the national community can be sensed on the basis of these implicit and explicit standpoints.

## I.

The way Liszt describes the Roma communities to be found throughout Europe and also in Hungary sheds light to the way in which ethnic communities were represented at the midst of the nineteenth century, respectively to the categories, notions employed and mental frameworks conceived for the sake of such descriptions. Naturally, the book is also specific and thus foregrounds the pragmatics of the above-mentioned problems: how does Liszt use them to represent group-specific characteristics, to constitute and authenticate them.

In *Des Bohémiens* the anthropological classification comprises the whole life-world, i. e. the characteristics of the Roma cannot be separated in any sense and aspect from the world they domesticate. A telling example of this is the almost grammatizing description our writer gives about the horses and the alleged characteristics of this species of animals. The anthropological categories and value-judgements of the description at issue are from the very beginning determined by the fact that the discourse occurs within a framework that imagines the Roma as a group (a historically and timelessly) governed by unlimited and unbridled passions:

*His faculty of taste having a liking for the horses (or for the mules – should he not have any of the former) reveals his sympathy for the heroic instincts of the steed. From among all the domestic animals it is only the horse that comes up to understand our moral passions and it is also the only that helps us in our less course needs. Only the horse seems to understand the restlessness of our heart, the fright of our love, the bitter ardour of our revenge, the high-flying illusions of*

<sup>4</sup> To be mentioned: István Bartalus, Budapesti Szemle III, IV; Ponori Thewrewk 1888:328–331; Ponori Thewrewk 1866:21–24.

our courage; it compares with our thoughts in flying across distances and reaching the goal. [...] Its devotion stretches not only to the property and the safe-keeping of the humans (like that of the dog), but it seems to be above the petit bourgeois concerns when it reserves the right even to perish for the human only so as to bring him to the arms of the beloved women with a minute sooner, or so as to overtake his faithless enemy (Liszt 1861:148–149).

Throughout his book Liszt implies that the Rroma are attached to a specific type of space. This kind of space borders not only their being, but its characteristics and whereabouts have strong cultural meanings inscribed into. For instance, the space-categories *inside* (or *not inside* – to be more specific) / *outside* are already extremely value-loaded and in this context seem to mark the Rroma off from an alleged normality of the communities having fixed spatial boundaries.<sup>5</sup> This colonizing perspective that takes as its basis the well-defined and characteristically-bordered space and endows it with the semantics of normality and artlessness. The culturally defined space and the value-loaded description of the Rroma community interact and come to transmit manifold realities. The description of Kiev (*Kiow* in Liszt's usage) and its surroundings might be a master example of the way a geographically localized slice of the space acquires more and more complex meanings, the way a description unfolds to become the carrier of values, presuppositions and value-judgements: i. e. the way a space becomes a meaningful space<sup>6</sup>:

*One should bear in mind this bizarre excess of the most different things, this accumulation of the rich and jumbled elements that have come from the East and from the West, this hotchpotch of the Greeek customs and of the remote mementos of decadent Roman Empire, of the Parisian and English taste that makes itself visible not only on the clothing and coaches of the aristocratic society, but on their customs and conversation as well. We should imagine this faded and parading, bulky and ceremonious magnificence of a town rich in military, religious and economic relics: the magnificence of a town that – like a declined, but still proud and affable queen – has preserved only the beauties of one of those realms that are called extreme by the scholars. This is the realm where the harshness of the northern winters alternate with the southern balmy breathes. We should vividly picture all these contradictions (existing within the amidst of a rich and barren nature, of a half-uncivilized, ignorant, superstitious people full of suppressed sorrow and firmness, of a slavish people that is always*

<sup>5</sup> For a critical comment on this conception see James Clifford's criticism on the localizing types of culture definitions: Clifford 2001, no. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Excellent examples tackle the meaning-endowment of the space in Said 1978 (his examples taken from the Orient interpret the appropriating gestures of Western colonialization); Wolf 2000 (a work with excellent Eastern European examples on the issue).

*ready to rebel) to be able to understand that only the individuals of a miraculously strange species cannot seem unfamiliar here.* [underlined mine – Sz. L.] (Liszt 1861:180–181).

The text doesn't hide that it appeals to the imagination and offers the image of a community that is allegedly *strange*, and the strangeness of which is pictured as being abnormal, basically inscrutable and thus downright threatening. The metaphors that constitute the imagined space domesticated by a major Rroma group implicitly picture a community that menaces the stability, and whose tranquility is only provisional. The constructed strangeness of the space constructs the strangeness of the Rroma on its turn: the geographically located and almost scientifically explained strangeness is endowed with the potential menace.

The distribution of the qualitative difference, strangeness in this discourse is also gender-specific. Rroma women are given a special place within their community: they are endowed with such roles that can be fulfilled successfully only by them, so their strangeness is doubled. When Liszt treats these roles as pathologically determined, he aims at integrating his vision on the Rroma into the canonic scientific visions of his age. The scale norm of this vision was exactly the biologically palpable *difference* and *strangeness* that could constitute the specificity of a certain race. Let me quote Liszt: "*The women who are generally blessed with less affinity to perceive and compare, under this tropical climate of the passions have acquired such an extraordinary and supernatural insight that helps them to find out secrets, never told by anybody, but sensed by them by means of their pathogenetic (pathogénétique) qualities*" (Liszt 1861:180–181). Nay, the strangeness at issue is even more obvious and persuasive since it is palpable also for the outsiders: "[...] *the vividness of their imagination gains ground like the fire, becomes contagious after touch and shatters everyone like the blow of the electric machine*"; at the same time the outsiders are *depending* on this experience, they seem to be in need of it:

*It is not accidental that common people attribute a peculiar origin to this faculty. And it was not accidental that distinguished ladies, country lasses and the great and the good went to them for a thousand times in order to learn the secrets of their future from these black and beautiful women; whose hair is a bit bluish, whose slenderness is so daring, who close their eyelashes with such a delight [...]* (Liszt 1861:151–152).

This rearranges the relationships between the Rroma and the non-Rroma into hierarchy and a state of dependence: the non-Rroma are pictured as in need of the gift of prophecy of the Rroma women – nay, with regards to such an aspect of the human life that basically borders the personal existence, i. e.

concerning the future. This state of affairs is disquieting in the structure which can perceive the Rroma community either as outsider to the structure itself or as inferior to it. From this perspective one cannot be astonished at the criticism aimed at the alleged superiority Liszt would have given to the Rroma community over the Hungarian one.

A basic comparison that somehow becomes the core of the whole work draws a parallel between the Rroma community and the Jewish one. "*We should compare their [i. e. of the Rroma] maintenance appliances to those of another people that also live in Europe without native land, home and hospitable surroundings – a people whose tenacity is miraculous*" – writes Liszt at the very beginning of his book and goes on to draw the parallel anthropology of another community (kin to the Rroma one) in a series of interwoven chapters. The Jewish appear to be a community whose fundamental feature is an alleged subversive character; then again the cohesive power that seems to have an overtly positive content in the case of other communities is represented as a kind of negative, opposing and ruinous hatred:

*If they [i. e. the Jews] are driven out from their mildewy dens, from amid the riches they ceaselessly hoard in bundles, they flee and take with themselves the same bile hidden in honey, the same hypocritical hatred and the same inexorable plans. If they entrench themselves somewhere, they won't ever be content with living at the expense of the aborigines, but they seem to slurp the breath of the former and to drain away their knowledge so as to be able to rule over those who let them enter their premises (Liszt 1861:20).*

Liszt views the Jews in same he envisages the community that figures in the title of his book: a compact and homogenous group is pictured. Nay, while he operates with a minimal territorial distinction as regards the Rroma (and localizes the master type of the Rroma within the Hungarian Rroma community), the Jews seem to be not only compact, but also unchanged. The discursive practice at issue implicitly alludes to an alleged unchanging nature of both of the communities: thus it is inferred that there is no chance of change within the inherited nature of these communities and that – given their homogeneity – the discourse upon them, their nature, aims and values can be as stable and as timelessly valid as their character is pictured to be.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> The discursive illusion of homogeneity makes it easier for the viewer to speak about the communities, the practice offering also the delusion of perspicuity, and strengthening the alleged truths of the viewer, hiding their partiality, and making them seem global: "Should we find them everywhere, there is no essential change in their way of life. Should these aimless wanderers cover enormous distances, they always stay true to their principles, and there are no differences among them but the degrees of the very same talent. [...] No differences can be found even at the furthest tribes who don't know one another at all". Or, to quote another telling passage from this



This is the interpretive process that makes easier negative stereotyping, too. For instance, when the Jewish way of life is associated with an inherent historical decadence of the community, the view makes itself accepted and becomes intervoven with negative values and notions of enmity exactly along an alleged homogeneity and similarity of the ethnic group in question:

*How easy it seems to explain the reasons that are holding this group together strongly [...]. The Jews – that term themselves the people of God – are seen as cursed for eighteenth centuries: ignominy, indignity and calumny have been abundantly cast upon them. But they pay with hatred for the calumny, with wrath for the indignity and with vengeance for the ignominy. They abide the place the Christian embourgeoisement stakes out for them, but are to change their decadent rubbish tip into the hearth of disaster and peril and spread a contagious disease never seen, named and grasped before, a disease that will bring their oppressors to ruin (Liszt 1861:20).*

The image of such an apocalypse (and also that of the role of the Jews in it) seems so widely spread at the midst of the nineteenth century, that it is no wonder that this narrative appears to be shared as an interior norm by almost the whole reception of Liszt's work <sup>8</sup>.

According to Liszt, it is the lack of any affection to a specific territory that brings close the Jews to the Rroma: "*This people that always better travels and rushes about rather than changes, is steadfast in its nature. But it is not a pleasure for it to move to another place like it is for the Rroma to pack up and go away so as to look for the misfortune, which is the inevitable fate of both of them*" (Liszt 1861:24). The failure to locate and (thus) to grasp the community is unsettling first and foremost from the failure to territorially locate it. This is natural in an age when (in spite of the spreading of the new and more effective forms of traffic services and the cult of touring) modern nation-making still associates distinct macro-cultures to specific, localized geographies.

This geographic imagination that deduces the characteristics of a certain culture from its spatial aspects serves the basis for a whole line of

---

point of view: "Living in Metz, Mr Maréchal did really enthralling experiences in pastels regarding the Rroma of the Voges realm. We haven't ever seen a poet or an artist who could render the feeling and poetry of the Rroma life so truly. He has a whole collection from these portraits on which the nature itself can be seen in action and one could imagine that they were made on the model of individuals who have just arrived to Europe and still bear the characteristics of the Indian races. [...] Any painter could find worthy models for his brush in the sight a Rroma orchestra offers. He would surely be surprised seeing these people who resemble one another like the children of the same mother [...]" (Liszt 1861:20).

<sup>8</sup> An example from the early 1860's for this narrative: the illustrated magazine *Vasárnapi Újság* discloses the news that the Hungarians charge the Jews with accusations of poisoning. Cf. *Vasárnapi Újság* 1861: 203.

argumentation. According to this the renewal and conversion of the urban Jews is actually apparent: the core of their nature stays stable and unchanged. Liszt is not the only one to employ Biblical arguments more or less metaphorically at the midst of nineteenth century: in the 1830s the Hungarian István Horváth reinterpreted the mediaeval narrative of the divine election of the Hungarian people and tracked back the origins of this community along the Bible. Though the professional historiography of mid-nineteenth century Hungarian culture rejected Horváth's views, these seemed to reappear in the first literary / national commemorations, exactly at the end of the 1850's.<sup>9</sup> When Liszt employs the Bible to prove the inherently hostile character of the Jews, he actually uses this historical framework without any explicit comments:

*[In parts outside Europe] the Jews are the same as they were in the Middle Ages: wily, cunning elements of the society who always pretend; they flatter its vanity and faults, exhaust its resources and despise its feebleness. The traces of these indelible characteristics seem to fade out in Central Europe [...]. But in spite of this [...] if they fell out of the grace of the society, there would be enough Hebrew blood in their veins from the one that had once been given by Jacob to his twelve sons so as they could take delight in the death of their tyrants (Liszt 1861:32-34).*

These are also those characteristics that border and influence their attitude towards creation: according to the view, the hiding of the ill-mood and the inherent hatred cannot lead to creative imagination (presenting an ethical philosophy of the creation that presupposes the presence of the *good* in everything that presents itself or is perceived as *beautiful*). Thus Liszt's argumentation deprives the Jews of all the creative faculties, leaving them with *mimetic* ones. It is essential to see that what has been termed as the inherent characteristics of a literary system (i. e. operating with norm of mimetic and creative processes, a so-called pre- and post-Romantic distinction) becomes here, in Liszt's book, a basis for ethnic characterization. The 'specific' 'literary' norms come to be re-situated and work within another framework: "*But because they [i. e. the Jews] have subdued all their feelings during the last*

<sup>9</sup> On Horváth's views and his negative canonization, see Soós 1994. On the argumentative power of the Moses-metaphor in the 1859–1860 commemorations which celebrate the literate Kazinczy as the founder ('the Moses') of recent Hungarian national history see Margócsy 1997, 2000. Both Margócsy's excellent paper, and other interpretations tackle the Moses-metaphor locally: I suggest a broader interpretation of the problem that includes the fact that the commemorative practices (both in the 1850–1860's and later, for instance, during the Hungarian Millennium) employ different narratives from the canonic professional ones. From this perspective, I see the Moses-metaphor and the narrative of divine election as the recurrent sign of one of the rival narratives on national identity and history. The Biblical argumentation is – in this view – a framework that makes these narratives visible.

twenty centuries, and they have been very careful to hide *all* things of their hearts and to sharpen their wit in matters of wiliness and deceiving, they could study the arts, but they have never learned how to *create*" (Liszt 1861:32-34). Though the norm of creation lays emphasis on differentiating the Roma from the Jews, we should pay attention to another discursive procedure that establishes a subtle hierarchy between the two above-mentioned groups and the utterer of the discourse on them (respectively the community the utterer presumes himself to belong to). This procedure of exclusion is closely linked to the dichotomy of the silence and speaking. Who is the one that is allowed to speak and who is the one that is sentenced to silence? Who speaks in the name of who? This are the questions that pop up when Liszt associates the faculty of silence to the Roma, too. In their case the silence is presented not as a conscious, but an instinctive feature. But by attributing silence to the communities at issue, he actually grants himself the title to speak about and in the name of these communities. For – according to this logic – if a community does not wish to speak about itself or it is not able to do it deriving from its existential circumstances, then it is possible and justified to speak in lieu of it, to represent its 'truth'. This argumentation situates the one represented into complex power structure where the narrator is always above the one he speaks about in matters of competence, validity, entirety, justification and knowledge.

This competence – omnipresent in processes of acculturation, for instance in the thinking about 'the folk' in mid-nineteenth century Hungarian culture – is vindicated also when Liszt speaks about the ennobling and improvement of the Roma:

*we asked from ourselves, couldn't be the Roma artist be endowed with all the advantages that the study would mean for the mere zeal; if we looked after one of these foreign beings, couldn't we make him get civilized; wouldn't be consideration implanted in one of these undomesticated beings helpful in ennobling him* (Liszt 1861:191-192).

So, the Roma are in need of ennobling from the very beginning – and *we and only we* are the ones who know *how* to ennoble such a community, nay we are already in possession of these qualities and not in any need to be 'ennobled'. These implied values and value-judgements of the perspective of *ennobling* articulate a way of looking at things where *the other* lacking our values makes him / her / it fallible and blameworthy (and thus strengthens the confidence in the autocracy of our own values).

Liszt presents the instance of a Roma boy bought [!] from count Teleki as the master example of his endeavour to ennoble somebody from the community in question:



*In Paris, at that time when we hardly thought of all those Rroma whom we had ever met, seen, heard and dreamed of, count Sándor Teleki visited us, accompanied by a some twelve-year-old boy. This latter wore a waistcoat resembling the one of the hussars, his complexion was dark brown, his head of hair stood on end in an aboriginal disorder. He was extremely arrogant and held a violin in his hands. "Here he is – said the count and pushed him closer to me – it is a gift I am bringing for you". [...] This evil being had been discovered in one of Teleki's estates, had been bought and sent for Teleki so as to become a friendly gift (Liszt 1861:191-192).*

The story that ends in Liszt's failure to ennoble the boy can be seen as a typical colonial occurrence and makes visible one of the consequences of the above-discussed conception: according to this effect the object community is always the field of free experimentation since the ennobling aim and the probable success of this aim makes such and alike experiences equitable and necessary. The aim ('the ennobling') ennobles the process itself, too: the member of the object community can be bought, can become a friendly gift, and his story should inevitably be imagined along the narrative of ennobling.

Let me remind, that this is not the only and first case when Liszt (and the discourses alike to his one) make artifacts seem natural and thus represent their ontology as given as advance and unalterable. This is the case with his view on the Rroma community that – according to his arguments – cannot be entered or left neither by the members of the community nor by the outsiders since it is given *a priori*. Thus the borders between the Rroma and other communities appear as anthropologically given and existing *a priori* of any human perception and judgements: the border-making, its consequences (and within this: the exclusion resulting from the border-making) are presented as inevitable, unalterable and depending neither on the community nor the ones viewing it:

*Csermák [the famous Rroma musician] is a bloodstained sacrifice of this merciless opposition in which those can find themselves who – after having been brought up in our civilized circles – try to enter that aboriginal state from which the Rroma are not willing to step out. The Rroma feel themselves somewhat chained in the civilized circles and come to experience a state of extreme anxiety that appears to be adjacent to madness, but at least leaves the innermost parts of the human being untouched. But those who return to the primitive state after having lived and felt in a completely different way, will see deranged all his faculties that are the prerogatives of the human being (Liszt 1861:300).*

Though Liszt's work seems to have a very positive view on the role of the Rroma – at least the Hungarian reception of the book disapproved exactly this

alleged positive role attached to the community at issue in comparison with the Hungarian national community – a minute analysis of the book reveals an intricate and complex power framework which elaborates not only a hierarchical structure (often positioning this imagined community at the bottom levels of the hierarchies), but – at the expense of several types of exclusions – it strengthens the colonial view it endows both itself and its non-Roma readers with.

## II.

*Des Bohémiens* had a paramount effect in Hungary of the time. Some protested against the work even before its publication, others – like Sámuel Brassai – made attempts at refuting its assertions after its translation into Hungarian in 1861. The impact can be gauged if we think about the endeavours of Emil Ponori Thewrewk who dedicates a whole chapter to the three-decade-old issue within the bibliographic section of Joseph archduke's Roma grammar. Nay, special stress is laid to establish the alleged truth of the issue and to underline: Liszt himself acknowledged his 'mistake'. The conclusions of Ponori's treatise are interesting exactly because they reveal the strength and the hidden continuance of the polemic:

*Since before he came to Hungary [!] the Roma hadn't known the similar pulsation of the accent of the Hungarian language and music and he has acquired it here [...] it is clear that he couldn't bring the Hungarian music, having an aboriginal Hungarian rhythm, with himself: he has learned it here. Hearing this refutation on January 13, 1873, by word of mouth Liszt asserted that he is a practical musician [...] and admits the validity of this conclusive proof (Ponori Thewrewk 1888:331).*

The reappearance of the controversy also after almost three decades shows that Liszt's assertions touched upon highly powerful communal consensual beliefs, normative, conventional and unquestioned knowledge the restoring and reinforcing of which came to be of paramount importance. This is why it can serve as a significant source for an analysis centred on the exploration of the diachronic factors of the Hungarian national community; what are these identity-components, what kind of media, occasions and genres are seen fit to represent them – these are the questions that can be raised along the texts of the debate.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the sources are part of a debate have a positive quality from the perspective of the paper: media that carry conflicting and rival

---

<sup>10</sup> I find less interesting (but, of course, it can be considered a viable solution) the interpretation according to which the whole debate would be about "the malevolence of some of Liszt's contemporaries" and "the mistakable title of the book" (see Kaczmarczyk 2001:102).

pragmatics usually activate and bring forth also *hidden, unspoken* and even *unconscious* presuppositions and stereotypes.

For instance, when deducing the Rroma (and implicitly the Hungarian) music from the living conditions of this community, Liszt implicitly asserts that enormous human values can be produced in a space outside and ontologically different from the organized, domesticated, fixed and firmly bordered territory and in certain senses this latter (be it urban or rural) has no chance to make up for this spectacular disadvantage (since it doesn't seem compatible with these values already because of the nature of its ontology and thus it isn't even able to produce and to vindicate them as being their own, but only as *learned* ones). Passages like the one that follows were refuted seemingly on the basis of these presuppositions:

*When we first returned to Hungary, we wanted to revive our memories of youth and wished to see the hordes on the fields and in the forests, amidst the picturesque spectacle of their stay. We wished to see them amidst all their contradictions that contain no convention and pretension at all rather than the close walls of a room suppressed by other rooms, or in the narrow and stinking streets of the towns the dust of which they brush off from their legs [...]* (Liszt 1861:158–159).

At the same time the hint upon the implied proximity of the Rroma community to nature and artlessness offended the structure of the Hungarian national cultural discourse where these categories had already been value-loaded from the beginning of nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> The categories have already normative value at the end of the 1850's and are considered essential in the representation of the Hungarian national culture (even if notions of nation and national are extremely dispersed even diachronically). Hungarian folk culture

<sup>11</sup> Already in 1818 István Kultsár connected the notions of the national, folk, natural and artless: "The artless nature represents itself in them [i. e. in the folk-songs] and the natural character, the mores and the way of life of the nation become obvious from them." (István Kultsár, *A köznépi dalai* [The songs of the folk] in *A magyar kritika évszázadai. 2.: Irányok. Romantika, népiesség, pozitívizmus*, written and compiled by Béla G. Németh et al., Szépirodalmi, Bp., 50). Ferenc Pulszky regards the products of folk culture also *historically* in close links with artlessness: "The folk has preserved the power of nature that endows the sounds of the feeling heart with an irresistible grace" (Ferenc Pulszky, *Népmondák* in *A magyar kritika évszázadai. 2.: Irányok. Romantika, népiesség, pozitívizmus*, written and compiled by Béla G. Németh et al., Szépirodalmi, Bp., 226). János Erdélyi's opinion on the 'birth' of the folk-songs implies an inherent artlessness and the lack of anything that would show these cultural products as artifacts: "This [i. e. the process] is like breathing [...], so of an utmost naturalness, since humans learned it from nature itself." (Erdélyi 1991:107) [The paper was originally published in 1843].

regarded as the repository and *indicium* of artlessness<sup>12</sup> in national culture was touched upon passages like:

*The Roma virtuosos were those who created these energetically interrupted, or softly rhyming rhythms. They are the only ones who [can] explain this art in their quality of artists. Even if the shepherds and herdsmen played the very same themes on their flutes and reeds, the reapers sang the very same melodies, the Roma were those who lent value and fame, and infused life to these rhythms by their feelings and performance (Liszt 1861:270).*

The (rounded) wholeness of the tradition and the integrity and originality of the texts building this national tradition seem also to be normative characteristics within (the elite of) the Hungarian culture that responds sensitively to Liszt's work. One of the founding national narratives asserts that tradition is inevitable for bordering the present and future existence of the nation; on their turn originality and integrity assure the quality of this tradition: *"Nothing feeds the national self-esteem more than reading the histories [!] of the nation. And nothing can be better moral drawn from. [...] But the science and above all the historical science can become common property of the nation only in an artistic form."*<sup>13</sup> The latter part of Csengery's assertion points to also another norm regarding the mediation of the tradition: only those narratives are considered legitimate and representative which present the story of the community as a whole, ceaseless and enthrallingly *beautiful* account. The *facts* don't acquire truth and reality from their having been occurred, but (also) from their being *formed*. The Roma pictured by Liszt seem far away from this ideal (and from this point produce a rival version of national identity) when they are presented as ignorant of the importance of macro-communal memories and if

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. in general, for instance: *Writing culture. The poetics and politics of ethnography*, ed. James Clifford – G. E. Marcus, University of California Press, 1986, in particular: Tamás Hofer, *Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage' in Hungary and Rival Versions of Identity*, in "Ethnologica Europaea" 21, 145–176. In other papers I posed the question from the perspective of the discipline–founding activities of nineteenth – century national cultures: Levente Szabó (2003), *Gondozók és gondozottak. Filológiai(ák), önértelmezések és kulturális konstrukciók a XIX. század közepén* [Philologies. Editors, the edited and cultural constructions in mid-nineteenth century Hungary in István Berszán (ed.), *Proceedings of the first conference of the Dept. For Hungarian Literary Studies*, Transylvanian Museum Society, Cluj, respectively *The Making of the Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Historical Canon*, Yearbooks of New Europe College. Institute for Advanced Study, Bucharest, under press.

<sup>13</sup> Csengery 1884:146. Cf. also for the norm of artistic representation: Arnold Ipolyi, *Történelem s a magyar történelmi szellem* [History and the Hungarian historical spirit] in Flóris Rómer, Arnold, Ipolyi, Vilmos, Fraknoi Egyház, műveltség, történetírás [Church, education, historiography], Gondolat Publishing House, Budapest: 150; Szinyei 1863:488–489; Wenzel 1856, I:135–139.

they do pay attention to them these will not suit the norms of wholeness, integrity, originality and artistic formation:

*Me tried to persuade the elders of the horde to chat with us; we called upon them to narrate some fantastic episodes from their memories. Their chronicles don't go beyond the present generation and besides they have to be helped to recover the course of the events. They have to be questioned to regain the details so as we could make a whole out of them; but if we can draw up the course of some event with their help, they are extremely happy [...] and they describe the recalled events with interest, a fine poetry and in Oriental tropes. [...] The originality [of these stories] consists in wrapping up the hero in a highly emotional form accompanied by more or less fantastic and unforeseen details. [...] Otherwise nothing else has been preserved on their lips but historical fragments: anecdotes that are attributed to one or the other horde. It would be an impossible venture to draft the biography of one of them. Their memories are interwoven only in some eminent points (Liszt 1861:160–162).*

The national past viewed as a unique entity, the notion of the civilizing ancestors and the primeval genealogy as the *indicia* of communal values are all injured in Liszt's discourse since it affirms that the past (in possession of all the qualities mentioned above) of the Hungarian national community can be viewed as similar (or even less valuable) than the history of the Rroma that allegedly lacks all the characteristics that are fundamental in the case of the former:

*In olden times the Rroma who had tasted all the types of bread all over the world came to put up their tents in the plains where the Hungarians had settled down. Though they had accepted the language of the ancient Roman world more than other barbarous conquerors, the offspring of this race, coming from far-away realms, were changed less [by the Roman culture], since they had found little trace of the spirit, laws and civilization of the Empire in these realms. Thus they preserved the memories of their wanderings and of their predecessors (who had been as uncivilized as were those of the Rroma) and when they saw the Rroma joining them, they didn't felt such an unfamiliarity towards them like others did. [...] On the other hand the rommys [!] felt enthralled in the midst of a rich and gentle nature [...] They found that diversity of the sunlight and the feelings they always strive after [...] (Liszt 1861:199–201).*

Liszt not only implicitly questions the norm of unique national history and the 'purity' of the genealogy of the Hungarian nation, but also offers a rival version on the coming into being of the same community:



*If the Rroma had their traditional dance, they had to have also a music of theirs adapted to this dance. What would be strange and impossible in the fact that the Hungarians – using the talent and superiority of their guests in matters of music – adapted the rhythm of their national dance to the rhythm of the Rroma music and in time the approach between them became so perfect that even the trace of the origins have been lost.*

Nay, when Liszt labels the gesture of naturalization a conscious and undertaken historical deed, he builds into the rival identity an assumed dependence of the Hungarian national community to the Rroma one:

*Hungary acted magnanimously and wisely when it adopted this child who was languishing and weak; it foresaw that the baby would be beautiful several years later. It gave it name to the child and presented it with family and inheritance right. Then it attracted the child to its hearth, it drank with the child from the same glass and sacrificed to the same gods together with it. Their existence became one in a way that the difference of their blood passed unnoticed (Liszt 1861:271).*

At the same time Liszt situates the development of the Rroma musical culture in a context that is traumatic for mid-nineteenth-century Hungarian elite culture: the presence and alleged reaction of the Hungarian public.<sup>14</sup> The lack of the elite public and the great success of some non-elite cultural products made this aspect of the national culture a sensitive component of the cultural discourse of the time.

*The art [...] demands favourable circumstances to become naturalized. It isn't given to the individuals, but to the communities; though it feeds abundantly the one who is able to taste it, it still cannot be created by the breath of a sole and weak human being. This might possess the talents of an artist, but they vanish without other viable sources. The enthusiasm of the communities is as sorely needed as the fertile ground for the seed. If this ardour doesn't keep the art alive, the birth of a bastard is inevitable (Liszt 1861:208).*

Liszt not only describes the Hungarians as the ideal public and the point of reference for its success (in a time when the debates on the lack of the public and the lack of the success of Hungarian canonic literature are high on the order of the day!), but points it out like a public that is fit only for patronage and listening and thus deprives it from the creative faculties. So like as at other

---

<sup>14</sup> On the notions of the public and the debates upon them with regards to Hungarian culture and specifically to Hungarian literature, see Hász-Fehér 2001.

times the explicit positive qualities attached to the Hungarians become implicit negative ones:

*The Rroma as a public [...] didn't give satisfaction to the Rroma. He needed a public that was above him – a public that was able to give an account of what he heard [...] The Hungarians came to be this cultivated audience, without whom the art would have become scraggy [...] Nobody shut his/ her door from before them: the straw huts and the palaces received them warmly. [...] It was necessary for one of them to be superior in the creation [...] and the other to understand and to regard the creation of the other as beautiful so as to hearten, protect and make it prosper (Liszt 1861:209-210, 250).*

The co-arts constitute many more arguments in *Des Bohémiens* only to support the idea that Hungarian music is a derivative of the Rroma music in the sense that the latter had been the one that upheld and ennobled the music of the former. These arguments that refer to the co-arts reveal a mid-nineteenth-century Hungarian identity is composed from multiple factors and among these factors the humanities in particular and the arts in general seem to have a paramount role. "If there were any of them who ever tried the adjustment to dwelling in hut, sooner or later returned to their needy homes, tattered clothes and ill-mannered mates, to the brown beauty of their women, to the babble of the unknown brooks, to the improvised orgy of their lunch and to their frantic dances" – quotes Brassai Liszt's work so as to refute the last argument of the highly poetic overall view. He comments on it:

*We cannot stand to leave this awkwardness of the A[uthor] untouched. Where could our fellow countryman, Liszt see frantic dance (*danse frénétique*, *danse échevelé* – as he calls it) within the realm of the Carpathians either at the Hungarians or at the Slavs and the Rroma. After all the *csárdás* carries all the good manners and does never commit a *faux pas* even when the spirits go high. If one wants to see *frénétique* and *echevelé* he/she should chose the German walzer, the Czech redowacska or the French cancan, but let us object strongly to such epithets regarding our [!] dance (Brassai 1861:4-25).*

Brassai's objections can be approached from another angle: he represents the Hungarian music and the national dance of the same community along a chain of representational media and occasions the elements of which seem to be interwoven. The epic poem, the national clothes, the national music and the national dance are such media. Representation not only offers the media for representing the national community, but also prescribes certain canonic attitudes and usages towards them, specifying – like in our case – also the

attitudes and usages that are unacceptable and single out also the ones belonging to the national community from the ones that are excluded from it.

Let me offer a few samples that can contextualize this nature of the Hungarian music as viewed at the midst of the nineteenth century. Imre Vahot, the redactor of the chief editor of *Napkelet* was invited to be the best man at the wedding of Ferkó Patikárius and Rózsi Boka, the former being a famous Rroma musician of the time, the latter the daughter of a similarly famous Rroma musician. Vahot not only went to the wedding, but organized an evening with an artistic programme for the general public present in great numbers at the event. The correspondent of the *Vasárnapi Ujság* comments upon the apparently successful affair:

*Many people gathered in the small theatre – why? I don't know that, but I know for sure that I love Rroma music; if I order it to be played I pay for it, and till that does the friendship hold!. If I were a Hungarian writer, I wouldn't "play academy" on the occasion of a Rroma wedding! (It deserves attention that the cream of Debrecen thinks in this manner; we have kept repeating for a long while that less "Rroma-mania" would be desirable - note of the editor)<sup>15</sup>.*

The report illustrates the process of border-making very well: the Rroma music is implicitly valued not only as an inadequate media of the Hungarian literature (that –on its turn – is viewed as a representational media of the national community), but also is perceived as inherently differing from the Hungarian 'national character'. One of the following issues of the *Vasárnapi Ujság* already speaks about "the honour of the Hungarian writers and literature"<sup>16</sup>, but beyond the debate on the occurrence there seems to be a tacit concord regarding the place of the Rroma: "I rather listen to our Rroma – who were created by the God of the Hungarians solely for the Hungarians themselves and who cannot live without the Hungarian nation [...] – than to the play of the foreign artists"<sup>17</sup> – puts it one opinion-maker, revealing the fact that the seeming acceptance actually hides a strong exclusion of the Rroma community.

The debate over Liszt's book brings forth not only the (half-)hidden components and mechanisms of the diachronic national identity, but also strengthens them as the criteria of belonging to the very same national identity.

The paper tried not only to trace back these factors and the notions, criteria and narratives incorporating them (and attempted at underlining the multiple character and pragmatics of both the diachronic macro-identities), but – in its

<sup>15</sup> *Vasárnapi Ujság* December 12, 1858, no. 50, 599 [emphasis mine – Sz. L.].

<sup>16</sup> *Vasárnapi Ujság* January 2, 1859, no. 1, 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Visszhangok a debreceni dalidóról*, *Napkelet* December 17, 1858, no. 51:813. See also: Vahot 1858, no. 49:781.

first part – also pinpointed at the mechanisms of *othering* through which cultural *otherness* was perceived and “translated” in a given historical period.

# REFERENCES:

**Brassai, Sámuel** [1861]. *Magyar vagy cigány-zene? Elmefuttatás Liszt Ferenc “Cigányokról” írt könyve felett [Hungarian or Rroma music? Essay on Liszt’s book upon the Rroma]*, Kolozsvár.

**Clifford, James** 2001. *Utazó kultúrák [Travelling Cultures]*, Magyar Lettre Internationale, no. 41.

**Csengery Antal** 1884. *Előszó [Foreword]* in Cs. A., *Történetírók és a történetírás [Historians and history-writing]*, The Publishing House of Kilián Frigyes, Budapest.

**Czeke, Sándor** 1858. *Hölgyfutár*.

**Erdélyi János** 1991. *Népköltészetéről [On Folk Poetry]* in E. J., *Nyelvészeti és népköltészeti, népzenei írások*, ed. Ilona T. Erdélyi, Akadémiai Publishing House, Budapest [The paper was published originally in 1843.]

**Hász-Fehér, Katalin** 2001. *Elkülönülő és közösségi irodalmi programok a XIX. század elején. Fáy András irodalomtörténeti helye [Integrated and structured literary programmes at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The historical value of András Fáy]*, Kossuth University Publishing House, Debrecen.

**Hofer Tamás**, *Construction of the ‘Folk Cultural Heritage’ in Hungary and Rival Versions of Identity*, “Ethnologica Europaea” 21.

**Kaczmarczyk Adrienne** 2001. “*Conquassatus, sed ferax*”. *Liszt Ferenc a magyar szabadságharc leverése után [Franz Liszt after the defeat of the Hungarian War for Independence]* in *Vereség vagy győzelem? [Defeat or success]*, ed. Anna Cséve, Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, Budapest.

**Kultsár István**. *A köznép dalai [The songs of the folk]* in *A magyar kritika évszázadai. 2.: Irányok. Romantika, népiesség, pozitívizmus*, written and compiled by Béla G. Németh et al., Szépirodalmi, Bp.

**Liszt, Franz** 1859. *Des Bohémiens et de leurs musique en Hongrie*, Paris, Bourdillat.

— 1861. *A cigányokról és a cigány zenéről*, Heckenast, Pest.

— 1966. *Briefe aus ungarischen Sammlungen 1835–1886*, gesammelt und erläutert von PRAHÁCS Mária, Akadémiai Publishing Company, Bp.

**Margócsy István** 1997, 2000. *Magyarok Mőzese. Az 1859-es Kazinczy-ünnepélyek nyelvhasználatához*, november 53–57.

**Polyi Arnold**. *Történelem s a magyar történeti szellem [History and the Hungarian historical spirit]* in Flóris Rómer, Arnold Ipolyi and Vilmos Fraknoi, *Egyház, műveltség, történetírás [Church, education, historiography]*, Gondolat Publishing House, Budapest.

**Ponori Thewrewk, Emil** 1866. *Cigány zene-e a magyar zene, vagy eredeti magyar? [Is the Hungarian music Rroma, or aboriginally Hungarian]* in P. T. E., *A hang mint műanyag. Költészet-zenészet értékezés a magyar zene eredeti magyar voltának bebizonyításával [The sound as material. Poetic-musical treatise with a verification of*

the aboriginal Hungarian nature of the Hungarian music], The Publishing House of Hartleben Adolf, Pest.

—1888. *A magyar zene eredete* [The Origin of the Hungarian Music] in József archduke, *Cigány nyelvtan. Románo czibákero sziklaribe* [Rroma grammar], The Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest.

—1888. *Irodalmi kalauz* [Literary Guide] in JOSEPH archduke, *Cigány nyelvtan. Románo csibákero sziklaribe* [Rroma Grammar], Budapest, The Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

**Pulszky**, Ferenc. *Népmondák* in *A magyar kritika évszázadai. 2.: Irányok. Romantika, népiesség, pozitívizmus*, written and compiled by Béla G. Németh et al., Szépirodalmi, Bp.

**Said** W. Edward 1978. *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books.

**Simonffy**, Kálmán 1859. *Dr. Liszt Ferenc és a magyar zene* [Dr Franz Liszt and the Hungarian Music] I–II, Pesti Napló September 6, 7, 14.

**Soós** István 1994. *Horvát István és a történeti segédtudományok*, doctoral thesis: manuscript, Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Manuscript D17.533.

**Szabó** Levente 2003 a. *Gondozók és gondozottak. Filológiai(ák), önértelmezések és kulturális konstrukciók a XIX. század közepén* [Philologies. Editors, the Edited and Cultural Constructions in Mid-nineteenth Century Hungary in István Berszán (ed.) *Proceedings of the First Conference of the Dept. For Hungarian Literary Studies*, Transylvanian Musaeum Society, Cluj-Napoca.

— 2003 b. *The Making of the Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Historical Canon*, Yearbooks of New Europe College. Institute for Advanced Study, Bucharest, under press.

**Szénfy**, Gusztáv 1859. *Liszt a cigány zenéről* [Liszt on the Hungarian Music], Pesti Napló September 14.

**Szinyei**, Gerzson 1863. *Rövid pillantás a történetírás különböző fajaira művészeti szempontból* [A View on the Different Ways of History-writing], Sárospataki Füzetek July 24.

**Vahot** Imre 1858. *Patikárius Ferkó mennyegzője és Dalidónk*, Napkelet December 5, no. 49.

**Wenzel**, Gusztáv 1856. *Magyar történelem, vagy is történetkutatás, történettudás és történetírás Magyarországon* [Hungarian History, i. e. Historical Research, Historical Knowledge and History-writing in Hungary], Kelet Népe, vol. 1.

**Wolf**, Larry 2000. *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilisation in Enlightenment Period*, romanian edition, Bucureşti, Humanitas.

*Writing culture. The poetics and politics of ethnography*, ed. James Clifford – G. E. Marcus, University of California Press, 1986.