

FALUM, AN ARTICLE ABOUT LITERATURE, FOLKLORE AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

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Introduction

This article is an experiment out of which we will analyse the research potential that a material can have in a way that shows the manner in which a community faces its oral traditional culture. In 2012, when recording folk tales from the Banat, the priest of the Catholic Church in Otelec, Timis County, makes available a book typewritten in 1980 entitled *Falum*, in Romanian *My village*, written by the teacher Kovács Mihály. This detail is relevant for the open mindedness with which the research process was perceived, as well as for the material we propose for analysis in this article.

The objectives of the study limit to briefly analysing the book's contents in order to find the answer to the question: How should this type of materials that have an amateur as well as a cultural character be dealt with? Moreover, does such a study represent an element of regional heritage, especially for the Hungarians in the Banat? In order to answer this question, the book published in 1980 will be examined in this article from different points of view that the material makes available: that of book with fictional nuances, and in terms of traditional culture, respectively heritage.

A monographic construction

Written in Hungarian, *Falum*, a book about Cruceni village (Torontálkeresztes), Timis County, starts with an image of a village deprived of maternity: „The village didn't have a qualified midwife. Auntie Roza is the one who helped with births. She was mother to several children as well”¹ (page 1, trans. S.T.). Lacking a certain title, the discourse continues with Roza's image, a correspondent of the midwife, iconic image whose role is carefully described. This kind of beginning can be interpreted as a metaphoric and symbolic one. In the

¹„Okleveles szülésznő a faluban nem volt. Róza néni volt az, aki a gyermekáldást a világra segítette. Ő maga is több gyermeknek volt az anyja”

absence of an incipit meant to bring geographic information about the village, the almost maternal image of Roza overlaps with the author's option to begin his own study. The birth – as a beginning for the village's image that is going to be revealed in the book – stands for objective information, and the study is given a labyrinthine and fictional character from the very first page.

In a rural Hungarian, the author introduces two key characters in the first part of the book: Joska and Pisti: „Joska and Pisti were two neighbour boys of the same age. Auntie Roza was a midwife for them almost at the same time. Joska was taken care of by his brother Andras, and Pisti by Jani”² (page 6, trans. S.T.). Thus, the two characters develop throughout the book and mingle with the other details of the village, their function being an oscillating one, between characters and ambassadors of the place.

Structurally, the book is a study divided into mini-chapters, anecdotes, and short descriptive discourses. Of all these, the beginning is oriented towards the detailed presentation of the village's houses, where the part entitled *Jóska's new house* (p.8, trans. S.T.) is an extremely rich text. Jóska's house is similar to the other houses in the village, so the character and its house represent the community. As one can remark from the first pages, the monographic character of Kovács Mihály's study is supported by the complexity of the details that rewrite the specificity of the village, yet we can often sense a narrative voice in the study that distances it from a scientific monograph: „It was a large courtyard, because the wheat was selected there, they needed place for hay, chaff, carriage with hay. In the courtyard there was the well that had bad water for drinking and washing, only the animals drank from it”³ (p. 10, trans. S.T.).

The history of the two characters develops throughout the book, and the specificity of the place develops simultaneously: „In September 1920, the two neighbour boys, Jóska and Pisti, went to school holding hands. Hanging from their necks they had a small hemp bag, woven by their mothers, inside a small tablet, with lines on one side and squares on the other. One was for learning letters, the other for learning numbers” (p. 22, trans. S.T.).

2 “Jóska meg Pisti egyivású szomszéd gyerekek voltak. Szinte majdnem egy időben járt Róza néni mind a két házhoz babáskodni. Jóskára András testvérbátya vigyázott, Pistire pedig Jani.”

3 “Az 1920-as évek egyik szeptemberében a két szomszédgyerek Jóska és Pista elindultak egymás kezét fogva az iskolába. A nyakukban a kendervászonból édesanyuk varta, benna a palatábla amelynek egyik oldala vonalas, a másik oldala pedig kockás volt. Egyik a betű, másik a megtanulásához.”

Practically, the fictional style permanently merges with that of traditional culture observant. The dialogue, the description and a certain degree of language archaism come to support the aesthetic dimension of the book. As a whole, the book is a story of Cruceni village, a history that can be divided into multiple stories with a strong fictional character. Yet the objective observation and the rural routine can always be observed, and the author permanently returns to them. At the same time, the text is filled with a series of characters to support the story, respectively the stories. In *Kismalacok álma*, the dialogue prevails, and if these texts were to be analysed separately from the whole material, they would function like true short prose. However, the book doesn't limit to the fictional style, since it is not a real literature book, but freely combines the objective observations that support the monographic part of the study, without certain regularity.

As beginning moments of his texts, the author chooses different trickery which introduces the reader with every title into a different context, a different world. Although separated from the same geographic space this world takes shape differently through the way it is rendered in writing. If sometimes the incursion into a new small sub chapter is done unexpectedly, other times the author chooses a more artistic technique as he does with the text entitled *Paprikás*. („The village sayings go: if on the first day of the year an old villager was dead, we could expect a hard time digging the maze”⁴, page 123).

Regarding the connection with school, the author writes about the manufacture of writing tools and especially their sale, a story depicted with a dose of plastic imagery, where the selling of goose feather pens brings about the construction of an episode where the act of selling these things is included in the range of elements specific to the village. The fair – does not limit itself to a phenomenon narrated in an objective tonality, but receives an aspect of act pertaining to a not nostalgic past, but a slightly labyrinthine one: „In the village where there was a child ready to keep an eye on the geese, people would keep geese. [...] And they even got money for the feathers if they sold them. After plucking the geese the streets would sound with the yelling of the feather seller: Feather, feather, is it for sale? Then they yelled: uncle, come in! And he would go in quickly”⁵(p.28, trans.S.T.)

⁴ “Ha az estztendő első napjaiban öreg halott vabn a faluban, akkor kemény kukoricakapálásra számithanak.”

⁵ “A faluban ahol liba őrzésre alkalmas gyerek volt a háznál, ott libát is tartottak. [...] Meghát jó pénzt is kaptak érte ha eladták. A liba kopasztás után ugyancsak hangzottak az utcák a tollkereskedő kiabálásától: Toll, toll, van-e eladó Ilyenkor utána kiabáltak hogy: Bácsi gyűjjön !be Be is ment az sietve.”

The changing of seasons and their celebrations bring about the continuation of the history of the two friends at the same time with shaping the place's particularities. From specific celebrations, „III 18, 19, 21, Sándor, József, Benedek, bring warmth to the village”⁶ (page 69, trans. S.T.), to sayings about weather, „If the first dead man was young, they could expect good maize digging”; „If the first dead man of the year was old, they could expect hardship”; „If fog came up at noon, they expected rain within 3 days, about 3 months afterwards the fog would come down as rain or snow”⁷. (trans. S.T.) At least 20 methods of predicting rain are remarked, these beliefs being set in a symbolic scenery of an ancient fertility cult that naturally fits in this rural setting, reconciled with nature and „the ancient course of things” – „They also used the onion calendar for weather prediction, when they put salt on the 12 rings of onion and thus they said which month the rain would fall. There are 12 days from Luca's birthday till Christmas. The weather forecast for each day corresponded to the weather of the entire world”⁸ (page 68, trans. S.T.). These elements show that Jóska and Pisti's work is set at the border of literature and ethnologic imprints, with disparate, but constant anchorage in the village's world filled with magical beliefs sprung from the Crueni community.

This border dissolves more and more as the study advances. The nostalgic style and the omnipresent narrative voice seem to grow absent in favour of a significant ethnologic dimension of the text. Verses, rituals and beliefs are now mini-texts turned into thesauruses by the teacher of Crueni, and the emphasis is permanently on them. They are usually separated from the rest of the text. What is mostly outlined in the second part of the study is the heritage and identity value for the ethnic group they represent. The book presents a vast and colourful range of traditional practices, correlated with spiritual beliefs and pragmatic reasoning in a constant attempt to create and recreate a symbolic universe in accordance with nature, which reminds of, with the risk of forcing the statement, shaman cultures.

The text also reveals the romantic dimension of the village, the naturalness of things by respecting the family and the blood ties, the

⁶ „III 18, 19, 21, Sándor, József, Benedek zsákban hozzák a meleget.”

⁷ „Ha fiatal halott volt először a faluban, jó kukorica kapálásra számíthattak”; „Ha öreg halott volt először abban az évben, kemény kapálásra számíthattak”; „Ha köd volt és a dél órákban felszáltm akkor három napon belül esőt vártak vagy három hónap mulva esett le a köd, eső vagy hó alakjában.”

⁸ „Használtak az idő jóslásra a hagyma kalendáriumot is, amikor sót tettek a hagyma tizenkét cikkelye közé és így megmondták, hogy melyik hónapban fog esni majd az eső. Luca napjától karácsonyig tizenkét nap van. Minden nap időjárása megfelelt egy hónapi időjárásnak.”

alignment of children in the community with all that makes the local customs, mixed with beliefs that give nature magical valence („In summer, during the warm rain, in the street, at the root of the tree, we see the child that can barely walk, stand next to his older brother and he shapes the mud, and like the other children, he makes little baskets”⁹) (page 6, trans.S.T.)

By massively structuring the text in the first chapters around the households of the main characters, by accessing the history of the targeted families, the author offers a partial vision on local material values, as well as on the importance of „earnest” and well maintaining the households, at the same time being a symbolic appreciation offered to the Hungarian ethnic group to which clearly the author of the text Falum, Kovács Mihály, belongs. (The new house of Joska’s family, The house of Pisti’s family, The description of the house of Pisti’s family).

The author gives special attention to children who become essential elements and characters that shape the content of the literary-ethnologic discourse, at the same time being indicators of a positive birth rate that could lead to diagnose a wealthy community with powerful work force, as the symbolic markers indicate, exemplifying the first stork seen by the children: „In summer children liked very much to walk barefoot. Hardly had they waited to see the first stork that they would take off their socks. Bespeckled children, especially the girls yelled at the first sight of storks: We saw the stork, we washed away the speckles, pah! And they spit on the ground. Everybody was happy for the stork, when they saw it the girls would yell: Stork, stork, iron shovel, bring us a baby. Stop talking girl, yelled their mother, ‘cause you’re enough already.”¹⁰ The sacred dimension invoked on this occasion exceeds a folklore belief that brings welfare, the entire scenery gives the village a superior spiritual dimension that becomes the binder of the community, the village becomes a universe where nothing is coincidental, every element has a specific role, having a determinate symbolic significance (page 23, trans. S.T.).

There are clear passages in which the teacher indicates the prosperity degree of the village, correlated with the sufficiency concept.

⁹ “Nyáron a meleg esők idején az utcán a fal tövében ott látjuk az alig járnai tudó gyereket és nagyobb testvére mellett ülve ő is gyurja a sarat a többi gyermek, kis kosárkát formál”

¹⁰“Nyáron a gyerekek nagyon szerettek mezitláb járnai. Alig várták hogy megláthassák az első golyát, máris vetették le a harisnyájukat. A szeplős gyerekek különösen a lányok, az első golyalátáskor elkiáltották magukat: Golyát lattám, szeplőt mostam Pfuj! és leköptek a földre. Örült mindenki a golyáknak, a kislányok amíg csak látták kiabáltak is utána: Gólya, gólya, vaslapát, hozzál nekünk kisbabát. Elhallgatsz te leány, kiáltott reájuk az anyuk, hisz nem elegen vagytok már így is”

Money is seen as a strong reward, encouraging masculine competition in a discreet manner, within the frame of a mini-ritual dedicated to the community's natural growth: „A carriage of round pie was covered with plum jam. It was well baked. In the middle of the dough there was the coin. Four children offered to enter the contest”¹¹ (p 26, trans. S.T.).

We also find in the text at least one song collected from the Hungarian folklore, which certifies the community's affiliation to the Hungarian culture, according to the narrator's story: „A hundred geese go in line on the field/In front there's the gander, he walks so proud/ A hundred geese go in line on the field”¹² (page 31, trans. S.T.)

Among the folk beliefs enumerated in the book, there is also the custom of interpreting dreams: „To dream eggs means humiliation, gossip; that is what the book of interpreting dreams says about him”¹³ (p. 42, trans. S.T.)

Water is a very present element in many of the stories and rituals presented by teacher Kovacs. Water, correlated with the special attention paid to births and raising children suggests a spiritual belief correlated with the renewal and ritual purification of people through the rain, through the water of the sacred well to whom the author dedicates a different chapter (Sacred well,¹⁴ p. 44).

The book does not show the concrete affiliation to a certain religion, but the fact that „unclean practices” are sanctioned by the villagers, especially by the elders in the community, is visible: „Pisti's grandfather was seen as a charming man. Behind his back, the old ladies said about him that he worked with a spirit, and that is why he got rich. [...] Do you think I don't know who you are? Who the witch in the village is? Many do not see, but I do”¹⁵. (p. 45, trans. S.T.)

What could be easily anticipated, the wedding scene could not be absent from such a book (the chapter *Wedding*¹⁶, page 102-117). Thus, versified formulae and various details come to complete the information

¹¹„Egy taliga, kerek nagyságú lepény be volt kenve vastagon szilvalekvárral. Ez keményre volt sült. A közepébe volt belesütve a díj egy pénzdarab jutalom. Négy gyerek vállalkozot versenyre .”

¹²„Száz liba egy sorba mennek a tarlóra/Elöl megy a gúnár, jaj de begyesen jár/Száz liba egy sorba mennek a tarlóra”

¹³„Tojással álmodni annyit jelent, mint gyalázat, pletyka, azt mondja róla az álmoskönyv.”

¹⁴„Szentkút”

¹⁵„A Pisti öregapját olyan bűbajos embernek tartották. Sutyomban azt is beszéltek az öregasszonyok róla, hogy nyilván lidérce is van neki, azért gazdagodott meg [...] “Azt gondolják maguk, hogy én nem tudom hogy maguk kicsodák? Hogy ki a boszorkány a faluban? Sokan nem látják, de én látom.”

¹⁶„Lakodalom”

range from the village's cultural heritage. Once the author turns from a nostalgic writer to a good ethnologist, the characters Jóska and Pisti seem to lose part of the author's attention that goes towards the traditional culture.

Cruceni is situated at the border with Serbia, a border village, but Kovács Mihály's study does not have any specific note in that direction. The book aims at the memory of the traditional Hungarian village in the Banat, and at a closer look, the material could be divided into several categories: the literature part in *Falum*, the traditional culture one and the memory one.

Going back to the predominantly monographic character of the study, it accredits Ugo Fabietti's statements who observes how ethnographic monographies have as goal the creation of an objective image of the described situation, but any writing of this kind has also a fictitious dimension.¹⁷ This study is situated at border between these two coordinates, the „objective” image being oriented towards the material belonging to traditional culture which dominates towards the end of the book: „The cake was made with white flour/With sugar is not that strong/It was given taste with raisins from grapes/Many other things were pun in it/Each pair of the woman/Even the man eats it/So, come on gentlemen help yourselves/Live long!”¹⁸ (p.111, trans. S.T.) Thus, we start the discussion for the second part of the article where we will approach the heritage value of Kovács Mihály's study.

Scientific and heritage approach to these materials: possible future researches

About Cruceni village, the historic data acknowledge that: „After the Austro-Hungarian dualism settled down in 1868, the first Hungarian families, tobacco harvesters come to Cruceni. 75 families settle down then, and are given a plot of land with 1 yoke of land within the built-up area and 7 yokes of arable land. Towards the end of the XIXth century the village becomes Hungarian in majority, and the Germans leave for other places. In 1895 another wave of Hungarian colonists from all over

¹⁷. Ugo Fabietti, *Réalités, fictions et problèmes de comparaison (Realities, fictions and problems of comparison)*, in *Construire le savoir anthropologique (Building the anthropological knowledge)*, under the coordination of Francis Affergan, Presses Universitaires de France, p. 67-82.

¹⁸. “Finom fehér lisztből készült a sütemény/Cukorral vegyítve nem is olyan kemény/Mazsola szőlővel lett ez izesítve/Sok más -féle dolgot tettek is még bele/Szereti ezt minden asszony féle/Még a férfi ember is megeszi/Tessék hát uraim lássanak hát neki/ Éljen!”

Hungary settle down. In this period, until the First World War, the Hungarian administration leads a politics of colonizing the place with Hungarians. Consequently, Cruceeni doubles its population between 1880 and 1920, passing 1.000 inhabitants. After 1921 the village receives the Romanian name *Cruceni*”¹⁹. The village is also mentioned in Varga E. Árpád’s²⁰ dictionary, which shows that it does not represent an anonymous space which could bring to light unknown things. However, the range of beliefs, rituals, and specific traditions of the inhabitants of Cruceeni described in the manner the author received them, belong to a certain immaterial cultural heritage of the Hungarians who live in that area.

In order to correlate the material analysed and its heritage value, we will introduce a series of helping theoretical terms. Therefore, UNESCO defines the immaterial cultural heritage as follows: „The term ‘cultural heritage’ has changed content considerably in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by UNESCO. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.”²¹ In this wide range of elements belonging to the heritage area, the oral tradition boasts a clear statute: „The oral traditions and expressions domain encompasses an enormous variety of spoken forms including proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, legends, myths, epic songs and poems, charms, prayers, chants, songs, dramatic performances and more. Oral traditions and expressions are used to pass on knowledge, cultural and social values and collective memory. They play a crucial part in keeping cultures alive.”²²

Going back to the material of the teacher in Cruceeni, its heritage state allows its valorisation in several manners. The first would target the identity heritage of the Hungarians in the Banat, and a future project around Kovács Mihály’s study would imply a publication of the 1980 typewritten book.

As for the material regarding the oral traditional culture shown here, it is quite interesting the way in which the author chooses to present it within a text. If in the first part we observed the fictional style

¹⁹ *Enciclopedia românească*,

[http://enciclopediaromaniei.ro/wiki/Cruceni_\(Timi%C5%9F\)](http://enciclopediaromaniei.ro/wiki/Cruceni_(Timi%C5%9F))

²⁰ Konyvtar Erdely, <http://www.kia.hu/konyvtar/erdely/erdstat/hnevtar.pdf>, p. 112.

²¹ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00002>.

²² <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00053>.

combining with that of the researcher/observant, in this part, we should underline the fact that the folklore material that consists of verses, rituals or beliefs, can often be found isolated from the fictional text. The exact rendering of the text to be said by the participants during different events, like the wedding for example, shows the fact that the author tends to become, from the omnipresent writer in the first part, a folklore collector meant to preserve in written form the respective texts. These are accompanied by explanations, interpretations, and this time without a narrative line or artistic images. („Dear Godfather I bid you Good Day/I know you know why I'm here/For that day and hour have come/When your daughter gets married/If your groom loves our daughter/Please come with us”²³, page 105, trans. S.T.).

The answer to the question: How should this type of materials be treated? is a problematic issue that needs some amendments. On the one hand, this paper represents a study with an amateur character, taking into consideration that it is not done by a famous researcher of traditional culture. On the other hand, *Falum* comes as a piece given by the community with the purpose to serve the researcher interested by the folklore of the Hungarian community in Banat. Therefore, the community, the one that views this book as a heritage object, credits it as an ambassador of the place. Even though the rituals, beliefs and folk verses in the book belong to an initially oral culture, it is suggestive that the members of this community still relate to the document written by a local authority. The statute of heritage of these documents resists by virtue of the support it receives from the community.

Therefore, an author in a chameleon state, from the writer to the oral traditions collector, the teacher in Cruceni proposes a material that, without being huge, can be received, apparently like one that did not have too many possibilities regarding a successful research. However, the issue we have raised at the beginning of the article, the one regarding the way we should and could treat such materials, proves to be a generous issue that could come in addition to heritage elements. The material discussed can thus be valorised as a literature material, as well as a folk culture material, as a memory document or as an anthropological one. Under such conditions, the discussion remains open for further research of this book and its author, an extended study being able to complete, recover and valorise this category of materials.

23. “Tisztelt násznap uram jó napot kívánok/Tudom hogy tudják jól hogy mi járatban vagyok/Ime eljött az a nap és az óra/Melyben leányuk fellép a házasságra/Hogyha völegényünk a lányukat szereti/Szivedkedjenek most velünk tartani”

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„Enciclopedia românească~,

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„Könyvtar Erdely”, <http://www.kia.hu/konyvtar/erdely/erdstat/hnevtar.pdf>

„UNESCO”, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00002>.

„Unesco”, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00053>.

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