



The Genres of Literary Cult? A Methodological and Theoretical Recommendation for the Research of Eastern European Literary Cults

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Abstract: My study examines a regional characteristic of Eastern European literary cults (Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, Sándor Petőfi, Aleksandr Pushkin) that has been overlooked by cult research. Literary cults build on both praxis and textus, so the ritualistic and textual dimensions of the phenomenon also have to be considered. Due to this heterogeneous nature of cults, they can be interpreted within the theoretical framework of several disciplines: they are described as “disciplinary institutions” (Foucault), “lieux de mémoire” (Nora), or “specific attitude, certain ritual and peculiar way of language use” (Dávidházi). Several important works have examined European literary cults from a comparative and transnational perspective (Leerssen and Rigney 2014, Dović and Helgason 2017). Their theoretical framework draws upon research on nationalism and cultural memory to analyze the ritualistic expressions of literary cults (erecting statues, celebrating centennials). While Eastern European celebrations were inspired by the Shakespeare and Goethe centennials, research on the textual manifestations of cults could discover the existence and function of genres typical of Eastern European literary cults. I argue that some texts belong to cults due to their regional nature, which evolved from the cultural, political, and social characteristics of nineteenth-century Eastern European societies (including control over the public sphere, censorship, the phenomena of the so-called literary periphery [urban folklore], and the processes of mass culture linked to delayed urbanization). All these texts represent changing, borderline genres that move between the social use of literature and the aesthetic dimension (anecdote, necrology, laments in verse). My theoretical considerations are based on Boris Dubin’s work on cultural authority. Developing his theory, which focuses on the sociology of literature but which also has relevance for literary scholarship, I introduce the concept of *segmented* and *stratified cult* for Eastern European literary cults. Its segmentation operates along elite and popular cultural lines and through the genres that sustain and shape its manifestations, which I call *cultic facts*.

Keywords: literary cult, cultural authority, anecdote, obituary, popular culture.

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Introduction to the history of research

In 1989, Péter Dávidházi concluded his monograph on cult research with a conjecture: it seems doubtful to claim, wrote the researcher, that there is a “universally applicable single basic concept of cults.”¹ Empirical research from the last few decades seems to confirm this hypothesis, formulated from a sociological or cultural-anthropological point of view. In any case, it is clear that characterising our “cultural-historical models” is a different matter when drawing conclusions from the cult of a foreign author in Hungary or from the cult of a Hungarian “patriotic” poet, belonging to the national canon in Hungary. There is also a growing consensus that the complexity of literary cults is difficult to grasp solely through traditional literary studies tools, and that, as an interdisciplinary phenomenon, literary cult can be examined from the perspectives of cultural studies, anthropology, literary history, cultural and religious history, linguistics, and sociology, perspectives that are often incompatible with one another.² A

1. Péter Dávidházi, *“Isten másodszülette”: a magyar Shakespeare-kultusz természetrajza* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1989), 304.

2. The theoretical and methodological plurality of the field of research is best characterized by the literature on the historical development of Pushkin’s reputation and cult, which can be distinguished into at least five perspectives. These are: (1) the *discourse analysis* of texts related to Pushkin’s jubilees, which reveals ideological constructions within critical-historical and broader literary-critical contexts (Marcus C. Levitt); (2) an objectification of *memory in social-performative activities* and their multimedia extensions such as texts, images, films, sculptures, making visible the analysis of Stalinist ideology and its associated conceptions of time during the 1937 Pushkin Jubilee (John B. Platt); (3) a *literary sociology* study (Abram Reitblat); (4) a *semiotic cultural studies and biography* study (Yuri Lotman); (5) *socio-psychological studies with a focus on the history of mentality*, emphasising the culture-shaping role of the Pravoslavie and exploring the literary cult through *analogy with religious cults* (A. A. Panchenko).

review of the international literature shows that different studies have approached the phenomenon of cults from different perspectives, with different sensibilities and interests; there is no single "evidential" research approach.³ Furthermore, literary cults are complex phenomena that manifest in *practices* as well as in *texts*.⁴

Important studies published in the 2010s have revealed similarities in *cult practices* based on descriptions of European literary cults (Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Pushkin, etc.). By analyzing the repertoire of practices of different European literary cults, these studies have concluded that the protocol for literary centenary celebrations across Europe became standardised, consisting of ritual and social gestures independent of national cultures.⁵ Transnational, comparative studies thus argue for the possibility of *establishing a general European typology*. This conclusion stems from a threefold research approach, based on analysing the function of literature in nineteenth-century national cultures, the simultaneous processes of canonisation, and national movements.

Research on the European literatures and cultures of the nineteenth century has given the process of "reticulation" that characterised nineteenth-century Europe the collective name "centenary fever"⁶, a process that brought these common trends together in a mental sense and made them visible. It is no coincidence that the aforementioned studies identified common patterns in sculptural celebrations and anniversary commemorations across different national cultures, as well as similarities in the rites. These works specifically analyse the period in cult history that we might call the "institutionalisation phase," during which the "reticulation" of cults is particularly significant. The distinguishing feature of this phase in cult history is the establishment of a *ritual order during the institutionalization of the cult*. Institutionalisation is primarily undertaken by the national or local elite, which is the social group that, by virtue of its cultural, economic and political capital, has a broad outlook extending across national, linguistic and cultural borders. The social group that underpins this process of institutionalisation is therefore capable of recognising, adopting, gaining acceptance for, and establishing foreign models in the domestic (national) context.

The above studies do not include the *linguistic functioning* of individual cults or analyse specific *texts* belonging to each cult. Without falling into the blinders of so-called *methodological nationalism*⁷, I wish to argue that, while nineteenth-century literary cults in Eastern Europe did indeed adopt Western European models to some extent during their institutionalization (for example, the Petőfi and Pushkin cults refer to Shakespeare and Goethe commemorations), they diverge from their Western European counterparts in the *earlier phases* of their development because of their similar political and regional circumstances. The most important role in this process is not played by the (literary) elite or high literature, but rather by "the cult manifested in orality and popular literacy."⁸ An important feature common to these types of Eastern European cult, when we consider their close social contexts, is their delayed and obstructed institutionalization. They are also similar in nature due to common historical and political prohibitions, such as restrictions on publicity imposed by repressive power, i.e. the difficulty of breaking out of the local, informal, familial public sphere into the wider public sphere. The potential of cults to reach smaller and larger masses varies with the changing political will, which periodically eases and then reinforces prohibitions: we can observe historically that cults of particular authors are repeatedly pushed back into informal, oral space by the authorities. In the context of a limited public sphere, it is essential to mention the historical development of an ambivalent relationship with censorship (Pushkin) and the use of more archaic reproduction techniques that emerge from time to time (the valorisation of manuscript culture and copying in place of forbidden printing). Cities are very important social arenas for the establishment of these cults. In the cults of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz and Sándor Petőfi, the so-called rural intellectuals are key to the functioning of the cult, while in Pushkin's case it is the intellectuals (*raznochinets*), merchants and clerks of the capital—St Petersburg and Moscow—who are key.

In this study, I focus primarily on the literary cult of the Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin as well as on two

3. The chapters of the Hungarian *Handbook of Literary Cult Research* (*Az irodalmi kultusz kutatás kézikönyve*) testify to this. See József Takáts, "A kultusz kutatás és az új elméletek," in *Az irodalmi kultusz kutatás kézikönyve*, ed. Takáts József (Budapest: Kijarat Kiadó, 2003), 298–299.

4. See Orsolya Rákai, "Tükör által színről színre: az (ön)azonosság (f)elismerése," in *Utazások a fekete királynővel. Írások írásról és irodalomról* (Budapest: Kijarat Kiadó, 2006), 154.

5. Ann Rigney and Joep Leerssen, "Introduction: Fanning out from Shakespeare," in *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe Nation-Building and Centenary Fever*, eds. Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 4.

6. Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney, eds., *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe Nation-Building and Centenary Fever* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 13.

7. Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences," *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 301–34.

8. Márton Szilágyi "Kultusz történet és a Csokonai-recepció rétegei," in *A költő mint társadalmi jelenség. Csokonai Vitéz Mihály pályafutásának mikrotörténeti dimenziói* (Budapest: Ráció, 2014), 399.



Hungarian poets, with occasional references to the Hungarian poets Mihály Vitéz Csokonai and Sándor Petőfi. My aim is to demonstrate the close relationship between the features of their cults and the social structure, political system, cultural and ecclesiastical traditions from which they emerge and exist. In addition, I explore their correlation with the degree of freedom of the public sphere, the level of urbanisation, the social affiliation of the cult participants and, above all, the autonomous or heteronomous status of literature (understood here as an institutional system) in the region.

My research does not seek to analyse cultic practices that have not yet emerged, but rather examines the textual forms and modes of cultic expression associated with social groups outside the cultural elite, in relation to the poet's role as a source of symbolic authority within the cult. By identifying these invariably *popular* genre groupings (e.g. urban anecdotes), it becomes possible to reveal the uniqueness of particular cults, to uncover the simultaneous segmentation and stratification of the literary field (particularly striking in Pushkin's case), and to describe the various manifestations of *veneration*. In this study, a cultural-historical approach is combined with critical-historical and poetic approaches. The study examines the function and meaning of particular cults within a given society⁹ and ultimately demonstrates the complexity of the social uses of literature.

Theoretical approaches to literary cult research

To date, literary cult studies have developed several theoretical starting points and prospectives that have proven useful and productive for the study of their subject. Literary cult has been conceptualised as a "specific attitude, ritual and linguistic formation" (Péter Dávidházi), as a "social disciplinary institution" (Michel Foucault), or as "lieux de mémoire" (Pierre Nora). Also, because of the regional uniqueness of Hungarian literary cult studies and the associated theoretical scarcity,¹⁰ Hungarian researchers in the early to mid-2000s proposed perspective theoretical initiatives that called for a renewal of the theoretical base of cult studies. Writings grounded in *communication theory* and *social history* emerged, which outlined possible directions for the continuation of cult studies, following the works of Paul Ricœur, Niklas Luhmann and Michel Foucault (Orsolya Rákai).¹¹ Others have called for literary cult research to be examined in the light of *modern theories of nationalism* (Gábor Gyáni, Lajos Lakner).¹² Pierre Nora's theory of "lieux de mémoire" has also proved to be inspiring. The literary historian József Takáts argued that "literary cult is one of the memory socialization processes that create and sustain the

9. Gábor Gyáni, "Az irodalmi kultusz kutatás dilemmái," in *Relatív történelem*, 30 (Budapest: Typotex, 2007), 21–36.

10. The literary cult studies that emerged within Hungarian literary studies in the 1990s represents a unique and distinctly Hungarian phenomenon. In terms of its genesis and orientation, it is inseparable from the intellectual-historical context of the debate over the question, "Does autonomous literary studies exist?" Hungarian literary cult research was initiated by a process of scholarly self-reflection that sought to develop an alternative way of interpreting, within literary history and alongside the prevailing trends in contemporary Hungarian literary studies, a phenomenon related to the social uses of literature. One of the initial steps in Hungarian cult research, which can be attributed to Péter Dávidházi, was to shed new light on the phenomenon of cultic veneration of a literary author and to establish it as a cultural value worthy of scholarly analysis. (Referring to Dávidházi, Dávid Szolláth, "A kultusz kutatás két tendenciája," *Budapesti Könyvszemle*, 3 (2004): 232–240.) Dávidházi's explicit aim was to challenge the practice of treating the enthusiastic *attitude* itself, the *recipients* who were cultic admirers of an author or work, the *texts* in which this enthusiasm was expressed, and the *rituals* organised to sustain the cult as merely lay, naïve, or even harmful from the superior position of the professional scholar, and instead to make them objects of scholarly research. This, in turn, led to the important step of bringing the *scientific* vs. *non-scientific* (*critical* vs. *cultic*) *opposition* in literary interpretation and reception into literary studies as a context worthy of examination. The thematisation of the *critical* vs. *cultic* opposition in literature and language necessarily implied that, although literary cult is a complex phenomenon in many respects, comprising elements of both practice and textuality, Hungarian literary studies became primarily interested in the organisation of the textual dimension of this phenomenon (stylistic, rhetorical, linguistic), that is, its discursive dimension. In this way, the opposition between *cultic literary understanding/conception* and *scientific literary understanding* was narrowed down to the study of *cultic language* versus *critical language use*. As a result of all these steps, literary cult studies as a discipline revitalised and ultimately renewed *thinking about the language of literary criticism and scholarship*. In other words, Hungarian literary cult studies can be seen as a catalyst for renewing *the use of the language of literary studies*; at the same time, because it emerged with particular vigour, for example, in the nineteenth century, it has also served as a catalyst for renewing *the language of literary criticism*. The re-reading of secondary texts on literary works and authors, no longer condescending but informed by understanding, from a "position of insertion," as described in cultural anthropology, and with respect for the "otherness" of these texts, is also seen as a stimulus for a kind of *deconstructive literary historiography*; Orsolya Rákai, "Margócsy és az irodalmi gépezet" in *Utazások a fekete királynővel. Írások írásról és irodalomról* (Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 2006), 96. The defining feature of Hungarian literary cult research, to which most subsequent scholars have contributed, was the *anthropological-religious* motivation underlying the investigations. This approach described literary cult by means of *an analogy with religious cults*. In his book synthesising his analysis of the cult of Shakespeare in nineteenth-century Hungary, Péter Dávidházi not only provided researchers with a case study, but also with a *paradigm*.

11. Orsolya Rákai, *Utazások a fekete királynővel: Írások írásról és irodalomról* (Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 2006).

12. Gyáni, "Az irodalmi kultusz kutatás dilemmái"; Lajos Lakner, "Irodalmi kultusz, történetiség, aktualitás. A kultusz kutatás útjain," in *Kultusz, mű, identitás. Kultusztörténeti tanulmányok*, ed. Kalla Zsuzsa, Takáts József és Tverdota György, 4 (Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 2005), 11–30.

nation”¹³, thus participating in the construction of a common historical past “which shows the national community as continuous and homogeneous from time immemorial”¹⁴. The cults of particular Hungarian writers, Takáts wrote, are also “exercises of socialization to the nation as a community of memory.”¹⁵ Alongside studies of communication theory, social history and nationalism, I propose to introduce a further perspective from the field of sociology of literature into cult studies.

Early cult: Pushkin and Petőfi

At the time of Pushkin’s death in 1837, when the cult suddenly erupted, texts of several different modalities appeared simultaneously.¹⁶ The emergence of a *divergence of voices* concerning the figure of Pushkin during the period of mourning is hardly surprising, given that heterogeneity had already characterised Pushkin’s reputation. This diversity can hardly be regarded as accidental, since by 1837 Pushkin’s renown, initially associated with the literary elite, had already extended beyond his own aristocratic social stratum, and his popularity can also be detected among other social groups. It is also known that Pushkin himself did not commit to any single literary or intellectual circle. An important “pillar” of Pushkin’s renown and popularity stemmed from the transfer of his poetry into urban culture, their transformation of his poems into songs, and their subsequent popularisation. (The phenomenon of *sperontism* played an instrumental role in the canonisation, popularisation and cult of both Csokonai and Petőfi.) Pushkin’s renown was further considerably enhanced by the introduction of literary history as a subject into education, and at the same time, from 1820/21 onwards, Pushkin’s works began to appear in school textbooks. As a result of the Russian educational reforms, his renown became even more widespread from 1850 onwards, as his poems became regular items in anthologies intended for the most diverse school-age groups.

The popularization of Pushkin’s oeuvre and the urban popular public sphere will also be of particular importance when examining the early period of the cult, because this form of publicity was situated on the periphery of the power that strongly dominated and restricted the public sphere. Therefore, the content in question was not subject to censorship. Because Pushkin’s death was perceived as a potential threat to Nikolai I and his clientele, public expressions of veneration for the poet were restricted and prohibited, thereby fostering a shift towards more clandestine and oral forms of veneration. It is important to note that in nineteenth-century Eastern Europe the processes of silencing and repression often functioned as both an external constraint and a self-limiting factor in the canonisation of poets who participated in the political and social public sphere.¹⁷ Thus, in the first phase of canonisation, conclusions concerning the artist’s entire career and oeuvre are derived from fragmentary knowledge of the writer’s biography and cultic practices published oeuvre, without consideration of the impact of censorship or of works that remained unpublished. At this point, it is worth comparing the early cult of Aleksandr Pushkin with the data and theoretical findings of empirical studies of the early cult of Petőfi.¹⁸ A parallel can be drawn between the limited information available on Pushkin and the absence of detail concerning Petőfi’s biography during the final year and a half of his life – the period preceding his disappearance in 1848 – then the taboo surrounding his figure until 1854. These circumstances led to the creation of a legend and a cult, which “submerged literary history.”¹⁹ According to Marcus C. Levitt, the concealment of Pushkin’s rapid funeral far from the capital, the lack of obituaries, and the cover-up and silence surrounding the duel, all contributed to the “failure to create a contoured, homogeneous figure of the poet in the public consciousness.”²⁰ In the case of both poets, then, the lack of clarity about the circumstances of death and, as Levitt notes in relation to Pushkin, the absence of a funeral as a social

13. József Takáts, “A nemzeti kultúra megalkotása és a kultuszok,” in Takáts József, *Ismerős idegen terep*, 153 (Budapest: Kijarat Kiadó, 2007), 152–160.

14. József Takáts, “A tér és az idő nemzetiesítése és az irodalmi kultuszok,” in Takáts József, *Ismerős idegen terep. Irodalomtörténeti tanulmányok és bírálatok*, 149 (Budapest: Kijarat Kiadó, 2007), 137–151.

15. Takáts, “A nemzeti kultúra megalkotása és a kultuszok,” 153.

16. Zsófia Kalavszky, “»Csak a csontvázát dobta oda«. Műkedvelők verses nekrológjai Puskinról,” in *Doromb: Közköltészeti tanulmányok* 10, ed. Csörsz Rumen István (Budapest: Reciti, 2022), 57–80.

17. On the phases of the Petőfi canonization, see István Margócsy, “A Petőfi-kultusz határtalanságáról,” in *Az irodalmi kultusz kutatás kézikönyve*, ed. Takáts József, 148 (Budapest: Kijarat Kiadó, 2003), 135–153.

18. The institutionalization of the Petőfi cult was possible in 1850–51, due to the temporary restoration of constitutional conditions. Ferenc Kerényi, “A közözlévtől a szoboravatásig (A Petőfi-kultusz első korszaka, 1849–1862),” in *Vörösmarty–Petőfi–Madách* ed. Császtvay Tünde, Gyurgyák János és Szilágyi Márton (Budapest: Osiris, 2022), 187. The beginning of the period of institutionalization is actually 1876, the date of the founding of the Petőfi Organisation (Petőfi Társaság). *Ibid.*, 188.

19. *Ibid.*, 177.

20. Marcus C. Levitt, *Literatura i politika: Pushkinskii prazdnik 1880 goda*, *Sovremenniaia zapadnaia rusistika* (Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1994), 29.



symbolic event have to be taken into consideration.²¹ Following the deaths of Pushkin and Petőfi, a search for scapegoats began, which became the decisive motif of the first phase of the Petőfi cult.

During this period, genres circulating in oral culture, public poetry and popular literature are associated with both Petőfi and Pushkin, most notably *legends* and *anecdotes*. It is via these mediums that poetic figures manifested in the texts of so-called elite literature acquire greater complexity. From the perspective of Boris Dubin's sociology of literature, these *genres* can be regarded not only as simple genres, in the literary meaning of the term, but also as different *cultural strategies*. Following Dubin, these modes of expression can be linked to literary cult understood as a "set of social actions that create cultural authority." This approach also allows us to see the simultaneous presence of different types of cultural authority within the same period, that is, the cult itself is not homogeneous but stratified.

Literary cult research and the theory of cultural authority (Boris Dubin's perspective from the sociology of literature)

The terms "*popular author*" (*fashion writer*), the *star writer*, the *cult writer* and the *classical writer* embody different and competing *bearers and foci* of cultural authority situated at different levels within literature as an institution.²² In the context of these "authority compositions"²³, the recognition and affirmation of authority by the active agents of the public (readers and authors), who engage in opinion-forming and evaluative activities, emerge as part of different strategies. The underlying motivation for these strategies is the desire for different kinds of community identity. Over time, an author positioned as a symbolic authority may become the bearer of different patterns, norms and values because of changes taking place deep within society and culture. Accordingly, the figure of the author may move from one level of literature, understood as an institution, to another. This *transition*, this *shift*, is accompanied by certain transformations in the content and modality of the writer's figure: the subject of a cultural strategy that takes shape in social interactions actually changes roles and (broadly speaking) "appearance/form." The sociologist of literature is concerned precisely with this *function* of the figure (understood as a text in the semiotic sense) as a communicative device that *connects and links* the different levels of literature (as an institution).

According to sociological research on literature, these symbolic authorities are constructed by means of different cultural strategies, they are collectively developed and operated by different groups of readers and authors, and, in the aftermath of the author's death, by readers and institutions. From a horizontal and historical perspective, literary history reconstructs and interprets this phenomenon in quantitative and qualitative terms: the growing success of a particular author is associated with increasing recognition (or fluctuations in recognition). From the literary historian's point of view, the various cultural positions of authority held by an author can be regarded as *phases in their recognition*. The succession of these positions delineates the trajectory of the author's career, describing its line and arc. From this perspective, literary-sociological constructions of authority can be understood as individual phases of a two-, three-, or even four-element historical model. Symbolic authorities thus become successive stages in *the reputation* of a given poet or writer and in the *cult* that may begin during their lifetime or post mortem; in this sense, they resemble the model of cult history. However, this cult-historical model is not sensitive to the simultaneous differentiation of the cult.

It is important to note that, in contrast to Bourdieu's notion of the literary field, Dubin's theory takes into account professional critics, the agents of the Bourdieuan literary field, as well as the masses of lay readers, all as groups involved in and shaping the interactions within a specific cultural or social context. The latter's educational backgrounds, identity

21. In 1880, the first documents revealing the circumstances of Pushkin's death and funeral became publicly available. Since Tsar Nicholas I and Aleksandr Benkendorf, the head of the secret police, feared an uprising, they arranged the funeral and the memorial service in secret. Sergei Uvarov, the Minister of Education, was instructed to prohibit the publication in the press of obituaries, reports on the funeral ceremony, and articles commemorating the poet. It was only in 1880 that the public learned of Pushkin's numerous conflicts with the secret police—for after all, the fact that Nicholas I was his personal censor had caused him more difficulties rather than fewer. It was likewise not widely known that, shortly after Pushkin's death, the idea of erecting a statue, a "national monument to the poet," had been proposed, but the Tsar did not permit it. Marcus C. Levitt, *Literatura i politika: Pushkinskii prazdnik 1880 goda*.

22. Boris Dubin, "Klassika, posle i vmesto: O granitsakh i formakh kul'turnogo avtoriteta," in *Klassika, posle i riadom. Sotsiologicheskie ocherki o literature i kul'ture* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010), 96–107.

23. Ibid., 104.

constructions, goals, and differences in taste also influence the emergence of a particular type of cultural authority.²⁴

Application and transformation of the theory of cultural authority from the perspective of literary studies: the differentiated cult and the cult shaped through popularity

The sociological perspective on literature outlined above draws our attention to *the phenomenon of the multiple differentiation of a writer's reputation and/or cult*. It makes visible how, within the same period, a given poet takes shape as a different kind of cultural authority in a metropolitan or a rural community. In the language of anthropology, we can say that different types of *recognition and admiration directed towards the author* can be described in the different socio-spaces in which the author (his oeuvre, his works) is known: among fellow poets who know him personally, among publishers and booksellers who publish and sell his works, among professional critics, or among the wider public.

Furthermore, the insight offered by Dubin's sociology of literature is worthy of further development. This is because it takes into account not only the potential of professional opinion-makers but also that of the "anonymous public" to shape literature and culture. From a literary historical perspective, the objective is to identify texts that, in terms of their *intention and intentionality*, reflect or mirror the recognition or rejection articulated by the communities that produced them towards someone or something.

My empirical research supports the view that *genres* operating within the dual perspective and function of belles-lettres and social use participate in forming an author's reputation and cult. These genres are associated with different groups of recipients, and several may be present simultaneously. I refer to these as *cultic facts*, drawing an analogy with Tynyanov's *literary fact*. Genres become cultic facts when they actively contribute to the development of the cult. However, their involvement in the formation of the cult is not constant; over the course of the cult's history, they may shift from the centre to the periphery.

Genres of early cult 1: laments in verse as socially accepted traces of literary activity

The initial event in the formation of literary cults is often the death of the poet in question. In such cases, *obituaries, memorial addresses, memorial and funeral poems*, etc. constitute the foundational documents of the cult.²⁵ Cult studies regard these texts, along with the associated rituals, as the primary sources of the cult. However, in the case of many authors, it is certain that a high degree of respect and esteem for the poet was already present before their death. Traces of this can be found in the *eulogistic passages, and laudatory and congratulatory poems* addressed to the poet during their lifetime, as well as in *satirical epigrams, lampoons, and parodies*. The amount of *gossip, jokes, and anecdotes* circulated about the poet can also indicate the extent and quality of the respect accorded to them. The period preceding the poet's death is when *literary reputation* is formed and a place within the literary institutional system is established; this reputation is built by the poet's actions and works, as well as by the written and oral texts created *in opposition to* and *in support of* them. According to Dubin, a "consistently constructed 'biography'" on the part of the author and self-cult are mutually supportive and synchronous phenomena. However, the size and scope of a literary reputation do not guarantee the formation of the cult: that is to say, a writer who was successful and popular during their lifetime, who received prizes and high fees, and who published extensively will not necessarily acquire a cult following. Clearly, literary reputation, like cult, operates only within a community, and it can only be sustained by it. In all likelihood, the communities that initiate the cult will also be those that praised the poet during their lifetime. The formation of Pushkin's reputation within various groups with different degrees of proximity to him can be analysed particularly well.²⁶ The critical-historical analysis of the official criticism of Pushkin's works provides only one narrative of this reputation, albeit a highly important one from the perspective of literary studies. Similarly, in the case of Csokonai Vitéz Mihály, the

24. The early 1980s saw the emergence of the non-Marxist and non-Bourdieuian Moscow school of (literary) sociology. Its founders were Boris Dubin (1946–2014) and Lev Gudkov (1946), and they were closely associated with the researcher of reading Abram Reitblat, all three of them members of the Department of Book and Reading Research of the Lenin State Library, which served as their common intellectual workshop. Dubin's theoretical background is primarily Weberian 'understanding sociology', structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism, functionalist theories of modernity, phenomenological sociology (Alfred Schütz), narratology (Paul Ricoeur) and reception aesthetics (Hans-Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser). See on this Irina Kaspe, "Kak vozmozhna literatura? Kak vozmozhna sotsiologiya literatury ne po Bourdieu?," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 2 (2015): 132.

25. Zsófia Kalavszky, "A Puskin-kultusz forrásánál: nekrológok és siratók (1837)," in *Természeti és társadalmi katalizmak: Hagyomány és megújulás a szláv népek történelmében és kultúrájában* 11, ed. Szabó Tünde és Szili Sándor (Szombathely: Szláv Történelmi és Filológiai Társaság, 2021), 95–111.

26. On the phenomenon of literary reputation in general and in relation to Pushkin, and on how Pushkin reached audiences from different socio-cultural backgrounds, see Ivan Rozanov, *Literaturnye reputatsii: raboty raznykh let* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990); Abram Reitblat, "Kak Pushkin vyshel v genii (O literaturnoi reputatsii Pushkina)," in *Kak Pushkin vyshel v genii. Istoriko-sotsiologicheskie ocherki* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2001), 51–70.



"latent value judgements at the popular level of reception"²⁷ are of fundamental importance, just as they play a key role in the formation of the Petőfi cult.

Literary scholarship has mainly focused on the works belonging to the high-literary canon that bid farewell to Pushkin following his death in 1837, such as those by Lermontov, Tyutchev, Zhukovsky, Vyazemsky, and Kozlov.²⁸ Scholarly literature pays particular attention to Mikhail Lermontov's poem *The Death of the Poet*. This poem was just one of many inspired by Pushkin's death, even though it was undoubtedly the most outstanding from an aesthetic point of view. It is well known that writers and readers from different social groups (of noble origin and/or city dwellers, including a guards officer, a sailor, a civil servant, and a diplomat) took up their pens on 29 January in St Petersburg. As the news of Pushkin's death spread in the following weeks and months, they were joined by others throughout Russia (despite the authorities' efforts to prevent the news from spreading). They expressed their grief over the poet's death in their own words, mostly in verse. Their works were not published in print, of course (nor could they have been), but sometimes members of the emerging public collected them in their own manuscript notebooks. Thus, sections of manuscript albums reflecting the tastes of individual readers also came into being, containing poems of all kinds and by authors of all social ranks, written specifically in response to the poet's death. Alongside amateur, dilettante poems written for a narrow circle of acquaintances, readers copied both high-literary texts published in censored journals and texts that bypassed censorship and circulated in manuscript. These poems provide insight into the literary tastes of Pushkin's wider readership and into their ideas about the poet.

This *discordance* is evident in the necrological poems, the mourning and farewell poems written *immediately* after the poet's death. Just as there was no consensus on the poet's image during Pushkin's lifetime, either among his immediate circle of friends or in high-literary circles ("a passionate writer of odes" or "a Romantic elegist"), so too there was no homogeneous image of Pushkin among the increasingly broad journal-reading public. Moreover, this heterogeneous state was perpetuated into post mortem interpretations, which fundamentally shaped the cult that emerged after the poet's death. One of the defining features of Pushkin's cult is that different contemporary groups had markedly different knowledge of and images of Pushkin, all of which are reflected in the imagery, rhetoric, and intellectual and ideological content of their poems and texts. Thus, differences can be identified concerning not only the aesthetic value and craftsmanship of the mourning poems in high-literary and in dilettante circles, but these differences also persisted in the images of the poet and *concepts of authority*. In very simplified terms, the poet's death provided an opportunity for the development of a form of veneration based on a sombre, dramatic image of Pushkin (see the iconic role of "Pushkin as the martyr of the nation"), while another form of homage, emphasising the human side of the poet also survived and continued to endure, (see the portrait-like depiction of Pushkin as "the witty one, the joker, the marvellous singer, the frivolous pleasure-seeker," etc.). Thus, the diversity of representations of Pushkin did not disappear during the nineteenth century. This remained the case even though certain groups of the literate elite brought together sombre, dramatic texts within a conception that sought to homogenise the poet's figure: they sought to reduce his image to that of a martyr or a prophet. The strength of the official Pushkin cult at the end of the century is based precisely on this profoundly complex image of Pushkin, which simultaneously sustains sacred and profane forms of homage in a unique and highly compelling way: although these forms counterpoint one another, they do not cancel each other out.

One of the most important tenets of the literate elite's mourning for Pushkin was that Pushkin "was the poet of Russia and of the nation as a whole," meaning that his death became a national grief. As a result of the political attempts to suppress the news of his death and the obituaries, this mourning acquired another paradoxical feature: it became communal while retaining a personal and familial character. In other words, individual grief became collective. The pronounced simultaneity of collective and individual mourning moves Pushkin's figure towards both the sacred and the human. This all stemmed from the absence of an official position and from a series of measures by the authorities aimed at suppressing the expression of collective mourning. However, the authorities did not prohibit Pushkin's friends or ordinary readers who admired him from remembering the poet as a deceased friend—as "my Pushkin."²⁹

27. Szilágyi, "Kultusztörténet és a Csokonai-recepció rétegei," 399.

28. Literary history conventionally considers Lermontov's poem to be the first poem to be built up over the decades from a corpus of texts that grew from a swelling corpus of paraphrased poems quoting from several poets into a corpus of texts called "the death of the poet". See Aleksandr Dolinin, "Tsikl 'Smert' poeta' i '29 yanvarya 1837' Tyutcheva," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly. Academic Electronic Journal in Slavic Studies*, 15 (2006), <http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/15/dolinin15.shtml>

29. On the specificity of the cult that the distinction between "my Pushkin" and "our Pushkin" produces in different ways and from different perspectives, see Stephanie Sandler, "The Pushkin Myth in Russia," in *The Pushkin Handbook*, edited by David M. Bethea, Publications of the Wisconsin Center for Pushkin Studies (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 403–423.

Genres of early cult 2: *the obituary* – on the borderline between the official, publicistic, and belles-lettres genres

The obituaries in Pushkin's time differed from one another not only because the rhetorical framework and rules of the new, secular genre were still being established to adapt to the norms of the estate-based society,³⁰ but also because they sought to meet the *social* needs of a growing press market and an increasingly differentiated readership. The obituary genre was also subject to political pressure, so its formal appearance was of fundamental importance and highly informative. At the very least, we can describe it as a *socially and politically* sensitive, *mobile genre*. Obituaries about writers were particularly challenging to formalise, since the concept of the writer as a social status was still in its infancy. At the beginning of the century, literary and poetic activity was still explicitly considered as part of private life. However, by the 1830s, the status of the writer had acquired much greater prestige, and writing as an independent, income-generating profession was increasingly accepted by society.

Following Pushkin's death, the heightened atmosphere meant that every rhetorical, stylistic, and visual element of the few Pushkin obituaries that passed through or circumvented the censorship filter was of great informative value to both the authorities and to the "ordinary" readers who could read between the lines. The censorship authorities and the Third Department did not regard the heightened emotional rhetoric of Odoyevsky's obituary—which was virtually the only one published in response to Pushkin's death, alternating between exclamations and silences—as the greatest problem. Rather, they were troubled by the following assertions: (1) Pushkin had a *significant career and mission*, (2) he had enjoyed a short but *extremely productive life*, (3) his future endeavours *would have brought even greater glory* to the Russian nation, and (4) Pushkin stood *at the top of the collective*.

Another interesting piece of information for readers in Odoyevsky's text was a reference to Pushkin's *unexpectedly cut-short* career. Contemporary readers clearly saw the Odoyevsky obituary as an unusual and atypical text. It evoked the genres of the *lament* and the *lamentation* far more than the formal obituary genre. Even his other, less emotional obituary published in the newspaper *Severnaya Pchela*, did not conform to the genre, since it disregarded the official ranks that had to be mentioned. The text prioritised *talent* and *the social importance of literature* as the most important values.³¹

Alongside the Odoyevsky obituary, a poem of Lermontov, circulated in manuscript, became the other "key text" in the flood of necrological texts. The vocabulary and rhetorical devices used in both texts would subsequently reappear in a multitude of paraphrases. At the same time, the topoi raised by the two works were modified by both highly esteemed poets and those belonging to the second or third rank, primarily because they integrated them into systems of motifs derived from different cultural traditions.

Overall, it can be said that, alongside the formal diversity of the poems bidding farewell to Pushkin—including *laments, epitaphs, prose parables, dialogues, and memorial poems*—we can discern monotony and similarities in motifs borrowed from one another. These poems echo the mode of expression that Pushkin had created in his poetry of the 1820s, albeit in a simplified form. This unusual and startling Pushkinian Romantic voice of the 1820s would become fashionable in the poetry of second- and third-rate poets by the end of the 1830s, and by which time it had become familiar and customary to the public.

Reading the farewell poems written in February 1837 and thereafter, we witness how these farewell texts "turn Pushkin into Lensky," into a Romantic poet. At the same time, the poems' network of motifs and stylistics blend into the highly popular contemporary genre of the "death of the poet," poems which enjoyed great popularity in the late 1830s. The clichéd image of the poet, as portrayed in amateur Romantic literature, continued to be actively perpetuated in poems such as "The Death of Orpheus," "The Poet's Grave," "To the Poet's Grave," "On the Death of a Friend," and "In Memory of the Poet." In some poems written about Pushkin's death, his name is omitted and he is referred to only as "the Poet." Thus, a large proportion of the farewell poems dedicated to Pushkin relate, in general terms, to "the Poet."

At the same time, however, we find a number of poems whose genre, mode of expression, rhetoric, and stylistics resemble *lament* and *lamentation*—poems with a tragic, resigned tonal register—yet which express the *joy and delight celebrated by Pushkin*, the mischievous poet who sang beautifully, or the impulsive and exotic, African-born child. Indeed, we find texts that urge their readers not to mourn Pushkin's death, because the poet himself

30. From 1837, a tsarist decree stipulated that an obituary of every deceased nobleman must be published in the newspaper of the governorate concerned. See, Laurie Manchester, "Vozniknovenie i znachenie. (avto)biograficheskikh praktik v nekrologakh prikhodskikh svyashchennikov Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi," in *Vera i lichnost' v meniaiushchemsia obshchestve. Avtobiografika i pravoslavie v Rossii kontsa XVII — nachala XX veka.*, red. Laurie Manchester i Denis Sdvizhkov, *Historia Rossica* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2020), 206–227.

31. [at]iana Kuzovkina, "Nekrolog Bulgarina Zhukovskomu," in *Pushkinskie chteniia v Tartu 3: Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi 220-letiiu V. A. Zhukovskogo i 200-letiiu F. I. Tyutcheva*, red. L. N. Kiseleva, 280 (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2004), 276–293.



disliked boredom and died smiling. These texts are noteworthy precisely because, in contrast to the image of the “tormented Pushkin” image, they focus on the *poet who sang of sweet love, pleasure, and delight*.

I consider this group of poems particularly intriguing because, unlike poems that transform the image of the “tormented, martyr” Pushkin into an *icon*, these poems present Pushkin’s image in a much more *portrait-like* manner. The former is similar to the *zhitie*, the ecclesiastical predecessor of the obituary, while the latter is closer to the *secular biography*, which also includes entertainment.

Genres of early cult 3.: *the literary anecdote as a trace of symbolic authority expressed in small communities*

Pushkin was connected with the genre of the literary anecdote (*literaturnyi anekdot*) in two ways: on the one hand, he shaped it as an author and collector; on the other, his own life also inspired numerous literary anecdotes.³² He was himself an excellent storyteller and a master of the anecdotes. The anecdotal image of the poet became an important factor in his social and literary reputations, the latter of which was strongly influenced by the former in the 1830s. However, it is evident that anecdotes about and by Pushkin influenced much more the poet’s public image after his death. With the emergence of the official cult at the end of the nineteenth century, we can no longer speak of literary anecdotes in the classical sense, rather of their derivatives. These anecdotes played a part in shaping the popular image of Pushkin.

In the popular anecdotes of the late nineteenth century, which were based on hearsay and gossip about the poet, Pushkin is portrayed above all as an *ostroslov*. With his wit and pithy sayings, he embodies the Russian folk clown or trickster, the *shut* or the *plut*. The protagonist of the anecdotes exploits the possibilities of language in terms of its sound and meaning in a Protean manner, flexibly and brilliantly. In these anecdotes, Pushkin is presented as a master of eloquence and poetry, with charm and entertainment also playing a part.

In the anecdotes, Pushkin often shows no respect for authority, standing up to those above him in the social hierarchy. The punchline of the anecdotes always comes from Pushkin: as the hero, he expresses something in a paradoxical or parable-like manner that calls the morality of the age into question. Often, Pushkin’s sayings mock narcissism, arrogance, stupidity, greed, and narrow-mindedness. While this is not yet the case in classical literary anecdotes, in the anecdotal stories from the late nineteenth century, Pushkin increasingly “outgrows” his mask, occupying a role with greater potential. He appears as a bold, courageous and outspoken figure, whose self-esteem, sensitivity, and pride also come to the fore. A new type of hero emerges that cannot be understood from the perspective of the literary anecdote: the autonomous, unique, individual hero.

By the end of the century, an increasingly conspicuous transformation of the image of Pushkin can be observed. In late-nineteenth century’s anecdotes, truthfulness and boldness, qualities also associated with the *shut* or *plut* role, derive not from the archaic mask but from the figure of Pushkin constructed during his nineteenth-century cult. This figure is based on the Romantic representation of Pushkin himself and of the character traits attributed to him, such as his desire for freedom, pride, rebelliousness, self-esteem, courage, and prophetic qualities. As Efim Kurganov writes, the classical Russian literary anecdote does not reinforce reputation. Rather, owing to its situational nature, it exposes or enables the rediscovery of something at a particular moment. For example, it may reveal the intriguing background of a historical event or offer an insight into the hidden side of a prominent historical figure.³³ In doing so, it awakens the recipient’s curiosity about history. The anecdotal stories about Pushkin from the turn of the century, however, are already exclusively about Pushkin as a (cultural) hero.

The counter-genres of the institutionalising cult: *urban anecdotes as oral genres of interculturality*

Until the mid-1850s, the social significance of Pushkin’s figure was confined to a narrow intellectual circle.³⁴ However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, and particularly from the 1880s onwards, the significant increase in the number of publications featuring Pushkin in the pages of St Petersburg and Moscow journals³⁵ devoted to uncovering the past and providing a forum for such documents indicates the growing public interest that accompanied the efforts of literary agents dedicated to the “Pushkin cause.” Their aim was to preserve the memories, manuscripts, and all available information about the poet from his surviving contemporaries. The unveiling of Pushkin’s statue in Moscow in 1880, followed by the closely successive commemorative anniversaries

32. Zsófia Kalavszky, “Pushkin és az irodalmi anekdota,” in *Doromb. Közköltészeti tanulmányok* 9, ed. Csörsz Rumen István (Budapest: Reciti, 2021), 57–72.

33. Efim Kurganov, *Literaturnyi anekdot Pushkinskoi epokhi* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1995), 26.

34. Ol’ga Murav’eva, “Obraz Pushkina: istoricheskie metamorfozy,” in *Legendy i mify o Pushkine: Sbornik stat’ei*, red. M. N. Virolainen (Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1999), 117.

35. Pyotr Bartyenyev, as editor of the Moscow journal *Russky Archive*, has been publishing new and more recent memoirs of Pushkin for many decades since the 1860s. Mikhail Semyovsky, publisher of the Petersburg journal *Russkaya Starina*, was himself a historian and the author of numerous sources on Pushkin, articles on Pushkin’s estates and valuable Pushkin memoirs.

of 1887, 1889, and 1899, which grew increasingly larger in scale, contributed to and intensified this process. The journals *Russkii arkhiv* and *Russkaia starina* became major venues for the publication of semi-apocryphal and apocryphal stories and anecdotes about Pushkin.³⁶

In 1880, the unveiling of Pushkin's statue in Moscow and the commemorative ceremony could still be regarded as an event for the intelligentsia and civil society. At the same time, press reports ensured that news of the event reached people from a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds. After 1887, official cultural policy increasingly emphasised certain features of Pushkin's image, such as his loyalty, obedience, and piety. This propagandistic use of the poet made his name known to ever wider sections of society, though it still provoked controversy within the Russian Orthodox Church.

The largest state-sponsored commemoration in Tsarist Russia took place at the turn of the century. In 1899, to celebrate the centenary of Pushkin's birth, city councils, economic and educational, as well as civic organisations and companies across the country were already capitalizing on official propaganda by organising various leisure programmes celebrating Pushkin. In the increasingly capitalist and industrialised economic environment of the late nineteenth century, retailers made inventive use of Pushkin's quotations in advertisements for commercial goods. The poet's image appeared on a variety of gift and everyday items, while booksellers and printing houses involved in mass publishing distributed inexpensive editions of his biography and works. Information about Pushkin also appeared in the widely read publications from the small press (the *kopeck newspapers*), while his fairy tales featured among the *lubok* literature offerings, and his songs were an indispensable parts of songbooks.³⁷ Between 1880 and 1899, journalists made considerable efforts to uncover ever more information about the poet's life.³⁸

In response to the complex "information pressure" (A. A. Panchenko) described above, which was then preoccupying the press and urban everyday life, a new group of Pushkin anecdotes emerged in urban oral culture and became increasingly visible as their numbers grew.³⁹ These texts all feature Pushkin, they are colloquial, belong to a lower stylistic register than their *literary* counterparts, have profane themes, and circulated orally. An important characteristic of these texts is their frequent use of obscene expressions. Pushkin is frequently depicted as the instigator of risqué and ambiguous situations, a clever, sharp-witted figure capable of improvising verse in any situation, while simultaneously appearing as a vulgar, outspoken, impolite and arrogant person.

The nineteenth-century Russian city, and especially the urban civilisation of the second half of the century, together with the lifestyles, everyday practices, and cultural conditions of the social groups living within it, made possible and indeed stimulated the emergence of these texts as one of the most important and popular types of so-called *urban folklore*. Aleksandr Belousov distinguished this group from anecdotes belonging to traditional folklore and called it the *urban anecdote*.⁴⁰

These anecdotes were present in cities as an *intercultural phenomenon*, providing opportunities for collective creation in various spaces, both narrow and broad where smaller and larger communities could meet. Urban life offered free, direct, active, and intrinsically valuable forms of creation in the forms of *secular salons*, *petty-bourgeois gatherings*, *barracks*, *balls*, *drinking with friends*, and the *street* as a club-like setting. Urban folklore encompasses the traditions of various social strata and communities, including soldiers, peasants, petty bourgeois, nobles, craftsmen, and the so-called school folklore (lyceum, college, and university folklore). Together, these ensure the socio-cultural diversity of *urban folklore* and its complex system, while remaining in constant contact with professional artistic works and performances, such as contemporary elite literature, music, and theatre. Belousov is quite certain that in the second half of the nineteenth century, the musical, performative, and textual and oral culture of Russian cities was strongly influenced by the professional arts. These permeated the public life and popular culture of the cities, so that the texts, melodies, and narrative games associated with and accompanying the inhabitants' everyday activities, celebrations, and entertainments emerged from an interaction between, and use of, folklore and high art. Complex semi-literary and semi-folkloric forms arose from this living, direct, free, collective process of communication and creation.

36. Marina Zagidullina, "Formirovanie osnovnogo svoda vospominanii o Pushkine," *Vestnik Cheliabinskogo universiteta. Seriya Filologiya*, 1 (2001): 70.

37. See Marcus C. Levitt, "Pushkin v 1899 godu," in *Sovremennoe amerikanskoe pushkinovedenie. Sbornik statei. Contemporary American Pushkin Studies. Collection of Works*, red. W. M. Todd III, *Sovremennaiia zapadnaia rusistika* 24 (Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1999), 21–42, 29–31; Sigizmund Librovich, "XXXIX. Portrety Pushkina na vodochnykh butylkakh..." in *Pushkin v portretakh. Istoriia izobrazhenii poeta v zhivopisi, graviure i skul'pture* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1890), 242–254.

38. Zagidullina calls this the Puskin battle of the press [bitva armii zhurnalistov za "pushkinskuyu informatsiyu"]. Zagidullina, "Formirovanie osnovnogo svoda vospominanii o Pushkine," 66.

39. Zsófia Kalavszky, "Puskin és a városi anekdoták (orosz, lett és lengyel) nyelvű forrásokban," in *Doromb: közköltészeti tanulmányok* 11, ed. Csörsz Rumen István (Budapest: Reciti, 2023), 91–114.

40. Aleksandr Belousov, "Gorodskoi fol'klor." in *Kul'tura. Literatura. Fol'klor* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2023), 119–142.



The Pushkin anecdotes constitute a distinct type of urban anecdote: the oldest and most enduring cycle of the so-called *cultural hero anecdotes*. In the *Anecdotes about Pushkin in the City of Sarapul* corpus, recorded by the collector Nikolai Onchukov, it is clear that many anecdotes were not specifically connected with Pushkin's figure, life, or works. In this sense, they were not characteristic of Pushkin. Rather, Pushkin became the hero of already existing urban anecdotal plots that had been circulating for many decades. One of the most interesting historical developments in the Pushkin anecdote tradition is the 'shift' whereby Pushkin assumes the role of *clown poet*, the *shut*, instead of the *serious poet*. A similar "change of place" can be observed in Hungarian literary history, in the cult of Csokonai. Elements and motifs of *garabonciás* stories appear in the Debrecen legends associated with Csokonai; the *garabonciás* was a wandering student who was believed to possess magical powers. As Márton Szilágyi convincingly demonstrates, Csokonai becomes the protagonist of an earlier Debrecen legendarium, 'replacing' the earlier figure in these legends, the physician István Hatvani, who was associated with diabolical powers. "In this way, Csokonai's familiarity, manifested in several forms and demonstrating his suitability for assuming several different social roles, makes him capable of taking the place of the named protagonist of the *garabonciás* stories."⁴¹

The Pushkin corpus in Sarapul, comprising the so-called erotic and scatological Pushkin anecdotes, was very popular among the urban population. This body of anecdotes, which has virtually no written record, constitutes a *parodia sacra*, the number of which multiplied as the cult grew stronger. It is particularly evident that these everyday anecdotes contained plot frameworks and role possibilities.⁴² These empty, unfilled yet formed and ready-made masks, into one of which Pushkin was inserted, derived from the roles of traditional popular anecdotal heroes, such as the *cunning soldier*, the *judge*, or the *fool*.⁴³ It can also be observed that certain plots are preserved for long periods of time, often for centuries, because the linguistic element that produces the humour proves to be timeless, they could essentially be made topical simply by replacing the names of the heroes.

Another important change in the history of urban Pushkin anecdotes occurred at the turn of the century, particularly during the first decades of the twentieth century. On the one hand, the official cultural-mediating practices of the tsarist Pushkin cult had "matured"; on the other hand, the mechanisms of the new Soviet state for maintaining and disseminating the cult were already in motion, meaning the impact of the dissemination of knowledge about Pushkin could be measured. An increasing number of literary-historical and everyday anecdotes that had been circulating for centuries became specifically "Pushkinian." This was because certain elements of Pushkin's biography had become so widely known that they constituted shared knowledge among the urban population, enabling their incorporation into humorous anecdotes. As is well known, a punchline works when the story builds on the audience's shared knowledge.

Conclusion

Empirical research on cults of Hungarian and Russian literature shows that Eastern European literary cults are connected to multiple social levels and cultural forms. Therefore, their sources and forms of expression should not be sought exclusively in interpretations of elite culture. Types of veneration are embodied in popular texts such as *anecdotes* or *laments in verse* and *farewell poems*.

We can also observe phenomena common to Eastern European cults as a consequence of their regional similarities, rooted in their shared political and historical circumstances and social structures. In nineteenth-century Hungarian and Russian culture, the modern condition of literature, which was just becoming institutionalised, and the social formation and unsettled status of writers made it possible for poets to be regarded in many different roles and as various forms of authority. The mythologising statements by elite literate circles, drawing on Romantic aesthetics to depict the poet as a Protean figure, a prophet, or a martyr, constitute only one source of these role constructions. Alongside the *necrological* mode of discourse, the other most widespread and effective mode of expression of the popular nineteenth-century Pushkin myth and cult is *anecdotal* and can be identified in popular culture. I am convinced that these two modes dominated the modalities of the civil and subsequently the tsarist (state) Pushkin cult in the second half of the nineteenth century, while simultaneously constituting the dominant genres that constructed and sustained the contemporary memory of Pushkin.

The ways in which these roles appear in folk legends and anecdotes are particularly revealing in terms of their symptomatic significance. The *garabonciás* character, as well as the *shut* (fool) and *plut* (trickster) attributed to

41. Szilágyi, "Kultusz történet és a Csokonai-recepció rétegei," 406.

42. Aleksandr Belousov, "Iz istorii fol'klornykh anekdotov o Pushkine." in *Trudy fakul'teta etnologii (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2001)*, 211–213.

43. Yeleazar Meletinskii, "Skazka-anekdot v sisteme fol'klornykh zhanrov," in *Izbrannye stat'i. Vospominaniia*, red. E. S. Nonik (Moskva: Rossiisk. gos. humanit. un-t, 1998), 318–333.

Csokonai and Pushkin are constructed from identical motifs: both involve a sharp-witted figure who improvises a rhythmic response, while simultaneously being associated with the idea of erudition (Csokonai) or wisdom (Pushkin). These shared features more generally testify to the social status of the nineteenth-century Eastern European poet, revealing the poet to be a distinctive embodiment of symbolic authority. One possibility for the social integration of poets, as Márton Szilágyi writes in connection with Csokonai, is to "assign the poet the position of entertainer"; the other possibility, alongside respect, also encompasses the emotion of alienation and otherness. It can thus be concluded that "these are the two extremes of the poet's role: the pole of integrability and the pole of solitude."⁴⁴

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