

**„BABEŞ–BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF LETTERS**

THE HUNGARIAN STUDIES DOCTORAL SCHOOL

DEPARTMENT OF HUNGARIAN ETHNOGRAPHY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

**Funeral valedictions from Transylvania in the second half of the
20th century**

– genealogical memory and biography, functions of funeral texts –

PHD THESIS – ABSTRACT

Scientific coordinator:

PROF. DR. KESZEG Vilmos

PhD candidate:

BAJKÓ Árpád-István

CLUJ-NAPOCA

2019

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 7

I. Research perspectives and paradigms of interpretation 10

I.1. The research of popular writing 10

I.2. Aspects of remembrance culture 13

II. Antecedents and results of research history 15

II.1. The approach of church history 15

II.1.1. The form and content of funeral valedictions in the context of prohibitions 15

II.1.2. Genre versions and contested features of form and content 19

II.2. Literary reception, history of publishing and research 23

II.2.1. The funeral valediction as a poetic (literary) product: literary expectations – a source for the history of literature 23

II.2.2. Educational strategies in the funeral valedictions' sample books 25

II.2.3. Popular poetry and folk poetry - strategies of interpretation 29

II.2.4. Inspired by literary examples: becoming a Cantor and a Poet 31

II.2.5. In between the history of literature and folklore studies 33

II.3. The approach of ethnography 34

II.3.1. Results of Hungarian ethnographic research 34

II.3.1.1. Regional and local ethnographic approaches 34

II.3.1.2. The genealogy of the genre relations and categorizations of the funeral valedictions 51

II.3.1.3. Valediction and sermon - excerpts from historical sources 55

II.3.1.4. The biographical text as a resource of history, histories of mentality and linguistics 58

II.3.1.5. The attachment of communities to funeral valedictions 60

II.3.1.6. The parody of the funeral valediction as a subgenre 63

II.3.1.7. The status of the cantor as object of ethnographic interest 65

II.3.1.8. Data about text usage and interpretative attitudes in the journal *Ethnographia* 66

II.3.1.9. Researches and source explorations under the aegis of the UBB Department of Hungarian Ethnography and Anthropology 74

II.3.2. Romanian-language folklore parallels and collections 80

II.4. Summary 82

III. Individual habits in the valediction practice in Transylvania in the second half of the 20th century 83

III.1. KISS Dániel's practice as a poet in Mezőkeszű – The role of writing in the everyday life of a self-thought writer from Mezőség county 83

III.1.1. "The Curriculum Vitae to be told on the Last Day of My Life on Earth" – KISS Dániel's life	83
III.1.2. KISS Dániel's funeral valedictions	89
III.1.3. The role of writing in KISS Dániel's life	103
III.1.4. Summary	119
III.2. A Biographical memory carved in stone – KALLÓ Ferenc's funeral poems carved Kalló in the calvinistic churchyard from Inucu	121
III.2.1. Writing as a family (maternal) heritage	137
III.2.2. Representations of Transylvania in the open air Ethnographic Museum of Szentendre - the manuscript collection as a representative example of popular writing in Kalota county	141
III.2.3. Intersections of KALLÓ Ferenc's role as a dance specialist and his activities as a poet	143
III.2.4. The Structure of the texts carved in tomb and their social significance	148
III.2.5. Summary	152
III.3. The valedictions written by the peasant cantor KURTUCZ István– a resources for FALKUS Margit and ALMÁSI László auxiliary cantor's writing practice	154
III.3.1. The narrative of SARUSI Mihály - nephew of KURTUCZ István	159
III.3.2. The historical context of the funeral valedictions written by the cantors from Kisiratos	162
III.3.3. The valediction as a memorial text of strengthening and recording family ties	165
III.3.5. A wedding musician who became a cantor: ALMÁSI László	168
III.3.6. FALKUS Margit's roles as a cantor assistant	175
III.3.7. The presentation of the funeral valedictions as a community event	181
III.3.8. Summary	183
III.4. Farewell from the dead in Györgyfalva - representations of the body in the manuscripts of JASKÓ István	186
III.5. Local specialists of writing - writing practices of five poetry specialists	195
III.5.1. ÁGOSTON János (Nagypetri)	195
III.5.2. BABÁN János (Bogártelke)	198
III.5.3. ZSOLDOS István (Sinfalva)	203
III.5.4. SÁNDOR Botond (Nagyenyed)	208
III.5.5. GÁL JANKÓ László (Zsobok)	213
CONCLUSIONS	221
REFERENCES	228
Other sources, newspaper articles	245
Cantor sample books	245
Collections within the UBB Department of Hungarian Ethnography and Anthropology	247

KEYWORDS: valedictions, vernacular writing, funeral rites, forgiveness, vernacular poet, biography, functions of writing, genealogical memory, cultural memory, functions of funeral texts

ABSTRACT:

In the introductory part of my thesis I outlined the considerations regarding the questions about the genre of funeral valedictions, as well as the observations revealing the relation between genre and the function of texts based on some representative texts of the Hungarian ethnographic literature. In my research I compiled and examined in detail the texts of the Hungarian funeral valedictions of Transylvania. During my analysis I focused on understanding the function and tradition of valedictions. Based on the structured or semi-structured biographical interviews I endeavored to reconstruct the context of the usage of funeral valedictions: who ordered the text, what information were shared with the author. I paid close attention to the author of the funeral valediction (biography, profession, prestige, environment, education, accepted tradition, creative habits), to the presentation of the funeral valediction (performance within the framework of the burial ceremony, handwritten or printed form, the way of preservation).

As the closing act of the more extensive representative case analysis and also at the end of shorter chapters, I tried to summarize the conclusions based on the reference documents taken into consideration from given aspects, so below I present a few, more general statements.

1. Throughout its history lasting hundreds of years the funeral valedictions have got a special status, a special community image. Due to church interdictions this custom has been almost completely marginalized, so I became aware of them in their secondary context, in sources of family archives in Transylvania, when neither personal, nor community need could generate new texts, repertoires. Those texts that were used during a funeral service as their primary context and that were popular and demanded at the second half of the 20th century, to some extent attracts just an ethnographic interest, in their secondary context, as a text object, as proof of folk literacy.

2. Archive sources and other written documents that mention the interdiction of funeral valedictions and the regulations regarding the genre report about the confrontation between the secular approach and that of the official church. At the beginning valedictions were included in the funeral service right after the pastoral sermon, then due to general interdictions, they were taken out of the service. Interdictions from the 17th century confirm that the question of funeral valediction, community reactions to the usage of texts and conflicts that were their outcome (disagreements on the payment for writing and singing, theological excuses, the low quality of rhyming, excessive length, aesthetic expectations etc.) were important for both the Protestant and the Catholic decisions makers. *Anger* and *hatred* were recurrent motives, they were sources of conflict that arose from the content specific to the genre, so these served as arguments in case of church interdictions. Dispositions often referred to the loss of community balance, they declared the funeral valedictions to be a genre that breaks the order. It was a common argument that rhyming and versified praise had to be cancelled because they minimalized the effect of a good funeral sermon.
3. Orders regarding the genre and attempts to regulate it reflect the need of the church to show its authority regarding valedictions that mentioned biographies and decent. Interdictions were evoked by the strong emotional effect of the poem. In the interviews made during field trips the communal force and cathartic function of valedictions either in the form of songs or poems were paralleled with the church service, often at the expense of the quality or the effect of the latter.
4. In the places studied we can speak about the variation of periods of interdictions and permissiveness, there is not a single community where the rules regarding the usage of valedictions and the local attitudes towards its interdictions would be uniform and consistent. We learn that one could oppose the standpoint of the official church. Theoretically decisions taken on higher levels were generally effective in all church districts, however the respect of church orders depended on the authority of the pastors, so compliance with the rules was not homogenous.
5. The centuries-old practice of funeral valedictions adverts to the symbiosis, to the coexistence of genres and texts framing a funeral. The text about the dead person's relations, his/her biography and will had not been always a secondary, additional genre.

Generally speaking we can say that funeral valedictions of the nobility, of the aristocracy from the 17-18th century were part of the structure of the official church service, and as texts they were considered equal to the church sermon. At the 19-20th centuries funeral valedictions gradually detach themselves from the official church service that questioned the justification, the community function of the genre (the tradition of its approach and the construction of texts) practiced by choristers, chorister teachers, vernacular poets.

6. Attempts to reform the content and form of funeral valedictions, interdictions introduced by the church, breaking with this problematic genre, a certain condemnation of this type of text should be interpreted within the context of the expectations of the audience, the community's affection and the provoked reactions. The extent of the "suffering" of the function of the text as an important part of the burial varies from place to place, when the network of family and relatives as well as the biography of the deceased represented either in a song or in a poem shrinks to an additional part of the pastoral sermon.
7. Regulations coming from outside resulted in different editorial solutions: instead of a poetical valediction the funeral service ended with reading the family archives; a long valediction in prose was transformed into a single, cliché-like closing sentence having the role of collective farewell; valedictions originally written in rhymed poems changed into valedictions written in prose (first person singular) that were rewritten by pastors (third person plural) and were included in the sermon. There are cases when a Unitarian pastor who loved poetry introduced poetical valedictions instead of prose forms, and later he changed those to rhyming songs. The studied material proves that funeral valedictions were part of a complex discourse among the church and its representatives (the pastor, the chorister), family members and the extended community.
8. The empirical reference documents that I studied, convinced me, that it is not helpful to think in terms of strict criteria of the genre. Genre specialties that were defined in church history, literary history or ethnography cannot be considered exclusive, we need to take into consideration the communication between genres, the borders of the usage of texts, the practice of writing specific to certain poets, compliance with the expectation of the community and the church, creative strategies.
9. If we considered the question of genre only from the perspective of orality, of how the texts were recited in their primary context, we would need to ignore interpreting the

epitaphs of the Reformed cemetery from Inaktelke (Inucu) as funeral valedictions (Ferenc Kalló), we could not mention the valediction parodies from Sinfalva (Cornești), or further valedictions that were not recited (István Zsoldos), or the texts that were never read and that were written on the back pages of a notebook (Dániel Kiss) from Mezőkeszű (Chesău). If we restricted the genre to written forms, we could not mention funeral valedictions from Érmihályfalva (Valea lui Mihai) that were preserved only in memory, and that were partly improvisations mixed with biographical and genealogical elements performed by the Reformed pastor himself (Dániel Sánta). We could not mention funeral valedictions recorded on audio or video tapes created by authors for their own funerals.

10. At the beginning funeral valedictions were mentioned only in ethnographical descriptions about funeral customs. These sources and descriptions of customs reported mainly about how the valedictions were included within the context of the funeral service, how texts were created and performed. Data about valedictions in monographies state that these types of texts were usually present at the end of a funeral service, publishing these valedictions were illustrations of a practice belonging to the past and also to the present. Writing practice of specialists creating such texts and the community aspects of their poetic career were rarely mentioned in descriptions of customs focusing on events.
11. The repertory of texts that I studied during my research, beyond the appearance of uniformity of form and content, bears witness to individual strategies of creating and using a text. They all reveal the effort of specialists to continue the tradition of funeral valedictions by complying with the criteria of content (biography, genealogy, narrative roles: usage of first or third person singular), of performance (reading, singing) fit in with the expectations of church and community. In some cases controversy against church expectations is part of the strategy of how to use a text, even if that means to confront the pastor. In such cases strong community will and adherence
12. Dániel Kiss self-taught folk poet from Mezőkeszű started to write funeral valedictions and other occasional poems in the second half of the 1940's. His activity and writing practice that had a personal motivation, became an accepted and needed service in the community. This had influenced his creative identity, the further evolution of his self-image. When communities started to use texts much rarer, writing became the tool of recording everyday life and career. His creativity resulted in creating a poetic genre based

on funeral preachings written in prose. Through his written texts the self-taught poet enlarged the scale of phrasing of the society of Mezőkeszű. As a result of his creativity he became a conscious innovator, so by his speeches held in public, he could transform the script of local speech events.

13. Everyday writing enriched Ferenc Kalló from Inaktelke with a special identity. He worked intensively to preserve his memory in the last period of his life. Recording the story of his family he preserved and passed on a genealogical knowledge. His texts engraved in tombstones record not only the life career, the death circumstances of the dead from Inaktelke, but also their social environment. These signs on the tombs have become part of the cultural and material heritage of the community, they are the unique footprints of local history, community identity. The epitaphs functioning as funeral valedictions are biographical texts engraved in stones, they are stories about life careers that are part of the local community memory.
14. István Kurtucz's chorister valedictions from Kisiratos present a tradition of texts getting more and more prestige. After the death of the chorister, the legacy that was a source of subsequent funeral valedictions was included in the collection of local cultural values. As a representative tradition, it was enriched with symbolic value, with added meaning. Due to external interest, manuscripts get more value, and through the names, network of relatives, biographical allusions they become the footprints of the local history of a place, of the community identity of Kisiratos. Analyzing the life career and activity of the three specialists, the role of the individual is shown in passing on tradition.
15. In case of István Jaskó the starting point of my analysis was the health and illness image of funeral valedictions, the textual representation of dying, the body suffering a tragic accident. Creating a biography it was inevitable to present physical suffering, the physical act of the representation of illness was the act of putting the dead body into the grave. István Jaskó had recognized his poetic talent at an early age, and he realized that he could contribute to the communal experience of loss, to mourning by his writing. He was appreciated because of his knowledge, and even after funeral valedictions were becoming more and more rare, writing had a high value for him. His poetic activity, his texts constructing a special visual world illustrate how a writing person could influence the practice of local text usage.

16. The shorter, illustrative analysis consisting of five subchapters are about local writers that try to alter the image of the church's prohibition of funeral valedictions. Examples that vary according to denominations and regions prove that the differentiated study of text usage in particular places, or the ready for a compromise attitude of a church employee is better than discussing prohibitions in a simplistic manner.
17. The role of the individual in preserving tradition becomes obvious by studying the life career of specialists using writing. Poetic and performative activities are not isolated phenomena: poets of a specific region, area knew about each other's work, they evaluated and paid attention to each other's writing and performative skills. There was a community consensus about who was the ideal speaker, performer. Several interviews and notes in manuscripts emphasize this (e.g. Körösfő, Zsobok, Inaktelke, Bogártelke).
18. Talking about the dead, about their personal life career, about family ties and relatives had a special significance. Valedictions as special moments of funeral services, as the imprint of the religious and remembering practice of the community could become a decisive component of collective identity when the dead are no longer greeted in the form of a song or poem (pl. Kisiratos, Zsobok). Biography and genealogy are such basic editing structures, that could be the basis of a world of texts that are different in terms of content, length and form.
19. The reason why funeral valedictions have been marginalized or ceased to exist have different reasons from place to place. There are communities where the usage of funeral valedictions is still present in spite of the Catholic and protestant church's prohibitions, regulations (e.g. Kisiratos, Korond, Zsobok). Sometimes it was the pastor himself who was calling for the preservation of the custom, while he required the previous control of the texts (e.g. Zsobok). Generational change could also cause the local disappearance of funeral valedictions: young specialists do not continue the tradition of the older folk poets or choristers, their role within the community and their poetic and performative activities are not followed.
20. Texts with a certain type of form and content popular throughout the past centuries had not always conformed to expectation coming from a higher level, did not want to fulfill external criteria by which they could have become part of the literary or religious canon as examples from the historical chapter (ideological expectations and aesthetic, linguistic

and stylistic expectations) illustrate. Funeral valedictions on the border of orality and literacy served a specific community need, but later due to valid or unmotivated prohibitions slowly became marginalized, in terms of content, form, and function they had changed their structure, song changed into text and later due to the influence of the sermon, to prose.

21. It is justified to ask what happens to the dead and to the funeral service without valedictions? What are the other ways of talking in public about a personal life career, biography and kinship? New customs appeared at the turn of the century that certify to the special forms of ritual farewell and remembering, and that is the digital mourning. These unusual phenomena could make us aware how social media treats mourning and sorrow. As an example we could mention the virtual cemeteries of the internet that give us the possibility of lighting a candle for a certain fee even in case of unknown dead people. Also we could mention audiovisual materials with a commemorative aspect in case of persons that died in tragic circumstances, at a young age (e.g. on YouTube), or the paid specialists of the civil valedictions who offer their poetic and performative personalized services on their own websites independently of congregational or religious constraints.

The III.1. chapter presents the reader with the handwritten contents of a Mezőkeszű self-educated writer's notebooks. KISS Dániel's texts are written down in 28 notebooks, the fruit of almost 65 years' work. Unfortunately, some texts the writer produced on special occasions for various persons have not been copied and therefore are missing from these notebooks.

His writings are completed by the story of his life as related to the editor; this story is mostly made up of episodes related to the habit of writing, the writing of the funerary poems and the custom of bidding farewell to the dead.

The chapter is made up by the repertory of the funerary poems available in KISS Dániel's manuscripts, written in 1945–2008, followed by other text types chosen from the contents of the 28 notebooks, arranged in thematic modules. The 18 thematic modules of Part II are a cross-section of the self-educated writer's complete repertory, his actual oeuvre, presenting notes of genealogy, family and local history as well as short autobiographical notes, confessions, letters

written while in the army, reflexions on historical and political events, wedding poems, Christmas, New Year, Easter, Mother's Day, school and church congratulatory verses, poems addressed to doctors and nurses, letters and prayers. We haven't set out to present the entire contents of the notebooks; instead, we have wanted to give an insight into the fields the local specialist of writing covered as well as his writing habits and practices.

The editor's afterword presents to the reader the funerary poems as a defining part of the complete repertory, the circumstances of their writing and their acceptance, and defines the local function of this text type. In the same time, it presents the writer's writing habits both in a personal and in a community context, as well as defining its role and assessment in local community. Thanks to KISS Dániel, funerary poems gradually enter the repertory of the community's ritual texts, becoming a popular service the author defines a means to give consolation. He is considered a specialist and so he can innovate nuptial texts too: as proved by his autobiographical notes, his nuptial poems gradually take the place of the obscene texts formerly uttered at weddings.

After presenting the reader chosen texts from the self-educated poet's oeuvre, the essay looks into the problem of the role writing as an action has in a person's life as well as of the ways the writing specialist presents his status in community he obtained as a writer. After the community ceases to use these texts, how does writing become a means to record everyday happenings, one's life story? The wish to leave some sort of monument to his life is formed gradually in Kiss Dániel's mind. Again and again, he records and connects all his life's happenings that provide a frame to the endurance of his oeuvre.

The columns introducing the text modules tell about the contents of his handwritten notes as well as the context the texts were written and told in. The interpretation focuses on the individual writing practices, looking into the integration of writing into personal and local way of life, the stabilization in the everyday world, the ritualization of text editing and usage.

A Biographical Memory Carved in Stone. Funeral Poems by KALLÓ Ferenc in the Calvinistic Churchyard from Inucu

The purpose of this chapter is to present funeral poems as *official documents* carved on tombstones in the village Inucu (Cluj county) by stonemason specialist KALLÓ Ferenc, and the list of deceased local people as a *personal document* compiled by the carver between 1930 and

1975. This tradition functions as a form of cultural memory: the texts written and carved in stone capture the life of the deceased and his social environment. By the end of the 20th century this tradition became the heritage of the local community, a form of local history.

Farewell from the Dead in Gheorghieni in the Middle of the 20th Century. The Representation of the Human Body in the Manuscripts of JASKÓ István 'Pitti'

The textual world created by the funeral poetry specialist from Gheorghieni (Cluj County) can be understood as the result of the collective memory. This analysis focuses on representations of health and illness, of the process of dying in the funeral poems preserved in the Jaskó family archive. These texts often describe the different physical states of the human body, as it is affected by illnesses or accidents. Based on textual resources (42 funeral poems and interviews) the article emphasizes recurring motifs and identifies the types and causes of death which are usually present in the edited biography of the deceased person. The textual analysis is completed with information related to the creative process and the context of the utterance of the poems, with special focus on the writing praxis of the specialist.