The authoritative knowledge produced by the disciplines we work within has a paramount force in the articulation of the self-definition of everyone using the disciplines at issue. The lecture will try to look at the disciplinary subject of different disciplines (ethnography, dialectology, historiography and their relationship with literature) and will examine the ways they have been historically constituted in nineteenth-century Hungarian culture.

In his *Folklore and materiality* Erdélyi János argued for a joint understanding of the folklore and other poetic texts, practically making the cultural borders that separated nineteenth-century folklore texts and elite culture texts disappear: “I believe that if something is poetry, it shall necessarily be treated as such, even if descending from the folk, folklore should be withdrawn from the general principle of poetry. And certainly one can perceive folklore as such poetry that – though having originated from an uneducated crowd – comes up to the mark of the aesthetics. In my opinion the only difference between the so-called high poetry and folklore consists in the latter sounding in a beginner’s fragrance, in a timid frankness that resembles nature and the former bearing the marks of a distinguishment and of a more polished language the latter is simple, the former foregrounds more signs of maturity and cultivation.”¹

Folklore is measured in a culturally different scale from its own cultural framework: the distinguishment hints to a culture highly concerned with its genealogy, respectively with the longevity and purity of this genealogy, revealing one more hidden link between the consciousness and mechanisms of self-legitimation of nineteenth-century Hungarian elite culture and its uses of the symbolism of an aristocratic type of class-representation.²

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¹ János Erdélyi, ”Népköltészet és kelmeiség” (Folklore and Materiality) in *Nyelvészeti és népköltészeti, népzenei írások* (Writings on Issues of Grammar and Folk Poetry, Folk Music), Budapest: Akadémiai, 1991, p. 194.

² On a closer inspection many links can be established between the representations of an aristocratic tradition perceived for several centuries as truly and exclusively representing the nation and nineteenth-century Hungarian literature trying to define itself as the *par excellence* medium to represent the same Hungarian nation. I would only mention here the exclusive character of belonging to the representational groups in question, the symbolism of duelling in the literary criticism of the 1850’s alluding to the canonic form
The mentioning of a polished language, a tradition and a cultivation as characteristics of an aesthetics-based poetry make exclusive use of the constituents of a culture that is defined by a written tradition.

A fine example of this may be that the folklore collections – as books – are considered the best places for one to find a perfect folklore text after having undergone a process of refinement. I quote from Gábor Kazinczy and Ferenc Toldy’s introduction to a re-edition of a former collection of folklore texts: “The tales evidence us what a master Gaal was in composing a round whole by means of leaving out and supplementing so as to fit the demands of the aesthetic idea. That is because the folk are unassuming and imperfect in terms of composition: the folk narrators always forget something, lengthen or their products lack the antecedents or the consequences. Thus the composition hardly ever denotes that wholeness and roundness the elite poetry consciously aspires to.”

It is not only the necessary imperfectness of the folklore texts outside the collection that is touched upon in the paragraph quoted above, but the tangible presence of the same texts in book form as the simulacrum for the whole that makes the field study of the individual less relevant, if not irrelevant at all. The focus on the written word almost exclusively functioning as an aesthetic entity (and leaving out the possibilities of several other functions) in order to characterize a mainly oral type of culture with mainly non-aesthetic functions is also revealed by the ceaseless focus on the invariancy and textuality of the folklore culture at issue. Lecturing at one of the first scientific sessions of the Transylvanian Musaeum Society, Pál Gyulai pointed out some values carried by folklore poetry. Taking a closer inspection at the arguments advanced in his Contributions to Our Folklore reveals even more about the values and meanings attributed to folklore in the midst of nineteenth century. The ballad entitled Márton Ajgó had set out excels by means of originality: according to Gyulai, it can’t be mistaken for neither any domestic or foreign ballad, being a sui generis work. And in a wider sense all ballads are similar to the one brought into discussion, for “real originality both in high and in folk poetry lies not so much in the object, the basic idea, but in the inventive and creative power of the spirit.”

So, a first value used to measure the folklore texts is that of the individual creativity of the romantic elite culture foregrounding the ideal of a text that is unique, never to be repeated again, thus closed and in this sense wholly invariant.

of protection in all matters of honour in the aristocratic circles of the period, respectively the fact that the vast majority of writers to establish a most canonic institution: the Hungarian Academy of Sciences were also noblemen.

3 György Gaal, Magyar népmesegyűjtemény (Collection of Hungarian Folk Tales), ed. by Gábor Kazinczy and Ferenc Toldy, Pest, 1857–1859: III., pp. IV–VII.

Some parts of the ballad quoted by Gyulai seem to be imperfect: “A thorough charge would be that Márton Ajgó’s climbing to the tree is not sufficiently motivated. […] These kinds of defects are not rare even with the most enthralling legends […] for the fate of the legends is peculiar, too: in fact, their passing from mouth to mouth is the mechanism that writes them up, brings them together. Some come to be wholes, others remain at a certain stage of their formation, certain parts fade out from many and not a few are lengthened only to interfere with the process of their becoming.”

In this way the most sensitive side of the folklore texts that is at the origin of their imperfection, hardly to be eliminated in their original context is exactly their medium of handing down and the mechanisms that operate in this medium. The writing-based handing down of the texts – even implicitly hinted upon – is viewed as a much more valuable process than the oral one, for – in Gyulai’s perception – it insures texts against any kind of alteration.

The unaltered text and the written medium that is fit for producing and handing down such texts are both products of an elite literary type of way to imagine a culture that needs continuous preservation and unaltered record of its values.

But before drawing some interim conclusions regarding the disciplinary embeddings of these ideas, let me bring one more example of the values the system in question is oriented towards. In the 1862 volume of the Szépirodalmi Figyelő Pál Gyulai published a treatise on several aspects of the Hungarian folk tale. Touching upon János Arany’s critique of Merényi’s folk-collection the Contributions to Our Folk Tales sketches the process the writer of the treatise himself started in order to find an even “more complete, more beautiful and more poetic” variant of the folk-tale Arany mentioned in comparison with the sample Merényi’s collection had offered: “I did everything to obtain this tale in its completeness. I asked children, aged women, maidens, nurses, coachmen, briefly all I had even heard a tale from. In vain. Anyone who remembered it, recalled only faded fragments of it.” The variant regarded as fragment sheds light on the nature of the logic that determines the relationship of the variant to that of the invariant.

The category of the fragment functions already as a (negatively) value-loaded category regarding the Hungarian (unlike most Western European Romantic) literary texts of the period. For instance, Toldy’s edition of Csokonai, Gyulai’s edition of Vörösmarty, Madách or Petőfi (be it the early edition of Petőfi’s

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7 Ibidem, p. 51.
proseworks or the 1874 edition attributable to both Gyulai and Greguss) position the fragments (together with the so-called ‘immature works’) mainly to the last place of the edition, or they are even omitted like when editing Madách or in the case of the 1874 edition de luxe of Petőfi. Thus the fragments of a poetic work come very close or if not to similar position to those of uncertain authorship, actually constituting the periphery of a certain ouvré. They seem to be considered to be less important and needing less interpretative attention than the non-fragmental parts of the corpus, i.e. those components that from a certain point of view become regarded as ‘wholes’.

The last example draws the attention to a whole discipline that seems to enforce a certain type of text: the product of a unique creative process, with aesthetic qualities, ethically unobjectionable, structurally whole. Nineteenth-century Hungarian diachronic philology’s notion of text was also paired with several strategies devised for obtaining and dealing with both suitable and unacceptable texts: among these one could mention the relative power of the editor to position, to value and even to alter the text according to his aesthetic and ethic standards.

Viewed from this point the necessary imperfectness of the folklore texts as perceived at the middle of the Hungarian nineteenth century, together with the special status of the folklore collector as the person regaining the perfect state of the folklore texts draw the attention to philology, a discipline itself transcending several other disciplines (literature, different types of historiography), carrying and enforcing of an elite culture. Thus philology stands not only for a set of poetic (or as accused sometimes since then: mechanic) rules, but for a discipline embedded in a whole system of intimately related interpretative power frameworks through which an elite literati community views, enforces itself, the values of his [sic!] own culture even when claiming to have met horizons and values of other types of cultures.

Before I proceed to show the connections of this philology-based cultural construct with the way other disciplines of the time were connected to this construct I would like to emphasis the extraordinary force and firmness of this cultural framework through a series of interrelated examples. Let me foreground the case of János Kriza, one of the most praised folk-collectors for his Vadrózsák (‘Wild Roses’). The story of his collection partially reconstructed from archive materials sheds light up on the resolute and systemac character of the epistemology backing −not only, but also − the great folklore collections of the nineteenth century.

Kriza’s correspondence with Gyulai8 on the forthcoming collection of Vadrózsák dates from the end of the 1850’s and the beginning of the 1860’s, and

8 The correspondence between Kriza János and Gyulai Pál is a fragmented one, as well the whole correspondence itself of Kriza. With regards to the former: mainly Kriza’s letters have been preserved in the archives of the Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár,
bears witness to many of Gyulai’s worries and actions towards Kriza’s methods, and, of course, highlights his own method. In a letter dating from August 12, 1862 Kriza gave account of the texts he had prepared for edition: “I send my greetings to Arany – I really enjoy the tales of his Lací. Compared to his, my tales will be slightly rustic, but in the literary life, just like in the social one, there should be some belonging to such a class. Then the peasants can easily become educated gentlemanlike people.”

The ideal scale in comparison to which he defines the tales prepared by him goes from peasantry to gentlemanliness, the social order being transformed into a literary one, too. It is no wonder why Kriza’s aim of regaining the voice of the peasant informant didn’t achieve too much success. But what exactly did this aim of regaining imply? “I have got into the dialect so much that sometimes I catch myself in uttering hezzá, szüvet, vadnak [i.e. dialectic forms] whilst I speak.

Fortunately I am not a preaching clergyman, because I might blend it with the sermon […] Nobody has ever prepared to edit so many literary things in such kind of dialectical form. I made minitious inquiries so as even the last sound should be characteristically székely. […] I took troubles with the texts – sometimes I had to write even two or three letters to Háromszék for the right syllable or letter. […] I believe I am ensured against falsehoods and ‘literary winkings’.”

Kriza’s method is a great step towards regaining the informants’s voice: he still has no direct contact with his informants, but he is aware that the literary language employed by folklore-collectors actually changes the cultural framework of the informants’ texts.

A letter dated from November 19, also 1862, reveals Gyulai’s resistance and Kriza stepping back in a way that will lead to a major change regarding the epistemological conditions within which his folklore collection will be elaborated: “There is no more misunderstanding on the question […] I think I can already give you some pieces from Vadrózsák, as you suggested ‘keeping the székely taste, but not the exact dialect’.”

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9 The son of Arany János. The edition referred to: László Arany, Eredeti népmesék (Original Folk Tales), Pest, 1862.

10 Kriza János to Gyulai Pál: Kolozsvár, August 12, 1862, National Széchenyi Library, Correspondence Archives

11 Kriza János to Gyulai Pál: Kolozsvár, 29. October 1862, National Széchenyi Library, Correspondence Archives

12 Kriza János to Gyulai Pál: Kolozsvár, November 19, 1862., National Széchenyi Library, Correspondence Archives
The offspring of dialectology within the literary system arrives to similar consequences as the ethnographic aspirations that were first articulated within the same literary system: in the case of the former constructs of the dialects occurred, dialects being reshaped according to the tastes and values of an elite culture, mainly disregarding the idiosyncratic elements that weren’t consonant to the system or those components that weren’t compatible with the elite cultural ideas on beautiful and acceptable sounding.

In the midst of the nineteenth century the aesthetic conception of literature emerging from the cultural combats of the 1820–1840’s imposed itself not only upon literary texts and phenomena, but also on the disciplines that, on their turn, emerged from the broader notion of literature and were trying to define themselves as autonomous entities. They took over from the values up even to the canonic notion of text of the aesthetic type of literary system.

It is enthralling to see how the notion of a literature governed by the value of the beautiful was so strong that it has even refunctionalized the notion of *ars historica* in the historiography of the age. “Historiography operates on the fields of science and art and wishes not only to search for, but also to write about the events and relations of bygone times, therefore it is under the reign of *ars historica*” – argued Gusztáv Wenzel in a 1856 paper on the possibilities of Hungarian historiography. Gyulai Pál reflecting on an early monograph of Kálmán Thaly on János Bottyán touched also upon the necessity of a certain poetics of historiography that derives certainly from literary rules: “A real historiography work belongs not only to science, but to a literature taken in a narrower sense. It requires a certain artistic inner form constituted by the power of composition, the lively ceaselessness of the narrator, the proportionate grouping of the events and the projecting drawing of the main actors”.

The idea of a beautiful history modelled on the beautiful forms as exemplified by literatureshows historiography also to be in close connection with the literary ideals of the age.

During the first alf of nineteenth century Hungarian literature was thought to represent a whole nation. This representational function was the result of a whole process of struggle over how to show the nation’s values to all those claiming Hungary had always been a worthless nation. Imagining literature (and its different genres, like the epic poem, the novel or the tragedy) as the appropriate medium to represent the nation brought about not only a special status for the literati engaged in literary affairs, but also a special politics of

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13 Gusztáv Wenzel, “Magyar történelem vagyis történetkutatás, történettudás és történetírás Magyarországon” (Hungarian History Namely Historic Research, Historic Knowledge and Historiography in Hungary), *Kelet Népe* 1856: 1., p. 139.
literature, including its genres, its communicational methods, poetic strategies, accepted and refused interpretational strategies et cetera. The individualisation of several new disciplines emerging out of the process of a narrowing of the notion of literature and their attempt to define themselves as viable sciences (alongside the raising status of the sciences at the midst of the nineteenth century) still made their relationship with literature an important aspect of their self-assertion and of their imposing themselves as important disciplines.

They took over not only its poetics, but also a politics engaged in a representative process of nation-construction.