

# The Popular and Urban Roots of Hungarian Joke

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**Abstract:** Hungarian humour went through significant changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though the urban middle-class way of living and culture had developed by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, they had to coexist all over the country as well as in ethnic Hungarian territories abroad with the traditions of rural culture and folklore until the middle of the century. Consequently, Hungarian humour is made up of two important layers of folklore: popular funny stories that have been developing among the peasantry for centuries, and jokes, a genre that emerged from urban oral culture in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this paper, we examine the thematic categories of this genre of popular and urban humour and their popularity.

**Key words:** Hungarian, joke, humour, popular, urban, theme, minority, profession

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. A short history of jokes

The collection and the study of funny stories and jokes began centuries earlier in the Western countries of Europe than in Hungary as the formation of the middle class in those countries had started earlier. A good indicator of the belated middle-class formation in Hungary is the fact that genres of urban folklore only appeared as late as the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> With the unification of Pest, Buda and Óbuda in 1873, Budapest became the tenth largest city on the continent by the turn of the century, though only every third of its inhabitants was born in Pest or Buda. Immigrants accounting for two thirds of the population had arrived from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as well as from the neighbouring countries, representing tremendous linguistic, cultural, ethnic and social diversity. The rootlessness of the immigrants made the city susceptible to accepting different influences, and, since one of the characteristics of jokes is ridiculing *otherness* (Heller 2002, 3–5), *the Budapest joke* ('a pesti vicc') found a rich breeding ground in this whirling and colourful diversity. Compared with other big cities, the citizen of Budapest remains provincial for a longer time, as most of the immigrants at the turn of the century moved into the feverish commotion of the throbbing city from the countryside. The new city-dwellers strengthened the folklore character of the joke, not so much because of the folklore elements they had brought from their rural home, as by means of the oral tradition, which for them was an every-day way of living.

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1 Cities that had developed earlier fell victim to the storms of history. During the Mongol invasion and the 150-year-long wars against the Turks, not only market towns but, in the central region of the country, also a large part of villages were destroyed.

At the turn of the century, 570 cafés operated in the city of a population of 600,000. Cafés represented a way of life. This was the place and the way where and how a new stratum of society, the new urban intelligentsia, was born, and this was also the most typical birthplace and habitat of 'pesti' humour. A product of modern mass culture, the joke, found a powerful market in the show business of the big city in the years of peace preceding World War I.

## 1.2. The joke and its environs: questions concerning the genre

The joke is a genre of urban folklore. It is short, hard-hitting and highly dramatic. It is associated with city dwellers, it adjusts itself to the hectic pace and the happenings of city living. The laughing stock is usually one or another group of the society, determined in terms of their profession, origin, gender, age, or social standing.

The predecessors and the contemporaries of the jokes are the genres of folk humour: anecdotes, funny stories, humorous folk histories. They are focusing on smaller, better-determined local groups, with frequent verifying elements. They are the genres of the countryside where feudalistic structures survive. Anecdotes are popular among the upper layers of society. For the Hungarian nobility, the informal social events providing occasions for telling anecdotes still served as the most common form of entertainment until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Popular stories and other funny stories are genres mainly characteristic of peasantry. According to the definition of the Hungarian Encyclopaedia of Ethnography, the popular story is 'a short, striking, epic prose genre, maintaining a cheerful tone. Its characters are not concrete historical personalities, rather representatives of an abstract type, e.g. *the Gypsy, the bootmaker*, etc. The popular story does not claim concrete authenticity. It abounds in amusing turns, has a light style and often uses the tools of irony and mockery' (Szemerkenyi 1977, 32). The community events providing occasions for telling tales and stories are primarily times of joint working events and village festivals, which gradually lost their grounds as the traditional peasant way of living disappeared, and as a result of the forced collectivization of agriculture in Hungary in the 1950s. The sweeping transformation of the peasants' way of living did not, however, take place overnight, but step by step. It was an observable tendency that after the collectivization, adapting to the new organization of work, new story-telling occasions emerged, and this entailed significant transformations of the genre: long, epically well-elaborated traditional fairy tales were replaced by shorter and faster forms of funny stories (Vöö 1962, 1107–1109).<sup>2</sup> Though both types

2 In West European folklore, this change was completed as early as the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while among the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Hungarian popular culture, peasant story-telling lasted until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, or, in more archaic regions, even till the end of the century.

are aimed at, and have the function of, entertaining the audience, fairy tales and legends required a lengthy, detailed interpretation with deep empathy, while the popular stories are built on a punch line and their recitation is faster, to-the-point, using unexpected twists. They require a shorter time of interpretation, rely on less common knowledge, therefore, they can also function in heterogeneous groups, not only in traditional, closed village communities.

The gradual switching from popular fantasticality to the spheres of reality has created transitional genres, the connecting link of which is humour. Some of them are longer, having a more epic character, like tall tales, village-mocking stories, anecdotes based on historical subjects, while others have a more concise, more dramatized structure that is built on a punch line, like popular stories or jokes themselves.<sup>3</sup> Popular stories are most liked among peasants, and they have multiple links to more traditional folklore genres, in terms of formal elements as well as concerning their motives: they find their subjects in rural life, their motives often show influences from folk tales, and some folk tale characters also appear here: priests and Gypsies, landlords and servants, artful dodgers and profligate wives, just to mention a few (Magyar 2009, 17–19).

In this way, popular funny stories have been organically incorporated into the body of genres of Hungarian folklore as a whole. The joke, on the other hand, though it has a lot in common with the popular stories, and has by our day spread in all layers of the society, is basically the genre of the urban middle class, the intelligentsia. Unlike the former genre, this one is not associated with a geographically and culturally homogeneous community determined by its own traditions, but is generated by an ethnically, culturally, linguistically and socially heterogeneous, permanently changing environment (see *pesti vicc*). Therefore, it makes use of motives, ways of thinking and characters of different cultures (even subcultures), it spreads extremely rapidly and, as a result, the stock of jokes has a strikingly international character.

## 2. Hungarian folk and urban humour

### 2.1. Comparing jokes and funny popular stories

Below we will be comparing the material contained by two collections that were published at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, primarily from a thematic point of view. On the one hand, we relied on the work by József Köves titled *A legnagyobb vicckönyv*, featuring 10,000 jokes. The other subject of comparison will be *Szilágysági dekameron*, a collection of funny popular stories by Zoltán Magyar, which includes the author's self-collected funny popular stories.

3 Funny popular stories have long been pushed in the background behind more acknowledged folklore genres (tales and legends). The Hungarian folklore science has only paid attention to the important role they play in modern popular culture in the past few decades, therefore their collection and systematization have not yet led to any results that can be considered comprehensive and final.

SUBJECT/CHARACTER	JOKE	FUNNY POPULAR STORIES
characters	Gypsy Székely Jew	Gypsy Székely Jew
laughing stock	Scots	village mockers ('Rátót sagas')
loonies	mentally ill psychiatrist sick-nurse	the village idiot
profession	physician restaurant keeper policeman	priest soldier excise officer policeman/gendarme
innate silliness, ignorance	policeman aristocrat	village mockers ('Rátót sagas')
boozing	drunkard	popular stories on wine drinking
marital status jokes	young Maurice pupils marriage mother-in-law	childhood stories pupils indecent stories
sexuality	erotic and pornographic jokes	indecent stories
absurd, grotesque	absurd jokes	tall tales
historic events, famous people	political jokes anecdotes	historical popular stories

Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the larger subject areas that they used to organize their material basically correspond to one another.<sup>4</sup>

4 There can be different aspects of classification, though the thematic units of folklore collections often turn out to be identical. What we have found most suitable here is categorization according to situations of life and the characters and groups referred to by name. Of course, like in every such collection, there are also unclassifiable 'other cases' as well, but they remain beyond our scope now.

## 2.2. Presentation of the contemporary stock of jokes according to main subject areas

We have examined the material included in one of the largest web-based collections (vicclap.hu) and looked into the popularity<sup>5</sup> of the different joke categories. The following table shows the frequency of the different joke categories in decreasing order. Naturally, the categorization of texts according to subjects is not always clear-cut.

SUBJECT	NUMBER OF ITEMS
marriage	1,661
obscene	1,075
children	866
doctor, psychiatrist, lunatic	821
blonde	811
policeman	767
political	495
mother-in-law	420
traffic	411
workplace	372
pub	355
Gypsies (Roma)	345
computer	340**
Scots	315
Jean*	269
Székelys	268
soldier	240
Jews	230
lawyer	108

Table 2.

\* Some of the material collected here is not jokes proper and from the point of view of genre classification, they cannot be grouped among jokes unambiguously.

\*\* Jean, the butler, is the survivor of the jokes about aristocrats that mostly became obsolete by the 21st century.

5 We have not examined the popularity (evaluation) of individual jokes in the strict sense of the word, nor the number of occurrences (frequency) of individual jokes, just the number of jokes of a given subject appearing in a collection. That is why we do not make a difference between popularity and frequency in this article.

### 2.2.1. Minorities

All the 843 jokes classified in this category are associated with ethnic groups and minorities that the majority Hungarian population has been living with for centuries. They appear in the Hungarian folklore as positive figures who, in spite of their subordination and helplessness, are clever enough to turn their defenceless status to their own advantage and outwit the powerful (e.g., landlord, priest, policeman, or gendarme). Gypsies and Jews live in rural and urban environments as well, though Gypsies are more characteristic of the villages, while (since the beginning and mainly since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) Jews are typically an urban population. A part of the jokes is clearly linked to a locality. Some of the typical scenes are the Gypsy shanty, the Gypsy row, the forest, the fair, the local parish, the church, the pub, all of which can be linked to the rural way of living. Some typical characters also imply the scene: the village constable, the game warden, the village parson, the Gypsy marketer, the voivode are characteristic figures of the village, while the job centre attendant, the tramway, or the registrar evoke an urban environment. The Gypsy is traditionally the most popular figure of the Hungarian joke repertory, he appears in the most varied situations. His figure is a widely liked, fallible, congenially artful character both in folklore and in fiction. In more recent jokes and contemporary popular stories, however, the Gypsy is often no longer a positive character; rather his laziness, trickery and theft appear as characteristic stereotypes:

Joke 1:

*Gazsi hears from others that in the developed Western countries people only have to work one day a week. So he travels to Germany and asks the first person he bumps into:*

- Could you tell me, please, is it true that one only has to work one day a week here?*
- Yes, and it is in the middle of the week, on Wednesday.*
- And tell me, please, every Wednesday?*

(Köves 1999, 122)<sup>6</sup>

Joke 2:

*The Gypsy is walking across the meadow. On his way, he meets the game warden.*

- Good morning, Gypsy. Where are you going?*
- A hen? Me? Oh, c'mon.*

(Köves 1999, 124)

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<sup>6</sup> The original (Hungarian) text of the jokes is to be found in the Appendix.

The humorous stories about Jews represent a different situation: the funny folk stories mainly tell about playing tricks on Jews and ridiculing their different customs; they emphasize the differences between the two groups. The Jew jokes, on the contrary, rather ridicule the negative stereotypes the majority has in relation to the Jews: money-minded thinking, miserliness, cunning:

Joke 6:

*Old Kohn wants to buy Coke from the vending machine at the airport. He inserts a dollar coin and presses the button. Nothing comes out. He inserts another dollar, presses the button, and still no luck.*  
– *Clever, very clever, – the old man says.*

(vicclap.hu)

Joke 7:

*Kohn applies to have his name changed to Kovács. One week after the change has gone through, to the attendant's great surprise, Kovács (formerly Kohn) submits another application to have his name changed, this time to Szabó.*  
– *I understood why you had your name changed to Kovács, - the attendant says. – But why do you want to change it from Kovács to Szabó?*  
– *Well, what'll happen if I introduce myself as Kovács and they ask me what my name had been before?*

(vicclap.hu)

Another group of the jokes has been taken over from the Jewish culture and they reflect the characteristic Jewish way of thinking, the attitude to life, and their humour arises from the self-irony that is inseparable from this culture (Papp 2009)

Joke 8:

*On his deathbed, Samu asks Ráhel:*  
– *Ráhel, were you here with me when the Nazis took away our first shop?*  
– *Yes, I was, Samu.*  
– *Were you with me when we were taken to the concentration camp?*  
– *Yes, I was with you.*  
– *Were you with me when the Nazis took away our second shop, too?*  
– *Yes, I was with you then too.*  
– *And are you here with me at my deathbed?*  
– *I am here now, too.*  
– *Ráhel, Ráhel, you do not bring good luck.*

(vicclap.hu)

The characters featuring in these jokes are mainly all Jews; typical figures are the wise rabbi and the yeshiva student. Some theories hold that the Pest joke was born from the marriage of the down-to-earth way of thinking of the Hungarian peasant and the Jewish way of thinking (Eröss 1982, 233), others regard the latter as a central element of the whole East-Central European region.

The shrewd Székelys<sup>7</sup> traditionally appear both in jokes and in humorous folk genres with a frequency similar to Gypsies. In the whole Hungarian language area, they are known for their wily way of thinking, being quick of mind but slow with words and their simplicity that hides wisdom. In the popular stories telling about them, erotic contents also often appear. In the new and unaccustomed urban environment, however, i.e. in the more recent layers of humour, the Székelys may become fallible, awkward figures, who are ridiculous in themselves:

Joke 3:

– *Hey, brother, will you take me to Szentgyörgy?*

– *I will.*

*They sit silently in the coach for hours.*

– *Is Szentgyörgy still far away?*

– *Well, it's getting further away by the minute.*

(Köves 1999, 147)

Joke 4:

*The Székely child takes the dinner out to the field for his father. On getting there, he asks:*

– *Father, is Gergő Kovács a relative of ours?*

– *No, son, he is not.*

– *Father, is it certain that Uncle Gergő is not a relative of ours?*

– *I tell you, it is certain. Why are you asking?*

– *Just because he is in bed with my mother at home.*

– *Well, then he must be a relative of ours, son.*

(Köves 1999, 151)

Joke 5:

*Public opinion pollsters are working in the villages of Csík. They ask Uncle Mózes:*

– *So, Uncle Mózes, now that the price of bread has been raised again, how do you feel?*

– *I feel good.*

– *Could you be a bit more explicit?*

– *I feel bad.*

(Köves 1999, 154)

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7 Székelys are an ethnic group speaking Hungarian and living in Székelyföld, a part of Transylvania. Since 1920, the territory has belonged to Romania, but it has more or less retained its language and identity.

### 2.2.2. More remote groups: village mockers, jokes about Scots and aristocrats

Mockers are a popular genre of Hungarian folklore; the anthologies of folk poetry contain a very high number of mockers. We can distinguish woman mockers, profession mockers, lad mockers, maiden mockers, religion mockers, village mockers, nationality mockers, etc. (Szemerényi–Lajos 1977). Mockers are characterized by exaggeration, irony and improvisation. Village mockers, which are popular in every region, typically ridicule the ignorance and clumsiness of the inhabitants of poorer, nearby villages. In *Szilágysági Dekameron*, residents of Szilágysámson despise the neighbouring village, Szér, and its residents:

Joke 11:

*Says the man from Szér: Open the gates, the yard needs airing.*

(Magyar 2009, 59)

Joke 12:

*In the old times, we used to say that we would know when the world would pass away, as in Szér it would pass away one day earlier. It was because the people in Sámson used to despise those in Szér. It was a very remote village ...*

(Magyar 2009, 63)

Among the jokes, quite surprisingly, we find the Scots as the primary target group of mocking. To determine the origin of the legend would be difficult. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the English style was considered trendy, and this was the time when the English-type dry humour became popular. It is possible that Scots jokes also originate from this period. The target of Scots jokes is the legendary stinginess of the Scots. Considering the lack of any real-life historical relations and experience, presumably their function may have been simply to ridicule this human quality:

Joke 9:

*Two old Scotsmen are sitting about on a bench in the cemetery.*

*– How old are you?*

*– I am 78. And you?*

*– I am 88.*

*– Then for you it's not worth going home.*

(Köves 1999, 315)

Joke 10:

*The Scotsman was asked why he had bought his girlfriend a lipstick for her birthday. Because, says the Scotsman, this is the only present that I will gradually get back from her in small portions.*

(vicclap.hu)

This group also includes stories on human dumbness and ignorance in general. People associate these qualities with aristocrats and policemen. These two groups had emerged in different historical epochs. The jokes on aristocrats were born as mockery by the Hungarian middle class taking shape toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century directed toward a social class so high above them in terms of social status. Their constant characters evoke the image of those figures who are unviable, ignorant, perform weakly sexually, and have that characteristically aristocratic speech defect:

Joke 13:

- *Did you hear the news? A chimney-sweeper was run over by a car.*
- *Terrible. One can no longer be safe on the roof.*

(vicclap.hu)

Joke 14:

*Countess Anasztázia asks her husband, Tasziló, on the morning after their wedding night:*

- *Tell me, dear Tasziló, does what we have been doing cause such pleasure to everyone?*
- *Yes, of course.*
- *Even to the peasants?*
- *Yes, to them also.*
- *Do you not think it is too good for them?*

(Köves 1999, 80)

Over the past decades, the popularity of jokes on aristocrats has decreased dramatically. These are exclusively formula jokes, that is, they do not have an epic core, and the punch line is often based on a pun. Especially popular is the short, question-and-answer structure, in which the question and the answer, similarly to the absurd jokes, are completely incongruent with the situation.

### 2.2.3. Profession jokes

Historical changes swept away ignorance as a group characteristic from the aristocracy that lost its role in the society, while the new possessors of power inherited it with their newly acquired power. It also happens that the same joke exists in two versions, one with an aristocrat, the other with a policeman as the main character (joke 13). The jokes on policemen emerged after the Second World War, during the dictatorship of the proletariat. The policeman at that time was a representative of the political power, thus having power of life and death, so mocking them was a way for the defenceless men of the street to get rid of the fear they felt of him. For this reason, policeman jokes can be classified as belonging to the group of political jokes as well. Stupidity and ignorance ridiculed in these jokes, in most cases, were based on reality: policemen were selected not on the basis of ability and qualification, but of political reliability:

Joke 15:

*The detective is interrogating a suspect:*

*– How did your marriage come to an end?*

*– I became a widower.*

*– And who died?*

(Köves 1999, 283)

Policemen jokes have been one of the most liked types of jokes over the past decades, the question-and-answer structure of formula jokes is rather common here, too. The zeugmatic structure is also quite often applied. From a pragmatic point of view, the basis of the humorous effect is the out-of-context, incongruent interpretation or behaviour:

Joke 16:

*– Why does a policeman buy a hatchet when his wife gives birth to a baby?*

*– He wants to carve a man from the child.*

(Köves 1999, 280)

The policeman, or earlier the gendarme, who, abusing his power often pilfered this or that from the peasants' attic or cellar, also features in funny folk stories. The priest and the soldier, the two members of the peasant community who are not peasants themselves, are classical characters of the folk stories. Most of the funny stories about priests are priest mockers at the same time, so they can be classified as mockers as well. They mainly ridicule greed, miserliness and hypocrisy:

Joke 17:

*A priest was preaching: Brethren, don't do what I do, do what I say.*

(Magyar 2009, 93)

Both in popular folk humour and in jokes, the Gypsy and the priest often feature as a pair. In these pieces, it is not the ethnic content, but the priest-mocking motive that is dominant. In the jokes, the priest has later been replaced by the doctor, a character more typical of modern city living. Jokes on physicians were popular in Budapest as early as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Eröss 1982, 68), typical stereotypes characterizing them were money-grubbing and incompetence:

Joke 19:

*– Well, says the doctor to the patient, you will have to lie in the hospital and undergo surgery.*

*– Oh, no, I would rather die.*

*– Look, sir, one does not exclude the other.*

(Köves 1999, 236)

The doctor-patient and the psychiatrist/psychologist-patient jokes tend to merge together. Sometimes it is really difficult to determine the difference between them. The funny popular stories about village idiots can also be grouped among mockers, while jokes on loonies are set in the upside down world of the mental clinic or the madhouse. Most of them have a punch line based on the conclusion that those inside and those outside are not different after all:

Joke 18:

- *Doctor, I have dual personality. I am not me, as there are two of us.*
- *Hmm, (the doctor looks sternly at the patient), now will you repeat all of this, but only one of you should speak at a time.*

(K oves 1999, 118)

#### 2.2.4. Marital status jokes and children jokes

The marital status jokes and children jokes are, beyond doubt, the commonest type of all: the marriage jokes, erotic jokes, blonde jokes, pupil jokes and mother-in-law jokes account for over half (4,838) of the jokes classified in 19 categories in total.

Marital fidelity, e.g., is a frequent and popular theme in such jokes. The jokes show that in the vast majority of cases, infidelity is found out by the spouse and that it is often mutual. We also learn from the corpus that sex is the number one reason for cheating but it accounts only for less than half of the cases; it is followed by business. Accordingly, the forms of appearance of infidelity are far from being exclusively sexual. Trying to find out who is most laughed at, we see that husbands come first, and then wives.

The next question was to see if jokes draw a different picture of men and women. Different jokes or even different variants of the same joke often say the same thing about husband and wife. Here are some of the common points that jokes attribute to men and women.

- The two sexes cheat repeatedly in almost the same proportion.
- Husbands and wives find out their spouse's infidelity in an identical proportion.
- Cheating spouses and lovers of both sexes try to conceal infidelity in the vast majority of cases.

However, the survey has also shown many differences between the two sexes.

- The major difference is that the pair cheating wife–cheated husband appears in twice as many jokes than the cheating husband–cheated wife combination. This would mean that almost twice as many wives than husbands cheat!<sup>8</sup>
- Husbands change their lovers faster than wives.<sup>9</sup>
- Extreme violence (murder/suicide) is much more common with men: as forms of appearance of cheating and as a reaction when cheating has been found out.
- The difference between the two sexes is present in the ways infidelity is found out: catching in the act is a more male, recognizing a telltale sign a more female way to learn the truth.
- Men are more inclined to confess to cheating or to give themselves away: cheating husbands tell their spouses about it three times more than cheating wives (Barta 2012, 199–200).

The group euphemistically referred to as erotic jokes, and its folklore counterpart, the indecent stories, mainly include blue and obscene texts. Popular humour has always confronted the middle-class standards that had become prudish and euphemistic in the course of the development of civilization, and retained its bare and brutally outspoken nature. The popularity of this category can look back on a long history both in its urban and its folklore version, and, as shown by Table 2, it is one of the most popular sources of humour currently as well. It is difficult to draw the dividing line separating erotic jokes from marriage or children jokes, as both categories contain an abundance of erotic jokes, too.

The 'dumb blonde' is a new player in the international joke world. Our first verified encounter with a Hungarian joke about blonde women dates from July 1999, it appeared on the Internet website *vicclap.hu*. It is likely that these jokes became massively popular at around the turn of the millennium. A look at joke categories shows us that blonde jokes are among the most popular in Hungary: they are in fifth place for frequency, beating the traditionally top-seated police, political and mother-in-law jokes. The most important stereotypes appearing in the blonde jokes are stupidity and violation of sexual morals. The stupidity in these jokes does not involve making an occasional accidental mistake but is a congenital inability to think logically, labelling all blonde women as obtuse at all times.

8 Theoretically, it is not impossible, if the numerous unfaithful wives have affairs with the few unfaithful husbands and single men.

9 Theoretically, it is not impossible, if husbands have affairs with single women.

Women have been the butts of sex jokes and jokes about their role in the family (wife or mother-in-law) since time immemorial. The ‘dumb blonde’ is different in that she is generally young and single, and often a secretary.

What then is the latent social problem behind this appearance and rapid spread of jokes about women in a new role? Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the system of social expectations regarding female and male roles lost its certainty as the actual roles changed in European society, and the accelerated rhythm of recent decades triggered particularly acute changes. A fundamental change occurred in the life of the female: thanks to access to education and mass entry into the workforce, women have entered the public space that for centuries had been reserved for the male of the species. Women have appeared in a new role, one that might even be conceived as a role threatening the integrity of the male community. The response is a symbolic assault in which the men cast doubts on the intellectual and moral suitability of (blonde) women, in an effort to destroy their self-esteem and identities (G ero 2008; G ero 2010a; G ero 2010b; G ero 2012).

Jokes on mothers-in-law constitute a significant group. According to the history of Hungarian jokes, they have a long history. Several researchers observe that though a marriage involves two mothers-in-law, the jokes mostly mock the husband’s. This applies to the Hungarian stock of jokes as well as to the German, the Russian or the Spanish ones: their mother-in-law speaks too much, orders them about, is offensive, dumb, ugly, old and a horrible cook. All this leads to extreme aggression from the son-in-law, he seeks her life, either in thought or in deed.

Among children jokes, many jokes are about the child’s unexpectedly apposite remark (the so-called ‘out of the mouth of babes’ jokes) and many are, in line with the age group, ‘pee and poo’ jokes. But the commonest children jokes are the M oricka jokes. These latter ones belong, at the same time, to the group of Jewish jokes and most of them have an erotic content. They are often organized in a question-and-answer structure, in which the dialogue is set between the (female) teacher and M oricka or M oricka and one of his parents. The humorous effect is elicited by the contrast between the innocence we would expect due to his age and the boy’s behaviour that belies this expectation:

Joke 20:

– *Children, who can give me an example of harmony in married life?  
the teacher asks.*

*M oricka puts up a hand:*

– *My grandparents live in harmony. Grandpa snores and grandma is deaf.*

(vicclap.hu)

### 2.2.5. Historical anecdotes, political jokes

In Hungary, the top position of the popularity list has always been shared by erotic jokes and political jokes:

Joke 21:

*Two old ladies are feeding the pigeons.*

– *You know, these pigeons are just like politicians.*

– *Why?*

– *While they're down on the ground, they eat from our hands, but once they begin to soar they shit on our heads.*

(debrecenlive.hu)

The predecessors of the latter were historical popular stories and anecdotes related to a historic event or a famous personality, which have a long history both in peasant folklore and in the higher literary tradition. Already our first known funny anecdotes are linked to an outstanding Hungarian historical personality, King Matthias. Nowadays, this type is slightly being pushed into the background, at least as far as visitors of Internet websites are concerned. But, till our day, this is the only area of the Hungarian humour research, still in its infancy, in which serious, reliable and professional collection has been carried out beginning from 1945 (Katona 1994). In modern history, there are some personalities (Rákosi, Kádár) who had cycles of jokes organized around themselves.

## 3. Conclusion

In Hungary, genres of urban folklore only emerged in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was the time when a new social layer, the urban intelligentsia, and, simultaneously with it, 'pesti vicc' (the Budapest joke) was born. Joke is a genre of urban folklore, which develops in an ethnically, culturally, linguistically and socially varied and continuously varying environment, as a result of which the stock of jokes shows rather an international character. The predecessors and the contemporaries of the joke as a genre are genres of folkloristic humour: anecdotes, popular funny stories and folk histories, which are all linked to a locally and culturally homogeneous community cultivating the same traditions, and are organically integrated among the other genres of Hungarian folklore. Table 1 proves that popular funny stories and Hungarian jokes largely correspond to each other from a thematic point of view, as the typical themes and typical characters show conspicuous similarities.

Findings of the frequency examination show that the most frequent jokes can be grouped as belonging to marital status and children jokes: they account for more than half of all jokes classified in 19 categories. Minority jokes are linked to ethnic groups or minorities with which the Hungarian majority have

been living together for centuries, their chief characters are e.g. Gypsies, Jews or Székelys. Considering Gypsy jokes, there is strong correlation between folklore anecdotes and urban jokes. Jokes on Jews are of two types: one reflects the negative stereotypes that originate from the perception of the majority, while the other is borrowings from the Jewish culture.

Among profession jokes, it is policeman jokes that have been topping the list for years. As policemen are linked to power, these jokes can be regarded as political jokes at the same time. According to classification by the source of humour, they belong to mockers, the new representatives of power-inherited dumbness as a group characteristic from the jokes on aristocrats so popular in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The recent social changes are also reflected in the emergence of jokes on blondes, indicating that another social group is beginning to take over this role nowadays.

Besides erotic ones, political jokes have always been the most popular in Hungary. Their predecessors, the anecdotes linked to historic events or famous personalities, boast a long-standing tradition both in peasant culture and in higher literary tradition. The Hungarian joke also carries on this tradition until the change of regime of 1989; there are historical personalities who have been surrounded by cycles of jokes. Frequency examination shows, however, that this type seems to be pushed into the background nowadays.

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## Appendix

[1]

Gazsi azt hallja mindenkitől, hogy a fejlett nyugati országokban már csak heti egy napot kell dolgozni. Kiutazik hát Németországba, s ott az első kérdése:

- Hát, tessék már mondani, igaz, hogy itt csak heti egy napot kell dolgozni?
- Igen, mégpedig a hét közepén, szerdán.
- És tessék mondani: minden szerdán?

(Köves 1999, 122)

[2]

A cigány megy át a réten. Útközben találkozik a vadőrrel.

– Jó napot, cigány. Hová, háová?

Mire a cigány:

– Én tyúkot? Ugyan má'!

(Köves 1999, 124)

[3]

– Mondja, bátyám, elvinne Szentgyörgyre?

– El én...

Szótlanul ülnek a bakon már órák óta.

– Messzi van még Szentgyörgy?

– Hát, már elég messze...

(Köves 1999, 147)

[4]

Ebédet visz apja után a mezőre a székely gyerek. Odaérve megkérdi:

– Édesapám, rokonunk nekünk a Kovács Gergő?

– Nem, fiam, nem rokonunk.

– Édesapám, biztos, hogy nem rokonunk a Gergő bácsi?

– Biztos, ha mondom. De miért kérded?

– Csak mert otthon fekszik az ágyban édesanyámmal.

– Hát akkor mégiscsak rokonunk, fiam.

(Köves 1999, 151)

[5]

Közvéleménykutatók járnak a csíki falvakat. Megkérdezik Mózes bácsitól:

– És Mózes bácsi, most, hogy megint emelték a kenyér árát, hát milyen a közérzete?

– Jó.

– Egy kicsit bővebben!

– Nem jó.

(Köves 1999, 154)

[6]

Az öreg Kohn a reptéren kólát akar venni az automatából, bedob egy dollárt és megnyomja a gombot. Semmi nem jön ki. Bedob még egy dollárt, megnyomja a gombot, megint semmi.

– Ügyes, nagyon ügyes! – jegyzi meg az öreg.

(vicclap.hu)

[7]

Kohn kérelmet nyújt be, szeretné a nevét Kovácsra változtatni. Miután megtörtént a névcsera, a hivatalnok legnagyobb meglepetésére (az immár) Kovács egy hét múlva újabb kérelmet ad be, ezúttal Szabóra szólóan.

– Amikor Kohnról változtatta Kovácsra, azt még megértettem – mondja a hivatalnok. – De miért akarja Kovácsról Szabóra változtatni?

– Azért, mert mi van akkor, ha bemutatkozom mint Kovács, és megkérdik, hogy mi voltam azelőtt?

(vicclap.hu)

[8]

A halálos ágyán kérdezi Samu Ráhel:

- Ráhel, itt voltál velem, mikor a nációk elvették tőlünk az első boltunkat?
- Itt voltam, Samu.
- Velem voltál, mikor elvittek minket a koncentrációs táborba?
- Veled voltam.
- Velem voltál akkor is, mikor a nációk elvették tőlünk a második boltunkat is?
- Akkor is veled voltam.
- És most is itt vagy velem a halálos ágyamnál?
- Most is itt vagyok.
- Ráhel, Ráhel, nem hozol szerencsét!

(vicclap.hu)

[9]

Két öreg skót üldögél a temetőben egy padon:

- Maga hány éves?
- Én 78. És maga?
- Én meg 88.
- Akkor magának már nem is éri meg hazamenni.

(Köves 1999, 315)

[10]

A skótot megkérdezték, hogy miért vett a barátnőjének születésnapjára ajándékkul egy ajakrúzsot.

- Azért – feleli a skót –, mert ez az egyetlen ajándék, amit kis részletekben, lassanként visszakapok tőle.

(vicclap.hu)

[11]

Mondta a széri: nyissátok ki a kaput, mert meg kell szellőztetni az udvart!

(Magyar 2009, 59)

[12]

Régen azt mondtuk, hogy megtudjuk, hogy mikor múlik el a világ, mert Szérbe hamarabb elmúlik egy nappal. Mer a sámsoniak kicsit lenézték a szérieket. Eldugottabb falu vót...

(Magyar 2009, 63)

[13]

- Hallottad, kéhlek? Egy autó elütött egy kéményseprőt.
- Hettenetes! Máh a háztetőn sincs biztonságban az embeh!

(vicclap.hu)

[14]

Anasztázia grófnő a nászéjszaka hajnalán azt kérdezi ifjú férjétől, Taszilótól:

- Mondja, kedves Tasziló, az, amit mi most csináltunk, mindenkinek ilyen öhomöt szehez?
- Természetesen.
- Még a pahasztoknak is?
- Igen, nekik is.
- Nem gondolja, hogy ez túl jó nekik?

(Köves 1999, 80)

[15]

A nyomozó faggatja a gyanúsítottat:

- És hogy ért véget a házassága?
- Megözvegyültem.
- És ki halt meg?

(Köves 1999, 283)

[16]

- Miért vesz a rendőr kisbaltát, ha gyereke születik?
- Embert akar faragni a gyerekből.

(Köves 1999, 280)

[17]

Az egyszeri pap úgy prédikált, hogy: „Kedves híveim, ne azt csináljátok, amit én csinálok, hanem amit én mondok!”

(Magyar 2009, 93)

[18]

- Doktor úr, nekem kettős személyiségem van. Én nem is én vagyok, hanem mi ketten vagyunk.
- Hm... – néz a betegre az orvos szigorúan. – Most ismétlje meg az egészet, de egyszerre csak az egyikük beszéljen!

(Köves 1999, 118)

[19]

- Nos, uram – mondja az orvos vizsgálat után –, önnek feltétlenül be kell feküdnie műtétre.
- Azt nem, doktor úr, inkább meghalok!
- Nézze, az egyik nem zárja ki a másikat.

(Köves 1999, 236)

[20]

– Gyerekek, ki tudna mondani egy példát a harmonikus házasetre? – kérdezi a tanárnő.

Móricka jelentkezik:

– Az én nagyszüleim harmonikusan élnek. A nagypapa horkol, a nagymama meg süket.

(vicclap.hu)

[21]

Két öregasszony eteti a galambokat. Az egyik megszólal:

– Te, ezek a galambok olyanok, mint a politikusok.

– Miért?

– Hát, amíg lent vannak a földön, addig a kezünkből esznek, de ahogy felkerülnek, csak szarnak a fejünkre!

(debrecenlive.hu)



Caricature by Géza Halász