"THESIS STATEMENTS" FOR THE DISSERTATION[*]

Hungarian Roma and African American Autobiographies

in Comparative Perspective:

Lakatos, Peline Nyari, Wright, and Hurston

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General Introduction

My dissertation is a comparative study of the following Hungarian Roma and African American autobiographies: Menyhért Lakatos's *Smoky Pictures*, Hilda Péliné Nyári's *My Little Life*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road*. I use the rich critical literature on African American autobiographies to better understand Gypsy autobiographies, about which there is a paucity of literary scholarship. I make use of the latest developments in theoretical writings about the genre of autobiography, particularly autoethnography. So, my study is a groundbreaking work on Hungarian Roma autobiographies, and my comparative method brings an original contribution to the fields of comparative literature and cross-cultural ethnic studies.

My dissertation focuses, on the one hand, on how the Hungarian Roma and African American authors grapple with ways to understand their own cultures and present their experiences and insights, and, on the other hand, on the equally complex presentations of contacts with the majority cultures. The authors search for ways to reveal the dynamics of their cultures and their special positions within them, using the language, cultural productions, and ideologies of the majority culture, finding ways to express things that are often unthinkable in the majority culture's understanding of the world. A study of the narrators' relationships with their mothers and families opens up ways of understanding the complexities of their own cultures and their complicated relationships to these cultures. While

[*] This section is not part of the original dissertation work submitted at Rutgers University, but was created as part of the process of having the PhD accepted in Hungary (in 2016).

descriptions of the relationships with the mothers are readily accessible to most readers, these descriptions point beyond themselves to the complicated and emotionally charged relationships to the cultures.

The presentation of intercultural encounters is equally unique and difficult in each case, as the subject of the minority culture describes experiences of oppression and disadvantaged status. Experiences of poverty, isolation, disrespect, and lack of access to education can be difficult to transmit because these experiences penetrate the deepest levels of one's being. I study the presentations of violence because violent experiences are palpable and emotional ways of encountering oppression at the hands of the majority culture. The understanding thus gained can explain the varying attitudes towards resistance among the four authors.

The Selection Process

The Choice of African American Narratives

Among twentieth-century African American autobiographies, Richard Wright's and Zora Neale Hurston's are of primary significance. Read together, Hurston's and Wright's autobiographies raise even more important critical and theoretical issues. The ideological difference between Hurston and Wright has been simply stated as one between the "protest fiction that Wright represented" (Howe 119) and "a positive analysis of black culture" (Alice A. Deck 237) found in Hurston's works. But their differing approaches to politics, society, and culture also influenced their views on the self and self-development.

More recently, however, critics have started to pay attention to the similarities between Hurston and Wright. In spite of Hurston's suppression of racial hatred, for example, a strong social protest can also be found in her autobiography. At the same time, critics point out that issues of self-creation, emotional integrity, and need for a benign environment are also present in *Black Boy*. Re-reading their autobiographies, I will look for their very different but still comparable ways of dealing with issues of self-development, self-making, cultural belonging, social protest, patterns of resistance, and violence. While the political and protest issues are more foregrounded in Wright's *Black Boy* than in Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road*, a careful reading can trace the more subtle, and perhaps more subversive, patterns of resistance in Hurston's writing, too. Similarly, while Hurston is known for celebrating her self and her culture, issues of personal integrity and the "affirmation of Black values" are

important in Wright's narrative, too. Using the critical literature available for Wright and Hurston, as well as my own findings, I will study similar issues in Lakatos and Péliné.

The Choice of Roma Narratives

In the Hungarian Roma tradition, there are no earlier written autobiographical novels of this kind; therefore, the two I chose are important because of their novelty in this tradition.

There are many Roma Autobiographies written in Europe and America—for example: Manfri Frederick Wood from Britain, Ceija Stojka from Austria, Otto Rosenberg from Germany, Ilona Lacková from Slovakia, Konrad Bercovici from Romania, and Ronald Lee from Canada. However, these and other Roma writers in other countries have had very different experiences from those of the Roma in Hungary, as I detail in the historical overview. There is a very rich tradition of Roma literature in Hungary, but most of it is in the form of poetry and tales, and this is reflected in the studies that have appeared.

Among European critics, I find Grobbel's study of German Romani people, "Contemporary Romany Autobiography as Performance," very useful. His theoretical considerations are important, even though the German autobiographies he studies are very different from the narratives I study. Kati Trumpener has written about Roma narratives of Western Europe, particularly Britain. Her study centers mostly on historical observations in a culture that differs greatly from the Hungarian setting. Martin Shaw's 2006 Ph.D. dissertation, "Narrating Gypsies, Telling Travellers: A Study of the Relational Self in Four Life Stories," also concentrates on the traveling lifestyle of European Gypsies—a style of life non-existent in twentieth-century Hungary. Barbara Rose Lange's "Gender Politics and Musical Performers in the Isten Gyülekezet. A Fieldwork Account" contains very important observations about folklore, but not about narrative genres. Francis Hindes Groome has also published on Gypsy folk tales.

The Decision to Compare These Four Texts

A study of Wright and Hurston can be used in understanding Lakatos and Péliné because their relative positions in the culture they describe offer significant grounds for comparison. Lakatos and Péliné have written the first two major Romani autobiographies in Hungary. While Wright and Hurston had behind them the tradition of slave narratives, as well as other earlier African American autobiographies, they are both considered innovative and

ground-breaking reference points of twentieth-century African American autobiographies. The plots of all four books take place at around the same time, in the economically and politically burdened years preceding World War II, but this is of secondary importance to the books' significance in their cultural positions. Hurston and Wright published their works in 1942 and 1945, respectively, while the Roma narratives appeared later, Lakatos's in 1975 and Péliné's in 1996. Nevertheless, I believe that Wright and Hurston, along with their reception, can be better used to understand these Roma writers than newer African American writings. Living in Communist Hungary, Lakatos and Péliné as authors did not have access to the global publishing industry, that featured stories of ethnic minorities or the cultural movements that took place in America and other parts of the world. African American life writings of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s build heavily on the traditions of precisely Wright and Hurston, so even if the publication dates were closer to the Roma books under study, their literary backgrounds would be very different. Of course, Wright and Hurston themselves had more of a written literary tradition to build upon than the Roma writers, but still, their groundbreaking status in the African American autobiographical tradition makes them more fit for a study of this type.

Lakatos and Péliné must be understood in their specific Eastern European and Hungarian context. The cultural, social, and literary backgrounds of the Roma must not be equated with the African American experience as it appears in Wright and Hurston. This is why my comparison between the Hungarian Roma and the African American autobiographies is not based on the similarities between cultural or social conditions, but rather on the various authorial responses they make to them. The issues I study are exactly those that can be compared in spite of the vast differences. Ghetto life, segregation, discrimination, difficult access to education, and the search for one's identity are in fact shared experiences between African Americans and Hungarian Roma. In some sense, Lakatos and Péliné write from a background that more closely resembles the circumstances of Wright and Hurston than those of other Roma writers in Europe and America. In Hungary, the Gypsy traditions of travel and other folk customs were almost totally stifled by the time the books' plots take place, so in that sense, the settings and backgrounds are characterized by uprootedness and direct repression, aspects that are also seen in Wright and Hurston. This is where, I believe, the extensive literature on Wright and Hurston can help in better understanding Lakatos and Péliné.

I have chosen the books to include one man and one woman writer from each tradition. Wright and Hurston both lived in the South, characterized by Jim Crow laws of segregation. But while Wright emphasizes the violence and ethnic strife as he experienced it

in Southern cities, Hurston's world is centered in the peaceful all-black town of Eatonville, Florida. Among the Gypsy autobiographies, Lakatos, the male writer, describes violence and ethnic strife that can be compared to the world described by Wright, even though Lakatos lived in the countryside of Eastern Hungary. Péliné's world is the opposite of Hurston's small town, as her story takes place in multi-ethnic Budapest, capital of Hungary. Nevertheless, she is similar to Hurston in that her emphasis is on racial peace and positive self-image rather than on the painful social realities described by the male authors. While my study is not centered around issues of gender, it must be noted that the affirmative re-construction of a culture is more emphatic in the female narratives, while the male authors are more centered on protest and political issues.

Historical, Economic, and Cultural Backgrounds

I trace the historical, cultural, and economic backgrounds out of which the Hungarian Roma and African American autobiographers of my study emerged. Besides positioning the books in their historical realities and pointing out the material and social effects that went into shaping the ways in which the four authors chose to narrate their lives, I emphasize the importance of seeing clearly both the similarities and the differences that exist.

Theoretical Background, with Special Emphasis on the Genres of Autobiography and Autoethnography

The African American Tradition of Autobiography

I have chosen four autobiographies for my comparative study of African American and Roma Hungarian writings because of the generally acclaimed importance of autobiography for African American literature. (Morrison "The Site of Memory," 103, Andrews 197). I review some of critics who characterized Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston as writing in the tradition of slave narratives and initiating twentieth-century African American autobiographical traditions. Next, I look at some more recent developments in the study of autobiographies, and show how they led me to formulate my findings with the help of studies of autoethnography and recent multinational feminist theories.

In the early 1980s, most critics of African American autobiographies concentrated on issues of self-definition, adding that "wresting" one's individuality is not enough, rather, self-

creation is necessary, in A. Robert Lee's formulation, "in the face of that self's historic denial" (Lee 154). Lee located in Frederick Douglass's slave narrative a background for African American autobiographies, focusing primarily on "concerns about self" (Lee 151), self-definition, and self-representation, acts that had normally been denied to slaves.

Most critics at this time operated with notions of unified (Western) selves and individuality, and credited African American autobiographers for attaining these in spite of their disadvantaged positions. More recent scholarship, however, has suggested the importance of looking at the limitations of traditional genres, and thus not expecting oppressed minority subjects to make heroic efforts to formulate these mainstream definitions of the self. Recently, the critical emphasis is rather on opening up possibilities for dialogues among people of very different backgrounds, including different concepts of self, community, and culture.

About the Genres in Light of More Recent Scholarship

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001) carefully distinguish among the genres of life writing, life narrative, and autobiography. From the point of view of my study, these distinctions are important because all four narratives necessarily break the generic limits of the traditional autobiography, as they grapple to express experiences that are often incomparable to what is portrayed in conventional autobiographies. For this reason, I find it important to briefly mention the works of Jacques Derrida and other postmodern thinkers who question the limits of genres, in particular the genre of autobiography.

The unlikely connections I make among Hungarian Roma and African American autobiographies are made possible by new approaches to autobiography studies.

While none of the works in my study are about direct political confrontations, an understanding of their special political background is essential. The African American texts were written in the "First World" (before that term was used), but by members of an oppressed class. Both Wright and Hurston were aware of and practiced various forms of resistance to the "Jim Crow laws" of the South in which they lived. Part of my study is to locate these forms of resistance, sometimes "between the lines" of these narratives. Wright's openly political agenda contrasts with Hurston's culture-centered approach, but they both describe modes of resistance in what may seem "established genres" of autobiography. Péliné and Lakatos wrote in what has been called the "Second World," in a closed, Communist society. Without being overly political, part of their resistance is to establish images of a

unified "Gypsy nation" in a culture that historically managed to disperse and divide Roma people.

I make use of studies of the genre *testimonio*, a genre that "highlights the possibilities for solidarity and affiliations among critics, interviewers, translators, and the subject who 'speaks'" (Kaplan 122). Calling her life "little" in the title of her autobiography, Péliné suggests that her life is nothing special; yet, her narration of it is still valuable information as an example of a Roma woman's life. Lakatos also generalizes his experiences to all Roma, by suppressing his "Oláh Gypsy" identity, thus suggesting that his life can stand for many Roma lives. Most slave narratives were written to give first-hand witness about what slavery was like; hence, the life of the protagonist was often seen as an example of a "real, typical" slave, notwithstanding the fact that "typical slaves" did not manage to escape. The solidarity and affiliation between the slave narratives' "subjects" and the abolitionists were very important. Building on this tradition, Wright called his book *Black Boy (American Hunger)*, thus generalizing his hero as a Southern boy, not necessarily the genius he actually was. Hurston, while confirming her personal peculiarity, creates an autoethnography out of her autobiography, thus making herself one of the people about whom she writes to members of her university and other interested "critics and interviewers" (she wrote her autobiography upon request from her publisher).

In some ways, all four works in my study can be considered Bildungsromans, but they all break the boundaries of this traditional genre by, among others, formal innovations. Wright's unusual narrative strategy is to incorporate poetic insertions into his narrative, thus breaking up both the chronological and thematic flow of his narrative. Hurston's narrative is also unusual, as she begins in the traditional way of narrating her early life, but then she jumps around in picaresque format in the middle section, only to finish her book with a series of essays. In this way, she asserts her freedom from traditional forms of autobiography. Both Lakatos and Péliné write without any divisions in their books. In Lakatos's narrative, this serves to underline the arbitrariness of his memory, emphasized by the title, "Smoky Pictures," which calls attention to subjectivity, discontinuity, and uncertainty. Péliné, in her narrative attempts to imitate orality, thus connecting her to Gypsy traditions of storytelling while being aware of her groundbreaking undertaking in being the first Roma woman in Hungary to write an autobiography.

Another generic consideration is the trauma narrative, "a mode of writing the unspeakable. … [S]peaking the unspeakable involves the narrator in a struggle with memory and its belatedness. … Gilmore stresses in the experience of trauma its self-altering or self-

shattering character" (Smith and Watson 206-7). Wright clearly indicates how the trauma of growing up hungry amidst the violence of Southern society has affected his personality. Lakatos comes up with innovative ways of "speaking the unspeakable" by "packaging" the most terrible experiences into a long insertion in the middle of the book. The women writers, on the contrary, do not write directly of traumas; rather, they choose to assert their "racial health" (Hurston) as a demonstration of strength and wholeness in spite of "unspeakable" experiences.

Ramadanovic makes a very interesting generic observation about Wright when he compares "Lacan's understanding of comedy [and] the indestructibility of the comic hero," "Paul de Man's seminal examination of autobiographical writing, *Autobiography as De-facement*" (Ramadanovic 502) and Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. His study is another example of how generic boundaries are opened up by Wright.

While looking at the genres just discussed amply demonstrates that all four works in my study break generic boundaries in order to voice their unique minority experiences, I find the recent generic discourses about autoethnography the most useful terms with which to study ways of expressing complex relationships and initiate dialogues in the following two distinct areas: within the minority cultures of the subjects and between the majority and the minority cultures.

An Overview of the Two Major Sections of the Dissertation

I find autoethnographic scholarship very useful in understanding the narratives in my study. The openly avowed emotional involvement, together with the "double consciousness" of the narrator (and thus the erasure of traditional generic limitations), make it possible to create dialogues both within the minority culture and between the minority and majority cultures. The minority culture is not presented as an idealized, unified, or well-delimited entity; rather, the focus is on its own complexity, contradictions, and undefinability. This cultural explication is done in the narrator's own terms (not bound by traditional generic expectations), but is presented in a way that is accessible to readers of both the narrator's own and other cultural groups.

For these reasons, I have chosen two major areas along which to study these four narratives. First, the study of the relationship with the narrator's own family, particularly the mother, sheds light on the complexities of the culture being presented, enabling discussions of

oneness and belonging as well as changes over time and painful ruptures. The emotionally charged relationships with the mothers point beyond themselves, serving as examples of interpersonal ties within these minority groups. Moreover, the portrayal of both the closeness of belonging to a family and the distance of having grown out of it point to the special position of these narrators as being both insiders in the culture they describe and outsiders by virtue of education and lifestyle. Second, the study of ways of resistance helps to understand the relationships with the majority cultures, issues concerning what it means to live in the "contact zones" of cultures—places that often involve subtle and open forms of violence. Violence is the most emotional way of encountering the majority culture, creating scenes that make minority experience accessible to readers of all backgrounds. A study of the various ways in which the authors portray resistance to discrimination and violence show the diversities and complexities of how majority and minority cultures coexist. Both of these are emotionally charged areas, often requiring the double consciousness of "speaking the unspeakable" experiences, as the narrators attempt to reveal the special dynamics of their cultures and present intercultural encounters that are also unique in each case.

Dialogues of the Authors with Their Own Cultural Group

The first major part of my dissertation studies the narrators' struggles with their relationships to their own cultures. In this part, I will make use of the scholarship on autoethnographies, studying the special position of the writers as being both insiders and outsiders to their cultures. As insiders, the narrators describe their ties to their families, particularly to their mothers. These relationships vary from intimacy and closeness (mainly in Péliné and Hurston) through respect and care (mainly in Lakatos) to pain and violence (mainly in Wright). But in all cases, the insider's knowledge and understanding are amply demonstrated and displayed. As outsiders, the narrators have the special vantage point of being educated in the majority culture (though Péliné received little formal education), being distanced in time and experience, and thus understanding their own cultures' values and faults more clearly than their mothers or family members. Whether they describe their families and cultures primarily to members of their own minority group (as do Wright and Hurston) or to members of the majority group (as do Lakatos, Péliné, and Hurston – who seems to address both), they position themselves in all cases as insiders, in the sense possessing both intimate knowledge and emotional involvement, while also being outsiders, in the sense of having the distanced vantage point and the knowledge of the majority culture's values and expressions.

The special emotional ties between mother and child point beyond themselves, to the special relationships between narrator and community in these narratives. In the works under study, the protagonists stand in special relationships to their cultural groups. They are not only the subjects of autobiographical self-narration but also special representatives of the minority groups they come from. Paul John Eakin calls this a "collective identity … an alternative to the traditionally individualist cast of Western autobiography, a 'synecdochic' model of selfhood" (Eakin 10, discussing Arnold Krupat's essay in the volume). Readers from the majority (or another minority) culture perceive these narratives as "examples" of lives in the particular minority group, while readers from the writer's own culture may read for affirmation or guidance concerning their own experiences in the minority status described. Nevertheless, the very act of writing, of being an intellectual, puts the narrator somewhat outside of his or her cultural group, of which the mother and family seem to be more authentic, insider representatives. This is why the various complex relationships with the mothers as described in these narratives create dialogues between the narrators and their cultures, opening up new ways of looking at these cultures simultaneously from the inside and the outside. In her discussion of autoethnographies, Deck emphasizes the inner knowledge of Hurston, based on the special connection between the community and the autoethnographer. (Deck 252). Alice Walker discusses these issues in her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" and her short story, "Everyday Use," both of which I will use to understand the connections among mothers, daughters (and, where applicable, sons), and cultures in the narratives I study.

In Wright, the alienation from the mother and the problematic relationship with her shows the alienation from and the problematic relationship with his people and their past. Wright's violently harsh, but later pitied, broken, ill mother is in line with his own attitude to his people, with mixed feelings of anger for their complacence, pity for their sufferings, and love for their own sake.

Similarly to Hurston, Lakatos structures his narrative around distinctions among a home of broken traditions, wanderings in search of meaning, and ambitious efforts towards a formal education. The grandmother's death in the opening passages signals the loss of traditions, the loneliness of his wanderings paves the way for the development of a self-conscious individual, and the experiences at school introduce the majority culture with its values and brutality. Throughout, the mother appears over and over again, attesting to the ties that continue to bind Lakatos to his people, as well as to the love and understanding they bear

towards him. Lakatos remains a part of the family throughout, thus retaining the insider's knowledge, even though his talents and the story of his life make him an educated outsider.

Péliné's "perfect" mother is an embodiment of her celebration of the best in her people. Unlike Hurston, who became a trained anthropologist, and unlike Wright and Lakatos, who also received formal higher education, Hilda became acquainted with the majority culture, and thus obtained an outsider's point of view of her own culture, by marrying a Hungarian man. Thus, in her own way, Péliné is also an autoethnographer, describing, among other things, the unusually strong family ties in her culture by simultaneously putting her own emotional involvement with her mother into focus while still exhibiting the distance and viewpoint of the outsider who married "into" the majority culture.

Dialogues of the Authors with the Majority Culture

The second major part of my dissertation focuses on the voicing of encounters and relationships with the majority culture. As Allen Carey-Webb and Stephen Benz argue in their 1996 volume of essays, *Teaching and Testimony: Rigoberta Menchú and the North American Classroom,* the voicing of these experiences in autoethnographic texts is always contestatory because it involves an appropriation of the majority society's cultural productions to express situations unknown in that culture. As Dupcsik observes, "The general attitude in Hungary towards 'the Gypsy question,' and towards Gypsies in general can be best characterized as indifference and unconcern"[1] (Dupcsik 94). Thus, in writing their autobiographies, both Lakatos and Péliné had to come up with novel and innovative ways to speak about a culture that had not been represented earlier, and to present it in ways available and interesting for a majority readership, yet containing their own culture's uniqueness.

It is important to point out that the African American and the Hungarian Roma minority groups, with all their differences, both occupy a similar position of living on the borderlines of their societies. Both Lakatos and Péliné wrote in the context of living in the "Second World," in a Communist dictatorship, thus not being parts of the Western European and American intellectual discourse of their time. Nevertheless, they had access to the traditional Hungarian and Western literary canons and their conceptions of prose narrative and autobiography were influenced by these. The African American texts were written in what would be called the "First World;" their literary influences were also primarily the

[1] "A 'cigánykérdéssel', s egyáltalán a cigánysággal kapcsolatban a magyarországi közgondolkodát a két világháború közötti korszakban elsősorban a közöny, az érdektelenség jellemezte" (Dupcsik 94).

traditional Western canon, with of course, the special heritage of slave narratives and other African American literary productions. The important point to note is that both groups lived on the margins of their societies, close enough for actual physical contact with the majority culture and its heritage, but very far from them in concrete experiences and cultural background. Hence, theoretical formulations concerning "Western canons" can be used to further understand these books, but the attention to differences and details must be great. Similarly, neocolonial or Third-World studies can provide useful insights into understanding these narratives, but it must be kept in mind that these writers are neither neocolonial nor Third-World. In a sense, the situation of these writers is comparable to the present-day globalized world, where the visibility of the other's existence is greater than previously, but is certainly not accompanied by understanding or equality. This is why Kaplan's statement about resistance literature can be used here: "[w]e can locate most resistance literature and out-law genres on the borders between colonial and neocolonial systems, where subjectivity, cultural power, and survival are played out in the modern era" (Kaplan 133).

Living on the borderline, at the clash of cultures, can never be a peaceful affair. The pain and deprivation Richard Wright must have felt when he had no access to the library, the confusion of Zora Neale Hurston as she was failing in her initial communications with members of her village after getting back from college, the humiliating experience of Menyhért Lakatos in being the only Gypsy boy at school, and the desperation of Hilda Péliné for not being able to attend the Dance School of the Hungarian State Opera House are all "interior" cultural experiences, shocks, of minority status that the majority reader may or may not understand. Experiences of real, physical violence are more palpable and more readily available. Thus, while violence is the real and palpable way in which the majority cultures dealt with these minority groups, its descriptions also demonstrate a state of being ground between two cultures, the pain of experiencing a spasm between possibilities and realities. Experiences of violence involve just as intense emotional involvements as the relationships with the mothers, but violence always arises out of a contact with the other culture (even when it is within the culture, it can still be traced to outside violence, as trauma narratives tell us). Thus, a study of the presence of violence in these books can be a study of how these autoethnographic texts engage the majority culture in a dialogue about the emotional depths to which the minority narrator has experienced the pains of those encounters. This is why the second part of my dissertation begins with a discussion of the various ways in which violence is present in the four narratives and continues with a study of other experiences of repression and possible ways of resistance.

Western thinking has privileged the mind over the body since Descartes, making it logical for writers of slave narratives to appeal to the mind. But, using the example of Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Christopher Stuart and Stephanie Todd (2009) argue that presentations of the body, "black corporeality" are of increased importance in recent minority writings. Most minority groups have traditionally been identified with their bodies. In this way, the dialogue between minority autobiographers and their readers has shifted from appeals to the mind towards more open presentations of the stark realities experienced by the body. Hurston's openness about her personal desires and bodily experiences can be understood in light of these discussions. Moreover, this openness lends Hurston a sense of honesty, giving special strength to her few but pointed comments on race relations and ways of resistance.

Black Boy is much more saturated with violence than Hurston's narrative, and Wright's experiences are very different in this respect. In his narrative, contact with the majority society is persistently violent, affecting all aspects of inter-racial encounters. Intra-racial violence, in turn, signals the traumatic experience of the breakdown of African American culture, traditions, and familiesThe traumatic experiences of violence amply demonstrate why Wright perceived racial encounters as hopeless, as well as the total breakdown of his people's culture, as they escaped into the fanaticism of an extremist church. It is by keeping in mind the depths of these traumatic experiences that we can understand Wright's own approach to resistance and racial justice.

In a way somewhat similar to Wright, Lakatos presents extreme cases of violence both within the Gypsy community and in encounters with the majority society. In this way, he also emphasizes the breakdown of Romani culture and communities, the seemingly impossible task of redeeming any cultural treasures of the past in the face of the violent and humiliating present. Nevertheless, Lakatos does attempt to affirm the value of Gypsy traditions, but presents it to the majority society through the authority of his educated self.

Although her city background in a largely multi-ethnic environment differs greatly from Hurston's all-black hometown, Péliné's attitude towards portraying intercultural encounters is similar to Hurston's in many ways. Like Hurston, Péliné constructs a culture, a positive celebration of folk traditions that does not stand in opposition to the majority culture but is rather meant to enrich it in spite of the admitted cultural gaps. Unlike the male-signed narratives, in which violence is primarily destructive and resistance futile, the female-signed narratives make use of violent scenes to affirm their inner lives and resist racial stereotypes so as to construct cultural values and traditions. Péliné's book does not center on violence, but

there are scenes of both inter-racial and intra-racial violence, and both types show Hilda's deep emotional reactions, and through these, her interior life in painful social situations. As the only one of the four writers who did not receive formal education, she nevertheless exhibits a subtle understanding of majority culture, and describes the clever tricks she played to confidently resist racism, while at the same time ending up being the connection between the races.

Conclusion

My comparative study of Wright, Hurston, Lakatos, and Péliné focuses on how these autobiographers engage in dialogues with their own cultures and with the majority cultures. But as a four-way comparison, my study also creates dialogues among the four authors, using the existing scholarship and the new insights I have come to on each to better understand the others through carefully noted similarities and differences. Issues of poverty, hunger, violence, homelessness, struggle for education, search for traditions, and redefining family relationships are all bases for comparisons and contrasts. Though the autobiographical narratives of my study span cultures, races, continents, and political situations, the dialogues I create among them about these issues will hopefully open up new ways to appreciate both the little known Hungarian Roma literature and the better researched African American autobiographies.

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