This dissertation aims to discuss the reception of three humanistic short stories, originally written between the last third of the fourteenth and the last third of the fifteenth centuries, in the sixteenth-century Hungary. Subject of the thesis are: the story of Griselda, translated by Francis Petrarch from the original Italian version by Giovanni Boccaccio; the original short story entitled Historia de duobus amantibus, written in Latin by Enea Silvio Piccolomini; finally, the Latin version of the story of Guiscardo and Ghismonda, written in elegiac verse by Filippo Beroaldo the Elder. My examinations treat on the main stages of the transmission and reception of these three stories: 1) in the Appenine Peninsula both in Italian and Latin, 2) their first penetration into the Hungarian culture in Latin and 3) their first translations into Hungarian, which were done within the framework of the literary genre of the so-called széphistóriák (“beautiful stories”) during the second half of the 16th century. The dissertation consists of five main chapters and a conclusion; which are supplemented with five appendices illustrating the subjects discussed in the main text.

In the first chapter I discuss the definition of the “beautiful stories”, and describe the 16th century social and cultural context the Hungarian translations arrived. I focus on generally accepted vision of love and rules of matrimony as well as consequences in cases these rules were unobserved. Firstly, I analyse some semi-legendary cases and gossips from Hungarian history which could be familiar to the same public which became the readers of the “beautiful stories”. Secondly, I turn to the Hungarian translation of the Griselda-story as a special wedding gift with a political message, and put it in context of lives of three Hungarian queens, Beatrix of Aragorn, Maria of Habsburg and Isabella of Jagiello.

In the second chapter of my thesis (Different Worlds, Different Tastes, the Central European Public and the Centres of the Renaissance Humanist Culture in Central Europe) I demonstrate that there were three cultural factors that hampered the reception of Boccaccio’s Decameron, but at the same time facilitated the reception of neo-Latin novellae in Hungary. These factors were: the wide-spread illiteracy, the unfamiliarity with the Italian language and the differences of social values between the two countries. Even the minority of the Hungarian litterati who knew Italian were prejudiced against the vernaculars and favoured works written in Latin. Also in the other Central European countries, Bohemia and Poland, place of Latin in the cultural life was prominent, but these cultures, unlike the Hungarian, were receiving Italian love stories also directly from Italian and from other vernaculars. My discovery of the exact source edition for the Hungarian translation of Piccolomini’s Historia supports the results of research devoted to book-collecting in early modern Hungary. On the other hand, it may suggest that the choice of the Latin source by the Hungarian translators could have been arbitrary and random.

In the third chapter (The Fortune of the Decameron Stories: from the Vernacular Literature to the Neo-Latin Literature in Italy and Beyond) I reconstruct the main lines of transmission of the Italian love stories stemming from and inspired by the Decameron; the process in which they became the “highbrow” Latin novellae which could gain access to the Hungarian culture. I follow the chronological order of the creation of the Italian stories and ponder on their importance in the forming of the genre of neo-Latin novella. I analyse the changes in the stories introduced by their Latin translators; in Petrarca’s Griselda, in Leonardo Bruni’s and Filippo Beroaldo’s Ghismonda. I also touch upon the place of Matteo Bandello’s Titus et Gisippus in this process. Finally, I examine Historia de duobus amantibus by Enea Silvio Piccolomini. All these works are examined against the background of Italian popular versions (rhymed Decameronian cantari novellistici and translations of the neo-Latin novellae). The concluding part of the chapter treats on the transfer of the fictive characters of Piccolomini’s Lucretia and Griselda into the realm of history. I investigate also the transfer in the opposite direction, on the example of the Hungarian protagonists of history becoming literary figure in works of Matteo Bandello and Sebastiano Erizzo.

The subject of the fourth chapter (Social Control at all Cost and the Changes in the Concept of Love in Hungary: Including Love in Matrimony?) is the image of love represented in the three Hungarian “beautiful stories” confronted with the Szép magyar komédia; a comedy written by the “first” among Hungarian poets Bálint Balassi for his own wedding feast that had never happened. Balassi’s work follows the evolution of theory of love present in the
Western Europe, but it was the “beautiful stories” that constituted the main stream discourse about love in Hungary. Therefore Balassi’s comedy should not be considered the highest point of a linear development, but an exception. The main trend was set by very conservative idea expressed in Griselda that the love in matrimony should be understood exclusively as a gift from God. The story of Lucretia starts the campaign for the legitimisation of the love sentiment as a condition *sine qua non* for the matrimony. Ghismonda further backs the view expressed in Piccolomini’s story with the theological argument borrowed from St. Paul (*Melior est nubere quam uri*). Balassi approaches the subject from a different angle, he treats the marriage out of love with affirmation. Moreover, he asserts that this love could born because of the physical beauty of the women. Sadly this advanced theory of love lived only as a literary construct and was not accepted by the majority of Hungarian society. The main message of the Hungarian versions of the stories of Eurialus and Lucretia and Ghismonda and Guiscardo was that the conflicts the love between two private people arouses in the community should be resolved in favour of the community, even on the expense of love. The private sentiments should be subordinated to the well-being of the society. These two Hungarian “beautiful stories” are full of theological debates and were intended to provide a moral instruction to the readers and the audience. In case of the “Hungarian” Griselda the interpretation remains more ambiguous.

The fifth chapter (*Ubiquus Examples. The Elements of the Classical Culture and Erudition in the “Beautiful Stories” and 16th-century Hungarian Poetry*) focuses on the presence of the classical culture and erudition before and after the work of the anonymous of Patak and of György Enyedi. According to my examination of 340 poetical sources, both 30th poem by Balassi (*Mire most barátom*) and the two “beautiful stories” employ a unique set of the classical references, used nowhere else in the 16th-century Hungarian poetry. Considering *topoi* 30th poem by Balassi occupies a very important place. On the one hand, it uses a wide repertoire of the classical erudite references, which were to remain popular throughout the coming two centuries. On the other hand, it is a witness of the domestication of the new heroines of “beautiful stories” into Hungarian poetry. They rooted into the common imagery fast and firmly at the end of ’70 of the 16th century. Together with the Trojan Helen, Dido, and Medea they became the figures of the loyal love and the tragic fate. Griselda, on the contrary, does not appear in any work of which she is not a protagonist. In Hungary she did not make it into the number of popular literary figures.

One thing is certain, the famous Italian lovers who disguised themselves in the Hungarian robes were not committing an act of mischief as Eurialus did dressing up as a porter in Piccolomini’s love story. It was a carnival masquerade which helped the servants of Love to continue their triumphal advance north across the Alps into the maze of the vernacular literatures.