

Hungarian Eulenspiegel and Munchhausen – Publishing Analogies and Differences

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Jelen esszé témája két világhírű szereplő, Eulenspiegel és Münchhausen báró magyar felbukkanása, akiknek népszerű képei a népi almanachokon és hagyományokon keresztül tárulnak eléink. Eulenspiegel hazai fogadtatására hosszabb idő után került sor; bár karakterét a sokféle idegen nyelvű publikáció igazoltan ismerte, magyarul csak a 19. század elején lehetett róla olvasni, míg Munchhausen megjelenése a magyar irodalomban ezzel szemben viszonylag korán, alig néhány évtizeden belül megtörtént. Hírnevük és népszerűségük országoként eltérő, így Magyarországon is más.

Kulcsszavak: Eulenspiegel, Munchhausen, a magyarországi recepció története, népszerűség, szórakozás, folklór, variancia

Concerning the relationship of Eulenspiegel and Munchhausen, there already are efforts for the comparison of the two (at first, seemingly very different) characters, and for the joint reading of the literary works dealing with their life and actions. (Michaelis-Jena 1986.) While one of them is a scoundrel, who is infamous due to his finesse and capers, the other one is a general retired to his estates, who recalls his former experiences for pleasure, in order to entertain others, while transcending these into the realms of fantasy and marvel by his imagination. This essay focuses on the early publications, which attempted to naturalize the two characters in Hungary.

The fact, whether Till Eulenspiegel was a real person (in contrast with Baron Munchhausen) was never confirmed with reliable authenticity. Eulenspiegel's character became depicted on the pages of folk almanacs from anecdotes and oral traditions. His widespread popularity can be attributed to Hermann Bote's compilation of anecdotes entitled *Ein kurzweilig lesen von Dyl Ulenspiegel* (1515); which was translated to several languages, and whose revised, extended versions were also published with remarkable popularity all over Europe (Michaelis-Jena 1986: 103.) – and whose recognition, moreover, did not even fade at the middle of the 19th Century if we consider it as

an inspiration to Charles De Coster's novel; as well as to the 21st Century opus of Daniel Kehlmann.

The subject is a character embedded in rich European context. According to Olga Nagy, the astute protagonists of jocular stories, the pranksters are late descendants of one-time mythical characters. Their characters can be considered as almost mystified symbols of finesse and smartness. However, the most significant characteristic of jocular stories that they are created by vernacular scepticism, which does not believe in miracles, let alone expecting them, thus it does not accept such elements in poetry either; it actually expresses its bitter observations about society by placing the protagonist into a confused and erratic world, in which finesse and sneaky nature is the only chance to overcome. (Nagy 1993: 63.) Concerning the nearly permanent characteristics of finesse, shrewd and cunning thinking, as well as unscrupulous target-orientation, their character is somewhat "immoral"; however, this unprincipled behaviour often blends with the segments of the "sense of abandonment", outcast attitude and low perspective, which all shape the personal characteristics, since the person itself is on the brink of society, without any wealth, social status, or authority. The motivational basis of the protagonist's actions is usually found in some kind of coercive circumstances. Most of the time, he manoeuvres to reverse the suffered injustice, to avenge the offenses committed against him, and seeks retaliation at any costs, for being humiliated into castaway life conditions (while almost creating Machiavellian allusions). Thus, his activities are also defined by deliberately taking risks, which creates reflective confrontation with the forms of trampling authority. Concerning certain characteristics, the personality and behaviour of Lúdas Matyi is not far from Eulenspiegel's prankster. (Nagy 1974: 85–99.) It is an archetype, regardless of nationality or name; the personality, actions and main characteristics of Nasreddin, Herschele of Ostropol, Till Eulenspiegel, Hitar Petar, Păcală, Suszter Lipli, Csalóka Péter are almost identical in each version; all of their stories share the function of entertainment.

There are earlier examples of their sporadic presence in Hungary. (György 1931.) The attraction towards the short stories and anecdotes about the likes of Munchhausen and Eulenspiegel is certified by the regular publication of the compilations that share both the characteristics and the intention to entertain – considering the handwritings of József Hermányi Dienes, or the compilations of János Kónyi or Sámuel Andrád, the arrival of these stories was not completely unprecedented. In the anecdote compilation of Kónyi (whose popularity is certified by six editions) both Munchhausen- and Eulenspiegel-like stories can be found and read. Concerning the latter, and especially the immoral, obscene character traits of "Eulenspiegelian" use of language, Mátyás Riethaller, a censor at Buda, expresses his disapproval, and thus does not

recommend it as a literary work that is worthy of the attention of honourable readers. (Mályuszné 1985, 60–61.) The criticism against libertine syntax later promoted the edition of more sophisticated story variations; considerably consolidating Eulenspiegel's obscenity and often obnoxious behaviour in the modern versions.

The first volume that exclusively contains the stories of Eulenspiegel was only published in Hungary in the first decade of the 19th Century, precisely in 1808, by Hartleben Konrád Adolf Publishing; it bore the title *Amaz Ország-szerte elhiresült, néhai nevezetes Suszter Liplinek élete, tettei, dévaj, és tzégéres Furtsaságai* [*The Life, The Actions, The Knave and Flagrant Oddities of the Country-wide Infamous Whilom Renowned Cobbler Lipli*], translated by Imre Holosovszky. Its source is the compilation entitled *Leben und Thaten, Schwänke und Possen des Till Eulenspiegel* (1807) that contains twenty-five stories. Concerning its contents, structure and prints it is practically identical to the German original (only the name of the protagonist was changed to a more Hungarian sounding alternative); thus the intention to entertain is already expressed *expressis verbis* on the title page, making the iconographical recognition of the character's Eulenspiegelian origin possible (the protagonist rides a mule, while an owl rests in one of his hands and he holds a mirror in the other). Its guiding principle of course is also confirmed by colloquial language, however it secludes the basic characteristics of the text from possible criticism – behold, literary readers have nothing to complain about, since the title page already drew attention that the inherent primary purpose of the book is entertainment. Formally, the German original is a collection of separate stories, anecdotes that are individually complete. The book neither followed the storyline, nor the sequence and links of the countless copies of *Eulenspiegel* printed for centuries; instead it wantonly picked different parts that seemed appropriate for the author's taste. Sometimes two story events are blended in one chapter, which required the trimming and modification of their sources. (György 1931: 378.) Presumably, the prospects of distribution of such types of texts are actually found in the practice of variability, especially because a substantial characteristic of anecdotes is the amazingly fast variation, assimilation that results in countless different forms. The stories of Eulenspiegel and Munchhausen constantly contaminated, varied, integrated other anecdotes, blended into different stories or adopted the tales about diverse other characters. In each cases, a special “text deposit” is established, thus, the smaller, freely variable individual units, the non-linear sequence, the interchangeable nature and the possibility to create new versions (in an analogous manner to the variable nature of folklore work pieces) provides a manifold, rich publication form. Thus, it is likely that Hartleben's aspirations – beyond the widespread popularity of the char-

acter – were primarily affected by the (only hypothetical) profitability of the text type, which stems from its possible structural variations.

So far, the most well-known person of these lie-stories rooted in antique and medieval traditions is Baron Munchhausen. A peculiar variation of the genre, the convoluted network of merry anecdotes, exaggerating fibbings, absurd stories, wartime tales and hunting adventures linked to the historical person of Hieronymus Karl Friedrich Freiherr von Munchhausen (1720–1797) lived through several adaptations. A part of these stories was first published between 1781 and 1783 in Berlin, as a collection of anecdotes, bearing the title *Vade Mecum für lustige Leute [Manual for joyful people]*. Two years later, Rudolf Erich Raspe – after fleeing from Germany to England – published a compilation in English, in which he supplemented the stories, and in addition, also indicated Munchhausen's name on his book. (Raspe 1785.) As a consequence of rapid success, in 1786, Gottfried August Bürger also became aware of the promising profitability of the baron's adventures, so he published an extended German edition of his work, the *Wunderbare Reisen Des Freyherrn von Munchhausen*. (Bürger 1786.) Its numerous editions gained enormous popularity among the readers, and later resulted in the emergence of several adaptations. József Turóczi-Trostler pointed out that the lie-tales and their related variations operate amongst the same limited circle of motives and typology, almost always and everywhere, just as they share the use of the same narrow set of predominant ideas. (Turóczi-Trostler 1942: 6.) This observation of Turóczi-Trostler about the motivic, typological consistency of “Munchhausenias”, is also relevant concerning the “Eulenspiegelian” stories.

Due to its freely variable structure that could be ad lib narrowed or extended, the “Munchhausenias” held a potential for rapid distribution. Baron Munchhausen's influence reached Hungary within a relatively short period of time. Concerning the popularity of its predecessor texts in Western Europe, no wonder that in 1805, Mihály Landerer choose the first Hungarian adaptation of Munchhausen's stories – *Báró de Mánx' lengyel orsz. confed. generálisnak a' tengeren, és szárazon tett Útazásai és tsudálkozásra méltó Történetei [The Journeys and Amazing Stories of Baron de Mánx...]* – as the subject of the opening volume in the series of novels published under the moniker *Téli és Nyári Könyvtár [Winter and Summer Library]*. The background of Landerer's decision was presumably a publishing “concept”, which, beyond mercantile (economic) aspects also paid attention to the selection of literary works that were worthy of translation. Vilmos Tolnai was the first to raise awareness to the correspondent elements of the stories of Baron de Mánx and Munchhausen. No doubt, that *Báró de Mánx [Baron de Mánx]*, which was published without indicating the identity of its author, is not a mere translation, but a partial naturalisation instead, which was greatly in fashion at the era; here certain

chapters take place at Árokszállás, Szolnok, Pest, Buda, while the new Hungarian theatre, the Rudas Baths and other contemporary references are also mentioned, which could also be useful for the identification of the translator of the adaptation. Since it is not a precise translation of the original German source text, the direct source of *Báró de Mánx* [*Baron de Mánx*] has not been revealed by any philological research yet; however, we cannot rule out the possibility that the Hungarian author compiled his native text according to his own typology based on his respective reading experiences, loosely selecting some parts of the baron's adventures. Concerning the name change, Tolnai highlights that every other translation or naturalisation kept the original name of Munchhausen, only the Hungarian publications use the name Baron de Mánx, which could originate from the anagram of the Latin word *mendax* – meaning “liar” – as a translational ingenuity. (Tolnai 1934: 21–24.) It is an expressive curiosity that both Eulenspiegel and Munchhausen change their names in Hungarian translations and naturalisations, to a name form that significantly deviates from the original.

The attractiveness of the book in Hungary is certified by the fact that as a first element of a novel series it qualified for three editions (1805, 1809, and 1813) within a short period of time. The forty-four chapters of the volume enumerate the classic adventures of Munchhausen adapted to Hungarian relations: the essential motives of the stories are usually kept in their original form, while the narration is embellished with sub-plots and diverse Hungarian references. This way, we receive information about actual historical events: among others, about the French Revolution, and in the course of a conversation with Admiral Nelson, about the future Egyptian conflict between England and France. Another noteworthy fact is that the protagonist finds some odd companions during his travel to China, whom he hires into his service. All of these companions have their own marvellous talent, they can either see very far, run very fast, or have extreme strength. (Berze Nagy 1957: 23–30.) The inclusion of these mythical figures, the archetypical characters of international fable traditions implies a living relationship between the hereby presented genre variation of lie-tales and the traditions of folk tales and mythology (by the way, this element of the story is also included in Burger's original version, where these subordinates are mentioned by the name of *Läufer*, *Horcher*, *Schützen*, *Starken* and *Windmacher*). The role of these travelling- or helping companions, who are manifested in our language as *Soak*, *Glutton*, *Runner*, *Shooter*, *Far-sighted*, *Freezer*, *Wind-blower* and *Load-carrier* is usually to aid the protagonist with their superhuman powers during his heavy trials, thus facilitating the successful completion of these. Therefore, it is a phenomenon, whose diverse transformations also left their mark on the traditions of Hungarian folk tales (and later, on belles-lettres), and in this endeavour, the text

variations of Baron de Mánx provided an efficient assistance. (Propp 2009: 79–83.)

However, three editions did not prove to be sufficient. Soon, the rival printer and publisher, János Tamás Trattner also realized the opportunities promised by booklet and issued Munchhausen's adventures in a new translation, under the title *Valóságos mesterség úgy hazudni hogy érdemes legyen kinyomtatni [Veritable Craft....]*. As an apparent and deliberate act, he pursued to avoid the misunderstandings that could stem from corresponding names: instead of Baron de Mánx, he named his protagonist as Baron Nyargalóci. The identity of the translator of this publication is also unknown. In contrast with the loose structure of *Báró de Mánx [Baron de Mánx]*, its translator handles the German original in a much stricter manner, with a consistent adherence to its structural lines. In comparison with the previous booklet, in this edition we can find actual self-reflective references concerning the Baron's person and the realistic value of his marvellous stories. A later adaptation even goes beyond the self-reflective characteristics of *Valóságos mesterség [Veritable Craft....]*: in *Tündértár vagy is Báró Demánx gondúzó kalandjai [Fairy Collection or the Comforting Escapades of Baron Demánx]*, the central role is attributed to ironic self-reflectivity and to the Baron's contemplative remarks, overshadowing the narrative dominance of the adventures. Baron de Mánx of *Tündértár [Fairy Collection]* is more talkative, and his gaze often wanders; he longs to bear witness to the authenticity of his words, aims to persuade his readers, and the course of his adventures is fraught with reflections, contemplation and moral advices. At certain points he only speaks in general, instead of being characterized by the lean brevity of previous text variations. He concludes every adventure, each special event by a moral synopsis, often in a social commentary tone. His adventurous life is already well-known in his synchronous time – he is treated as a real celebrity, his stories are widely recognized – thus, a countless number of absurd stories become confirmed through the narration of his related remarks. Nevertheless, he lengthily contemplates over the issue whether each of his readers recognize the truth embedded in his stories as true, realistic events, and it is often manifested through self-reflective expressions: “Not everything is true, since people maliciously lie; and the inability of many to distinguish reality from tales, just as real events from poetry, is an eternal detriment!” (40.) The German Munchhausen-story is also mentioned *expressis verbis* in this version, with an ironic doubt concerning its originality: “For the headless, it is impossible, but for those who have their heads in place, it does not require exhausting efforts to imagine how painful it is for a high-spirited gentleman, for a hero of worldwide renown, for a valiant soldier, who inaugurated himself into the Kingdom of Immortality through glorious deeds and thousand monuments, that some German writer attributes his fearful ad-

ventures to a baron by the name of Munchhausen, who, as far as one can know, never ever existed in this world under the sun. – Well, my friends, it is just like that, this enormous mutilation of reputation happened to me.” (73–74.)

Besides the adaptations, the Hungarian edition of the first individual version of the “Munchhauseniadas” soon emerges, whose connection to the Baron’s person is only referential. The foreword of the booklet, entitled *Szájas Péter Úrnak ama híres B. de Mánx Keresztfiának, hadi, vadászat és utazásbéli nevezetes és ritka tapasztalásai ’s történetei* [*The Famous and Rare Military, Hunting and Travelling Experiences and Tales of Mister Péter Szájas, the Godson of that Renowned B. de Mánx*] appeals on the knowledge of the previously published Baron de Mánx-stories that lay the foundations for the understanding the aforementioned volume; while proclaiming in its reflective (still, laced with the rhetoric formulas of traditional introductions) foreword that instead of being a close translation, the book is actually a compilation. While conferring about the harmful and beneficial effects of Romanesque reading, and making a distinction between the different Romanesque types, he mentions – thus certifying that the publication of this new type of Munchhauseniada is legitimate – that the original *Báró de Mánx* [*Baron de Mánx*] already earned three press editions. Therefore, it is evident for him that there is a great need for adventurous, incredible stories in the readers’ community. The most important question from our point of view is asked in order to justify not only himself, but also his work: why these booklets, full of lies and nonsensical stories are so popular among both publishers and readers? In his opinion, such booklets could provide good reading experience for a rural social class that lacks aesthetic judgement, and especially for women who long for festive entertainment. Although openly refers to his (counter)opinion concerning the aesthetic criteria of lie-tales, he still does not condemn the popularity of the booklets, and perceives the tales of Baron de Mánx (and his fellow adventurers) as instruments that educate a wide reading audience. In this respect, he clarifies that the reputation of the name Baron de Mánx is actually able to generate mercantile attraction: “De Mánx deserves that the deeds of his godson would also escape from oblivion, and that by his name, my booklet would gain sufficient popularity.” (13.) His allusions and references to the 1805 edition of *Báró de Mánx* [*Baron de Mánx*] illustrate such premise, that the mentioning of the famous ancestor not only facilitates the reception of the actual booklet, but also raises awareness to the complete set of writings, to the multitude of variants that are different in size and style, but univocally speak in a popular register. Also, as a relevant criterion concerning future plans, he announces the next volume containing new marvellous stories in advance, however, in a conditional manner, as its publication becomes subject to the success of the present booklet: “my sailing

companion presented me with the tales that happened to him since we parted ways; which however, will be only shared with our generous readers when they have already read the hereby published miraculous stories so many times that they almost know them by heart." (130.) There is neither continuity, nor cause-and-effect relation between his tales; they constitute a cluster of side-by-side placed, mostly individual narratives; in the end, he practically concludes his work with one unfinished paragraph.

We can easily discover the differences concerning the reception of the two characters in Hungary. Since the Hungarian Eulenspiegel could only address domestic reading audiences in one mere edition, one can suspect that Hartleben's experiment proved to be ineffective, failing to generate such interest as the Munchhauseniadas that were published in several editions and adaptations. Nevertheless, his presence illustrates (with regards to the wider context of the Munchhauseniadas) how the characters of similar calibre, with several decades or even centuries of European popularity – as well as the texts that convey their stories – were adapted into Hungarian, thanks to the publishing practices that sought out such literary works (expecting financial profits from their naturalisation). It is worth mentioning that simultaneously with the publication of the novel series entitled *Mulatságos Könyvtár [Ludicrous Library]*, Hartleben issued several other books, however, we lack the appropriate knowledge, the orienting, positioning paratextuses and the contemporary reflections that would help to assign these to the series. *Susztér Lipli [Cobbler Lipli]* is also placed among these, quasi "outsider" volumes that constitute a "non-official" part of the series – and although due to the above mentioned lack of resources it cannot be linked to the series in a specific manner, it still fits well into the publishing schedule that created the series and operated along the same principles.

The popularity of Munchhausen in Hungary neither can be measured by the high number of sold copies, nor by the loud applause of audience or censors; its merits are rather shown in the fact that as an opening volume of the series *Téli és Nyári Könyvtár [Summer and Winter Library]*, on the one hand it found its way to the readers and created such sense of novelty amongst literary traditions that successfully revised centuries-old traditions, and on the other hand its tensile force also prospected promising results concerning the rest of the volumes in the series. By being a subject of several literary and publishing references, it successfully crossed a threshold (while also becoming trans-generational heritage), which only a few of contemporary prosaic publications could achieve. This way, the presentation of how the images of centuries-old traditions and the literary works of Western Europe that are also inseparably connected to popular tradition integrate into each other could reveal the popular interconnections of each contemporary literary

genre. On the other hand, in a receptive aspect, they could have been useful instruments that significantly shaped the conditions of popularity and successful reception.

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