

**THE DOUBLE CHRONOTOPE
IN KÁLMÁN MIKSZÁTH'S NOVEL
*THE SIEGE OF BESZTERCE***

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The paper approaches to Mikszáth's novel as a dialogic structure, a kind of double plot novel. The plots of the first and second chapter with different setting and personage meet in the third chapter and start coalescing. But these different plots represent two different worlds where also the workings of time is different and the human activity has different dynamics. The paper discusses in some detail the possibility of the analysis of time in fiction, since the scholarly discourse on the topic seems to deny the possibility that time can work in different ways in fictional worlds and describes the specialities of fictional time as anomalies of narration. The encounter of the worlds in Mikszáth's novel is represented as a fight with no real winner, which can be regarded as a sort of dialogue.

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Kálmán Mikszáth is nowadays regarded as a major representative of the beginning modernism in Hungarian prose writing. This is a rather new phenomenon, since his work was previously interpreted in terms of a late "critical realism" that not only preceded the modernist literary revolution of the journal *Nyugat* but also ran contrary to the main characteristics of the so-called precursors of *Nyugat*. Mikszáth's experiments in the parataxis of two stories, which he was doing both in shorter and longer texts in the 1880s and 1890s, also can be regarded as a modernist break with linear story telling and unitary plot.¹ I think his novels *Beszterce ostroma* [The Siege of Beszterce] and *Szent Péter esernyője* [St. Peter's Umbrella], which he wrote one after the other in 1894 and 1895, can be classified as such experiments. In both novels we find a shift in story telling at the end of the "First Part". With the beginning of the "Second Part" the whole story told in the "First Part" disappears, and a new story begins with different characters, in a different setting, and in a time one cannot relate to the time of the first story. This phenomenon might embarrass the readers; the paratext "Second Part" clearly suggests that what will follow is the continuation of the same novel, which raises ex-

pectations the text will not satisfy. You cannot find any link to the previously told events either in space, or in time, or in personage. An order that fits the genre conventions is to be re-established at the end of the “Second Part” when the two stories meet and start coalescing.

Mikszáth’s readers usually find this structure difficult and problematic. A contemporary critic, for example, found the composition of *The Siege of Beszterce* wrong because he thought the change of the central character in the “Second Part” hindered the reading of the later parts that should focus on the central character of the “First Part” (Lázár 193–194). This means the composition obstructs a traditional unitary reading by challenging the attitude that tries to focus on one central character continuously. But the composition also challenges the concept of linear time usually associated with nineteenth-century novels. The last moment of the “Second Part” is identical with the last moment of the “First Part”. However, this does not become clear until the end of the “Second Part.” Nothing indicated or suggested a step back in time at the beginning of the “Second Part”, and the text scarcely anywhere revealed any connection to the “First Part.” The reader cannot recognise any connection until much later. The experience gained by previously read novels of any sort, however, raises expectations of some connections between the parts, but such connections cannot emerge from the two different plots. In *Szent Péter esernyője* an umbrella plays a role in both the “First Part” and the “Second Part”, but nothing suggests that it is the same umbrella in both parts – apart from some literary conventions, i.e., previous reading experience. But how these umbrellas can be identical, and how this identity can create a connection between two groups of characters acting in different places remain a mystery for a long time.

Frigyes Riedl described the composition of *St. Peter’s Umbrella* as representing one of the basic forms of novels that he calls “the system of two columns” and associates with “English novelists” in general. He describes this scheme of composition as follows:

The narrative takes a direction and goes a while, then suddenly stops. We do not hear anything of those any longer as if a completely new novel started. This plot also goes up to a point where the first and second columns meet and unite. (...) *English novelists like* this way of composition; in their writing you can find not only two but three or four such columns. Always a new plot, a third, a fourth, even a fifth one; you read it with a sort of hesitation. Suddenly you see an unexpected trick and the events are connected. (Riedl 82–83, my translation, italics in the original.)

This hint at the English novel seems appropriate, if it refers to Victorian fiction, because the multiplot novel was characteristic of that period, and Dickens is known to have been one of Mikszáth’s favourite authors. *Little Dorrit* might be a

suitable example to demonstrate both similarities and differences between Dickens' and Mikszáth's narrative techniques. When writing the first chapters, Dickens described his plan of the novel as follows:

It struck me that it would be a new thing to show people coming together, in a chance way, as fellow-travellers, and being in the same place, ignorant of one another, as happens in life; and to connect them afterwards, and make the waiting for that connection a part of the interest (Forster 2: 182).

Dickens explicitly reckons upon a waiting for the connection of actors or different groups of actors as a feature for increasing interest. I am not sure that the interest is really increased and not reduced by the fact that the actors are shown together at the beginning, although they meet each other quite accidentally. This opening tableau, however, is the second chapter of the novel; in the first chapter another group of actors is presented in another place; and as the narrative goes on, this group is also to be connected with people of the second chapter.

This way of beginning embodies a double suggestion. Readers will more carefully observe the analogies of the different plots or groups of actors, in other words they will be more open to metaphorical reading strategies. Two actors of Chapter 1 are imprisoned in jail in Marseilles; the wealthy travellers of Chapter 2 are quarantined before landing in Europe. The Dorrit family living imprisoned in the Marshalsea is introduced in Chapter 6. These plots are narrated in a paratactic order without any possibility of their integration on the level of narrated events. This very separation, however, might highlight their connection by the jail metaphor that imbues the novel.

On the other hand, this beginning raises some eagerness for the narrative connection of the separate plots, which is suggested by Dickens as well. This expectation is also increased by the narrator's and the actors' intensive discourse on the topic that every event of the world is connected, all the travellers wandering in quite different roads are going finally to the same place.² As if the working of the narration would mimetically mirror the working of the world, conceptually described in the narrator's and the actors' discourse. This suggestion of the existence of hidden connections between all the seemingly disparate phenomena is also made by the mystery structure of the novel.³ Clennam is continuously investigating a secret or the prints of a previous sin, which he intuitively suspects must connect his family to the Dorrits.

The mystery plot, however, has a rather uncertain conclusion. The secret is revealed in such a confused scene that hardly any reader can understand exactly the situation, and Clennam is absent at that time; thus, the actor who was most interested in the secret past will never be informed of it (Garrett 74–78). The secret that seemed to be the organising feature of the story turns out to be completely irrele-

vant, or rather the hypothesis of a secret was an activating factor for Arthur Clennam, but the actual content of this secret does not matter either in the development of the story or in its conclusion. Although the connection of different story lines seemed adequate to the necessities both of the narration and the world, this very connection organised around the secret turned out to be weak, superficial and irrelevant. This fact, however, does not affect the necessity to make metaphorical connections; the ironic deconstruction of the causal and narrative connections strengthens the appeal for metaphorical reading.

Many features of this description of Dickens' narrative strategies can be applied to Mikszáth's double plot novels. However, we find a remarkable difference in the proportions. In *Little Dorrit* a new plot starts after a relatively short first chapter, and the whole novel is rather long, which suggest that there is enough time or space to connect the plots. In the critical edition of *The Siege of Beszterce* 174 pages contain the main text, and the second, independent plot starts after 45 pages, and this plot meets the first one after 36 pages. *St. Peter's Umbrella* is 192 pages long, and the first plot is shifted after 29 pages, to be returned to on the page 104 of the novel. In both cases the first plots have enough place to suggest that they are the only topic of the given novel, and the second plots are independent long enough to challenge this suggestion.

After such skilfully raised expectations how does Mikszáth finally connect the plots? In *St. Peter's Umbrella* the quest for his father's umbrella necessarily introduces György Wibra into the other world; the encounter of the two plots in *The Siege of Beszterce*, however, seems rather accidental or improbable.⁴ This accidental way of connecting, however, may suggest that we should look for a connection deeper than what is displayed in the plot. The fact that both narratives turned out to be parts of the same story afterwards, might be regarded as a statement that they are – at least partially, or from some aspect – identical. This is a metaphorical statement; a declaration that two different things are identical. If we try to analyse this narrative structure as metaphorical, we will not necessarily focus on their similar features, since in the work of the metaphor differences may have even greater importance than similarities. If by connecting two different phenomena, metaphor suggests two points of view from where we should consider them (Ankersmit 209–220), we will be able to realise differences rather than similarities.

The first chapter of the novel takes place in Nedec, in the world of István Pongrácz, the second chapter in Zsolna. I will analyse the differences of these worlds, or rather the traits of these worlds that are highlighted by their juxtaposition. If both the first and the second chapters belong to the same plot, they are identical in one way or another. Nevertheless, their connection seems completely external, since it is only created by the fact that Count Pongrácz's way to Beszterce passes through Zsolna.

On the other hand, if both stories are to create the same story, they must be comparable. This comparability can mean nothing else but the possibility of reading both stories from the viewpoint of the other. I think it is worth emphasising at the very beginning that comparing the stories cannot be based on the problem of Count Pongrácz's insanity. In the novel both the narrator and the agents enthusiastically discuss whether the protagonist is insane or not; as if the decision of this question was the only stake of the narrative. I regard this question so much over-emphasised by the narrator as a bait of sorts. And the interpreters of the novel usually nibble at it; they love continuing this narrative discourse, weighing the pros and cons again and again. They seem to regard the deciding of this question as their most important task. But the fact itself that the narrator's discourse on insanity can be continued might raise our suspicion. The narrator always avoids answering the question; the discussions on the problem usually lead to aporias in the novel. We repeatedly read the conclusion that insanity lacks general standard.

A reading process that applies the viewpoint of the other world of the juxtaposed ones might result in a much more complicated image of Pongrácz's world than a simple classification on the basis of a normal–insane dichotomy. I am not speaking of a reciprocity of this question. If we were to ask if Zsolna is insane, we would still remain in the realm of a problem I have called a bait, i.e., we would still assume that there must be a standard or normal behaviour in the represented world(s), and agents who behave differently are insane. By the fact, however, that a behaviour is described as insanity or abnormality it ceases to be a problem. If we manage to demonstrate that a person is mad, we can lock up him or her in a lunatic asylum, i.e., we can eliminate him or her from our world, and we do not need to care about his or her behaviour and ways of thinking. This actually happens to the hero of *The Sipsirica*, a later novella of Mikszáth which can be read as a new, critical elaboration of the *The Siege of Beszterce*. Their connection is emphasised by a set of repeated motives and intertextual links (Fábri 103–104; Eisemann 82–84). When a despotic government violently locks up professor Druzsba in an insane asylum, the very fact that he is in a lunatic asylum seems to guarantee that his statements are false and not worth taking seriously:

A few days later an official announcement appeared in the press, to the effect that the sensational news items concerning the manor-house at Zsám, which had recently been given currency, and which contained disagreeable imputations affecting an eminent and respected figure in our public life, had originated in the deranged mind of a certain Mr. Tivadar Druzsba, a schoolteacher, who had since been declared insane. The allegations, which were *of course* entirely without foundation, had leaked out from a report submitted by him. The schoolteacher concerned was at present receiving treatment

in the Lipótmező lunatic asylum (Mikszáth 405–406, emphasis added).

The fact that professor Druzba is in a lunatic asylum guarantees that he is insane; the fact that he is insane guarantees that the perspective from which he describes the count (as an immoral being who has bought a young girl from her mother to keep her in a remote castle) is inadequate and untrue. The same way of reasoning is applied by his previous friends to reject his interpretation of Jahodovska's (who is the young girl's mother) personality:

“Why, of course it's not true,” cried Mr. Mliniczky in a shocked tone of voice, gesticulating heatedly. “How could it possibly be? Only some crazy person has invented that” (Mikszáth 410).

Druzba's story, however, clearly demonstrates that the decision upon insanity is simply a question of power. One representative of the rival interpretations has the power to lock up the other one in a lunatic asylum and to declare by that that his interpretation (or *Weltanschauung*) is nonsense. In *The Sipsirica*, however, there is a privileged narrative position; the narrator can see this debate from a superior point of view, and in full possession of the truth he can decide which interpretation is true and which is false.

In *The Siege of Beszterce* there neither is such a position, nor is Pongrácz's environment able to isolate and deactivate him as insane. Michel Foucault thought that in history there was always a position outside the common conceptual system, which was opposed to the common self and therefore useful for self-understanding; this position, nowadays assigned to the insane, is therefore both interpreted and interpreting.⁵ This means that the imposition of the common conceptual system depends on power relations. A community needs to have the power to isolate what it regards as being outside its conceptual system and to make it the point of reference for its own self-understanding. A point of reference dominated and controlled this way cannot be regarded as interpreting the common conceptual system on its own right, but by its difference. It does not matter what an insane individual says of the world; it is enough that he or she says something different from what those in power say. Only the conceptual system in power has content. An insane person as a point of reference is controlled by the victorious opponent, who regards himself as normal and is strong enough to enforce this claim.

The question of Pongrácz's insanity remains a problem for the characters throughout the novel precisely because nobody has the power to eliminate him as an insane man. And the question is important also for Count Pongrácz because he discerns the efforts for his isolation; moreover he seems to co-operate in this activity. It is, however, not easy to handle him as an insane man because his wealth, social position, family connections and last but not least the strength of his personal-

ity enable him to force his will upon his environment or to repel any intervention from outside.

Reality and illusion become completely relative in sentences such as:

Instead of the make-believe with which he had surrounded himself since his youth, here for the first time was reality. Yes, this, this pack of lies (Mikszáth 132).

For Pongrácz the submissive legation from Beszterce seems more real than any of his previous experiences, when he had to hire the enemy for his own war games. But he achieves real glory, since he manages to impose his conceptual system upon the environment, and everybody adapts to his point of view. The commanding officer from Budetin states one should talk to the count “in his own language”. In this “pack of lies” that Zsolna society admits that his language is an alternative one of equal rank, and it is willing to speak that language. It is true, however, that the mayor of Zsolna is actually forced to play this game by Károly Pongrácz, a military officer, who has strong family connections with the count.

Since the situation is so well balanced, Count Pongrácz remains a problem for his environment. The narrator displays a non-committal attitude; he gets involved in this discourse many times, but hardly ever qualifies Pongrácz as insane. The narrator's declarations are usually ambiguous, as the following example shows:

He was mad; just as there is a streak of madness in every great man (Mikszáth 37).

On this ground criticism does not need to continue the discourse of the novel's voices on the possible insanity of the hero. A much more fruitful method would be a metaphorical, or dialogical, reading of Pongrácz's and Zsolna's worlds respectively, based on their balance of power and the structural juxtaposition of the first two chapters. We can find hardly any textual sign to suggest a point of view for this collation. Therefore I will try to base my reading on the analysis of time structures, which is generally accepted as an important aspect of creating meaning in novels. I have chosen this point of view not because time – as a theme and a problem of twentieth-century novel – seems important on its own right, but because I think the different attitudes towards time can clear up the basic difference of these worlds. This – as it seems at the moment – purely intuitive statement might be supported by Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the different worlds of novels as different chronotopes, an issue to which I shall return later.

To be able to confront two different times we need to discuss the notions of narrative time applied by theoretical discourse that might be a major obstacle to such an approach. Narratology is generally based on a linear concept of time. A linear time progresses homogeneously: always in the same direction and at the same speed. From its unidirectionality it follows that the same event cannot be repeated.

The principle of causality presupposes this linearity; an event can only cause other events that follow it in linear time. Narratology postulates that the time of the narrated world is necessarily linear. The order and duration of the narrated events can be fixed and described in comparison with this homogeneous and linear time. The narration of these events, however, rarely conforms either to this “real” order or to these relations of duration.

Russian formalists described the difference between the order and duration of the narrated world and the narration with the notions of *fabula* and *suzjet*. Since they regarded the *suzjet* as “a specific property of literary work” (Ėjxenbaum 16) and their claim was to describe the literariness of literature, the difference between *fabula* and *suzjet* became the main tenet of their approach to narrative texts. But how can we experience the *fabula*, which is not, of course, directly present for a reader? A special activity of readers is needed to construct for themselves the *fabula* by selecting and interpreting information given in the *suzjet*. After this, however, they should define the differences of the *suzjet* in relation to the *fabula* in order to be able to describe the narration and to evaluate its quality. It might seem to be a vicious circle that first we need to construct the *fabula* on the ground of the *suzjet*, then we can compare them to define the *suzjet*. We should, however, remember why story-telling, i.e., the development of the *suzjet*, was so important for formalist scholars; it was in this sphere that they found the gesture of defamiliarization, which results in a destabilisation of the everyday perceptive strategies. Just like poetic language may be opposed to practical language, *suzjet* is opposed to *fabula* (Jefferson 38–39). Or at least the world of the *suzjet* is opposed to the world of the *fabula*. Just as readers approach the language of poetry with possession of practical language, they find poetic language difficult due to the gesture of defamiliarization, i.e., due to the differences between poetical and practical languages; so also readers approach to the narrative in possession of an everyday or a practical perceptive strategy and experience of time, and they are faced by a different and defamiliarized experience. When readers construct the *fabula*, they impose the everyday experience of time on the narrative.

On the one hand, readers quite naturally make use of their previous experiences when interpreting literary texts, and the constructed *fabula* might be regarded as a realisation of their own experience of time, which is opposed to the otherness of the *suzjet*. On the other hand, the notion of *fabula* is problematic because it is regarded as a reality of the narrated world and not as something belonging to the world of the reader. Therefore it is theoretically impossible that a time different from the reader’s experience could be a part of the narrated world; experiencing such a time cannot be but a characteristic of the act of narration as a sort of poetic licence. The pair of notions *fabula* and *suzjet* was originally created to describe the process when a reader is faced by an experience of time different from his own;

nevertheless they ascribe such a privileged position to the reader that the different experience cannot be taken seriously.

This concept can be regarded as a foundation for structuralist narratology, which has chosen the linear and homogeneous time as the base of comparison for the description of narrative. This comparison needs a recurring reference to an everyday experience or to common sense, or to the real condition of nature. These are in a sense identical, since nature cannot be experienced directly, but through the concepts of common sense. And where does this linear time, the base of reference for narratology, exist? Gérard Genette explains the general possibilities of recurrence as follows:

An event is not only capable of happening; it can also happen again, or be repeated: the sun rises every day. *Of course, strictly speaking*, the identity of these multiple occurrences is debatable: "the sun" that "rises" every morning is not exactly the same from one day to another (...). The repetition is *in fact* a mental construction, which eliminates from each occurrence everything belonging to it that is peculiar to itself, in order to preserve only what it shares with all the others of the same class, which is abstraction (Genette 113, emphases added).

He is not speaking of literature here, but of the everyday experience expressed in everyday speech that some events may recur. He finds this experience problematic, since the concept of linear time simply excludes the possibility that the same event would recur again. The solution is provided by a separation of reality and human reasoning; there is no "real" recurrence, but a "mental construction" existing in us, not in reality. Readers of fiction can disregard the "fact" that there is no recurrence in the reality, and they can accept the reality of recurrence as a mental construction, but they should know that it is not a "real" reality. What is able to recur is a general scheme that is the result of a human act of abstraction, i.e., disregarding details. This way of thinking we have already met when speaking about *fabula* and *suzjet*; we have an axiom that in reality (as well as in the narrated world) a linear time is working; if one experiences recurrence, it cannot be but his or her own mental construction (or that of the act of narration).

Another problem is caused by the hypothesis that recurrence necessarily means the repeated occurrence of an abstract scheme without minute details, since in literature the recurrence of scenes rich in detail is a quite common feature. Genette tries to solve this problem through inducing the notion of pseudo-iterative narration:

[there are] scenes presented, particularly by their wording in the imperfect, as iterative, whereas their richness and precision of detail ensure that no reader can seriously believe they occur and reoccur in that manner, several times, without any variation (Genette 121).

Such presentation is “literary convention,” “narrative licence”; (Genette 121) every reader “naturally interprets this as hyperbole,” and instead of the literally written “this happened every day” they will read “every day something of this kind happened” (Genette 122).

Narratology has elaborated a complete methodology and a closed logic construction to eliminate non-linear time concepts from the narrated world. This construction, however, has the shortage that it regards the basic linear time concept both as eternal reality and at the same time an attitude construed by the common sense. But this common sense cannot coincide with the readers’ primary experience, which is necessarily influenced by their mental constructions as well. A vast majority of human beings do experience recurrence in nature. But it is their mental construction; using their common sense they should know that such a thing does not exist. Human thought, however, evidently changes in history. Where can we find the eternal standard of common sense with linear time as a part of it? I think, we can do this in the case of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century science. At that time reason seemed able to know reality independently from historically changing mental constructions, and simultaneously notions of linear time were also flourishing.

Concepts of time are, of course, changing in history. Christianity has erased the mostly cyclic time concepts of Antiquity. This development has usually been ascribed to St. Augustine, who had elaborated the linear concept of time because sacred history contains events such as the Creation, Fall, and Salvation in a fixed order that can never recur (St. Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* 12.13–14; cf. Turetzky 56). Linear time seems to have become homogeneous with the development of precise, mechanical clocks that have made time something objective and independent from human perception (Turetzky 68–69). Newton based his physics on this time concept. From the constancy of time and space the relativity of speed necessarily followed. The concept, however, was not compatible with the constancy of the speed of light. With the theory of relativity modern physics has renounced a concept of the homogeneous time, and some scientific theories nowadays seem to experiment with some restrictions of the linearity of time, which does not necessarily mean the return of cyclic time concepts, rather the “no boundary condition” (Hawking 115–141). Twentieth century philosophy does not favour the concept of linear and homogeneous time either. Narratology therefore makes use of the time concept of an outdated scientific paradigm.

I think we have good reasons to reject the time concept that was the base of the comparison of narratological analysis. First, the concept is itself a historical phenomenon and should not be regarded as an eternal standard; second, the rude oppositions of perception and common sense, reality and mental constructions, or reality and language are not supportable in a post-modern context any longer.

Gilles Deleuze differentiates between two archetypes of repetition that he calls Platonic and Nietzschean, respectively. The first one presupposes a pre-established identity in the world on the basis of which one can perceive difference, while the second one thinks “of similitude and even identity as the product of fundamental disparity” (Deleuze 302, cf. Miller 5–17). The narratological concepts of repetition evidently belong to the second type that Deleuze – for one reason or another⁶ – calls Nietzschean, and they are so closed because they subordinate identity, which they regard a mental or linguistic construction, to difference, which they regard as reality. It is, however, not at all evident that one cannot choose another identity concept to approach literature (Bezeczky 2000, 56–57⁷). Cyclic time concepts, of course, belong to the “Platonic” identity concept. If we supposed that the time of the represented world does not necessarily work in harmony with our own time concept (of whatever type it is), we might experience more interesting readings.

After this long, but necessary, theoretical excursion let us turn back to the time concepts of *The Siege of Beszterce*. The first part of the novel takes place in Pongrácz's world. One of the peculiarities is that the rules of linear time are not or are hardly effective there. Time is standing, or cyclically recurring. If we imagine history in accordance with nineteenth-century scientific worldview as something happening in linear time, we should deny the possibility that different people live in different ages at the same moment, or that history stops at some places. The narrator declares something like this about Count Pongrácz and his environment.

This is a perfect setting for a castle, and for a feudal lord. Here live the monsters of olden times, not those of today. The snorting of the steam engine is not to be heard here; instead you hear the coughing of Jarinkó, the spirit of the woods. (Mikszáth 11)

Hush! The nineteenth century shall not elbow its way in here (*ibid.*).

These declarations, of course, can be interpreted figuratively; they might describe not the historical time or the natural rules actually working in that area but the beliefs of the Slovak inhabitants. We can reformulate this figurative meaning as “both the infrastructural modernization and the population's thinking are undeveloped”. However, the enlightenment rhetoric and an anthropology “as an allochronic discourse”, a “science of other men in another Time” (Fabian 143), which stigmatise “undeveloped” areas, tend to suggest through the identification of history and time that different times may coexist. This concept regards the existence of other times as a pathological anomaly of time/history, which must be cured. On this ground one should identify in Mikszáth's text the age with the worldview of the population. The opposition of the nineteenth-century steam engine and the prehistoric Jarinkó as two monsters (who snort and cough, respec-

tively) cannot be formulated but from the viewpoint of the “undeveloped” local population. It is to them that a steam engine could appear as a monster.

No matter which solution we choose, the history that plays in a linear and scientific time is not valid in castle Nedec and its environment. If we accept the narrator’s statements, history has stopped here, and the rules of a former historical age are here still valid; time passes at different speeds in different areas, moreover it can stop. If we interpret the narrator’s statement figuratively, history is independent from linear time, and it is identical with the changes of the community’s worldview; scientific time concepts, of course, cannot clarify the changing attitudes. According to the narrator’s declaration, Count Pongrácz even more clearly denies the conception of history as a process in linear time:

I don’t want to live in the nineteenth century. I’ll return to the seventeenth, since that’s what appeals to me. Time may come and time may go, but it won’t carry me with it; I’ll put myself where I want to be (Mikszáth 20).

One can even move backwards in this history if one really wants to.

In order to be somewhere in time, instead of being carried by it, one has to stop one’s own time or to be outside of the movement of time. Pongrácz achieves this by making each day the same. The whole “First Part” emphasises uniformity, especially in the recurrent narratorial remarks:

Everything went to schedule (Mikszáth 16).

When the roast appeared István Pongrácz rose to his feet and proposed a toast to the health of Franz Josef, the king (the *same*, and only, toast *every day*) (Mikszáth 17).

Every day, whatever day it was, he beckoned to his catellan, saying: “Be good enough to bring the treasure-chest” (*ibid.*).

... to await the *daily* distribution of largess (*ibid.*).

“The servant of the Lord shall not enter the haunts of the Devil,” Count István would *invariably* remark. (*ibid.*, emphases added)

The actors are not only doing the same in a given hour of every day, but they are also using the same words too. We should interpret this phenomenon as a signal of the pseudo-iterative, or we should accept that Nedec is a special world where the same events recur each day.

We read of a place that is cut out of its surroundings and where a different time works. This time is historically different, and in contrast to the environment it is staying, or it exists in the cyclic recurrence of exactly the same days. If we describe the world of the first part in such an inseparable coalition of time and space, it suggests something like a chronotope in Bakhtin’s sense. And we can really find

a novel-chronotope in Bakhtin's writing, which is quite similar to the one described above. I mean the chronotope of the castle.

The castle is saturated through and through with a time that is historical in the narrow sense of the word, that is, the time of the historical past. The castle is the place where the lords of the feudal era lived (and consequently also the place of historical figures of the past); the traces of centuries and generations are arranged in it in visible forms as various parts of its architecture, in furnishings, weapons, the ancestral portrait gallery, the family archives and in the particular human relationships involving dynastic primacy and the transfer of hereditary rights. And finally legends and traditions animate every corner of the castle and its environs through their constant reminders of past events (Bakhtin 245–246).

Bakhtin associates this chronotope with the English gothic novel and with the historical novel, especially with its version developed by Walter Scott. The narrator of Mikszáth's novel clearly refers to that tradition of the European novel when he traces back the peculiarities of the time in Nedec or Pongrácz's concept of time – we have seen that it is not so easy to differentiate between them – to the time that is objectified in the castle and its furnishings, and that is present in the family tradition and in the legends told around the castle. The war games presuppose a great amount of medieval weaponry stored in the castle, and Estella's role as mistress of the castle presupposes the many medieval costumes (Mikszáth 13 and 15). The connection between the family tradition and Pongrácz's behaviour, so strange for outsiders, is already made in the "Introduction" – in a rational manner, of course, which is characteristic of the narrator:

The history of the Pongrácz family is full of mediaeval brilliance and splendour: Pongrácz of Szentmiklós, to whom princes paid tribute; Péter Pongrácz, handsomest of knights, object of a queen's unhappy love; Pál of the great broadsword, who reaped a harvest of Turkish heads; and to match these valiant forbears, as many stately, soft complexioned Pongrácz damsels, with their plumed hats and little golden slippers, later to become the mothers of great historical figures, and, later still, white-robed phantoms in the castles where they had once lived... The history of this family is like a bottomless lake. If you gaze into it too deeply you become dizzy, unless you have a strong head. Count István did not have a strong head, and he gazed very deeply indeed... (Mikszáth 8).

This connection is even more clearly formulated in the narrator's comments on Pongrácz's ritual before falling asleep.

The page massaged his legs while the clerk read chapters from the history of his ancestors. The ancestors lulled their extraordinary

grandchild to sleep, and in his sleep he continued to weave the fabric of their adventures, putting his dreams into practice when he awoke next day (Mikszáth 19–20).

I have already mentioned the legends spoken in the castle's environment. The narrator also tried to make a connection between the environment and Pongrácz's behaviour.

This is a perfect setting for a castle, and for a feudal lord. Here live the monsters of olden times, not those of today (Mikszáth 11).

The isolation of the given place and the limitation of the agents' movements logically must play some role in the creation of so static a chronotope. In "Part I" they actually do, although isolation does not seem a presupposition, but the result of a longer process. However static a world Nedec is, the singular mood of narrative is important despite the predominance of static descriptions and the iterative. The singular events, however, all contribute to the increase of isolation. To Pongrácz's behaviour his wider social environment (the local gentry) reacts with an attempt at isolating him; to these attempts he reacts with such unusual actions that, as a final result, increase his isolation. When he has a broken leg, he forbids the doctor to reduce the bones; he becomes lame and excludes himself from any sort of hop. After war games "magnum áldomás"⁸ follows, which contains a ball for the gentry, but "the titled families were reluctant to allow their wives and daughters to visit Nedec castle", because there was no lady of the house (Mikszáth 14). Therefore count Pongrácz buys Donna Estella, the equestrienne of a circus company, to have a lady of the house. Her person is, of course, not at all suitable to attract gentile ladies to Nedec, and she also increases the count's isolation through preventing him from visiting his high-born neighbours. It makes his isolation perfect; nobody visits him, and he cannot go anywhere. Nothing can bother the daily cycle of Nedec's time any longer. The elimination of movement makes the chronotope completely closed; the lack of movement, of course, does not dissolve time, but makes it hardly perceptible. Interventions from outside do not seem able to cause essential changes in Nedec. When Estella arrives there, we are informed that the count "continued to devote himself to his singular pastimes" (Mikszáth 15), and not even the hard training before the war against the professional soldiers in Budetin can change the daily routine: "But, apart from that, life flowed in its usual channel" (Mikszáth 36). The narrator concludes his description of life in Nedec, or rather that of the stability of this world as follows:

No, there probably never would have been any change in the count's way of life, in which case I would never have written this tale, if he had not had neighbours as mad as Baron Pál Behenczy and his son Károly (Mikszáth 22).

What follows is the description of the life-style of the two barons Behenczy. Two plots might be said to be present in "Part I" as well. The time of the Behenczys is almost as cyclic as that of Pongrácz, but its cycles encompass longer periods of time.

This income was paid every six months and, as long as it lasted, father and son devoted themselves to the wildest carousals and merry-making. The boy went off to have his fling in Vienna and the father to Pest, or vice-versa; but they never went together. And how long did those five thousand forints last? Between ten and twenty days. By the end of the month penury had already brought them together once more in the ancient Trencsén castle, where, like Miklós Toldi's horse they eked out a bare existence for five months, until the time came for them to spread their wings again (Mikszáth 23).

After five months' penury in Northern Hungary they could enjoy a luxurious life for one month in Budapest or in Vienna. Father and son spent five months together, and then one month apart. Periods of penury differ according to the seasons, since penury in summer is much more tolerable, but this difference cyclically returns. This aspect attaches an artificial cycle consisting of a life annuity paid twice a year to the Behenczys' world of natural cycles. As far as I can judge, the Behenczys' world is as static as that of Pongrácz's, which does not mean that they are identical. From the viewpoint of time, they do not differ essentially, but the value systems which their worlds centre around are basically different.

The way the narrator mentions his own narrative (quoted on page 280) is eye-catching, because it seems to suggest that a narrative presupposes a change. And I dare actually say that there is a tradition of narrative in European literature where a change is needed to make a story begin from a static and balanced initial situation. The narrator of *The Siege of Beszterce* seems to hint at this tradition of narrative when he declares that the possibility of narrating Pongrácz's world presupposes a change in that world.

Tzvetan Todorov regarded the need of change as a quite general rule of narrative. In his narratology a minimal complete plot is a passage from one state of equilibrium to another. In the ideal narrative the initial "stable situation is disturbed by some power or force" and due to this change after a set of incidents a new state of equilibrium will develop at the end (Todorov 1977, 111). An initial static situation and an intention to change this very situation constitute what Todorov calls "obligatory propositions" of any narrative (Todorov 1977, 117). We should highlight two problems of this concept. First, Todorov wants to write the grammar of narrative in general, but he discusses examples from Boccaccio's novellas in the *Decameron*, while the framing of the plot remains outside of his view. He published the French original of the paper I referred to above one year

before his book on the grammar of the *Decameron* in which he explicated his ideas in much more detail but with a restricted claim for generalisation (Todorov 1969). Nothing either in the previous sketch or in the later book proves that the results of the structural analysis of Boccaccio's novellas can be really generally applied to *every* narrative; actually he generalises the results without reflecting upon the problem of the possibility of generalisation. The second problem is the contingency of Todorov's interpretative viewpoints. He seems to regard his inquiry as completely objective (and maybe therefore something that can be generalized without any further argumentation). The interpretation of a text, however, deeply influences the structure of the text, which is to be the result of the analysis, and the interpretation is also preformed by the interpretative points of view. For example he declares: "The second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical" (Todorov 1977, 111). What is similar and what is identical, however, depends on our choice of viewpoints and culturally determined identity concepts (Bezeczky 2000, 57–58). And in case of tragic stories, to find an obvious counter-example, which contains a rather important group of European narratives, one would need a quite sophisticated system of viewpoints to prove that the initial and the final situations are similar. What is a state of equilibrium and what is not also remains a question of the chosen viewpoints. Todorov solves this problem by regarding the initial state of equilibrium a peculiarity of the *fabula*; his "ideal" *suzjet* corresponds to the *fabula* in this respect. He describes, however, an important group even among the novellas of the *Decameron*, which do not begin with a state of equilibrium because that initial state of the *fabula* has been already disturbed before the beginning of the *suzjet* (Todorov 1977, 118).

After these restrictions I dare not say that the narrator in *The Siege of Beszterce* formulates a general rule; nonetheless he refers to an important tradition of European narrative literature when he speaks of change as a criterion of narration. We cannot, however, easily answer the question of what causes the change in this story. Having mad neighbours is said to be a necessary condition of the change, but from this it does not follow that it is simultaneously a sufficient condition. If a mention of a necessary condition meant a necessary and sufficient condition, the narrator's statement would imply that in this narrative world everything necessarily follows from the preceding events. In such a view of narrative one could recognise the Aristotelian requirement of a causality regulating the whole plot, which requirement played a central role in the nineteenth-century theory of the novel. In this case the narrator would refer to a tradition of the European novel again, or at least to its dominant reading strategy.

This, however, would be too long a way to go. The narrator does not say that the contact with the Behenczys' world was the only cause of change in Pongrácz's world, but that it was one of its preconditions. If the change, however, has some preconditions, we need to suppose the working of a sort of causality, even if not in

the most challenging Aristotelian form. The arrival of the younger Behenczy at Nedec does not cause any change for a while; he is said to conform to the new environment: he “made himself more and more at home” (Mikszáth 36). The direct cause of the change cannot be but the table scene when Behenczy tries to flirt with Estella. If we regard this scene as the cause of the change, which really has the precondition of having mad neighbours, we can conclude that a strict causality is working in this world, where a thoughtless movement is enough to cause imprisonment in a dungeon, the organisation of the escape, the declaration of war, and so on.

It is important to emphasise that the mention of preconditions does not necessarily imply this logic of causality. And if so, the narrator does not have the hegemony of interpretation in Mikszáth's text; moreover the identity of the narrator in different parts of the text is also questionable. We can detect some contradiction even here, since the narratorial discourse has previously presented Pongrácz's world as a rather stable one, which is able to avert, or to integrate, any influence from the outside. Why do not work the usual mechanisms in this case? Does the table scene really differ so much from all of the previous events? Why exactly is it these neighbours who are able to cause changes in Pongrácz's world?

His men find Pongrácz's reaction to Behenczy's act exaggerated and senseless, and therefore they join each other in preventing him carrying out his plans, which they have never done before. Some previous changes in his mental disposition might clarify his unusual reaction to this event, since his behaviour became somewhat strange some days earlier. He plucked off the flowers of the apple tree to offend God, and he cancelled the summertime war, about which he had seemed to be so enthusiastic. The passage that described Pongrácz's mental change begun with the following statement of the narrator:

One day, however, an event of a different sort occurred. The count was walking in his garden when he saw a magnificent rose in full bloom in the greenhouse (Mikszáth 37).

Might be the “event of different sort” that changes everything the blooming of a rose in the garden and not Behenczy's thoughtless movement? Count Pongrácz allows his servants to send the rose to Erzsébet Motesiczky, who sends him Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and this book seems to cause mental changes in the count. The tradition of the European novel enters the story again, this time in the form of an actually denominated piece of central importance.

In order to understand this scene, I think we should discuss in some detail the problem of fictionality in Mikszáth's novel. In the “Introduction” put before “Part I” a narrator tells about the origin of the novel. He declares that it is not a fictive story; Count Pongrácz did live; moreover, he will appear with his real name in the novel. The author further claims that he personally met Pongrácz once, and he

received all the data from the count's relatives. On the other hand the relatives evidently supplied not only data, but interpretations as well:

Relatives would join us at the table, and they in turn contributed piecemeal to the outline of István Pongrácz (Mikszáth 7).

I made many enquiries about him, and probed deeply to uncover the driving force within him. Those who knew him intimately all said the same thing: "Count István had brains, but not much. He had ambition too, overmuch of that. He wanted to cut a figure at any cost, but he realised that he couldn't as an ordinary sensible man, so he tried to do so as a lunatic" (*ibid.*).

The relatives do not simply inform the author; they offer character sketches (since they are speaking of an outline), and they try to find a psychological explanation for his behaviour. The narrator's activity must rest upon those interpretations. Readers are from the very first page faced by a suggestion that facts (or at least the facts of Count Pongrácz's life) do not exist (at least for the narrator and through him for us) outside of a human perception that implies the act of interpretation. Patterns on the basis of which the interpretations can be construed are, of course, culturally determined. The most obvious pattern is, as we have already seen, that of the lunatic, which is mostly applied both by the novel's agents and the narrator. An interpretation based upon the pattern of a lunatic does not necessarily mean that one is called a lunatic, since the act of interpretation may have a negative result ("he is not lunatic") as well. The interpretation, however, can be performed by many other patterns of the literary tradition as well. In later chapters of the novel, for example, the majority of the agents interpret Pongrácz's attitude towards Apolka in the pattern of the comedy figure of the amorous old man, and this interpretation is supported by the narrator as well. And we have already seen that the narrator's comments imply various elements of the European tradition of narrative: the chronotope of the castle, the tradition of the narrative that presupposes a change, the principle of strict causality. These interpretative patterns are more or less incompatible. Readers must personally decide which attempt at interpretation they will accept as successful and in what degree; and it probably depends also on the readers' interpretative strategies whether they regard the relationship of the different patterns dialogic, or aporetic (which do not necessarily exclude each other), or dialectic. To take the interpretation based upon the principle of causality as an example, one can ask whether the causes offered by the narrative (mad neighbours, a thoughtless movement, one single rose, reading *Don Quixote*) exclude or complement each other. If they exclude each other, does their co-presence mean the deconstruction of the narrative strategy based on the principle of causality? If they complement each other, does anything guarantee the knowledge of all the partial causes, or does the beginning of a series of partial explanations,

which can be continued ad libitum, lead to aporia, just like the system of causes excluding each other does?

Be it as it may, Erzsébet Motesiczky interprets Count Pongrácz through the narrative of *Don Quixote*, and her interpretation enters the story as an active force when it changes the count's behaviour. Since he is told that the book is sent to him as an allusion, he must read it as an interpretation of himself, and the application that he cannot avert in this situation affects him in an extremely destructive way. We cannot have, of course, any idea why exactly this interpretation affects him so much while he could easily reject all the interpretative attempts based upon the pattern of the lunatic. Nonetheless, the cultural allusion is quite important as a *mise en abyme* of the narration. The narrator that makes an appearance as an agent in the "Introduction" cannot experience Count Pongrácz, whom he regards as a part of reality but only through some interpretations. When agents of the narrative connect their interpretations to a well-known literary narrative, this almost explicitly declares a thought usually associated with modernism or post-modernism that the interpretation of reality is performed by pre-existent cultural patterns and narratives. And when such an interpretation starts forming the story itself as an active force, this undermines the narrator's suggestion of purely putting data on record, and directs the readers' attention towards the story's poetic formation, i.e., fictionality. The literary influence of *Don Quixote*, however, can be detected also in the poetical forming of the story, which makes Ms. Motesiczky's interpretation of count Pongrácz a *mise en abyme* of the whole *Siege of Beszterce*.

According to the narrator's comments, Pongrácz seems to have built out a stable world, which was existing in a uniformity of cyclically recurring events and in a gradually increasing isolation, until an unexpected event probably from outside disturbed this state of equilibrium. The narrative offers several possibilities of this event changing everything, but the uncertainty of the actual direct cause does not influence the result that due to the change Pongrácz denounces his tacit agreement with the externals and, what might be even more important, he decides to leave Nedec and to start moving about in space.

Count Pongrácz, however, gives a completely different explanation for the genesis of the change:

I knew that something was bound to happen, I felt it in my bones. For you see, my Polish friend, the world had become very empty and dull; completely stuck in the mud, in fact. I had even been thinking that perhaps it was time for us to part company (Mikszáth 56).

As if the static nature of the world or the increasing stability itself enforced a change, which therefore cannot be the result of any intervention from outside. Pongrácz might be fed up with the attempts at his isolation, but with the rupture of isolation he necessarily imparts motion upon time too. Instead of the imitated

wars, which were fixed in place and which supported cyclic time, he has to attempt a real military expedition.

Let us have a look at Zsolna as well, where Pongrácz is going, although neither this fact nor its importance is evident after “Part I”. Zsolna is a different world with different rules, and the differences highlight some additional peculiarities of Nedec too. “Part II” is dominated by the singular mood of narrative, the time in Zsolna is linear. Some events recur, nevertheless, and it seems a good idea to analyse those first. For a while the two Trnowszky brothers alternately take the responsibility for Apolka’s education; she lives half year in Péter’s, half year in Gáspár’s house. This half year long cycles might remind one of the Behenczys’ lifestyle, but there are two important differences. The cycles work in only a short period of Apolka’s childhood, both before and after which she is just tossed about; the relative equilibrium cannot be maintained longer than for two years, which means that one cycle, i.e., a half year in one of the houses, is repeated only once. On the other hand the cycle does not really seem to recur. In the case of the Behenczys’ an iterative narrative presented the uncountable set of indistinguishable half years; in Zsolna a continuous contention is going on between the brothers, and therefore we are only given details of differences. Every period appears in its particularity, and they can be clearly distinguished on the basis of their peculiarities, different both from the previous and the following periods. Even the half year long cycles are vehicles of permanent changes here.

We can describe the permanent conflicts and hostilities as another characteristic feature of the life in Zsolna. The two brothers face each other in hostile opposition, and a similar hostility divides Hungarians and Slovaks, or to put it in more exact terms, Hungarian patriots and Pan-Slavists, since ethnicity in Zsolna seems a question of personal decision rather than origin or acculturation (Kiss 87–91). The middle class agents of some importance in the novel are bilingual, and the example of Miloszláv Trnowszky, who becomes Emil Tarnóczy at a moment in the story, suggests that a shift of national identity is as easy for them as the shift of language. But it does not matter on which side they decide to stand, they behave with hostility against the other side.

We did not read of such ethnic hostility in Count Pongrácz’s world. The peasantry and the majority of the count’s men are Slovaks, and therefore the language of commands in the everyday war games is Slovak. Pongrácz uses that language without any problem or ethnic conflict. “The peasantry humbly idolised him. (Mikszáth 35) The opponent armies in the “wars” are formed by chance (*Na dve stránke, chlapani!* [Fall into two divisions men!]), and their roles as besiegers or defenders are decided by lots. In Nedec there is a joyful permanent war without hostility, in Zsolna a peace full of hostility.

It happens twice that persons known from “Part One” appear in “Part Two,” but their behaviour is different from what one would expect on the basis of the previ-

ous experience. We have two possibilities. Applying a usual reading strategy we should suppose that the agents are unique psychic entities, and in this case we should modify our image of them through finding a sort of psychological explanation for their incoherent behaviour. I would, however, suggest the other solution, namely that we give up the identity of persons appearing in different worlds. Exactly like a sign can have different meanings in different contexts, an agent of the novel can behave differently in different circumstances. When Count Pongrácz appears in a world that is impregnated with ethnic hostility he disturbs a meeting of the Matica with a "bad joke". The Behenczys seemed rather harmless rascals. They provided many little difficulties to the local population, but the wise old men said:

There's no point in grumbling, you donkeys, about the Behenczys being poor and hungry and ruining you so that they can eat. That's fine. That's natural. A few wretched chicken don't matter all that much (Mikszáth 24).

In "Part II", however, Pál Behenczy appears as a really noxious person who wants to take a quite active role in Apolka's education as a would be prostitute.

Those passages where persons known from "Part I" are mentioned or appear in "Part II" might make one aware of the need for some relation between the two stories and might excite some expectations of their connection. However, the unusual behaviour of the persons known from a different environment might highlight the difference of the context, the different roles and patterns of behaviour regulating this world.

The permanent changes in Zsolna, however, are not exclusively caused by the tensions between persons and groups. A not less important reason is that people living here always aim at something, they always want to do or to have something, they always have plans. This feature is, of course, connected with the tensions, since the contrary intentions of different groups may follow to hostility. And what the brothers Trnowszky generally want is nothing else but to hurt each other. Apolka, the beautiful young girl appears in this world as the symbolic object of desire. Desires do not tend towards her directly, but almost everybody wants to reach their goals through her possession and use. Klivényi wants to get money through her. Péter and Gáspár Trnowszky want to annoy each other through pampering her. The mayor entrusts Apolka to Klivényi in order to ensure her Hungarian patriotic education. Emil Tarnóczy's love might be the exemption: a desire that tends towards Apolka herself. She is quite passively standing in the centre of the different intentions. She never wants anything; she only adapts herself to the others' intentions. Her person is not at all interesting for anybody (apart from Emil), which is absolutely evident in the periods when nobody happens to need her.

As a contrast, there are no intentions in Nedec. Count Pongrácz does not want anything, because he is completely satisfied by his static life. All the people around him are interested in maintaining the status quo, in which they can make their living. Here too a woman is the only exemption. She wants to get married to the count. Her intention, however, does not cause either any tensions or any changes in Nedec. At most it increases the isolation, which supports the stability and uniformity of the life in the castle. We are, however, informed of a little opposition between Colonel Pamutkay and the pseudo-Polish Pruzsinszky. The colonel suggests that the above mentioned rose should be sent to Ms. Motesiczky because he “would have liked to marry off his master to this wealthy young lady” (Mikszáth 37). Pruzsinszky, however, reminds the count that the book sent by her is an insult, because he “didn’t want the count to get married (he wanted to live in the castle for the rest of his life)” (*ibid.*). Their opposition does not result in any hostility, and it seems to have little importance. The story, however, is interesting, because it demonstrates another feature of the life in Nedec; if somebody wants something here, he or she wants Count Pongrácz to do something. He really seems to live the life of a medieval oligarch; everything depends on him, and other persons can try to influence him at the most. He is the only one that is able to act, but he does not want to, and therefore no change can occur in his world. This situation is to be terminated by Behenczy’s escape, which is the result of cooperation by the whole court, including Estella. This time the people around Pongrácz, after trying to influence him in vain, act autonomously, and by that they take over his freedom of action.

The worlds of Nedec and Zsolna are basically different in many aspects. The time is cyclic in Nedec, but linear in Zsolna; and what is not at all independent from this fact, in Zsolna everything is in permanent movement due to various intentions and tensions, while in Nedec the lack of intentions stops time. These differences could be described with such dichotomies as village and town, the Middle Ages and modernity, or harmony and disharmony. Signals of fictionality also differ. The “Introduction” declares that the story of Count István Pongrácz is not fictive, but the story contains plenty hints at various traditional literary genres and other signals of fictionality. The Zsolna narrative begins like a folk tale (once upon a time there was a man, who had three sons, who learned different professions),⁹ but then we are directly introduced into a world of facts well-known from the contemporary newspapers. These include the Pan-Slavist movement or meetings of Matica. This “realist” narrative does not display its fictionality as a literary topic.

What will happen when two so different worlds encounter each other? Will they be in conflict, or will they compromise? Will one of them change or destroy the other, or will they coalesce in an interaction? The benevolent citizens of Zsolna seem to manage to avert the conflict and restore the previous state through

a clever trick. The army returns to Nedec, where they continue their isolated life; and Pongrácz's short visit in Zsolna could not change anything about the town. The count, however, brings Apolka with him as a hostage, and this will inject Zsolna into Nedec. When Apolka substitutes for Estella, everything changes basically. Count Pongrácz's passivity had previously blocked every intention around him, while in Zsolna the similarly passive Apolka had activated all the other persons' intentions. When they live together in the Nedec castle, things work as previously in Zsolna. Apolka remains the only passive figure in the centre of various intentions. Even Count Pongrácz himself starts elaborating some long-term plans. "His ambition" is to provide the finest education for Apolka; he wants to write a book on the intellectual faculty of asses. "Donkeys definitely ought to be rehabilitated in the eyes of the world" (Mikszáth 142); he wants to put the things of his estate in order, moreover he wants to get rich.

Estella was increasing the count's isolation, Apolka quickly dissolved it:

Meanwhile Apolka developed into a lovely, slender young woman. The news of her beauty spread far beyond the borders of Trencsén and even in the rich Nyitra there was much talk of the "Rose of Nedec." Young men descended like swarms of locusts upon the castle. (...) The young men had sisters whom they persuaded (for a sister is a good go-between) to visit Nedec too, and, for their daughters' sakes the mothers began to come also. Soon Nedec Castle, as in times long past, was filled once more with the leading gentry from the neighbouring countryside, young ladies in silk bottines, and stately matrons of haughty demeanour. Instead of the long drinking bouts there were gay balls (Mikszáth 143–144).

The jovial war games, which had not caused either hostility or danger, because death was excluded, ceased. Instead of them the count fought a duel with pistols, because a young gentleman kissed Apolka's shoulder, and was fatally wounded. The tension around her reappeared in Nedec, especially when Emil Tarnóczy declared himself as a suitor. From that point on Pongrácz had to fight for Apolka, and not only against Tarnóczy but the whole world: Zsolna demanded its hostage back.

Michael Riffaterre thinks that signals of fictionality hint at an important truth by suspending probability. (Riffaterre 33) Probability itself, however, is also artificially construed through the repetition of the tautological derivations of a linguistically given element (Riffaterre xiv–xv). Not only the direct signals of fictionality can therefore suspend probability. New elements can be made probable by later tautological repetitions with a retrospective effect. When they appear first, they might be as well be regarded as signals of fictionality (if everything is a signal, which suspends probability), but they at least may hint at a truth, since according to Riffaterre where probability ceases, truth will take its place (Riffaterre

46). Emil Tarnóczy's escape from the Nedec dungeon contradicts the previously construed norms of probability in the novel. The only person who had known the underground passage was Commandant Károly Pongrácz. Count István Pongrácz, the owner of the castle and the family history nut, who had known the function of the sling slot in the dining hall, found the disappearance of the prisoner mysterious. Apolka can be said to have liquidated the count's world, and the story of the underground passage made it absolutely clear that this world has disintegrated. A secret passage under the castle should have been typical of Pongrácz's world, but this time such a means has been invented against him. He has been integrated in a world of ambitions, tensions and linear time, and he has partly given the accessories of his previous life up. The war games are suspended, although he tells the constable: "The fortunes of war are changeable, my good sir" (Mikszáth 183), and now these accessories are used by others. On the other hand this secret passage dissolves the isolation once and for all. The dominant feature of Nedec previously was the castle wall, which excluded the enemy and ensured defence; this new accessory of the Middle Ages has been invented to admit people from outside. The function of the underground passage cannot be for insuring a way of escape for the defenders in case of an irresistible siege, since they do not know it. Instead, it is a way from the outside into the castle without the defenders' knowledge. And we learn that the passage was also originally built for this purpose:

István Szunyogh arranged for it to be dug years ago when he wanted to rescue Erzsébet Czobor, Count Nedeczky's beautiful wife, who was held prisoner in the dungeon at Nedec. He brought her out here, the rascal (Mikszáth 186).

The underground passage dissolves the isolation of the castle, but those in the castle do not know this. We can suppose that the passage was in existence all the time, and this fact makes the isolation illusory in retrospect. People outside Nedec could always have intruded into the castle, and they were always superior. But until that time they did not make use of their advantage. With this reading strategy, however, which presupposes linear time, we would identify ourselves with the world outside Nedec. The improbability of the event seems to suggest another reading strategy. When Count Pongrácz or Baron Behenczy appeared as quite different personalities in Zsolna from those we have experienced in another context, we did not think it necessary to reinterpret their previous behaviour. In a similar way we can accept that in "Part I" the castle wall is the symbol of the increasing isolation of Nedec, while in "Part IV" the difference of the two worlds disappears, and therefore Nedec is connected to its environment by an underground passage.

Nedec becomes completely exposed because of this connection. Count Pongrácz also understands that the integrity of his world has ceased:

The prisoner Tarnóczy's escape, which no one among the inmates of the castle was able to explain, completely crushed István Pongrácz. He was gripped by fear, and he began to be tormented by strange misgivings.

"They will take the girl away from me," he murmured, and his teeth chattered (Mikszáth 187).

The above discussion might suggest that the encounter of the two worlds had led to the complete destruction of one of them without any changes in the other. The recurrent events on the last pages of the novel, however, might imply that the encounter with Pongrácz's world had left traces on Zsolna too. If we apply Deleuze's typology to these worlds, the Platonic concept of recurrence with the supposition of basic identities will be characteristic of Nedec, while the Nietzschean type with the supposition of basic differences will be characteristic of Zsolna. After both story lines meet and mingle, the singular mood of narrative predominates, and the recurrent events cannot be easily classified with Deleuze's typology. We learn that the cyclic uniformity of the Behenczys' lifestyle has been restored. Estella has assumed the role of the shrewish old housekeeper. The description of their life emphasises the identity of the situations in "Part I" and "Part IV". And the singular event in which the son cheats his father through some pretended indignation because of the violation of family tradition in order to sell Estella alone is the repetition of an event in "Part I" when the father cheated his son in a quite similar way. There are several differences between these events, but the identical traits and the recurrence seem to be emphasised. The Behenczys' cyclic life was characteristic of the world in "Part I", and this feature of that world seems to have survived without any change, or at least to have been restored after Estella grew old.

The novel ends with the second appearance of the false delegation of Beszterce. In which degree is the delegation identical with the first one? The event undoubtedly conforms to the logic of linear time, since they reclaim the hostage they had given. On the other hand, the linear time allows for some recurrence. The same persons reunite to repeat or repair a previous dishonesty. The purpose of the repetition of the previous event is to restore an original state so that Estella should be in Nedec and Apolka in Zsolna. The similarity is not only emphasised by the identity of actors and the accessories, but also by the diction of the director, who speaks in iambic pentameters, like in the first delegation. This metre appears only in these two cases in the novel, while all the other poetic quotations are written in traditional Hungarian metrical forms.

Director Lengeffy tried to interpret the events in the context of Shakespeare's tragedies, but this time the narrator definitely rejected this interpretation; he regarded this genre tradition as completely inadequate here. Lengeffy's poetic, or at

least metrical, diction was inadequate also in the first delegation, because it caused serious problems of communication. Another actor found it necessary to explain his speech with an interruption in prose, and Count Pongrácz also needed to ask for the meaning at the end:

And until then this child remains with me as a hostage, if I have understood you well? (Mikszáth 133)

This time the narrator's discourse emphasises the inadequacy of Lengeffy's utterance; the director is said to utter his pathetic words "with indifference," and the narrator comments the apostrophe of "My lords and ladies" as follows:

But there being no lords or ladies present to draw the moral from these sad events, it was left to Estella to make the next observation: "Yes, yes, I know. But now what happens to me?" (Mikszáth 233)

The inadequate poetic speech in iambic pentameters returns, although the delegation itself is cancelled because of Count Pongrácz's death. For the repetition of the delegation all the actors, who had dispersed in the meantime, must have been reassembled, which also might signal some of the remaining influence of the cyclic time of "Part I" in this world of linear time. The story lines, while they were presented in paratactic order, could not interact but in the reading. After they meet and mingle, they can realise the interaction also in the narrative, and the united story line contains characteristic features of both worlds. Although Zsolna basically dominates, the principle of recurrence characteristic of Nedec does not disappear. In the last scene of the novel it happens first that the two emblematic female figures of "Part I" and "Part II" are present at the same place. As usual, the moving centre is Apolka (the whole delegation has been organised because of her), and Estella declares that as an active person she has some intentions. Her intention is rather vague and general, but it is clear that her intention will not be able to make anybody act this time either.

The encounter of the different worlds can hardly be said to create a new quality of harmonic unity. When the stories coalesce and unite as one single story, their incompatible features continue coexisting as incompatible. The dialogic reading of the novel did not result in a demonstration of unity or a harmonic order of various elements. It did, however, demonstrate that the incompatible elements can be understood in comparison to each other. The paratactic elements interpret each other, and this interpretation is realised in the reading.

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Notes

1. On this topic I published a paper in this journal some years ago (Hajdu 2000).
2. “In our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet us, from many strange places and by many strange roads, (...) and what it is set to us to do to them, and what it is set to them to do to us, will all be done. (...) Your pretty daughter (...) starts to think of such things. Yet, (...) you may be sure that there are men and women already on their road, who have their business to do with you, and who will do it. Of a certainty they will do it. They may be coming hundreds, thousands, of miles over the sea there; they may be close at hand now; they may be coming, for anything you know or anything you can do to prevent it, from the vilest sweepings of this very town” Miss Wade says (I 2). “Strange, if the little sick-room fire were in effect a beacon fire, summoning some one, and that the most unlikely some one in the world, to the spot that must be come to. Strange, if the little sick-room light were in effect a watch-light, burning in that place every night until an appointed event should be watched out! Which of the vast multitude of travellers, under the sun and the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another; which of the host may, with no suspicion of the journey’s end, be traveling surely hither? Time shall show us” the narrator says (I 15).
3. For Šklovskij *Little Dorrit* was an exemplary case of mystery novel.
4. This feature was also described and (as the whole composition I am discussing) condemned by Riedl (95): “the narrative suddenly stops and we are in Zsolna, listening to the story of a young girl, Apollónia. Then Mikszáth connects the two plots with a not at all probable incident.” But he raised the same objection against the story of the umbrella; since György Wibra encounters Veronka not even because of the umbrella, but because of a lost ear-ring (Riedl 83). The quest for the umbrella as the motivation for the hero and for the narrator following the hero to go from one world to the other does not imply any necessity in terms of the narrated – only in terms of the narration. What connects the two worlds is a completely accidental object, an umbrella, or rather the rambles of the insane Jónas Müncz. Can we imagine a more accidental connection than one created by the rambles of a lunatic?
5. For the possible connection of Foucault’s theory and the interpretation of Mikszáth’s novel see Eisemann 76.
6. Nietzsche could have given the name to a concept of eternal, unchanging recurrence as well.
7. For the application of his theoretical insight into the societal nature of time conceptions to the reading of literary texts see Bezczky 1998/99, 180–190.
8. The half Latin, half Hungarian phrase is a quotation from the Latin *Gesta Hungarorum* 16; the quotation attaches Pongrácz’s martial victory to the Hungarian conquest of Hungary, and highlights the fact that Pongrácz’s world, or at least the narrative of it is structured by history or by the narratives of historiography.
9. “... many years ago, there dwelt an ironmonger by the name of Trnowszky. He had three sons called Péter, György and Gáspár. When the boys were approaching manhood the old man, realizing that he had not long to live, called them together and told them that they must choose a carrier.” (Mikszáth 65)