

**MÓR JÓKAI,  
A CONTEMPORARY OF PIERRE MÉNARD:  
METAFICTION, HYPOTYPOSIS AND METALEPSIS  
IN JÓKAI'S PROSE OF THE 1880s**

After taking stock of his protagonist's visible oeuvre, the narrator of Jorge Luis Borges's emblematic short story *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* turns to the realization of the actual purpose of his writing, namely to become a "contemporary of William James"<sup>1</sup> and at the same time to bear witness to Menard's *invisible* oeuvre, since "there is not a single draft to bear witness to that yearslong labor"<sup>2</sup>. *The pseudo-summary*, or the "simulated summary of an imaginary text"<sup>3</sup> makes the text a hypertext whose hypotext is fictitious, that is, a pseudo-hypotext<sup>4</sup>. Mór Jókai's<sup>5</sup> 1886 short novel *A ki holta után áll boszut* [*The One Who Takes Revenge After His Death*]<sup>6</sup> does not evoke Borges' 1939 short story in the reader's mind primarily because it makes use of the popular (and variously applied) world literary topos<sup>7</sup> of the "burnt manuscript". Nor is it simply because Jókai's text is essentially built up of pseudo-hypotexts (a translation of a poem and a letter by his poet friend Sándor Petőfi, both certainly written by Mór Jókai, are also "published" in the text)

---

<sup>1</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* (1939). Transl. by Andrew Hurley, in *Collected Fictions*, New York, Penguin Books, 1999, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Transl. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln & London, Nebraska University Press, 1997, pp. 251ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 381ff.

<sup>5</sup> Mór Jókai (Maurus Jókai, 1825–1904) was the most influential prose writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Hungarian literature. He was known and respected worldwide in his time, but his international reputation faded as his translations became dated.

<sup>6</sup> *A ki holta után áll boszut* [*The One Who Takes Revenge After His Death*] was published in the third volume of the Hungarian monthly magazine *Magyar Szalon* in 8 instalments, from January to August 1886. The serial publication of *A Magláy-család* [*The Magláy Family*] was completed in the December 1885 issue of the journal, and the following year's subscription was advertised by the publisher with reference to a circulation of 10,000, and to Jókai's "brilliant new story", which was to be launched in January. The first book edition is Mór Jókai, *A Magláy-család – A ki holta után áll boszut: Két elbeszélés* [*The Magláy Family – The One Who Takes Revenge After His Death: Two Stories*], Budapest, Révai, 1887.

<sup>7</sup> Just a few examples that demonstrate the prevalence of the motif: Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler* (1890); Hermann Broch, *Der Tod des Vergil* (1945); Imre Kertész, *Felszámolás* (*Liquidation*, transl. by Tim Wilkinson); Christoph Ransmayr, *Die letzte Welt* (1988); Mikhail Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita* (1928–1940). One of the most frequently quoted sentences in world literature reads as follows (in Michael Glenny's translation): "'I'm sorry but I don't believe you', said Woland. 'You can't have. Manuscripts don't burn'." Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*. Transl. by Michael Glenny, New York, The New American Library, 1967, p. 281.

and pseudo-summaries (“Czifra asszony” [“Fancy Lady”]), which are organised around hypotexts, self-quotations and identifiable cultural codes that are easily recognisable by the reader (many of these are still meaningful today, not only to philologists). The burnt manuscript is already a metafictional device in Jókai’s short story *A remete hagyománya* [*The Legacy of the Hermit*], dated 1846, insofar as the embedded narrative is here also a pseudo-summary. The first-person narrator is the finder and destroyer of the hermit’s manuscript; the embedded narrative is thus a form of *re-scripturalisation*<sup>8</sup>. Relating Borges’ text from 1939 to the 1886 short novel can be exonerated from the charge of readerly arbitrariness, above all by the fact that Jókai’s narrative is based on variations of metadiegetic transgressions, of fictional and figural forms of metalepsis, and of the metaleptic staging of the author. Not only does “the author intervene in his own fiction”, but “his fiction also entangles itself in real life”<sup>9</sup>.

The short story consists of two parts. The peritext of the title of the first, shorter chapter establishes a hierarchy between the two parts. According to the subtitle, this chapter<sup>10</sup> is a prologue, an introduction to the “real” narrative (“And here begins the real narrative, the one promised by the title; for what I have told

---

<sup>8</sup> By *re-scripturalisation* I mean that the destroyed manuscript, which in this sense has lost its materiality, becomes an immaterial piece of writing that is still vividly present and thus identifiable as a *work* in the memory of its first and at the same time last reader (and annihilator). Although no longer tangible, it is made identifiable for the reader and those who remember it by the powerful effect of a reading that concludes in a single, closed-off meaning (See Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*. Translated by Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1986). The primary narrator, who attempts to re-record, to grasp the lost original, reflects on the fact that he is “recording” something which, due to the specificities of the work of memory, cannot be self-identical. In other words, it is a re-construction, a re-creation that is at an uncertain distance from its non-existent original. See Mór Jókai, *A remete hagyománya* [*The Legacy of the Hermit*], in *Elbeszélések (1842–1848)* [*Stories (1842–1848)*]. Edited by Ambrus Oltványi, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1971, p. 154: “A kunyhót szépen kitakarították, ami elvihető volt, elvitték belőle, csupán egy csomag megsárgult, megfoltosult írott papírt hagytak ott egy szegletbe vetve, mit én gondosan felszedtem, s mohón elolvastam. Ez iratok minden szavát szívembe oltottam akkor. Mint pokoli balzsam, úgy esett keserves lelkemnek. Ez lett embergyűlöletem katekizmusa. Később eszem megtérvén, az egészet a tűzbe dobtam. Most sajnálom. Sok ábrándos bohóság volt benne. Amennyire emlékemben maradt, megpróbálok néhányat közülök kuriózum gyanánt ide feljegyezni” (“The hut was neatly cleaned, what could be taken away was taken away from it, leaving only a packet of yellowed, faded writing paper in a corner, which I carefully picked up and eagerly read. I took every word of this paper to my heart. Like balm from hell it was to my bitter and hungry soul. It became the catechism of my misanthropy. Later, when I came to my senses, I threw it all into the fire. Now I am sorry. There was much fanciful folly in it. As far as I remember, I shall try to record some of them here as curiosities”). On the history of the short story’s genesis and editions see *Ibidem*, pp. 600ff. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

<sup>9</sup> Gérard Genette, *Métalepse. De la figure à la fiction*, Paris, Seuil, 2004, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Mór Jókai, *A ki holta után áll boszut*, in *A Maglár-család – A ki holta után áll boszut: Két elbeszélés* [*The Maglár Family – The One Who Takes Revenge After His Death: Two Stories*], Budapest, Révai, 1887, pp. 81–129.

you so far is only a preface”<sup>11</sup>), where the autobiographer appears only as a frame narrator. In the „real narrative”<sup>12</sup>, the narrator of the second part is a minor character from the first, autobiographical narrative: the horse doctor, Szepi. It is his narrative that the autobiographer listens to, comments on and publishes. The temporal ellipsis between the two parts spans four decades, with the autobiography telling the story of the autobiographer’s becoming a writer in the period between the autumn of 1844 and the autumn of 1846<sup>13</sup>.

The key scene in the autobiography plays on one specific night when the first short story is being composed. The excerpt narrative that prepares the key scene introduces the theme of the short story, its plot and material, while a second excerpt narrative that follows the writing scene first tells the success of this very short story (the “premiere” on the next day: the author’s reading for the Bántód society; Szepi copies the short story and, in return, asks for and receives the manuscript as a gift, as a “reward” for the clarified version; the presentation of a copy of the short story to Petőfi; Adolf Frankenburg commissions it for the magazine *Életképek*<sup>14</sup>; Rayée’s translation offer for the *Journal de Demoiselles*<sup>15</sup>), and then recounts its failure (Reseta, the censor, omits the horror story from the journal<sup>16</sup>, the author decides to burn the manuscript). The second part is set in a past much closer to the present of the narrative recollection. While the narrated protagonist of the first part, the nineteen-year-old Mór Jókai, a law clerk in Komárom, could only dream of becoming a writer and of literary success at that time, i.e. he is quite remote from the narrator-self not only in a temporal sense but also in his habitus, taste and social status, the narrated self of the second part is, with regard to time and position, almost identical with the narrator, “Mór Jókai”: “Last year, during the national exhibition, the devil of vanity made me exhibit all my works. A whole library was filled with them”<sup>17</sup>. Readers of *Magyar Szalon* (an illustrated literary magazine representing the programme of modernism) where the short story was published, might have remembered the press reports on the 1885 Budapest National Exhibition that covered all the details of the Jókai exhibition too<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 130: “S itt kezdődik már most a valóságos igazi elbeszélés, a mit a czim ígér; mert amit eddig elfecsegttem, az mind csak előljáró beszéd volt”.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 130. Part two: pp. 130-168.

<sup>13</sup> The referential allusions and cultural codes (the Komárom law clerk, Jókai’s move to Pest, the publication of the short story *Sonkolyi Gergely*) allow us to reconstruct the time span of the narrative; however, the temporal ellipses of the short novel do not provide a firm basis. In the narrated time of the autobiography this period might be as short as one single year.

<sup>14</sup> Jókai, *A ki holta*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 124-127.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 132: “Tavaly, az országos kiállítás alkalmával, a hiuság ördöge rávet, hogy kiállítsam az összes munkáimat. Megtelt velük egy egész könyvtár”.

<sup>18</sup> The national exhibition of 1885 became a regular feature in the daily papers as early as January. For example, on 11 January 1885, the newspaper *Nemzet* announced that the Budapest National Exhibition would be opened by Franz Joseph on 2 May, and that Crown Prince Rudolf would

The second section of the short story is set in 1885, and the embedded, excerpted narrative recounts an encounter with a good friend from youth. The reader already knows from the first part that Szepe is not only a witness to the birth and successful premiere of the *first* short story, but also the *first* copyist, that is, the “reproducer”, the first to record it:

He kept asking me to give him my short story: let him write it down for himself, he will never show it to anyone until I was willing to agree; and I gave it to him, so I let him capture it – at least in ink<sup>19</sup>.

The manuscript, though supposed to have been burnt, is returned by him to its author and annihilator, and, later on, it is also Szepe who tells the rest of the story of the *Fancy Lady*. The listener of Szepe’s oral storytelling is the autobiographer. The act of storytelling takes as long as it takes the storyteller to smoke four cigars. The embedded oral narration is intended by Szepe as a continuation of the short story *Fancy Lady*, the manuscript of which he kept as a relic for forty years. From the autobiographer’s point of view, it belongs, in turn, to those series of narratives, also embedded, which he had listened to in the Bántód company forty years ago, and the ending of which he then figured out in order to compose his horror story. From the reader’s point of view, moreover, it is a continuation of the pseudo-summary that is the focus of the short story, taking shape during the act of writing, i.e. in the course of the self-reflexive narration that reports about the composition of the horror story. Structurally, the two parts of the short story mirror each other inasmuch as the central scene of the first part depicts *the act of writing* the gothic short story about the *Fancy Lady*, whereas the second focuses on *the performance*

---

welcome the King as the protector of the exhibition. In the news section of the 1 May 1885 issue of *Nemzet*, under the title “The Court in Budapest”, the newspaper reported on the arrival and reception of the Crown Prince on 30 April. Jókai was a member of the welcoming committee, and the article tells us that Rudolf intended to drive with him to the exhibition the following day. At the beginning of May, *Nemzet*’s “exhibition supplement” gives readers an almost hour-by-hour account of the events of the exhibition. Crown Prince Rudolf and princess Stéphanie visited the exhibition on the afternoon of 2 May, in preparation for the opening, and at the end of the visit the couple “returned to the Jókai exhibition at the Crown Prince’s request”. See “Kiállítási hírek” [“Exhibition News”], *Nemzet*, IV, 2 May 1885, p. 4. Also, the exhibition supplement of *Nemzet* features a map of the 1885 Budapest national general exhibition. The report on the court banquet (*Nemzet*, IV, 4 May 1885, p. 2.) quotes the emperor stating that the Jókai collection “gave the exhibition a special light”. Although we know that the sentence was uttered at a protocol event and that the front page of *Nemzet* lists Mór Jókai as editor-in-chief, a review of the newspapers of the period does not give us the impression that Franz Joseph’s words to Jókai were of mere formal nature. János Temple’s portrait of Mór Jókai was exhibited among the portraits at the fine arts exhibition (cf. József Keszler, “A képzőművészetek a kiállításon II” [“The Fine Arts at the Exhibition II”], *Nemzet*, IV, 7 May 1885, pp. 1-2). On the Jókai statue displayed at the exhibition see Sándor Adorján, “Jókai mint kiállító” [“Jókai as an Exhibitor”], *Nemzet*, IV, 10 May 1885, pp. 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> Jókai, *A ki holta*, p. 115: “[A]ddig kért, hogy adjam neki oda a novellámat: hadd írja ő azt le magának, bizony soha sem fogja mutatni senkinek, a míg hajlandó lettem ráállni; s oda adtam neki, örökítse hát meg – legalább tintában”.

of the storyteller Szepe, who continues the Fancy Lady story. While smoking the four cigars, Szepe tells the fate of the Fancy Lady to the now famous writer between the writer's last visit to Bántód, 1844, and 1885, the present time of the narrative, thus filling in the four decades that the temporal ellipsis has torn out of the autobiography. This story remains, of course, open-ended, since there is no "end".

This insertion, however, does not introduce the reader to the missing decades of the writer's life, but to the fate of one of his "short story protagonists". In the extradiegetic perspective of the autobiographical frame narrative, Szepe's narrative is intended as the recounting of events that have taken place, while the *mimesis* of the narrative is a retelling of the "first" short story that has been (arbitrarily) removed from the oeuvre of a young friend who became a famous writer, i.e. a sequel to a literary text *that does not exist* for the literary public and in the textual network of literature:

[...] But his collection is not yet complete.

I wouldn't think so.

But I certainly do. There's something missing. Well guess what? Can't even guess? Need a little help? What about the very first job? Surely you don't remember the name? Well, the "Fancy Lady"<sup>20</sup>.

The autobiographer thus stages the scene in such a way that, at the moment of the encounter, the burnt short story no longer exists for him as a (textual) memory – he has forgotten it. The young friend, moreover, wants the famous writer to write what he is about to tell him because the manuscript of the short story "is only fantasy; but what follows is a true story; and it exceeds even the wildest poetic imagination. I came here to tell you that"<sup>21</sup>. Szepe wants to persuade the writer to listen to the "sequel" to the story, claiming that its reality is even more "fantastic", more "inventive" than what literary fiction may be able to create. The romantic horror story is thus more "realistic" than the fantastic reality, while Szepe's request is, after all, still motivated by the consideration that literature's task is to retell reality by a mimetic approach.

In the key scene of part I of *A ki holta után áll boszut* ("Hogyan támadt ez az elbeszélés? Olyan előljáró-beszéd forma" ["How did this narrative come about? Something of a foreword-speech"]), the first-person narrator, who is supposed to be Mór Jókai, produces a pseudo-summary of his "own" "burnt manuscript" of his young age (that is, a manuscript that had been written and annihilated by the narrated self) from the distance of forty years. Embedded in the autobiographical

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 134: "[...] Hanem hát még sem teljes a gyűjteménye. Nem gondolnám. De én bizonyosan tudom. Hiányzik belőle valami. No találja ki, hogy mi? Még azt sem találja ki? Segitsek egy kicsit? Hát a legelső munkája? Bizony talán már a nevére sem emlékezik? Hát a 'czifra asszony'".

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 138: "az csak fantázia; de a mi ezután következik, az igaz történet; és az tulmegy a legvakmerőbb költői képzelődésen is. Azért jöttem ide, hogy azt önnek elmondjam".

narrative of part I is the scene of the composition of the short story *Fancy Lady* and, step by step, the mentioned pseudo-summary as the result of the act of writing, which at certain points in the text turns into the pseudo-hypotext itself, due to the diegetic transgressions between the narrator-self and the narrated self. In the scene of the search for a title, we can observe how the retrospective, past tense narration shifts at first to the status of reported speech with an imperative, encouraging statement, since, here, it cannot yet be decided who is speaking: the remembering narrator, who calls on himself to report on the act of writing and implicitly addresses the reader who is also present in the scene due to the presence effect generated by hypotyposis, or the protagonist of the narrative, namely the narrated “self” of the evoked youth:

The single candle I lit only helped to dim the room.

So let's start with soul-evocation.

Are these walls locking your still unquiet soul, innocent murdered “white woman”?

Should “White woman” be the title? No! For this title is so worn out that it can no longer be truly white. “Black woman”, then? No. For it is the symbol of death in the land of poetry; besides, there is plenty of that around. So what is she? a blue, yellow, pink woman? None of them fit here. I found it! I've found it! “Fancy Lady” will be her name. According to Hungarian folk myth, it means a fairy from the otherworld. Besides, I will explain in my short story why that lady deserved to be called “fancy”. She will be a bizarre, an extraordinary character: she who is fancy because she wants to please her husband – no one else<sup>22</sup>.

The questioning sentences already make the metalepsis obvious. The questions are asked by the young clerk, the protagonist of the story, Móric Jókay, who aspires to be a writer. The narration thus shifts from an extradiegetic position to an intradiegetic, present-time narration that allows for an inner speech that highlights, in contrast to the retrospective perspective of the autobiography, immediacy, momentary moods and impressions in the present tense of the story being told.

The search for words, the staging of the dilemmas and “professional” difficulties of writing reflect not only on the creation process of the literary texture, the “artificial” nature of fictional prose, but also on the contingency that is an inevitable part of the author's choices. *Writing* in this scene has little to do with the

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 99: “Az egy szál gyertya, a mit meggyújtottam, csak homályosabbá segített tenni a szobát. Tehát lássunk a lélekidőzéshez. Ezek a falak zárják be talán most is nyugodni nem tudó lelkedet, ártatlanul megölt ‘fehér asszony’? ‘Fehér asszony’ legyen a czime? Nem! Hisz ez a czim már úgy el van viselve, hogy nem is lehet többé igazán fehér. Tehát ‘fekete asszony’? Az sem. Hisz ez a döghalál jelképe a költészet országában: azután ebből is van már elég. Tehát micsoda? kék, sárga, rózsaszínű asszony? Egy sem illik ide. Megtaláltam! ‘czifra asszony’ lesz a neve. Ez a magyar népmýthosz szerint tulvilági tündért jelent. Azonkivül pedig majd kifejtem én azt a novellámban, hogy miért szolgált az a hölgy a ‘czifra’ elnevezésre. Valami bizarr, valami rendkívüli alak lesz belőle: a ki czifrálkodik azért, mert a férjének akar tetszeni: senki másnak”.

Romantic idea of automatic writing<sup>23</sup>, nor is it the outpouring of inspiration. It is a series of decisions in which the author weighs up and chooses between different options according to his or her best knowledge at a specific moment. In doing so, he not only de-mythologises the artistic process and its outcome but also dismantles the notion of the closed nature of the work of art, in so far as his decisions and choices are based on his momentary attunement and technical knowledge (the same ambition lies behind the scenic editing, the *cut-at-will form* in Jókai's novel *Egy ember, aki mindent tud* [*A Man who Knows Everything*])<sup>24</sup>. This is why the narrative self of the autobiographer can also attempt to reproduce the pseudo-hypotext, simultaneously with the reconstruction of his former self in the character of the narrated self. Like recollection, rewriting is as much possible as it is impossible:

The start went quickly. I depicted the charming Eglantine with such a plethora of ladylike charms that when I read it I began to fear not the woman but the husband, that suddenly he would strike my table with his mace and shout in my ear, "Where did you see all this? Weakling!"

I used much more dark layers to describe the husband. He really can be satisfied with his portrait. These domestic tyrants do not deserve to be spared.

And yet she loves him and is faithful to him.

"An angel faithful to his devil!"

(This is such a nice phrase that it would fit into the Stammbuch of the officer's wife)

But how do we unravel the intrigue now?

If I were of the honest realist school, I'd let the pretty woman get mixed up with some handsome young man. I could, on the basis of the actual data, bring her sweetheart up to her with the trapdoor, and have the dining-room table sent up to her, and the husband himself could lurk this through the Judas holes and the ears of Dionysus; however, according to the idealistic romantics, there are such women in the world – who are faithful yet very boring, and even poets who write even more boring novels about such boring women; and Apollo destined me to be one of the latter.

How, then, are we to contrive that she remains purely innocent; and yet that the impression bears such infallible testimony that the husband's murderous anger should be seen to be quite justified before the riddle is solved?

I was busy with this until midnight: picking and choosing the tools. A speaking parrot spilling secrets? A dwarf hidden in a vase of flowers, listening unnoticed? – This wouldn't apply, either<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> See Ludwig Börne, *Sämtliche Schriften* [*Complete Works*]. Revised edition by Inge and Peter Rippmann, Düsseldorf, J. Melzer, 1964.

<sup>24</sup> See Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Marquez*. Transl. by Quintin Hoare, London, Verso, 1996, p. 96 "Organization imposes fetters; as does organic form. Mechanical form, by contrast, with its parts constructed one at a time, like the acts of Faust, or the chapters of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and of *Ulysses*, leaves more freedom – more space for experimentation. [...] A form that may be cut at will".

<sup>25</sup> Jókai, "A ki holta", pp. 100-101: "A kezdet gyorsan ment. Leírtam én a bűbajos Eglantinét oly pazarlásával a hölgyi bájnak, hogy mikor elolvastam, már nem az asszonytól, hanem a férjtől

At the beginning of the quoted passage, it is the autobiographer who speaks, and the shift between diegetic levels is clearly indicated by the verb tenses. The speech in the present tense is the speech of the protagonist of the autobiography, the narrated self, but it is interesting to note that within the intradiegetic level the verb “ordit” (“shout”) introduces a literal quotation that can come from two different diegetic and fictional levels of fiction within fiction. On the one hand, it can be understood as *the hero of the short story “Fancy Lady”*, the story being written, addressing his own creator, the protagonist of the autobiography, the narrated self. However, it can also be interpreted as though the narrated self is being addressed by the hero of the true story (true in the imaginary world of the narrated story), namely the “ghost” of Count Palárdy, the builder of the castle in Bántód, the spot where the writing act takes place, because he does not want to be a model of a character, or to become literature. And since the beginning of the Palárdy legend has already been told earlier in an anecdotal manner, as an embedded story by one of the minor characters in the autobiography, the quotation can be linked to further levels of fiction.

Similarly, the origin of the phrase quoted by the narrator cannot be clearly stated either. It may be a quotation from a fictional hypotext but also a cliché that comes to the mind of the narrator (i.e. the protagonist of the autobiographical narrative), who is considering whether to include it in the short story he is writing. The parenthetical reflection does not exclude this latter possibility, but the present tense comment points, however, to the ironic distance of the narrative self from the quoted cliché. The narrator of this passage, the narrated self, defines the cultural register to which the sentence belongs as fitting the taste of a member of the Bántód society (the officer’s wife). The possibilities formulated as questions draw attention to the junctions in the act of writing, to the multiplicity of decision situations, the juxtaposition of “realistic” and “romantic” solutions, that is, to the constructed nature of the literary text.

---

kezdtém félni, hogy egyszer csak odaüt a buzogányával az asztalomra, s a fülembé ordít: ‘Hol láttad te mindezeket? kákompile!’ A férj jellemzésére annál több sötét színt használtam el. No az meg lehet elégedve az arczképével. Megérdemlik ezek a házi zsarnokok, hogy az ember ne kímélje őket. És a nő mégis szereti őt és hűséges hozzá. ‘Egy angyal, a ki hűséges az ördögéhez!’ (Ez olyan szép frázis, hogy a tisztartóné Stambuchjába is beválnék) De most hogyan bogozzuk a cselszövényt? Ha becsületes realisticius iskolát követnék, hagynám a szép asszonyt szép fiatal legénynyel összeviszonyulni. A tényleges adatok nyomán felhozhatnám hozzá az emelősülyesztővel a kedvesét a hogy az étkező asztalát felküldik hozzá s ezt maga a férj kileshtné a Judáslyukakon és Dyonisius füleken keresztül; de hát az idealista romantikusok szerint még olyan asszonyok is vannak a világon: a kik hűségesek; de nagyon unalmasak, sőt olyan poéták is, a kik az ilyen unalmas asszonyokról még unalmasabb regényeket írnak; s engemet azzal vert meg Apolló, hogy az utóbbiak közé tartozzam. Tehát hogyan fűfángoljuk ki, hogy ő tiszta ártatlan maradjon; de a látszat mégis oly csalhatlan tanubizonyság erejével birjon, miszerint a férj embergyilkos haragja egészen indokoltnak láttassék a talány megoldása előtt? Éjfélíg elbajlódtam vele: válogatva az eszközökben. Beszélő papagáj, mely titkokat kifecseg? Nem való ide. — Virágvázába elrejtett törpe, a ki észrevétlenül hallgatózik? – Ez sem alkalmas”.



That the pseudo-summary is close, at some points even identical, to the pseudo-hypotext, is most clearly shown in the dialogic passages. The reader, however, cannot be sure *what* he is reading: (1) a successful or failed “reconstruction”; (2) a fiction opposed to the extradiegetic level of autobiography that outlines an idea of what the never-published short story written four decades earlier might have been like; (3) or a fiction of a first novel that was never actually written. The present tense narrative of the pseudo-summary shifts to past tense after the dialogue between the Fancy Lady and her murderous husband. However, reflections on the literariness of the text are not absent in this passage either:

She opened her arms to embrace him: she opened her lips to kiss him, and he hugged her with such force, pressing his lips to hers, that he killed her with this embrace. (It was more beautifully described in my short story, this murder by a love embrace, but an old gipsy forgets a song every day.)  
So, the woman was killed by the most desirable way to die.  
But already the corpse should be hidden somewhere<sup>26</sup>.

The “floating” between the diegetic levels, i.e. the reported speech that could finally be attributed even to the protagonist of the fictional hypotext, takes place just after the narrator’s self-reflection, when the autobiographer’s statement reminds the reader of the distance between the recalled pseudo-summary and the pseudo-hypotext.

From the passage that ends with the interjected utterance of the narrator self, it becomes also clear how convincingly the pseudo-summary produces a parody of the genre. The story told in the pseudo-summary is grotesque not only because it summarises a “premature” work, a story written according to the literary taste of forty years earlier. The shortened, summed up version appears as the most important device of grotesquerie, thus the pseudo-summary becomes (among others) a parody of the text it summarises. In addition to the contradictory information about the fictitious hypotext, it is summarisation that can be made responsible for the insight that we do not know “what” the text referred to might have been like, since such a method is always capable of producing a caricature of anything. The narrator of the grotesque murder scene in the pseudo-summary is the remembering primary narrator of the autobiography, but precisely because of the quoted previous dialogues, the distance between the hypotext and the pseudo-summary is not clear. In the parenthesised interjection, the autobiographer turns to the reader; the following sentence may be attributed to the narrator-self as well as (in worst case, when the pseudo-summary is not so much a parody but captures the

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 106: “A nő széttárta karjait ölelkezésre: ajkait nyujtá csókolásra, s arra a férj oly erővel szorítá őt magához, ajkait ajkaira nyomva, hogy ezzel az ölelkezéssel megölte az asszonyt. (Sokkal szebben volt ez abban az én novellámban leírva, ez a gyilkosság szerelmi öleléssel, hanem hát a vén cigány minden nap egy nótát felejt.) Az asszony tehát meg volt ölve a legideálisabb halál nemével. Hanem már most a hullát el is kell rejteni valahová”.

essence of the hypotext) to the narrated self, whereas the next phrase could also be uttered by the murderous protagonist of the pseudo-summary or the hypotext, i.e. it could be interpreted as the inner speech of the protagonist of the embedded story, just as the preceding sentence can be interpreted as the parody of this inner speech.

Shifting between the diegetic levels of rewriting and the original writing act, the narrator-self often gives the floor to the narrated self. However, the transitions between extradiegetic and intradiegetic narration can also be read as a simultaneous parody of two opposing strategies of relating to literary texts. These two models represent two mutually exclusive extremes of understanding, conceived as rewriting. While the first respects the textual whole as a linguistic work of art and aims at capturing its complexity, the second is not interested in the linguistic complexity of the text, but rather in its reduction. The narrator of *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* was inspired by precisely these two opposed strategies, represented by texts of “unequal value”, to reveal Pierre Menard’s invisible work. The method of “*total identification* with a given author” is linked to a philological fragment of Novalis, while the reductive, simplifying procedure of naïve actualization is identified with the “pointless travesties” of “those parasitic books” that set “Christ on a boulevard, Hamlet on La Cannabière, or Don Quixote on Wall Street”. It is also important to note that, compared to the latter, Borges’ protagonist Pierre Menard found it “more interesting [...], though of contradictory and superficial execution, to attempt what Daudet had so famously suggested: conjoin in a single figure (Tartarin, say) both the Ingenious Gentleman don Quixote and his squire”<sup>27</sup>. It is a curious and ironic coincidence that *Magyar Szalon* began serialising Alphonse Daudet’s novel *Tartarin sur les Alpes* in their April 1886 issue, meaning that for a few months the two texts, Jókai’s and Daudet’s, appeared simultaneously in the journal<sup>28</sup>.

Genette discusses the autobiographical narrative as a genuine case of metalepsis, the implied statements “I was there” and “I am still here” (for example, as narrator and as characters in the text), i.e. *the presence effect* of hypotyposis extends not only to the presence of the author in his own text, but also to the presence of the *object(s)* described (in the mimetic sense of the scenic liveliness) and, consequently, to the reader of the autobiography<sup>29</sup>. Genette traces the narrative paradox of the autobiography to the role of *reality effects*<sup>30</sup>. To the reader, the

<sup>27</sup> Borges, *Pierre Menard*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>28</sup> The summary of the April issue of *Magyar Szalon* (III, 1886, 4, p. 112), which also serves as an advertisement, comments on the publication in a back blurb as follows: “Our reading public will surely be pleasantly surprised to learn that we have managed to acquire the latest novel *Tartarin sur les Alpes* by Alphonse Daudet, the most popular French writer, and that we can start publishing this amusing novel right in this issue. As much as we intend to publish preferably original contributions, we consider the publication of a work by such a distinguished author to be a credit to our journal. In our next issue we shall already present the Tarascon hero’s adventures in splendid drawings, too”.

<sup>29</sup> Genette, *Métalepse*, p. 93.

<sup>30</sup> See Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*.

elements that are recognisable from the real world (which Barthes calls the cultural codes of *lexia* in *S/Z*) produce, while creating the *illusion of* realism through the scenic liveliness of mimesis, precisely the effect of presence that only pure fiction can do. In short, they “fictionalise” the “historical” narrative<sup>31</sup>. The figures of hypotyposis and metalepsis play a prominent role in Jókai’s prose from the 1880s onwards. What is also a striking common feature of these autobiographically framed first-person narratives is that the narrating author breaks the “autobiographical” and the “fictional” “pact” at the same time, i.e. he acts as a notorious metadiegetic “border crosser”. (Along with his most typical narrative and/or poetic techniques, Jókai had used this method earlier, but it had not become dominant in his oeuvre before the 1880s.).

The predominance of diverse forms of first-person narration is discussed in Viktor Žmegač’ historical poetics of the novel as a characteristic feature of the modern novel<sup>32</sup>, as are the self-reflective references to the genre woven into the texture of the novel<sup>33</sup>, or the narrative techniques based on metatextuality and meta-narration which make the authorial “interventions” and the construction of the text transparent, revealing the text’s relation to other literary texts<sup>34</sup>. These conclusions of Žmegač’ analysis are worth considering especially if we take seriously what he says about the “paradox” of modern novel, namely that the characteristics of the “modern novel” must be considered “conditionally specific” because the significance of diachronic relations often overshadows the synchronic ones<sup>35</sup>. Further, Žmegač argues, while the dismantling of the fabular order, or even “plotlessness” is a leitmotif of modern novel poetics, “modern” novels often document contradictory tendencies<sup>36</sup>. As he puts it somewhere else: “the novel [...] can do anything”<sup>37</sup>.

*A ki holta után áll boszut* is not a “plotless” narrative in the strict sense. However, the fabular order is broken at several points and due to several metaleptic techniques. On the one hand, the narrator makes the transitions between the diegetic levels visible. On the other, the continuous references to the act of writing, the back-and-forth interplay between the extra- and intradiegetic reflections of the narrator-self and the narrated self, between the “narrator” and the “protagonist” reveal the temporality and variability of genre concepts, poetic techniques, aesthetic values, the changing material conditions of writing as recording and copying, of publishing and of the literary marketplace (technological background,

<sup>31</sup> Genette, *Métalepse*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Viktor Žmegač, *Povijesna poetika romana* [*The Historical Poetics of the Novel*], Zagreb, Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1987, p. 291.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 298.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 328-329.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 277.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 279ff.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 300.

relation networks, ideologies). The autobiographical framing thus serves not to create an illusion of reality and to free the reader from doubt, but rather to “produce” *the instability of* “reality”, “literature” and the “self”. The “Fancy Lady” plot is constructed by a series of embedded narratives, but it contains fragmented, disjointed elements. What the narrators of the different diegetic levels (the fiscal law director; the officer; the narrated self, i.e. the clerk Móric Jókai; Szepi the horse doctor) tell as the story of the “Fancy Lady” varies in terms of historical time and relation to reality (historical fact, which is also recorded in the chronicles; a legend living in the oral tradition and in local context; a feared family secret; a short story/horror story known from the pseudo-summary of a fictional hypotext; press news; an anecdote). The title, which holds the disparate narratives together, comes from the narrated self, a self-proclaimed writer, and his creation is enacted in a key scene of the text. This is, among others, why I believe that *A ki holta után áll boszut* can provide a compelling argument that Jókai’s late prose had reached the threshold of modernity.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- \*\*\*, “Kiállítási hírek” [“Exhibition News”], *Nemzet*, IV, 2 May 1885, p. 4.
- ADORJÁN, Sándor, “Jókai mint kiállító” [“Jókai as an Exhibitor”], *Nemzet*, IV, 10 May 1885, pp. 1-2.
- BARTHES, Roland, *The Rustle of Language*. Translated by Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1986.
- BORGES, Jorge Luis, *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* (1939). Transl. by Andrew Hurley, in *Collected Fictions*, New York, Penguin Books, 1999, pp. 88-95.
- BÖRNE, Ludwig, *Sämtliche Schriften* [Complete Works]. Revised edition by Inge and Peter Rippmann, Düsseldorf, J. Melzer, 1964.
- BULGAKOV, Mikhail, *The Master and Margarita*. Transl. by Michael Glenny, New York, The New American Library, 1967.
- GENETTE, Gérard, *Métalepse. De la figure à la fiction*, Paris, Seuil, 2004.
- GENETTE, Gérard, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Transl. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln & London, Nebraska University Press, 1997.
- JÓKAI, Mór, *A Magláy-család – A ki holta után áll boszut: Két elbeszélés*, [The Magláy Family – The One Who Takes Revenge After His Death: Two Stories], Budapest, Révai, 1887.
- JÓKAI, Mór, *A remete hagyománya* [The Legacy of the Hermit], in *Elbeszélések (1842–1848)* [Stories (1842–1848)]. Edited by Ambrus Oltványi, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1971, pp. 147-172.
- KESZLER, József, “A képzőművészetek a kiállításon II” [“The Fine Arts at the Exhibition II”], *Nemzet*, IV, 7 May 1885, pp. 1-2.
- MORETTI, Franco, *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Marquez*. Transl. by Quintin Hoare, London, Verso, 1996.
- ŽMEGAČ, Viktor, *Povijesna poetika romana* [The Historical Poetics of the Novel], Zagreb, Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1987.

MÓR JÓKAI,  
A CONTEMPORARY OF PIERRE MÉNARD: METAFICTION,  
HYPOTYPOSIS AND METALEPSIS IN JÓKAI'S PROSE OF THE 1880s  
(Abstract)

In the world literary network of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Hungarian novelist Mór Jókai was a real “hub”, a node to which almost all the significant authors of the time were connected. Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, for example, managed to reach the Russian literary audience with an imitation of Jókai. The plot of Jókai's 1886 short story *A ki holta után áll bosszút* [*The One Who Takes Revenge After His Death*] unfolds with the modern topic of the “burnt manuscript” also used by Ibsen, Hermann Broch, Mihail Bulgakov, Imre Kertész and Christoph Ransmayr. But this is not the only reason why it can be read as a 19<sup>th</sup>-century variant of Borges' 1939 short story *Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote*. The narrator of Borges's emblematic narrative sets himself the goal of reporting and bearing witness to Pierre Ménard's invisible oeuvre, since “there is not a single draft to bear witness to that yearslong labor”. Seven decades earlier, Jókai's short novel was based on the same technique as Borges' short story. The pseudo-summary, or “the simulated summary of an imaginary text” (Gérard Genette), makes the text of the short novel a hypertext whose hypotext is fictitious, i.e. a pseudo-hypotext. Jókai's text is built from pseudo-hypotexts (letters, translations of poems), pseudo-summaries which are embedded in hypotexts, self-quotations and identifiable cultural codes easily recognisable by the reader. The burnt manuscript, moreover, is already a device of metafiction in his short story *A remete hagyománya* [*The Legacy of the Hermit*], dated 1846, insofar as the embedded narrative is a pseudo-summary, the first-person narrator being the finder and annihilator of the hermit's manuscript. The embedded narrative is a re-scripturalisation. To relate Borges' text to Jókai's can be exonerated from the charge of readerly arbitrariness primarily by the fact that Jókai's narrative is based on variations of metadiegetic transgressions, of fictional and figural forms of metalepsis, and of the metaleptic staging of the author. To quote Genette again, not only does “the author intervene in his own fiction”, but “his fiction also entangles itself in real life”.

*Keywords:* burnt manuscript, metalepsis, modern novel, pseudo-hypotext, pseudo-summary.

MÓR JÓKAI, CONTEMPORANUL LUI PIERRE MÉNARD:  
METAFICȚIUNE, HIPOTIPOZĂ ȘI METALEPSĂ  
ÎN PROZA LUI JÓKAI DIN ANII 1880  
(Rezumat)

În rețeaua literară mondială a celei de-a doua jumătăți a secolului al XIX-lea, romancierul maghiar Mór Jókai reprezenta un veritabil „nod”, un punct de convergență la care erau conectați aproape toți autorii importanți ai epocii. Anton Pavlovici Cehov, de exemplu, a reușit să dobândească notorietate în spațiul literar rus prin imitarea lui Jókai. Intriga prozei scurte a lui Jókai din 1886, *A ki holta után áll bosszút* [*Cel care se răzbună după moartea sa*], se construiește pe baza tematicii moderne a „manuscrisului ars”, exploatată, printre alții, de Henrik Ibsen, Hermann Broch, Mihail Bulgakov, Imre Kertész și Christoph Ransmayr. Totuși, acesta nu este singurul motiv pentru care textul lui Jókai poate fi interpretat ca o variantă din secolul al XIX-lea a prozei lui Jorge Luis Borges din 1939, *Pierre Menard, autorul lui Don Quijote*. Naratorul ficțiunii emblematice a lui Borges își propune să relateze și să ateste opera invizibilă a lui Pierre Ménard, întrucât „nu există nici măcar o ciornă care să dea mărturie despre această muncă de ani de zile”. Cu șapte decenii mai devreme, proza lui Jókai se fundamenta pe aceeași tehnică narativă ca textul lui Borges. Pseudo-rezumatul sau, în termenii lui

Gérard Genette, „rezumatul simulat al unui text imaginar”, transformă textul prozei scurte într-un hipertext al cărui hipotext este fictiv, adică un pseudo-hipotext. Textul lui Jókai este construit din pseudo-hipotexte (scrisori, traduceri de poeme), pseudo-rezume încorporate în hipotexte, auto-citări și coduri culturale ușor recunoscutibile de către cititorul avizat. De altfel, formula manuscrisului ars constituie un procedeu metafictional și în nuvela sa din 1846, *A remete hagyománya* [*Moștenirea pustnicului*], întrucât narațiunea încorporată funcționa ca un pseudo-rezumat, iar naratorul subiectiv era deopotrivă descoperitorul și distrugătorul manuscrisului pustnicului. Narațiunea încorporată se constituie, astfel, ca o re-scripturalizare. Raportarea textului lui Borges la cel al lui Jókai poate fi absolută de acuzația de arbitraritate a lecturii, în primul rând prin faptul că narațiunea lui Jókai se bazează pe variații ale transgresiunilor metadiegetice, pe forme ficționale și figurale ale metalepsei, precum și pe înscenarea metaleptică a autorului. Pentru a-l cita din nou pe Genette, nu numai că „autorul intervine în propria sa ficțiune”, ci și „ficțiunea sa se întrepătrunde, la rândul ei, cu viața reală”.

*Cuvinte-cheie:* manuscrisul ars, metalepsă, proză modernă, pseudo-hipotext, pseudo-rezumat.