



Present study enumerates and describes the main features of Gyula Krúdy's prose from both stylistic (rhetoric) and narratological perspective. In the second part of the study the author discusses the questions regarding the teachability of Krúdy's prose in primary and secondary schools. Although the prose of the writer shows typical stylistic features from the 1910s taking only these features into account would be misleading. For this reason, the study focuses on the narrative structure of the texts and demonstrates how recollection and imagination are intertwined in a way that generates a peculiar nostalgic attitude. However, this kind of nostalgia is often undermined by the irony of the text. For example, in the case of the short story *On the Bridge* it is undefinable whether the events effectively took place in the fiction or just in the mind of the protagonist. When teaching Krúdy we should emphasize above all the subtle narrative techniques that direct the reader in a unique way.

*Keywords:* narrative discourse, memory, imagination, nostalgia, irony, teaching of Krúdy.

DOI: 10.35634/2224-9443-2024-18-1-115-120

### Introduction: The question of the voice

In relation to Gyula Krúdy it is often stated that practically any of his works can be recognized even by a short passage taken out of their context: Krúdy's voice in his prose is so unique that it cannot be mistaken for that of any other writer. Although this statement is not entirely conceived out of thin air, one must submit it for further consideration.

First of all, we have to emphasize that – despite all of his originality – Krúdy could not free himself from the impact of his predecessors (especially from Mór Jókai and Kálmán Mikszáth) either. His first short stories prove the apparent influence these 19<sup>th</sup> century classics had on him. One can see this for example in the way he uses anecdote as a main principle of storytelling, which later almost entirely disappears from the set of tools he uses as a writer. The effect naturalism had on his writing can also be mentioned, which one can see in his first novel published in a volume, *Az aranybánya* [The Gold Mine]. As it is in the case of our greatest writers (aside from some rare exceptions) it had taken many years for Krúdy to gradually work out an original narrative style that posterity can recognize as his unique narrative voice. He achieved his first literary success only in the 1910s with his stories about Szindbád the sailor. It would be, however, misleading to suppose that his style stayed unchanged during the next period. In the middle of the 1910s his way of writing – especially in works like *Pesti nőrabló* [Pestian Kidnapper], *Púder* [Powder] or *Aranykéz utcai szép napok* [Fine Days at Golden Hand Street] – became somewhat pretentious. The fact that these works were only less successful detours is proven by his great works written at the end of the decade: *Napraforgó* [Sunflower], *Asszonyságok díja* [Madams' Prize] and *N. N.* In these novels the craft and talent of Krúdy conquers great (aesthetic) heights and (epic) depths never before seen in his writing. Since that time one can observe some minor changes in the narrative voice of his writings. In novels like *Nagy kópé* [Great Pickle] and *Hét-Bagoly* [Seven Owls] written in the 1920s the style shows signs of classicization and is less ornamental, while in the latest works (e. g. *Purgatórium* [Purgatory]) we can notice the return of previous themes and modalities [Kemény 1991, 36].

As it was demonstrated by stylistic research [Kemény 1991; 1993; Pethő 2005], the uniqueness of Krúdy's prose lies in practicing stylistic tools as syndetic construction of sentences, the prevalence of qualifiers and pleonasms. These tools are often accompanied by the frequent use of semblances, metaphors, and pseudo-archaisms, which increase the stylistic level of the text. Due to this the author's writing style elicits a double effect: on the one hand – thanks to the emphatic stylization – the linguistic nature of the text is more apparent. On the other hand the seemingly insignificant events that constitute the background of the diegetic world become more important. This has been called “the Krúdy-effect” by one of the author's most relevant interpreters, Imre Bori [see Bori 1978, 104–115]. In spite of this one should keep in mind that the enumeration of stylistic features does not encompass the entire range of effects that a certain text can produce, since these features are always subordinate to the narratological and poetic structure of the text. The following section contains a discussion of these features.

### Narrative discourse, modality, space-time relations

One of the most disconcerting features of Krúdy's prose is that it combines the tropes inherited from the Hungarian literary tradition with modern narrative techniques in a very unusual way. Taking into consideration the types of narration in his novels, we can confirm the prevalence of the heterodiegetic omniscient narrators, typical for the 19<sup>th</sup> century novels (the rare exceptions are *N. N.* and *Az útitárs* [The Fellow Traveler] where Krúdy employs the personal form). Although this form is generally less suitable for the renewal of the genre, Krúdy mingles it with the techniques that constrain the univocal voice of the narrator and therefore support the openness of the text.

One of these techniques characteristic for Krúdy is that the unnamable narrator temporarily renounces his position and conveys the narrative status to a certain character. While this change of narrators does not imply the change of the narrative voice (which remains constant), yet it offers a new perspective. In the novel *Őszi utazások a vörös postakocsin* [Autumn Travels on the Crimson Coach] we can read a passage from the diary of Madame Louise; in *Asszonyságok díja* [Madams' Prize] a significant part of the story is narrated by the protagonist called Dubli úr (Mr. Dubli); in the *N. N.* another protagonist (Juliska) does the same. These shifts do not threaten the sovereignty of the narrator, nevertheless they give an opportunity for the protagonists to present their worldview.

Beside the multiplication of narrators Krúdy relatively often performs a narrative trick where, by adding a supplement to the end of the sentence, he appropriates a seemingly neutral statement to one of the characters (see the first paragraph of the *Nagy kópé* [Great Pickle]). Sometimes it occurs that we cannot definitely assign the narrative voice to any of the characters, nor to the heterodiegetic narrator. More precisely, it is undecidable whether a character or the heterodiegetic narrator speaks (some examples can be found in *N. N.* and in a fragmented novel *Mit látott Vak Béla szerelemben és bánatban* [What Did Blind Béla See in Love and Sorrow]). Also the self-reflections of the narrator can serve as challenges of the narratorial omniscience. We can refer to the passages where the narrator attracts the reader's attention to the linguistic composition of the text, or its literariness, emphasizing that what we read is only fiction. This method is similar to a kind of self-irony which was popular in 18<sup>th</sup> century English novels [see Gintli 2005].

As for the time-relations of the narrative, Krúdy can be considered a more daring one. He often used the technique of anisochrony, that is, the discrepancy between the time of the story and the time of the narration. It means that the reader can experience a difference between the actual time of the events and the time that is needed for the storytelling. In the case of Krúdy this usually happened at the expense of the former, for his custom was to dwell on seemingly unimportant events which measurably slow down the speed of the narration. In relation to this we can also mention that some of the texts lack an identifiable main plot thread. In the novel *Boldogult úrfikoromban* [When I Was a Young Gentleman] – which from many aspects resembles the famous time novels<sup>1</sup> of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann or *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf – the main protagonists get stuck in a tavern and spend their time with casual acts without noticing that the whole day goes by. The tavern – as a classic scene of novels – functions as a chronotope: a place where time passes differently and usually it often produces the illusion of timelessness.

We can speak of timelessness, however, only in a metaphorical sense, for time does not stop actually. What the novel emphasizes is the subjective nature of time (which can be conceived as the opposition of measurable time). Besides "timelessness" Krúdy often breaks the linearity of storytelling. It is most visible in texts where the recollection of memories plays a crucial role. In addition to this we can observe in several texts the presence of cyclical time (which does not necessarily contradict linear comprehension). Pistoli – the main character of *Napraforgó* [Sunflower] and *Kleofásné kakasa* [The Rooster of Madame Kleofás] dies at a certain point of the story and later he resurrects from the dead [see Wirágh 2017]. The same happens to Szindbád. The time structure of *N. N.* is no less cyclical for the story of the son reiterates the story of the father (as the father's had reiterated the grandfather's).

### Memory, imagination, and nostalgia

For a long time Krúdy had been considered by literary scholars as a late romantic, however, by today we have recognized the complexity of his art of writing (which is in many ways – such as the representation of time or the various forms of self-mirroring – in a synchronous relationship with contemporary world liter-

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<sup>1</sup> The term, coined by Thomas Mann himself, refers to the kind of novels in which time serves not only as a principle of representation but is a main theme of the novel as well.



ature, moreover, he had employed narrative techniques that became decisive only later). Even with this said, it is indisputable that Krúdy borrows some elements from the romantic literary tradition. We can mention his affection for ghost stories, frequent thematizing of the duplicity of the human self, or the glorifying of the past in expense of the present. In the following section we discuss the questions that arise from the latter.

As his interpreters had stated many decades ago: Krúdy was – above all – the writer-chronicler and main expert of the Monarchy [Fülöp 1986]. It is unquestionable that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy plays a decisive role in his fictional universe and that “the happy peacetime” (the period between the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914) is always mentioned in a positive light. Perhaps this attachment is the reason why it has become commonly accepted that Krúdy talks about the past with a certain nostalgia, for the past in his opinion is always more valuable than the tainted present.

At first sight it might seem to be the proper thing to talk about nostalgia in relation to the past, since the nostalgic modality is discernible in many of Krúdy’s works. But – as we have suggested above – the isolated analysis of modality can be misleading. Therefore, we must notice that Krúdy often employs techniques that deliberately undermine the feeling of nostalgia in relation to the past. As an example, we can mention his novel *Nagy kópé* [Great Pickle].

The starting point of the story indicates a nostalgic motivation in itself: Kázmér Rezeda (Pestian newspaperman and recurrent protagonist in Krúdy’s novels) desires to return to the past and wishes to see the capital city once again in a form it was when he had arrived there 25 years ago. He moonily recollects the world of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and finally decides to search the long-forgotten past. His research, obviously, takes places not only in space (he roams toward the city center) but in time as well (as he tries to relive his former experiences and moods). Although the nostalgic modality of the narration can be seen in numerous passages, we can also observe in many cases that the irony of the narrator makes us question the nostalgic attitude [Dobos 2015, 42– 46]. The novel employs at least three techniques that render the protagonist’s nostalgia about the past problematic.

First of all, we can state that the past and the present in the novel are not in contradiction. The present perpetually penetrates into the past, thereby the idea of the past in itself becomes uncertain. Rezeda is compelled to face the fact that there is no self-identical past independent from the person’s present who remembers. And if the self-identical past does not exist, the nostalgia for it also becomes questionable. Secondly, the main protagonist not only remembers; his attitude suggests a contradictory intention as well: the desire to forget. It seems that Rezeda does not want to recollect the past that much, rather he strives to recreate it. This leads to the third technique, that is that remembrance never appears in its pure form; the memories of the protagonist always mingle with the imagination. Moreover, in the end imagination becomes the tool by which Rezeda can form a relation to his past. This is not, however, a real past that can be recollected (even in a nostalgic way), but an evidently created (or constructed) and fictive past: a literary 19<sup>th</sup> century and an imaginary Budapest.

A similar form of recollection can be found also in some of the early Szindbád-stories, such as *Szindbád, a hajós* (Szindbád, The Sailor), or *A hídon* (On the Bridge) [On recollection see Eisemann 1999; 2015; Mesterházy 2003].

### **Interpretation of the short story *On the Bridge***

Krúdy has a firm position in Hungarian classical literary canon as well as in the curriculum. His art of writing is taught at primary and secondary schools. His short story, *On the Bridge* – due to its briefness and accessibility – can serve as a good introduction to his literary world in both levels.

Since the interpretation of any literary text does not have preliminary steps that one must follow, in this case we can start our commentary with the title and subheading of the story. According to the latter the story tells us the fourth journey of Szindbád, the sailor. The path of the hero leads to a small rural town where Szindbád had served as a soldier in his young days. The word “bridge” appears not only in the title but also three times in the text, every time in an emphatic place: at the beginning (in the second sentence), in the middle and at the end (in the last sentence). Thus, the title and the subheading foreshadow crucial parts of the story.

Nevertheless, the metaphorical level of the text should be considered as well, for the words “bridge” and “path” do not appear in the text only in their literal meaning. The journey of Szindbád takes place in an undefined space and time, yet it suggests that the hero sets off for the search of his lost youth. Therefore, the term “path” acquires a metaphorical surplus of meaning (path as recollection, path as walk of life). Similarly the word “bridge” does not refer only to the bridge of the town that Szindbád had crossed so many times in his youth, but it can be comprehended as a metaphor that can refer to the separation or the interconnection as well. What does the bridge divide from each other? In literal sense primarily the two riverbanks, in meta-



phorical sense many other things. From the first sentence we can learn that Szindbád decided to start his fourth journey when “he felt his death coming” [Krúdy 1985, 52]. Preparing for his approaching death Szindbád visits a scene of his youth with an un concealed intention. He wants to make contact (or bridge the gap) between the present and the past, that is, between his youth and his declining years respectively. At the same time the bridge can link not only these two time dimensions, but life and death as well. It can scarcely be a coincidence that Szindbád stands on the same bridge at the beginning and at the end of the story, looking toward the distant blue forests. What do these blue forests mean?

Present and past, youth and old age, life and death – the bridge separates oppositions from each other, while it links them as well. Further examples of contrapositions can be found by examining the question of narration. The storyteller of the text is a third person heterodiegetic narrator who sometimes allows us to get an insight into the viewpoint of the hero. When Szindbád arrives at the town, his first steps lead toward the local patisserie, where he desires to meet his former lover, Amália again. Entering the patisserie, he catches sight of a young woman who resembles Amália. For a period of time the text – by a continuing alternation of viewpoints – leaves the question of whether it is Amália or not open. Later the uncertainty vanishes: Szindbád is compelled to acknowledge that the young lady was not Amália, but her (and Szindbád’s) daughter.

The constant shift of the internal and the external focalization can be caught elsewhere in the text as well. Szindbád is roaming toward the patisserie while his thoughts digress – he is pondering about the question of what the closed windows can hide. At this point we have to notice how the rhetoric of the text relates back to the thoughts of the protagonist. As if the words of the narrator (“folding shutters with closed eyes”, “death windows” [Krúdy 1985, 53]) set forth the direction of Szindbád’s thoughts (“Maybe a corpse lies there on the catafalque” [Krúdy 1985, 53]). Also, it sometimes occurs that the shift in focus produces irony. While hearing the trumpet-call, in a reflex-movement Szindbád starts to march forward as a soldier and – to his own surprise – realizes that spurs are missing from his boots.

As we have said, Szindbád’s journey has spatial and temporal relations as well. Similarly, the bridge connects not only the two parts of space but also the two temporal dimensions. The river that runs beneath the bridge can direct the gaze of the reader to the passing of time, and it can evoke the saying of Heraclitus: “No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man.” Although Szindbád does not step literally in the river (he stands on the bridge), he actually faces the problem articulated by Heraclitus (respectively he gives a peculiar explanation to this problem). He poses the following question to himself: How can the past be brought back? His answer is – evidently – that it could be done by the means of recollection. But we have to thoroughly examine what kind of recollection he means.

In the present time of the story Szindbád dwells in a bazaar in Istanbul, however we do not have any information about the distance that separates his presence from the evoked period. We only know that then Szindbád was a young soldier, and now he prepares for his death. When he arrives at the small town, he becomes possessed by the sense of timelessness (“...the church-clocks had stopped here. They showed the time that perhaps never existed.” [Krúdy 1985, 53]). He can also perceive certain changes (“The gilt of the letters had worn off long ago...” [Krúdy 1985, 53]). It is noticeable that the quoted sentence is followed by an oppositional connective that also expresses that Szindbád is less receptive to the changes but rather he would like to identify with his former self. The following substitution refers to his intention: “...somewhere soldiers were blowing trumpets and Szindbád grabbed his walking stick and put it under his arms – as if it were a sword – and with energetic steps he started to walk toward the patisserie as he did in the past.” [Krúdy 1985, 53]

Entering the patisserie, however, the frontiers between the past and the present begin to blur to him. More precisely: he is the one who strives to blur these frontiers. He recognizes himself in a young soldier playing pool and he believes that the confectioner is none other than his former lover, Amália. Everything suggests that Szindbád does not want to recollect past events, but he wants to relive them. Recollection for him is only a form of appropriation. In this sense the story can be read as Szindbád’s failure, for it turns out that the young woman in the patisserie is not Amália, but her (and Szindbád’s) daughter who knows nothing about her father. Although she has a medallion with the picture of her father, she does not recognize Szindbád in this picture. Only Szindbád knows that the picture of the young man in the medallion is actually his younger self, however, the impossibility of identifying with the former self appears clearly at exactly the moment when Szindbád – looking at the picture – finds the portrait strange and unfamiliar.

The end of the text remains open for the narrator does not directly draw any conclusion. He merely repeats – almost word for word – the statement from the beginning: “...under the ancient vaults of the brown bridge, over the colorful pebbles a pure small river is racing along, and Szindbád – from beside the stony edge of the bridge – musingly looked at the blue forests that slept in the distance...” [Krúdy 1985, 52]



“Szindbád went to the old bridge, where – deep in thought – he was looking at the forests dreaming in the twilight for a long time.” [Krúdy 1985, 56] We can see a substantial difference only in Szindbád’s mood: earlier he looked at the forests musingly then he sank deeply in his thought. This difference can refer in turn to an unuttered lesson.

At this point the interpretation would come to an end, but there is something else that we can mention. It is the first sentence of the story that – when we read it closely – can supplement our interpretation. The sentence says: “When Szindbád, the sailor felt his death coming, he decided to go on a last journey before he would leave the bazaar in Istanbul, where he was sitting on the carpet smoking his pipe.” [Krúdy 1985, 52] There is only a single word that can supplement the interpretation with further perceptions. It is the word ‘before’. The narrator claims that Szindbád set out before he left the bazaar in Istanbul. How can this be possible? On the one hand, we can think about the bazaar metaphorically as if it were life itself. In this case, the meaning of the sentence is that Szindbád went on a last journey before his death. On the other hand, there could be another interpretation. According to this Szindbád did not leave the bazaar at all. He sat all the time on the carpet smoking his pipe, and the whole journey happened only in his memory and imagination. As we saw above, the recollection mingles with the imagination, and together they form the strategy by which Szindbád tries to creatively reconstitute his past.

### Conclusion

The aspects of the above interpretation are readily applicable in a literature class as well. To teach Krúdy’s short story *On the Bridge* we can take into account following aspects: to activate preliminary knowledge of students (main topics: romanticism, symbolism, dream), the stylistic level of the text (language, modality, the vocabulary of the author), narrative structure (time and space relations, the uniqueness of storytelling), metaphorical level (the connection between the reality and the dreams, the metaphor of the bridge), rhetorical level (the relation of nostalgia and irony). The uniqueness and complexity of Gyula Krúdy’s prose can be revealed only when we consider multiple perspectives.

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## **УНИКАЛЬНОСТЬ И УСВОЕНИЕ ПРОЗЫ ДЬЮЛЫ КРУДИ**

DOI: 10.35634/2224-9443-2024-18-1-115-120

Настоящая статья перечисляет и описывает главные особенности прозы Дьюлы Круди как со стилистической (риторической), так и с нарратологической точек зрения. Во второй части статьи автор обсуждает вопросы, касающиеся преподавания и усвоения прозы Дьюлы Круди в начальной и средней школе. Хотя проза этого писателя демонстрирует типичные реалии 1910-х гг., принимать во внимание только эти особенности было бы неверно. Именно поэтому статья фокусируется на нарративной структуре текстов писателя и показывает, как переплетаются воспоминания и воображение, создавая особое чувство ностальгии. Однако ностальгия такого рода часто разрушается иронией самого текста. Например, в случае короткой новеллы «На мосту» непонятно, произошли ли события на самом деле, или только в голове у главного героя. Когда преподаем творчество Д. Круди, мы должны прежде всего подчеркивать его утонченные нарративные техники, которые ведут читателя по уникальному пути.

*Ключевые слова:* нарративный дискурс, память, фантазия, ностальгия, ирония, преподавание творчества Д. Круди.

**Citation:** Yearbook of Finno-Ugric Studies, 2024, vol. 18, issue 1, pp. 117–122. In English.

Поступила в редакцию 01.03.2023

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