

The Hungarian *Bouvard et Pécuchet*¹

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Abstract. Mór Jókai's satiric novel *Egy ember, aki mindent tud* [A Man who Knows Everything] was first published in 12 parts in the illustrated satirical weekly *Az Ústökös* between 2 May and 18 July 1874. Its German translation was published parallel with the Hungarian text. This paper shows that, in several regards, Jókai's short novel is parallel to Flaubert's unfinished, subversive masterpiece *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. The structure of the two novels is obviously similar; both are built on a chain of metonymic contacts of failed "projects". Although in the fields of science and knowledge the heroes "encounter" do not follow the same order, the *extent* of thematic coincidence is surprising. Jókai's and Flaubert's novels are built on a *scenic* or *episodic* structure, the *cut-at-will-form* (Moretti). Both texts may be read as a narrative telling the story of the birth of the *dilettante* as a product of popular communication and mass media.

Keywords: Mór Jókai, Flaubert, Bouvard et Pécuchet, satiric novel; scenic/episodic narrative style, cut-at-will-form

Depersonalizing narrative and the *cut-at-will-form*

Mór Jókai (1825–1904) is still the most translated novelist in Hungarian literature. Celebrated worldwide in the second half of the nineteenth century and at the turn of the century, the author was increasingly forgotten as his translations were becoming obsolete. Hungarian literary history always acknowledged his decisive role in the development of the modern Hungarian prose language, though regarded him an author of romantic adventure novels who made a decisive influence on the development of Hungarian national identity. His reception in world literature followed much the same pattern. In recent decades, however, Hungarian research has radically overturned this earlier notion. The modernity of his narrative language has been uncovered, finding that language games and puns are the protagonists

1 An earlier version of the study was published in Hungarian: Hansági, *Irodalmi kommunikáció és műfajiság*, 298–338.

of his works. His short novel *Egy ember, aki mindent tud* (1874), which has also been forgotten in Hungary, shows striking parallels, sometimes almost textual similarities, with Flaubert's unfinished last novel, *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (1881), first published seven years after Jókai's novel. This curious coincidence proves that not only Flaubert, generally discussed in Hungarian criticism as a counterpoint to Jókai, but also Jókai saw the new possibilities of modern prose in scenic editing, personalizing narrative, and the *cut-at-will-form*.² This parallel and Jókai's modern experiments were long overlooked by Hungarian critics because Hungarian literary tradition treated grotesque humor with reservation, regarding it a feature of non-canonical genres of popular literature. In Jókai's novel, the rhetoric of satire can be understood as a method of "recycling" linguistic formulae. The formulae eliminate the narrative "voice" that sets the rhetorical form of prosopopoeia in motion, as does the similar process of elimination, usually referred to as the *impossibilité* of the narrative voice in Flaubert's case.

In 1868, shortly before his death, the poet Mihály Tompa wrote a farewell letter to the friend of his youth, Mór Jókai. The closing sentence of the short, shockingly intimate last message is worded as follows: "God be with you, *immortal creator of Hungarian humor!*"³ This is one of the altogether five sentences of the letter, in which Tompa announces his own death, creating special acoustics for the address. It is not only Tompa who considers humor one of the main virtues of Jókai's texts. Ferenc Zsigmond, the first modern Jókai-monographer dedicated an entire chapter to Jókai's humor⁴ and referred to Tompa's farewell letter supporting his opinion, according to which the world literary rank of Jókai's lifework is due exactly to his humor—in addition to his masterpiece feuilleton-novels. Zsigmond sees humor as "one of the most valuable and the rarest nourishing juices of world literature",⁵ arguing that it offers the reader an understanding of characters, situations, and processes that compares to no other method:

"The most essential and indispensable features of humor—i.e., that we submit not only the external world but also ourselves to the eternal passion of the human soul, which suspends, exchanges, interprets, and misinterprets the usual relations of concepts and values, and notices (or insights) great features in small-time phenomena, as well as small-mindedness in

2 "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." Moretti, *Modern Epic*, 96.

3 Tompa, *Jókai Mórnak*, 373. All translations from Hungarian are by the author.

4 Zsigmond, *Jókai*, 333–50.

5 Zsigmond, *Jókai*, 334.

grandiosity—appear only in the works of the most outstanding humorists as unsophisticated as in Jókai's works.”⁶

Through humor, Jókai's narrators/speakers could make otherwise familiar phenomena appear in always new perspectives, in a refraction different from the usual. Zsigmond assigns Jókai's influence on the whole of Hungarian culture, spreading over the borders of literary publicity to the pathos that creates a modern Hungarian mythology, as well as to side-splitting humor.⁷

“This miracle doctor was healing at best by making you laugh: two thirds of the tears that fell onto his books were caused by the irresistible stimulus of laughter; however, the patient who can laugh is on the way to recovery. Only one poetic armament was more effective and triumphant than Jókai's pathos: Jókai's humor. This elevated him so early onto the dictator's chair of unique popularity, and this is the side of his talent and effect least worn out up to now.”⁸

The chapter states that in Jókai's texts humor is a component whose aesthetic impact determined the use and judgment of the texts concerning the system of literature and culture as well. Zsigmond concludes the discussion saying that, in literary texts, humor—being a stylistic-rhetorical issue—is always linguistic, therefore Jókai's humor can be interpreted as a *linguistic* achievement.⁹

This is the only feature acknowledged by nineteenth century Hungarian criticism determined by the Gyulai-school, however, later several outstanding Hungarian literary historians appreciated most the anecdotic-humorous genre elements.¹⁰ In Gyulai's opinion, *humor* proves that Jókai's novels belong to entertaining literature, they are dime novels. He argues that Jókai's unparalleled popularity is not due to the fact that his aesthetic-literary texts could reach the readers in the possibly most effective way in the period, through the channels of popular communication.¹¹ He

6 Zsigmond, *Jókai*, 335.

7 Jókai is not only a humor-maker: being a public figure, he is often the object of caricatures, anecdotes, and jokes. See Renkecz, “Parókai Jókai Mór,” 135–78.

8 Zsigmond, *Jókai*, 99, 333–34.

9 Zsigmond, *Jókai*, 350.

10 Imre, *Műfajok létformája XIX. századi epikánkban*, 161.

11 “Erst wenn die Teilnahme an medialisierter Kommunikation generalisiert, zu einer effektiven, flächendeckenden und breitenwirksamen—dabei aber unregulierten—Agentur von Sozialisation und Individualisierung wird, kann auch Populäres entstehen. Die Unterschiede in der Beurteilung des Populären rühren vor allem daher, dass mit dem Begriff sowohl eine spezifische Qualität von medialen Produkten (Kunst-Formen, Lesestoffen, Bilder- und Klangwelten), als auch besondere Weisen ihres Gebrauchs bezeichnet werden, und dass dabei Begriffe von Kunst und Kultur im Spiel sind, die der Mediensituation und Sozialstruktur der modernen Gesellschaft nicht mehr angemessen sind.” Helmstetter, “Der Geschmack der Gesellschaft“ 45.

states that the texts themselves belonged to popular literature. While in Gyulai's essays about Jókai, humor is always a *linguistic* issue of the narrative discourse, he does not think that the aesthetic profit “emerging” in the narrative style—i.e., in the linguistic stratum—is able to compensate for the “deficiencies” of the compositional plot structure or the elaboration of characters, which is so different from the psychologism of nineteenth century realism that Gyulai preferred. In 1881, Jenő Péterfy wrote a paradigmatic critique in which he compared Jókai's works to contemporary French and English novels and concluded that in Jókai's prose the role of humor is to (consciously) cover the logical errors of the plot structure and the inconsistencies of construction:

“Jókai often conceals these turns by his humor and ideas. However, even poets are not allowed to joke about psychology and pay with flashes of wit for the truth.”¹²

Both Gyulai's and Péterfy's Jókai-interpretations are built on the counterpoint technique: according to Gyulai, Zsigmond Kemény's precise character formation, while in Péterfy's opinion the contemporary Flaubert's style represent the counterpoints to Jókai's novel-writing techniques. Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* was first issued as a print volume in 1881,¹³ the year when Péterfy published his paper. They contrast Jókai's style—based on playful linguistic idioms and the aesthetic capacity of humor—to a scale of values which measures the success of a novel by the psychological “realism” of character portrayal or, more exactly, they contrast his style to the norms of a specific narrative character formation method. Plot structure the proportionality of composition should be based on the psychological “credibility” (probability) of the characters and the resulting logical predictability; at the same time reflection (self-interpreting gestures) aimed at the interpretation of the plot chain can play an important role in making the narrator's voice and the characters' voices heard. That is, characteristic narrative methods of “narrative realism” defined in present-day terminology as psycho-narration in a third-person context; quoted and narrated monologue, self-narration, self-quoted monologue, self-narrated monologue in first-person texts¹⁴ are thought to be missing from Jókai's texts. In fact, however, they are present in his narration but aim at mental or conscious processes that do not meet the notions of contemporary psychology. Gyulai and Péterfy, the two contemporary critics who guarded the aesthetic canon and decided on primary canonization would have demanded a narrative technology of Jókai that was alien to the playfulness of his texts. In their interpretation, the narrative language built

12 Péterfy, *Jókai Mór*, 622.

13 *La Nouvelle Revue* started the publication on 15 December 1880. See Cento, “Introduction,” XC VII. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k35916n/f823.item>; <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k359170/f66.item>

14 Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 21–172.

on humor, moreover, *humor* itself was a signalizing element of non-correspondence. In other words, it was considered a stigma, an “apparent” manifestation of the chase after “easier forms”, easy popularity, the concealment of inconsistencies, deficiencies, ultimately the concealment of the truth.

The success of this nineteenth century framework of interpretation can be seen even in István Sótér’s monography published in 1941, which tries to re-evaluate Jókai’s style asking the question: “Why should we analyze Jókai exactly from the perspective of Flaubert’s idea of style?”¹⁵ However, despite its intention and inventive reading suggestions, the monography was unable to create a sufficient counterpoint to the traditional interpretation that wanted to present Flaubert as a trademark of modern prose, serving as proof of Jókai’s “belatedness” or “non-simultaneity” compared to his European contemporaries. When in the mid-90s Mihály Szegedy-Maszák wanted to answer the question of how the narratives of Hungarian literature can be attuned to the criteria of comparativism, presenting the difficulty of the problem, he stated that in the discourse of Hungarian literary history the *Flaubert* “trademark” had been *fixed* in the above function:

“Is it essential that András Fáy was a contemporary of Stendhal, Jókai of Flaubert, and Mikszáth of Henry James? In case our answer is that—as a matter of fact—these authors created their works in another intellectual period, we are in fact protecting the autochthonous writing of our national literary history.”¹⁶

At the same time, humor seems to “uncover” or make the innovative narrator invisible in Jókai’s works, as he intended to divert his critics’ attention from the narrative “inventions” and strategies they missed so much in his novels. Jókai’s satiric short novel *Egy ember, aki mindent tud* [A Man who Knows Everything]¹⁷ is perhaps the best example. This strange—according to Jókai’s own genre definition “*humorous*”—novel was first published in 12 parts in the illustrated satirical weekly *Az Űstökös*¹⁸ between 2 May and 18 July 1874. The novel filled both columns of the first three of the twelve framed pages of the especially nicely laid out weekly, thus occupying at least

15 Sótér, *Jókai Mór*, 152.

16 Szegedy-Maszák, “A kánonok szerepe az összehasonlító kutatásban,” 73.

17 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*.

18 *Az Űstökös* was the first high-quality, long-life illustrated satirical weekly. Mór Jókai founded it in 1858, and also owned it up to 1881. At the beginning, he contributed as editor and author, even caricaturist, but in the 1870s the intensity of his editorial activity was fluctuating. The *Pester Lloyd* began to publish the novel in German a day later, on 3 May, under the title *Ein Mensch der alles weiß: Ein Stückchen Roman von Moriz Jókai*, and the publication continued in parallel with that of *Az Űstökös*, coming to an end on 19 July. See Ujvári, *Kulturtransfer in Kakanien*, 45; Sándor, “Jegyzetek,” 412.

a third of its content. The fact that the periodical offered an extraordinary subscription fee—more favorable than the usual quarterly—for the period of the planned publication of the novel, reveals Jókai's popularity and sheds light on contemporary reading habits and press conditions.¹⁹ In spite of its significant career as a hard-cover book issued after the end of the serial publication—up to 1914 it had nine editions—the novel has been fully invisible for literary criticism and literary history. The “first clever, truly funny periodical—the very long-life”²⁰ *Az Üstökös* (meaning Comet)—*nomen est omen*—seemed to bring bad luck for the humorous novel.

The texts of the satirical weekly (like those of every other funny periodical) target regular “consumers”. They count on the aesthetic impact potential of the texts as much as their reflection on issues of everyday life and politics that can be transformed into shocking and, at the same time, entertaining experiences because of their effective irony, humor, satire, or parody. However, the non-canonization of the novel is not because it was captured in the degradable medium of the weekly magazine of humor and satire, as it had a significant career also when issued in book form. In other words, it *was not* the publication in the weekly, the medium of popular communication, that should be blamed for the exclusion of the novel from the scope of literary reading focusing on linguistic complexity. This probably happened because of the label of “humorous novel”, that it placed it into the category of popular literature once and for all. Usually, the reader does not pay special attention to the author's “compulsory” genre-definition. The novel was published in the satirical *Az Üstökös*, thus the definition was literally considered redundant in the author's contextualization; later literary publicity interpreted this fact as an instruction for the reader, according to which the text was set on a platform suitable exclusively for running a program of “laughter”. Thus, the novel was listed as entertaining fiction, falling outside the horizon of literary criticism, as these works were not included in the corpus of “serious” pieces. Notwithstanding, in several regards this short novel is parallel to Flaubert's unfinished, subversive masterpiece *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.²¹

19 The subscription for the weekly cost eight forints a year, and two forints a quarter. The novel was published in 12 weeks; those who subscribed only for this period paid only 1 forint and 50 kreuzer. This special offer was necessary as after 1865 the number of subscribers increased (from 1200 to 1500). However, even at this low price, subscription was available only for few. The modification of the electoral law in 1874 resulted in the reduction of the number of people entitled to vote. According to Article XXXIII, only those persons were entitled who had land estates granting at least twice as much as the subscription fee—i.e., 16 forints.

20 Szinnyei, *Novella- és regényirodalmunk a Bach-korszakban I*, 134.

21 Several Hungarian translations are available: by László Nógrádi (1882), by Marcell Benedek (1921) and by Árpád Tóth (1921). The Hungarian reception displays an extremely wide scale (stretching from a failed attempt to an unfinished masterpiece). See bibliography Bereczki et al., “Gustave Flaubert en Hongrie.”

In his essay on Flaubert's novel, Jorge Luis Borges considers certain data—the date of writing and publication—vitaly important. As for its comparison to Jókai's novel, the dates may be essential, since Flaubert began work on the text after a long period of preparation at the exact time when Jókai's humorous novel came out:²²

“For six years of his life, the final years, Flaubert dedicated himself to the design and execution of this book, which ultimately remained incomplete, [...] The first edition of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* appeared in March 1881.”²³

Maupassant emphasized the same:

“On peut dire que la moitié de la vie de Gustave Flaubert s'est passée à méditer *Bouvard et Pécuchet* et qu'il a consacré ses dix dernières années à exécuter ce tour de force. Liseur insatiable, chercheur infatigable, il amoncelait sans repos les documents. Enfin, un jour, il se mit à l'œuvre, épouvanté toutefois devant l'énormité de la besogne. 'Il faut être fou, disait-il souvent, pour entreprendre un pareil livre.' Il fallait surtout une patience surhumaine et une indéclinable volonté.”²⁴

This condition makes the (non-)history of the non-canonization of Jókai's novel especially instructive, as it goes along with the experiment of an author (Flaubert) who the Gyulai-school referred to in trying to marginalize Jókai. On the other hand, this also explains the indifference toward the novel. It is true for Jókai's humorous novel that “behind the fairly indifferent reception we can perhaps see the partial resistance of the text to the canonization principles used to describe Jókai's poetics.”²⁵

Fragmented “small stories”, scenic structure, grotesque

Undoubtedly, compared to Flaubert's earlier prose, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* seeks new ways. Jorge Luis Borges interprets the unfinished novel as an explicit experiment: “The man who, with *Madame Bovary*, forged the realist novel was also the first to shatter it.”²⁶ More recent analysis likes to interpret *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as the parody of the novel as a genre and cultural institution. Hugh Kenner explicitly states: “[Flaubert] will use fiction itself to vanquish fiction; he will arrange, and maneuver, and contrive, to such bland effect that no one will ever afterward be quite sure where contrivance began, and serendipity left off.”²⁷ The title of Borges' essay is

22 Cento, “Introduction,” XLII–XLV.

23 Borges, “A defense of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*,” 386–87.

24 Maupassant, “*Bouvard et Pécuchet*,” 1217.

25 Bényei, “Vetkőzd le az új embert, s öltsd fel a régit,” 348.

26 Borges, “A defense of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*,” 389.

27 Kenner, *The stoic comedians*, 13.

telling: *A Defense of Bouvard and Pécuchet*. According to Borges, Flaubert had an intuition of the “death” of the so-called great novel of the nineteenth century based on linear storytelling, which—i.e., its death—came about in *Ulysses*. In 1922, the year *Ulysses* was published, Ezra Pound interpreted the interrelations of the two texts, stating that Joyce’s novel closed a process crowned by the concentrated, effective poetic initiations of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.²⁸ In *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, the time in which the story takes place is blurred, inessential for the story and the characters, which Borges characterized as something that “tends toward eternity.”²⁹ Borges lets the statements of eight characteristic interpreters collide against each other,³⁰ and concludes by saying that Flaubert very consciously wrote a satire.³¹ That is why he thinks that this novel, provoking extreme emotions and value judgments, can and should be appreciated on the level of *aesthetics* rather than logics.

“The justification of Bouvard and Pécuchet, I would venture to suggest, is of an aesthetic order, and has little or nothing to do with the four figures and nineteen modes of the syllogism. Logical rigor is one thing and the (now) almost instinctive tradition of placing essential words in the mouths of simpletons and madmen is another.”³²

Trying to remove the interpretation of the novel from the framework of the ideological debate, Borges offers the reader more than his own reading; he explains why a number of critics refused Flaubert’s late masterpiece:

“There is, perhaps, another key. To mock humanity’s yearnings, Swift attributed them to pygmies or apes; Flaubert, to two grotesque individuals. Obviously, if universal history is the history of Bouvard and Pécuchet, everything it consists of is ridiculous and insignificant.”³³

The structure of the two novels is obviously parallel; both are built on a chain of metonymic contacts of failed “projects”. Although the fields of science and knowledge the heroes “encounter” do not follow the same order, the *extent* of their thematic coincidence is striking:³⁴

28 Read, ed., *Pound/Joyce*, 194–211. The French text is an extended version of the English one. The volume referred to contains both.

29 Borges, “A defense of Bouvard and Pécuchet,” 389.

30 In the order of mention: Edmund Gosse, Rémy de Gourmont, Émile Faguet, Henry Céard, René Dumesnil, Claude Digeon, Hyppolite Taine, René Descharmes. (Several of their articles are available on the website of *Centre Flaubert*: <http://flaubert.univ-rouen.fr/etudes/>)

31 Borges, “A defense of Bouvard and Pécuchet,” 388.

32 Borges, “A defense of Bouvard and Pécuchet,” 388.

33 Borges, “A defense of Bouvard and Pécuchet,” 389.

34 In Flaubert’s correspondence, we cannot find evidence of his familiarity with Jókai’s text. See

<i>Bouvard et Pécuchet</i>	<i>Egy ember, aki mindent tud</i>
agriculture (grain, fruit, ornamental garden construction, liqueur brewing)	military science
chemistry	literature/poetry/novel writing
medical science/anatomy/physiology	hunting/travelling
geology	natural history/ethnography/collections/museum
archeology/collections/museum	education/pedagogy
history	table dancing/spiritism
literature/drama writing	agriculture/animal breeding/plant cultivation
stylistics/grammar/aesthetics	natural sciences
politics/rhetoric	medical science/homeopathy
hygiene (health science)	diplomacy/politics/rhetoric
table dancing/mesmerism/magnetization	enterprise
religion	religion
education/pedagogy	–

Nineteenth century “realist” novels arrange plot chain(s) into dramatic structures, which—citing Genette’s terminology—can be best described in the following way: dialogic scenes are built into the basic text of the linearly proceeding *summarized narration*, the rapid progress of the narrated time is suspended by temporal ellipses, while the narrated time is suspended by descriptive breaks. In contrast, Jókai’s and Flaubert’s novels are built on a *scenic* or *episodic* structure,³⁵ a *cut-at-will-form* where—due to the narration of individual episodes—the role of scenes is of decisive importance (the term is not used here in Genette’s definition). Fragmented “small stories”³⁶ are connected only by metonymic contact. The breaks between the episodes destroy the teleological structure which arranges preceding and following events happening to the characters in a causal relationship, up to the final ending of the story. In both novels, this results

Flaubert, *Correspondance*. If the German translation published parallel to the Hungarian text entered into the international circulation of feuilleton novels without the author’s name and under a different title—which could be a real possibility at that time—it may have been published in small or regional periodicals. A possible pirate edition (not known by the author) has not been found in any available database or catalogue. However, thanks to the rapid (international) spread of digitalization, the possible existence and future identification of a pirate edition cannot be excluded.

35 Thorel-Cailleteau, “Bouvard et Pécuchet,” 20.

36 According to Thierry Poyet, there are ten small novels. See Poyet, *Bouvard et Pécuchet, le savoir et la Sagesse*, 72.

in the sort of “timelessness” that Borges identifies in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. That is, the narrated time puts the cyclical nature of days in the foreground, thereby not allowing the reader, who is willing to create an illusion of reality, to assign the events to the points of a chronological timeline. There is another consequence, namely that “character portrayal” and “character development”, so common in realist novels, are incomprehensible in this structure. Neither of the heroes are autonomous personalities: they are always looking for new models, identifying themselves with more and more different roles, as they have no identity of their own. Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus’s statement concerning the scenic narrative of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* may also be true for Jókai’s novels: episodes can be read as parodies of previous novel forms (adventure novel, development novel, and education novel).³⁷ According to Schulz-Buschhaus, in nineteenth century ideological history the place of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* may be defined by the presence of the following three essential, inter-correlating moments: (1) making the plot undramatic (*Entdramatisierung der Handlung*) and (2) making the characters impersonal (*Entpersönlichung der Figuren*); (3) montage of existing forms and linguistic material (*Montage von vorgefundenen Formen und Sprachmaterial*)³⁸ Jókai’s short novel is also built on the co-existence of the three features.

Parodic or grotesque re-application of the well-known components extends not only to the formal elements of the story scheme. The heroes, who do not have personalities of their own, do not have a personalized “language”, and the third-person narrator uses the method of linguistic recycling. Both texts are extremely rich in allusions, references, and intertexts, which—however—are neither thematically nor medially limited to the usual forms of literary references. Literary and fictional texts are less often cited: in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* popular or educational works on natural sciences and informative works available on the contemporary book-market are dominant, while Jókai tends to refer to daily newspapers and periodicals rather than books. If correlated to Roland Barthes’ five codes, the above essential features can be described as follows: the role of *proairetic* codes which can be used in the construction of the plot chain is surprisingly small in the process of meaning construction, at the same time the role of referential or cultural codes is extremely strong. On the one hand, the cultural code is very much exposed to time, as for later generations it is invisible or serves as a deixis noticed by the reader but pointing at an empty place for her. On the other hand, this is exactly why the critique of cultural knowledge is a challenge for narrative texts in the long-term. Roland Barthes refers to *Bouvard et Pécuchet* twice in his *S/Z*. The reason may lie in the fact that Flaubert discovered a narrative technique criticizing the stereotypes, the “cleverness” or “stupidity” of a given class and period, while at the same time the text may be “readable”

37 Schulz-Buschhaus, “Das historische Ort von Flauberts Spätwerk,” 194–200.

38 Schulz-Buschhaus, “Das historische Ort von Flauberts Spätwerk,” 204.

by other, non-contemporary generations as well. According to Barthes, the narrator can present *Bouvard and Pécuchet* in their uncertain status, as the author is “using no metalanguage (or a suspended metalanguage) in their regard.”³⁹ In terms of its narratological approach, this means that the voice of the superior narrator is omitted or at least strongly limited. Just like the two copyists, Jókai’s Ottó Rengeteghy (talking name meaning something like Otto Gentle Oodles) is also a *copier of codes*, and Barthes’ further statements are also true for Jókai’s novel:

“This is what Flaubert did in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*: the two copyists are copiers of codes (they are, one may say, *stupid*), but since they too confront the class stupidity which surrounds them, the text presenting them sets up a circularity in which no one (not even the author) has an advantage over anyone else; and this is in fact the function of writing: to make ridiculous, to annul the power (the intimidation) of one language over another, to dissolve any metalanguage as soon as it is constituted.”⁴⁰

In the description of necromancy, both the parallels and the abovementioned difference between the methods of the two short novels are clear:

“Le phénomène des tables tournantes n’en est pas moins certain. Le vulgaire l’attribue à des esprits, Faraday au prolongement de l’action nerveuse, Chevreul à l’inconscience des efforts, ou peut-être, comme admet Ségouin, se dégage-t-il de l’assemblage des personnes une impulsion, un courant magnétique? Cette hypothèse fit rêver Pécuchet. Il prit dans sa bibliothèque le ‘Guide du magnétiseur’ par Montacabère, le relut attentivement, et initia Bouvard à la théorie. Tous les corps animés reçoivent et communiquent l’influence des astres, propriété analogue à la vertu de l’aimant. En dirigeant cette force on peut guérir les malades, voilà le principe. La Science, depuis Mesmer, s’est développée;—mais il importe toujours de verser le fluide et de faire des passes qui, premièrement, doivent endormir.”⁴¹

“Count Otto is not the only clever person to believe that ghosts are in direct contact with the living world. In America, the number of believers exceeds eight million, they have twenty journals, one of them, the ‘*Banner of Light*’ has thirty thousand subscribers (they are not ghosts but real human beings paying real dollars); among the mediums we find well-known people, namely *Cooper Fenimore*; in Europe *Victor Hugo*, *Flammarion*, *Hofmann Fallersleben*, and *Lord Bulwer Lytton*; they have their own branch of faith included in nineteen basic canons, announced in the great Oecumenicum

39 Barthes, *S/Z*, 206.

40 Barthes, *S/Z*, 98.

41 Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 459–60.

Consilium in Rochester. Napoleon the third himself—in the presence of Empress Eugenie and Prince Montebello—could see the hand of his uncle, Napoleon the Great, called by conjurer Home—the hand appeared on the table and wrote down his name; the great emperor allowed Louis Bonaparte and Eugenie Montijo to kiss his hand; but he pulled it away from Montebello. (He must have known about the latter’s infamous affair with Princess Metternich in advance.)”⁴²

Both these texts are dominated by cultural codes. Names known by the reader come from textbooks and encyclopedias, their function is a sort of legalization, based on authentic references. However, the great number of references and names make us feel that the text is increasingly faster, owing to the rhetoric effect of syntactic repetition and listing. In the enumeration of personal names and data the reader loses “control” over the “referentiality” of the text read: the great number of references make meaningless elements “authentic”, while recognized references, speaking to the reader are deprived of their weight and “verification”. Both texts start with a live-speech-like sentence in third person. While Flaubert’s opening sentences (1–3) could be interpreted as “*free indirect speech*” (*erlebte Rede*), the first sentence of Jókai’s narrator looks at the character from an external perspective. The relation of Count Otto to occult phenomena seems to be in accordance with the similarly “accepting” behavior of well-known personalities of contemporary cultural and political life. The behavior and acts of the hero of an imaginary world are “verified” by celebrities that readers may know from their reading: mainly from daily news and feuilletons and, to a lesser extent, from books. The novel published in weekly instalments consciously plays with this “secondary acquaintance”, which is everyday experience for the public reading dailies and weeklies in the 1870s. The life of and events happening to “contemporaries” appearing in the yellow press can be traced in columns on social life and feuilletons running parallel to their own lives. Readers may have proof of their existence, but they cannot verify the content more accurately than that of any fiction. This is how stories become social themes, anecdotes, or urban legends, and contemporary readers may recognize them as events known from secondary orality (speech). The sentence reporting the number of American “believers” and subscribers could have been published in an informative feuilleton article, but—as the text is proceeding—the reader is less and less able to decide whether the following sentences are spoken by Count Otto’s voice or by the narrator. The strategies of the two narratives are similar as the narrator’s voice is not considered to be superior to the characters’ voices. The identification of the texts quoted as *free indirect speech* (*erlebte Rede*) can be done—in addition to being grammatically unmarked—by the fact that third person sentences do not differ from the characters’ points of view.

42 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 47–48.

While Pécuchet is trying to find the way out of the labyrinth of information with the help of a book, the Jókai passage concludes with a reference to a contemporary piece of news. It is indifferent for the “common reader” reading the two texts where the cultural codes come from: from the searchable archive of books, or information captured in degradable newspapers stored in newspaper collections. In both cases, our primary experience is the *fading* of the code—not depending on the type of printed media or the cultural register of the reference. A philologist reader can be confronted by the apparatus of the critical edition of Jókai’s texts, namely the fact that the technical development of archives (e.g., digitalization) may bring back cultural codes “extinct” for decades. The editor of Jókai’s novel explains Montebello’s *infamous affair* as a hint at “an event obviously familiar to contemporaries, which cannot be detected now.”⁴³ For the present-day interpreter, the article of the Paris correspondent of the *London Telegraph*, reporting *the Metternich – Montebello Duel* in *The New York Times* issued on 4 June 1874 is quickly available in *The New York Times* digital archive. According to the article, the event travelled the world press.⁴⁴ The “infamous affair” is especially interesting as one of the “main heroes” is the structurally changed publicity created by daily newspapers working like mass media. Count Montebello demanded satisfaction from Prince Metternich for something the Prince had not done. The conflict arose between the Count and Metternich’s wife. Metternich was ready to take up the gauntlet, but he denied that there was a reason for the duel. He informed the Count that he was not responsible for the words said by his wife at an event where he was not even present. In case Montebello could not be considered attacked, the right of the choice of weapon would not be due to him. At this point, Montebello’s dueling assistants turned to the public: they published the whole correspondence between the Count and the Prince. Then the duel could no longer be avoided, and—as Montebello allowed the right of the choice of weapon to Metternich—they fought the duel with swords. Metternich was injured lightly but this did not prevent him from returning to Paris and dining with his friends. The contemporary “hoax” or “celebrity news” is telling about Jókai’s working method and the date of writing,⁴⁵ but the recognition of the cultural code

43 Sándor, “Jegyzetek,” 495.

44 *The Metternich – Montebello Duel*, *The New York Times*, 4 June 1874. Several articles reporting the event are available in digital archives (e.g., *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 23 May 1874; *The Spectator*, 30 May 1874; *The New York Times*, 1 June 1874; *Daily Alta California*, 12 June 1874; *Sacramento Daily Union*, 18 June 1874; *The Queanbeyan Age*, 1 August 1874).

45 According to the Paris correspondent of the *London Telegraph*, the duel between Count Montebello and Prince Metternich took place in St. Cloud on 21 May 1874. The text cited referring to the duel was published in the 6th episode of the sequel. This issue of *Az Űstökös* came out on 6 June 1874. In *A Complete Bibliography of Fencing and Duelling* issued by Carl A. Thimm in 1896, the duel is dated between 23–25 May. See Thimm, *A Complete Bibliography of Fencing and Duelling*, 307.

and the understanding of the hint do not affect the “work” of the text concerning its interpretability and its effect.

The time when the two novels take place is not identical: the gap is about twenty years. While Flaubert’s narrator dates the starting event of the narrated time in the summer of 1838 (when the title characters get acquainted)⁴⁶, Jókai’s narrator launches the story of Ottó Rengeteghy’s life in the 1850’s, referred to in the summary preceding the story.⁴⁷ Both novels begin in the decade when—due to daily newspapers becoming mass media—the market of printed media is radically changing, transforming the structure of publicity, with the starting age of popular communication.⁴⁸

Both texts can be read as narratives telling the story of the birth of the *dilettante*. In both novels, the *dilettante* is the product of the modern mass media, the

46 The opening sentence of the first chapter informs us only that Bouvard and Pécuchet got acquainted in dog days: “Comme il faisait une chaleur de trente-trois degrés, le boulevard Bourdon se trouvait absolument désert.” Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 271. The first actual date recorded—the date of an unexpected turn of Bouvard’s life—functions also as a prolepsis in the text: “Un après-midi (c’était le 20 janvier 1839) Bouvard étant à son comptoir reçut une lettre, apportée par le facteur.” Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 280. The exact date can be considered a prophecy predicting that everything happening to Bouvard that day will become very important in his future life. Up to this date elements referring to time—“the other day”, “once”, “on a Sunday”, “in an afternoon” [“Le lendemain”; “Un fois”; “Un dimanche”; “Un après-midi”]. Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 276, 279, 280—seem to be mainly temporal ellipses. In addition, they are usually connected to the moments of recurrence and frequency, which puts cyclicity, the recurrence of days rather than linear time in the foreground. The sentence cited begins with a temporal ellipse, the actual date of the story is put in brackets, which does not mean the secondarity of the narrator’s insertion; on the contrary, it intends to draw the reader’s attention to the importance of the information in brackets.

47 “In the fifties (meaning the 1850s, not his age) Count Ottó Rengeteghy was serving in the imperial army, where he was one of the foremen.” Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 6. The uncertainty of the date is referred to by the narrator himself through the insertion in brackets; at the same time he makes use of the semantic gap due to the possible diversity of interpretation: out of the two possible contexts of “in the fifties” (the century/Rengeteghy), the latter is excluded, this way the narrator states that the phrase refers to the historical period. Despite the seemingly literal supplement of the narrator, the negation reveals something about the age of the main hero: namely, that he has *not yet* turned 50. The first nodes of events of the story, told at a slower speed, are indirectly dated by the narrator: he mobilizes the readers’ cultural and historical knowledge via metonymic substitution—instead of April–June 1859, he speaks of “the Italian–French War” and “Solferino” instead of 24 June 1859. “The historical events” (war, battle) included in textbooks substitute for the actual date of the story, however, the readers can interpret this metonymy only if they are able to place the event exactly in the chronology of world history. See Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 8.

48 In the case of the French press, this can be dated to the 1830s, while in Hungary to the 1850s. See Hansági, *Tárca-regény-nyilvánosság*, 33, 157.

market of printed media. The privileged role of books and journals, which form the narrated “events” directly, cannot be accidental. In his essay *Fantasia of the Library*, Michel Foucault connects the stories of “the two grotesque Fausts” to the “free entry” into the Gutenberg Galaxy, the metaphor of the bookstore, i.e., to books “which can be bought”.

“Bouvard and Pécuchet are directly tempted by books, by their endless multiplicity, by the frothing of works in the grey expanse of the library. [...] The Bible has become a bookstore, and the magic power of the image has become a devouring appetite for reading. [...] the books that should have taught them how to exist dissipated their energies by telling them what they must do. Such is the stupidity and virtue, the sanctity and simple-mindedness of those who zealously undertake to make of themselves what they already are, who put into practice received ideas, and who silently endeavor throughout their lives to achieve union with their inner selves in a blind and desperate eagerness.”⁴⁹

In her inventive book on cultural history, Kirsten Dickhaut studied the depiction of the “deformed library” in French literature, dedicating a long chapter to the grotesque library of Bouvard and Pécuchet.⁵⁰ In Flaubert’s novel, the “knowledge-storing” library, the traditional symbol of universal knowledge, does not reflect the surrounding world and is unable to perform its previous function.⁵¹ The library’s owners move to the countryside, and in their private sphere the library becomes a grotesque collection the “builders” furnish with objects that do not fit it or match each other (a coconut, a cabinet with shells, a portrait of the father).⁵²

49 Foucault, “Fantasia of the Library,” 106–8.

50 Dickhaut, *Verkehrte Bücherwelten*, 255–94.

51 Dickhaut, *Verkehrte Bücherwelten*, 270–75.

52 “La seconde chambre, où l’on descendait par deux marches, renfermait les anciens livres apportés de Paris, et ceux qu’en arrivant ils avaient découverts dans une armoire. Les vantaux en étaient retirés. Ils l’appelaient la bibliothèque.

L’arbre généalogique de la famille Croixmare occupait seul tout le revers de la porte. Sur le lambris en retour, la figure au pastel d’une dame en costume Louis XV faisait pendant au portrait du père Bouvard. Le chambranle de la glace avait pour décoration un sombrero de feutre noir, et une monstrueuse galoche, encore pleine de feuilles, les restes d’un nid.

Deux noix de coco (appartenant à Pécuchet depuis sa jeunesse) flanquaient sur la cheminée un tonneau de faïence, que chevauchait un paysan. Auprès, dans une corbeille de paille, il y avait un décime, rendu par un canard.

Devant la bibliothèque, se carrait une commode en coquillages, avec des ornements de peluche. Son couvercle supportait un chat tenant une souris dans sa gueule,—pétrification de Saint-Allyre,—une boîte à ouvrage en coquilles même;—et sur cette boîte, une carafe d’eau-de-vie contenait une poire de bon-chrétien.

Its stock, principles of selection, spatial arrangement, and material world may be interpreted as the unveiling of Bouvard's and Pécuchet's personalities. Through describing the library, the author shows the reader how the rules are broken by integrating *style breaking, kitschy, trivial, or pseudo-scientific* elements in the novel. The ways the books are acquired (borrowing, order, purchase, or donation) are as varied as the reading methods (loud, mute, social, reading aloud, literal memorization, discussing the text following mute reading, etc.). Unfortunately, all this does not result in the desired understanding; in contrast, it leads to non-understanding, misunderstanding, incomprehension.⁵³ “Durch ihren Willen, alles wissen zu wollen verlieren sie sich im Labyrinth der Bücher.”⁵⁴

Ottó Rengeteghy is also lost in the labyrinth of information that does not come from the medium of books (that are beginning to lose their hegemony), although the third-person narrator lets the reader know that books were the source of the Count's “shoreless” knowledge before the starting moment of the narrated story. The narrator enters Rengeteghy into the *sujet* of the novel as if somehow he had *already* read everything previously. “As for belles-lettres, he knew everything—masterpieces as well as curiosities.”⁵⁵ The first chapter begins with an exhaustive enumeration of languages, arts, sciences, and crafts in which the title-hero had *previously* obtained skills. The list is characterized—similarly to the library of the two copyists—by putting together elements that do not match each other: besides classical, living, and exotic languages, there is the argot slang learnt from “the famous pickpocket”; geography is followed by spiritualism; at the same time Rengeteghy was “a national economist, an outstanding miner, and animal acclimatizer.”⁵⁶ Due to his wealth and social position, the Count has access to all sources of information: books and an extremely large number of international dailies issued in a globalized world. As a traveler, he also gains empirical experience, he watches, sees, hears, and tries

Mais le plus beau, c'était dans l'embrasure de la fenêtre une statue de saint Pierre! Sa main droite couverte d'un gant serrait la chef du Paradis, de couleur vert-pomme. Sa chasuble que des fleurs de lis agrémentaient était bleu-ciel, et sa tiare très jaune, pointue comme une pagode. Il avait les joues fardées, de gros yeux ronds, la bouche béante, le nez de travers et en trompette. Au-dessus pendait un baldaquin fait d'un vieux tapis où l'on distinguait deux amours dans un cercle de roses – et à ses pieds comme une colonne se levait un pot à beurre, portant ces mots en lettres blanches sur fond chocolat <:> ‘Exécuté devant S.A.R. Monseigneur le duc d'Angoulême, à Noron, le 3 d'octobre 1817’.

Pécuchet, de son lit, apercevait tout cela en enfilade—et parfois même il allait jusque dans la chambre de Bouvard, pour allonger la perspective.” Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 363–64.

53 Dickhaut, *Verkehrte Bücherwelten*, 268.

54 Dickhaut, *Verkehrte Bücherwelten*, 268.

55 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 5–6.

56 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 5–6.

everything (because of the scenic narration, the majority of these are missing from the *sujet* though). He is unable to select, the principles of cultural order are often broken, registers are transgressed, and the frequent enumeration of the extreme accumulation of incongruous elements results in a grotesque effect.

The *dilettante* as a product of popular communication and mass media

We cannot neglect the fact that in Flaubert's and Jókai's imaginary worlds *books* and *journals/newspapers* create a medial network which can establish the “modern” framework of autodidacticism, the necessary preconditions for the “emerging” dilettante,⁵⁷ only in such a two-level network.⁵⁸ That is the exact reason why Ezra Pound considers the figures of Bouvard and Pécuchet (similarly to Leopold Bloom) the basis of democracy. (“Messrs Bouvard and Pécuchet are the basis of democracy”).⁵⁹ They are the men in the street believing everything they read in the *newspapers*. The innovations/discoveries of the closed elite circle of scientists, artists, and explorers address the “average reader”, the not systematically educated, unprofessional public only when they become news in the mass media which *anybody* can access. Interpreting the survival of “the truncated *Bouvard et Pécuchet*” as “a Pyrrhic victory over Gutenberg's empire,”⁶⁰ Hugh Kenner argues that it is not by chance that Flaubert put the story of his heroes in the middle of the nineteenth century: similarly to Pound, he also considers the birth of the dilettante a (by) product of democracy:

“For if there is one thing certain about the Enlightenment it is this, that the Revolution has democratized its benefits, and released, for any pair of copying-clerks, the assurances, the freedom for the intellect to play, that were once monopolies of the salon. And this is a capital fact that Flaubert locates their enterprise so exactly at the semicentenary of civilization's new frontier, like a solemn commemorative ritual. Every man is at liberty now to be his own polymath. The mind of Europe has disclosed its secret contents and become a vast Coney Island in which all France is entitled to play.”⁶¹

57 In my interpretation, the *dilettante* is a non-systematically educated autodidactic person, who is unable to apply his knowledge, a person whose process of understanding is hindered or does not work at all. That is, it does not simply mean an amateur, a person doing something not to make his living. See Wirth et al., *Dilettantismus als Beruf*.

58 Mészáros, *Reformáció, közvetítés, nyilvánosság*, 54.

59 Pound, “Paris Letter,” 194; Pound, “James Joyce et Pécuchet,” 206.

60 Kenner, *The stoic comedians*, 4.

61 Kenner, *The stoic comedians*, 9.

At the same time, Pound draws attention to the absence of daily news, political news, and “small features” in the imaginary world of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.⁶² Due to their absence, not only time-markers are excluded: in this context the daily newspaper is a primary mediator of information leading to *other* printed media; it connects the networks of books and newspapers/journals. By means of the news, the book itself becomes an object that can be ordered (theoretically) by anybody: the diverse public of newspapers, the invisible “everyman” is informed of books when reading the daily news. The network of daily newspapers can reach a much more extensive pool of readers than the predictable number of those who read a book, and in addition, the network may bring along “unexpected”, “uncalculated” readers as well. As a commercial product, a book—even an informative one—has target consumers, i.e., implied and ideal readers with a certain knowledge, way of life, gender, and age, while newspapers working as mass media target a much more extensive and diverse public.

News appearing in mass media and the information included do not “select” their readers.⁶³ Connecting the networks of books and newspapers, additional—previously excluded—readers emerge who interpret information in irrelevant contexts, which is not expected by authors of books. Before the emergence of mass media, the reading public of a book was transparent (concerning their knowledge, possible methods, and contexts of interpretation). However, when the networks of books and newspapers were connected, the situation changed:

“L'éducation, la presse, les dictionnaires et les encyclopédies vendus en fascicules bon marché accessibles à tous véhiculent ce nouvel état de la connaissance. Il n'est pas étonnant que Flaubert adopte le genre du dictionnaire comme matrice formelle du savoir. La diffusion du savoir, qu'on voit plutôt comme un progrès, est pour Flaubert un facteur de multiplication de la bêtise. La vulgarisation est au savoir ce que le suffrage universel est à la politique: le triomphe du nombre, l'égalisation par l'égalitarisme.”⁶⁴

Flaubert's heroes are often led to new themes and books via informative feuilletons and advertisements published in newspapers, however, the relation of the two media is far from going one-way in the new medial space:

“Le lendemain soir au Havre, en attendant le paquebot, ils virent au bas d'un journal, un feuilleton intitulé ‘De l'enseignement de la géologie.’

Cet article, plein de faits, exposait la question comme elle était comprise à l'époque.

62 Pound, “James Joyce et Pécuchet,” 204.

63 Helmstetter, “Der Geschmack der Gesellschaft,” 45.

64 Leclerc, “Notes de cours sur Bouvard et Pécuchet,” 222–23.

Jamais il n’y eut un cataclysme complet du globe. Mais la même espèce n’a pas toujours la même durée, et s’éteint plus vite dans tel endroit que dans tel autre. Des terrains de même âge contiennent des fossiles différents comme des dépôts très éloignés en renferment de pareils. Les fougères d’autrefois sont identiques aux fougères d’à présent. Beaucoup de zoophytes contemporains se retrouvent dans les couches les plus anciennes. En résumé, les modifications actuelles expliquent les bouleversements antérieurs. Les mêmes causes agissent toujours, la Nature ne fait pas de sauts, et les périodes, affirme Brogniart, ne sont après tout que des abstractions.

Cuvier jusqu’à présent leur avait apparu dans l’éclat d’une auréole, au sommet d’une science indiscutable. Elle était sapée. La Création n’avait plus la même discipline, et leur respect pour ce grand homme diminua.”⁶⁵

Waiting for the ship, they were accidentally handed a feuilleton which overwrote their knowledge gained from books they had earlier read. For the two autodidacts, the article published in an educational newspaper swept to them by the whim of the wind was not less authentic than the knowledge included in books they selected themselves or had studied upon the advice of their scientist friends. The relation between books and newspapers is by no means hierarchic: for the two friends, the authority of books is overwritten by that of the mass media.

When Rengeteghy enters the chronotope of the plot, he has already discovered the Gutenberg Galaxy; for him information carried by the mass media is the starting point of action. In Jókai’s short novel, the newspaper is a crucial factor as the dilettante could not have emerged without the two-level network of printed media. At the same time, mass media create the world of their own⁶⁶, which cannot be avoided by Jókai’s antihero, whose actions are “guided” by ever new temptations. At the same time—telling the story of the “origins” of these pieces of information – the narration uncovers the “reality” created by the mass media of the newspaper:

“He had lots of travel notes, very interesting ones.

Well then: meat, vegetables, fat, flour, spices, and eggs is not lunch yet. What can one do if one wants to have lunch at home?

First, one employs a cook.

Quite so! Cooking is the task of the cook.

65 Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 355–56.

66 In Luhmann’s opinion, the reality of mass media is not only constructed. Its dictatorship is due to its being able to decide: “However, we can speak of the reality of the mass media in another sense, that is, in the sense of what *appears to them, or through them to others*, to be reality.” Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, 4.

Such a literary cook was Bojtorján [a funny name literally meaning Burdock].

(...)

He handed all his travel notes to Bojtorján to take a comprehensive look at them. These travel notes were written in different languages as they were used in different countries: those coming from Algiers were in French, others from East-India in English, still others from Mexico in Spanish, while those coming from Russia in German.⁶⁷

Bojtorján was looking into the notes—he was looking at them with one eye as if he was looking into a perspective, with open eyes, and also with merged eyebrows, and finally he said it was impossible to make head or tail of them.

Definitely no. As he did not know any of these pagan languages, not even German. He was the newcomer who had led the American ship from the port called ‘Stapel’, who had transmuted Young-Chechens into ‘young *carousers*’, and who had made the Stagione sing at the Italian opera company. He knew nothing else but Hungarian. But—admittedly—he could write in Hungarian like a gurgling rivulet.”⁶⁸

Via the question-and-answer play, the dialog-like beginning of the scene prepares the reader for taking an active, acting role demanded by the text. The narrator lends his voice to the “voice” of the imagined reader, while the imitated dialog is trying to carry on a series of identifications, which in the succeeding replicates, unfolds a profane, reversible metaphor: *lunch* (i.e., the ready-made, edible, cooked meal) is identified with the written *literary* work. The narrator’s first statement (“He had lots of travel notes”) does not seem connectible to the enumeration of kitchen ingredients. However, if the reader performs the identification, it can be due to the opposite conjunctive introducing the second sentence, and the following modulating particle (i.e., a discourse or conversation organizing element), which shows that the negation contained in the sentence is valid for the first sentence (note = ingredient). The narrator involves the reader in a dialog, where the puzzles the latter must solve refer to the literary work itself, as well as to their author, the writer. The narrator, who asks the question from the reader, lends his voice for the answer. In fact, he makes the reader say the simultaneously ironic and self-ironic verdict identifying the *author*

67 We find a nearly parallel example in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*: “Et avant d’entreprendre des explorations nouvelles ils consultèrent le ‘Guide du voyageur géologue’ par Boué. [...] Le même ouvrage donne des préceptes de conduite: ‘Savoir la langue du pays que l’on visitera’ ils la savaient.” Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 350–51.

68 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 21–23.

with the cook, and confirm that the answer is right: the *act of cooking is implicitly identified with the act of writing*.

In the following part of the citation, the main source of humor is that the narrator's statements do not meet predictability (partly due to the logic of language), which makes the reader unable to catch the narrator in "making a mistake", so they are more and more disappointed in their expectations. The first unrealized expectation is caused by the exaggerated use of the construction—"all kinds of languages", since only the four main European languages are connected to the enumeration of exotic countries in the four repeated syntagmatic structures. The reader's second "disappointment" occurs when finding that the names of the countries and the languages do not seem to match. In addition, the narrator closes the line of repetition with a bang. In the first three cases, the reader easily finds explanation for the divergence, as the areas concerned are colonies. The same "rule" does not work in the fourth case, as in Russia, the "indigenous" elite as well as ordinary citizens use a foreign language quasi voluntarily. The cited text is closed by a "reward" for the reader, who—opposed to the "literary cook" Bojtorján—can understand the meaning of mistranslated words, this way they gain advantage over the character as well as over the text, as they can easily solve the puzzle.

Through the figure and working method of the journalist Bojtorján, "a ghost-writer", the story of publishing travel notes may be interpreted as a satirical description of producing books and newspapers. In other words, the episode may be seen as a self-reflecting mirror. The article written by Bojtorján is as incredible as the book he compiled based on Count Otto's travel notes. Neither of the media can grant the correctness of the information provided. Nevertheless, Rengeteghy's book will get placed in the two-level medial network; as a result, it will not stay unnoticed and cannot rely on the protection of the local context. Via newspapers, the book will be available to everybody, and publicity gives way to critical opinions. The reality of the mass media seems more realistic than the experimental one, and it turns against Rengeteghy when a fact-finding article does not only doubt the credibility of the travel note and Rengeteghy's authorship, but goes as far as to deny his very existence.

"Finally, a Saxon correspondent from Nagyszeben gave him the coup de grace in the Augsburg *Allgemeine*, revealing that Otto Rengeteghy did not travel to the places described; as a matter of fact, Otto Rengeteghy was not a count, moreover he was not even a human being, it is only a pseudonym of a journalist called Bojtorján, who compiled a tenth version from nine travel notes, which was published in this bright display by renitent old conservatives, demonstrating for the Hungarian element."⁶⁹

69 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 31.

The case demonstrates to the “hero” of the novel, as well as to its reader, that newspapers do not respect country borders. They are organized in a network in which every printed article becomes part of popular publicity, they cannot be withdrawn and never disappear, you can only enter the area of communication, but there is no exit. Count Otto cannot escape critiques; more than two dozen newspapers are listed, and emphasized by repetition, as reporting the case. The “effectiveness” of articles in the international press is guaranteed not merely by the fact that they have appeared, but also by the ability of the mass media to thematize public discourse: the news is spread by word of mouth; what the public has read gets into secondary orality, which speeds up spatial spreading. In a rhetorical sense, it is the type of repetition simultaneously applying anaphora and epiphora, repeated elements can be found both at the beginning and at the end of the text sequences. There are several examples of the formation of *symploce/complexion*.⁷⁰ Questions repeated 18 times are closed by the long enumeration of the titles of newspapers—well-known media are followed by less known or unknown ones, which causes the reader to give up searching for references:

“Someone who will be hanged has still got friends; but the one who is fleeced by critics has none. Not even a secret friend. For this one, every person is an Apostle Paul. The awful way everybody is laughing at his mishap! The awful way they are spreading his scandal from mouth to mouth! Wherever he may go, he will be asked the question: Have you read the ‘Pall Mall Gazette’? – There you are in it! – Have you read ‘Russky Mir’? – There you are in it! – Have you read ‘Berlingske Tidende’? – There you are in it! – Have you read the ‘Bombay Times’? – There you are in it! – Have you read ‘Revista d’Espagna’? – There you are in it! – Have you read ‘Sei-Yeu-Ki’ from Beijing? – There you are in it! – Have you read the ‘New-York Herald’? – There you are in it! – Have you read ‘Revue des Deux Mondes’? – There you are in it! – Have you read the ‘Foreign Review’?, have you read ‘Once a Week’?, have you read ‘Magazine for Town and Country’?, have you read ‘Vivodán’?, have you read ‘Neue Freie’?, have you read ‘Allgemeine’?, have you read ‘Trompeta Karpacilor’?, have you read ‘Rumili Teskere’?, have you read ‘Europaikos Herenistes’?, have you read ‘Punch’?, ‘Ulk’?, ‘Floh’?, ‘Styx’?, ‘Zmáj’?, ‘Figaro’?, ‘Tatár Péter’?, ‘Füles Bagoly’ [Eagle-owl]?, ‘Fekete Leves’ [Black soup]?, ‘Kladderadatsch’?, ‘Charivari’? ... You are there – you are there – you are there in it!”⁷¹

In the glorious fifty years of *feuilleton* novels, the ghost-writer and the pseudoname were important institutions of medial publicity and the hierarchic relations

70 Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary rhetoric*, 276–77, 626.

71 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 31–32.

contemporary readers were very much interested in. Both called the attention of the reading public to the separation of the authorship/copyright name and the biological self of the author. While copyright names deprive the actual author or authors of their rights, the pseudonym was a means of protecting the private sphere or interests of the authors, too.⁷² In addition, in the very case it is not the brand which “uncover” the ghost-writer, but another person, who acts in the public space as an author. The Saxon correspondent exposes the fraud, and his conclusion is right when—considering the author’s style and working method—he realizes that the actual author of the travel note is Bojtorján. Nevertheless, he draws the wrong conclusion based on the fact that the name of the actual author he identifies is not identical to the copyright name on the cover. As the name *Rengeteghy* is not a run-in author’s brand, he does not think that Bojtorján could be the “author’s” well-paid ghost-writer. This last interpretation results in the turnover of the original hierarchy laid down in Rengeteghy and Bojtorján’s contract: Bojtorján, who has been invisible for medial publicness, becomes the actual author, while as for Rengeteghy, even his existence is deleted.

At the beginning of the two novels, education or the absence of education has a distinguished role. Pécuchet is characterized as follows: “Mais la conscience d’une instruction défectueuse, avec les besoins d’esprit qu’elle lui donnait, irritait son humeur; et il vivait complètement seul, <,> sans parents, sans maîtresse.”⁷³ In Jókai’s novel, in turn, the narrator begins Otto Rengeteghy’s life-story by stating that “in his life he could not make use of anything he knew”, although “he knew everything a person was able to learn, and he was learning everything up to the final hour of his life.”⁷⁴ Flaubert’s heroes are undereducated, while Rengeteghy is overeducated: what they share is that all three were unable to make use of their knowledge, the dilettantes do not stand the test of practice. While Flaubert’s copyists could not integrate in the system of civil professions due to their incompetence,⁷⁵ Rengeteghy is excluded from the professional world due to his gentility and wealth. Those minor characters who *actively participate* in the world of professional work, and this way come into conflict with the experimenting amateurs, play important roles. Mrs. Bordin, de Faverges, and Count Erdőváry make telling counterpoints as they have prospering estates and consider farming as a profession that requires competence, experience, and practice. That means that, in the imaginary world of the novels, not only those who make their living from it are forced to apply their knowledge but also landowners. In both novels the market of daily newspapers and books becomes a *model*: the heroes imagine their own relation to knowledge and

72 Hansági, *Tárca-regény-nyilvánosság*, 172.

73 Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 277.

74 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 5.

75 Schulz-Buschhaus “Das historische Ort von Flauberts Spätwerk,” 199.

science based on this model. Rengeteghy—just like Bouvard and Pécuchet—thinks that knowledge, together with its media, can be bought. In the opening sentences of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, describing their first lunch together when the heroes begin a medical discussion about spicy meals, the narrator makes the reader aware of their belief in the media.⁷⁶

The copyists believe that only the lack of time hinders them from accessing science. In the agricultural scenes of the novels, we see how the heroes' enthusiasm for and belief in new solutions give them trust that any kind of innovation may work anywhere and under any circumstances, that scientific achievements offer universal solutions. Belief in science reduces their sense of danger and overwrites the economic codes: their actual ambition is not targeted at profit but at innovation, even if applied at a loss.

The *ghost-writer* Bojtorján's figure is a good example of the fact that in Otto Rengeteghy's world the carrier of science is often a person whose knowledge he can buy, with whose help he can reach the desired aim. Rengeteghy's agricultural "adventure" ends up in a tremendous loss, but he wins his bet on a thousand cigars and is rewarded by a diploma of acknowledgement of the agricultural exhibition in London (which Pécuchet is only dreaming of).⁷⁷ The story told in first person starts from Rengeteghy's point of view,⁷⁸ but the text sequence is closed by the counterpointing technique: the arguments and motives of the dilettante Count Otto and the professional farmer Erdőváry are confronted. The third-person narrator does not comment on either Rengeteghy's or Erdőváry's monolog cited in first person. The paratactic relationship of the competitive voices spreads over to a minor character, who—as an "imported" expert—is not mentioned by name but by a serial number (Nr. IV., an Englishman advised...). The starting point of the problem (the low price of grain)

76 "Pécuchet avait peur des épices comme pouvant lui incendier le corps. Ce fut l'objet d'une discussion médicale. Ensuite, ils glorifièrent les avantages des sciences: que de choses à connaître! que de recherches—si on avait le temps! Hélas, le gagne-pain l'absorbait; et ils levèrent les bras d'étonnement, ils faillirent s'embrasser par-dessus la table en découvrant qu'ils étaient tous les deux copistes, Bouvard dans une maison de commerce, Pécuchet au ministère de la Marine,— ce qui ne l'empêchait pas de consacrer, chaque soir, quelques moments à l'étude. Il avait noté des fautes dans l'ouvrage de M. Thiers et il parla avec les plus grands respects d'un certain Dumouchel, professeur." Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 274.

77 "Well, Count Otto won the thousand cigars and the diploma of acknowledgement for his exhibited yaks in London" Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 76. "Pécuchet respirait bruyamment,— et tout en se frottant dans les narines des prises de tabac, il songeait que si le sort l'avait voulu, il ferait maintenant partie d'une société d'agriculture, brillerait aux expositions, serait cité dans les journaux." Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 309.

78 "Meanwhile he was working on his brilliant plans for farming." Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 75–76.

stimulates Count Otto to introduce an innovation (to build a steam mill), the failure (there is no water) “anticipates” the following project five times, the series of experiments is metonymically organized. Erdőváry always raises objections to the Count’s innovative plans of compensation i.e., that he wants to “buy knowledge” and to send for an “Englishman”.⁷⁹ The library and the book borrowed from the archive to help decide Rengeteghy and Erdőváry’s debate are represented as control instances considered authorities by the characters, but they are unable to decide who is right. In the debate upon sheep breeding, *the farm* is the context of the conversation for Erdőváry. His confidence is based on his conviction that only those animals can be bred that can accommodate to local conditions. However, the encyclopedia may provide arguments also for the mistaken party. Rengeteghy finds a passage where the exotic yak is described,⁸⁰ which formally supports his position, if the coordinates of space and time are suspended. Just like Bouvard and Pécuchet, Otto Rengeteghy fails, since—although all of them access the information needed (they have the money and they can read)—they are unable to transform information into knowledge, not being able to apply it; in a hermeneutical sense, the event of understanding never happens to them. Theory and praxis are in continuous conflict, which is an important moment in both novels. This is well illustrated by the following two texts:

–‘Si nous faisons des vers?’ dit Pécuchet.

–‘Plus tard! Occupons-nous de la prose, d’abord.’

On recommande formellement de choisir un classique pour se mouler sur lui, mais tous ont leurs dangers – et non seulement ils ont péché par le style, mais encore par la langue. [...]

Comme ils avaient senti et croyaient avoir observé ils se jugèrent capables d’écrire. Une pièce est gênante par l’étroitesse du cadre. Mais le roman a plus de libertés. Pour en faire un, ils cherchèrent dans leurs souvenirs.

Pécuchet se rappela un de ses chefs de bureau, un très vilain monsieur, et il ambitionnait de s’en venger par un livre.

Bouvard avait connu, à l’estaminet, un vieux maître d’écriture ivrogne et misérable. Rien ne serait drôle comme ce personnage.

79 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 72–76.

80 “Count Erdőváry also turned stubborn, he stated that in the whole world there is no ruminant, cloven-hoofed animal *bearing fleece*, which had more than two udders. Count Otto offered a bet. They bet on a thousand cigars. The Oken [a book by the German naturalist and philosopher] will decide on the bet. The Oken was brought from the old count’s library, and Erdőváry read out the distinctive features of sheep to Rengeteghy. Well then, Rengeteghy took over the Oken and read to his opponent the description of the ‘yak’, which—in fact—was not a kind of sheep but had fleece and had four udders.” Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 75–76.

Au bout de la semaine, ils imaginèrent de fondre ces deux sujets, en un seul – en demeuraient là, passèrent aux suivants: – une femme qui cause le malheur d’une famille – une femme son mari et son amant – une femme qui serait vertueuse par défaut de conformation, un ambitieux, un mauvais prêtre.

Ils tâchaient de relier à ces conceptions incertaines des choses fournies par leur mémoire, retranchaient, ajoutaient.

Pécuchet était pour le sentiment et l’idée, Bouvard pour l’ image et la couleur – et ils commençaient à ne plus s’entendre, chacun s’étonnant que l’autre fût si borné.

La science qu’on nomme esthétique, trancherait peut-être leurs différends. Un ami de Dumouchel, professeur de philosophie, leur envoya une liste d’ouvrages sur la matière. Ils travaillaient à part, et se communiquaient leurs réflexions.”⁸¹

“He realized that he was better at literature than all those poets, scientists, writers, and patrons.

Well, what is needed to get ahead of them? A triviality. To write better than they do.

It is beautiful and easy to be a writer.

It is better to be a poet because poets have to write less. Poems are shorter works of art.

‘A verse is similar to a hussar.’ Otto said. ‘How does a hussar arise? First, a man is born, then a horse is born: when the man finds the horse, they make a hussar. A verse arises in a similar way. First, the thought is born, then the rhyme: when the thought finds the rhyme, they make a verse.’

And he made an attempt.

And he had the experience that the horse sometimes drops the man, and there is no hussar anymore.

Well, the novelist’s job seems better: he is only an infantryman. (He does not have to clean the Pegasus.)

Count Otto possessed all the precious features of an author. He had read a lot: he could cite the original texts written by Horace, Byron, Victor Hugo, Metastasio, Goethe by heart, he knew the original texts of *Frithiof’s Saga* and Eugene Onegin, the translation of Sakontala, and he had travelled through Homer’s *Iliad* following the ancient incunabula [...]. However,

81 Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 408–10.

it is a more professional job to describe a common human thought in simple words so that the reader may understand what the author meant.

He realized that writing prose was more difficult than writing poetry. The poet's job is easy. He writes the first line, then looks for a cadence to the last word: having found it, he looks for another thought fitting the rhyme;— but in prose how does the leaf of a thought sprout from the stem of another thought?

This is the secret! »To understand writing' and 'to be able to write' are concepts so distant as 'to be in love' and 'to like«.⁸²

Both trials failed. Both suggested that literary communication could be imagined as similar to the everyday model, to oral speech. Just like in a dialog, the two positions can be exchanged: those who can read should be able to write. While the fiasco of Bouvard and Pécuchet stimulates them to learn, then give up the project and start another one, Rengeteghy begins to understand his project after going through the process of “literary education”. The possession of information itself does not result in competency, and Rengeteghy does not have the ability to apply information. Instead of giving up his project, he chooses another way: he asks Fantissa, the prototype of magnates' dilettante in novels, that they should write a novel “together”. However, instead of literary success, Rengeteghy has to flee the woman, concluding that there is a great difference between understanding theory and praxis (which is an exclusive case of application!): “From this case Count Otto has learnt that a person can be very good at writing novels ‘in theoria’, but ‘in praxi’ the first thing is that he should write a novel himself, but should not act in it.”⁸³

Free indirect speech and the staging of the text's *literariness*

As we can see at the end of the text cited above, in Jókai's narration *free indirect speech* (*erlebte Rede*)—which is usually attributed to Flaubert and the narrative styles of modern novel—is of outstanding importance. In contrast to the best-known stereotypes concerning Jókai's narrative style, the role of the superior narrator, the authoritative narration is very much limited in the text, as the aim of this (the narrator's) voice is to highlight literariness, to signalize the fictionality of the text, by staging the author:

“We should follow the hero of our novel, which is a big loss for the required unity of telling the story, as he is always inviting us into other fields, and

82 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 15–16.

83 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 19.

he starts everything but finishes nothing. Some of my novels suffered this flaw, I admit that in those cases it was my mistake, but in this case the entire reading public can certify that the mistake is not mine but that of the hero of my novel, who knows everything. We will go with him to several more places! Well, let us follow him!”⁸⁴

The focalization of the third person narration is in accordance with the citation. As a matter of fact, the voice of the third person narrator can most often be heard from the heroes’ point of view.

In both novels, the dense network determines certain features of the language of narration: through enumerations syntactic repetitions become a basic form structuring the text. In Jókai’s short novel, scenic units are closed by repeated formulae in six cases. The failed experiments of becoming a soldier, a novelist, a travelogue writer, a conservatoire-founder, a spiritualist, and a politician are finished with the same turn: at the end of each episode only a woman’s photograph is left for Otto. The closing formulae are varied repetitions, with only the names and events being different (“nothing else was left of it but her photograph”).⁸⁵ Turning to the reader (“we know this already by heart”), at the fourth repetition he lends voice to the “part” that is usually mute in literary communication. However, making the receiver “speak”, the author calls their attention to the fact that repetitions or returns are not simply rhetorical tricks. Otto is not the “hero” known from psychological novels, who—going through certain points of the plot—is developing and changing; the failed trials do not have a positive or negative effect on him, as he has no personality. At the end of the novel, the photographs hanging above the dying count’s bed induce substitutions contradicting each other (sinner against victim, sufferer against seductor). Photographs transforming the illusion of presence, signalize the absence and make the reader aware of the fact that the aimlessness of past events is, at the same time, chaotic and tragicomic: “Then, when he is left alone, portraits hung over his bed arranged in order come to life, portraits kept alive by so many sweet and bitter memories: good and bad angels, sinners and victims, sufferers and tempters, they are dancing around his bed rising into the air, dazzling his eyes by the mixed events of the past; they mock him, torture him, make him cry, or laugh at him.”⁸⁶

In Jókai’s text, various forms of repetition are in connection with the language of satire and the rhetoric of humor. Out of the many forms of repetition, especially *geminatio* (the same words or groups of words are repeated at a certain place in the sentence, mainly at the beginning) and *symploce* (anaphora and epiphora are

84 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 65.

85 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 14, 19, 25, 41, 65, 91.

86 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 101–2.

repeated together, the beginning and the end of the units are repeated, both) is often combined with the rhetoric form *acumen* (a logically witty contradiction, the subject and the predicate fit each other on one side, and they do not fit on the other).⁸⁷ Each of them could be illustrated with several examples.

One typical combination:

“Jealousy is the most torturing pain of the heart, consequently, love which is not exposed to jealousy is the greatest happiness. Jealousy can fully vanish only when you are perfectly convinced, i.e., when you are perfectly convinced that you are being deceived.”⁸⁸

Symploce and *acumen* are very often combined:

“Bojtorján was making increasingly more progress. He had an elder brother, who he recruited to the Count as a bailiff, a younger brother, who he recruited as a fiscal manager, the Count wanted to sell some horses, he bought them, but the Count never saw their price.”⁸⁹

An example for the combination of reduplication and *acumen*:

“First Bojtorján sent honorary copies with the author’s compliments to seventy-two newspapers, seventy-two newspapers sent price lists in return—in exchange for the published advertisements, and the Count had to subscribe to seventy-two newspapers for a year in advance.”⁹⁰

An example for the combination of *geminatio* and *acumen*:

“Next day the minister says good-bye to his clerks and leaves for Switzerland;—the beautiful baroness does not even say good-bye to her creditors and leaves to find her husband; Count Otto is left alone and can’t say good-bye to anyone.”⁹¹

And:

“When a wife loves another man, you can divorce her; when the sewing-maid loves another man, too, you can leave her; but when the coveted woman, a noble lady is coveted by the minister at the same time, well, there is no incompatibility—(You can read the 1st §: Ministers are excluded.)”⁹²

87 Lausberg, *Handbook of Litrerary rhetoric*, 276–77, 670.

88 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 90.

89 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 24.

90 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 26.

91 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 90.

92 Jókai, *Egy ember, aki mindent tud*, 90.

The caricature-like accumulation and emptying out of linguistic schemes bring about the parody of literary forms and modes of speech. The novel character of this experiment can be best seen from the dominance of anti-genres appearing in the twentieth century.⁹³ Jókai's humorous novel does not simply continue but takes to the very end the insights which appeared and had an essential influence on narration already in his "great novels" of the 1860s. Rewriting the popular novel schemes of the period in a parodistic way, the scenic narrative style of *Egy ember, aki mindent tud* makes it visible that a literary text is a human construction, which may sometimes create the illusion of reality, but its imaginary world can never be measured by reality. Contrary to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, in Jókai's novel the narrator's voice has a marked peculiarity, namely that most of the textual sequences are arranged in the rhetorical formulae described above. The strongly rhetoric language of the novel makes literariness transparent, while it separates the *written* text from orality, from the oral act of storytelling. In Jókai's novel, the "compression" of the narrator's voice into rhetorical figures may be understood as a method of "recycling" readymade, already existing linguistic formulae. The narrator's "own" individualized language is replaced by formulae that allow for the suspension of the narrator's "voice" based upon the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia to the same extent as the means of distance-creating in the voice of Flaubert's narrator that are usually subsumed under the category of *impassibilité*. The rhetoric of satire practiced ad absurdum by Jókai's narrator plays the role of those black masks used at carnivals that hide the narrator, who the reader could wink at.

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