

# GYULA KRÚDY'S EARLY SHORT STORIES

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## Introduction

In 1911 the success of *Szindbád*, a composite novel, turned Gyula Krúdy (1878–1933) into a bestselling author. Both the critics and the reading public immediately accepted him as one of the masters of modern Hungarian fiction. Since then literary criticism has presented a strange mirror image of this event: the novels and short stories Krúdy published before *Szindbád* have either been regarded as juvenilia following his great predecessor Kálmán Mikszáth, or as embryonic *Szindbád* pieces. The reference to Mikszáth and *Szindbád* has considerable power. It organizes the possible interpretations of the early short stories, emphasizing certain features and suppressing others. The third type of interpretation is a compromise, which describes Krúdy's early short stories as the stages of a process connecting Mikszáth and *Szindbád*. Between these well-known endpoints, the uniqueness of the early short stories is bound to be lost. Krúdy is probably the most neglected modern Hungarian classic. His early periods are practically unknown.

This neglect is for a number of reasons quite understandable. Starting when he was only fourteen, Krúdy had published about a dozen novels and more than fifteen hundred short stories by 1911, only a tenth of which has ever been collected into books. The rest are still buried in daily and weekly newspapers. As the numbers show, Krúdy wrote novels and short stories in such abundance that even the word 'prolific' is, in his case, a gross understatement. Nobody knows exactly how many short stories he wrote. He certainly did not. The bibliographies of his work are hopelessly unreliable. The last one of these, Mihály Gedényi's bibliography<sup>1</sup>, contains almost five thousand entries, which is by any standard an astronomic number, yet the actual number must be higher.

The period in which he started publishing was until the beginning of the Great War, the Golden Age of the local press, unrivalled by the radio or the television. In 1897, for instance, there were more than nine hundred local newspapers in Hungary. Even small towns had their pro- and anti-government newspapers, and many of them carried a short story each day. Krúdy knew perfectly

well how to exploit the situation. Most of his early short stories were published more than once, some of them five times, with major or minor modifications, the origin of which cannot be determined with any certainty. He did not care about the manuscripts. He kept a collection of his short stories, in the form of newspaper clippings, in a suitcase. When he arrived in a new town, and while he was still more or less sober, he grabbed a handful of the clippings and offered them for the local papers. The editors, it seems, were happy to have him among the contributors.<sup>2</sup> As a result, it is wellnigh impossible to find and read all his early short stories. (Some of them, stolen from the libraries by Krúdy's admirers, are probably lost for ever.) It is by no means accidental that there are at least four hundred errors in the first two thousand entries in Gedényi's bibliography. And those who collected his 'mature' writings took it for granted that, when compared with his later masterpieces, whatever preceded *Szindbád* must be less valuable artistically and, with a few exceptions, left them out of the subsequent editions of his collected works. A handful of contemporary critics, like Dezső Kosztolányi, Elek Londesz, and Aladár Schöpflin, knew long before *Szindbád* that Krúdy was one of the major authors of the period. In any event, his later masterpieces guarantee that the neglect of his early periods is unjustifiable – even if the harshest critics of his early periods are right. This is an attempt to do justice to the short stories of the period between 1902 and 1907.

The study of Krúdy's poetics is also significant on more general narratological grounds. His technique is both well outside the mainstream (in the sense that it is very difficult to find decisive similarities between him and his European contemporaries) and amazingly successful. If both assumptions are true, then the minute analysis of his works will probably shed new light on age-old narratological problems.

### Temporal structure

A passage from *Hét szilvafa* (789) seems to be suitable to start out from.<sup>3</sup> It displays some of the characteristics of Krúdy's poetics.

Otthon semmi egyebet nem csinált, mint földesúr volt. Lesétált a "falu"-ba, ahol vályogházakban némely öreg cseléde lakott. Ezeket a cselédeket jobbágyoknak nézte, és dehogyis jutott volna eszébe akármelyiknek ellentmondani a tekintetes úrnak. Öreg, félig vak vizslája bánatosan ödöngött a sarkában, a nemesi birtok jegenyefái barátságosan súgtak össze a kis öregúr feje fölött. Az urasági ház felől – tulajdonképpen egy igen egyszerű falusi ház volt az, fehér ámbitussal és felül nádfedéllel – harangütés hallatszott. Ezt a harangszót a birtok minden részében meg lehetett hallani, és azt jelentette, hogy délre jár az idő. Már fordult is az öreg vissza, hazafelé, a "jobbágyok" jó étvágyat kívántak a tekintetes úrnak, és a szél szárnyain pörkölt szaga terjedt az urasági ház felől.

– Űrűpűrkűkűlt van ebűdűre! ... – mondta nyelvűcűtűntűve az űregűrű, minűha tűz esűzűtűndű űta nem mindűg az lett volna ebűdűre. A sűket, vűn gazdasszűny, aki csupűn sűzes s nedves idűben, amidűn kűszűvűnye kűnozta, mondott fel az űregűrnűk, műr nem is tudott műst fűzűni, mint űrűpűrkűkűltet. Az űregűrű jűzűűen csűműcsogta meg ebűdűjűt, műjd a zűld kűrsűbűl tűltűtt (csak egy űjűjűyűt, mert a szűlűgűzűdasűgű: nűhűny vűnyűge vessűzű egy lugason, nem engedűlyezűtt tűbbet), űs gyűnyűrkűdűve nűzűtt szűjűl tavaszű idűben a napsűgaras tűjűn.

– Ha minden magyar űgy gondűlkűzűtt volna, mint űn, sohasem ment volna tűnkűre az orszűg – mormogta. – No de, áll műg az utűlsű nemesű bűrtok.

Az esűzűtűndűk műlűsűvűl mindűnkűbb meggyűzűdűsűvűvű vűlűtt, hogy az utűlsű nemesű bűrtoknűk fűnnmaradűsűrű űppen olyan szűűksűg van, mint akűr az alkűtműnyűra. “Honnűn ismerűhetűnű meg az űj neműzedűk, műlyen volt apűű űlete?” – gondűlűta nűha magűbűn, űs űreg jűbbűgyűit az esűzűtűndű nagy űnűnepeűn maga kűrű gyűűjtűtte, s egyűtt űnekűlte velűk a zűltűrűkűt. Műskűr, ha vendűg vetűdűűtt a hűzűhűz, egűyszerű megvűlűtűzűtt az egűsz nemesű bűrtok kűpe. A cűselűdek űnűneplű ruhűbűn szűlűgűlűttak fel az urasűgű hűzűnűl, űs a nagy kűnyűhűn akűkűrű tűz lobogűtt, mint egy kűlyűha.

The text presents a double vision. On the one hand, the narrator is thoroughly familiar with the situation he describes. He knows much more than an outsider or a casual visitor. He follows the old gentleman wherever he goes, he can hear what he says to himself, and seems to understand the way he sees his own world. On the other hand, the narrator does not share the old man's vision of the world. He has his own perspective. The juxtaposition, the ensuing tension and the interaction of the different views create a dialogical text. The passage quoted allows, sometimes even invites, the reader to assume that the hero and the narrator are opposed as the representatives of the past and the present. Not only the narrator looks upon the old man as a relic of a bygone age, but sometimes it appears as if the protagonist agreed with him. Although they seem to stand for the past and the present, it would be a mistake to give an account of their differences merely in terms of subsequent historical periods. The two worlds are present simultaneously. The worlds the protagonist and the narrator live in are different worlds with different rules, conventions, values, probabilities and languages.

Since it is the narrator's point of view that dominates, the old gentleman's perspective is to be disentangled from the narrator's discourse. The relationship of the two worlds is not quite clear. The languages are translatable, at least initially, from the narrator's point of view. The narrator translates the old man's words into his own language. The translation, however, always brings about major corrections. For instance, what the hero thinks to be a village is in fact, that is, according to the narrator, a collection of a few adobe houses. The narrator justifies his correction on the basis of his wider perspective and his knowledge of contemporary reality. While the labels the old gentleman uses have only limited validity, the ones the narrator introduces to replace them are supposed to

be seen as accepted more generally. At the same time, however, the necessity of corrections makes it doubtful whether the two worlds are translatable at all. Whenever the narrator changes the labels, the whole landscape changes as well.

The temporal structure of the world in which the hero lives is cyclical, or in other words, it is based on a type of identity that is not vulnerable to the passage of time. In such a world the repetition of the same event can be taken for granted – to the point that it does not make sense to ask whether the old gentleman's walk on his property is a singular or an iterative event, or to ask how many times his old cook can refuse to work and quit her job. It is this type of temporal structure that allows the hero to be pleased with the smell of the same mutton stew that has been served to him every single day for a decade. Such events (and the recurrent coincidence of different events) can be regarded as most improbable from the perspective of linear time. It is difficult to appreciate the cyclical conception of time, and the conflict of various time schemes in general, because the type of literary criticism (that is, formalism and structuralism) that systematically studied the temporal structure of narrative works is intimately related to the linear conception of time.

Discussing Proust's "intoxication with the iterative," Gérard Genette introduces the term "pseudo-iterative."<sup>4</sup> What distinguishes pseudo-iterative scenes from the iterative proper is their "richness and precision of detail." Because of these features, "no reader can seriously believe they occur and reoccur in that manner, several times, without any variation."<sup>5</sup> The category of pseudo-iterative may be useful for describing some aspects of Proust's narrative art, but it would certainly be misleading to apply it to Krúdy's short stories. The pseudo-iterative can be useful when the problem of repetition emerges within the context of linear time. But when the conception of cyclical time, the essence of which is unmodified repetition, is also involved, it is necessary to suspend the decisions reached on the basis of linear time. To rule out the possibility of the repetition of extended conversations and recurrent coincidences – on the ground that it is hard to believe they can take place without any variation – is to say that there is necessarily a Heraclitean principle at work in the world, or rather in any world. But this is precisely what is at stake in some of Krúdy's early short stories. Many of his characters live their lives on the assumption that "[w]henver the same conditions are fulfilled, the same entities reappear."<sup>6</sup>

Genette also suggests that those passages that state literally "this happened every day" should be understood figuratively as "every day something of this kind happened, of which this is one realization among others."<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly Genette's formula can be used in a number of cases, but on the whole it resembles the way the narrator re-writes the phrases Somodi actually thinks and says. This indicates that the various time schemes have a built-in bias, which will inevitably change the structure and meaning of events. One is tempted to say that

there is no neutral time scheme. The linear conception of time is not any more natural than the cyclical. To put it another way, the various conceptions of time should not be seen as parts of nature.

There is another, similar problem. Genette mentions that there is a type of action, the renewal of which is “wholly contrary to its nature.”<sup>8</sup> Death seems to be a good example. Certainly, there is a common sense world in which nobody can die more than once. But this is definitely not Krúdy's world. In some of his short stories and novels, even death is a repeatable event:

A halott még mozdult néhányat, aztán véglegesen, csendesen meghalt.  
(*Korvin lelke*, [1281])

Álmos úr egy napon meghalt.  
Ezt minden esztendőben megcselekedte [...] (*Napraforgó*, [2416])

More or less systematically Krúdy questioned the consequences of linear time. For instance, some of his characters meet themselves, different persons turn out to be the same person, or a broken cup reappears as if nothing had happened to it. The case of the broken cup was too much for one of Krúdy's editors. He must have thought that cups cannot be both broken and intact. He decided that the word “same” was a typo, and corrected it to “similar.”<sup>9</sup> And a critic, commenting on the word ‘same’, said that it was “somewhat illogical.”<sup>10</sup> Actually, what they do is not essentially different from Genette's suggestion: whenever it is hard to imagine the word “same” applies literally, it should be understood as “similar.”

Discussing similar issues Tzvetan Todorov claims:

The minimal complete plot consists in the passage from one equilibrium to another. An “ideal” narrative begins with a stable situation, which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical. Consequently, there are two types of episodes in a narrative: those which describe a state (of equilibrium or of disequilibrium) and those which describe the passage from one state to the other. The first type will be relatively static and, one might say, iterative; the same kind of actions can be repeated indefinitely. The second, on the other hand, will be dynamic and in principle occurs only once.<sup>11</sup>

Here again the conception of linear time is speaking, and what it states is absolutely logical – as long as we restrict our investigation to narrative works that are based on linear time. However, the short story about Pál Somodi is entirely different. The situation with which it begins is both stable and unstable. According to the narrator, the forces of change have been there for some time, seeking

an opportunity to usher in a new historical period. Thus, the state of disequilibrium predates the beginning of the story. Somodi's world resists the forces of change. This is what makes it relatively stable, unique and worthy of the narrator's attention. When Somodi dies and his son returns from America, the forces of change seem to gain momentum, but the new situation is far from being really new. It is just another possibility for the forces of change. In other words, paradoxical as it may sound, even the linear time scheme works through similar, repeated events. This shows that the narrator's time scheme interacts with that of the protagonist from the beginning.

Pál Somodi and his son, Sándor, are introduced as opposites. Sándor left his country, and was, according to his father, "könnyelmű, léha ember." However, when he returns and spends some time on the property, he decides to continue his father's role. This prompts a member of the local gentry to remark:

– Az utolsó tekintetes úr nem halt meg. Ott lakik még mindig Loncsoson.

The same conditions are fulfilled, the same entity reappears. Although they were introduced as opposites, the local society accepts Pál and Sándor Somodi as representatives of the same function, which also means that the first and the second situations are exactly the same. Pál and Sándor are not just similar or doubles. They are identical, regardless of the differences they might have. The world the Somodis live in has its own criteria of identity. The fact that Somodi junior is accepted as the same as his father also means that the story as a whole is shaped by the logic of cyclical time. The (dis)equilibrium described in the first part of the story is not upset or brought to a conclusion but reinforced as (un)stable. Using Todorov's terms, one could say that the short story does not describe a "passage from one state to another."

The cyclical conception of time can be related to metaphorical and paradigmatic structures, while linear time to metonymical and syntagmatic structures. In the protagonist's world identity is periodically superimposed upon the passage of clock time and upon personal differences. In Krúdy's short stories the causality of the cyclical time scheme often dismantles the metonymical causality of linear time. For instance, Sándor Somodi's decision to continue his father's role does not follow from his own life.

The narrator, as opposed to the protagonist, regards the present as fundamentally different from the past. The result of the tension between the hero's cyclical and the narrator's linear time is, among other things, irony. However, since the narrator's distance from the protagonist is uncertain at the beginning and is gradually diminishing, the irony is mild and benign. The text shows Pál Somodi, the last of the feudal landowners, as a harmless old eccentric whose favourite pastime is the re-enactment of the past. Not only does he accept the role, but

takes it most seriously. The sentences in which he refers to himself as the owner of the last feudal estate make it obvious that he considers the current state of affairs in his country to be an anomaly. He looks upon his own property as an institution and upon his own way of life as the standard. The function of both his property and his way of life is to maintain the repetitions required by the conception of cyclical time. What makes the utterances of the protagonist ironic is the fact that they take place in the context of the narrator's linear time. Somodi is no longer one of the many similar landowners. The sameness that once dominated society, space and time is now restricted to a single example, the survival of which is somewhat doubtful. Living in his own world, Somodi is not willing to consider that identity is not natural but conventional and that it depends not only on him but on society as well.

The irony in the first part of the short story changes to eulogy in the second, which makes the identity of the narrator questionable. This is one of the many paradoxes Krúdy's short story creates. While Pál and Sándor Somodi turn out to be identical, and the cyclical time scheme seems to be victorious, the identity of the narrator is subject to serious doubt. How could he be consistent, if his attitude to the Somodis switches from irony to eulogy? In a sense Todorov is right, and even this short story is based on a passage from one state to another. However, this passage takes place not in the events of the outside world but within the narrator. The change in the narrator's attitude happens to coincide with the return of Sándor Somodi. On this basis one might argue that the narrator is not really inconsistent: irony and eulogy belong to two different states of mind, and the change the narrator undergoes is caused by the decision Sándor Somodi makes. The change is, in fact, development. If true, this argument cannot but contribute to the paradoxes: the triumph of the cyclical time scheme over the linear will be undermined by the development of the narrator. Causally motivated, gradually unfolding development belongs to the world of linear time. Thus, the opposites presuppose the existence of each other. Linear time works according to the principles of cyclical time, while in order to be victorious cyclical time requires linear time to be operational. In other words the narrator's eulogy can be absolutely sincere, but the reader has reason to look upon the narrator's development ironically. Irony is simply transferred from the hero to the narrator, which will in turn question the value of his eulogy, and irony will periodically return to the protagonist.

The first sentence of the quotation is a hybrid, a mixture of the grammars the protagonist and the narrator speak. Since there is a discrepancy between the two parts of the sentence, it is slightly odd. When translated into English, the strangeness of the sentence can be highlighted: "all he did was" and "be a feudal landowner" do not seem to go well together. Different grammatical structures and the various conceptions of grammaticality can carry different world views.

The sentence definitely belongs to the unnamed narrator, but the temporal scheme of the sentence (“all he did,” or, “he did nothing but,” referring to the protagonist’s recurrent activity) and the phrase “feudal landowner” belong to the grammar and the vocabulary of the protagonist. When uttered by the narrator, referring to the owner of a tiny property, the sentence becomes inevitably ironic. It is difficult to decide whether the narrator is using the words of the protagonist as if in quotation marks, or his language is invaded by elements which belong to the protagonist. In either case, the irony is not lasting. Being slightly odd, the sentence has a marginal status in the narrator’s language. On the other hand, it belongs to the core of the protagonist’s language. According to the sentence, activity (doing something) and state (being a landowner) follow the same pattern, and both are characterized by repetitions. The mixture of the grammars involved yields a balanced compromise, which is halfway between the two individual grammars. However, the anomalous nature of the sentence is de-emphasised. In his early period Krúdy went out of his way to maintain the illusion of closeness to spoken speech. There is an enormous amount of semantic complexity with hardly any syntactic complexity – apart from the hybrid constructions – in these short stories.

There are a few more characteristics of the cyclical time scheme that will be introduced by referring to other stories. The reality of the world based on the cyclical time scheme is both created and maintained by the repetitions. Between the repetitions, there is a span of wasted time:

Hej, hogy tudtak főzni valamikor! Az asszonyok egyebet sem tettek, mint sütöttek-főztek, az urak pedig ebédeltek és vacsoráltak. Amely idő közbeesett, az az idő elveszett idő volt. (*A főispán ebédei*, [928])

It should be obvious that the repetition of events has considerable interpretive power. The passage quoted suggests that life can properly be described only in terms of cooking and eating. The passage is somewhat unique in stating that there was a period that was nothing but the repetition of a single activity. In the introduction of most short stories, there is a concatenation of short iterative scenes, referring to various activities. The duration of the events can be measured in decades, and the repetition is indicated by the iterative verb forms and the adverbs of time.

Az atyafiak már hús esztendeje nézegettek be az udvarába ott Gerlicen, ahol a vadszőlős tornácra ült a vörösarcsú, kopasz öregember és mindig bort ivott. (*Egy bolondos végrendelet*, [883])

There are hundreds of similar examples. Sometimes the concatenation of iterative scenes can be quite lengthy: they take up four pages in the five-page *Egy*

*jeles mulattatóról* (902). The concatenations often produce recurrent coincidences which – from the perspective of linear time – make it hard to believe that the events “occur and reoccur in that manner, several times, without any variation.” It is easy to provide an example:

A tunya Zathureczky csendesen mosolygott vöröses bajusza alatt, amikor átpillantott a kerítésen Zsombolyékhoz vagy sánta Szurmák Gyurihoz. A sánta Szurmáknak az udvarán a kocsis örökösen a lószerszámot tisztogatta, a homokfutó pedig hétszámra nem tolták be a színbe: a sánta Szurmák mindig útban volt.

Mikor felkapaszkodott a bakra az alacsony termetű, nyugtalan tekintetű Szurmák, Zathureczky Mihály nagy néha csendesen ráköszönt a kerítés mellől:

– Hát csak nem nyughatsz itthon a feleséged mellett, he?

Szurmák megvető mozdulatot tett, majd a lovak közé csapott és foghegyről felelt:

– Hallgasson az úr! Az úrnak dunsztja sincs a politikáról meg a közéletéről. Közél sem engedték az urat oda, ahol a tudományt mérik. Különben régen megmondtam, hogy az ilyen tunya fráterrel, mint az úr, nem állok szóba.

A homokfutó kigördült az udvarról, és vitte a sánta Szurmákot a politikához meg a közéletéhez. A tunya Zathureczky pedig szokatlan nagy fejét válla közé kapva, csúfondárosan nevetett. Majd nagy medvetalpaival az udvar másik oldalára balagott, ahol a kerítésen átkukucskált. Ott éppen csirkéket kergetett özvegy Dócziné, a Zsombolyék híres főzőasszonya. A tunya Zathureczky egy kis gondolkodás után beleavatkozott a csirkék dolgába.

– Mit bántod azt a csirkét, te gyilkos néember? – kérdezte bizonyos haraggal. (*A tunya Zathureczky*, [693])

It is hard enough to imagine that the dialogue between Szurmák and Zathureczky should always occur in the same manner, but it is even harder to believe that after these dialogues, when Zathureczky walks to the other side of his yard and peeps over the fence, his neighbour should always be doing exactly the same thing. Sometimes, when the adverbs are missing, it is difficult or impossible to decide whether there is an iterative or a singular event, or rather whether the cyclical or the linear time scheme is in effect:

Gaálné tovább is járt éjjel a Tisza-partra, és a forró nyári estéken bizony fogyatékos volt a ruházata. De hát csak nem moshat selyemköntösben? A sűrű fűzes eltakarta, és a szellő, ha árulkodva hajtotta félre a gallyakat, Gaálné ijedten kuporodott le a vízbe. Gaál János nevető dörmögése hallatszott:

– Csak én vagyok! Gyere ki a vízből.

A menyecske szégyenlősen felelt:

– Csak menjen szépen vissza. Magának sem kell mindent látni. (*A fehér lábú Gaálné*, [866])

The first sentence of the passage refers to iterative events but it seems undecidable how many times the ensuing dialogue can occur. Confronting different time schemes, Krúdy's early short stories make this type of indeterminacy inevitable. It is only logical that the cyclical time scheme blurs the distinction be-

tween present, past and distant past. In *A megye pávája* (920), Werbőczy does not seem to belong to distant past but is referred to as “the old man” and is regarded as if he was a contemporary of the speakers:

A vén, goromba Barinkó várnagy, aki rosszkedvében még a szolgabírákat is kendezte, összeültötte csizmája szarát Prépostvárné előtt, s ezért a megyében gyakran mondogatták:

– Nincs ilyen asszony az országban. Kisujjában van az egész Corpus Juris. Még tán Werbőczy uramat is sarokba szorítaná, ha élne az öreg... Kár, hogy meghalt.

Another important characteristic of the world of the cyclical time scheme is that the individuals who have names are examples of a repetitive activities:

A főzöasszonyokat úgy hordták az ország egyik vidékéről a másikra, mint manapság a híres orvosokat: Trinkóczyné nevezetesen egyebet sem tett harminc esztendeig, mint folyton-folyvást utazott. (*A főispán ebédei*)

The individual’s way of live is prescribed by the tradition of the community. The protagonists of the stories are often introduced as members of a set of similar individuals:

A régi magyar úri életben annyi groteszk figura volt, hogy hemzseg tőlük az öregemberek elbeszélése. (*A legnagyobb bolond*, [940])

Hajdanában szélkakas nélkül nem is lehetett házépítést elképzelni. (*A szurdoki szélkakas*, [829])

Nem tudom, ma is annyi-e a kutya a vármegyénk házában, mint abban az időben volt, amikor én szolgáltam a megyét. (*A megye vizslája*, [848])

Régen sok zsvány volt hazánkban. (*A zsvány Barzó*, [779])

In most stories the fate of the community is as important as that of the individual protagonists. In some stories, the individuals are so overshadowed by the community that they become marginal. In *A lord* (948), the protagonist Sári Gaál can only say one sentence of her own. In *Falu a nádasban* (930), it is definitely the community that plays the central role, and only two individuals have names. However, one of them formulates the most important thesis of the cyclical conception of time: “Egyszer az nem egyszer, hanem mindenszer.” Even bizarre events can start a cycle. In *A legnagyobb bolond*, János Prinyi makes up his mind to die, be buried and resurrect. Soon, a number of people start imitating him:

A debreceni kántor hetekig énekelt olyan koporsók felett, melyekben elevenek feküdtek, a halotti menetekben csupa nevető, vidámorcájú gyászolók mentek a sír

felé, és a halotti énekbe belevegýtít a cigányok hangolása. Mikor az öreg Cseffy Abris hónapokig nyomta az ágyat, s végre meghalt, a vármegyékben így szóltak:  
 – No, ezt jól megcsinálta az öreg, de mi nem ülünk fel neki.  
 Volt aztán nagy csodálkozás, mikor az öreg a temetőből nem jött haza a halotti torra. Nézték, keresték, várták. És amikor másnapig nem jött elő, mindenki meg volt győződve arról, hogy az öreg Cseffy azért halt meg komolyan, hogy bolondozásban még Prinyi János uramat is lefőzze.

Since both the cyclical and the linear types of causality are present in these short stories, the individual stories vary according to either or both of them. By introducing a degree of unpredictability, this feature makes room for chance and randomness:

A végzet néha bolondos tréfákban leli kedvét. (*Szép asszony papucs*, [1994])

Vannak a sorsnak ilyen tréfái, az ember néha azt gondolná, hogy a világot voltaképpen egy élclap-szerkesztő kormányozza, aki bohókás ötletei szerint játszik az emberi figurákkal. (*A nagyehető Simkovics*, [735])

Although the causality of the cyclical time scheme often disrupts the causality of the linear time, it is somewhat hard to point out its presence. Nevertheless the following examples are fairly clear-cut. The explanation that the protagonist does something because forefathers did the same thing would probably be insufficient in the world of linear causality. Still, this is exactly what the sentences state:

mert már ugyanezt látta őseitől. (*A megye pávája*)

mert már az apjától is azt látta. (*A furfangos kísértet*, [827])

mert apja, nagyapja, szomszédja is ugyanazt tette. (*Rombadölt ház a faluvégén*, [668])

mert már ugyanezt látta apjától, nagyapjától. (*A másvilági csizma*, [961])

When there are two types of causality working simultaneously, the turn of events cannot be based on necessity. Similar situations usually lead to similar conclusions in the world of linear causality, but they can yield different results in Krúdy's short stories. In one of the villages of thieves, in Tar, there is an uninterrupted idyll, while another similar village, Geszteréd, is destroyed (*A becsületes Gombos* [828], *Csörsz*, [1137]). One of the entertainers a "captain" Sárvári, disappears; the other, Gábor Sírontai, must realize that the traditional role he performed is no longer needed; but the third, Gyuri Enyiczky, enjoys happiness and prosperity (*A bujdosó földesuraságról* [1057], *Az utolsó vendég* [867], *Egy jeles mulattatóról*). In one of the stories the treasure supposedly hidden in a coat is

found, but in another story, it turns out that there was no treasure at all (*Az ördögös ködmön* [927], *Egy sikkasztás története* [891]). One of the beauties, Erzsi Milotai, suddenly turns into an old, ugly woman, while the charm of another is unbroken (*Szép asszony papucsá, A fehér lábú Gaálné*).

While similarities can bring about differences, different situations can lead to similar conclusions. Not only the village of thieves, Geszteréd, is destroyed, but Gér and Zugod as well, even though they have not committed any crime at all (*Csörsz, A lusta Gaálok* [933], *Út a faluba* [820]). The two Somodis also belong here.

### Point of view

In Krúdy's early short stories, the events are recounted by four types of narrators: (i) the witness, (ii) the community, (iii) the narrator with limited omniscience, and (iv) the protagonist. Usually, they have access to different aspects of reality, or different aspects of different realities. Both grammatically and in their assumptions, the discourse of the different narrators can either be sharply opposed or they can blend into one another. Each story shows a unique configuration of the four points of view. The cumulative effect of their juxtaposition will be that all the events that make up the story are to be appreciated from all the rival points of view.

Some of the short stories begin by introducing a narrator who claims to have witnessed the story he tells:

Gyermekkoromban még ismertem az öreg Barzót, [...] (*A zsvány Barzó*)

Egy kis homokos és akácás nyírségi faluban, ahol darab ideig gyerekeskedtem, lakott egy szomorú, csendes ember, Bubis Sámuel [...] (*Dáma*, [1135])

The knowledge of the witness is limited. He is only an observer. In these short stories the narrator never becomes the main protagonist, and in most cases he does not tell his own story, even though the opening sentences like the ones quoted above would provide the opportunity for doing so. In many stories the narrator only implies that he has been – to varying degrees – a witness by mentioning casually that the events took place in his own village:

Egy híres szűrszabó élt a vidékünkön, bizonyos Krotvai János, akit a környéken a legfurfangosabb embernek ismertek. (*Hol lakik Krotvai?*, [752])

Egy szomorú, öreg nemesember lakott a falunkban, bizonyos Zahorai Pál, akit csak vasárnapi templomjárásakor lehetett látni végighaladni a falun. (*Az ösök*, [908])

Lakott valamikor a mi vármegyénkben egy fúrfangos, tréfakedvelő úriember, bizonyos Sárvári; illetőleg "kapitány Sárvári", mert így nevezte őt az egész világ. (*A bujdosó földesuraságról*, [1057])

The point of view of the witness is usually combined with other points of view:

Gyermekkoromban még ismertem az öreg Barzót, akiről az a legenda járta, hogy egykor zsványkapitány volt. Némelyek, akik nagyon tisztelték az öreget, a híres Sobri Jóskát gyanították benne. (*A zsvány Barzó*)

Egy kis homokos és akácfas nyírségi faluban, ahol darab ideig gyerekeskedtem, lakott egy szomorú, csendes ember, Bubis Sámuel, akiről mindenki tudta, hogy szomorúságának az az oka, hogy évekkal azelőtt elkártyázta a feleségét. (*Dáma*)

In addition to the first person singular of the unnamed narrator, there is another narrative authority in the sentences quoted. The community is very often not only a co-protagonist, but has its own narrative forms. The communal point of view can be identified on the basis of the phrases referring to more than one person playing a part in telling the story:

A kisvárosi krónikások, akik mindenbe beleütik az orrukát, különösen egy kívánatos, szép asszony viselt dolgaiba, följegyezték, hogy Tahiné is arra sorsra jutott, mint már sok asszony – beleszeretett a Bodolay kaftánjába. (*A kaftán*, [697])

Különc, embergyűlölő lett öreg korára, aki a podolini közvélemény szerint csak azért sétálgat még a platánok alatt, mert az ördögnek sincs kedve hozzá, hogy elvigye. (*Poprádi szállásai*, [1270])

A podolini közvélemény azt tartotta, hogy itt hibázta el Kaveczy Mátyás az életét. (*A hóbortos Kavenczy*, [1204])

The communal point of view is also present in expressions like "pletyka," "hír," "legenda" and "babona," which – except "pletyka" (gossip) – are difficult to translate, because their vocabulary meaning changes under the pressure of the context. They are roughly synonymous with gossip and rumour:

Nőtt, nőtt az ágyúgolyó híre. Aki nem látta, az többet tudott róla, mint aki látta. (*Az ágyúgolyó*, [651])

Nem kellett már vinni a gyönyörűséges Gaál lányokat. Megnőtt a híruk három vármegyére. Lehet, hogy nem is voltak olyan nagyon szépek, csak a híruk tette őket azzá. A hír, amely az embereknél fontosabb mindennél. (*A híres Gaál kis-asszonyok*, [929])

Pedig nagy híre lett gazdagságának. Már amilyenek az emberek: tízszer annyit mondtak, mint amennyi valójában volt. (*Az ördögös ködmön*)

[...] tán a Gaál Erzsi lába se volt olyan nagyon fehér, hogy külön följegyeztesék, csak a híre tette, az a bolondos hír, amely gyakran széppé teszi a rútat is, és csúnyává a gyönyörűt [...] Akik azt gondolták, hogy látták valamikor, mind holdkórosak lettek attól a vakító fehérségtől. Pedig sokan vélték látni, mert a menyecske ott szokta mosni egymaga csalánszövésű ingeit a kertjük végében, a Tiszában [...] Talán így, talán másképpen kerekedett a szégyenlős Gaálné az a híre, hogy olyan nagyon fehér a lába, amit pedig közelről senki sem látott. [...] A vénasszonyok nyelve pedig kerepelt, kerepelt, de hát még ez is csak a Gaálné lábának a hírét növelte. (*A fehérlábú Gaálné*)

The narrator often distances himself from the communal point of view, and implies that the knowledge the community has is not perfectly reliable.

Ha körülnézünk ismerőseink között, senkit sem találunk, aki valaha a kaftánt látta, megtapogatta, megsimogatta volna.  
De azt mindenki tudta, hogy milyen. Fehér nyest a bélése, szegélye pedig egy olyan ritka állatnak a préméből készült, amely állat csupán a legzordonabb ázsiai hegyek között tanyázik. Szöveve kasmirselyem.  
De nem is lehetett másilyen a kaftán, amelyet a Bodolay a cserkeszek bégjétől kapott ajándékba, midőn egyetemista korában kardot vitt az oroszverő török fővezérnek. Legendák keringtek erről az utazásról. (*A kaftán*)

Nobody we knew had seen it, but everybody knew what it was like. The communal point of view is rarely free of contradictions. Krúdy usually preferred such latent incongruities separated by a number of sentences or pages to blatant contradictions. One might say that the latent incongruity of the various points of view is the most important structural characteristic of his short stories. The dubious consistency of gossip and rumour is an essential factor in the creation of this internal tension. Although Krúdy was definitely not the first to use the communal point of view, it is neglected in narratological works.

When the communal point of view dominates, and the characters leave the scene, their travels are usually absences:

Előbb Gaál Károly – a vörös – tűnt el titokban Zugodról. Senki sem tudta, hol járt, merre járt. (*A lusta Gaálok*)

Olykor elutazott, senki sem tudta, hova ment; napokig elmaradt, majd hirtelen újra megjelent. (*Hamis bankó*, [941])

[...] a paripa eliramodott Rohonkayval, aki soha többé nem jött vissza a falujába. Nyoma veszett, eltűnt. (*A ló meg a szoknya*, [1134])

Both the witness and the community have limited knowledge. They can only guess what is going on within the protagonists. Neither the community, nor the witness is reliable. When the witness shares the community's point of view, he will be a member of a set of similar individuals. The two points of view are inseparable in the following passage:

Ez a Rohonkay nem is hozzánk való ember volt. Sunyi arcú, rövid lábszárával bizonytalankodva ügyelgő, kevésbeszédű ember volt. Állítólag valahonnan a felsővidékről került ide birtokos embernek, és ha nem tetszett neki valami, azt mondta, hogy: az másképpen van ott, náluk, ahonnan harminc esztendeje elkerült. (*A ló meg a szoknya*)

When one of the points of view that shapes the story proves to be unreliable, the reader is expected to re-interpret the events retrospectively. Some of the stories oppose reality and fantasy. In *A lusta Gaálok* the story is told as it is usually recounted by the Gaáls:

[...] a legnevezetesebb volt valamennyi közt Benedek, akinek valami örökségi dologban el kellett volna utazni Németországba, mégpedig Hamburgba. Egy bizonyos Amerikából visszatért Gaál ott hirtelen elhalálozott.

Later, however, it turns out that the heritage was only a product of their collective fantasy. Although reality and fantasy are opposed, it should be noted that the Gaáls interpret reality on the basis of the heritage, even after they learn it does not exist:

A Gaálok egymásra bámultak. Mintha valami kemény ostornak ütését érezték volna a hátukon... Vége a legendának. Ezentúl be kell érni a holdvilággal és a nappal, más többé nem világít nekik.

Krúdy, however, is only marginally interested in opposing fantasy and reality. Instead of reducing the complexity of events to one definitive interpretation, his short stories go in the opposite direction. Usually, the different points of view are used either to create multiple worlds or divergent interpretations of the same events. In this context even "reality" is just one of the interpretations. His stories, sometimes described as "simple village sketches," turn out to be anything but simple. In fact they are almost as complex as his later masterpieces.

In *A ló meg a szoknya* the witness shares the point of view of the community, while the narrator with limited omniscience is close to the protagonist. Neither the witness nor the community are in a position to tell what Rohonkay thinks:

Mindent megnézett alaposan, és hogy mit gondolt magában, azt senki sem tudhatta. Egyszer, midőn éppen két napig odakóborolt, hazaérkezve, egy kocsit látott a háza előtt. Piros napernyő virított a kocsiból, és kis fehér pónilovacsák álldogáltak a rúd mellett nagy nyugodalmasan. A lovakról rögtön fölismerte Rohonkay a tabi földesasszonyt, özvegy Szirnyák Jánosnét.  
– Vajon mit akar velem ez a boszorkány! – dünnyögte magában, és tán még mélyebbre nyomta az öklét a kabátja zsebébe.

The passage is a transition between the point of view of the witness/community and that of the omniscient narrator. The first sentence states that nobody knew what the character thought, while the last sentence quotes what he mutters to himself. Here the transition is relatively slow and gradual. As a rule, the point of view changes after the introductory passages. The role of the omniscient narrator is limited: sometimes he overhears dialogues, or knows what the characters say to themselves or do when they are alone. His role is limited in order to enable the other points of view to contribute to the story.

The role of the characters' point of view is even more limited. It appears in brief passages, subordinated to the omniscient narrator's discourse. In *A megye pávája* Mrs Prépostváry sends her husband to Vienna:

Húsz esztendeje nem járt Bécsben. Akkor daliás katona volt, és az asszonyok szépek, híresek voltak. Vajon milyenek mostanában az asszonyok?

Sometimes the character and the omniscient narrator continue each other's sentences. In *A hetedik szilvafa* (985) János Gaál wants Erzsi, his granddaughter, to tell him who she is in love with:

– Nincs neki neve – felelte Erzsi, és lehet, hogy igazat mondott. Utóvégre tizenhat éves volt, s ilyenkor nem szükséges még, hogy neve legyen annak, aki után a szív eped. A kalendárium összes szentjei egyforma esélyekkel pályázhatnak az ilyen szívekre, a Sámuelek éppen úgy, mint a Józsefek...  
– Oh, hogy a mennykő csapna beléjük – nyögött keservesen az öreg. – Bezzeg másként volt az én síheder koromban!

The affinity between the points of view of the witness and the community, on the one hand, and between those of the omniscient narrator and the character, on the other, can be seen in *A megye özvegye* (945); Eszter Győri is called the “widow of the county” because all her late husbands worked at the county hall. The introductory passage describes the iterative events of her life from the point of view of the witness/community:

Az én gyermekkoromban még virágjában volt – de nem lehetetlen, hogy még manapság is ott jár kel talpig gyászban, nagy fekete fátyollal (mely alól kivillant két bogárszeme) a megyeház folyosóin. [...] Többnyire az elhalt férje után keresett nem létező jussokat [...] Hubolai Gáspár – akit a régi jegyzőkönyvek így említenek: “utolsó alispán”, segített is rajta kétszer: férjhez adta. [...] Aztán fordult egyet-kettőt az idő kereke, talán még a porréteg sem lett magasabb megyei hivatalok iratsomóin, amikor ott kilincselte ismét Győri Eszti talpig feketében. Özvegy lett ismét... [...] Takaros, szép asszony volt ez a híres Győri Eszti. Kebele, válla, nyaka gömbölyű, mint a galambé; a csipője rengő-ringó, mint a violaszál. Hervadhatatlan szép arcából úgy világított ki két szeme, mint a lámpások. Nemigen volt tanácsos azokba a lámpásokba nézni, ha az ember szerette az éle-

tét. Mert valami csodálatos babona járt láthatatlanul ennek a szép asszonynak a lába nyomában. Nem is kellett hozzá álmodozó falusi emberek babonása, beszélték a tények magukért: meghalt az, akit Győri Eszti megszeretett.

The community seems to know what is going on. They are quite certain the beautiful Eszter Győri is somehow responsible for the death of her husbands. They think the “facts speak for themselves.” This, however, does not prevent her new suitors from coming forward. The following iterative scene is on the verge of being grotesque:

Az öreg Hubolai Gáspár zavarodottan simogatta előre a füle mellett ősz haját, amikor meg-megkérték tőle a keresztleánya kezét:

– Őcsém – dohogta –, én nem vagyok babonás. Ám itt az a kérdés, hogy nem vagy-e te babonás?

– Dehogy, urambátyám – felelték a kérők boldogan. – Ha csak ez a baj, ezen már segítettünk. Mert Esztiike vonzalmáról máris biztosított...

Hubolai does not care about Eszter's bad reputation. Like her suitors, he does not believe in superstitions. But there is one thing that disturbs him. After the death of one of her husbands, Eszti visits him in his office:

Hubolai Gáspár már várta. Megcsókolta, leültette, és így szólt hozzá:

– Tudom, miért jöttél: férjet keressek neked, te szép boszorkány. Hát már találtam is...

– De Gazi bátyám – kiáltott fel Esztiike. – Hisz egy hónapja se múlt még...

Az alispán indulatosan folytatta:

– Bánom is én. Azért én mégis találtam neked való férjet. Nézd meg jól – itt áll előtted. Kérem a kezéd Esztiike.

A szép Győri Eszti meghökkenve nézett az öreg alispánra. Majd szelid mosoly futott végig hervatag, szép arcán, melyre vékony pókhálóit immár lerakogatta a bánat.

– Nem bánom – mormogta, és a kezét nyújtotta.

Hubolai Gáspár a két tenyere közé szorította a keresztleánya kezét:

– Így... Nem adlak senkinek. Megtartalak magamnak. Annyit adtalak férjhez, hogy utóvégre megkívántalak magam is.

Here, again, the singular event, recounted by the omniscient narrator, contradicts the introduction. When Hubolai proposes to her, Eszter's “hervatag, szép” face is shown from the character's point of view. The witness/community thought her face was “hervadhatatlan” and failed to see the grief in her expression. The description of her face tells us there is another interpretation, different from the one the community has accepted. The ending of the story suggests that the community was all wrong: Eszter has not caused but suffered the loss of her husbands. However, this is not a story that opposes fantasy and reality. Even old Hubolai can be one of those unfortunate men who fell under Eszter's spell. It is possible that the final scene in which Hubolai looks into Eszter's eyes is far from being singular. It brings back the community's interpretation: “Nemigen volt

tanácsos azokba a lámpásokba nézni, ha az ember szerette az életét.” Although both interpretations (Eszter as a kind of female fortune-hunter who puts her husbands into the grave, and Eszter as the victim of her ageing husbands’ ill health) include all the details of her life, they impart different meanings into them. Furthermore, both interpretations are aware of the rival interpretation.

### Metaphor

The ideology implicit in the cyclical time scheme, in the suspension of linear causality and in the techniques of point of view, has, among other things, linguistic consequences. The communities and individuals living in their own worlds develop their own sociolects and idiolects. These languages are based on various iterative activities. One of the most intriguing examples can be found in *A geszterédi agarak* (987). When his daughter elopes with her lover, Sámuel Gaál cries out in pain: “Ellopta a tolvaj a legkedvesebb agaramat.” In the village where Gaál lives, Geszteréd, the whole community is devoted to breeding racehounds, and everything is measured in terms of hounds:

Voltak itt asszonyok is, lányok – de hiszen ilyesmi másfelé is akad. Torok, keresztelők és lakodalmak annak rendje szerint lefolytak, de mégiscsak az volt a legnevezetesebb, ha valamelyik dicsőséges agár megkölykezett.

Sámuel Gaál is the most famous hound merchant. When he calls his daughter his “most precious hound,” he is not using a metaphor. He is speaking the local language, his own sociolect, in which any value can only be expressed in canine terms. For an outsider the sentence is bound to be metaphorical. An instance of metaphor is a linguistic innovation, but the sentence quoted is, in Geszteréd, based on the shared values and the local commonplaces. In other words, the sentence is literal when Gaál Sámuel says it. It should be noted that both the literal and the metaphorical interpretations are insufficient in themselves. Both are needed when the whole meaning of the sentence is explained.

Whenever there are parallel or multiple realities, similar expressions can be found. In *Az utolsó futóbetyár* the narrator mentions that “Minden ember másféle szempontból fogja fel a körötte történő dolgokat.” In *Öreg szekér, fakó hám* (883), captain Sirotoy conceptualizes the world in military expressions. He calls his house “barracks,” and when he tries to find out how to approach Erzi Zsarnó, he is involved in a “fogas háború-probléma.” Eventually he managed to solve the problem because one day he “megattakírozta az asszonyt.” Another ex-army officer called his old farm hand “sergeant,” and “egy részeg kocsiszt kurtavasra veretett” (*A bujdosó földesuraságról*). The oenologist’s vision of the world begins with the following words: “A magyar borban mintha benne volna

az egész magyar história, az egész magyar jellem. A hegyaljai bor a tárogató hangjait ébreszti..." (*Sárkány-vér* [974]). In *Hogyan veszett el a lengyel korona?* (1051) the protagonist spends his life collecting outrageously obscene expressions, and "végül már nem is tudott másféle nyelven beszélni, mint azon a nyelven, amelyet ő saját magának szerkesztett." The examples suggest that metaphor, the product of the interaction of various languages, is dialogical, rather than a monologic, infra-linguistic phenomenon.

### Short story cycle

There are innumerable cross-references in these short stories. The story about the Somodis ought to be read with the story about Pál Hóka in mind (*Hét szilvafa, Az utolsó futóbetyár*). In general, all those stories, and there are dozens in which the last representative of a certain activity is mentioned, should be considered when any one of these stories is interpreted. Also, there are stories about doubles, about villages that are destroyed, about entertainers, beautiful women and ageing men, about treasures supposedly hidden; and there are the recurrent protagonists, like the members of the Gaál and the Zathureczky families, and Pál Poprádi, as well as the stories obviously connected by their titles (*Milyenek az asszonyok?* [972], *Milyenek a férfiak?* [1067]). Although the stories clearly belong together, for a number of reasons it is not easy to determine the genre of the aggregate of which they are parts. It is certainly not a novel, not even a composite novel as Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris define it:

The composite novel is a literary work composed of shorter texts that – though individually complete and autonomous – are interrelated in a coherent whole according to one or more organizing principles.<sup>12</sup>

The aggregate of Krúdy's early short stories is definitely not a coherent whole. It is much larger than the collections of stories Krúdy published in this period. He did not seem to care if his readers realized or not that some of his stories belong together and significantly modify each other's meaning. This does not mean that the stories are just remotely similar or loosely connected. For example, Krúdy wrote two stories that have a protagonist named Pál Poprádi (*Poprádi szállásai* and *Kázmér, az asszony* [1385]). The setting and the plot are the same – with opposite endings. Both stories were published in *Hét*, the first in 1908, the second in 1910. Since then they have never been published in the same collection of stories, which means their connection has not been discovered by Krúdy's editors. The organizing principles of the aggregate are also dubious. In particular, it is far from clear how many stories belong to the aggregate. In addition, the order of the stories is random, or perhaps randomly circular. The

meaning of the two stories about Pál Poprádi depends largely on their order. For more than one reason the short story *cycle* is a most fitting term in Krúdy's case. When Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris explain why they did not adopt the expression "short story cycle" to refer to what they call a composite novel, they say that "a 'cycle,' in anyone's definition, implies cyclical motion, a circular path, a return to the beginning, all of which preclude linear development."<sup>13</sup> All these features are absolutely relevant when we are discussing Krúdy's stories. (And there are very similar problems in some of Krúdy's other works, like *Szindbád*, even though they are usually thought to be "coherent wholes.") Still, there can be no doubt that the stories discussed here are parts of a whole that may not be easily defined. In Krúdy's words:

Az volna a világ legmulatságosabb könyve, amelybe összegyűjtenék a magyar  
famiák régi babonáit, legendáit, anekdotáit. (*A babonás ing*, [1942])

Krúdy did certainly write some of the chapters of this book. Since the idea of an ordered whole may contradict cyclicity, it is quite possible that this book must be precisely such, and different from any other book. A composite novel, like *Szindbád*, seems to be both a restriction and a special case of Krúdy's conception of the short story cycle.

### Notes

1. Gedényi Mihály, *Krúdy Gyula (Bibliográfia)*, (Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 1978).
2. Nagy Endre, *Egy város regénye* (Budapest: Magvető, 1978), 13–14.
3. The number after the title of each short story refers to Gedényi's bibliography.
4. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 123.
5. Genette, 121.
6. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris, (London: Duckworth, 1983), 107.
7. Genette, 122.
8. Genette, 123.
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