

Gyula Balogh

The Character of the Wayfarer in Gyula Krúdy's Novel The Travelling Companion

Abstract

In Gyula Krúdy's texts, the author's alter ego figures and mediator types can be given a new meaning with the help of the results of folklore research. The writer got to know the archetypal features of these figures very early on, as even when reading the writings of his youth, it is striking that Krúdy not only wrote the plot and atmosphere of the mostly family-based fairy tales and ghost stories into his texts, but also used the storytelling techniques that create the folklore treasure.

The study will discuss Krúdy's short novel *The Travelling Companion*, the division of the main character's identity, the wide range of reading possibilities offered by the story's sacred character and mystical atmosphere. The present interpretation undertakes to reveal the complex personality of the travelling companion, to examine those scenes abounding in sacred elements, through a detailed analysis of which the common features of the Krúdy hero and certain figures of the folk religious world become visible.

It can be assumed that Krúdy knew and used in his works certain features of the accompanying, helping spirit, the so-called soul guide, psychopompos, which term denotes Hermes, the god of travel. However, the term psychopompos is not only known in cultures based on Greek myths, it also applies to the accompanying spirits of ancient shamanism. We find the remains of this belief in shamans in the case of the so-called wayfarers, who, together with other strange people, are considered late descendants of shamans.

Keywords: Krúdy Gyula, *The Travelling Companion*, saman, psychopompos, wayfarer, alter ego, Doppelgänger, St. Agnes

„My beautiful, sad travelling companion, sleepless sorrow has caught up
with me one night”¹
(Gyula Krúdy)

¹ Krúdy 2016: 99.



An outstanding piece of modern Hungarian literature is Gyula Krúdy's short story *The Travelling Companion* (*Az útítárs*).² The 1918 text is one of the fundamental works of Hungarian literary modernity, which has already attracted the attention of many. But it was not typical for interpreters to often use the results of religious history and ethnography (in addition to stylistic or ethical perspectives when examining the religious motifs appearing in Krúdy's work.) However the religious history and ethnography can help expand the themes of the reception, which consider the characteristics of Gyula Krúdy's oeuvre. In the following, I will perform a religious historical and ethnographic evaluation of the religious origin of the dimension changes characteristic of the short novel *The Traveling Companion*, as well as the identity changes following these sacred moments. The text passages featuring religious phenomena are not in the author's prose world as a simple reference to reality or to create an atmosphere, but also have a poetic function. This circumstance is suitable for examining the folk roots and archetype of a traveling figure similar to Sindbád, who exists independently of time and space, while at the same time it also provides an opportunity to examine the effects of the so-called wayfarer on his oeuvre, which is also known in Europe.

The plot of *The Travelling Companion* (*Az útítárs*) can actually be summed up quite simply: the reader learns the details of a tragic love affair between two unknown travellers, the protagonists of which are the eccentric adventurer Pál Pálfi, and the last innocent daughter of the town of X, Eszténa. Apart from them, the only other characters who play a more prominent role in their short story are the mother, who is jealous of her daughter's virtues, and Pálfi's landlord, the rightly-named pimp Hartvigné. Instead, I am specifically concerned with the exploration of the personality structure of the travel companion's title and position, and more specifically with the problematization of those scenes rich in sacral elements, through which the similarities between Krúdy's hero and certain soul-guiding figures of the folk faith can be made visible.

Peter the rooster

The figure of Pál Pálfi, like Krúdy's other travellers, eternally wandering, flying from dimension to dimension, is often on the agenda of literary scholars

² „Supported by the ÚNKP-22-4 New National Excellence Program of the Ministry for Culture and Innovation from the source of the National Research, Development and Innovatio Fund.”

who place identification techniques in the forefront. For the travelling companion, whose story, presented in the first person singular during the train journey, is revealed to the reader through the seemingly ignored (announcing) speech of a fellow interlocutor, is an elusive entity, moving unhindered between dream and reality, or even between life and death,³ whose personality can hardly be defined linguistically through the confusion of narrative utterances.

„The identity of the character in the story is called into question, the figure, which is assumed to be unified, is scattered in several directions at once, and this scattering is of such a magnitude that it almost threatens the idea of the figure as a unified character.”

– says József Keserű, who points out that the companion can perhaps only be fully identified by one name, „Pál Pálfi”, if we disregard the confusing Peter (the rooster) of the encounter with Genovéva.⁴

The first horizon of meaning offered by the analysis of the story is formed by biographical aspects, since it is not incidental that Krúdy divorces his first wife and marries his second wife in the same year. The period of his recovery from a twenty-year affair with Bella Spiegler and the new life he began with Zsuzsanna Rózsa certainly forced him to do some serious introspection. The state of mind that resulted from all this is, according to many, reflected in the pages of *The Travelling Companion* (*Az útítárs*).

„The short novel, which the author put down on paper during a long and care-free holiday in a press house by Lake Balaton [in the company of a large barrel of wine, according to Ede Szabó's legendary statement],⁵ is a subtle, metaphorical interpretation of an emotional crisis waiting to be resolved, a passion that can no longer be concealed, the love of a forty-year-old man demanding fulfilment, wrapped in a story with grotesque charm.”⁶

Like Anna Fábri, István Fried also draws attention to the confessional layer of meaning:

³ „The heroes of the short story [...] are enthroned by death.” Fried 2006: 196.

⁴ „[Genovéva] »spoke of her wedding shirt, her husband who died five years ago, her big black cock, which she will henceforth call Péter (my first name)« (p. 248). Péter? Isn't the character called Paul? Is it a misnomer or a mistake? Or is the companion introducing himself under a pseudonym, Genovéva? [...] The text does not support either interpretation. It is as if the statement had never been made, but it is there and it is confusing.” Comp. Keserű 2008: 39–40.

⁵ Szabó 1970: 168.

⁶ Fábri 1975: 1289.

„In the decades of Sigmund Freud, one could even consider this continuous, but (possibly) imaginary, utterance to a partner who is actually or (possibly) imagined to be present, as a (self-) therapeutic practice, which considers a story to be told exclusively in a little fixed situation of being, an »archetypal« situation, if you like.”⁷

According to this reading, the inclusion of the companion as narrator is merely a gesture of removal, an attempt by the author, who is traversing psychological depths and introspecting, to extinguish the excessive intimacy of the text.⁸

„In *The Travelling Companion* (*Az útítárs*) the author-narrator begins the story-telling by quoting the unknown »companion«, by referring to his narrative. Soon the narrative changes perspective, because the authorial narrator retreats into the background, relinquishes his role of »quoter«, the narrator function is taken over by a fictional figure belonging to the story being told, the protagonist himself, and the story unfolds as his narrative, his own story. The »companion« becomes the communicator, the speaker; the partner - the authorial »I« - is relegated to the position of passive listener, and often it does not even appear.”⁹

István Fried adds to this statement by László Fülöp by pointing out the modality and situational similarities between the speech of the communicator and that of the companion.¹⁰ He asks the question:

„can the travelling companion be separated from the traveller, the narrator from the listener, the memorializer from the communicator? If the tone of their utterances, their sentence structure, their »thoughtfulness« can be copied, is not the speech of a single person(s) fragmented by external signs?”¹¹

So the question, which has been restated so many times by the reception, is who is speaking? For the lifeless dialogue that is spoken is indeed more like the imaginative inner dialogue of an introspective, struggling figure in a far-off

⁷ Fried 2006: 191.

⁸ Here it is worth noting that István Fried, in his study *The Narrator as Companion*, draws attention to the fact that the voice of the narrator, who very quickly moves into the background and then completely out of the narrative, does not change what he is listening to, and in fact, after the events have temporarily come to a close, he does not even round off the narrative or add any comments. Comp. Fried 2006: 190.

⁹ Fülöp 1986: 265–266.

¹⁰ Comp. Fried 2006: 207–208.

¹¹ Fried 2006: 213.

landscape, independent of time and space.¹² But even if this is the case, the almost mystical voice of this inner speaker, „the sad words of the companion sounding around my head, as if death were reading the Bible”,¹³ may even suggest a more distant narrative position.

Several features of Krúdy's work suggest that the writer was well acquainted with the so-called haunting spirit, and that he probably used these patterns to create the ghostly alter-ego type of his narrative.¹⁴ It will be worth returning to this possibility after having scanned the most significant sacral moment of the text.

“...even your mother dreamed of St George's horse”

Many, following Imre Bori, highlight the interweaving of religious phenomena and the erotic images associated with them as one of the defining features of the work. The Novi Sad scholar, referring to the climactic candle-lighting in the proceedings, says that the scene „is the most complete combination of medieval religiosity and modern love passion.”¹⁵ Gábor Kemény also mentions this characteristic of *The Travelling Companion* as an example when analysing Krúdy's imaging procedures.¹⁶ However, at several points it can be seen that the motifs of a text laden with religious phenomena are not merely intended to function as an end in themselves, as elements of mischief, perversity or horror, nor are they only intended to float the ecclesiastical aesthetic on the periphery of thought: the need to accumulate sacral elements is, moreover, to stimulate interest in the structures of meaning to be found in the deeper structures of the novel. For example, the ruptures and dimensional transitions that occur in the fabric of space and time, which line the main nodes of the narrative and constitute the main motivations of the characters.

In the most influential and striking images, such as the passage quoted by Imre Bori: „[t]he burning Easter candle – decorated with golden dragons –

¹² „Fülöp argues that, together with the N. N., it is mainly in these writings that the »first-person novel model« [Fülöp 1986: 266] is realized, according to which the first-person narrator creates character and determines the narrative style.” Vigh 2014.

¹³ Krúdy 2008a: 203.

¹⁴ Later we will talk about the chapter of Krúdy's *Book of Dreams* entitled „Wayfarers”, from which I would like to quote just one thought for now: „These unfortunate people were called wayfarers because no one sees them resting, they are always going from village to village, and according to superstition, where they rest, someone dies.” Krúdy 2008b: 263.

¹⁵ Bori 1978: 154.

¹⁶ Kemény 2010: 347–357.

would have fit between the two knees”,¹⁷ the sacred is intertwined with the erotic in a way that combines in a very graphic way the most important ceremonial occasions that construct the narrative: the various initiation rites. By invoking the Easter candle, Krúdy associates the meaning of the sacrament of baptism, which connotes birth and death, with sexuality from the very beginning of the narrative; these initiatory life events are also traditionally accompanied by candle-lighting. But it is also this set of associations that is mobilised by the crypt inscription that is the setting for one of the central scenes in the narrative. This detail, which alludes to the imagery of the underworld and juxtaposes the rites of baptism with death, marriage and the bones of a child, foreshadows the story’s conclusion, which is built on the same motifs.

“Steps led down into the dry cellar, and the two stone coffins that stood against the wall did not take up enough space to prevent a small feast. There were kneelers at the end of the crypt, candle remnants at the foot of the iron crucifix, dried flowers that rattled like a child’s skeleton...”¹⁸

At the same time, the images in the narrative, which are steeped in erotic and sacred elements, are repetitive, indicating the deformities in the fabric of time, the fractures and ruptures into which the events of the generations essentially run back again and again in a cyclical manner. The notion of a steady flow of time is often suspended by images overflowing in sacrality, which, as if pausing time, create new meaning by pointing to the cyclical (repeated) repetition of events. Such is the case of the daydreams of the young girls sitting in the church and the big, muscular horse of the dragon-slaying St George:

„Neither brings a thought to the church that has not already had a counterpart. They almost shudder at the huge, dragon-slaying muscles of St. George’s horse, because they had a dream last week about a similar big horse.”¹⁹

This fantasy, and the sense of shame that follows, is meant to poeticise the constant repetition of the mother-daughter figure pair. „Do not tremble, your mother has dreamed of St. George’s horse, yet she has become a beautiful old woman.”²⁰

The fact of the inevitable repetition is already recorded in the name of the

¹⁷ Krúdy 2008a: 210.

¹⁸ Krúdy 2008a: 245.

¹⁹ Krúdy 2008a: 227.

²⁰ Krúdy 2008a: 227.

protagonist. Pál Pálfi, Pál, son of Pál. The traveller in transit, who, as an adventurer, with all his mischievousness, can easily be assumed to be a copy of the Casanova archetype without moral scruples, is this time destined to set Eszténa's fate on the same course as his mother's. And whose name, in the crypt scene just quoted, appears in a tomb, makes the problem of repetition, of being exaggerated as a double, tangible, and sharpens the problem of the repetition. „Eszténa crouched down on one of the coffins. With her fingers she inscribed the inscription on the stone. 'Pál Pálfi... As if you were lying here, sir.'”²¹

Together with the discovery of Pál Pálfi's namesake, the book actually articulates the complex personality problem of turn-of-the-century modernity, which is no stranger to the knowledge of psychoanalysis. As is clear from the list of Romantic literature and spirit, and of superstitions and beliefs, folk beliefs cannot be alienated from Krúdy's writing. For all this, the episode of the underworld, even if through such a complex network of connections, evokes the visionary, otherworldly world of certain mediators of folk beliefs.

The day of St Agnes (*Szent Ágnes napja*)

Keeping the constant repetitiveness of fates afloat is one of the most fundamental questions of history. The tragedy itself is precisely the result of the mother's attempt to prevent her daughter from replicating her youthful mistake and atoning for her life as a fallen woman on the social margins. „I have never seen a sadder face. The motherly pain of a hundred years and a hundred years was engraved on that face.”²² But what is important for the later is that all these events: the preparation for the act, then its failure, and the time of Eszténa's suicide, are accompanied by circumstances of carnival chaos, such as the miraculous appearance of the mother,²³ or the uproar of the inhabitants of the town:

²¹ Krúdy 2008a: 246.

²² Krúdy 2008a: 256.

²³ „There was an unforgettable old woman standing on the window ledge, where she had obviously climbed up a ladder. I have never seen a sadder face. A hundred and hundreds of years of motherly pain were etched on that face. [...] There stood the old woman in her variegated dress, with her arms spread like a scarecrow's, between heaven and earth, as if despair had given her tired old limbs the strength to rise to such a height of majesty. It was as if she had crawled up the rain gutter, as if witches had aided her slippered feet, and angels were guarding her right and left. [...] Eszténa was making the sign of the cross and leaping to the window. She stood there in a shirt, barefoot, like a dream that will never be gone for the rest of my life. She had a radiant, forgiving, almost otherworldly smile on her face, like the smile of the saved. She looked back at me lovingly, happily, unforgettably.” Krúdy 2008a: 256–257.

“This must have been the atmosphere in the town when martyrs were set on the stake two hundred years ago. Everyone seemed to be going mad. [...] The air smelled of sulphur. There are clowns going somewhere with their colourful bells, their roaring singing. [...] Finally, around the corner, the Turkish man with the pipe came down from the tin bar of the tobacconist’s and humbly greeted me.”²⁴

All this happens because, instead of fulfilling the task that was necessarily imposed on her, she has made a decision that is not in harmony with the usual rules, thus interrupting the continuity of events in the profane world and enforcing a different temporary order. As a result, the entire community of the town fell into carnival consciousness and took to the streets. „It was as if a spell had been cast over the town, and everyone moved in the silent streets...”²⁵ In fact, the scene that closes the tragedy reveals that the world had turned so far out of its corners that even the hitherto reluctant Hartvigné began to obey Pál Pálfi as a devoted lover.

Given the narrative’s strong sacral motif system based on initiation rites, it can be seen that Eszténa’s death, which at first sight seems surprising, was very legitimate, which, in addition to the evocation of medieval fanaticism, could be indicated by such signs as the evocation of the Christian tradition of St. Agnes and the religious reading of the water metaphor, which plays a prominent role in the narrative.

The first and most important sacrament of initiation in Christianity is baptism, traditionally accompanied by immersion in water or an act symbolic of immersion, which frees the catechumen from death, dies to sin and is born again. The death of Eszténa, however, despite the seemingly blatant parallel, can be read as an act of baptism not only because of the presence of water, but also because of the rite of initiation of the sacrament of baptism. In all cases, rites of initiation contain both symbolic forms of death and resurrection, signifying both the destruction of the previous life stage and the subsequent birth of a new one. This is one of the reasons why it is significant that the companion sees the smile of the saved on the face of the girl who is fleeing.²⁶ Parallel to this, the first love union is also a ritualistic behaviour: „my mother wants me to be a nun before she dies anyway - before I am the bride of Christ, I want to be the sweetheart of an earthly man.”²⁷ This intention, however, is replaced by

²⁴ Krúdy 2008a: 258.

²⁵ Krúdy 2008a: 258.

²⁶ Eszténa then runs to the river and drowns herself in the gaping hole. She had „[t]he kind of indulgent, forgiving, almost otherworldly smile” on her face that you see on the saved. Krúdy 2008a: 257.

²⁷ Krúdy 2008a: 247.

the mother's intervention with the other rite, immersion in water that ends in actual death.

But all this is far from without precedent. For Eszténa has chosen the feast day of a virgin martyr for her act. As if the already strikingly conscious woman ("she undressed without prompting, as if she were carrying out a long-planned plan."²⁸ "Yesterday my poor mother scolded me for waiting for you at the window, even at night, she began very simply, as if she had already decided to tell me what had happened yesterday"²⁹), as if by way of a vicarious blood sacrifice, she had already planned in advance to choose the alternative route to death. Her suicide, as we learn in the crypt conversation, takes place on St. Agnes' day:

"Not today, sir, for I have neither confessed nor been blessed... who knows if I may die afterwards? Do not wish me to take such a step without the holy body of the Lord. [...] – I confess to the friar on Anthony the Hermit's day.³⁰ I fast on Friday and bless on Sunday. On Saint Agnes' day³¹ I will be yours."³²

It is somewhat disconcerting that the elements of faith associated with the figures of Saint Anthony the Hermit and Saint Anthony of Padua, the latter of which is traditionally represented by the lily, the symbol of innocence, are confused in the promise of Eszténa;³³ but the author's intention is of course understandable, since the invocation of the name of Saint Anthony further intensifies the expectation of infinite purity associated with the figure of Agnes.

The martyrdom of Saint Agnes, however, is the subject of many legends, her name being mentioned as early as the last third of the 4th century. It is not known whether she was a real person, but the stories about her are similar. According to one version, the Roman girl refused to give in to her pagan suitor, saying that she was already the bride of Christ and that she did not even want to sacrifice to the Roman gods, so she was

„stripped naked and taken to a brothel in broad daylight. But Agnes was miraculously hidden from prying eyes by her suddenly growing head of hair, and in

²⁸ Krúdy 2008a: 256.

²⁹ Krúdy 2008a: 237.

³⁰ Holiday January 17.

³¹ Holiday January 21.

³² Krúdy 2008a: 247–248.

³³ The story is about the feast of Saint Anthony the Hermit, but the beliefs associated with him and the figure of Saint Anthony of Padua have become confused over time. „Saint Anthony the Hermit was venerated as the patron saint of domestic animals. The beliefs and customs associated with him waned during the period of the Reformation and were revived in connection with the figure of St Anthony of Padua.” Bálint 1977: 145–155.

the brothel an angel even dressed her in light. But her former captor, who had followed her here to rape her, was struck dead by a demon. Then the girl was to be burned as a witch, but the flames roasted the executioners. Finally she was beheaded in the »agon« (circus) of Domitianus.”³⁴

In another version, Agnes, accused of heresy, was offered freedom if she would marry one of the Roman soldiers present, but she refused and replied: „I want to be with the one who chose me first: God!”³⁵

The psychopomp

„The belief is that when someone dies, their soul must be taken to the afterlife, and no one else can do this but the shaman.”³⁶
(Mihály Hoppál)

After a review of the rites, background and sacral aspects of Eszténa’s journey to the afterlife, it is time to talk about the actual helper, the travelling companion. The ghostly figure of the companion in the context of the initiation rites allows us to approach a very ancient concept, that of the psychopomp and, more generally, the concept of the haunting spirits derived from shamanic religions. It is important, however, to come to the connection between Pál Pálfi’s namesake in the crypt and one of the main characteristics of shamanism, the ability to tempt the other world, from a distance. Therefore, it is first worth clarifying in what sense and with what traditions we can speak of Krúdy’s Doppelgänger.

Katalin Fleisz, examining the mythical characteristics built into Krúdy’s texts, when clarifying the phenomenon of Krúdy’s sub-ego, the doubled self, observes that „it is closely related to mythical thinking and worldview that figures are formed as variations of a particular archetype,”³⁷ and emphasises that „[t]he cyclical worldview in Krúdy’s work also belongs to the mythical language.”³⁸ In this world, the boundaries of things are necessarily dissolved, which in turn allows for the emergence of a wide range of variations. Psychoanalysis offers an appropriate interpretative framework for the study of the self-

³⁴ Jankovics 1997: 43–44.

³⁵ Diós 2009.

³⁶ Hoppál 2013: 119.

³⁷ Fleisz 2013: 161.

³⁸ Fleisz 2013: 161.

duplications thus formed, the personality contours thus dissolved and then dispersed into a multiplicity of variations.³⁹ Since primitive patterns of thought, mythical roots, can make connections between the most diverse phenomena of culture, and can easily reproduce themselves when embedded in a given context (such as the literary types posited as exemplary, eternal characters, the Don Juans and Hamlets), it is worth considering myths in the wider context.

Fleisz and many others see this context in Krúdy's case as the tradition of Romanticism, which is characterised by the fact that he very often brings into play various Doppelgänger figures. However, he also warns that the visual inspection of wandering symbols „can only yield partial results in the case of Krúdy's texts.”⁴⁰ Such an examination of the oeuvre, he argues, could narrow the interpretation to a one-sided influence-reception relationship, whereas the principle of doubling or multiplying texts could lead to the most fundamental questions of Krúdy's prose. As he writes:

„[r]esearch in recent years has shown that Krúdy's prose does not create its characters on the model of a coherent, self-identical personality. Rather, the figures have a malleable, shifting identity, in which the process of identification rather than an end point is depicted.”⁴¹

In addition to this, he adds that the relationship of Krúdy's texts to myths and archetypes involves not only identifying but also alienating processes: „[t]he process of becoming a double and identifying with a double is thus a continuous movement that has neither a beginning nor an end.”⁴²

With reference to this briefly quoted line of thought, it is important to return to the question of the contextualization of the myth-making processes mentioned above, since, for example, the idea of the Doppelgänger has certain roots in popular cultures beyond Romanticism, and ethnography and religious history deal with the general features of these ideas.

It can be rightly assumed, and I have already mentioned it earlier, that Krúdy knew and used in his works certain features of the accompanying, helping spirit, the so-called soul guide, psychopomp, which term (Greek: ψυχοπομπός psychopompos) refers to Hermes, the last travelling companion,⁴³ the god of travel.⁴⁴ However, the characteristics of the god who crossed the

³⁹ Fleisz 2013: 162.

⁴⁰ Fleisz 2013: 163.

⁴¹ Fleisz 2013: 163.

⁴² Fleisz 2013: 164.

⁴³ Kerényi 1984.

⁴⁴ Tózsá 2020: 257.

river Styx can also be found in the Christian archangel St Michael, who was believed to stand over the sick person's bed and, at the hour of death, to be the one who takes the soul out of the body and leads it to heaven or hell, i.e. the psychopomp, the guide of the souls of the dead.⁴⁵

But the term psychopomp is not unique to cultures based on Greek mythology; it also applies to the companion spirits of ancient shamanism. As Mircea Eliade points out, one of the important social functions of the shaman is that of the psychopomp, i.e. one of his tasks is to guide the souls of the dead (those who have undergone certain initiation rites, those who have been redeemed from their previous lives) to the afterlife.⁴⁶ The spirits who appear as helpers on such occasions are a reflection of the shaman's psyche, and can be thought of as the shaman's inner alter-ego.⁴⁷

The remnants of this belief in shamans can be found in the case of the so-called wayfarers, who, along with other strange people, are considered the late descendants of shamans,⁴⁸ and who are described in more detail in Krúdy's *Book of Dreams* (*Álmoskönyv*), written shortly after *The Travelling Companion* (*Az útítárs*).

Of course, it is true that the story of the companion has explicitly nothing to do with shamanistic cultures (no descriptions of superfluous bones, no mention of the character as a healer or as a mediator communicating with the afterlife, etc.), but it is indisputable that the investigation of the common thought-origin of the image of the Hungarian world of beliefs as alter-ego and doppelgänger, homo duplex, Doppelgänger as a doubled identity, even if we have to unravel these contents from a complex web of motifs, can lead us back to the world of archaic shamanic cultures.⁴⁹ In what follows, I will therefore discuss in more detail the supposed shamanic and/or psychopompic roots of the story of the companion and the protagonist.

⁴⁵ Comp. Czövek 2006: 447–450.

⁴⁶ Comp. Eliade 2002a: 201.

⁴⁷ Comp. Schmidt 1997.

⁴⁸ Szendrey 1938: 262.

⁴⁹ A surprising episode of contemporary Krúdy-philosophy, in which the writer was referred to as a shaman. „His language is also the language of the shaman and - soft, warm, sad language, the embodiment of refined taste, pure beauty, noble simplicity and mystical sadness” says, for example, the author's first wife, Bella Bogdán. Bogdán 1900: 7.

„How could Gyula Krúdy have known about the similar structure of the incantations representing the shaman's delirium? I think it unlikely that it was from literature.” Simonics 2013: 56.

Underworld walk – Initiation rites and dimension shift

The main motivation of the travelling companion is the need to cross the boundaries between dimensions, the rites of initiation. These events are moved out of context by unexpected, („isolated in the narrative”),⁵⁰ but distinctly shaped images built from sacral and erotic elements.

The two most important moments in terms of dimension crossing are undoubtedly the underworld passages. During the courtship of the Crypt, the discovery of the sarcophagus inscribed with the inscription Pál Pálfi, the spirit of the ancestor involved in the underworld passage becomes explicitly present. In the other event, the drowning through the gaping hole in the river represents the gateway to the underworld, where the strange, witch-like ghostly figure of the mother symbolises the ascendant who is the soul guide.⁵¹

Both events begin with Eszténa's sexual advances, aimed at bringing her into adulthood, and in both cases Pál Pálfi is a partner.⁵² In the crypt scene, Eszténa verbally refuses: „the girl defended herself gently and firmly – not today”;⁵³ while in the brothel situation, the only way out was to rush to her death. In both cases, the stakes were high for Eszténa, since, having lost her virginity, her journey from the crypt would surely have led to the underworld, while her innocence would have allowed her to aim for heaven.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Fleisz 2013: 165.

⁵¹ „The gap is also a window, the window of the river, through which the incessantly flowing water, the eternal locomotive, peeps out into the daylight, as it travels under the vault of ice, in the gloom. The fish wonder at the shadow of the tower that casts its shadow on the gap at noon in winter. On the bridge, the frozen floor crunches beneath men and carts: otherworldly figures do their otherworldly work as they travel on in the darkness of the water to other cities, other lakes.” Krúdy 2008a: 236.

⁵² József Keserű, in his already cited essay *Narrative and Ethics in the Context of Gyula Krúdy's novel The Travelling Companion*, draws attention to how often the character identifies with the figure of the ghost and the devil as a role in which the companion knows himself. Keserű 2008: 38. „How much easier my work would be if I could stand up in the pulpit with bare forehead and bare face to speak to my female listeners about the infertility of fornication! But now I am a devil.” Krúdy 2008a: 252.

If Pál Pálfi, the seducer, is able to identify himself as the devil, it also supports the role of his helping spirit, because, as Éva Pócs points out, in a Christian context certain folk beliefs are often associated or replaced by figures known to Christianity, such as the devil. And this „applies to both death-demon and werewolf witchcraft, as well as to the helper-spirit and nightmare-like creatures.” Pócs 1992: 63.

⁵³ Krúdy 2008a: 247.

⁵⁴ At the hour of death, he takes the soul out of the body. He is the „Psychopomp”, the leader of the souls of the dead, and also the judge of those who go to the afterlife: he keeps the balance, weighs the sins, the good and evil deeds of men. He takes the good to heaven, and they are seated before the Virgin Mary, and from there they are brought before the Lord.

This is supported by one of the recurring motifs of the underworld, the encounter with a dead ancestor,⁵⁵ a pre-condition, which is fulfilled by the sarcophagus with the inscription Pálfi Pál discovered in the crypt. And in the final scene, the face of Eszténa's mother, furrowed with the mother's lividity of a hundred and hundreds of years, contains the obligatory element of ancestors, which, moreover, is in keeping with the expectations of ancient beliefs, since the spiritual teacher in shamanic visions is often a grandparent, or grandmother in the case of women, or ancestral mother, who performs soul-searching for the purpose of healing or to accompany the soul of the dead person to the afterlife.

The encounter with the ancestors is a characteristic motif of initiatory trance states all over the world, which means that in a certain semi-awake, semi-dream-like state of consciousness one can observe oneself with a kind of disembodied gaze.⁵⁶ This condition, firstly with Pálfi contemplating his own name on the sarcophagus, and secondly with the archetype of the respective mothers being revealed in Eszténa's mother, is fulfilled without remainder. While the dreamlike, delirious moments of the confused ending convey precisely the aforementioned trance state. Not to mention the fact that during the closing sequence of events,⁵⁷ certain attribute animals, traditionally reinforcing the presence of the helping spirit, appear one after the other,⁵⁸ which play an emphatically important role in „the prelude to the shamanic ceremony, i.e. the preparation of the ecstatic sky-reading or underworld-going.”⁵⁹ Such animals include the frog, („like frogs leaping like bullfrogs”),⁶⁰ the dog, („old men ran with their little dogs”),⁶¹ and the rooster⁶², „the cross disappeared from the hill of the tower of St. John. A cock

Michael is also one of the „advocatus” who descends to hell with Mary („Advocata Nostra”) and together they „intercede” for the guilty soul (the journey to Inferno is preserved in another genre, the „sacred letter”, which reflects early Christian literary traditions). Comp. Czövek 2006: 447.

⁵⁵ „The ghost is the soul guide; this theme, by its very structure, excludes »possession«. It seems very much that the main role of the dead when endowed with shamanic powers is not so much to »possess« the subject, but rather to help him become »dead« in short, to help him become a »spirit« as well.” Eliade 2002b: 91.

⁵⁶ Comp. Hoppál 1997: 35.

⁵⁷ „The direction of »soul searching« is no coincidence. On their journeys to the underworld, where they could reach via tunnels, earth hatches, gullies, etc., they met their animal helpers.” Schmidt 1997.

⁵⁸ The alleged witch was often accompanied by a so-called companion spirit, e.g. a black cat or a snake, frog, crow, mouse, bee, ant, but there were also legless spaniels. S. N. 2000: 66.

⁵⁹ Eliade 2002a: 97.

⁶⁰ Krúdy 2008a: 258.

⁶¹ Krúdy 2008a: 258.

⁶² „Midnight has passed, and down below the rooster crows, the grim stranger, freezing in the snowfall, banging his bony legs together, knocking on the locked gate.” Krúdy 2013: 322.

crows up there, as in the centuries when people and churches changed their religion.”⁶³

In addition to the above, the figure of the travelling companion has a number of characteristics that can easily be paralleled with that of the shamanic traveller, who is believed to exist independently of time and space, driven by the need to travel, even in „X city”⁶⁴ at an unspecified time and period.⁶⁵ He is a sickly, reclusive type, not to mention the ominous quality that his mere company can be deadly, and as the *Book of Dreams* (*Álmoskönyv*) emphasizes, „sometimes he carries a girl's heart in his purse.”⁶⁶ It is believed to be the first of the undead to emerge from the grave, and to have a predilection for spending the night in crypts.

„Strange people include, finally, the wayfarers, the dead who have come back to life while still in bed or in the coffin. A wayfarer, for such a one never rests, he is always coming and going, but no one dares to give him a place, for the house would soon be deserted. The one he looks at falls into jaundice, – the one he touches withers, the one he kisses dies. They also often think of the thin, pale, sickly-looking wanderers and beggars as wayfarers, and believe that such people, hiding away from home, live in crypts at night.”⁶⁷

Summary

The figure of the traveler, Pál Pálfi, when compared with the figure of the folk belief world called the wayfarer, which Krúdy also writes about in the *Book of Dreams* (*Álmoskönyv*), shows several fundamental similarities. And with the help of the comparison, it is possible to discover in both figures the characteristics of an ancient role, the characteristics of the role of the shaman, the soul companion. Someone who helps a person get through the initiation rites, someone who helps them change dimensions. The moments of dimensional shifts in Krúdy's work are densely filled with sacred motifs; these junctions give space to identity changes, which the author also emphasizes in the text using narratological tools. I am convinced that the applied textual, folklore-based analysis method in the thesis can also be applied to other pieces of his oeuvre and brings us closer to understanding Krúdy's innovative modernity.

⁶³ Krúdy 2008a: 258.

⁶⁴ Krúdy 2008a: 204.

⁶⁵ Fried 2006: 193.

⁶⁶ Krúdy 2008b: 264.

⁶⁷ Szendrey 1938: 262.

Bibliography

BÁLINT, Sándor

1977 *Ünnepi kalendárium*. I. Budapest: Szent István Társulat

BOGDÁN, Bella

1900 A víg ember bús meséi. *Előkelő Világ*. 1900. 3. 7.

BORI, Imre

1978 *Krúdy Gyula*. Újvidék: Forum Könyvkiadó

CZÖVEK, Judit

2006 Angyalok ábrázolása a 19. századi vallásos ponyvákban. *Ethno-Lore*. 23. Az MTA Néprajzi Kutató Intézetének Évkönyve. 437–468. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó

DIÓS, István

2009 *Szentelek élete I*. Budapest: Szent István Társulat

ELIADE, Mircea

2002a *A szamanizmus*. (Translated by Saly Noémi) Budapest: Osiris Kiadó

2002b *Okkultizmus, boszorkányság és kulturális divatok*. (Translated by Saly Noémi) Budapest: Osiris Kiadó

FÁBRI, Anna

1975 Utószó és életrajzi adatok. In Krúdy Gyula: *Nyolc regény*. 1285–1297. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó

FLEISZ, Katalin

2013 *Önreflexív alakzatok Krúdy Gyula prózájában*. (PhD dissertation.) Debrecen: DE BTK

FRIED, István

2006 Az elbeszélő mint útítárs. In Fried István: *Szomjas Gusztáv hagyatéka. Elbeszélés, elbeszélő, téridő Krúdy Gyula műveiben*. 190–210. Budapest: Új Palatinus Könyvesház Kft.

FÜLÖP, László

1986 Elbeszélésmód a regényekben. In Fülöp László: *Közelítések Krúdyhoz*. 265–266. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó

HOPPÁL, Mihály

1997 Halálélmények a sámánizmusban. *Kharón Tanatológiai Szemle*. 1. 1. 35.

2013 Részlet a V. P. Djakonovával készített interjúból, 1992. In Hoppál Mihály: *A sámánság újjászületése*. 119. Budapest: Balassi Könyvkiadó

JANKOVICS, Marcell

1997 *Jelkép-kalendárium*. Debrecen: Csokonai Kiadó

KEMÉNY, Gábor

2010 A szakrális és az erotikus viszonya Krúdy prózájában. In Kemény Gábor: *A nyelvtől a stílusig. Válogatott tanulmányok, cikkek*. 347–357. Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó

KERÉNYI, Károly

1984 *Hermés, a lélekvezető. Az élet férfi eredetének mitológemája*. Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó

KESERŰ, József

- 2008 Narratíva és etika összefüggései Krúdy Gyula Az útitárs című regényében. *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle*. 10. 4. 27–41.

KRÚDY, Gyula

- 2008a Az útitárs. In Bezeczký Gábor – Kelecsényi László (eds.): *Krúdy Gyula összegyűjtött művei 12. Regények és nagyobb elbeszélések*. 7. 202–260. Pozsony: Kalligram Könyvkiadó
- 2008b Álmoskönyv. In Bezeczký Gábor – Kelecsényi László (eds.): *Krúdy Gyula összegyűjtött művei 12*. Pozsony: Kalligram Könyvkiadó
- 2013 Lázás szemmel az éjben. Egy szegény ifjú vallomása. In Bezeczký Gábor – Kelecsényi László (eds.): *Krúdy Gyula összegyűjtött művei 23. Elbeszélések*. 7. 318–325. Pozsony: Kalligram Könyvkiadó
- 2016 Egy kis gyertya kialszik. In Bezeczký Gábor – Mészáros Sándor (eds.): *Krúdy Gyula összegyűjtött művei 27. Elbeszélések*. 10. 99–104. Budapest, Kalligram Könyvkiadó

LÁZÁR, Béla

- 1943 Népíró, táltos s más egyebek. *Koszorú. A Petőfi Társaság közlönye*. 10. 1. 42–45.

PÓCS, Éva

- 1992 A boszorkányszombat és ördögszövetség népi alapjai Közép-Délkelet-Európában. *Ethnographia*. 103. 1–2. 28–88.

S. N.

- 2000 *Boszorkánykönyv*. (Translated by Eszter Füzéki) Budapest: Jászöveg Műhely Kiadó

SCHMIDT HORVÁTHNÉ, Ilona

- 1997 The basic symbols of the shamanistic worldview. *Terebes*. 16. 05. 1997. <https://terebess.hu/keletkultinfo/samankep.html> – 30. 03. 2025.

SIMONCSICS, Péter

- 2013 A varázsló Krúdy. *Forrás*. 45. 4. 52–61.

SZABÓ, Ede

- 1970 *Krúdy Gyula – alkotásai és vallomásai tükrében*. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó

SZENDREY, Zsigmond

- 1938 A nép élő hitvilága. *Ethnographia*. 49. 257–273.

TÓZSA, István

- 2020 Az alvilág földrajza. *Polgári Szemle, Gazdasági és Társadalmi Tudományos Folyóirat*. 16. 4–6. 243–257.

VÍGH, Imre

- 2014 Halmozás, emlékezés és utazás. *A Vörös Postakocsi Online*. 07. 02. 2014. <https://avorospostakocsi.hu/2014/02/07/halmozas-emlekezés-es-utazas/> – 30. 03. 2025.



Each lazarka offers a willow stalk on the chapel door. Source: Meryem Madili 2024.