

Babeş—Bolyai University
Faculty of Letters
Department of Hungarian Culture
Hungarology Phd School

Pénzes Ágnes

Points of view about the Hungarian revolution in 1848—49.
The representation of the events and personal roles in the
oeuvre of Jókai Mór

Supervisor:
Prof. dr. Kozma Dezső

Cluj-Napoca
2013

Contents

Foreword	3
1. “Writing alternative history”	7
2. Why mythology?	9
2.1. The social role of myth.....	9
2.2. Canon – the definer of social role.....	10
2.3. A miracle-like event: the Hungarian revolution.....	15
2.4. The point of view that reveals the miracle – the role of romanticism and that of Petőfi.....	17
3. What is revealed in myth – The mythical vision of history in “Battle-pieces”	20
4. Stepping “behind” myth – ways towards multi-perspective historiography	25
4.1. The Andromeda.....	25
4.2. The representation of history, which can be interpreted in different ways.....	29
5. The possibilities of the elegiac voice	34
6. The polyphony of narrative voices and points of view: the novels	37
6.1. The mythical perspective in the novels: the miracle.....	37
6.1.1. Oath.....	40
6.1.2. Prayer.....	44
6.2. “The existence of one single truth is an illusion”.....	49
6.3. The synthesis (?)-novel.....	63
6.4. Narration and metafiction.....	65
7. The possibilities of visual representation. The relation between picture and text	70
7.1. A commemoration album serving historiography.....	70
7.2. The Hungarian revolution as a glorious antecedent – the concept of history in the commemoration album.....	72
7.3. The pictures.....	73
7.3.1. <i>Allegory and text</i>	74
7.3.2. <i>The caricatures</i>	96
7.3.3. <i>Portraits and commentaries</i>	107
7.3.4. <i>The representations of macro- and microhistory</i>	117
7.4. Pictures and texts reflecting each-other.....	120
7.4.1. <i>The picture and its models</i>	121
7.4.2. <i>A portrait built out of pictures and texts</i>	123
8. The “literature of facts” as historical representation: autobiography and history	127
8.1. Possibilities for the interpretation of autobiography.....	127
8.1.1. <i>The textual net</i>	139
8.1.2. <i>The alternatives of narrative</i>	149
8.2. Writing history – a restricted modality of representation?.....	153
8.2.1. <i>The norms of historiography in the 19th century</i>	155

9. The polylogue “behind” the narrative	160
9.1. Different contemporary interpretations of the revolution.....	160
9.1.1. <i>Political clashes of views and conflicts of interests during the revolution</i>	161
9.1.2. <i>Political “languages” during the age of Enlightenment: liberalism, democratism, centralism, conservatism</i>	164
9.2. Clashing views about the idea of revolution.....	166
9.3. Nationalism in the 19 th century.....	170
9.4. The aims of the revolution and the founding of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.....	171
9.5. Literature and politics.....	172
9.6. Jókai’s political volte-faces and the press.....	176
10. Literary genre and the diversity of historical representation	183
11. The theme of the revolution and popularity	188
12. Summary, conclusions	194
Bibliography.....	205
Text editions.....	205
Studies and monographies.....	208

Keywords:

historical representation, revolution, historiography, romanticism, point of view, narrative, metafiction, visual representation, portrait, allegory, myth, pluriperspectivity, canon, autobiography, politics, literary genre, novel, short story

The theses of the Ph. D. thesis:

- Those works of Jókai Mór, which have as a theme the Hungarian revolution in 1848, are connected not only by their theme, but also by their similar narrative devices—consequently they form an organic unity. These texts show the interpretation of history as well as self-interpretation as an endless process.
- Jókai answers the purpose of forming the cult of the revolution, but in the meantime he creates an individual mythology, which does not correspond in its every aspect to the canonical requirements, it often overwrites the latter through the special use of the typical motifs of the heroic-mythical narrative.
- Because of their complex narrative strategies, these texts can be interpreted from the perspective of 20th century historiography.
- In the commemoration album edited for the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the revolution, the texts lead a dialogue with the pictures, due to their points of view and techniques of representation.
- Out of the different types of texts (novel, short story, autobiography, history) a textual net is built, in which interpretation is disposed to be in continuous movement among texts. The connections between texts generates new, often surprising meanings.
- The texts answer in various tones to the expectations of the readers, the theses of literary criticism, they reflect the possibilities of representation and interpretation. The construction of narrative, the process of creation itself becomes a latent theme.
- In the context of the clashing points of view about the revolution, of the opposing interests of political parties, of the writer's political roles and of the press, Jókai's oeuvre seems to present a panoramic view of these perspectives. It combines different, often opposing interpretations of history.
- The choice of the literary genres is not accidental. The shift between long and short epic genres can be connected to the changing perspectives of the narrative, which is alternately the history of macro and micro stories.
- Jókai realized that the theme of the revolution was a key of successful writing. His works responded to the demands of the readers, and contributed to the dissolution of the collective trauma by retelling the traumatic events. His later works kept their popularity, because Jókai found the current aspects of the theme: the life of the hero of the revolution after the age of heroism.

Summary

The works of Jókai Mór which have as a theme the revolution in 1848 are part of a process of interpretation which permanently reinterprets the events and the narrative perspectives used to describe them.

This process of interpretation starts with the short stories, that appeared in 1850 and 1851. The short stories present the events in a way, that, on the one hand fits the canon concerning literary genre and type of text, on the other hand it “steps further”, using a technique that is similar to the pluriperspectivity of 20th century historiography.

Representing the revolution as myth, as epos corresponds to the expectations of the literary canon in the 19th century. During the age of the Enlightenment the demand of the national epic was connected to the theme of the ethnogenesis. After 1848, a new possibility occurred for the national narrative meant to construct national identity. In the laws of April 1848 Jókai saw the foundation of the modern political nation. In his texts, which contribute to the creation of the cult of 1848—49, he presents the revolution as a new ethnogenesis.

Arany János states, that the motif of the miracle, which is the proof of a metaphysical power, is an indispensable element of the epos. According to this, he was searching for a miracle-like event, as a theme of the national epic. Jókai saw the revolution this way, like a miracle. The writer accepts the cult of the revolution, because his own life story was part of it. He finds the solutions for an epic, which is relevant in the 19th century. According to Arany’s theory, the *deus ex machina* in the *Battle pieces* fits in the Christian ethos. In the motif of the God of the Hungarian, pagan cults are mixed with the elements of Christian belief and notions of nationality. This is how an individual mythology is built up of literary works created on the model of the biblical text. The visionariness similar to that in Petőfi’s poetry, the prophetic locution, which originates in Lamennais’ prose, is built up from a perspective that can seize historical events in relation with their metaphysical meaning. The role of the prophet, which is similar to that in the Bible, is combined in the visionary texts with the role of the national leader. But the cult is modulated even in these mythical texts. Glory is assigned to the God of the Hungarians, the heroic fight of the nation is placed within the frame of a mythical battle for the gate of Paradise, but revolution itself is sometimes presented as an allegorical monster. National conflicts fit in this context.

Amidst the romantic cult of the genius, when the national leader was seen as a prophet, who knows the single truth and the proper way for the nation, Jókai realizes, that there are several truths, and each one is relevant from its own perspective. The short stories express the criticism of the revolution as well. This is also the criticism of the exclusive, canonical interpretation of the events. The evaluations presented from different characters’ voices and points of view, are often antithetical, or they show the events from a perspective that is missing in historiography. Interpreting Jókai’s texts from the viewpoint of 20th century historiography, we see a highly modern author, who interprets the conflicts through

conflicting different interpretations, who completes our image of the “great stories” described by (macro) history with the perspective and “small stories” of microhistory. Besides the mythical narrative, these short stories also include voices and points of view which relativise the value of fighting from the perspective of family and the value of life itself. Conservative manners and values are not criticized, though the members of the conservative party refused the appreciation of the revolution. Only those characters are criticized, who cause needless bloodshed, or are led by personal interests. Exclusive interpretation is also refused through the voices of those characters who represent the national minorities. Besides the battles and the stories of representative personalities, everyday life is also presented in Jókai’s works.

The novels continue the chain of works interpreting the revolution. The shifts of the point of view are similar to those in the short stories. On the one hand the novels also build the mythology of the revolution, on the other hand they present several other interpretations. Through intratextual hints, in his last novel Jókai creates the dialogue of the former works with this theme. The end of the novel suggests that Jókai gave up the belief in the justice of tales and mythology.

Visionariness is not characteristic to the novels, but some motives hinting to the metaphysical are integrant part of the works. These are the motives connected to the concept of miracle: vow and prayer. Through these motives on the one hand the cult of the revolutionary hero is built up, on the other hand the novels present the process of degradation of the same heroes.

According to the scheme of values reflected by the novels, being perfect and becoming a hero is linked to the participation in the revolution. In the same time, taking part in the fight of the nation does not save the hero from the later moral decline provided the character breaks his vow or acts differently as he had promised in prayer. In the meantime prayer and vow is a metaphysical help of those, who serve the nation altruistically. In most of the cases these two motives serve as a metaphysical legitimacy.

Besides the mythical-epos-like narrative, the historical representation of the novels presents the pluriperspectivity of interpretation. Different characters may relate the events in contradictory ways, newspapers can also contain contradictory informations, and characters may find out, that media is manipulated by personal interests.

Besides the story of glorious battles and heroes, the novels also show how can people turn into a mob, which can be manipulated. In the national army there were decursions, which were behaving rather shamefully. The presentation of these becomes a parody of the idealized glorious national army. 15th March and the Twelve Point Declaration also appears in pathetic, humorous, ironic and theatrical ways. Myth is demolished through the theatrical aspect of

representation, too. The outsiders and those characters, who take part in the revolution can all see the events as a tragedy, a comedy or as tableaux. A part of the heroes are actors themselves.

The disapproved characters also get their voices in the novels, but they are placed in a narrative which presents their moral decline and fall as natural consequence of their values and deeds.

The account of possibilities of representation also becomes a hidden theme of the novels. It is discussed in prologues and epilogues as well as in the text of the novels. Besides the representation of the events, the novels also interpret the act of constructing a narrative about historical facts.

The novels reflect the problems of interpretation and the narratological possibilities this theme offers. A complex textual game is created through inter- and intratextual hints, through the reinterpretation of canonical texts in contexts, that are determined by different tonality. "Talking names" are also part of the textual game. They usually suggest an appreciation of the character, totally different from the image the character has about himself.

Jókai's novels also reflect the possible interpretations and the objections of critics. From these parts of the text can we see that Jókai decides for a pluriperspectivical representation and he disallows the exclusive and referential interpretation. The different expectations of the readers form a textual dialogue in the prefaces and epilogues, which are often contradictory. In the prologue of *Political Fashions* the writer rejects the allegorical interpretation. In the short story entitled *The deserter* the writer gives the key to an allegorical reading.

The theme of two short stories was initially the revolution, then the writer placed the plot in other historical context. In the novel entitled *Black Diamonds* he answers to those critics who blamed him for this method. The text suggests that for those readers who try to "translate" the text to real life events and characters, the historical context, and even the plot itself is irrelevant, because they do not observe the complex narratological structure, the aesthetical values of the works anyway.

The prologue of the novel entitled *God is one single* accentuates the right of literature to create different narratives about the same historical event, and neither of these will be identical with reality.

The novels also answer to those critics who blame the writer for creating romantic works, not realistic ones. In *The see-blue eyes of a woman* the narrator, who is a writer, explains the romanticism of his works with the expectations of Hungarian readers, but it also suggests that the possibility of becoming a realistic writer would have existed for him in another country.

The conclusion of this argument is, that style is not an integral part of the writer's personality, he can decide freely how he will write.

The epilogue of the novel *The actors of life* offers two endings of the plot. According to the title, these possibilities are: a tragic and a comical one, the latter in the sense of a well-ending plot (Dante's terminology). It even contains an ironical remark that the reader should choose the one he likes. The epilogue of the novel *The small kings* ironically corrects the ending of the plot in a realistic way, but in the meantime this is how the romantic justice prevails. We have the impression that the writer winks to the reader over the heads of critics. Also in this novel our knowledge of history and the authenticity of historical representation are questioned through the motives of falsified history and false historian.

The question of representation and its possibilities does not only appear in novels and short stories. The writer, who also painted and carved is interested in visual representation as well. The relation between picture and text is spectacular in the commemoration album edited by the writer at the 50th anniversary of the revolution.

The subtitle of the album hints to the intention of the editors to offer source material for history. But the album offers much more than this. Like the novels and short stories, it reflects the problems of representation and interpretation. The album creates a polylogue of picture, historiography, literature and autobiography, and this way it illustrates the fact that the interpretation of historical facts always depends on the point of view and values of the interpreter. Thus the album does not only build the cult of the revolution, but also shows the problematic nature of interpretation. The criteria of the selection of pictures present the same shifts of the point of view as the literary works.

The allegorical pictures suggest a metaphysical legitimacy of the events, just like those visionary texts, which build up the mythology of the revolution. Their comments often hint to literary works written from this mythical perspective.

The allegorical figure of freedom is based on the one hand on Christian iconography, on the other hand on the visual representation of the French revolution. Through the allusion to the Pieta, this kind of representation presents downfall and death in the context of the hope of resurrection.

The allegorical representations of the poet Petöfi build his cult and in the same time they fit to a wider context: they present a new kind of national hero: the civilian revolutionist. This aim is accomplished through constructing a kind of visual narrative out of the pictures presenting the different roles of the poet.

The allegorical figure of Hungary represents the destiny of the nation and of the country. For the editor, who is searching for the possibilities of peaceful cohabitation of nations, the figure of Hungary is an important motif. It invokes the Hungarus-identity of the Medieval Ages. This identity was linked to territory and state, not to the concept of ethnicity. Jókai probably sees a possible solution of ethnical conflicts in it.

Another group of the pictures is formed by caricatures. This kind of visual representation reveals the conflicts similarly to those texts which oppose to the different theories and interpretations through different characters' points of view. On the one hand caricature is a means of propaganda, as well as of constructing the image of the enemy, on the other hand it is also a critique of the inner national states, and it can also express hidden fears.

Portraits and their comments serve a double aim: like romance and mythology, portraits also construct the image of heroes and their enemies. The national heroes idealized with hagiographical narrative schemes form a spiritual pantheon, opposed to the group of portraits of their enemies, whose lives are related with the help of a kind of punishing narrative.

Among the realistic battle pieces there are some, which show the value of life, questioning the *raison d'être* of fighting. Battle pieces present the "great stories" of the revolution. Besides them we can see in the album pictures presenting everyday life, scenes about which the commenting texts reveal that they are missing from historiography.

Some of the comments also question the authenticity of visual representation. They either mention the tendency of idealization, or refer to unreliable oral sources of information, or point at the fact, that most of the pictures were made by Austrian artists, who represented the events from their point of view.

The connection between image and Jókai's texts is visible, if we consider the similar techniques of representation, the ekphrasis-like nature of some fragments form the short stories, the common motives of visual and textual representation. Besides, we often find Jókai's texts as the commentaries of the pictures in the album, and thus the picture becomes an illustration of the text.

The connection between the techniques of visual and textual representation is accentuated by the prologue of the short story *The minister with diamonds*. The narrator of the mentioned text evokes the spirit of the revolution to appear and be a model to his painting. This text is the first in the chain of short stories collected in the volume entitled *Battle pieces*. Gadamer's hermeneutical definition of the portrait helps us interpret the notion of the narrator as a painter: the pictures (and metaphorically the texts as well) show more about the model, than

what is visible for a beholder. Representation is always an interpretation, thus can the short stories become metaphorically a portrait of the revolution.

This portrait built up of novels, short stories and the pictures in the album is completed with the autobiographical writings, which reinterpret several times the roles of the writer in the revolution.

An essential question in the interpretation of autobiography is whether it can be taken as the realistic description of life events, whether the “autobiographical pact” (Lejeune’s term) guarantees the referentiality of the work. In the case of Jókai’s works, Paul de Man’s theory seems to be a productive base of the interpretation. Paul de Man states, that the created narrator of the autobiography and the physical person of the writer are not identical. Consequently the interpretation is not searching for the real life events in the autobiography and gives up the intention of finding out the truth about the real life of the author. The interpretation, which wants to separate truth and fiction in autobiography, finds itself in an endless circuit of ideas. The well-known Rózsa Sándor-story can prove it. Since Mikszáth Kálmán’s biographical novel about Jókai, the bibliographical works have considered the story a proof of the fact that the writer did not always write “the truth” about his life. Mikszáth considered the story of meeting the infamous lanceman fiction. But if we take a close look at the text relating this meeting, our conclusion will be different from Mikszáth’s one. The narrator mentions a document, which discredits the autobiography, but the story itself discredits the document. Thus interpretation becomes an endless movement from one text to the other, without revealing what happened in reality.

Instead of this detective-interpretation, the texts themselves offer other possibilities for the reader. The autobiographical texts form a textual web with the novels, short stories, and even with the pictures selected by the writer for the album. This web has an inner referential base: autobiography and historiography written by Jókai serve as the field of reference for the novels and short stories. This is why sometimes autobiography turns to 3rd person narrative of events in which the narrator was not involved: the duel on the battlefield, the student who spoke in verses, the soiree organized on the walls of the attacked fort.

The connection between the texts enriches these works with new, often surprising meanings. Through the varied reiteration of the stories, tonality changes, and the stories are always reinterpreted. Pathetic tonality and cult can turn to humour, elegy, irony or self-irony in the new context. The relativity of truth and values is revealed through the textual web. What is usually considered absolute value, like bravery, fidelity or wisdom, and what is considered

negative value, like treason can change their positive-negative signs. Interpretation is A permanent “movement” among texts, if we read from the perspective of the web.

The textual web can also be read as metafiction, because the different narratives of the same events face the reader with the question of writability (the possibilities of writing a narrative) and readability (the possible interpretations of different readers). The texts often refer to newspapers, pictures, gossip, personal memory, the context and the modalities of representation. This reveals, that not only narrative, but interpretation also depends on point of view, which is based on its context. The case of the writer’s newspaper (*Evenig Papers*) exemplifies it.

Jókai’s textual web shows a modern thinker: it shows that the canonical representation of great historical events is just one of the many narratives, which can be constructed about it. The case of the *Evenig Papers* shows, that the same is valid for reading and interpretation. Thus, accepting the role of the chronicler makes it possible for the writer to create not only the chronicle of the events, but also the chronicle of the chronicles.

Jókai’s historiography fits the textual web, on the one hand, because of the common theme, on the other hand it differs from the other texts because of the absence of the shifts of point of view. This text is determined by the cult of the monarchy. Thus the writer makes a selection of the historical events and leaves out everything that does not build the national identity or serve the political situation of the present. The non-canonical points of view and interpretations that occur in the novels, short stories and autobiographical writings, do not have a place in historiography.

The historical, political and biographical context of the works shows us that Jókai’s oeuvre offers a kaleidoscopic view of the political and historiographical debates of the time (debates about the *raison d’être* of the revolution, about the ways and possibilities of advancement, about administration and independence). This context also reveals, why the revolution became one of the most frequent themes of the writer who assumed different political roles during his life.

The events of the revolution were seen differently by the participants of the revolution: the members of the different political parties and groups often had debates. Beside this, the conflict with national minorities also deepened. In the second half of the 19th century each political party proclaimed his attitude towards the revolution and the past. The debates about revolution in Széchenyi’s, Kossuth’s and Deák Ferenc’s writings fit into a wider, European context: the debate about the revolutionary French, or the English, organical way of progress. Terror and Jacobinism are also interpreted differently in European historical works.

The historiographical and political works usually present the problem from one certain point of view. Through its pluriperspectivity, Jókai's oeuvre creates a polilogue of these regards. He is able to achieve it, because he had several different political roles and belonged to many different political parties: he was a radical democrat at the beginning of the revolution, a pacifist later, a political persecute after the revolution, then a popular writer and journalist, a parliamentarian belonging to the opposition, then to the governing party after 1875. He wrote ironical articles about the emperor and glorified him in later writings, he was an adept of the independence, then he proved his loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty. He was permanently criticized because of his political turnarounds, but he always appreciated his political roles as the process of searching the truth amidst the quick political changes. He claims that this process was led by his conscience. The difference between self appreciation and others' opinions, the inner conflicts between changing self-appreciations could lead to ironical and elegend keynotes in his late texts. This need of reinterpretation can be the reason why the revolution remained one of his most frequent themes.

Jókai had a good sense of market as well. Besides his enchanting style and language, his interesting plots, his popularity was also due to the fact, that he recognized the expansive claim to talk and read about the revolution. The volumes of short stories were also news from the point of view of the literary genre, which is another factor of his popularity.

The cycle of short stories became popular in the second half of the 19th century. Jókai's volumes appear before Mikszáth's ones, and they reveal the problem of the "macro stories" and "micro stories" of history through the genre, which is based on an oscillation between the long and short epical forms. Besides the novelty of this genre, another factor of popularity was the appearance of the fragments of the novels in the fiction column of different newspapers. Thus the actuality of the theme was clear. The conflicting points of view, the debates of the characters, the situations could be linked to the news in the other columns. The newspapers assured the novels a wide range of readers.

Another factor of popularity was the theme of the revolution. Retelling collectively traumatic events right after the subdual of the revolution, contributed to the process of deliberation from the trauma, through evoking what happened and retelling it with emotional accents. Jókai realizes that speaking about the revolution, contributing to the construction of a cult and finding the faults of the past are equally expensive demands.

When the theme of the revolution lost this psychological effect, the destiny of those who had taken part in the revolution, remained up-to-date, as the readers were exactly in the same situations as the characters of the novels.

Jókai's contemporary critics disapproved the lack of realism in his works, because this was the mark of modernity at that time. The interpretation of his works in the 21st century shows him as a modernist thinker, whose works can be read and interpreted with pleasure nowadays too.