

ON THE ETHNIC BORDER

THE IMAGE OF SLOVAKS IN KÁLMÁN MIKSZÁTH'S WRITING

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Kálmán Mikszáth was born in a village on the ethnic frontier between Hungarians and Slovaks. At the time of his birth the ethnic relations of Szklabonya [Sklabiná], the place of his birth, were both hazy and complex. According to László Gyöngyössi, who wrote a biography of Mikszáth in 1886 on the basis of some informal interviews (Gyöngyössi 1911: 5), Szklabonya was a Slovak village, “but the inhabitants of the neighboring village of Ebeck [Obeckov] were already Palóc,” the Hungarian ethnic group to which Mikszáth always insisted that he belonged (Gyöngyössi 1911: 14). Béla Várdai thought that these villages, which were inhabited primarily by Slovaks in 1910, had become Slovak in the meantime because earlier the ethnic border might have been north of the present one (Várdai 1910: 10–11). This image of the shrinking Palóc and expanding Slovak populations was also shared by Mikszáth, who wrote: “The strength of the Palóc is shrinking each day. We are like the cubes of sugar in the mouths of the Slovaks; a small part adheres to their tongues with each breath until the whole cube melts and disappears” (*A mi hőseink* [Our Heroes], *Mikszáth Összes* 2, 305). Be that as it may, Mikszáth was probably born in a bilingual village with a mixed population, and he might have learned the alphabet in a bilingual village school (Kiss 1997: 84–85). In his writing we can easily find evidence of his knowledge of the Slovak culture and language. Many of his writings depict the Slovak or ethnically mixed world of Upper Hungary. Although this world was, of course, familiar to Slovak readers, and this has been a reason for the popularity of his works among the Slovaks (Kiss 1997: 86–87), nevertheless Mikszáth wrote primarily for a Hungarian reading public. He sometimes explicitly stated that he was looking at the Slovaks from the viewpoint of the Hungarian community. In a striking sentence he noted, “They will never make a revolution against us” (*Utazás Palócországba* [A Journey to Palócland], *Mikszáth Összes* 64, 126). In this statement the word *they* means the Slovaks, and *us* means the Hungarians. So, although he looked at the Slovaks from the outside, his attitude was usually friendly and sympathetic.

The friendliness can be seen in his descriptions of the beauty of the Slovak people, especially of the girls. Let me quote two examples. “The Slovaks came to

the tables in a queue: long, slender lads with chestnut-brown hair, some old men with their hair combed straight back [...] brisk young women with broad smiles in green skirts tied in the back and mottled ribbons hanging from their belts" (*A lohinai fű* [The Grass of Lohina], *Mikszáth Összes* 3, 14); and "Curious Slovak women with their so called 'frog' hairstyle, their pretty headgear, flaunting two flirtatious squares of lace that covered the ears, and the younger girls with red ribbons plaited into their hair blonde like hemp" (*Szent Péter esernyője* [St. Peter's Umbrella], *Mikszáth Összes* 7, 112; translation based on Mikszáth 1966: 127). The physical appearance of Slovaks was usually presented as attractive, and their traditional clothes were depicted with pleasure. Criminals and vicious figures very rarely appear among Mikszáth's Slovaks. We meet with a few Slovak criminals in his early writing and two Slovak bandits in a short scene in his last fictional work *A fekete város* ([The Black Town], *Mikszáth Összes* 23, 38–39). In addition Mikszáth occasionally mentioned Jánosik "the generous Slovak bandit of Upper Hungary" (*Prakovszky a siket kovács* [Prakovszky the Deaf Smith] *Mikszáth Összes* 8, 158) who gave to the poor what he had taken from the rich. The short story *A kedélyes delikvenssek* [The Jovial Delinquents], serves as a particularly telling example. Béla Grünwald summarizes in a surviving letter the story of the five Slovak criminals he recounted to Mikszáth (*Letter 158*, *Mikszáth Összes* 25, 12). In Mikszáth's version of the story there were only four delinquents and only one of them was a Slovak. The others included a Jew, a Hungarian, and a German (*Mikszáth Összes* 37, 65–66).

"Meek" is the stereotype adjective of the Slovaks in his writing. Meekness and fantasy might in a mysterious way be connected with the region itself, with the great and beautiful mountains dominating the region. The beauty of the country helps to create a mysterious atmosphere. But this same country, with its stony and infertile land, often causes misery for the population. This land produces oats, potatoes and hay. At least a dozen brilliant descriptions can be found where Mikszáth depicts the sterility of the land, which caused poverty and frequent famines. Yet these discouraging facts were meekly accepted by the good Slovaks. And for this same reason the Slovaks, unable to make their living at home, had to go and find work somewhere else. They did the heavy work throughout the Hungarian kingdom. They did the harvesting and the threshing; and as day laborers they helped to build the large buildings in Budapest. The Slovaks were the glaziers, and they often wandered the roads to repair broken pottery. The difficulty of eking out a living from the harsh land created an almost permanent motif in Mikszáth's texts. If the story has a Slovakian background, the hints of an infertile land, poverty, and men far off working on the Great Hungarian Plain were never missing. If the location was Hungarian, Slovak day-labourers could easily appear nonetheless. As a result "in a Slovakian village you cannot find a glazier, not even for gold" (*A lohinai fű* [The Grass of Lohina], *Mikszáth Összes* 3, 7). And further-

more it can be said that "the world will end on the day when every Slovak is at home," in other words never (*A tót atyafiak* [Our Slovak Brethren], *Mikszáth Összes* 63, 117–118).

Being a journalist for all of his life and a member of the Hungarian Parliament after 1887, Mikszáth was very much interested in politics. Since the question of the national minorities remained one of the most important issues in Hungarian political life, Mikszáth sometimes had to publicly defend his ideas on this issue. He usually appeared to regard Hungarian supremacy within the Hungarian kingdom as self-evident, but we can distinguish two different aspects of his attitude toward the nationalities. On the level of general state affairs he found the Slovakian nationalist movement offensive because he regarded it on the one hand as simply an attempt to assume political supremacy, or on the other hand as identical with the pan-Slav movement supported by the expansionist Russian empire (*A titkok éje* [Night of Secrets], *Mikszáth Összes* 61, 27–29; *Hunyák Pál*, *Mikszáth Összes* 63, 97–101). To Mikszáth, the political integrity of the Hungarian kingdom seemed to be a value well worth retaining. Therefore the nationalist movement in its political aspects, or the political aspects of the nationalist movement, appeared to him as disintegrating forces. On the level of local affairs he believed in the possibility of the Hungarians and Slovaks living together in peace. Therefore he accepted the cultural aspects of the nationalist movement. He did not believe that the differences in culture and language caused the problems. Indeed, this would appear to be almost impossible, since he described Hungarian-Slovak coexistence as a bilingual world creating a uniquely heterogeneous culture, in which even ethnic identity could be questionable. Although a peaceful coexistence seemed to be possible, Mikszáth did not represent this world as always peaceful. Tensions could appear on the local level and these could disturb the peace. But such tensions in Mikszáth's opinion were often artificially created by professional troublemakers, who could be either the Slovaks or the Hungarians.

The relationship to each other of the two levels is not at all clear. On the one hand Mikszáth's conflicting views on the nationalities question may be regarded as a type of hypocrisy, since peace on the local level might be a precondition of Hungarian supremacy on a larger scale. On the other hand the integrity of the Hungarian kingdom, which he could only imagine as sustained by Hungarian supremacy and based on a community of common history and interests, was a precondition of the possibly peaceful local coexistence. We cannot decide which aspect was more important for him. As a Hungarian political journalist and as a politician, Mikszáth was interested in Hungarian supremacy; but as a man born and educated in Upper Hungary in the world of ethnic coexistence he regarded local peace as an important value. The very existence of these levels, however, might be one of the reasons why his attitude toward the Slovaks seemed to be much more sympathetic in his fiction than in his political journalism. In the latter

he discussed topical state affairs, and even in this area his attitude was not hostile. In fiction he just represented the world of coexistence, where his friendly attitude was bound to prevail.

Another reason for this slight difference might be the usually cheerful tone of his fiction, which sometimes tends excessively to harmonize tensions. A telling example was the problem of emigration from Upper Hungary to America. Slovak politicians usually called attention to the problem and coupled it to the poverty that served as its primary cause (e.g., *Mikszáth Összes* 65, 173). A number of emigrants came back from America, and the Hungarian government and the media made a considerable fuss over their return. A politician speaking of the emigration of Slovaks could argue that “they usually come back all the same.” In his report from the Parliament Mikszáth mocked this statement (*Mikszáth Összes* 79, 129), and in a political argument he clearly sought to argue that there was not anything joyful about the return of the emigrants. “It seems to be a naive joy that is created by the re-migration of the American-Hungarians. Now everything is all right. As if death was terminated by exhaustion of wood for coffins. If somebody went to America because he could not make his living here, can he make his living here just because he could not in America?” (*Az új Eldorádó* [The New Eldorado, *Mikszáth Művei* 13, 656). Discussing the same problem in a discursive manner, Mikszáth gave a sharp and pessimistic formulation. When referring to the same phenomenon in fiction, he always used a joyful tone. In a novel, when threshing is being done, as usual, by hired Slovaks, he says, “The Slovaks were reliable. At least nothing suspicious had happened apart from the fact (which made Vince very angry) that they were often talking to each other in English” (*A fekete kakas* [The Black Rooster], *Mikszáth Összes* 12, 15). In a short story we find a passage on the mixed language of Sáros county in Upper Hungary: “Szervusz, te skribler, vitaj pán brat!’ Mert a Sáros megyei nyelv ilyen zagyva. Régente is azt mondták ‘Hajtsd ki a *kravicskát* arra a *lúkára*’ (hajtsd ki a tehénkét arra a rétre), de újabban angol szavak is járultak hozzá, mióta egész Amerikáig járnak és visszajönnek.” [The Slovak words in the Hungarian sentences are in Italics.] “Szervusz, you scribbler, vitaj pan brat’ [good health, my friend] for [Sáros] dialect is very mixed. In times past they used to say ‘Drive the *kravička* to that *luka*’ (Drive that calf out to that meadow) and recently they have even acquired a number of English words from those who have been as far afield as America and have returned” (*A gavallérok* [Gentry Wedding], Mikszáth 1982: 243–244). Emigration and re-migration appear as accessory parts of a jovial country life. Moreover, Mikszáth wrote a short story in which he spoke of a narrator-agent lost in the night. He came to a village, where everybody spoke English. This turned out to be a village of Slovaks who had come back from America; and the village was well organized, rich and happy. These Slovaks were said to have made some money in America, then came back because of their homesickness and bought land. A potato simply tasted much

better in one's homeland (*P. Jork, Mikszáth Művei* 13, 636–651). This image of wealthy people returning from America was just the opposite of that depicted in the above quoted political argumentation.

Another topic that Mikszáth mentioned exclusively in his journalism concerned alcoholism among the Slovaks. The way Slovak men lived must have been mentally exhausting. For months they worked as day-labourers far away from their family and community in an alien environment. Many of them, it seems, tried to ease this burden by drinking spirits. We cannot find a word about this in Mikszáth's novels and short stories. In his journalistic pieces, however, the theme figures as a commonplace. Mikszáth, for instance, describes a day in Budapest: during the early morning one cannot hear people speaking anything but Slovak because the day-labourers get up first to drink some spirits before going to work (*A fővárosból* [From the Capital] *Mikszáth Összes* 53, 15). The loneliness of Slovaks being far away from their homes was suggested by the scene of the Slovaks of Liptószentmiklós [Liptovský Mikuláš] going home from Budapest and stopping by the grave of one of their countryman, who was buried in *Palóc* territory, in order to commemorate him and to tell him what had happened at home. "Now you can see. Why did you come here to a foreign land of pagans? You are buried out by the side of the road. You weren't let in the graveyard. At home you could live in peace until you died. Matyej Csepcsan ploughed off half an acre of your land last year... the Matyej Csepcsan you know... Your wife beats her older child, the one she had with you..." (*Utazás Palócországba, Mikszáth Összes* 64, 128). Death made their countryman's absence and loneliness final. But the way the community recorded and kept track of even a member who had been buried somewhere else suggested that they regard this absence as an unbearable sojourn among aliens.

The image of Slovaks, however, appears most clearly in texts representing the region where Slovaks and Hungarians live together. The world of peaceful coexistence is characterized by a mixed language, or at least an easy transition from one language to the other and by obscurities of ethnic identity. Since the lower classes tended to be monolingual – although exceptions were not at all rare – the upper and middle classes set themselves socially apart by speaking a language different from that of the common folks. In *Különös házasság* the gentry in the Slovak villages spoke Hungarian, in the Hungarian villages Slovak in order to separate themselves from the ordinary people (*A Strange Marriage* 158). The language one speaks, however, does not accurately define an individual's ethnic identity. A peasant, who has returned from America, says of his son: "Toby cannot speak but English. However, now he is about to begin speaking Slovak because I ordered him to do so. 'Remember Toby, my son, we are Hungarian people, aren't we? So you should at least learn to speak Slovak'" (*P. Jork, Mikszáth Művei* 13, 649–650). In another work, when an old gentleman is asked, whether the fiancé of his daughter, a Czech businessman, belongs to the gentry, his answer

reads: "Oh, yes. Yes, he is Dubek of Zöptau. He would be just us honest Hungarians, if he spoke Slovak." (*Prakovszky, Mikszáth Összes* 8, 170). We may see in such declarations signs of the idea that Hungary should be one political community and being a Hungarian should mean nothing more than being a member of this community, no matter which ethnic group one belongs to. There are, however, characters whose ethnic identity is really questionable. Madame Wrana was usually called "Madame Wraneau" just to show off, truly, however, "she was no more than *pani Wrana*, a poor relation of German-Slovak origin" (*A gavallérok*, Mikszáth 1982: 254, Italics in the original). The spelling of the name and the language of the apostrophe showed the ethnic identity. In this case, however, there was a true identity as opposed to a false one. This situation is similar to that of Szaniszló Pruzsinszky, an exiled Polish gentleman, who turns out to be a Hungarian actor called László Tarcsay and it is said of Donna Estella that "there was something curiously Japanese about those eyes, although the manager had as much difficulty in presenting her as coming from Japan as from Grenada, since Donna Estella apart from a little broken German and Slovak, could only speak Hungarian, and even that with a strong Gömör accent" (*Beszterce ostroma* [The Siege of Beszterce], Mikszáth 1982: 125 and 15). The lawyer Peter Mali changed his ethnicity according to his political circumstances. "It was a good name for a lawyer. When he was in a Hungarian environment, he put the accent on the "a," and his name sounded Hungarian, like Mály. When there were bad times, however (and usually there were), he put the accent on the "i," and he became Malí (small in Slovakian)" (*A demokraták* [Democrats], Mikszáth Összes 10, 14). To change the spelling of the name was enough to change ethnic identity; but it is telling from the viewpoint of the narrator's preferences that the "Hungarian environment" was set in opposition to "bad times." Ethnic identity seems to be a matter of decision. In the case of Gáspár Trnowszky, he suddenly stopped being a Slovak nationalist and became a Hungarian. He also changed his name to Tarnóczy, which sounds like a Hungarian name (*Beszterce*, Mikszáth 1982: 77).

Even the language of a text can be questioned in Mikszáth's world. A French song, which a Slovak bourgeois girl sings, turns out to be a Slovakian folk song with French-like pronunciation (*Francia kultúra a tótságán* [French Culture Among Slovaks], Mikszáth Összes 37, 82–83). In this story the girl is cheating. She wants to pretend to master the French language. Such games of false identities and untrue appearances were a characteristic of Mikszáth's writing (cf. Eisemann 1998: 100–116). Accordingly, the French air of the song seems to be artificially and intentionally created. But in another short story the narrator declares of the same "tender, melancholic Slovakian song" that it "misleadingly sounds as if it were in French" (*A holt kortes* [The Dead Canvasser], Mikszáth Összes 41, 62).

The speeches of the characters are presented in Hungarian, but it does not necessarily mean that they are actually speaking Hungarian. What we are reading

can be a translation given by the narrator. Sometimes special signs mark the original language of a declaration. Mixed language usually signals literal quotation. As an example, I have already quoted a Hungarian sentence that contained Slovak words. I called it a Hungarian sentence, since Slovak words were integrated into an intact Hungarian grammatical structure. The other possibility, when exclusively Hungarian words create a Slovak grammatical structure, an act which the Hungarian reader will regard as ungrammatical, also signals literal quotation. It is usual when Slovaks – especially uneducated Slovaks – try to speak Hungarian. In the middle of a conversation a person, who has been using grammatically incorrect sentences all along, produces a virtually understandable utterance: “csináltam olyan instrumentumot, hogy a ház alja fölmássza a tetejére, vagy a teteje lemássza az aljára, ahogy akaródnak.” Due to its chaotic grammar the statement can hardly be translated. István Farkas renders as “I have make instrument which make of the house the bottom climb up to top or the top climb down the bottom – which way you will.” To which his interlocutor replies: “Better speak Slovak, Jóska, I’ll understand what you are saying much better.” From this point on Joseph’s sentences followed in correct Hungarian style, which signaled that Joseph was now speaking Slovakian (Mikszáth 1964: 164). In this case we see the point of the change, and in Joseph’s first Slovakian sentence a Slovakian apostrophe (*mladí pan*) also functions as a signal of the language. Theoretically, however, we cannot differentiate between a sentence spoken in Hungarian by a person of reliable knowledge of the language and a sentence “originally” spoken in Slovak and “translated” by the narrator. We can never know. In the second part of Mikszáth’s most famous novel *Szent Péter esernyője* the location was Upper Hungary, but nothing suggested that the protagonists were speaking Slovak to each other. When in a later scene they appeared in Szeged, they created a sensation by speaking Slovak (Mikszáth 1966: 62). Hence it follows that they always spoke Slovak to each other, although we are only made aware of this fact when the characters appear in a purely Hungarian environment.

From these cases of easy transition and from such confusions of languages and ethnicities it does not follow that we cannot differentiate between the two cultures or that the transition is always unproblematic. Texts – as the previous passage might also have suggested – can be translated without any problem. A Hungarian speech that is translated into Slovakian and then re-translated will literally be identical with its original (*A Noszty fiú esete Tóth Marival* [The Noszty Boy’s Affair with Mary Tóth], *Mikszáth Összes* 20, 98–99, 20, 138–139. For the ethnic confusion in this case see: Szilasi 1998: 137–138). A Slovak tailor could understand Garibaldi’s letter, although it was translated from Italian into Hungarian, then from Hungarian into German, and finally from German into Slovak (*Garibaldi butéliái* [Garibaldi’s bottles], *Mikszáth Összes* 28, 28). Slovak songs, however, could not be translated into Hungarian without losing, or at least changing, their

artistic value. “Melancholic” was the stereotypical adjective of the Slovak songs in Mikszáth’s works. In one place, however, he wrote as follows: “a prankish Slovak song was intoned mildly and melancholically to fool foreign ears into thinking it sad” (*A szökevények* [Runaway Lovers], *Mikszáth Összes* 12, 72). Familiarity not only with the language but also with the art of Slovak folk songs is a precondition for their appropriate comprehension. Songs, nevertheless, were usually quoted by Mikszáth in Hungarian, sometimes in prose translation, or sometimes in metrical form. A narratorial declaration was necessary to the effect that it was actually sung in Slovakian. For example: “an old workman was quietly singing a Slovak song to himself.” Then later we read the text in Hungarian prose. In this case, however, the character hearing the nice song tries to translate it into Hungarian: “struggling painfully with rhymes and caesuras” (*A sipsirica* [The Sipsirica], Mikszáth 1982: 371). According to the narrator, the text we have already read is not that Hungarian translation which still needed to be made by the character. But it is not the Slovak text either, since it is in Hungarian. It cannot be more than a sign of the presence of the Slovak song. However, the result of the character’s efforts in translating will never be quoted. The inaccessibility of the artistic value of a Slovak song, implied in this example, becomes explicit in another work. There the song is quoted in a rhythmical translation, but then the narrator remarks: “All this sounds naturally beautiful and round in Slovak, but in Hungarian it looks like nonsense” (*Nosztly*, *Mikszáth Összes* 20, 84). In another case, the strangeness of the artistic value is explicitly stated. But only a subsequent hint suggests that the song has been in Slovak, although the setting is a Slovak town, Selmecebánya [Banská Štiavnica]. Here a miner is singing “woefully, sadly. His heart has been almost torn into two pieces, he felt so much passion.” Here I will quote the flat Hungarian text and will give a prose translation.

Mikor reggel a bányába mentem,
 A pipámat otthon felejtettem.
 S most hazatérve, mi mosolyog rám...
 Jó estét, jó estét, édes pipám!

“When I went to the mine in the morning, I left my pipe at home. And now, coming home, what is smiling at me? Good evening, good evening, my sweet pipe!”. The old man walked forth, and the poignant refrain was following him fainter and fainter, fading away: ‘Good evening, little pipe, good evening, good evening.’ Romeo could not greet Juliet more mildly than the young miner his useless ‘zapekačka’. Nonetheless, it was not ridiculous; since underground there was a different world, and different songs grew underground” (*Az eladó birtok* [An Estate for Sale], *Mikszáth Összes* 5, 119–120). The quotation marks of the Slovak word ‘zapekačka’, which means a sort of pipe that one is to put among embers to light the tobacco (Peciar 1959–1968: 5, 495), signal that the word is

quoted from the song. Therefore, the song must have been sung in Slovak. The otherness of the artistic value follows not only from the singer's special work and lot, but also from the different cultural background.

How could ethnic tensions be created in such a world? True, the task required some work, but it was possible. Mikszáth recognized a dual political will disturbing local peace. On the one hand he discovered the influence of the Russian empire on Slovak politicians through the penetration of pan-Slav ideology. On the other hand Mikszáth observed the policy of "Hungarianization" by the Hungarian government, which constituted an attempt at assimilating the nationalities into the Hungarian nation. In a political essay Mikszáth gave a typology of the *főispáns*, who were the chief administrative magistrates in the counties. The worst type was the agile man, who was often sent to counties inhabited by national minorities. He will go there accompanied by a journalist whose task will be to edit a newspaper propagandizing for the idea of a Hungarian national state. Both the *főispán* and the newspaper will regularly attack the national minorities. The *főispán* will launch his assaults in his speeches during the meetings of the county council, while the newspaper will do so in various furious articles. Copies of the newspaper will be sent to the ministry every week, and the appropriate passages will be marked with a blue pencil "so that the minister should see how hard the *főispán* and the journalist were working. And they were working and working and working until they had turned a previously peaceful situation upside down in barely two years of activity" (*A főispánok* [Főispáns], *Mikszáth Művei* 15, 344–345). Here the troublemakers were deliberately sent, or at least encouraged, by the Hungarian government artificially to create tensions.

Mikszáth had already hinted at such activity of journalists in an early sketch. In this text the chief editor of a provincial newspaper has readied an entire new issue but he cannot find any topic for a headline. Then he hears the Slovak glazier shouting on the street, and he immediately starts writing a lead story against "the fateful intentions of the nationalities" (*Mint készülnek a 'Nógrádi Lapok'?* [How are the 'Nógrád Papers' Written?], *Mikszáth Összes* 51, 38–39). If you have nothing else to write about, you can always attack the national minorities. A chapter of a later novel, *A Noszty fiú esete Tóth Marival*, entitled "A Sample from the Field of Local Politics Activity" also depicted the breakdown of local peace, or the development of ethnic hostility managed by a *Főispán* named Kopreczky. The setting of the chapter is a fictitious county of mixed population, where Slovaks, Germans and Romanians together form a slight majority in comparison to the largest ethnic group, Hungarians. Three nationalities are regarded as better than one. "God save us from only one nationality. The more we have the better it is. Where there are three of them, you can already play cards with them. One of them is always the 'trump card' against the other ones, or the two are trumps against the one. It depends." These tactics were said to guarantee the predominance of Hun-

garian will (*Mikszáth Összes* 21, 45). In this special case, however, it was the *főispán*'s personal will that confronted everybody. Two subjects were up for discussion in the meeting of the county council. First, Kopereczky supported the Hungarianization of the schools, against the universal protests of the nationalities. Second, he wants his brother-in-law, Ferenc Noszty, to be elected a district administrator. This the Hungarians declined. To be sure, the Hungarians of the county did not really support the Hungarianization of schools. In fact they remained thoroughly disinterested in the whole affair. "It did not matter, according to the Hungarians, what the peasant children learned in the school. On the other hand they did care who the boss in Voglány [the fictitious district] was" (*Mikszáth Összes* 21, 41). Kopereczky promoted the Hungarianization of the schools in an exceedingly insulting way when he declared after many hours of debate that he had not heard any counter-arguments. The counter-arguments had been stated in German and Slovak, and the *főispán* declared he did not understand these languages. It was a lie, of course. In fact he usually preferred speaking Slovak to Hungarian, but acting as a *főispán*, he declared that he understood Hungarian exclusively. The Hungarians' aggressive behavior sustained Kopereczky's position and validated the damaging decision. Then he similarly declared that Noszty had been elected, although almost everybody had been shouting the other candidate's name.

We can see that ethnic hostility was just one of the means by which Kopereczky manipulated the national groups for his own purposes. He did not act in the interest of the Hungarians; since obviously he gave them something that they do not want, and he did not give them what they did want. If he was "playing cards" with the nationalities, the Hungarians also constituted a card in his hand. What remained of this game was ethnic hostility and the expanded power of a troublemaker.

Mikszáth sometimes experimented with a form of fiction that contained two different stories one after the other (cf. Hajdu 2000). *Beszterce ostroma* is one of these experiments. The protagonist of the first chapter was István Pongrácz, a Hungarian gentleman, a sort of Don Quixote, who, based on his fortune and privileges, could live the chivalrous life of the Middle Ages at the end of the nineteenth century. The first chapter of the novel described his life and then in the second chapter that of the town nearest to his castle. Then the work continued and the narrative went on to unite both stories, just to see what the result of the interaction would be. The worlds were very different and this difference contains an ethnic element, although ethnicity is only one of the several divergent features. Different ethnic groups could live peacefully together in Nedec, Pongrácz's castle. Every week Pongrácz arranged for war games involving the Slovak peasants living around his castle, and every day he performed military exercises with his servants and new recruits. Everybody enjoyed this cheerful life, "because war is wonderful when there's no risk of being killed" (Mikszáth 1982: 35). The language of com-

mand was always Slovak, and the ethnic differences did not seem to cause any problems. There was no allusion to ethnic tensions in this harmonious and timeless world. On the other hand, in Zsolna [Žilina], the neighboring town, Slovaks and Hungarians face each other with hatred and anger. (For a careful analysis of the ethnic relations in the Zsolna scenes see Kiss 1997: 87–91). Nonetheless, the middle classes were bilingual in Zsolna, and therefore ethnic identity, as I have already mentioned, seemed to be an open question. However, when Trnowszky changed his ethnicity, his step led to such furious anger by the Slovaks that the decision become irreversible. This hatred was, however, absurd, since the ethnic relations of Zsolna were rather confused. Péter Trnowszky, the Slovak nationalist, Gáspár Tarnóczy, who moved from being a Slovak nationalist to becoming a Hungarian patriot, and Klivényi, the most enthusiastic Hungarian patriot in the town are all relatives. Klivényi's patriotism was, however, worth discussing in some detail. He was an old alcoholic, who when he was drunk – in short whenever he had money for a drink – sang a mock song against the Slovaks, which was quoted in Slovak in the text. This “always greatly annoyed the Slovak gentlemen of Zsolna, but that was just what Klivényi wanted. He was a fervent [Hungarian] nationalist and he thrived on his pretensions, though he should really have been sent packing a hundred times over for his numerous misdemeanours and petty frauds in the office. But one could scarcely sack such a patriot without being made to pay for it in some way. Klivényi's cause was always the country's too” (Mikszáth 1982: 77). In Klivényi we can observe the professional troublemaker who made his living from ethnic hostility; and his case also suggested that ethnic hostility was actually created by such people.

Behind the activity of both Kopereczky and Klivényi we can see the hand of the Hungarian central government. Without this support they could not succeed, but they evidently used this support for their own selfish purposes. In *Beszterce ostroma* it might be suggested that this governmental will also had its counterpart on the Slovakian side in the politics of the Russian Empire. That was why Miloszlay Trnowszky, later Emil Tarnóczy, was a student at St. Petersburg university. The Slovak counterparts of troublemakers like Klivényi were not the pan-slavist citizens of Zsolna. Instead the population, which had been forced into hostility – “misled” in Mikszáth's journalism – was a victim of this double political manipulation that upset the local peace and employed the troublemakers who abused the situation.

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