Close to one hundred and seventy years ago, Hartleben in Pest published the copiously illustrated Malerische Reise auf dem Waagflusse in Ungarn (A Picturesque Journey on the River Vág in Hungary). The author was Baron Alajos Mednyánszky, a Hungarian magnate with properties in what is now Slovakia, a region that was generally known in Hungarian as the Felvidék, the Up-Country or Upper Hungary, as opposed to the Alföld, the Lowlands or Great Hungarian Plain.

A Picturesque Journey leads down the River Vág, all the way from its mountainous source down to the plains, where it joins the Danube. The 375 km reach is covered by raft, passing by towns and villages, and medieval castle ruins on rocks and hilltops. On occasion there is a pause, a closer visit, sometimes we have to rest content with a passing glimpse. The aristocratic guide is reliable, he is an official of the state administration who has done his homework. He provides demographic and economic information and draws our attention to the beauties of nature. Castles and ruins, a key component of the picturesque that forms part of the title, however, are dealt with exhaustively and in detail. Mednyánszky, who mostly published in German, was one of the early Hungarian Romantics. Another book of his, Erzählungen, Sagen und Legenden aus Ungarns Vorzeit (Tales, Lays and Legends from Hungary’s Distant Past, 1829) is evidence of his keen interest in the romantic Middle Ages and in folk tales.

Mednyánszky’s book and collection of lays pointed attention northwards in Hungary despite his concentration on one characteristic region only. Majestically savage mountains, infinite forests, castles and ruins appeared as metaphors of the passing parade. Seclusion and solitude, secret hiding places, a recurring location in the works of Hungarian romanciers,
searching for their own voice in the footsteps of the French Romantics and Sir Walter Scott.

Poets were perhaps even more attracted to this region, for in the retelling of lays and legends in verse the Up-Country, the land of medieval magnates, had a distinguished place. The young Sándor Petőfi, barely sixteen years old, compiled a list of sixty castle ruins in Hungary; two thirds of them were up north. As he repeatedly pointed out, his heart was in the lowlands and he admired only from the distance the savage, romantic Up-Country. Later he spent many weeks travelling in its eastern regions, publishing his travel notes in five instalments. Hungarians, at the time, were absorbed in a Great Plains idolaty; these travel notes created a sensation, further strengthened by a poetic competition in which Petőfi engaged with two young fellow poets, the subject being an idyllic Carpathian landscape.

There was more to it than poetry: a number of prominent Hungarian politicians stemmed from Upper Hungary, especially its eastern and north-eastern regions. Those who gathered for meetings of the Hungarian Diet in Pozsony (Pressburg, later to be rechristened Bratislava) included Lajos Kossuth, the leader of the opposition, as well as the short-lived leading conservative, Count Aurél Dessewffy, who also came from eastern Upper Hungary. A surprisingly large number of the young opposition intellectuals gathering in Pest in the 1840s were of burgher origin from the towns up in the north, or had been educated in the famous schools there. Theirs were the key positions in the nascent press. One of the most prominent of them was Mór Jókai, whose cradle had stood in the south-western marches of the region; he was a journalist and editor, who published his first novel in 1846, at the age of twenty-one, and became one of the heroes of the 1848 Revolution.

Jókai, in a huge œuvre which defined the nature of Hungarian fiction, was the first to make systematic use of Mednyánszky’s Picturesque Journey—not only of its data and set pieces but of journey by water as a narrative topos. Such are frequent in Jókai’s works, achieving a key role in one of his major fictions, Az arany ember (Timár’s Two Worlds).

Jókai was born in Komárom (Komarno), the destination of Picturesque Journey, where the Vág joins the Danube, and he spent the years of his childhood there. The romantic isles, used as recreation areas by a town built on both banks of the Danube, and the fortress of Komárom, one of the most powerful in the whole Habsburg Empire and which played so important a role in the dying days of the Hungarian Revolution (1848–49), all figured in a dozen Jókai works. Childhood impressions, and figures that the writer’s memory faithfully preserved, the merchants of Komárom, river boatmen, artisans, soldiers, noblemen, and burghers, Hungarians and non-Hungarians were Jókai’s companions in a working life that spanned almost six decades.
Mór Jókai 1825–1904

Novelist, editor and journalist, an important figure in the days of the 1848 Revolution, elected to succeeding Parliaments from 1861 on, appointed to the Upper House in 1896.

His first novel was published in 1846, his last in the year of his death. For nearly sixty years he enjoyed recognition, success and popularity. His narrative skills created a modern reading public in Hungary and his was the greatest influence on the writing of fiction in Hungarian. His works were translated into numerous languages; he was as popular in England as in Poland and most popular in Germany. His works were enjoyed by royalty and students alike.

His critics primarily objected to the involved plots, akin to those of the French Romantics. It was held against him that he served the tastes of his readers but they were compelled to admire a lively style which made him stand out amongst his contemporaries. It was not really critics but fellow writers like Kálmán Mikszáth, Endre Ady and Gyula Krúdy, who drew attention to the fact that Jókai placed the key problems of a Hungary in transition and undergoing modernization at the centre of his Romantic, historical fiction. As a rule he presented the struggle of the old and the new as a conflict between individuals and the community.

Jókai was wholly a child of his times, of the 19th century, a noble turned burgher, a town-dwelling intellectual who cultivated his own garden, a patriot and supporter of the community, a spokesman for the inviolability of privacy. True to Calvinism, the faith of his fathers, he proclaimed tolerance. He was a competent painter and sculptor, a recognized pomologist and oenologist, an amateur astronomer and enthusiast of technical progress. Like so many of his fellow writers, he too was a provincial boy who made good in the capital, but he is perhaps the only one of his fellows who, secure in his international success, was able to survey his own provincial and Hungarian origins without prejudice. The edition of his complete works runs to a hundred volumes.

Main works: An Hungarian Nabob, 1853; The New Landlord, 1862; The Baron’s Sons, 1869; Black Diamonds, 1870; Timár’s Two Worlds, 1872.
The city of Pozsony also frequently appears in Jókai's work. It is an inevitable location for a writer who, in the years of Habsburg despotism (1849–1867) that followed the Revolution, wants to evoke in his readers the encouraging memories of the recent past. It was Pozsony, the city of the reform diets, where the representatives of the Hungarian nobility had legislated to modernize the country and to wipe out (in 1848) the privileges of the nobility, and with them the nobility itself. It was in that spirit that Jókai abandoned the noble suffix of-y from his name and replaced it with the -i of non-nobles.

The other face of Pozsony, Pressburg, the town of German burghers, also figures in his works. He spent two years there, in his boyhood, learning German in a German speaking family. He was thoroughly familiar with burgher homes, and the smell of bakers' and pastrycooks'. In a surprisingly personal novel, *Mire megvénülünk*, *(When We Grow Old, 1865)* he devoted several chapters to the years of the 1830s he spent in the city. These images, full of life, contrast with the description elsewhere of a fin-de-siècle palace in Pozsony in which an aristocratic lady, sick of life and herself, shuts herself by way of penance. Nothing natural finds a place in this palace, the flowers in the conservatory are artificial, and the butterflies and dragonflies that flutter above them are mechanical. Apparently, Jókai looked only on the Pozsony of the ancient diets as alive; he seems to have intended the dead palace as a symbol of a city that had survived its own glory.

In addition to the two cities of autobiographical importance, a kaleidoscope of Upper Hungary locations is present in Jókai's oeuvre, a picturesque multiplicity of towns, villages, and romantic landscapes. A number of his historical novels on the Rákóczi rebellion in the early 18th century are set here, as is *Szomorú napok* *(Days of Sadness, 1848–1856)* which deals with the devastating events of the 1831 cholera outbreak. This novel also wrestles with the spectre of pan-Slavism, and is perhaps the first work of Hungarian literature which attacks the social aspects of the national question. Searching for the causes of minority resentment, it points to Hungarian national pride as one.

Any sort of prejudice or intolerance shown to the other ethnic groups which inhabited Hungary was alien to Jókai, a writer who had no rival in the country as regards readership or popularity. He never incited national hatred but attuned his readers to tolerance. His protagonists were usually neither Slovaks nor of other ethnic minorities. Hungarian problems were at the centre of his attention. Yet, although he wrote relatively little about national minority movements, he wrote still much more than other Hungarian novelists of his time.

In a number of his works Jókai stressed that the majority of Slovaks in Hungary felt as Hungarians in 1848–1849 and continued to do so. He described them as patriotic, talented and ambitious, as a people "too poor and fertile to make a living on the land God granted them, they were therefore forced to emigrate into the wide world. But they do not go begging like dervishes; nor are they mercenaries like the Swiss, but they work and trade... They cannot speak
Hungarian, but they have a love of country that is very keen, and they know how to shed their blood for it. They can do more, too: they know how to bear things for it, and to work for it.”

Jókai effectively portrayed the major secular problem of the region, “the pauperism of the Carpathians.” “The misery of Upper Hungary” was frequently mentioned in the press, even in the years preceding the Revolution, and news items to this effect noticeably multiplied in the 1850s, a period of growing economic and social anxieties in the region. In A régi jó táblabírák (The Good Old County Officials), written in 1856, Jókai brought to life the great famine there of ten years earlier, and described impossible property relations and the urgent duties that had to be tackled by the local administration. He was the first to show Upper Hungary as one of the characteristic locations of a feudal society about to perish.

For the first time in Hungarian literature a medieval castle, this much favoured symbol in romantic writing of ancient glory, undergoes an ignominious degradation. It is stripped of all magnificence and left with the role of a stage setting. In this novel, the fearful edifice of medieval robber barons is first transformed into a warehouse by an immoral developer, who later, acquiring nouveau riche tastes, places the monuments of other men’s past in the service of his own future.

A petty, tasteless life without dignity, led between walls that speak of ancient grandeur and power: the many variations of this subject are key elements in a number of Jókai novels, with the castles and their ruins becoming symbols of changed social roles and status, only to reappear highlighted in the novels of Kálmán Mikszáth, his younger contemporary.

The depiction of situations of isolation in time and place, like a fly caught in amber, is a frequently applied device in Jókai’s oeuvre. The Up-Country is truly a treasury of castles on hilltops, villages locked in by ravines in the depths of woods, clans, estates, and cultures locked in. The northern Hungarian village in Jókai’s most read novel A köszivű ember fiái (The Baron’s Sons, 1869), that has been called the epic of the 1848-1849 Revolution, symbolises the enclave character of Hungarian provincial life as such. The village is outside time and society, it does not even figure on any map. Its position is succinctly summed up by the most respected local landlord: “We are nowhere.” The writer himself uses an anecdote to illuminate the peculiar mind-set that governs this fly in amber aspect: at the end of 1849, once fighting had died down, when asked whether the enemy had passed through the village, the locals answered: “not here, but all three passed through the neighbourhood, the Germans, and the Muscovites, and the Hungarians.” Jókai splendidly described this village without an identity and in the complicated story of many strands he uses a comic figure from time to time, a half (or entirely) Slovak Hungarian nobleman, as a pledge so to speak of the problem that would determine the whole oeuvre of Kálmán Mikszáth, the most popular writer of the Hungarian fin de siècle. That is the problem of identity confusion or, more precisely, of identity pragmatism.
Jókai, the novelist of the romantic landscape, frequently welds nature and the state of the soul. A number of unforgettable examples are taken from the Carpathians. Thus, two Carpathian heights occur in *The Baron’s Sons*. From one, patriots returning from abroad to fight for their country glimpse Hungary, from the other the traitors survey its occupation.

The Up-Country is the setting of one of the most extraordinary descriptions of nature in Jókai’s oeuvre. In *Fekete gyémántok* (Black Diamonds, 1870) Jókai, in addition to a castle that has lost its ancient dignity, and a miners’ village that has risen from poverty thanks to hard work, describes an underground landscape of fascinating beauty: the secretive world of a coalmine, replete with danger, which finally comes under the domination of man while preserving the memory of life on earth before humans.

The Up-Country is only one region, and not even the most important, in the huge world of Jókai’s fictions. Gyula Krúdy, on the threshold of his own successes, writes of Jókai in his obituary of Kálmán Mikszáth: “When we buried Jókai, it was Mikszáth who wrote somewhere that Jókai was moving to another world like a king, an entourage large enough to fill a camp following him. The characters about which he wrote, whom he created, whom he saw from his desk. It was a colourful camp indeed: kings and bashi-bazouks, princesses and slave-girls. Not only Hungarian history but the history of just about every nation served as an attendant in the otherworldly procession envisaged by Mikszáth.

“...Jókai may have selected his otherworldly surroundings from a great many nations, whereas what Mikszáth did was to take a piece of Hungary with him into immortality. A county from somewhere in the Ipoly valley that stretches up to the Carpathians, laterally reaching Sáros and Beszterce. Wherever the writer may have walked. The mark of just about every one of his steps is found in his books. He takes the whole Up-Country with him, for his sojourn in another world.”

Kálmán Mikszáth, the writer who can be considered the writer of the Up-Country, was born in a small village in northern Hungary and educated in nearby towns. He started his working life as a clerk in one of the northern county seats, where he met his wife, his employer’s daughter. Ties of kinship and the experiences of his childhood and youth created bonds that survived his move to the capital at the age of twenty-six. With some brief interruptions, he lived in Budapest up to his death. That is where he became a successful writer—the greatest and most popular next to Jókai—a member of the Academy and of Parliament—but, unlike Jókai, he remained a provincial in the depths of his heart. A few years before his death, using his ever increasing royalties, he bought a property in his home area, and stayed there as often as he could.

Stories remembered from his childhood created his breakthrough as a writer, nineteen stories collected in two volumes, *A tót atyafiak* (The Slovak Relations) and *A jó palócok* (The Good People of Palocz). The village and peasants, country-
Kálmán Mikszáth 1847–1910

Novelist, editor and journalist. A liberal member of the Lower House of Parliament from 1887 to his death. At first he met with a failure as a writer but was nationally celebrated at the end of his life. A parliamentary resolution declared that an estate be purchased for him and the name of the village of his birth was officially changed from Szklabonya to Mikszáthfalva, though, being situated in Slovakia, it has since officially reverted to Sklabiná.

His early successes, in 1881–1882, were due to his descriptions of folkways, but he became a public favourite as a political sketch-writer and, principally, as a novelist. At the fin de siècle he was second only to Jókai in popularity. The image of independent men and women, of many differing origins, coalescing into a great Hungarian middle class, Jókai's dream, was also present in Mikszáth's work, but his narrative work was really centred on the twisted attitudes of a Hungarian nobility that had lost its legal privileges. Mikszáth knows his characters and shows great skill in describing them. His gentry heroes are both great eccentrics, obsessed with ancient norms of behaviour, and unprincipled time-servers, adepts of survival. As a narrator he was judgemental, but he made it quite clear to his public that he in no way thought of himself as above society or the criticized lifestyles or mind-sets, but that writer, characters and public all shared human frailty. Identification with the people he wrote about determined his narrative methods, he tuned his idiom to the speech habits of his readers—who were mostly of noble parentage—and employed their favoured form, the anecdote. This commitment was the main source of his narrative powers, and also of his peerless humour. He was the writer of an age and of a society that favoured pathos and brilliance as a means to cover the anxieties of transitoriness. Mikszáth, however, avoided both. Generally, his stories are tragic, comic parables of the recognition of relativity told with the immediacy of living speech.

Main works: The Slovak Relations, 1881; The Good People of Palocz, 1882; The Siege of Beszterce, 1895; St. Peter's Umbrella, 1895; New Zrínyiad, 1898; A Strange Marriage, 1900; The Young Noszty's Affair with Mary Tóth, 1906; The Black Town, 1910–11.

Where Time Stood Still
men, Hungarians and Slovaks, appeared in a new light in them, becoming more and more legendary characters from a world that was rapidly sinking and disintegrating. A world in dissolution became legendary. The fantastic success of The Good People of Palocz meant that Mikszáth himself became known as the Great Palocz. The Palocz of north-eastern Hungary, with their characteristic traits and dialect, became known outside Hungary thanks to bibliophile editions in English and German which already appeared in Mikszáth’s lifetime. Later the book was translated into many more languages, including naturally Slovak.

Mikszáth was probably the Hungarian writer best known amongst Slovaks and very likely continues to be so to this day. All his major books have been translated. And that makes good sense. After all Mikszáth has, in his writings, immortalized just about every part of present-day Slovakia, and there is perhaps no other writer who has described Slovak life in all its variety as frequently. Often in his writings characters who would describe themselves as Hungarians will, giving way to a certain linguistic laziness, switch to Slovak in the middle of a conversation.

This is a true novelty. Certain foreign expressions and turns of phrase have always been used, particularly Latin, or French or English, also German, to help characterization. Indeed, Hungarian writers have also used national minority words, but nobody before Mikszáth used them intentionally as a method of characterization. What was particularly noteworthy was that Mikszáth himself as the narrator also used a Slovak expression now and then.

Mikszáth was a virtuoso narrator. His was no transcript of the vivacity of living speech, he created it anew, building on a myriad of observations, memories and experiences. Bringing to life the rich and varied world of Upper Hungary, he presented mixed idiolects as a clear manifestation of conflicts and their reconciliation.

The Up-Country is conveyed almost as an independent country, linked to national politics and to Budapest, the capital, only by Parliamentarism and the administration. In Mikszáth’s simultaneously poetic and comic presentation, Up-Country life is self-contained. The archipelago of castles and ruins, however, rises from the calm sea of satisfaction of villages and small towns, because their past entitles them to a place in the historical Hungarian world, and because their present inhabitants dwell in the past and not in the present.

Beszterce ostroma (The Siege of Beszterce, 1894) is set in the valley of the River Vág, described in the Picturesque Journey. The feudal castle and the burghers’, or rather small burghers’, town not only symbolize the difference between the estates but also the gulf between the mind-set of Hungarians and Slovaks. Szent Péter esernyője (St Peter’s Umbrella, 1895), Theodore Roosevelt’s favourite book, sets the town against the castle but the village. Mikszáth here also alludes to the problems of Slovak social stratification, presenting the assimilationist (sometimes dissimilationist) stimuli of town life, and the conservatism of villages.
Mikszáth’s Up-Country villagers are seldom Hungarians, but the life-style, at least of the manors, set apart from village houses and streets by stone walls and parks with shady trees, generally is. These are the lairs of old noble families. Though little be left of ancient status or economic power, the spirit of the ancien régime is jealously guarded by the lords of the manors.

Mikszáth devoted the novella Gavallérok (The Gentry, 1897) to the pretensions of what had once been the nobility. It is set in the north-eastern county of Sáros (the Hungarian Gascony, as he once wrote). The eponymous impoverished cavaliers now inhabit these manors, the ancestral homes of their kin who—underpaid petty officials—come to visit them. They all pretend that estates, property and status, all lost in the course of time, are still real. On festive occasions they feel the need to see and touch the accessories of bygone wealth, and to put on a show of generosity and cavalier manners. At such times, they assemble all that goes with carefree wealth, the silver and the porcelain, the jewels and the court dress, including a livery which will briefly promote the man-of-all-work to the rank of valet.

Mikszáth’s Up-Country nobles frequently bear Slovak or Polish names, with the noble suffix -y at the end of their name as the only token of their Hungarian character. What is Hungarian about them is the history of their family, the memory of noble privileges and noble solidarity, and the good will of the administration, that helps them upwards in the bureaucracy as a counter to their decline. One of Jókai’s nobles, half Slovak, speaking broken Hungarian, shows himself to be a dogged defender of noble privileges. Similarly, the majority of Mikszáth’s Up-Country nobles are keen defenders of the Hungarian interest in public life and determined supporters of Hungarian as the language of education, even though they may well find it more convenient to speak Slovak in their homes.

The towns—and even more so the small towns—are the scenes of a self-satisfied, commonplace smugness. Mikszáth is a sympathetic, though ironic observer of small town life, primarily of burghers who wish to be masters of their own fate. He is well aware though, and shows it too, that urban freedom is pseudo-freedom. Generally his characters know it too, all except the young who are still closer to ideas than to reality.

Small-town burghers, who still keenly feel the surviving power of the feudal world, endeavour to secure their civic rights, therefore, are ready to conform, just as nobles who have lost their historic role are ready for the most impossible compromises in the defence of their illusionary status. These compromises and agreements manifest themselves in language, in mutually borrowed turns of phrase, in gestures and in the conventions of public and social life. Mikszáth depicts this world of mixed identities, indeed of troubled identities, which not even feudal or national ideologies are able to integrate. As the years passed, the Up-Country, in Mikszáth’s mind, embodied the accumulation of conflicts which were generally swept under the carpet. Fatal clashes were avoided as a rule but irreparable damage was nevertheless done.
In *A fekete város* (The Black Town, 1910–11), Mikszáth’s last novel, the opposition between the urban (burgher) vs. country (noble) mind is manifest and ends in tragedy. *The Black Town* is set in the time of the Rákóczi rebellion in the early 18th century; it is not this, however, that is at the centre of attention but the implacable conflict between antagonists very much aware of their historical rights and privileges: the burghers of Lőcse (Leutscheu–Levoče) in the Saxon Zips and the nobles of County Szepes. At the end of his life, Mikszáth, one of the most clear-sighted of political observers in Hungary, the author of numerous political satires, novels and sketches, considered the prospects for a Hungarian life that resolved conflicts merely on the surface, either violently or practicing self-deception, as a despairing sceptic.

Mikszáth’s love of the Up-Country, the landscape and world of his youth, survived the loss of illusions. Right to the end mountains rose magnificently in the distant blue, rivers calmly wound their way, flowers whispered in the breeze and bloomed as in the first successful Up-Country stories. Mikszáth’s descriptions do not captivate because of their variety but because they are so personal.

In his Mikszáth obituary already quoted, Gyula Krúdy asked: ‘Is the Up-Country truly as Mikszáth saw it?’ As a writer he was well aware that the real question was whether we would ever see the Up-Country through Mikszáth’s eyes.

Gyula Krúdy had something to say about this latter question. Indeed, his first novel can be read as a collection of Mikszáth paraphrases. *A podolini kísértet* (The Podolin Ghost, 1906) is related to Mikszáth not only because it relies on Up-Country tales, but also because it too presents fly in amber situations.

Podolin is a small town close to the Polish border, which became the formative influence of Krúdy’s life and work. He was sent to the Piarist College there at the age of ten by parents who hoped that they would make a man of him. The town, one of thirteen pledged to Poland by the Emperor Sigismond of Luxembourg, King of Hungary, as security for a debt, had remained Polish for three hundred years. Medieval remains of the Polish years, misty mountain evenings, the unusually long and severe winters, all helped to produce a kind of romantic mood in a small boy from the Great Plain. A series of medieval tales, drafted between 1906 and 1910, and set in County Szepes, are all witness to this, as is the first of Krúdy’s Szindbád stories, which followed them and defined the tone of the whole series.

The persona of Szindbád, Krúdy’s alter ego, a literally immortal character, is one of the great figures in Hungarian literature. After his first successful appearance (in 1911), it follows Krúdy all through his literary life. The close to a hundred Szindbád stories are linked not only by Szindbád’s persona but also by his travels in search of the memory of his loves, of a lost past. Not surprisingly, his first journeys take him to the scene of feelings in bud, to the Up-Country, to Podolin.
Gyula Krúdy 1878–1933

Novelist and journalist. The writers’ writer in the eyes of his contemporaries. A lone wolf, who joined neither literary movements nor political parties. His whole life was devoted to writing, the more than a hundred volumes he left behind vie with Jókai’s productivity. He had his years of success and of failure, there were times when he spent a fortune on an evening’s entertainment, but in the last year of his life he could not pay his electricity bill and had to work by the light of a candle. After his death things were much the same. For a brief period at a time he was ahead of all his contemporaries in popularity and then years passed when his name was hardly mentioned. He started publishing in the Budapest and provincial press at the age of fifteen but he only found his own voice—that of remembrancer—in 1911, well past thirty, with the stories collected in the volume *The Youth of Szindbád*. It was only that which allowed him to escape the oppressive influence of his literary models, Jókai and—primarily—Mikszáth.

*The Red Stage-Coach* was his first major success, and its characters, like Szindbád, kept on turning up in his later writings.

His is an unmistakable narrative voice: a dense lyricism, an authoritative eye, powerful metaphors and a shy irony, unusual ways in handling time are characteristic of all his writings. The line dividing past and present is never clear, and neither is that between imagination and reality, waking and dreaming. They all overflow into each other. Every one of his successful works is somehow linked to the good old days before the War, and the more distant in time that period was the greater his interest in it, the more attractive it became to him as a writer.

The already present surrealist character of his writing was boosted by a feverishness in his style in the years of war, revolution, and counter-revolution. His similes live a life of their own, and lyricism permeates just about the whole of the narrative space. In his final creative period carnal joys and passions, and the illusions and troubles of the soul are manifest in simple stories. He abandoned all his stylistic excesses, his narrative voice became precise and terse.

Main works: *Szindbád stories*, 1911–1933; *The Red Stage-Coach*, 1913; *Sunflower*, 1918; *The Prize of Ladies*, 1919; *Seven Owls*, 1922; *Life’s a Dream*, 1930; *My Bygone Days as a Young Master*, 1930.
The journeys in search of memories generally end in greater or lesser disillusion; what proves enduring, however, is the dreamlike isolation of the small town. Men and women grow old, but the moods of yesterday stay fresh and lively. Just as Baron Mednyánszky, the pedantic official had surveyed the stages of his journey by raft and thus the castles, towns and villages of the western Up-Country so, a hundred years later Krúdy, the most poetic of Hungarian novelists, following the path of his memories, prepared an inventory of the impressions of the small towns along the frontier with Poland.

School, convent, church, pastrycook's, inn—these are the most frequent stages in the nostalgic journeys of Szindbád and other Krúdy characters, so too are the houses of Saxon burghers, where decent families live, and a fire crackles in the tiled stove. And just about all the time, as in a distant Russian province, it is snowing, “the snow falling in the Carpathians has a voice,” Krúdy maintains), sleighbells tinkle on winding mountain roads, and all sorts of travellers chase their fortune or the memories of their past.

In Krúdy's interpretation, the life in Up-Country small towns is quiet, dreamy, and so simple that the most commonplace commercial traveller appears as a secretive adventurer to the locals and, later, to himself as well. Krúdy keeps on stressing that this country is on the fringe in every sense of the term. Its past is not Hungarian and Cracow, the Polish royal city, is much closer than Budapest, the capital of Hungary.

This border nature is also an eloquent and multivalent metaphor for Krúdy, a stage on the journey, both a real place and something dreamlike and evanescent. It is also a fly in amber of a way of life centuries old, and the place of exile for misbehaving priests and schoolboys.

The Up-Country already appears as a memory, as a past preserved in the imagination, in fairy tales, and legends in the Krúdy stories of the 1910s and earlier, and even in The Podolin Ghost. Looked at from this angle it truly makes no difference whether the subject is one's own past or history, our own yesterdays or something that happened hundreds of years earlier.

Krúdy could not know at the time that later, in the twenties, memory would acquire a special intensity, that those hastening to the frontier would not have to travel to Podolin or beyond, that the borders would shrink and the Up-Country would cease to be the Up-Country. Once it became part of Czechoslovakia it lost even its name; the Hungarians there also called it Szlovénszkó. In 1925, in “The Cookery Book and the Toy Shop”, (printed on p. 28), Krúdy for the last time sent Szindbád off on an Up-Country journey. The aging hero was shocked to note that on the promenade, “elderly ladies conversed in a foreign language around him.”. The novel Boldogult úrifikoromban (My Bygone Days as a Young Master), a masterpiece if there ever was one, appeared in 1930. In it the Up-Country and its people and yesteryear’s Hungarian life as such, appear as a conversation piece. Sometime, not all that long ago, that was reality, now just chatter.