

MIKLÓS ZRÍNYI'S HUNGARIAN OSMANOLOGY



By Amedeo Di Francesco

*Towards the mid seventeenth century the prominent politician, military operator, and poet Miklós Zrínyi – with a view of contemporary confrontations with the Ottomans and looking back at the battle at Szigetvár in 1566, where his ancestor, the commander of the castle, and also Suleiman the Magnificent died – authored not only political treatises that were marked by Machiavellian inspiration, but also a heroic epic in the Tassonian mode, *Obsidio Szigetiana* (in Hungarian), about the deeds of his ancestor. Framed by themes of providence and fate, Zrínyi's exhortation in the poem to national unity and defence against the Ottomans in certain respects includes admiration for Ottoman culture and thus goes against the grain of dominant Hungarian attitudes.*

During the winter of 1647–1648 Miklós Zrínyi, then in his late twenties, wrote the epic poem *Obsidio Szigetiana* (*The Siege of Sziget*) in Hungarian.¹ He was born in Csáktornya – or, less likely, in the castle of Ozaly – in 1620, of a noble Croatian family, that again and again was engaged in fighting the Turks. The territory of the Zrínyis – the Muraköz – was a border area that was permanently disputed by the contenders: on one side the Habsburgs, whose policy did not always coincide with the interests of the Hungarian nobility – to which the Zrínyis belonged by rights acquired during the Kingdom of Hungary under Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490), – and on the other side the Turks, whose political and military force, although weakened after the death of Suleiman the Magnificent (1566), was still more than sufficient to be of concern to those who bothered about the defence of the vast territory of Hungary including Transylvania in the east. Thus, two basic components are at the root of the creation of *The Siege of Sziget*. The first being the resolve of Miklós Zrínyi – a poet, a writer, but also a military man and a politician on his way to become the *ban* of Croatia – to draft a concrete plan for the political struggle against the Turks along the lines of modern theories concerning both government and nation, including the establishment of an efficient Hungarian

¹ Zrínyi 2011, *The Siege of Sziget*, translated by László Körössy. The quotes in the text are from this edition. Quotes in Hungarian follow the edition by Sándor Iván Kovács (Budapest 2003) as reproduced in Zrínyi 2015, *La Zrinyiade ou Le Péril de Sziget, épopée baroque du XVIIIe siècle*.

army (at last), as part of strategy for the revival of an independent Kingdom of Hungary, free of the dynastic ambitions of the Habsburgs as well as the expansionist ambitions of the Turks. The second component is Zrínyi’s desire to launch this ambitious project via the epic story of the siege of Szigetvár (1566). This battle claimed the life of Miklós’ homonymous great-grandfather, who was in command of the fortress; Suleiman the Magnificent also died, the poet erroneously attributing the death of Suleiman to his own ancestor. What, essentially, was required was the transformation of that episode and its main protagonists into a myth. There was no want of sources on which to reconstruct the facts: these – also those that had resonance in Europe – were almost all to be found in the famous “Bibliotheca Zriniana” which would eventually come down to us and demonstrate, that Zrínyi used all historical accounts – in prose and verse, in Hungarian and Croatian as well as in Latin – which in the previous century had informed the whole of Europe of what had happened in that, hitherto almost unknown, Hungarian fortress. In particular, he used the broad historical reconstruction of Miklós Istvánffy (*Historiarum de rebus Ungaricis. Libri XXXIV, Köln 1622*), but in our case it is certainly useful to remember and quote the following Latin couplet affixed by the poet next to the image of his ancestor, reproduced in the collection edited by Jacob Schrenck von Nozing:

One is the true image of the highest virtue
Live while you can, fear not to die.²

But were things really so? Anyhow, it is our task to dig deeper, in order to rebuild a more truthful picture of the Turk in the collective imagination of the Hungarians and in Zrínyi’s heroic poem.

I: Szigetvár 1566: Miklós Zrínyi, a hero by accident?

It was in 1556. Hádım Ali, Pasha of Buda, had laid siege to Szigetvár with the declared intention of seizing control of most of the Great Hungarian Plain and the Danube-traffic, and with the secret hope to keep the Habsburg forces bogged down until the return of Isabella and John Sigismund. To the general surprise, perhaps to its commander Márk Horváth as well, Szigetvár managed to resist the siege for a whole month and would therefore, badly fortified and worse supplied as it was, not have survived long if a raid by Tamás Nádasdy against the stronghold of Babócsa had not for four days diverted the troops of Hádım Ali, who then suddenly returned to Buda. Szigetvár was saved, but some of his valid defenders were taken prisoners, and experienced the prisons of Constantinople – six years later, in a letter to King Ferdinand, they were pleading for their liberation. How did that happen? The letter was written

² “Una est et verax summae virtutis imago:/ Vivere cum possis, non timuisse mori.”

from within the prison to the king of the hostile side? Here we have to pay attention and look for an explanation.

A wide survey on the subject leads us to believe that the forced residence on the Bosphorus was not really that unbearable.³ Not only. If we really want to talk about imprisonment, various refined tortures and cruelties, then we should take a closer look at the activities taking place in the dungeons of our Hungarian friends. Anyhow, the battle royal between Turks and Hungarians seems to have had also less noble reasons than the defence of Christianity or the conversion to the true faith of Islam, in contrast to the motives stated in the heroic poems and chronicles of both sides. The reasons, the real ones, in fact, are presumably to be found in the need to get hold of the substantial recurring revenue, generated by mutual ransom demands for the release of prisoners, i.e. the most important and wealthy, of course, their life, by the way, never seriously endangered. What about the piles of corpses depicted in the epics? They certainly were there – the poetry does not lie on this point – yet they consisted almost always exclusively of the multitude of less wealthy people.

Hero

Ten years later, in 1566, the second and most important siege of Szigetvár took place, during which Miklós Zrínyi and Suleiman the Magnificent died. The episode, of course, immediately inspired chroniclers and rhymesters, mostly Croats and Hungarians, thus improving the modest level of the epic genre in sixteenth century Hungarian literature – at least the one of classical and western ancestry. Really, there is not much to these early accounts in verse and prose, at least from our contemporary point of view, but they became primary sources of the great baroque vision, the descendant of the hero of Szigetvár unfolded in the winter of 1647–1648, celebrating and magnifying an event of, after all, only relative military importance.⁴

But who was, actually, Miklós Zrínyi senior, who had sworn before God to sacrifice his life with a view of not only saving Hungary politically, but even redeeming the nation morally? Well, the few inhabitants of the fortress and the more numerous peasants from the adjacent countryside knew soon enough of his greed: before long they had to admit that the Turkish despotism was far more endurable than dealing with the measures taken by this fierce

³ Takács 1907, 415–435 and 518–540.

⁴ Miklós Zrínyi (1620–1664) wrote this poem during the winter 1645/46 and published it together with pastoral and mythological idylls in Vienna in 1651 under the title *Adriai tengernek Syrenája* (“Siren of the Adriatic Sea”). The work was translated into Croatian with variations by his brother Petar Zrinski and published in Vienna in 1660 entitled *Adrijanskoga mora Sirena* (“Siren of the Adriatic Sea”).

Hungarian-Croatian soldier.⁵ For sure, his precautions aimed at coping with a state of indisputable emergency, yet they became subject to an investigation commissioned by King Ferdinand. This did not sit well with our man, who reacted with pride and declined to defend Szigetvár. Soon the deployment of the Turkish troops compelled him to take a fresh and more realistic view of the situation and eventually accept battle. Yet Zrínyi did not regain his good moods⁶. As we know from a letter written by Benedek Szalay Bakonoki on August 8, 1566 (two days after the arrival of Suleiman under the ramparts of Szigetvár), he had 50 Turkish prisoners impaled.⁷ Nothing exceptional, you might say, all in all a routine case of torture which, together with mutilations, was just one of the most current forms of physical coercion in vogue in those days. Not even as distinguished a humanist as Antal Verancsics, who in 1567, when he was Bishop of Eger, had many hassles and setbacks in these matters of captures and releases for ransom, could, in fact, refrain from applying the second form of coercion. True enough, but it is also true that harshness of torture was applied in direct proportion to the entity under negotiation for release and/or the speed at which the requests for ransom were met. And then, what we celebrate is Verancsics' fine erudition and his diplomatic skills reaching all the way to Constantinople, not his inclination for martyrdom, a motif, which may feed into the Baroque construction of the heroic and Counter-reformist machinery. This was what was done in the case of Zrínyi senior at the hands of the younger Zrínyi. And then, what would be the correct interpretation of *The Siege of Sziget*, particularly considering that, at the time, it was acclaimed as a strong ethical composition?⁸ Should we, perhaps, resort to the baroque paradox? Or should we try to establish some order in the contradictory speculation of our author, who in such an eminent way does express and interpret the confusion and disorientation among those who have to act in a mad world, that is considered seriously ill and nefarious?⁹ I prefer to take the second road, fully aware of the difficulties of the undertaking. But an attempt must be made, even at the risk of critical heterodoxy.

Martyr

The thought cannot be discarded that Zrínyi, the poet, wished to represent his ancestor as a particular *figura Hungariae*, i.e. the symbol of someone who was driven to a strict moral conversion after having served unscrupulously as

⁵ Klaniczay 1964, 12–13.

⁶ R. Várkonyi 1985, I, 276.

⁷ Takács 1907, op. cit., p. 419.

⁸ Di Francesco 1979, 351–369; Király 1989.

⁹ Cf. Maravall 1985, 249–287.

a hit man, and having felt no compunction towards the fate of Szigetvár.¹⁰ Hence the idea of turning the ancestor's inevitable death in battle into evidence of voluntary martyrdom, a test, by the way, yearningly invoked and systematically evaded. This interpretation cannot be ruled out, our poet being a particular kind of Catholic who was not insensitive to moral reasons put forward by the pious Protestant side. It is not easy to gauge to what extent his attitude was the result of a healthy realism dictated by the reason of state in the specific confessional situation of Hungary. Here is, undoubtedly, a true element, but it does not exhaust the question, since a careful reading of Zrínyi's texts allows the assumption, that he shared many ideas with Protestants. Those who represented the ideas of reformation did, in fact, not limit themselves to purely religious matters, but broached with ease questions within the scope of a modern existentialism *ante litteram*. In the neo-stoic view, endorsed by the moderate culture of Hungarian Baroque, the theme of fortune has (also in synonymic meanings of destiny, luck and chance) a prominent position. In Zrínyi's heroic poem it is a basic component of the *értékrendszer* [value system]. The relevance of this theme urges Zrínyi to represent the "world upside down", also rhetorically and stylistically, and so, in the Hungarian poem, the problematic attitude of the new ideal man presents a sort of romantic pragmatism, typical of those who must deal with the volatility of the world and of history. These aspects would become manifest in the description of Zrínyi the elder during the episode of Szigetvár. And to this end the poet undertook a careful work of deconstruction and assemblage of texts and narrative episodes from a variety of sources.¹¹

Evil and Destiny

Two reference points: the problem of evil and the question of destiny. Two fixed points in Zrínyi's thought: a substantially positive assessment of the Turks and an ingrained negative appraisal of the Hungarians. In his patient and stubborn effort, problematical and contradictory as it is, to re-establish the reputation of his ancestor, Zrínyi found a valuable ally, in terms of literary and ideological intertextuality, in the clever syncretism of an *opusculum* that, effectively celebrating the episode of Szigetvár¹², is not stingy with references to the spirit of Reformation and the indestructible *topos* of unstable fortune. Thus, for example, in the epigrammatic reconstruction of Petrus Albinus, the defender of Szigetvár would have spoken:

¹⁰ Cf. Bessenyei 1994.

¹¹ Cf. Di Francesco 2000, 301–307.

¹² *De Sigetho Hungariæ propugnaculo, a Turca anno Christi MDLXVI. obsessio et expugnatio ...*, Collectum opera Petri Albinii Nivemontii, Witenergae, excudebat Mattheus Welack, 1587.

No cruel enemy defeated us, but Mulciber [Vulcan]
sent from hell and fate oppressed Hungary.¹³

“Mulciber, et fatum”: it is not unfair to suppose that the poet’s grandson would have pondered intensely on these two core themes, turning them into cornerstones of the architecture of his epic. Also because it is difficult to imagine that Zrínyi was not aware of the ruthlessness of his ancestor. Hence the recourse to the expediency of a providential *sors bona*, that had Zrínyi senior converted and transmuted into an instrument of divine grace. Hence the link between the problem of evil and the intervention of Providence. Our poet seems to share the ideas of Gáspár Heltai, this particularly determined, salacious and corrosive Lutheran: destiny and divine mercy wanted Szigetvár to fall into the hands of the Turks and not in the hands of the Habsburgs, i.e. the web of the Inquisition¹⁴. It was the saving action of the God of the Reform redeeming Hungary and defending it from the, apparently antagonistic but in reality concurrent, endeavours of Islam and Catholic Antichrist – even if this interpretation of Hungarian events was drowned in the clamour of the European echo of the Catholic idea of “*antemurale christianitatis*” – Bulwark of Christianity, and in the arrogant triumphalism of Turkish chronicles.¹⁵

Thus the need – eighty years after the clash of Szigetvár – also to sing the positive aspects of the imponderables of destiny, especially when referring to Providence on the one hand, and the current “juncture” in the form of concrete political projects on the other (these plans anticipated the election of a national king, primarily as an anti-Habsburg move, and only secondarily and as a necessity envisaged the resumption of the war against the Turks). Zrínyi’s approach to the Ottoman Empire is basically full of goodwill beyond any preconceived schematic commonplace. In the poem the repetitive term *jó Zrínyi* (the good, brave Zrínyi), describing the defender of Sziget, is, in the view of his descendant, the obsessive redundancy of an awkward oxymoron. The epithet applies as well to the individual as to the nation, both in need of destiny’s intervention – a positive destiny, of, perhaps, vaguely Eastern origin – in order to (re)establish Hungary as a nation forever freed of any form of ethical relativism.

¹³ “Non nos hostis atrox vincit, sed missus ab orco/ Mulciber, et fatum quod premit Hungariam” (Petrus Albinus Nivemontius 1587, *In Imaginem Zerini non armati*, in *De Sigetho Hungariæ propugnaculo*, op. cit., C 3r.).

¹⁴ Cf. Horváth 1957, 382–383; Hopp 1992, 112. Important are the affinities with one of the most well-informed texts on the Hungarian Protestantism, published in Sárovar 1602: I am referring to Magyari 1979.

¹⁵ Fehér 1975.

II: The Turk in the Ideological Structure of *The Siege of Sziget*

Discussing the image of the Turks represented in *The Siege of Sziget* thus leads to the question of the ideological makeup of Zrínyi's poem. The Turk is a most important integral part of that structure. Zrínyi does, in fact, use the image of the Turk freely to broach a number of topics: not only 1) the vagaries of fortune and / or of divine providence, but also 2) transgressive love, almost justified and presented in an atmosphere of lush sensuality; 3) the theme of the military (un)preparedness of the Hungarians, and 4) the "couleur locale" described with empathy. These are topics that could be "embarrassing" if treated with sympathy by a Catholic politician solidly inserted in the ideological context of a Hungary divided, by and large Turkified and still heavily affected by religious struggles and disputes. The strong involvement of the Turkish characters in the elucidation of the ideas of the Hungarian-Croatian poet, stems, in short, also from an understandable need for caution.

Fortuna and Providence

There is an ample literature about the motif of fortune.¹⁶ Some further comments on the issue may, however, be of interest, since the subject – in all its complexity – is expressed in the poem and prose by four interchangeable terms: *szerecsse*, *Fatum*, *gondviselés*, *sors* (luck, destiny, providence, fate or chance). The large number of occurrences of these terms and their synonyms justifies the assumption that Zrínyi attempted a nearly full examination of the relationship of man to the unstable nature of the world and of history. Zrínyi tries to construct a practical philosophical discussion of the term in question. By mixing the main term either with the concept of destiny or of divine transcendence, the text, however, often creates significant, unresolved contradictions. The terms mentioned above are used in a rather messy way, following a muddled positing of the problem. If destiny is assumed or already established, then fate represents the imponderable. In other words, destiny is rigid and fate is fluid.

Fortune, then, as a literary motif – for example in Balassi Bálint (1554–1594) – eventually rises to the level of a higher and looming entity against which only neo-stoic virtue – as it had been in János Rimay (c. 1570–1631) and István Illésházy (1541–1609) – or heroic activism as conceived by Zrínyi might be a remedy. The Hungarian literature of this period is – also due to historical changes arising from meeting and clashing with the Turks – characterized by a conceptual and lexical evolution of the notion of reality's precariousness, so omnipresent in these three poets and handled in so variegated ways. Not intending to provide a more detailed discussion of this

¹⁶ On fortune in Zrínyi: Klaniczay 1964, 460–467; Perjés 2002, 250–263.

issue, I wish, nevertheless, to point out that the eventual solution to Zrínyi's contradiction actually depends on the assumption of a sort of doubling, which our poet had to apply again and again. Zrínyi's conception of fortune is spelled out on two levels: 1) it acts directly or indirectly by divine will upon the individual actions of men; 2) or it is determined prior to human life itself, as a kind of predestination, no longer controllable even by God, who willed it. The terminology used by the poet confirms this: fortune is *szerencse* (luck), in the first sense, and *Fatum* or *Isten akaratja* (divine will), in the second.

Heroic Virtue and Divine Will

Zrínyi's heroic activism, therefore, is embedded in an ethical conception based on the following argument: the Hungarians are punished by God because they are lazy and immoral; to redeem themselves, they must first of all be virtuous heroes (*vitéz*), i.e. they must show those individual skills and the heroism, which alone can defeat idleness (*henyélés*) and debauchery (*feslett erkölcs*); but heroic virtue (*vitézség*) alone is not sufficient to redeem man, since – in the words of Zrínyi – “heroism (*vitézség*) without luck (*szerencse*) is nothing.”¹⁷ But luck is nothing more than divine will or its instrument: thus, in order to benefit from it, man must be *vitéz*, but he must be fulfilling morally positive actions, always endeavoring to contribute to a just cause (*igaz ügy*).

This framework surely summarizes Zrínyi's way of thinking, however it is far from covering the vast area of uncertainties and doubts that so often crop up in his reflection on the problem of luck. In a sense, our poet's religiosity manifests itself in offering a solid architecture that clearly assigns the domains pertaining to the human and the divine, but at the same time leaving a gray area between the two domains in shadowy darkness. The situation gets rather indistinct, when examining how fortune bestowed by divine will is performed – and not always to the benefit of the righteous, as Zrínyi concludes. Structurally based on this thought-pattern, *The Siege of Sziget* is the poem in which Zrínyi's philosophical and speculative ideas are fully unfolded at the foundation of coincidence of a positive divine intervention and availability of a hero to receive it. Nevertheless, we are left in an area of dimness, when the poet rails against fortune as divine instrument, which is felt and reproved as cursed and cruel. Yet I do not think that this stems from incoherence, or a sudden afterthought adjusting the discourse to the general structure. In fact, if we pay attention to the various passages, where the poet locates such outbursts against adverse fortune, these are, clearly, the result of musings and meditations on a human level, in no way compromising God's

¹⁷ Zrínyi 2003, 285: “vitézség semmi szerencse nélkül”.

greater plan. It is difficult to imagine an inconsistency between the poem's framework in which the central role is assigned to the inscrutable divine plan – which in its ultimate goal is always regarded as positive – and the emotional proclamation of the paucity of the human condition, which may be negatively affected by the same divine will, but only in an ephemeral way, in its practical effects and merely at the human level.

Turks and Providence

In Zrínyi's epic depiction, what is then the role assigned to the Turks? With the Hungarians they share the existential doubts that have always tormented the human condition; however, whereas the military defeat of the Christians is, actually, a victory, the Muslim's success is just the beginning of their political demise. And Sziget is the place chosen by providence or by luck for the realization of this paradox:

Be not afraid, for lo! I have said I will be beside you;
The holy Mahomet also guides your hand.
And then also, dear son, the heroic man
Must cede some things to fortune. (I, 43)¹⁸

Suleiman, in short, had been warned: he would capture Szigetvár, but also die. One of the most significant components of baroque mentality is presented by the re-enactment of an historical episode from the previous century. "In the seventeenth century fortune is the rhetorical image of the mutability of the world. Fortune is conceived as motor of change and cause of the movement that stirs up the sphere of men."¹⁹ It is the triumph of ambiguity, if the human experience cannot express clear ideas differentiating providence from destiny. It is therefore inaccurate to assign an excessive importance to contradictions (which do exist) in the thought of Zrínyi. The contradictions spring from the distress of the disability to find certainty in a historical period full of declarations of the need for certainty.²⁰ Words like "fortune, chance, transience, caducity and ruin loom large in an existential vocabulary, while linguistic and representational strategies try to weaken their most challenging significance."²¹ Man is anxiously looking for ways to keep history in check, he wants to control or at least understand what is happening, but does not succeed. Suleiman is a tragic hero, representing man's perpetual contradictory nature at this particular historical moment. In Zrínyi's baroque vision, Suleiman is the symmetrical counterpart to the hero of Sziget; he

¹⁸ "Ne félj, mert lám, mondom, én lések melletted,/ Az szent Mahomet is vezeti kezedet./
Osztán, édes fiam, az vitéz embernek/ Kell valamit engedni az szerencsének."

¹⁹ Maravall 1985, 312.

²⁰ Cf. Bouwsma 2003, 247 ff.

²¹ Campa 2001, 226.

shares with him the tragic destiny, the dependence on history willed by God and by man, the desperate search for an answer to the many absurdities of life. Not only Zrínyi, but also Suleiman lives in the presence of God.²² Suleiman dies on the day of his victory, Zrínyi dies on the day of his defeat. A seventeenth-century poet and thinker could not miss such a parallelism – and antinomy as well.

The Human Condition

The second part of the poem opens two different perspectives on Zrínyi's idea of fortune. *The first* expresses the idea of fortune's dependence on God:

Ahead of the sultan, two miles distant, go
Sixty-three hodjas who scatter money on all sides
To all the poor, so that these from God
May incur favor for the sultan by their pleading. (II, 43)²³

This image – duplicated in XI, 52 – clearly stems from certainty or merely hope of a top-down process of fortune “from on high”, the only dimension, where intimate, personal concerns of inner uncertainty could find a place. And the Turk is, importantly, in both episodes the interpreter of this idea of the relation between God and luck. Here as elsewhere, when Zrínyi speaks of the human condition, he does not differentiate between Christians and Turks, for both are sharing his few certainties and many doubts. I think it is for fear of the Inquisition Zrínyi has the Turks in the poem speaking about destiny, because he – as Machiavelli – tends to have no faith in Providence or at least to have his doubts about it.

The second perspective (i.e. the fluidity of fate) is based on the baroque vision of the world. Here the motif of fortune represents the dynamic mutability of everything, and expresses the sum total of reality's imponderables. More specifically, evidence of military good or bad luck will distinguish the figure of the ideal leader, who is “by wisdom, valor, and all virtues good.”²⁴ In this context too, Suleiman certainly is the most convincing character:

Fortune did not toy with him, as with others:
If she wanted to scare him with a blow,
Or with defeat in battle, or with other harm,
He was always prepared, with his intelligence;

²² Sík 1989, 291.

²³ “Megyen császár előtt messzi két mérfölddel/ Hozsa hatvanhárom, pénzt osztanak mind széllel/ Minden nyomorultnak, hogy ezek Istennél/ Szerezzenek szerencsét könyörgésekkel.”

²⁴ Torquato Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered* XVII, 6: “ne l'arti regie e militari esperto.”

He did not bend, like a twig, but like a boulder stood
Amidst the waves of the sea, steeled himself;
So, if fortune gave him something good,
He became not proud, nor boastful. (II, 48–49)²⁵

And here we cannot avoid noticing the strong analogy with Seneca's *Oedipus*:

As lofty peaks do ever catch the blasts, and as the cliff, which with its
jutting rocks cleaves the vast deep, is beaten by the waves of even a
quiet sea, so does exalted empire lie exposed to fate.²⁶

It could be that this is simply a *topos*, thus excluding any presumption of intertextual relationship. Nevertheless, this image occurs so often in *The Siege of Sziget*, showing – as it is also evidenced by the quotes in the prose works – how well acquainted Zrínyi was with the works of Seneca and the tragedies of the Roman philosopher, which were proudly displayed in his library.²⁷ In short, with its strong neo-stoical influence, a novelty in the history of Hungarian literature, Zrínyi's treatment of the problems of destiny and fortune differs clearly from earlier conceptions. To paraphrase the title of a famous work of Bauman,²⁸ we can say that Zrínyi acts within an early and unstable modernity, immediately following the first stable modernity represented by the Renaissance, which slowly and progressively transfers and bequeaths its crisis on to the Baroque, but not before testing the possibilities offered by neo-stoicism.

Transgressive Love

“I wrote about love too, but quietly”,²⁹ but is it really so? It is unlikely, if we read the passionate transport with which love is represented correctly. The vanity of glory and virtues finds a tangible reward in an invitation to the most irrational of loves. Rationality collides with its opposite, irrationality, but the latter triumphs in a blaze of passion, making the XII canto of the poem one of the most beautiful passages of Hungarian literature. It is not accurate to say that only this chant embodies the romantic theme. Already at the start of the narrative action the impossible love story of the two Turkish protagonists is

²⁵ “Szerencse úvéle nem játszott, mint mással:/ Ha ijeszteni is akarta csapással,/ Vagy had veszésével, vagy más kárvallással,/ Mindenkor állandó volt okosságával;// Nem hajlott, mint az ág, mint kőszikla állott/ Tenger habjai közt, mert magában szállott,/ Ha szerencse neki valami jót adott,/ Nem bizta el magát, föl nem fuvalkodott.”

²⁶ “ut alta uentos semper excipiunt iuga/ rupemque saxis uasta dirimentem freta/ quamuis quieti uerberat fluctus maris,/ imperia sic excelsa Fortunae obiacent.” Seneca 1938 (vv. 8–11)

²⁷ Cf. Klaniczay 1991, 274–275.

²⁸ Cf. Bauman 2000.

²⁹ Zrínyi 2003, 10: “Irtam szerelemről is, de csendessen”.

enacted and acquires threatening forms parallel to the unfolding of military events:

They say: That Deliman, when many nations
He had wandered to see famed cities,
In Galata he saw beautiful Cumilla,
Cumilla the beautiful, Suleiman's daughter.

Cumilla's fine hair entwined the heart
Of youthful Deliman, and all his desire;
One look stole all his strength
So that without her, he wishes not to live. (I, 71–72)³⁰

Cumilla is a true symbol of the beloved woman, conceived as the mental place of the impossible, the unachievable and the elusive. It is simultaneously near and distant; it is the proper image of a pipe dream, expressing perfectly the dimension of the inaccessible. It is the evanescent palpability of dreams; the symbol of the sincerest desire opposed to the reality of awakening; the spasmodic search for what is denied to us always and forever. Zrínyi's seemingly calm considerations is actually the din of the storm of passions; repressed passions closeted in by the condition of man, damned to suffer limitless desires in the intimate sphere of privacy's narrow margins. Love, perhaps, only represents metaphorically this condition, the most visible sign of man's incompleteness, which condemns him to find within these boundaries the meaning of his own existence and endurance:

Which god moves now my thoughts,
That I should love him, who has killed my husband?
But unhappy me, I love my destroyer,
Or perhaps Deliman hates me, too.

Perhaps he hates me because I was Rushtan's partner,
And I love him, because he freed me
By his noble hand. Ah, Deliman, my heart!
I, too, was bored by pagan Rushtan. (XII, 26–27)³¹

For the length of an entire canto, Zrínyi bestows upon a Turkish location the atmosphere, so rich in lyricism and sensuality of the episodes of Tasso's

³⁰ "Azt mondják: Delimán, mikor országokat/ Járt volna látásért híres városokat,/ Galatában megláta az szép Cumillát,/ Cumillát az szépet, Szulimán leányát./ Cumilla szép haja megköttözé szüvét/ Ifju Delimánnak, és minden kedvét,/ Egy tekintet vévé el minden erejét/ Ugy, hogy nála nélkül nem kívánja éltét."

³¹ "Mely isten forgatja most az én elmémet,/ Hogy azt szeressem, ki megölte férjemet?/ De boldogtalan én, szeretem vesztőmet;/ Avagy szintén Delimán gyűlöl engemet./ Talán azért gyűlöl, Rustán társa voltam,/ S én azért szeretem, hogy szabadítottam/ Vitéz keze által. Ah, szívem Delimán!/ Előttem is unalmas volt pogány Rustán."

Jerusalem Delivered, in which love triumphs in all its varied phenomenology. And the thoughts and anxieties are relived, reconstructed and reinterpreted more amply in terms of solitude, regarded as the most eloquent representation of human condition. And solitude is always meant to be overcome only fleetingly, briefly, apparently, even where the encounter and the embrace are poetically fully realized, in quite a new way in the history of Hungarian literature:

What shall I say about their union:
Romantic youth's many romances?
They redouble their kisses around each others' mouths,
Their hearts rejoice over Venus's victory parade.

As ivy enwraps a tree
As a snake winds about a pillar,
As Bacchus's vine leans on a post,
In so many ways did the two phoenixes, entangled, sway. (XII, 50–51)³²

The finitude of man consists precisely in a sort of inevitable sentencing to the condition of isolation, incommunicability, of defective dialogue. Perhaps it is not accidental that Zrínyi's Turkish characters are always so proficient in acting out the role's human dimension, so strongly marked by its flawed nature. The zrínyian discourse on love is completely different from the manners of the Petrarchan mould, which were so successful in Hungary through the poetry of Bálint Balassi (1554–1594). The spiritual sense of the so-called torments of love is replaced by a very sensual connotation, more suited to the crass humanity of the characters belonging to the Turkish world. Hence the insistence on the *bujdosó* motif (the lonely, roaming warrior), which aims to highlight the hopelessly insane nature of human feelings and the robust use of a rhetorical-stylistic device, enhances the poetic quality of the motif. As the asyndeton in XII, 42 serves to create a concentrated expression of sentimental impulses requiring the space of discourse and the time of the acoustic reception. Or in XII, 46 alliteration and antithesis show the complexity of Zrínyi's composition. As if to demonstrate once again that canto XII as a whole is the essentially lyrical part of the poem, disrupting not only the epic narrative, but also the dominance of the previously dominant, traditional formulaic style.

³² "Mit mondjak ezeknek öszvejükésérül,/ Szerelmes ifiaknak sok szerelmérül?/
Duplássák csókokat egymás szája körül,/ Venus triumfusán kedves szüvök örül.// Mint
borostyán fával öszvekapcsolódik,/ Mint kigyó oszlopra reá tekereszik,/ Bachus levele is fára
támaszkodik,/ Ennyi mód két phoenix öszvecsingolódik."

Warfare

Zrínyi's criticism of the severely disorganized Hungarian military asserts explicitly that the Hungarians must learn from the Turks. In fact, *The Siege of Sziget* is also a small treatise in verse on the art of war.³³ Numerous descriptive parts focus on so many details that they allow us to enjoy the charm of Zrínyi's military culture. The historical memory of the battle of 1566 is also a reminder of questions of warfare and shows the way to eliminate or at least reduce inefficiency and ostentation on the Hungarian side. Hence the insistence on the huge military competence of the Turks and the ideal dimensions of the figure of Suleiman:

On the tenth day of St. Iván's season
Suleiman departed from Constantinople
With that tremendous army: waters draining,
Great mountains leveling, cities destroying.

A black Saracen horse was beneath him,
But one could not draw a finer one on canvas;
You would not think that his slim feet ever touch the earth,
So beautifully does he smoothly and silently trot.

His great bloody eyes bulge,
His sleek head is topped with a well-placed tuft,
Out his nostrils fiery breezes blow,
His mouth spews foam, as like an ocean god's.

He bows his head under his high-arching neck,
The wind blows his short, shaggy mane,
With his wide chest, an elephant he resembles,
In claws, sleek sinews, a buck he surpasses.

Gracefully, quietly under the emperor he trod,
But should another have wanted to touch him –
Like a swift falcon, when alighting on wings,
Or like a fleet squirrel jumping from tree to tree.

On the saddle, dignified, the emperor sat,
A thin white cloth on his head,
Two sheaves of heron feathers line the width of his cap,
His beard is sheer white, his appearance is pale.

His fine golden tunic hangs from his shoulders,
His dolman is of the same material,
A mighty Misrian sword hangs down his side,
Which Sultan Musa won from the Greek emperor.

³³ Cf. Perjés 2002, 146–174; 164.

With terrible majesty he glances to either side,
One could easily tell that he carries weighty thoughts;
These carry in his heart flame and sword,
These are a great threat to the Christian world. (II, 31–38)³⁴

Anaphoras in the last two verses and alliterations focused on the fricative sound “v” in the Hungarian original, underlines the measured solemnity of the advance, as a challenge to time’s inexorable passing. Suleiman seems to be the absolute master of time, he is in no hurry whatsoever, since the destiny of Sziget is already sealed. This exceptional, smart and ruthless genius is here represented in strong colours. In a perfect backdrop for interaction of “pictura” and “poësis,” the epical writing manages to surpass the boundaries of Hungarian nationalism in order to serve historical truth. Art and political thought are needed to encourage the Hungarians to imitate the exemplary model of the Turks. Zrínyi creates a gallery of portraits, articulating his osmanology, but in an unusual way, avoiding the trite and useless topical prejudices: he goes straight to the heart of the matter. Whenever he speaks of the Turks, passion does not hinder his intent of objectivity. Suleiman thus becomes his hero too³⁵, not relegated at a mythical distance, but evoked as participating in historic events shared by an entire geo-political area.

It is difficult to say whether Zrínyi, in the description of Suleiman, had a certain picture in mind. It is also hard to say whether he knew the Turkish miniatures depicting the Sultan in the Battle of Mohács (1526). He might, possibly, have recalled the dynamism of other knights in battle, because the Turkish portraiture offers a very static, almost hieratic, scene:

³⁴ “Szent Iván havának tizedik napián/ Konstantinápolybul megindúlt Szulimán,/ Aval az sok haddal vizeket szárasztván,/ Nagy hegyeket bontván, városokat rontván.// Egy fekete szerecsen ló volt alatta,/ De képiró falra szebbet nem irhatna;/ Nem vélnéd, hogy éri földet száraz lába,/ Oly szépen egyeránt s halkal változtatja.// Véres nagy szemei ugyan kidültenek,/ Szaraz fejcskéjén van helye üstöknek,/ Az orra likjain lángos szellők mennek,/ Szája tajtékot vér, mint vízi istennek.// Magassan költ nyakán fejét alá hajtja,/ Szálos rövid serényét szél hajtogatja,/ Széles mellyel elefántot hasomlitja,/ Körmmel, száraz innal szarvast mekhaladja.// Jamburúl csendeszen császár alatt jára,/ De hogyha az ember fogdosni akará,/ Mint az sebes sólyom, mikor kél szárnyára,/ Vagy ha könyü evét ugrik fáru fára.// Ül vala merevén nagy császár nyeregben,/ Féjer vékony patyolat vagyon fejében,/ Két csoport kócsagtoll alá áll széltében,/ Szakálla merő ősz, halvány személyében.// Szép arany hazdia függ alá vállárol,/ Az dolmánya is szintén olyan kaftánbol,/ Kemény misziri kard függ le ódalárol,/ Mellyet szultán Musa nyert görög császártól.// Szörnyü méltósággal kétfelé tekinget,/ Könnyen esmerhetni, hogy nagy gondja lehet;/ Ez viszen nagy szüvében lángot és fegyvert,/ Ez keresztény világnak nagy veszedelmet.”

³⁵ On the representation of Suleiman in Zrínyi, cf.: Klaniczay 1973, 347.

I must write the truth, listen to me now:
Though Sultan Suleiman was our enemy,
Only his faith being pagan aside,
Perhaps never was there such a lord amongst the Turks.

Even aside from that, I can confidently say,
Amongst pagans there never was upon this earth
A man so honorable and wise, who in so many wars
Was victorious, and over many nations. (II, 44–45)³⁶

“I must write the truth”: this statement is explained by the fact that *The Siege of Sziget* also intends to be a military report, a traditional *tudósító ének*³⁷ (“rhymed chronicle which served as broadsheets to his contemporaries”³⁸), enriched by the baroque vision and transformed into an epic. In this hemistich there is not only the profession of serious concern for historical truth, but also concern for the military backwardness of the Hungarian, who, in fact, in the political-military scenario of the seventeenth century, may not be up to the challenge of history, cannot counter the Turk, especially because of his being “disciplinatus.”³⁹ Everywhere in the poem there is a clear acknowledgment by Zrínyi of the quality of the Turks, but, actually a selective appraisal, restricting, within the Turkish army, the knowledge of military strategy specifically to Suleiman and the *kajmekán* [governor]:

For they cower, for they have no general.
Lost are their wise men, and their captain;
The emperor and the *kajmekan*, only these are strategists,
Deliman, Demirham are daring fools. (XIII, 95)⁴⁰

The World of the Turks

In the works of Zrínyi, the Turk, really, is not only an embattled enemy. Why, indeed, endow the Turks the positive solution of the three most important issues: luck, military art, and love? It seems that the dream world is the province of the Turks, where fantasies come true, as well as desires unattainable by common man, where the dimension of the impossible, of the arcane and inexplicable meet and vanish. In this fashion Zrínyi too has his

³⁶ “Igazat kell írnom, halljátok meg mastan,/ Noha ellenségünk volt szultán Szulimán,/ Csak aztot kivésem, hogy hiti volt pogán,/ Soha nem volt ily ur törökök közt talán.// De talán nélkül is bátran azt mondhatom,/ Pogányok közt soha nem volt ez földhátan/ Illyen vitéz és bölcs, ki ennyi harcokon/ Lett volna győzödelmes, és sok országon.”

³⁷ This opinion of mine is confirmed by Nemeskürty 1975, 364.

³⁸ Bertényi 1999, 126.

³⁹ Zrínyi 2003, 419.

⁴⁰ “Mert félnek, mert nincsen sem generálisok,/ Elveszett, ki mit tudott, itt kapitányjok;/ Császár és Kajmekán, csak azok hadtudók,/ Delimán, Demirhám vakmerő bolondok.”

share in the idea that life is a dream. In his poetry he shows the impalpable tension of the unattainable, that bittersweet mixture expressing the real (in)consistency of human action, the happy unhappiness only on offer and yieldable through the suspension in the oneiric limbo. The dream as a refuge, then, as a sphere of expectation, opening from time to time for access to a place removed from daily life's realities. With the Turks, there can never be friendship, but this forced choice of side does not preclude the envy of what is positive on their side, what they have that is denied to the Hungarians by history and destiny. The Turks represent a loved and hated counter-world, unknown and desired, unreal, yet there. In a sense they represent the Dionysian element envied and feared by the Apollonian element, which sustains but also restrains and represses the Hungarian and Christian side.

Zrínyi's intent is to strike a reasonable balance, which is not always appealing nor is it always satisfactory: the interdependence of good and evil – here evident at the epistemological as well as the existential level – is demonstrated by the reasoning of the mind and the instinctive impulses. And it is the result of the attention payed by Zrínyi less to the Hungarians than to the Turks. He also locates the sphere of love in the Turkish counter-world, in which he unfolds a phenomenally vivid, although materially inconsistent, perception of a fragile and precarious satisfaction of the senses.

The precise and accurate description of the interiors and of the habits of the Turks (III, 28–30) originates, perhaps, not solely from the wish and the need to give the poem a local colour. We may also say, that the Turkish otherness is elected to do the "dirty work", i.e. to give voice to all the claims, that could not otherwise have been expressed openly, and all those beliefs, he could not have sincerely admitted. In the poem it is also the Turks who state a negative opinion of the Habsburgs, not without a good measure of satisfaction on the part of the author.

Nowhere does he have ready troops, and he does not even think,
Like a madman, that he may sometime need them.
And Maximilian lives among the Magyars
Tranquilly, only eating and drinking. (I, 64)⁴¹

Zrínyi did not like the Turks, but neither did he like the way, the Habsburgs managed the political situation in the region. What then? It was necessary to substitute them by rebuilding a strong Hungarian monarchy modelled on Matthias Corvinus' kingdom. In this new state there could and should be room for religious tolerance, not necessarily limited to Christian denominations, but including a cultural dialogue with Islam. The latter had,

⁴¹ "Nincs sohul kész hada, s nem is gondolkodik,/ Mint bolond, hogy valaha talán kelletik./ Ám Maximilian magyarok közt lakik/ Gondviseletlenül, csak észik és iszik."

in fact, already taken root in many areas of Hungary’s *hódoltság* (Turkish Occupation), already peopled by “mixed” Hungarians, who were thus involved in this dialogue and were, by then, the product of it. Zrínyi is a political realist. He knows that his political projects will have to take off in an already established situation. The future does not belong to him; it will be built starting from the birth of the new kingdom of Hungary. Perhaps Zrínyi had to discriminate between the Ottoman Empire and Turkified Hungary.

III: Political Project and European Horizon

What we have observed, so far, in *The Siege of Sziget* is also present in military treatises. In *Vitéz hadnagy (The Virtuous Captain, 1650–1653)* Suleiman is an example for the Hungarian soldiers.⁴² In *Az török afium ellen való orvosság (An Antidote to the Turkish Opium, 1660–1661)* Suleiman is synonymous with military discipline.⁴³ But we must also remember that the treatise includes lengthy discussions of the fundamental skills highlighted in the heroic poem, for example, the *okos rendtartás* (III, 51: smart formation) granted to Zrínyi, which is also called *jó rendtartás* (VI, 57: good order; precise military order) attributed to the Turks and/or Suleiman. Equally indicative of Zrínyi’s thought are the epithets applied to Suleiman, who is not only generically “great” (*nagy*: I, 2, IV, 53, IV, 77, XV, 100, XV, 67), “world-wrecking” (*világrontó*: VIII, 20), “enraged” (*haragos*: XI, 15), “powerful” and “mighty” (*hatalmas*: V, 6; VIII, 23, 81, 87), but also and especially “diligent” (*szorgalmatos*: II, 52) and “wise” (*okos*: IV, 103; XII, 65).

But Zrínyi’s political project necessarily also implies issues of religious peace. He is a link between Reformation and Counter Reformation, aiming at re-establishing a realm modelled on Matthias Corvinus’ kingdom, but itemizing the entire ideological apparatus that sprang from the so-called *bűnlajstrom*, that is, the record of the alleged evils of the Hungarian nation, which entailed the necessity of a moral catharsis of an entire people and the moral redemption of an entire historical epoch. Thus, we think that Zrínyi – as a strong supporter of the re-founding of the Hungarian kingdom following the Corvinian model, perhaps combined with the most recent and successful ideas of French absolutism – found the Hunyadian moderation in confessional matters agreeable. The cultural interaction between Hungary and the rest of Europe would become so much more efficient and profitable: if the Hungarian political vision fed on contemporary European acquisitions, a particular interest towards ideas and events from the Balkan-Danubian area was similarly manifest at the European level. The Turks no longer posed a

⁴² Zrínyi 2003, 331.

⁴³ Zrínyi 2003, 412.

real threat, but the constant reference to their domination was instrumental to the experience of hitherto unthought-of aggregating possibilities. Zrínyi's political project – modelled on the reign of Matthias Corvinus and the Transylvanian principality of Gábor Bethlen – was so unambiguous that it became fatal to him: his thinly veiled aversion to the increasingly pervasive interference of the Habsburgs did not engender the desired effects, although it managed to elevate the Hungarian nation to rank among the most important countries in Europe.

Zrínyi was in fact also a particularly well-informed *maître à penser*. Rummaging around his rightly famous library holds a good many surprises in store. But to our author historical information and painstakingly accurate corroboration is never a passive element of sheer erudite quotation, as his treatises demonstrate. In particular *Vitéz hadnagy*, where he manipulates freely and with great nonchalance some important sources, and *Az török afium ellen való orvosság*, where the concepts of *szorgalmatosság* (zeal, diligence, care) and *disciplina militaris* are of great consequence, precisely those qualities that are lacking to the Hungarians, and which the Turks to the contrary possess in abundance.

In *The Siege of Sziget*, the poet's ancestor, Zrínyi, and Suleiman embody the values of the ideal warrior: "Therefore the "epic" hero is in contrast to the "romance" hero, and the warrior to the knight."⁴⁴ Yet there might also be something else, since Zrínyi opposes order to disorder, and sets the good *condottiere* against the armed fighter, the latter in lack of a tactical vision of the battle as well as a strategic view of the war. This ideological system, although typically Hungarian, corresponding to the needs of the historical and political situation of Hungary, was also valid in a wider European context and certainly was in tune with Pope Urban VIII, who was by the way also a poet. Urban considered the poetical conception of *Jerusalem Delivered* to be useful for really cogent aims: to inspire and theorize imitations of Tasso with a view of proposing anew in all of its actuality concrete warfare against the Turk. It was basically about a transformation of the matrix of Tasso's *inventio poetica* into the factuality of a real struggle against the Turk, by means of a truly, and finally, committed literature. In other words, art was to serve the moral regeneration of modern man: indeed, it had to become the foundation of modernity.

⁴⁴ Jossa 2002, 139.

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