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Opera and nineteenth-century nation-building : the (re)sounding voice of nationalism

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Appendix 1

Hunyadi László – opera synopsis

The story of László Hunyadi takes place in 1456-57, in Nándorfehérvár (today's Belgrade, one of the major fortresses against the Turkish army), in Temesvár (today's Timișoara) and in Buda.

In **Act I**, at Nándorfehérvár, László Hunyadi's circle awaits King László V. His uncle, Mihály Szilágyi warns László not to trust the king or Czilley. Nevertheless, László is ready to give a royal reception to King László V and his courtiers, and to acknowledge Czilley as regent of Hungary. His uncle's prescience proves to be correct. Hunyadi's soldiers capture a courier with a letter written by Czilley to the Serbian despot György Brankovics, in which Czilley promises him the heads of the two young Hunyadis. The king enters with Czilley and his retinue. Just as he promised at the diet of Futtak, László Hunyadi hands over the keys of the castle to the king, but the king rejects them saying that they are in the best hands. Everyone is pleased. Later the king's German mercenaries arrive. László Hunyadi does not let them enter the castle, which causes indignation among the courtiers. Using these sentiments, Czilley convinces the king to approve the plan to murder László Hunyadi. Though the king asks Czilley not to shed blood, he gives him the royal ring, which symbolises a tacit consent to his plan. Czilley wants to bribe Rozgonyi, a true friend of the Hunyadis, to help him capture and kill László. Rozgonyi remains faithful to the Hunyadis and warns László about Czilley's attempt. László confronts Czilley with the information, Czilley tries to defend himself, but one of László's men kills him in the subsequent fight. When the king arrives and sees the body of his uncle, he becomes so terrified and he promises not to take revenge on Czilley's death. The supporters of László sing in chorus the victorious march *Meghalt a cselszövő* (The schemer died).

Act II takes place in Temesvár, where Erzsébet Szilágyi, Hunyadi's mother awaits the king amidst her maids. She is afraid that the king is going to punish her son for the death of Czilley. When the king arrives she begs for forgiveness and makes the king take an oath not to punish László. In the meantime, the king is distracted by the beauty of Mária Gara, László Hunyadi's fiancée. Her father notices the king's fascination and decides to use it for his plan to become governor of Hungary.

Act III takes place in the king's castle in Buda. The king sings about his love for Mária Gara; her father arrives and promises the king his daughter's hand if he agrees to execute László Hunyadi. The king resists, but is in the end overwhelmed by his passion for Mária, gives his consent. Gara rushes to the wedding ceremony of László and Mária, interrupts the festivity, and orders the soldiers to throw László into prison. Mária visits László in the prison and pleads him to escape with her. But László refuses to run away because he still believes in King László's oath and good will. He proves to be wrong. László is brought to the gallows at St. George's Square in Buda. The headsman strikes three times but misses and László remains unhurt. According to medieval customs this should mean mercy. But Gara commands the executioner to strike a fourth time, and László's head rolls off in the dust.

Appendix 2

Bánk bán – synopsis of the opera

The story takes place in the castle of Visegrád during the reign of King Endre II. The time is 1213, when the king left the country for the battles in Halics (Galicia) and entrusted her wife, the Meranian Queen Gertrude with the government of the Hungarian Kingdom.

Act I – In the absence of the king, Queen Gertrude hosts luxurious feasts in Visegrád. Her brother, prince Otto, is attracted to Melinda, the wife of Bánk bán. Bánk is on tour in the country and part of his mission is to listen to the discontented Hungarians all over the country. There is much sorrow and poverty all over the kingdom. In a remarkable scene, we can hear the desperate voice of the people formulated by Petur bán, a Hungarian noble, who wants to kill the queen with the help of others. They want to gain Bánk bán's help for their plan and secretly recall him from his trip. Petur bán shares his sorrow with Bánk. However, Bánk immediately detaches himself from the rebels and warns Petur to keep away from the queen; otherwise he would have to report on them and charge them with high treason. Petur wants to kill Bánk, but he drops the weapon and kneels before Bánk, naming him "my king". Bánk embraces Petur, does not accept further apologies, and wants to leave the room. But when Petur tells him, that the password to their secret meeting is "Melinda", he returns and asks where the rebels are to be found. Biberach, a German courtier at Gertrude's palace and her brother's friend, listens to their conversation, and when Petur discovers him, he pretends to be on their side and tells Bánk that the queen's brother Otto set eye on Melinda. Bánk is outraged.

Act II – Bánk meets Tiborc, a peasant and ex-soldier, who, as it turns out, once saved Bánk's life. Tiborc describes the deplorable condition of the Hungarian peasants. The people live in unimaginable poverty, while the queen leads a glamorous life and gives away Hungarian land as present to her Meranian relatives. Bánk wants to save the honour of his wife and the future of his country. It seems that both are being destroyed by the Meranians led by Queen Gertrude. With Gertrude's tacit assistance and Biberach's love potion, Otto manages to seduce Melinda. Melinda is driven mad by her shame and by Bánk's curse on her and their child. Bánk asks

Tiborc to take care of Melinda and her child, and goes to the queen to settle accounts. Their confrontation ends in tragedy: when the queen grabs a dagger, Bánk stabs her.

Act III – Tiborc wants to escort Melinda over the Tisza river, but a storm breaks out and the mad lady throws herself and the child in the river. In the following scene back in the castle, the returning king has to face the chaos in his castle and country. He orders to capture the rebels, but Bánk admits that he killed the queen. Before the king would sentence him, Tiborc brings in the bodies of Melinda and their child. Bánk's tragedy is complete, he too has lost his wife, and this is his punishment. In conclusion, the choir sings: "Great is the power of God! / Let the dead rest forever, oh God! / And receive the soul of the deceased!"

Mihai Viteazul in the Romanian national imagination

Historiography:

Miron Costin (1633-1691) – *Moldovan Chronicle* – Mihai Viteazul was depicted as a conqueror of Transylvania and Moldova, who was “the cause of many sorrow and bloodbath”, and who was “also hated by his fellow Wallachians, because he was the source of many wars”.

Radu Popescu: *Istoria domnilor Țării Românești* (The History of Wallachian Rulers) – a chronicle from the end of the seventeenth century – “Mihai conquered them, because they were all as stupid as an ass.” This chronicler also mentions that Habsburg Rudolf was very pleased with Mihai’s triumphant deeds and reign in Transylvania, because “the Hungarians were always against the German emperor.”

Samuil Micu (1746-1806): *Scurtă cunoștința a istoriei românilor* (1796) (A short history of the Romanians) – mentions that Mihai was a great warrior, who defeated both the Turks and the Transylvanians and offered his conquests to the Emperor Rudolf

Gheorge □ incai (1754-1816): *Hronica românilor și a mai multor neamuri* (The Chronicle of the Romanians and of Other People) (1811) – dedicates a large description to Mihai Viteazul. Undoubtedly he depicts Mihai as a hero and contrasts his figure to his enemies, but the political idea of a unified Romanian state does not appear in this writing yet.

Damaschin Bojinic □ (?) – published a biography about Mihai Viteazul under the title *Vestitele fapte și perirea lui Mihai Viteazul, prințul Țării Românești* (The famous deeds and the fall of Mihai Viteazul, the suzerain of Wallachia) (1830), where the main accent fell on Mihai’s heroic fights against the Ottoman Empire, but he did not appear as a national hero yet.

Aaron Florian (1805-1887): *Idee repede de istoria prințatului Țării Românești*. I–III (The History of Wallachia) (1835–1838) – **TURNING POINT (!)** in the representation of Mihai Viteazul – in the second volume published in 1837 Mihai is depicted as a **national symbol and unifier of the country**.

Mihail Kog □ Iniceanu (1817-1891): *Histoire de la Walachie* (1837) – he mentioned Mihai’s impressive political ambition to become ruler of Transylvania, but Kogălniceanu did not go any further than that in his narrative. However, six years later in 1843, in a speech given by Kogălniceanu as an opening lecture of the history

course at the Academia Mihăileana in Iași, Mihai appeared as a national hero, who managed to unify the scattered lands of Dacia

Nicolae B. Icescu (1819-1852): *Istoria Românilor sub Mihai Vodă Viteazul* (The History of the Romanians under the rule of Mihai Viteazul) (1847-1852) – Mihai's figure is unequivocally depicted as a national icon, whose political actions were motivated by the thought of "national unity". According to Bălcescu, Mihai Viteazul "was strong enough to unite the Romanians in one single state and in this way to restore the ancient Kingdom of Dacia." During Mihai's reign "The Romanian brothers united under one single fatherland."

Literature:

Vasile Alecsandri (1821-1890) – *Poezii populare ale românilor* (Popular Poems of the Romanians) (1866) – a poem portrays Mihai as a great warrior, who managed to stop the Sultan's army.

Gheorghe Asachi (1788-1869) – He wrote a drama about Mihai. It is not surprising that in the period of the Greek revolutionary movements that coincided with Romanian interests as well, Asachi sets for to write a drama about Mihai Viteazul, the warrior, who managed to liberate his country from the Ottoman occupation. It was his very first historical theatre play, which was destroyed in the fire that damaged the city of Iași in 1827, therefore not much is known about it.

Ion Heliade Rădulescu (1802-1872): *Mihai Viteazul* (1848) – the libretto of the first Romanian national opera, *Mihai Viteazul în ajunul bătăliei de la Călugăreni*

Constantin Halepliu (1816-1873): *Moartea lui Mihai Viteazul la Turda* (Mihai viteazul's Death at Turda) (1854) – drama

Dimitrie Bolintineanu (1818-1872): *Mihai Viteazul condamnat la moarte* (Mihai Viteazul's death sentence) (1867), *După bătăia de la Călugăreni* (After the battle from Călugăreni) (1868), *Mărirea și uciderea lui Mihai Viteazul* (The glory and assassination of Mihai Viteazul) (1868) – dramas

Painting:

Theodor Aman (1831-1891), Romanian history painter – such works by Aman as *Cea din urmă noapte a lui Mihai Viteazul* (The last night of Mihai Viteazul) (1852), *Unirea Principatelor* (The unification of the Principalities) (1857) or *Izgonirea turcilor la Călugăreni* (The expulsion of the Turks at Călugăreni) (1872)

Opera:

Ion Andrei Wachmann (1807-1863): *Mihai Bravul în ajunul Bătăliei de la Călugăreni* (Mihai Viteazul in the Battle at Călugăreni) (1848)

Karl Theodor Wagner: *Moartea lui Mihai Viteazul* (Mihai Viteazul's Death) (1866)

Julius Sulzer (?-1891): an opera about Mihai Viteazul, on which he worked between 1868-1869, but he could never present it on the stage

Film:

Sergiu Nicolaescu (1930 -) Romanian film director made the movie *Mihai Viteazul* (1970), which is a great historical tableau divided in two parts: *The Battle of Călugăreni* and *The Unification* – two aspects that were the major elements of the myth about Mihai Viteazul in Romanian national consciousness.