

EÖTVÖS LORÁND UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

PHD THESIS

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*Biblical Roles in the Oeuvre of  
Miklós Zrínyi*

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# PHD THESIS

## 1. The subject of thesis

According to spatial theory, spaces could be categorised by their position as *facade* or *backyard*. The cycle of different styles and the rotation of mental orientations causes the phenomenon that due to the effect of novelty or the revolt against conventions abandoned, backyard places certain sub-cultures discover and occupy these backyard places, by which they slowly take over a facade position again. This phenomenon, even if not in entirety, is broadly true for literature as well. Works are constantly discovered and they disappear to become forgotten and so that later on they would be rediscovered. As expected, if this is true for primary literature, it should be also true for secondary literature as well, for the critical works, and literary criticism. The same kind of rotation could be observed in the field of literary criticism as the actual literary criticism is overridden in accordance with current zeitgeist. We could state that literary criticism is constructed constantly from age to age and this phenomenon sheds light to the fact that an author's intention could never be completely understood.

The literary criticism studying the biblical aspect of the works of Miklós Zrínyi always stayed in a backyard position. Every generation of researchers has enriched the literary criticism studying the works of Miklós Zrínyi with imperishable results. The community of researchers who studied the works of one if not the greatest Hungarian literary figure of the 17th century, has slowly but surely discovered all the terra incognita related to this field of study. It appears that the biblical aspects of the works of Zrínyi has always been outside the charted land.

Of course, from time to time the biblical aspect of works of Zrínyi garnered some attention, however the importance of this aspect was never fully discovered. Even at the end of 18th century critical works have been printed which touched upon the subject, they only dealt with it as point of interest, never thoroughly studying it. While reading the works of Zrínyi it is striking to see the effect of the Scriptures on them, especially if we take into account that the works of Zrínyi never could be considered as pious literature neither was he ever an ecclesiastic writer but he was a politician-general which also means that he mostly wrote writings on politics and military science.

In my thesis I try to direct the attention, that how striking could this biblical aspect be even for a first reading, how interwoven it is in the works of Miklós Zrínyi and how it

determines the reception and the history of effectiveness. The title of this thesis also tries to express this deep rooted biblical determination found in the works. In the same time the title also anticipates that Zrínyi attains the baroque human ideal, which means that he steps out to the stage, to the world theatre's, the *theatrum mundi*'s huge stage, and for his cause he uses all the necessary devices of 17th century literature, among which you could find literary biblical allusions. By the choice of the title I also wanted to show that in the case of Zrínyi using biblical allusions is not only a machiavellian roleplay, but much more. In his person, we find a statesman with a clear sense of vocation or to use the biblical terms, a calling, who borrows his roles from the Scriptures, especially he internalizes the role of the prophet and when he uses this voice, it shows even through his political writings, that he uses this voice out of conviction, faith and a responsibility before God.

## **2. Methodology**

In my thesis I analyse the texts through close reading. I also make an attempt to give a comprehensive picture on the biblical determination of the works of Miklós Zrínyi based on the methods of historical poetics. After an *overview of the critical studies*, I will try my best to answer resurfacing question, which bible translation was the source of the biblical quotes which the author cited in his works. In the framework of philological research I examine thoroughly the currently accessible bibles in the collection of the Zrínyi Library, the Bibliotheca Zriniana, I also draw up the cultural historical background, which surrounded Zrínyi, and in the mean time I also take into the account of the question of liturgical effect. In the *third chapter*, based on the previously mentioned, periodically fashionable topos of world theatre and from the point of view of the necessity of role-play I analyse the volume *Syrena* of poems and the epic. The epic as the lengthiest Zrínyi text contains the most of biblical quotes. As opposed to the literary criticism before, in this work, I will not only take note of presence of biblical allusions, but I am going to present a possible and valid grouping of these allusions. These groupings are based on the determination of the genre of these allusions also taking into the account of general linguistical or literary historical context. Within this chapter, I also cover the question of inspiration which reappears from time to time as an underground stream in the works. In the *fourth chapter*, the previously mentioned prophetic role will be examined in the context of the 17th century's image of the prophet which was not free of load in the sense then it was a topic of debates for longer periods. This analysis is going to clearly show how Zrínyi practically takes on all the biblical, so called

„great prophetic” roles in order to adequately communicate his say. In the appendix, I hope to show the most detailed account of the biblical connections in the works of Zrínyi.

### **3. The Bible of Zrínyi**

In the age of Zrínyi, making reference to the Bible as a citation was not an exceptional, particular case. However the depth of this knowledge of the Bible, which characterised him, was not at all mundane. Among the prosaic works of Zrínyi, we can only find biblical citation and quotes only in three of them. In these three books out of the 66 books of the Bible 20 is quoted, actually in 44 quotes. This kind of use of the Bible presupposes a practical and thorough knowledge of the Bible, because among these quotes we can find in great quantity examples of less known or less quoted passages of the Bible, which are not frequently used in liturgical texts either.

Considering all this, we can state with great conviction that, Zrínyi always chose that linguistic register which conveyed his message in the most authentic format, he did not deviated from this method in the case of biblical allusions either. In case of the Bible, for Zrínyi the most adequate version always meant the Vulgate, Latin translation. He inherited this unshakeable attitude towards Latin as *lingua sacra* from Pázmány. Because of his education, first he knew the Bible as a sacred text from the liturgy, which also means that for him the Scriptures as the written text meant the Latin translation. It is not a negligible perspective, he expected the acceptance and the realization of his thoughts and actionable program from the nobility, his intentions would have not been taken seriously if he would not have cited the Bible on the official language of communication, which is already separated by the holy tradition.

So in case we meet a Latin biblical citation different from the Latin known mass or a liturgical song, we are certainly meeting a direct quote from a version of the Vulgate. Being the educated, aristocrat, quoting the Vulgate is quite mundane, especially if you take into account that from the records of his library to his letters we could clearly see the image of a regular reader. In the case of his Hungarian language quotes, we could not presuppose the same level of knowledge of the Scriptures, such as the regular reading of Hungarian translation of the Bible, so if Zrínyi refers to a biblical passage, characters or history only be casually mentioning it, he does it in a Hungarian version to which the holiness of the Scriptures are never linked. So if we try to answer the question asked again and again by literary criticism, which was Zrínyi's own, personal Bible, we could clearly state that it was

not his Hungarian language Scriptures. By the analysis of Latin biblical quotes in his prosaic works, we could identify that most of the known and used textual corpus is found in the liturgy, so we do not have to think of an use of books in the case of every citation or reference. Zrínyi's biblical quotes which are not present in liturgy show that Zrínyi must have also individually read the Bible, probably one of the edition of Vulgate. Most probably he did not use one of the still surviving three copies of *Bibliotheca Zriniana*, however these copies could be considered as philological point of interest rather than books for everyday use, on the other hand they surely elevate the beauty and value of any library. Concerning the question which version of Vulgata might have been used by Zrínyi, when he quoted a biblical citation other than the liturgy, we could state with high probability that he used one version of Vulgate Sixto-Clementine. The citation, Zrínyi used, could all be found in that version of the Bible, however they could also be found in today's critical edition of the Vulgate. This also means that quotes used by Zrínyi has been left out from the newer revisions of the Vulgate.

#### 4. The roleplaying Zrínyi

In the 94th aphorism of the *Vitéz hadnagy*, Zrínyi provides us with a brief yet artistic summary of the idea of the *simulatio – dissimulatio* in the baroque worldview. According to this social and political behaviour, one must sometimes pretend to be different from his true self and must hide the characteristics and informations of him that may have a negative effect on the assertion of interest.

He writes: "It is a misery, but we cannot do anything against it, that the acute soldier must be prepared for everything with sword or mind or cunning or even with foolishness in this world. Those who have only one personage and cannot change himself can progress slowly. Here the apostle Paul proves it for me: Et factus sum Judaeis tanquam Judaeos lucrifer, iis, qui sub lege sunt, quasi sub lege essem, cum ipse non essem sub lege, ut eos, qui sub lege erant, lucrificerem, iis, qui sine lege erant, [tanquam sine lege essem,] factus sum infirmus infirmis, ut infirmos lucrificerem, omnibus omnia factus sum, ut omnes facerem salvos. It was the apostle who was far from hypocrisy, yet – in order to serve God – he transformed himself in many ways."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> KULCSÁR Péter (szerk.), *Zrínyi Miklós prózai munkái*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2004, 2596. (To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have

Here stands before us the idea of *Theatrum Mundi* in a clear, fully developed form. The world is an enormous theatre (“worldly scene”), and on the planks every human, especially a political and military leader, needs to be familiar with playing different roles in order to succeed, even if some of these roles or the whole necessity of roleplaying is a misery. The ideas theoretically stated in *Vitéz hadnagy* were achieved by Zrínyi in poetic form in the *Syrena* – volume. In his essay titled *A szerkesztett verskötet mint a szerző ifjúkori önarcképe* László Szörényi logically elucidates that Zrínyi – by referring to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* both in structure and content – creates his symbolic portrait printed on the volume's cover through subsequent metamorphoses.

Sándor Bene extends the validity of roleplaying by claiming that carrying a “persona” is present not only in this volume of poetry but also in the entire Zrínyi-oeuvre. “In case we are searching for a Hungarian example of transformation of the moral allegory of the baroque theatre-trope into a political metaphor, the transformation of the *Theatrum Mundi* or theatre of human lives (*Theatrum vitae humanae*) into *Theatrum politicum* to present the process through which the politician, the bearer of divine wisdom, the Christian Monarch becomes an actor, his tutor and counselor, a philosopher, a humanist institutor morum becomes a professional infiltrating the state administration and the the historian, who used to build for eternity, becomes a journalist manipulating the curious spectators on the behalf of a certain political agenda, we can't find a more paradigmatical example than the poet and politician Miklós Zrínyi, [...] After a long preparation, the role of the unrequited lover of the Italian idyll, the heroic example of the Zrínyi of Sziget, the abstract strategist-ideal of «vitéz hadnagy», and applying the morals of king Matthias's role that offers greatness for politicians and strategists, **at the end of the experimental roleplaying**, he becomes probably one of the most influential figure in Hungarian politics in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and attempts to unify the characteristics of a savior-politician in himself.”<sup>2</sup>

The thesis about *simulatio* and roleplaying set forth in the 94<sup>th</sup> aphorism of *Vitéz hadnagy* was Zrínyi's guiding principle and he implemented this thesis in his works. Supporting the necessity of this behaviour with biblical allusions is a brilliant idea. The citation originated in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians is taken from Virgilio Malvezzi's commentary on Tacit titled *Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito*. Zrínyi uses the tension between the Bible's general

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become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 1 Corinthians 9, 20-22. NIV)

<sup>2</sup> BENE Sándor, *A hír és a közvélemény koncepciójának formálódása Zrínyi Miklós műveiben*, ItK, 1996/4, 369.

hostility towards hypocrisy and the apostle Paul's 'soulsaving' hypocrisy to support the need for *simulatio* required among strategists.

In my paper, I demonstrate how the principle stated in *Vitéz hadnagy* is represented in the *Syrena*-volume.

## 5. Prophetic roles

The literary application of the representative publicity of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was the rhetoric form. One of the main questions in my thesis is why did Zrínyi find the rhetoric functions of the prophetic roles the most suitable to create the context of public speaking. A further question concerns the chosen prophets and their features highlighted by Zrínyi in order to play the role of the savior-politician authentically.

The answer is rooted in the age of the Thirty Years War that created general existential insecurity. The self-styled, fanatical prophets claimed that through their inspirations they are enabled to reconstruct the scattered worldview. On the other hand, there stood the reformation's radical and novel hermeneutical principle that the divine word identifies the old as new thus the citations from the Scripture taken from the time of divine timelessness put and put into historical time are prophetic on their own. Thus citing the Scripture becomes the role model of application of the old, which is one of Zrínyi's guiding principles. In the old Word, there is a new problem and in the thoughts explained by the Word, lies the new solution. Zrínyi wants to sound the ideals of the ancestors in the voice of his own age and to achieve that he virtuously applies archaisms. The new content is sounded in an old voice during searching for the proper voice and setting the past as an example and – according to Zrínyi – this gives the authority of the text. The ancient virtues and the Scripture both serve as a context for the author to interpret the forgotten old thus it strikes the reader as novel.

According to John Milton, inspiration is needed to declare something which is and can be known (divine truth), but has not yet been recorded in a form approachable and acceptable for contemporary audience. Thus being inspired is a mean to authorize a text through which the text itself becomes divine. According to Zrínyi's idea, those are able to fulfil and practice his divine vocation who are conscious about their inspiredness and present the message in a way that it moves the reader. The dedication and the prologue of *Szigeti veszedelem* simultaneously defines the role of writing, the author and the audience. The work itself is a call to follow our ancestors' tradition, the author is the one who calls his nation and expects them to follow the example. This is the quintessence of being a prophet. In the epic,

the idea of inspiredness implicates the thought that although Zrínyi had known his great grandfather's heroic story, it is no more than history. To become a relevant message for the contemporary leaders, first the already known story must get into Zrínyi's mind as an inspired one, and then from his mind – through poetic techné – into the epic's stanzas. Through this the past is reinterpreted by divine inspiration and it serves as a pattern for acting in the present. Updating through divine inspiration also serves the aim of poetic self-representation. The example of the past is connected to him, he is the one that sets the aim of the future and he is the one able to build a bridge between the two through inspiration.

By taking the role of **Jeremiah**, Zrínyi provides double protection for his work. Firstly, he by paralleling his message with the divine one, thus giving it the divine message's seriousness by allusion. Secondly, he prevents and silences future criticism, because by ignoring the prophetic message one disobeys the divine word of warning and declaration of judgement. By citing **Isaiah**, the count teaches the nobility as a prophet to fill the present hiatus. In this he uses the ancient virtue, the tradition of the ancestors renewed by inspiration as a tool. Only with a powerful reason and with well-supported arguments can one accuse the nobility of being untrue because of ignoring the malpractice. The role of Isaiah creates the *occasio* for the prophet's teachings to become public. As **Nathan**, Zrínyi chooses to communicate openly and reveals the duality of his position in front of the emperor. The root of his struggle is that his role given by the emperor is in conflict with the possibility of giving undesired advice to his ruler. This tension is solved by the idea of inspiredness, whose aim and content is bringing back memories. The most critical aspect of a prophetic vocation is the responsibility of confrontation, accepting the inspired message, even if it costs the messenger's life. By focusing on inspiration, Zrínyi implies that the emperor empowered him to give advice and this advice is of divine origin, as divine it is irrevocable. The Nehemiah-like roleplaying – be it an intentional or structural allusion – by emphasising inspiration means that the moral responsibility of Zrínyi's enemies are enormous if they prevent him from building fortresses to protect the motherland.

In the *Áfium* the reference to Ezekiel represents the responsibility of warning about the unavoidable danger. The watchman cannot stop the enemy nor can he take them out of their way, his only duty is to warn. Zrínyi applies this aspect of the prophet's role and updates the problem of responsibility expressed by Ezekiel with enormous power. In this case, the fulfilment of the prophet's role realised through writing, in which the idea of inspiration is covertly present. The roleplay plays the rethorical function of subtly transforming the author's individual responsibility into a collective responsibility.



The social criticism of *Afium* is embedded into two citations from two prophets. The work begins with emphasising the relevance of collective responsibility of the watchman from Ezekiel. The frame is completed with a citation from the song of **Deborah**, that summarises appropriately the pamphlet's core message: voluntary sacrifice is required from the responsibly thinking leaders. The prophet's role here means the priority of undertaking voluntary sacrifice, like Barak, constable of Israel, would have not started to fight without Deborah. With this citation, Zrínyi applies the metaphorical category cheat which means that the author endows the identified with a characteristic that is yet just a requirement. This tension can only be solved from the reader's point of view by accepting voluntary sacrifice.

By asserting the prophets general attributes, the reader has two choices to judge Zrínyi's message: 1. identification with the content of the message and acting according to it, 2. label him as a fool and ignore him. The prophetic role simultaneously serves as assertion of interest and protection. The citations from the bible contain the condemnation or the warning message, the annexed thoughts are just the interpretations of the quotes. If the reader wants to challenge Zrínyi, he faces the words of the Scripture that are updated messages for the reality of the present.