

## Ambiguity and Paradox in the Humanistic Literature of the Jagiellonian Age

The *Stauromachia* (1519) by Stephanus Taurinus, the most important contemporary literary account of the Dózsa revolt (1514), has been the subject of a complete reevaluation in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Despite its substantial length, clearly definable social and courtly context and literary environment, the intention of the author in writing the text remains a riddle. Unlike many panegyrics of his contemporaries, which celebrate the virtues and victories of rulers and aristocrats using the topoi of praise and blame in the epideictic and demonstrative genre of rhetoric, the message of this epic poem remains hard to decode. Several scholars – including László Szörényi and László Jankovits – have recently called attention to the subversive, pessimistic, ironical or paradoxical overtones both in its overt authorial judgments about the pravity of the nobles and in the intertextual relationship to its most direct poetic sources, the *Pharsalia* by Lucan, and the *Battle of Frogs and Mice* attributed to Homer.<sup>2</sup> The aim of this paper is twofold: first, to call attention to the ironical and satirical inspiration of several other humanistic works of the Jagiellonian age, in the context of which the lack of a clearly definable moral good in the poetic landscape seems to be rather the standard than the exception; and second, if we accept the validity of these reinterpretations, we might have to rethink the social framework behind the traditional understanding of patron-client relationships that surrounded humanistic literary activities. Multiple meanings of literary works might have served multiple social functions: when authors re-invented such ancient genres as fictitious orations, dialogues, paradoxical praises

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1 I am referring both to the original print and to the critical edition: Stephanus Taurinus Olomucensis, *Stauromachia id est Cruciatorum servile bellum* (Vienna: Singrenius, 1519) and Stephanus Taurinus Olomucensis, *Stauromachia id est Cruciatorum servile bellum*, ed. Ladislaus Juhász (Budapest: Egyetemi, 1944).

2 László Jankovits and László Szörényi, “A megíratlan és a megírt magyar tárgyú eposz: 1519: Megjelenik Stephanus Taurinus Stauromachiája,” in *A magyar irodalom története. 1. köt. A kezdetektől 1800-ig*, ed. László Jankovits and Géza Orlovsky (Budapest: Gondolat, 2007), 195–203, and László Szörényi, “L’influenza della Farsaglia di Lucano sull’epopea tardoumanista latina in Ungheria (Stephanus Taurinus: *Stauromachia*),” *Neohelicon* 27 (2000), 97–111.

or even epic poems, they had not only rhetoric and literary aims in sight, but they were also keen on leaving the door open to contradicting interpretations, which might have helped their social advancement.

Taurinus was not only a contemporary of the events, but stood in the service of two aristocrats who played an important role in the history of the peasant revolt, and his direct involvement in the course of events would exclude the possibility of a neutral standpoint in his epic. First, he was hired by Cardinal Tamás Bakócz, the Archbishop of Esztergom, as a secretary in 1511, and he lived through the entire following course of events as a member of his retinue—the journey of Bakócz to Rome, the unsuccessful papal election, their return to Hungary and the outbreak of the rebellion.<sup>3</sup> From 1517, Taurinus's second patron became Ferenc Várdai, the Bishop of Transylvania, who personally participated in the suppression of the peasant uprising with his own troops. There can be no question that the immediate social context of his epic poem would not let Taurinus express any other opinion of the peasant rebellion, than that of scorn, disdain and abomination. Georg von Brandenburg, the dedicatee of the *Stauromachia*, suffered financial losses because of the turn of events, which are also mentioned by Taurinus in his dedication.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, he refers to the uprising as *plebeius furor* ("plebeian rage") in the dedication, a portion of the text in which he speaks outside of his role as an epic narrator.<sup>5</sup> Being a protégé of Bakócz and later a client of Francis Várdai, and dedicating his work to Georg von Brandenburg, Taurinus obviously had to agree with the political and ideological stance of his patrons.

But how can we then insert Taurinus's independent poetic voice into the wider social context of patronage relationships existing in the *Stauromachia*? One of the responses to this question is given by the writing process of the work. Although the book was given to the press by the author himself in the spring of 1519, there remained many incongruencies in the narration that betray a certain lack of unity. In the first canto, after the account that a "good spirit" (*eudaemon*) prompted

3 Taurinus left for Vienna in May 1514, but returned to Hungary probably already at the end of that month, as he was present at a royal council on May 28, 1514. See Sándor V. Kovács "A Dózsa-háború humanista eposza," *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 63 (1959): 456.

4 "Nam [Ioannes Thurzo] ea tempestate illustrissimam dominationem tuam nonnihl damni ab iisdem perpressam fuisse audiverat." Taurinus, *Stauromachia*, 1944, 1.

5 The personal participation of Taurinus in the events is mentioned once in the description of journey with the Archbishop of Rome: "cuius ad Utriculos flavas traiecimus undas" (I, 137) and "post patulum campum montes transcendimus altos" (I, 143; Tuscan Apennines), "Vidimus et magno Laurentia condita sumptu // Delubra" (I, 147/148) and back ("Sic illo tandem discessimus..."; "hinc Dravum resolutum navibus imus," I, 172, 176). The plural first-person account of this passage (I, 104–80) suggests that it might have been conceived originally as a *hodoeporicon* in the manner of the *Odeporicon* of Richardus Bartholinus (Vienna, 1515). At the end of the poem, "the author" prays for the lucky rule of Ludwig II to the holy kings of Hungary, but the speaker remains here inside his role as an epic narrator ("Vos precor, o divi reges, coelia regum // Numina..." V, 475–76).

Cardinal Bakócz to travel to Rome, where the virtuous Pope Julius II soon died and his throne was occupied by Pope Leo X, we find a poetic itinerary, a *hodoeporicon*. Here Taurinus starts to speak in the first-person plural, falling out of his role as an epic narrator that was inaugurated by the invocation at the beginning of the poem. Through forty-three lines (I, 137–80), he recounts the troubles experienced on the way home, the crossing of the Apennines (I, 143), the visit to Narni, Loretto and Ancona, the tempest which they survived in the Adriatic Sea and their landing near Senj on the Croatian coast (I, 139–167).<sup>6</sup> Taurinus made hardly any references to the papal aspirations of Cardinal Bakócz (I, 100) and fell completely silent on the Crusade entrusted to Bakócz, which could have been seen as part of the causal chain of events leading to the peasant rebellion.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Taurinus included in his epic poem this travel account, which might be the remnant of an earlier *hodoeporicon* that emerged from the retinue of Bakócz during and after the trip to Rome. When he penned this portion of the poem, the eulogy to Pope Julius II (I, 104–15) and the praise of Leo X (I, 120–28) might have been considered relevant, whereas they might have become anachronistic by 1519, five years after the publication of the *Iulius exclusus de coelis*. Similarly, the fifth canto shows signs of later redactional work: all the protagonists of the first four cantos (the king, Bakócz, János Bornemisza) disappear from this part and their place is taken by Ferenc Várdai and János Szapolyai, the two heroes extolled in the first line of the last canto.<sup>8</sup> This lack of narrative unity might have been caused by the changes in Taurinus's epic concept: what was first conceived as a *hodoeporicon* praising Cardinal Bakócz in the first canto became an epic poem exonerating the cardinal (second to fourth cantos) and finally turned into a praise of his new, Transylvanian patrons at the end of the poem.

Furthermore, we might better misunderstand Taurinus's paradoxical stance on the peasant war if we do not consider his approach to this historical event as a literary creation within an ancient poetic genre with set rules. Although, according

6 Cf. Vilmos Fraknói, *Erdődi Bakócz Tamás élete* (Budapest: MTA, 1889), 142.

7 Taurinus made no reference whatsoever to the Bakócz's papal ambitions and that he had arrived back to Hungary with a papal bull proclaiming a crusade, which thwarted the ongoing peace negotiations with the Turks. As Fodor and Dávid suggest, Bakócz called off the crusade after the truce with the Turks was finally made, which ultimately led to the outbreak of the peasant rebellion. See Pál Fodor and Géza Dávid, "Magyar–török béketárgyalások 1512–14-ben," *Történelmi Szemle* 36, no. 3–4 (1994): 193–225. The *Stauromachia* mentions only that Pope Leo X gave Bakócz some vaguely named "honores," which were accepted by Bakócz against his will (I, 129–30: "Decretos iterum Thomae Leo praebebat honores / Quos ille invitus vix tandem assumpsit...") and the text of the poem remains completely silent about his role in the crusade, which turned into a peasant rebellion. On the figure of Dózsa in the *Stauromachia*, see also Gabriella Erdélyi, "Tales of a Peasant Revolt. Taboos and Memories of 1514 in Hungary," in *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Erika Kuijpers et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 99.

8 V. Kovács, *A Dózsa-háború*, 461.

to the prologue, Johannes Thurzó asked him to compose a short historical compendium on the Dózsa Rebellion in Breslau, Taurinus purportedly chose a completely different, literary genre.<sup>9</sup> Epic poetry has always considered the protagonists of any story as figures governed and guided by divine intervention, whose fate is determined on a transcendental level rather than as independent human agents with free will. The storyline of epic poems, which follow the ancient Greco-Roman generic rules, is directed by a divine *mechane*, a master plan of the gods, or a God to which human characters react differently according to their personal moral qualities or their luck. Without taking into account this generic framework for the *Stauromachia*, we might misunderstand Taurinus's motives and intentions in the description of the events and figures of the peasant war.

In the universe of the *Stauromachia*, the chain of events is launched by three different agents on three different levels. First, God and the stars rule history: God, who is often called *Deus astripotens* (I, 395; I, 453; V, 456), is the only entity capable of ruling the stars, but he does not directly interfere in events, whereas the stars often give a foresight of things to come. Stars trigger the epic action, as the ominous Saturn is the ultimate cause of all the troubles caused by the peasants (I, 33) and the disappearance of the bad constellation leads to the end of the fight (V, 438–43). The second main reason for the peasant war in the literary account of Taurinus are the two capital sins, avarice and luxury, which gave moral foundation to the bloodshed (I, 58–75; II, 57–82).<sup>10</sup> Third, the most important direct cause of the peasant war is Dózsa, or Zeglius according to the name given to his literary figure by Taurinus. Zeglius is directed by one single goal in the entire epic: to cause more destruction and to incite arbitrary bloodshed and uncontrolled terror wherever he appears. The epic action of the first four cantos in which Cardinal Bakócz is present is based on the rhetorical opposition of peace and war. The cardinal is the representative of peace, which he propagates through his every word: he is addressed as *Pacis auctor* (“the creator of peace”) by György Szatmári in the account of his entrée into Buda (I, 279) and at the beginning of the fourth canto Bakócz attacks in his poetic oration not the peasantry or Dózsa, but the war itself (IV, 6–8). On the other hand, Zeglius flies to Buda as a Fury (I, 347–48, “*pernicibus alis advolat*”—“he flies with swift wings”); and he convinces his followers, the peasants, simply by his appearance to opt for war instead of peace (I, 432).<sup>11</sup> His journey to the *Kunság* region of Hungary escalated into bloodshed

9 Taurinus, *Stauromachia*, 1944. 1.: “[J. Th.] stimulabat, ut tam initium, quam exitum plebei furoris huiusmodi caeteraque id genus omnia, quo fieri posset compendiosius, conscriberem.”

10 In the description of the latter Taurinus follows the fifth satire of Juvenal.

11 *Ibid.*, 14: “Postponenda putant pacem dominosque perosi.” Taurinus's biased presentation of the historical facts is even more evident if contrasted with the fact that Dózsa joined the

without reason (I, 459–66), and his only message is war (“*Evocat in bellum crudele*,” I, 481), at least according to the epic account of Taurinus. Consequently, the peasantry becomes a tool and a symbol of the war („[bella] duos in nos, nostramque salutem // *Spirasse agricolas, belli portenta crudelis*” II, 25–26—“the wars have inspired the strong peasants against us and our life as portents of the cruel war”) and Zeglius fills everything with Mars (III, 339). This heavy-handed opposition between Bakócz, the ambassador of peace on one side, and Zeglius, the agent of war, on the other was played out by Taurinus in order to cut all historical connections between the cardinal and the genesis of the peasant war, which broke out basically spontaneously after the furious incitement of Zeglius, according to the humanistic literary account.

Taurinus’s relationship to the peasantry is defined by the same opposition of moral good and evil, but the role of peasants is different from Zeglius’s epic function.<sup>12</sup> Although they are often characterized by negative expressions, the most important quality of the peasantry is not evil, but stupidity. Taurinus’s image of society consists of three classes differentiated as *servi*, *civica turba*, and *regis curia/heroes*—the serfs, the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy around the king’s court.<sup>13</sup> In this social system, the peasants act as mindless servants and they are called *pecus servile* (III, 327)—“servile flock.” It is because of their mindless obedience that Zeglius can direct them with his evil will: “And when Zeglius deluded their souls with his persuasion, they all assented to sin” (“*Atque ubi persuasos animos elusit, iniquo / Assensere omnes sceleri*,” II, 207–08). At the turning point of the events, in the fourth canto, when the new constellation of the stars turns the luck of warfare and János Bornemisza holds a menacing speech, an unnamed peasant excuses himself by saying that “we have started this war against our will and partly by constraint.”<sup>14</sup>

Allegorically, even Jupiter tries to return them to good sense: at the end of the epic, he offers Pallas, the goddess of wisdom, the possibility to help the “wretched peasantry” (*plebs misella*, V, 374), whom the main God sympathetically refers to as “my own laborers” (*agricolis meis*). Pallas nevertheless turns down the offer and Iuno asks for revenge, thus making retaliation inevitable. Taurinus’s wording and his general epic conception show that the peasants are sinful, but mindless: the origin of their sin can be traced back to Zeglius, and the peasant war is not a social conflict, but the struggle of war against peace.

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crusading peasant forces only at a later stage. See Gábor Barta, “Georgius Zekeltől Dózsa Györgyig,” *Századok* 109 (1975): 63–88.

12 See also Gábor Klaniczay, “Images and designations for rebellious peasants in late medieval Hungary,” in *The man of many devices who wandered full many ways. Festschrift in Honor of János M. Bak*, ed. Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebők (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 119.

13 See Taurinus, *Stauromachia*, I, 541–46.

14 “*Inviti bellum hoc partesque timore / fecimus*” (Ibid., IV, 160–61).

It is clear from the beginning of the poem that the reader is supposed to see the origin of all evil in Zeglius. He appears in the first canto as a “cunning” (*dis-simulans animum*), “malignant” (*promptus ad omne nefas*), “obnoxious and unfaithful” (*artemque nocendi edoctus, violare fidem*) nobleman, who came to Buda with the single objective of causing trouble (I, 341–71).<sup>15</sup> Some elements of his description deserve special attention: first, the details of Dózsa’s characteristics are derived from the depiction of Flavius Rufinus, an Eastern Roman consul who betrayed the Western Roman army of Stilicho and was therefore attacked by the late Roman poet Claudian in a short epic. The typological parallel between Rufinus and Zeglius is clear: just as Rufinus was supposed to help the Western Roman Stilicho in his efforts against the Visigoths of Alaric, though he diverted his troops from the final battle, Zeglius similarly betrayed the anti-barbaric, anti-pagan crusading enterprise of the Christian nobles. Zeglius’s mischievous intentions are instigated by the hellish Muse of the poem, Megaera, similarly inspired by the *In Rufinum* of Claudian, where the Fury Alecto and the Vices conspire to send Megaera to infiltrate the mind of Rufinus. From this point of view, Zeglius’s figure in the *Stauromachia* unites the features of the literary characters of Rufinus and Megaera herself: Zeglius is not only the executor of the will of the Hell’s Devils, but he himself is the cause of the troubles—he himself is diabolic. Megaera is the Muse of Taurinus, but not the cause of events: the real cause lies in the wicked personality of Dózsa, who is characterized by the same words, as the Megaera, the devilish teacher of sins in Claudian’s epic.<sup>16</sup> The other important typological parallel for the figure of Zeglius is Catiline: as was shown by V. Kovács a long time ago, this rebellious speech delivered at Cegléd (and often cited in the 1940s and 1950s as an example proto-communist thought) is in fact an exact poetic rephrasing of the oration of Catiline as it was rendered by Sallustius in the *Conspiracy of Catiline*.<sup>17</sup> In general, Taurinus repeatedly denotes all peasants in his text as *monstra*,<sup>18</sup> “monstrous creatures” (*monstrosis caedibus*,

15 The description stems from the first canto of Claudian’s *In Rufinum*. The works of Claudian were published in Vienna in 1510 by Johannes Camers (VD16 C4032). The margin notes applied by Taurinus to his own work resemble those in most this edition, as they employ similar rhetoric terminology in structuring the poem. The parallels in Claudian’s *In Rufinum* have already been cited by Zoltán Császár, *A Stauromachia antik és humanista forrásai* (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1937), 10, though he did not analyze them.

16 Cf. Claud. in Ruf. I, 97–100 (Meque [sc. Megaeram] etiam tradente dolos artesque nocendi / Edidicit: simulare fidem sensusque minaces, / Protegere et blando fraudem praetexere risu, / Plenus saevitiae lucrique cupidine fervens) and Taur. *Staur.* I, 349–56. (“Promptus ad omne nefas, cunctorum Lerna malorum, // Thesaurus scelerum, gestusque artemque nocendi // Edoctus, violare fidem sensusque minaces // Cognatam, et ficto fraudem praetexere risu...”)

17 V. Kovács, Sándor, “Taurinus és Sallustius Catilináj-a,” *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 60 (1956): 319–22.

18 Gábor Klaniczay, “Images,” 119. But, as it has been noted by Ferenc Csonka, the first Hungarian translator of Taurinus’s epic, László Geréb has clearly misunderstood the text to

III, 186), although these descriptions seem to strike a much milder tone than those applied to Dózsa. While Dózsa is the arch-evil himself, the peasants often seem to be only the victims of his misleading rhetoric. Nevertheless, Taurinus is not an exception to the rule that not a single contemporary historical source shows a completely positive attitude toward the peasants.

On the other hand, it is clear that the message of the *Stauromachia* is not unambiguous. Szörényi is correct to state that we must move beyond the question of pro- or anti-peasant attitudes reflected in the poem: the real question is whether there are identifiable subversive patterns under the narrative surface of the story. Most of the signs of the author's ambiguous attitude to the history of the uprising can be revealed if we examine the intertextual motifs of the text. As is well-known, the title itself is modeled on the *War of Frogs and Mice*, the *Batrachomyomachia*, a mock epic generally attributed to Homer at the time of Taurinus and a popular school text around 1510 at the University of Vienna, where two editions have been published.<sup>19</sup> The protagonists of the original story, the frogs and the mice, were not enemies: the war breaks out by accident: the careless Frog King invites a mouse to his home, but he forgets that the mouse is travelling on his shoulder while he is swimming home through a lake. The mice protest the drowning of this innocent mouse, but the king denies the entire incident. A large-scale war breaks out between the two species, which is almost won by the mice, but Zeus sends the armored troops of crabs to aid the frogs at the last moment and finally the mice retreat. A simple allegorical reading of this subtext could easily translate the main actors of Bakócz and his retinue as frogs, the peasants as mice, and the Transylvanian forces as crabs (especially if we think of the description of the armored Transylvanian forces against the weaponless—*inermes*—peasants).

This intertextual reference to the *Batrachomyomachia* becomes an even stronger clue to the interpretation of the *Stauromachia* if we examine it in the context of the contemporary Viennese understanding of Homer's mock epic. On November 30, 1504, Augustinus Moravus, a friend of Conrad Celtis and a patron

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the point that his translation is unusable. His errors include two phrases that denigrate the rebellious peasants more than it was intended by Taurinus: it is not the Hungarian peasants who imagine themselves as *Pannonian Neros*, but they think that they have already defeated the *Pannonian Neros*, i.e., the aristocrats, and "teneram frontem perfricare" means simply to lose one's sense of shame (an expression used by Juvenal) and not "to scratch the feeble-minded forehead." Ferenc Csonka, "A Dózsa-forradalom első eposzának fordítása: fordítói tévedések a Paraszti háborúban," *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 76 (1972): 664–65.

19 One edition was prepared by Joachim Vadian, a teacher (probably) and a friend of Taurinus, while the other one, which shows clear signs of Erasmianism in its dedication, was published by Bartholomaeus Pannonius. Farkas Gábor Kiss, "A Békaegérharc Bécsben a 16. század kezdetén: jegyzetek a copia oktatásáról," in *Magistrae discipuli. Tanulmányok Madas Edit tiszteletére*, ed. Előd Nemerkenyi (Budapest: Argumentum, 2009), 167–74.



of Taurinus, wrote a letter to the Celtis discussing his latest literary-dramatic production, the *Triumphus de Boemis*. The soldiers of Emperor Maximilian I won a minor battle against the Czechs at Wenzenberg in 1504, and the Viennese “arch-humanist” celebrated this victory with a short triumphal panegyric. Nevertheless, it was too much of a flattery for Augustine’s taste: as he claimed, one could hardly speak of a victory suiting a classical epic form, when a 14,000-strong German cavalry confronted 1,000 Czech infantry soldiers.<sup>20</sup> Despite his discontent with Celtis’s treatment of the subject, he asked his Viennese friend to send him the poem, which he ironically called “pugnae huius ludicrum” – “a joke of a battle” or “this battle-play” (*ludicrum* referring both to a ridiculous event and to a comic play) – especially because he recently read a comparable poem, the *Battle of Frogs and Mice*, the *Batrachomyomachia* from a Sicilian poet,<sup>21</sup> which one could easily adapt to this event.<sup>22</sup> Thus, according to Augustinus, this battle was rather a farce that would suit only a mock poem, not a heroic epic.<sup>23</sup> Although we cannot prove that the idea of representing the peasant war as a derivative of a mock epic, the *Batrachomyomachia* was directly taken over from him by Taurinus, this note from Augustinus’s letter shows that even regular warfare in less than equal circumstances could be reinterpreted using the generic patterns of pseudo-Homer’s mock epic.

Another often-quoted intertextual reference, which might be called subversive, is the overwhelming presence of Lucan’s *Pharsalia* in the epic diction of the *Stauromachia*. Lucan was the favorite epic poet of Joachim Vadianus, the author of the *De poetica et carminis ratione* (1518), who exerted great influence on Taurinus, his (probably) pupil and friend through his teaching. Taurinus

20 Despite Augustinus’s reservations, Riccardo Bartolini described the battle scene in heroic terms in his courtly epic *Austrias. De bello Norico*. See Elisabeth Klecker, “Kaiser Maximilians Homer,” *Wiener Studien* 107–108 (1994–1995): 613–37.

21 It is not clear whether Augustinus referred to a contemporary poem or the mock epic attributed to Homer. The adjective *Siculus* (“Sicilian”) suggests that he meant the *Croacus seu de bello ranarum et murium* of Elysus Calentius (Luigi Gallucci), a Neapolitan poet active in Calabria and Puglia, which was written around 1448 and first published in Rome in 1503. Cf. Elysus Calentius, *Opuscula Elisii Calentii Poetae Clarissimi* (Rome: Ioannes de Besicken, 1503) and Elisio Calenzio, *La guerra delle ranocchie. Croaco*, ed. Liliana Monti Sabia (Naples: Loffredo, 2008).

22 Conrad Celtis, *Der Briefwechsel des Konrad Celtis*, ed. Hans Rupprich (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1934), 576: “Obsecro tamen ut pugnae huius ludicrum mihi mittas. Legi enim his diebus non inelegantis cuiusdam poetae Siculi Batrachomyomachiam, cui triumphus hic Rodilardorum cum Pisophagio egregio quadrare videbitur.” The names with which Augustinus refers to the mice and frogs seem to have been derived from the *De bello ranarum Croacus libellus* of Elisio Calenzio. See Elysus Calentius, *Opuscula*, a1v-b6r.

23 Interestingly, Augustinus himself occasionally referred to his malignant enemies in the court elite as *mures palatinos* (“the mice in the palace”), Celtis, *Briefwechsel*, 566: “Nosti enim *mures palatinos*, quam vafri sint ad aucupanda beneficia, quamque me facile vel crimine laesae maiestatis reum arguere possint vel agere mecum ex iure manu consertum.”



stresses the importance of Lucan's Pharsalian epic in his dedication, too, calling it the single most influential text for his poem – a claim that has been justified by philological research. Lucan shows ambiguous attitude toward his heroes, Caesar, Pompey and Cato the Younger: Pompey and Cato the Younger represent traditional Roman values and morality, while Caesar impersonates the rebellious, mischievous and subversive powers, which ultimately win in the conflict due to the adventurous, immoral character of Caesar, who always acts with readiness (speed) and never fails to take a risk. Dózsa's figure in Taurinus's epic is constructed from Caesar's temerity, audacity and immorality on one hand, and from the Stoic virtuosity of Cato the Younger on the other, as Dózsa faces death, and delivers his magnificent final speech in the fifth book of the poem. Lucan's ambiguity, his moral distrust in Caesar's party, and his low esteem of Pompey's leadership skills seem to be reflected in Taurinus's representation of the first part of conflict until the arrival of the Transylvanian troops. Just like Lucan, he seems to suggest that neither side is the good side and that events are shaped by an irreversible and malicious fate.

Third, the title leaf of the work, engraved especially for this publication (thus probably inspired by the author), accentuates the pivotal moment of the war, the execution of Dózsa, the only occasion in the history of the entire uprising that has been judged ambiguously by contemporary humanists. Several researchers (including Marianna D. Birnbaum and Paul Freedman) have called attention to the similarities between this depiction and the late medieval iconography of the Passion of Christ, while the metal crown has been related to the martyrdom of Saint Christopher.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps even Taurinus hid this parallel in his text, when he wrote that the torturers of Zeglius mocked the peasant-king after putting the crown on his head, applying the very same word (*illudere*) which the Gospel used for the mocking of Christ.<sup>25</sup> Such a hagiographic context would definitely elevate the merits of Dózsa and his army. We find almost contemporary examples in which the parody of passion is used to shed positive light on the suffering victim: a case in point is the passion of Martin Luther, *Passio Doctoris Martini Lutheri*, which appeared shortly after the Diet of Worms in 1521<sup>26</sup> and represented Luther

24 Marianna D. Birnbaum, "A Mock Calvary in 1514? The Dózsa-Passion," in *European Iconography East and West: Selected Papers of the Szeged International Conference*, ed. György E. Szőnyi (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 91–108; Paul Freedman, "Representations of peasant and seigneurial fury in late medieval and early modern Europe," *Temas medievales* 19 (2011): 79–82. See also Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 272–74; Norman Housley, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400–1536* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 69–70.

25 Compare Taurinus, *Stauromachia*, V, 155: "descito illudunt regi" with Mt 27, 29: "et plectentes coronam de spinis, posuerunt super caput ejus, et arundinem in dextera ejus. Et genu flexo ante eum, illudebant ei, dicentes: Ave rex Judæorum."

26 Johannes Schilling: *Passio Doctoris Martini Lutheri* (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1989). (Quellen und

as the innocent, Christ-like victim of the process at the Diet, “who suffered by the Papists, and resurrected in the Christian hearts.”<sup>27</sup> However, we should not forget that mock passion narratives were a popular genre in late medieval East Central Europe earlier as well. Two accounts are known from Bohemia from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, which consciously parallel the execution of criminals in one case and the anti-Jewish pogrom of Prague in the other case with the Biblical narrative of the Passion. The *Passio raptorum* (“Passion of the Thieves”) uses Biblical elements to adorn the style of a narrative about the execution of 56 thieves who were captured near Brno in 1401. Another, still earlier narrative, *Passio Iudeorum Pragensium secundum Ieškonem Rusticum quadratum* (“Passion of the Jews of Prague according to Johnny the Peasant”), tells the story of 1389 pogrom in Prague, following the Gospels even in its title. This text, which a prominent German literary historian, Burghart Wachinger, characterized as belonging to the “darkest types of texts” (*einer der finsternsten Texte des Mittelalters*),<sup>28</sup> consciously overturns the passion narrative and metes out revenge on the Jews of Prague for the Passion of Christ. The pogrom, which took place precisely on Easter, is described by putting the words of the suffering Christ into the mouth of Jews, while Christian pursuers slander the victims of the pogrom with the words used by the crowd in the Gospels.<sup>29</sup> The cases of the Brno thieves and of the Prague Jews clearly demonstrate that the meaning of a parodistic Passion might also be a *contrafactum* – an imitation with an opposite conclusion, to use a medieval poetic term. Thus, it cannot be claimed that the reenactment of the Passion in the trial of Dózsa, especially in its visual representations, would necessarily bestow the aura and benefits of Christ’s suffering on the peasants.

In sum, the representation of the Dózsa rebellion by Taurinus seems to be paradoxical. Of course, we do not have to suppose that every reader of the epic

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Forschungen zur Reformationgeschichte 57.). The Latin text was also published in Vienna in 1521 (VD16 ZV 22257).

27 “Lutherus passus est sub papistis, resurrexit in pectoribus Christianis,” Ibid. a8r. See also Burghart Wachinger, “Die Passion Christi und die Literatur. Beobachtungen an den Rändern der Passionsliteratur,” in *Die Passion Christi in Literatur und Kunst des Spätmittelalters*, ed. Walter Haug and Burghart Wachinger (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), 4–5.

28 Wachinger, “Die Passion Christi”. Cf. also Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales. The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

29 See František Šujan, “Passio raptorum de Slapanicz secundum Bartoss tortorem Brunensem,” *Sborník historický* 3 (1885): 245–52, 301–03; Eva Steinová, “Jews and Christ interchanged: discursive strategies in the *Passio Iudeorum Pragensium*,” *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 17 (2012): 93–106; *Passio Iudeorum Pragensium: Kritická edícia Pašiji pražských židov*, ed. Eva Steinová (MA thesis, Brno, 2010). Accessed on Dec 1, 2014, [http://is.muni.cz/th/180028/ff\\_m/](http://is.muni.cz/th/180028/ff_m/); and Lucie Doležalová, “Passion and Passion: Intertextual Narratives from Late Medieval Bohemia between Typology, History and Parody,” in *La typologie biblique comme forme de pensée médiévale*, ed. Marek Thue Kretschmer (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 245–65.

could have been aware of the poetic sources behind the speeches of Dózsa. We could regard them as nothing else than poetic embellishments used by Taurinus to authenticate his Classical Latin style. But even then, there remains a significant contradiction between the fierce Caesar- and Rufinus-like figure of Dózsa at the beginning and his stance as a Stoic hero at the end of the epic; and the choice of the *War of the Frogs and Mice* as a guiding light to the structure of the poem almost certainly defines the point of view of Taurinus. Where the modern reader would expect a panegyric of the winning party, we receive an evil anti-hero with diabolic intentions, who still proclaims his eternal fame in the moment of his death, suffering with pride and with Stoic endurance. This scene of torture and pain, to which even the woodcut of the title page calls attention by rendering it the symbolic climax of the entire story, provides the reader with the description of Zeglius's defiance. As he says, his eternal fame will survive and "they will sing of me with great praise of the Huns all over the world, as the small king of peasants" (*regulus agricolum*) (V, 139–40). Previously, he announces with a similar audacity that his own *Stauromachia* will live as long as the fame of the poem about him survives.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Zeglius identifies his role as the author of the events with Taurinus's role as the author of the text, which demonstrates a strange affinity between Zeglius's and Taurinus's epic characters.

Sándor V. Kovács tried to solve this paradox in his pioneering study in 1959 by claiming that Taurinus needed to avoid siding only with the Hungarian aristocracy in order to maintain a false semblance of neutrality and historical veracity. According to V. Kovács, "an entirely dismal characterization of Dózsa would have damaged the sense of realism in the epic,"<sup>31</sup> which was announced in the dedication. But did Taurinus nevertheless aim at a balanced, impartial rep-

30 As Zeglius—and not Taurinus—says: "Quantum grandoloqui durabunt vatis honores / Tantum, crede mihi, mea vivet stauromachia" (II, 199–200). In this passage, Taurinus played with the ancient poetic tradition of *sphragis* in which the author invokes his own work and puts his trademark on it. One of the most famous examples is the *sphragis* of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, which is verbally paraphrased here (cf. *Pharsalia*, 9, 983–86.). Taurinus subverts Lucan's idea: whereas Lucan addressed Caesar and told him that their common *Pharsalia* (*Pharsalia nostra*) will live forever, in the *Stauromachia* it is Zeglius, the protagonist, who speaks out of the epic text and proclaims the eternal fame of the work, which he considers his own, although it was written by Taurinus (*mea vivet Stauromachia*—"my *Stauromachia* will live").

31 V. Kovács, "A Dózsa-háború," 463. In fact, Taurinus does not speak about realism in the dedication. The term "servato historiae decoro" (Taurinus, *Stauromachi*, 1944, 3), which he uses to describe his objective, suggests only that his changes on the historical facts do not transgress the limits of decency. We can cite Erasmus as a parallel: he suggested in the *De duplici copia verborum et rerum* that when using fictitious *prosopopoeia* one should keep decency in the description. Erasmus Roterodamus, *De duplici copia verborum et rerum*, Ed. Betty E. Knott (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing, 1988), 212: "personam hominis procul absentis aut iam olim defuncti loquentem facimus servato decoro"). The principle of rhetoric decorum, not that of historical realism.

resentation of the historical events? I doubt it. Zeglius is evil down to the bone, sent to the earth by Hell, where he descends back when he dies. How much realism can we expect from the description of how he is taken in front of the three mythological judges of Hell who send him to Cocytus? How realistic is Taurinus's poetically vivid idea that the servants of Hell's judges have to tie up the body of Dózsa with steel shackles because its dismembered pieces are falling apart and bitten out?<sup>32</sup> Panegyric and epic poetry need no historical veracity and the intended evil of Dózsa's figure was obvious from the beginning. If Taurinus simply follows the recipe of Claudian, who sends Rufinus back to Hell without furnishing him with any virtues, he could have simply handled Dózsa as the ultimate evil without any positive connotations. The question is why Taurinus did not do so.

In my opinion, the answer lies in the popularity of ambiguous speech in many of the humanistic texts in this period, the most important model of which is Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly* published in 1509. As is well known, Erasmus uses the figure of Folly in order to create a paradoxical and ironic mode of speech in which every human vice becomes a virtue. Folly praises all human professions for their foolishness and aimlessness, thus creating a sphere of free speech in which traditional medieval vanity literature mixes with contemporary social criticism against monks, theologians, and worldly authority. At the same time, we must not forget that the speaker of the *Praise of Folly* is Folly herself, thus every word of her social criticism can be taken as a lie as well. The technique of using paradoxical statements along with fictive citations and vaguely attributed opinion was often employed by Erasmus in his letter exchanges in order to express potentially dangerous political or theological statements.<sup>33</sup> Sándor V. Kovács still doubted a stronger Erasmian influence on the work of Taurinus in his fundamental study,<sup>34</sup> as he has found no direct proof of the presence of the Erasmus in Taurinus—which can be otherwise found in the works of several contemporary humanists in Hungary. Actually we do not have to go further than the dedication in order to find an undeniable sign of Erasmus in the *Stauromachia*. As Taurinus describes why he neglected serious studies and chose instead to write an epic poem on the peasant war, he says apologetically that a serious sickness prevented him from continuing his legal studies, hence he decided to take a sip of water from the sacred fountain of the Muses.<sup>35</sup> Although some details and the choice of words

32 "Discissi et laniati dentibus artus // aeternis chalybum nodis artantur..." (V, 250–51).

33 On this aspect of his epistolary, see Lisa Jardine, "Concentric circles: confected correspondence and the Opus epistolarum Erasmi," in: ea., *Erasmus, man of letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 147–74.

34 V. Kovács, "A Dózsa-háború," 457–58.

35 Farkas Gábor Kiss, "Constructing the Image of a Humanist Scholar: Latin Dedications in Hungary and the use of Adages (1460–1526)," in *Cui dono lepidum novum? Dedicating Latin*

were modified by Taurinus and some Erasmian adages were added to the Erasmian text, the story remained the same in the main lines. A tiny detail of this paraphrase of Erasmus reveals even the working method of Taurinus. When Taurinus transforms the expression “iuxta Plinium perire ratus omne id temporis, quod studio non impertiatur” (“thinking – following Pliny – that all my time is wasted that is not spent on study”), he chooses a typical Roman expression, “ego autem in Plinii sententiam pedibus iturus” (“I, going with my feet in the opinion of Pliny”), recalling the habit of Roman senators who voted by gathering at several spots in the Roman senate. Erasmus included this expression in his *Adagia* and it was used in the explanation of the text of Sallust’s *Conspiracy of Catiline* at the University of Vienna, where it was published in 1511, as is revealed by surviving annotated copies of the lecture texts.<sup>36</sup> A tiny note here refers even to the “proverbs”—here the *Adagia* of Erasmus. Even two copies survive with more or less the same lecture notes and these notes also demonstrate that irony was part of the interpretation of texts, as both call attention to the irony hiding in the words of Marcus Cato against Caesar in the Sallustian text. While the presence of irony is no surprise in a rhetoric analysis of Sallust, these examples call attention to the fact that the rhetorical schooling taught students like Taurinus to express an opinion obliquely, contrary to the literal meaning of the text. Obviously, these Erasmian influences did not inspire a completely critical approach to the nobility or to the worldly authority in Hungary. It was obvious to the contemporary readers that Taurinus scolded both the nobility and the peasantry. As Ulrich Fabri, a professor of rhetoric at the University of Vienna, clearly says in his paratextual poem:

Crimina nobilium, quae sunt, plebisque prophanae  
Carpit nunc turbas, aeris inde sitim.<sup>37</sup>

(“He [Taurinus] blames now the sins of the nobles, which are present, then the revolt of the corrupt mob, and then the greed of money.”)

Erasmus’s Folly has taught local humanists how to express their opinion obliquely, with ambiguity, without clearly defining the objective reference of their speech.

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*Works and Motets in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Ignace Bossuyt and Demmy Verbeke (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2008), 155–56.

36 Caius Sallustius Crispus, *De coniuratione Catilinae et bello Iugurthino historiae* (Vienna: Singrenius, 1511), D3v: to the sentence “pedibus iturus in sententiam Tiberii” the manuscript commentary adds: “Eras. in pro[verbiis]: pedibus in sententiam discedere, A[ulus] Gel[lius] li.” 3. ca. 18. The two copies mentioned here are kept in the Library of the Eötvös University under the shelf mark Ant. 0502. and Ant. 0505. The copy Ant. 0502 was annotated by the Viennese student Johannes Wiert.

37 Taurinus, *Stauromachia*, 1519, 4v.

The paradoxical appearance of fictive figures in political and social statements had important precedents by the time the *Stauromachia* was published. The author of the *Apologia regis Wladislai* (Apology of King Wladislas),<sup>38</sup> written in opposition to Queen Beatrix, is Udis, i. e., the well-known Outis, or Nobody of Homer's *Odyssey*. Udis—or Nobody—speaks up against the infertile Beatrix in defense of the annulment of her marriage with King Ladislas, claiming that even the gods of the pagan mythology stand on his side. The author, who seems to have known Greek quite well and cited Sophocles in Greek, used a wide rhetoric repertoire. Even King Ladislaus V Postumus steps forward out of the grave in the form of a *prosopopoeia* in order to protest against an ignoble royal line of descent,<sup>39</sup> and Udis-Nobody tried to charm his public in Rome with a fictitious literary frame with which the local audience might have been familiar from the *pasquillades*.

While the *Apologia regis Wladislai* hid only the identity of the author by letting Nobody speak, more intricate ambiguity is evoked in two contemporary works. In the comedy called *Gryllus*, written by Bartholomaeus Frankfordensis, a schoolmaster in Buda in 1519 (the very same year when Taurinus's epic was published), the protagonist Gryllus is a parasite, who earns his bread by flattering and dropping useful information to his patron just as any humanistic poet would do.<sup>40</sup> After he reveals how the son of his patron was abducted, he gets beaten and receives no award for finding the lost son. Significantly, he recites a monologue that recalls the main statements of *The Praise of Folly*: “pro sapiente quisque morionem agitat”—everybody is acting like a fool instead of a wise man. While most earlier and later school dramas have a moral lesson to teach to the students, *Gryllus* is lacking exactly this clear, undisputable moral lesson and emphasizes the stupidity and vanity of the world.

We find yet another example of ambiguous attitude in a work of Valentinus Cybeleius, a canon of Pécs, who wrote a declamation on a popular subject in the

38 Edited (with many mistakes) in Udis, “Apologia regis Wladislai,” in Roszner Ervin, *Régi magyar házassági jog* (Budapest: Franklin, 1887), 452–79. Vilmos Fraknói attributed this work to Johann Filipec (Vilmos Fraknói, “II. Ulászló királyá választása [The Election of King Wladislas II],” *Századok* 19 (1885): 5). It is noteworthy, that both known manuscripts (Munich, BSB, clm 24106, 7r; Prague, National Library, I. D. 3., 98r) contain a work by Augustinus Moravus who was in Padua at the time of writing (1492) and the author of Udis had excellent knowledge of Greek, just as Augustinus. More recently, Miriam Hlavačková attributed this work to Anton Sánkfalvy, though without any serious reason: Miriam Hlavačková, “A diplomat in the service of the Kings of Hungary. The activity of the Bishop of Nitra, Antony of Šankovce at the end of the Middle Ages,” *Historický Časopis* 58 (2010): 15–35.

39 Udis, *Apologia*, 478. (“Si Ladislaus adolescens ab inferis revocatus de suo genere gloriari posset.”)

40 For the text, see Bartholomaeus Frankfordinus Pannonius, *Opera quae supersunt*, ed. Anna Vargha (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1945).

Renaissance, the *Praise and Blame of Wine and Water* in 1517.<sup>41</sup> This declamation belongs to the deliberative genre of rhetoric, as it is suggested also by the subtitle of this work, in which both the pros and cons of drinking wine and water are listed.<sup>42</sup> The genre of declamation was often used with a comical tone at the end of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In Bologna, Filippo Beroaldo the Elder published a popular declamation on the comparative merits of a drunkard, a womanizer and a gambler,<sup>43</sup> which became an international success and it was translated into both English and German. Antonio Urceo Codro, another professor of rhetoric at the University of Bologna, transformed this genre into a comic and rhetoric *satira* mixing philological subjects with moralizing themes, which he called “sermons” (*sermones*).<sup>44</sup> Valentinus Cybeleius, who studied in Bologna under Giovan Battista Pio, Filippo Beroaldo’s most eminent student, imitated the satirical tone of his masters in his own declamation, as he started his short literary piece with a scene of *bathos*, a comical rhetoric device. According to his account, they were about to start a discussion on the various kinds of accents using Aldus Manutius’s work as a point of departure,<sup>45</sup> while just chatting in the house of Michael, canon of Pécs. This elevated subject was suddenly dropped when they changed topic and decided to start a discussion on the comparative merits of wine and water. Significantly, the dispute is situated in Pécs, in the court of György Szatmári, the bishop, who was the patron of Valentinus. Interestingly, a contemporary Venetian dispatch (by Alvise Bon) notes about the bishop in 1519 that “he often gets drunk, because that is the typical habit of Hungarians, who become often drunk. Then they sleep four hours after lunch to get rid of the effects of wine. There is no shame here in getting drunk, because they work here in the morning and not after lunch.”<sup>46</sup> If Alvise Bon’s information is correct, Valentine’s choice of topic seems to be atypical for a client-patron relationship

41 Valentinus Cybeleius Varasdiensis, *Opera. Carmina et Opusculum de laudibus et vituperio vini et aquae*, ed. Mária Révész (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1939). On the flaws of this edition, see Ibolya Bellus, “Megjegyzések Valentinus Cybeleius Opusculumának szövegéhez,” *Magyar Könyvszemle* 107 (1991), 120–23.

42 “...quatenus utraque secundum suos gradus vel ad laudem vel vituperium tendunt inseruntur.”

43 Filippo Beroaldo, *Declamatio ebriosi, scortatoris et aleatoris* (Bononiae: Benedictus Hectoris, 1499).

44 Antonio Urceo Codro, *Orationes seu Sermones* (Bologna: Ioannes Antonius Platonides Benedictus, 1502). See also W. S. Blanchard, “O miseri philologi: Codro Urceo’s Satire on Professionalism and Its Context,” *Journal of Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 20 (1990): 91–122.

45 When Valentinus speaks of the ten kinds of accents, he refers to Aldus Manutius’s *Institutiones grammaticae*. Cf. Aldus Manutius, *Institutionum grammaticarum libri IV* (Paris: Stephanus, 1531), 341.

46 Balogh István, *Velencei diplomaták Magyarországról (1500–1526)* (Szeged: private edition, 1929), 29.



and the ambiguity of the message might seem surprising if the text is interpreted within its direct social context.

What is common in all these cases is that the literary character of the written text, its fictional framing and the use of poetic allusions allowed a greater ambiguity of meaning, which in turn created a previously unprecedented richness of possible interpretations. We know that several humanists of the age – most significantly Erasmus – used this strategy consciously when trying to convey ambiguous, equivocal messages to their audience. These humanistic models of fictional framing provided models for redefining the rules of communication between the patron and the humanist client. They allowed the construction of messages that might have been perceived as ambiguous, especially in highly educated literary circles such as that of Bishop Johann Thurzó and his friends in Neisse.<sup>47</sup> Such ambiguities were not necessarily inspired by a need for the freedom of speech. Rather, the career of Taurinus, who changed patrons repeatedly in his lifetime, teaches us that humanists were confronted with the need to present their works in new political and social environments and in front of new patrons and freshly acquired friends. Intertextual models could be used to create tension between the intended meaning of the text and the context of the imitated original, and several literary genres (as declamation, or dialogue) were capable of conveying a nuanced, variegated meaning to the audience. In all these cases, literary framing gave opportunity to the authors to leave the exact intention of the work and the position of the author open.

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<sup>47</sup> On Johann Thurzó and his court, see Martin Rothkegel, *Der lateinische Briefwechsel des Olmützer Bischofs Stanislaus Thurzó. Ein ostmitteleuropäische Humanistenkorrespondenz der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2007), 67–68.

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