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The Figure of Rákóczi as Reflected by Literature

Prominent heroes of national history have an identity-shaping role and influence; their figures are interwoven in the mental system that traditional history calls historic consciousness or national consciousness and the post-modern school of thought (i.e. the French Jean-François Lyotard) calls 'great narrative'. Great narratives indicate the choice of values and scale of values that have been made and observed throughout history, that is, the orientation of a collectively chosen strategy (national strategy). Because of this orientation, prominent historic figures can have a symbolic role (as well): they denote examples of fate, values, and historic strategies that have a profound influence on the self-image, self-consciousness, and the ambitions of a larger community, a nation.

In the Central and East European regions, great national narratives are shaped usually not by historical or political science but by fiction. It was primarily fiction that made the outstanding figures of Hungarian history known and popular, and lifted them into the sacral and mythic height based on the inspiration of which collective choice of values and action strategy evolved. Saint Stephen, Saint Ladislaus, John Hunyadi, King Matthias, Miklós Zrínyi, Gábor Bethlen, Lajos Kossuth, and István Széchenyi all played a sacral and mythic role, and Ferenc Rákóczi II was no exception either. Literary works, such as poems, novels or dramatic works connected posterity to the great figures of national history and to the historic past; they shaped the great narrative, in lack of which national self-consciousness and identity cannot be imagined, more effectively than any book on history.

The figure of Prince Rákóczi became an integral part of this national great narrative in the past two hundred years. Without the knowledge we have of the prince and the insurrection he led, not only our picture on Hungarian history would be incomplete, but also our national identity and consciousness. Ferenc Rákóczi II and the story of his life have been present among the motivating factors in Hungarian literature at all times, although not with the same intensity and not always with the same interpretation. It is the history of this interpretation that presents the multifold transformation of the intellectual horizon by which national community could examine its past and create its self-image.

The figure of the prince was incorporated in the popular songs of the 18th century, this enormous literary corpus that Hungarian literary history calls 'Kuruc poetry'. Following various earlier enterprises and the publications of the lyrics by Kálmán Thaly, Pál Erdélyi, Tamás Esze, Gyula Dávid, and Béla Stoll, the compilation and critical elaboration of this vast poetic material was carried out by the outstanding researcher of the Rákóczi era: Imre Varga. In 1977, on the 300th anniversary of the birth of the prince, he published the volume entitled *A kuruc*

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küzdelmek költészete [The Poetry of the Kuruc Struggles], in which he gave an introduction to the military, political, and especially the 'spiritual' history of the era as reflected by 243 poems.

The poetry of the Kuruc era presented a rather variegated picture on the figure of Rákóczi. The poetic corpus has pieces that are still generally known, like the poem entitled *Rákóczi Ferenc buzgó éneke* [Zealous song of Ferenc Rákóczi], the authorship of which several historians (among them, the first publisher of the text, Ferenc Badics) attribute to Rákóczi himself; the *Song of Ferenc Rákóczi* (Cantio de Francisco Rákóczi) that, in the name of the prince, calls upon the nation fighting for its independence to seek unity of action; the *Rákóczi Ferenc bús éneke* [Sad Song of Ferenc Rákóczi] that depicts the farewell of the prince to his homeland as he sets out on his way to voluntary exile; and the *Rákóczi ének* or *Rákóczi-mars* [Hungarian Song or Rákóczi March]. This latter song, better known by the title *Rákóczi Nóta* [Rákóczi Song], was the one to play the greatest political and spiritual influence, primarily on the public opinion of the Reform Era. It had an effect on Kölcsey and his text of the *Himnusz* [National Anthem] as well.

The Kuruc poems that recall the figure, struggles, and personal fate of Rákóczi present the prince in part as a charismatic leader who would bring liberty and, in party, as a tragic hero who prays for the mercy of God. The first Rákóczi poem, which, as we could see, has often been attributed to the prince himself, was conceived under the inspiration of Poland, during the siege of the fortress of Kálló. The leader calls out to the nation for unity of action: "*Magyar nemzet, kérek téged az Istenért, / Hogy magyar magyarnak ne szomjúzza véré, / És senki ellenem ne fogja fegyverét, / Mert én nem kívánom magyar veszedelmét.* [Hungarian nation, I pray for thee to God, / No Hungarian would long for Hungarian blood, / And nobody would take up arms against me, / for no Hungarian I wish to devastate.]" The *Sad Song of Ferenc Rákóczi* was added among ecclesiastic songs because of its profound religiosity. It makes the prince narrate the tragic feelings triggered by the defeat: "*Ím elmégyek országomból, / Drága kedves jó hazámból, / Eddigvaló hajlékomból / Költözni kell jószágomból. / Mutass, Jézus, kies földet, / Lakásomra adj jó helyet, / Ez életben csendességet, / Jövendőben idvességet.* [Lo! I shall leave my land, / My dearest homeland, / That was my shelter, / I shall leave all I have behind. / Jesus, show me to a pleasant land, / guide me to a charming land, / Grant me peace in my life, / And salvation in afterlife.]"

Besides the poetry of the 18th century, its narrative literature, and primarily the *Emlékiratok* [Memoirs] of the prince himself, provide a variegated picture on the insurrection of 1703–1711 and its leader. Naturally, there were others to write about the history of the anti-Habsburg Kuruc war as well. György Ottlyk, the steward of the prince, Mihály Teleki, son of a former powerful Transylvanian chancellor, Dániel István Vargyasi, and even Sándor Károlyi who prepared the compromise with the imperial court. These writings are from persons who, at one point, played some role in the movement hallmarked by the name of Rákóczi, but then integrated into the framework of the noble compromise reached with Vienna. This

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compromise deeply influenced even those pictures that would be drawn on Rákóczi's insurrection decades later.

The first classic work to depict the figure of Rákóczi is connected with the name of Kelemen Mikes: his *Törökországi levelek* [Letters from Turkey] provided authentic, ample, and a still vivid description of the prince, comparable to the information in the *Memoirs* and *Vallomások* [Confessions] written by Rákóczi himself only. Others who depicted Rákóczi with the tool offered by literature included János Pápay, 'first secretary' of the prince's chancellery, who wrote about him in the diary of his Turkish mission; Gáspár Beniczky, private secretary of the prince, who described him in his notes on the life of the court; and Ádám Szathmáry Király, page in the prince's court, who wrote about him in his records on the events of the Polish and French emigration. Yet, it is in the letters of Mikes that we can find the classical depiction of the figure of Rákóczi in the daily life of his emigration, as seen by a chronicler who observed him closely. The central epic figure of these letters is the prince; a hero described by the devoted admirer, which reveals why the work of Mikes has been so important throughout the history of the Rákóczi cult.

The letters of Mikes remained unknown and in the form of manuscripts for several decades. Their influence became palpable only following the end of the 18th century, after their publication under the editorship of the renowned István Kultsár in Szombathely in 1794. The figure of Rákóczi and the story of the insurrection he led had been in oblivion for the 80 years preceding this publication. The consolidated Habsburg power sought to wipe out every trace that might have reminded one of Rákóczi's insurrection. The Hungarian nobility, cosy amongst the circumstances established by the Peace of Szatmár, seconded these efforts. The reply of Maria Theresa to the petition for pardon submitted by Mikes and his friends in exile in 1741 characterises the mood of the court well: "ex Turcia nulla redemptio" ("There is no return from Turkey"). Indeed, there was no return for Rákóczi from exile, neither in a moral nor a spiritual sense, for some 150 years.

It seemed as if the Hungarian public and literature had forgotten about Rákóczi and his Kuruc. Furthermore, there were some, including his former followers, who denounced him a rebel. Censorship, which eagerly served the interests of the Viennese power centre, noticed every little manifestation of the memory of the prince, and struck down wherever it perceived some sympathetic declaration. The monograph by Béla Köpeczi and Ágnes R. Várkonyi mentions a case when the censorial authority confiscated the grammar book of Gergely Molnár in 1752 because of the following example: "Similar to a lion who fights the wild animals to save its cub, Rákóczi fought for Hungary." Even the otherwise patriotic poet, Pál Ányos, an opponent of Josephinian politics, described Rákóczi as a rebel in 1784, whose "pártos népe templomokat rabolt, / S ezért nem engedte az Isten hadának, / Hogy szabadítója legyen hazájának [Rebellious people sacked the churches, / So God did not let his troops / Become liberators of his homeland]."

The reviving of the memory of Rákóczi and the evolution of the Rákóczi cult came about in the last years of the 18th century when, following the death of

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Joseph II, an actual revival of nationalism started as a natural consequence of the provisions of the emperor that had curbed Hungarian national consciousness and institutions. The Holy Crown was transferred from Vienna to Buda in the last days of the emperor, and the new sovereign, Leopold II convened the Hungarian Diet first in Buda and then in Pozsony. The Rákóczi cult was a result of this enthusiastic nationalism. The *Rákóczi Song* was spreading throughout the country, speeches recalled the struggles of the forgotten heroic prince, and, naturally, the above-mentioned publication of the letters of Kelemen Mikes served the cult of the leader of the insurrection as well.

Ferenc Kölcsey was the first poet who set the heroic personality of Ferenc Rákóczi as a historic example to the nation. He evoked the figures of Rákóczi and Bercsényi in his poem entitled *Fejedelmünk hajh* [Alas, Our Prince] in 1817 (the title of the poem, as József Waldapfel found it out in 1935, was *Rákóczi hajh, Bercsényi hajh* [Alas, Rákóczi, alas, Bercsényi], which the poet changed under pressure from the censorship.) The poem starts with tragic words: “Fejedelmünk hajh! vezérünk hajh! / Magyartok gyászban ül, / Még leng a szellem töleték, / s már lelke sem hevül. [Alas, our Prince! Alas, our Leader! / Your Hungarians are in mourning, / Your spirit lingers, / But their spirit has stopped burning.]” Yet, it ends with optimism, as if foreshadowing a promising future: “Rohan mint á, a győzelem / Kelettől nyugotig, / A láncs zúg, a lobogót / Magas szellők viszik, / S ledőlt országok hamvain / Egy szép hon támad fel, / Mely lelket tölt, mely szívet ráz / Neve zengésével. [It precipitates, victory / From East to West, / Shackles ring and the banner / Flies on the wings of the breeze, / Out of the ashes of fallen countries / A beautiful homeland rises, / That fills the spirit and bursts the heart / With the echoes of its name.]”

Kölcsey considered Rákóczi a historic example for the national revival, which was just about to unfold. The biography of Rákóczi by Béla Zolnai indicated that the text of the *Rákóczi Song* was sure to have influenced the tragic atmosphere and certain lines of the *National Anthem*, even though the figure of Rákóczi, probably for a political reason, was missing from the circle of such great Hungarian leaders as Prince Árpád, John Hunyadi, and King Matthias. Yet, wrote Zolnai, it seemed as if the lines of the *Rákóczi Song* “had echoed in the mind of Kölcsey when he wrote the first verse and closing chord of his *Hymnus*: »Jaj, régi szép magyar nép, / Az ellenség téged miként szaggat, tép« [Alas, good old Hungarians, / How your foes tear you apart and lacerate]. As for the setting of this national hymn, continued Zolnai, one could not have imagined a century more turbulent than the hopeless period of the anti-Habsburg Kuruc and pro-Habsburg Labanc wars. The period of the Exile, Rákóczi, who could not be but an outcast in his homeland.”

Following the passionate enthusiasm of nationalism in the 1790s, the memory of and example set by Rákóczi became a factor that shaped Hungarian public life and literature only gradually. For example, Vörösmarty, who had attempted to evoke the figure of the prince in one of his earlier poems (*Rákóczi Bercsényinél Lengyelországban* [Rákóczi at Bercsényi's in Poland]), was constrained to give the title *Egy öreg rabszolga keserve Pompejus sírja fölött* [Grief of an Old Slave

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above the Grave of Pompeius] to his poem, which was in reality entitled *Mikes búja* [Grief of Mikes] in 1826. This poem denounces the forced oblivion that, as he was buried in the faraway Turkish land, fell to the prince's lot. "Árva hazád tiltott nevedet nem zengheti többé. / Vajha ne érezd ezt a súlyos földnek alatta, / S hogy fejedelmi porod nincs emlékezve, ne tudjad: / Ím élő emlék vagyok én, bú rajtam az írás, / És ha magyar tán még e gyászos földre vetődik, / Elmondom neki: »Itt nyugszik fejedelme hazádnak, / Számkivetett onnan, mert nem vala benne szabadság. [Your orphan country cannot echo your name again. / If only you felt this not in the ground, / and knew not that your princely name is forgotten: / Lo! here I am your living memory, writing in distress, / Should a Hungarian be driven to this land of sorrow, / I shall relate to him: The Prince of your home rests here, / Exiled, for no freedom had reigned there.]"

The cult of the prince and his insurrection unfolded fully and more consciously more than ever before during the reform assembly of 1843–44 and the days of the revolution of 1848. This was no accident. The political and intellectual strategy of the renewal of the country could lean primarily on the memory and example of Rákóczi. The monumental poetic reception of the political legacy of the prince can be connected first of all to the conscious Rákóczi cult of Sándor Petőfi. The poem *Szent sír* [Holy Grave] was the first manifestation of this legacy in 1847. Similar to the above-mentioned poem of Vörösmarty, this piece too draws attention to the sense of national responsibility that the faraway grave of the prince is to inspire. At the same time, Petőfi sets it as a task of the poet, that is, himself, to recall the prince's figure authentically: "otthon már nevét is / Alig ismerik; csak / Egy emlékszik rája, / Egyedül csak egy... a / Költő, a szabadság / Ez öröklámpája. [At home his name is remembered / hardly; for there is one only / who remembers him, / Only one of the many... the / Poet, the beacon / of Freedom.]"

For Petőfi the name of Rákóczi and the notion of liberty became inseparable. He noted in his diary, in which he recorded several events of the revolution in Pest, on 21 April 1848: "The day of Good Friday! Fly back, my memory, fly back 113 years across the snowy mountains of the Balkans, to Turkey of the South, to the banks of the Propontis. Carry with you the tears I had shed on your dark wings and let them fall on the hands of the man, who died there and then. He was a great man, and his hands were holy; the sword of liberty he had brandished for years sanctified them. How much he struggled, how much he struggled! But, alas, in vain, for can one expect success where one's friend is a traitor and the homeland is indifferent? The sword fell from his hand and the hero became an outlaw. While his deceitful friend feasted on the immense prize of treason, he scraped along on charity bread in exile. He died exactly 113 years ago today. Yet, is there anyone else beyond me in this homeland and world, who would remember that this is the anniversary of the death of this hero? Alas, Rákóczi!..."

The poem entitled *Rákóczi*, written on the same day, mentions the forgotten gave as well. Petőfi recalls the glorious memory of the leader of the insurrection in a series of revolutionary poems written after the happenings of March 1848 (A

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szabadsághoz [To Liberty], *Föltámadott a tenger* [The Sea Has Risen], *A királyokhoz* [To the Kings], *Készülj, hazám* [Prepare, My Home], *Megint beszélünk csak beszélünk* [We Talk Again and Again], *A király és a hóhér* [The King and the Hangman]: “Hazánk szentje, szabadság vezére, / Sötét éjben fényes csillagunk, / Oh Rákóczi, kinek emlékére / Lángolunk és sírva fakadunk! / Az ügy, melynek katonája voltál, / Nemsokára diadalmat ül, / De te nem lész itt a diadalnál, / Nem jöhetsz el a sír mélyiből. [Saint of our home, leader of freedom, / Bright star of ours in a night of gloom, / Oh, Rákóczi, whose memory / Burns us and consumes our tears! / The cause you embraced / Will be soon prevail / But you shall not be here, / In your tomb you remain.]”

János Arany wrote his poems connected to the memory of Rákóczi during the revolution and war of independence. The poem *A rodostói temető* [Cemetery in Rodostó], written in 1848, was inspired probably by the above-mentioned poem of Petőfi, the *Holy Grave*. Arany seeks to encourage the nation in its current struggle by conjuring up the memory of Rákóczi and his friends in exile. The insurrection, fought 150 years before, becomes the source of power for the war of independence: “a nemzet, e derék faj, / Dicsőségünk gondos őre, / Multja kincs-aknáit felett / Élni fog örök időkre [The nation, this valiant race, / Careful guards of our fame, / Above the treasures of its past, / Shall forever live at last]”. By evoking the example of the young Rákóczi who fell captive, the ballad *Rákócziné* urges the nation to hold on.

The memory and example of Ferenc Rákóczi became a resource of national revival and the notion of independence in the glorious days of 1848. The drama *II. Rákóczi Ferenc fogsága* [The Captivity of Ferenc Rákóczi II] by Ede Szigligeti, first performed on 4 November 1848 in the National Theatre, was an example of this phenomenon. This historical drama presented how the young Rákóczi pledged himself to the cause of national independence. The poem *A fogoly* [The Captive] by Mihály Tompa, written after the fall of the war of independence, had the same theme. The figure of Rákóczi appeared in the poetic cycle *Hangok a múltból* [Voices from the Past] by Pál Gyulai, while Miklós Jósika wrote a biography of the prince in the form of a six-volume novel entitled *Ferenc Rákóczi II*, published in 1861. Károly P. Szathmáry, a writer popular in the times of absolutism, presented the cruel fate of the exiled Rákóczi in his novel *A bűjdösök* [The Exiles], published in 1862. The second edition of *The Letters from Turkey* by Kelemen Mikes was published under the editorship of Ferenc Toldy in 1861. It reached a wider audience than the previous edition, and had the purpose of keeping the cult of the prince alive as well.

From then on, the cult of Rákóczi lived on in the Hungarian literature of the second half of the 19th century. Its poetic theme and style influenced the rejuvenescent poetry of the popular-national school and the belated Romanticism that prevailed in the poetry prior to the appearance of the literary movement *Nyugat*. Kálmán Thaly was to discover and popularise Kuruc poetry and Kuruc-style romanticism. He started out as a poet of popular poetry, but became well-known

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as the historiographer of the Rákóczi era; a role that earned him great prestige in public life. As a young poet he liked historic themes, and used archaisms together with the linguistic and formal characteristics of ancient Hungarian poetry. His first attempt at writing in the Kuruc style, the poem entitled *Thököly bujdosó híve, 1697* [Exiled Follower of Thököly, 1697] was written in 1862. Following this attempt, he wrote a volume of Kuruc-style poems, and published them under the title *Kuruc világ* [Kuruc World] in 1903.

Especially the publication and elaboration of the poetry of the Rákóczi era brought success to Thaly. The collection *Adalékok a Thököly- és Rákóczi-kor irodalomtörténetéhez* [Contributions to the Literary History of the Thököly- and Rákóczi Era], published in 1872, laid the foundations to another the boom of the cult of the literature of the Kuruc era. Frigyes Riedl and Vilmos Tolnai, independent of each other, pointed out in 1913 that Thaly inserted his own poems among the Kuruc poems. Interestingly, these poems, including for example *Esztergom megvétele* [Capturing Esztergom], *Bujdosó Rákóczi* [Rákóczi in Exile], *Ocskay árultatása* [Ocskay, the Betrayed], and *A kölesdi harcról* [On the Fight in Kölesd], became the most celebrated pieces of the anthology. This exposure resulted in a heated debate ongoing for years and did no good to the reputation of Kálmán Thaly. Nevertheless, true poetic power was manifest in his fake Kuruc poems and, even though Thaly was discredited in literary science, his talent as a poet, which even Endre Ady acknowledged according to the work entitled *Thaly Kálmán regénye* [The Novel of Kálmán Thaly], was recognised. In reality, Thaly considered himself the “scribe of the prince”, and explained his fake texts by referring to the passionate admiration he felt for the figure and memory of Rákóczi.

The Rákóczi era and Kuruc poetry, both resuscitated by the power of poetry, set the trend in all fields of life from popular literature to clothing, thereby exerting a great influence on the national consciousness and public taste of the end of the 19th century. Several works drew from national romanticism (which was present in the political strives of 1905–1906 as well), including the novels *Ocskay brigadéros* [Brigadier Ocskay] by Herczeg Ferenc, *Kuruc Féja Dávid* [Kuruc Dávid Féja] by Samu Fényes, *Kurucok csillaga* [Star of the Kuruc] by Géza Lampérth, and *Rákóczi* by Pongrác Kacsóh, moreover the volume of Sándor Endrődi *Kuruc nóták* [Kuruc Songs] (published in 1896), and the poems and narrative poems of Emil Ábrányi, Gyula Vargha, Géza Lampérth, Antal Radó, Mihály Szabolcska, and Sándor Sajó. Naturally, the return of the remains of the prince and his exiled friends and their placement in the Rákóczi crypt of the Saint Elisabeth Basilica in Kassa in 1906 served and strengthened the Rákóczi cult of the period as well. The heroes of the Kuruc era, first of all the figure of the prince, came to life again in literature, on stage, and even in popular dramas and operettas. The literature (fake literature) that evoked the Kuruc times and the figure of the prince conformed to a diluted version of romanticism and manifested the national illusions of the late 19th century.

At the same time, Kuruc-style Romanticism had another aspect as well: besides revealing national illusions, it helped preserve the tradition of 1848–49,

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and traditions of independence and the mentality of opposition in general. As such, it played an important role in the movements of opposition intellectuals and literature, who proclaimed new directions of orientation and searched new ideals after the turn of the century. This became manifest primarily in the Kuruc poems by Endre Ady, in which the figure of the prince appeared many times. The Hungarian national consciousness and patriotism of the poet were revealed through a richness of thoughts and emotions, and expressed both national pride and self-criticism. Ady established an original and authentic poetic language based on the traditions of Kuruc poetry and revealed the painful experiences of the First World War by way of reviving the spirituality of the traditions of the Kuruc exiles. However, not only Ady, but also Gyula Kosztolányi and Gyula Juhász made use of the Kuruc and Rákóczi tradition in their poems.

The work of Gyula Szekfű entitled *A száműzött Rákóczi* [The exiled Rákóczi] (1913) brought a change in the Rákóczi cult and brought about a heated debate as soon as it was published. As opposed to the almost compulsory stereotype of national romanticism, it sought to present the figure of the prince forced into exile and the context in which he lived realistically and authentically. The work of Szekfű, as Béla Zolnai correctly pointed out: “was a test for Hungarian historiography as well: accordingly, can one risk that illusions would be shattered and yet present a critical picture of the Heroes of the nation based on documents, authentic sources, select notes, and confessions, and, through a search for truth and the explanation of spiritual motives, bring the Man, hidden in a halo, closer to us.” The historian revealed facts to a wider audience that did not correspond with the feelings of a public opinion fed on Kuruc-style romanticism. At the same time, it unveiled the humility and spiritual nobility the prince demonstrated throughout the hardships that elevated him above his followers and enemies, his surroundings and age.

The work of Szekfű deeply reshaped the traditional picture on Rákóczi but, as far as we can conclude, it did not seek to and actually did not hurt the cult of the prince. The memory and example of the figure of Rákóczi and his heroic struggle lived on, although perhaps in a less romantic manner, and influenced the times between the two world wars as well. This was proven by the festivities all over the country celebrating the 200th anniversary of his death in 1935. The rather valuable, two-volume *Rákóczi Emlékkönyv* [Rákóczi Memorial Volume], published under the editorship of Imre Lukinich, was the most important scientific result of these events. Ferenc Herczeg wrote his novel *Pro libertate*, which again recalled the romantic Rákóczi figure, on occasion of this anniversary and published it in 1939. Naturally, popular and juvenile literature presented various works as well, thereby rendering a tribute to the cult of the prince.

Following the Second World War, scientific literature and political life categorised the figure of Rákóczi among ‘progressive traditions’. Undoubtedly, this had a positive consequence in so far as the Rákóczi cult, which received the green light even during the Communist era, could reinforce the tradition of national independence and identity in a way not quite correspondent to the intention of the cen-

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tral power. The popular piece in juvenile fiction entitled *Rákóczi zászlai* [Flags of Rákóczi] by Tamás Bárány (1962) reflected this role of the Rákóczi cult. This cult of independence was promoted by new Hungarian poetry as well, with poems such as *Nagyszombat, 1704* by Vas István, *Sárospatak* by Bóka László, *Mikes Kelemen elveszett leveleiből* [From the Lost Letters of Kelemen Mikes] by Takáts Gyula, *Rákóczi tölgye* [The Oak of Rákóczi] by Devecseri Gábor, *Rákóczi* by Csanádi Imre, and *Thököly utolsó levele II. Rákóczi Ferenchez* [The Last Letter of Thököly to Ferenc Rákóczi II] by Sípos Gyula, and the novel in verse *Rákóczi ifjúsága* [The Youth of Rákóczi] by István Jánosy published in 1958.

The historical novel by Géza Laczkó entitled *Rákóczi* was clearly the greatest literary undertaking of the period that promoted, and, in a certain sense, signalled new ways to follow for the Rákóczi cult. The writer demonstrated in his novel on the life of Miklós Zrínyi entitled *Német maszlag, török áfium* [German Humbug, Turkish Poison], published in 1917, that he could revive the heroes and dramatic events of our national past with the thoroughness of a historiographer and the composition skills and linguistic powers of an artist.

The novel on Rákóczi was the greatest undertaking of the work of Géza Laczkó as a writer. He was spent all his time on this one work starting from the early 1940s until his death in 1953. He withdrew from every public function and worked in his small flat in Soroksár according to the strict rules he established for himself. He started out from the structure of the novel on Zrínyi. He discovered a natural relationship between the two books, in so far as the Rákóczi insurrection sought to realise the national political plans of Zrínyi: an independent and reviving Hungarian state. The epic structure of the novel followed the previous examples as well. Lackó created a modern epic novel, in which epic completeness manifested in the comprehensive introduction of the depicted period and the exploration of the evoked world of the past.

Lackó carried out an immense research and accumulated a body of knowledge astonishing even for a historian. He completed the principle of realistic completeness with the requirement of scientific reconstruction. He developed the classic epic novel into a monumental historical picture, a tableau of cultural history. In a study of his entitled *A történelmi regény* [The Historical Novel] he justified this approach to the topic by referring to the sense of responsibility that a realist writer must feel with respect to the reality of the past. He did possess this sense of responsibility, which made him narrate the story, depict the cultural historical picture, and express the linguistic characteristics of the adolescence of Rákóczi and that of the Kuruc-Labanc wars with almost monographic completeness. Yet, his novel did not become a study on cultural history, for his knowledge of the human character, and the poetic ease in inventing and constructing the plot helped the work preserve its literary character. With the depiction of the struggles and mental disputes that went on in Rákóczi himself, Laczkó demonstrated that the novel had a timely message as well. The writer reflected on the nature and prospects of great changes in history and the historical chances of the Hungarians.

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Unfortunately, he could finish only two parts of the trilogy (*Isten árnyéka a földön* [A Shadow of God on Earth], *Vörös zászlók alatt* [Under Scarlet Flags]). He could not prepare but the outline of the third part – A “*magyar király*” [The “Hungarian King”] – that would have dealt with the emigration of the prince. Notwithstanding this incompleteness, his work became the greatest literary memorial of the heroic fate of the prince. It is a pity that no literary workshop undertook to republish this work on occasion of the current anniversary.

In conclusion, I would like to quote the words of the protestant Bishop László Ravasz, from his essay entitled *Az örök Rákóczi* [The Eternal Rákóczi], published in the *Rákóczi Memorial Volume* in 1935. Rákóczi, he summarizes the historic parable inherent in the fate of the prince, “was an ideal and unifying figure of the Hungarian nation, who became a rebel and died in exile. His tragedy is an eternal Hungarian tragedy: we could never achieve what we should have; we always had to do, what we were allowed to do. This compromise turned into a principle of life, but Ferenc Rákóczi represented the denial of this principle all through his life. He was a hero who never won a victory and never smiled. Accordingly, the Rákóczi concept is accompanied naturally by the feeling of forlornness and sadness, based on which Hungarians perceive the threats and paradoxes of their existence.” Indeed, the figure of Rákóczi is not merely a depiction of the historical hero, statesman, and writer, but also a symbol of our national identity. He is deservedly among the greatest figures of Hungarian history that offer us ideals and show us the direction to follow.