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**”WHAT YOU DID WAS WRONG, FATHER.” THE FULL
PLAYTEXT OF KÁROLY OBERNYIK’S
GYÖRGY BRANKOVICS. LIBERATING DRAMA ”FOR TWO
BROTHERLY GLORIOUS NATIONS”, TRAGEDY
ENGRAINED IN HISTORY**

1. Why a Serbian protagonist? Cultural, historical, and political context

At the time when I was investigating the above named play by Károly Obernyik, I came across, in a different reading experience, the notion of *independence narrative*, a notion that I found most useful in my approach to the tragedy of the medieval Serbian despot, György Brankovics. In the volume entitled *Saviours of a Nation or Compromisers? Collaborators in Hungarian History*, historian Róbert Hermann introduces the idea of the so-called independence narrative of small nations.¹ In Hermann’s view, the independence narrative characterises those nations who, having lost their independence, prefer representing themselves in constant fight to regain their independence, in a heroic posture of self-sacrifice. This national self-portrait, true may it be, may eventually become one-sided or slightly false, with no choice for any other self-identification. Compulsive heroism or scapegoat-seeking might grow obligatory, if no other points of view occur while such a nation (heroically facing danger) interpretes and expresses itself. As I understand *György Brankovics* and its afterlife now, this play may have invited its audiences to change from one specific national perspective to another, and thus to identify with the Hungarian and the Serbian independence narratives alternately, moreover, to ponder a bit on the Turkish perspective as well. Luckily, some recent studies are discussing the Serbian afterlife of the tragedy and Erkel’s opera version.² This paper will delineate my textological findings that contradict the so far accepted vision of an unfinished posthumous play in order to contribute to a revised understanding of Obernyik’s last tragedy and its Hungarian reception history.

Károly Obernyik, ”like a lamp in front of an altar, modestly did shine in the temple of literature” – remarked Obernyik’s friend, Gyula Bulyovszky at Obernyik’s funeral.³ In spite of his modest reputation, Obernyik’s oeuvre is worth reading. Al-

¹ HERMANN, 2015, 7–9.

² These references in chronological order: TÖMÖRY 2020; TALLIÁN 2017; BARANYI 2010; IMRE 2013; JUHÁSZ 1998.

³ The necrologue written by Bulyovszky was published in *Délibáb* [Fata morgana], 1855.II./11. Quoted

most in each of his plays, Obernyik introduced some small but essential innovation regarding genre, theme, characters, or dramaturgy. So is the case with Obernyik's posthumous play written under tragic circumstances, *György Brankovics*. This play may be regarded as the summation of a large literary heritage; moreover, two dozen plays about the Hunyadis (son and two sons), chronicle plays, historical tragedies, the oeuvre of the great authors like József Katona, Károly Kisfaludy or László Teleki preceded this romantic historical tragedy. Moreover, *György Brankovics*, penned during the absolutist Bach régime, represents the dramatised experience of the cruel repression following the 1848–49 revolution and war of independence. *György Brankovics* is the tragedy of a ruler who in great danger changes his loyalty according to the mutabilities of success and defeat at war, who in order to evade failure sides with the more powerful, but eventually pays too heavy a price for it.

As novelist Mór Jókai wrote, the Bach régime was a time when poets thought they should keep silent once and for all, when theatre directors did not know what to put on stage so as not to annoy either the audience or the police.⁴ At this time, Obernyik's *Brankovics* became a specific moment in Hungarian theatre history: although it was composed in the spirit of the so-called independence narrative, the play exceeded the limitations of that type of narrative.

The protagonist of the play was modelled after the medieval Serbian ruler, despot Durad Brankovic, who 'in the mouth' of the Turkish empire, supported mainly by the Hungarian kingdom, wavered between being loyal or treacherous to the military leadership of the Hungarians. It is a historical fact that not only Brankovics, but even the great vanquisher of Turks, János Hunyadi was forced to sign a peace treaty (Adrianapol, June 1444) with Murad II in secret while the pope called for crusade against the Turks. Eventually, it was the Italian shipmen who being ordered to block the Bosphorus still transported the whole Turkish army, for one gold coin per person, across the sea.... There were rather ambiguous situations. Likewise, it is a fact that the first Habsburg king of Hungary, Albert did not manage to arrive in time with his army to the fortress of Smederevo (Szendrő) in 1439, so Brankovics's elder son, Gergely had to capitulate after three months of heroic defense. Then, with the pretext that Brankovics the father had fled to Hungary, Murad II who was the despot's son-in-law, had the two Brankovics sons defending Szendrő blinded. Geographical position, economic interests, political and economic factors, and even family ties connected Serbia with both Hungary and the Turkish empire. Therefore, György Brankovics tried to get along well with both countries. The defence of the Serbian regions was important for the safety of Hungary; but the Turks were rarely stoppable, and Brankovics, just like Vlad Dracul, Valachian (Romanian) ruler of the

by LUXEMBURGER, 1929/30, 3.

⁴ TALLIÁN 2017.

time, being so close to the Turks, often negotiated with the sultan, conspired against the Hungarian army, and when military defeat was imminent, fled to his Hungarian dominions he had been given in order to make him loyal to Hungary. Above all the intricate tactics needed in the situation, while one of Brankovics's daughters became one of Murad II's wives, Brankovics's other daughter, Katarina was married to count Ulrich Cilje II, fierce enemy of the Hunyadi family.⁵

Obernyik condensed and slightly modified some of the historical facts in a way as to remain coherent and true about his theme, but to also reflect upon the dilemmas of his own time. He set the plot of the tragedy at the Hungarian-Serbian border, around 1440. The scenes of the five acts present the Serbian court with its surroundings: a fortress, a church, a forest, military tents, and both the Hungarian leaders and soldiers and the Turkish sultan and his people, as they come to and leave the Serbian environment. Few scenes of Act 4 and 5 take place in the sultan's harem and on the battlefield. Mob scenes and intimate scenes follow each other. There is a dynamic shift of perspectives, the focus moves from groups to individuals, from allies to enemies back and forth. Violent rage, soft words, pungent repartees, and tactful orations build up the text of the play. By placing the Serbian despot's figure in the centre of the tragedy, the author attempted to offer alternately a Hungarian and a non-Hungarian point of view, an interior and an exterior focus, creating an outstanding double self-representation for his audience. This fragmented tragic self-portrait, when the play got staged, had an enormous impact on Hungarian, Croatian, and Serbian spectators alike. The nations who had been made enemies by the Austrian 'divide et impera' policy, willingly involved themselves with the tragic conflict, plot, and characters of *György Brankovics*; to some degree, they could all find themselves mirrored in the play. Obernyik's play both expressed and prompted the wish of an approach between the 'brotherly nations' who had been suffering under the same tyranny.

While the heated critiques of the Brankovics performances avoided overt political interpretations or comments, they ranged from enthusiastic to overcritical evaluations, contributing to the shaping of an elaborate Hungarian aesthetic concept of the tragic. Brankovics, like Zsigmond Kemény's protagonist Pál Gyulai, revolts against the compelling force of history and society and commits his tragic mistake out of pure good intention. First he allies with the enemy, then he lets his two sons fall prey to this enemy. Both his decisions have tragic outcomes. It is excessive virtue that pushes him towards the inevitable fall. Zsigmond Kemény presented such a concept of the tragic in respect with the grievous outcomes of the 1848 revolution, comparing Széchenyi's, Kossuth's or Görgei's choices, trying to find some justifications for the national tragedy. In Kemény's opinion, Világos is the consequence of Kossuth's

⁵ BÁNLAKY 2001.

excess of virtue, and Görgei with all his good intention could not avoid becoming a scapegoat, etc.⁶

We can recognise the traces of the Hungarian post-1848–49 mentality in both *György Brankovics* and its critical evaluation. Obernyik's main hero prefers to be excessively virtuous (keeping his promise even if he may lose more by keeping it than by breaking it), yet he is excessively emotional and hesitant, thus incoherent in a chaotic world. The romantic vision expressed in this play reveals the duality of the characters and sheds light on the uncommon features within the commonest character. But beyond ideological or literary tradition, by placing not Hunyadi's but Brankovics's dilemma in the focus of his play, Obernyik certainly leads his audience to find the latent parallel between Brankovics and Jellasics, Iancu Avram or others who, incited by the court of Vienna, turned their people against the Hungarians during the war of independence.

György Brankovics both represented and influenced the public thinking of several nations in the Habsburg empire. In the ceasefire of ideologies and politics, leading actor Gábor Egressy's overwhelming success as György Brankovics from 1856 to 1866 led to an effective approach between Serbian-Croatian and Hungarian communities. The play about Brankovics shone light on the sense of danger and interdependence of small nations and also presented a glimmer of the ideal of stable alliance of small nations who live under the threat of greater political powers. After the 1867 compromise between Hungary and Austria, the questions raised in Obernyik's posthumous tragedy gained a new significance. No wonder in 1874 composer Ferenc Erkel wrote one of his best late operas based on a libretto that followed the plot and the text of Obernyik's *Brankovics*. It goes without saying, while such works of art, as always, expressed much awareness of and worry for the fragility of human cooperation and understanding in face of destructive forces and wars, neither Obernyik's nor Erkel's *György Brankovics* could stop the occupation of Bosnia in 1878, which certainly led on to more damage and evil. While Obernyik's *Brankovics* saw a renewed period of (Hungarian and Serbian) performances from 1906 to 1913, Erkel's *Brankovics* has gained some new, yet insufficiently clear interpretations only since former Yugoslavia fell apart.

⁶ KEMÉNY 1908; RAKODCZAY 1911; LUXEMBURGER 1929/30, 33–34.

2. The full play, on basis of all extant playtexts, with special attention to the most complete promptbook NSZ 92/1, is unknown till now⁷

Nevertheless, the tragedy of György Brankovics is much more than a political thesis drama; the following fragment from Act 3 Scene 3 of Obernyik's play testifies it:

GYÖRGY BRANKOVICS: What am I, is it a slave who sits in this chair, a slave you command to break his oath? Am I a painted puppet, a blind instrument in your hands? [...] I sacrificed all for you, I have given away the most sacred pledges of my heart, and is this your gratitude? If you do not respect the old monarch, spare at least the unfortunate father in me.

LORDS: We do appreciate your generous deed and we have not forgotten your past bright merits.

GYÖRGY:⁸ (rises from his chair, approaches them): Are you yourselves fathers? Do you know what it is like to lend the loadstar of your home to a foreign power that might, at the least suspicion, mercilessly take revenge? Oh, I am full of fears for my children now. Not as a ruler, but as a father I ask you to change the intention of the Council. If you agree with me, the people will also stand by me. [...] You ungrateful, most ungrateful! I shall not forsake you, my children, not if the earth and the sky should conspire against me. You all may forsake me, yet my people are not as ungrateful as the proud lords whom I myself have raised from the dust. My people is mine, I know.

PEOPLE (outside): Long live the Hungarians! Death on the Turks!

Act 3 Scene 3 is a tense moment within the plot. It exemplifies how Obernyik employs the traditional consultation scene of the so-called consultation play,⁹ but not only this structural element moves the action forward. Obernyik creates a grotesque variant of the consultation scene, in which the Serbian ruler informs the noblemen of his court, rather than consults with them, allowing no contradictions, emotionally blackmailing them. He tells them that in the absence of the Hungarians who lately have been concerned with finding the successor of their deceased king, he made peace with the Sultan and had his two sons be taken with the Turks as his truces. He sacrificed so much for peace that he is ready to neglect the intentions of his council,

⁷ In this paper, if no other indication is given, all the quoted fragments of the tragedy come from the very first playtext of *György Brankovics*, promptbook NSZ 92/1, found by me in the Hungarian National Library (OSZK). This promptbook has not been examined and considered earlier, and many statements, critical or appreciative, concerning the play and its performances prove somewhat false in the light of my findings. The English translation of all the passages from the playtext are my work. (Zsuzsánna Kiss).

⁸ In the early playtexts, the protagonist is referred to as György; my paper respects this usage.

⁹ PINTÉR 2019b, 127.

hoping that he can convince his people to support him anyhow. Evidently, the scene to come contradicts this belief. The hasty fickleness of the despot is not only caused by the dangerous and intricate political situation, but the ruler's wavering, immature character, and his distorted notions of reality. The Serbian oligarchs do agree with Brankovics, considering dangerous to lose the confidence of an old ally: "The Hungarian will be a stronger enemy than the crescent moon." The despot argues on, protesting that he is not a vassal but an associate partner to the Hungarians. Inner conflict occurs within the Serbian court. No doubt Obernyik wished to remind his audience of the misunderstandings, rivalries, and discrepancies which grew harmful within the leadership of the Hungarian war of independence. Moreover, reality proves exactly the opposite of what Brankovics imagines when the people express their will to continue fighting against the Ottomans.

The impulsive and tactless hero with great pride but low self-esteem behaves like Shakespeare's Coriolanus on the one hand, and confuses his role as a father with that of a ruler on the other hand, strongly resembling Shakespeare's King Lear. Taking wrong decisions, Obernyik's protagonist's good intentions and authority melt away. Like any tragic hero, Brankovics grows isolated from his community and becomes alienated from his former self.

Considering the Shakespearean features of the above quoted scene, let us find some similar texts in Shakespeare's plays:

Am I not your king?/ Awake, thou coward majesty! thou sleepest, [...] (*Richard II*, 3.2.)

Peace, Kent! Come not between the dragon and his wrath. (*King Lear*, 1.1.)

Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,/ That makes ingrateful man. (*King Lear*, 3.2.)

You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate! (*Coriolanus*, 3.3.)

The main conflict of Obernyik's tragedy develops in political, domestic, and psychological dimensions. War is a major condition in *György Brankovics*, just like in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and most of the history plays. War conditions reach family ties and affect personal integrity. Moreover, Obernyik presents how war affects each character and each of the three nations differently.

The play starts outside the Serbian despot's palace in front of a church. News arrive that King Albert died (October 1439), and János Hunyadi and János Székely must leave for Hungary.¹⁰ Brankovics fears that the Hungarian military forces will

¹⁰ János Hunyadi is not included in this play, only János Székely, his lieutenant and his son, László Hunyadi, the bright first born, who had a most tragic death, which indirectly was related to Branko-

dwindle before the new king is elected, so he is tempted to accept the Turkish offer to negotiate about peace-making. The fear of any internal turmoil or civil war at a king's death has always been real both in history and in history plays. Concerned about their future unity and collaboration, a nervous dispute develops between Hunyadi's lieutenant, János Székely and Brankovics. Brankovics, quite like Coriolanus, defends his integrity by saying: "I am in alliance with your king but I am not his conquered subject, my will cannot be bound by your king." The quarrel is quenched by the tactful words of Hunyadi's son László. János Székely orders that his page, Campanus, the Transylvanian student should stay with Brankovics to assure the Hungarian support for and control over the Serbian monarch. Campanus is the *raisonneur* of the tragedy, and functions like Horatio in *Hamlet* or rather, the Fool in *King Lear*: he tells puzzling stories to open Brankovics's eyes to see reality. In Act 1 Scene 8, Campanus remarks sceptically: "It is curious to expect that our allies who are threatened by the world's greatest empire should not break their loyalty to us when within our country we ourselves are split in fractions." No doubt by the bitter self-irony of these words Obernyik referred to us, Hungarians.

Beside the despot, there are two other men. His loyal servant Lázár (Serbian), an emotional 'mirror' for Brankovics, who respects but never contradicts his monarch and thus cannot help him to see the truth as it is. The despot's third constant attendant is Cselebi, the sultan's cynical spy who not only informs Murád of whatever Brankovics does, but tries to bribe Campanus and encourages and helps the sultan to kidnap Mara, Brankovics's daughter.

The second plotline focuses on the love between Brankovics's daughter Mara and Murád (Murad II appears as either Murád or Murát in the playtexts). In Act 1 Scene 2, Mara confesses to her nurse, Fruzina her infatuation with an unknown Turkish youth who soon turns out to be the young sultan. The devoted but too common and gullible nurse, just like Juliet's nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, vehemently blames all the Turks, she does not understand Mara and wails in vain to hinder her from loving the enemy. The scenes where she appears are farcical. Obernyik, like Shakespeare, combines mob scenes and intimate scenes, highly tense scenes with looser or comical ones to assure the balanced structure of the play. Thus Mara's discussion with her nurse in front of the church is followed by the noisy arrival of Serbian noblemen, or Mara's and Murád's wooing scene (2.2) precedes the dynamic and agitated discussion of Brankovics, his two sons and Lázár. In the wooing scene Mara tells Murád: "you

vics's family as well as to the excessive abusive power of the oligarchs in the age. In the earliest three playtexts of Obernyik's play, Lászlós's name is an emendation: originally there stood Mátyás as character. At the time of the play, Mátyás, the future great king must have been too young, a child only. This is why the correction was necessary and right. It was leading actor Gábor Egressy who must have corrected the pages of all the first three playtexts.

detest me, you are my country's enemy". Murád appears like Romeo: "firy steeds of my desire have taken me here."

In Act 2 Scene 3, the the first born son, Gergely (his name in most playtexts is overwritten as Gerő) disagrees with his father and refuses to cooperate in this peacemaking. He warns his father against betraying his former alliance and baffling his own subjects. The opposition between father and son resembles the conflict between Lear and Cordelia; both Gerő and Cordelia try to provide their father with a clearer vision of reality. Gerő contradicts his father: "This was not correct, father, by my God!" The despot answers like Lear in the love contest scene: "What words are these, son?" and holds on to his darker purpose: "Which of my sons will go as truce?" Being contradicted again, he cries out: "I will go mad!" Gerő's answer is both insolent and true, like Cordelia's to Lear: "There are higher aspects to consider than filial duty. Where the country's fate depends on the self interest or the whims of the noblemen, power is never stable there."¹¹ Gerő's words sound like a warning: "The nation which falls into pieces will perish." Brankovics's younger son, István does not engage in much political argumentation, but for love he is ready to sacrifice himself instead of his brother. He still speaks: "Father, brother! I am young, but love does not need the intelligence of mature ages to do what is right. My heart breaks in pieces to hear this. Great souls may follow different paths, but must never hate each other. My brother defends your power and our people. Forgive each other." Gerő cannot let his younger brother go with the Turks alone, and he forgets about his political clear vision, righteousness and disagreement with his father, following István. There is no rivalry but unconditioned love between the two brothers, like in *Cymbeline*. But happy ending is not a choice in a tragedy: sons will pay for their father's mistake. Neither the sons' honesty, care, and love, nor Campanus' fable on credulous sheep, cunning wolves, and self-conceited shepherd dogs can persuade Brankovics to refuse the sultan's peace offer. Act 2 ends with Brankovics's and Murád's oath-taking; the stage instruction here indicates the Bible (only the Bible, not the Koran) to be placed on the table they stand at.

Act 3 contains the most violent scenes of the play, but these scenes are essential and well embedded in the structure of the play. In Act 3 Scene 1, Cselebi in vain tries to bribe Campanus to spy on the Serbs and the Hungarians. In Act 1 Scenes 2 and 3, the Serbian council return announcing they have changed their mind and will not continue to fight against the Turks, as Brankovics wanted. From Scene 4 to Scene 10, this act presents the awesome consequences of Brankovics's decision to let his sons be his truces. Cselebi orders the blinding of Brankovics's two sons. The cruel punishment happens offstage. The sons are sent back to their father; they are lead in one by

¹¹ The 14th and 15th century saw European feudal states divided and weakened by excessively strong feudal lords whose power reduced the monarch's influence.

one. The representation of such cruelty and such suffering on stage have provoked much critical debate, paralleling the attacks that Shakespeare's *King Lear's* blinding scene received. Indeed, these scenes did cost the famous actor Gábor Egri his life in July 1866, as detailed later in this paper. First we see Brankovics blame and curse the messenger who tells the terrible news concerning the first born, Gerő:

GYÖRGY: How, you lie, slave! Tell you have just lied, or from your body I shall expel your base soul! (with drawn sword he approaches the servant)

MESSENGER: I would gladly live my life to make reality not as I said it is.

GYÖRGY: No, no, the sultan could not do this, the sky, fate, God could not allow this happen! Blinded, my son? (beating his chest with his hand) Alas, alas, soft, soft! One of my sons you said, which one? Stop, do not tell. It it's Gerő, he is strong, he could endure this horrible fate. No, no, I won't give Gerő! he is my pride, my support. But István? [...]

GERŐ: (from stage bottom entrance): Father!

GYÖRGY (alarmed): His voice! Where, where is he?

GERŐ (approaches): Father!

GYÖRGY: My son! (he is helped towards his son)

GERŐ: Where are you, Father? A cannot see you.

GYÖRGY (embraces hime): My son!

ALL: Oh, horror. [...] (3.4.)

The deeply shocked father falls in a state of madness, he imagines what he can see is not true, and he tests his son's eyesight by asking whether he can see his father hold the sword in his hand; then he orders windows be opened wide to let light in, as nobody can see in darkness. Then comes the second messenger and then the second son, István is lead in. Antique Greek tragedies, Shakespeare's tragedies abound in such scenes. Didn't the critics, who found fault with the representation of excessive suffering in these scenes, consider Obernyik and the performers of this tragedy professional or great enough to accomplish what Lessing for instance allows in all artistic creations, that is the true expression of extreme suffering?

The comparison between Obernyik's playtext and some canonised Greek or Tudor (or Shakespearean) dramatic scenes where visual, enacted, or verbal violence surpass the point of being 'just bearable' would lead too far from the aims of present paper. But for one moment let us remember Act 4 Scene 2 in *Cymbeline* where Imogen dressed as Fidele wakes, recovered from the poisonous potion she had earlier drunk. She finds herself beside Cloten's headless corpse, and as she sees her husband's Posthumus's clothes on Cloten, she thinks the body is her beloved Posthumus's ... This is a most bizarre scene, but why would anyone dare to find fault with Shakespeare, in the prime time of the Shakespeare cult...

The final two scenes of Act 3 contain another manifestation of the rising tension in the play: Székely and the Hungarians return resuming their fight for the Christian land.

Act 4 takes place outside the palace in a forest at night, resembling the storm scenes and the encounter scenes (Lear and Gloster, Lear and Cordelia) of *King Lear*. In addition to the sound of thunder, distant orchestra music is included in the stage instructions for this act to suggest that events happen simultaneously on the battlefield. Murád takes Mara on his horse and elopes with her. Mara's and the nurse's shrieks are heard in the darkness of the night. Brankovics horrified by the blinding of his sons, tormented by remorse and bad conscience, runs away into the night, accompanied by Campanus. In Act 4 Scene 6, Campanus both scolds and ironises the desperate monarch who is again at the verge of going mad, saying: "Now that you are unfortunate, you rejoin your Hungarians, but if fortune favours you again, you will pack with the Turks..."

Lázár assists the two sons who wander outside the palace, too. They grope about to get out when they hear Mara's voice in the distance. The elder son tries to pretend that he can see, this is how he wants to protect his younger brother. Lázár whispers to him and guides him so as he can guide István. A play-within-the play motif is beautifully built up in the following scenes (4.7–11.) The torment of the previous scenes ceases, compassion, care, even some hope of reunion shines through the figures of the two youngmen.

ISTVÁN: I am exhausted, Gergely; where are we? tell me.

GERŐ (to Lázár): Whisper to me, where we are.

LÁZÁR (to Gergely): The night is dark, not much can be seen.

GERŐ: The night is so dark, I cannot recognise the region.

ISTVÁN: Oh, as for me, I am in everlasting darkness. But tell me, dear brother, did we go far from the fortress?

GERŐ (to Lázár s before): Tell, Lázár, tell.

LÁZÁR: We reached the closest village. [...]

GERŐ: The night is silent and gentle. Thousands of stars smile in the sky. So beautiful, so sweet. Here a group of dark trees are scattered beside me. Shall we walk on?

Only after such a bitter "pastoral" do father and sons meet in a touching reconciliation scene. Certainly, the audience must have had vivid memories of man-hunt, chase, hidings, inevitable losses, and yet some sense of survival. But these scenes were not fully staged; this paper will reveal this later.

The concluding act takes us to the harem where Mara lives full of remorse but still in love, where Murád promises her to compensate for her ruined brothers

and to cease fighting against her father. Historians claim that Murad II had in fact a poetical mind who sometimes escaped from his military duties to some distant place to write poetry and enjoy a calm life. Interestingly, in Obernyik's play, Murád is portrayed either as a passionate lover or a quite tolerant person who wishes not to kill... With the exception of the oath-taking scene (2.5.), Murád does not appear in public scenes. We can see him either with Cselebi the villainous intriguer, or in Mara's company. Should we understand the chief enemy's character from Mara's nurse's point of view, or should we see him differently? Certainly, the disparaging sentences of Fruzina that belittle Turkish men are exaggerated, therefore comic, too. They show Fruzina scared and prejudiced, although she may be right, while it is her duty to protect the despot's young daughter from any 'bloody' youngman, be it Christian or Turk (1.2.).

In the harem scene of the fifth act, Murád's sentimental 'improval' is interrupted by his messengers who tell him that his own soldiers mock at him because he withdrew from the battlefield. Murád only gets insulted when he hears that he has been called a coward. He takes up arms again. A most upsetting scene follows (5.6.) where Mara does not want to be recognised by her blind brothers, but they are led in front of her, and they know her by her voice. They beg her to leave the harem and live with them. The two blinded boys speak about a desperate but idyllic hermitage where they would avoid war and violence. They even mention flowers and butterflies, things the three of them would enjoy together; this passage resembles the softness of King Lear's and Cordelia's prison scene (5.1.). But Mara refuses to join her brothers. Her passivity and alienation from her national identity provoked some critical debate later when the tragedy was performed in Belgrade. Mara says calmly, almost in self-alienated (like Cressida in *Troilus and Cressida*) despair: "Whoever wins, will break my heart." Gerő gets furious, but before he curses his sister, István stops him. In the next scene, Mara meets her father who enraged attacks her, but soon he drops his sword, he recognises his daughter whose elopement he tried to wipe out of his memory. (It was Campanus who like a therapist talked with him about Mara in the 'stormy night out' scenes...) Brankovics tells: "What, am I your father? Are you in the Sultan's harem? I don't know you. [...] Are you saying you sinned without wanting it? Are you mistress to my pagan killer who destroyed my homeland, who blinded your brothers? Perish, you miscreant!"

Battle scenes continue, Campanus is taken prisoner. Mobs move around; nothing is clear about who wins and who loses; wounded people moan and die on stage. Campanus, like servants in *Julius Caesar* or *Antony and Cleopatra*, for being separated from his master in the enemy's hands commits suicide heroically and laughingly. He borrows the sword of a Turkish soldier as he does not have one,¹² stabs himself

¹² Did Obernyik think of Petőfi's dying under similar circumstances? Did Egressy not dare to have it acted out, as discussed later? We do not know.

and says: "Do not fear, I will not hurt you, but I would be cross otherwise; now you can mock at me, torture me, care for me!" The joined army of the Hungarians and the Serbians win the battle, but Brankovics is mortally wounded. In a tent Székely, Hunyadi's son László, Lázár, Mara and the two sons surround him. Lázár resembles Kent, expresses his own sorrow at his master's dying: "Oh Lord, for him there is no victory, no happiness, death sits on his forehead. You cannot die, Monarch..." With remorse and guilty conscience Brankovics turns to Székely: "Your hand, valiant fighter. Tell Hunyadi the unhappy Serbian autocrat does not live any more." Thy dying man cannot see clearly any longer, he asks: "Who is this angel faced youth beside you? I cannot see well. I have seen him somewhere but I do not remember his face well, my eyes are weak." Both the situation and the words resemble the final scene of *King Lear*. And it still goes on, emotionally it is exhausting, the phrases are perhaps too sentimental, less poetical. Hunyadi promises to take care of the blind sons: "They will be my brothers!" The monarch rises with effort: "My sons, you will not be abandoned." Brankovics blesses all. In this moment Mara cries out asking: "And your daughter, Father?" At this Brankovics falls back and dies. She embraces him. The soldiers cheer the victorious Hungarian army.

Today one may feel some bitter irony reading this ending. This is not the analogy of Világos, certainly. It is not *Hamlet's* last scene with Fortinbras taking hold of the control in Denmark. But it may be much more an allusion to those national inner divisions, which existed within our own nation at Mohács, likewise in 1848; and the timeline may be continued with cycles of kinship and enmity¹³ with other nations and with ourselves. Like at a Shakespearean problem play's ending, we are given a complicated picture with so many angles and perspectives, that we find ourselves somewhat perplexed. The mourning Serbian family is enclosed by the victorious Hungarians whose leaders suggest trust and promise brotherhood and more victories.

3. The author

Károly Obernyik was born on the 22nd of October, 1814 in Kömlőd (Komárom county). His father was a Calvinist priest whose ancestors came from Obornik, a small settlement near Cracow. At the age of 11, Károly and his three brothers lost their father. The family moved to Hajdúnánás (North-Eastern Hungary) where the mother's relatives were living.¹⁴ Károly studied at the Calvinist college

¹³ FRIED 1982.

¹⁴ The first born son, Joseph (he corresponded with Károly a lot) studied law, he died young as a soldier. The second born son studied theology, he died in the cholera of 1832. Károly's younger brother was expelled from the college of Debrecen, he died not much after Károly's death. FERENCZY 1878–1879;

of Debrecen in 1832. A crucial event in his spiritual growth was meeting Ferenc Kölcsey, the great poet, thinker, and the clearest mind of the reform age. By becoming Kölcsey's nephew's private tutor in 1836, Obernyik not only gained free access to Kölcsey's library, but he grew to be Kölcsey's close friend. By the time the two met, Kölcsey had just undertaken the defence of Miklós Wesselényi, reform politician, who got accused by the Habsburg court. For two years, Obernyik could see Kölcsey daily, who was a genuine mediator between the old and the new (language, literature, social circles, politics). He was beside him when on August 24, 1838 Kölcsey died. Obernyik did not marry as the woman he loved was far above his social state. His first writing was published at the age of 23 in the *Regélő* (Fable-telling). His early dramatic works on János Korvin and László Kún were lost. In 1841, he moved to Pest with his tutor and his mother, Mrs Ádám Kölcsey. In 1842, he met Jókai, Petőfi, Vahot, and other figures of contemporary literary circles. In his first full play, *Főúr és pór* (*Magnate and Pauper*, 1843) a somber 'revenge' tragedy, Obernyik raised embarrassingly urgent social questions like the boundaries between the rich and the poor, hypocrisy and honesty, conservatism and radicalism. He was awarded with 100 gold forints by the Drama Evaluation Company, while Jókai's *Jewish Boy* and Szigligeti's *Gerő* were only praised. Although the censor banned the whole play, Obernyik at once became fashionable and famous. He worked long on another play which presented the intellectual duel between Jesus and Judas, entitled *Messiah*, at the the same drama competition. *First Born* and *Inheritance* (1843, 1844) were happily ending domestic plays. *Unmarried Husband* (1845) won 60 gold forints at another drama competition; the author was accused of plagiarism, but he proved that the accusation was false. Obernyik was a founding member of the Tens' Society (with Petőfi, Pálffy, Pákh, Degré, Jókai, Lisznyai, Bérczy, Kerényi, Tompa). From September 1847, he replaced József Bajza (who became the first director of the Pesti Hungarian Theatre) in the Drama Evaluating Company, and from June 1848 until 1851, he was the secretary of the company. During the revolution, he wrote *Hungarian Emigrant in the Viennese Revolution* (1849) and *Just a Small Piece of Adventure* (1850). As public social life became prohibited, he moved back to Cseke, once Kölcsey's dominion. When Kálmán, Kölcsey's nephew died, Obernyik moved back to Pest. He translated the newly introduced German civil code successfully. Not accepting to teach law at Debrecen, he was invited to teach classical languages at Kecskemét where he spent the most fruitful period (1851–55) of his life. His *Khelonisz* (staged in November 1854) was a psychologically well motivated and well structured historical tragedy on an antique theme, the Spartan corruption and decadence versus loyalty, honesty and compassion.

LUXEMBURGER 1929/30.

Following György Bessenyei's tragedy, *Ágís tragédiája* (*Ágís's Tragedy*), Obernyik focused on the split within the royal family where grandfather and grandson turn immoral while parents try to restore honest morality, and the wife, irrespective of the results, supports the loser, first her father, then her husband. A nation corrupted in his morals cannot be saved from decay, not even by the heavens – such was the message of this tragedy. According to *Sunday Paper* (*Vasárnapi Újság*, November 12, 1854), the audience at the performance of *Khelonisz* did not wish to get involved in the stage suffering, "preferring the worst singer to the best play."¹⁵

However, by 1855, the national process of general mourning after 1848–49 seemed to come to an end; the experience of the revolution and war of independence had to be drawn, concerning the insoluble conflicts of the nation. As József Eötvös wrote in a letter: "Sad times have taught us about the consequences of our lack of agreement, freedom or oppression in this country for all nations are mutual."¹⁶ On November 8th 1854, the *Pesti Hírlap* (*Pest News*) announced a call for plays on Hungarian historical themes, the best play being awarded with 100 gold forints to be paid by Anasztáz Tomori (born Teodorovits, with a Serbian ethnic background) who, among his many generous deeds, financed the Complete Shakespeare Translations of the Kisfaludy Society. The deadline was August 20th, 1855. We do not know when Obernyik started to write his historical play on Brankovics, but when in the summer of 1855 the school year finished, he took a coach and ran away from Kecskemét to Pest fearing the cholera which was spreading in the country. He stayed strictly locked up in his hotel room at the Aranyas (Golden Eagle) and worked. (It was here that he received a letter from the Nagykőrös college, a letter signed by poet János Arany, by Anasztáz Tomori and other colleagues, offering him a teaching position.) On August 11th Obernyik got sick, he was tended by his housekeeper from Kecskemét and by his physician; his friend Bulyovszky could not enter his room. In the morning of the 17th of August, the waiter found Obernyik, bent over his Brankovics manuscript, dead. His dead body was taken to Rókus Hospital, and his funeral was held on the 19th at 3 o' clock at the Kerepesi graveyard. Degré, Vahot, Bulyovszky, Ráday, and twelve actors (among them Ida Komlóssy, Etelka Fácsy) attended the burial lead by Calvinist priest Pál Török, Obernyik's friend. His only living relative was his younger brother Jonathán, who decided that the Brankovics manuscript should be disinfected, copied, and submitted to the Drama Evaluating Committee.

¹⁵ LUXEMBURGER 1929/30, 30.

¹⁶ Eötvös's letter to György Illyasevics from 1861 quoted by JUHÁSZ 1998, 32–33.

4. *Brankovics* on stage. Gábor Egressy as *Brankovics*. *Brankovics* for Hungarians, Croats and Serbs. Final line versions from the original playtexts to Erkel's opera

Obernyik's posthumous tragedy was not awarded; the prize-winning works were Jókai's *Könyves Kálmán* (*King Kálmán the Learned*) and Lajos Hegedűs's *Bíbor és gyász* (*Purple and mourning*). After having staged Jókai's (in December 1855) and then Hegedűs's play (in April 1856), on June 3rd 1856 with Gábor Egressy in the title role the National Theatre had Obernyik's last play staged. The costumes were newly made for this premiere, for all the 21 roles (3 were silent).¹⁷ Gábor Egressy directed and played 26 extremely successful performances of *Brankovics* at the National Theatre in ten years to come.¹⁸ He took Obernyik's tragedy everywhere he toured. It was one his favourite and most popular roles until his sudden, almost onstage death that intervened during the third act of the performance at the Pest National Theatre on July 30th, 1866.

Brankovics's older son Gerő was played by Egressy's own son, and Flóra Munkácsy played the younger son. When István, the second son entered, Egressy (who had suffered a stroke some time earlier during his almost always extremely active and stressful life) felt dizzy. Act 3 Scene 8 still went on:

GYÖRGY: Well, soft, soft, have you brought him back?

SERVANT: We did, your majesty. [...]

GYÖRGY: And I cannot die, I cannot go mad...

ISTVÁN: Father, my father, where are you?

GYÖRGY: I am coming! Lead me to him.

ISTVÁN: Here he is, he has already seen me, hasn't he? Alas, my good father, I implore you do not despair at my wretched fate, or I shall be miserable. You still have a brave son, who must be all right. He will certainly be your ward in your old age. Promise you will not cry and will not curse.

GYÖRGY (aside): He still doesn't know what happened to his brother. (loud): I promise, I promise.

ISTVÁN: Father?

GYÖRGY (he tries to be strong, staggers towards István): Here I am, my child. (embrace)

According to the note inserted on Egressy's prompt copy, playtext NSZ 92/1, page 50, and noted into Ákos Egressy's own playtext of *György Brankovics*, MM 5006: these were the actor's last words on stage. He collapsed to István's feet; Gerő

¹⁷ MS 132/13 NSZ Katalógus, NSZ Kötetes iratok 686, page 78.

¹⁸ MS 132/13 NSZ Katalógus, NSZ Kötetes iratok 686, page 78.

– his son Ákos ran back on stage and the performance was stopped. Theatre and life once more got inextricably intertwined for Egressy.

Obernyik's *György Brankovics*, like 'the Scottish play' of Shakespeare's (*Macbeth*), often met inauspicious circumstances and events from its creation all through its afterlife, but it accomplished much from what a notable cultural product may, expressing, investigating, questioning, uplifting, and challenging human awareness and conscience. As with his favourite Shakespeare roles or Katona's *Bánk bán*, Gábor Egressy toured with *Brankovics* all through the country. After the premiere, directors in the countryside asked him to lend them the playtext of *Brankovics*. In January 1857, Egressy played *Brankovics* in Szabadka (Subotika, in Serbia today), and tours with this tragedy followed: Nagyvárad (Oradea, today Romania), Miskolc, Szeged, Marosvásárhely (Targu-Mures/Neumarkt, today Romania), Győr, Arad (today Romania), Debrecen, Nyitra (Nitra, today Slovakia), Kaposvár, etc.¹⁹

January 16th 1860 was not Egressy's first stage appearance with *Brankovics*, but this time, he was cheered more vehemently than ever before: „Long live the Serbs! 'Zsivio' (long live) the Hungarians!” echoed in and outside the theatre the final words of the tragedy. Flower wreaths decorated with the Hungarian and the Serbian national colours were thrown onto the stage. The Hungarian and Serbian youth organised a street demonstration together where Laza Kostic's celebratory poem addressed to Gábor Egressy was read out in both Hungarian and Serbian.²⁰ Evidently, the police confiscated the poem's printed pages and banned it immediately, prohibiting any more demonstrations.

However, the energising thoughts from *Brankovics*'s tragedy were spreading. The nations living under the Austrian rule had started to approach each other at least culturally by this time. The two Serbian reviews, *Matica* and *Letopis* published articles about what was common between Hungarian and Serbian history, and also about the experience of the recent past events. In 1850, Jovan Subotic published medieval documents concerning the relationship between Hunyadi and *Brankovics* (in *Letopis*). We do not know whether Obernyik read those documents or he remembered Miklós Wesselényi's belief that fraternizing between the nations was absolutely necessary, but the necessity of justice, trust, and cooperation between the small nations seemed to be better understood after than before Világos.

In Záhgráb (Zagreb, now Croatia), István Reszler's Hungarian company staged *Brankovics* successfully in August 1860; the German theatre critiques in Záhgráb did not even mention the performance – the technique of keeping silent about such 'unpleasant' events to power was regular. The Croatian translation of Obernyik's tragedy by Spiro Dimitrovic Kataranin was staged in Zagráb in December 1861. The Serbian

¹⁹ MS 132/13 NSZ Katalógus.

²⁰ JUHÁSZ 1998, 32–60.

premiere translated by Jovan Dordejevic from Újvidék (Novi Sad, Serbia today) happened to be held in 1865 in Arad where three fourths of the enthusiastic audience were Hungarian. The Belgrade (Nándorfehérvár, Serbia) premiere took place after the 1867 compromise in November 1868: it was the opening play at the Serbian theatre, much celebrated and praised. Yet the critiques tried to find more justifications for Brankovics's wrong decisions – the tragedy continued to step closer to reality than in 'healthy, normal' times which had not frequently occurred in these regions, but this time a new shade of interpretation emerged. In 1859, Jakov Ignjatovic Durad's novel on Brankovics came out on the pages of the *Letopis*; by and by the tragedy of Brankovics was appropriated, and the adaptation distanced itself from the original. Hungarian theatres from Pozsony (Bratislava, Slovakia) to Arad continued to stage *Brankovics* till the first decades of the twentieth century.²¹

Comparing the different playtexts of these performances, it is worth mentioning how interesting tiny alterations appeared at the end of the Hungarian performances after the 1867 compromise. These slight changes expressed a new, but well noticeable sense of danger that had to be shared between actors and audience. For instance, in the playtext of the 1874 Baja premiere, the original final lines were altered. As we have seen, in Obernyik's original playtext NSZ 92/1 and its copies, the final words are uttered in a tent at Brankovics's death, and Székely, László Hunyadi, Brankovics's three children, and soldiers are present. The last words are told by the Serbian soldiers who have lost their leader, but who fearing the Turks willingly accept fighting with the Hungarians, so they accept Hunyadi: "Long live the Hunyadi, long live the Hungarians!" Obernyik's intention in 1855 was to remind people (and nations) of the fatal mistakes committed during the war of independence.

The Baja premiere in March 1874 mediated for a world again reshaped politically, and those changes were ambivalent and in certain dimensions rather alarming. No wonder that in the Baja playtext (MM 3641) the last lines are uttered by János Székely to emphasise the Hungarians' compassion with the mourning Serbians and the unity of the two nations: "The hero is dead, but two brotherly nations will shed their tears together as brothers at his grave!" Since the Baja playtext was for a long time used, as *Brankovics* was run by the playtexts's owner, Miklós Mariházy until 1906, one cannot tell exactly when the overwriting of the final lines was effectuated. Nevertheless, this playtext documents that actors and directors in Baja expressed their concern for the small and large world, for "who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out".²²

When only a few weeks later, on the 20th of May 1874, Ferenc Erkel's opera, *György Brankovics* was performed for the first time, and the opera closed with a clear warning instead of compassion and sorrowful promise of union or encouraging cheers! The

²¹ Ibid.

²² From *King Lear* 5.3.15. SHAKESPEARE 1997, 365.

libretto was written by Ferenc Ormay and Lehel Ódry who followed one of Obernyik's playtexts – the tragedy got edited only a few years later. In Erkel's opera, there are few and small changes from the original plot. One of these little alterations is a slight dramaturgical shift, a question of emphasis. In the opera, Brankovics turns against the Turks only after he learns that his daughter Mara has fled with the sultan, while in the original, the despot is decisive right after having met his blinded sons; when the Serbian lords come back saying they stop fighting as the despot requested, Brankovics get enraged and calls them to fight again. As for the very last lines in the libretto (MM 13.563), they suggest deep anxiety: "Oh, my poor homeland!"²³

5. The significance of the first full promptbook, NSZ 92/1. Egressy's cuts. Critiques and editions reconsidered

The original Obernyik play has so far been considered a torso by theatre critics and literary historians alike. The circumstances of the creation and preservation of this work were chaotic indeed. After Obernyik's sudden death in the hotel room, his manuscript was probably disinfected, copied, and burnt. Its new copy had to be handed in to the Drama Evaluating Committee the first day after Obernyik's funeral. Nobody could have written two final acts in one or two days, although this was what the editor of Obernyik's complete works, József Ferenczy and following Ferenczy, József Bayer, stage critics deemed likely to have happened.²⁴ Ferenczy and then Bayer assume it was Gyula Bulyovszky, Imre Vahot or Gábor Egressy who finished Obernyik's play. There are no positive references to such an enterprise in any letter, diary, or other document of the three persons. There must have been some cooperation between Obernyik's brother and Imre Vahot who submitted the copy of manuscript to the Committee. Once the copy was taken from the Committee to the National Theatre, it got first to Zsigmond Szenpétery. He handed it to Gábor Egressy, who in his stage diary does not write anything concerning Obernyik's play, only when in late May 1856 the tragedy was going to be staged in a few days. Presumably Egressy was working on a copy and then getting the text ready to be staged, he chose the actors for the roles, ordered the censorial copy and his own copy to be copied from the first playtext on which he had been working...

So there must be three primary playtexts! And no wonder so it is, the National Széchényi Library owns all these three copies.

Playtext NSZB 92 (115 pages, 27 cms, larger handwriting) was the censorial copy, later used as directorial copy. The censor, Csechall cut (red ink marks) all the

²³ TALLÁN 2017.

²⁴ FERENCZY 1878–79; BAYER 1898.

instructions which indicate the usage of Hungarian and Serbian symbols (national flags) and also cut some references to the one sacred God and to providence. This playtext was handed in on May 28th, and the censor accepted it on June 1st. As the *Dramatis personae* of playtext NSZB 92 shows, Mátyás (Hunyadi's younger son) figures as Hunyadi's son, but this name often, if not consistently, is corrected to László. We might assume Obernyik wanted to make it sure he was not following the tradition of writing about László Hunyadi. But doing so, Obernyik may have overlooked the fact that around 1440 Mátyás Hunyadi was far too young to take (significant) part in battles. At some point, Obernyik himself, the copier, or the director of the playtext must have considered it necessary to replace Mátyás by László Hunyadi. Last but not least, there are many long cuts along this playtext; several massive fragments that I have so far presented in this paper are crossed out.

Playtext NSZB 92/2 (78 pages, 27 cms) was Gábor Egressy's directorial copy. Corrections and insertions in black and blue pencil and thick black ink abound. Egressy reinserted those censorial cuts he did not accept: the figures of oath-taking (considered blasphemy by Csechall), and some props like the Hungarian and Serbian national colours. He consistently corrected Mátyás to László Hunyadi. Moreover, Brankovics's son, Gergely is everywhere emended to Gerő. Several entire scenes and passages of the tragedy (from the first till the last act) do not appear; Campanus is not part of the *Dramatis personae*. Comparing this copy with the censorial playtext, we can see that the heavies cuts have been effectuated along the last two scenes. The following 'introductory' sentences can be read on the front cover of Egressy's copy: "Obernyik's posthumous tragedy, not completed by the author owing to the intervention of his sudden death. Gábor Egressy's last title role, not completed owing to the intervening death." The same text appears on Ákos Egressy's promptbook registered as MM 5006, copied in 1879 from his father's before mentioned playbook.

But there is the primary playtext which seems to have often been used as the prompter's copy while Gábor Egressy directed the tragedy and played the title role so successfully from 1856 to 1866. This promptbook seems to have been completely neglected by scholars until now! The playtext was registered as NSZB 92/1 (64 pages, 25 cm, smaller handwriting). The numbering stands for the order in which the library received the playtexts.

Chronologically playtext NSZB 92/1 is the very first extant text of Obernyik's *Brankovics*, namely, the copy which directly derived from the author's manuscript. Found in the hotel room where Obernyik had struggled both with the cholera and to finish the tragic play on Brankovics, the authorial manuscript was no doubt disinfected, copied, and then burnt. Thus the copy of Obernyik's posthumous work was handed in to the Drama Evaluating Committee just in time. (As mentioned earlier, Károly Obernyik was found dead on the 17th, his funeral was held on the 19th, and the deadline for the drama contest was the 20th of August 1855.) And, although

György Brankovics did not win that drama contest, in less than a year the tragedy was performed on the stage of the Hungarian National Theatre. As the note scribbled on the front cover of this manuscript copy (later registered as Playtext NSZB 92/1) indicates, Obernyik's *Brankovics* was handed in to the National Theatre by Imre Vahot on April 2nd, 1856. On top right of the front cover, we can see theatre director Ferenc Komlóssy's signature, at the bottom right stands Vahot's signature and explanation that he by Obernyik's brother's will submitted the copy. And on most of the pages we can see, perhaps among some other hands' traces, Gábor Egressy's handwriting, his cuts, his emendations, and his insertions! Mátyás Hunyadi here is consistently corrected to László Hunyadi. Székely's confident servant, the learned youngman, Campanus is completely dismissed, all his appearances cut.

Studying playtext NSZB 92/1, one can see how Gábor Egressy cut almost the whole fourth act: the two blinded sons with Lázár, as well as Brankovics with Campanus wandering in the night never got staged. No wonder the fourth act grew lean; only Mara's elopement with Murád remained. The fifth act also grew somewhat shorter, as the scenes with Campanus and his suicide were eliminated. It is obvious this playbook must have been the very first copy from Obernyik's manuscript. Egressy, so busy, creative and hard-working as he was, did not explain why he had shortened Obernyik's tragedy which soon became one his most applauded and also most criticised roles. One may try to guess his motivations, perhaps he would have needed at least three equally good male actors to play those roles fully, or perhaps he had dramaturgical reasons to cut the play.

Anyhow, critics did not find the staged *Brankovics* wholly coherent, and they were right. They celebrated the tragedy as the audience did, but the *Hölgyfutár* (*Ladies' Herald*, February 17, 1862) believed that it was not good enough to be performed so often, the *Pesti Napló* (*Pest Journal*, August 24, 1857) wrote it was unfortunate that Egressy loved the play so much... Ágost Greguss was sorry that Gerő did not resemble Miklós Wesselényi (who got blinded in the Austrian prison where he was kept with a false charge and accusation) more, whom Obernyik had known well. Greguss also found Mara's character too passive. As for Brankovics, he considered the protagonist not a truly tragic hero. Pál Gyulai expected another plot: one he imagined and found better. He wrote there should be a revolution in the Serbian court to force the despot to fight against the Turks, for which the sultan would have the two sons blinded, for which Brankovics would again perfidiously change his mind and fight against the Turks... In an ironical tone similar to Gyulai, Pál Rakoczay defended Obernyik's – Egressy's play by raising the question whether critic Gyulai would have wished to have a plot built on the prejudice about the perfidy of a nation... All the critiques remarked how many Shakespearean features there were included in the play, but they did not seem to appreciate the Shakespearean features in a play that expressed so much doubt and pain in respect with their own national conflicts. Per-

haps some critics tried to avoid taking the play seriously, neglecting the novelty of the challenge it offered. Perhaps they tried not to recognise themselves mirrored by any character, situation, conflict of the play.

Adolf Dux in the *Pester Lloyd* criticised Fruzina the nurse for her bad language when speaking about the Turks... Petőfi's German translator remarked how the last two acts, like straw roof on a palace, did not match the beauty of the first three acts.²⁵

Actor György Molnár confessed that when he played Brankovics, he found it almost impossible to keep the tension so high and the catharsis for so long a time; therefore, he had the two blinded sons come in together in the third act. But seeing Egressy play these scenes, he admitted Egressy could do as the play indicated it perfectly well, like in Lear's role, he raged, moaned, howled, softened, and despaired.²⁶

Further polemic rose around the protagonist's character: had he been evil, he could not become a tragic character; a good actor may enact such a difficult role worth any great stage, etc.

So the tragedy edited by József Ferenczy in 1878–79 is identical with Egressy's playtext, and József Bayer takes it all granted whatever he finds in Ferenczy's edition. Bayer claims that there is too much moving around in the whole play and accepts the belief that the tragedy remained unfinished. Two doctoral theses are written on Obernyik: Irén Luxemburger and Márton Faragó supposed this was not true because there was no time to finish the play so fast, they argued. The more detailed presentation of the Serbian and Croatia afterlife or of Erkel's opera would be worth other papers.

To conclude, the found NSZB 92/1 prompt copy contains the crucial evidence of the fact that Obernyik's posthumous tragedy was not unfinished. The number of the scenes in each act is quite balanced in NSZB 92/1, there are even more scenes in the last two acts than in the previous acts (Act 1: 8 scenes, Act 2: 6 scenes, Act 3: 11 scenes, Act 4: 12 scenes, Act 5: 12 scenes).

Obernyik dared to combine tragedy and irony, he dared to reach beyond prejudices and the traps of common mentality. The motto of his play, found on the front cover of all the three primary playtexts and in Ferenczy's edition, Petőfi's poem entitled *Az utósó ember* (*The Last Man*) expresses the despair of a man who is imprisoned under a coffin-like sky.²⁷ Sheltered in a hotel room, it was Obernyik who fought with the epidemic while he was just finishing his last play. He certainly knew that tragedy is meant to warn and heal and animate audiences who greatly need a sense of reality, self-understanding, collective memory, and compassion.

²⁵ LUXEMBURGER 1929/30, 31–36.

²⁶ RAKODCZAY 1911.

²⁷ This poem is one of Petőfi's 'crisis' poems from 1844–45.