

Fama, malum qua non aliud velocius ullium: Ferenc Hunyadi's 1583 epic poem about Stephen Báthory

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ABSTRACT

Ferenc Hunyadi (1550?–1600), often referred to as the “Hun Virgil,” published a significant work in 1583 in Venice, celebrating the hero Stephen Báthory, King of Poland. Likely commissioned by the Polish Royal Chancellery, this volume serves as an example of Báthory’s deliberate political self-representation. This paper examines Hunyadi’s epic work as a piece of propaganda, particularly in relation to Báthory’s siege of Danzig (Gdańsk) and the Livonian War. Although Hunyadi’s epyllion does not appear to be a consistent or coherent composition, several compositional arcs can be identified within his work. This paper provides a concise summary of the epic poem, aiming to identify the motifs and larger compositional elements that function as deliberate propaganda tools.

Keywords: Neolatin literature, epic, propaganda, historiography, fame

1. Introduction

Ferenc Hunyadi (Franciscus Hunniadinus), the “Hun Virgil”, published a voluminous work in a collection praising Stephen Báthory in Venice in 1583. The Polish Royal Chancellery probably commissioned the volume and is a good example of Báthory’s conscious, political self-representation (Gömöri 1999, 90; Bitskey 2013, 245, 251). This paper examines Hunyadi’s epyllion as an ideological work reflecting Báthory’s political self-representation.¹ Tibor Csorba (1944, 51–60, 70–107) summarized the propaganda related to Danzig’s (Gdańsk) conflict with Báthory and the Livonian War. Although Csorba also mentions Hunyadi in the

1 I am particularly indebted to Gábor Petneházi for his help in interpreting the poem.

wreath of poets around Stephen Báthory, he forgets to include him among the authors of the propaganda literature on the conflict of Danzig, even though – as we shall see – this conflict is one of the main pillars of his epic poem. Danzig's propagandistic writings – mainly in German – have most recently been analyzed by Maciej Ptaszyński. His study also includes Polish scholarly literature on the propaganda of the Danzig conflict. Szymon Brzeziński deals with another segment of the Polish propaganda literature around Báthory, which the execution of Samuel Zborowski generated. Éva Gyulai analyses the propaganda policy of the Báthory-impresas, which continued even after the king's death. Ildikó Horn examines the carefully composed image of the ruler Báthory's personality in the light of the idealist Erasmus' mirror of prince.



Figure 1. Cartari 1581, 264.

Although Hunyadi's epyllion is not a consistent and coherent composition, we can discover several compositional arcs in his work. This paper concisely summarizes the epic poem and demonstrates that these structural and thematic elements were deliberately employed to serve the political aims of Stephen Báthory's reign. By analysing the poem's recurring motifs and compositional strategies, the paper argues that Hunyadi's epic functioned as a conscious instrument of royal self-representation in the context of the siege of Danzig (Gdańsk) and the Livonian War.

2. The first part of the poem: invocation (lines 1–66)

Hunyadi structured his epic poem into four chapters of progressively increasing length. The first introductory part, containing 66 hexameters, is the shortest (Hunyadi 2022, 99–100). Its epic function resembles an invocation, or rather a reverse invocation, in which, instead of the poet calling upon the Muses for assistance, the personified figure of Fame, Fama (Φήμη) appeals to Hunyadi for aid. Although no specific personified figure of Propaganda or Report, they can be assigned all of Fama's attributes. Virgil (*Aen.* IV. 174–190) depicted the monstrous figure of Fama as follows (translated by John Dryden, see Fig. 2):

Fame, the great ill, from small beginnings grows:
 Swift from the first; and ev'ry moment brings
 New vigor to her flights, new pinions to her wings.
 Soon grows the pigmy to gigantic size;
 Her feet on earth, her forehead in the skies.
 Inrag'd against the gods, revengeful Earth
 Produc'd her last of the Titanian birth.
 Swift is her walk, more swift her winged haste:
 A monstrous phantom, horrible and vast.
 As many plumes as raise her lofty flight,
 So many piercing eyes enlarge her sight;
 Millions of opening mouths to Fame belong,
 And ev'ry mouth is furnish'd with a tongue,
 And round with list'ning ears the flying plague is hung.
 She fills the peaceful universe with cries;
 No slumbers ever close her wakeful eyes;
 By day, from lofty tow'rs her head she shews,
 And spreads thro' trembling crowds disastrous news;
 With court informers haunts, and royal spies;
 Things done relates, not done she feigns, and mingles truth with lies.
 Talk is her business, and her chief delight
 To tell of prodigies and cause affright.



Figure 2. Vergilius 1502, CCXV^v.

While Vincenzo Cartari only refers to Virgil's lines in his book (Cartari 1556, 77^v–79^r; Cartari 1996, 440–1), a few decades later Cesare Ripa (1593, 74) has already quoted them in his Italian translation (*Aen.* IV. 174, 176–7, 181–8). Independently of Virgil, neither author emphasizes the figure of the monster but rather that of the woman. Ripa (2012, 176) describes the figure as “Donna vestita d’un velo sottile, succinto, a traverso, raccolto a mezza gamba, che mostri correre leggiermente; averà due grand’ali, sarà tutta pennata, e per tutto vi saranno tant’occhi quante penne, e tra questi vi saranno molte bocche et orecchie, nella destra mano terrà una tromba [...]”.² In addition, Ripa (2012, 177) also gives the attributes of Good Fame (*Fama buona*) and Bad Fame (*Fama cattiva*), which could be combined to shape the figure of Propaganda. The Good Fame has pure white wings but has no eyes, mouths, or ears. Additional attributes include the trumpet in her right hand, the olive branch in her left hand, and the gold necklace with a heart around her neck. The female figure of the Bad Fame glides on black wings with dark, mournful, gloomy (*nero*) images painted on her dress. She also has a trumpet in her hand.

2 “A woman dressed in a thin, succinct veil, gathered across her waist at mid-calf, appearing to run lightly; she will have two large wings, she will be covered in feathers, and everywhere there will be as many eyes as feathers, and among these there will be many mouths and ears, in her right hand she will hold a trumpet [...]”



Figure 3. Fama (Marcolino, 1540, XI)



Figure 4.
id. Hans Weigel
(~1520–1577), Fama

Hunyadi's Fama is not a monster but a muse-like female figure (see Fig. 3 and 4) who arrives at the poet's Paduan idyll surrounded by bloody vapours, weary from haste, with weakened wings, and exhausted, bringing news of the ferocious Livonian War in the north. With her chiding, she arouses Hunyadi, who has wasted his poetic talents on trifling verses, epigrams, and bucolic idylls, while the character and deeds of Stephen Báthory demand an epic subject: "Aude aliquid, noluisse sat est, teque exime vulgo!"³ This scene (mostly lines 16–31) shows a striking similarity to the beginning of Janus Pannonius' Marcellus-panegyric, when Pallas Athena, and not Fama, is the one who encourages Janus to write more significant works.⁴

Thus, Fama, who may also be interpreted as the personified figure of Propaganda, swiftly convinces Hunyadi to serve as the voice of the king's greatness and extraordinary deeds: "Te nunc ignavia deses occupat Euganeae iuvenis pars una coronae."⁵ Fama urges the poet to compose and recite an epic about the northern war. As illustrated in Cartari's work (see Fig. 1), one of Fama's most significant attributes is her presence alongside the chariot of Mars, as she is responsible for

3 "Dare to do something, enough of not wanting to, set yourself apart from the crowd!"

4 "[...] iterumne Guarini / Ludere vis ludum? vel te pastoria forsan / Has inter potius delectant sibila silvas? / Lascivive placent Elegi, aut iurgator Iambus? / An tardus Scazon? veterisve undena Phalaeci / Syllaba, dulce iocis spargens epigramma facetis?" See Jankovits 2022, 45.

5 "Now, let your laziness cease, the young man of Euganea occupies one part of the crown."

disseminating news of military events. The reliability of the news she proclaims, however, remains inconsequential.

Cartari (1996, 440) paraphrased the Virgilian description as “la Fama apportatrice non meno del falso che del vero.”⁶ The news, by its very nature, is neither true nor false. News is news because it spreads everywhere on nimble wings, whether true or false. Fama kept on a leash and controlled can become a carefully managed propaganda. Whoever controls the news can choose which eyes and ears on Fama’s body to keep open and which to close according to their preference.

Johannes Sambucus’ emblem (1569, 281) entitled *Vel levia multitudine clarent* [Through multitude even light/insignificant things can become famous] points out another important aspect of the image of Fama/Propaganda. The message of the emblem dedicated to Johannes Oporinus, a printer from Basel, is clear. The printer is seen during the process of printing in his workshop, with the winged female figure of Fama above his head (see Fig. 5).

All of this aligns with Báthory’s deliberate propaganda strategy: the broader the dissemination of the message, the greater the likelihood of reaching its intended audience. One of the most prominent examples of Báthory’s propaganda efforts is the Paduan volume, whose most substantial component – both in content and length – is Hunyadi’s epic poem. Notably, Báthory recognized the power of news and rumours in shaping public perception to such an extent that, when military operations in Livonia commenced, he not only imposed censorship but also established a mobile printing press that travelled with his army, ensuring that his version of events was disseminated as swiftly as possible (Horn 2008, 381–2).

Furthermore, the Fama scene presents a practical reinterpretation of the epic invocation. If the Polish Royal Chancellery commissioned the edition of *Viridarium*, then it is not the poet who calls upon the muse, but rather the chancellery – embodied by Fama – that summons the poet. By definition: news disseminated for a specific purpose is propaganda. This explains why Hunyadi does not appear in the company of the muses at the beginning of the epic. In this context, the anachronistic notion of an “independent artist” who invokes the celestial beings contrasts with that of the “court artist,” who is instead invoked by them. The former voluntarily seeks the company of the muses, while the latter is forcibly removed from their grove and placed upon a “watchful throne high on the housetops or lofty towers” by the celestial Fama, who, as Virgil describes, “can cling to the vile invention and malignant wrong, or mingle with her word some tidings true.”⁷ This transformation thus reflects the image of a poet pulled from the ivory tower into the service of the court.

In Hunyadi’s description, Fama is not associated with a trumpet. Instead, the *Viridarium* volume itself serves as the instrument through which Fama proclaims the glory of Stephen Báthory. At the conclusion

6 “Fame brings no less falsehood than truth.”

7 Translated by Theodore C. Williams.

of the reverse invocation—where the earthly office summons the poet through the celestial Fama—Hunyadi laments that his prolonged engagement with bucolic poetry has left him unfit to compose a suitably grand account of Báthory’s heroic deeds. He confesses that he has grown so idle in the fragrant valleys of Italy that he can only sing of its forests and groves, rather than noble poetry worthy of his subject: “tam timida vibrare lyra temerarius error excludit veniam, laus est siluisse modeste.”⁸

However, in the final lines of the first part, Hunyadi remarks that perhaps the time will come (*forsan erit tempus*) when he will extol the king’s glorious deeds in a more refined song, stirring the whole Helicon. Until then, however, he can offer only this humble, rustic piece.

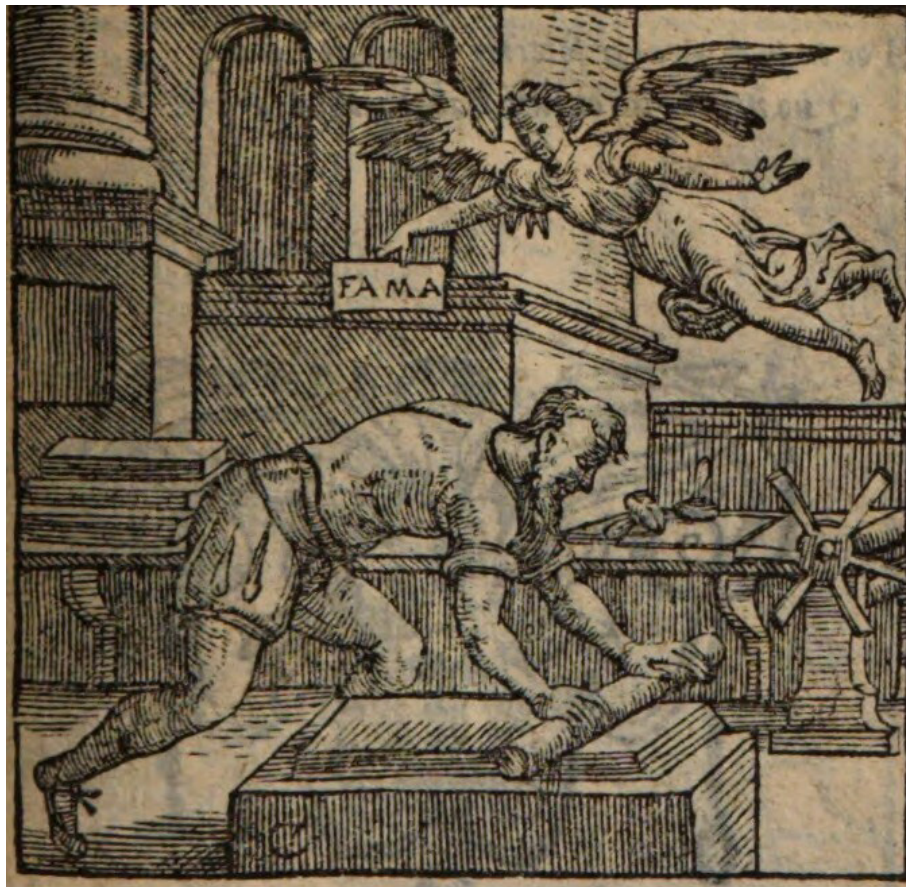


Figure 5. Sambucus 1569, 281.

3. The second part of the poem: Stephen’s birthday celebration (lines 67–300)

The chapter entitled *Stephanu genethlia* also suggests that Hunyadi composed the epic poem from various parts. This relatively short chapter (234 hexameters) appears to be an occasional poem in the genre

⁸ “To vibrate the lyre so timidly, a rash error excludes pardon, it is praiseworthy to have remained modestly silent.”

of *genethliacum* or *natalitium* and may have originally been intended as a birthday tribute to Báthory, which the poet later integrated into his *epyllion*. From an ideological perspective, this chapter reveals a deliberate and significant element of Báthory's self-representation, emphasizing the divine ordination of his reign and his heavenly vocation. Ildikó Horn (2008, 368-372) has identified this motif as well as its connection to the Erasmian ideal, which became a cornerstone of Báthory's self-representation (Erasmus 2003, 26-27). Another example of this ideological motif appears in the preface to *Viridarium*, where the publisher Zucconelli states (Hunyadi 1583, A2v): *a Daciae Principatu ad excelsam Poloniae Coronam divinitus evocatum*. At the beginning of the second chapter of Hunyadi's poem, Báthory must have particularly appreciated the passage in which he is portrayed as the Erasmian *pater patriae* ('father of the country'). Here, Hunyadi describes the long-foretold birth of the *magnus pater patriae* ('great father of the country'), who, safeguarding ancestral power, will ensure the observance of ancient laws. Under his rule, Hungary's golden age will be reborn, and long-awaited peace and justice will flourish. This divine calling is further legitimized by miraculous signs appearing across the world and by ancient Chaldean, Persian, Etruscan, Egyptian, and Sibylline prophecies. While the peoples of the South and the East await these events in fear, those of the West and the North already celebrate the coming golden age.

This anticipated era of peace will reverse the natural order: steel will soften into gold, swords will be reshaped into scythes, trees will exude balm, and rivers with gold swirling in their beds will flow with milk and honey instead of water. Even the waters of the "warlike Danube" will transform, carrying nectar and ambrosia.

The gods want to see the miracle with their own eyes, thus gather at the cradle of the new-born Stephen. However, the Parcae, the weavers of human destiny, are absent. At Jupiter's command, a messenger is dispatched to summon the three sisters. Upon their arrival, Atropos is the first to address the infant Stephen. As she spins the thread of his fate, she repeatedly chants a hexametric incantation to determine Báthory's destiny: "Currite felices felicia licia fusi!"⁹ Atropos foresees a future in which, following the bloody wars against the Turks, Buda and Belgrade will be liberated, and the once-ravaged southern countryside along the Drava River will flourish in peace. The prophecy extends beyond Hungary, envisioning Stephen as the liberator of the Polish people from Moscow's domination and the one who will recapture the lost city of Połock (now Polack in Belarus). Ultimately, the mother of the goddesses, Nature, affirms these prophecies with her murmured approval. From that moment on, Báthory's destiny is bound to the immutable laws of nature.

9 "Run, happy ones, happy ones, spinning yarn!"

In this scene, Hunyadi's depiction goes beyond the conventional rhetoric of divine ordination. The authority of the Parcae and the natural order supersede even the will of the gods. Consequently, Stephen's reign is not merely divinely sanctioned but dictated by the very laws of nature. In this framework, his accession to the throne becomes as inevitable and universal as the principles governing thermodynamics or gravity, an unalterable force of nature. The approval of Atropos' words by Nature has the same impact as the legendary apple falling on Newton's head. Recognizing the power of natural law is akin to apples knocking on the heads of the gods present.

4. Third part of the poem: Stephen's childhood (lines 301–1315)

The chapter *Stephanu paedia* focuses on Báthory's childhood and youth. At the beginning, Hunyadi evokes Báthory's father, the Transylvanian voivode Stephen Báthory the Elder, and envisions a rebuilt church in reconquered Buda, along with a triumphal arch erected for King Báthory. This arch is guarded by lifelike marble statues of Attila, the "god of war," and King Matthias. In front of them, the corpses of fallen Turks lie piled up in heaps.

The first approximately three hundred lines of the chapter function as a mirror for princes, in which Stephen Báthory the Elder – through historical, biblical, and mythological examples – instructs his young son on the proper way to rule. At the same time, he emphasizes the importance of learning. The infant Báthory, eager to throw himself into battle, must be calmed by his father. Later, the adolescent Stephen finds himself at the Herculean crossroads, where the personified figures of Virtus and Voluptas engage in a contest (*certamen*) for his allegiance. This topos in Hunyadi's poem consists of 350 lines (Molnár 34–5). Hunyadi's depiction of "Virtus & Voluptas" aligns with the widespread topos of "Hercules at the Crossroads", a key element of ruler self-representation that proliferated from the 15th century onward.

With this, Stephen Báthory joined the ranks such as Charles VIII of France (1470–1498), Henry IV of England (1553–1610), the Duke of Milan Maximilian Sforza (1493–1530), the young Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500–1558), Philip II of Spain (1527–1598), the Duke of Parma Alexander Farnese (1545–1592), the Elector of Bavaria Maximilian I (1573–1651), and anticipated such rulers as Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand of Austria (1609–1641), or the kings of France Louis XIV (1638–1715) and Louis XV (1710–1774).¹⁰

If we consider this in light of the ideological objectives of the Polish Chancellery, the mere inclusion of this list of rulers enhances the significance of Hunyadi's crossroads scene. However, the propaganda

10 For the most detailed summary of the topos, see Panofsky (1930). See also Dickerman and Walker (1996); Polleroß (1998).

value of the motif is noteworthy from another perspective as well: it contrasts with the notion of divine predestination presented in the previous chapter. As a Catholic ruler, Báthory freely chooses Virtus over Voluptas: not under the force of immutable predestination, but as a reflection of his noble character. While his rule derives from divine decree and is affirmed by Mother Nature, the quality of his governance stems from his own choices, as he is granted the freedom to wield power virtuously or sinfully.

The original source of this topos is Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (II.1.21–34), where he recounts Prodicus' story of Hercules' choice between Ἀρετή/Εὐδαιμονία and Κακία. Cicero briefly references this passage in *De officiis* (I.118), an important moment, as his Latin interpretation popularized the contrast between Voluptas and Virtus. The most influential later adaptation, however, is found in Silius Italicus' *Punica* (XV.18–128), where the two figures appear in Scipio's dream.

By the 16th century, the topos had evolved beyond Silius Italicus' version, and Virtus had undergone a radical transformation: losing her femininity and physical beauty in favor of internalized virtues. The humanist reinterpretation of the topos thus emphasizes the difficulty of the choice between the two figures. Another innovation introduced by Silius Italicus is the inclusion of allegorical attendants around Virtus and Voluptas, though in *Punica*, their number is far smaller than in Hunyadi's adaptation.

In Hunyadi's poem, Virtus delivers her monologue following the same rhetorical structure as in *Punica*, but with a significant difference: rather than presenting Roman and ancient historical exempla, she invokes figures from Hungarian history. Virtus traces an arc from the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin in the late 9th century to King Matthias' capture of Vienna in 1485. At the end of the scene, Virtus embraces and kisses the young Báthory before vanishing into thin air (Hunyadi 2022, 127). (Notably, the kiss of Virtue is a recurring motif in Hunyadi's oeuvre, the final instance occurs at Báthory's death in the volume of *Pis manibus*, Hunyadi 2022, 250–251).

From a propaganda perspective, Hunyadi's depiction of Hercules' *studium sapientiae* along the path of Virtus is a crucial element, which he associates with the philosophical, poetic, and scholarly pursuits of the future prince (see, for example, Tietze-Conrat 1951, 308–309, fig. 52). By the late 16th century, within the framework of the Hercules topos, choosing the path of Virtus had also come to signify the pursuit of erudition and the *vita contemplativa*.

Báthory's education is remarkable even by humanist standards. Beyond his knowledge of natural philosophy and astronomy, he is well-versed in various philosophical traditions. In addition to Plato and Aristotle, he is familiar with Democritus, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Cato the Younger, the Cynics, and the Stoic Cleanthes, as well as the Chaldean Oracles and the Corpus Hermeticum. His rhetorical skills are refined to the extent that he speaks like Pericles, having trained his

eloquence with Isocrates and Demosthenes, and he blends the historical depth of Livy, Pliny, Terence, and Cicero with the light wit of Plautus (see also Veress 1933, 21-24; Horn 2008, 365–367, 376).

Hunyadi concludes the third chapter on Báthory's youth with his return from Germany and his prophetic nightmare of a grief-stricken, suffering Hungary (*Ungaria*). Accompanied by the river gods of the Danube, Tisza, Sava, Szamos, Maros, and Drava, as well as the personified figures of Illyria, Moesia, and Bohemia, *Ungaria* laments her fate. In a brief speech, she declares that she no longer wishes to live, desiring only a dignified death. The only glimmer of hope, she suggests, lies with the Báthory family. Turning to *Dacia* (i.e., Transylvania), she pleads for help in preserving the Hungarian name. Báthory awakens in horror as the figure of *Ungaria* vanishes into thin air.

5. The fourth part of the poem: Stephen's reign (lines 1316–2793)

The final and most extensive chapter, *Stephanu basilia*, focuses on Stephen's reign as Prince of Transylvania, his kingship of Poland, and his celebrated historical deeds in Danzig and Livonia. This section may have originally formed the core of the epyllion, which Hunyadi later expanded by incorporating Báthory's birth and childhood. It is in this chapter that Fama's earlier visit to the poet finds its purpose, as if this section were an independent epic, a notion reinforced by the renewed use of the epic device of invocation.

If we consider the epyllion as a coherent work, it suggests that Hunyadi, having begun with Fama's call, has only now reached the moment where he invokes the Muses in accordance with epic tradition. He calls upon none other than Clio, the muse of history. Perhaps not coincidentally, Fama, whether conveying truth or falsehood, complements and contrasts with history. The most illustrious contemporary representation appears in Hendrik Goltzius' engraving, where Fama soars through the air with her trumpet while Historia remains grounded, absorbed in reading a thick historical book.¹¹ The winged hourglass floating between them symbolizes the temporality of both figures: History is anchored in the past, while Fame belongs to the present.

Hunyadi, therefore, "writes history" in this section. At the outset of the epic poem, Fama visits Hunyadi, urging him to sing of the events of the Livonian War. This chapter focuses on three of Báthory's "epic-scale" military exploits: the Battle of Kerelőszentpál¹² (today: Sânpaul, Romania) on 19 July 1575, the siege of the rebellious city of Danzig at

11 Washington DC, National Gallery of Art: <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.153980.html> (12.03. 2025.)

12 This battle ensured the political autonomy of the Principality of Transylvania and marked the starting point of Stephen Báthory's independent reign and his path to the Polish throne.

the end of 1577, and his three campaigns of the Livonian War between 1579 and 1581. However, despite Fama's request, Hunyadi dedicates the least attention to the Livonian War of the three.

The figure of *Ungaria*, who had appeared in Báthory's dream at the end of the previous chapter, now emerges from her tomb and enters the narrative reality as *Pannonis*. The Parcae have finally woven away the thread of Hungary's sins, and in its place, they weave a new and more fortunate destiny in which Stephen Báthory's reign is heralded as a form of redemption. Just as in the prefigurative dream sequence, the saviour of Hungary is once again Dacia (i.e., Transylvania), who, overwhelmed by the unbearable suffering inflicted upon her and her mother Pannonis, implores the gods for a merciful death rather than continued affliction. At this moment, Virtus herself appears before Pannonis and Dacia to offer consolation. In contrast to the nightmare vision, where Ungaria merely lamented her fate, Virtus now actively entrusts Dacia with rescuing Pannonis, who is drowning like a shipwrecked soul. Simultaneously, Virtus rebukes Pannonis, who – having failed to learn from the examples of Hellas and Rome – has allowed weak and flabby kings to ascend her throne, reducing her status from queen to slave.

As only Báthory can provide salvation, Dacia convenes the Senate of Gyulafehérvár¹³ to elect Stephen as the Prince of Transylvania. Báthory is sitting in a vineyard, contemplating the fate of Pannonia, when a jubilant crowd suddenly appears, bearing the insignia of power and celebrating his name. Despite their acclamations, Stephen initially declines the princely throne with humility. However, after being visited once more by the exiled Pannonia, alongside Pietas and Virtus themselves, the sight of the weeping mass of people moves his heart, and he ultimately accepts the honor. This moment marks the realization of the new golden age foretold at the beginning of Hunyadi's work.

However, fearing her defeat, the furious Austria plots to usurp the Transylvanian throne from Báthory. In a furious monologue, she vows to relentlessly pursue Pannonia, whom she likens to the Hydra, perpetually growing new heads. Meanwhile, Mars and his companions – Fear (*Pavor*), Wrath (*Ira*), and Death (*Mors*) – are amid a quarrel with the gods when Fama, now reduced to the role of a mere messenger, intervenes at Jupiter's command (see also: Cartari 1996, 440–441).

Upon her arrival, the quarrelling gods fell silent. The confused gods are stunned. She commands Mars not to delay, but to come to the aid of the Hungarians at once ("Absiste morari, prorue et Ungaricis fer opem, expectate minis [...]"¹⁴). So they are ready to engage in the Battle of Kerelőszentpál. The angry Fama rebukes the god of war: "Mars, what are you waiting for? Perhaps you are flirting with goddesses again, or arranging a celestial spectacle with the betrayed Vulcanus once more? Do not delay, hurry, and bring help to the Hungarians!" After this,

¹³ Today: Alba Iulia, Romania.

¹⁴ "Stop delaying, rush forward and bring aid to the Hungarians, wait for threats [...]"

Mars, breathing heavily, begins his monologue. He explains that he cannot join them, as he must depart for Persia, and entrusts leadership to Virtus. The god of war shares his detailed battle plan with Virtus.

Virtus then rides one of Mars' horses through the Balkans, arriving just in time for the Battle of Kerelőszentpál. She spots the majestic figure of Báthory from afar, runs up and embraces him, and breathes divine power into the prince with her kiss. The scene is particularly striking, because Virtus kisses the prince on the lips, which means that Báthory's youthful choice ends in modest sensuality of Virtue during the heat of battle.¹⁵

After an hour-long battle, most of the fleeing 'German' soldiers are slaughtered; an act Hunyadi interprets as the fulfillment of just retribution of their crimes. He attributes blame to the Germans for a series of past Hungarian military failures, including the unsuccessful siege of Pest and Buda in 1542, the siege of Gyulafehérvár in 1551 ordered by George Martinuzzi, the fall of Temesvár¹⁶ in 1552, and the killing of Captain István Losonci. Although the pious Báthory (*rex pius*) attempts to protect the surviving enemy soldiers with his shield, many are nonetheless slain.¹⁷

Meanwhile, Sarmatis (Poland), left without a king, hears of a southern land called Dacia (i.e., Transylvania), inhabited by the fierce Huns. Sarmatis seeks a ruler who will embody the qualities of Pallas Athena in arms, Mercury in eloquence, Jupiter in helping the nation, and Mars in confronting its enemies. Since Báthory possesses all these virtues, Sarmatis invites him to assume the Polish crown. The good news is heralded to the world through miraculous signs and wonders: the Szamos River flows with milk instead of water, and John Hunyadi joyfully laughs in his tomb in Gyulafehérvár. As an exceptional diplomat and legislator, Báthory surpasses expectations, resolving centuries-old conflicts. However, Hunyadi primarily praises two significant military achievements of the Mars-like Báthory in Poland. The first is his conquest of the city of Danzig, which had pledged allegiance to the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian II (see Lepszy 1935), and the second is his successful military actions in the Livonian War against Ivan the Terrible. The fact that Hunyadi dedicates a disproportionately long section to the events in Danzig (800 lines, or half of the chapter), while the campaign against the Russians is summarized in only 100 lines, suggests that for Hunyadi, the anti-Habsburg dimension of the Danzig events held greater ideological significance.

On the eve of the upcoming events at Danzig, Báthory – like a brooding bird perched on its egg, anxious about its unhatched chick and waking at every noise – lies restlessly, tossing and turning in sleeplessness. Then Virtus, leaning on the king's bed, appears once

15 Not to mention, that Virtus had already been portrayed with masculine qualities in Hunyadi's earlier descriptions.

16 Today: Timișoara, Romania.

17 On the contested nature of Báthory's piety, see Szádeczky 1887, 55–9.

more. Similar to how Fama urged Hunyadi at the beginning of the work to write, Virtus now encourages the king to undertake something great (an action that Hunyadi can later celebrate in a song).

After this, the captain of the renowned “blue drabants”, Mihály Vadas gives a 100-line speech exhorting the army. In the end, he invokes Mars, who is not in Persia now and is available to help them. However, before that, the god of war also gives a speech. Then Mars and his escorts – Fear, Wrath and Death – throw themselves into the battle and make a great massacre. Wrath (Ira) is commanded to assist Virtus and Constantia, who are engaged in the thick of the battle. In Hunyadi’s poem, Danzig finally capitulated. The poet promises fame to fifty fallen Hungarian heroes whose names will live on forever in his poem. He says they deserve more fame than fabled heroes such as Aeneas, Achilles, or Heracles. If Virgil and Homer could see this, they would now laugh at their works scrawled with childish deeds, and would rather fill their pages with Báthory’s feats.

Mars then directs the king against the Russians in pursuit of further glory. It is curious that Hunyadi covers the three military events of the Livonian campaign in just a hundred lines: the sieges of Połock (Polack, Belarus) in 1579, Velikiye Luki (today Russia) in 1580, and Pskov (today Russia) in 1581 (see Laskowski; Natanson-Leski 1935).

Danzig was undoubtedly one of the largest northern ports and was crucial in controlling the Baltic Sea. In Hunyadi’s work, the events of the Livonian War pale in comparison to this. However, the significance of the latter is well demonstrated by the fact that the Russians were expelled from approximately a hundred towns and eighty fortresses. The most notable of these are Riga; Jeziaryszcza, in the territory of present-day Belarus; and Wieliz (Velizh), Uswiaty (Usvyaty), along with the fortresses of Zawołocze, Porchow (Porkhov) and Starodub in the territory of present-day Russia (Csorba 1944, 81–2). Because of this military campaign, even the Turks feared the name of the king. However, even with the help of Clio, Hunyadi cannot properly tell the coming glorious times promised in the prophecies and the fall of the Ottoman Empire before the power of Stephen Báthory. The poet concludes the epic by urging Hungarians to fill their own libraries with books celebrating their own glorious deeds, just as other nations do abroad. If Báthory gives him the opportunity, he will write his immortal epic on Báthory’s illustrious feats, which he promised earlier in the invocation. Perhaps this promise was never fulfilled solely due to the king’s death.

6. Conclusions

To summarize, this study has briefly outlined an epic-scale work that served Báthory’s ideological self-representation and has not been previously examined. Ferenc Hunyadi’s work not only complements

the propaganda literature of Danzig and Livonia but also highlights the conscious topoi Báthory used to shape his royal self-representation. In Hunyadi's work, the most significant and detailed topos, besides the obligatory praise of military events, is the popular "Hercules at the Crossroads," which emphasizes not only the spiritual but also the intellectual qualities of the king. Additionally, the topoi of the *pater patriae*, the *rex pius*, the "always vigilant and watchful ruler," and his "divine mission" also appear. These closing observations suggest that Hunyadi's epyllion not only served as an ideological instrument of Báthory's royal self-representation, but also exemplifies the broader relationship between politics and literature in the late sixteenth century. In fact, it is an epic work that belongs to the genre later described as "political poetry", proclaiming not only the earthly but also the divine legitimacy of Báthory's rule. Although the program of legitimizing political power through literary means may seem commonplace, Hunyadi's epyllion provides a perfect example of early modern power representation addressed to the narrower audience of the high "courtly register." Through classical topoi and inherited traditions, Hunyadi's work participates in shaping the collective memory that sustains royal power in the eyes of the contemporary intellectual elite.

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