Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences  
Faculty of Humanities  

Etelka Doncsecz  

Affiliations and literature of the different fraternities  
Approaches to Ferenc Verseghy’s oeuvre before his imprisonment  

(Theses)  

Doctoral School of Literary Studies  
The leader of the doctoral school: Dr. István Lukács DSc  

Doctoral school into the Hungarian and European Enlightenment  
The director of the doctoral school: Dr. Márton Szilágyi DSc  

Members of the Board:  
President: Dr. Márton Szilágyi DSc  

Opponents:  
Dr. Gergely Főrizs PhD  
Dr. Gábor Vaderna PhD  

Other members of the Board:  
Dr. László Szelestei Nagy DSc  
Dr. Gergely Labádi PhD  

The Secretary of the Board:  
Dr. Mariann Czifra PhD  

Supervisor:  
Dr. Piroska Balogh PhD  

Budapest, 2016.
I. Initial research questions

This thesis presents and discusses the career of Ferenc Verseghy, who is one of the symbolic figures of the 18 – 19th century Hungarian literature. His work, Treatises, was published as an appendix to the Millot-translation. As the result of this publication an investigation was conducted against him. The history of literature recognises this investigation as the most important momentum of his career. The present thesis evolved into its present form by unfolding the investigations into this much discussed yet still unexplored case.

The work, Élémens de l’ histoire générale, of Claude François Xaviere Millot (1726 – 1785), the famous French historiographer at the time, was written in the genre of philosophical world history. It was well-known and popular among those Hungarian readers who were literate in French thus were well-informed in current events. György Bessenyei had already called for its translation in the late 1770s. Finally, at the request of János Batsányi, Ferenc Verseghy accepted the assignment. He translated Millot’s work into Hungarian and published two volumes of the originally six piece work. Three pieces were about ancient and three were about modern history. ([Claude François Xaviere] MILLOT, A’ világnak közönséges történetei: First volume: A’ régi nemzetek, [translated by Ferenc VERSEGHY,] Pest – Buda, Weingand, 1790., [Claude François Xaviere] MILLOT, A’ világnak közönséges történetei: Second volume: A’ görögök, [translated by Ferenc VERSEGHY,] Pest-Buda, Weingand, 1791.). He considered Millot’s conclusion disproportionately focused on event history. To compensate the shortfall of the original work he published the first ten volumes of the Hungarian translation with ten additional essays about the history of civilisation. However, as they held opposing views towards the position of the Catholic Church, these additional volumes attracted the censor’s attention. An investigation was then launched against the author who was condemned in the end, the copies of his work were confiscated, he was obliged to withdraw his statements, and was sentenced to a three-month imprisonment. The case received much attention from his contemporaries and the reception as well. The fact that the author of Treatises had served his sentence did not mean that the followers of the events would forget his destiny. Even after he had written a series of publications in a wide range of topics and genres over the years, he was mostly identified with his notorious thesis for a long time.

The response to Treatises was significant, but it received little attention from the literary history. After the monograph of Elemér Császár, a fundamental work with reference to the subject and a few smaller time-honoured publications, among researchers it only attracted attention in the last decade, and mostly tangentially. As a matter of fact this phenomenon can be interpreted as a symptom, because the same statement essentially applies to other works of the Verseghy oeuvre.
The author was exceptionally fortunate to be blessed with a long career, during which he was extremely active for four decades regarding literary products. He left behind a significant number of printed and handwritten spiritual heritage. His oeuvre is not only respectable due to its size but also because it involves many different scientific fields. The explanation for this peculiarity of the Verseghy-reception might be concealed in the following: after Elemér Császár’s work in 1903 there were no monographs published about the author. His name appears in volumes with a wide variety of subjects often mentioned as an example, or analogy, indicating that he participated in the discussed issues, debates or that he was a member of one of the spiritual milieux in reference to the research in question. This is why his name surfaces in works discussing linguistic issues, source publications and monographs that released Jacobin papers. His name also appeared in different books, and thematic study collections about the era’s lyrical poetry, theatre history, Bible critics, philosophical world history, sermon history, press and musical history, aesthetics. So typically, and mostly not in analyses that were especially motivated by questions about Verseghy himself. If we rigidly insist on the viewpoint of each scientific field, or follow the reasoning of the researches studying these essentially different subjects, in terms of methodology, it might prove to be hazardous. From this very colourful portrait only a few shades can be visible, and they also look very different from various directions. Researchers (of this behaviour) approached the case of Treatises by only focusing on the conflict with the audit office. They ignored contexts offered by, for example, other pieces of the oeuvre, and by the authorial connection network as well. According to the viewpoint of the present interpretation this way such important aspects remain dim that could place the examined matter into a totally different light. This thesis, of course, do not claim that statements in works based on the above approach would not appear to be valid.

Readers informed only by seconder resources, the late spectators of the events, even by disregarding these details, could create their narrative in relation to Treatises. After Joseph’s mild censorship regulations, at the time of Emperor Franz, they observed a high degree of tightening in the auditing process and once again the influence of the Catholic Church. The government, at the same time with the raging wars in France, intended to control more and more readings. They tried to censor mainly the readings which citizens got most of their knowledge from. The contemporaries who had little insight into the major policy processes, got filtered and late information about the ongoing events around them. Thus the steps of the authority could have resonated as unexpected experience with them.

The interpreter who accepts this alternative approach to the Verseghy’s case, as a matter of fact, is not mistaken. The investigation also started with a denunciation resulting in the condemning censorship review. However, as we take a closer look at the following events of the case, the
relevant sources, and the actors themselves, if we interpret the proceedings in the wake of Treatises as only a conflict with the censorship office, it would leave many aspects of the case hidden. First of all, the aspects of church history. The author was in the crossfire of accusations and in this case a secular ex-pauline priest. His incriminated work does not speak against the governor, or the state, but specifically criticises the role of the Catholic Church in the state and the organisational framework of its operations.

Those Catholic parish clerks who offered an opinion on the escalated conflict, under the false excuse of the Mill-translation’s appendix, are usually divided into two groups. Indeed, among those who articulated their objections, we may find names like Mátyás Riethaller, (ex) Jesuit censor and other Catholic opinion-leaders of the time as Vazul Alexovics and Leó Szaicz who were regarded as Catholic apologetics, and finally Joseph Batthyány, the archbishop himself. The reception portrayed Ferenc Verseghy as an opposing renitent, a radical and provocateur (ex)monk. This thesis-antithesis goes beyond the immediate lessons learned from the analysis of the Treatises, and opens a way to an interpretive approach to the Roman Catholic authors of the turn of the 18-19th century.

The underlying arguments of this thesis are rooted here. By focusing on the behaviour of the Catholic, once Pauline author, I intend to find answers to the following questions. Can Ferenc Verseghy truly be regarded as a renitent parish clerk? If so, does he stand alone with this characteristic to the opposing clerks lining up against him in this debate? Did he really commit a transgression (at the time of release) by publishing the Treatises? If so, can its degree be measured? Did the Pauline religious background, where he originated from, as it is often reclaimed, contribute to the development of his attitudes? When János Batsányi leaves Millot’s world history in Verseghy’s hands, in 1787, whom does he entrust with the care of the volume? The ex-pauline litterateur who writes and reads in many languages and works as camp priest at the time or his free-thinking former Pauline frater friend who he has known for a long time? (Is this distinction even legitimate?) Was there any evidence upon the completion of the request that not only the Hungarian translation would be finalised but the volume would leave the press with ten additional essays thematically linked only loosely to the world history? Altogether: why did the author published them appended to this work, why didn't he release them separately? Why and, as a matter of fact, according to which party’s intention did this storm, sparked by the essays, attract such media attention? Can the real magnitude of this attention be judged accurately? How can be the Mill-translation and the Treatises be positioned in the context of the Verseghy oeuvre?

It is possible to find answers to these questions by contextualising the Treatises (1.) In order to do this, scrupulous attention needs to be paid on the author’s other works, and texts written
around this time. The first half of the 1790s is one of Verseghy’s most active period, both in terms of his publications, both regarding his community engagement. The momentum of his works published thereafter in rapid succession was brought to a halt by the damning verdict of the Martinovics trial, in 1795. The remained printed and handwritten products tell us about the events of the previous tight decade, dated from 1786, and create the context of the Treatises both in literal and figurative sense. The overture of the period started with disbanding the Pauline Fathers who provided not only community, but at the same time livelihood as well to the author. After dropping out of this circle he tried several other ways to prosper. First religious ones, eventually getting further and further as a litterateur, similarly to many other monks who lost their religious ties. What makes him stand out is his unique sense and diligence that assisted him to spot and seize opportunities to speak out and thus prevail. His extensive net of connections helped him to realise these opportunities. In this regard, it seems to be justified to take a closer look on two partially overlapping communities. Firstly, I will analyse the embankment built around Pauline intellectual surrounding, and social network in Pest, through which the translation assignment ended up in Verseghy’s field of interest. On the other hand, the monk community which was no longer only Pauline survived and luckily or by following a successful strategy avoided the abolition. Thus they could offer behaviour patterns to him: among others, the pattern of the religious litterateur who published and produced books for the book market.

(2.) Ferenc Verseghy is less explored nowadays. A considerable part of his enormous oeuvre consists of translations. Speaking of the Millot-translation and the Treatises, it is inevitable to examine the sources of his knowledge, and his language skills. If we take a closer look at his oeuvre, it suggests, however, that he used translation as a way of creating texts not only as a kind of dissemination method but also as the fastest process to release products that may be easily sold on the market. The Treatises was published appended to a volume which was popular, in demand and written in the genre of world history. Observing it placed among other Verseghy translations may result in further lessons from several aspects.

(3.) Verseghy himself points to the third momentum in his letter written to avert the accusations. It may define the framework of the investigation. Here he refers to the fact that his work received loud criticism only after two years of its release. Detecting the reasons for this delay may takes us closer to answer the reasons of the special attention for the Treatises. Verseghy received the request directing his attention to Millot’s work in 1787. After the condemnation of his translation, he was sentenced and completed the imposed punishment in autumn, 1793. The six years between these dates brought defining twists and turns to the history of the Habsburg Empire, to Europe and the Catholic Church, and eventually to Verseghy’s personal history as well. II.
Joseph was replaced by II. Leopold, who then was followed by I. Francis on the Habsburg throne. The subjects of the Empire did not only have to memorise the names of their new rulers. In a short period of time the basic framework of their opportunities in life had been re-tailored by the completely different policies of these three extremely different leaders. The frequent changes in the circumstances did not only originate from the above-mentioned contrasting gubernatorial styles. The traces of the backlash to the French wars can be also found among the reasons. It steered the fate of the continent into a very different direction. The most significant change, regarding the destiny of the Catholic Church, was brought by the death of II. Joseph and the withdrawal of his regulations. Both his former supporters and the opponents of his provisions had to find their place within the circles of the community, and a mixture of circumstances. The community now enjoyed the support of the state government, and it eventually responded to its members previous actions. It was no different in the case of Verseghy, the author of Treatises. There were some clerks who agreed with the reforms of the Josephine Church, and supported them explicitly or in their works. Their behaviour and/or support was in line with the ‘80s government policies, but became undesirable during the following decade. The storm stirred around Treatises, the disciplining of the author, in this sense, can be interpreted as a message sent by the Catholic Church.

II. Research methods

The present research intends to take a closer look at the above-mentioned six years (1787 – 1793) what was, in many respects, a very changeable and malleable period. We will be focusing specifically and closely only on the fate of Treatises, along the previously mentioned issues and contexts. However, the present study attempts more than just this, and can promise no less than the following. According to our point of view, this case is beyond itself significant, in respect of both the author and the turn of the old century. Establishing the incriminated texts as an excuse for the clashes of the long time opposite parties, we define a wider timeframe for the research. Its starting point will be the end of the 1770s, the period when the Trnava University was transferred to Buda. As Ferenc Verseghy’s ties to the Pauline order can be approximately dated from here. These ties presented him with a networking capital which directly or indirectly accompanied him until the end of his life and contributed to the birth of Treatises. The end point will be placed to the middle of 1810s for two reasons. Firstly, because during these years was Verseghy for the last time identified as the protagonist of this sensational case by contemporary statements. Secondly, he won a council assignment during these years to publish high school textbooks. Almost at the same time with this request, in October 1814, one of his main patrons, Mária Majthényi from Kesselekő, died and left him an annuity almost equal to her pension. In the light of the related sources, the last two
momentums seem to close the path of his long years of quest: he finally completed his one decade sentence as one of the convicts of the Martinovics conspiracy and the dissolution of the Pauline order, that took nearly thirty years, eventually ended as well. After winning a long-term assignment with a promising income, and receiving a significant amount of inheritance, around 1814, it becomes possible for Verseghy to work according to his own personal interests and not to the needs of loyalty and demands. With a seemingly durable existential background, from which later the abolition deprived him, he had the last opportunity to do so in 1786. Thus this paper embarks on not only analysing one single debate, but rather telling a story. How he started as a Pauline monk of the mid 1780s and became the litterateur and secular priest of the mid 1810s who experienced the prisons of Kufstein, Graz and Brno. On this road the birth of Treatises is an especially important milestone and its influence on his contemporaries. Here we can observe a conflict between his intentions and interests as an author, and the expectations of the circle surrounding him. The clash of his two character traits as a litterateur-clerk: the one who belongs to the brace of the Church, and the writer who would like to prosper in relations of the book market.

In the course of the wide variety of events and actions that happened during the years between the two above mentioned frame-giving dates, there is only one activity Verseghy keeps on ceaselessly doing which is writing. His answers to the questions ‘What?’, ‘When?’, ‘How?’, ‘Who?’, ‘Why?’ are constantly changing, though. The responses are induced by the reactions, which in the case of Verseghy, if not always but on many occasions provoke crisis situations. Crises that threaten the litterateur's existential background. There can be two such setbacks identified during his career: the dissolution of the Pauline Order and the severe condemnation following his participation in the Martinovics conspiracy. Studying the oeuvre indicates that he followed very similar steps in both cases. He used his skills and abilities as a litterateur to create a background for a certain life form. Later from the framework of this new life form he used the same skills and abilities but now for his own personal taste and interest, without sacrificing them for other purposes.

Although researchers do not call it crisis or disaster, it is not a strange phenomenon to them. ‘Bedrohung’, a very similar expression that means threat in English, is the central concept of Julia Anna Riedel’s doctoral thesis that she defended in Tübingen, and published in 2012. Her thesis is connected to one of the projects of the University of Tübingen (Eberhard Karls Universität). The assignment ‘Bedrohte Ordnungen’ is called the ‘systems at risk’. She was a member of a research group who reviewed various issues regarding time and location. Their attention was drawn to the cultural or social order or system (‘Ordnung’) in which certain factors (‘Störelement’) cause such disturbance, or threat (‘Bedrohung’) that it leads to damages, losses (‘Ordnungsverlust’, ‘Ordnungsverschwund’) in the previous conditions. Riedel joined the subprogram about the 18th
century led by Anton Schindling, and in her own thesis she explored the following questions. To what degree did the reforms of Maria Theresa and II. Joseph introduce threat ('Bedrohung') on the Pauline Order ('Ordnung')? What kind of strategies did they follow to avoid or balance these negative effects? In the countries of the Habsburg Monarchy, first as the competitors of the Jesuits, then as their successors, the Piarist Fathers can be considered as the most widespread and important teaching order. According to Riedel’s point of view, education is a prioritised area in the confrontation between the Catholic Church and the state. She thinks that the educational reforms represent the demands of the state, in a field that has been dominated by the Church, more specifically by (teaching) monk orders. Therefore she defines the educational reforms as threats ('Ordnung') in respect of the Piarists monks’ dual-characterisation (clerks/educators). Her conclusions and methods, in many regards, exceed the initial objectives of her research, and offer an opportunity, based on the example of the Piarists, to apply when approaching other monk orders. Concerning Verseghy’s case, two factors seem to be useful from Riedel’s conclusions. Firstly, analysing a number of Piarists’ portrays, she depicts the character of a monk type. Riedel uses the term ‘geistlicher bürgerlicher Gelehrter’ to describe monks, the so-called ‘geistlicher bürgerlicher Gelehrter’, who exists at the turn of the 18-19th century, publishes, researches, and has more and more connections to the profane world. Secondly, when analysing the same pathways, she identifies behavioural strategies that the Piarist monks used to react to the threatening effects of government interventions.

According to the opinion of the present thesis, the features identified by Julia Anna Riedel called ‘geistlicher bürgerlicher Gelehrter’, despite their dominant presence among the Piarists, can be also found for example in the Pauline order, whose members also suffered threats. There are many signs suggesting that the Pauline Fathers, who served in Pest at the same time with Verseghy, had lively and intensive connections to the Piarists, who also operated here. Thus the conditions were given to contact, detect and apply the above mentioned patterns, and in the case of Verseghy, it seems that this opportunity was not left unexploited. He owns many criteria of the ‘geistlicher bürgerlicher Gelehrter’ model.

In the opinion of the present thesis this is exactly why the case of Treatises, appended to the Millot-translation holds real importance. Now as an ex-monk, even after the death of II. Joseph, Verseghy acted in accordance with the behavioural traits of the ‘geistlicher bürgerlicher Gelehrter’. However, this time not as an optional possibility, not in preparation to the consequences of the backlash, but primarily as a strategy to escape an inevitable situation. Beyond the targeted disapproval, especially with this behaviour, he attracts the attention of the criticised community. As
the observation report sent to the primate demonstrates, they kept an eye on him even before the launch of the investigation. Presumably they just waited for the right occasion to react.

III. The chapters of the thesis

The above considerations support the assumption, justified from many sides, that the investigation around Treatises leads way beyond the concrete criticism of the text itself. (1.) From one side: it offers an excuse and opportunity for the clerks to openly clash. Although they belonged to the Catholic Church, they had very different mentality and interests, and thus had been in conflict for a long time. It points out that this community is far from homogeneous. There might be serious mental and spiritual differences not only between secular priests and monks, but between the orders, and what is more, within religious communities as well. At the turn of the 18 – 19th century the members of this in many respect diverse group reacted differently to the challenges of the Catholic Church. There were people who joined the voice of the criticism, and there were ones, who didn't show any receptivity toward new ideas. These two parties clashed in relation to the Treatises. The fact that Verseghy’s text had been published years earlier but attracted so much spotlight only around this time can be interpreted as a message. It announced that even though this behaviour might have been a good strategy during the Josephine times, it is no longer recommended to follow. At least not in a way that it would leave an imprint by the media. (2.) From another point of view: the author’s strategies can be explored by observing the birth of Treatises from the context of the responses to the threat of the Pauline Order’s disbandment. From an existential point of view Verseghy was a self-sustaining litterateur.

This paper moves towards to its objective by unknotting these two storylines and its chapters following one another in a chronological order. We will firstly take a closer look at the Pauline Fathers. They used to surround the author but then in 1786, after the disbandment, they let him go. The religious community’s awareness forming power is emphasised as a firmly entrenched element to the reception, a reoccurring momentum but without characterising it, exploring and processing its basic resources. The first chapter takes on the unavoidable task regarding the analyses and application of the concepts of ‘geistlicher bürgerlicher Gelehrter’ and threat. Its ambition is to get an idea of the order’s character, nature, and scope of its duties after the disbandment of the Jesuits, and its relations with other monks, especially with the Piarists.

The next unit focuses on his conduct from the disbandment in 1786 to the birth of the first criticism of the Treatises, in 1792. The author-translator’s choices, who was not among the Fathers by then, are in the centre of this chapter. In what ways does he think he can profit from his existing
competencies? What motivates his decisions? What genres does he write in? What directions does he get information from? And finally, which old or new members of his connection network helped him to express himself?

The fourth chapter completes the detailed analyses of the investigation around Treatises. It presents Claude François Xaviere Millot, and his world history. It also reviews Treatises, and explores Verseghy’s possible resources. After contextualising the text, we will study the written manifestations of the prosecution and the defender, the reception of the case at that time, and its later reflection.

As a final step (or a kind of outlook) another threat can be interpreted as a break in his life circle: his prison sentence for the his participation in the Martinovics conspiracy and his attempts to reintegrate, after the exceptionally long imprisonment. Both of them will be analysed. Identifying and taking these actions into account, it seems to be inevitable that even two decades later Verseghy was copying his strategy of 1786. On the basis of partly adapted and partly his own tactics, he tries to rebuilt his lost existence by mobilising his knowledge, competence as a litterateur and social networker.

The annex of this essay consists of three units. The first unit includes the tables that did not make it into the main text as they would have interfered with its continuity. The second one publishes the unreleased pieces of his correspondence, regarding the year round his essay is about. The third one issues the unpublished archival sources of the era, from Verseghy himself or regarding him, and other official documents.
IV. Publications released on the subject of the thesis


VERSEGHY Ferenc Drámái, s. a. r. Etelka DONCSECZ, Debrecen, University Press of Debrecen, 2014 (Csokonai Library: Sources: (Our old-time contemporaries) 11.).

Etelka DONCSECZ, „úgy bántam akármelly idegen gondolattal, mintha sajátom lett volna”: *Verseghy Ferenc egyházi témájú munkáinak mintái = Nunquam autores, semper interpretes*, Annamária BRETZ (ED), Réka LENGYEL (ED), Miskolc, 2015. [Not yet published.]


10