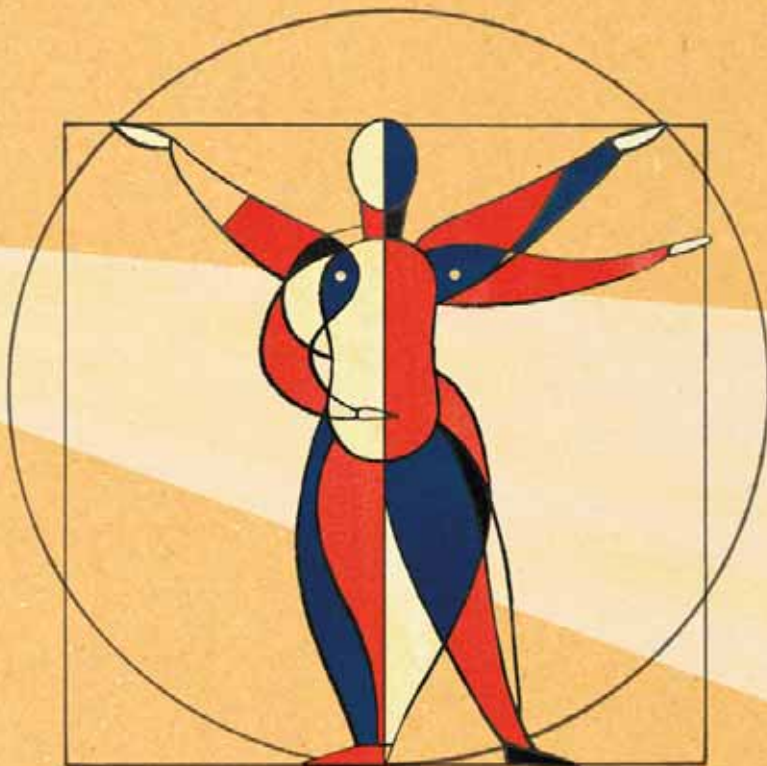


# szcenárium

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**Zsolt Szász: In the Workshop of Director Attila Vidnyánszky**  
● **Madách Redivivus** – Articles on *The Tragedy of Man* by Géza Balogh, Ildikó Sirató, Nina Király, Miklós Hubay, Ágnes Pálfi ● **Eszter Katona: Federico García Lorca's Reception in Hungary** ● **Márton P. Gulyás: New Mediality in *Woyzeck* at the National Theatre in Budapest** ● **Valdas Vasiliauskas about Eimuntas Nekrošius and Lithuania's Youth Theatre** ● **"We Understand Our Culture Better Through the Other's"** – Interview with Nina Király

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Imre Madách (1823–1864)

Antal Diósy: *Portrait of Imre Madách* (mixed technique: tempera, oil-tempera;  
source: *Scene by Scene*, OSzK–OSzMI, 1999)

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY

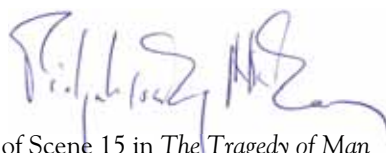
## “Adam, as a Young Man Again”\*

“There is nothing wrong with mankind as to its biological essence. Its *élan vital* (‘vital impetus’) would still shoot it in the air as a well-strung bended bow would an arrow,” writes playwright Miklós Hubay, my first theatrical mentor in Hungary, in his commentary on the London Scene in his book on Imre Madách. This is the last historical scene in *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*) with mankind being on the verge of acquiescence in the final exhaustion of its physical, intellectual and moral reserves. Eve alone, the First Woman, opposes collective suicide: “Dismal abyss, gape at me, since you must, / but I’m undaunted by your fearsome night; / what tends towards you is but earthly dust – / look, I traverse you on a shaft of light!”

Madách’s vision and Hubay’s commentary have an entirely new resonance in Europe today. Is there enough vital impetus indeed in the nations of our aging continent to survive and rejuvenate? This is what, in my current staging of *The Tragedy*, I am inevitably asking my youngest students playing the major roles and myself.

Is Madách’s view of history and the future to be regarded as pessimistic or optimistic? By now we may be beyond the ideological burden of this problem, in connection with which Géza Balogh, in the present issue, recalls an episode from 1937 when *The Tragedy* directed in Hamburg by my great predecessor and role model, Antal Németh, was allowed on stage by the censors on condition that the negative vision of the future in the Phalanstery scene, with the inscriptions in Cyrillic letters enforced by them, should not even accidentally refer to the totalitarian ideology of Nazism but unambiguously to the communist single-party system of the Soviet Union.

The special issue of *Szcenárium*, *MITEM English* this year devotes a whole block to Madách’s drama of mankind. I would like to draw attention to the paper by our beloved colleague who died in June 2018, Nina Király, which places the dual reading of *The Tragedy* into the context of world literature and world theatre, discussing the question of how the fate of mankind is determined by the existential drama and responsible decisions of individuals. I also recommend to the readers of this issue the life interview with her, which shows that Nina had a key role in the formation of the creative workshop at the National Theatre in Budapest. And also – let me add – in launching, through her extensive international contacts, MITEM itself.




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\* Instructions by Imre Madách at the beginning of Scene 15 in *The Tragedy of Man*





Eszter Ács as Éva and Sándor Berettyán as Ádám in the Garden of Eden, Scene 2  
in Imre Madách: *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*), National Theatre, Budapest, 2018,  
d: Attila Vidnyánszky (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)



ZSOLT SZÁSZ

# New Dramaturgy on the Stage of History

In the Workshop of Director Attila Vidnyánszky<sup>1</sup>

I have been following the development of Attila Vidnyánszky's stage language since 2002, when I first entered into a closer working relationship with him as the dramaturg of his first *Bánk bán* (*The Viceroy Bánk*) production<sup>2</sup>. At that time I noticed only the simultaneous technique of staging scenes and the capaciousness of space-time on stage which had been unusual in Hungary, but now – after the audience could see another three of his *Bánk bán* renderings<sup>3</sup> – I can safely say that the nature of “fragment dramaturgy” often mentioned in connection with his directing as well as the term “poetic theatre”, so difficult to interpret, become truly tangible only in the light of the particular view of history he professes.

It is worth noting about József Katona's piece, published in 1820, that it played as a festive performance at the Hungarian National Theatre, which had already opened twelve years before, on the evening of 15<sup>th</sup> March, the day of the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution of 1848. From that moment on, this historical drama has been part of Hungarian theatre history and later compulsory

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper is an extended and edited version of the essay with the same title published in *Magyar Művészet*, 2018/2, prepared for the MITEM *English* special issue of *Szcenárium* for festival guests. My thanks go to my co-editor, Ágnes Pálfi for her share in rewriting.

<sup>2</sup> It premiered at the National Theatre, Budapest, on 14 December 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The opera version, with its music by Ferenc Erkel, opened at Erkel Theatre in Budapest on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2017. The chamber theatre version of József Katona's drama premiered at the National Theatre in Budapest on 21 September 2017 (dramaturg: Zsolt Szász). Also, a “classroom production” titled *Bánk-misszió* (*Bánk Mission*), transcribed by Ernő Verebes, was prepared as a drama exam production at the Drama Institute of Kaposvár University, to be performed at the Third Student Festival of the University of Arts, Târgu Mures, Marosvásárhely, Romania, in November 2017, too.

reading at secondary schools as a pivotal work embracing the idea of national independence. However, the evaluation of the piece has been contradictory from the very beginning. While it has been billed by the prevailing National Theatre time and time again in order to represent the stature of the institution, its topicality and aesthetic quality have been challenged either by dictatorships seeking to destroy national identity or cosmopolitan opinion leaders of the Hungarian intelligentsia<sup>4</sup>. The division in Hungarian public opinion is illustrated by the fact that spectators brought themselves to the brink of a battle in the auditorium of the National Theatre, newly opened on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2002, after a *Bánk bán* performance. The opposition of conservative right-wing and liberal left-wing intelligentsia is still typical of our intellectual life, the critical responses to Attila Vidnyánszky's activity as a director included. And however incredible it may be, productions carrying his name are considered, even though from different perspectives, but with reservation by both camps. Although the chamber theatre version of *Bánk bán* presented in 2017 was welcomed by critics with unanimous enthusiasm<sup>5</sup>, I still do not feel that it has made a real breakthrough.

It is obvious from studies and reviews appraising the oeuvre that while the poetic tools of this directing are relatively professionally captured by the authors through the concepts of postdramatic aesthetics<sup>6</sup>, they fail to ask the question what view of history and sense of mission there may be behind the radical transformation and innovation of dramaturgy and theatricality. Yet the chamber theatre version of *Bánk bán*, in the repertoire since 2017 and also presented at MITEM 2018, is about nothing but how we can return the closest possible way

<sup>4</sup> See: Zoltán Imre: "(Nemzeti) kánon és (Nemzeti) Színház. *Bánk bán*, 1928–1930" ["(National) Canon and (National) Theatre. *The Viceroy Bánk*, 1928–1930"] In: id: *A nemzet színpadra állításai. A magyar nemzetiszínház-elképzelés változásának fő momentumai 1837-től napjainkig (Staging the Nation. The Major Changes in the Concept of the Hungarian National Theatre from 1837 till Today)*, Ráció Kiadó, Budapest, 2013, pp. 91–110

<sup>5</sup> At the same time, this production did not feature at the most significant professional forum in Hungarian theatre life, POSzT (Pécs National Theatre Festival) in 2018. However, *Isten ostora (The Scourge of God)*, which involves the life and death of the central figure of Hungarians' mythic history, Attila, king of Huns and is based on the drama by Miklós Bánffy, was awarded the grand prize at POSzT in 2015 (director: Attila Vidnyánszky; dramaturg: Zsófia Rideg). See: Katalin Keserű: "POSzT 2015", *Szcenárium*, October 2015, pp. 96–98

<sup>6</sup> Probably the most significant attempt at this has to date been István Bessenyei Gedő's thesis (Faculty of Arts, Hungarian Dept., University of Târgu Mureș, Marosvásárhely, Romania, supervisor: Dr. Ildikó Ungvári Zrínyi), which concludes with an analysis of the production *Mesés férfiak szárnyakkal (Fabulous Men with Wings)*, presented in 2010. See István Bessenyei Gedő: "Halál! Hol a te fullánkod?" Dedramatizáló törekvések Vidnyánszky Attila rendezéseiben ("Oh, death, where is your sting?" Endeavours of De-Dramatization in Attila Vidnyánszky's Stagings, Parts 1 – 2), *Szcenárium*, October, November 2013





Dorottya Udvaros as Gertrudis with her royal household,  
played by drama students at Kaposvár university, in József Katona: *Bánk bán* (*The Viceroy Bánk*),  
National Theatre, Budapest, 2017, d: Attila Vidnyánszky (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

to the original work, to the dramatic core which – as Attila Vidnyánszky has stressed several times – has the conflict between man’s historical commitment and personal happiness compressed in it by Shakespearean standards.

The success of this staging is, in my view, due to the fact that the anonymous actors – drama students of Kaposvár University – arriving at the dramatic space from the outside, are able to express the distance that separates and alienates them as well as the spectators from the work, from the age of József Katona and even from the age in which the plot takes place<sup>7</sup>. However, the manner in which they make their appearance on the stage, with gestures radiating the irresponsibility of youth – nearly as laypersons but, at the same time, as actors intent on stepping into their roles already – launches two simultaneous processes at the level of dramatic fiction. The “now” they represent gains a historical dimension (as they become members of Gertrudis’s “multicultural” court), whereas their relationship to historical events becomes ever more personal and direct. Though reversely, this turn has been demonstrated at the beginning of the performance already by the singing together of the sentimental hit, reminiscent of the 1960s, which, in its profane manner, is also about patriotism. The simultaneous presence of the two planes of time underlies and justifies the director’s solution that the murdered actors, surviving their deaths as it were, resurrect on stage at the end of the performance, making the relationship between the evoked past and the play’s present even tighter. I find that the production has, since its premiere, begun to function more and more as a kind of ritual; a (self-)initiating theatre with an effect on spectators of exceptional intensity – which, we must admit, is a rarity today.

However, this new approach to history is typical not only of Attila Vidnyánszky’s directing of national topics. It was back in 2010, during his directorship in Debrecen<sup>8</sup>, that as I was once stepping down the auditorium

<sup>7</sup> The drama involves the murder of the Queen during the reign of Endre II in 1213 and the conspiracy of Hungarian rebels against Gertrudis of Merania.

<sup>8</sup> Attila Vidnyánszky was artistic, then managing director of Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen from 2006 to 2013.

installed on the rotating stage after the production *Mesés férfiak szárnyakkal* (*Fabulous Men with Wings*)<sup>9</sup>, I realised to my delight that the language suitable for relating all the horrors that had happened also to us, Hungarians in the twentieth century, had at last been born. By then I had long been having the question in the back of my mind as to – where there was so much suffering and life drama piled on one another unworded – why a truly great and epoch-making dramatic work would not come into existence, one which all of us have – either explicitly or inexplicitly – been waiting for.

Posing this question thus may of course seem naïve or anachronistic in the eyes of those who, “inspired” by Adorno’s now famous sentence<sup>10</sup>, have denied for a few decades that art is not only able to pronounce, but also resolve terror – as one of the most important Hungarian poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Gyula Illyés (1902–1983) wrote in his well-known *Bartók* poem<sup>11</sup>. That is music, poetry and art in general continue to reserve the right to intervene in shaping history in their own particular way. It is so even in the sense in which the Catholic poet, János Pilinszky (1921–1981) was doing when he suggested in his existentialist philosophical thesis<sup>12</sup> that the “scandal” of Auschwitz was to be judged by us, citizens of Christian Europe, from the broader perspective of the story of our salvation.

The reception at home of this production, now safely be called of theatre historical significance, is most edifying from this point of view. When the play about the glory days of space travel, *Mesés férfiak szárnyakkal* (*Fabulous Men with Wings*) was included in the competition programme of POSzT (Pécs National Theatre Festival) representing the best pieces of the 2010/11 season, a professional debate<sup>13</sup> followed the performance where those dilemmas surfaced

<sup>9</sup> *Mesés férfiak szárnyakkal* (*Fabulous Men with Wings*), Csokonai Theatre, Debrecen, 26 November 2010 (opening night). For an analysis of the piece see: Ágnes Pálfi – Zsolt Szász: “Költői és/vagy epikus színház?” (“Poetic and / or Epic Theatre?”) In: *Magyar Művészet*, 2016/3, pp. 61–70

<sup>10</sup> “...nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch...” (Writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.)

<sup>11</sup> “Thank you, thank you for this, / thank you for strength that can resist / even the darkest, worst. / Here at last at rock-bottom, man can stand firm. / Here, the exemplar of the few who seem / burdened for all mankind, gives utterance / to anguish, owes an intolerable duty / to say the intolerable, and thus resolve it / in beauty. / This is the true response of the great soul, / art’s answer to existence, making us whole / though it cost the torment of hell.” Adapted into English by Margaret Avison from the literal translation by Ilonn Duczynska, in <https://canlit.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/CL120-Full-Issue.pdf>, p. 48

<sup>12</sup> “All that happened here is a scandal insofar as it could happen, and sacred without exception insofar as it did happen.” Cf. *Ars poetica helyett* (*Instead of an Ars Poetica*), In: *Pilinszky János összes versei*, Budapest, Osiris, 1999, English translation by Richard Chess in “János Pilinszky” in Lillian Kremer (Ed.) *Holocaust Literature*, 2002, p. 946

<sup>13</sup> Moderated by Nóra Winkler, opponents: Tibor Pethő and Zsolt Anger. Here is an extract from Tibor Pethő’s speech: “Sometime in the ’80s, I heard Soviet astronauts

to which the practitioners of the divided domestic theatre profession have been giving sharply divergent answers ever since. The production, which opened on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gagarin's space flight, has been in the repertoire of the National Theatre in Budapest since then and also featured at MITEM 2014. In my view, it may rightly be paralleled with Pilinszky's above-quoted thesis because the director also approaches events from an apocalyptic perspective, ruthlessly revealing and yet consecrating the series of cataclysms in 20<sup>th</sup> century history.



Scene from *Mesés férfiak szárnyakkal*  
(*Fabulous Men with Wings*) d: Attila Vidnyánszky  
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

The almost mystic ecstasy of the scientist Tsiolkovsky (1857–1935), the ancient desire to unite with the cosmos, and the physical concreteness of the passion story of missile constructors exiled to the Gulag forced labour camp are rendered simultaneously; and the director does not hesitate to juxtapose the triumph of the first man stepping out into space with Christ's life sacrifice and the apocryphal story of the latecoming fourth prince. The stage demonstration of the unity of these seemingly disparate elements reveals the life experience, familiar to all of us, which makes the simultaneity of the beginning and the end as well as the interpermeability between humanity-scale universal time and the lifespan of the individual ever more apparent at the level of everyday experience<sup>14</sup>.

However, the consequences of this development shaking Hungarian theatre world are obviously not easy to see. Because it is not just that Attila Vidnyánszky is able to integrate such sundry texts into his productions of “non-traditional

---

on the radio and German Titov say [...] there was no God. There was no God. He had been up in space, seeking and not finding it. This statement of Titov's is memorable. I am mentioning this in advance of my thoughts on the piece because there are two key words here: no and God. It seems as if “no” and “God” were the two poles in Attila Vidnyánszky's present production ... [then, responding to the other opponent, Zsolt Anger] I do not agree that the performance would be a collection of clichés. I think this is a huge exaggeration. I see atmospheric theatre and poetry in it. Poetry, which you do not necessarily have to understand or fully understand. However, what I do find problematic is that the Hungarian, the domestic Hungarian audience has very little intellectual connection to this performance ...”. (For full dispute, see POSZT archives.)

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed analysis of the production see Ágnes Pálfi – Zsolt Szász: *Poetic and / or Epic Theatre?* In: *Magyar Művészet*, 2016/3, pp. 61–70

dramaturgy”<sup>15</sup>. No matter how bold a statement it might seem, this “non-traditional dramaturgy” breaks down the “objective” view of history which, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was promoted by the contending European superpowers in the spirit of enlightened absolutism.

In fact, this is the time when the study of history was becoming a discipline in its own right, and, in the service of the state, it got torn from its roots, philosophy and arts, for good by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. First and foremost, it marked itself off from such former literary genres of writing history as myths of origin, heroic poetry or chronicles. At the same time, the novel became the leading genre, which, by telling the story of the individual, offered an authentic summary of the age as well. However, this history is, contrary to Napoleon’s famous saying, usually not written by the victors but by the ambitious and determined personalities who are just as familiar from the inside with the deep layers of the particular society, the world of the “humiliated and insulted”, as they are with the “world-changing” ideas of their time.



József Katona (1791–1830)

As the notable Russian-Estonian semiotician, Yuri Lotman<sup>16</sup> put it, the past of culture is its present, and the same applies to history itself, which is repeatedly rewritten by people of culture to renew the sense of identity in national communities. One of the elementary experiences of the past three decades in Hungary is exactly this rewriting compulsion. If we only take the two remarkable anniversaries, in 2006 and 2016, of the 1956 Revolution and War of Independence, we can see that this epoch-making historical event is still caught, primarily on an ideological basis, in the crossfire of interpretations.

As is commonly known, the distinctive genre for retrial has always been drama, especially historical drama. The first Hungarian classic of the genre, József Katona, wrote this about it in his poetic treatise: “Dramaturgy, which, like the Curule Seat of the Dead of Egypt, has the Deceased stand in front of the Living in order to judge their actions, used to belong with Religions. The Priesthood made Living Persons act out what had happened to their Gods bestriding the earth (for each bestrode the earth first).”<sup>17</sup> It is as if Andor Szilágyi,

<sup>15</sup> See Balázs Urbán: “Líra és epika Vidnyánszky Attila színházában” (“Lyricism and Narrative in Attila Vidnyánszky’s Theatre”). In: *Színház*, April 2018, pp. 19–22

<sup>16</sup> “And if history is culture’s memory then this means that it is not only a relic of the past, but also an active mechanism of the present.” p 272 In: Lotman\_Yuri\_M\_ Universe\_of\_the\_Mind\_A\_Semiotic\_Theory\_of\_Culture\_1990.pdf

<sup>17</sup> Cf. József Katona: “Mi az oka, hogy Magyarországon a játékszíni mesterség lábra nem tud kapni?” (“What is the Reason Why the Craft of Acting Can Gain No Foothold in Hungary?”) In: *Tudományos gyűjtemény*, 1821

the author of the drama on Ilonka Tóth presented at the National Theatre in Budapest on 25 October 2016, had placed the act of retrial into the frame of a heavenly court for the very same reason. By this, he not only acquitted the young medical student<sup>18</sup> of the murder charge, but also meant to glorify her with the intention of elevating her into the pantheon of our national heroes. However, the director, Attila Vidnyánszky, did not accept this version. Taking as a starting point the former four-hundred-page screenplay based on documents, he asked the author for a complete rewrite of the drama (with the participation of dramaturg Ernő Verebes). He presumably did so because this “heavenly scene” would have made the final outcome of the drama a foregone conclusion the same way as, ten years earlier, János Mohácsi might have been encouraged by the very genre he had chosen, that of the “historical wax museum”, to present Ilonka Tóth as a murderer<sup>19</sup>.

The medium of the eventual version staged at the National Theatre is the all too earthly court of hanging judges in the Kádár regime<sup>20</sup>, just as the contemporary documents used are also from the world of realia. This way an expectation builds up in spectators to clearly see the ominous scene which is the subject of both the one-time and the current trials. And although we are perceiving that this may really be the scene taking place in the middle of the stage, it is impossible to tell what it actually is that is happening here and now, or was happening then and there. It is at this very point that the key words of Luke’s gospel are uttered for the first time by the actor in the role of a young historian: “For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open”. It has a dual function of confirming the Last Judgement on the one hand, and, on the other, implying that what we have just seen could be seen only “through a glass darkly” yet. In this dramaturgy of simultaneous spacetime dimensions, the apocalyptic view of history is again revealed.



Andor Szilágyi: *Tóth Ilonka*, National Theatre, Budapest, 2016, d: Attila Vidnyánszky (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

<sup>18</sup> In the days of the 1956 revolution, Ilonka Tóth was tending to the wounded in a hospital in the capital. During the retaliations she was sentenced to death on accusation of killing a person connected with the army.

<sup>19</sup> “56 06/Őrült lélek, vert hadak” (56/06 *Mad Soul, Defeated Forces*), Gergely Csíky Theatre, Kaposvár, 29 December 2006, d.: János Mohácsi

<sup>20</sup> János Kádár (1912–1989) was a leading politician of the 1956–1988 period during the Soviet-type system following 1945.

For the time being, however, we have to find that neither spectator nor critic can read this language fluently because our sense of history is still held captive by the kind of linear causality that bequeathes us Enlightenment's myth of progress and ultimately identifies man's "salvation" with the creation of earthly prosperity<sup>21</sup>. In my view, the much-condemned naturalism of Hungarian theatrical language and dramaturgy, as well as the attitude of the majority of contemporary directors to debase "grand narratives" to the level of everyday life, stem from this. Unremitting references to social sensitivity have distracted our attention from the centuries-old experience that art is able to shape the thought and feelings of the man of today really effectively by simultaneously opening up greater historical perspectives and the dimension of the story of salvation.

Perhaps the most direct benefit of organizing MITEM on an annual basis is that there have always been productions to appear in which this kind of



Danilo Kiš – Ernő Verebes: *Borisz Davidovics síremléke* (*A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*), Novi Sad Theatre, 2017, d: Aleksandar Popovski (photo: Srdan Doroški, source: uvszinhaz.com)

broadness of perspective is created by a radical renewal of dramaturgy. Two of the productions featured at the last five festivals are worth highlighting as examples: *The Raven*, staged by Nikolai Roshchin at Alexandrinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, and *Borisz Davidovics síremléke* (*A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*) by Danilo Kiš, transcribed by Ernő Verebes and directed by Aleksandar Popovski at the Hungarian language Novi Sad Theatre.

*The Raven*, based on Carlo Gozzi's 'fiaba' of the same title creates, similarly to Attila Vidnyánszky's production on Gagarin's space flight (*Mesés férfiak szárnyakkal* [*Fabulous Men with Wings*]) the passage between the mythical worldview of tales inherited from antiquity and the rationalism of technical civilization resituating the story. And it is impossible to decide which of them will eventually override the other. We feel that both are true at the same time: authoritarian power will continue

<sup>21</sup> See László Koppány Csáji: "A posztkolonialista fejlődésmítosz" ("Postcolonial Development Myth"), *Szcenárium*, March 2018, pp. 39–52; and: "Nincsen egyedül üdvöztető válasz a világ változó kihívásaira". ("There is No Single Answer to the Ever-Changing Challenges of the World". Anthropologist László Koppány Csáji is Interviewed by *Szcenárium* Editors), *Szcenárium*, December 2017, pp. 53–65



to be able to survive itself and, although there is no fairy tale happy ending, the rebirth of human quality will always be possible through sacrifice.<sup>22</sup>

But what kind of human quality is it and who is the hero of our time? In his recommendations to *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, Ernő Verebes, dramaturg at the National Theatre, is asking himself, the director, and, above all, the title character of the story:

*“Who are you, Boris Davidovich Novsky? A killer clown, who keeps throwing about walnut-sized bombs like pebbles? Who’s Boris Davidovich? A hooded revolutionary, without a face or voice, running around and playing hide and seek? What are you? A false prophet? A materialistic executor? A patriot? Jewish, Serbian, Hungarian, a refugee, an intellectual, a democrat or a terrorist? A freedom fighter killing others in the name of his own truth? You, who no longer detect the enemy only outside but also within you, yet you don’t think that it is you. You believe the enemy is outside while you have also become one, and now it doesn’t at all matter whose enemy you are. It’s someone you have to destroy in the name of something that no longer exists because it’s been replaced by another idea. Another deadly enemy who’s moved inside you. It gets you to work because you have no other work to do. You’ve become your own employer and employee. You give yourself a command and what you are to execute can only be something one never does of their own accord. We can’t sing and make love on a mere command, but we do them because it is right these things that we don’t die of. But that’s not enough for you. You need to snuff it of what you call freedom because this word, hammered into your head some time ago, never reached your heart but got stuck in a corner of your brain and has been desperately yelling out of there for help, get me out of here! Don’t you see? I’m the freedom of Boris Davidovich!”<sup>23</sup>*

The cult novel by Danilo Kiš, published in 1976, is a summary of historical experience, having been suffered on multiple occasions, of the natural history of dictatorship. However, as a stage play four decades later, it informs of the absurd experience of 21<sup>st</sup>-century man that although dictatorial systems have – at least in Central Europe – ceased to exist, we are still captives of the psychosis that had made them possible<sup>24</sup>. Yet the terrorists of our time, clearly recognizable by

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ágnes Pálfi – Zsolt Szász: “Ez egy valóságos színházavató volt! Gyorsjelentés a harmadik MITEM-ről.” (“It Has Been a Real Inauguration of Theatre. Flash Report on ‘MITEM 2016’”) *Szcenáriumi*, May 2016, pp. 49–51, for full essay in English see *Szcenáriumi*, April 2018, pp. 29 – 47); Ágnes Kereszty: “Morbid történet – 21. századi köntösben. Carlo Gozzi A holló című darabja Nyikolaj Roscsin rendezésében.” (“A Morbid Story – in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Clothing. Carlo Gozzi’s *The Raven*, directed by Nickolay Roshchin”) *Szcenáriumi*, May 2016, pp. 81–89)

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ernő Verebes: “Forradalmi megsemmisülések nagy kérdései. Danilo Kiš: *Borisz Davidovics síremléke*” (“The Big Questions of Revolutionary Wreck. Danilo Kiš: *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*”), *Szcenáriumi*, May 2018, pp. 73–81

<sup>24</sup> See the closing lines of the poem by Gyula Illyés, written in 1950 but first published during the days of the revolution in 1956 only, *Egy mondat a zsarnokságról* (*A Sentence on Tyranny*): “Because it is standing / From the first at your grave, / Your own

their costumes in the performance, are apparently no longer propelled by “world-bettering” ideologies, but by the kind of automatisms that the superheroes of today’s American action films have. However, the ineradicable heroic surplus and dynamism of human nature is present – even if in a distorted form – in this production, too. It is shown by Danilo Kiš’s commentary on his own work, which may remind Hungarian readers and spectators of the philosophy of history in Madách’s humanity drama mostly: “The world is destroyed time to time by the fire of which it had been taken but it will be born again to live the same history”.<sup>25</sup>

In 2018, Attila Vidnyánszky directed *The Tragedy of Man* for the fifth time<sup>26</sup>. The current issue includes several papers on the work itself and its present as well as former stagings. Therefore, we would just like to draw attention here to the fact that it is the same loss which the director is sensitive to as Ernő Verebes reflected on above, apropos to *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*. Namely that something of the man of our time seems to have been lost forever. We are in vain looking for the “wholeness” that once characterized the paradisiacal state of natural peoples and distinguished, even a few decades ago, those acting giants who were playing the main roles of *The Tragedy* at that time. “Hová lesz énem zárt egyénisége?” (“... what becomes Of me, of my self-image, of that body...?”) – it is no coincidence that this question, asked by Adam in the third scene before he steps onto the stage of history, was selected by the director as the motto of the production. However, as far as the fallen archangel, Lucifer is concerned, the demonic surplus of “the genius of Negation” can hardly be discovered in his young alter egos multiplied on Vidnyánszky’s stage. It must be due to the same directorial concept that the taintless and elemental energies of the young group of actors in the performance are released and become visible, also carrying the promise of a new beginning. To see them is as if one could see Miklós Hubay’s comment on Eva’s wonderful escape in the London scene justified: “There is nothing wrong with mankind as to its biological essence. Its *élan vital* (‘vital impetus’) would still shoot it in the air as a well-strung bended bow would an arrow”<sup>27</sup>.

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biography branding, / And even your ashes are its slave.” (Translated by Vernon Watkins, in: *Hundred Hungarian Poems*, Albion Editions, Manchester, 1976)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 77

<sup>26</sup> He first staged it in 1998 with the company of Gyula Illyés Hungarian National Theatre in Beregszász, Ukraine. Its open-air version opened by the same company in Zsámbék, Hungary, in 2008. In 2011 he created a gigantic production as a gala performance for the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of Szegedi Szabadtéri Játékok (Szeged Open-Air Festival); as a joint venture between Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen and the Beregszász Company, another interpretation of *The Tragedy* was born in 2012. The present rendering by Attila Vidnyánszky premiered on 19 October 2018 (dramaturg: Ernő Verebes).

<sup>27</sup> Miklós Hubay: “Aztán mivégre az egész teremtés?” (“And as for This Creation – What’s the Purpose?” *Notes on the Margin of the Works of the Lord and Imre Madách*) Napkút Kiadó, Budapest, 2010



*Csíksomlyói passió (Passion Play of Csíksomlyó),*  
 adapted from 18<sup>th</sup> century Franciscan school dramas and Géza Szőcs's *Passió (Passion)*,  
 National Theatre, Budapest, d: Attila Vidnyánszky (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

Prior to the premiere of *The Tragedy*, 10 March 2017 saw the opening of, in my view, the most significant enterprise in Attila Vidnyánszky's first five-year cycle, *Csíksomlyói passió (Passion Play of Csíksomlyó)*, to which I was the dramaturg. It is worth knowing that the typical medieval theatrical genre of Christian Europe flourished longest in Csíksomlyó in Székelyföld (Székely Land) – there are 41 passion plays remaining from the period between 1721 and 1788, written and acted out for students at the grammar school run by Franciscan monks. It was not only these school dramas to contribute to the script of the production, but also contemporary Transylvanian poet Géza Szőcs's volume titled *Passió (Passion)*, published in 1999, which, considered by its individual texts and as a whole, is a project postmodern to the core. The way the production is capable of bringing these two "divergent" text corpora into equilibrium and making them organically united at several points, too, is an impressive demonstration to me that truly high-calibre contemporary creators are not interested in bringing down the foundation of Christian cult community by replacing the philosophical surplus in the passion story of Jesus Christ.

Not incidentally, this enterprise is a creator of language in such a respect, too, that the Hungarian National Dance Ensemble, led by Zoltán Zsuráfszky, is present on the drama stage as co-creator on an equal footing. Dancers do not only perform choreographed movements and sing in this production, but also have a thorough knowledge of how to say the lines of the school dramas, confirming Zoltán Kodály's claim that the Hungarians' musical and dramatic mother tongues, crystallised in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, derive from the same root, therefore we must be familiar with both of them in order to communicate credibly. The even deeper archaic layers of the soul of the Hungarian people

are represented by singer – storyteller András Berecz in the production, who is connecting his tales reaching back to the story of creation, and the sacred songs, still alive, of the Székelys on pilgrimages, with the Stations of the Cross in Jesus's passion story.

The burden test of this project took place on 18 August 2018, when the production, originally created for a stone theatre auditorium with a seating capacity of 190 and now with one hundred odd Székely dancers and a children's choir of fifty added, could be seen by 25,000 spectators in Csíksomlyó, Transylvania, a shrine to the Virgin Mary operating for more than five hundred years. The significance of this event can be felt in its entirety by those only who are aware that as a result of the 1920 Trianon peace treaty two-thirds of the territory of Hungary came under the jurisdiction of foreign nation states. It was not before the last three decades that Hungarians in their home country and abroad have had the opportunity to experience their sense of togetherness and national identity freely. A prominent venue for this is the Csíksomlyó col, where 500,000 Hungarians gather annually at Pentecost to recognise the power of the Holy Spirit. It could therefore rightly be called an event of theatre history that *Csíksomlyói passió* from our home country was received by the local community as their own. This success also proves to me that, even today, theatre stands a chance to be tested on the stage of history.

*English translation by Mrs. Durkó, Nóra Varga*  
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Scene from the performance in Csíksomlyó, Transylvania, on 18 August 2018  
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)



## MADÁCH REDIVIVUS



GÉZA BALOGH

### Productions of *The Tragedy of Man* at the National Theatre During and After Dictatorships

*Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*), born at the end of the period of general despair over the fall of the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence and at the beginning of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise bringing about a decade of development, is the most well-known work of Hungarian dramatic literature abroad.

Imre Madách penned the first version of the drama titled *Lucifer* in 1852, during his imprisonment for hiding freedom fighter János Rákóczy, who had been sentenced to death, and wrote a second version between 1856 and 1857. He himself recorded starting *The Tragedy* on 17 February 1859 and he finished the work nearly a year later, on 20 March 1860.

The dramatic poem considers history in 15 scenes, raising the universal questions of the past and future of mankind, wrapped around the figures of the first human couple, Adam and Eve, and ever-sceptical Lucifer. The deeply philosophical work is customarily listed with such masterpieces of world literature as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *Faust* and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. *The Tragedy of Man* is one of the hardest works to decipher in Hungarian literature and the past 136 years saw several stage interpretations of it.

It premiered on 21 September 1883 at the National Theatre in Budapest. It was directed by Ede Paulay with actors Imre Nagy as Ádám, Mari Jászai as Éva and László Gyenes as Lucifer. The incidental music was composed by Gyula Erkel, and Adam's costumes and the sets were designed by Ede Paulay, too.

On the initiation of playwright Miklós Hubay, the then president of the Hungarian Writers' Association, the Hungarian Drama Day has been celebrated on 21 September, the premiere of *The Tragedy of Man*, since 1984.



Theatre poster for the 1947 premiere of *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*) (source:wikipedia.org)

Every dictatorship regarded Madách's dramatic poem as dangerous. When Antal Németh directed it at the Hamburg Staatliches Schauspielhaus in 1937, the Admissions Committee wanted it banned, because it considered the Phalanstery Scene an open attack on the idea of national socialism. It relented after a lengthy debate, on condition that the ominous Scene XII include inscriptions in Cyrillic as a reference to the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> The communist one-party state did not dither as much: it simply commanded the play off the stage.

After 1945, it re-entered the stage with a bit of delay during the coalition period, on 26 September 1947, directed by Béla Both, with the set designed by Mátyás Varga, costumes by Teréz Nagyajtay, and new music composed by Sándor Veress. It had two alternate casts:

Adam was played by Lajos Básti and Ferenc Ladányi, Eve by Margit Lukács and Éva Szörényi, Lucifer by Tamás Major<sup>2</sup> and Lajos Rajczy. (Subsequently, both Samu Balázs and director Béla Both debuted as Lucifer.) The reason the premiere was delayed for two whole seasons after the “liberation” is suggested by Tamás Major's foreword in the production's brochure: “Tibor Barabás”<sup>3</sup> treatise in this booklet sheds light on the outlook and societal concept of Madách's work and also explains why it has taken so long to interpret properly and to stage *The Tragedy of Man* in the manner it truly deserves.” Though Tibor Barabás' essay fails to provide a clear reason, it is the first to mention the subsequently oft-used excuse, “Despite its optimistic ending, *The Tragedy of Man* is a problem piece, the problem being its outlook.” Barabás suggested it was pessimistic because of the crushing of the 1848 Revolution

<sup>1</sup> The production premiered on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1937, translated by Jenő Mohácsi Jenő, with Werner Hinz (Adam), Ehmi Werner (Eve) and Robert Meyn (Lucifer) in the leading roles, and was eventually performed thirty times. It is interesting to note that the play had been staged in a foreign language for the very first time in 1892 in this very town.

<sup>2</sup> Actor and director Tamás Major (1910–1986) was Manager of the National Theatre from 1945 to 1962. At that point, he was demoted to Head Director, a position he held until 1978. He was a decisive figure in post-WWII Hungarian theatre life.

<sup>3</sup> Writer and journalist Tibor Barabás (1911–1984) was Column Manager of the daily Szabad Nép in 1946, then became Secretary General of the Writers Association. He used fiction as a vehicle to promote communist ideology.



and War of Independence, and then proceeded to defend the dramatic poem, pointing out how progressive the author's historical and visionary thinking was.

The critical response was all-encompassing, from enthusiastic celebration to outright rejection. Positive reviews pointed out how the current production returned to the true (?) Madách, in contrast with past, arbitrarily abridged, versions. They highlighted the ardent passion of the Paris Scene and welcomed the restoration of the Second Prague Scene.<sup>4</sup>

Béla Both, director of this, by no means significant, production wrote in the brochure, "The National Theatre's renewal of *The Tragedy* will, no doubt, also resurrect its cult, which is both useful and desirable for our literature and theatre culture."<sup>5</sup>

Béla Both was not the only one to mispredict hugely the play's future.

The renewed production of 1947 ran for 89 nights and was then removed from the National Theatre's repertoire for a long time. For four years, there was not a word about Madách's work. The tacit code of dictatorships is understood to have a rule that says what we don't talk about does not exist.

In 1952, József Waldapfel, a profoundly Marxist literary historian, who nonetheless happened to be a Madách fan, was the first to dare to publish an essay, resuscitating hopes that the greatest Hungarian national tragedy might soon have a new life on the stage. The introduction reads like this, "To the best of my knowledge, the Madách problem is one of the issues concerning the assessment of Hungarian literary tradition that is surrounded by the greatest uncertainty and commotion, with people from many sides calling for clarification."<sup>6</sup> He did not hide the fact that he intended to decide as soon as possible the debate on who owned Madách. Did he belong to the "reactionaries" or to "us", who could rely on the undisputed expert authority of the likes of János Arany or Maksim Gorky? Waldapfel had a good understanding of how the top officials of the one-party state thought: reference to a Soviet writer of authority meant the battle was half won, even if the reference could not be scientifically corroborated. The lengthy essay concludes as follows, "... I think we'll soon have to reach a stage where *The Tragedy of Man* can be played again in a production that allows the play's treasures to shine bright, and to show its hitherto always-falsified fighting message. [...] The new production must



József Waldapfel (1904–1968)

<sup>4</sup> The Second Prague Scene was cut already from the 21<sup>st</sup> September 1883 premiere, directed by Paulay.

<sup>5</sup> Pesti Műsor, 1947, Issue 39.

<sup>6</sup> József Waldapfel (1904–1968): *Madách*. Irodalomtörténet (Literary History) 1952, Issue 1.



Scene from *The Tragedy* played by students, Madách Grammar School. From left to right: György Lengyel (Lucifer), Éva Somody (Éva) and Géza Balogh (Ádám), author of this article

be preceded by very thorough preparations, which will require artists and scientists to work closely together.”

Yet, one had to wait another two years for Madách’s work to be published by Szépirodalmi (Belles Lettres) Publishing House. The wall of silence was broken by the Budapest-based Madách Grammar School student acting group, which performed *The Tragedy* on seven occasions<sup>7</sup> at the Small Chamber of the Music Academy in 1954. The premiere and subsequent performance were attended by the era’s cultural crème de la crème, ranging from Zoltán Kodály to Bence Szabolcsi<sup>8</sup>, from László Bóka<sup>9</sup> through Zsigmond Remenyik<sup>10</sup> to Deputy Minister Magda Jóború<sup>11</sup>.

“Beyond compulsory politeness, the press welcomed the performance with the enthusiasm that the artistic feat and aesthetic value commanded”, wrote Tamás Koltai<sup>12</sup> in his book analysing the theatrical career of *The Tragedy*. There was a considerable media response in which the daily *Magyar Nemzet* was the only paper to criticise the imposed silence in a daring article: “What happened is essentially that teachers and students at Madách Grammar School did what the audience expects the National Theatre and our other theatres to do: they staged Madách’s highly controversial work and thus took the first step toward fully recognising and duly acknowledging one of the greatest treasures of our progressive tradition.”<sup>13</sup>

The production designed to be monumental at the National Theatre was directed by three persons: Endre Gellért, Tamás Major and Endre Marton.

<sup>7</sup> No further performance was permitted.

<sup>8</sup> Bence Szabolcsi (1899–1973) was a scholar of music, a founding father of the modern science of music.

<sup>9</sup> Poet, writer and literary historian László Bóka (1910–1964) became Secretary of State for Public Education as of 1947. He belonged to the third generation of literary journal *Nyugat*’s (West) authors.

<sup>10</sup> Novel writer and playwright Zsigmond Remenyik (1900–1962) was silenced in the early 1950s.

<sup>11</sup> Teacher, communist cultural policy expert and librarian Magda Jóború (1918–1982) was Deputy Minister for Education between 1950 and 1958, then became Director General of the National Széchényi Library.

<sup>12</sup> Tamás Koltai (1942–2015) was a theatre critic and newspaper editor. Work cited: *Az ember tragédiája a színpadon* (*The Tragedy of Man on the Stage, 1933–1968*). Kelenföld Kiadó, 1990. p. 189.

<sup>13</sup> László Lontay (1920–1975): *Gimnazisták* (*Grammar School Students*). *Magyar Nemzet*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1954.

An indication that the team would take joint responsibility for the production. The dazzling “realistic” period costumes were designed by Gusztáv Oláh, Director General and also Set and Costume Designer of the Opera House. Again, the leading roles were played by two alternating casts: Lajos Básti and Ferenc Bessenyei played Adam, Margit Lukács and Éva Szörényi played Eve (i.e. the actresses playing the same role in the 1947 production), and Tamás Major and László Ungvári played Lucifer. The press covered the long-awaited major event extensively and with due reverence. With one exception: the Communist Party’s central paper chose to ignore it for the time being. István Hermann, a philosopher in György Lukács’<sup>14</sup> circle, published a counter-opinion piece: Lukács and his students had long held reservations about Madách’s play, and took the opportunity to detract it. Instead of treating the play as a masterpiece, Hermann’s review is about “a problem piece that contains fragmented assets and is, therefore, hard to play”.<sup>15</sup>

This was but a prelude to the manoeuvre aimed at banning *The Tragedy* again. On one occasion, the people’s wise leader, Mátyás Rákosi<sup>16</sup> saw the performance in person. And threw a tantrum in the Manager’s office during the intermission, proclaiming the subsequently oft-quoted sentence “you people are lucky that I hate to see artists in prison!” In short, he personally banned the piece that he thought was detrimental



*The Tragedy of Man*, National Theatre in Budapest, 1955, Lajos Básti (Ádám), Margit Lukács (Éva) and Tamás Major (Lucifer) (photo: Ella Wellesz, source: mandadb.hu)



György Lukács in the 1940s (source: 24.hu)

<sup>14</sup> Philosopher and scholar of aesthetics György Lukács (1885–1971) was People’s Commissioner in charge of Public Education in 1919. He emigrated after the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, returned in 1945. He was Minister of Culture in Imre Nagy’s government. Retired from public life in 1957.

<sup>15</sup> István Hermann (1925–1986): *Madách a Nemzetiben* (Madách at the National Theatre). *Művelt Nép*, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1955.

<sup>16</sup> Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971) was Secretary General /First Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party from 1945 to 1956, and President of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People’s Republic from 1952 to 1953. He had reached the top of the hierarchy of the total Stalinist dictatorship in 1947. Ousted and exiled in 1956, he lived in the Soviet Union till his death.



Sculptors working on Mátyás Rákosi's gypsum portrait in the 1950s (source: lazarus.elte.hu)

to the ideological development of the masses. But it had been played to full houses on thirty-three occasions since its premiere, so on account of that Major, who was a Central Committee member, later managed to cajole him to authorise three performances a month on average.

But the war was not over yet. At the end of March and at the beginning of April, the daily *Szabad Nép* published György Lukács' "decades-old counter-opinion" in two parts, launching a vigorous attack on Madách's pessimism, along the lines of Hermann's opinion piece. The Marxist scholar juxtaposed János Erdélyi's opinion<sup>17</sup> and that of János Arany, pointing out that

"Madách's work attained the height of its success during the Horthy era". To him, a comparison with *Faust* did not demonstrate that one was on a par with the other or "even above it ideologically and artistically". On the contrary: "Madách's basic concept is flawed in that it overgeneralises... and intends to rise on the wings of generalisation so high as to have the destined overall tragedy of mankind answer his specifically Hungarian question."<sup>18</sup>

Whatever one thinks of György Lukács' intentions and candour, his opinion delivered the penultimate stab that would seal the poem's fate for the 1950s. That last stab came in the form of an article in *Irodalmi Újság* (Literary Journal) by Sergey Krushinsky<sup>19</sup> a month later, taken over from *Pravda*, in which Krushinsky challenged an article titled *The Situation of Hungarian Theatre Today*, published in *Sovietskaya Kultura*. The contested article had been audacious enough to lavish words of acknowledgement on the performance of *The Tragedy of Man* at the National Theatre, "attributing to it virtues it does not have in reality".

<sup>17</sup> János Erdélyi (1814–1868) was a poet, critic and philosopher. In keeping with his Hegelian principles, he challenged Madách's view of history in his 1862 review of *The Tragedy*.

<sup>18</sup> György Lukács: *Madách Tragédiája* (The Tragedy of Madách), *Szabad Nép*, 25<sup>th</sup> March and 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1955. Bound in a volume with Mihály András Rónai's (1913–1992) pamphlet *Madách-Lukács*. Glória Kiadó, year n.a.

<sup>19</sup> Sergey Konstantinovich Krushinsky (1909–1959) was a Soviet-Russian writer and journalist, who worked for various journals. He was *Pravda*'s correspondent in Czechoslovakia and Hungary from 1945 onwards.

Krushinsky proceeded thus: “The play’s heroes traverse the ages to reach the conclusion that man’s struggle is pointless. ‘There is wasteland all around’ is the basic concept of the work. The piece rightly criticises Egypt, Rome, Byzantium and the bourgeois establishment, but the problem is the author wants to show that man will not be able to organise society sensibly at any point in future either.

The flawed basic philosophy of the piece doomed the theatre’s efforts to fail. Brilliant though Madách’s strophes may have been in their outward appearance, and much as the directors and actors/actresses may have excelled in implementing their tasks with great talent – all their ado can not turn a lie into truth.”<sup>20</sup> The dramatic poem was re-staged in 1955, but it could only be seen again in the aftermath of the crushed October 1956 Revolution, as of March 1957. Due to the huge interest, it was also performed on the Margaret Island Open Air Stage and on the Tchaikovsky Park Stage in the Kőbánya District of Budapest during the summer.

Three years later, in summer 1960, Major came up with a brand new concept. He would stage the work during the Szeged Open Air Games, and in the autumn, as a morality play at the National Theatre. In an interview, he promised to “rid Madách’s work finally of the incense-smoked spin that has tarnished it... Our starting point will be Madách, this authentic and peculiarly deist-decabrist genius. It would be a mistake to downplay or lie either about his faith or about his progressive revolutionary outlook.”<sup>21</sup> The result of this novel, though still ideology-driven statement was a surprising – turned – laugh-out-loud concept of trying to place the people in the play’s focus. Detractors of Major’s inventive ideas would keep talking about the London police crowd-shooting scene for years, along with the Lord’s portrayal that was supposed to “rid the work in one fell swoop of the mysticism in which bourgeois theatre shrouded the liberal Madách’s deism that was different from the faith of the Catholic Church in God and also from other dogmatic creeds.”<sup>22</sup> It was with this dubious production that the National Theatre marked the one thousandth performance of the play on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1963.

The play was re-staged next on the one hundredth anniversary of Madách’s death, again under Major’s direction, in 1964. Rehearsals began in the condemned Lujza Blaha Square National Theatre building, which would be blown up by a Hungarian People’s Army technical team in March 1965. The tearing down of the main walls put an end to one of the most shameful events in the history of Hungarian theatre.

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<sup>20</sup> Sergey Krushinsky: *Budapest színházaiban* (In the Theatres of Budapest). Irodalmi Újság, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1955.

<sup>21</sup> Magyar Nemzet, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1960.

<sup>22</sup> Péter Rényi (1920–2002): *Utólagos megjegyzések a Tragédia szegedi előadásához* (Ex-post Remarks on the Szeged Performance of The Tragedy). Népszabadság, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1960.



Lajos Básti (Adam) and Margit Lukács (Éva) in *The Tragedy* at Szeged Open-Air Festival in 1960 (source: tiszataj\_1980\_008)



György Kálmán (Lucifer), Imre Sinkovits (Ádám) and Hédi Váradi (Éva), d: Tamás Major, 1964 (photo: Éva Keleti, source: mandadb.hu)

The production premiered in the new interim National Theatre facility, i.e. Radius Cinema in Nagymező Street (which used to be, and is again today, the Thália Theatre). This facility had served as a host theatre for some time by then and became the home of the National Theatre for two seasons during the reconstruction project. The summer of that year saw the start of the full overhaul of the Sándor Hevesi Square (then Izabella Square) building, with the idea that it would serve as the next home for the troupe until the new National Theatre was built.

The director published a visionary essay in the jubilee programme brochure in which he postulated what were by then his frequently used Brechtian arguments against the “academic” interpretation of the classics. The key feature of the production was the set designed by Endre Bálint<sup>23</sup> which, contrary to the earlier “period” props, was now devoid of any specific historical reference. The costumes were made of leather, inspired by the *King Lear* costumes used during a recent visit by the Royal Shakespeare Company. The director sought to emphasise a break with his past endeavours by completely recasting the production: Adam would be played by Imre Sinkovits<sup>24</sup>, Eve by Hédi Várady, Lucifer by György Kálmán.

<sup>23</sup> Endre Bálint (1914–1986) was an outstanding 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian painter.

<sup>24</sup> Imre Sinkovits (1928–2001) was a great Hungarian actor. In 1958, he was dismissed from the National Theatre in retaliation for his involvement with the 1956 Revolution, but was rehabilitated in 1963.



Again, some of the reviews were enthusiastic and acknowledging, and some remained negative. Péter Rényi, who had amply criticised Major's earlier direction of *The Tragedy*, now declared under the protection of Kádár's "liberalism" that gone were the days when "criticism of the Phalanstery could be turned against our reality. [...] The artistic tragedy of *The Tragedy* has always been that it became great in an age when high art in the theatre meant either lofty rhetoric – e.g. in the spirit of Schiller – or the perfect illusion of reality, i.e. true-to-life reproduction as practised by naturalistic theatre."<sup>25</sup> *Tempura mutantur* – or so it might seem.

László Vámos, director of the next production of the dramatic poem in 1983 and Artistic Director of the National Theatre from 1982 to 1990 wrote in 1987, two years before the fall of the one-party state: "Having a New National Theatre is a cause for not only Hungarian theatre, but for our whole socialist culture. The new theatre must belong not only to the National Theatre, but to Hungarian theatre in general"<sup>26</sup>.

But it would take a lot of water under the bridges of the Danube until the long-awaited National Theatre would be completed in Soroksári Road. In March 2002, *The Tragedy of Man* premiered as part of the inauguration ceremony, directed by János Szikora<sup>27</sup>. Adam was played by József Szarvas, Eve by Vera Pap, Lucifer by Róbert Alföldi. The reviews reflected the intense attention that matched the importance of the event, but the majority were negative about the performance. Interestingly, a majority of the critics compared the production that was intended to exude hypermodernism to the Meiningenistic tradition set by the very first premiere in 1883. Tamás Koltai wrote that "its concept completely vindicates *The Tragedy-Vaudeville*. expressing at the same time the low-brow standards of our age, and the high technical standards of the National Theatre."<sup>28</sup>



Vera Pap (Éva) and Róbert Alföldi (Lucifer),  
d: János Szikora, 2002  
(photo: Tamás Katkó, source: mandadb.hu)

<sup>25</sup> Péter Rényi: *A megújult Madách* (Madách Renewed). *Népszabadság*, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1964.

<sup>26</sup> László Vámos (1928–1996): *Gondolattöredékek a nyolcvanas évek Nemzeti Színházáról* (Thought Fragments about the National Theatre of the 1980s). In: *A Nemzeti Színház 150 éve* (150 Years of the National Theatre). Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1987, p. 211.

<sup>27</sup> János Szikora (1950) is a director and theatre manager.

<sup>28</sup> Tamás Koltai: *Tragédiának nézéd?...* (You Take this for a Tragedy?) *Élet és Irodalom*, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2002.



Imre Madách: *The Tragedy of Man*, National Theatre, Budapest, 2018,  
d: Attila Vidnyánszky (photo: Zsolt Eőri Szabó)

A sarcastic hint that, more than anything else, the director sought to maximise the utilisation of the new stage's cutting-edge technology. By contrast, the director did have a message beyond the technology, mostly expressed by reinterpreting the roles of Adam and Eve. Péter Molnár Gál<sup>29</sup> wrote of that as follows: “Szikora lifted the leading roles out of their set contexts, i.e. challenging the idea that Adam would be played by the troupe's hero, Eve by the naïve heroine, and Lucifer by the scheming villain. A reference to the idea that this time, the main characters of the piece were played by ordinary – or if you will, “little” – people. Katalin Metz's review defends Szikora's concept, pointing out that “he only uses the new theatre's hypermodern stage technology very selectively and sparingly, i.e. to the extent justified by the historical context, the idea presented, and the stage situation. Even when he injects lots of anachronisms into the flow of the performance, a highly risqué technique for a director, he manages to do so without turning it into an exercise per se.”<sup>30</sup>

The latest renewal of Madách's dramatic poem in 2018, and the directorial concept of Attila Vidnyánszky<sup>31</sup>, impose a huge task on everyone involved, including all the players and also the spectators seated on the stage-turned-arena.

<sup>29</sup> Péter Molnár Gál (1936–2011) was a critic and dramaturge. He was a journalist of *Népszabadság* from 1961 to 1978, and senior staff member as of 1982. Citation from: *A Nemzeti Színház tragédiája* (The Tragedy of the National Theatre). *Népszabadság*, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Katalin Metz (1938–2010): *Látomásokban az eszmék viadala* (The Struggle of Ideas Depicted in Visions). *Magyar Nemzet*, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Attila Vidnyánszky (1964) founded the Gyula Illyés Hungarian National Theatre in Berehove, and later became Manager of the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen. Since 2013, he has been General Manager of the National Theatre of Budapest. He has

The production is both puritanical and monumental, i.e. festive and everyday, at the same time. It starts out like a church service. The actors / actresses explain some of the locations, such as the site of the first scene, along with a few of the author's instructions that they find important. All the players are on stage the whole time, reciting Madách's poem. The text becomes a montage during the performance. Some sentences are uttered several times, some by a chorus, some consecutively, some in canon, some overlapping and outbidding the others.

Then the Lord's Voice is heard, interpreted by Imre Sinkovits. There is a mystical, transcendent quality to that. Sinkovits stands for more than himself: he represents the past. His voice evokes his trials and tribulations in the spectators' minds. He wasn't just a hero on stage. His life merged with his roles in the Hungarian spectators' consciousness. He is the National Theatre. He stands for tradition. His virtual presence extends the scope of the performance to its past and to its roots.

Everyone in this community can be Adam, Eve, Lucifer, God, and man. Lucifer is played by the largest number: nine actors pass the baton to and fro. They vary in age, they are old, young and middle-aged. What we see of the story as it unfolds through history is conjured up by Lucifer. The actors do not play a role, they represent behaviour patterns instead. They think together. They comment on the ideas raised, engaging in a passionate debate. To the extent of a few scenes, they embody a role, they "live" certain situations, or they argue like Brecht's actors, yet they never focus solely on their own role, but on the whole work and their place in it.

Aurél Kárpáti's words about *Hamlet* from over ninety years ago apply also to Madách's play: the secret to Madách's work, too, is the secret of a genius. It is inscrutable. "We may keep undoing and unravelling the threads of the fabric of his tragedy, but the enigmatic pattern into which the genius wove his magic for all time can never be wholly deciphered."<sup>32</sup>

The National Theatre's 2018 production of *The Tragedy* represents yet another impressive attempt at deciphering the magic; it clearly suggests that this much-criticised and long-banned masterpiece is, after all, optimistic.

English translation by László Vértes

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directed five productions of *The Tragedy of Man* to date: Berehove in 1998, Zsámbék in 2008, Szeged Open Air Games in 2011, Debrecen in 2012, and Kiskváda, where the performance was washed away, i.e. cancelled due to rain.

<sup>32</sup> Aurél Kárpáti (1884–1963): *Hamlet tragikuma* (The Tragic Character of Hamlet, 1925). In: Örök Shakespeare (Timeless Shakespeare). Year n.a. Károly Grill, Budapest, p. 40.



ILDIKÓ SIRATÓ

## *The Tragedy of Man* in Foreign Languages and on Foreign Stages

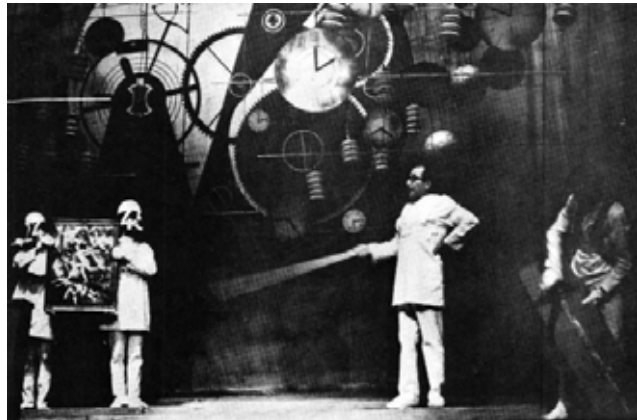
*The Tragedy of Man* is among our literary classics available to readers in many languages, and also to theatre-goers in many countries. In 2014, Csaba Andor and György Radó put the number of published and unabridged *Tragedy* translations at 33. They also referred to another three full but unpublished translations. The target languages include Arabic, Bulgarian, Catalan, Croatian, Czech, Dutch, English, Esperanto, Estonian, Finnish, French, Galician, Georgian, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romani (Lovari), Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Ukrainian, Yiddish, as well as Armenian, Danish and Pular (of Guinea). Many of these languages boast several translations of the play. Occasionally, new translations and in-house versions may also have been made for some theatre productions.

The stage history of *The Tragedy of Man* began with its premiere at the National Theatre on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1883. Foreign audiences could then see the dramatic poem on stage in several ways. First and foremost, during the foreign tours of Hungarian theatres (some of which subsequently became trans-border Hungarian theatres), such as the Budapest-based National Theatre's Vienna Tour in 1892, then its tour in Moscow, Leipzig, East Berlin and Warsaw in 1970, the Bucharest Tour of the Oradea State Theatre's Szigligeti Company in 1973, the Miskolc-based National Theatre's performance in Warsaw in 1985, and the Subotica People's Theatre performances in West Berlin and Mexico City in 1988. The Merlin International Theatre (which used to operate in and out of Budapest) played *The Tragedy* in English in Dundee and Edinburgh in 1997 (for 13 nights in the latter). A genuine curiosity among *The Tragedy* productions in Hungarian outside Hungary was the 1946 performance by Hungarian Prisoners of War in Cherepovets Camp near Leningrad (today: Saint Petersburg).

The first time that Hungarian *émigré* theatre-makers staged the play overseas (in Hungarian) was in 1922, at the New York Lexington Theatre. The production was directed by horror movie star Bela Lugosi, who also played Adam. Amateur / student performances took place subsequently in Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit (1924), Buenos Aires (1952, 1961), and Toronto (1960). In Europe, the play was performed in Zurich (1916), Poznań (1965), and Paris (1992). It also premiered as a theatre-reading session in Montbard (in French) in 1995.

*The Tragedy* – played by a foreign theatre – premiered in Hamburg, and that production also played in Vienna (1892). In the same year, it also premiered in Prague. It was staged at Berlin's Lessing Theatre in 1893. There are also poorly documented news reports of performances in Vienna (in German) and Krakow (in Polish), both from 1903. It was staged in Prague in 1904, followed by Brno and Plzeň in 1905. In 1914, it premiered in Zagreb. The Slovak audience of Bratislava could see the play for the first time in December 1926. In 1934, it entered the repertoire of Vienna's Burgtheater. It was first performed by a German troupe in Hamburg in 1937, directed by Antal Németh. Frankfurt am Main (1940) and Bern (1943) followed suit. As a puppet show, it premiered at Géza Blattner's Arc-en-Ciel (Rainbow) Theatre in Paris in 1937. In the post-WWII period, *The Tragedy* was banned for some time, and then found its way back to the stage in Kosice in the Slovak language in 1966. This was followed by performances in Vienna (1967, 1969), in Gottwaldov (in Polish, 1968) and a new production in Bratislava (1969). It premiered in Tartu and Gdańsk in the same year (1971). Then there was a guest performance of *The Tragedy* in Budapest by the Minsk Russian Drama Theatre. In 1983, it premiered in Klagenfurt. It was directed by Giorgio Pressburger in Rome in 1989. Finally, a noteworthy puppet adaptation in French was staged in Strasbourg in 1998.

Antal Németh (1903–1968), Manager and Director-in-Chief of Budapest's National Theatre between 1935 and 1944, staged *The Tragedy* in a total of five versions during his career. In spring 1937, as he set about directing the production in Hamburg's Schauspielhaus, the Prop Manager stepped up to him and began to recite Madách's lines in German. It transpired that the old stage hand had already been around at the time of the Hamburg performance of *The Tragedy* in 1892, the play's first premiere outside Hungary.



In Phalanstery. Imre Madách: *The Tragedy of Man*, Teatre Wybrzeże, Gdańsk, 1971, d: Mátýás Giricz (source: szinhaz.net/archivum/)

Directed in November 1940, *The Tragedy* became the year's top show, an achievement underscored by the fact that it took place in the native town of Faust's author Goethe. In the essay *Egy emberöltő Az ember tragédiája szolgálatában* (*A Generation in the Service of The Tragedy of Man*), Németh recounts that as a result of the production in Frankfurt, the Head of the Department of Theatre Studies at the University of Jena offered a full-semester course on Madách and the play, and that several Ph.D. theses were written on the subject.

### ***The Tragedy of the Estonians***

Beside Sándor Petőfi's poems, Imre Madách's dramatic poem, *The Tragedy of Man* is among our literary classics available to readers in many languages, and also to theatre-goers in many countries. It has been staged several times outside Hungary since its foreign-language premiere (Hamburg, 1892). However, our representative national classic has rarely, only on exceptional occasions, attained any more than protocol success. One such exceptional and genuinely significant event occurred on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1971 at the Vanemuine Theatre in Tartu, Soviet Estonia's second largest and culturally number one city (and reoccurred during the same theatre's 1972 guest tour in Hungary).

The premiere took place as part of the cultural event series "Socialist Drama Festival", initiated from Moscow. Central and Eastern European countries and the Soviet Republics celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 1970. Estonia, which could only enjoy an independent statehood as a Soviet Republic between 1918 and 1939, interpreted the central

directive – according to which each Republic was to choose a cultural sister country from the socialist block – from its own national perspective, and picked Hungary as a favoured linguistic relative and "sister" in the revolution.

Jaan Kross (1920–2007), the Estonian nation's most important post-WWII writer, poet and literary translator, published a translation of *The Tragedy* (*Inimese tragöödia*) in 1970 that had the ability to speak to readers directly. Kross' rendering of Madách managed to convey the play's romantic passion, nation-awakening message, and philosophical concept of late-20<sup>th</sup> century relevance, to his contemporaries in Estonian. (Jaan Kross' works, i.e. his poems and mainly his novels, were also published





in Hungarian, and earned the author plenty of recognition, several Nobel Prize nominations, and eventually the Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary in 1992).

The play's premiere in Tartu was a real cultural feat. As foreign authors and artists are not bound by the traditions surrounding the work in its homeland, they cast this often heavy yoke off more easily, and feel more at ease with the language, interpretation and presentation of literary texts, including plays. Epp Kaidu (1915–1976), director of *The Tragedy* and her husband, Kaarel Ird (1909–1986), Manager of the Vanemuine Theatre, wanted to speak to



Epp Kaidu (1915–1976)

their own audience, rather than recite a foreign classic as one recites a tedious lesson. The play was performed in Tartu 41 times between 1970 and 1975 to an aggregate audience of over 17 000 (Estonia's population at the time was, and still is, around 1.3 million).

The key to the play's success there, as Hungarian spectators came to discover in 1972, may have been the fact that Adam, Eve and Lucifer were all impersonated by young people of nearly the same age on a philosophical and moral quest to understand the world, thus bringing Madách's hypothetical options shaped by transcendental powers closer to the human scale, i.e. closer to people. Lucifer did not seem omniscient and haughty, Adam wasn't naïve, and all three realised their individual responsibility. Through with experimenting after trials, errors and new beginnings, they embraced their struggle as the sole purpose and meaning of human existence. The simple set did not aspire to create a historical illusion, the players' puritanical costumes did not distract spectators from the faces, eyes or the text. Though the monumental character of this multi-actor *Tragedy* could be felt as a result of its physical and intellectual dimensions, the three main characters remained in its focus throughout the performance.

The Tartu performance gave the Estonian audience an experience of the freedom that arises from large-scale ideas, and demonstrated the



Scene from Madách's *The Tragedy of Man* in Tartu, Estonia, 1970, with Raine Loo (Éva), Jaan Tooming (Lucifer) and Evald Hermaküla in the picture, Vanemuine Theatre, d: Epp Kaidu (photo: Gunnar Vaidla, source: teatriliit.ee)



Snapshot from the Phalanstery scene (source: szinhaz.net/archivum/)

power of their repressed national-European culture and language. Though the director's script shows the censor's comments and suggestions in Russian (e.g. to relocate some scenes), these were largely ignored in the eventual production. Hungarian spectators could see the Estonian *Tragedy* at the Thália Theatre in Budapest, at the Vörösmarty Theatre in Székesfehérvár, at the Petőfi Theatre in Veszprém, and also in the North Nógrád County ethnic Slovak village of Alsósztrégova (Holná Strehová), the birthplace of both Madách and *The Tragedy of Man*. There were plenty of theatre-makers and directors in the auditorium, and they had the refreshing experience of seeing *The Tragedy* freed from its captivity between the book covers as it emerged from underneath the sediment of the romantic and historical traditions it had accumulated since Ede Paulay's Meiningen-style premiere in 1883, allowing a new generation of Hungarian *Tragedy* directors to enter the scene. The impact of this revelation manifested itself in the Hungarian productions of the following decade, and also in the writings and interviews of some theatre-makers, including György Lengyel, who staged *The Tragedy of Man* four times. In 2004, for instance, he praised the Estonian performance as follows: "the 1971 production of Tartu's Vanemuine Theatre, which I saw in Budapest during their tour, is among the best implementations"... of the morality-style approach ... "which became exceptionally expressive within a puritanical framework, due to the way it was interpreted and thanks to the actors' work. That night, to put it this way, it reinvented the world of *The Tragedy* also for us."

English translation by László Vértés

Published in Hungarian: *Nemzeti Magazin*, December 2018 – January 2019.



NINA KIRÁLY

## The Tragedy of Man or Mankind?<sup>1</sup>

“Into this valley of perpetual dream,  
Show whence I came, and where  
I am, and why –  
Pass not away upon the passing stream.”

(P. B. Shelley: *The Triumph of Life*)

As can be seen from the bibliography<sup>2</sup> of translations compiled by Mihály Praznovszky and published in the volume titled *Madách Színről színre* (*Madách Scene by Scene*), there are basically three variations to encounter on the title of Madách's *The Tragedy of Man*: one is “the tragedy of mankind” (in English, Polish, Russian, Romanian and Danish) or “the tragedy of the human” (in Norwegian, Italia and Russian) or the “human tragedy” (in Finnish); then the “sad human song” (in Armenian), “the destiny of man” (in Japanese); and the “vision of Adam” (in Hebrew). This is important to take into account when evaluating foreign stage renderings, because, in many cases, it determines whether Madách's poem is to be interpreted as a philosophical (“Faust-like”) piece or a (cosmic) mystery play. In the preface to *Jocelyn* written in 1836, Lamartine makes sense of the essence of “mankind poems” (*poeme d'humanité, Menschenheitsdichtung*) thus: “The epic is neither heroic nor national any longer, but it is more: it is

<sup>1</sup> Nina Király's study was first published in 2002, in the second issue of *Napiút*. This is an improved edited version of the text.

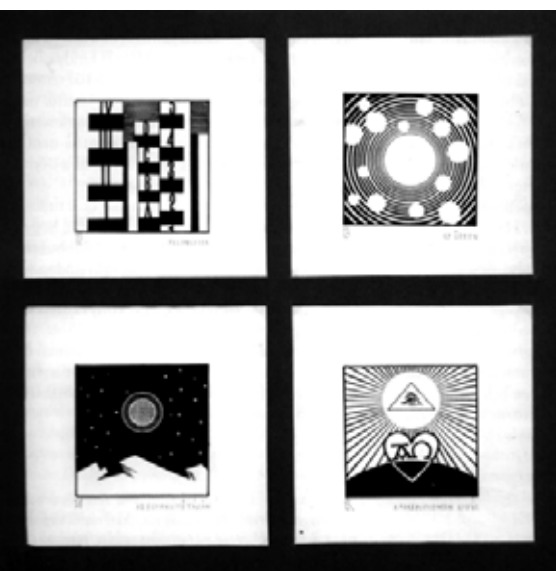
<sup>2</sup> *Színről színre. Látványtervek Madách: Az ember tragédiájához.* (*Scene by Scene. Set Designs for Madách: The Tragedy of Man.*) Budapest, Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet (Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute), 1999. Appendix: *Madách Imre: Az ember tragédiája a világ nyelvein* (*The Tragedy of Man in the Languages of the World*). Compiled by Mihály Praznovszky; *Madách Imre: Az ember tragédiája a színpadon* (*The Tragedy of Man on Stage*). Literature Selection, 1983–1999. Compiled by Magdolna Both.

“human”; its subject is: the fate of “man”, the stages that the human spirit must go through in order to reach their goal on God’s road.”<sup>3</sup>

Poems of this type, such as *Manfred* and *Cain* by Byron, *The Legend of the Ages* by Hugo, *Prometheus Unbound* by Shelley as well as the works of the Three Bards of Polish Romantic literature, already a traditional parallel – Krasiński’s *Nie-Boska komedia* (*The Un-divine Comedy*), Słowacki’s *Kordian* and Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* (*Forefathers’ Eve*) –, constitute the European literary context in which *The Tragedy of Man* is usually analysed. However, if we examine the presence of the above “mankind poems” in French, English, German, Polish and Hungarian theatre history, that is to say, we are looking at what place they have occupied in the national repertoire during the past one and a half centuries, Madách’s *The Tragedy* will turn out to be the one which nearly matches the stage presence of Polish Romantic dramas. It certainly must not be forgotten though that censorship did not allow Polish Romantic dramas on stage for a long time. They could first prosper between the two world wars, then, with a few exceptions, they did not get played again until as long as 1956. Still, they were making repeated political waves even later, as it happened in the case of director Dejmek’s staging Mickiewicz at the National Theatre in Warsaw in 1968.

Therefore Madách’s work may be said to be the probably most played dramatic poem. Thanks to the performances of *The Tragedy* in Vienna (1934),

Hamburg (1937) and Frankfurt (1940), the play did not remain unnoticed in Europe even before the Second World War. Unfortunately, neither the vision-oriented designs by Álmós Jaschik for the Prinzregenten-Theater in Munich (1931–32), nor János Horváth’s set and stage designs for the Teatro Reale dell’Opera in Rome and the Arena of Verona were realized. The dominant reading both in Hungary and abroad was mostly that of the “humanity’s history of ideas”, which seemed to justify János Arany’s remark on the poet’s weak point being that “his thinking is stronger than his imagination”. Scenographers usually tried to compensate for this “lack of imagination” by large historical tableaux, as the premiere of the work on



Record cover designs by Álmós Jaschik for Scenes 12 – 15 of *The Tragedy* (source: Jaschik Álmós, *a művész és pedagógus* [Álmós Jaschik], Noran, 2002)

<sup>3</sup> Magyar, Bálint: *Az ember tragédiája színpadi felfogása napjainkig*. (*Concepts of The Tragedy of Man on Stage to this Day*) Budapest, 1963, p. 29

Hungarian stage was realised in the Meiningen spirit of historical authenticity.<sup>4</sup> If *The Tragedy* was not regarded as “the tragedy of mankind” though, the main motif of Shelley’s poem quoted in the motto could apply most: “For what would it avail to bid thee gaze On the revolving world? What to bid speak Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change? To these All things are subject but eternal Love.” (Act 2, Scene 4, P. B. Shelley: *Prometheus Unbound*)<sup>5</sup>

This is exactly what Giorgio Strehler was trying to do in his unfinished *Faust* project, which he thought of as a European venture par excellence. “It embraces the whole of European humanistic culture which is gathered together in *Faust*, and with *Faust* we are shown its greatness, its human value, the attainment of a synthesis of all that is beautiful, elevated, immeasurable (the good and the bad) that the »homo europeus« has given to the world” – wrote Strehler, who considers *Faust* “an ultimate final message to the world



Scene after the death of Faust, W. Goethe: *Faust, Fragments*, Piccolo Teatro di Milano, seasons 1988/89/90/91, d: Giorgio Strehler (photo: Luigi Ciminaghi, source: peroni.com)

(the audience being a microcosm of the world) by means of the theatre”. Yet Strehler did not focus on large crowd scenes and spectacular solutions but on Faust’s state of mind and development, as he himself played the role of Faust at the age of seventy. Strehler insisted on Goethe’s full text, trying to break with Berlioz-Boito’s melodramatic and operatic rendering of *Faust*. When, in Strehler’s version, Faust reappears after his death, motionless and wrapped up in a white shroud, he reminds one of a larva or a chrysalis, which is intended to visually represent the generally omitted words of the heavenly choir: “Freudig empfangen wir / Diesen im Puppenstand” (“Joyously, we now welcome Him in a

<sup>4</sup> However, János Szikora in his interview in Magyar Nemzet (Feb. 14, 2002, p. 15) talks about the visual values of *The Tragedy*, which can be read in Madách’s authorial instructions mainly: “Madách’s authorial instructions had almost the same inspiring effect on me as the text itself. They have opened my imagination and gave me a warning that what Madách writes should be taken seriously. That is why I have accepted a lot of his instructions and am even trying to implement them. For example, I am making an attempt to follow the writer’s wish in the Byzantine Black Sabbath, which is usually omitted. The apocalyptic image of »savage hordes are seen descending from the heights« in the authorial instructions has also inspired me to use visual representation.”

<sup>5</sup> Magyar, Bálint: op. cit. p. 33. [http://www.lieder.net/get\\_text.html?TextId=49341](http://www.lieder.net/get_text.html?TextId=49341)

state of chrysalis”). Here, Goethe employs the traditional image of the soul as a butterfly, and depicts Faust in an intermediary stage before his salvation.

To Strehler, like in Shelley’s *Prometheus*, the end of the poem means “eternal love,” “the triumph of the feminine, and of the mothers and maternity”. There are only female figures present on the stage in the scene corresponding to the last lines in *Faust* – “dark-clad holy women who cover Faust with an enormous shroud – and he disappears into the mystical realm of the Mothers”. Strehler explained this scene thus: “Goethe defines for us his concept of immortality. Only through the mutation of life and its cyclical structure is there infinite regeneration of new life.”<sup>6</sup>

This incessant transformation is shown through the events of the Springtime of the Peoples in 1848 in the poem (*Quidam*) of the Polish poet, C. Norwid also, written in 1857 and published in 1863, that is almost simultaneously with the birth of Madách’s *The Tragedy*: “Sunt quidam de hic stanibus qui (There be some standing here) – Matthew 1628”<sup>7</sup>. “The hero is just someone – anyone – quidam! He does nothing, only seeks and longs for goodness, that is, as they say, he does nothing – but suffers a lot.” Incidentally, the poem – similarly to Madách’s – takes stock of a love affair which ended in disappointment, because one of the female characters – Sophia – represents Greek antiquity in which there is no room left for genuine emotions. Several analysts compare the fragmented structure to montage technique, which Norwid uses to look for the past in the present by alternating perspectives and planes, and represents the present by fragments of the past.<sup>8</sup> We can almost hear Lorán’s words in Madách’s play titled *Csak tréfa (Just a Joke)* from 1843–44: “Mi a jelen? – Perc szülte fuvalom, / Mely múlt s jövődnök csókjából ered” (“What is present? – A minute-born breath of wind, / Which emerges from the kiss of past and future”).

It is a remarkable phenomenon abroad that Madách’s *The Tragedy* is not sought by professional theatres in the first place – but by drama school students, studio and children’s theatres as well as puppeteers. They do not see the motive of “dream about history” in this work, but the representation of the ethical issues of the time, Adam’s present-time peregrination, his desire for a just world order and, decisively, the fact that he is getting to know several religions and cultures in his ongoing quest. It was characteristic of the “happening” performance titled *Madách-Annotations* in Szabadka (Subotica), staged at the Népszínház (Popular

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Balme: *Giorgio Strehler’s Faust Project*. Világszínház ’98. Nyár (Summer), p. 65. [https://books.google.hu/books?id=EY1HMT4tXMwC&pg=PA215&dq=Strehler+faust+synthesis+homo+europeus&hl=hu&sa=X&ved=0ahUKE-wi9vsW3sYvgAhWRaQKH\\_XMBgEQ6AEIKjAA#v=onepage&q=Strehler%20faust%20synthesis%20homo%20europeus&f=false](https://books.google.hu/books?id=EY1HMT4tXMwC&pg=PA215&dq=Strehler+faust+synthesis+homo+europeus&hl=hu&sa=X&ved=0ahUKE-wi9vsW3sYvgAhWRaQKH_XMBgEQ6AEIKjAA#v=onepage&q=Strehler%20faust%20synthesis%20homo%20europeus&f=false)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16%3A28&version=KJV>

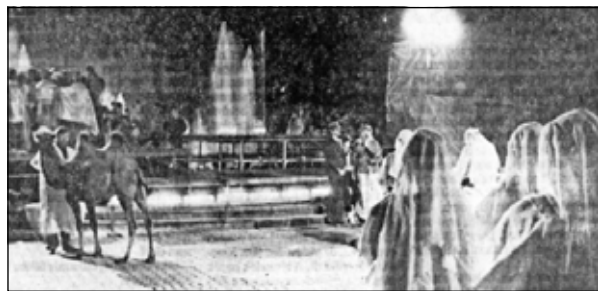
<sup>8</sup> Cyprian Norwid: *Pisma wybrane*. Poematy. Warszawa, 1968, p. 127



Theatre) in Szabadka both in the Serbian and the Hungarian languages in 1985. The studies preparing for the production were published a year later, edited by Dragan Klaic and János Sziveri. In fact, this Madách project was made in the same spirit as Giorgio Strehler's above-mentioned *Faust*.

Grégoire Callies, director of the Youth Theatre – TJP – in Strasbourg, had been getting ready to realise *The Tragedy of Man* for many years. He even visited Budapest to collect material in the archives of the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute, and in 1998 he created the production casting live actors as well as puppets. In his view, Madách's drama is still extremely topical, "seeking the answer to the fundamental questions of existence, and above all, whether it is worth continuing the struggle". And as exemplified by Strehler's *Faust* production or Shelley's aforementioned poem, the afflictions of the romantic couple become a symbol of eternal love.

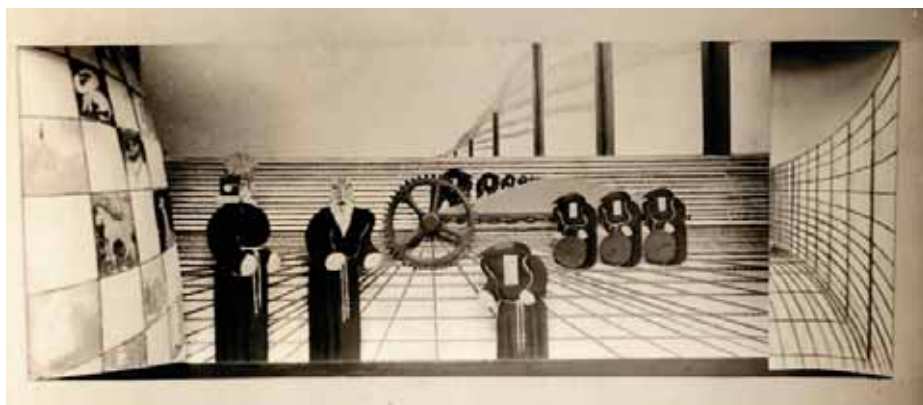
Performances combining live actors and puppets have become quite widespread in recent times, which indicates a special revival of the language of theatre: at times the puppet is a means of alienation from the role, and at other times it is the contrary, being the link between actor, role and narration. However, in *Faust*, Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* and Madách's *The Tragedy*, there are fairground scenes embedded in the text of the drama, which draw upon traditional folk "devils", various Faust and Mephisto figures as well as popular scenes and fairy-tale texts related to them. These inserts are meant to alleviate tragic and cathartic moments, as it also happens in several Bergman films for instance. As we know, the initiator of adapting Madách to puppet theatre was Antal Németh. From Budapest, all through the creative process, he kept instructing Géza Blattner, who was living and working in Paris and headed the Arc-en-Ciel puppet theatre, as well as Sándor



*Madách kommentárok (Madách Commentaries)*, adaptations of *The Tragedy* played at several places, Népszínház Szabadka (Subotica, Serbia), 1985, d: Ljubiša Ristić (source: vajdmagy.blogspot.com)



Drawing by costume designer of *Faust*, *Fragments*, Luisa Spinatelli, to Strehler's figure of Faust (source: piccoloteatro.org)



Madách: *Az Ember tragédiája (The Tragedy of Man)*, Arc-en-Ciel Puppet Theatre, Paris, 1937, designer of the Phalanstery scene: István Beöthy, d: Géza Blattner (source: modemart.hu)

A. Tóth and the other puppeteers: Zsigmond Walleshausen, Tivadar Fried, Zoltán Olcsay Kiss, Zsigmond Kolos-vary (Kolozsvári), Károly Koffán among others. Naturally, the puppet production had to rely on an extremely shortened text only, as pointed out by Géza Blattner in his recollection, too: “With some modest Hungarian and French contribution, we had to go through a real egg dance so that we could put the one-hour mystery play across properly. There was no way to present the whole of *The Tragedy*, and therefore we compressed the dream scenes so that Lucifer was commenting on the vanishing centuries in front of a huge wheel of fortune. The actor turning the wheel incarnated human fate itself by pulling a mask over his face, with half of his body emerging from the stage opening and rotating the images fitted to the spokes from the bottom”.<sup>9</sup> The production was awarded the Grand Prix at the Paris World Exhibition, so the young artists from Strasbourg were already in possession of the French “tradition” created by the Hungarian puppeteers.

Committed to Hungarian literature and theatre in Italy, Giorgio Pressburger directed the drama exam performance of thirteen graduate students at the Academy of Dramatic Arts (Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica) in Rome at Eleonora Duse Theatre in 1989, which had a most significant Hungarian press coverage as well.

Internationally renowned Polish film director Krzysztof Zanussi was also impressed by the philosophical, moral, and religious issues in Madách's work: his heroes' struggles, search for the essence of existence and preservation of faith may best be expressed by the title of one of his films: *Constans (The Constant Factor)*.

On his last visit to Budapest, he said he was planning to stage *The Tragedy* by Madách with Italian actors, as an open-air production in Migniato near Florence, where he had directed theatre productions on multiple occasions.

<sup>9</sup> Mészáros, Emőke: *Az ember tragédiája bábszínpadon. (The Tragedy of Man on Puppet Stage)* Színháztudományi Szemle, 32. Bp., 1997, p. 64

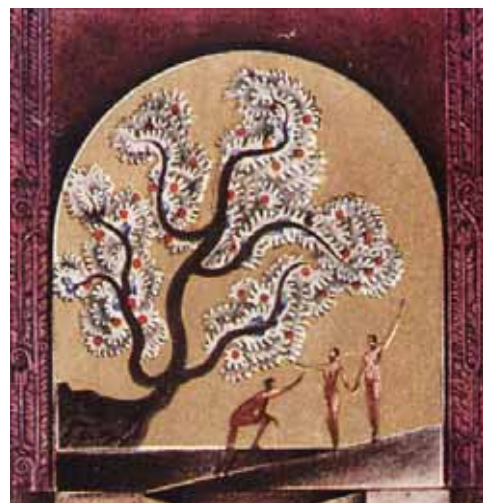
To my question about what he had found so appealing in Madách's drama, he replied:

"I have long wanted to put *Faust* on stage. My wish has not been granted so far, but after Strehler and the controversy surrounding his project it does not seem timely. However, I see *The Tragedy of Man* between Goethe's *Faust* and Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*. It has crossed my mind a few times to stage *The Tragedy*, but not having received a definite answer from the Italians yet, I cannot say anything specific. *The Tragedy of Man* offers many opportunities for a monumental open-air production. I have, of course, already cut the text and would like to stage it with a total of twelve actors. The piece gives an opportunity for extremely rich visual representation, since visions in a dream do not require a naturalistic setting. I am thinking of virtual scenery first and foremost, which can be achieved by the technical means of television. My open-air productions so far have also been characterized by multimedia visuals. Of course, I would not like to completely ignore the historical context, so I thought that paintings alluding to the particular periods of history would be projected on a canvas on the stage, with ever diminishing specificity and opening to cosmic vision. However, this would in no way be a representation of the tragedy of mankind, as suggested by the previous translations, but of the fate, the search and the suffering of »man“ on the thorny road, walking along which he would like to create an intelligent world. And although he loses his hope of achieving this several times, his faith is unbroken in his own power, and it is in accordance with the will of God. God has accomplished his perfect creation – machine is running – but history, which is the work of human hands – makes man face new and new ordeals, urging him on to create better and more perfect forms, according to the will of God. The fire of this struggle must not dwindle because it is the purpose of creation and existence.”<sup>10</sup>

English translation by Mrs. Durkó, Nóra Varga

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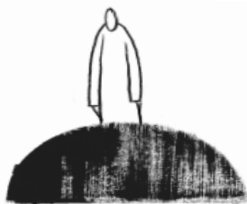


Almos Jáschik's unrealized scenic design for the Garden of Eden scene for Prinzregenten-Theater, Munich, 1932 (source: *Scene by Scene*, 1999)

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Krzysztof Zanussi, 27 February 2002. Here is just one example from the script instructions to the final scene of Zanussi's *A Year of the Quiet Sun*: "They were in Colorado, Monument Valley. They were the same at dusk as when they met. Two lonely silhouettes against the background of metaphysical nature, of which Andrei Tarkovsky said that it was the window to eternity". – Krzysztof Zanussi: *Scenariusze filmowe. II*. Warszawa 1985, p. 316



Mihály Zichy: *Prologue to Az ember tragédiája (The Tragedy of Man)*,  
Illustration, Scene 1 (In the Beginning), paper, carbon, 790 × 503 mm, 1885 (source: mng.hu)



MIKLÓS HUBAY

## The Crystal System of the Drama<sup>1</sup>

### The Cathedral Which Constructs Itself

If I manage to stay on my own in the “lion’s cave” of the castle<sup>2</sup> in Sztregova, I always attempt the impossible: I am trying to imagine, to fathom, to experience how, for thirteen months, Imre Madách was receiving the impulses to write his work. Always onwards, always upwards, always remaining in the magnetic field of the composition – without going astray, without any adventitious shoots. Thirteen months in the overwhelming flow of motives and thoughts.

The first three scenes were supported by the Bible. Then the eight scenes of Adam’s dream from Egypt to London were supported by history. But the subsequent three scenes – Phalanstery, Outer Space and the World of Ice – were not assisted by any experiences or news. And now, over 150 years after the birth of *The Tragedy*, we can see that almost each line of these three visions of the future, depicted without any information at the time, has struck home and been fulfilled.

I cannot find any other explanation for this miracle than that the architecture of the drama – once we have discovered its crystallization formula – will autonomously find its way and the cathedral will build itself without the need to copy or mirror so-called reality.

The inner logic of the drama leads to Truth more securely than experience or any other contribution.

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from Hubay Miklós: “*Aztán mivégre az egész teremtés?*” Jegyzetek az Úr és Madách Imre műveinek margójára. (“*And as for This Creation – What’s the Purpose?*” *Notes on the Margin of the Works of the Lord and Imre Madách*) Napkút Kiadó, Budapest, 2010

<sup>2</sup> Madách Imre (1823–1864) was born in Alsósztrégova (Dolná Strehova) in the historic region of Upper Hungary (today Slovakia) and wrote *The Tragedy of Man* there in 1859–1860.



## One Time Is the Master of Another

*The Tragedy* in the historical scenes involves Adam's growing to maturity as well as ageing. By the clock of world history: it is a slow process. Because the journey from Egypt to the Eskimos' world of ice is long. By the dream-clock this process was magically fast. Adam had his hair turn white all at once in his sleep, like God in Vörösmarty's poem.<sup>3</sup>

On waking, Adam will be young again. This effect carries one of the most concealed meanings in Madách's work. What could Madách have meant to say by drawing the individual's biological path of life as a parallel line to accompany the fate of mankind? I think Madách wanted to make a new and suggestive argument for the necessity of the evolution

and destruction of humanity. According to Madách's concept, life on earth is inevitably finite and the same laws of biology apply to mankind as well as the individual. Both are doomed to life – and to the very same life. (Let us not forget the Madách theorem: "All living things have equal share of life, the same chance of achieving their potential: the age-old tree, the fly which lives a day")<sup>4</sup> Here, in the relativity of time which Madách has produced in the closed system of *The Tragedy*, Adam and mankind have equal share of life. The path of life Adam has run in his dream emphasizes and symbolizes humanity's equally determined path of life.

It is a poetic and impressive symbol of mankind also having one life only. It is a good symbol. And necessary to Madách's concept. For no matter what energy deficiency or catastrophe will finish the human race off, the last remaining



Mihály Zichy: *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*), Illustration, Scene 15, paper, carbon, 1000 × 700 mm, 1887 (source: mng.hu)

<sup>3</sup> See *Prologue* by Mihály Vörösmarty (Hungarian poet, 1800–1855): "...The earth turned white; / Not hair by hair as happy people do, / It lost its colour all at once, like God,..." translated by Peter Zollman, in: [http://www.babelmatrix.org/works/hu/V%C3%B6r%C3%B6smarty\\_Mih%C3%A1ly/EI%C5%91sz%C3%B3/en/2123-Prologue](http://www.babelmatrix.org/works/hu/V%C3%B6r%C3%B6smarty_Mih%C3%A1ly/EI%C5%91sz%C3%B3/en/2123-Prologue)) ]

<sup>4</sup> The quotes from Madách's work are taken from the English translation and adaptation by Iain Macleod, Imre Madách: *The Tragedy of Man*, Canongate Press, Edinburgh, 1993 at <http://mek.oszk.hu/00900/00917/html/>



individuals will still be living their own lives and not mourning the extinction of their race. The calf of the last but one bison is not necessarily world-weary.

However, the transfigurations of Adam in the course of the scenes show, like an accurate clock, the expiry of that other living entity, mankind. The Eskimo scene – the last minutes. And yet: later, on awakening, the stopwatch hand will go back to zero. Madách has “Adam, as a young man again” in the instructions to Scene 15.

There seems to be no obstacle for either Adam or humanity to get ready for a fresh start. This is another message of Adam’s rejuvenation: Go! Let us give it a try!

### **Drama: The Wholeness of Time (1)**

If I put Madách’s *The Tragedy* into the hands of a foreign reader, I advise them to read its very end first, and continue with the beginning only after that, because knowing what is at stake will not throw cold water on their interest, but will increase their excitement rising from the relevance of the drama.

The alternative of to be or not to be in the end, which – and that is where I admire Madách’s genius most – may in the case of Adam mean the suicide all at once of the protagonist and – in him as a forefather – of the entire human race, this alternative is already present in the previous fourteen scenes of the drama as preparation. The thrill of this most relevant alternative is feeding the fire of each line in *The Tragedy*.

The gestation of the drama through time does not contradict our consideration of it as a single extended moment. (It is no accident that we keep talking about dramatic moments in which we feel a concentrated presence of events.)

The Bergsonian categories of time and duration are simultaneously (and much more emphatically than in life) relevant in the dramatic experience. Within the running time of two to three hours, every little word and gesture has a fully lucid presence. Each remaining word and gesture is ready, with its possibility foreshadowed, to be unfolded. That is why the final moment of the drama gives the experience which we can describe, in the words of Attila József, as “time’s tally is wound up”<sup>5</sup>.

In every case, it may be advisable to conduct drama analysis at the light of the closing minutes of the play, and it seems particularly appropriate for Madách’s work. The mythic beginning (with events familiar from the Bible), followed by the great scenes of world history, can easily give the reader – and the viewer

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<sup>5</sup> From *By the Danube* by Hungarian poet Attila József (1905–1937), transl. by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner

in the usual Hungarian stage interpretations – the feeling that what they read and see is but the epic of evolution, some series of illustrations to what they know from the Bible and world history anyway. (Oh, the unbearable historical revues in which stage directors had Adam's repeated tragedies go down the pan. The flesh and blood Athenian citizens and old heretics about whom the stage directors do not even realize that they are nightmares and that they follow each other with the compulsion of recurrent dreams.)

Of course, the directors of cumbersome dream tableaux may well argue that everything up to the London scene corresponds to known history and that the three scenes after the London one correspond to what we, people who have lived to see the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are experiencing in our basic anxieties. That the dream scenes are two feet on the ground, among their period sets. And that – apart from the occasional witty commentaries – there is nothing new in Madách's dream scenes.

But there is! There is a single one thing brought in. And that is what matters. And it is not just some new point of view: it is an Archimedean point. This is where Madách could lift the Earth off its four corners even. Its four corners: myth and the world's story. It is a moment of to be or not to be.

The moment Adam could have committed suicide... And he did not.

## The Wholeness of Time (2)

"Hosanna in the highest! Praise Him on earth and in the firmament!" – this is the opening Gloria, and, just like any personality cult deification (even if it is deifying God), it is too beautiful to be free of conflict. Indeed, Lucifer's dissonant voice will soon be heard.

When I am putting *The Tragedy* on stage – because that is what I am doing when interpreting it to my Italian students in Florence and Rome, and now to you as well, oh, gentle Hungarian reader<sup>6</sup> – I immediately cite, into the unison of the Angels' choir, Adam's gross screech from the end of *The Tragedy*: "One jump, as if it were the final act, / and I can say: the comedy has ended!"

It is via this association only that the devotional opening Gloria will gain full meaning: "[I'm tired of] ... that puerile band / of heavenly choristers with children's voices, / the host which never doubts, always rejoices."

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<sup>6</sup> Miklós Hubay (1918–2011) was a Kossuth Prize-winning dramatist and translator. His first piece (*Without Heroes*) was staged by the Antal Németh-headed National Theatre, Budapest, in 1942. He worked as dramaturge at the National Theatre between 1955 and 1957. He was professor at Színház- és Filmművészeti Főiskola (Academy of Drama and Film) from 1949 to 1957 and later between 1987 and 1996. The backdrop to his career was Florence from 1974 to 1988, where he promoted Hungarian literature at the University.

### The Wholeness of Time (3)

The boundaries between the concepts of past, present and future are blurred in Madách. The first man lives to see the end of the world – the end of a meaningless world – in advance, and although he might as well commit suicide at the dawn of creation: he does not kill himself. Come hell or high water. Drama in Madách is in the simultaneity of past, present and future. Almost every major drama is in pursuit of the relativity of time, and in its exceptional moments it does achieve that. These moments are usually indicated by the stunned silence of the audience.



Mihály Zichy: *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*), Illustration, Scene 15, paper, carbon, 790 × 503 mm, 1887 (source: mng.hu)

### Masterly Concentration

“Hail, Supreme Goodness!” – says Archangel Raphael and prostrates himself. The order of creation is flawless, worship is flowing towards the throne of God, the music of the spheres can be heard. There is no sign of dissonance.

A short pause. Then the conflict explodes and, 78 lines later, Lucifer announces the overthrow of this Order and a world catastrophe – the catastrophe of this freshly created world. A mere 78 lines – with more than half of them being Lucifer’s two declamations, sheer philosophy, on the properties of matter, on nonsense humankind, on the dilemma of free will, on the determination of Creation itself by the Nothing to name but a few. These two declamations embrace 43 lines. So there remain 35 lines for the plot proper. These 35 lines are full of concise sentences which have become proverbial since. To Lucifer’s first declamation, casting doubt on the sense and success of Creation, the Lord’s response is now classic.

“To pay homage is your part, not to judge me.”

The return, like a hard ball bouncing off Lucifer, is no less laconic:

“That would be out of keeping with my nature.”

Then the rest:

“Niggardly dole, indeed, a Lordly gesture!”

Continuing thus:

“Still, that terrestrial foothold will suffice:

there let Negation stand to see the day

when your creation shall be blown away.”

This succinctness and crystallization of sentences are accompanying phenomena of the prevailing dramatic tension. It is only in the clash of extraordinary forces that such diamond phrases are born. Maybe I need not even say that the very same tense atmosphere is necessary for Lucifer to develop his declamations. In drama you can philosophise only in moments of either-or, expanding the volume of these moments to the maximum. Exuberance and concentration: two intermittent states of matter. One is the test of dramatic tension – let us see how much philosophy it can bear –, the other is the result of dramatic tension – weighty and hard sentences of accelerated flight.

The acceleration and rhythm of crisis processes can also be studied here. 78 lines after the celebration of the perfect creation the Angels' choir, not to be blamed with excessive pessimism, knows it, too: it is the beginning of the Apocalypse.

### **The Myth of the Future – The Beginning and the End Woven of One Fabric**

Everything taken from the layer of myths in his work is preserved as myth by Madách. He does not even make an attempt to rank it with the historical facts or to place it in the light of reason, where etiological myths – like germs in the sun – would inevitably wilt away, or vegetate only as naive tales for children.

The uncritical, non-ironic seriousness – undisturbed faith? and an unbeliever? – with which Madách presents the myth of creation, the Fall and divine consolation – this last one as his own ingenuity – does not at all fit in with the author of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historians of religion and proto-religion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century rarely took myth seriously, except its poetic values at best.

Madách knows just as well as the man of today that myth – not turned out of its own symbolism – is the human spirit, having always been troubled by the problem of origin, comforting itself – as the guarantee for the tranquility of a sleeping man disturbed by some external noise is the dream.

Enigma and ambiguity follow from this function of myth. This is what may make the last phrase so enigmatic in *The Tragedy*: “Man...do your best”, the prod into periodical enthusiasm in the midst of the worries of world history waiting for Adam. More than that could hardly have been collected as provisions for the journey.

It is a brilliant feat of artistry that Madách weaves myth and history of one fabric in his work. Besides myth, dreamlike by its very nature, the non-mythic historical scenes are also dipped into dream. It is a feat to ensure the organic unity of the work. However, it is not just that. Adam, entering history, has not only received a mythical image of his origin but of history as well.

In fact, Madách creates the myth of the future in *The Tragedy*.

[illegible]



Mihály Zichy: *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*), Illustration, Scene 2 (The Garden of Eden), paper, carbon, 790x503 mm, 1885 (source: mng.hu)

ideology has gone out, and the ideal begins to have its distorted features sticking out. It is at this point that Adam's avant-garde spirit comes into play, stamping out his previous ideology without hesitation and starting to profess its opposite.

It is almost impossible to insert an interval in the dream process. Not only because of its oniric nature, but also because Madách was not a bit concerned with the defence of particular ideologies (cultures and worldviews). He focused a lot more on the transience, the ephemeral life of these. "All things that live, though wholesome in their life, must die in turn: the spirit will depart, but their remains are left, a foul cadaver, from which a murderous contagion issues..."

Perhaps the Hungarian people could endure the marxist promise of salvation yoked onto them in Yalta partly because they had been vaccinated against it by Madách well in advance. Then, in '56, all that had been curbed erupted with elemental force. "We've had enough of this!" Everyone could already feel the deadly microbes in the air. Even the main marxists did. What keeps happening to the man of *The Tragedy* is that he creates an ideology with enthusiasm and commitment but, in the meantime, he is turning crestfallen (presumably because he has unquenchable thirst for absolute truth in his heart) and gives it all up.

## Man and Woman

*The Tragedy* involves "man" ["ember" in the Hungarian language] and this – especially in the Hungarian language – means an adult male human ["férfi" in the Hungarian language]. "Woman" appears in the work as a riddle, a catalyst, an irregular factor, full of paradoxes.

In Apuleius, Isis says that there is only her, and all the other goddesses are simply her local names (Venus in Cyprus, Diana in Crete, Minerva in Athens, Proserpina in Sicily, even the dark Hecate is also her...).

In Madách, Eve is the partner of a slave flogged to death, the proud wife of a Greek military commander, and a cloistered virgin, and a marchioness, and a middle-class girl, and ...

Adam is eternal resumption, Eve is eternal transformation.

English translation by Mrs. Durkó, Nóra Varga  
Published in Hungarian: *Szcenárium*, September 2018





# SZÍNROL SZÍNRE

## SCENE BY SCENE

Látványtervek Madách:  
Az ember tragédiájához  
Set designs for Madách:  
The Tragedy of Man

ORSZÁGOS SZÍNHÁZTÖRTÉNETI  
MÚZEUM ÉS INTÉZET  
HUNGARIAN THEATRE  
MUSEUM AND INSTITUTE

Cover of the volume published in 1999 by the National Széchényi Library and the National Theatre Museum and Institute, Budapest (book design: Margit Kőfaragó and Gyula Kőfaragó). See further a selection of scenic designs from the publication, following the order of the scenes in Madách's work. For an illustration for the heavenly prologue (Scene 1), see page 40.



### II. The Garden of Eden

László Viski Balás, 1939 (not realised), Chamber Theatre of the National Theatre, Budapest



### III. Before History Started

Mátyás Varga – János Horváth, 1937, National Theatre, Budapest (d: Antal Németh)



#### IV. Egypt

Gusztáv Oláh, 1955, National Theatre, Budapest (d: Tamás Major, Endre Gellért, Endre Marton)



#### V. Athens

Téréz Nagyajtay, 1937, National Theatre, Budapest (d: Antal Németh)





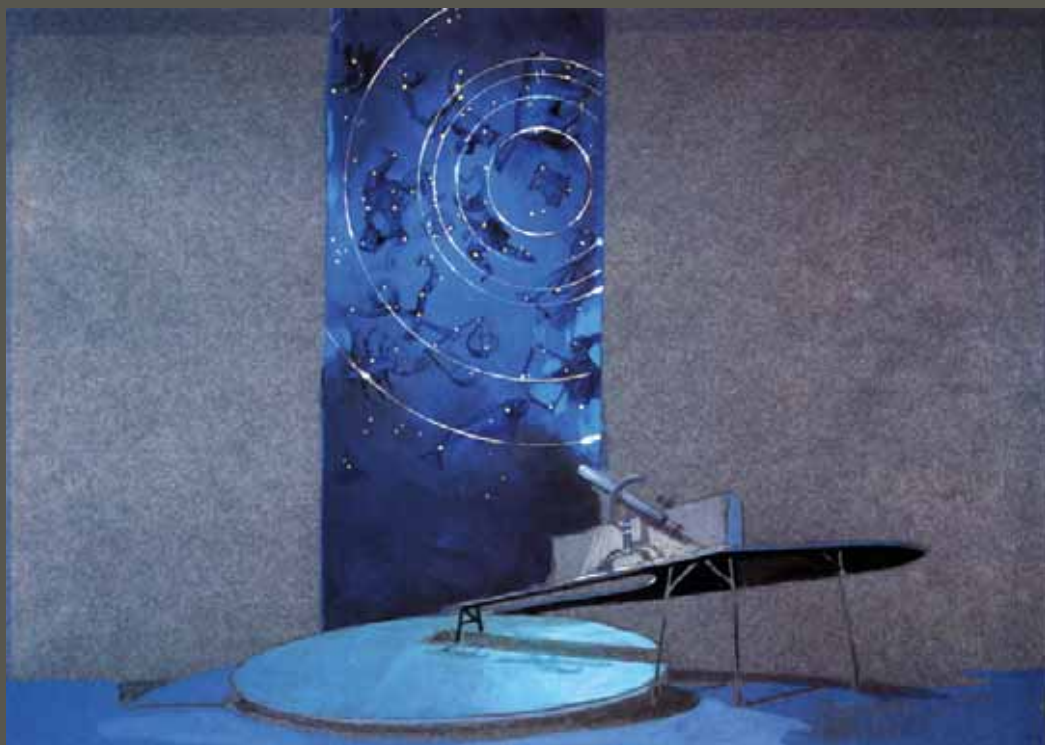
#### VI. Ancient Rome

József Bakó, 1965, Open Air National Theatre, Szeged (d: László Vámos)



#### VII. Constantinople

Nelly Vágó, 1983, National Theatre, Budapest (d: László Vámos)



### VIII. Prague

Róbert Wegenast, 1963, National Theatre, Miskolc (d: Orosz György)



### IX. Paris

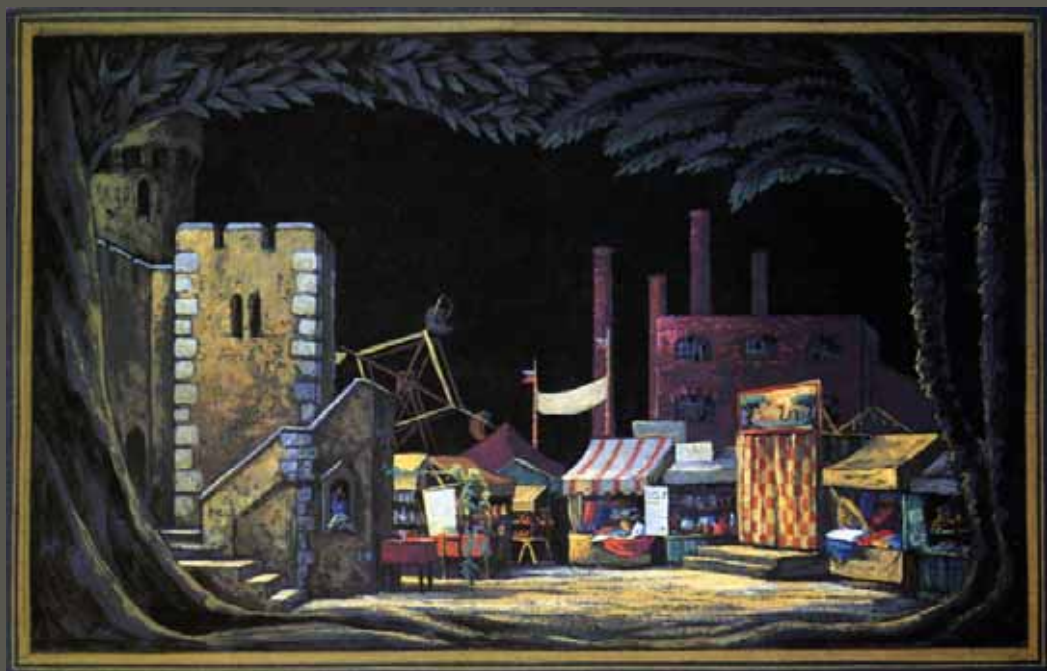
Árpád Csányi, 1983, National Theatre, Budapest (d: László Vámos)





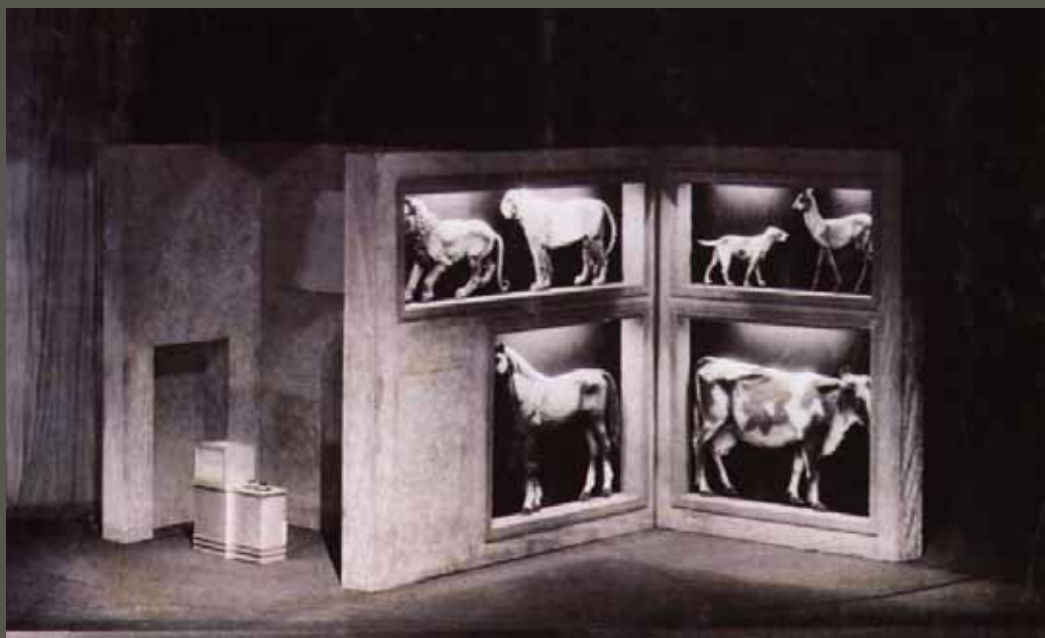
#### **X. Prague 2**

József Bakó, 1964, Petőfi Theatre, Veszprém (d: György Pethes)



#### **XI. London**

Gusztáv Oláh, 1955, National Theatre, National Theatre, Budapest (d: Tamás Major, Endre Gellért, Endre Marton)



### **XII. Phalanstery.**

Mátyás Varga – János Horváth, 1937, National Theatre, Budapest (d: Antal Németh)



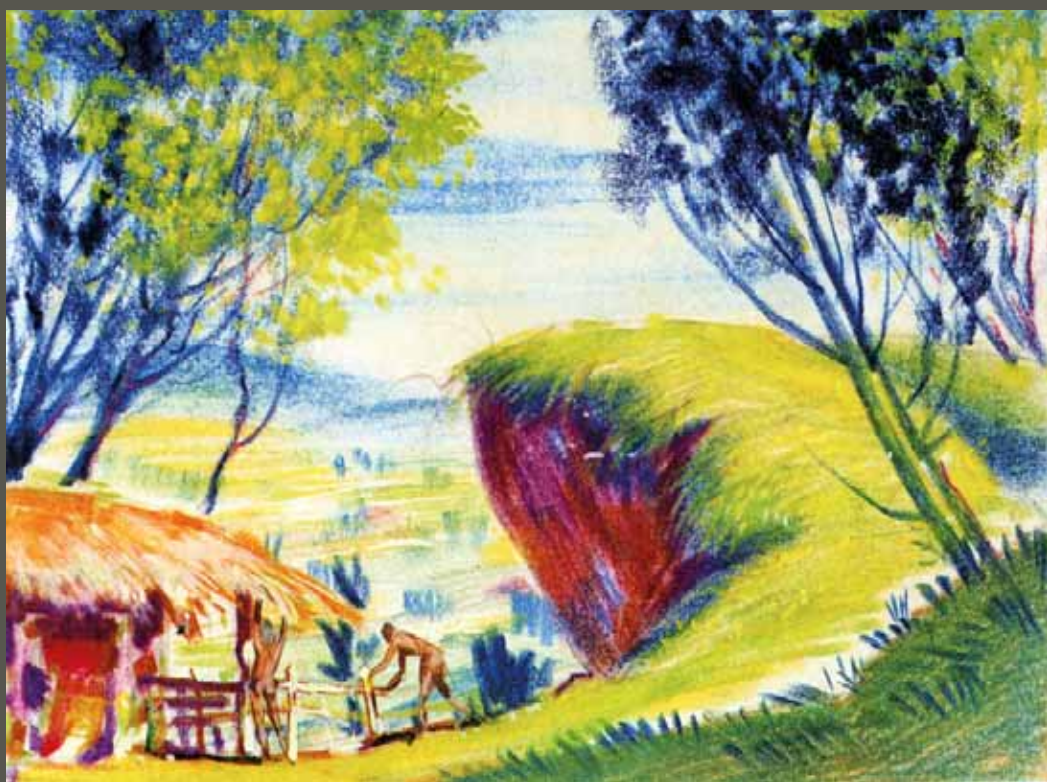
### **XIII. Outer Space**

A copy of a set design of Jenő Kéméndy by Zoltán Füllöp, 1905, National Theatre, Budapest (d: Sándor Somló)





**XIV. The World of Ice**  
András Baráth, 1961, Kisfaludy Theatre, Győr (d: György Nagy)



**XV. Before History Started**  
Álmos Jäschik, 1932 (not realised)

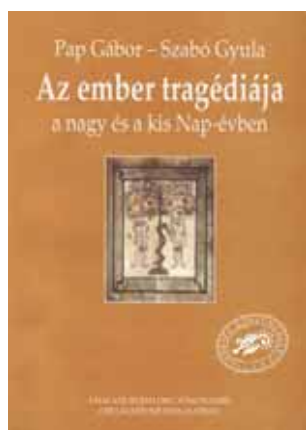


ÁGNES PÁLFI

## The Pregnancy of Feminine Vigilance in *The Tragedy of Man*

A Reading of the Eskimo Scene<sup>1</sup>

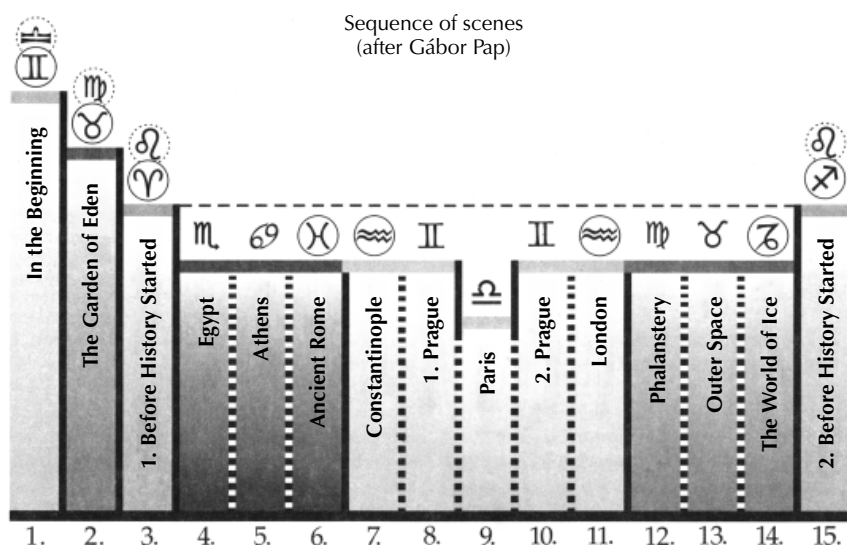
According to the “astro-mythological” interpretation by Gábor Pap, *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*) by Madách reaches its nadir in the axial Paris scene (Scene 9), the apocalyptic judgement situation of the Libra decan of Aquarius, which, however, does not appear on the everyday level but as a vision, as a dream within a dream. He describes the successive order of the scenes in *The Tragedy* so: “The first scene is the heavenly one, the level of the



Father. The next one is Eden or Paradise, the level of the created world which is still sinless. The third is the scene outside Paradise, the level of the fallen world. It is at the end of this one that the couple falls asleep and the dream or historical scenes begin. Among the latter ones, the middle three scenes have relative autonomy and the Paris one drops to a lower level again, because it is a dream within the dream: dreamt by Adam as Kepler in Prague. In the last one, Scene 15, we return to the level of Scene 3, outside Paradise, but we will not rise higher than that.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is an extract from the following extensive study: Ágnes Pálfi 'A női éberség másállapota'. ('The Pregnancy of Female Awareness. On the Figure of Éva in *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*) Apropos of Miklós Hubay's Book on Madách'), *Szcenárium*, September 2013, pp. 29–41

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Pap, Gábor – Szabó, Gyula: *Az ember tragédiája a nagy és a kis Nap-évben*. (*The Tragedy of Man in the Large and Small Solar Cycles*) Örökség Könyvműhely, Érd, 1999, pp. 97–98



Yet, if we ask which the two correspondable scenes that bring us face to face with the end as concrete corporeal reality are, the answer is clear: they are the London scene (Scene 11), which is the last act in history, and the Eskimo scene (Scene 14, the World of Ice), which is the end game of life on earth. Still, this naturalistically concrete end game does not lead to destruction with Madách.

It is worth quoting the author's instruction word for word because it reveals that he was not thinking of an ordinary change of sets to follow the Eskimo scene, but pictured a real metamorphosis to himself<sup>3</sup>: (*"The scene changes back to the set of Scene III. A landscape with palm trees. Adam, as a young man again, is seen leaving the hut, heavy with sleep. He looks around him in amazement. Eve is still asleep inside. Lucifer is standing in the middle of the stage. Bright sunshine."*) (SCENE XV) Therefore, the area of the Eskimo scene, the "Barren, mountainous landscape, covered in snow and ice", changes to a landscape with palm trees in front of the viewer's eyes. And surely it is no coincidence either that the abode of the first couple is called a "hut" here by Madách, just like in the Eskimo scene previously. However, Scene 3 originally had "a rough wooden shack" instead of the "hut". This may give rise to the assumption that it is still the Eskimo woman having fallen asleep during the former scene who is now talking as Eve, to wake up soon and step out into the light with a new look already:

<sup>3</sup> In *The Tragedy*, the only similar instruction by the dramatist comes at the other prominent point of the dream dramaturgy, at the beginning of the Paris scene. The metamorphosis of objects in the preceding Prague scene is quite surreal in this description: (*"The scene suddenly changes to La Place de Grève. The balcony turns into a scaffold, and the desk into a guillotine..."*) (SCENE IX) (The quotes from Madách's work are taken from the English translation and adaptation by Iain Macleod, Imre Madách: *The Tragedy of Man*, Canongate Press, Edinburgh, 1993 in: <http://mek.oszk.hu/00900/00917/html/> with the no. of scenes indicated in brackets.)

“Adam, why did you steal away from me?  
 You seemed remote. Your kisses made me shiver.  
 I read despair or anger in your face....”  
 (SCENE XV)

By no means is it certain then that Eve has woken up from *the very same* dream as being choreographed by Lucifer. Because the utterance she has just made suggests she does not remember a thing of all that she was supposed to be watching together with Adam. She appears to have been untouched by the historical scenes. And, apparently, she does not suspect that Adam is going to make a fatal move: to commit suicide.

Though in the garden of Eden, she was original sin. She was the one to take an apple from the forbidden tree. She was female hubris, rebelling against her “cruel” creator and wishing to know all secrets, obsessed with curiosity. She did not shrink from Lucifer’s offer or fear the wrath of the Lord. She was the “first philosopher”, she was basic trust in the divine plan:

“Why should He punish us? If He appointed a path upon which we were meant to walk, most likely He would have us so created that no enticement could prompt us to leave it. Or would He have us perched above the gulf without a head for height and doomed to fall? But if our trespass were of His designing, like storms which rumble in the sunny season, then who could allocate the rights and wrongs between the days of thunder and of heat?”

(SCENE II)

Having tasted the apple, Adam will submit to this overwhelming female force first, and hear Lucifer’s offer only later and decide to embark on the great adventure now really manfully:

“... to see the future  
 my strife and suffering will bring to pass.”

(SCENE III)

Strife? Suffering? – the female ear seems to be deaf to these words. The prophetic dream, the “charm” that Lucifer puts on them means something utterly different (what a cheeky play on words by Madách!) to Eve: her own charm, her looks.

“I’d love to see these changes working through:  
 if I shall always look – the way I do.”

(SCENE III)

Never does Lucifer, the pedant dramaturge, forget about this vain womanly question throughout the historical scenes. And his response is positive time



Painted coffered ceiling,  
 panel of Adam and Eve,  
 Szilágyi László, Transylvania,  
 1778 (photo: János Fábi)

and time again: womankind has nothing to worry about in this respect. Eve will stay as attractive as ever, passing time will spare her, and no matter she changes roles and costumes, Adam will see her in all “these changes working through”. Although he is far from always feeling the same flame of love for her. He gets disappointed with her several times and, in two cases, he seems to be turning away from her for good. In the Paris scene he is appalled at the wanton “tigress” of the popular uprising who passionately kills a man and wants to be rewarded for her bloody act – only asking, or rather demanding the “great man”, Adam-Danton, to “spend the night” with her. And in the last scene before the awakening Adam recoils from the sex offered, presumably also because of female violence. Or does he not? Could Eskimo Eve’s animal magnetism still have overcome disgust in Adam?

“The animal within you claims the first place” (SCENE XIV) – says Lucifer to Adam beforehand, meaning this very scene to be the last “lesson, /another chance to get to know yourself”. However, Adam, this “*broken, old man*”, is believed to be a real god by the Eskimo man who not only sacrifices the first seal to him but also offers him his woman. True, the custom of “guest rights” itself also dictates so; but, behind the profane surface, the sacred background to this gesture emerges as well. The Eskimo may well hold the view that this sexual act is the ritual of unification with the “old god”, the life-renewing “sacred union” – or as Pilinszky (TN: Hungarian poet, 1921–1981) would say: “the celebration of nadir”. From this point of view, the question may rightly be asked: does not the miraculous transformation of the scene at the beginning of Scene 15 suggest that Adam has eventually been able to consummate as well as consecrate the union – which, as Miklós Hubay says in his book<sup>4</sup>, has been delayed up until now – to Eskimo Eve right at this nadir? And is the Lord not speaking again for the same reason, practicing the so-called “free grace” – without finally destroying humanity?<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Hubay Miklós: “*Aztán mivégre az egész teremtés?*” Jegyzetek az Úr és Madách Imre műveinek margójára. (“*And as for This Creation – What’s the Purpose?*” *Notes on the Margin of the Works of the Lord and Imre Madách*) Napkút Kiadó, Budapest, 2010

<sup>5</sup> According to the interpretation of Gábor Pap, the human couple’s waking is to be located in the spacetime of Sagittarius, where the positive turn is the result of the outflow of beneficial fatherly energies (see op. cit. pp. 133–134). If that is true, then the reviving first parents are to find shape in Gemini opposite Sagittarius. And this may mean that they are to unite in “heavenly union” as the twin deities of myths (or the Lord’s androgynous images) there. However, if the Eskimo scene is taken as a starting point, there is another reading to present itself: following the consummation of the “holy” union in winter solstice Capricorn, the first parents are reborn, in the physical sense, in opposing summer solstice Cancer. As is commonly known, starting a family and sacrifice for the offspring are due in this medium (see the well-known image type of pelicans feeding their nestlings with their own blood, which represents the characteristics of Cancer).





Mihály Zichy: *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*), Illustration, Scene 14 (*The World of Ice*), paper, carbon, 790x503 mm, 1887 (source: mng.hu)

No matter how this sequence of scenes is interpreted, it is indisputable that Madách's text is ambiguous at this point. That is, the author does not give any indication as to what Adam and Eskimo Eve are doing or not doing and how much time they actually spend together in this particular "hut" – is it only a moment, an hour or a full night?  
"MAN

*[entering the hut]*

Wife! Visitors!

Now, see to it, and make them comfortable.

*Eve throws her arms round Adam's neck and tries to drag him into the hut. Adam is struggling to shake her off.*

EVE

Welcome, stranger! Come, make yourself at home!

ADAM

Help! Help! Lucifer! Get me out of here!

Back to the present time. Confound the future!

I've had enough of sights, this pointless struggle with destiny. It's time to think again:

dare I wage war against the will of God!?"

(SCENE XIV)

It can be reasonably assumed that Madách made a conscious decision at this delicate point to leave it to the discretion, to the taste, temperament and mindset of prospective stage directors to abandon or present the very act. Just as the question is also well-founded as to what is conveyed – beyond the back reference to the Eskimo scene – by the fact that instead of mentioning the negative experience of historical scenes, Eve, awakening from her sleep, asks for the cause of Adam's estrangement. Is it because she is only interested

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To this see Susánna's monologue in the drama by Weöres Sándor (1913–1989) titled *Kétféjű fenevad* (*The Double-Headed Beast*): "With Ambrus we have lived in the snow, in the tussocks, in the coffin of a ravaged cemetery and rarely in some remaining hut. If I was already dying of hunger, Ambrus gave me a pot of his blood. Or when he couldn't go on, I gave him blood to drink. (...) And you know, if you find yourself in mortal misery, what else could you do than make children." Cf. Weöres Sándor *Színhátek* (*Stage Plays*). Magvető, Budapest, 1983, p. 466



Panel of painted coffered ceiling. Noszvaj, Hungary



The World of Ice in *The Tragedy*, National Theatre, Budapest, 2002 (d: János Szikora, photo by Tamás Katkó of József Szarvas (Ádám) and Lajos Kovács (Eskimo)), source: mandadb.hu)

in herself, in the soap opera of her indestructible charm? Or is she motivated by a deeper insight?

In my reading, Eve was not having the same dream as Adam. This I think is already made obvious by Madách through the fact that Eve is never present as a third party in the company of Adam and Lucifer when, having left a previous scene, they are heading towards the subsequent station.<sup>6</sup> Eve is elsewhere, or to take a different approach, she is just as invisibly present in the

moment of scene changes as the Lord. While walking through the stages of the story of mankind, Eve cherishes one image in herself: the changing forms and facial features of Adam.

In *The Tragedy*, Eve's dream is the secret story of the conception of the new Adam. And it is the secret story of maturing into motherhood, of which there is hardly any information even in the most prominent works of literature. That is what makes the narrative about Psyche so precious in Apuleus' novel<sup>7</sup>: it is the "earthly Venus" story of feminine initiation, which has the mystical union with Eros as its turning point, and which is followed by the just punishment for her curiosity, Psyche's exile. These stages from conception to childbirth ripen her into a mother until she finally acquires Zeus' grace and her deserved rank in the heavenly and earthly hierarchy.

There is a passage in Plato's *Symposium* where Socrates argues that pregnancy *precedes* conception. Here the philosopher is not arguing in his own name any longer; Diotima, the priestess, is quoted as a credible source, and she is made to say the final word to settle the men's dispute on the nature of Eros:

"...when approaching beauty, the conceiving power is propitious, and diffusive, and benign, and begets and bears fruit: at the sight of ugliness she frowns and contracts and has a sense of pain, and turns away, and shrivels up, and not without a pang refrains from conception. And this is the reason why,

<sup>6</sup> Scene 5, Athens, may be considered as some exception with Eve having the last word, proving that even political canvassing may be authentic of a woman in Madách's view.

<sup>7</sup> Apuleius *Az Aranyszamár (The Golden Ass)*. Európa, Budapest, 1993



when the hour of conception arrives, and the teeming nature is full, there is such a flutter and ecstasy about beauty whose approach is the alleviation of the pain of travail. For love, Socrates, is not, as you imagine, the love of the beautiful only.” “What then?” “The love of generation and of birth in beauty.”<sup>8</sup>

I wonder how this fertility, conception following pregnancy, is to be interpreted in the case of Madách’s Eve. – I imagine that in her dream, Eve is rather active: she is contemplating the man’s passion story, his pupal states throughout history, and carries it all as spiritual existential experience through the filter of the psyche into living biological matter. To use a trendy technical term, she is “encoding” into the unborn one what its job is going to be. It is possible to mass produce cannon fodder, standardised people in a different way, whether in a test tube or by cloning. But the genetic programme of this artificially produced creature will be lacking in the spiritual surplus of Eve’s dream.

This pregnancy of feminine vigilance – in which spirit, mind and body are active as one – is painfully absent from Goethe’s Helena as well. She and Faust are twin-like creatures reflected in each other’s dream: the sculptures of perfect beauty. The child of their “aesthetic” union, Euphorion, is an ecstatic artist; his disembodied spirit rises to the sky, having no more earthly mission.

In *The Tragedy*, however, Eve’s dream is constant feminine vigilance itself. A ready-to-conceive, fertile pregnancy. I imagine her as the female figure on the famous Scythian belt buckle, a prehistoric woman sprouting a tendril from her hair, sitting with her back straight at the foot of the world tree.

She is keeping a vigil, hiding the feverish man’s head into her lap and looking inside it with her *spiritual* eyes; she is not gazing at Lucifer’s comedy. She is seeing another Egypt, another Byzantium, Athens, Rome, Paris and London – and, listening to the heartbeat of the fruit of her womb, another Budapest.

English translation by  
Mrs. Durkó, Nóra Varga

Published in Hungarian:  
Szcenárium, September 2013



Canova: *Cupid and Psyche*,  
1777, marble, Musée du Louvre  
(source: archaeology.wiki)

<sup>8</sup> *Symposium* by Plato, translated by Benjamin Jowett, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/symposium.html>



## CHANGING TIMES



ESZTER KATONA

### Federico García Lorca's Reception in Hungary and the Success of *The House of Bernarda Alba*<sup>1</sup>

García Lorca in Hungarian



Federico García Lorca  
(1898–1936)

Federico García Lorca presumably came across the word *Hungría* (i.e. Hungary) for the first time in 1929 aboard the ocean liner *Olympic* en route to New York. That is where he met a five-year old boy – says his biographer Ian Gibson – on his way to the America, hoping to find his father who had emigrated there before his birth.<sup>2</sup> We know from García Lorca's correspondence that he also wrote a poem about this personal experience: "He is the subject of my first [American] poem: this boy I never saw again, this rose from Hungary."<sup>3</sup> Though the poem (if any) referred to has not yet been found in Lorca's estate, the memory of this encounter with the "beautiful Hungarian kid"<sup>4</sup> is also cherished by *Little Viennese Waltz*, one of

<sup>1</sup> The paper was written as part of the research project *The Reception of Spanish Plays in Hungary from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present Day*, funded by a János Bolyai Research Scholarship.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Gibson: *Vida, pasión y muerte de Federico García Lorca*. Barcelona, De Bolsillo, 2010, p. 369.

<sup>3</sup> Federico García Lorca: *Epistolario completo*. Ed.: Andrew A. Anderson, Christopher Maurer, Madrid, Cátedra, 1997, p. 614.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369.

the best known poems<sup>5</sup> in the posthumous volume *Poet in New York*: “Because I love you, I love you, my love, / in the attic where the children play, / dreaming ancient lights of Hungary [...]”<sup>6</sup>

News of García Lorca reached our country with the coverage of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939): we first learned of the poet’s tragic death (19<sup>th</sup> August 1936). “Lorca was lifted into our field of vision by death like a black sensation”<sup>7</sup> – states László Nagy in his essay *No forgiveness*. Hungary’s post-1945 cultural policy tried its best to mould the image of García Lorca, executed during the Spanish Civil War, into that of “the people’s poet” martyred by the fascist dictatorship. By contrast, it was not martyrdom that made the Andalusian artist great, but “his oeuvre as an objective aesthetic fact”.<sup>8</sup>

Though we had to wait relatively long for the publication of the first stand-alone Lorca volume, Hungary’s literature-loving public heard of the author earlier thanks to poet Miklós Radnóti, who closely followed the plight of the Spanish people and the developments of the Civil War from 1936 onwards, and voiced his concerns in several poems. Lorca’s name, in fact, was introduced into Hungarian literature by Radnóti: “Because Spain loved you / lovers recited your poems, – / and when they finally came, what else could they do, / they killed you, for after all you were a poet, / and now the people must fight on without you, / Federico García Lorca!”<sup>9</sup> – he wrote in the epigram *Federico García Lorca* in 1936. A year later, he paid homage to his Spanish role model in a dialogue between the shepherd and the poet in *The first eclogue*.

The first Lorca translations were completed in the early 1940s, a few years after the tragic news of his death. The first Lorca work translated into Hungarian and published was *Little Ballad of Three Rivers*, rendered by István Vas, published in *Szerelmes versek. Világirodalmi antológia két ezredév költészetéből* (Love Poems. An Anthology of World Poetry in the Last Two Millennia) in 1941. Three years after that, the poem *Ode to the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar* came out in the anthology *Lyra Hispanica*, rendered into Hungarian by Endre Gáspár.

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<sup>5</sup> The poem is mostly known through Leonard Cohen’s musical adaptation (*Take This Waltz*), which became a worldwide hit. Its well-known adapted Hungarian version is sung by Zorán (*Volt egy tánc, There was a Dance*).

<sup>6</sup> Federico García Lorca: *Little Viennese Waltz*. In: *Federico García Lorca összes művei* (The Complete Works of Federico García Lorca) Volume I, Budapest, Helikon, 1967, p. 437. Translated by Sándor Weöres.

<sup>7</sup> László Nagy: *Adok nektek aranyvesszőt* (I’ll Give You Goldenrod) Budapest, Holnap, 2011, p. 110.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Miklós Radnóti: *Összes versei és versfordításai* (Complete Poems and Poetry Translation) Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1994, p. 160.

García Lorca's first fully translated cycle of poems was the volume *Gypsy Ballads*<sup>10</sup> which, interestingly, came out in two versions in the same year, 1947. One was translated by Ervin Gyertyán and published by Cserépfalvi Publishing Company, and the other was translated by László András and published by Lux Publishing House. Despite the duplication, neither received much attention from Hungarian readers. The big splash came only in 1963 when it was retranslated by László Nagy – this time earning well-deserved rave reviews – and incorporated in the volume *Federico García Lorca válogatott művei* (Selected Works by Federico García Lorca). Albeit, the two-volume *Federico García Lorca összes művei* (The Complete Works of Federico García Lorca, Helikon Publishing House, 1967), in contrast with its title, did not actually include all his works<sup>11</sup>, it did present Lorca as a poet-playwright-prose author to the Hungarian public. It was a major translation project at the time, employing a team of twenty-three renowned Hungarian literary translators. From 1947 to date, García Lorca's writings<sup>12</sup> have been published in Hungarian in over twenty volumes, with valuable prologues and epilogues (by László András, János Benyhe, Gábor Tolnai, among others), but undoubtedly, the playwright García Lorca captured the hearts and minds of Hungarian spectators on stage, rather than on the page.

### The popularity of García Lorca's plays in Hungary

García Lorca's last play, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, finished a few weeks before his death, premiered on the Hungarian stage in 1955. It was presented at the József Katona Theatre, under extremely interesting circumstances. Namely, the troupe had been preparing to perform László Németh's play *Galilei*, but the censors withdrew their approval at the last minute. Director Endre Marton was forced to make a quick decision and he chose to present García Lorca's play instead, with the ironic result that a play banned in Spain

<sup>10</sup> The translators of the first two publications spelt the title as two words. Then László Nagy coined the single-word spelling *Cigányrománok*.

<sup>11</sup> Some manuscripts turned up only years or decades later. But every work missing from the 1967 Complete Works was subsequently translated and added: *The Public and Play Without a Title* were published in 1981 (Helikon), followed by the collection *Sonnets of Dark Love* (Európa) in 1988, both translated by László András.

<sup>12</sup> Only two monographs provide a comprehensive interpretation of García Lorca's oeuvre. Gábor Tolnai published *Federico García Lorca* (Budapest, Academy Publishing House) in 1968, and Eszter Katona published "*Rejtőző medrű bánat...*". *Federico García Lorca világa* ("Pain of hidden river-beds...". The World of Federico García Lorca, Szeged, Szeged University Press – Gyula Juhász Higher Education Press) in 2016, on the eightieth anniversary of the poet's death.

for decades<sup>13</sup> got the green light to stand in for a Hungarian author's freshly banned play.

The first *Bernarda* production in Hungary was highly successful, critics wrote acknowledging reviews of the director's work, of the actresses' performances (mainly of Anna Tóké playing Bernarda and of Ági Mészáros playing Adela), of the author and of the play, which paved the way for García Lorca's popularity in our country. As translation of Lorca progressed and his works were published, our theatres added his great and lesser-known plays to their repertoires one after the other. The premiere of *The House of Bernarda Alba* in 1955 was followed by *Blood Wedding* in 1957 (directed by Endre Marton at the National Theatre), *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife* in 1959, *The Love of Don Perlimplín and Belisa in the Garden, an erotic lace-paper valentine* in 1960 (directed by Károly Vass at the Géza Gárdonyi Theatre, Eger), and welcomed by enthusiastic audiences. The disappointment that *Mariana Pineda* (directed by Ilona Vadász at the József Katona Theatre) caused in 1962 was reversed by the third great Lorca play, *Yerma* (directed by Vilmos Dobai, performed by the Universitas Company). The latter would become a smash hit with Irén Psota playing the protagonist (directed by László Vámos at the Madách Theatre) in 1965. Dwarfed by the great plays, *Doña Rosita or the Language of Flowers*, which mocks the



Above: Ági Mészáros in Federico García Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, National Theatre, 1955, d: Endre Marton (source: [criticailapok.hu](http://criticailapok.hu))



Manyi Kiss (Old Pagan Woman) on the left with title character Irén Psota in F. G. Lorca: *Yerma*, Madách Theatre, Budapest, 1965, d: László Vámos (photo: Éva Keleti, source: [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com))

<sup>13</sup> *The House of Bernarda Alba* premiered in Buenos Aires in 1945, with Catalan actress Margarita Xirgu in the title role. The first production in Spain opened in 1950, fourteen years after its creation and García Lorca's death.



*Öt év múlva – nyilvános kísérlet*  
(*When Five Years Pass – A Public Experiment*)  
a Federico García Lorca adaptation,  
Spidron Workshop Theatre – Merlin, 2009,  
d: Ádám Tompa (source: underground.hu)

petite bourgeoisie of Granada, fared in 1964 like *Mariana Pineda*: it was not an unambiguous success. Lorca's lesser plays mainly drew attention from students of acting, e.g. the tragi-comedy *The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal*<sup>14</sup> was repeatedly performed at the Ódry Theatre for exam purposes, as was the aforementioned *Don Perlimplín*<sup>15</sup>. *Don Cristóbal* mostly enhanced amateur troupes' repertoires, and did so for the first time in 1966<sup>16</sup>. The plays García Lorca himself qualified as unrepresentable (teatro irrepresentable) or theatre beneath

the sand (teatro bajo la arena) boast few performances and represent genuine curiosities in theatre repertoires. Such plays include *When Five Years Pass*, *Play Without a Title* and *The Public*. The first one was staged twice in our country<sup>17</sup>, and the latter two were performed in the original language by a visiting troupe from Madrid (Teatro de la Abadía)<sup>18</sup>. The list is completed by García Lorca's first stage-play, insect-drama *The Butterfly's Evil Spell*, which created a scandal in 1920 and was introduced to the Hungarian public for the first time in 1999.<sup>19</sup> Our public is fortunate in that all García Lorca plays have been performed on our stages, and only two of them, i.e. *Play Without a Title* and *The Public* have not been seen to date in the Hungarian version.

A monograph in the Spanish language traced the history of the reception of García Lorca's plays in Hungary and summed up the relevant figures (i.e. the number of productions, along with their dates and directors) in tables, but went beyond dry statistics to include detailed analyses of landmark Lorca performances. The author scrutinises fifteen *The House of Bernarda Alba* productions (Endre Marton [1955], György Patkós and Endre Selkánszky [1956], Ferenc Szécsi

<sup>14</sup> Directors: Judit Selymes (1962), Eszter Novák (1993).

<sup>15</sup> Directors: Dezső Kapás (1962), István Illés (1972), László Gali (1976), Tamás Puskás (1985), Zoltán Bodnár (1999).

<sup>16</sup> Director: Sándor Bodnár, Vasas Art Ensemble.

<sup>17</sup> It was presented in 2008 by Spidronműhely and in 2017 by Call17 Company. A new production is scheduled at the József Katona Theatre for May 2019, directed by Gábor Zsámbéki, retranslated by András Imreh.

<sup>18</sup> *Comedia sin título*, 2006, Budapest Spring Festival, director: Luis Miguel Cintra; *El público*, 2016, MITEM, director: Álex Rigola.

<sup>19</sup> Director: Róbert Csontos, Pincszínház (Basement Theatre).

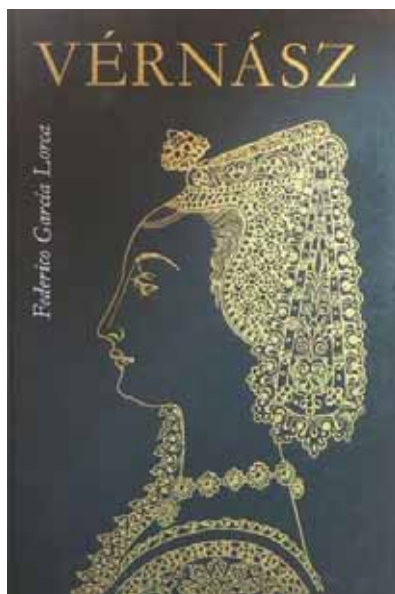


[1963], Alfred Radok [1968], Judit Nyilassy [1968], Zoltán Várkonyi [1976], Jenő Horváth [1976], László Gali [1978], Kati Lázár [1985], Árpád Schilling [2000], Judit Galgóczy [2005], Imre Csiszár [2006], Radoslav Milenkovic [2008], Csongor Csurulya [2009], László Béres [2015]), seven *Blood Wedding* productions (Endre Marton [1957], Béla Udvaros [1981], Eszter Novák [1996], Zoltán Lendvai [2000], Péter Forgács [2001], Gábor Rusznyák [2008], Ádám Horgas [2013]), and also seven *Yerma* productions (Vilmos Dobai [1962], László Vámos (1965), István Illés [1974], Péter Valló [1975], Imre Csiszár [1994], Csongor Csurulya [2008], Roland Rába [2015]). Some of the lesser-known plays are also analysed, including four productions of *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife* (Ilona Vadász [1959], Károly Vass [1960], Margit Hortobágyi [1973], Katalin Berek [1980, 1986], and three productions of *Don Perlimplín* (Károly Vass [1960], Zoltán Bodnár [1999], László Keszég [2013]). The book also provides references to noteworthy performances of the minor plays.

### The plays translated and retranslated

All in all, García Lorca's plays were published in Hungarian in eleven stand-alone volumes. The two most complete volumes are Volume II of *The Complete Works* from 1967 and *Stage-plays* from 1988, though the latter is merely an unaltered republication of the former. The translators are János Benyhe (*The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife*), Gyula Illyés (*Blood Wedding*), László Németh (*Yerma*), István Tóthfalusi (*The Butterfly's Evil Spell*) and László András, to whom we owe the translations of *The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal*, *Mariana Pineda*, *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife* (the parts in verse), *The Love of Don Perlimplín* and *Belisa in the garden*, *Don Cristóbal*, *When Five Years Pass*, *The Public* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

Text written for the theatre, however, is intended not so much for publication as for performance, since the ultimate goal of a play is to be staged. Translating plays is a distinct genre of literary translation. Though plays come in both verse and prose, translating them is not the same as translating either poetry or prose. Greek plays address the audience in verse, and verse was the preferred format of English,



*Blood Wedding* translated into Hungarian by Gyula Illyés, Magyar Helikon, 1972 (source: antikvarium.hu)

Spanish, French and German playwrights, such as Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Corneille, Racine, Goethe and Schiller. Many of the authors who renewed 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre – including Bertolt Brecht or García Lorca himself – often used lyrical insets in their plays. Rendering verse drama in another language might in theory fall in the same category as translating poetry, except that a beautifully translated poem is an amazing feat in its own right even if it can't be performed, whereas a play in verse is to be recited on stage: it has to have a good flow and it must be capable of expressing the dramatic concept. Theatre audiences can't flip back a page to ponder the meaning of a difficult line, as the show must go on. It, therefore, makes a big difference whether the play is intended for readers only or for a theatre audience.

A play written in prose is also special, it is not merely prose. Dramatic dialogues are a lot more brisk-paced than dialogues in a novel, and a playwright can only use dialogue or soliloquy to characterise the players, whereas a novel writer also has other tools for the purpose. At first sight, a play may seem easier to translate, but that appearance can be deceptive.

Plays are often retranslated upon the director's request, and the criticism of literary translation offers a lot of literature on retranslation as well. Retranslated classical plays often pit reviewers against each-other and lead to heated debates, with one side claiming that the canonised text is sacrosanct and can't be butchered, and the other side calling for an up-to-date retranslation. The retranslation of Shakespeare's plays (into Hungarian) is known to spark controversy, and while the sacrosanct camp and the up-to-date camp find it hard to see eye to eye, one may reach the (part-)conclusion that though the classics continue to play a prominent role in reading and in education, canonised versions are superseded by the versions that come across as contemporary and "speak the language of the stage". That is because the most ancient force driving the theatre is the *here and now*. While new translations don't always achieve unambiguous success, it is generally true that more recent versions improve the director's focus, the spectator's understanding and the actors' diction.<sup>20</sup> Classics don't need to be retranslated just so the new translator should compete with the earlier great ones, but because new translations are required by practical, artistic and cultural reasons.

Though García Lorca is already a modern classic by now, he is not as far away in time as Shakespeare or Goethe, so his retranslators do not need to bridge several centuries of language development and shifting cultural references. In Lorca's case, we can't even talk about canonised translations like in the case of the classics rendered by János Arany, so retranslating Lorca is not a complex

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<sup>20</sup> Eszter Szablyár: "Újramagyartott drámaklasszikusok" ("Drama Classics Retranslated into Hungarian". In: HVG, 27<sup>th</sup> March. [http://hvg.hu/kultura/201112\\_ujramagyartott\\_dramaklasszikusok\\_forditott](http://hvg.hu/kultura/201112_ujramagyartott_dramaklasszikusok_forditott) 30/1/2019

problem. His plays are about human relationships and timeless issues, and they can have an impact *here and now*. That said, today's productions must still address the fact that Yerma's sterility or the eight-year mourning imposed on the Alba girls had a different meaning in the 1930s than they have now. A member of today's theatre audience may think of questions like why doesn't a sterile young woman get in vitro fertilisation<sup>21</sup> or why doesn't rebellious Adela simply elope with Pepe de Romano?

## The House of Bernarda Alba

It is unsurprising that our directors staged *The House of Bernarda Alba* most frequently<sup>22</sup>, since this is García Lorca's best known and most often performed play worldwide. The table below enumerates its prose theatre productions in Hungary between 1955 and 2019.

Year	Theatre	Director
1955	Budapest, József Katona Theatre	Endre Marton
1956	Cluj-Napoca, National Theatre	György Patkós, Endre Senkálcsky
1956	Békéscsaba, Jókai Theatre	Tamás Vági
1959	Győr, Kisfaludy Theatre	Joó László
1960	Kecskemét, József Katona Theatre	Udvaros Béla
1960	Debrecen, Csokonai Theatre	György Pethes
1960	Pécs, National Theatre	Antal Németh
1963	Budapest, Déryné State Theatre, satellite production in Réde	Ferenc Szécsi
1965	Komárom, Jókai Theatre	Albert Szilágyi
1966	Komárom, Jókai Theatre	József Konrád
1968	Budapest, guest performance by the National Theatre of Prague in the National Theatre of Budapest (in the Czech language)	Alfred Radok
1968	Miskolc, National Theatre	Judit Nyilassy
1976	Budapest, Comedy Theatre	Zoltán Várkonyi
1976	Szolnok, Szigligeti Theatre	Jenő Horváth
1977	Subotica, People's Theatre	Marjan Bevk
1978	Pécs, National Theatre	László Gali
1979	Győr, Kisfaludy Theatre	Menczer János
1985	Kaposvár, Gergely Csíky Theatre	Kati Lázár
1990	Budapest, Madách Chamber Theatre	Tamás Puskás

<sup>21</sup> Tamás Koltai: "Meddő kérdés" ("Sterile Question". In: *Élet és Irodalom*, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

<sup>22</sup> For details regarding the Hungarian reception of *The House of Bernarda Alba*, see: Eszter Katona's *Así que pasen 60 años...*, pp. 53–106.

1990	Cluj-Napoca, Hungarian National Theatre	Miklós Tompa
1996	Szeged, National Theatre	Erzsébet Gaál
1996	Veszprém, Petőfi Theatre	Vándorfi László
2000	Budapest, József Katona Theatre	Árpád Schilling
2000	Győr, Kisfaludy Theatre	Erika Szántó
2001	Budapest, performance by the students of Mária Górnagy's Acting School	Zoltán Tóth
2004	Oradea, National Theatre, performance by students of acting in final year	Dorel Visan
2005	Debrecen, Csokonai Theatre, Árpád Horváth Studio Theatre	Judit Galgóczy
2006	Komárom, Jókai Days, Selye University Stage	József Kis Péntek
2006	Targu Mures, Theatre University, Kisvárdai Castle Theatre	Elemér Kincses
2007	Budapest, Ericsson Studio	Imre Csiszár
2008	Novy Sad Theatre	Radoslav Milenković
2009	Veszprém, Pannon Castle Theatre	László Vándorfi
2009	Odorheiu Secuiesc, Sándor Tomcsa Theatre	Csongor Csurulya
2010	Budapest, Aranytíz Cultural Centre	Géza Czipott
2010	Budapest, Eötvös 10 Cultural Stage, performance by Mária Górnagy's Acting School students	Eszter Herold
2012	Komárom, Monostor Fortress	Sándor Silló
2015	Békéscsaba, Jókai Theatre	László Béres
2017	Satu Mare, North Theatre, György Harag Troupe	Sorin Militaru
2018	Budapest, Spirit Theatre	Gábor Czeizel
2018	Szeged, Basement Theatre (Genéziusz Theatre Troupe)	István Horváth
2019	Budapest, MITEM (visiting troupe from Portugal, performance in Portuguese)	João Garcia Miguel

As I mentioned earlier, García Lorca's plays have been retranslated several times. To the best of my knowledge, *The House of Bernarda Alba* has been translated into Hungarian three times: by László András, by László Nagy, and by György Somlyó. The latter two translations both date from 1976, the year in which two of our theatres paid homage to the Andalusian poet on the fortieth anniversary of his death by staging *Bernarda*. György Somlyó, whose version was subsequently published<sup>23</sup> as well, translated



Mária Sulyok (Bernarda) and Zsuzsa Bánki (Angustias), Vígszínház (Comedy Theatre), Budapest, 1976, d: Zoltán Várkonyi (source: szinhaz.net)

<sup>23</sup> The translation was published in György Somlyó's collection of translated plays *Miért hal meg az ember* (Why Does Man Die, Budapest, Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1984).

the play for Vígszínház (Comedy Theatre) at the request of Zoltán Várkonyi, while László Nagy's version<sup>24</sup> was commissioned by director Jenő Horváth<sup>25</sup> for the Szigligeti Company of Szolnok.

The above list does not include the productions inspired by Lorca's *Bernarda*. In fact, the play was a source of inspiration for many of our performing artists and contributed to various musical, dance and even puppet adaptations, the most important of which are listed below.

2000	Budapest, Honvéd Dance Ensemble (folk dance adaptation, title: <i>Bells</i> )	Choreographer: Jolán Foltin
2000	Budapest, MU Theatre (flamenco adaptation, title: <i>Bernarda</i> )	Choreographer: Veronika Vámos
2003	Debrecen, KonzervArtaudrium (amateur performance, title: <i>My Daughters Sleep Well at Night</i> )	Director: Klára Deczki
2008	Budapest, National Dance Ensemble (contemporary ballet adaptation)	Choreographer: Dóra Barta
2008	Budapest, MU Theatre (theatre of movement adaptation, title: <i>House of Knives</i> )	Choreographer: Bea Gold
2010	Budapest: Holdvilág Chamber Theatre (poetic vision, exam performance)	Director: Judit Koltai
2010	Győr Vaskakas Puppet Theatre (puppet adaptation)	Director: Gábor Tengely
2011	Budapest, MŰPA Palace of Arts (John LaChiusa's musical <i>Bernarda Alba</i> )	Director: György Böhm
2012	Targu Mures, Theatre University (John LaChiusa's musical <i>Bernarda Alba</i> )	Director: Éva Patkó
2013	Budapest, Főnix Theatre (musical tragedy, title: <i>Bernarda Late Night Show</i> )	Director: György Baku
2015	Győr Dance Festival, Forte Company (contemporary ballet adaptation)	Choreographer: Kristóf Widder
2017	Budapest, MŰPA Palace of Arts (John LaChiusa's musical <i>Bernarda Alba</i> )	Director: György Böhm
2018	Szeged, Kisszínház (chamber theatre of the National Theatre), Szeged Contemporary Ballet performance, ballet adaptation	Choreographer: Tamás Juronics

<sup>24</sup> The manuscript lay hidden for four decades and only turned up in the summer of 2016. More precisely, it was not László Nagy's original manuscript, but the typed theatre script. The Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute Library also has a copy of it under Q 23.118.

<sup>25</sup> László Nagy's *Bernarda* translation is analysed in greater detail in Eszter Katona's: "A *Bernarda Alba*-háza és Nagy László fordítása" (The House of *Bernarda Alba* and László Nagy's Translation). In: *Magyar Napló*, XXX. December 2018, pp. 46–52. See also: Zoltán Jánosi's "Nagy László föltámadt drámafordítása. Előhang Katona Eszter tanulmányához" (László Nagy's Resurrected Translation, Prologue to Eszter Katona's Paper. In: *Magyar Napló*, XXX. December 2018, pp. 44–45.

García Lorca's last play offers the director 16 female roles. The instructions to Act I include the following sentence: "*All two hundred women are already in [the house]*"<sup>26</sup>. Obviously, this can't be implemented on a confined stage, but without a doubt, García Lorca created a play that is genuinely about women<sup>27</sup>, a fact highlighted by the subtitle as well: *A Tragedy of the Women in the Villages of Spain*.

García Lorca composed the play for actresses only, and though his earlier plays also showcase female characters, this is his ultimate play for an all-female cast: no male character is physically present onstage.<sup>28</sup> Still, the constant presence of the male is felt, as the author uses the dramaturgy of absence to amplify the mysterious object of desire. Pepe el Romano is the Man with a capital M. More precisely, he represents the *male gender*, i.e. ultimate masculinity, which becomes the sole object of desire for the women forced to mourn for eight years. All the play's conflicts erupt because of, and converge toward, him.

At the beginning of the play, the author identifies 16 female characters aged between 20 and 80. Obviously, these are not 16 prominent roles, but there are at



Kati Lázár (Martirio) and Teri Horváth (Bernarda), Szolnok, 1976, d: Jenő Horváth (photo: Zsolt Nagy, source: szinhaz.net)

least eight important female figures on stage, representing a variety of ages. There is Bernarda (60), who becomes head of the family upon her husband's death, her daughters Angustias (39), Magdalena (30), Amelia (27), Martirio (24) and Adela (20). Important supporting roles include that of the crazy grandmother María Josefa (80) and the family's maid servant Poncia (60), aged the same as Bernarda.

The setting (*Spanish villages*) referred to in the subtitle is always a cardinal issue in Hungarian productions: to what extent can directors give the impression that the story takes place in a Spanish village, and to what extent do they intend to? For example, several

<sup>26</sup> Federico García Lorca: *The House of Bernarda Alba*. In: *Federico García Lorca összes művei* (The Complete Works of Federico García Lorca, Vol. II, p. 650).

<sup>27</sup> This play is often picked by directors for "practical reasons", i.e. to employ so many actresses at the same time.

<sup>28</sup> To be clear, Pepe el Romano is only missing for the spectator, since two of the girls, Angustias and Adela see him offstage, as one may deduce from subsequent dialogue.



reviews of the Szolnok production of 1976 point out that this family tragedy might just as well take place in a Hungarian village: the set, the costumes and László Nagy's translation<sup>29</sup> all amplified this feeling. By contrast, a number of productions sought to preserve the Hispanic roots and tried to reproduce the red-hot atmosphere of the South of Spain along with the rhythm of flamenco<sup>30</sup> on the Hungarian stage.

In addition to the subtitle, there is also an important instruction at the beginning of the play: "the poet remarks that these three acts are meant to be a true picture"<sup>31</sup> (*documental fotográfico* in the Spanish original), i.e. reality is to be reproduced as in a photograph. This point is emphasized by the contrast between the white walls of the house and the black dresses of the mourners. The realism of the play also manifests itself in that Lorca wrote all of it in prose, whereas in his earlier plays, he would also use many lyrical inserts – such as the lullaby in *Blood Wedding* or the chorus of the washerwomen in Act II of *Yerma*. Lorca pointed out himself during the first public reading of *Bernarda* that his play had "not a bit of poetry but only dry reality in it". Nonetheless, the play does have a poetic substrate, but poetry here – as Anna Pór concludes rightly in her review following the 1976 productions – is a lot more covert than in the aforementioned plays: "The peculiar poetry of *The House of Bernarda* lies, perhaps, less in its words than in its atmosphere."<sup>32</sup>

*The House of Bernarda Alba* can be interpreted and staged in many ways. The international productions following Lorca's death mainly sought to remind spectators of the playwright's martyrdom and interpreted Bernarda's tyranny as a parable of the Franco regime. These interpretations would project the oppressive regime into the figure of Bernarda, and rising up against freedom-tramplng tyranny into the rebellious figure of Adela. That was, indeed, the political hue of Hungarian *Bernarda* productions throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

The post-1980s, however, opened the door to increasingly courageous interpretations that moved farther and farther away from political symbols. Some international productions would have men playing the women's roles, or the director would combine the suppressed eroticism of the locked-up women with a lesbian motif. Several interpretations would also put greater emphasis on physicality and nakedness.

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<sup>29</sup> "I forge the text using the noblest Hungarian, so that these figures, who are well-nigh Hungarian by now, speak as beautifully and authentically as possible", writes László Nagy in a diary entry (László Nagy: *Krónika-töredék* [Chronicle Fragment]. Budapest, Helikon, 1994, p. 90.)

<sup>30</sup> For example, the production in Békéscsaba (Jókai Theatre, 2015, directed by László Béres) combined Lorca's text and the world of flamenco.

<sup>31</sup> Federico García Lorca: *The House of Bernarda Alba*, p. 646.

<sup>32</sup> Anna Pór: "Időszérű-e García Lorca? Még egyszer a Bernarda Albáról" (Is García Lorca Timely? Once Again about Bernarda Alba. In: *Színház*, 1977/3, p. 28.



F. G. Lorca in 1932 in front of the La Barraca Theatre poster (source: nashagazeta.cz)

The critical reception of the Hungarian productions indicates that, as of the 1970s and '80s, young people found it harder and harder to fathom the play's message. The main reason was that new generations no longer understood either the political metaphors or the social message of this 1930s play. City-dwelling youth at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and nowadays have a hard time imagining what eight years of mourning can be like or how eight women can live together locked up in a village house without men. Which is why new interpretations strive to amplify the play's timeless and profoundly human values by focusing on the individual's struggle to lead a full and unrestrained, natural instinct-driven existence.

The Hungarian image of playwright Federico García Lorca has changed a lot since 1955. In the 1950s and '60s, he was seen as the people's poet and martyred playwright,

and interpretations wore the imprint of left-wing ideology. It took until the '80s for this political-ideological connotation to fade and for directors to shift their focus toward the plays' timeless human messages. Spanish *couleur locale* and the traditional Hungarian realistic perspective began to fade as of the '80s, and Lorca's plays allowed room for innovative and experimental directorial concepts. Since the millennium, there has been a leap in the number of very diverse adaptations (ranging from musicals through theatre of movement to puppet shows), which suggests that García Lorca is no longer untouchable, but has become a modern-classical author.

*English translation by László Vértés*

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MÁRTON P. GULYÁS

## Shrinking Spaces

New mediality in *Woyzeck* at Budapest's National Theatre

“What is the theatre? What is unique about it? What can it do that film and television cannot?” – the question was raised by Jerzy Grotowski in the 1960s, but this issue is probably even more topical today in the era of the internet with all the flurry of motion pictures and advertisements. Of course, the relationship between film and theatre, as well as their interaction, have been the subject of intense debate since the beginning of film history. Theatre and film professionals, art historians, theorists have expressed their ideas about the connection of the two media.<sup>1</sup> In my view, there are two basic types of opinion behind the diversity of approaches.

One is based on the assumption that there is no reciprocal passage between the media of film and that of the theatre, for they represent something different in their essence, and for their “mission”, their “genius” is different. If a film becomes “theatre-like” or a theatre performance turns “cinematic”, then its artistic values get reduced. Grotowski himself took this position, he did not accept theatre as “the synthesis of different artistic branches such as literature, fine arts, painting, lighting effects, acting,” and he opposed the fashionable “rich theatre” of that time to “poor theatre”:

“What is Rich Theatre? The Rich Theatre depends on artistic kleptomania. (...) By multiplying assimilated elements, the Rich Theatre tries to escape the impasse presented by movies and television. Since film and TV excel in the area of the mechanical functions (montage, instantaneous change of place, etc.), the Rich Theatre countered with a blatantly compensatory call for «total theatre». The integration of borrowed mechanisms (movie screens on stage,

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<sup>1</sup> A good compilation in Hungarian can be found in the following volume: János Kenedi (ed.): *A film és a többi művészet*. [=Film and the Other Arts.] Bp. Gondolat Publisher, 1977. pp. 249–381.

for example) means a sophisticated technical plant, permitting great mobility and dynamism. (...) No matter how much theater expands and exploits its mechanical resources, it will remain technologically inferior to film and television. Consequently, I propose poverty in theatre. We have resigned from the stage-and-auditorium plant, simply an empty room was indispensable: for each production, a new space is designed for the actors and spectators. Thus, infinite variation of performer-audience relationships is possible.”<sup>2</sup>

Of course, many people before Grotowski came to similar conclusions as well. A good example of this is an early study by György Lukács, which starts with the statement that cinema today (in the 1910s) is perceived by many as a new and cheap competitor to theatre. This perception, in his view, is fundamentally wrong, which he justifies as follows:

“...The root of theatrical effects relies neither in the words, nor in the gestures of an actor, nor in the events of the play, but in the power by which a living person, the live will of a live man, overflows directly and without inhibitory referral to an equally live mass. (...) The presence, the actor’s ‘being here’ expresses in a most tangible, and therefore in the most profound way, that the people in the drama were consecrated by fate. Because to be present, that is, to live in reality, to live exclusively and most intensely, in itself equals the fate – the so-called ‘life’ never can reach the life-intensity which could raise everything into the sphere of destiny. (...) The absence of this ‘presence’ is an essential feature of ‘the cinema’. (...) It is not a deficiency in the cinema, but it is its boundary, it is its principium stilisationis. (...) The essence of ‘cinema’ is the intrinsic movement, the eternal variability, the never-ending transformation of things. (...) Thus, everything that was oppressed by the abstract monumental weight of destiny, flourishes into a rich and sprawling life. (...) It is here that the liveliness of nature gains an artistic form first: the splashing of water, the blowing of wind among trees, the silence of the sunset, the rage of the thunderstorm here will turn into art in their quality as natural processes, (unlike in painting – where they do so via their picturesque values obtained from another world).”

Meanwhile Lukács believes that the cinema – indirectly – may have a positive effect on the development of theatre, because “it has the ability to make everything more efficient, and still in a much finer manner, that falls into the category of entertainment and can be made more visible than in the pulpit stage.” Therefore “if once – and here I am talking about the aim of the very distant but deep desires of those who take drama seriously – the entertaining stage literature

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<sup>2</sup> Jerzy Grotowski: *Színház és rituálé.*[=*Theatre and Ritual.*] Bratislava – Budapest, Pesti Kalligram, 1999. pp. 13–14. English edition: Jerzy Grotowski: *Towards a Poor Theatre*, preface by Peter Brook, published by Simon and Schuster, New York, 1968, pp. 19–20.

gets eliminated by this competitor, then the stage will again be forced to deal with what its real vocation is: with great *tragedy* and great *comedy*.”<sup>3</sup>

It was the film director Robert Bresson who formulated the essence of this approach perhaps in the most compact way: “No marriage of theatre and cinematography without both being exterminated. (...) The truth of cinematography cannot be the truth of theatre, not the truth of the novel nor the truth of painting. (What the cinematographer captures with his or her own resources cannot be what the theatre, the novel, painting captures with theirs).”<sup>4</sup>

Approaches of the second type state that the two art forms can enrich one another, synthesize each other, take on the tools of the form language, and even the alloying combination of the two can create new quality. According to André Bazin, “there have been significant interactions between different arts, at least at some stage in their development. The idea of ‘pure art’ is a preconceived notion of relatively modern concepts of criticism.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, both film and theatre can win by putting their peculiarities in the service of the other art form.

There are many examples that justify the validity of these approaches. The first unified film style, German expressionism, took many formal elements from Max Reinhardt’s expressionist theatre.<sup>6</sup> It cannot be ignored that Eisenstein, one of the main pioneers of the montage theory, began his career as a theatre director working as Mejerhold’s disciple. In his theoretical writings he followed the so-called mimetic traditions, i.e. he considered film and theatre to be a spectacle, designed for the viewer.<sup>7</sup> In his first theatre production of *Enough Stupidity in Every*

<sup>3</sup> Lukács György: *Gondolatok a mozi esztétikájáról.* [= *Thoughts about the Aesthetics of Cinema.*] In: Lukács György: *Ifjúkori művek.* [= *Youth Works.*] Bp., Magvető, 1977. pp. 594–601.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Bresson: *Feljegyzések a filmművészetéről.* Bp., Osiris Kiadó, 1998. pp. 10–11. [= *Notes sur le Cinématographe.*] Paris, Gallimard 1975. English edition: Robert Bresson: *Notes on the Cinematographer*, Translated from the French by Jonathan Griffin. Green Integer. Kobenhavn, 1977. p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> André Bazin: *Színház és film.* In: André Bazin: *Mi a film?* Bp., Osiris Kiadó, 1995. pp. 137. A. B.: *Théâtre et cinéma.* In: A. B.: *Qu’est-ce qu’un film?* Paris, Cerf, 1976. English edition: André Bazin: *Theatre and Cinema.* In: A. B.: *What is Cinema?* Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> “The distorted shapes, the strong light-shadow contrasts, the broken planes, the mechanized movements have been transferred from the expressionist art and the scenery of the theatre.” András Bálint Kovács: *Metropolis, Párizs.* Bp., Képzőművészeti Kiadó, 1992. pp. 40–41.

<sup>7</sup> In his book *Narration in the Fiction Film* David Bordwell describes several experiments with Eisenstein in which the Russian director tried to combine film and theatre: “In 1924 Sergei Eisenstein and Lev Kulesov began to design a rehearsal room in which they would train actors for film. The building itself was paradoxical, because it was intended to be a theatre that goes beyond the legacy of the theatre. The main stage stood in the middle, and two stages on the sides. The middle one was a rotating stage. The audience was situated in a disc-shaped auditorium, which was able to

*Wise Man* (*Ha всякого мудреца довольно простоты*) by Ostrovsky (1923), the actors were wearing clown costumes and playing in a biomechanical style. In this performance he projected his first film, entitled *Glumov's Diary* (*Glumov's Tagebuch*), at the end of which he bowed in front of the camera, in a similar way as it was customary for actors in the theatre to bow for the audience. Eisenstein elaborated his famous theory of “montage of attractions” originally for the film, and not for the theatre. As he writes, “Any aggressive manifestation of the theatre, that is, any element that exposes the viewer to such a sensory or psychological effect which is empirically verified and which mathematically calculates the emotional shocks of the recipient – is an attraction (from the point of view of the theatre).”<sup>8</sup>

According to András Bálint Kovács, “the theatre was the main inspiration for the late modern film, and this effect determined the stylistic surface of many



András Bálint Kovács  
(photo: András Dér, source: nyugat.hu)

modern films, as well”,<sup>9</sup> so “theatrical forms” can be considered as a separate stylistic category. Films by artists such as Alain Resnais, Fellini, Fassbinder and Hans Jürgen Syberberg can be listed here. The two main features of this style are the exaggerated or abstract acting, and the importance of the artificiality of the scenery, and that of the expressive lighting. – The reason for the appearance of theatrical forms is that the formal conventions of the art film (directing, spatial arrangement) have again

rotate, so as to turn the spectators towards the scene in the right moment. The walls were removable in order to let the outside landscape be revealed, if necessary. There was a bridge from the main stage to the auditorium, so the actors could play in “close-up premier plan”. Even a conveyor belt was installed, on which the actors could run locally, or could “pan away” aside in front of the audience. In short, although this “filmed” rehearsal room possessed all perspective laws of the traditional stage, its designers modified it according to the contemporary filming habits. Eisenstein performed similar experiments in the directors’ class of the State Film Institute. Once he was about to stage a play in a traditional theatre space, he designed very sophisticated stage machines, though he could have had the desired effects in the cinema much easier.” English edition: David Bordwell: *Narration in the Fiction Film*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. In Hungarian: David Bordwell: *Elbeszélés a játékfilmben*. Bp., Magyar Filmintézet, 1996. pp. 25–26.

<sup>8</sup> Szergej Mihajlovics Eisenstein: *Válogatott tanulmányok*. [=Selected Studies.] Bp., Áron Kiadó, 1998. p. 59. Сергей Михайлович Эйзенштейн: *Избранные исследования* [=Sergei Mikhaylovits Eisenstein: *Izbrannye islebovaniya*.] Искусство, 1964. English edition: Sergei Eisenstein: *Notes of a film director*, translated by X. Danko. Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1959

<sup>9</sup> András Bálint Kovács: *A modern film irányzatai*. [=Trends in Modern Film.] Bp., Palatinus, 2005. p. 210.

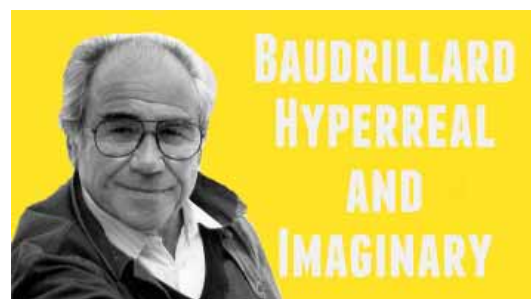


lost their credibility, and “the film sought to renew its forms again from outside sources only. (...) Finding the renovation of film in creating the theatrical film style is a typically modernist response to the crisis. Relying on theatre directing is the creation of markers that can be transferred to the film to renew the film markers”.<sup>10</sup> In contrast in postmodern films (their most important forerunner is Fellini’s *E la nave va* (*And The Ship Sails On*), the their most mature pieces are perhaps the works by Greenaway made in the early 1990s, such as *Prospero’s Books* or *The Baby of Macon*, “we are witnessing the continuous intertwining of various aesthetic marking systems – film, theatre, painting, text. (...) The meaning is created through a transtextual series of markers, where each series is media-specific in itself, but the meaning created by them loses its original relationship with its own unique medial environment.”<sup>11</sup>

According to Hans-Thies Lehmann, who elaborated the theory of post-dramatic theatre, the appearance of the new form of theatrical discourse can be dated to 1970s, when the media completely inundated everyday life and their presence became permanent.<sup>12</sup> The rapid development of mass media equipment radically changed the common perception of space and time, and this change was not left unanswered in the various branches of art – which was often realized by extending the boundaries of the media, quoting Yvette Bíró’s expression “by means of non-forbidden border crossings”. It can be said that the adequate expression of postmodern (and post-postmodern) age is the hybridization of different art forms and means.

It was Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard, French philosophers, who most effectively drew up the changes of our relationship with reality (such as our sense of space and time). According to Baudrillard, we entered the era of hyperrealistic representation: the relationship between original and copy overturned, signs and images grew to primary reality. The world is flooded by simulacra, which are no longer mere copies, since there are no “original” behind them. In a late essay he describes our age as a “post-orgy state” – we are beyond all kinds of revolution, all kinds of liberation and emancipatory endeavors which have never ever fulfilled our hope, never ever led to the revaluation of values:

“We can now only simulate orgy and liberation, at most we can pretend as if we



Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007) talking about ‘hyperreal and imaginary’ (source: youtube.com)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>12</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann: *Poszt dramaturgikus színház*. Bp., Balassi Kiadó, 2009. pp. 17. Hans-Thies Lehmann: *Postdramatisches Theater*. Verlag der Autoren, 2005. English edition: Hans-Thies Lehmann: *Postdramatic Theatre*. Routledge; 2006.

were moving in an unchanged direction with an accelerated speed, but in fact we are accelerating in emptiness, because all the goals of liberation are behind us, and we are suffering from knowing that all results are known in advance, for we are in the possession of every sign, every form, every desire. (...) The glorious movement of modernity has not led to the transformation of all values as we had been dreaming about, but to the dispersion and atrophy of values, and the result of all this for us is the total chaos, that we can no longer grasp the idea of defining things either aesthetically, sexually, or politically. (...) Art has failed – following the aesthetic utopia of modern times – to become an ideal way of life (it did not have to exceed itself in the direction of any kind of completeness because this completeness is present here in religion already). It has got vanished not in any kind of transcendent idealism, but in the general aestheticism of



Paul Virilio in 2010 (photo: Caroline Dumoucel, source: vice.com)

everyday life, it ceased to exist so as to hand over its place to the mere spreading of images in the quotidian transesthetics.”<sup>13</sup>

In his essays Paul Virilio analyzes the consequences of social acceleration (regarding transport, telecommunication and war). According to him, the acceleration in speed brought about decisive changes in our spacial awareness as well:

“... If we shrink the world, if everything is within reach, then (...) we will be infinitely unhappy because we have lost the true place of freedom, the spaciousness. (...) An area without temporality is no longer an area, but its illusion. It is urgent to raise awareness of the political repercussions of such space-time-management, because they are *fearful*. The

space of freedom is shrinking with speed. However, freedom needs space. (...) Before, freedom of movement was thought to lead to infinite freedom. I show that this is not true; beyond a certain limit, the dictatorship of movement occurs; the self-exhausting, tormenting offensive. (...) We will still be considerably far from each other in space, but through audio-visual and transport equipments we will be forced to go to crowds and overcrowdings, which will reduce the world to anything which equals nothing.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Jean Baudrillard: *A rossz transzparenciája*. [= *The Transparency of Evil*.] Bp., Balassi Kiadó, 1997. p. 16. Jean Baudrillard: *La transparencia del mal*. Galilée, 1990. English edition: Jean Baudrillard: *The Transparency of Evil*. Verso, 1993.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Virilio – Sylvère Lotringer: *Tiszta háború* [= *Pure War*.] In: Tillmann J. A. (ed.): *A későújkor józansága, II.* [= *Soberness of the late New Age. vol. II.*] Bp., Göncöl Kiadó, 2004. pp. 204–206. Paul Virilio – Sylvère Lotringer: *Pure War*. Routledge,

In *Woyzeck*, directed by Attila Vidnyánszky Jr, the creators achieve a cinematic, film-like effect by mere theatrical means. There is no projected motion picture in the performance, there is only one TV screen, but with its back to the audience, so we, the spectators, do not see what is on – and still yes, we do, because the flash-and-blood actors enter the stage from it (literally). From now on, the performance gets a carnival-like touch, TV show parodies (advertisements, talk-shows, news, cooking programs) alternate with scenes of the *Woyzeck* drama, characters enter from the wall, or from the fridge – as if they were consumer goods.

It is customary to regard it as a form language characteristic of the film that (as opposed to theatre) the spectator, due to camera movements and cuts, does not feel the marge of the space. He can “move” freely within the borderlines, the space outside the picture frame being part of his “cognitive map”, thus his perception feeling is much closer to everyday experience. Following the performance of *Woyzeck*, we will enjoy a film-like experience, thanks to the scenery and the imaginative design of the playground, and we really will get closer to the everyday perception – to the perception of our over-mediated hyper-realistic world (sometimes even too close, being confronted with its exaggerated, parodistic image). The auditorium is also housed in a closed space inside the theatre: we must enter a “room” in *Woyzeck*’s house. On entering we get outside simultaneously: the two sides of the auditorium is a part of the scenery showing the outside surface of the block’s walls (padded with newspaper) with windows and doors where the actors enter and exit. (The two sidewalls do not run parallel, so the space seems “shrinking”, through this our feeling gets reinforced that we are part of the events, we are “panders”). So the performance begins the way the exposure in a movie is built up: first they show us the environment in LS-s (wide angle long shots), and then the first scene begins. Later on we see the house even in a much further “plan”:



Photos: Zsolt Eöri Szabó

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2007. There is a good summary in Hungarian, of social acceleration and the theoretical reflections about it: Márk Horváth – Ádám Lovász: *Felbomlás és dromokrácia – társadalmi gyorsulás a modernitásban és a posztmodernitásban* [=Disintegration and Dromocracy – Social Acceleration in Modernity and Postmodernity.] Bp., Dialóg Campus Kiadó, 2016.

Woyzeck, holding a maquette in his hand like in a “presentation”, points out one-by-one which characters live in what part of the block. Meanwhile, the actors whom the protagonist is talking about appear in the windows on the side of the auditorium – making the spectator’s gaze jump from “wide angle shot” to an “extra wide” one. The scenes follow each other in a fast rhythm from the beginning to the end, moving into a completely different tonal environment without transition, as if someone was continuously switching the TV remote controller from one channel to another. At the end of the performance the stage goes dark, only the maquette is lit by a pulsing red light. All this is not a mere self-purpose formal game because it actually is close to the dramaturgy of the original work: the scenes of the fragmentary drama also do follow each other in a film-like manner and, according to Péter Balassa, they are not even autonomous units.<sup>15</sup>

As it is known, Büchner’s drama is left fragmented in four versions. At the same time, as Peter Balassa writes, “fragmentariness is the *characteristic feature* of this drama – it is not its *disability*”. That is the reason why “this drama does not have, for it could not have its real performance tradition. Because this language represents a world state which is to be interpreted, to be played on stage as a permanent *Now*, the signs as linguistic signs are the signs of the prevailing times, and they become decipherment, they become keys by reinterpretation, by the re-energizing presence again.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, it is an important fact that Büchner wrote the play on the basis of actual cases. First and foremost, from the story of a man called Woyzeck in reality, whose case had been the subject of a detailed expert opinion from the Chief Medical Officer of Leipzig and from a medical expert, based on which Woyzeck was executed before 5,000 people. He also used the so-called Schmolling Documents: Daniel Schmolling was a tobacco roller cigarette craftsman who killed his lover.

The four versions of the Woyzeck drama show us four different *sujet*. As we know, the fable is the series of events that come together in the head of the viewer after viewing/reading the piece.<sup>17</sup> The processing of the work is made

<sup>15</sup> Péter Balassa: “*Mint egy nyitott borotva...*” [= “*Like an Open Razor...*”] In.: *Szenárium* 2018. March, p. 64.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> Here we should draw the attention to the concept of the *fable* and the *sujet* of Russian formalists (used in narratology even today). “The *fabula* (...) is a pattern created by the recipient through assumptions and conclusions: it is the outcome of growing bands resulting from the reception of narrative signals, from the use of schemas, from creating and controlling hypotheses. In an ideal case, the fable, depending on the circumstances, is displayed in a general or detailed verbal synopsis. (...) The *sujet* is a system that organizes the components – the events of the story and that of the facts – according to specific principles. As Boris Tomasevsky puts it: ‘The *fable* – although it is made up of the same events – is opposed to the *sujet*: it always takes into consideration the order of events established in the art piece and the series of informational processes designating them.’ The *sujet* (...) is a set of signals that



difficult, among others, by the fact that the four *sujets* do not “contain” the same fable. For example, the murder is included in the first version only. The fable of the piece *could* be what the doctor-expert in Leipzig described: “After returning to Leipzig in December 1818, (Woyzeck) lived in the following places in time sequence, worked in the following positions, and according to his own account, the following things happened to him: (...)”.<sup>18</sup> And here follows a list. But Büchner did not aspire for exact reconstruction. He considered the court records as a starting point, selected parts and motifs from them, and – especially in the part called “murder complex” – even used Schmolling’s testimony of how he struggled killing his lover. It is of particular interest that the story, reconstructed by a forensic expert, does *not* include any doctor who has an important dramaturgic function in all four versions. My assumption is that The Doctor who wrote the expert opinion in the piece was “invented” by Büchner.

It is not exaggeration to say that the Stalker Group handled Büchner’s text as freely as Büchner himself handled the original documents. At times, the parodistic, TV-show-like episodes are directly related to the world of action, and they are separated from it at other times. Even the *sujet* does not display the events of the fable linearly. In the first third of the performance the Doctor – as a piece of news from a newspaper – reads along the court judgment (which is an abbreviated, updated version of the medical opinion), that is, we are aware of the murder well before its occurrence. Relationships between actors are roughly mapped out by Büchner’s scheme, and longer scenes and parts of text (eg. shaving The Captain, dialogue of Woyzeck and The Doctor, the tale of the poor

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induce us to extrapolate and collect the storyline information.” Bordwell, quoted work pp. 62–65.

<sup>18</sup> Johann Christian Clarus: *Expertise on the credibility of Johann Christian Woyzeck, a murderer, based on the principles of court records and forensic medicine*. In: Mátyás Domonkos (ed.): *Georg Büchner összes művei*. Bp., Osiris Kiadó, 2003. p. 286. Georg Büchner: *Gesammelte Werke*. Goldmann Verlag, Klassiker Bd. 1978. English edition: Georg Büchner: *The Complete Plays and Prose*. Verlag Mermaid Dramabook 1963.

child, dialogues by Andres and Woyzeck, monologue of the Journeymen) in one way or another (updated, expanded with improvisations) are released. Most of the performance time, however, is made up of TV program parodies (which are sometimes interwoven by the story of Woyzeck) and of dancing scenes, the latter being, of course, mostly comparable to the scenes in the pub. In the performance, both versions of the ends of the piece (according to the first and fourth drafts) appear. At first, Woyzeck does not want to buy the knives. Then he says the final words of the fourth version (“Truly, Andres, when the carpenter (...) <sup>19</sup> the woodchips, no one knows whose head will rest on it.”). And in the end, like in the first variant, he stabs Marie – however, after the Showman’s speech (which again is not an exact quotation – “From monkey became a soldier, from soldier became a murderer”; in the original it is only “from monkey became a soldier”) and the first curtain call of the actors Marie gets out of the tub and dances with Woyzeck, leaving the possibility that all this was just imagination.

According to Miklós H. Vecsei, who wrote the textbook, the Stalker Group asks these questions by the performance: “Can Woyzeck be called guilty? Or is the world itself guilty which gives birth to murderers?” At the beginning of the piece, the actor playing The Doctor turns towards the auditorium and tries to explain that we are going to see an attempt to answer this question. But he fails: either he is interrupted or he interrupts himself, taking on new and new roles. Could it not be possible to ask this question? Leastways, the players congratulate Woyzeck after the murder...

The transtextual elements appearing in the performance can also be interpreted as a manifestation of Woyzeck’s madness, a kind of “mental journey”, or, since the Showman, the circus stunts, the puppet plays performed within the drama have an important role, the “deposit scenes” not closely related to the plot can be regarded as its special interpretation. However, I think the performance directed by Attila Vidnyánszky Jr. holds a curved mirror to the world state described by Baudrillard and Virilio:

“...The real problem, the one and only problem is: where has the Evil disappeared? To everywhere: the anamorphosis of the Evil forms of today is endless. In a society that has alwayed so much with prophylaxis, extinguishing its natural references, washing violence white, killing germs and all the elements of the cursed part, with negative plastic surgery, it only wants to work with predicted control and just want to hear about Good, in a society where it is no longer possible to pronounce the Evil, the Evil has put on all the viral and terrorist forms that is tempting us.”<sup>20</sup>

*Translated by István Pinczés*  
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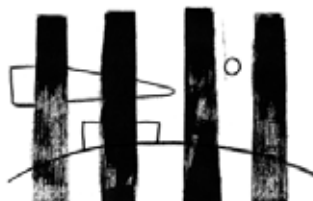
<sup>19</sup> Text missing from Büchner’s manuscript (*ed.*)

<sup>20</sup> Baudrillard, quoted work p. 73.





## IN MEMORIAM



VALDAS VASILIAUSKAS

### Eimuntas Nekrošius and Lithuania's Youth Theatre

May 2018 marks thirty years since an event of central importance to Lithuanian culture: the National Youth Theatre's month-long American tour. Taking place as Lithuania began to shake loose of Soviet control, it was the first commercial tour of the USA by any group of professional artists from Lithuania – and further reinforced the legend of the theatre's enigmatic star, director Eimuntas Nekrošius.

#### **Beginnings**

During the romantic 19<sup>th</sup> century, even at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, art legends were born in the attics and garrets, preferably Parisian. During the more practical decades of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, artists relocated to much more prosaic places, such as the smoke-filled cellars of Liverpool (The Beatles) or the garages and student dormitories of the American West Coast, populated by computer magicians and IT wizards. The great legend of the Lithuanian theatre was born in a warehouse in Vilnius, more specifically, in the section of the Youth Theatre used both as a workshop and a warehouse in which stage decorations were stored. Nowadays, the building – a newly redecorated palace, originally built during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries by the Radziwiłł family – is difficult to recognize and hosts the Museum of Lithuanian Theatre, Music and Cinema. In the 1970s, it was a dilapidated structure, despite the fancy name – Experimental Stage of the Youth Theatre – given to one of its decrepit halls. It was this stage, the most modest among the Lithuanian theatres of the time, that was chosen by Eimuntas Nekrošius for his debut as a theatre director in 1977. Then a student of GITIS, the Lunacharsky State Institute for Theatre Arts in Moscow (renamed the Russian Institute of Theatre Arts in 1991), Nekrošius

directed his diploma performance *A Taste of Honey* (Medaus skonis) with the troupe of the Youth Theatre.

The debut production was modest, too, but also incredibly meticulous, starting with the choice of playwright. It may have seemed that Shelagh Delaney, of England's 'angry young men' generation, wrote this 'kitchen sink' drama specifically for the Experimental Stage of the Youth Theatre, whose poverty Nekrošius did not even attempt to conceal, as if with a nod of acknowledgement to the great innovator of 20<sup>th</sup>-century theatre Jerzy Grotowski and his Poor Theatre. Delaney's characters became the predecessors of the figures Nekrošius would later persistently put on centre stage – subjugated outsiders, hurt and humiliated, whose social status overshadows their humanity and the beauty of their soul.

In Nekrošius's rendition, the irony of the title of *A Taste of Honey* was further underscored by a very mundane detail: during the second part of the performance, the room would be filled with a pervasive smell – not of honey, but of cigarette smoke, whose clouds would waft in from the foyer, in which the audience smoked during the interval (back then, all of us, young and old, men and women, smoked like crazy). The performance would begin in complete darkness with only a few cigarettes flickering on stage, but their light was too weak to pierce the darkness or warm up the relationships between the characters. Still, it was a flash of hope, a candle in the dark.

The young director was right to have selected the actors of the Youth Theatre, although he could hardly have chosen anyone else. His was a return of one of their own. Eimis (Eimuntas Nekrošius's pet name, given to him during his student years by his friends and theatre people) had been eagerly awaited by his first teacher of stage art, Dalia Tamulevičiūtė, who taught at the Department of Acting at the Conservatoire (now the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre), and his former course-mates, the ten actors whom Tamulevičiūtė had trained and brought to the Youth Theatre, then managed by her.

'The Ten' of the Youth Theatre – the actors trained by Tamulevičiūtė – could have just as easily been 'The Eleven' (by the way, the young men loved, and were extremely good at, football), but Tamulevičiūtė soon noticed that one student in her group kept creating intricate *mise en scènes*, very different from what she was instructing her students to do. I do not know how long it took her to persuade him, but after he finished his first two years at the Conservatoire, Eimis left for GITIS to become a theatre director.

Therefore, upon his return to Lithuania, Nekrošius did not have to navigate the tricky waters of the Youth Theatre in order to avoid the reef which had sunk many a director – distrust on the part of the troupe. The latter was a group of distinct and very self-confident young individuals, with their own understanding of the theatre and rehearsal methods, even the criteria of acting excellence. What made Nekrošius's debut as a director so distinctive was the

perfect harmony he achieved between directing and acting. It is the happiest moment in the theatre when the director's and the actors' hearts beat in sync. *A Taste of Honey* was a first step towards the greatest roles of their lives for the actors Dalia Overaitė, Algirdas Latėnas and Vidas Petkevičius.

After he completed his studies in Moscow, Nekrošius was appointed to Kaunas Drama Theatre, where he directed *The Ballads of Duokiškis* (Duokiškio baladės) by Sauliaus Šaltenis and *Ivanov* by Anton Chekhov (both 1978). His second return to the Youth Theatre in 1980, the performance *A Cat Behind the Door* (Katė už durų), based on Grigory Kanovich's text, was not as triumphant as had been expected. Nonetheless, triumph was around the corner.

In 1975, the Youth Theatre had undergone a renewal, marked by the employment of Tamulevičiūtė's 'The Ten' and of Saulius Šaltenis, who went on to become not only the theatre's major playwright, but also its guru, something of a spiritual leader for the entire troupe. For five subsequent years, particularly after its first very successful tour in Moscow in 1978, the theatre was constantly in the limelight. It could continue exploiting the gold mine of texts created by Šaltenis; however, both the theatre and its gifted actors soon began to long for new ideas. The troupe was characterized by free thinking and irony, introduced by Šaltenis, whose targets were the persistent lies, empty extravagant phrases, pathos and artificially heroic poses so beloved by Soviet culture, aiming to cover up the reality, which was far from heroic. The actors of the Youth Theatre needed directors who would offer new, more complicated tasks and greater challenges. Their well-trained imagination, their improvisational nature, the flexibility of their bodies and minds, even the entire atmosphere of the Youth Theatre urged them to constantly seek new things. Nekrošius, on the other hand, badly needed actors who would share his ideas. In 1980, these circumstances begat a *chef-d'oeuvre*, the performance of *The Square* (Kvadratas) directed by Nekrošius.

## The great explosion

During the six years between 1980 and 1986 at the Youth Theatre, Nekrošius directed five masterpieces: *The Square* (1980), *Pirosmani, Pirosmani...* (1981), *Love and Death in Verona* (Meilė ir mirtis Veronoje) (1982), *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (Ilga kaip šimtmečiai diena) (1983), and *Uncle Vanya* (Dėdė Vania) (1986). His last production at the Youth Theatre, *The Nose* (Nosis) by Nikolai Gogol (1992) was suddenly very different; it was somewhat of a postscript by Nekrošius, a painfully ironic commentary on himself and the entire period which had just come to an end.

*The Square* was not just another brilliant performance. It was an absolutely new theatre, never seen before. The new theatrical language allowed Nekrošius to create an epic theatrical phenomenon out of a sentimental didactic novella

by Valentina Eliseeva, titled 'This Is How It Was...' and depicting a criminal who is reformed by a young teacher and active member of the Komsomol. Next in the line was a mediocre play by Vadim Korostylyov, *Pirosmani, Pirosmani...* Both texts were fundamentally rewritten by Šaltenis, who sat next to Nekrošius during the rehearsals; Šaltenis is the real author of the monologues and occasional asides in these performances. For Nekrošius, a literary text typically served to provide a topic, which he then developed on stage using non-verbal means, sound and movement. In Nekrošius's performances, the actors often say much more by using physical actions and body language, rather than dialogues.

Several instances of this wordless but eloquent acting are impossible to forget. I am thinking, for example, of the dumb Guard played by Vidas Petkevičius in *Pirosmani, Pirosmani...*, whose only tool of communication was an empty bottle, which made mysterious sounds when the Guard blew into it. The Clown by Remigijus Vilkaitis (*Love and Death in Verona*), a true ode to the actor's profession, framed the Shakespearean plot by employing the 'theatre within the theatre' principle and commented on the action without any words, using only facial expressions; this characteristically Italian comedian, a vagabond with a suitcase, a Maestro loyal to the theatre, may have predicted Nekrošius's successful career in Italy in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The role of a mankurt by Saulius Bareikis (*The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*) managed to convey, exclusively through pantomime, what happens when a human being's and a nation's memory is destroyed. The *lazzo* (*Uncle Vanya*), those brazen, passionate beings who polished the parquet of professor Serebryakov's estate – to the loud applause of the most diverse audiences in different countries – deserve a special mention. These servants, imagined and put on stage by Nekrošius, were a remarkable episode in the long career of experienced actors Rimgaudas Karvelis, Jūratė Aniulytė and Vytautas Taukinaitis, who did not utter a single word during the entire performance.

By the early 1980s, the word had been totally compromised by socialist realism, Soviet campaigning and propaganda. In Nekrošius's hands, however, the humbug of Soviet parading became the building blocks for *The Square*. Energetic marches, Mayakovsky's poems, the over-the-top enthusiasm of the Komsomol youth, slogans transmitted through megaphones, all of this would be transformed into mere noise – whistles from a train and the rattle of the wheels on a railway, punctuated by shrill commands, emitted from the megaphones at the labour camps of the Gulag. For a live human voice, undistorted by megaphones and microphones, to resound again, deadly silence had to prevail, the silence of the universe, as if the old world had ended to give way to a new one.

The central character in *The Square*, a nameless He played by Kostas Smoriginas, was a remarkable accomplishment on the actor's part. With a haphazardly donned *ushanka* hat, its ear-flaps pulled down, and a square loaf

of bread in his hands, He was a generalized picture of the *zek*, an inmate of the infinite Soviet Gulag: it was as if the famous sculpture by a Gulag martyr Leonid Nedov had come to life and stepped onto the stage. Everything in *The Square*, even the breathing of He, was controlled by the Leader, played by Remigijus Vilkaitis, who stood for the numerous guards, supervisors, jailers, convoyeurs, politruks, functionaries, and other officials of the repressive state and the largest 'prison industry' in the world, developed by the Soviets.

In front of our eyes, Smoriginas's He (zeks did not have names and were referred to by numbers) was reduced to a *tabula rasa* – a clean slate, the soul of a child, who had to relearn how to live and to re-establish his severed ties with the world; hence a child's bed, placed on the stage of *The Square*. Overcome by childish belief and hope, He would attempt to communicate with a post-box or a can as if they were living beings and would then turn the can into a radio receiver (nowadays, He would probably conjure up a mobile phone).

At the same time, a brutal conflict was unfolding between Him and a prison guard, one which would culminate in the victory of the prisoner. With the help of the radio and a post-box, He overcame the walls of his prison cell as well as the endless vastness of Siberia, which had kept him isolated, and received a response from another human being, Her (Janina Matekonytė and Dalia Overaitė). In exchange, instead of sugar, the most precious possession of the prisoner (in Soviet prisons and labour camps, pieces of sugar were used as a kind of currency), He gave Her his heart. The *mis-en-scène* was extremely poetic, but also very unsettling, setting the love scene, which was covered in a rain of sugar cubes, in the most unfitting of places, the brutal environment of the prison.

Pirosmani (Vladas Bagdonas), a self-taught Georgian painter full of dreams to amaze Paris, also found himself in a hostile world, in which he could converse only with the dumb Guard (Vidas Petkevičius). The performance would begin in complete darkness, with a reading of an excerpt from the Georgian poem 'The Knight in the Panther's Skin' by Shota Rustaveli. Then, from behind Pirosmeni's dark shop window, human figures would begin to emerge, of people whom he had met and dreamed about, had remembered and painted

The stunningly beautiful window of Pirosmeni's shop – and of his dream world



Remigijus Vilkaitis as Guard (left) and Kostas Smoriginas as Him (Man) in *The Square*, d: Eimuntas Nekrošius (photo: eurozine.com, with permission from Kultūros barai)



Vladas Bagdonas as Pirosmeni and Irena Kriauzaitė as Iya-Maria in *Pirosmani, Pirosmeni* (photo: eurozine.com, with permission from Kultūros barai)

– created by scenographer Adomas Jacovskis was reminiscent of the doors and gates as described by the 20<sup>th</sup> century British thinker Clive Staples Lewis: they allow humans to look beyond nature. As Lewis puts it, ‘But all our confidence that Nature has no doors, and no reality outside herself for doors to open on, would have disappeared.’<sup>1</sup> In the performance *Pirosmani, Pirosmeni*..., the door to the otherworld (eternity) did indeed open, and, very fittingly, the audience would see a miniature Georgian church in the finale.

Nekrošius constructed the fragile poetic space of the performance in his usual manner, using very simple objects. Bagdonas’s *Pirosmani* brought his best and only friend a gift of an Easter egg, wrapped in gilded paper. In another scene, he carried an intricate pyramid of simple chairs, a celebration of his loneliness. Before his death, Iya-Maria (Irena Kriauzaitė) smeared *Pirosmani*’s soles with black shoe polish. The Guard transported *Pirosmani* from this vale of tears to a heavenly homeland, having lugged his body onto scales and dusted him with white flour, suggestive of resurrection.

After these productions, set on the small stage at the Youth Theatre, Nekrošius moved on to monumental forms. The rock opera *Love and Death in Verona*, based on William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, for which Kęstutis Antanėlis composed the music and Sigitas Geda wrote the libretto, began as a medieval mystery play about the secrets of love and death, which elevated Juliet (played by Violeta Podolskaitė, Kristina Kazlauskaitė and Janina Matekonytė) to the status of the Madonna. However, the mystery soon turned into a carnival, even a burlesque. The omnipotent Prince of Verona (Antanas Šurna and Arūnas Storpīrštis) turned into a midget, and Romeo (Kostas Smoriginas), accompanied by his rascal friends burst into a crowd of Veronesi, wearing stilts. Audacious Romeo then bravely stepped on a precarious keyboard-bridge to meet Juliet, his fate, while the chorus on stage – and the audience in the theatre – looked on, breathless.

The polyphony of the high (medieval mystery, tragedy, drama) and the low (burlesque, farce, comedy) enriched Nekrošius’s other performances as well, for instance, *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* and *Uncle Vanya*, both marked by tragic existential undertones. A grand sacral funeral procession to the

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*. London: Harper Collins, 2009. p. 16.



ancient Ana Beii Cemetery in *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* was accompanied by two jesters, the deceased Kazangap's son (Arūnas Storpīrštis) and son-in-law (Juozas Jaruševičius), who could not stop quarrelling. The most intense and candid confession scenes in *Uncle Vanya* were repeatedly unsettled by clumsy, fat Vaflya (Juozas Pocius), who would keep appearing on stage seemingly without a reason.

*The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, a powerful story, adapted for stage from the Kyrgyz writer Chinghiz Aitmatov's novel of the same title and enhanced by visual and acoustic means, to this day remains, arguably, the best Lithuanian theatre production. On stage, a simple rope was woven to form the grand, elegant shape of the camel Karanar, given as a gift to Kazangap's friend, railwayman Yedegei (Algirdas Latėnas). An entire world was created, using very basic elements, such as sooty utensils and objects typical of a small isolated railway station, as well as the noise of trains flashing by, dismal sounds of everyday life, punctuated by the ting-a-ling of the funeral bell and the 'cosmic' chanting of Tibetan monks, suggestive of the hum of eternity. Suddenly, the melody of 'Suliko,' a song much loved by Stalin, would be heard, which composer Faustas Latėnas transformed into a *danse macabre*, a harbinger of calamity and death.

The time and space constructed in the performance acquired epic dimensions: one day of the funeral rites indeed seemed to last a hundred years. Yedegei's tiny world expanded into a macrocosm, in which, for instance, the surface of the water in a barrel would reflect a spaceship taking off.

During the introduction to the performance, conducted in complete silence, it would take the audience some time to discern Yedegei and Ukubala (Irena Tamošiūnaitė) as they seemed to have merged with the grey dullness of their daily life. Aitmatov had made Burannyi Yedegei the centre of the contemporary world, and Nekrošius entrusted the centre of the epic created on stage to the actor Algirdas Latėnas, who had to control the stream of consciousness of Aitmatov's narrative and prevent the performance from turning into merely a spectacular spectacle. It seems to be an impossible task, but Latėnas handled it masterfully. Even though Yedegei's role in Aitmatov's novel consists mainly of monologues, Latėnas turned them into conversations. There were awkward appeals to the railway station master, who had ruthlessly refused to let Yedegei attend



Algirdas Latėnas as Yedegei  
in Aitmatov's *The Day Lasts More  
Than a Hundred Years*  
(photo: eurozine.com, with  
permission from Kultūros barai)

his friend Kazangap's funeral. There were heartrending tête-à-têtes between Yedegei and his beloved Zariipa (Kristina Kazlauskaitė) as well as his teacher Abutalip (Ferdinandas Jakšys), both lost during the years of Stalinist terror and repressions, and only alive in Yedegei's memory. There were discussions about history and mythology with mankurts, characters from Kyrgyz legend who were prisoners of war whose heads would be wrapped in camel skin, which would dry and harden under the sun, enslaving them forever and depriving them of the ability to think. Yedegei talked even with his surroundings, including the camel Karanar, a fox, and birds. As the performance progressed, several of Yedegei's neighbours joined the funeral procession and gave him a white handkerchief so that he, bent under the coffin and in pain, could wipe away his tears. Strange as it may seem, the brightest episode in this sombre performance was Yedegei's own death. In preparation for it, Yedegei gave away pieces of his last shirt, wrapped in which were handfuls of the sand from the bottom of the drying Aral Sea, considered sacred by the Kyrgyz people. Thereby he reconciled himself with the world and regained peace and harmony.

At the time, many quarrelled over Nekrošius's take on playwrighting and the text. Some argued that he disrespected the word and literature by over-relying on wordless 'dramaturgy,' totally dependent on the director's choices, thereby usurping the role of the playwright. Defying such criticism, Nekrošius later adapted for the stage an entire library of literary classics: Alexander Pushkin's little tragedies and *Boris Godunov*, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Faust*, Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, *The Seagull*, and (for the second time) *Ivanov*, Lithuanian Kristijonas Donelaitis' long poem *The Seasons* (Metai), Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, Dante Alighieri's entire *The Divine Comedy*, Franz Kafka's *A Hunger Artist*, even the masterpieces of *The Old Testament*, *The Song of Songs* and *The Book of Job*. Nonetheless, even while still at the Youth Theatre, Nekrošius proved his respect for literature and literary classics as well as demonstrating a unique talent in interpreting them.

*Uncle Vanya* directed by Nekrošius was a modern take on the brutal realism of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps even its radical manifestation. Without denouncing his dramaturgical experiments, this time Nekrošius did not omit a single (!) word from the play and even added some phrases from Chekhov's other texts, creating a very special harmony between verbal and non-verbal forms of expression.

The plot of the performance was punctuated with directorial pauses. The introduction was meant to foreground the creation of the performance space with actors establishing contact with the stage space and the objects which would become an essential part of the stage design. What I want to call Nekrošius's 'liturgy,' his strategy of turning material objects into suggestive leitmotifs (not unlike bread and wine are turned into flesh and blood), allowed Chekhov's words to become flesh and make their dwelling among the audience. And I use

the term 'liturgy' not only as a metaphor: Nekrošius's *Uncle Vanya* would begin with a Jewish song, reminiscent of a lament or a prayer, adapted to stage by the director's 'brother in arms,' composer Faustas Latėnas. Who or what was lamented? Who or what was prayed for?

The introductory directorial pause spoke, albeit without words, about sickness and resignation afflicting a tormented soul and an entire world, which had exhausted its possibilities. In the *mis-en-scène*, doctor Astrov (Kostas Smoriginas) was treating the Nurse (Irena Tamošiūnaitė) by applying suction cups to her back and then, suddenly and surreptitiously, pulled out a bottle of morphine, his only way to endure the debilitating dreariness of the provincial life. As is typical for Nekrošius's dramaturgy of physical details, the bottle of morphine found its way back on stage in Act Four of the play (the scene between Astrov and Voynitsky), while the suction cups reappeared during the finale: in the final scene, the cups were applied to Uncle Vanya's (Vidas Petkevičius) back, as it was now his soul that had been overcome with sickness. Life, in the manner typical to Chekhov, had come full circle.

Only the retired professor Serebryakov (Vladas Bagdonas) and his admirer, old Voynitskaya (Elvyra Žebertavičiūtė), did not feel tormented in any way. In Nekrošius's performance, this grotesque couple was characterised by highly mechanical movements, foregrounding their unwillingness or inability to change their habits: a new life had not yet begun, and the old one continued out of sheer inertia. Serebryakov's only concern during the performance was not the people living on his estate, nor their destiny, but a heavy metal weight placed on the *avant-scène*, another image from Nekrošius's dramaturgy of physical details. When on stage, Serebryakov watched with envy with what ease his friends and rivals, uncle Vanya and doctor Astrov, would lift the weight.

Sonya (Dalia Overaitė) and Yelena Andreyevna (Dalia Storyk) made another pair of friends-rivals. In aging Serebryakov's provincial estate, his young and beautiful wife Yelena Andreyevna looked like a palm tree among the snow. She was also the centre of the action, even though seemingly against her own will as at one point she acknowledged that she was performing a merely 'episodic role.' Everyone on the estate leaned towards Yelena Andreyevna, as if enchanted by her beauty, of which they wanted to steal at least a small part, just like they kept stealing her perfume bottles – another instance of Nekrošius turning words into flesh. Not only the men were guilty of that, but also Sonya, whose long and heavy black braids reached to the floor, as if a pair of mourning sashes. As far as I know, in the history of Chekhov's theatrical production, no Sonya has been played with so much talent, elevating the character to the status of a tragic figure, on a par with Uncle Vanya.

Differently from the conventional interpretations of the play, Dalia Storyk's Yelena Andreyevna was not an attractive beast, not a slick beautiful weasel, but a selfish coquette, who rejected and destroyed a wonderful man. In



Final scene in *Uncle Vanya* (photo: eurozine.com, with permission from Kultūros barai)

Nekrošius's performance, everyone got rejected and destroyed, even Yelena Andreyevna herself, repeatedly treated like an object: in one scene, Astrov met her equipped with a pair of pincers; in another one, Serebryakov prodded her with a walking stick.

This world, doomed to disappear, could not be saved by Yelena Andreyevna's ephemeral beauty, which, just like her exotic perfume, would soon vanish without a trace, and she would remain empty handed and helpless. After the estate went on sale, the residents lined up for the last photograph and sang *Va, pensiero*, the chorus of the Hebrew slaves from the

Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Nabucco*. This, arguably, is the most beautiful crowd scene in the entire history of the Lithuanian theatre. And the photograph turned out to be a last record of the dying epoch as the old Soviet system collapsed less than five years later. At the same time, it was a farewell photograph of the troupe of *Uncle Vanya*, the dream team of the Youth Theatre. The legendary troupe soon fell apart; the actors began their solo careers, each going their own way, seeking the new lands of their dreams, their promised lands.

## The prophecies of Doctor Astrov

Even after the demise of the communist dictatorship, Nekrošius's phenomenon in the Youth Theatre remained without adequate explanation. *The Square*, a performance about the Soviet man's 'freedom without rights,' was performed in Vilnius, completely, unimpeded, during the very peak of the Soviet stagnation: when attempts were made to rehabilitate Stalinism and the Gulag, because communism could not sustain itself without labour camps; when Stalin's crimes had become a forbidden topic; when one could not even breath without permission. The censors obviously did not attempt to decipher the title of the performance, even though it was an obvious euphemism for both the prison and the camp surrounded by barbed wire.

The idea of *The Square* can be most accurately described, drawing on the words of Varlam Shalamov, whose writing was strictly prohibited at the time: 'The camp is a replica of our life; the camp even resembles the world. There is nothing in it that wouldn't exist outside, in freedom, in its social and spiritual

structures.<sup>2</sup> In other words, Nekrošius's *The Square* showed that the entire Soviet Union was a gigantic prison, in which even a free person was hardly different from a prisoner.

'Was it not here, in these prison cells, that the great truth dawned? The cell was constricted, but wasn't *freedom* even more constricted?' These were the questions Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn asked in *The Gulag Archipelago*.<sup>3</sup> Much later, when Solzhenitsyn's study of the Soviet Gulag became freely available, we suddenly realized that, except of course for the numerous evidence and facts he presented, Solzhenitsyn did not condemn Stalin's terror more openly than did Zaripa (Kristina Kazlauskaitė) in *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, when she slapped the gigantic portrait of the moustached Senior Murderer, Stalin, in revenge for the death of Abutalip and billions other innocent victims. Maybe, during the Soviet times, we were braver than Solzhenitsyn himself? No, we were not. Maybe the censors were not attentive enough? Maybe they could be deceived? Or negotiated with?

There were, of course, no deceptions or deals. The censors were not inattentive, either. Their requirement was that the Gulag, if referred to, be talked about without words, which is precisely what was done at the Youth Theatre. However, even during Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika years, the censorship made it impossible to show *The Square* and *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* outside Lithuania. In 1987, when American theatre professionals were selecting the repertoire for the Youth Theatre's tour in the USA, Moscow recommended to the Ministry of Culture of the Lithuanian SSR that Smoriginas 'fall ill,' so that the American visitors would not be able to see *The Square*. Nonetheless, the minister of culture, Jonas Bielinis, took personal responsibility and Smoriginas miraculously recovered: *The Square* was performed for the Americans in secret, in an otherwise empty theatre. Such a cat-and-mouse game can be partly explained with reference to Herbert Marcuse's discussion of the universal relationship between society (not only totalitarian) and art (high culture): 'To be sure, the higher culture was always in contradiction with social reality, and only a privileged minority enjoyed its blessing and represented its ideals. These two antagonistic spheres of society have always coexisted; the higher culture has always been accommodating, while the reality was rarely disturbed by its ideals and its truth.' Marcuse continues, 'In its advanced positions, it [art] is the Great refusal – the protest against that which is. The modes in which man and things are made to appear, to sing and sound and speak, are modes of refuting, breaking, and recreating their factual

<sup>2</sup> Varlam Shalamov. *Vishera: An Anti-Novel*. See: <https://shalamov.ru/library/16/> (in Russian)

<sup>3</sup> Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn. *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*. Transl. Thomas P. Whitney. Vols. 1–2. New York: Harper and Row, 1974. p. 614; original emphasis.

existence. But these modes of negation pay tribute to the antagonistic society to which they are linked.<sup>4</sup> It is probably because of such 'tribute' that attempts were made to tolerate Nekrošius's modes of brazen refuting.

Moreover, the high art created at the Youth Theatre was never meant to be enjoyed solely by the privileged minority, the élite. Queuing for the tickets overnight became part of the legend of the theatre, and not only a local one. During the theatre's triumphant second Moscow tour in 1987, crowds stormed the Sovremennik Theatre; mounted police were called to restore order, while those eager to see the Lithuanians perform a play by a Russian cultural icon, Anton Chekhov, were begging for a spare ticket in the nearest subway station.

Nekrošius's dream (remember the aforementioned chorus of slaves) eventually overcame the borders erected by the censorship: his performances crossed the Iron Curtain and reached the free world despite the restrictions of the Soviet regime. Those born in independent Lithuania can hardly fathom that during the fifty years of the Soviet occupation, Lithuanians, if they were permitted to go abroad at all, had to fly via Moscow. Foreigners, too, could come to Vilnius only via Moscow.

The first international pilgrim to the Youth Theatre was the director of the Belgrade International Theatre Festival (BITEF) Mira Trailovič, a glamorous lady, who, when she stood next to Eimis, in his regular sweater knitted by his mother (most of us, including me, wore handmade sweaters at the time), looked, as Germans would put it, like air from a different planet (*Luft von anderem Planeten*). Yugoslavia then, indeed, was a different planet to us, and Mira Trailovič took the Youth Theatre there in 1984. BITEF became for the Lithuanians the first window to have opened to the world. In 1988, the Youth Theatre performed at BITEF for the second time. Among the audience there sat Franco Quadri, one of Italy's most famous theatre critics, who subsequently became Nekrošius's good friend and patron in Italy.

Nonetheless, the strongest impetus for the Youth Theatre's international career was given by famous American playwright Arthur Miller. In 1985, he was attending a meeting between Soviet and American writers in Moscow and had an opportunity to visit Vilnius, where he saw several performances directed by Nekrošius. Upon his return to the USA, Miller told his colleagues about the peculiar Lithuanian theatre genius. Soon after, the Youth Theatre was visited by Edith Markson, an influential figure in the US theatre world. She came accompanied by a group of American theatre directors and producers. A little later, Bernard Sahlins, the director of the Chicago International Theatre Festival, and several directors from the Alley Theatre in Houston arrived. The Chicago festival and the Houston theatre selected *Pirosmani, Pirosmani...*

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<sup>4</sup> Herbert Marcuse: *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002. pp. 60, 66.



and *Uncle Vanya*, and agreed to cover the expenses of the Youth Theatre's watershed tour in the USA in May 1988.

The Berlin Wall was still standing, and Sąjūdis, the Reform Movement of Lithuania, which led the struggle for Lithuania's independence, had not yet been created. Therefore, the first tour of the Youth Theatre in the United States (the second one took place in 1990) was more than a cultural event: it was Lithuania's first escape from a cage, the Soviet 'square'. It was a hopeful message to the nation that the Iron Curtain was not forever, that it might soon be withdrawn and trips to the West could become a regular thing. Thus the thirty five people from the Youth Theatre set off to the USA as if carried by the wings of *Lituanica*, the aeroplane flown from New York across the Atlantic Ocean by Lithuanian pilots Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas's in 1933. It is quite symbolic that Eimuntas Nekrošius had starred as Stasys Girėnas in Raimondas Vabalas's film *A Flight Over the Atlantic* (*Skrydis per Atlantą*) (1983), which narrates the story of Darius and Girėnas's endeavour.

The theatres were full. The English-speaking audiences watched with rapt attention and applauded enthusiastically for the actors, performing in Lithuanian – in fact, only in the theatre did many in the audience find out that Lithuanians are not Russians. Extremely positive reviews were published in the American press. All in all, it was a stupendous success. Lithuanian-American Arūnas Čiuberkis did a fabulous job as a translator. He and another compatriot, the wonderful Audra Misiūnienė, who volunteered to manage the tour, became true members of the troupe. It was an international triumph not only for the Youth Theatre but for the entire country, then still under the Soviet regime.

The tour was also important as a historical and purely political event as it united, for the first time, two parts of the nation, violently split by the Soviets: that which remained in the occupied Lithuania and that which had found refuge in the free world. The majority of the organisations created by the Lithuanian diaspora in the USA strictly complied with the policy of withdrawal and did not foster any connections with the Lithuanian SSR. They would boycott or even picket the sparse representatives of culture and arts from the homeland, because these visits, aimed exclusively at Lithuanian audiences in the US, were correctly seen as propaganda campaigns or even spying, conducted by the association *Tėviškė* (Homeland), essentially a KGB institution. By contrast, the tour of the Youth Theatre was arranged through the Ministry of Culture of the Soviet Union and its commercial institution Mosconcert, thereby bypassing the involvement of *Tėviškė* as well as avoiding the danger of being seen as yet another propaganda campaign celebrating the 'achievements' of Soviet Lithuania.

This allowed the Youth Theatre to be received with warm welcomes by various political organisations of Lithuanian Americans, even those who usually abstained from any official contacts with the Lithuanian SSR, because these threatened the anti-communist resistance movement and the politics of non-



Scene from the production '*Pirosmani, Pirosmani...*' (source: mmcentras.lt)

recognition of the occupation as well as eroded the unity of the diaspora in exile. The power of the art of the Youth Theatre helped demolish the wall of distrust which loomed large between the two artificially antagonised parts of the nation.

Sooner or later, any legend comes to an end, even if art is as ephemeral as theatre is. However, thirty years later, I can remember one of the scenes from *Uncle Vanya* in the tiniest details: Doctor Astrov (Kostas Smoriginas) shows Yelena Andreyevna (Dalia Storyk) a cartogram of his own making, detailing how the district looked 50 and 25 years ago, and how it looks now, and delivers a harsh diagnosis: 'Overall, this picture shows a gradual and certain degeneration, which, some 10 or 15 years later, will most probably become universal.'

More than 10 or 15 years have passed since *Uncle Vanya* premiered at the Youth Theatre. Has Astrov's prophecy come true? We need (I do!) to look at Eimuntas Nekrošius's magic screen once again, that gigantic magnifying glass which would show us the real picture of our contemporary existence.

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Funeral procession of Nekrošius (1952–2018) in Vilnius (source: technika2.org)



## “We Understand our Culture Better through the Other’s”

Interview with Theatre Historian Nina Király (1940–2018)

**Zsolt Szász:** *You belong to the ‘war generation’ which is commonly called the ‘great generation’ in Hungary. In the history of Russia, the Great Patriotic War (1941–45) and the subsequent years were crucial. What pivotal experiences did you, as a child, have at that time?*

**Nina Király:** During the war I stayed in Smolensk with my grandparents. I have a vivid memory of the many soldiers who could be seen everywhere, of the burnt-out churches and the dead. And of the games we played, which were all related to burial. We found dead birds, buried them and carved crosses for them. And sometimes I can hear the sounds of that time as well. Actually, in theatre, too, it is the sounds that I am most sensitive to. I find intonation very important. When we returned to Moscow with my grandparents after the war – my parents had stayed there all through the war – we had difficult times, but I remember a lot of positive community experiences. And I had fantastic teachers, despite the fact that I attended an average district school only. For instance, our maths teacher at the elementary school was already teaching us Gauss; or although there were no foreign languages taught at that time, when the teacher realized that I had an ear for languages, she gave me private English lessons; or that our history teacher obsessively made us draw blank maps... This experience makes me say today that the operation of every state is determined by the quality of its intellectuals.

**Zs. Sz.:** *Your openness to languages and cultures may also be due to the fact that you, as a child, travelled widely in the country with your father, who worked as an engineer in the Soviet Army, spending more time at different places.*

**N. K.:** There are four languages that I can use at every level: Russian, Polish, Hungarian and English. But I also went to a Lithuanian school so I can still read, say, a Lithuanian fairy tale. And since I have been to the Caucasus,



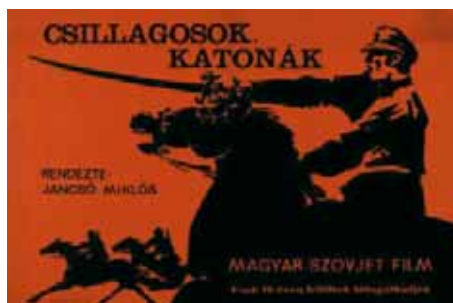
Lomonosov Moscow State University  
(postcard from the 60s)

and Russian. I took Polish, too, because Western literature was published mainly in Polish translation at that time, especially after 1956. I made very many Polish friends this way, who ensured me a continuous supply of fresh literature. These contacts of mine have been kept alive. Since our accession to the EU these then-flourishing Slavic courses have unfortunately been cut back everywhere. But I was also into anthropology, and began learning the Hungarian language at that time too – for love. But my teacher at that time was not my eventual husband, Gyula Király, but the inhabitants of Borzsa, a village in the district of Beregszász (Beregovo), where I spent two months and learned the basics. In fact, my fascination with the Hungarian language began when I heard someone speaking in a strange, unfamiliar language, and I had to take the trouble to find out that what I heard was a poem by Attila József. Thanks to Khrushchev's 'thaw', there were a lot of foreign students studying at the university at that time: English, Italians as well as Americans. And all at once I could hear two gentlemen talking in the corridor in Hungarian: one of them nicely and fluently, and the other a bit disjointed – I thought it was a linguist (and so it was, Kálmán Bolla, researcher of Russian-Hungarian linguistic relations, as it later turned out); and the other one was Gyula Király, who was to become my tutor in the family. Because one day in a park near Lomonosov University, I heard a group of foreigners speaking Russian, with someone – apparently a literary scholar – among them talking about Dostoevsky. Well, that's funny, I said

I am familiar with the Georgian alphabet. This kind of interest remained when I went to Lomonosov University in Moscow: I participated in ethnographic expeditions several times in the summer.

**Zs. Sz.:** *What was your major at university?*

**N. K.:** Since I graduated from secondary school a year ahead of my peers, with a gold medal, I did not need to take an entrance exam for the university and was free to select from the courses. I needed permission to take two majors, and I chose English



Film poster for Miklós Jancsó's *Csillagosok, katonák* (*The Red and the White*) by László Bátki, 1967 (source: [budapestposter.com](http://budapestposter.com))

to myself, what country can that be where they understand Dostoevsky even? That particular young man was Gyula Király. And shortly afterwards I decided to move to Hungary.

**Zs. Sz.:** *The middle of the sixties – when you moved to Hungary – was a most effervescent period in Russian-Hungarian cultural relations. It applies to literature, theatre and film as one. That was the time when, for example, Csillagosok, katonák (The Red and the White), was made by Jancsó, on Russian locations. What impact did this have on you?*

**N. K.:** Not much at that time. Only later, when I got acquainted with Miklós Jancsó and Márta Mészáros, did I start thinking about Hungarian mentality. I thought then, just as I do now, that Hungarians are very strong in character, and there are fewer maniacal people here than in Poland. However, they have less sense of community, and they are rather individualistic. It can also be observed in *Csillagosok és katonák* that it is easier to deceive Hungarians when they are together than when they are fleeing individually. They are endowed with a lot of invention and can concentrate very well, but only when they are on their own.

**Zs. Sz.:** *To change cultures is always very difficult. How did you take root in Hungary?*

**N. K.:** I started out very radically, translating a thousand-page novel by a nineteenth-century Hungarian novelist, József Eötvös (*Magyarország 1514-ben / Hungary in 1514*). Then I thought with my Hungarian artist friends that this would grow into a great cultural enterprise, but unfortunately it did not. Nevertheless, I wrote 150 new words every day into my vocabulary notebook, half of which I forgot right away, but I did learn the other half. Incidentally, it has been picked up again that this translation of mine might be published in Russia, in the academic series “Literary Memorabilia”, for the 500-year anniversary. To answer your question in more concrete terms: I began teaching at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in 1965, first on a contract basis, then, from 1968 on, by appointment to the Slavonic Department, where my favourite course was the comparative analysis of Polish and Hungarian Romanticism, such as Juliusz Słowacki and Vörösmarty. In 1973, when I defended my dissertation on Polish theatre, the independent Department of Polish Studies was created, which I am very proud of, because it granted Polish a prominent role among the other Slavic languages and literature.



Scene from the film *Csillagosok, katonák (The Red and the White)*, 1967, with József Madaras as Hungarian commander and Tibor Molnár in the role of András, d: Miklós Jancsó (photo: Tibor Inkey, source: stefan2001.blogspot.com)

**Zs. Sz.:** *When did you get close to theatre?*

**N. K.:** I have always, since my childhood, been close to it. In Moscow we used to go to the Bolshoi Theatre regularly, more to ballet and opera at first, because my dad had a very good singing voice. Later I also went to drama theatres regularly, where the best directors, such great masters as Tovstonogov, were working. And when I came to Hungary, as a doctoral student I chose the development of the Polish national theatre and the era of Enlightenment and early Romanticism as topics for research, on which I worked for five years. I regularly went to Wrocław and Warsaw, where I became acquainted with Jan Kott among others. In fact, we chose this topic together with him and my supervisor, Zbigniew Raszewski (the author of the famous Polish theatre historical monograph) in 1965, which was the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Polish theatre.

**Zs. Sz.:** *Jerzy Grotowski also worked in Wrocław at that time.*

**N. K.:** Yes, it was the last era of his theatre in Wrocław, and I saw all the performances that I could see live in his Laboratory Theatre. It was a very intensive period in Poland up till 1968, with political scandals surrounding Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*), with student riots and a lot of political events. However, few people know that Grotowski was very much tied to literary tradition, to Polish Romanticism, as he began with Słowacki's *Kordian*; or that he was also fond of epic pieces; and that he had an awesome *Hamlet*-project, which never got realised but the idea was very nice, as his colleague, Flaszen, documented it. This was a most intensive and happy period for me, too.

**Zs. Sz.:** *How did your professional career progress at home in Hungary after 1973?*

**N. K.:** Actually, I enjoyed teaching very much: my first students at that time, who were almost the same age as me, became my best colleagues later. I am proud of having managed to secure a few scholarships for them to Poland, which granted them an excellent training – for example, they had obligatory examinations in the term courses there, too.

**Zs. Sz.:** *1975 saw the premiere of Tadeusz Kantor's *Dead Class* in Krakow. How did you learn about it, and when did you meet Kantor in person?*

**N. K.:** Happenings were in fashion in those years, so Kantor as an artist also directed such things. The first thing I saw by him was some happening in Warsaw. Later I learned about the ongoing rehearsals of *Dead Class*, and then



Tadeusz Kantor's painting on the cover of *Halálbűnház* (*Theatre of Death*) (ed. László Beke and Nina Király), Budapest – Szeged, 1994



I went to its opening as well. Yet it was not then that we met in person. When the acclaimed semiotician Yuri Lotman came to visit Budapest in 1984, we could already feel the upcoming significant changes. It even crossed my mind that I should return home, to Moscow. Lotman also kept saying what a pity it was that I did not stay there at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy, where I started work after graduation at the Departement of Cultural History, and where, besides Lotman, several famous semioticians were working,

such as Boris Uspensky or Andrei Zalizniak. So I was at a loss as to what to do. And then I received a phone call from Krakow asking if I wanted to substitute for Professor Jan Mihalik at the Jagiellonian University to teach the course in the theatre history of Poland. So I took my children and left for Krakow. And on the day after my arrival a colleague told me that Kantor was just beginning rehearsals for *Let the Artists Die* and asked me if I wanted to join him. And from that time on until his death I worked with Kantor.

**Zs. Sz.:** *You were also his colleague at Cricot 2.*

**N. K.:** Yes. I participated in the symposia and helped with the preparation of the materials. That is why it was possible to have Hungary publish the first foreign-language translation of Kantor's texts in a book form.<sup>1</sup> This volume is important not only from the perspective of theatre but also for the new kind of synthesis between fine art, music and text.

To me, who had been an expert in traditional theatre before, it meant that I needed to re-evaluate and reformulate all my knowledge and experience. By the way, Kantor was extremely sensitive and jealous of his actors and me, too, so we could only escape secretly to see a couple of performances at the Stary Teatr, for example. He was even difficult to persuade to use the gallery of Stary for an exhibition, but it finally worked out somehow.



Signboards of Cricot 2  
and Kantor Archives in Krakow



<sup>1</sup> Tadeusz Kantor: *Halálszínház (Theatre of Death)*, Szeged, Prospero Könyvek, 1994.

**Zs. Sz.:** *In retrospect, what is, in your opinion, the essence of Kantor's reform of the language of theatre?*

**N. K.:** He always used the texts of Gombrowicz and Witkacy (Witkiewicz) in his productions. However, he wrote the performance-text, the 'scores', on the basis of improvisations with the actors. Taking the Witkacy text as a starting point, the actors created a situation among themselves along the lines that Kantor had predetermined for them, so that what they were doing should not be make-believe or role play. Music came to be added to this created situation. Then they returned to the text. It was no accident that Kantor gave the name Cricot 2 to his theatre. Because there had also been a Cricot 1 with mostly artists taking part and performing grotesque parodies of Romanticism. But even then it was already very important for Kantor that artists should control and transform their roles as actors. That artists should visualise their roles, 'draw themselves into them', since they, as artists, have a lifetime's experience of that, and in the meantime there is also a given text, the canvas to keep in mind. But, after all, they must have this whole thing performed, too. Anyhow, Polish theatre, not only in Kantor's case, has typically had a way with distancing, with transpositions of this kind.

**Zs. Sz.:** *This feature can be noted with Wyspiański already. Returning to antique tragedies, he was both a reformer of the Polish dramatic language and the creator of the new, art nouveau visualisation on stage. This tradition deriving from him has a profound effect on Polish theatre even to this day. The same is true of Kantor.*

**N. K.:** Polish theatre is connected to mainstream European theatre through Wyspiański. Similar to the way Stanislavski used to connect to Craig at that time. An intricate context comes into being in this manner. But ever since I came to Hungary I have found that Hungarians tend to shut themselves off on account of their language, whereas these contacts and this openness are natural across the world. It was also typical of the art life of Berlin or Munich at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the ongoing cooperation of artists and theatre practitioners.

**Zs. Sz.:** *Do you think this sort of theatre-making proves sustainable after Kantor's death?*

**N. K.:** Jan Kott's famous phrase might be quoted that after the death of Molière nobody is to sit in his armchair. Nobody is to sit in the chair of Kantor with impunity, either. But Kantor has had a great impact on Polish theatre to this day. Take, for instance, the fact that Piotr Tomaszuk has used very many quotations by Kantor in his 2006 production of *God Nijinski* at the Teatr Wierszalin in Supraśl, northeastern Poland. And Kantor's last work, *The Death of Tintagiles*, with students from Milan, which was, on the one hand, a return to his own first stage direction, functions as a real message: it demonstrates that real, viable innovation can only be founded on tradition.

**Zs. Sz.:** *Between 1993 and 1999 you were the director of the Hungarian Theatre Institute and Museum (OSZMI). What concept did you have as head of a national institution? What are you most proud of concerning those five years?*

**N. K.:** My ambition was to place Hungarian acting in a wider European context and to attract as many European theatres into the country as possible. To this end, Gábor Zsámbéki had done a great deal before me by making Katona József Theatre enter the Union of the Theatres of Europe (UTE). It was no accident that the Hungarian Theatre Institute and Museum and Katona József Theatre jointly published a book about the activity of foreign stage directors in Hungary and foreign productions presented in Hungary during the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> I also wanted foreigners to see more of us, Hungarians. I was delighted to have officially had the opportunity to nominate visual designers to the Prague Quadrennial, the most significant forum for scenographers. At first, it was not easy to persuade them to participate in the forum and to allow their works to appear in a publication, but we eventually managed, and even won a silver medal with it.<sup>3</sup> As the head of the Hungarian Theatre Institute and Museum, I thought my most important task was to bring out in Hungarian translation as many foreign publications of theory, theatre history and aesthetics as possible. Without this, it is impossible to think, to properly educate and train a new generation of creators or reviewers. Within the publishing programme, the reorganization of the contents of our periodical *Világsház* (*World Theatre*) was very important, with thematic issues coming out on anthropology, avant-garde and puppetry, for instance. The Kantor volume, published in Szeged, was followed by the publication of the writings of Anatoly Vasiliev and Jan Kott here. I also had multiple external colleagues helping with that, such as András Kozma and Zsófia Rideg, with whom we are now colleagues at the Nemzeti (National). I built very good relationships with museums, take for example Hopp Ferenc Museum of Asiatic Arts, Béla Kelényi or the manager and curator of the Esterházy collection, with whom we also had a joint publication on Baroque theatrical scenery in Hungary<sup>4</sup>. In collaboration with Petőfi Literary Museum (PIM), we published a hundred years' set designs for Madách's Tragedy as well<sup>5</sup>. However, I could not manage, during my term of office, to bring out, for instance, Eugenio Barba's dictionary of theatre anthropology, which will probably be produced now by Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen.

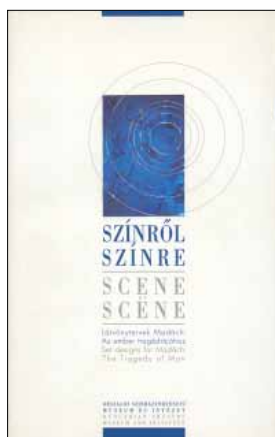
**Zs. Sz.:** In 1999 you received a contract from artistic director Attila Vidnyánszky to work with him at the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen, where you stayed until 2006. It must have been a bold undertaking in Debrecen to transform a regional repertory theatre into an experimental arts theatre.

<sup>2</sup> *Summary of Guest Performances by Foreign Companies 1881–1993*. Ed. Ágnes Alpár, Budapest, 1993

<sup>3</sup> *Hungarian Scenographers*. 1995 Prague Quadriennial. Hungarian Theatre Institute and Museum, Budapest, 1995

<sup>4</sup> *The Sopron Collection of Jesuit Design*. Enciklopédia Publishing House, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> *Scene by Scene*, Hungarian Theatre Institute and Museum – National Széchényi Library, Budapest, 1999



N. K.: I first came to know Attila Vidnyánszky better at New Theatre (Új Színház), Budapest, where I also worked in international relations under the directorship of István Márta between 2003 and 2004. Earlier, however, I had seen Beregszász (Beregovo) productions and advised the then artistic director of the KONTAKT Festival to invite the company from Beregszász. In fact, it was due to this that Anatoly Vasiliev learnt about them and they could take part in the Third International Theatre Olympics in 2001, in Anatoly Vasiliev's programme series titled *The Eye – Slanted Scythians View*, at the newly built theatre in Moscow. I took an active part in the preparation of this programme. And during the festival I worked with Thomas Richards' company and the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław, too. Attila Vidnyánszky's appeal was that he turned to



Nina Király and Anatoly Vasiliev in the new building of the Dramatic Art School Theatre in Moscow, 2001

me to recommend foreign stage directors. Since theatre for me always starts with the stage director. I think that it is through the invitation of directors of outstanding originality that you can show something really new to the audience. Although people usually resist at first, later they say: 'Well, let me see that again.' Initial reluctance is always reckoned on, and you do not have to worry about it. The audience should never be despised and humiliated for not being able to understand novelty. Some will leave the production but most of them will stay. When,

for example, Vasiliev opened the *A nagybácsi álma* (*Uncle's Dream*) production in 1994 at the then Art Theatre (Művész Színház) in Budapest, very many left, but then there were those who went to see it twice, and finally scenographer Igor Popov was awarded the Critics' Prize that year. There is always a little resistance to novelty. At the same time, it will, sooner or later, challenge your imagination and curiosity. In Debrecen, I had to overcome my resistance to a rural town at first. Because, say, the distance between Madrid and Valladolid (which is home to a very important drama school at present) is the same, 200 km, and the train covers it in 45 minutes, whereas the train from Budapest to Debrecen takes two hours and a half to bump along. But the bigger risk was whether the actors and the audience would accept the famous directors I recommended. I feel that eventually this did happen in the case of Andrzej Bubień or Victor Ryzhakov, for instance.

**Zs. Sz.:** *Let us consider a wider international terrain, too. It seems to me that in Western Europe, especially in German-language theatre, a kind of schematicism has gained dominance in the formal expression of director's theatre.*

**N. K.:** Indeed, European theatre festivals were not so interesting over the last two years. Perhaps it is because the great directors' generation is growing old. And because the disintegration of the ensembles has begun in the eastern regions of the European community, too, which was earlier a typical tendency in the West. A reason why it was not easy to invite some of the productions to our current festival is that the actors are signed up here and there, being only guests in the productions, so we need to make individual contracts with them. It can also be seen recently, both in the West and in the East, and here in Hungary as well, that actors are getting a greater role in shaping theatre. Take, for instance, that three or four actors team up to travel all around the country with their performances. More and more actors are involved in stage direction, too, which usually does not do productions any good, but of course there are exceptions and successful attempts. It seems to me as if the relationship between tradition and innovation has become split. It is mostly in Russia that the relationship between, for example, masters and disciples or literary traditions and theatrical schools has remained steady. Students keep coming to Saint Petersburg or Moscow from republics which became independent after the disintegration of the Soviet Union to study drama. However, they are, at the same time, open to the Western world, Scandinavia or America as well. So there is greater movement and stronger globalisation. But as I see it, there is nevertheless a slow return to theatre founded on stage directors of great originality. As is the case in Europe from the beginning of the twentieth century, with productions still recorded by directors.

**Zs. Sz.:** *With the emergence of new nation states, nationalist sentiment has inevitably strengthened, and ethnic traditions are coming to the fore again in the whole of Europe. In the former Soviet republics, for example, national theatres come into being one after the other, while they also remain tied to classical Russian theatrical schools.*

**N. K.:** Already in 1991 Krystyna Meissner began the KONTAKT Festival in Toruń, Poland, where she invited productions from, for example, Siberia, but also from other republics of the former Soviet Union. At this festival, the national theme brought poetic novelties as well, which is due as much to the Russian school. In the meantime, in Yekaterinburg, the Russian traditions-based Nikolai Kolada School was founded, attracting playwrights, stage directors and actors from provincial Siberian towns, who had great success in Moscow at the current Chekhov Festival, too.

**Zs. Sz.:** *I wonder if we, today, can expect the revival of theatre through some kind of synthesis between our own tradition and the shared form language.*

**N. K.:** Yes, it is an existing trend today. But beyond this, the media have a very important role to play now, with new media tools readily being used onstage by everyone. It can also be seen that theatres nowadays do not choose contemporary pieces of their own authors only, but, as we are to see from the Tatars at our current MITEM festival, they present works from other cultures, in this case a Scandinavian piece (*A Summer Day*, by Jan Fosse). The director of the production, Farid Bikchantayev (the head director of the Galiaskar Kamal Tatar National Academic Theatre, in Kazan), was also brought up on the Russian school of psychological theatre, and this is such a unique connection, which makes this production most exciting. There is some kind of Scandinavian sadness in the production, the acting style is covert, yet it also has a deeper psychological approach, which the viewer finds unsettling: How can one, left to themselves, survive emotional ordeal? Where does love end? How do people become distant? The aesthetic novelty here lies in the visualisation of the story, and it offers a fantastic experience throughout the performance.

**Zs. Sz.:** *There is an existing concept of cultural theory which predicts the focalization of current peripheries.*

**N. K.:** Yes, and that is one reason why oriental theatres are so important. Take, for instance, the impact of Japanese theatre on Meyerhold, then on Kantor at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, it can be seen in the other direction, too: the 2013 Beijing *Romeo and Juliet* production is a real world event. Who would have thought that a Chinese actor would play Shakespeare like that? The Korean costumes, for example, a combination of Shakespearean style and native tradition, were beautiful, for which they received the Gold Medal at the Prague Quadriennale.

**Zs. Sz.:** *Does this re-discovery of oriental culture indicate a kind of return to the art philosophical ideas of Art Nouveau a hundred years ago? The period when philosophy and sacrality, to use a modern term, were embodied in a new kind of sensitivity and created new artistic forms?*

**N. K.:** Yes. A new kind of aesthetic approach, open-mindedness and, in addition, a deeper immersion are typical of the present creators. And the wisdom that we understand our culture better through the other's.



**Zs. Sz.:** *Were these also the main selection criteria for the productions at MITEM?*

**N. K.:** Yes. But the fact that the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stanislavski's birth last year remained almost unnoticed in Hungary also had a part to play in it. When, in any case, the twentieth century came to pass in the spirit of Stanislavski in the field of theatre culture. This year is the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Meyerhold. They are the two basic figures; and next year will be an other Stanislavski student's, Vahtangov's. And these anniversaries coincide with the opening of the new theatre in Petersburg, which I believe was not built for the twenty-first, but for the twenty-second century already. The initial selection criterion for our festival was that it should be the meeting of national theatres. But the Warsaw theatre had already created such a festival, and as next year will see the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Polish theatre, the meeting of national theatres will be re-organized for that occasion. So I thought we had better build the concept of the festival on stage directors. That is why Russian theatre became the guest of honour. And similarly to the first KONTAKT Festival, I wanted to present, first of all, those new national theatres in Hungary which grew out of the Russian school but which have their own special style of acting, visuality and musicality. Almost each shortlisted country has a favourite author: for example, it is Shakespeare for the Georgians, Molière for the Bulgarians, but their director, Morfov, once had a fantastic *Peer Gynt*, too. There is going to be a very nice Lithuanian *A Masked Ball* performance directed by Rimas Tuminas. I must tell you, that while it was Sokurov by his film *Faust*, in theatre Tuminas was the one who made me understand the essence of German and Russian Romanticism. But Tuminas' Schiller play was also beautiful at the Moscow Sovremennik Theatre earlier. Today he is the most brilliant interpreter of Romantic pieces, mixed with some surrealism characteristic of Lithuanians. In addition to the detectable impact of the Russian school in his work, each of his productions is characterised by a projection of the play onto the ethics, mentality and imagination that Lithuanians own.

**Zs. Sz.:** *With next year's festival already in mind, where should we orient ourselves? Are we in a position here, on the border of East and West, to unite these two worlds in some way?*

**N. K.:** I thought we would go a little further south next year, orienting towards Romanian, Spanish, Italian and French theatres as well. Although once we had a Strehler production here, thanks to Gábor Zsámbéki, the genre of commedia dell'arte is enjoying an upswing again. Spanish theatre is also going through an era of renewal; contemporary Spanish dramas are very exciting, too, mainly those by authors of the generation in its forties today. But Serbian and Croatian theatres could also be better presented, as a lot of interesting productions were made there. Although they have fewer great director's theatres, the actors are excellent. And let us not forget about Northern Africans, either...

**Nina Király** (née Nina Petrovna Dubrovskaya, (1940–2018) was a theatre historian, dramaturg, lecturer and festival curator and an internationally renowned expert of Eastern European theatre. Born in Moscow in 1940, she graduated from Lomonosov University (today: Moscow State University) in 1962 from the Russian Philology Department (Linguistics and Anthropology). That same year she conducted research at the Slavic Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Department of Cultural History). Those years laid the foundation for her studies in the area of Theory of Culture and Communications in the Department of Cultural Semiotics (under the guidance of Yuri Lotman, Vyacheslav Ivanov and Boris Uspensky). In 1964 she moved to Budapest, Hungary, with her husband, the literary historian Gyula Király.

From 1965 she worked as an assistant lecturer, and from 1973 as an associate professor in the Eötvös Loránd University's (ELTE) Slavic Department, until 1994. From 1984 till 1990 she worked as a guest lecturer at the Jagello University in Krakow, Poland (Department of History and Theory of Theatre), where she taught the theory of world theatre and the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Polish theatre. During this period she became Tadeusz Kantor's official collaborator at his Cricot 2 theatre. She also collaborated with other famous Polish directors such as Jerzy Jarocki, Włodzimierz Staniewski and Andrzej Wajda.

From 1993 to 1999 Király served as Director of the Hungarian Theatre Institute and Museum (OSZMI). During this period she initiated, edited and brought to publication many books by and about famous international theatre directors and creators, introducing them to Hungarian readers for the very first time. She edited a compilation of the essays and manifestos of Tadeusz Kantor in Hungarian translation (*Halálszínház*, Prospero Könyvek, Szeged, 1994), the essays of Jan Kott (*A lehetetlen színház vége*, OSZMI, Budapest, 1997), and the theoretical writings and rehearsal notes of Anatoly Vasiliev (*Színházi fűga*, Budapest, OSZMI, 1998). The catalogue she co-edited about Hungarian set and costume designers (*Magyar színpadképzők*, Prágai Quadriennálé '95, OSZMI, Budapest, 1995) won a silver medal at the 1995 Prague Quadriennial. Nina Király strived to bring international directors and scenic artists to the theatre and to share their work with the Hungarian public. She also helped take important Hungarian productions to audiences around Europe. She served on many festival jury panels across Europe.

Between 1999 and 2003 she worked as a freelance theatre researcher, critic and artistic advisor for the International *Divadelna Nitra* Festival (Slovakia) and for KONTAKT (Poland). She also held seminars at Anatoly Vasiliev's Dramatic Art School theatre in Moscow.

Between 2003 and 2004 she was advisor for international theatres at the Új Színház (Budapest). She also worked as the editorial member of *Société Internationale d'Histoire Comparée du Théâtre, de l'Opéra et du Ballett* (Université de Paris IV – Sorbonne); was a member of the advisory board for *Theater* (Yale School of Drama / Yale Repertory Theatre, USA); and worked as co-editor of the Polish theatre periodical *Pamiętnik Teatralny*.

During the period 2006–2013 Nina Király was the artistic consultant for international projects at the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen. From 2013 till her death she worked as the Head of the International Department at the National Theatre, Budapest. From 2016 to 2018 she also worked as a regional editor (Hungary) of TheTheatreTimes.com.

For her services to theatre, Nina Király was the recipient of several awards, including L'Ordre du Merite Culturel (Ministry of Culture, Poland, 1975), the Jászai Mari Award (Hungarian Ministry of Culture, 2012) and the Witkacy Award (International Theatre Institute [ITI], Poland, 2015).

*The interview was conducted by Zsolt Szász in 2014*

*English translation by: Mrs Durkó, Nóra Varga; Revised English version by Katalin Trencsényi (TheTheatreTimes.com); Published in Hungarian: Szenárium, 2014/3.*

„Őrjöngő röptünk  
mondd, hová vezet?”

/Madách Imre/



**MITEM**

**MADÁCH NEMZETKÖZI SZÍNHÁZI TALÁLKOZÓ**  
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“Every dictatorship regarded Madách’s dramatic poem [*The Tragedy of Man*] as dangerous. When Antal Németh directed it at the Hamburg Staatliches Schauspielhaus in 1937, the Admissions Committee wanted it banned, because it considered the Phalanstery Scene an open attack on the idea of national socialism. It relented after a lengthy debate, on condition that the ominous Scene XII include inscriptions in Cyrillic as a reference to the Soviet Union. The communist one-party state did not dither as much: it simply commanded the play off the stage.” (Géza Balogh)

“García Lorca’s last play, *The House of Bernarda Alba* (...) premiered on the Hungarian stage in 1955. It was presented at the József Katona Theatre, under extremely interesting circumstances. Namely, the troupe had been preparing to perform László Németh’s play *Galilei*, but the censors withdrew their approval at the last minute. Director Endre Marton was forced to make a quick decision and he chose to present García Lorca’s play instead, with the ironic result that a play banned in Spain for decades got the green light to stand in for a Hungarian author’s freshly banned play.” (Eszter Katona)

“We can now only simulate orgy and liberation, at most we can pretend as if we were moving in an unchanged direction with an accelerated speed, but in fact we are accelerating in emptiness, because all the goals of liberation are behind us, and we are suffering from knowing that all results are known in advance. (...) Art has failed (...) to become an ideal way of life (...) It has got vanished not in any kind of transcendent idealism, but in the general aestheticism of everyday life, it ceased to exist so as to hand over its place to the mere spreading of images in the quotidian transaesthetics.” (Jean Baudrillard)

“If we shrink the world, if everything is within reach (...) we will be infinitely unhappy because we have lost the true place of freedom, the spaciousness. (...) The space of freedom is shrinking with speed. However, freedom needs space. Before, freedom of movement was thought to lead to infinite freedom. [But] this is not true; beyond a certain limit, the dictatorship of movement occurs; the self-exhausting, tormenting offensive.” (Paul Virilio)

“«There is nothing wrong with mankind as to its biological essence. Its *élan vital* would still shoot it in the air as a well-strung bended bow would an arrow», writes playwright Miklós Hubay, my first theatrical mentor in Hungary, in his commentary on the London Scene in his book on Imre Madách. This is the last historical scene in *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*) with mankind being on the verge of acquiescence in the final exhaustion of its physical, intellectual and moral reserves. Eve alone, the First Woman, opposes collective suicide:

«Dismal abyss, gape at me, since you must, / but I’m undaunted by your fearsome night; / what tends towards you is but earthly dust – / look, I traverse you on a shaft of light!»” (Attila Vidnyánszky)

