

szcenárium

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Inaugural by E. Á. Kulcsár • E. Barba: *A Theatre Not Made of Bricks and Stone* • T. Suzuki: *Culture Is the Body* in Hungarian – Foreword by K. Steele • 12 Comments on 12 Chapters of Th. Terzopoulos: *The Return of Dionysus* by I. Dimadi • “We Are on Our Way to Salvation” – In the Directorial Workshop of A. Vidnyánszky • G. Balogh: Productions of *The Tragedy of Man* During and After Dictatorships • N. Király: The Tragedy of Man or Mankind? • I. Sirató: Madách in Foreign Languages • Two Readings of the Eskimo Scene by K. Kürtösi and Á. Pálfi • M. Hubay: *After the Ball*. One-Act Variation on the Theme of the Eskimo Scene

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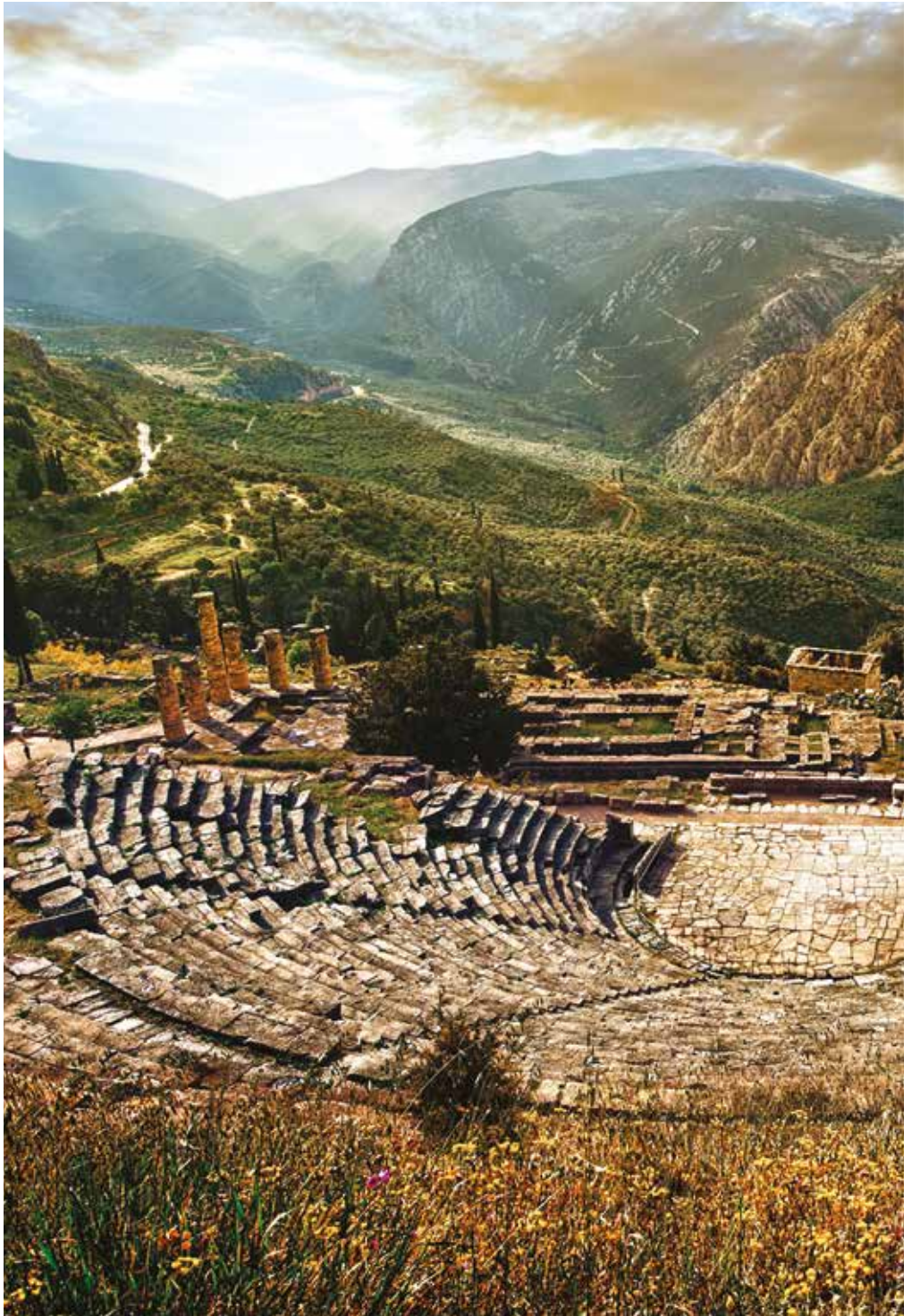
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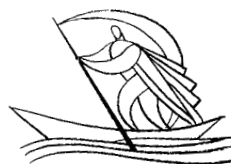
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The theatre and the ruins of the Apollo sanctuary in Delphi
(source: nationalgeographic.com)



Weapons, Muses, Encounters

Edit Ágota Kulcsár, main organiser of the Theatre Olympics,
interviewed by György Lukácsy*

– The framework for holding the 10th Theatre Olympics in Hungary is ensured by the Madách International Theatre Meeting (MITEM), which the National Theatre has been organising annually for the past nine years. What is the idea that connects these two events?

We tend to think in stereotypes about world events and about people living far away. This predicament enhances the role of personal encounters and experiences. Art festivals are an opportunity to learn more about other peoples' cultures, worldview and feelings about the world. This is what MITEM, held annually since 2014, has accomplished, and this year, the Theatre Olympics will make foreign performances accessible to audiences across the country. The idea occurred to us before the pandemic and the outbreak of the war that the Madách jubilee year would be the best time to extend MITEM into the Theatre Olympics. The world has changed a lot since then, presenting us all with unexpected obstacles and challenges. Imre Madách was born 200 years ago, and his most important work will be commemorated in the framework of the Olympics: the scenes of *The Tragedy of Man* will be performed by acting students from different nations, which, in addition to a unique theatrical experience, will contribute to a wider international awareness of Madách's genius.

– Weapons were silent for the duration of the ancient Greek Olympics, but we seem to be living in a more ruthless environment today. Can different views really coexist at a cultural event like the Theatre Olympics?

It is a fair question to ask: is there a place for art and theatre in people's lives when the guns are roaring, there is crisis in every aspect of our lives, society is divided on almost every issue, and opposing views clash? Art has no direct

* Edited version of an interview published in the January 2023 issue of *Nemzeti Magazin*

impact on social and economic processes, but it can always warn people to look beyond things and to find, again and again, the eternal values that guide us like a compass through troubled seas. These days, we tend to forget that reality is not merely the visible, material world. Humans are spiritual beings, our spiritual health affects the functioning of every cell in our body. The miracle of the theatre is that it communicates from soul to soul, and provides spiritual nourishment and healing. Spectators who experience old-new stories with the actors can draw strength for their daily struggles from the intellectual and spiritual heritage of humanity.

– *It is also extraordinary in the history of MITEM that this time, the National Theatre is organising it as part of the Olympics. To what extent does this alter MITEM?*

MITEM has been getting stronger year after year, with more and more countries and major theatres coming on board. But the Theatre Olympics is taking it to the next level not only in terms of the number of performances invited, but also by allowing us to present the latest work of many more major creators. The programme includes several recent productions coming to Budapest on their European tour after Madrid, London and Rome. One such production, based on the play *Life is a Dream* by the Baroque poet Calderón de la Barca, is the latest international project of world-famous English director Declan Donnellan and his company Cheek by Jowl, coming to MITEM after Madrid and London. Over the past two years, Romeo Castellucci's *BROS*, an interdisciplinary vision that draws us into joint-up thinking with elemental force, has been a resounding success across Europe. The outstanding German artist Heiner Goebbels is coming to Budapest to present his grand theatrical vision *Everything that Happened and would Happen* with his company at a special venue: the Tüske Hall. We have managed to bring productions all the way from Mexico, China, India and Japan. We have planned it for years and now it has come true: the most important Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki, whose famous book *Culture is the Body* will soon be published in Hungarian, finally makes his debut in Hungary with his company. And we will also have with us Theodoros Terzopoulos, a regular guest at MITEM, who even directed at the National Theatre last year. His book *The Return of Dionysus* is also about to be published.

– *MITEM has been committed to artistic and ideological diversity all along, but this time, you are also planning to open the Theatre Olympics to new genres.*

MITEM's programme at the National Theatre has fundamentally consisted of so-called "prose" performances, sometimes spiced by circus, dance or puppet performances with a special theatrical atmosphere. This will be the case again this year. And circus-theatre will return, too – with the top-class production the *Slawa Snow Show*. We have organised the Theatre Olympics in partnership with all the theatrical institutions in Hungary, multiplying our forces, so to speak, with our colleagues contributing their professional know-how and contacts

all over the country. The Olympics' programme of puppet and dance theatre, circus, alternative, student and amateur theatre has been developed by the most knowledgeable experts of each theatrical genre. This also means that there is something for all ages, from children and young people to theatre enthusiasts and operetta lovers. We are delighted that Hungary will host in the framework of the Theatre Olympics the *International School of Theatre Anthropology/New Generation (ISTA/NG) Workshop* led by Eugenio Barba on 7–21 May 2023. We hope to have his representative book *The Five Continents of Theatre*, co-authored with Nicola Savarese, published in Hungarian by then. The closing performance of the Olympics, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be staged by a Ukrainian director and presented at the Margaret Island Open-Air Stage, accompanied by the magical performance-spectacle of the Italian company Teatro Potlach.

– *Based on previous Olympic experiences, what benefits can Hungary and our theatre culture expect of the event?*

The 200th anniversary of the Miskolc National Theatre and the 100th anniversary of the Budapest Operetta Theatre, among others, will be celebrated during the Olympics, which makes these artistic institutions natural participants for the international showcase. As the Hungarian theatres participating in the Theatre Olympics have invited partner institutions from over 50 countries as well as Hungarian companies from across the borders, the long-term impact of the Theatre Olympics will depend on the inviting institutions themselves, i.e. whether these theatres succeed in building and strengthening their foreign networks. In 2023, audiences will have the opportunity to discover the world's major theatre companies, and professionals can learn a lot from this unique chance to see what the world has to offer. In addition to the theatres' autonomous networking opportunities, Attila Vidnyánszky will also be there as a member of the Organising Committee of the Olympics. These two circumstances alone can help our theatre culture to remain open and become integrated in the international circulation.

Translated by László Vértés



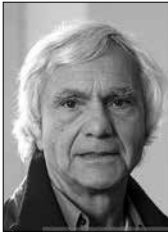
Eugenio Barba

Nicola Savarese

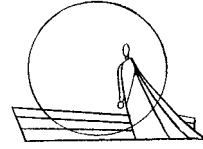
A SZÍNHÁZ ÖT KONTINENSE TÉNYEK ÉS LEGENDÁK A SZÍNÉSZ MATERÁLIS KULTÚRÁJÁRÓL



Cover of Hungarian-language volume for 10th International Theatre Olympics



world theatre and theory



EUGENIO BARBA

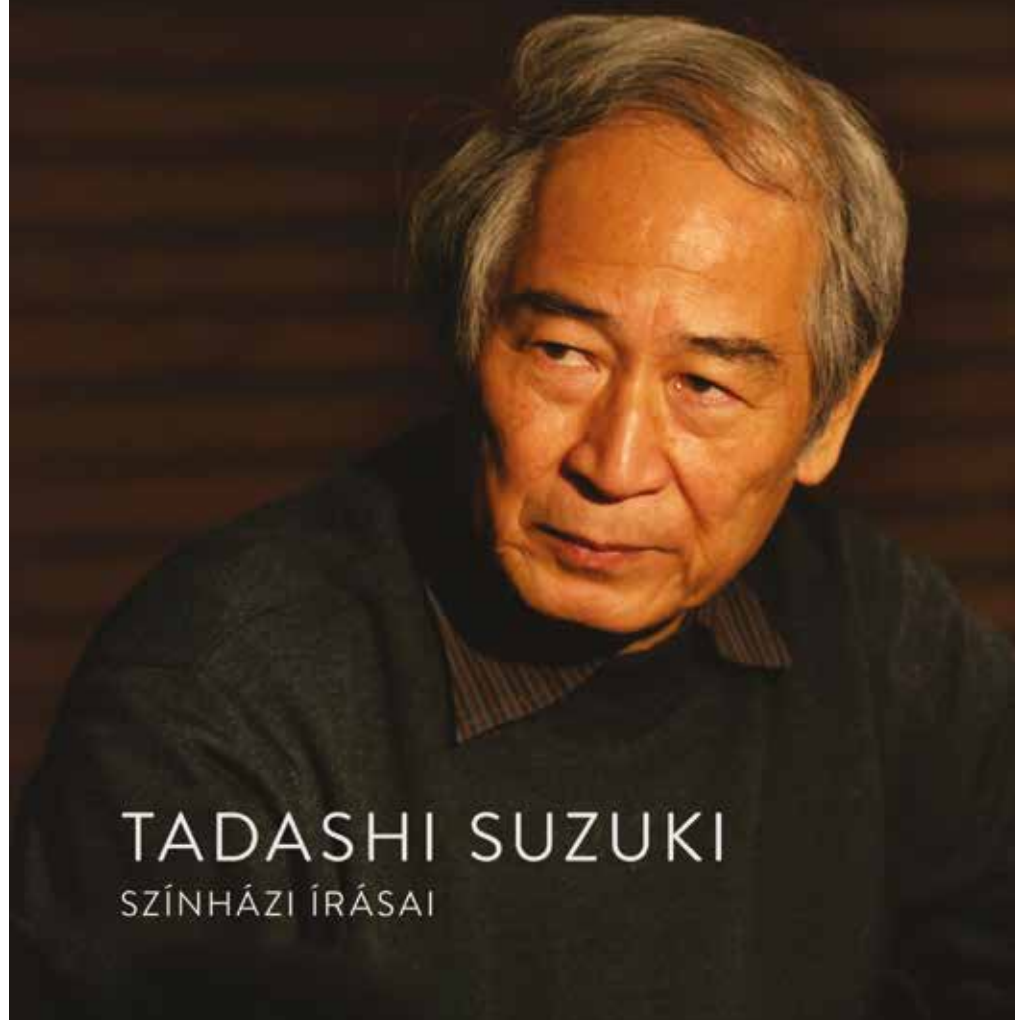
A Theatre Not Made of Bricks and Stone^{*}

In 1914, a World Congress on theatre was organised in Rome: Gordon Craig, Max Reinhardt, WB. Yeats, Maeterlinck, Marinetti, Pirandello and Walter Gropius all participated. Copeau sent a text in which he spoke of the future of theatre as a popular art. The idea circulated at the Congress that in order to overcome the crisis which was crippling world dramaturgy, one could turn to architects for help. A new stage architecture might be able to produce a new way of writing for the stage. In discussion with Walter Gropius, Gordon Craig defended the autonomy of the director against the tendencies of a creative but constrictive theatre architecture. Finally, he argued with the Italian critic Silvio D'Amico: "Mr. D'Amico has quoted a statement by Mr. Bernard Shaw, claiming that drama gives birth to theatres, but a theatre does not give birth to a drama. Mr. D'Amico has reported Shaw's statement and pointed his finger at a small architectural model for a big theatre made of bricks, wood and stone. It is probable that theatre buildings have been constructed (with a little help from architects) by the works of dramatists. But the theatre preceding the drama, and which is the only theatre that counts, was and is not a building: it is the sound of the voice, the expression of the face, the movements of the body, of the person; that is, the actor."

What is theatre? A building? The Comédie-Française, the Aleksandrinski, the Dramaten? Is it an institution, a financial enterprise, a cooperative? Theatre is the women and the men who do it. Nevertheless, when we visit Drottningholm, Versailles, the Olympic Theatre in Vicenza, or one of the small theatres with which the princes, the courts and the Academies embellished their cities, we feel the same kinaesthetic reactions as in a live performance. Those bricks and stones become living space, even if nothing is staged there. They too are a way of thinking and dreaming the theatre, materialising it and handing it down through the centuries.

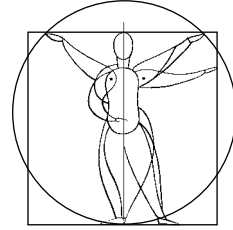
^{*} See: Eugenio Barba – Nicola Savarese: *The Five Continents of Theatre* (fragment), p. 156.

A TESTBEN ÉLŐ KULTÚRA



TADASHI SUZUKI
SZÍNHÁZI ÍRÁSAI

Cover of Hungarian-language volume for 10th International Theatre Olympics



The Limit of the Actor Approaching Zero

Foreword by Kameron Steele to the English Edition of
Tadashi Suzuki: *Culture Is the Body*

The Limit of the Actor Approaching Zero

In analytic geometry, an asymptotic limit approaching zero refers to the convergence of a curve and a straight line, or asymptote. The critical feature of this mathematical concept is that the distance between the curve and its asymptote approaches zero as they move along the graph of a function to infinity. In other words, the curve and the line grow incrementally closer to each other, but never meet.

The fundamental theory behind Tadashi Suzuki's praxis is a working hypothesis for applying this concept to art. If zero signifies perfection, then the "limit" represents how the artist persistently advances toward that perfection, knowing it will never be attained. The limit of the actor approaching zero thus describes the ceaseless quest for ways to realize, however miniscule, the ever-elusive state of absolute freedom in performance.

For Suzuki, this quixotic notion of striving to achieve an impossible goal correlates to the inherent, almost maniacal tenacity required to be an artist. In practice, this means cultivating an awareness of the gap



Tadashi Suzuki & Kameron Steele
(source: Suzuki Company of Toga)

between the ideal self and the actual self, identifying the obstacles to closing that gap and experimenting with ways to overcome them. As each individual obstacle is overcome, a new one must be discovered to replace it. It is this incessant search for obstacles and willful engagement of the challenges they present that allows us to evolve as artists – and as human beings. “Go toward the difficulty”: This is the central mantra of Suzuki’s ethic. As such, Suzuki’s theoretical writing is not merely a response to theatrical concerns, but an epistle for living in the twenty-first century. Behind his plea to vigorously identify and overcome obstacles is an imperative to focus on process, not product: a manifesto imploring us to change the paradigm of our lives, to live not in the solution, but in the problem; not in the answer, but in the question.

Living in the Answer

To some, these ideas will no doubt seem impractical. Why make infinite, Sisyphean efforts to achieve the impossible? Common sense tells us that for x effort we should expect y result, etc. Yet such “cause-and-effect” logic forces us to think and behave within set social and political boundaries. Instead of living as a curve approaching a line, many of us choose to exist as a flat line at a set distance from our ideals. Perhaps the influence of rampant global consumerism and its concomitant materialism has cajoled us into assessing our actions simply in terms of final product or outcome. Whatever efforts we make in life, a constant evaluation based on pre-determined criteria follows us – be it grades in school, the value of our investment portfolio or the effectiveness of domestic behavior adjustments at the advice of marriage counselors. The only result we can be sure of in life is death... all the rest is changeable and capable of surprising us. Yet somehow materialism has brought about a kind of machinelike fatalism which dictates almost every aspect of contemporary daily life, so that we dwell within narrow, predictable parameters, with decreasing room to imagine a world divergent from the one advertised to us. The role of the artist in society must be, rather, to give people an opportunity to perceive the world anew, to stimulate their imagination so they may “live in the question.” Thus, artists can encourage the greater society to liberate itself from the product-based mindset by generating new dialogue and creatively engaging conflict.

The Specter of Global Atrophy

Perhaps what has exacerbated modern society’s tendency to favor product over process has been the gradual disengagement of the body from everyday life. As we have moved through the agricultural, industrial and information ages, our bodies

have become progressively divested from the struggle for survival. Much of Suzuki's philosophy is in response to this de-physicalization of the human race, which he sees as a direct result of contemporary civilization's almost complete dependence on non-animal energy. Starting in the 1960s, he predicted how modern technology would gradually attenuate our individual and group personas. He foresaw the impoverishing of physical, vocal and linguistic expression that Internet-based smart technology has spawned today. In fact, our era is witnessing an exodus of human communication from the physical and biological to the virtual and electronic. In an age when copulation is not necessary for human procreation, we are quickly nearing the time when out-of-body experiences will be the norm, not the exception. As our global population grows passive, anaesthetized by virtual media, disconnected from our bodies and behaving in increasingly predictable ways, the potential for abuse by those in power – the authors of this new communication system and its attendant world order – grows exponentially.



The SCOT company in training
(photo: Tadashi Suzuki)

Culture Is the Body

Suzuki recognizes these risks of globalization, as well as the extreme inequality and subsequent violence it can produce between peoples. Instead of seeing this crisis as inevitable or unsolvable, Suzuki's philosophy motivates us to reclaim our social agency through exploring the primitive, animal energy that lies dormant in the contemporary body. His training method wakens and develops this in actors, empowering them in turn to provoke the audience and demonstrate how "culture is the body": that by embracing the mystery of life, engaging our bodies and thus reconnecting to the natural world, differences of color and creed, class and education, politics and history can be overcome. Suzuki shows us how to live in the question, not the solution; to infinitely go toward the difficulty instead of accepting the status quo, so that as artists, and as citizens of the world, we may inspire new ways of living in it.

Mendoza January 2015

THEODÓROSZ TERZOPULOSZ
DIONÜSZOSZ
VISSZATÉRÉSE

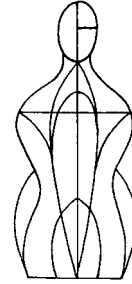


Cover of Hungarian-language volume for 10th International Theatre Olympics



ILIANA DIMADI

Thodoros Tersopoulos: The return of Dionysus



12 comments on 12 chapters

12 comments on 12 chapters based on the main principles of Theodoros Terzopoulos's actor training method, this preface traces the biographical, sociopolitical and cultural context that fostered the creation of a unique psychophysical theatre apprenticeship that could be credited as "the Greek method" or even "the Dionysian method".

Body

It all started with a fall. Back in 1985, Theodoros Terzopoulos was walking up the mountains nearby the ancient sanctuary of Delphi along with a few actors, as part of their training. It was August. The sun had set. Dusk had settled over the valley. There appeared a deep gorge, hindering their way. Without notice, Terzopoulos fell into it. "Follow me!" shouted to the ones behind him. Just three-four of them did so¹. With those bravest ones, almost a year later, he founded the theatre ensemble ATTIS and blew away the audience, presenting Euripides' "The Bacchae"(1986)². This is the only surviving tragedy in which Dionysus, the mythological divinity honored as

¹ Information deriving from personal communications and interviews with the director Theodoros Terzopoulos, between 2002–2020.

² In *Bacchae* (407 BCE), Euripides recounts the attempt of God Dionysus (or Bacchus) to enforce his worship through the bacchic rites in his homeland, the city of Thebes. His cousin, King Pentheus, rejects the cult. Dionysus claims his revenge. Pentheus meets a horrible death: he is savaged by his own mother, Agave, who rips him apart while in trance, in the wild woods, thinking of his son as a small lion.

the God of Theatre³, is not just a holy distant presence but the main character in the play -actually, the protagonist, the catalyst, the enactor and destroyer of the plot and all tragic heroes.

Terzopoulos shook the Greek theatrical landscape with this production, bringing into play the Dionysian condition in the extreme: physical violence and ritual violence⁴. Moreover, he staged Bacchic excess in what Erika Fischer-Lichte describes as “a liberation from all kinds of barriers and pressures, be they political, social, moral, or psychological, and either the affirmation of an existing community or the uniting of the participants into a new one”⁵.

The archetypal body of Dionysus, this old and flawed demigod who is transcending the centuries with his fierce and festive energy, who is dismembered only to be recomposed and regenerated, is the body lying underneath and the body hovering around ATTIS theatre.

Dionysus’ conflicting body is the Corpus Christi of Terzopoulos’s stagecraft.

Breath

Terzopoulos took his first breath on October 18, in 1947, in the seaside village of Makriyalos (meaning “long beach”), in Northern Greece. He is the descendant of Greek refugees from Pontus, member of a leftist family, defeated during the Greek Civil War and a self-exiled young artist in East Germany, student at Bertolt Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble.

Just like Brecht’s actor, who cannot simply observe without at the same time interrogating the social forces at play⁶, Terzopoulos’s actor cannot breathe on stage without comprehending the various concepts of cruelty and marvel, which operate in life. Just like Brecht himself, the Greek director realized early on in his career the need for a methodology to work with and to incorporate through it the diverse material he was accumulating from his childhood.

³ Dionysus, the son of Zeus and the mortal Semeli, is credited to have been born, killed and reborn. He was raised as a girl to hide from the wrath of Hera, Zeus’s spouse. It was in the shape of a bull that he was torn to pieces by the Titans just to be rejuvenated again. He is the mercurial god of fertility and destruction, transformation, freedom, religious ecstasy, communion, wine and theatre.

⁴ Eleni Varopoulou in Theodoros Terzopoulos and Theatre ATTIS: Retrospection, Method and Comments, Athens: Agra Publications, 2000, p. 9 & in Journey with Dionysos, The Theatre of Theodoros Terzopoulos, ed. Frank M. Raddatz, Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2006, p. 85.

⁵ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Dionysus Resurrected: Performances of Euripides’ The Bacchae in a Globalizing World*, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014, p.26

⁶ See: Alison Hodge, *Actor Training*, London & New York: Routledge, 2010.

He grew up surrounded by myths, folk tales, rural rituals, post-World War II atrocities and the extraordinary political turmoil caused by the Greek Civil War (1946–49). All those were evident in the agricultural community of his homeland, situated at the foothills of Olympus mountain, notable in ancient Greek religion and mythology as the home of the twelve major deities of the Greek pantheon.

The tradition of “Anastenaria” is a ritual Terzopoulos noticed and experienced himself. For the celebration of St Konstantinos, on May 21st, worshipers are walking barefoot onto the mountains for hours. While descending back to the villages, one by one is dancing on burning coal, holding tight a religious icon picturing the Saint. It is said that they never get burnt. Their feet are warmed up and well trained due to their barefoot walking.

Terzopoulos grew up listening his family recounting this story: some days before the end of the World War II, a bunch of German soldiers, afraid of the upcoming defeat and in an attempt to exorcise their fear and exercise their power, got drunk, became violent, got out in the streets of the village. They raped and murdered three Greek women from the village Kitros, nearby Makriyalos. Families and friends mourned the loss of the three women by swaying their dead bodies around a bonfire, uttering the sounds that emerge from a suffering body. This same type of lamentation provided needed release from the atrocities during the civil war that followed⁷.

Terzopoulos never stopped performing those miracles and traumas. Always towards a theatre not bound up by any sort of national identity.

Energy

He launched his ensemble as well as his method with an unfamiliar, visceral, and ritualistic gesture: a call to let go free. To fall over a mountain. To embrace the danger. To accept the challenge of freedom.

With similar gestures Dionysus is recounted to have worked out his godliness. It is as if Terzopoulos asks the performer to become the carrier of the Dionysian energy, which is, at the same time, ecstatic, catastrophic and rejuvenating, thus fully transformative in all possible senses.

He named his ensemble after the most ambivalent nickname of God Dionysus. ATTIS (originally typed in capitals when for his group) refers to the ancient Greek, Egyptian and Roman god who castrated himself in frenzy, brought on by wine, music and dancing. Attis (or Adonis or Osiris) is one of the year-Gods sacrificed to the worshiping of the Earth Mother (or Cybele) and

⁷ Marianne Mc Donald, *Journey with Dionysos*, The Theatre of Theodoros Terzopoulos, ed. Frank M. Raddatz, Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2006, p.12.

for that considered the Hibernial God Dionysus: the seed, the gestation, that which will be born in spring and simultaneously an irrational figure of fecundity, married with the darker side of the self, like Dionysus, like Hades⁸.

Deconstruction

Bacchae was the fertile soil for the development of his method. During the rehearsals, Terzopoulos invented what was to become the cornerstone of his working system: “the deconstruction of the triangle”.

It all starts with the feet. Performers walk for hours, within a collective rhythm, in a circle, just like the pilgrimage in *Anastenaria*. Activating all Seven Zones of Energy⁹ brings about an explosion of corporeal energy. Performers are gradually driven to visit the inner space within their bodies, in a state of blissful transition, where every part, even the small finger, can dance its own autonomous enchanting dance. “It is not with drinking wine that the performers reach ecstasy but through the wine of the body: Blood. The veins flow with blood, the body flows with nectar” Terzopoulos notes.

We are ceremonial beings, made up of myths and collective rituals. According to Victor Van Gennep¹⁰, there are three stages in a rite of passage: a) detachment from the everyday, b) transition to a new liminal state where everything seems possible, and c) incorporation to a new situation. These three stages mimic nature and Man’s progress through it: separation from our mother’s wombs at birth, initiation into society and exposure to the liminal experience of encountering other humans and culture; reincorporation into nature at death. Then back to the beginning in an endless cycle of death and rebirth, construction and deconstruction.

Terzopoulos is somehow asking his actors to become Bacchantes: Dionysus worshippers who mediate—but also sacrifice—for the god. His training method seems to be structured according to the stages of a rite of passage and to the extra-daily practices needed for it.

Rhythm

“We are tired but happy” is what *Bacchae* are singing while accompanying Dionysus. This line in Euripides’ text (“*kamaton t’efkamatōn*” in the original) was the initial research material for Terzopoulos and still is a basic component

⁸ Frazer, James George, Sir, *The Golden Bough: Adonis, Attis, Osiris. Studies in the history of Oriental Religion*, London: Macmillan, 2008, Chapter 43: Dionysus, p. 385–392.

⁹ Almost equivalent to the Seven Chakras in Yoga.

¹⁰ See: Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

in his working method. After all, it is a statement reinforcing his belief that all is in flux. As Heraclitus says in this book: “Everything moves, and nothing stays the same”.

We are bound to stay active, in the trouble and with the trouble. With a reference to Donna Haraway, “We—all of us on Terra—live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times. The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events ... In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present. [...] Our task is to stay with the trouble.”¹¹

Staying with the trouble, always inventive and creative, energetic, dynamic: this is the rhythm underneath Terzopoulos’s work.

Infinite improvisation

“We shouldn’t confuse improvisation with randomness or lack of planning” states Terzopoulos at the end of this book.

Acknowledging the early influence of Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Grotowski, Kantor and even Julian Beck in his work, Terzopoulos kept on yoking together diverse and heterogeneous traditions from pre-Colombian and indigenous Australian rituals, as well as from the systematic training traditions found in Eastern performance drama, such as those of the Japanese Noh and Kabuki theatre, or even avant-garde Butoh and African Dance. Distancing himself from the Cartesian dualism of mind and body but also from the psychological realistic acting paradigm of his times and the familiar tricks of bourgeois stagecraft, Terzopoulos stressed upon the metaphysics of the human body. Always bearing in mind the motto “no need for orders from the head”, Terzopoulos treats the body as a natural landscape full of mountains and rivers. “In the inner body of the actor, all-natural phenomena such as a tempest or an earthquake take place. Each body bears its own history, biography and topography. Each performer, when visiting this inner landscape, can manifest the intimate and the universal”¹².

There is one prerequisite to get into the realm of this infinite improvisation: concentration. Only through it one can enter the hidden room of the inner body. Only then can he/she manifest what is entrapped, fragile, almost perishable, esoteric, slow moving about us.

¹¹ See: Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble, Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2016.

¹² From personal communications and interviews with the director Theodoros Terzopoulos, between 2002–2020.

Speech

Forgotten echogenic sources come to the surface while working out the exercises of Terzopoulos' method. ATTIS' actors chew on their words, growl and howl like dogs, charge headlong at one another and break out into sublime arias only to end up tightly embracing like figures on a funerary stele: Hades and Persephone. How did they come up with such a speech, posture and corporeality?

Theodoros Terzopoulos is always guiding them backwards, as close to the primeval nature of logos as he can get. Thus, he elevates theatre into something that precedes all discourses, taking it to the threshold of the things that formed the content of the Dionysian mysteries. It was not permitted to disclose the content of those mysteries. They remained unspoken. They were the most ineffable of the ineffable. The initiates swore to keep the content of their rituals secret. No one knows what they did or said. Terzopoulos's method conveys something of the hidden world of these immaculate mysteries to us. He is fully aware that the available historical data is insufficient to confirm what happened during them. But he does demand transcendence of his actors, asking them to activate their imagination and shed light on this shadow world. Just as the Christian faithful prepare themselves twice over before Holy Communion, physically through fasting and spiritually through prayer, so Attis' actors both train their minds and their bodies, as well as the hidden body and unspoken logos.

"It is like people singing in church -they are not singing; they are talking to God. [...] It is as if man speaks for the first time. [...] It is the same with Pythia: the things she says come out of the depths, not out of her."¹³

Sense

What is it all about?

What is the kernel of the matter in this extra-daily apprenticeship and, consequently, in this Pythian performative style? The sense is skeptical. Just like the mood in tragedy. "Skeptical is the mood of ancient tragedy. In tragedy, the tragic hero is a problem, not the solution to the problem. The hero is a riddle, not the solution to a riddle. Tragedy is the experience of moral ambiguity. Tragedy is not the expression of a religiously legitimized ritual. It is rather a metaritual"¹⁴.

¹³ Etel Adnan in *Dionysus in Exile: The Theatre of Theodoros Terzopoulos*, Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2019, p.7

¹⁴ Simon Critchley, *Tragedy, The Greeks and us*, London: Profile Books, 2019, p. 33–35.

Almost the same counts when talking about ATTIS theatre; its mode and sense resemble those of tragedy. ATTIS performers manifest themselves in the same ambiguous way tragic heroes throw themselves on stage to bring forth the ontological question of all humanity and of all times: "What should I do?". However, the question must not be put as a pathetic mourning or an anxiety breakdown but with the awareness that "one must learn to live without hope or despair", as stated by Heiner Muller, friend, collaborator and teacher of Terzopoulos in his emblematic text "The Hamletmachine" (1979).

Time

What is time without space?

"Time-space is the projection of the inner energy and need" Terzopoulos states in his conversation with Torsten Israel at the final section of this book. If time is the memory home of one's twisted and messy passage on Earth, full of extraordinary gaps and amnesia spots, in Terzopoulos's life and work, time has always been out of joint: a constant seeking of the unfamiliar, the unpredictable, the unusual, the paradoxical. In a space, full of memories and traumas, he decided to launch his theatre stage in the capital of Greece. "When I first moved to Athens, I was searching for a building in an area that had really apparent traumas. Back in 1990, in the house that was to become my theatre's home, one could still see bullets in the walls from the German Occupation and the Greek civil war. There was a long, narrow, low house in the courtyard, with small rooms, where workers who blew glass, lived. It was the courtyard of miracles. Previously, in the beginning of the century, the Asia Minor refugees had found shelter in there. Later, it was inhabited by the middle class, but it had also been a brothel. After the civil war, persecuted leftists came and hid here. At a later period, it seems that the building had been taken over by drug addicts.

With these in mind, we installed Dionysus here, a man, a demigod, that never became an Olympian god and was also persecuted. So, this spot, a wound, but also a passage, was the best place for ATTIS theatre. A space and a passage to somewhere else. This somewhere, for another place and another time, is constantly sought after in my work. This keeps me and my associates in a constant state of anxiety for the discovery of the unexpected, the non-articulated, the new and the diverse"¹⁵.

¹⁵ Theodoros Terzopoulos interviewed by Crystalia Patouli for 2Board (p. 48–51)

Grief

Why does tragedy exist?

Anne Carson, opening her outstanding translations of Euripides' four plays, *Grief Lessons*, writes about "a curious art form called tragedy": "Why does tragedy exist? Because you are full of rage. Why are you full of rage? Because you are full of grief"¹⁶.

In correspondence, Terzopoulos confesses: "My memory was marked by the Greek post civil war condition. This is a determining issue for me not so much socio-politically but existentially. I am always angry, my work is also angry and this constant anger is the result of a hatred I felt in my childhood when I was among the defeated"¹⁷.

As Heiner Müller puts it: "In Terzopoulos' theatre, myth is no fairy-tale but accumulated experience, the rehearsal process not a dramaturgical encounter, but an adventurous journey in the landscape of memory; a quest for the lost keys of unity between body and logos."¹⁸

Charm

The enigmatic allure of Terzopoulos's performances stems from the ecstatic faces, bodies, words and sounds of his performers. Dramaturgy does not consist of some linear storytelling. Non-linearity is apparent in all aspects of Terzopoulos's work. What matters to him is to peak the fragments that touch what he calls "the nucleus of the play" and guide the actors to express their inner dynamic. In "Bacchae" he escalates the ecstasy and the bereavement, in "Perses" the lamentation, in "Ajax" the madness and the guilt, in "Prometheus Bound" the fury of heroism. The actors recount the ethos and the passion of the tragic heroes via a corporeal theatre code, which does not aim to express any authorial, privileged meaning, most of the times uttering words while smiling enigmatically like some mythical creatures; Medusa or the Sphinx.

Terzopoulos's theatre is a riddle. No easily readable symbolisms and imagery exist. Manipulation of the audience and simplification of the meaning do not have any space in it. As ancient tragedy constitutes a theatre that thinks, develops, wonders, doubts and places questions, thus his directorial view moves, upsets, surprises and puzzles the spectator. As in ancient tragedy, thus and in his performances, the lucidity of the form encloses a picture of the chaotic

¹⁶ Anne Carson, *Grief Lessons*, New York: New York Review Book, 2006, p.7

¹⁷ Penelope Chatzidimitriou in *Dionysus in Exile: The Theatre of Theodoros Terzopoulos*, Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2019, p.49

¹⁸ Heiner Müller in *Theodoros Terzopoulos and Theatre ATTIS: Retrospection, Method and Comments*, Athens: Agra Publications, 2000, p.35.

subconscious. It is not an easily perceived method or theatre. Yet, if we, as practitioners of this method or spectators of those performances, allow its excess of energy to invade us, it can prove absolutely revealing.

Performer

Since 1985, Terzopoulos's theatre abounds with bodies and rituals. The decision to stage firstly the *Bacchae* is not a surprise. Until the late 19th century, the play's themes were considered too gruesome to be studied and appreciated. It was Nietzsche's "Birth of Tragedy" in 1872 that re-posed the question of Dionysus's relation with the theatre and awakened interest in *The Bacchae*. Terzopoulos became the first Greek director who staged tragedy against Modern Greek aesthetic normalities¹⁹, versus the fake folklore nostalgia and the gloss of intellectual stupor. Simultaneously, he proved to become the founder of a unique actor apprenticeship – always with Dionysos, the most instinctual and unexpected God, by his side.

The God of Theatre is called upon as if he is the hidden corporeality and the entrapped energy within the performer. Better said, the performer becomes the carrier of Dionysus: a raft or a canal, taking us to a paradoxical spacetime. ATTIS' actors are travelers to unimaginable worlds; to hidden landscapes within their bodies. The corporeality of their stage presence bears the traces of those journeys. This is why their performative power has the quality of the fabulous, the dense of a liminality and the aura of a metaphysical dimension. There lies all magic. In the words of Nietzsche: "let your imagination conceive the multitudes bowing to the dust, awestruck -then you will approach the Dionysian"²⁰.

Terzopoulos never stopped declaring "Dionysus is my god" and "my theatre is an offering to Dionysus". Because his theatre reminds of a ritual. Or might his method, performances and theatre *be* a ritual above all else?

If so, it is a ritual to bring back Dionysus from the exile. To bring back the performer at the epicenter of theatre. In other words, to seek what it means today not only to have a body, but to fully be a body²¹.

November 2020

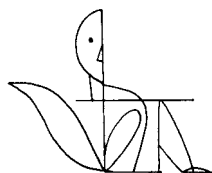
¹⁹ Giorgos Sabatakakis in *Contemporary Adaptations of Greek Tragedy: Auteurship and Directorial Visions*, ed. George Rodosthenous, London: Methuen, 2017, p. 197

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: The Modern Library, 2000, p. 37.

²¹ Freddy Decreus, *The Ritual Theatre of Theodoros Terzopoulos*, New York: Routledge, 2019.



in the directorial workshop of attila vidnyánszky



ÁGNES PÁLFI – ZSOLT SZÁSZ

Poetic and/or Epic Theatre?

(Extract¹)

Zs. Sz.: In professional theatre circles, it is now a commonplace that in the post-dramatic era the classic conflict between heroes disappeared from the stage, and with it, the legitimacy of the dramatic dialogue also ceased to exist. Therefore, according to some, it is not advisable to take seriously literary classic texts which focus on a conflict between larger-than-life heroes. However, there is a peculiar self-contradiction that even the most determined followers of the post-dramatic school still do not give up on classic heroes, since – even if they deheroize them on stage – they can only demonstrate their own greatness and celebrity status through them. Yet you think that there is also a much deeper and real basis to this deheroizing tendency: it is the now widespread state of the world that “the participants in dramatic events with global implications do not act in a shared space-time continuum, that is, in many cases, they do not even meet each other in physical space”².

Á. P.: And I also claim that this is why the current era favours mass-market films with superheroes effortlessly moving from one space-time dimension to another, or being present in both at the same time. But that is only one half of the issue. Because on the Web you can connect virtually with the farthest corner of the globe, and often with much less trouble than with your immediate neighbours. The Transylvanian poet, Zsófia Balla recounted at a recital of hers several years ago how shocking it was for her to realize in retrospect that the conflict in the nearby region of the Southern Balkans had seemed to be so distant to her that, even though the bombings could be heard across the border,

¹ For the full text of the conversation in Hungarian, see: Ágnes Pálfi – Zsolt Szász: ‘Költői és/vagy epikus színház?’ [‘Poetic and/or Epic Theatre?’], *Magyar Művészet [Hungarian Art]*, September 2016, pp. 61–71

² Cf. Pálfi, Ágnes – Szász, Zsolt: “Ez egy valóságos színházavató volt!” [“It Has Been a Real Inauguration of Theatre!”] *Szcenárium*, May 2016, p 54

it had no connection to her life. As she admitted, this experience shook her up in her poetic existence. This aspect of her confession is just as important, as it indicates that the artist still wants to be responsible for what is happening in the world, even if her instincts fail her from time to time.

Zs. Sz.: In your above-mentioned writing, you express that in their case it is no longer directly the actors, but in fact “these particular segments of space-time [that] enter into a dialogic relationship”. To be honest, this sounds a bit abstract for a theatre practitioner, but I will try to translate it into our language. It may, among other things, refer to the kind of simultaneity when multiple locations and time planes appear all at once in a single stage space. Take, for example, *Psyche*³, from the repertoire of the National Theatre in Budapest, where the stage space – if I count correctly – consists of nine sub-units. Among these, the intimate sphere of László Tóth Ungvárnémeti in the middle back for instance serves a stable reference point: this hero belongs to this centre throughout, which indicates that unlike the constantly travelling and shape-shifting heroine, he is a “self-identical” figure, a narcissistic personality locked in his own mania. Similarly, the living quarters of Psyché’s sister and brother-in-law can also be localised well on the centre left side (where her childbirth and Psyché’s polyp surgery also take place), and the centre right side, where the scene at Kazinczy’s literary salon in Bányácska is evoked, takes on particular importance. This part of the stage is dedicated to the drama of Psyché’s poetic identity throughout the performance, either staged concretely or in symbolic representations. – It is generally true that simultaneity as a compositional principle can become truly productive in the enclosed space of the stage, where it is not limited by the linearity typical of literature or film⁴. Yet theatre relates to modern visual art by the very same compositional principle, the simultaneous presence and dialogic interplay of space-time segments. It is no coincidence that in the 20th century, the renewal of the language of theatre was often inspired by visual artists. However, storytelling on stage is also based on the principle of linearity, even if the director uses reverse chronology (like Vidnyánszky, for example, in the case of Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*, which he starts with the third act). In this performance, Psyché’s life story can be followed chronologically, faithful to the biographical

³ Fictitious female character in the mixed-genre work *Psyche* by Sándor Weöres (1913–1989), one of the greatest Hungarian poets of the 20th century. Published in 1972, the work is one of the first and emblematic pieces of Hungarian postmodernism. It contains the fictitious poetic oeuvre and life story of the heroine named Erzsébet Lónyai, evoking the Hungarian conditions of the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries.

⁴ For the different spatial and temporal dimensions of theatre and film, see Anatoly Vasiliev’s “A valóság nyitott tere” [“The Open Space of Reality”] in his book *Színházi fuga* [Theatrical Fugue] (OSZMI, Budapest, 1981, pp 82–113). It should be noted that Attila Vidnyánszky first directed *Psyché* in an open-air production, with the same cast later performing in a stage version in Gyula on 6 July 2015.



Sándor Weöres's *Psyché*, d. by Attila Vidnyánszky, National Theatre, Budapest, 2015
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó, source: nationaltheatre.hu)

nature of the original work, which transforms the poet who expresses herself in verse into a flesh-and-blood figure and/or into the protagonist of a “verse novel” in the reader’s consciousness. The greatest sensation of this production more than four decades after the publication of Weöres’s work is that the seven same-aged *Psyché* alter egos (who are same-year acting students) together create on stage the complex character in whom we can recognize the *Psyché* of our time. However, this magic could only come to life because *Psyché*’s “split personality” was able to manifest itself in an adequate, complex spatiotemporal system, constantly crossing by her erotic surplus the virtual boundaries that separate the “segments” of this stage space-time from each other.

Á. P.: Still, in the reality of Hungary in the first decades of the 19th century, these boundaries were by no means virtual. In Gábor Bódy’s 1980 film adaptation⁵, there is a great emphasis on the distances separating the different spheres of existence, *Psyché*’s continuous journey as an “adventuress”, who shuttles like a real-life picaresque hero between the “up” and “down” worlds, between the squalid slum and the elegant Viennese salon, between the rural noble manor house and the Pozsony Diet, each milieu expecting a different mentality. And the dynamics of this series of spatial adventures suddenly seem to stretch the realistic time frames of her life story by themselves: after spending

⁵ Gábor Bódy (1946–1985) is a prominent figure in Hungarian and European film and video art. He won the Bronze Leopard Award at the Locarno Film Festival in 1981 for his feature film *Narcissus and Psyche*.

years in America, Psyché returns to a period a hundred years later, the Europe of the 20th century, as it begins to succumb to fascism... When I taught Hungarian literature at Toldy Ferenc Grammar School in the 1990s, I showed this film to my sixteen-year-old students every year before we started studying the 19th-century reform period. After this, it was much easier for them to cope with the language of *Bánk bán*⁶ and *Az ember tragédiája*⁷, now considered “outdated and unenjoyable” (the students of one class prepared completely independently and with great pleasure a 5–10 minute abridged version of some of the scenes of Madách’s work and presented it to me). – Of course, you can never predict what kind of experience will propel a young person through the impasse to start reading the classics as if they were his contemporaries. To me as a university student in the mid-1970s it was Pushkin who provoked the question with his famous poem, *The Bronze Horseman*: how can the tribute to the founder of modern Russia, the genre of the glorifying ode, and the narrative poem about the rebellion of the Russian little man who ultimately utters a menacing curse on the equestrian statue of Peter the Great, the cause of his tragic fate, on the banks of the Neva be reconciled? Later, philologists found out that these two originally separate works were combined and given a common title by an editor who was Pushkin’s contemporary. But as I see it, in this case, the editor acted in the spirit of the author, as evidenced by his drama, *Boris Godunov*.⁸ In this work, the two protagonists, the tsar-designate who is fleeing from the historical responsibility of ruling, and Grigory, the young anarchist raised in a monastery, who is striving to seize power as a self-proclaimed heir to the throne, do not even meet on stage. So the work has no dramatic conflict in the classical sense; Pushkin collides two remote spheres of existence where there is no possibility of dialogue between the respective characters. They do not even share a language in common: Boris speaks in the archaic verse language of the Slavonic church liturgy, while Grigory speaks in a more prosaic, profane verse speech. Yet 20th-century history proves that these two spheres, the power centre of Bolshevik autocracy leading to a one-person dictatorship and the all-people anarchism opposing it on the peripheries of the empire, continue to have a simultaneous impact on the development of not only Russia but the entire world. We can safely say that, even in Pushkin’s time, it was not from the poet’s subjective point of view that this conflict appeared so dramatic, even if few comprehended the extraordinary significance of this issue. Of course, it is possible to consider Pushkin’s insight as a “poetic vision” which has been eminently confirmed

⁶ *Bánk bán*, the historical drama by József Katona (1791–1830), one of the fundamental works of Hungarian literature, was published in print in 1820.

⁷ Imre Madách’s (1823–1864) dramatic poem *Az ember tragédiája* [*The Tragedy of Man*] was published in print in 1862.

⁸ For an analysis of the drama, see Ágnes Pálfi’s *Vers és próza. Puskin-elemzések* [*Poetry and Prose. Pushkin Analyses*], Akadémiai, Budapest, 1997.

by time. But this bold idea, which no wonder startled his contemporaries, of connecting the two seemingly disparate spheres, the “sacred” and “profane” spheres of existence, and forcing them into dialogue, was as much a result of Pushkin’s exceptional understanding of reality as it was of his prophetic vision.

Zs. Sz.: It means you have reservations about the term “poetic theatre”. As far as I perceived a few years ago in Debrecen⁹, Attila Vidnyánszky and the Artistic Workshop around him aimed to express with this adjective that their theatre is opposed to the increasingly prevalent naturalistic tendencies in contemporary Hungarian plays and directors. It is true that this group, of which we ourselves are members, has not since provided a more precise definition of the concept of “poeticism,” as is rightly pointed out by more and more people.¹⁰ Yet theatre history has already seen a similar opposition: a hundred years ago, Meyerhold fought for the replacement of the so-called realistic, but in fact naturalistic theatre aesthetics.

Á. P.: Mind you, he contrasted symbolism with naturalism, but not “poetry”. He looked to renew stage language through the symbolist Russian poets of the turn of the century, such as Alexander Blok, Valery Bryusov, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Leonid Andreyev, and Andrei Bely.¹¹ Yet no one can seriously think that we should dispute the poetic quality of the best representatives of naturalism (in which movement some literary historians, such as György Lukács¹², include Ibsen and Chekhov as well). If we want to be professionally correct, the adjective “poetic” is actually a synonym of “literary”; it is true that in Hungarian, the word “poet” primarily refers to a writer of poetry, but the terms “dramatic poet” and “prose poet” inherited from the 19th century are also used.¹³ Therefore, I think it is justified to approach the theatre aesthetics represented by Attila Vidnyánszky and notably contemporary Russian directors from a different angle. In the 1960s and 1970s, Gyula Király, the outstanding Hungarian scholar of Russian Studies, came to the conclusion that literary works are not actually to be classified into three modes, but into two. The subject’s relationship to reality is fully realized in the mode of lyric poetry, taking on appropriate genre

⁹ Attila Vidnyánszky was the artistic director and later director of the Csokonai National Theatre in Debrecen from 2006 to 2013.

¹⁰ See for example István Bessenyei Gedő’s “Halál, hol a te fullánkod?” [De-dramatization Efforts in Attila Vidnyánszky’s Productions] Part 1: *Szcenárium*, October 2013, pp 5–19; Part 2: *Szcenárium*, November 2013, pp 24–42

¹¹ See on this: *Mejerhold műhelye* [Meyerhold’s Workshop], Gondolat, Budapest, 1981, pp 33–39

¹² György Lukács (1885–1971) was a Marxist philosopher, communist politician, and literary critic.

¹³ One of the most significant developments in Hungarian literary studies in the past three decades has been, thanks primarily to Árpád Kovács and his students, the vigorous exploration of the language of narrative prose, down to the level of phonemes, based on the methods developed for the analysis of the language of lyric poetry.

forms. The objective perception of reality, on the other hand, is the domain of epic literature, which, according to this view, has two types: dramatic epic, characterized by the conflict of personified interests, and narrative epic, which has two major genres, the epic and the novel. In the latter, as the leading genre of the 19th century, there is a need for authorial, formal and/or narrative storytelling, because the ambitions and aspirations of the heroes are not directly tested in dramatic conflicts, but indirectly: through the transmission of usually multi-threaded plotlines featuring multiple protagonists.” By this means, we can either gain insight into reality’s “self-movement” or “logic of existence” (novel of fate), or we can get to know the moral character of a given era (novel of morality).¹⁴

Zs. Sz.: I consider this argument extremely important primarily on account of its ontological orientation. I myself have come to the realization on a similar basis – from the perspective of ontology, and later through the questions raised by cultural anthropology – that man is *ab ovo* a dramatic creature who can only manifest as a personality through the transmission of the community. And I gradually came to see that these forms of expression are inherently theatrical, ranging from the rituals that sanctify the most mundane activities, to large communal celebrations –both in prehistoric times and as they continue today. Therefore, for me, the syncretic concept which proved to be valid for every cultural manifestation was not epic, but drama. This is the shared basis from the folk tradition of dramatic customs to the cult of Petőfi, as well as new community-building communication techniques such as Facebook, a favorite hunting ground for the currently popular “verbatim” theatre. At the same time, as a practising theatre maker, I mostly worked from archaic narrative epics: chronicles, legends, knightly hero stories, folk tales and oriental folk epics. During the production of the stage script, when I had texts of different genres “appear on stage” and tried to force them into dialogue, I needed a narrator. For this I had to clarify who this person was: a simple storyteller, or perhaps someone in the role of a chorus commenting on the events on stage. So, in fact, I mostly dealt with how to combine and bring together the narrative and dramatic elements within the epic genre. Therefore, due to my interest in theatre, I look from a different perspective at Gyula Király’s theoretical proposal with its focus on novel poetics, which is certainly a legitimate position for the 19th and 20th centuries. In the 21st century, however, we see an even greater motivation for crossing over genres, and even literary modes, than before.

Á. P.: It is also worth considering that the dominance of the novelistic state of being actually did not begin in the 20th, nor even in the 19th century. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is a groundbreaking work for many reasons, one of which

¹⁴ See for this: Király, Gyula: *Dosztoevszkij és az orosz próza* [Dostoevsky and Russian Prose], Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1983

is that it brings the very disappearance of dramatic conflict onto the stage, which becomes particularly important when viewed from today, the mediatized world of the 21st century. Because, as the saying goes nowadays: “It’s not enough to be authentic, you have to look authentic, too”. In the famous mousetrap scene, the courtiers exit the room one by one after Claudius has left, so, despite Hamlet’s successful “calling him out,” the announcement of the result fails to materialize. Instead, it becomes evident that the officials of the state apparatus are guided by their momentary political interests, and they are indifferent to whose hands the fate of the country has fallen into. This subservient and conflict-avoidant attitude leads to the fact that at the climax of the drama – in the moment of “catastrophe”, to use Katalin Kemény’s expression – they are unable to turn towards “being”¹⁵. As a result, the “main event”¹⁶ of the drama is cancelled, while in the medium of theatre, the conditional reality of the play takes on the status of actual reality. Therefore, as viewers, we get the impression that the judgment fades away in existence itself.¹⁷ And it would be hard to deny that the general decay, the principle of entropy in this play overwhelms everyone and everything – which drives some contemporary directors and literary analysts to step over the border by questioning even the tragic hero status of Hamlet.

Zs. Sz.: The downgrading of epic roles is a common phenomenon nowadays, both in everyday life and on stage. For example, on television, one of our

¹⁵ Katalin Kemény warns that “katastrofí” (καταστροφή) in the Greek language originally meant ‘reversal’, “more precisely the turning point in the drama where the threads of complexity begin to unfold (...). “[where] the disturbances and connections of life would be clear, where we could turn to the real and become real, there we crash”. Cp. Kemény, Katalin: *Az ember, aki ismerte a saját neveit* (Szélgjegyzetek Hamvas Béla Karneváljához). [*The Man Who Knew His Own Names* (*Marginal Notes to Béla Hamvas’s Carnival*)] Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1990, p 41

¹⁶ Cf. Anatoly Vasiliev’s ‘Irodalmi szöveg és improvizáció’ [‘Literary Text and Improvisation’] in Id. *Színházi fuga* [*Theatrical Fugue*], Budapest, OSZMI, 1998, pp. 34–55. See term on p. 44

¹⁷ See in this regard the semiotic approach of Yuri Lotman, according to which the “play on ‘real/conditional’ opposition” is characteristic of any “text within the text” situation. He uses the example of the play initiated by Hamlet in Shakespeare’s drama how the “double coding of certain parts of the text” results in the interpretation of the text’s “base space” as a real space. According to Lotman, a crucial role in this is played by the fact that “Shakespeare on stage not only presents the scene, but [...] also the rehearsal of the scene”. Due to this, “the double code system of ‘real/conditional’ is transformed into the sphere of conscious structural construction”, and, on the other hand, the basic text of the drama becomes interpretable as the text-space of reality. Cp. Jurij Lotman’s ‘The Problem of Artistic Space in Gogol’s Prose’, translated into Hungarian by Andrea Mercz as ‘A művészi tér problémája Gogol prózájában’. In: *Kultúra, szöveg, narráció. In Honorem Jurij Lotman* [*Culture, Text, Narrative. In Honorem Jurij Lotman*]. Edited by Árpád Kovács and Edit V. Gilbert. Janus Pannonius Egyetemi Kiadó, Pécs, 1994, pp. 172–173

distinguished poets compared the prime minister to a bus driver whose job is to transport the “passenger” to the desired destination, and he also mentioned that the word “minister”, which comes from “ministrans”, originally means servant – yet he failed to add that this kind of service is offered to God. Undeniably, Attila Vidnyánszky is going against this megatrend of downgrading. And, lo and behold, the success of the award-winning production *Isten ostora* [*Scourge of God*]¹⁸ based on Miklós Bánffy’s Attila drama at the 2015 POSzT proves that the audience still has a demand for heroes of a mythical stature. At MITEM 2016, plays involving the Iliad and Titus Andronicus also appeared among the foreign performances, which proves the same. The desire for greatness is so deeply encoded in human nature that, as Ernő Verebes put it in a debate about the *Don Quixote* production, even the lack of greatness can now fill the function once occupied by tragic heroes who were “better than us”, as Aristotle said.¹⁹ In the late 1950s, Samuel Beckett made this very absence itself the main character of his absurd drama, which is already hinted at by the title of the play: *Waiting for Godot* – at least based on the meaning of the English “God” – can also be interpreted as waiting for God.²⁰

Á. P.: This reminds me of the famous study by Mikhail Bakhtin, in which he claims that dialogue between two people “always creates



Ernő Verebes – Cervantes: *Don Quijote*, d. by Attila Vidnyánszky, National Theatre, Budapest, 2015 (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó, source: nationaltheatre.hu)

¹⁸ About the award-winning performance at the Pécs National Theatre Meeting, see Márta Tömöry’s “*Mondd, bűn megölni egy sólymot?*” Miklós Bánffy’s Attila drama on the National stage’, *Szcenárium*, March-April 2015, pp. 95–100; and Katalin Keserü’s “POSzT 2015” in *Szcenárium*, October 2015, pp 87–98

¹⁹ See also: “*A hősi hőbort ragálya*” – beszélgetés a Nemzeti Színház 2016-os *Don Quijote*-bemutatójáról [“*The Madness of Heroic Delusion*” – A Discussion About the 2016 Production of *Don Quixote* at the National Theatre] (dir. Attila Vidnyánszky). (Participants: Márta Tömöry, Ágnes Pálfi, Zsolt Szász) *Szcenárium*, October 2015, pp. 62–70; and: Ágnes Pálfi: ‘Bekezdések Cervantes regényének újraértelmezéséhez’ [‘Paragraphs for the Reinterpretation of Cervantes’ Novel’], *Szcenárium*, May 2015, pp. 43–55

²⁰ See a doctoral dissertation on the play, by István Pinczés: “4D Ro” analógiájú művészi hatásesszközök vektorizációja Samuel Beckett *Waiting for Godot* című tragikomédiájában [‘Vectorization of “4D RO” Analogy Artistic Effect Tools in Samuel Beckett’s Tragicomedy *Waiting for Godot*’] (DLA dissertation, 2009). www.szfe.hu/uploads/dokumentumtar/pinczesidolgozat.pdf

space for a third participant as well”.²¹ He argues that in fact it is this third entity which binds the two speakers in dialogue together, whether it is a natural phenomenon like winter, or any other thing. In the example given by Bakhtin, the speakers consider winter as a living person above them, as the great mover of life, without naming it. In Bakhtin’s view, this particular *third party* is both the subject and object of the dialogue, and if it ceases to exist, there is nothing left to talk about – real dialogue becomes impossible.

Zs. Sz.: It is exactly at this position that ‘personnel substitution’ takes place in the major turning points or era-changers of human history. In the world of animism, animal-, plant-, or object-shaped ancestral totems occupy this position, while in polytheistic cultures it is both animal and human-shaped deities. In monotheistic religions, the “one true God”, or the primordial principle which moves the world, usually becomes present through the mediation of human beings – prophets or saviours. Alongside this, various dramaturgical strategies emerge. In pre-literate tribal societies, this function is yet fulfilled by the order of ceremonial rituals which reinforce the entire worldview as well as the rules, protected by taboos, of social interaction, through the shaman as the master of these rituals. However, at the drama competitions of Athenian polis democracy, the playwright functions as a dramaturge who extracts from myths and presents on stage stories about the cosmic struggles of human-like gods and earthly heroes, while demonstrating the hierarchy between celestial and earthly powers and also the ongoing dialogue to be renewed between them every year. Thanks to writing, this kind of dialogue has not been forgotten to this day, and what is more, theatre theory still considers it as a benchmark to follow. Yet we cannot say that this model is still valid today, although ancient tragedies are continuously being performed, and even contemporary adaptations are being created from them. In the position of a dramaturg, however, there is no longer a playwright-didaskalos today, who would be capable of opening a gateway between these spheres of existence. The 20th century was the era of the director’s theatre. But the most significant ones among directors – such as Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Brecht, Grotowski, or Tadeusz Kantor –, who were also theorists, each and every one of them aimed to open this gateway, regardless of the kind of ideological context in which they as “escape artists” tried to restore the status of human beings, from which transcendence cannot be excluded.

Á. P.: Anatoly Vasiliev also belongs to this group, who directed for the first time in Hungary during a short-lived but epoch-making enterprise: at the Művész Színház (Artists’ Theatre), which had been founded by actors and operated from 1993 to 1995. In 1994 Vasiliev directed *A nagybácsi álma* [*Uncle’s Dream*] based on a Dostoevsky short story here. His prediction formulated in

²¹ Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin: *A szó az életben és a költészetben* [*The Word in Life and in Poetry*], Európa, Budapest, 1985, p 26

1990 – which is also his directorial creed – seems to be coming true today, at least in light of the performances presented at MITEM that we have already mentioned above:

“I believe that dramatic theatre as I know it, is currently in decline. It seems that visual theatre can no longer convey the information it once did. The theatre of text is no longer satisfying because it is a dead theatre. Although there are still performances that can tell the story well, they always give way to those that do not use the text. It seems that the search for a synthesis of the avant-garde and the classics – the visual action encapsulated in a pause and action founded on literary text – will be the future path of theatre. For me, this is the mutual relationship between literary text and improvisation. The combination of freedom and non-freedom, precision and anarchy. I believe this is the only version that brings life back to the stage.”²²

Zs. Sz.: If I so choose, this statement summarizes all our previous content. But beyond that, Vasiliev is also referring to the striking phenomenon which characterized the Hungarian theatre of the past quarter century, too, namely that text-based dramaturgy has been pushed into the background by the increasingly dominant physical theatres. It would also be worth mentioning how this trend has been reversed by today (see the aforementioned “verbatim” theatre). But far more important than that is where the pursuit of synthesis, which Vasiliev predicted here, stands today. And what is the magnetic force that attracts the opposing attitudes of avant-garde and classical artistic views to each other: the radical use of signs as well as philosophical commitment of avant-garde, and the layered language as well as extensive range of meanings of classical texts? And the most important question, in my opinion, is how the emerging, yet still uncoded visual gesture language and the literary text enclosed in the artwork can mutually energize each other.

Á. P.: I think that for both of us, the production based on Carlo Gozzi’s play, *The Raven*, directed by Nikolay Roschin, was a revelatory experience in this respect at MITEM 2016.²³ We get Gozzi’s tale, which is a baroque version of a Middle Eastern (Baghdad) story, in an old-new adaptation here, with the simplified language of fairground comedies, focusing on action. This method of direction, evocative of the spirit of early 20th century Russian avant-garde, makes the relationship to the literary text active and open due to its brevity and fragmentation already. But the mechanism of effect is similar for the visual language of the performance as well: by presenting the metal monsters operating as living creatures, this direction parodies, on the one hand, the

²² Anatoly Vasiliev, *ibid.* p 51

²³ For a detailed analysis of the performance, see: Ágnes Kereszty: ‘Morbidity történet – 21. századi köntösben. Carlo Gozzi A holló című darabja Nyikolaj Roscsin rendezésében’ [‘Morbidity Story – In 21st Century Attire. Carlo Gozzi’s Play *The Raven* Directed by Nikolay Roschin’] in *Szcenárium*, May 2016, pp 81–89



Carlo Gozzi: *The Raven*, d. by Nikolay Roschin, MITEM 2016
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó, source: nationaltheatre.hu)

illusionist stage technique of Baroque theatre and, on the other hand, the fatal horror story, which has excessive self-sacrifice and erotic over-excitement also characteristic of the Baroque era as its basic themes. The 21st-century character of storytelling, the here and now relevance of the performance, is established – beyond the uniformity of the set and costumes – by the ceremonial framing (the prologue of the “Gozzi successor” and the epilogue of the “ritual master” conducting the orchestra), as well as the interlude of the abduction (in which the “Gozzi successor” is liquidated by terrorists). The plot structure of the performance, however, faithfully follows the fairy tale model in which the “main event” (Vasiliev) is actually the solution, that is, the happy end. Though the emphasis here is not, as in Gozzi’s *fiaba* (fairy tale), on the fact that all obstacles eventually give way to the happy marriage. Here, the catharsis that follows almost immediately after the “catastrophe” (Katalin Kemény) is thanks to the simultaneous functioning of the entirety of time, the cultural memory of humanity unfolding before the audience: the mythical pre-time of the fairy tale, the great European era of the Baroque, during which the Gozzi play was written, and post-Soviet Russia, still an open era that extends into the present, form a single space-time continuum in terms of perspective. To us the directorial concept of Roschin embodied in this composition clearly indicates that for the new generation of Russian artists, the programme is no longer about coming to terms with history (as it was for generations appearing since the mid-twentieth century, as demonstrated by Weöres’s entire oeuvre and his book

titled *Teljesség felé* [Towards Completeness] (1945) within that in Hungary), but rather about confronting an ecological catastrophe. This is what makes this tale of the raven's "revenge" truly relevant, as it sends us, people living in the 21st century, the message that man as a dramatic creature cannot break out of nature, of which he is a part, without consequences, for then the elemental forces, the animal and plant world, will turn against him as one.

Zs. Sz.: The same type of universal perspective is characteristic of the directorial concept of Attila Vidnyánszky. His 2003 production based on Ferenc Juhász's²⁴ opus *A szarvassá változott fiú kiáltozása a titkok kapujából* [The Boy Changed into a Stag Cries Out at the Gate of Secrets] (1955), also manifests the duality of human identity, its determination by both nature and civilization. This production, which the director created with his ensemble in Beregszász, is, in my opinion, also as significant an artwork in its genre as Bartók's *Cantata*.

Á.P.: With Bartók, the symbolism of the deer motif, originating from shamanism, is yet akin to the symbolism of the archaic plot of the kolinda (Christmas carol). In his *Cantata*, the mission of the stag-boys is fulfilled on a cosmic level: having found the "clean spring", there is no turning back to the world of civilization for them. In Ferenc Juhász's opus, the milieu of nature and civilization is already distinctly rewritten, as if roles were reversed: the wilderness is the metropolis here, into which the post-World War II generation which left their native village with world-changing ambitions entered, and the departure, this second exodus, no longer promises the possibility of a new beginning, but is burdened with a premonition of early demise. The production by Attila Vidnyánszky, *A szarvassá változott fiú kiáltozása a titkok kapujából*, is strikingly new also conceptually. On this stage, the protagonist, the boy turned into a stag, like the shaman and the poet, turns simultaneously towards the dual otherness of himself and the outside world. This enables him to engage in dialogue and metamorphosis, to explore and connect the levels of existence "below human" and "above human". Its existential operation is two-way: continuous exodus and return.²⁵



Ferenc Juhász: *The Boy Changed into a Stag*, d. by Attila Vidnyánszky, Illyés Gyula National Theatre, Beregszász, 2003 (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó, source: nationaltheatre.hu)

²⁴ Juhász Ferenc (1928–2015) was one of the greatest Hungarian poets of the second half of the 20th century, and a renewer of the genre of epic poetry.

²⁵ Cf.: Pálfi, Ágnes – Szász, Zsolt: 'Ímhol az ember' [Behold the Man'], in *Csokonai Színpad*, 2007.

Zs. Sz.: In Attila Vidnyánszky's performance titled *Mesés férfiak, szárnyakkal* [*Fabulous Men with Wings*] created for the 50th anniversary in 2011 of Gagarin's space flight, we get the interpretation of the world citizen from the perspective of civilization. The question here is already whether humanity, venturing beyond earthly spheres, has truly gained new experience when the cosmic dimension has opened up to them in a technical sense. After Yuri Gagarin's spaceflight, which lasted about an hour and a half, a confident statement was made that humanity had entered the space age, and that the possibilities for development were unlimited from that point on. The past half-century has indeed brought revolutionary changes, but not quite in the sense in which the two superpowers participating in the space race communicated it back then. Because while we reached the Moon by the end of the decade through American astronauts like Neil Armstrong and others, it became clear by the 1990s that this new era would be defined much more by the revolution in terrestrial communication, the internet, even if space exploration was a prerequisite for it. This digression was important for our line of thought because in information society people began to perceive the dimensions of space-time in a completely different way – as you also mentioned at the beginning of our conversation. Instantly, all the accumulated knowledge became accessible, providing free passage between the world's regions and cultures that represented – and partly still represent – different periods of civilization. The natural peoples' cyclical perception of time and the goal-oriented, finalistic attitude of the “developed” world, which no longer conforms to the rhythm of nature, are present at the same time. In fact, Attila Vidnyánszky's production keeps track of the emergence of this global condition, when it exhibits in physical reality the essential stations of humanity's mythic visions of flight, from birdman via Leonardo's flying contraptions and Tsiolkovsky's precise calculations to the suffering of the exiled constructors in the Gulag. It is accompanied by comments narrated by actors embodying deceased historical figures, who, through their texts, bring the actor's paradox itself into play: as living beings, sort of returning from death, they evoke their “own” story of suffering with cool objectivity, often in the third person singular. One by one, these human dramas are exposed by the direction from the perspective of the “supreme event”, the moment of death, when those in power ‘reward’ superhuman achievement by retaliation, by disregarding, or even liquidating the creative human being.

Á. P.: Actually, this alone would be enough for an authentic docudrama to be created about one of the great stories of the 20th century. A play like this could even go so far as to have these tragic life stories sanctified by the commonplace metaphor of the Christian sacrifice. Yet Attila Vidnyánszky does not choose this obvious, easier path. With the way he weaves the legend of the fourth Magi into the play, he does the opposite: the director's staging emphasizes from beginning to end the spatial and temporal distance between the mystical past



Zhukovsky – Szénási – Lénárd: *Fabulous Men with Wings*, d. by Attila Vidnyánszky, Csokonai Theatre, Debrecen, 2011 (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó, source: nationaltheatre.hu)

and the profane present, while also evoking the mystical event in its physical concreteness as a sequenced silent play. However, the story itself – that the fourth Magus set out on the journey at the time of Jesus’ birth and, having sacrificed everything, he arrived at the crucifixion of Christ – is conveyed by a minstrel-like narrator. However, the paraliturgical textual space of the narrative cannot be localized, so it does not fulfill the function of linking this mystery play to the climax of the story about space travel, when the first astronaut overcomes gravity and leaves the Earth’s atmosphere. Therefore, the “main event” must and can only take place in the consciousness of the third dialogue partner, the audience, who, seated on the revolving stage, observes the current events taking place in the isolated segments of space-time according to the rules of reverse perspective. And as the revolving stage turns around with them multiple times, the equivalence between humanity-scale world time and the individual’s lifespan becomes perceptible for the audience over and over again.

Zs. Sz.: It can be said about this performance, too, that the kind of humaneness which is capable of overriding the ideological burden of dictatorships, whose loudly proclaimed programme was, beside atheism, to do away with the past, stems from the composition itself. For contemporary playwright generations, the most significant lesson of this production may be that particular historical periods, even the century-long passion story of a nation, can only be told legitimately within this broader conceptual framework.

To sum up, we can provide the following answer to the question posed in the title of our essay:

It can confidently be said about the internationally recognized distinctive trend of contemporary world theatre, of which we have examined only a few performances in more detail here, that it *simultaneously* realizes the drama's inherently *epic* character as well as *poetic* nature. The affinity between stage works and narrative epic – primarily the epic poem and the novel – has become increasingly apparent in recent times as directors regularly employ narrative techniques developed by narrative epic to establish a dialogic relationship between the various dimensions and isolated segments of space-time. As for the term “poetic theatre”, it is essentially synonymous with the meaning of “artistic theatre”: both express the idea that, rather than depicting natural reality, the given institution seeks to restore poetic/artistic fiction²⁶ to its rights – leading the audience to “creation in the fullest sense”²⁷ through the artistic production of the actors. Nevertheless, the two concepts mentioned above are not sufficient to point out the characteristic features of the new theatre aesthetics examined here. The essence of this artistic approach and practice is more accurately captured by familiar concepts operable in other contexts, such as the *wholeness principle*, *universalism*, *transhistoricism* that encompasses the full range of human cultural memory²⁸, and the *apocalyptic view* of the simultaneity of beginning and end. With this paper, we wanted to draw attention to the fact that apparently there seems to be a renewed demand nowadays – not only within Europe but beyond its borders as well – for a kind of “humanity drama”, which is represented in Hungarian literature by Madách's masterpiece, *Az ember tragédiája* [*The Tragedy of Man*].²⁹

Translated by Nóra Durkó

²⁶ See classical philologist Olga Freidenberg's opinion that, in the world of antiquity, the semantics of fiction (πλάδμα) can be traced back to the cosmic image of “creation.” According to this semantics, ancient “fiction” does not coincide with our concept of “sheer deception.” Moreover, ancient circus “deception” also referred to the imitation of the original, and the fiction of art was understood as the “image” of reality. Cp. O. Freidenberg: ‘Metafora’. In: Poetyika. Trudí russzkih i szovjetszkih poetyicseszkih skol. Edited by Gyula Király, Árpád Kovács. Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, p 70

²⁷ Anatoly Vasiliev, *ibid.* p 289

²⁸ See for this: Szörényi, László: ‘Epika és líra Arany életművében’ [‘Epic and Lyric in Arany's Oeuvre’]. In Id.: “Múltaddal valamit kezdeni”, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Publications, No. 45, Budapest, Magvető, pp 164–207

²⁹ For the dramaturgical projection of the apocalyptic space-time view of the Age of Aquarius, see: Pap, Gábor – Szabó, Gyula: *Az ember tragédiája a nagy és a kis Nap-évben* [*The Tragedy of Man in the Great and Small Year*], Erd, Örökség könyvműhely, 1999

“We Are on Our Way to Salvation”

Roundtable Discussion on the *Csíksomlyói passió* (*Passion Play of Csíksomlyó*)

Csíksomlyói passió by the National Theatre in Budapest premiered in the Csíksomlyó mountain saddle on August 18, 2018. This version of the production, transformed for an open space and expanded with local folk dance ensembles and choirs, was seen by 25,000 spectators. The following National Theatre colleagues were asked about this large-scale enterprise by Mária Rádió editor Vera Prontvai: Zsolt Szász, the dramaturg of the theatre performance; Edit Ágota Kulcsár, the production manager of the performance in Csíksomlyó; and poet Ágnes Pálfi. (For the discussion in Hungarian see: *Szcenárium*, October 2018, pp. 14–28.)



V. P.: Warm greetings to Ágnes Pálfi, Edit Kulcsár and Zsolt Szász in the studio of Mária Rádió. Can you tell me what specific role each of you played in the creation of this large-scale endeavour?

Zs. Sz.: Well, I'll start by answering as the dramaturg of the theatrical version which opened on March 9th, 2017. I thought it was important to tell in the text promoting this performance that we're now in the third era of 20th century adaptations of school dramas from Csíksomlyó as well as passion plays in general.¹

Director Attila Vidnyánszky's present enterprise could rely on academic results that were previously unavailable, such as, in the first place, the book² written and edited by Norbert S. Medgyesy, which

¹ The adaptation of Imre Katona's *Passió magyar versekben, avagy a megfeszítés története* (*Passion in Hungarian Poems or the Story of the Crucifixion*), which was presented at the Egyetemi Színpad (University Stage) in 1971 under the direction of József Ruszt, was based on Árpád Fülöp's collection published in 1987, which comprised only four school dramas. The same source was used by Elemér Balogh and Imre Kerényi when they staged the *Csíksomlyói passió* (*Passion Play of Csíksomlyó*) at the Várszínház (Castle Theatre) ten years later.

² Medgyesy S. Norbert: *A csíksomlyói ferences hagyomány forrásai, művelődés- és lelkiégtörténeti háttere*, PPKE, Bölcsészettudományi Kar – Magyarok Nagyasszonya Ferences Rendtartomány, Piliscsaba – Budapest, 2009



includes a complete analysis of passion play texts based on the findings³ of a research group led by István Kilián. With respect to archaic folk prayers, I'd also like to draw attention to the summary work⁴ by Zsuzsanna Erdélyi, who, after editing her famous collection of prayers (*Hegyet hágék, lőtőt lépék*) also explored the genesis of tradition as well as folk religious texts, and collated them with Franciscan traditions in terms of spirituality, which means she looked into the antecedents philologically, too. Additionally, we could draw on the fact that significant dance companies

with their roots in the folk dance house tradition such as our creative partner, the Hungarian National Dance Ensemble, not only reach out with proper depth and attention to detail for authentic dance language today, but turn to related ritual elements, traditional games and religious folk practices in the same way. So we can speak of a kind of synthesis. In fact, I was the one who had access to the scientific mapping of the topic, so maybe that's why I was selected as the dramaturg of the production. From 1990 on, with my former theatre groups (MÉG Színház [MÉG Theatre], Hattyúdál Színház [Swan Song Theatre]), we were into staging dramatic or semi-dramatic texts which were preserved in the chronicle tradition, like for example in the codices. Therefore I also had acting experience in this area. In 1991 we took on a mission together with theatre historian and dramaturg Márta Tömöry, namely the mapping and presentation of *betlehemezés* (Hungarian nativity plays), which is a distinguished genre of the sacred dramatic play tradition still alive in the Carpathian Basin, besides the organization of the annual Nemzetközi Betlehemes Találkozó (International *Betlehemes* [Nativity Play] Meetings). Now we have hundreds of hours of video footage, which was of great help in terms of tone and rendition during the rehearsals of the *Csiksomlyói Passió*. It served as an example of how to authentically perform these old texts with a spiritual-intellectual-religious charge today.

V. P.: *How did the others get involved in this process?*

Á. P.: To be honest, I don't even remember the moment when I had a conversation with Zsolt and the thought occurred to me that it would be worth associating contemporary literature with the school drama texts as well as the sacred songs that András Berecz sings in the performance, drawing from his own collections, too. If I remember correctly, the work started in June 2016 with us listening to these songs in Attila Vidnyánszky's office. And when we

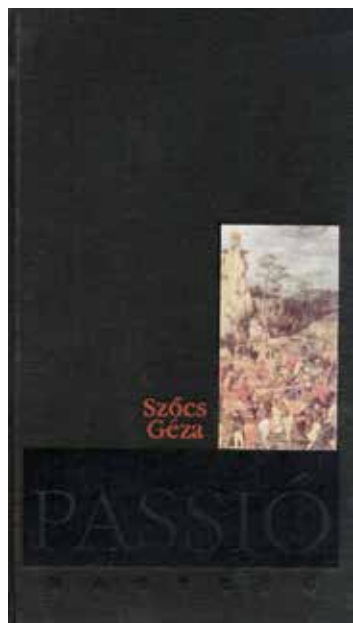
³ *Ferences iskoladramák I. Csiksomlyói passiójátékok 1721–1739*. Szerk., s. a. r.: Demeter Júlia, Kilián István, Pintér Márta Zsuzsanna. Argumentum Kiadó – Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 2009 (Régi Magyar Drámai Emlékek [RMDE] XVIII. század, 6/1.)

⁴ Erdélyi Zsuzsanna: *Múltunk íratlan lírája*. Az archaikus népi imádságműfaj háttérvilága, Kalligram, Pozsony, 2015



put together a possible script for Attila from the texts of the school plays during the summer, in August, Zsolt and I started looking for contemporary literary parallels. And suddenly I remembered Géza Szőcs's *Passió* (*Passion*), which had a profound impression on me at the very beginning of the 2000s when I got the book from Márta Tömöry. After reading the slender book, both of us were immediately enlightened that this was the text that we should give to Attila. Because, knowing his "fragmentary dramaturgy", we stumbled upon incredible parallels in it and discovered the same perspective as Attila uses in composing his stage works. *Passió* by Géza Szőcs is a postmodern venture, in terms of both its texts and as a whole. All the hallmarks of this contemporary trend can be discovered in it: it contains adaptations, guest texts, at least two dozen biblical and literary quotes, often with footnotes. Furthermore, it also names literary historical and philosophical sources, such as the serious theoretical work of Gyula Rugási. The reader of the book experiences two things at the same time: on the one hand, Géza Szőcs is at home in this postmodern way of thinking, and on the other hand, the framework of the composition is very firmly provided by the biblical story. Most of the texts are rewritings of the biblical one; sometimes through literary allusions, when the author emphasizes that his predecessors have already touched on the subject, and thus he can rely on their texts; but there are also completely new entries, with his own poetic ingenuity also present from time to time. And he is able to maintain these two things in balance in such a way that it results in a remarkable and exceptional philosophical achievement, too. For me, it demonstrates that the biblical framework, the dimension of salvation history, can perfectly be reconciled with the postmodern approach, and that contemporary artists of a truly high calibre are not interested in obliterating the foundation of the Christian cult community by replacing the existential philosophical surplus of the Passion of Christ. For me, this biblical framework makes the real benefits of postmodernism much more tangible and comprehensible. The Easter tradition, the Passion of Christ, which we experience anew every year, can safely be collated with the postmodern aesthetic creed that there is nothing new under the sun, that everything has already happened before. If you give some thought to it, this view is essentially no different from that of the salvation history in the biblical tradition.

V. P.: Edit, at which point did you get involved in this creative process?





E. K.: I got involved in the work when Attila Vidnyánszky decided to take the National Theatre production, which was created together with the Hungarian National Dance Ensemble, to the mountain saddle of Csíksomlyó. He invited me when the initial steps of this bold venture were taking place. It wasn't just about going there and nailing a performance. It was a very serious commitment, as local actors were also involved in the production. My job was to connect the threads between people.

Our technicians also needed very serious preparation, and we had to find those local partners who could be of help. We had three days to put the performance in a completely different space in the mountain saddle and to create an acceptable production, and what's more, there were more guest performers than there were of us. Our fifty dancers were joined by another hundred, and our twenty-something actors were joined by a fifty-person children's choir. The basic idea was not just taking something there but cooperation; we wanted to co-create the performance, together.

V. P.: *The concept of postmodernism has been mentioned here. This direction can also be called postmodern, as there are many indicators of this. How can that be reconciled with passion plays?*

Zs. Sz.: In my opinion, Géza Balogh wrote the best review of the National Theatre performance in *Critikai Lapok* (Critical Pages). He talks about how we are not in a small, isolated place, because the bay-shaped stage has a grand embrace. Thus the 190 viewers, who are a relatively small number, become real participants in the action as they are watching the stone theatre version together. Imagine a U-shaped space, with the viewers sitting in the centre. If we talk about postmodernism and try to associate Attila Vidnyánszky's theatre with it in a descriptive way, mention must be made of the multiple parallel events, multiple layers of meaning appearing on his stage, which guarantee communication with the recipient at all levels of the senses. This, if you will, means being outside of space and time in contrast to the realism of linear plot structuring. It is as if all sounds, images, and physical actions were swirling together in one space, much like how a modern person's mind can hold multiple thoughts at once. In other words, it is as Ágnes has also talked about: there are various layers of meaning that move together. All the consequences, intellectual and material implications of the continuous two-thousand-year-old narrative are present at the same time. What's interesting here though is that, within this pile, Attila was still able to make the Passion story itself unfold linearly. In the Bible, the four Evangelists describe this story from different perspectives, in different ways, with different attitudes, yet these narratives have the same nodes from Palm Sunday to the Resurrection and beyond, as the story does not

end on Good Friday, nor even on Easter Sunday, but we reach Pentecost and even beyond, Mary's Assumption. If we take into account the period opposite the middle of August in the annual cycle with the January wedding at Cana, we find that a kind of heavenly wedding is the end of the story.

Á. P.: To this I would add that Géza Szőcs, apparently due to the characteristics of poetic language, does not follow the linear sequence of events in his *Passió*. The best example of this is that Mary's prayer comes much earlier than the event of the death on the cross. The timeline is in fact reversed, as if the event which we'll zoom in on later had already taken place, showing what I've already pointed out, that Easter is actually about the death of Jesus on the cross happening to us over and over again. This act of remembrance is different from the Christmas mystery which Zsolt has also mentioned. The tradition of *betlehemezés* (Nativity playing) involves letting Mary and the holy family into our home, so that by giving them accommodation, we break the resistance of our ancestors. The act of acceptance, the birth of Jesus as the resolution of dramatic tension is repeated year by year through the *betlehemes*, whereas the Easter Passion continues to address Jesus' drama ending with his death on the cross, and regenerates it year after year. Confronting this, or repentance, does not provide absolution. Although its possibility is always there, it never really happens, as in the case of the Christmas birth. I'd also add that Attila finishes the performance with Christmas carols, which means that the story ends with the birth of Christ, that is comes full circle, and we return to its beginning. Interestingly, the wedding at Cana also appears in Géza Szőcs's text, which prefigures the second coming of Christ. This is also probably related to the characteristic of poetry, since a poetic text does not need to be objectified in the same way as a stage play. Time and space are handled with a lot more freedom in poetry. I should also mention that this text has been adapted several times, for example, there was an oratorio version at the Merlin Theatre. And on our way to the studio, Zsolt and I were talking about whether it would probably be the best to make a radio play out of it.

Zs. Sz.: In the case of playing the Passion story the central issue is definitely authenticity, and it is so from two aspects: the first one is the faith we start



Detail from the central panel of Hieronymus Bosch's *Altarpiece of the Adoration of the Magi*, as illustration in Géza Szőcs's book *Passió* (Magvető, 1999)

with, which in theatre is not necessarily a question of religiosity. In my opinion, we've won the battle in this regard because the knowledge that Zoltán Kodály called attention to in connection with the folk song, that is, if we want to sing the folk song at a native language level then we must learn the language of the 18th century, has already become second nature to Zoltán Zsuráfszky's dancers. These dancers don't just perform choreographies and don't just sing, but they also speak this 18th century text, the text of school dramas at a native language level. So the myth that this archaic text cannot be performed authentically has



András Berecz during a rehearsal break of the *Passion Play of Csíksomlyó* (photo by Katalin Balázs, source: szekelyhon.ro)

been dispelled by this. This high level of quality, which by the way characterizes our modern folk dance culture in general, has greatly contributed to the authenticity of the drama taking place on the stage. It's also worth bringing up András Berecz in this regard. Ágnes has already remarked that the twelve sacred hymns being sung belong to the archaic layer of religious folk songs. In fact, the entire medieval tradition of Franciscan spirituality is inherent in the image-making of these songs. Some of these were collected by András Berecz himself in Moldavia and Székelyföld (Székely Land), where he as a regular participant at the pilgrimage of Csíksomlyó met in person the singers for whom these songs are real prayers. Besides the dancers', this kind of initiation is the other source of authenticity on the stage. To this is added the treasure of folk tales which András Berecz partly collected and transcribed into his vernacular. He renders them in the oldest possible symbolic visual language, showing the world view cultivated by the Hungarian folk spirit virtually in its ontogenesis, from the creation of the world – an indispensable element of which is the humour of the performance. All of this certainly underpinned the theatrical authenticity. My

idea of screening the one-hour *bethlehemes* mystery play from Szentegyházsfalu to Attila Vidnyánszky and the actors before the first full rehearsal also worked well. I wanted to demonstrate by this that this mode of speech still exists in folk practice and that this consciously cultivated "technique" can be learned by professional actors as well.

Á. P.: During the rehearsals and now in the version performed in the mountain saddle, we observed that the actors were increasingly catching up with this kind of speech, which as we already saw during the first rehearsals was not at all a problem for the dancers. It was one of the big surprises for us to see how the actors began to tune into this wavelength, and they brought it to such a high level of proficiency that their speech was already unified in the saddle.



The full cast of the August 18th, 2018 performance of the *Passion Play of Csíksomlyó* in front of the Hármashalom-altar (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó, source: nationaltheatre.hu)

Zs. Sz.: Furthermore, the speech could be considered overwhelmingly powerful. Especially in the text commonly referred to as the *Aranyimatyánk* (*Golden Lord's Prayer*) which recounts the events from Palm Sunday to Pentecost. This is a medieval genre, showing a half-dramatic situation of the liturgical drama live, with huge and sweeping power. When the three hundred-strong cast mentioned by Edit speaks, it's irresistible...

V. P.: *To what extent could the dramaturgy of the performance be followed in the outdoor space?*

E. K.: The audience breathed so much along with the performance that there were no surprises for them on how to interpret it all. It surely helped a lot that, even though the faces were very far away in this huge space, two projectors showed the production in large and close-up, and the viewers could see the actors' faces clearly. A state of inspiration was created between performers and spectators, a high level of togetherness that is rarely experienced. I also went out into the audience, because I felt like I wanted to be there. As the first folk religious song began, someone in front of me said it was Mass and stood up. Then ten thousand people stood up, and they were still standing an hour later. The performance touched something within them which was incredible. These people were mainly local residents with religious life being so much a part of their everyday life that they had a clear desire to experience this story. They listened to the whole thing as if it was a mass. I was completely amazed by this phenomenon, the way those ten thousand people stood up because they felt that this could only be listened to standing...

V. P.: *And in complete silence...*

E. K.: Yes, in complete silence. The wording may sound a bit naive compared to my colleagues' brainstorming, but let me read something out. The leader and



Éva Veronika Nagy before the performance (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)



The singers of the Marosszéki Kodály Zoltán Children's Choir light candles during the performance (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

soul of the Marosszéki Kodály Zoltán Children's Choir, Sister Éva Vera Nagy, wrote us a report about how they, the members of the children's choir, saw this event. I don't think I could phrase what happened there as beautifully as she did. I will read out how they saw our side: "The sincere dedication and exposure of the actors and directors made their creed credible, and triggered the flow of goodness, which brought those on the mountain together as a community in catharsis." I would add that we really felt for three days that love was growing within us. I can't find better words for it. We wanted to embrace each other at the end of the performance, and carried that feeling with us further. I would like to utter one more word: blessing. I must say there was a blessing on us, and this was felt more and more each day by everyone: it was only thanks to this that the performance was created with such cooperation, in such a great way, and without any conflicts in this amount of time... We felt the help of the heavens, the protection of this event so to say. I would like to read another part of Sister Vera's report, because it also shows how the interpretation of this complex text became so simple there: "The Father and the Son were present in the *Csiksomlyói Passió*. We experienced it a bit like the children were the Holy Spirit. But on further reflection, the Wanderer, with his tales and songs resolving the situations and stopping the events, just like an aria in an opera, is also a representation of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, all the people, the entire audience, received the role of the Holy Spirit in the performance. The profound silence, the striking common song as a reaction."

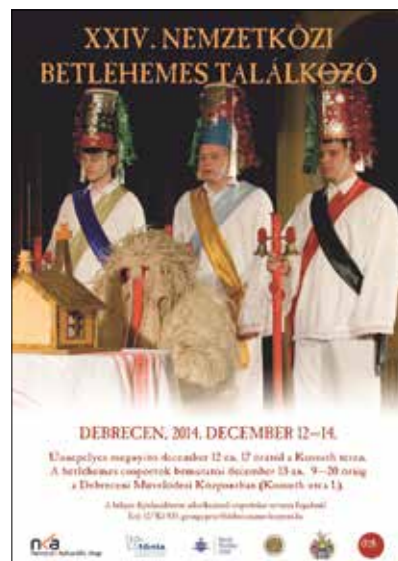
Zs. Sz.: The textus, the text of the school dramas has been preserved by some miracle. Árpád Fülöp was the first to publish some of it in 1897. This was the basis for all previous stage adaptations. In 1980, during a restoration, 1800 folios were found from the plinth of the devotional statue of the Virgin Mary, which are the text material for school dramas known today. It was published as a monograph by the research group led by István Kilián after several decades of work. S. Norbert

Medgyesi pursued the history of influence as well, and attempted to trace how the original mode of acting, or acting tradition continued, or may have continued. Since there was no film recording in the 18th and 19th centuries, or even in the first half of the 20th century, we can only make assumptions about the mode of acting. What I have experienced during the thirty years of the *betlehemes* meetings is that in the Csík Basin in the Székely community homogenous mystery play-like long *betlehemes* have survived, whose text panels, i.e. the constant elements recurring in the scenes, are very similar to these 18th century written school dramas. At the same time, the 42 Passion plays differ from each other in many respects, not only in their verse, but also in their choice of perspective. Don't think that there is a single final text, developed and canonized in the Middle Ages, which we adopted from Western Europe. What becomes interesting is how the mystery can be brought closer through the Passion of Christ, from era to era, from person to person, and possibly even with regard to the particular student youth. I'll give you an example: there's a piece even in the collection of four already, published by Árpád Fülöp, that describes the story in the form of trees talking and competing. In this, the Babylonian cedar knows the royal surplus which, if we continue to think about it, is at the same time Christ's tree of the cross and the tree of life, bearing everything in its very meaning. Such extreme solutions, or, if you like, very modern approaches exist in this era, too. Returning to *betlehemes*, I assume that this text- and acting tradition can only come from Csíkksomlyó. I even believe to have found evidence for this in the case of Szentegyháza, when I say that not only the Christmas mystery play has survived there, but also the so-called "*ördögbetlehemes*" ("Devil Nativity"), which is a story of Lazarus. Death and devils appear in it, so the late-baroque mode of acting that can be traced back to the Middle Ages is also palpable. Thus there's something to draw from, now not only in singing and folk dance culture, but but also in the living tradition of school dramas today.

V. P.: *Connecting to the idea that betlehemes is better accepted by people, this performance also ended with the theme that we're all redeemed. This is what the creators tried to instill in the souls of those present. Do you see it that way, too?*



Cover of the book by S. Norbert Medgyesi (source: Magyar Ferences Források 5. Piliscsaba–Budapest, 2009)



Zs. Sz.: Although the production was not overadvertised, as I can see from the reports, the majority of the audience was recruited from the Csík basin, and the pilgrimatic, cross-bearing population of villages made a pilgrimage to see the performance.

E. K.: Well, yes, because you had to come over the mountain, you had to make a pilgrimage. Those who were curious about this must have had the same desire as makes them set out on a pilgrimage at Pentecost as well, to experience the power of the Holy Spirit, which is said to dwell here. I feel that the audience was involved in this story with such dignity that a closed circuit was created between them and the performers. It all felt so natural, as is rarely given. Moreover, the postmodern theatre play has turned into a real ceremony in a location where holy masses are held at other times. Let's not forget that this is a Székely story, so the actor who later plays Christ appears as a Székely lad in Székely clothing from the first moment. The circle closes this way, too, since the viewer sees themselves and their own story, which increases the intimacy of being together. We were anxious for the *Csíksomlyói Passió* to find its way home. Even so, we were worried not only whether the audience but also whether the place itself would accept our endeavour, and it's a great feeling that it did. We didn't dare to hope that it would finally be received with such a blessing. Even the weather was with us.

V. P.: Since the premiere, I've been wondering about the question: what could be the message of hammering the nail into the bread at the end of the play?

Zs. Sz.: It doesn't appear at the end of the production, but before the end, at the most prominent moment. Dénes Farkas, who personifies the dark forces of Lucifer, Satan and the merchant, hammers into the bread the particular fourth nail of which András Berecz speaks earlier in the tale of the gypsy blacksmith. At one point, Attila – and this is his directorial invention – condensed all three symbolic planes of the story into one gesture. What are these? The symbolism of bread – life, tree of the cross – tree of life may be considered well-known. In Berecz's interpretation, the tale about the fourth nail is less like that: this nail is forever glowing, it can never cool down, so, as I see it, it symbolizes never-ending pain. And this extremely powerful, or, if you like, harsh gesture takes place at the table of the Last Supper. However, this brutality is immediately



The triple-divided set of the playing area in the Csíksomlyó saddle (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

resolved by our pilgrim uncle called Vándor (Wanderer), who breaks this bread with love and shares it with those nearby. As I see it in the recording, this gesture also worked in the Csíksomlyó mountain saddle. A few loaves of bread are passed out to the spectators, and in no time everybody is singing *Boldogasszony anyánk* (*Our Blessed Mother*) together... I'm bringing up this example because you cannot expect the same effect mechanism in a stone theatre and in an outdoor setting. Signal formation works completely differently in such a large space. The cosmic scale is already present in the Csíksomlyó mountain saddle, while it needs to be generated inside a closed space. While on the National stage even a tone or gesture can have a symbolic meaning, this kind of concentrated space and time cannot be created in such a large space. It's an interesting question how the field of meaning and symbolism developed in the interior space can be transferred without damage to such a large space, how the script and text corpus operating there can be used. Attila Vidnyánszky divided the space into three parts: the altar was in the centre, where every action starts and returns, with the city, the sinful city of Jerusalem with the procurator on the left side, and the site of the crucifixion, Golgotha on the right side.

E. K.: I'd read another part of Sister Vera's text: "Our choir members arrived around the monologue of Mary with a mission-driven empathy, in which it was clear that this is not theatre, but this is life. Naturally, the sincere feelings of the protagonists played a huge role in this experience. The emotions flowed so freely towards the children that it was easy for them to imagine the characters in their own family, village, and world. The comforting gesture of the little six-year-old Andika was addressed to both Mary and the actress Augustza Tóth, who became one for us during the play."

V. P.: *In preparation for the conversation, Zsolt asked me to play in the radio the excerpt "Maria speaks to the saints" from Géza Szőcs's Passió, performed by Augustza Tóth. Why did you consider this important?*

Zs. Sz.: I would like to pass this question on to Ágnes, who has more experience with the theme of the Mary cult.

Á. P.: Previously, I mentioned that Géza Szőcs places Mary's prayer a lot earlier. It helps you understand that this is about reliving a past event. In this monologue, a question is posed, which doesn't receive an answer, however, this condition, this open and personal nature of the question, and the representation



Dénes Farkas as Peddler –
Lucifer hammers
a nail into the bread
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

of motherhood are so direct as an experience that the dilemma of “what am I bringing my child into this world for” becomes clear for everyone. The text doesn’t move, no answer comes, but this repeated question will be the one that permeates the spirit of the entire *Passió*. But it’s not just Mary, all the other characters are also on a journey. You asked the question, is there redemption, are we redeemed? Edit put it well when she said we’re on the way. This “being on the road” is in fact the prelude to redemption. It could also be said that what we are in is an Advent spirit and state that carries the promise of redemption. The



Roland Bordás, in the role of Barabbas, distributes bread to the audience (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

manifestation of Satan is also very important when he asks: Will Christ redeem me as well? This is embedded in a very strange text-context that plays with the contrast between “money changer” and “redeemer”⁵. Yet in this scene, Satan gets to the point of understanding what this is all about and poses this question. With regard to the bread and the symbolism of him beating the nail into it, I’d like to draw attention to one thing. If we compare the figure of Satan with Pilate, I see this as a gesture of absolute commitment.

Because someone has to acknowledge that they are the one who committed the crime. I have to admit that it was a sinful act. At the same time, this gesture also involves that I’m part of something that I already know points beyond. Murder is not the ultimate meaning of Christ’s death. This reminds me of an astonishing remark made by a contemporary poet about what kind of religion it is that puts a murder in the shop window. Another contemporary poet says that Christianity is a humourless religion. These two unjust accusations have come to my mind. Yet, there is no lack of humour in this performance, either. For example, the scene in which Satan has come closer to the essence of salvation than Pilate, who is only concerned with how this story will benefit him and if his name will be remembered. Pilate refuses to accept liability as the primary person responsible for condemning Christ. The act of hammering in the nail is a very radical gesture from Attila on the stage: since bread is nothing other than the body of Christ, with this gesture Satan repeats the act of crucifixion and takes it upon himself.

⁵ [translator’s note: in Hungarian the compounds “pénzváltó” (money changer) and “megváltó” (redeemer) have the same word as a second member (“váltó”), so there is tension arising from the overlap in form and the diametric contrast in meaning]

V. P.: *And this is complemented by the gesture that those present will receive a piece of this bread afterwards.*

Á. P.: Yes, this is the participation I was referring to earlier. So that at Easter time we always become part of this event which is both scandalous – as Pilinszky says – and pointing far beyond it, forming the foundation of our entire culture. Many don't know that the apocalypse takes effect when Christ is born (or according to others, when he is baptized). Either way, we stepped into our own time in the life of Christ. And the same thing has in fact been happening since then, the same Easter mystery is repeated with us and through us.

V. P.: *Considering the reception of Vidnyánszky's works, where does this performance fit in?*

Zs. Sz.: I'm sure that this is not just another work of art among the many of Attila Vidnyánszky's previous productions, but also a kind of testimony in terms of faith. Professionally speaking, it's an extraordinary test of whether the skillset he has used so far is suitable for this testimony. If you like, this performance is the "stress test" of his previous life's work. According to the *crème de la crème*, as an artist moves forward on their career path, especially if they are successful, it becomes increasingly difficult to create the next piece.

V. P.: *I was thinking during the performance, is it still possible for him to make theatre after this?*

E. K.: Of course it is, precisely because it's both a recharge and a confirmation. Of course, it's not easy to move on after such a successful performance. I spoke to some who watched it on TV and they said that they also had a cathartic experience through the screen. Then I thought, yes, this was the confirmation of a journey, of an aspiration. At the same time, it's also a starting point for the future, its message is that we're on the right track, and it proves that it's possible to work with these tools.

Á. P.: Attila is going to direct *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*) again, perhaps for the fifth time, I don't even know. This drama, which is considered a mystery play by many, raises the most important philosophical questions at the



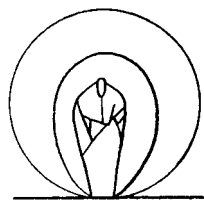
The members of the children's choir among the audience (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)



The creators of the performance from right to left in the picture after the performance: Levente Molnár, Judit Gigi Vas, Géza Szócs, Zoltán Zsuráfszky, Attila Vidnyánszky, Zsuzsa Vincze, members of the choir, Attila Benedek, Augustza Tóth, József Rácz... (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

same high level, and has faith as the foundation of the entire work in the same way as the Passion of Christ. We're very curious to see how it will turn out and how the experience of staging the *Csíksomlyói passió* will be reflected in this production. Attila Vidnyánszky's direction of *Bánk Bán* was also remarkable: the approach to the chronological structure, the epilogue beyond death in the performance already pointed in the same direction as the *Csíksomlyói Passió*. We can talk about a unified directorial perspective here, an apocalyptic worldview which is not at all alien to the postmodern toolkit. Years ago, when we started talking about the end of the postmodern era in sight, he said: "But I thought I was a postmodern director". The Russian school in which he was raised seems by every indication to carry a completely different perspective and is closer to what we tried to talk about earlier, that postmodernism does not necessarily mean a radical departure from Christian foundations. The interpreters of postmodernism in our country do not yet want to see that the same process is taking place behind the new phenomena which they have taken into account; that we're getting closer to the moment of *Libra*, the Scales, which is none other than the dramatic situation of the last judgment. Once my students asked me when I thought the final judgment would come. And then suddenly, because at such times one is forced to respond spontaneously, I found myself saying that we go through this moment several times a day, we just haven't stepped into the centre yet, and so the balance is still tipping back and forth. That's one reason why our stories are not written in a linear chronological order but often in reverse time structure, and why that particular "fragmentary dramaturgy" appears on Attila Vidnyánszky's stage, composing and reinterpreting the dramatic plot in a way that diverges from the usual logic...

Translated by Nóra Durkó



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.¹ 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 Major² 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”³ 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

¹ The production premiered on 15th 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.

² 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.

³ 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.⁴

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."⁵

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."⁶ 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)

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

⁵ Pesti Műsor, 1947, Issue 39.

⁶ 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 occasions⁷ 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 Szabolcsi⁸, from László Bóka⁹ through Zsigmond Remenyik¹⁰ to Deputy Minister Magda Jóború¹¹.

“Beyond compulsory politeness, the press welcomed the performance with the enthusiasm that the artistic feat and aesthetic value commanded”, wrote Tamás Koltai¹² 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.”¹³

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

⁷ No further performance was permitted.

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

⁹ 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.

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

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.

¹³ László Lontay (1920–1975): *Gimnazisták* (Grammar School Students). Magyar Nemzet, 7th 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’¹⁴ 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”.¹⁵

This was but a prelude to the manoeuvre aimed at banning *The Tragedy* again. On one occasion, the people’s wise leader, Mátyás Rákosi¹⁶ 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)

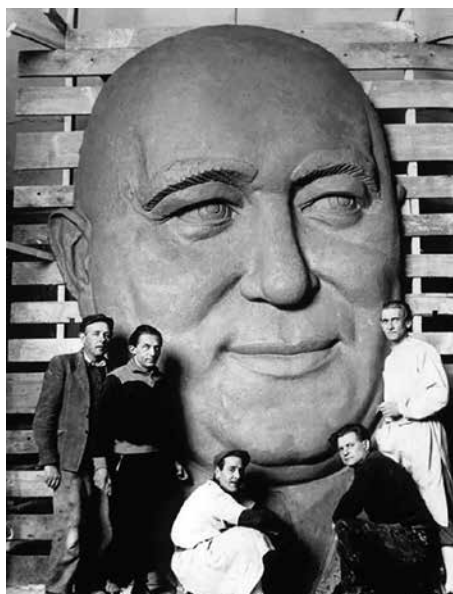


György Lukács in the 1940s (source: 24.hu)

¹⁴ 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.

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

¹⁶ 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 opinion¹⁷ 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."¹⁸

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 Krushinsky¹⁹ 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".

¹⁷ 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*.

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

¹⁹ 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.”²⁰ 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.”²¹ 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.”²² It was with this dubious production that the National Theatre marked the one thousandth performance of the play on 7th 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.

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

²¹ Magyar Nemzet, 11th August 1960.

²² Péter Rényi (1920–2002): *Utólagos megjegyzések a Tragédia szegedi előadásához* (Ex-post Remarks on the Szeged Performance of The Tragedy). Népszabadság, 4th 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 Várady (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 Bálint²³ 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 Sinkovits²⁴, Eve by Hédi Várady, Lucifer by György Kálmán.

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

²⁴ 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."²⁵ *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"²⁶.

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 Szikora²⁷. 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."²⁸



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

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

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ János Szikora (1950) is a director and theatre manager.

²⁸ Tamás Koltai: *Tragédiának nézéd?...* (You Take this for a Tragedy?) *Élet és Irodalom*, 15th 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 Gál²⁹ 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.”³⁰

The latest renewal of Madách's dramatic poem in 2018, and the directorial concept of Attila Vidnyánszky³¹, impose a huge task on everyone involved, including all the players and also the spectators seated on the stage-turned-arena.

²⁹ 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*, 18th March 2002.

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

³¹ 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."³²

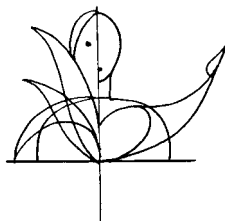
The National Theatre's 2018 production of *The Tragedy* represents yet another impressive attempt at deciphering the magic; it clearly suggests that this much-criticised and long-banned masterpiece is, after all, optimistic.

English translation by László Vértes

Published in Hungarian: *Szcenárium*, February 2019

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 Kisvárdá, where the performance was washed away, i.e. cancelled due to rain.

³² 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

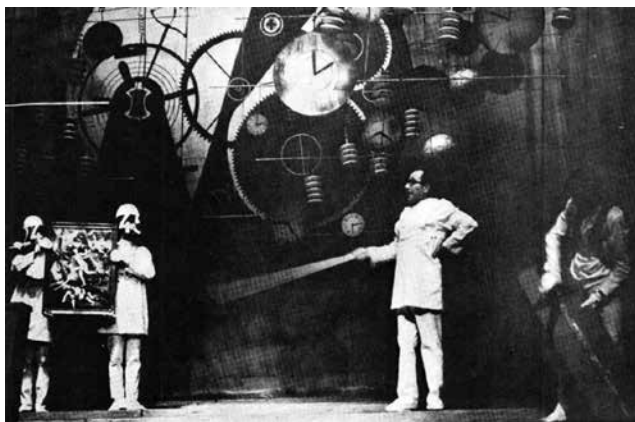
The Tragedy of Man is among our literary classics available to readers in many languages, and also to theatre-goers in many countries. In 2014, Csaba Andor and György Radó put the number of published and unabridged *Tragedy* translations at 33. They also referred to another three full but unpublished 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 21st 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 19th 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 25th 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-20th 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)

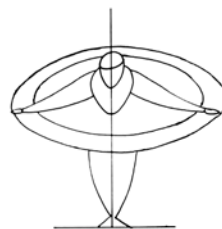


Snapshot from the Phalanstery scene (source: szinhaz.net/archivum/)

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

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NINA KIRÁLY

The Tragedy of Man or Mankind?¹

“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 bibliography² 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

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

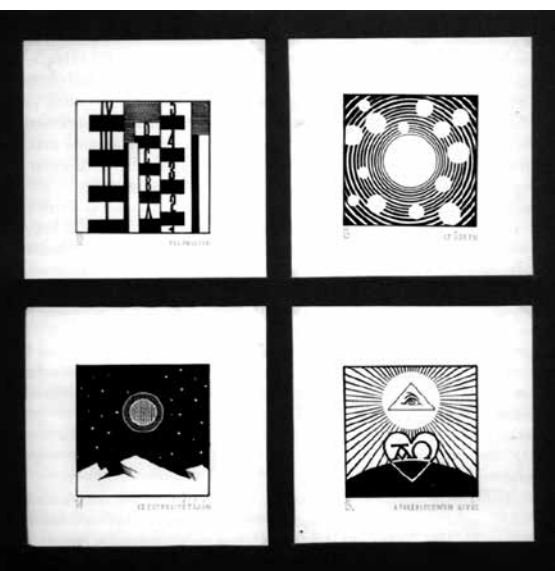
² *Színről színre. Látványtervek Madách: Az ember tragédiájához.* (*Scene by Scene. Set Designs for Madách: The Tragedy of Man.*) Budapest, Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet (Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute), 1999. Appendix: *Madách Imre: Az ember tragédiája a világ nyelvein* (*The Tragedy 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.”³

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)

³ 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.⁴ 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*)⁵

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

⁴ 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.”

⁵ Magyar, Bálint: op. cit. p. 33. 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.”⁶

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”⁷. “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.⁸ 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

⁶ 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

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

⁸ 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.

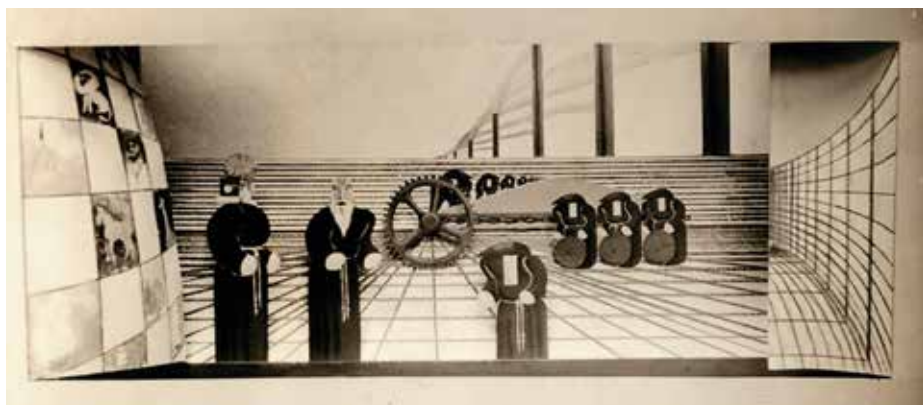
Performances combining live actors and puppets have become quite widespread in recent times, which indicates a special revival of the language of theatre: at times the puppet is a means of alienation from the role, and at other times it is the contrary, being the link between actor, role and narration. 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”.⁹ 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.

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

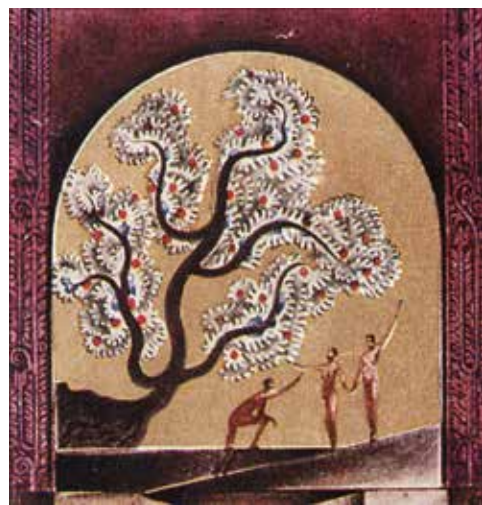
To my question about what he had found so appealing in Madách's drama, he replied:

"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."¹⁰

English translation by Mrs. Durkó, Nóra Varga

Published in Hungarian:

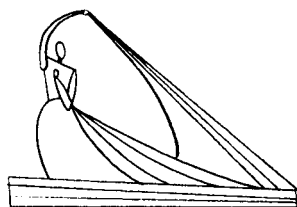
Szcenárium, September 2018



Almos Jáschik's unrealized scenic design for the Garden of Eden scene for Prinzregenten-Theater, Munich, 1932

(source: *Scene by Scene*, 1999)

¹⁰ 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



KATALIN KÜRTÖSI

“More of Seals”¹

Inuit-representations in *The Tragedy of Man*

Imre Madách (1823–1864) started to work on the final version of his ‘dramatic poem’ of humanity in his very remote home, Alsósztrégova, in 1859, exactly ten years after the defeat of the Hungarian war of independence. The writer himself was actively participating in the war against Habsburg rule and was imprisoned for almost a whole year in various prisons after the defeat. It was in prison in 1853 that he started to work on what became *The Tragedy of Man*, writing two more versions in the second part of the 1850s.² Like most mid-19th-century Hungarian intellectuals, he was well-educated, spoke several foreign languages (German, French, English, Latin, Greek, Slovak), played the piano, studied painting, was active in sports and had a remarkable collection of books, including those by French and German philosophers like Charles Fourier, Kant, Hegel, Humboldt, Schopenhauer and others. He followed the main issues of his times, including the discourse about materialism and idealism.³ One influential book on these topics was *Force and Matter* by Ludwig Büchner, published in 1855.

The Tragedy of Man is among the most precious works of Hungarian culture – a very complex one – provoking long discussions about its ideas on religion, society, human history as well as its ‘stageability’. Dozens of monographs and scholarly articles are devoted to its analysis from various perspectives. It has

¹ Imre Madách, *The Tragedy of Man*, trans. George Szirtes, introd. George F. Cushing, ill. Mihály Zichy, 6th ed. (Budapest: Corvina, 2009), 267, 247 (hereafter referred to as TM).

² Madách Imre, *Az ember tragédiája: Drámai költemény. Színoptikus kritikai kiadás.* kiad., jegyz. Kerényi Ferenc (Budapest: Argumentum, 2005), 807, 657, (hereafter referred to as SzKK).

³ For more details about these influences, see Dieter P. Lotze, *Imre Madách* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 74–104.

been translated into several languages and has inspired many artists. Staging the fifteen scenes or playing one of the leading roles – Adam, Eve, Lucifer – have been the greatest challenges for theatre people in Hungary, and even abroad. The new National Theatre of Hungary was inaugurated with János Szikora's *mise-en-scène* of Madách's masterpiece on March 15th, 2002.

The structure of the play is anything but typical of the age when it was written. It is divided into fifteen scenes (no acts are indicated). The first is about Creation, the second is set in Paradise, the third, after the Fall, outside Eden, at the end of which Lucifer casts a spell on Adam and Eve: they “will see unto the end of time/ As in a dream, in fleeting images” (TM, 50). The scenes that follow depict milestones in human history – in Egypt, Greece, Rome of the antiquity, Constantinople, Prague, Paris, and London. Adam, the protagonist (although some critics argue that Lucifer is the main character), appears as a young Pharaoh, as Miltiades, as Sergiolus, the Roman nobleman, Tancred, the head of Crusaders, Kepler and Danton, while in 19th-century London he is Adam again, a “man of mature years” (TM, 171). Scene XII is set in a Phalanstery, Scene XIII in Space where Adam is a very old man. The penultimate scene shows “Eskimo-land”⁴ with Adam as “a broken old man” (TM, 241), signifying the end of the dream. Scene XV leads us back to where the heroes fell asleep, outside Eden. It is Scene XI that is set in Madách's age: as in previous historical scenes, Adam is enthusiastic at the beginning (“This is the world I always hungered for”, TM, 171) but the *danse macabre* at the end sobers him: he has to realize that capitalism and modern industry do not offer a solution to mankind's problems. The following three scenes – featuring Luther, Plato and Michelangelo deprived of their names and identified by numbers only – (the latter doomed to making chair legs at the Phalanstery), forecast future possibilities. In Scene XIII Adam and Lucifer are flying in space, the Spirit of the Earth reminding man about the limits of his choices. It is in the last scene of this sequence of pessimistic forecasts concerning the future that Adam finds himself in a “barren, mountainous landscape, covered in snow and ice ... The light is dim. In the foreground we see a few stunted birches, and, between a juniper and a dwarf pine, an Eskimo hut” (TM, 241).

As a researcher of the Canadian culture, I have a special interest in tracing what sources Madách could rely on when creating this important scene – I consider it important because the playwright refers to issues that now would be defined as ‘environmental’ and also because it is at the end of this very scene that Adam has to wake, since his dream into the future has reached its end-

⁴ When speaking about the play by Madách I will use “Eskimo” – as it was generally accepted in Europe in the age of Madách – but I am fully aware that in our days this label is not accepted any more.

point. The whole play contains 4117 lines. This scene (XIV) has only 179 lines, so it is one of the shorter scenes (the longest one, 592 lines, is set in mid-19th-century London.) As in the other scenes, the main characters are Adam and Lucifer. An Eskimo appears later in the scene and, Eve, as the Eskimo's wife, appears at the very end to welcome the visitors.

Adam, an old man walking with a stick and discouraged by the cold, dark and snowy environment, asks Lucifer to lead him to sunny parts with palm trees. Lucifer explains to him that they are at the Equator, so Adam has to realize that the Earth is cooling down, it is but "a monstrous grave" (TM, 241) of humanity. The only survivor they can find is the Eskimo coming out of his tiny hut, ready to hunt seals. For Adam, he is a "stunted shape", a "strange deformity". He cannot accept that the Eskimo is "the heir to my estate" (TM, 243). The Eskimo, on the other hand, takes them for gods, but does not know if they are good or evil, so he wants to flee but Lucifer prevents his escape.

ESKIMO *falling to his knees*

Have mercy on me!

I promise I will sacrifice to you

The first seal that I catch, if you don't hurt me.

LUCIFER

What right have you to sacrifice the life

Of that poor seal in order to save your own?

ESKIMO

Because I'm stronger; I look around

And see the fish consume the worm,

Seal eat the fish, and I the seal. (TM, 243)

The Eskimo's argument pushes Lucifer into philosophizing about the importance and influence of physical well-being, particularly having sufficient quantities of food, at turning points in human history. Adam cannot bear Lucifer's reasoning and asks the Eskimo if there are others like him around.

ESKIMO

Oh many indeed, more than I could count

On all my fingers. But even though I beat

My neighbours' head in, it is pointless,

New settlers will keep coming, seals are few.

If god you are, I beg you, do this for me,

Let there be less of men and more of seals. (TM, 247)

This brutal statement is more than what Adam can bear. He wants to leave and does not wish to meet the Eskimo's wife but then he realizes that she is Eve. Adam wants to return from the future to the moment when he fell asleep.

The above brief overview and quotations show that the Eskimo scene is not only desolate but dystopic. Lotze (91, 96) argues that it is nihilistic. Like some other poets in early 19th-century Hungary (e.g. Mihály Vörösmarty, Péter Vajda), Madách was greatly influenced by theories about entropy, especially by Charles Fourier's *Théorie de l'unité universelle* which predicted the cooling down of the solar system (SzKK, 783). Károly Nendtvich, a pioneer of industrial chemistry in Hungary, published a book in 1851 discussing the future of the Earth from a geological point of view, claiming that phenomena of the polar circles would slowly move to the South, covering the hot deserts with eternal ice (this idea appears in some poems by Madách, too – SzKK, 781). Madách shared and integrated the concerns of his contemporaries about man's position in the universe, about free will, about theological questions. In Lotze's view, "Lucifer serves as Feuerbach's spokesman throughout the play" (90). Madách, however, was influenced not only by major philosophical and scientific works of his age, but also by important works of world literature, including the Bible, Plutarch (?), Milton, Goethe, as well as French, English, and German Romanticism. The parallels with Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Goethe's *Faust* are obvious and frequently referred to – less widely known are the similarities with Victor Hugo's *La légende des siècles*, including visions of the future.⁵

As far as the Inuit scene is concerned, it might be based on an article published in March 1837 in one of the very first issues of *Atheneum*, a popular paper appearing twice a week, which most probably relied on articles on the same topic in Western European papers (SzKK, 790). "The Eskimos"⁶ gave readers information about their life and habits, stating that they were created as humans but died as beasts (ibid.). Another source of information about life and inhabitants close to the North Pole was *Kraft und Stoff* by Ludwig Büchner⁷: The German philosopher wrote about Greenlanders in the chapter "Die Gottesidee" (SzKK, 791). A further German work that Madách may have used

⁵ For a more detailed elaboration on the literary influences see Lotze, *Imre Madách*, chap. 5 and 6.

⁶ The word "Eskimo" was first printed in Hungarian in 1802 according to the etymological dictionary of the language – most probably it was a loan-word from German – and two years later one of the leading poets used it in a literary text.

⁷ Lotze (*Imre Madách*, 91–2) summarizes it as follows: "Büchner's very successful book is a popular summary of the basic ideas of materialism. The author tried to demonstrate through many examples that our universe was not created or maintained by any divine power. The world of matter is infinite and is subject only to the inherent laws of nature. There is not force outside matter."

was *Demok-ritos* (1832–1835) by Karl Julius Weber which described how Lapps and Greenlanders welcomed guests (SzKK, 794).

It is obvious that Madách had neither first-hand nor second-hand information about the Inuit. He was relying on various sources popular in his age. These works passed on some basic facts about life above the Arctic Circle, including a few anthropological features, but their main concern was creating possible scripts for changes in nature and the impacts of these changes a hundred years later. Experts of *The Tragedy of Man* usually elaborate on the intellectual and philosophical forerunners of this unusual mid-19th-century play. The question still remains of why the pessimistic/nihilist/dystopic penultimate scene is located on 'Eskimo-land' and not in Greenland or some other place on Earth.

I propose that the playwright was greatly influenced by a sensational story of his own age, namely the reports about the Franklin expeditions.⁸ Hungarian newspapers and journals in the 1840s and 1850s also published articles about the unimaginable hardships that members of the Franklin expeditions and of the other expeditions searching for them had to endure. An article published in 1843 about 'Eskimos' is a short description of their conditions of life: The tallest willow and birch are but two feet high above the frozen ground, the people live on fishing and hunting, eating meat that is half rotten, half frozen, half dried; for dessert they have lichen, and they drink melted snow or the lard of fish. They wear the fur of wild animals. They have the look of animals. Their life is full of misery, but they seem to be satisfied with it⁹ (*Hon és Külföld*, 1843–11–14). The stage instructions and dialogues of Scene XIV show several minute details that evoke the descriptions of the article published anonymously. Twelve years later another article came out – this one, however, referred to the Franklin expeditions. In the mid-1850s Madách was already working on *The Tragedy* ... and, apparently, a relatively detailed description of hardships the expedition had to face was welcome when composing the scene of utter desperation. In *Vasárnapi Újság* Virgil Szilágyi wrote about the place where Franklin was lost many years before.¹⁰ He also mentions that several expeditions had been trying

⁸ Even our own age is very much interested in the topic of the Franklin expeditions – a series, *The Terror* is based on it.

⁹ „A legmagasabb fűz és nyírfa két lábnyira emelkedik a fagyos földből [...] [ez a 'nép-faj'] halászatból s vadászatból él, félig rothadt, félig fagyott, félig aszalt hust eszik, zuzmót rágcál csemegéül, s hóvizet, halzsirt iszik reá. E vad bőrbe burkolt emberek tekintete inkább állati, s életök nyomorult tengés az igaz, de meg vannak elégedve.” („Az eszkimó faj,” *Hon és Külföld: Toldalék Múlt és Jelenhez*, November 14, 1843, 91, accessed August 19, 2022, https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/HonEs-Kulfold_1843/?query=eszkim%C3%B3&pg=368&layout=.

¹⁰ „Itt téved el a jéghegyek és zátonyok tengerszorosain sok év előtt Franklin az angol tengerész. Azóta többen indultak ennek is fölkeresésére, bár hasztalanul. Maguire kapitány 1852-ik év aug. havában indult el Plover hajón, hogy meglátogassa az eszkimókat. [...] Mindjárt másnap el is ment Maguire, orvosával az eszkimófa-



Mihály Zichy: *Az ember tragédiája* (The Tragedy of Man), Illustration, 1887, Scene 13 (The Space), paper, carbon, 790×503 mm, (source: mng.hu)



Gustave Doré: Illustration for John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 1866, engraving
(source: [wikimedia.org](https://www.wikimedia.org))

to find the survivors, including Captain Maguire who went in the HSS Plover to visit the Eskimos in August 1852. In the Eskimo village, he found igloos. The article gives a reliable description of igloo-making and continues with a description of Inuit staples: dried wild goose meat, raw fish, fish-lard, and seal-tail were offered to the visitors. Again, we can find exact references to the information the article provides in the scene by Madách. The reports about expeditions trying to find the Northwest Passage served as suitable starting points for Madách envisioning a miserable future and the Eskimos were but personifications of the danger mankind had to face. These considerations can explain the negative and frustrating image of the Eskimo world in Scene XIV of *The Tragedy of Man*.

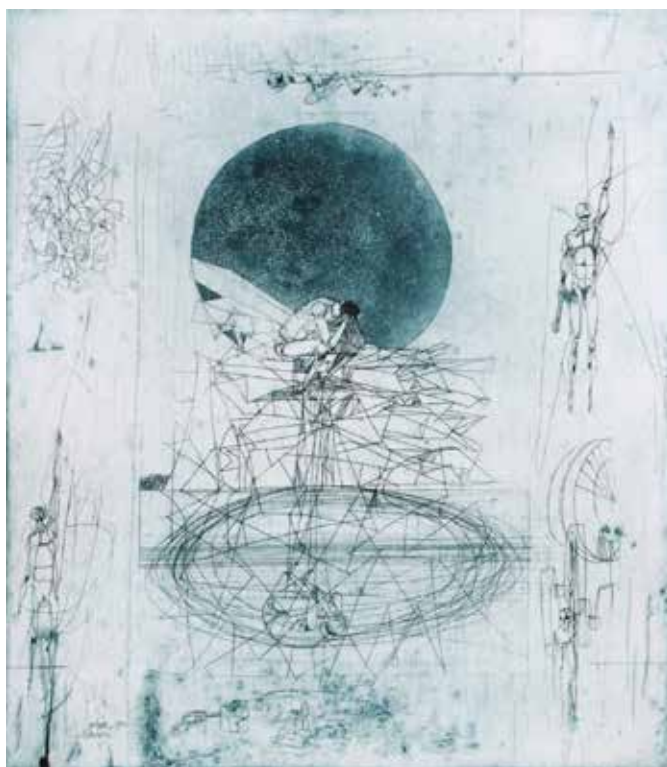
This monumental play presented a challenge for visual artists, as well: How to represent the historical and visionary locations on stage in set and costume design? The solutions are wide-ranging, from historical “realism” to abstract representation or projected pictures on stage. Being a key work of Hungarian culture, several editions of *The Tragedy of Man* are illustrated with pictures. The first, and still best-known and most popular drawings, were made by Mihály Zichy (1827–1906), the “Hungarian Gustave Doré” (Théophile Gautier’s phrasing cited in TM, 267) in the mid-1880s, starting with fifteen pictures, and adding five more later. They were first exhibited in 1886 and published two years later. Zichy lived and worked in Paris between 1874 and 1879, so he had first-hand information about French art and literature. He was particularly attracted to visionary ideas on canvas. In the early 1880s he made illustrations for Goethe’s *Faust* and Lermontov’s *Demon*. With several years’ break, he spent almost half a century in Saint Petersburg, working as a court painter. As Falus points out, Zichy “was always careful to represent a given period with historical precision and his illustrations testify to a profound knowledge of history, ethnography, and art” (in TM, 270). Examining his illustration of the Eskimo scene, however, we note that Zichy shows the Eskimo in “Nordic” fur coat and boots, but the characters are depicted standing in front of a teepee, a “Indian” tent, and not an igloo! Apparently, even in the mid-1880s European artists did not have access to authentic pictures of life in the North (while they could see paintings of Indians and their camps). So Zichy’s illustration is only partly accurate – and this fact is all the more disturbing, since his pictures were used for stage representation in the late 19th-century.

luba. A kunyhók itt sajátságosan vannak építve. Jégtáblákat, hógöngyölegeket raknak egymásra, építés közben folyvást öntözvén olvasztott hóvízzel, hogy összefagyjanak. [...] Aszalt ludhussal, nyers hallal, halzsirral és félig rothadt fókafarkkal [...] kínálták meg a vendégeket.” (Virgil Szilágyi, „Eszkimo király: Népismertető életkép,” *Vasárnapi Újság*, May 27, 1855, 166, accessed January 8, 2021, https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/VasarnapiUjsag_1855/?query=eszkim%C3%B3&pg=169&layout=s).

In the interwar period new approaches appeared in set designs for Madách's play, as Mária István's survey points out.¹¹ Concerning Scene XIV, she reveals that Benedek Baja's colourful design for a performance in 1926 featured a simple symmetrical stage evoking symbolism and expressionism, including a half circle suggesting a rising sun on one side and another half circle for the igloo on the other, the two connected with a rainbow. *Irodalmi Magazin* devoted a special issue to *The Tragedy of Man* in 2020 with several short articles and a well-chosen collection of pictures, including book illustrations. Of the latter, I wish to mention a drawing by Szeged-born János Kass (made in 1980, after the publication of the *Tragedy* illustrated by him). It shows a dark sun-disk in the background and a male figure sitting on a scaffold-like structure, evoking Rodin's *The Thinker*.

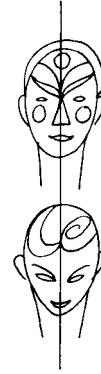
First published by Fidele Signaculum.

Writings Honour of György Endre Szőnyi, Szeged, 2022, pp. 563–569.



János Kass: *The Tragedy of Man, XIV.*, illustration, 1966, etching, paper
(source: kollergaleria.hu)

¹¹ Mária István, „Az ember tragédiája látványvilága,” accessed August 19, 2022, http://mek-oszk.uz.ua/01900/01925/html/menu_hu/scenehu/index.html; for Benedek Baja, see Székely György, főszerk., *Magyar Színművészeti Lexikon*, (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1994), accessed August 19, 2022, <https://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02139/html/sz02/29.html>.



MIKLÓS HUBAY

After the Ball

One-Act Variation on the Theme of the Eskimo Scene

*"It's time for revelations,
the hour to scrutinize the reckoning
the steward made up in the master's absence."
(Imre Madách)*

Characters:

THE MAN

THE WOMAN

VOICES

ADAM'S VOICE

EVE'S VOICE

THE LORD'S VOICE

Towards the end of *The Tragedy of Man*, Adam, the first man, encounters the survivors of humanity – beyond the concluding catastrophe of world history, beyond the destruction of the natural environment, and also beyond a wave of population explosion that already equals extinction. Adam is alarmed at the confrontation, and flees. His panic is increased by the fact that the Woman, the last Eve on Earth, wanted his love and the Man functioned as a procurer. Yet Adam ran away too soon, and the last human couple has been left alone. The curtain goes down. The *Tragedy* continues at another scene.

In it, the last human couple makes its appearance again. Only the scene starts where Madách left off.

During the scene, snippets of conversation can now and then be heard from the ongoing *Tragedy*. Does it indeed continue somewhere? Will God really provide some explanation for what has happened when humanity is one foot in the grave? Or is it just our theatre memories playing with us? Who knows?

The end-of-the-world situation is unusual enough to allow other unusual things to happen.

This two-person idyll of the last human couple is intended as a warning. The escalation smuggles destruction, camouflaged as ordinariness and familiarity, into our proximity. This idyll wants to warn us before it is too late: there has only been one humanity.

(1968)

• • •

*That particular lightless scarlet sphere
above the actors' heads will do as set.*

*To the side is a weekend cottage.
Appropriate aluminum furniture in
front of it. A curtain at the back, slowly
closing just now. We see the reverse of
the curtain, from the stage.*

*The sounds we hear from time to time
are theatrical, hollow, and echoing. They
are carried here from another space.*

ADAM'S VOICE

"Shall I who fondled an Aspasia,
embrace this one...!
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..."

(Sound fades out.)

*(The Man and the Woman stand side
by side, as if they were looking after
someone leaving. They are young, in
civilian clothes. Next to them, if you like,
is the furry Eskimo garb, thrown on the
ground.)*

THE MAN

He's quit. Good for him.

THE WOMAN

Do you envy him?... Am I really so
horrible? Am I?

THE MAN

We are. We are horrible. We're the
most horrible human couple in the
world. Or if you want it that way:
the most lovable human couple in
the world. And the most beautiful
human couple in the world. And the
ugliest human couple in the world...
The only one human couple in the
world. Now we're top in everything.
No more competition. For example,
we can safely say that you're the most
elegant woman in the world. We've
lived to see this.

THE WOMAN

We scared him off. When he saw
me.

THE MAN

Don't worry sweetheart, you'll never
ever scare anyone off again. That was
the last human-like visitor we had.
(trying to be funny) If there were still
a lot of people around to scare, we
wouldn't be so scary. You know what
the absolute scare is? A scarecrow
without crows.

THE WOMAN
Why did he get scared of me?

THE MAN
You're imagining things.

THE WOMAN
Who was it?

THE MAN
What do I know? The forefather of humanity, coming to pay a farewell visit to the last representatives of mankind.

THE WOMAN
Stop making these jokes!

THE MAN
If I'd said to you a few months ago in bed when we turned off the light on the nightstand: honey, imagine, we will be the last couple in the world, wouldn't that've been a joke?

THE WOMAN
You're always saying these kinds of things. You have an itch for such nonsense ideas.

THE MAN
I tried to keep up with world history. Unfortunately, it got ahead of me... Remember what I said when we saw the pope praying for peace on television?

THE WOMAN
I couldn't care less, no matter what you said. It bored me to death. I have no sense for such wit... But if you think that anything absurd may

happen now, why couldn't our visitor come back?

THE MAN
(a little more gently) Because it was just a memory.
(He draws the Woman closer.)
(Some noise can be heard, as if people were clapping.)

THE WOMAN
Do you hear that? They're clapping...

THE MAN
Do you think so? Last night, imagine, I woke up to a tram bell. I checked my watch. It was two o'clock. Trams still running at two in the morning? Strange, I thought.

THE WOMAN
Shame you didn't wake me. How nice it would've been to hear a tram bell again... With you.

THE MAN
You might not even have heard it... Only my ears were ringing.

THE WOMAN
Why? We've both heard this applause, too. We can hallucinate together. I wonder who they've been clapping for.

THE MAN
Not for us. Trust me!

THE WOMAN
They've been clapping for him. For having escaped from here. They're celebrating him.

THE MAN
Did you like him?... Our visitor?

THE WOMAN
(*She smiles, shrugging.*)

THE MAN
Would you've liked him?

THE WOMAN
You're silly. You said yourself that he was just a memory... Maybe not even real.

THE MAN
But an exciting memory!

THE WOMAN
(*laughing*) You're not jealous, are you? Starting just in time! Come on, let's dance!... Put on the record!

THE MAN
I'm not dancing.

THE WOMAN
Why not?

THE MAN
I don't feel like it.

THE WOMAN
You never feel like doing anything... That's no way to live! (*She sits down.*) (*She spreads out a crappy newspaper, takes out a pencil and, clearly, works on a crossword puzzle.*)

THE MAN
While there was still music to be found on the radio – I couldn't complain. But to play that antiquated

phonograph! With that lousy needle! The one and only creaking record... (*He starts singing angrily.*) "After the ball, reminiscing..."

THE WOMAN
Enough already!... Latin greeting. Three letters.

THE MAN
Tell me! How many times have you solved the same crossword puzzle?

THE WOMAN
Why? Could you possibly edit new ones for me?

THE MAN
I couldn't.

ADAM'S VOICE
"Terrible sight, what has become of you?
The world is happy and alive again as I left it ...".

(*Pause.*)

THE MAN
(*somewhat hoarsely*) Ave. The greeting in Latin... Did you hear?... The voice.

THE WOMAN
Did you too?

THE MAN
Yea.

THE WOMAN
What are these voices?

THE MAN

No idea... Memories.

THE WOMAN

Like an echo... Will we also continue echoing when we're gone?

THE MAN

For whom?

(Silence.)

THE WOMAN

Oh, sure.

THE MAN

It's more as if the performance was continuing somewhere.

THE WOMAN

Somewhere where?

THE MAN

Not somewhere, but sometime... In time. "The world is happy and alive again..." We've had that, too. Do you remember?... In another time.

THE WOMAN

No! And I don't even want to remember! I'm already fed up with memories. (*She buries herself in the newspaper.*) How did you say it? Ave!

THE MAN

The Latin greeting is also a memory. The gladiators who're about to die salute the emperor. Ave!

THE WOMAN

But I have nothing to do with it! I wasn't an emperor, nor a gladiator! It's a sterile memory. Ave.

THE MAN

That's why we're just as mortal as the gladiators. If not more... As a final salutation, we write in the blank squares of a crossword puzzle: Ave.

THE WOMAN

(*She crumples up the newspaper.*)

THE MAN

How're you going to amuse yourself tomorrow?

THE WOMAN

(*She goes over to him*) With you.

THE MAN

You know what? Go and feed the cockroaches. They're a lot more creative than I am. They grow day by day and multiply superbly. The radiation has done them good. Maybe one day they shall inherit the whole earth. I wonder if they'll ever create anything like the philosophy of St. Thomas.

THE WOMAN

It's no use. I've reached a point where not even these jokes of yours bother me. No matter how I try, they don't bother me. I can even laugh at them. I guess it's a sign of love.

THE MAN

Beware! I myself may not be more than a memory. I don't want to deceive you. After all, we really loved each other at one time... (*Looks at her.*) In another time.

THE WOMAN

Give it a try... This time, too.

THE MAN

But I'm also a sterile memory, dear.
A memory just for you.

THE WOMAN

(Suddenly she gives him a slap.)

THE MAN

(Starts to laugh silently.)

THE WOMAN

What're you laughing at?

THE MAN

That there isn't even a law court to divorce us. There's not a single divorce lawyer in the entire solar system, either. And there's no loyal friend to spill your heart to in a café.

THE WOMAN

(frustrated, she explodes) I can't take it! I can't take it! Where's the one who used to be here?... Come back! Hey! Why did he go away? Why did he leave me here?... I can't take it anymore! It's impossible to stand ... This indifference! It's impossible... Let everyone hear!

THE MAN

No one will come back.

THE WOMAN

They will, they will... They must... Is there nobody to hear me? *(She starts to cry quietly.)*

THE MAN

I am here.

THE WOMAN

Go away! With your cynical jokes...

THE MAN

The most cynical joke was when you talked me into not having any more children.

THE WOMAN

What do you want now? Do you enjoy tormenting me?

THE MAN

I only returned the slap. It wasn't much of a pleasure.

THE WOMAN

I talked you into it, fine. And what about me?... Every newspaper is full of pictures of how a modern woman does not mess around giving birth. It was full of it. How happy the mother is who plans her parenthood. That it's up to us to halt the population explosion. Too many children... That the earth will be jam-packed in the year two thousand...

THE MAN

We really don't need to worry about that now, darling.

THE WOMAN

And we needed the premium, too.

THE MAN

What did we need it for?

THE WOMAN

I don't know. We just needed it.
(*She sits stiffly.*)

THE MAN

We planned the family. Spent the premium for sterilization. Don't count on me in the redesign of humanity now.

THE WOMAN

Maybe the amount of radiation that's hit us since then...

THE MAN

Do you think it'll work miracles? Will I become a new patriarch?

THE WOMAN

We must try.

THE MAN

Just what we need!

THE WOMAN

Get out the kids' photo! Why're you always hiding it?

THE MAN

Do you think we'd have the same children again?... They'll be monsters! If we have them! But we won't!

THE WOMAN

What will they be like? Still...

THE MAN

(*shouting in frustration*) Maybe they won't have arms or legs. Remember the thalidomide babies? They were like seals.

THE WOMAN

Go ahead!... So?

THE MAN

It's nonsense! Do you want to torture yourself with this, too?

THE WOMAN

No way! Talk about them... (*She laughs.*)
(*Silence.*)

THE MAN

What's wrong with you?

THE WOMAN

I imagined I'm breastfeeding a little one like this.
(*Silence.*)

THE MAN

(*He sits down and speaks to himself*)
Humanity is going to perish eventually anyway, I said to myself. If it happens now, at least I'll see the greatest event in world history... The end of the world. The trumpets will sound... But who would've thought it'd be like this? Such a nonevent. Just like the life of a childless couple.

THE WOMAN

(*just stands, blankly*) Tell me, is it really that awful being here with me?

THE MAN

Shush! Shut your mouth!... I was talking to that. To the speech.
(*Silence.*)

Your friend's also beginning to lose his unshakable optimism. I'm really happy about that... He's starting to suspect

what if this isn't the best of all possible worlds after all? Did you listen?

THE WOMAN

Don't change the subject!

THE MAN

When I was a child, I read an article about the giant tortoises of the Galápagos. On the occasion that they just were just going extinct. There was even a photo of them. They looked terrifyingly sad. Visibly, every giant tortoise knew that they were dying out right then.

ADAM'S VOICE

"No! No! That is untrue. My will is free."

THE MAN

(He jumps up.) This is too much! Shut up over there! I've told you.

(Silence.)

All radio stations've long gone silent. And there he's starting it right now. Can't I have a peaceful end of the world?

THE WOMAN

You're so witty... Well?

THE MAN

Well, why do you want me to be more cheerful than the giant tortoises were in a similar situation? Tell me, really, isn't it a shame for this poor humanity? Wouldn't it deserve a little mourning? "It is with profound sadness and a broken heart that we announce the unexpected death in its prime of our only and promising species." It's not

customary to write that it's committed suicide. You could perhaps write "under tragic circumstances", which is accurate.

THE WOMAN

How did it actually happen?

THE MAN

Step by step. We were only ankle-deep in it first. Traffic accidents, weather forecasts, war reports. Ran out in front of the bus within braking distance. Was driving drunk. The heatwave came. Carried out bombing on a larger scale than ever before. That's how the news was coming. For years and years. The same every day. We got used to it. And then all of a sudden we were neck-deep in it.

THE WOMAN

Tell me, do you think the kids knew?

THE MAN

Knew what?

THE WOMAN

That they were born in vain.

THE MAN

Maybe that's why they didn't behave themselves. Every one protests the way they can. *(As the woman stirs to go toward the cottage)* Where're you going?

THE WOMAN

To get changed.
(away into the cottage.)

THE MAN

(He takes out his wallet, pulls out a photo and puts it down in front of him. Looks at it.)

THE WOMAN

(her voice from inside) What're you doing?

THE MAN

(staring at the photo, he says incidentally)
I'm finishing your crossword...Little girl in Latin. Plural. PUELLAE. Boy in Latin. Singular. PUER.

THE WOMAN

(her voice from inside) You do know everything.

THE MAN

For someone with a degree in engineering. And someone who failed in Latin. *(He forces a laugh.)* But it seems that all the knowledge of humanity has now landed in my head. And in yours, of course. Don't you feel that you also know everything? The god of love. Well?

THE WOMAN

(her voice from inside) AMOR!

THE MAN

You ask me now!

THE WOMAN

(her voice) Who was Aspasia?

THE MAN

No way! I know! She was the wife of Pericles. And who was Pericles?

THE WOMAN

(her voice) Aspasia's husband!

THE MAN

Before you die, you reflect on your entire life. Apparently, so does humanity. And it has rented out our very heads for this purpose. That's quite something. We'll have fun. While we're winding down this last five thousand years!...Recall Napoleon's battles on long winter evenings! *(Suddenly.)* Tell me! Do you remember when our little son got his bicycle?

(Silence.)

(looking at the photo) I even added a third wheel to it so he wouldn't fall. How much afraid we were for him!... Imagine, the highways are still there, and all empty. Now he could ride his bike safely even across the whole world. How the little fool would enjoy it!

(From inside, a cheesy waltz starts playing on a crappy phonograph: "After the ball, reminiscing.....")

THE WOMAN

(Comes out of the cottage. She in an evening dress, with a clumsily done hairstyle, made up. Has, a little defiant, and yet a little apologetic smile.)

THE MAN

You're truly the most elegant woman in the entire solar system!

(Not even wiping away his previous tears, he laughs.)

THE WOMAN

May I have this dance, sir?

(And since the man does not move, she starts waltzing by herself. She also sings, along with the phonograph.)

After the ball, reminiscing,

Our memories do recall,

Forgetting not a single thing,

That took place at the ball.

Many hearts were left orphaned

When the night began to fall,

The hope of many became a dream

After the ball.

(The phonograph sticks somewhere and repeats.)

(While singing, she speaks to the man)

Will you adjust it!

(Continues singing.)

THE MAN

(Jumps up and enters the cottage.)

(The phonograph stops.)

THE WOMAN

(Humming the melody, she continues waltzing.)

THE MAN

(Comes out. In his hand is an old thick phonograph record. He slams it against a stone. It shatters.)

THE WOMAN

(Stops. Gazes at the man uncomprehendingly, speechless.)

THE MAN

I can allow myself to destroy something too, can't I? *(Sits down.)*

THE WOMAN

Today's our wedding anniversary.

(She also sits down, shivering.) How the weather's changed, too.

THE MAN

Maybe a new ice age is coming.

(He takes off his jacket. Puts it on the woman.) Not now, of course. In the

next twenty thousand years or so...

(He sits back in his previous place.)

Listen! Those sounds've gone quiet, too.

THE WOMAN

They're offended. 'Cos you shouted at them.

THE MAN

See? I've killed all the sounds around us. The universe is moving on. But without sound.

THE WOMAN

When did you last have a dance with me?

THE MAN

New Year's Eve. We danced until the small hours.

THE WOMAN

I saw a play once. The woman talked her husband into having a baby with her. Remember the details?

THE MAN

No.

THE WOMAN

You said you remember everything.

THE MAN

The achievements of the intellect I do. I can whistle the chorus of the 9th Symphony. But I don't remember practical things. For example, I couldn't make a bicycle for our child. Though I have a degree in mechanical engineering. True, I couldn't make a child, either...

THE WOMAN

But...

THE MAN

There's no but.

THE WOMAN

In the last act the woman announced she was pregnant. You still don't remember?

THE MAN

Then it was a Deus ex machina. That doesn't count. A baby is pulled out of a hat. My tale is told. So that the audience don't commit suicide in the cloakroom.

EVA'S VOICE

"I am sure you'll love to hear the news. I'll whisper it to you. Come closer! Closer!
Adam, I think I'm going to be a mother."
(*Silence.*)

THE MAN

Was that it? At the theatre?

THE WOMAN

No. I don't think so. Who was that?

THE MAN

The mother of all.

THE WOMAN

Whose mother of all?

THE MAN

Humanity's. So: yours and mine. Perhaps you don't know we're related, my little sister? As you can see, our ancestors are in great shape. They might've spent the last few months on some star.

THE WOMAN

I'll shout, too. That I'm not going to be a mother. All of it's not true!

THE MAN

Who do you want to shout to? Who will hear it?

THE VOICE OF THE LORD

"Rise, Adam! Rise! Do not give way to grief
I have restored you to a state of grace."

THE WOMAN

Who's this? Who was it?

THE MAN

The Lord God. Sure, 'cos he was also on the cards.

THE WOMAN

It's him we should shout back to!

THE MAN

Hey! God! Where are you?
(*Silence.*)

He's deaf.

(Silence.)

THE WOMAN

God! Where are you?

(Silence.)

THE MAN

Has gone dumb. Or doesn't exist.
Never existed. Or if he did, he has
died a horrible death.

(Silence.)

But he might as well just be paying the
loan back.

THE WOMAN

What loan?

THE MAN

An old loan... God, where are you?!
He's lying low somewhere. Playing
hide and seek with us. "God, where are
you?" "I was afraid, and I hid myself."
– This is it. He has every reason to be
afraid. Your womb is barren. So is the
sky.

(Silence.)

THE WOMAN

My God!

THE MAN

Take it easy. There must still be
sharks left in the sea. Before your
heart breaks.

(Laughs.)

THE WOMAN

Where's the photo of the kids? Why're
you always hiding it?

THE MAN

There it is on the table.

THE WOMAN

(Slowly gets up, walks over, picks up the
photo, looks at it.)

THE MAN

See how sweet they are?

THE WOMAN

They are.

THE MAN

And how sweet the little air-raided
trench also was which we'd dug for
the baby's cradle. Remember? (With
a laugh tormenting both himself and the
woman.) That itty-bitsy little trench?

THE WOMAN

(Crumples and tears up the photo.)

THE MAN

Are you into destruction, too?

THE WOMAN

They're forever on your mind, that's
the problem. (Walks over to the man,
crouches down beside him.) Brush
them off! There's no one coming
into the bedroom. No forefathers, no
foremothers, no children. Forget what
there used to be. There's no one, no
one. If there was a God, he could see
us with his staring eyes set within some
triangle. But there isn't. You said so.
There's no one who could see us. Do
you understand already? There's no
one who can spy on our love. From
now on, there's no one we need to be
afraid of. I'll close my eyes, too, if you
like. We can do whatever you want.
No one, no one can see us anymore.
(Her hand in the man's lap.)

THE MAN

Tell me, for what did we need that premium we got for family planning?

THE WOMAN

But darling, you bought the bicycle for our son with it.

THE MAN

Right...

THE WOMAN

(*whispers*) Don't cry! Don't get worked up! Try to forget.

THE MAN

Sure.

THE WOMAN

Is this good?

THE MAN

Good... How mankind's been running itself into the ground! Now it's over. We can relax. Darwin's no longer valid. It was valid for half a million years. Struggle for survival.

THE WOMAN

It's better this way.

THE MAN

Of course. Like once upon a time in paradise.

(*Laughs and then makes a tweet, like a blackbird.*)

THE WOMAN

Was it you?

THE MAN

Sure.

THE WOMAN

How clever you are. Can you imitate a tram bell ringing?

THE MAN

That's hard.

THE WOMAN

Remember how packed trams were? I loved packed trams. The one that ran on the boulevard! Such sweet, happy and dizzying tumults were travelling in it. How much people must've loved one another!

THE MAN

(*with a little malice*) Do you think that was the golden age of humanity? There, hanging on the steps of the tram?

THE WOMAN

(*unconcerned*) Where in the world were there so many people from?

THE MAN

There were.

THE WOMAN

But from where?

THE MAN

Well, they were born.

THE WOMAN

And is it over now?

THE MAN

It's over.

THE WOMAN

Why?

THE MAN

Because we, fools have forgotten that there is only one humanity.

(Silence.)

There was, rather.

(The light of the glowing red sun has turned dimmer and dimmer. Darkness slowly covers the stage.)

THE WOMAN

(vividly, and more and more vividly)

Tell me, my love— what's happened to the last human couple?

THE MAN

It wasn't shown. Their visitor'd left them and the curtain came down on them. Apparently, the audience wasn't interested in them.

THE WOMAN

Sure they did something behind the curtain?

THE MAN

They washed off the makeup and went home to have dinner.

THE WOMAN

And what if they really were the last human couple?

THE MAN

Then they just sat there foolishly, behind the lowered curtain. And waited to see what would happen to them.

(He sits up, stares blankly in front of himself.)

(A little silence.)

THE WOMAN

(also sitting up) What will happen to us?

THE MAN

Nothing any more... Our last visitor's gone.

THE WOMAN

In fact, we had everything to be happy...

THE MAN

Yea.

(The speech is made in a dignified, theatrical voice. The stage light may brighten a little bit at this point.)

THE VOICE OF THE LORD

"I've told you, Man: have faith and do your best!"

(Silence.)

THE WOMAN

You said something?

THE MAN

No... Why? Did you hear something?

THE WOMAN

No.

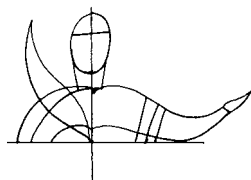
(Silence.)

THE MAN

Then go and feed the cockroaches. I would like them to outlast us... It does make a difference if there's someone to remember us... Knows we've been around.

(Curtain)

Translated by Nóra Durkó

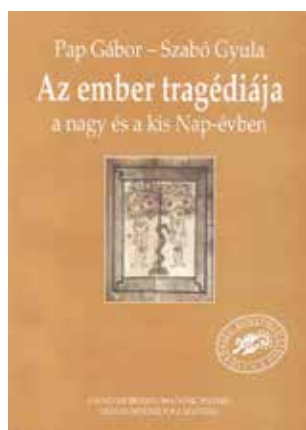


ÁGNES PÁLFI

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

A Reading of the Eskimo Scene¹

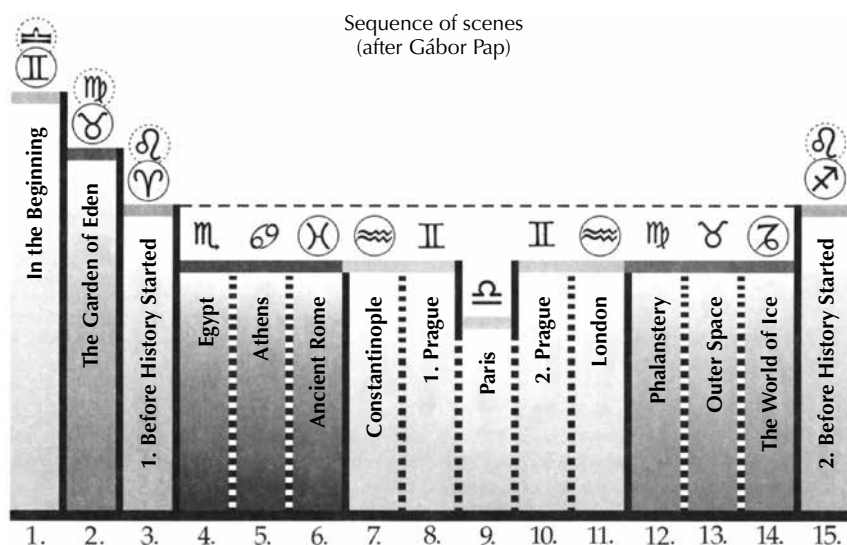
According to the “astro-mythological” interpretation by Gábor Pap, *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*) by Madách reaches its nadir in the axial Paris scene (Scene 9), the apocalyptic judgement situation of the Libra decan of Aquarius, which, however, does not appear on the everyday level but 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.”²

¹ 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

² 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 himself³: (*"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:

³ 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.”

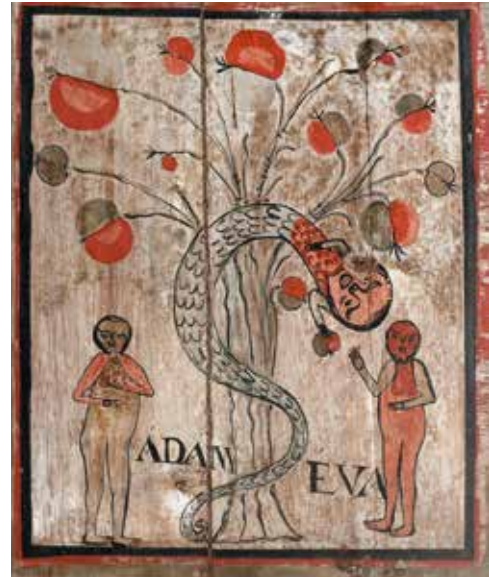
(SCENE III)

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,
Szilágyolompért, Transylvania,
1778 (photo: János Fábí)

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 book⁴, 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?⁵

⁴ 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

⁵ 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). To this see



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

Susánna's monologue in the drama by Weöres Sándor (1913–1989) titled *Kétfejű 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.⁶ 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' novel⁷: 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,

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.”⁸

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)

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

AZ ÉMBER TRAGÉDIÁJA

Irta
Madách
Imre.



Imre Madách: *The Tragedy of Man*, cover of the 11th edition, 1895
(source: wikipedia.org)

The Tragedy of Man on Hungarian stages for 140 years

Selection from the photo archive
of the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute (OSZMI)



Imre Madách: *The Tragedy of Man*, Scene I: *In Heaven*, premiere at the National Theatre in Budapest, September 21, 1883, d. by Ede Paulay (photo by Strelisky, source: OSZMI)



Mari Jászai, the first great tragic actress of the National Theatre as Eve in the premiere of *The Tragedy of Man* in 1883 (photo: Strelisky, source: OSZMI)



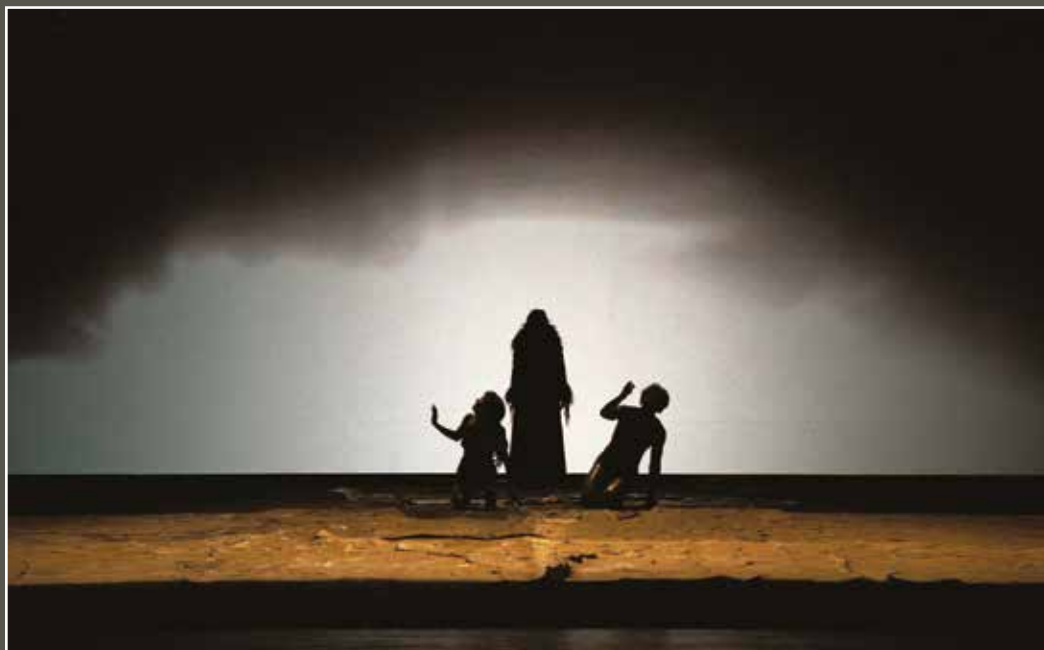
Scene I: *In Heaven*, People's Theatre – Comic Opera, Budapest, 1908, d. by Sándor Hevesi
(photo by József Kossak, source: OSZMI)



Scene II: *In Paradise*, Eve played by Anna Tőkés, Adam played by Árpád Lehotay, National Theatre, Budapest, 1937, d. by Antal Németh (photo by Pál Vajda M., source: OSZMI)



Scene II. Expulsion from Paradise, People's Theatre – Comic Opera, Budapest, 1908, d. by Sándor Hevesi
(photo by József Kossak, source: OSZMI)



Scene III: *Outside Paradise*, National Theatre, Budapest, 2002, d. by János Szikora
(photo: Tamás Katkó, source: National Theatre)



Scene IV: *In Egypt*, National Theatre, Budapest, 1937, d. by Antal Németh
(photo: Sándor Bojár, source: OSZMI)



Scene V: *Athens*, People's Theatre – Comic Opera, Budapest, 1908, d. by Sándor Hevesi
(photo: József Kossak, source: OSZMI)



Scene VI: *Rome*, People's Theatre – Comic Opera, Budapest, 1908, d. by Sándor Hevesi
(photo: József Kossak, source: OSZMI)



Scene VII: *Constantinople*, People's Theatre – Comic Opera, Budapest, 1908, d. by Sándor Hevesi
(photo: József Kossak, source: OSZMI)



Scene VIII: *Prague*, People's Theatre – Comic Opera, Budapest, 1908, d. by Sándor Hevesi
(photo: József Kossak, source: OSZMI)



Scene IX: *Paris*, with Anna Tőkés as a peasant woman, National Theatre, Budapest, 1937, d. by Antal Németh (photo of unknown origin, source: OSZMI)



Scene IX: *Paris*, Danton: István Bubik, National Theatre, Budapest, 1983, d. by László Vámos
(photo: István Csaba Tóth, source: MTI)



Scene XI: *London*, Eve: Éva Szörényi, Adam: Ferenc Bessenyei, Lucifer: László Ungvári, National Theatre, Budapest, 1955, d. by Endre Gellért, Tamás Major, Endre Marton (photo: Tamás Farkas, source: MTI)



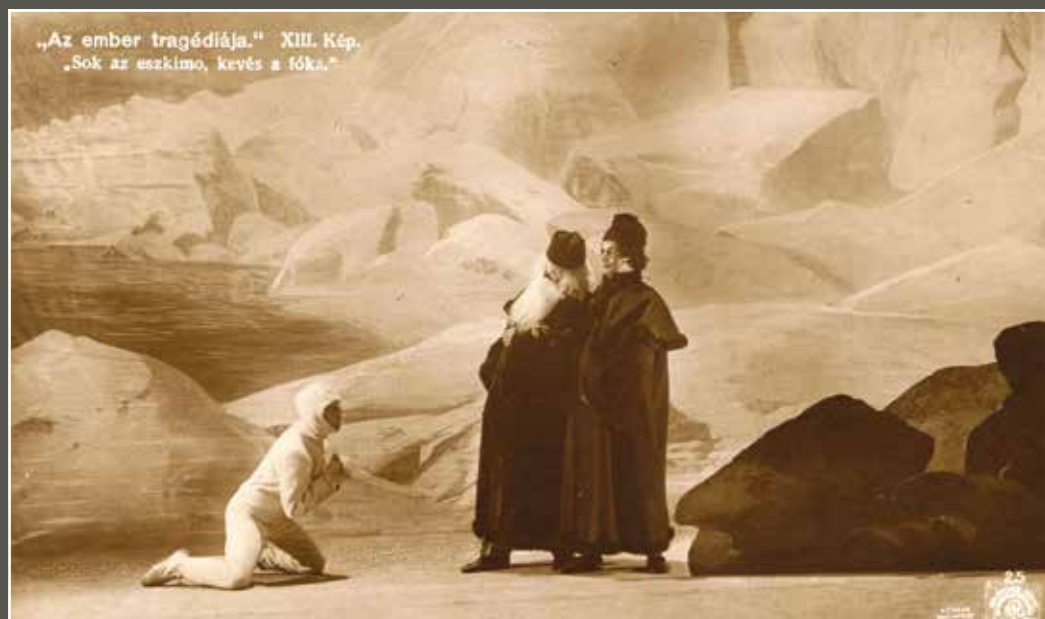
Scene XII: *Phalanstery*, Adam: József Szarvas, Lucifer: Róbert Alföldi, National Theatre, Budapest, 2002, d. by János Szikora (photo: Tamás Katkó, source: National Theatre)



Scene XII: *Phalanstery*, Adam: Sándor Berettyán, National Theatre, Budapest, 2018, d. by Attila Vidnyánszky
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó, source: nemzetisinhaz.hu)



Scene XIII: *Space* (an aerial view of the opening scene) National Theatre, Budapest, 2018,
d. by Attila Vidnyánszky (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó, source: nemzetisinhaz.hu)



Scene XIV: *Eskimo*, People's Theatre – Comic Opera, Budapest, 1908, d. by Sándor Hevesi
(photo: József Kossák, source: OSZMI)



Scene XV: *Outside Paradise*, Szigligeti Theatre, Szolnok, 1980, d. by István Paál
(photo: Béla Illovsky, source: MTI)

"O Man, strive on, strive on, have faith; and trust!"



Scene XV: *Outside Paradise*, Eve: Éva Szörényi, Adam: Ferenc Bessenyei, Lucifer: László Ungvári, National Theatre, Budapest, 1955, d. by Endre Gellért, Tamás Major, Endre Marton (photo: Tamás Farkas, source: MTI)



The façade of the National Theatre, Budapest, with the “ship’s bow” in the foreground
(photo by Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

"O Man, strive on,
strive on, have faith;
and trust!"

Imre Madách: Tragedy of Man



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10



**9TH MADÁCH INTERNATIONAL THEATRE MEETING
AND 10TH INTERNATIONAL THEATRE OLYMPICS**
NATIONAL THEATRE • BUDAPEST, 1 APRIL – 1 JULY, 2023

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“What is theatre? A building? The Comédie-Française, the Aleksandrinski, the Dramaten? Is it an institution, a financial enterprise, a cooperative? Theatre is the women and the men who do it. Nevertheless when we visit Drottingholm, Versailles, the Olympic Theatre in Vicenza, or one of the small theatres with which the princes, the courts and the Academies embellished their cities, we feel the same kinaesthetic reactions as in a live performance. Those bricks and stones become living space, even if nothing is staged there. They too are a way of thinking and dreaming the theatre, materialising it and handing it down through the centuries.” (*Eugenio Barba*)

„Suzuki’s philosophy motivates us to reclaim our social agency through exploring the primitive, animal energy that lies dormant in the contemporary body. His training method wakens and develops this in actors, empowering them in turn to provoke the audience and demonstrate how «culture is the body»: that by embracing the mystery of life, engaging our bodies and thus reconnecting the natural world, differences of color and creed, class and education, politics and history can be overcome.” (*Kameron Steele*)

“[Tersopoulos] named his ensemble after the most ambivalent nickname of God Dionysus. ATTIS (originally typed in capitals when for his group) refers to the ancient Greek, Egyptian and Roman god who castrated himself in frenzy, brought on by wine, music and dancing. Attis (or Adonis or Osiris) is one of the year-Gods sacrificed to the worshipping of the Earth Mother (or Cybele) and for that considered the Hibernial God Dionysus: the seed, the gestation, that which will be born in spring and simultaneously an irrational figure of fecundity, married with the darker side of the self, like Dionysus, like Hades.” (*Iliana Dimadi*)

“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*)

“[*Passion Play of Csíksomlyó* directed by Attila Vidnyánszky] demonstrates that the biblical framework, the dimension of salvation history, can perfectly be reconciled with the postmodern approach, and that contemporary artists of a truly high calibre are not interested in obliterating the foundation of the Christian cult community by replacing the existential philosophical surplus of the Passion of Christ. (...) The Easter tradition which we experience

a new every year, can safely be collated with the postmodern aesthetic creed that there is nothing new under the sun, that everything has already happened before.” (*Ágnes Pálfi*)

