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A HISTORY OF HUNGARIAN DRAMA BETWEEN 1945 AND 1970

by

IMRE GOLDSTEIN

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INTRODUCTION

The history of twentieth century Hungarian drama is one of missed opportunities. Social and political conditions have seldom if ever, produced a favorable climate for the evolution of a Hungarian drama comprable to that of Western Europe or America. While theatre has flourished in Hungary throughout all periods of this century, cultural policies under various governments have created a visible and an invisible drama. The terms visible and invisible are mine and they are used, primarily, to distinguish between produced and unproduced plays. The term visible refers to plays produced in the professional theatre in Hungary. A play will be called invisible if it has not been produced in the professional theatre in Hungary for reasons other than artistic ones; [illegible] play will be called invisible even if it has appeared in print, or if it has been produced outside Hungary.

Before World War II representatives of both visible and invisible Hungarian drama were produced abroad. The former was exported wholesale to the West and the United States, after great box office successes in Budapest, the latter appeared on foreign stages--mostly in Germany and the Soviet Union--without having been seen at home.

Playwrights and other artists of the theatre have struggled continuously to make invisible drama visible in Hungary. Occasional successes in reaching the stage, however, were, more often than not, marred by the damage of long years that elapsed between the writing and the production of a play. Plays that were kept invisible by the cultural policies of the interwar regime finally had a chance to become visible after 1945.

The year 1945 marked the beginning of a totally new era in Hungary's history. In the following quarter of a century the country's economic, social and political structure was to undergo a complete transformation. In the process a great many mistakes were made, a large number of people suffered, and at least once, in 1956, it seemed that the whole new system might topple. In the early 1970's, it is clear that the new system is firmly established, the mistakes, if not all of them corrected, are openly discussed; the overall impression the country gives is one of stability.

Arts and the artists suffered perhaps the most at certain points of this period. Drama was no exception. Cultural policies of post-World War II Hungary have affected drama in several ways. Certain pre-war plays were censored, dramas confirming to new political directions were promoted and some new plays were banned from the theatre thus adding them to the long list of invisible plays. But it was also within this period that a definite change had begun. Plays whose basic aim was entertainment could coexist with those

dealing with important aspects of life in post-war Hungary; and even some formerly invisible plays were mounted. The many voices in and out of the theatre calling for the production of neglected plays, combined with the appearance of some experimental theatres, underline this change in a positive manner. In some ways then our twenty-five year period presents a unit of time, albeit arbitrary, within which a meaningful development in the state of Hungarian drama may be measured.

This is not a political study. My primary interest is in the drama of Hungary. While politics has continuously influenced drama in Hungary, it is this influence and not politics itself that is important to this study. I feel that personal beliefs, political or ideological, have no place in this study. I cannot, and certainly do not wish to ignore the fact that I lived in Hungary until the end of 1956. Some of the background given to drama, in Chapters I-IV, is based on personal experiences. Part of the terminology I use regarding Hungarian drama and politics, is taken not from the vocabulary that was created in the West during the so called "cold war" years--so called, by the way, in the East and the West--but from Hungarian usage of the post-World War II era. I will, for example, refer to Hungary as a socialist, rather than a communist country, not only because Hungary is so designated by its own government, but because, I feel, socialist, rather than communist as a form of state is far

closer to reality in Hungary. Other terms, such as "personality cult," and "positive hero" have originated in socialist countries without ever having alternate designations in the West. I have consulted, weighed and evaluated the views of Marxist and non-Marxist critics and writers, as well as the opinions of those who have turned away from Marxist theories. While it may not be possible to remain completely objective about political events, I have tried to present politics as it has effected life and drama in Hungary, not as it may be measured in terms of international relations between East and West.

The focus of this study is the drama. Its examination is inseparable, to a considerable degree, from that of the theatre and of the forces that shaped and influenced both drama and theatre. My discussion will follow a chronological order. The twenty-five years between 1945 and 1970 had distinct periods, defined by political and social developments, which affected the course of Hungarian drama. The first of these periods covers the years from the end of Second World War until the nationalization of all theatres: 1945-1949. The following four-five years, 1949-1953/54, are usually referred to in Hungary as the era of the "personality cult," which in turn gave way, with Stalin's death and the removal of his Hungarian counterpart Mátyás Rákosi, to a more relaxed period, sometimes called the "thaw," that lasted until the October 1956 uprising. The years from 1957 to the early 1960's marked an interim of search for new

beginnings, and the entry of some noteworthy, new playwrights into the theatre. The rest of the 1960's constitutes a lot less abrupt, but all the more powerful, cumulative change.

The limitations of this study are numerous. Hungarian drama between 1945 and 1970 will be restricted to plays written by authors living and working within Hungary. Drama by Hungarian authors living in Hungarian-speaking territories of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Rumania would require a separate study. The musical theatre of Hungary, opera and operetta, has been omitted, and production of foreign plays will be mentioned only when relevant to the development of Hungarian drama and theatre. Because I have not attempted to present a comprehensive reference work to all of Hungarian drama of the twentieth century, but rather an interpretive history of a twenty-five year period in the course of that drama, many playwrights had to be excluded. I regret the omission of plays by such authors as Margit Gáspár, Miklós Gyárfás, Miklós Hubay, Endre Illés, Ferenc Karinthy, Gábor Thurzó and Sándor Weöres, to mention but a few. The decision to include or exclude an author or a particular work was not always based on artistic merit, but on the limitations of this study dictated by time and space. Among the authors we will meet those who returned from exile or captivity after World War II and continued to work--some picking up where they left off, others going in totally new direction--and writers who were denied the stage during the Nazi

era. New authors fall in two basic categories: those who, although prominent in other literary fields, turn to the stage for the first time in the period covered by this study, and members of the new generation of playwrights who matured, artistically, after 1945.

There is no major American work in English dealing with Hungarian drama between 1945 and 1970; no such works exist in French, Italian, German or Russian. Some articles, mostly short and usually parts of other surveys, have appeared in periodicals, but failed to give an ample background, or to discuss Hungarian drama in any detail. Hungarian material used in this study is fairly substantial but far more meager than might be expected. In-depth studies of the drama of the 1960's are particularly scarce. Primary sources include plays, some in manuscript form; documents, theatrical and political; and interviews with playwrights and other theatre artists. Secondary sources consist of play reviews, studies of individual plays and playwrights, playbills, criticism and works on dramatic theory. The Bibliography, which is almost entirely in Hungarian, includes plays of the twentieth century, and secondary sources relevant to all Hungarian drama, but with greater emphasis on the period 1945-1970. The plays in the Appendixes are samples of Hungarian drama. Although their dates of origin range from the 1910's to the 1970's, they do not, indeed cannot, serve as a comprehensive cross section of a country's dramatic output. They serve but one purpose: to make Hungarian drama better known.

Although the study will follow a chronological order, outlined above, dramas of traditional Hungarian genres, such as historical and folk-plays, as well as the cabaret that cut across chronological borders, will be mentioned. Within each chronological period a number of authors will be discussed, some of whose works may span two or more periods. In the first chapter a brief outline of the first forty years of twentieth century Hungarian drama is given, with special attention to the trends and developments that could have influenced post-World War II drama. Chapter II covers the years immediately after 1945, a period in which, for a short while, plays representative of most pre-war Hungarian drama were produced. A tendency toward socialist realism, first encouraged and then demanded by cultural policies, and the drama created in compliance with these policies, are the subject of Chapter III. All of Chapter IV is devoted to two Hungarian writers, Gyula Illyés and László Németh, whose works are necessary to the understanding of Hungarian history as it is expressed in literature and whose dramas are most representative of the Hungarian historical plays. The uprising of 1956 and plays written in the late 1950's justifying the return to power of the socialist system are discussed in Chapter V. Plays examining some of the problems of life under socialism and showing technical innovations, particularly the influence of Brechtean construction, are dealt with in Chapter VI. In the last chapter an attempt is made to show how both Hungarian drama and theatre of the mid-

to late 1960's came into closer contact with drama and theatre of other countries, including those of Western Europe, and how a new development began that produced a drama that, while dealing with peculiarly Hungarian life acquired a universal appeal, making some Hungarian plays visible outside the country's borders.

CHAPTER I

THE LEGACIES--VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

In March 1945, a full month before the total liberation of Hungary, some theatres opened their doors in Budapest. People arrived on foot to fill the seats in unheated, hastily repaired houses. Performances ended in mid-afternoon so people could reach home before dark. Public safety was just one of the many problems facing Budapest immediately after the war. Parts of the country were still in German hands, the future was unclear, the city lay in ruins, but life had resumed among the rubble, and theatre was a sure sign of life. By April, six theatres and three cabarets were in operation on whose stages the survivors of Budapest could see well-known faces--a greatly reassuring sight--and where even laughter seemed to be in place for a couple of hours, before returning home to the realities of the war's aftermath.

The task of reconstruction was enormous. By late 1948 Hungary was showing hopeful signs of stability, with a unified leadership in the government, but the years leading to this stability required extreme efforts. Rebuilding the country would have been most difficult even with a concerted struggle, but political strife, fighting for leadership in

the government among various parties, and warring factions within each party, made the job a herculean one.

The most comprehensive and farsighted programs were worked out by the Communist Party, addressing itself to the most urgent problems in the cities and in the countryside. While it was impractical to take over the factories and all the means of industrial production at this time, the Communists insisted on full employment of workers, the establishment of the eight-hour work-day and the organization of workers' committees to supervise production. Having learned from the country's past, the Communist Party realized that no system would succeed without the support of the peasantry--about one half of the population. Through a well-planned and swiftly executed land reform which appropriated some of the former mammoth estates and divided them among landless peasants, the Communist Party, in one fell swoop helped realize the centuries old dream of hundreds of thousands of peasants, and wrenched Hungary out of a state of lingering feudalism.[1]

Progress was not smooth; resistance, in the cities as well as in the countryside, proved at times fierce. When

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[1]The significance of this reform may be gauged by the following statistics: Before World War II ". . .out of an agricultural population of 4½ millions, only 1½ millions owned enough land to secure their livelihood, while the number of entirely landless peasants or those owning properties of only one or two acres amounted--including dependents--to 3 millions." [sic]. (András Sándor, Land Reform in Hungary Budapest: Hungarian Bulletin, 1947 , p. 11). The population of Hungary in 1930 was 8.6 million. (Miklós Gárdos, ed., Hungary 1971 Budapest: Pannonia, 1971 , p. 9).

the Republic of Hungary was declared in February 1946, both the President and the Prime Minister came, not from the Communist Party, but from the ranks of the Smallholders, a party that accomodated, along with small landowners, many rightist and reactionary elements. When inflation threatened to engulf the country, it was the Communist Party once again that proved to be strong and decisive enough to stabilize conditions by taking over key factories and minting Hungary's new money, the forint. With clearly defined aims for the systematic rebuilding of the country and development of the economy, the Communists instituted Hungary's first three-year plan in August 1947. In the elections held in the same month, the Communist Party received the largest percentage of votes (22%), which, combined with the three other leftist parties, yielded over 60% of the total votes. In June 1948 the largest (Communist), and the second most influential (Socialist Democratic) parties merged to form the Hungarian Workers' Party. This Party was the only one whose candidates appeared on the ballots of the May 1949 elections.[2] A sweeping victory for the Party was followed by the drafting of the Constitution and the proclamation of the People's Republic of Hungary.[3]

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[2]Other leftist parties joined the Hungarian Workers' Party, rightist groups were outlawed.

[3]Ferenc Erdei, ed., Hazánk Magyarország (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1970), pp. 290-297.

At the very moment they gained absolute power, the Communists embarked on an era of using their power absolutely. A brutal sign of what was to follow came soon after the great victory at the polls. László Rajk, a former leader in the Communist Party, was arrested on trumped up charges, tried, found guilty and, along with three others, hanged. The next four years, 1949-1953, mark the darkest period in Hungary's post-war history, corresponding to the last years of Stalin's reign in the Soviet Union. These years, now called the era of the "personality cult," (the "personality" being Stalin's Hungarian alter-ego, Party Secretary and Head of State, Mátyás Rákosi), saw the worst treatment of all the arts, by unrelenting demands on the artists to take an active part in paving what was termed the road to socialism. This was a trying and most debilitating period for Hungarian drama.

A closer look, however, reveals that it was in the preceding four years, 1945 to 1949, that an opportunity was missed, a chance for new directions in the drama and the theatre was by-passed. During these years immediately after the war when the Communists displayed great leadership, convincing and rallying people behind them by acting and not talking, drama and theatre could have started afresh, even as the country did; indeed both could have played a vital supporting role to Communist leadership.

Before investigating why or how this opportunity was missed, our first task is to establish what this opportunity was within the larger context of the traditions and roots on which post World War II Hungarian drama was--or could have been built.

The Visible Legacy: Commercial Naturalism

Looking back on the accomplishments of the years since the end of World War II, the Federation of Film and Theatre Arts issued a referendum after its first conference held in September 1950. The Referendum reads, in part:

> At the time of [the country's] liberation [1945] we received a dual legacy from the past:
>
> 1. The far past, most specifically the progressive tradition of [our] nineteenth century drama. . . The significance of this tradition was recognized by theatres under Communist management. The safeguarding of our national heritage. . . proved to our nation that the Hungarian Communists are continuing the great struggles of the past.
>
> 2. The other "legacy" . . .was the dramatic "literature" of the recent past. This consisted of the commercial trash of Ferenc Molnár and his imitators, and [of] fascist smut. The latter was thrown out of our theatres immediately at the beginning of our social transformation. The former had managed to hang on in the private theatres, and we succeeded in forcing it out only after the nationalization [of the theatres]. . .
>
> Communist writers returning from exile brought with them their democratic works dealing with the Horthy-era. (Sándor Gergely, Gyula Háy) The production of these works was a definite turning point . . .because they exposed the Horthy regime, and because the hero of Gergely's play was a communist.[4]

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[4] Szinház és Filmművészet, December 1950. Quoted in Olga Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja 1945-1957 (Budapest: Magvető, 1970), pp. 14-15. Translation is mine. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Hungarian sources are mine.

This Referendum is just as intriguing for what it fails to say as it is for what it says. While some classics of the nineteenth century were shown right after the war--the National Theatre opened with József Katona's Bánk bán (1833)[5] on April 25, 1945--so great a classic as Imre Madách's Az ember tragediaja (The Tragedy of Man, 1883) that had a short run in 1947, was revived, after much debate, only in 1955.[6] It is true that what the above Referendum called "fascist smut" was thrown out of the theatres in 1945, but by then there was not much of that in the first place. As for Ferenc Molnár's "commercial trash," the Referendum--if correct at the time--proved to be less than prophetic. From 1945 to the end of our period, the 1969/70 season, no less than sixty-nine separate productions of his plays had been mounted, despite the fact that, save for a dramatization of his novel The Boys of Paul Street (1954), Molnár was not represented at all between 1948 and 1956. Even this impressive record cannot match Molnár's popularity and the number of his plays' production at home and abroad

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[5]Translation of this play's title would be Viceroy Bánk, which would greatly weaken its alliterative power.

[6]Bánk bán and The Tragedy of Man, the two most noteworthy plays of the nineteenth century, were also victims of political and theatrical conditions of their own day. Their productions (the dates given in parentheses) followed their completion by eighteen and twenty-three years respectively.

before World War II. It is true that he and a relatively small group of authors dominated the theatres of Budapest for nearly four decades of this century, but it is also true that "Ferenc Molnár and his imitators" were not the only representatives of Hungary's theatrical scene--not even of the visible drama. What, then, was this dramatic "legacy of the recent past?"

Arriving successfully within one year of one another at the turn of the century, two authors, Ferenc Molnár and Ferenc Herczeg remained most successful and popular until the 1940's. An excellent journalist and war correspondent, brilliant novelist and an undisputed master of the stage, Ferenc Molnár (1878-1952) has been the subject of innumerable studies in and outside Hungary. Although his place seems secure in the history of Hungarian and world drama, controversy over his achievements in Hungary is still rife. Such noted critics as John Gassner and Alfred Kerr have praised him; well-known Hungarian critics György Lukács and Béla Osváth have berated him. Some have assigned him to the illustrious company of Gorky, Shaw and Pirandello, others denied that he was worthy of such august company. Our study is not the proper place for a thorough examination of Molnár the dramatist--all of his plays and most of the studies about him are available in English--but because of his influence on Hungarian drama in the first forty years of this century, the following brief remarks seem appropriate here.

Audiences and critics on both sides of the Atlantic agree that Molnár was a near-perfect craftsman, his knowledge of the stage second to none. He staged, or at least supervised the rehearsals of, most of his plays at home and abroad. To this day he is the one playwright Hungarian drama is most closely associated with in the West and in the United States. It is the value of a nation's drama being known through such plays as Molnár's that his severest Hungarian critics question. Remarks made at Columbia University in 1928 particularly incensed certain critics. Molnár said that he did not believe the stage was a platform for messages. "Behind the curtain there is a dream world, and once the curtain falls [this world] is gone, and life goes on unchanged."[7] What Molnár liked best in the theatre was play; he cherished the place in which it was still possible, even for adults, to play--an activity Molnar paid tribute to in countless stories, in his novels and in his plays. He mastered every dramatic and technological innovation available to him, made use of the accomplishments of his predecessors and contemporaries to create his plays whose witty dialogue and fascinating action still keep Molnár on the boards in many countries throughout the world--

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[7]Lajos Nagy, "Szószek-e a szinház vagy bretli?" 100%, January 1928. Quoted in Béla Osváth, Türelmetlen dramaturgia (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1965), p. 24.

including Hungary. Even the official attitude (see Referendum above) which objected most strongly to the lack of social consciousness in Molnár's plays, seems to be changing.[8]

Ferenc Herczeg (1863-1954), although far less successful abroad, was at times considered the only worthy rival of Molnár at home. Of German parentage, young Herczeg learned the history as well as the language of his adopted country during his school years. A prolific novelist and playwright, Herczeg found time to work as an editor, to fulfill duties as a member of the Hungarian Academy of Science and to serve as a delegate to the National Congress. It was the social circle that Herczeg the man moved in and emulated that found a sympathetic presentation in the works of Herczeg the dramatist. His plays, almost without exception, deal with the life of the upper classes and the gentry. While some of his triangle dramas could have been written by Molnár, in terms of dramatic action and dialogue, Herczeg's forte was the historical play. These plays, all of them well written and well structured, mark a break, if not a step backwards in the development of Hungarian history plays. As a nation under foreign domination for most of its history, Hungary has always needed, and by the middle of the nine-

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[8]Throughout the 1960's and in the 1970's several of Molnár's plays have been staged each season in Budapest and in provincial theatres.

teenth century produced, the kind of historical play that dealt bravely with the cause of freedom from both foreign rule and the tyranny of native nobility. Herczeg's format was right, his choice of characters and events was right, but he managed to reshuffle history in such a way as to imply that the future house of Hungary rested on the complementary, dual pillars of Hungarian feudal rule and the Court of Vienna. Herczeg served the government of Horthy[9] well between the wars; in turn he was made chief playwright-in-residence of the National Theatre which, along with the Comedy Theatre, presented or revived twenty of his plays in the 1920's.

Herczeg, like Molnár, was a near-flawless craftsman, but while Molnár was concerned with and wrote about the country's growing bourgeoisie--a class that at the time represented a certain degree of progress by any standard--Herczeg's world was that of the gentry, the aristocracy, the nationalist-feudal system which he hoped somehow to preserve. Only the nationalist, reactionary government that ruled Hungary between the wars could accomodate and even encourage this attitude which, historically, was obsolete even at the time Herczeg appeared with his first play in 1901.

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[9]Admiral Miklós Horthy (1868-1957) was Regent of Hungary between 1920 and 1944.

The impact of Molnár and Herczeg on Hungarian drama may be measured by the number of their followers, not all of whom were, as the Referendum above implied, "imitators." The success of the two reigning authors spawned an army of playwrights who were ready to cash in on the insatiable demand of theatres at home and abroad. Molnár's influence was best seen in the light, sentimental commercial plays of the 1930's, especially in the works of László Bús-Fekete, László Fodor, János and Gábor Vaszary and Béla Szenes. These authors produced a whole industry of entertainment; their plays, on the whole, lacked the Molnár wit and imagination.[10]

As chief apologist of a nationalist, conservative regime, the creator of romanticised historical plays, Herczeg too had a large following. Prominent among these was Kálmán Csathó (1881-1964) who directed many of Herczeg's plays thus gaining a first hand knowledge of his master's works. The most influential follower of Herczeg proved to be János Bókay (1892-1961). At the time when Herczeg wrote fewer plays and Molnár emigrated, Bókay became the darling of the theatre in Budapest. His opening nights were attended by high society and members of the government, and from the mid-1930's on he obliged his admirers with at least one play

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[10]Béla Osváth, Türelmetlen dramaturgia (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1965), pp. 53-55.

each season. At this time his success was in no small measure due to his strong support of a pure, Aryan theatre.[11]

By no means were all of the followers and contemporaries of Molnár and Herczeg without merit. Among them we find such talented and competent craftsmen of the theatre as Dezső Szomory, Lajos Zilahy and Jenő Heltai. But whether these authors dealt with the gentry, the bourgeoisie, or even went further to speak for an independent middle class, their dramaturgy and artistic inspiration remained within the range set by Molnár and Herczeg.[12]

The technical mastery of stagecraft was made possible by enterprising theatres that kept playwrights working. After a while, of course, authors wrote not only for a particular theatre--some theatres had as many as a dozen authors on contract--but created roles for individual stars. This practice, not uncommon throughout the history of theatre, had a dual effect. On the one hand every theatre was able to present a half-dozen or more new Hungarian plays each season, on the other, since this impressive number of plays brought few innovations in any area of theatre, stagecraft stagnated and acting faced no new challeges. Stars

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[11] Ibid., p. 68.

[12] Géza Hegedüs and Judit Kónya, A magyar dráma útja (Budapest: Gondolat, 1964), pp. 158-165.

wore their roles as they did their maticulously tailored costumes, and repeated similar parts--or rather themselves--in play after play. The commercial drama and theatre in Hungary between the wars was an anachronistic one, utilizing nineteenth century naturalism, but taking over only the movement's external attributes: painful accuracy in setting and costumes and "natural" speech and repeating them endlessly. The legitimate theatre in Hungary in the 1920's and 1930's was an entertainment industry. Drama, generally, was manufactured for this industry. Exceptions were few, and authors of plays that attempted to deal with social problems usually succumbed to the demands of the theatre for commercially viable plays, or stopped writing altogether.

In his play, Katonák (Soldiers, Comedy Theatre, 1898),[13] Zoltán Thúry (1870-1906) had painted a picture of the gentry-soldier life that was not all honor and glory. The class which his play showed to be detrimental to Hungary's development was the one that Herczeg went on to serve and preserve for decades. With a delay of nearly thirty years, true naturalism finally arrived in Hungary with Sándor Bródy's play: A dada (Nanny, Comedy Theatre, 1902). Bródy (1863-1924), through the tragedy of a young peasant girl opened a tiny window on the miserable life of

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[13]Unless otherwise indicated, designation of plays will follow this format throughout the study: Hungarian title, followed, in parenthesis, by the English translation of the title, the theatre in which the play was first performed and the date of performance.

the country's lower classes--a window the upper classes were reluctant to look through. The play was a turning point in Hungarian drama and dramaturgy, but its author did not follow the path he himself set. In his next play, A tanitónő (The Schoolmarm, Comedy Theatre, 1908), he still dealt with vital problems of peasant life, but contrived a happy ending: the formerly rebellious schoolmarm marries the son of the local landowner. Bródy continued to write, but his plays more and more resembled those of Molnár. After years of silence he surfaced once more after World War I. During the days of the Hungarian Soviet Republic he wrote a one acter: Orgonavirág (Lilacs, 1919) which played in three separate theatres; then, in his Vienna exile he faded from the theatrical scene.[14]

Zsigmond Móricz (1879-1942), one of Hungary's best and best loved writers had had a long battle with the drama as well as the theatre. Of peasant background, he wrote of peasants in his short stories and novels, following a long tradition of peasant literature. Móricz himself became a tradition, his influence is felt even today. His wish to see characteristically Hungarian drama propelled him towards playwriting. Drawing on folk-play traditions, his own stories and novels, and using mostly naturalistic techniques, Móricz created some interesting and promising pieces for the

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[14]Hegedüs and Kónya, A magyar dráma útja, pp. 146-148.

theatre, but was prevented, by a variety of obstacles, from reaching the stature of the dramatist that would match his own as a novelist. His prestige kept theatre doors open for him, but he often paid dearly for admission.

His first play Sári bíró (Judge Sarah, National Theatre, 1909) could have been something new on the Hungarian stage--as it was on paper. It broke a long convention of depicting the Hungarian countryside, the village and its peasants as part of an idyllic, pastoral scene. Characters were sharply drawn in this comedy, they spoke a crisp, unsweetened language, and their humor did not gloss over the true condition of the village, of the serf-lord relationship between the peasants and the authorities. This first production was not exactly to Móricz's liking, but he was only a novice in the theatre. The director of the National Theatre explained to him how his play would become a success: "We could probably take it off the program after three or four performances. But, we'll have Lujza Blaha [the Theatre's greatest star] play the lead. She'll be a darling despite the mean disposition of the character she'll play. . . No need to worry about the play's message, either: it'll come across all right, even if sugared up a little."[15] The play was successful, as were some of the others that followed. Never truly satisfied, Móricz tried to accomodate

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[15]Rózsa Kocsis, Igen és nem: a magyar avantgárd szinjáték története (Budapest: Magvető, 1973), pp. 21-26.

directors, managers and performers while attempting to retain his artistic integrity. He seldom succeeded. Under heavy pressure he altered the ending of his best play, a comedy exposing gentry corruption. The protagonist of Úri muri[16] (Comedy Theatre, 1928) fails to kill himself and makes up with his wife. Móricz reworked the play according to his original intentions, but this version was not shown until 1948.[17] Móricz went on to write a large number of one-acters and dramatized several of his own short stories and novels. Success won out and his plays between 1929 and 1940 catered more to the demands of managers than to Móricz's original dramatic purpose.

Attempts, such as Móricz's, to portray peasants and deal seriously with their problems on the stage, were part of a larger effort that involved many authors after World War I. Writing about and placing their hopes for the country's future in the peasants, a number of authors formed a group called népi (best translated as peasant-oriented) whose activities evolved from a literary movement into a political-ideological one. Since this movement is important to Hungary's history and many of its members played a role in the development of post-World War II Hungarian drama, they will be discussed later on in the study. The most unique member

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[16]A difficult title to translate. A somewhat satisfactory approach might be: Gentlemen's Carousal.

[17]Osváth, Türelmetlen dramaturgia, pp. 127-136.

of the group, Áron Tamási will be mentioned later on in this chapter.

The Now-You-See-It-Now-You-Don't Legacy Non-Commercial Theatre, Cabaret, Avant-Garde At Home

Commercial drama in Hungary in the first forty years of this century was performed in the legitimate theatre. From time to time, during this same period, there were other theatres in existence that were barely visible since they changed locations frequently and were considered illegal by the authorities. Unlike similar attempts in the West, these theatres in Hungary always lost their battle for permanent existence; yet they had contributed greatly to Hungary's theatrical legacy.

Also in this century, a new theatrical genre took root in Hungary, and, after two world wars, revolutions and uprisings, it is still alive and well. It may easily be the most adaptable theatrical form--even if it is considered a "minor" one. Perhaps in no other country has this form, cabaret, been so vital and vigorous as in Hungary, where it has served as a place of experiment as well as a small, but often powerful, bastion of political resistance, one with which authorities of all kinds have had to reckon.

In 1904, rather late when compared to its models, a theatrical venture called Thália Társaság (Thalia Company) got underway in Budapest. Inspired by the Theatre Libre, the Freie Bühne and the MXAT, and under the leadership of

György Lukács, Sándor Hevesi, Marcell Benedek and László Bánóczi, the Thália hoped to provide an alternative to commercial theatre: drama instead of entertainment; a new kind of acting instead of the ossified, nineteenth-century declamatory style still dominant in most legitimate houses. On their program we find such authors as Ibsen, Hauptmann, Wedekind and Heyermans, whose works were presented at temporary locations. Between November 1904 and December 1908 the Thália gave 142 performances. A company that numbered among its artists Zoltán Kodály and Béla Balázs as well as many of Hungary's leading performers in the decades to come, the Thália was prevented from owning a theatre. Harrassed by the police, hindered by changing fire regulations, the Thália was constantly on the move. Many of their performances were held in labor union clubhouses, and when, in their last season, they were forced out of Budapest completely, they traveled throughout the country giving their last forty-six performances in twelve different towns and villages. Due to pressure by the authorities and the lure of the legitimate theatre which many of the Thália's actors could not resist after years of hand-to-mouth existence, the company disbanded.[18]

Although the Thália did not realize one of its major

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[18]Ferenc Katona and Tibor Dénes, A Thália története (1904-1908) (Budapest: Művelt Nép, 1954), pp. 9-12 and 155-156.

goals: to present new Hungarian plays,[19] it gave Sándor Hevesi the experience which later made him a courageous and innovative director of the National Theatre; it started Lukács's life-long interest in the theatre; and by having no particular style of its own--the Thália sought to meet each play on its own terms--it gave Hungary many of its best, most sensitive and versatile performers.

There were other attempts at a different, meaningful theatre, but most of these lived but a few months. One of the most successful of these: Kamarajátékok (Chamberplays), a company run by Irén Feld for three seasons beginning with 1910, had the distinction of producing Chekhov's The Seagull for the first time in Hungary.[20] Besides such efforts as the Thália and Kamarajátekok, the first decade of this century saw a number of visits by some of Europe's outstanding theatres. These activities, as well as a boom in the building of new theatres, were brought to a halt by the First World War.

After World War I and the failure of the Hungarian Soviet Republic that followed the war, commercial theatre picked up where it left off before the hostilities. The

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[19]The only new full length Hungarian play the Thália produced was Menyhért (Melchior) Lengyel's A nagy fejedelem (The Great Ruler) which opened on March 3, 1907 for three performances. Lengyel went on to a very successful Hollywood screenwriter's career with Ninotchka among his credits.

[20]Ferenc Hont, ed., Magyar szinháztörténet (Budapest: Gondolat, 1962), p. 205.

visible theatre was once again claimed by the bourgeoisie that demanded plays that would not disturb or agitate. The Horthy regime that lasted until the end of World War II, saw to it that this demand was met--doing its best to squash non-commercial, non-bourgeois oriented efforts. At the time of theatrical revolutions in the West, Hungary took a giant step backward. Árpád Horváth, a director aware of theatre and drama abroad, wrote in 1930: "The taste of the world is fired by a thousand new motors of European theatre art while our audiences, in their fatigued ignorance, hold on to their habitual, undisturbing forms of experience."[21] Not only did the regime and big business perpetuate an outmoded theatre at home, official cultural policy went so far as to prevent the touring Meyerhold company from visiting Hungary.[22] When the Comedy Theatre, a stronghold of naturalism, finally attempted to break out of its own image and presented Pirandello and Wilder, it evoked the wrath of the regime through the conservative Catholic and extreme rightist press.[23]

The one theatre, or rather theatrical form which, from its inception early in the century until the very last days of Nazism had managed to remain visible was the cabaret. Hungarian cabaret is unique and peculiar to Hungary, most

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[21] Osváth, Turelmetlen dramaturgia, p. 222.

[22] Ibid., p. 225.

[23] Ibid., p. 227.

especially to Budapest. Just as it is a form of entertainment that deals with the present, it is also a genre that finds its fullest expression at the place it is born. Having had beginnings that drew much on the cabarets of Paris, Munich and Vienna, the cabaret of Budapest quickly grew up to be of a decidedly Hungarian flavor due to the special intellectual and cultural soil of Budapest. The content and mode of performance that are special to Hungarian cabaret have not only influenced the development of Hungarian theatre, but often exerted pressure on politics and political figures. In turn, cabaret has, at times, paid a high price for its views. In common with the French, Hungarian cabaret has its roots in folk tradition: folk songs and poetry; in common with the German, Hungarian cabaret counts among its founders and masters some of the greatest dramatists and composers, musicians and performers. In common with all other European cabarets, Hungarian cabaret has produced artists whose work and personalities have permanently impressed themselves on certain eras of cabaret.

The first, and perhaps most accomplished, cabaret artist of Hungary was a journalist with aspirations to write the great Hungarian novel, but who found his true calling in the cabaret. Endre Nagy (1877-1938) appeared in the very first Hungarian cabaret in 1907, and with a one year interruption continued to manage, write for and perform in several cabarets until 1929. Although he began by adopting some of the conventions of the French and German cabarets,

Nagy as much invented as he learned from others his own cabaret style. He broke up audience-performer relationship by staging scenes in the audience, making use of commedia dell'arte techniques; his political monologues were as witty as they were biting, but most of all, it is to his credit that his cabarets provided a place of experiment for many of Hungary's best authors, composers and performers--many of whom he encouraged and developed. Most of Móricz's one-acters were performed in Nagy's cabaret; Jenő Heltai, Ferenc Molnár and others wrote for Nagy.[24]

No less than eighteen cabarets operated in Budapest between 1916 and 1936. The effects of World War I caused a shift of emphasis in the work of the cabarets. They could afford only the half-uttered word, a conspiratorial smile, a joke not quite finished, to say what they really meant. Most cabarets did not even do that, but merely supplied escapist, somewhat piquant entertainment. With the rise of Fascism, however, the true artists of the cabaret came to the fore, and politics became, once again, the primary target. Anti-fascist jokes, the parading of political figures in life-like masks appeared on the cabaret stage.

In 1937 László Békeffy (1891-1961), author of the first Hungarian film's screenplay, journalist, dramatist and a great admirer of Endre Nagy, opened the Pódium which

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[24]Ján L. Kalina, A kabaré világa, trans. Ferenc Horváth (Budapest: Gondolat, 1962), pp. 164-165.

became the most outspoken cabaret in Budapest. After many restrictions placed on him by the authorities, Békeffy found that he could not even perform his monologues--regulations forbade him to appear on the stage by himself. He promptly created a new form called "duologue," in which his remarks were even sharper as he hammered home his points in reply to his mandatory "partner's" questions. In 1943 he was jailed for anti-Hitler and anti-Mussolini remarks. Both he and his secretary were sentenced to death. The latter was executed while Békeffy was sent to Dachau. He survived the concentration camp, but did not return to Hungary. He died in Zürich in 1961.[25]

Cabaret in Hungary did not always require such sacrifices, but true cabaret--in Hungary and elsewhere--has never been just entertainment. Cabaret has survived many changes, wars and revolts, and it has successfully adapted to conditions in socialist Hungary. Cabaret's function and purpose in pre-World War II Hungary was best summed up by its first master, Endre Nagy:

> Hungarian cabaret nibbled away at the stiff bark of public life. If the treatment it used was not completely vitriolic, it has managed, at least, to soften this bark. It did not destroy reputations, but by its occasional indiscreet lifting of the official skirt, it injected a healthy dose of doubt into the sometimes blind beliefs of the public. This is why audiences always celebrated a kind of liberation in the Hungarian cabaret.

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[25] Ibid., p. 189.

> Cabaret has always been the freedom-fighter of the spirit. A fighter lightly armed but honest. With its flexible, constantly changing program cabaret could undertake the risk of experiment easier than the regular [legitimate] theatre. And Hungarian cabaret bravely took that risk.[26]

No author was more willing to take this risk or more eager to write for the cabaret than Frigyes Karinthy (1887-1938). Perhaps Hungary's greatest humorist, Karinthy was also a most excellent novelist, journalist, poet, translator and dramatist. The bulk of his work for the stage consisted of cabaret skits, and it is for these pieces that Hungarian audiences remember him most. However, it was his first full length play Holnap reggel (Tomorrow Morning, 1915), that brought something totally new into Hungarian drama.

The play's protagonist, Sándor Ember (Alexander Man), an engineer, designs a rocket in order to prove his worth to his wife who left him for a baron with whom Ember refused to duel. Fear of death and subserviance to the weaker sex plague Ember until a Finnish brain surgeon performs an operation on him. The result is a new man who is sensible, free, and serves not his own purposes but those of mankind by putting his machine of destruction to peaceful use.

Tomorrow Morning, which Karinthy subtitled a "tragicomedy," introduced many elements that we have come to associate with the avant-garde drama of the interwar

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[26]Endre Nagy, A kabaré könyve (Budapest: Nyugat, 1936), p. 59.

period. The utopian solution through scientific means shows affinity to futurist thinking; surrealistic verbal and visual images abound, and a dream-like quality is maintained throughout the play. What is perhaps equally important is that Karinthy was deliberately seeking a new kind of drama. In the preface to the play's first edition in book form Karinthy wrote:

> To depict life. Yes, that is the most worthy goal of any art. But what if the theatre is the art form capable of going farther than that? Maybe it should not even be art, I don't care. Let it be more, or even less than that--let it be something that has no name in aesthetics. . .let it be science, but experimental science: experimental life-science, or something like that. I am looking for the law of life. But. . .laws cannot be found in pure form in nature--one must create, or rather recreate the phenomenon in a laboratory under controlled conditions in order to get at the correct results. . .must take away all distracting and interfering side phenomena. . . Experimental life--perhaps that's what drama is. If I [just] transfer life as I know it onto the stage, I cannot get at its laws, but merely at its experience. But I'm interested in the law--not what man is, but what he could be. . .I want to see the man whom intelligence and insight would have created on the sixth day, rather than the one whom chance created. . . Why are you so afraid of a deus ex machina? . . .Deus ex machina is the laboratory, the test tube, the vacuum in which I can arrive at the true laws; a lie by way of which I can arrive at perfect truth. In reality everything lies.[27]

Not only did Karinthy establish ties with the avant-

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[27]Frigyes Karinthy, Hőköm szinház, Vol. I. (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1970), p. 10.

garde drama of his day, but through some of his later plays[28] and cabaret skits he also showed that he had a great deal in common with the absurdists of the 1950's.

A cabaret skit, usually the chronicle of the day performed as a scene, is a rather perishable item. Karinthy's skits were made of different, more durable stuff: their core often very serious, their humor always bizarre. Hosszú háború (Long War)[29], an absurd picture of war as a card, or rather a bullet-and-bayonet, game. The obvious similarities between Karinthy's Ének lecke (Singing Lesson)[30] and Ionesco's La Leçon--both showing power gone haywire--have been pointed out by some scholars.[31] Beyond any movement or pioneering dramaturgy, Karinthy was, first and foremost, a humanist. He belonged to no party, embraced no political system to the exclusion of all other systems; his purpose was to find a better world for man. Since there was no place for man to go--Karinthy's novels deal with voyages in

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[28]Most of Karinthy's plays (not only his skits) were performed not in legitimate theatres, but in cabarets.

[29]See Appendix A.

[30]See Appendix B.

[31]Both Ján L. Kalina, in his work on the cabaret (A kabaré világa, and Rózsa Kocsis in her book on Hungarian avant-garde drama, mention the similarities between the two pieces. Kocsis goes so far as to call Karinthy's Singing Lesson the "ancestor of Ionesco's La Leçon." (Rózsa Kocsis, Igen es nem [Budapest: Magvető, 1973], p. 141).

search of utopias that usually turn out to be very much like earth--the only solution remaining was to make this planet a better place for man to live in, a process that ought to begin with the search for a new, better man.

Karinthy's most famous one-acter, A bűvős szék (The Magic Chair, 1917),[32] has been appreciated mostly for its comic satiric qualities. However, this brilliantly theatrical presentation of truth versus lies not only delineates a world of corruption, public and private, but, through a masterful process of unmasking, it clearly points in a positive direction. Some Hungarian critics have dismissed this play, claiming that it overshot its target and leaped out of the comic into the tragic, bogging down altogether at the end,[33] others blamed Karinthy for pursuing a weak utopia, brought about by technical devices, and for seeing a revolutionary new world order only in the form of wishful thinking.[34] It seems to me that what Karinthy had in mind is exactly what is in the play. In order to destroy a false existence, to expose lies and corruption, a complete unmasking is necessary--beginning perhaps in the theatre where make-believe

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[32]See Appendix C. This play was performed a year before its publication in 1918 by Atheneaum, Budapest.

[33]Károly Szalay, Karinthy Frigyes (Budapest: Gondolat, 1961), p. 125.

[34]Rózsa Kocsis, "A magyar groteszk tragikomédiát megteremtő Karinthy Frigyes," Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények, 1968, no. 5, p. 557.

passes for real--and all layers must be peeled off, layers that even a revolution might not eliminate if the job is not done thoroughly. Karinthy carries this process to the point where even the actors performing his play, and the playwright himself, are exposed for what they are. A complete sweeping out of lies and pretenses, rather than revolution or some other political scheme is necessary in order to have a better world.

Karinthy's plays, The Magic Chair and Tomorrow Morning were first shown during World War I and under the Hungarian Soviet Republic that followed it. Ironically, the regime that recognized the merits of Tomorrow Morning had a shorter life than the play.[35]

On March 21, 1919 a coalition of the Social Democratic and the Communist Party, called the Hungarian Socialist Party, took over the governing of Hungary. A dictatorship of the proletariat, the Hungarian Soviet Republic that lasted but 133 days, was significant for what it had attempted to do for the theatre during its existence. It also proved influential in the evolution of avant-garde theatrical ventures inside, and in the creation of avant-garde drama by exiled authors outside Hungary.

Theatre was considered extremely important by the Republic. On the second day of its existence plans were

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[35]Tomorrow Morning opened on March 8, 1919 and reached its 100th performance in October of the same year.

announced for the nationalization of theatres, but, in a wise move, on orders issued five days later, the management of theatres remained in private hands--until new management could be developed. A new union for performers, Actors' National Union, was created; its secretary: Béla Lugosi.[36]

György Lukács, in his capacity as Deputy Commissioner for Public Education, had formulated many of the guidelines concerning the arts. Leadership centers, direktoriums, were set up for all branches of the arts: Béla Balázs in charge of theatre, Bartók, Kodály and Dohnányi in charge of music and Kassák and Déry in charge of literature. Authors were asked to hold lectures in theatres before performances; children's theatres were established, and small, traveling companies began to tour the countryside and perform in factories and in army camps. Lukács recalls the cultural policy of the Republic as one that "wanted to raise the working people to the level where they could decide for themselves: out of the art and culture of the past and the present what it was they did or did not need."[37] Recruitment and development of audiences was begun by drastic reduction in prices and distribution of tickets through unions. Plans were made for the establishment of an experimental

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[36]Hont, ed., Magyar szinháztörténet, p. 265.

[37]György Lukács, Magyar irodalom magyar kultúra (Budapest: Gondolat, 1970), p. 629.

theatre and an academy for the performing arts. There was no time, in little over four months, to develop a new drama, but Karinthy was shown--besides Tomorrow Morning a poem of his was dramatized and put to music--and Bródy's new one-acter (Lilacs), commissioned by the National Theatre, played in three separate theatres.[38]

When the Republic was crushed, its leaders jailed, killed or exiled, its artists scattered, the commercial theatre, almost overnight, reclaimed its territory, the legitimate houses, which it did not relinquish until the late 1940's. Considering the enormous task of the Hungarian Soviet Republic: total reorganization within Hungary and raising of an army to defend itself from hostile forces from without,[39] the amount of attention given to the arts, particularly to theatre is truly remarkable. It would be useless to conjecture what direction cultural policy would have taken had the Republic survived, but it may be safe to assume that a great deal of its progressive and stimulating policies regarding the arts had to do with placing artists, theoreticians and farsighted administrators in key leadership positions.

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[38]Hont, ed., Magyar szinháztörténet, p. 268.

[39]The Hungarian Soviet Republic fell due to its own erroneous domestic policies--trying to accomplish too much too soon--to the resistance of reactionary forces within Hungary and to the military intervention of Czech and Rumanian armies aided by the political backing of Clemenceau. (Ferenc Erdei, ed., Hazánk Magyarország, pp. 267-268).

It was after the fall of the Republic that non-commercial theatre and drama fought its greatest battle--only the front was split, the forces uncoordinated, allowing, at best, for minor victories. Experimental theatres at home struggled for nearly two decades without native drama. Hungarian experimental drama was either produced abroad, or reached Budapest, in the best of circumstances, on the pages of periodicals. All of these: the theatres, the drama and the periodicals, were conceived in the spirit of the avant-garde.

When Piscator opened his Proletarisches Theater in 1920, he dedicated the first performance--which included the Hungarian Lajos Barta's Russlandstag--to the anniversary of the October Revolution in Russia and to the members of the Hungarian Soviet Republic who fell victim to the Horthy regime that followed the Republic.[40] Many artists of the left emigrated, others went underground. When the Interior Ministry banned amateur groups of workers, nothing remained on the visible theatrical scene in Hungary but the commercial, bourgeois theatre. Against this theatre, and in a larger context, against bourgeois culture, two young men published a manifesto in which they denounced the theatre where ". . . Mr. Bourgeois nightly regurgitates the miserable little tickles of his horizonless life."[41]

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[40]Rózsa Kocsis, Igen és nem: a magyar avantgárd szinjáték története (Budapest: Magvető, 1973), p. 303.

[41]Kocsis, Igen és nem, p. 305.

Iván Hevesy and Ödön Palasovszky began their practical activities by organizing poetry readings in trade union clubhouses. They engaged more and more of the audience, and slowly the readings developed into choral recitals. Hoping to break into the theatre--in order to fight for the theatre--the two men enlisted the help of some professional performers and other artists who shared their aims. In 1925 Hevesy, Palasovszky and the painter Sándor Bortnyik established the Zöld Szamár (Green Ass) "satirical theatre,"--the name came from one of Bortnyik's paintings, and a mask of an ass was created by Farkas Molnár of the Bauhaus. The declared intention of this theatre was not be belong to any "isms," but to present grotesque satire. Their first program consisted of two dramatized poems by Ivan Goll and Jean Cocteau's Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel, translated by Gyula Illyés. The performances were not unlike some of Tzara's and Huelsenbeck's at the Cabaret Voltaire: they included simultaneous poetry recitals, a typewriter orchestra, and jazz.[42] The Green Ass theatre gave only two performances, both in March 1925, but for another decade Palasovszky continued his avant-garde experiments, changing the name of his group constantly--partly to avoid and confuse the authorities and partly to reflect each new phase of the group's search for new forms and meaning.

Similarly to other theatres of the avant-garde, especially those of Piscator, Meyerhold and Tairov, a

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[42] Ibid., p. 313.

dominant trend in Palasovszky's became performances by crowds and masses. Between May 1926 and April 1927 Palasovszky held performances, at the Music Academy of Budapest, called Új Föld-estek (New Earth Evenings). A large chorus, sometimes split sometimes in unison, performed such poems as Mayakovsky's Left March and One Hundred Fifty Million. Palasovszky developed what he called the "parlando-chorus," which was something between a singing and a speaking chorus, and it also allowed the performers to produced noises, bits of sounds; voice could serve as an emotional emphasis, or an expression of spontaneous impulses. This use of the human voice seems to have been very close to what later Artaud called for in the First Manifesto of his Theatre of Cruelty: ". . .it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theatre to the text, and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought."[43]

Palasovszky followed his New Earth Evenings with five Cikk-cakk estek (Zig-zag Evenings) in early 1928, also at the Music Academy. These performances were marked by a further development of choral recitation and movement and the introduction of a kind of choral debate. In addition, elements of the cabaret were integrated into each evening's performance: the audience became part of the performance,

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[43]Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 89.

scenes were staged in the house, debate on current political and social issues was encouraged. Along with major choral works of Walt Whitman, Mayakovsky and some of Palasovszky's own, parts of Toller's The Machine Wreckers appeared on the program. With an eye towards cultures that produced theatre for and by the masses, Palasovszky's group included such exotic numbers as an Egyptian funeral ceremony, a Tibetan devil-dance (with music by József Kozma), and a pigmy dance called Poor Nkü.[44]

Late in 1928 Palasovszky's new venture that lasted for three performances at the Music Academy was called Rendkivüli Szinpad (Extraordinary Stage), and it probed yet another form: the Konferanszrevü (Conference-revue).[45] First of these revues, entitled Happy-end (the title was given in English), dealt with man longing for happiness, and included several poems, a "parlando-trio" by Ivan Goll: Montparnasse-station and Nikolai Evreinov's The Theatre of the Soul. In Evreinov's piece, man's three component parts: the thinking, emotional and subconscious selves, represented by three identical, masked figures, battle one another. When the emotional self shot itself, a large hole developed in the heart and "blood" gushed out onto the stage. The second revue was devoted to the plight of the "mechanized

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[44]Kocsis, Igen es nem, p. 328.

[45]Conference in cabaret parlance is the monologue of the conferencier--master of ceremonies--that ties together, or at least maintains continuity between, the numbers performed.

man," and it included machine-like dances, a lecture on Chaplin, and a short piece by Parlov called Company in which the audience only hears bits of a cliché conversation from behind a screen. At either end of the screen the masks of tragedy and comedy comment on what is being heard by a variety of eye movements. The Extraordinary Stage's last revue included the use of shadow-play, Palasovszky's poem for large chorus, Üvegfújók (Glass-blowers), and a movement composition by Olga Szentpál, Barbár tánc (Barbaric Dance) based on Bartók's Allegro barbaro.[46]

Efforts to create a mass-oriented dramatic-choral stage began to bear fruit when Palasovszky joined forces with Alice Madzsar who, at the head of her own school, was searching for new forms and means of expression in the dance. Beginning with the premise that European dance was bound by classical ballet, Madzsar sought a freer form; since dance and stage movement were both based exclusively on the technique of the body--and performers learned them as such--it was impossible to fill the dance with a meaningful inner content. Her aim was to develop a "convention-free, intuitive" dance that would become "the artistic expression of that mechanism that so organically ties body and soul together."[47]

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[46]Kocsis, Igen és nem, pp. 330-332.

[47]Ibid., pp. 333-334.

Palasovszky and Madzsar opened their Prizma Szinpad (Prism stage) in 1929 and enjoyed a relatively long cooperation that culminated in the performance of two dance-dramas: Ayrus leánya (Ayrus' Daughter) and Madzsar's most important work: Bilincsek (Shackles), given at the Operetta Theatre in April, 1931. Shackles, depicting man's inhibitions surfacing and eventually allowing man to act, was given without any scenery.[48]

A combination of Palasovszky's parlando-chorus and Madzsar's movement-chorus, called "synthetic choral drama," was employed in Palasovszky's work with workers' group. Mostly a clandestine activity at the beginning, in 1928, with the involvement of some professionals, Palasovszky planned to move into the realm of political theatre. Having no Hungarian play available, his choice fell on a full scale production of Toller's The Machine Wreckers. The group got no farther than a well attended dress rehearsal. Police stopped the production, as they did a "Synthetic Choral Evening" planned for May, 1930.[49]

Palasovszky was co-founder and co-editor of Hungary's first progressive periodical devoted exclusively to the performing arts. In the two years of existence, 1930-1931, Szinház és Film (Theatre and Cinema) took a strong stand

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[48]Kocsis, p. 343.

[49]Ibid., p. 347.

against the commercial theatre, kept in touch with worker's theatres throughout Europe, and published informative articles about the work of Brecht, Piscator, Stanislavsky and others.[50]

In the 1930's two colleagues of Palasovszky, Andor Pünkösti and László Márkus carried on avant-garde experiments in the theatre. Műhely (Workshop) operated between 1932 and 1934, Új Thália (New Thalia) between 1934 and 1936. The New Thalia produced the first, and possibly the best, play of Áron Tamási (1897-1966) who occupies a special place in the history of Hungarian drama.

Writing almost exclusively of his native Székely people, Hungarians living in Eastern Transylvania, Tamási's world is deeply rooted in folklore, ancient myths, peasant beliefs and superstition. His means of expression are often the language and miraculous events of fairy tales. His first play Énekes madár (Bird of Song, 1933), is the story of two young people trying to protect their love from the evils of the world represented mostly by older people. It is a simple, timeless struggle of good and evil, but the struggle takes place in a world where objects are animated, and miracles occur to help the side of the good: a tree bends down its branches to rescue the young man who fell into a well; the power of love topples a wall, and in the end,

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[50] Ibid., p. 349.

the lovers escape inevitable death by turning into birds and flying away. Tamási's language, the Hungarian dialect spoken by the Székelys, is poetry with a keen sense of humor and irony; his stage, on which he creates a world all his own, is a place where the real and the miraculous mix easily, where no one convention ever dominates. Énekes madár was produced by the National Theatre in 1938, directed by Andor Punkösti who also directed the original production of the play in 1935 at the New Thalia.[51]

There had been other non-commercial, avant-garde oriented theatrical experiments in Hungary, most notably the Független Szinpad (Independent Stage) under Ferenc Hont's leadership, but no group had so consciously sought to advance the cause of theatre, to fight the commercialism of the legitimate theatre, and to establish the closest possible cooperation with the working class, than did the many experimental ventures all bound together by the person and work of Ödön Palasovszky. Nothing speaks louder than police records of Palasovszky's leftist, if not outright Communist background. That Palasovszky was able to function, at least began to, after 1945, testifies to his great dedication to the theatre. It is possible to explain, but impossible to excuse the fact that, as we shall see, he was forced off the stage after World War II.

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[51]Rózsa Kocsis, "Tamási Áron játékai," Kortárs, October, 1969, pp. 1640-1645.

The Invisible Legacy: Avant-Garde Drama On Paper And Abroad

Why did Palasovszky and others produce no Hungarian drama? Why Toller and Mayakovsky, Sophie Treadwell[52] and Cocteau, but not Hungarians--save for such exceptions as Tamási; where was the Hungarian avant-garde drama? The answer is not a simple one. First, even the production of foreign authors, as we have seen, was not easy, but regardless of authors, once the authorities suspected that a play was tainted red or in any way anti-capitalist, they were quick to close it.[53] Second, Hungarian avant-garde drama did exist. However, it was written outside Hungary. Some emigrant authors worked and were produced in Germany, Russia and the United States, while others wrote as they moved from country to country in Europe and even in South America.[54] Publication of plays in Hungarian periodicals created the strangest kind of existence for drama: it was

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[52]The Independent Stage performed Sophie Treadwell's play: ". . .mint a gepek," (literally: Like the Machines) which may have been part of Machinal, at the Belvárosi Színház (Downtown Theatre on November 14, 1937). (Kocsis, Igen és nem, p. 436).

[53]See above, p. 40, for Palasovszky's failure to produce Toller's The Machine Wreckers.

[54]See below, on the following pages, for Remenyik's and Déry's plays. Déry wrote while traveling through Switzerland, Italy and Austria. Remenyik lived in Argentina for a while but journeyed through the whole Western hemisphere, sending his plays to Kassák from various points of his travels.

not visible; it was merely readable, available in print. Most of the printed plays appeared in Lajos Kassák's MA (Today), the most important of the more than a dozen avant-garde magazines published in Hungarian in Budapest and Vienna.[55]

Kassák published the first dramatic effort of Zsigmond Remenyik (1900-1962) entitled Vér (Blood, 1921), sent by the author from America. Blood signalled the beginning of a dramatic career--mostly on paper--of an author who among Hungarians most clearly traveled the path from powerful expressionism to the epic theatre not unlike that of Brecht. Remenyik's Blőse urék mindenkinek tartoznak (The Blőse's Owe Everybody, 1934),[56] consists of three acts and ten scenes. This tragicomedy, a scathing indictment of capitalism, shows Mr. Blőse, a simple man who has already resorted to raising animals in his courtyard to pay for all his debts, locked in battle with the "system." Unable to

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[55]For nearly a quarter of a century, beginning in 1915, Lajos Kassák (1887-1967), poet, painter, essayist and dramatist, had edited a magazine that, like Palasovszky's theatre, metamorphosed several times, adapting to changing political situations and to its own artistic directions. The magazine was first called Tett (Deed), then, after seventeen issues it was changed to MA (Today) in 1916. Kassák moved to Vienna after the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and continued to publish MA until 1925. Shortly after his return to Hungary he began editing his new magazine, now called Dokumentum which he published in 1926 and 1927. His last magazine, MUNKA (Labor) lasted from 1928 to 1939.

[56]Palasovszky planned to produce this play but his own permit to perform publicly was revoked before rehearsals began.

cope with his situation he escapes into madness: He renounces his family, dresses his favorite animals in the clothes he took from his family, and gathering his poor neighbors around him, he preaches to them. He dies a mad--but liberated man. However, there is no money left for Blőse's burial, and the corpse, inside the coffin, is kept "hostage" in the undertaker's funeral home until the family could pay for the interment--which is to say forever.[57] Some of Remenyik's other plays: Saroküzlet (The Corner Store, 1936) and Akár tetszik, akár nem (Like It Or Not, 1943) were also directed against capitalism and reflected a Marxist orientation, their form similar to Brecht's parable's. His Vén Europa Hotel (Hotel Old Europe, 1940) was an anti-fascist play. Only one of his plays, Az atyai ház (Homecoming, Comedy Theatre, 1943), reached the stage before World War II. Remenyik fared little better after the war.

Sándor Barta (1897-1938), a fiery young poet, found himself an immigrant at the age of 22, after the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. His poems and early plays, showing dadaist tendencies, appeared in Kassák's MA. In 1925 he wrote a brilliant expressionist tragicomedy,

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[57]Zsigmond Remenyik, "Blőse urék mindenkinek tartoznak," in Akár tetszik, akár nem (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1963), pp. 5-100.

Cirkuszkapitalizmus (Circus Capitalism),[58] similar in tone and intent to Remenyik's plays. Other, shorter pieces followed from the Soviet Union where he settled after 1925. His works were published in German and in Russian, and he was the first editor of the Hungarian language literary periodical Új Hang (New Voice) in the Soviet Union. Shortly after the first issue of Új Hang appeared, Barta was arrested--in circumstances still not known--and executed.[59] To date no play of his has been performed in Hungary.

János Mácza (1893-), the young critic of Tett and MA, began to formulate his theories for the theatre during World War I; as assistant director of the National Theatre during the Hungarian Soviet Republic he hoped to put some of his theories into practice, but was forced to emigrate. His work Teljes szinpad (Total Stage), had it been given a chance in practice, could have revolutionized Hungarian theatre, but

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[58]Circus Capitalism first appeared in print in Kassai Munkas in 1925, later it was published in Leipzig, Germany by Die Neue Bühne in 1929. The play tells the story of Fred Parkins, a falsely accused laborer. Parkins is tried, sentenced and executed, but is cut off the gallows as his innocence comes to light about a minute after the hanging. A newspaper wants Parkins--a man who has seen death--to write his own story as a sort of message from the dead to the newspaper's readership. The play shows, in fourteen scenes, Parkin's road to the gallows, during the course of which the highly industrialized, capitalist system's inhumanity to the little men, mostly workers, is revealed. The story does not sell, the newspaper wants to auction off the manuscript but there are no takers. At the end of the play a worker picks up the manuscript and walks away with it, presumably to learn from and to tell other workers about the experiences of Fred Parkins.

[59]Marcell Benedek, ed., Magyar Irodalmi Lexikon, Vol. I (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1963), p. 112.

it got no further than the pages of MA (1921). "Total Stage," writes Júlia Szabo, editor of Mácza's selected works, "has long deserved to be known in Hungary and throughout Europe. Had it not appeared in the Hungarian language, it would have found its way to all movements of contemporary European theatre."[60] Mácza also wrote a number of expressionistic plays, published in MA, none of which has been performed in Hungary. He has been living in the Soviet Union since 1923 where he teaches aesthetics at the Lomonosov University.

János Lékai (1896-1925) failed in his attempt to assasinate István Tisza, former Prime Minister of Hungary, as the latter was returning from the Parliament where he announced that World War I, for Hungary, had ended in defeat. Lékai was jailed, but the Republic freed him, and the Communist Party assigned him to the most vital areas of organization. He was in Vienna to lay the groundwork for an international congress of young workers when the Republic at home was crushed. He remained in Austria and continued to work and write for Hungarian and German publications in Vienna and in Berlin. He was sent to organize workers in Czechoslovakia; he was jailed on arrival. When released and returned to Vienna he was jailed again.[61]

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[60]János Mácza, Legendák és tények (Budapest: Corvina, 1972), p. 198.

[61]László Illés, ed., Lékai János válogatott irásai (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1963), p. 5.

In 1921 he was in Moscow for the Third International and the Second Congress of Young Workers' International. In honor of the International, Meyerhold's theatre presented Mayakovsky's Mystery Bouffe, and on the same program Lékai's three one-acters: Rab, Forradalom, Megváltás (Prisoner, Revolution, Salvation) that were highly praised by Lunacharsky who also wrote the introduction to Lékai's published plays.[62] After a period in Germany, Lékai left for the United States in July 1922. Although in failing health, he reorganized the Hungarian branch of the American Communist Party and rejuvenated their newspaper Új Előre (New Forward). Under Lékai's direction, and boosted by the talents of the recently arrived Béla Lugosi, the Új Előre performing group produced Madách's The Tragedy of Man, Ibsen's Peer Gynt, and several O'Neill plays.[63] Lékai wrote feverishly (he was using the pseudonym John Lassen--his real name was Leitner), roamed America and produced a most moving collection of sketches and stories that was first published in Germany under the title Das Andere Amerika (Leipzig, 1924), followed by publication in Moscow and Leningrad. While seriously ill--his lungs were hemorrhaging--he wrote the play Magyarország 1914-1919 (Hungary 1914-1919) which under the title New Christ was performed in New York in 1924. Several workers' groups

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[62]Ferenc Botka, "Lékai Janos elfelejtett jelenetei," Kortárs, November 1967, pp. 1822-1831.

[63]Illés, ed., Lékai válogatott irásai, pp. 20-21.

throughout New York and in other cities were performing Lékai's Herrin (1924), a play dealing with the life of miners. The day after Coolidge was elected in the fall of 1924, Lékai's poem Fegyverbe! . . .Fegyverbe! (To Arms! . . .To Arms!) called for revolution. He was arrested, charged, and released on a $5000 bail. There was no trial, however: Lékai died of pneumonia, at the age of 29, in New York's St. Joseph Hospital on July 17, 1925.[64] In the fall of the same year the Kamerny Theatre in Moscow produced Lékai's play: Ember János.

Ember János was Lékai's first play. The title of its German version: Der Mensch[65] conveys Lékai's intention better than the literal English translation of John Man would. This expressionist play was begun in a jail in Budapest, rewritten during the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and put into its final form in a German jail. A revolutionary, Lékai put all his political and artistic activities in the service of revolution. He wanted a new world, a new man. This goal above all informs each of his dramatic works. In his New Christ, a child born in jail becomes the hope of the oppressed; in Ember János man's own experiences make him a revolutionary. Through visions of the 1514 peasant rebellion in Hungary, the French Revolution, and the abortive Hungarian

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[64] Ibid., p. 23.

[65] Johann Lékai, Der Mensch, Ein Drama in 3 Aufzugen, Deutsch von Stefan J. Klein, (Konstanz: Oskar Woehrle Verlag, 1923), in László Illés, ed., Lékai János válogatott irásai, p. 569.

Soviet Republic, Ember (Man) realizes that the loss of his faith in existence--as he has known it--can be regained in a new world, in a new man. At the end of the play Ember's spirit and alter-ego, Szellem,[66] snatches him from death's coach:

> (Music shifts to a wild melody)
>
> EMBER: Is there a new life then?
>
> SZELLEM: Everything up to now's been bad and rotten. In sin, desire, blood and filth--that's where new man is born! The old world must turn upside down so that new man may arrive! The road is long and difficult! [Takes over coach]
>
> .....
>
> The future belongs to the perfect man. János Ember! Our road leads upwards!
>
> EMBER: But where?
>
> AZ IDEGEN:[67] In my coach? What do you want with my coach? Where are you rushing to with my coach?
>
> SZELLEM: To meet the perfect man![68]

No dramatic work by Lékai has been performed in Hungary. Closely related to the German expressionists in form and content, Lékai's plays also have peculiarly Hungarian

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[66] Szellem covers a variety of meanings including: ghost; spirit of things, of man, of ideas; genius, etc.

[67] Az Idegen means, literally, the stranger. But it is clearly implied in the play that this character is death.

[68] János Lékai, Ember János, in Laszló Illés, ed., Lékai János válogatott írásai, pp. 77-134.

references with which the author hoped to make them especially meaningful in his native country, while his primary aim was to help bring about the birth of a new man. What were the chances of a new man being born in post-World War I Europe? What were these chances in Hungary?

Dadaism, the avant-garde movement loudest in denying and denouncing a world engulfed in senseless war, reached Hungary, via Kassák's periodicals, rather late, but it could scarcely have found a more fertile soil. Unlike its Western counterpart, Hungarian Dada was born out of utter desperation caused by a lost war and a lost revolution. It was practiced by men who were literally on the run, hoping to escape the white terror that followed the Hungarian Soviet Republic's fall. "Above us the basalt-columns of hopelessness are blooming,"[69] wrote Kassák whose feelings were echoed in Tibor Déry's recollections of the 1920's:

> I despaired at the failure of the dictatorship of the proletariat, I hated the counterrevolution, I had nothing but contempt for the bourgeoisie gloriously returning to their former privileges, I was nauseated by the many turncoats. . .I was most furious at the 'literary' traitors. . .in my youthful inexperience and tendency toward the extreme, I had arrived at the conclusion that mankind could not be saved.[70]

It was perhaps this outlook, at least in part, that produced Tibor Déry's (1894-) play, Az óriáscsecsemő (The

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[69]Lajos Kassák, Összes versei I, (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1970), p. 133.

[70]Tibor Déry, Önéletrajz: Teokritosz Budapesten (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1967), p. 13.

Giant Baby, 1926).[71] Newborn, the play's protagonist, escapes from his crib shortly after his birth and, fully grown and able to speak, confronts a world which he believes is in his control. We follow him to his death and the birth of his offspring, the 2nd Newborn. Déry presents a world that has gone mad, one without coherent, meaningful aims or ideals. Using the full arsenal of dadaist means, Déry directs his attacks on as many fronts as there are components in the art of theatre. His plot, rather than having a beginning, middle and end, is cyclical; his language, a conglomeration of nonsense rhymes, advertisements, thought associations, clichés and poetry, is cut into a montage of visual images. His use of silent film and projections, masks, puppets and animated objects, makes for a total theatricalization rare in any theatre; his merciless mixing of banalities of everyday life and the grotesque creates a unique drama.

Written in 1926, equidistant in time to the outbreak of the two World Wars, The Giant Baby is not against war; it is not even against capitalism or any particular form of society so much as it is a desperate cry for the individual, for man.

Déry, one of Hungary's outstanding writers, has written other plays both before and after World War II. Only his post-war plays, and not all of those, have been produced.

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[71]See Appendix D.

The Giant Baby has had no professional production to date. Its only amateur performance took place in the provincial town of Győr in 1969, an occasion that prompted some articles concerning the play. In one of these, Déry was declared a "belated antecedent" of the Hungarian absurd.[72]

The list of Hungarian avant-garde dramatists of the interwar years is a long one. Those missing from the preceding brief account include such important names as Milán Füst, Bela Balázs, Andor Gábor and Andor Németh.[73] My purpose, however, has been not to present a complete roster of authors, but, by noting the existence and tendencies of some Hungarian avant-garde drama and theatre, to establish the claim that besides the legacy of nineteenth century classics and twentieth century "commercial trash," mentioned in the Federation of Film and Theatre Arts Referendum of 1950,[74] post-World War II Hungarian drama had another legacy: that of the avant-garde.

Hungarian avant-garde efforts truly began during and after the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, a period in Hungary's history that closely resembled political and social conditions immediately after World War II. Then, too, a new man, a new society was consciously sought. This

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[72]Gábor Mihályi, "Kisérletek és eredmények," Szinház, April 1969, p. 5.

[73]Of these authors Béla Balázs will be mentioned in Chapter II. Plays by the others are listed in the Bibliography.

[74]See above, p. 13.

was the search that was conducted by dramatists from Karinthy to Lékai, from Remenyik to Barta and Déry.

> The theatrical avant-garde of the post-World War I era was revolutionary socially, politically and psychologically as well as artistically... the surrealists... looked eastward, toward Moscow, for fraternity and inspiration... The expressionists, almost to a man, were socialists or pacifists.[75]

That the above observation holds true for Hungarian avant-garde drama has now been firmly established. Today, even in Hungary, it is no longer the existence, but rather the neglect of the socialist avant-garde is questioned. In reviewing Mácza's book, Legendák és tények (Legends and Facts, 1972), the critic Péter G. Molnár offered the following solution: "The socialist avant-garde [in Hungary] was neglected three times: during the Horthy regime [1919 to World War II] because it was socialist; in the 1950's because it was avant-garde; in the 1960's because it was a theatrical rather than a literary movement."[76] This is basically a sound answer; however, the second period Molnár mentions needs adjusting. Post-World War II neglect of the avant-garde did not begin in the 1950's but in 1945/46, when the foundations of a new Hungary were laid by socialist forces. Hungarian avant-garde drama on the whole has remained invisible. It might have become visible right after 1945.

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[75]Bernard F. Dukore and Daniel C. Gerould, eds., Avant-Garde Drama: Major Plays and Documents Post World War I (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1969), p. x.

[76]Péter G. Molnár, "Mácza János szinházi tanulmányai," review of Legendák és tények by János Mácza, Népszabadság, 16 November, 1972, p. 7.

As we begin to examine the drama after the war, we shall attempt to find out why and how this opportunity was missed; why, at the time when Hungary was experiencing the most radical change in its social and political life, theatrical life (drama being at the center of that life) proved to be--despite some claims to the contrary--little more than the continuation of the pre-war years.

CHAPTER II

THE OPPORTUNITY: WIDE OPEN DOORS...SLOWLY CLOSING

Communist Authors Up Front
Gyula Háy

There were no gala openings in 1945 when the "season" began in March, soon after the city was liberated. Espresso cafés serving ersatz coffee, cabarets and theatres opened one by one: Budapest was alive and breathing again. Many actors, often performing at temporary locations in the afternoon, spent their mornings clearing debris, helping with the repair of bombed-out theatres. Except for three, all theatres remained in private hands, and owners were eager to open for business. The question was how to choose a new repertory. The choice was almost unlimited; practically all of Hungarian drama was available. Sándor Barta and János Lékai were dead and Mácza chose to stay in Moscow, but Béla Balázs, Gyula Háy, Sándor Gergely and others had returned from the Soviet Union, István Örkény sent a play from a POW camp and from New York came a new Molnár play.[1] Déry, Kassák and

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[1]Örkény's play Voronyezs (Voronezh) has not yet been produced in Hungary. The play which Molnár sent, Császár (Caesar), a tragedy, opened at the Comedy Theatre on April 20, 1946. It received unfavorable notices.

Tamási were at home and soon produced. Palasovszky was directing his own group as early as June 1945.

There seemed to be little doubt that eventually Hungary would become a socialist country, but immediately after the war political uncertainty prevailed. This uncertainty, an obvious concomitant of the political struggle for power and leadership of the country, was reflected in the theatre. No theatre, whether the National under communist management or the private theatres, had, at this time, a definite program or policy. No dramatist had a contract with any one theatre, and it was not unusual for a communist author to be produced in a private theatre. For two or three seasons a peaceful coexistence of bourgeois, socialist and avant-garde drama followed.

Generally, managers and owners looked for plays that could be cast with the available actors, would draw an audience and would not clash with the current political situation. Since the political situation was liable to change rather frequently, (if not in direction, at least in intensity), classics of world and Hungarian drama seemed to be the safest course, along with plays by authors (some Jewish) who had been banned during the Nazi era. The steadily increasing influence and power of the Communist Party in politics was to be felt in the theatres, but at the very beginning, in the months immediately after the country's liberation, it was only the National Theatre, under the leadership of Tamás Major, and somewhat later the Madách Theatre, that

took direct, deliberate strides toward a socialist drama.[2] Not only did Major hope to present communist and socialist authors, but the National Theatre embarked--in a fashion rather reminiscent of the days of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919--on a vigorous campaign to recruit and develop new audiences. The latter task was just as important as the former. A substantial segment of the population, especially workers--those most likely to appreciate socialist plays--had little or no exposure to the theatre. Development of audiences in the countryside had to be postponed for a while: political organization of villages and the establishment of closer ties between peasants and workers were a more pressing matter.

The National Theatre took a very effective first step toward realizing its goals in May 1945, with a production that launched the career, at home, of a most enigmatic dramatist. Gyula Háy (1900-) is Hungary's best known socialist playwright--abroad. He first emigrated after the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, returned home in 1923, only to leave again in 1929. He went to Germany both times, and left there finally in 1933 for Austria. He was arrested and jailed for political activities in Vienna in 1934, and moved to Switzerland after his release. In 1935,

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[2]Ferenc Hont, ed., Magyar színháztörténet (Budapest: Gondolat, 1962), p. 282.

at the invitation of Soviet writers, Háy went to Moscow.[3] In 1945 he returned to Hungary. Jailed in 1957 for his part in the uprising of October 1956, Háy was freed in 1960. Since 1965 he has been living abroad, mostly in Switzerland.

Háy arrived home from the Soviet Union in 1945 with excellent political and artistic credentials. A member of the Communist Party who had been jailed for his beliefs, Háy also had had eight of his plays published or produced throughout Europe, mostly in Germany. His play Tiszazúg (To Have and To Hold, National Theatre, May 18, 1945), was written in 1936. The National Theatre's choice was most appropriate: a communist author's play that dealt with peasants and their greatest aspiration, the land. Land reform was just getting underway; thousands and thousands of peasants finally owned part of the land they had tilled for hundreds of years. Through Háy's play, audiences in Budapest were made aware of what the land meant to the peasants. With its action laid in the 1930's, Tiszazúg shed some light on the reasons for creating a society that would give the peasant his share--because the previous society did not.

The bizarre plot was based on fact.[4] In a Hungarian

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[3]Autobiographical notes by Háy in his published play, Pulykapásztor. Gyula Háy, Pulykapásztor (Budapest: Népszava, 1956), p. 3.

[4]György Lukács, "Háy Gyula két szindarabja," in Magyar irodalom, magyar kultúra (Budapest: Gondolat, 1970), p. 226.

village women had been marrying wealthy, landed peasants whom they slowly poisoned with arsenic in order to gain possession of the land their husbands owned. The play's heroine, Mari Árva, already pregnant by her lover Dani, the local gendarme, agrees, at the urging of her mother and other women to marry an older, wealthy peasant. But Mari cannot wait like other women--some had lived with their "husbands" for as long as twenty years before poisoning them--and she administers a fatal dose of arsenic on her wedding night. Guilt and remorse make Mari admit her deed to her lover who can no longer envisage a future with her--he is concerned with his position and promotion. The play ends with Dani filling out a report on the murder.

Overriding all other considerations, the will to possess land drives a villageful of women to murder on a grand scale. Mari upset the scheme and ruined herself. Háy treats the extreme, the exception, to drive his point home: Mari committed murder--seemingly a murder like all the rest before hers--not for possession of property but to safeguard her pure love: she did not want the older peasant to touch her and soil her for Dani. Mari is scorned by the village women; she loses her lover and her freedom. In the microcosm of one village Háy meant to show not what feudal-capitalism was like, but rather what it did to people. The published play's motto is a quote from Marx: "Private property has made us so stupid and onesided that

we consider a thing our own only if we possess it. . . Our senses, physical and spiritual, have been replaced by the very alienation of these senses: the sense of possession. Man had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order to give birth to his inner richness."[5]

The thesis is well proved in the swiftly moving play. Fourteen scenes, each a sociographic vignette, acquaint us with the village and its many inhabitants. The technique of reportage shows expressionistic tendencies; Háy did not wish to give the impression of fragmentation and so he warns us that, although there are fourteen scenes, a unity of place is maintained because all the scenes take place in one village.[6] Háy's description of each scene is detailed, his instructions for the sets are in the best naturalistic tradition.

In the preface of another published play, Pulykapásztor (Goose-herd, written in 1938, never performed in Hungary), Háy gives us a hint as to where he thinks he stands in relation to trends of modern drama. In a biographical note he speaks of his stay in Berlin in the early 1930's: "These were the last years of the so-called Weimar Republic full of

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[5]Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844), Section on Private Property and Communism," in Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, edited by Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1967), pp. 307-308.

[6]Gyula Háy, Tiszazúg (Budapest: Atheneaum, 1945), p. 7.

colorful artistic experimentation, including attempts at the disintegration of the dramatic genre. From the start I felt that I had to take a stand for the rejuvenation and strenghthening of drama: for dramatic realism--with an ever increasing social content."[7] Interestingly enough, at the end of the same preface, in his instructions regarding the setting, Háy writes: "At long last the tyranny of naturalism has been broken on our stages. This play, too, can be performed with indicated scenery. The players' immediate environment should be as real as possible, but whatever is beyond that does not interest us, could be left out."[8] It is difficult to guess how serious Háy is or what he really means: not only does he give detailed instructions for acting that only performers steeped in naturalistic style could adequately carry out, but the set of five designs at the back of the published play would be perfectly at home at the Théâtre Libre.[9]

Háy's next play Isten, császár, paraszt (God, Emperor, Peasant, May 10, 1946) at the National Theatre was preceded by its success in Germany sixteen years earlier. It opened in Breslau in 1932 and was shown in the same year in Berlin, but the authorities banned it at the Deutsches Theatre.[10]

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[7]Gyula Háy, Pulykapásztor (Budapest: Népszava, 1956), p. 3.

[8]Ibid., p. 8.

[9]Ibid., pp. 84-89.

[10]Lukács, "Háy Gyula két szindarabja" in Magyar irodalom, magyar kultúra, p. 220.

This is a historical play differing from the traditional Hungarian history play in its language and portrayal of heroes and heroism. Sigismund of Luxembourg, King of Hungary, is jailed by Hungarian lords who oppose his treatment of the nobility and want him to resign. Sigismund cleverly convinces the lords that the only way he could be of service to them is not by resigning, but by becoming Holy Roman Emperor.

The "God" of the play's title is Pope John XIII, God's earthly regent (at this time one of three rival popes of the Catholic Church) who meets Sigismund, now Emperor, when the latter calls together the Synod of Konstanz in order to mend the schism in the church. To discredit Sigismund in the eyes of the Synod, John plans to withdraw his claim to be the only pope, hoping that the other contenders would do the same. When the Synod seems to be swayed in John's direction, Sigismund takes off his crown and even kneels before John, displaying a humility that easily outdoes John's. In an ingeniously contrived scene, both Sigismund and John are shown for what they are and we learn how they had deceived not each other but the Synod:

> VOICES Long live the Emperor! Long live the Emperor!
>
> SIGISMUND (Kneeling, quietly) Do you hear that, Balthasar Cossa? [The Pope's real name]
>
> POPE (Hands locked in prayer) Damn you!

VOICES (Louder) Long live the Emperor!

(Organ music, singing)

SIGISMUND (Kneeling, quietly) Against duplicity, fraud and treachery I have found a wonderful cure: hypocrisy and dissembling. Who is being hailed now, Father?

POPE You are.

SIGISMUND Who is going to stay put and obey, or be swept from the throne?

POPE I am.

SIGISMUND (In a supplicating attitude) The question is whether we see things as they are or as they are called. Those over there hang their heads because they see me kneel. But you and I know that this little bending of the knees has swung me higher than the church-steeple.

POPE (His hands spread in blessing) You damned clown!

(Organ music, song, shouts)[11]

Sigismund chose to compromise with the Church just as the Pope chose to compromise with the crown. Sigismund did have one other choice: to ally himself with Jan Huss (the "peasant" of the play's title), and his movement. If he joined forces with Huss, Sigismund could have become a leader similar to those in England and France of the fifteenth century. But there were no realistic social bases for anything but a feudal society both in Germany and in Hungary at the time. Sigismund must become and remain Holy Roman Emperor in order

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[11]Gyula Háy, Isten, császár, paraszt in Királydrámák (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1964), pp. 73-74.

to remain a ruler at all; the Pope must compromise with the crown if he wants to remain the Pope, and for Jan Huss the road to victory--a transcendental one to be sure--leads to the burning stakes.

Háy is perhaps at his best in the construction of this play. He draws circles around his main characters, circles that are as binding as they are protective: movement is possible only within a given sphere of authority, and it is dictated by the position of each character. Tension and conflict arise from the clash of unbreakable circles. The author himself calls attention to his indebtedness to Shaw in his iconoclastic treatment of characters in history; he draws certain parallels to Shaw's Saint Joan.[12] The first act is particularly reminiscent of Shaw's parodistic style, but then the weight of events, the showing of historical forces operating with inevitable precision evoke a more somber style.

In both of the above plays Háy's language is simple and fresh, free from heavy peasant-dialects in Tiszazúg and of forced archaisms in God, Emperor, Peasant. The latter play, depicting the clash of those "historical forces that eventually produced modern bourgeois society,"[13] may have been more appropriate to Berlin and more appealing to German

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[12]Gyula Háy, Királydrámák (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1964), p. 9.

[13]Lukács, Háy Gyula két szindarabja, p. 220.

audiences just before the fall of the Weimar Republic. Still, the 1946 Budapest performance was a critical as well as a popular success.

Around the time of Háy's arrival in Budapest, two other communist authors returned from the Soviet Union. One, Sándor Gergely, least known to Hungarian audiences, was mentioned, along with Háy, in the Referendum quoted above (p. 13). The other, conspicuously missing from the same Referendum, but best known in Hungary of all the emigres, was Béla Balázs (1884-1949).[14]

The Ballad of Béla Balázs

Having devoted fifteen lines to the works of Béla Balázs, one Hungarian reference work concludes by saying that: "More important than his dramas are his studies on film-aesthetics; today we best remember him for these [studies]."[15]

Balázs's works on film remain important. In 1924 his The Visible Man[16] was perhaps the first comprehensive

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[14]Because all four plays by Béla Balázs that were produced in Hungary after World War II preceded the one play, Valiant Soldiers and Heroes by Sándor Gergely, and because Gergely's importance lies not so much in the creation of this play, but in his influence on Hungarian drama of the 1950's, Gergely and his play will be discussed in Chapter III dealing with socialist realist drama.

[15]Géza Hegedüs and Judit Kónya, A magyar dráma útja (Budapest: Gondolat, 1964), p. 210.

[16]Béla Balázs, Der sichtbare Mensch, oder die Kultur des Films (Wien, 1924).

aeasthetic work on film; it influenced Eisenstein and Pudovkin, among others. Balázs also directed films and wrote many screenplays, including one for the filmed version of Brecht's Threepenny Opera in Berlin, and it was Balázs's screenplay for Valahol Európában (Somewhere in Europe) that called international attention to Hungarian films after World War II.

Along with Lukács, Balázs was a member of the Thália early in the century, and, also with Lukács, he served on the Commissariat for Public Education during the Hungarian Soviet Republic; he was in charge of four theatres. In his years of exile, in Germany and in the Soviet Union, Balázs produced a large body of works including three plays.[17]

Balázs's struggle with theatres goes back to the first decade of the century when the National Theatre staged his play Doktor Szélpál Margit (Dr. Margit Szélpál, 1909). Neither the theatre nor audiences were ready for a play that dealt frankly with the career-versus-home problems of women. His subsequent plays in the 1910's fared no better save for two: A kékszakállú herceg vára (1913) and A fából faragott királyfi (1916) both of which have been made famous by Bartók, and the world knows them as Bluebeard's Castle and The Wooden Prince--the exact titles of Balazs's plays. His symbolist Misztériumok (Mystery Plays, 1913) found only

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[17]Béla Osváth, Türelmetlen dramaturgia, p. 189.

one sympathetic supporter (Lukács) when they were first shown, and they could not even match that number forty years later.[18]

After a quarter of a century of exile, Balázs returned home only to be humiliated and spurned by the people with whom he fought in the service of the same cause.[19] In

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[18]The Mystery Plays consisted of two one-acters: A Tunder (The Fairy) and A szent szűz vére (Blood of the Sacred Virgin). An undated report by dramaturg György Kemény--at the Documentation Center of the Hungarian Theatre Institute in Budapest--reads, in part, as follows:

[Of The Fairy]: "The play is poetic...has harmony and atmosphere. Still it cannot be recommended for production because of its author's rather decadent outlook that turns away from reality and escapes into irrationality."

[Of the Blood of the Sacred Virgin]: "The play poses the question: what is more important, friendship and one's calling or earthly love for a woman? The author opts for the former...In its style and atmosphere the play is poetic, although overly stylized. Its theme and lesson are alien to us. Production not recommended."

[19]In her book A magyar drámairodalom útja 1945-1957, Olga Siklós quotes a letter, written by Balázs (probably in 1946) to József Révai, chief theoretician of the Communist Party. The letter reveals that Balázs was hurt and extremely puzzled at the Party's attitude toward him and his work: "What is the sense of making people believe that I do not enjoy the solidarity of the Communists? Is it part of some Party directive that I be excluded from the Party press?...I do not need the support of the Party press, but would it not be a better cultural policy to take advantage of my rather substantial influence on a wide circle of intellectuals--if necessary with the proper guidance [of the Party] --to use me as a bridge towards the shore of the intellectuals? I do have a special mission, exactly because I have traveled the road from metaphysical idealism to dialectical materialism, from being an idealist living in an ivory tower to a revolutionary communist who lives and would die for the people. And this is the road onto which I could call them [the intellectuals]." (Béla Balázs's letter to József Révai at the Manuscript Department of the Hungarian Academy of Science. MS#5021/281., quoted in Olga Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja 1945-1957, pp. 64-65).

four years four of his plays were produced: after the moderately warm reception of the first, all the rest failed--or rather the critics did. Balázs was the first dramatist to attempt to face the events of the recent past. His play Boszorkánytánc (Witches' Dance) opened in a private theatre (Downtown Theatre) on September 12, 1945. Through the plight of a small Serbian village under German occupation and the heroic behavior of the local school teacher who is ordered to provide hostages--children--to insure a halt in partisan activities, Balázs paints a moving picture of the effects of war, and of a small people that could put up a fight in the face of mighty armies. The press gave Balázs the highest praise which he was to get in Hungary--the communist daily Szabadság did not even mention the play.[20] His next play A fű újra felál1 (The Grass Springs Back) continued the theme of war, expanding the idea that small nations could and did fight Nazis and the German war machinery. The play was rejected by the National Theatre because, among other things, ". . .the action, the story, and the theme are much too close to us not to be delicate and even painful."[21]

At the time of feverish rebuilding and reconstruction there were fears that an evaluation of Hungary's role in World War II might be detrimental. The nation's conscience

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[20]Olga Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja 1945-1957 (Budapest: Magvető, 1970), p. 54.

[21]Ibid., p. 60.

must not be burdened--in the open--with "painful" truths about the behavior of certain Hungarians, sympathizers and collaborators. Despite the fact that Balázs's play showed clearly the brave and even heroic behavior of peasants in both Hungary and Serbia, the National Theatre refused production. The play is still in manuscript form.

Mozart, a play written in exile, was shown next, on March 14, 1946 in another private theatre (Comedy Theatre). When the critics failed to find "meaningful conflict" in the play, Balázs tried, in vain, to defend himself: "It's not true that Mozart is not a fighter! There is tragic conflict between father and son, between Mozart and his love, between genius and his Maecenas; tragic conflict between the artist and the budding spirit of capitalism."[22]

In his frustration, Balázs decided to direct his next play, based on the successful original production in Leningrad. Lulu és Beata, vagy az eszmék harca (Lulu and Beata, or the Battle of Ideas, Downtown Theatre, February 7, 1947), was billed in Budapest as a "Comedy in 3 acts and 7 scenes." Originally, in Russia, it appeared as "A philosophical burlesque." Reminiscent of Remenyik's The Blőse's Owe Everybody, Balázs's play was clearly and frankly theatrical; it showed capitalism to be the ruthless exploiter of talent. Characters did not play on the emotions of the

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[22]Béla Balázs's letter to his critics, Szinház, no. 11, 1946, quoted in Olga Siklós, A magyar dramairodalom utja, p. 65.

audience, but rather called on their sober judgment in appraising what they saw on the stage. The dramatic technique Balázs employed in this play was, at least in part, the fulfillment of some of his own ideas about theatre dating back to 1919. Considering theatre's most vital function to be instruction, he wrote that instruction ". . .cannot consist of art's direct engagement in the service of political agitation. The function of art is not instruction in the technique of social change, but, by its nature, to educate the individual, the personality to be a doer, that is to say, not only interested but active. That is why every true art has revolutionary value."[23] Lulu and Beata had only seven performances; it was a critical and popular failure. Audiences had no experience in seeing plays such as this, where stage events, setting and characters, were not a reasonable copy of real life. Balázs had no actors or designers other than those raised in naturalistic tradition, and it was impossible to mount the play well under those conditions. Balázs tried to produce the play again, but failed.

Balázs's last work for the stage had only two performances. Cinka Panna balladája (The Ballad of Cinka Panna) was written to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the 1848 Revolution. After many difficulties it was produced, with

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[23]Béla Balázs's article in Vörös Újság, 27 March, 1919, quoted in Osváth, Türelmetlen dramaturgia, p. 189.

Kodály's music, as a joint venture of the National Theatre and the National Opera. For his plot Balázs reached back to the times of Ferenc Rákoczi who led an insurrection against the Habsburgs at the turn of the seventeenth century. The opera was called a "mistake," Balázs was accused of "falsifying history" and of "inaccurate" depiction of the peasants' role in the uprising.[24] Balázs "falsified" history in that he did not present a mere dramatization of textbook history. The central figure of his play was not Rákoczi, the leader, but Ocskay, a traitor, whom the play shows to be a negative character but not as the enemy, but rather the man who creates anarchy within the revolution. Balázs's depiction of peasants seemed especially "inaccurate" to critics in 1948, since they could not see how peasants would call Ocskay a traitor because he wanted to fight the Germans. What the critics refused to see and admit was that to peasants, throughout Hungary's history, their immediate enemy was the Hungarian aristocracy whom the peasants hated just as much, if not more, than foreign powers. Since its initial two performances in 1948 The Ballad of Cinka Panna has not been seen in Hungary. Its author, tired and silent, died in 1949.[25]

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[24]Márton Horváth's review of Cinka Panna in Szabad Nép, 18 March, 1948, quoted in Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja, p. 74.

[25]At last in 1974 Béla Balázs is once again being recognized as an important poet, film and theatre artist. Several articles and books have appeared about him and about his accomplishments. In September 1974 a film about him, based on his autobiographical novel Dreaming Youth (also the film's title) opened in Budapest.

Messages From The Home Front--Not Well Received
Déry, Kassák, Tamási

Balázs was still in the Soviet Union when Déry had already begun to write his play A tanúk (Witnesses). This play has not been seen in Hungary;[26] it was first rejected by the National Theatre right after the war. Déry touched on one of the most sensitive nerves of the times, a particularly delicate one in Hungary after the war: the Jews. Having lost nearly seventy percent of its Jewish population--making no efforts to prevent the deportation of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children--Hungary was indeed a witness.[27] But Déry did not mean to erect a monument to the half million Hungarian Jews that perished between 1941 and 1945 but rather to put into some perspective--through the fate of one minority within Hungary--the role of small nations, all minorities, in the great upheaval of the times. The play ends with a Russian soldier entering an air-raid shelter, symbolically and in fact signaling the liberation of the country. He speaks to the people in the shelter and a Hungarian professor interprets for him. The last line of the play is the Russian soldier's question which is the question Déry asks not only of Jews but of Hungarians as well. [The Professor interpreting]: "He wants to know why

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[26]It appeared in print in 1967.

[27]Jenő Lévai, ed., Eichmann in Hungary (Budapest: Pannonia Press, 1961), p. 265.

we didn't liberate ourselves?"[28]

Déry opened up the stage and engaged his audience directly, using a narrator, choruses and songs, but neither the theme nor the mode of the play's execution seemed acceptable--the theme possibly weighing heavier in the decision to keep Witnesses off the boards. The author of The Giant Baby had found it more and more difficult, in the late 1940's, to provide the proper form for his play's content--a factor that could be crucial in a decision to make a play visible.

In his first play on the stage, Tükör (Mirror, National Theatre, March 21, 1947), Déry was still fighting the limitations of the proscenium arch: the audience was invited to watch a family listening to a three-day marathon broadcast--through hidden microphones--of the life of another family. As the title suggests, one family turns out to be the mirror-image of the other. Déry's second play, Itthon (Home Again, National Theatre, January 9, 1948) was a realistic triangle drama. Objections were raised to both plays. In the first one the communists did too little to bring down the old regime; in the second, although the communist hero had grown in stature, still, he looked too pale next to the representative of the old society. Just as with Balázs, the critics called Déry to account for things which he never

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[28]Tibor Déry, Tanúk, in Az óriáscsecsemő (Budapest: Magvető, 1967), p. 193.

meant to say or show. Mirror does show the inevitable reckoning of the old society on the eve of World War II. The only communist, Vera, in love with the protagonist's son, is a minor character, and could, at best, perform a catalystic function in the play. The real drama takes place within the protagonist, a judge who considers himself to be an upright man with a sense of justice, and who must now reassess his own position as a new era is about to begin.

Home Again, conceived in completely realistic terms, presents more private conflicts. Having been reported dead three years earlier, a former officer and landowner returns from a German POW camp to find his wife married to a machinist, now mayor of the town. The latter trusts his wife to decide for herself with whom she wants to love. At the end, the former officer commits suicide, but not before gaining the audience's sympathies--he was wounded and slightly crippled in the war, lost his position and his wife--and making his opponent, the communist mayor, look rather passive and colorless by comparison. Critics found fault with the unsatisfactory solution--suicide. What the critics did not realize, or failed to mention, was that the increasing demand for realistic plays forced Déry to work in a form in which he was not comfortable, and the ready-made form he adopted demanded its own solution: a triangle drama of emotionally heated private conflicts just could not adequately represent the battle of two social classes as emphatically

as the critics would have liked.[29]

Déry was welcomed on the stage of the National Theatre which hoped to present as many communist authors as was possible--provided that they produce socialist plays. When Déry was unable to supply the right kind of play, he received neither encouragement nor help--only criticism. Except for a one-acter in 1954, Déry remained unproduced for eighteen years after the opening of Home Again.

Exactly three weeks after the opening of Home Again, Lajos Kassák's És átlépték a küszöböt (And They Crossed the Threshold, January 30, 1948), premiered at the National Theatre. This production marked the beginning and the end of Kassák's career as a dramatist in post-World War II Hungary. What had happened to Balázs in fours years and to Déry after two plays, happened to Kassák all at once. His play was misinterpreted on the stage and misunderstood in the press. After the opening, the author wrote: ". . .what I saw on that stage was but a shadow of what I wanted. . ."[30] Kassák presented a family locked in a helpless and hopeless existence. Their routine life, going through meaningless motions was matched by an equally routine, cliché-ridden language. Communication had almost completely ceased among the seven characters: the parents and five grown children, each with

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[29]Olga Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja, p. 157.

[30]Lajos Kassák's statement in Szinház, no. 8, 1948 quoted in Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja, p. 163.

some memory of an aspiration, none with a future. Only the youngest daughter, through involvement in illegal activities--she may be working for the communist underground--seems to have a chance to "cross the threshold" of this dying house. Only in the late 1960's was it realized that Kassák then, in the late 1940's, was working with characters and an environment that was to be the hallmark of many absurdist plays.[31] Kassák was criticised for having more than one hero, i.e. for not having one central hero whose actions would be dominant over the others' and for choosing the routine life of a bourgeois family, which the critics considered to be a bore.[32] Kassák completely withdrew from the literary scene and between 1950 and 1956 lived in, what he called, an "inner emigration."[33]

Áron Tamási's world of fairy tales and folk myths, miracles and powerful love had been shaken in the war, and in the years following the great destruction the author himself may have been wary of uncertainties. It is just possible that he was looking for himself, the artist, in his first play after 1945, Hullámzó vőlegény (The Wavering Bridegroom, National Chamber Theatre, January 30, 1947). The

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[31]Olga Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja, p. 167.

[32]Imre Sarkadi's review in Válasz, March, 1948, p. 284.

[33]György Rónay, Kassák Lajos alkotásai és vallomásai tükrében (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1971), p. 282.

setting is still the Székely countryside, but pure and young love returns only as a means, not as an end. Bodrogi, a young artist, has taken to making pots, rather than beautiful vases, in order to get rich. As the dramatic action begins, he is ready to sell out completely; only the pure love of a Székely girl prevents him from marrying for money. He returns to making beautiful vases. A kind of miracle has occurred, even if not through magical means. Tamási was restating something rather simple: the artist must find himself--and love could surely help him in that--art must be free from anything that is not dictated by the consciousness of the artist himself. Critical reaction, from the left and the right, was negative. Tamasi seems to have forgotten to say what kind of society would be right for the artist. To imply that an artist may find happiness in finding himself and in his art, was not enough, even if it was clear from the play that it was not merely one girl's love that guided Bodrogi back to himself, but the entire community, the strength inherent in one's roots. Tamási, too, defended himself in the press, but to no avail. Except for a puppet play in 1952, Tamási remained unproduced for twelve years after the showing of the Wavering Bridegroom.

Bourgeois Drama Tolerated

Critics of the left were hardest on leftist playwrights. It was unforgivable for a communist author, regard-

less of any other merit of his play, to leave out a forward-looking, positive solution. Non-communist authors were sometimes praised for simply presenting bourgeois life so that people could see a passing, obsolete phase in Hungary's history.[34] Endre Illés's plays, The Stepmother (1947) and The Liars (1949), fall into this category. Lajos Bíró's Felszállott a páva (The Peacock Has Alighted, Comedy Theatre, January 18, 1946) stirred some pro-American feelings, even tried to justify emigration to the West. But, because it spoke well of the Hungarian Soviet Republic--not exploring it, merely treating it sympathetically--leftist critics joined others in praising the play.[35] Other authors--famous, apolitical and of another era--were produced mostly in private theatres. Bús-Fekete, Vaszary, Zilahy, Márai and Molnár drew audiences and meant good business at a time when business was without a secure future. Theatres and critics on the left treated these authors with a child's tolerance: they knew that soon it would be time for the nursing home for the aging, harmless playwrights.

If bourgeois authors presented no threat, they could certainly not be expected to revitalize Hungarian drama

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[34]I recall that for years Western culture, particularly popular culture--styles in dancing, music and fashion--could be presented in cabarets only by making clear how decadent they were. Skits dealing with American popular culture were almost always introduced by statements that said, in effect, "Look, that's how they do it--isn't it just awful?"

[35]Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja, p. 111.

and theatre. Those dramatists who were able had to wage war for their very existence, a war, which, for all intents and purposes, they lost--to their own side. The battlefield was the press, and the noise of the battle was matched only by the number of casualties. Some, like Balázs, went down fighting; some, like Kassák, were killed in action, or were wounded seriously enough to be put out of action for years, like Déry and Tamási. Still others were prevented even from entering the arena. Despite notices of planned productions, plays of important authors who figure prominently in later Hungarian drama, like Örkény and László Németh, had to wait for more than a decade to become visible.

Few plays in Hungary have ever been written by authors who were only dramatists. Poets, journalists, novelists, essayists and literary advisors (dramaturgs) make up the majority of those writing for the stage. Years of absence from the theatre are usually spent cultivating those other genres, an activity that may or may not help the dormant playwright to surface again. When a theatre artist who is nothing but a theatre artist is pushed off the stage, he is sure to become a casualty with very little chance of recovery. The greatest casualty of the Hungarian theatre immediately after World War II was its most tenacious and able artist of the interwar period, Ödön Palasovszky; and no one played a greater role in dismissing him than the most celebrated author of the new, socialist drama, Gyula Háy.

One Last Time: Palasovszky

Immediately after the war Palasovszky received permission to perform in the partially damaged Madách Theatre, which he planned to use for productions specifically designed for workers. His actors were mostly beginners and amateurs. Palasovszky's first program, Pionir-Ak, opened on June 9, 1945. The two-part evening consisted of selections from the works of Istvan Szelényi, Antal Hidas, Rezruc and Mayakovsky, and a dramatized short story by the Soviet author Zozulya, called Ak and the People.[36] The latter dealt with man's happiness and conveyed the idea that life remains meaningful only if, after many false starts, one can begin anew. The first program was shortly followed by Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors. Béla Balázs, acknowledging the inexperience of the young company, praised their initiative and their exuberance and welcomed the new possibilities this group represented on the Hungarian stage.[37] On June 10, 1945, the day after Palasovszky's first opening, a long article

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[36]Two of Zozulya's short stories, including Ak and the People, may be found in a collection called Short Stories Out of Soviet Russia, compiled and translated by John Cournos, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1929), pp. 147-169. Ak and the People is my translation from the title Palasovszky gave to his program; in Cournos' book the story is under the title of A Tale About Ak and Humanity.

[37]Erzsébet Berkes, "A 'kakukktojás' története: Jegyzetek Palasovszky Ödön felszabadulás utáni működéséhez," Színház, October 1971, p. 45.

appeared in the pages of the communist Szabad Nép entitled: "Junk, boredom, and what's even worse." The article, written by Gyula Háy, speaks for itself:

> Beginning with pseudo-primitivism parading about the stage to the accompaniment of negro drums, followed by [samples of] movement art, "mechanical movement-like" gobbledygook of the 20's, dadaist prattle and the hollow-sounding repetition of the word "man". . .all this was exactly the same way in Weimar Germany. Then, the youngsters of bohemian inns thought they could shock the bourgeoisie. Well, the bourgeoisie was not shockable. On the contrary. Nothing came in so handy for the German bourgeoisie, preparing for fascism and arming for World War II, than this reactionary mumbo-jumbo [dressed] in revolutionary exterior.

Háy may have been bored, for reasons of his own, but the same could hardly be said of Hungarian audiences who had never seen this kind of performance--unless they attended one of Palasovszky's own before the war. Far more crucial than anyone's boredom, however, was the article's implication that Palasovszky was some sort of collaborator, if not an outright Nazi. Háy was relentless: "Don't let any one be fooled by the fact that the text heard from the stage is not by German authors. The whole thing originated there. . . where the reactionaries well understood that they could get nowhere with brute force, for a while; first they must poison the soul of the masses with pseudo-revolutionary demagoguery."[38]

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[38]Gyula Háy, "Ocskaság, unalom és ami meg annál is rosszabb," Szabad Nép, 10 June, 1945, Sunday Supplement, pp. 2-3.

The article goes on for two more columns, much in the same vein. It is easier to recount the results of this attack than to guess Háy's motivation for writing it. Palasovszky's group, despite its leader's eloquent defense in the press, became the stepchild of communist officialdom, and slowly help was withdrawn from them. First to apply for a permanent home at the Madách Theatre, Palasovszky was refused in favor of Ferenc Hont whose first announced production was to be Háy's Pulykapásztor. (This play has not been produced in Hungary to this day.) Hont closed the interview in which he outlined his program policy by saying: "It is too early to speak of further plans. . . But I can tell you one thing: Madách Theatre will not become an avant-garde theatre."[39]

Palasovszky moved to a recreation hall of the Communist Party's headquarters in the second district of Budapest. In the spring of 1946 he organized, with a former colleague, Magda Rónа, the Workers Theatre that was to perform for six months in a recreation hall at Socialist Democratic Party headquarters of the eleventh district, and for six months at the Communist Party's headquarters in the same district. Palasovszky produced Chekhov, Andreyev and Shaw. When the first six months were up the group moved,

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[39]Interview with Ferenc Hont, in Szinház, 26 September, 1946, quoted in Erzsébet Berkes, "A 'kakukktojás' története," Szinház, October 1971, p. 47.

only to find that the recreation hall they were to perform in had no seats. No amount of coaxing, appealing or knocking on official doors helped. Through not overly subtle means it was made clear to Palasovszky that he could no longer count on support from any governmental or political quarters. Palasovszky's theatrical career ended in 1946--at the very time it could really have begun.[40]

Pressing Problems Solved--In The Press

Háy continued to work on and off the stage. In 1947 the Theatre Institute published a slim volume of his: Emberi szó a szinpadon (Human Word on the Stage), in which Háy openly attacked all "isms," dismissing them as ". . .opposition movements whose common denominator is that their opposition is directed at the previous movement only." He equates "isms" with persecution of the dramatic, and in no uncertain terms calls epic theatre one that does not instruct any more or any better than any other kind of drama, but merely brings on characters ". . .in whom the author's interest is no more than [an interest] in guinea pigs or rabbits with whom he wishes to demonstrate some abstract theses."[41] About the future of the drama and theatre Háy concludes: "Only realistic literature is the literature of

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[40]Berkes, "A 'kakukktojás' története," Szinház, October 1971, p. 47.

[41]Gyula Háy, Emberi szó a szinpadon (Budapest: Szinháztudományi Intézet, 1947), pp. 32-34.

human progress. Theatre will only become the great weapon in the fight for mankind's future, if and when it becomes the theatre of realist authors and realist artists. . . if [in other words] it becomes the theatre of the people."[42]

With numerous pamphlets, essays and articles, Háy's voice was powerful in the press and his influence was increased by the fact that in the years after the war more issues regarding theatre and drama were decided on the pages of dailies and weeklies, magazines and Sunday supplements than in the theatre. Studies, essays and articles multiplied, debates developed, not entirely free from personal attacks, counter-attacks and ideological squabbles. The influence and power of the Communist Party was increasing steadily. Artists aligned with the Party voiced agreement with the Party--spending as much time writing articles as writing books or plays. By 1948 it was not only not a secret, but a slogan that the theatre must be a political forum, an instrument for educating the masses. Issues had to be confronted and shown on the stage. But only the press could keep up with the issues, not the theatre. By the time a play was produced the issue it dealt with may have been as obsolete as yesterday's newspaper.[43] No doubt, the theatre needed a viable solution to its problems if it was to ful-

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[42]Ibid., p. 40.

[43]Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja, p. 193.

fill its function as a vital part of new life in Hungary. For this solution theatre could only turn to the drama. But the demand to fulfill a definite function came too soon--before drama had a chance to show what it could do--especially the drama of some communist authors. It was during the crucial years right after the war that Hungarian drama could have found its new content as well as its new form, but because it was not allowed to do so by itself, this opportunity was missed--and it was missed on all fronts.

Why The Doors Were Closing

At the time when the education of a new audience was professed to be a most important goal, fear that there would be no audience for unusually staged plays, and the excuse that audiences would only want to be entertained, resulted in a failure to develop a new audience. It was clearly a failure to trust audiences to "decide for themselves: out of the art and culture of the past and the present what it was that they did or did not need."[44] The conservative attitude of most of the returned emigre playwrights triumphed over innovative ideas by Balázs, Kassák, Déry and Palasovszky. Brecht found the form to suit his content, as did Mayakovszky. Meyerhold and Tairov were able to experiment, at least for a few years, after the Russian Revolution; Hungarian artists,

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[44]See Lukács's remarks on p. 37.

many of whom worked with the Russians, were not given the same chance at home. Others were forgotten, either because they were dead, like Barta and Lékai, or because they showed too much kinship to Brecht, like Remenyik, for example.

With former avant-garde dramatists and artists out of the way, the theatre was left with bourgeois drama and the newly discovered socialist drama which was socialist only in intent, but which did not yet address itself to the problems of the day. Once this question became central: how to treat the day's problems in the proper form, the opportunity to find the appropriate form was missed precisely because those who would have been willing and able to experiment were removed from the scene. The outcome was inevitable: socialist content had to be forced into the only form that the majority of the new, large, but uneducated audiences would easily understand. This available form was the realistic bourgeois drama, which, many believed, once filled with socialist content, would instantly become socialist realistic drama. But the content posed problems as well.

In its fast-paced efforts to rebuild Hungary, the Communist Party looked unfavorably on anything that might slow it down by reflecting on the immediate past in which certain questions could prove delicate for the times. Hungary was liberated by foreign powers, and freedom in 1945 did not come about through a revolution. It may have been a painful phase for communist activities in Hungary, but the

facing of this fact in 1945/46 would have been much better than the suppressing of works of art dealing honestly with the war and that other delicate matter, the Jews. Both problems could have been brought out in the open and a national soul-searching might have revealed then what was to surface through long years of discussions, prolonged to no one's benefit: war and oppression, discrimination and bigotry may reach national proportions, but they are not necessarily the doings of an entire people. This is what some plays by Déry and Balázs dealt with, but these plays have remained invisible in Hungary.[45]

The battle in the press was joined by Lukács, and many saw in him an ally of Háy. Lukács did go as far as to say that the "highest form of realism is socialist realism," but he also stated that ". . .every inflexible, exaggerated and exaggerating application falsifies truth itself."[46] But, more importantly, it seems that no one in cultural policy-making circles bothered to notice either Lukács's question or answer regarding the function of literature and drama in the cultural revolution. "What is this special function?" Lukács asks. He answers simply: "No doubt the same as has always been the special function of literature: the portray-

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[45]Plays by György Rácz and Károly Papp, dealing with Jewish problems have not been shown in Hungary.

[46]György Lukács, "A marxista kritika, feladatai," in Magyar irodalom, magyar kultúra (Budapest: Gondolat, 1970), p. 539.

al of man. The reflection of his new and old, passing and evolving struggle becomes valid in literature only if it is made clear in the inner contradictions of men."[47] (Italics mine.)

Hungarian drama after 1945 was not given a chance to fulfill this "special function." It could not progress at its own pace because it was asked, indeed told, to hop on the speeding train of socialist progress. This train, and drama with it, did stop for the cheering, willing masses, but it failed to slow down for man.

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[47] Ibid., pp. 541-542.

CHAPTER III

ZHDANOV COMES TO HUNGARY

When cultural policy determined that drama must serve the cause of the people on their way to build socialism--and since no socialist plays were yet written in Hungary--theatres sought out plays written earlier that would serve as models for what later might become socialist realistic drama. One such model was provided by Sándor Gergely (1896-1966). Ten years after its premiere in Russia, Gergely's play, Vitézek és hősok (Valiant Soldiers and Heroes)[1] opened at the Downtown Theatre on March 30, 1948. Gergely, himself an emigre after 1919, places an exiled communist, Pál Eszterág, at the center of his plot. The play attempts to show that communists not only survived the crushed Hungarian Soviet Republic, but that they would be instrumental in bringing down the Horthy regime. The dramatic action begins on the day József Kovács, Eszterág's brother-in-law, has finally paid the last installment on his suburban home. With a secure and well-paying job, he can now concentrate on the only thing he lacks for what he

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[1]The play's Moscow opening in 1938 was followed by a tour of many cities in Soviet Union. The play was presented in the Soviet Union under the title My Son.

considers to be the good life: the title vitéz, awarded to decorated soldiers of the First World War whose conduct since 1918 has been beyond reproach. Kovács's day is shattered by a photograph in the morning paper. The police are looking for anyone who can identify the man whose picture is shown in the paper. Kovács recognizes his brother-in-law whom he has not seen or heard from for fifteen years; he has been telling people that Eszterág was dead, almost to the point of believing it himself. In fear of losing his position at work and the chance for the title vitéz, Kovács goes to the police. Eszterág, despite torture and endless interrogation, remains calm and refuses to admit that he is Eszterág. He denies knowing Kovács. Eszterág's old mother, in order to save him, pretends not to recognize her son. Eszterág returns her kindness by refusing to acknowledge her, so that there would be no reprisals once he is dead. With the other prisoners chanting his name, Eszterág goes bravely to his death.

There are two major dramatic possibilities latent in this play. One is the drama of Kovács as representative of the Horthy era's "good Hungarian" whose material values override human considerations, and through whose character the inevitable fall of the bourgeoisie could be depicted. The other is Eszterág's drama, the communist, now forced underground, who with his comrades would bring about the necessary change, a new society. Had there been a conflict between Kovács and Eszterág both possibilities might have

been realized. As the play stands, (so intent on proving who the real hero is), despite some moving scenes and occasional lively dialogue, we are left with two thinly drawn characters about whom we must assume a great deal more than we can believe. Kovács who is ready to turn in his brother-in-law to prove himself upright and honorable, is capable, we assume, of anything; and Eszterág who, in less than seventy lines throughout the play, shows such an unbending, intransigent attitude that we must assume that he would go against a world of police and be prepared to die a hundred deaths.

The Budapest premiere of Valiant Soldiers and Heroes was a success, and the press hailed it, as it did for a long time afterwards, as the true beginning of the new drama in Hungary. Far more important than its success, the play's real accomplishment lay in having become a model, at least in some respects, for many plays that followed it.

Socialist realist drama has a few indispensible components. One of these is the presence of the "positive hero." In Gergely's play, Pál Eszterág--relentless in his silence, noble in his carriage--dies for what he believes in. No cause could ask for a better leader or fighter than Eszterág, but it is doubtful that an audience can identify and love a character like that. If he does not generate love, he can certainly be admired--audiences do not have to know a hero in depth to admire him. In later years volumes would be written, in all socialist countries, regarding the figure of the positive hero, but at this time, in 1948, in

Hungary, this intransigent, tight-lipped hero sufficed.

It would be hard to confirm or to deny the claim made by the Hungarian dramaturg, Olga Siklós, that "Pál Eszterág was the brainchild of the literary debates that took place in the Soviet Union in the late 1930's,"[2] but it is a fact that Gergely wrote the play in the Soviet Union and it was successful there at the time when the guidelines regarding socialist realism, as spelled out by Andrei Zhdanov, were strictly adhered to. It is also a fact that Gergely's play did become a model which, along with other models, created the basis for all socialist realist drama in Hungary for years to come. The appearance of this drama was greatly facilitated, besides the necessary models, by two other events: the publication of some of Zhdanov's works in Hungarian, and the nationalization of all theatres, both in 1949.

Socialist realism, as described by Zhdanov at the 1934 first Congress of Writers, was not offered as a concept of art or literature but rather as a set of rules. Emphasis was on realism as a movement opposed to other, modern movements, one that would depict reality in its revolutionary development. Writers were called upon to join this movement. Modern art, or anything not under the heading "realism" was rejected as "formalist." It was the duty of artists and

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[2]Olga Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja 1945-1957 (Budapest: Magvető, 1970), p. 205.

writers to fight against this formalism and concentrate on the task of promoting "the ideological transformation and education [of the public] in the spirit of socialism."[3] In later years Zhdanov complained that too much attention was paid to "so called psychological dramas," and strongly urged the portrayal of the "positive hero."[4]

After World War II, Zhdanov looked past the borders of the Soviet Union and came to the conclusion that Soviet literature had an international mission: "It is natural that our literature, which reflects a system superior to bourgeois-democratic systems, and a culture far superior to any bourgeois culture, has a right to instruct others in mankind's new morality. . ."[5] (Italics mine.)

Zhdanov was already dead when some of his works appeared in Hungary in 1949, but his theories, rules and admonitions were made available, in the press, not only to people in the arts, but to the general public as well. While his theories were quickly becoming the guiding force behind cultural policies, Hungarian theatres undertook the

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[3]Francois de Liencourt, "The Repertory of the Fifties," Survey, Journal of Soviet and East European Studies, January 1963, p. 58.

[4]Ibid., p. 59.

[5]A. Zsdanov, "Beszámoló a 'Zvezda' és a 'Leningrád' cimű folyóiratokról 1946," in Béla Köpeczi, ed., A szocialista realizmus II (Budapest: Gondolat, 1970), p. 302.

production of many Soviet plays, mostly those adhering to Zhdanov's tenets. Only six western plays were shown in the five seasons following nationalization, but Hungarian audiences saw no less than sixty-six new Soviet plays besides thirteen classical Russian dramas.[6]

Zhdanov arrived at the time when the days of private theatres were over, making the implementation of his theories, and their Hungarian counterparts, rather easy. On August 1, 1949 all of Hungary's theatres were nationalized.

Theatre Belongs To The People?

As part of nationalization, some new theatres were created, others closed down. At the completion of the process Budapest had seven theatres for the drama, one for musicals (Operetta Theatre); the Opera and Erkel Theatre played operas and ballet. Along with government control came definite program policies. The National Theatre continued to play classics of the world and Hungarian repertory. Its studio, the Hungarian Theatre, was to present new works. The Downtown Theatre would primarily be a home for new Hungarian drama, while the Madách Theatre was to popularize new Soviet plays. Modeled after Soviet theatres (Komsomol and Pionir), two new houses, the Ifjusági and Úttörő (Young

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[6] Ágnes Alpár and Károly Szakáts, eds., A magyar színházak műsora 1949-1969 (Budapest: Magyar Színházi Intézet, 1970). This work lists every opening in Hungary between 1949 and 1969; its Appendix does the same for the years 1945 to 1949.

People's, Pioneer) theatres were opened.[7] Cabarets were closed. A last effort, the Kamara Varieté, with a very modified program, managed to survive for a couple of years when it, too, was closed down. In late 1951, also on Soviet models, the Vidám Szinpad (Gaiety Stage) opened with the policy of becoming a political cabaret.[8]

Six theatres began operations in provincial towns, each theatre touring neighboring areas. In two years' time the National Village Theatre, later Déryné Theatre, was organized whose eight to ten companies were to reach areas out of the sphere of provincial theatres.[9]

Theatres without financial problems, and with a sufficient number of companies to bring theatre to the remotest corners of the country were certainly great accomplishments. Actors no longer had to worry about their jobs, and employment for all theatre workers had become more secure than ever before. Earlier audience-development programs of the National and Madách Theatres were made part of each theatre's program policy. Tickets were not only subsidized--sold at a fraction of their former price--but often whole performances were "sold out" to a single institution, factory, village or government office. In a sense theatres fulfilled a social function: theatre-going was another

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[7]Ferenc Hont, ed., Magyar Szinháztörténet (Budapest: Gondolat, 1962), p. 283.

[8]Ján L. Kalina, A kabaré története (Budapest: Gondolat, 1968), p. 191.

[9]Hont., p. 283.

activity done by a group that also worked together.

Audiences that worked together, prepared to go to the theatre together, and finally sat in the house together, ought to, according to the new cultural policy, see and hear about problems that concerned them all. The arbiters of programs wanted plays that dealt with the day's problems in a fashion that would be easily understood by all. Once the auditorium was secure, the stage had to provide the right plays, and provide them fast.

Under communist leadership, Hungary was now declared a country that belonged to peasants and workers. It was their problems that drama was to reflect. At the time of nationalization of theatres, industrial workers were already in their rightful place: in the factories and shops that belonged to them; their major problems centered around not the acquisition of the means of production but ways to increase production. With the first five-year plan underway, (began in January 1950), the problem of agriculture was most pressing. What the Communist Party accomplished with its land reform in 1945 no longer sufficed in the country's new economic goals. A land divided into small, individual properties could not yield, the Party pointed out, the same results collective farms would--as the Soviet example showed. The logical solution, for the government, was to encourage the formation of collective farms. Cultural policy demanded that dramas pointing to the benefits of collectivization be produced.

In late 1948, even before nationalization, the Downtown Theatre, already working with high government subsidies, produced Éva Mándi's drama Vetés (Sowing, December 1). The play is set at the time of the land reform, and since in 1948 collectivization was not yet an urgent issue, Mándi's play showed only the difficult situation peasants with newly acquired land had to face. However, just as Gergely's play earlier in the same season, Sowing presented a central figure that would provide a model for positive heroes. In Mándi's play this hero is shown holding on to his land rather than giving in to the lures of reactionary forces--the kulak, the clergy and former bureaucrats--who are only outlined in this play but who would soon become indispensible stock characters in other plays.

The political significance and economic importance of the country's agriculture placed peasant dramas at the center of theatrical cultural policy. Models, such as Sowing were a beginning, the needed impetus for truly workable models was given by the nationalization of theatres when Party functionaries, working very closely with managers, directors and dramaturgs, saw to it that the most updated demand of current politics was met in the theatre. This arrangement was not unlike the establishment of the office of the zavlit, "deputy artistic manager in charge of literature," in the Soviet Union.[10] Given all the demands

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[10]Francois de Liencourt, "The Repertory of the Fifties," Survey, January 1963, p. 59.

placed on the dramatist, it is no wonder that the bulk of plays produced after the nationalization of theatres, for about half a decade, have been labeled "schematic," the products of a political-artistic assembly line. An important reference work on the drama, published in 1964, describes cultural policies of the late 1940's and early 1950's as one that bound and gagged artistic creation with "rules and regulations that cannot be found even during the most highly regulated and dogmatic era: the time of French classicism."[11] The exceptions among the dramatic output of these years are few, usually written by a major author. On the whole, schematic plays were written by young, relatively inexperienced playwrights and by a very small number of prominent authors who, like Hay, for political reasons chose to meet party demands on the stage. Writers, dubbed the "engineers of the soul" by Zhdanov, were given requests and deadlines; members of the Party, makers of cultural policy sat back to wait for the marvelous merchandise to be delivered. It was soon obvious, but not admitted, that quality was lacking in the new products, and playwrights had to go to great lengths to provide the right content packaged in the right form. But they did provide it--their labor giving birth to a new dramatic genre.

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[11] Géza Hegedüs and Judit Kónya, A magyar dráma útja, p. 217.

Well-Made Melodrama Not Too Well Made; Or The Case Of Dramatized Directives

Mihaly Földes's first play, Mélyszántás (The Plough Cuts Deep, József Katona Theatre in Kecskemét, March 15, 1950), accomplished, in some fashion, both of its goals: it showed how a semiliterate, barefooted peasant grew up to be a man in socialist Hungary, and how peasants with small farms found happiness on the collective farm. Jóska Bak, subservient and practically a slave to a kulak, becomes a constructive member of a collective, and in the third act humiliates the kulak who ill-treated him in the first. What convinced Bak to become a tractor driver in the collective was a simple statement by the man in charge of tractors that the Party wanted him to be a tractor driver. It was not difficult to detect in the play some allusions to the statements made in a speech by Rákosi in 1948 in which he called on collective farms to employ landless peasants to prevent the exploitation of the poor by the kulaks who, besides "skinning them alive, deride and make fun of them."[12]

The peasant of modest means in this play is first the victim of the machinations of a kulak who, among other things, poisoned some of the peasant's animals. When one of his sons leaves him, the peasant remains completely with-

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[12]Speech made by Mátyás Rákosi on August 20, 1948 at Kecskemét, quoted in Olga Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja 1945-1957 (Budapest: Magvető, 1970), p. 259.

out help, and only the tractors of the collective rescue him from ruin.

Rákosi made another speech in January 1950 in which he emphasized the need to employ women on collective farms. Within sixteen months at least three plays dealt with women who functioned just as well, if not better, than men on the collective farm.[13]

With very little variation, most peasant dramas were dramatizations of some event extolling the virtues of the collective farm. Most plots centered around the so called "middle-peasant" who, after weighing the pros and cons of the crucial step he is about to take, joins the collective. (In some cases he returns to the collective having left it before the dramatic action began.) Not only was there nothing new in each successive play, but the characters, or rather types, hardly varied at all. These were the same types that practically the entire country was familiar with through extensive political seminars, the press and radio. The party secretary of the collective, always a staunch, upright man, the conniving kulak, the vacillating, but good-hearted "middle peasant," etc., paraded about the stage--positive and negative camps neatly divided, all of them about as lively as their counterparts in daily editorials. There was never any doubt as to the outcome of any of these

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[13] Olga Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja 1945-1957, p. 261.

plays. The vacillating "middle-peasant" always joins the collective, and with that step the world is set aright: the whole village (in most plays) turns automatically socialist.

Calculated to illustrate relevant problems of the day, most peasant dramas presented, beside the main conflict of "to-join-or-not-to-join-the-collective," a long list of issues and problems, prepared them with the patient craft of the well-made play, and saw to it that every single issue received a satisfactory answer by the time the vacillating "middle peasant" decided to throw his lot in with the collective. Obligatory scenes were indeed obligatory and usually climaxed in an irresistible manifestation of the correct Party line; in the most blatant cases this was a quote from an important speech, a slogan or often just the mentioning of Rákosi's name. Dramatic technique of these plays was hardly more than a set of means designed to influence audiences, which was best achieved by a rather rhetorical line of dialogue. While the characters did not always play by the rules--especially the villainous kulak--the "conflict" strongly resembled the game-like conflict of the well-made play. In the world of these plays monopathic characters whose singleness of feeling, for or against the Party, gave the impression of wholeness were engaged in a pseudo-struggle in which the issue was not what Robert Heilman, in discussing melodrama, called the

"reordering of the self, but the reordering of one's relation with others."[14]

Production, Production, Production...

The vacillating "middle-peasant" had to be persuaded to join the collective; once he did, all problems raised in the play--therefore in the countryside--were solved. The industrial worker, by 1949, was already working in the factory that was supposed to be his. His life, too, had to be represented on the stage. His life was work, his milieu the factory. His fight for socialist Hungary was fought on two fronts: against reactionary forces still present--usually lurking--in society; and for a better, higher achievement in his daily work for the greater achievement of a three or five-year plan. A simple substitution of the major figures in a peasant play might provide the characters for a play dealing with workers and production: instead of the party functionary in the collective, the party functionary in the factory; instead of the villainous kulak, the reactionary engineer; assorted members, now in overalls and suits, of the opposing camps. For the goal--one could hardly speak of a conflict--replace the joining of the collective with innovations in work processes to increase production; for

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[14]Robert Bechtold Heilman, Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1965), pp. 85-86.

dangers that threaten the achievement of the goal substitute sabotage or carelessness for the kulak's attempt to poison wells and animals; include the right amount of sloganeering, Party lingo, and the most relevant ingredients are all there for creating an industrial-production drama. This, of course, is somewhat of an oversimplification, but not entirely without foundation.

Éva Mándi who opened the series of peasant dramas with her Sowing at the end of 1948, less than a year later reappeared with a play that was to become a model for production plays: drama dealing with workers in factories and shops. Mándi's Hétköznapok hősei (Weekday Heroes, Downtown Theatre, November 17, 1949), arrived on the Hungarian stage without a legacy or tradition; it was the result of Party demands for production plays. It presented three major problems: how to increase a particular factory's (a steel mill) production by five tons; how women can hold their own alongside of men, and how to replace dedicated and efficient workers--sent to other factories to set examples there--without causing a slow-down in production. It would be hard to find anything resembling a conflict, let alone excitement in this play. This deficiency was evident from the start and writers were encouraged to visit factories and gain insight into the life of workers. What authors could do during a brief visit, or even several visits, was, at best, to become familiar with some production technique or process, and that is exactly what showed up on the stage. The life

of the worker was never really seen, the man behind the work-bench remained anonymous, only the sign above his bench--showing how far above the required norm he was doing his job--was clearly visible. The achievements of workers were no more the achievements of individuals than the Party was an individual. At the height of the "personality cult" the only names of individuals that rose above the masses were those of Rákosi and Stalin. The climax of one production play (Black Gold) showed an oil well finally reach oil on Stalin's birthday. Gyula Háy's Az élet hídja (The Bridge of Life, National Theatre, February 13, 1951), was no exception among production plays: his deus ex machina was a combined glorification of Hungarian and Russian personality cults. The play is worth mentioning only to show that Party loyalty at times demanded a heavy price.

Háy was severely criticised at the first Theatre Conference held at the end of 1950, and, although he offered self-criticism, the Conference was not quite satisfied. The Bridge of Life was Háy's weightier answer, and the reward followed promptly: he was awarded the Kossuth Prize, Hungary's highest honor given to an artist.[15]

Just before Budapest was liberated, all bridges between Buda and Pest were blown up by the retreating Germans. With extreme effort by Hungarian workers and with some help

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[15]Olga Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja, p. 302.

from Russian soldiers, the Kossuth Bridge was in operation in six months--a remarkable achievement. Háy chose this event for the core of his play that was complete with a positive worker-hero, a goal to be accomplished, an array of engineers with varying attitudes toward socialism, and an assortment of reactionary figures--so many functions, not a single character. Just before the completion of the bridge, ice rushing downstream on the Danube threatens the construction. At the crucial moment the telephone rings and it is none other than Rákosi himself who tells the misty-eyed positive hero that a Russian icebreaker is on its way to help. Háy's play was officially declared the new model for socialist realist drama.[16] Within a year Háy was first to fulfill Party demands in yet another politically vital area.

The War Of Peace Must Be Won
The End Of A Career

The Party maintained that American imperialists and Wall Street war mongers would eventually destroy the world if the forces of peace were not on their guard. Statements to this effect could be read in the press, heard on the radio, and the Party wanted people to see them dramatized on the stage. Háy's Erő (Power, József Katona Theatre, Febru-

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[16]Critic Miklós Molnár wrote in his review: "The Bridge of Life is the greatest achievement of Háy's career of two decades as a writer. . . His art did not become shallow by writing about life today, rather it has deepened. His hero is no longer the adventurer emperor, or women poisoning their husbands. . .but a Hungarian worker. . ." (Miklós Molnár's review in Irodalmi újság, 1 March, 1951, p. 4).

ary 25, 1952), was actually a representative of a subcategory of dramas in the fight for peace: atomic energy problems. The thrust of the play was simply that atomic energy should be used for peaceful purposes, but in the United States scientists had no chance to experiment for peace since all efforts were directed toward military goals. Háy told the story through the experiences of a Hungarian scientist lured to the United States. Háy took care to present loyal Party members, conscientious as well as careerist scientists, decadent Americans and other characters appropriate to the day's headlines. He was praised for the choice of his subject, but his writing, the quality of construction--particularly the positive side's weakness when compared to the negative one--came in for strong criticism.[17] Concocting, rather than creating plays, the strain of having to produce on demand was bound to show, and it soon seemed that Háy had reached his limit.

Since the production of Power, Háy's plays have been invisible in Hungary. The reason for this, at least in part, is exactly the same as the reason was for their becoming visible in 1945; their author's artistic and

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[17]Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja, p. 325.

political credentials.[18] Háy was jailed for his activities in the 1956 uprising, and his plays no longer met the requirements of cultural policies.

Háy's career must be looked at in a light that differentiates between his works written at home and those written in exile--including exile inside Hungary. For fifteen years a successful author, produced all over Europe, Háy returned to Hungary after World War II and continued his success--on the strength of his plays written in exile. Practically all of Háy's plays have themes relevant to Hungary. The success of his pre-1945 plays indicate that they were good plays, non-Hungarian audiences applauded them. Once at home, living with the problems he was writing about, a change seemed to have occurred in Hay's perceptions which, of course, was reflected in his writing.

Always fond of building his plays around actual events, usually out of newspaper reports, Háy went about dramatizing specific problems of building socialism in Hungary. These plays fall into two groups. The early ones, like The Bridge of Life and Power were produced. Two later

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[18]Hay's autobiography, published in Germany, begins with the following two short paragraphs: "An einem Sommertag 1934 starb mein Vater. Ich konnte ihn nicht zum Grab geleiten, weil ich in Wien im Gefängnis sass. Als gefährlicher Kommunist. An einem Herbsttag 1958 starb meine Mutter. Ich konnte nicht zu ihrem Begräbnis gehen, weil ich in Budapest im Kerker sass. Als gefährlicher Antikommunist." (Julius Hay, Geboren 1900; Erinnerungen [Reinbek bei Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag GmbH, 1971], p. 11).

plays, Három nehéz nap (Three Difficult Days, 1955), and Varró Gáspár igazsága (The Truth of Gáspár Varró, 1954-55), have not been produced, although the latter was in rehearsals just before the outbreak of the uprising in October 1956.[19] All of these plays address themselves to life in socialist Hungary, but while the ones in the first group were relentlessly optimistic, and exulted in achievements to the exclusion of anything else, the second group concentrated only on mistakes, negative aspects of socialist administration, in dark pessimistic tones. The Hungarian critic Béla Osváth observed that "the distance from which emigrant writers view their homeland provides a correct perspective, assures, in a certain sense, a better overview. But the distance makes it impossible for the author to directly experience, and not just observe, reality at home; and this contradiction is noticeable in the dramatic works of emigrant authors."[20] Háy did need this distance. He did have it before World War II, and, in a different way he has had it since 1957 when he was jailed in his native country. His play Mohács (1958-60), written in jail, matches God, Emperor, Peasant in scope and execution: A ló

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[19]Photographs taken at rehearsals of The Truth of Gáspár Varró may be seen at the Hungarian Theatre Institute in Budapest.

[20]Béla Osváth, Türelmetlen dramaturgia (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1965), p. 182.

(The Horse, 1960-61), a satire dealing with Caligula's famous horse made consul, is among Háy's best. Both plays have been successfully staged in Switzerland and England.[21] Háy has written plays since he left Hungary, and at this time he is in a similar situation he was in thirty-five years ago: well-known abroad, unproduced at home. It seems rather unfortunate that of the plays he has written in the last three decades only the weaker ones were shown in Hungary right after the war. During that period however, Háy was a voice to be reckoned with not only on the stage and at the Academy of Performing Arts where he taught, but through his non-dramatic writings concerning the drama and theatre. Ironically, his pamphlets, articles and reviews may have had a stronger impact than his plays on the development of post-World War II Hungarian drama.

Theatre For Young People

Háy may have been out of the fight, but the battle for peace, often called the "peace offensive," continued.

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[21] Mohács was shown in Luzern, Switzerland in 1970, under the title Die Bastion. One reviewer did not care for the play that, he thought, was "philosophizing everything to death." (Unsigned review in Die Bühne, November 1970, p. 24). Another reviewer felt that the play was excellent, the production good. He had some objections to the play's length, (three hours). (Theater Rundschau, December 1970). Reviews of The Horse's production in England appeared in Theatre World (December 1965), The Stage (November 18, 1965), the Observer (November 14, 1965) and in The London Times on November 11, 1965. The Times' reviewer wrote: "Oxford University's Experimental Theatre Club must be thanked for introducing a major dramatist and a first-rate play to English audiences." (The play was translated into English by Háy's son, Peter.)

Themes considered were the question of atomic power and its use, the Korean War, espionage and morality in America, providing material for a number of plays. In an effort to reach every segment of the population, the Party called on the theatre to pay special attention to the instruction and education of school-age children and young people in their teens.

Not having a native tradition in theatre exclusively for children and young people--there had been children's shows, but not theatres--the Party's demand was met first by showing imported plays, mostly from the Soviet Union, at the newly established Pioneer and Young People's Theatre. On the whole, plays written for these two theatres served as an extension of pedagogical methods found in schools, and entertainment was subordinated to instruction and dramatized moralizing. Hoping to interest children with plays about children and young performers on the stage, dramas on pioneer[22] themes were produced. But these plays were concerned with problems no different from the problems of adults, and called on children to think exactly like adults, to cope with the question of Party loyalty, to exercise criticism, and especially self-criticism, in the same way it was demanded of their parents in everyday life.

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[22]Pre-high school children were organized in the Pioneer movement whose activities resembled those of the Boy, or Girl Scouts in the Western world, but whose orientation was political.

Familiarizing children with the political issues of the day, preparing them for adult life, was done through presenting models to follow and models to condemn. As is often the case, plays built on fairy tales fared best; authorities everywhere seem to be slowest in realizing what a fairy tale may be truly all about. In Tamás Török's Eltüsszentett birodalom (The Sneezed-Away Realm, Studio of the Young People's Theatre, May 15, 1953), children may have seen nothing more than the exciting story of a tyrant king in battle with his oppressed subjects, but the adults accompanying them could not have failed to detect allusions directed at the era and the object of the "personality cult."[23]

Hungarian history offered a number of heroes whose portrayal on the stage met with official approval. These plays were dramatizations of events already familiar to children from their textbooks--and the plays went no further than the textbooks. History plays, not only those written for children, generally lacked the probing of events as they may have been revealed in the action of some hero. Heroes in these plays--regardless of the time they lived in--were presented as positive: they were for the people, all of the people, and against some foreign rule or ruler. Before 1949, a play like The Peacock Has Alighted[24] was wel-

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[23]Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja, p. 342.

[24]See above, p. 83.

comed, even with its sympathetic attitude toward America, because it treated favorably the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919.

During the years of the "personality cult" the Republic constituted one of the touchiest subjects because of the person of Rákosi. The true leader and organizer of the Party in the Republic, Béla Kún, was completely discredited, and Rákosi's role magnified out of proportion. It followed then, that a play dealing with the Hungarian Soviet Republic would have to comply with the views of the Rákosi regime. This is exactly what happened to an otherwise well constructed and moving play, Kálmán Sándor's A harag napja (The Day of Wrath, Theatre of the Hungarian People's Army, May 1, 1952) in which communal efforts and the true struggle of the Party were underplayed to imply that the achievement of the Republic was directly proportionate to Rákosi's presence and participation in it.

Drama's reaction to headlines, Party policies and directives was becoming more and more sensitive and seismographic. Theatres were presenting a kind of mystery play series to illustrate dictums which appeared in the sacred instructions called cultural policy. But just as closely as the Party's lead was followed, so were political changes and reorganizations registered; and the speed with which some authors reacted when these changes occurred suggests that they may have been standing behind the door, pens poised, waiting for the slightest opening.

Laughter Sets Its Foot In The Door

It seemed that the iron grip of Rákosi and his followers was about to be pried loose in 1953. At the June 27-28 meeting of the Hungarian Workers Party's Central Committee grave mistakes regarding the unrealistic goals of the first five-year plan were admitted. Imre Nagy was appointed Head of State, and generally there was a small but noticeable change in the air, a change that lasted until Nagy's removal in March 1955.[25] No sooner was the June 1953 Central Committee meeting concluded than several plays went into rehearsal. As a result, the 1953/54 season offered something different from the fare seen in the previous four seasons. The greatest novelty was laughter. Some of it was caused by weak, half-hearted comedies, poking good-natured fun at some aspects of socialist life that had been praised, up to then, by peasant and production dramas. It was almost as if these comedies had addressed themselves not so much to life itself, but to the lifeless plays that had preceded them.

It was left to that age-old gadfly of the arts, satire, to ferret out some of the real problems, and, by showing them, evoke laughter that clears not only the lungs, but one's vision as well. Tibor Déry was among the first to appear with a play that forced even some critics to laugh.

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[25]Péter Gunst, ed., Történelmi kronológia (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1970), pp. 393-394.

Déry writes best about what irks him. There must have been many things that irked him during the Rákosi years, too many things to protest against, criticise and condemn. Déry selected one phenomenon, one character, one type, as his target whom he attacked with a verbal barrage which few playwrights could match. Language is particularly important in this play, A talpsimogató (The Sycophant, József Katona Theatre, May 29, 1954), because language is the weapon as well as the target. The author calls The Sycophant a "student prank in one act." The plot is truly a prank. At a university an impressionable young girl wants to marry a fellow student, Elemér Okos (Alec Smart). Members of the study group to which both the girl and Alec belong, want to show the girl, Kati, what they already know: that Smart is a most undesirable character; in Dery's words he is

> . . .a more dangerous disease than cholera, than cancer. . .because not the patient but his environment dies of it. . .whoever catches it will change completely: the honest will turn liar. . .the brave cowardly. . .a lamb in front, a wolf in the rear. . .when you see him bow to his boss his ass draws O-s in the air and his mind is on how to put this O 'round his boss's neck. . .he has all the answers, he agrees with every authority...[26]

Audiences had little trouble recognizing this character; he was everywhere, at universities as well as in factories, offices, villages and collectives. In truth, he was no

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[26]Tibor Déry, A talpsimogató, in Az óriáscsecsemő (Budapest: Magvető, 1967), pp. 357-358.

character at all, but a product--a strange being living on air that was filled with slogans, headlines, directives, plans and more plans for building socialism.

Organization was perhaps the most distinguishing mark of the Rákosi years. The country belonged to the people and therefore people had to be made aware of the country's needs, problems and political direction. Everyone had to participate in running the country, a task which, in fact, meant nothing more than discussing the issues and then underwriting the decisions made by the Party. Workdays began not with work but with meetings, in smaller or larger groups, gathered to discuss the state of the country and the world as it appeared in the morning paper, Szabad Nép (Free People) --especially in its editorial. By rotating the discussion leader, everyone had, or had to have, a turn in interpreting Party policy, according to the newspaper. Meetings were also called during the day, usually at lunch hour or after work, to acquaint people with something particularly important, such as news of great accomplishments of a factory, school or village, or to take a solidarity vote on international issues, such as the jailing of a communist leader in, say, Italy or France. Often on week-ends, voluntary work on major national projects was requested and large groups from factories, offices, or from a city block spent their day of

rest laying bricks or picking apples.[27] Sports and amateur entertainment groups were organized in most factories, shops and collectives. Organization was done in compliance with the needs of the Party, and therefore--according to the Party--with the needs of the people. And organization was done in the Party's language. Through the media of radio, and especially newspapers, this language permeated the air, slowly creeping into schools, factories, villages, everywhere. It was a highly adaptable language; it could be used to "relate" to any issue. And this was very important since there was very little the average Hungarian student, peasant or worker could do about a given issue, but he could have the right attitude toward it, "relate to it" in the appropriate phraseology. While this language was bound to affect everyone--few people could avoid reading newspapers or listening to the radio, least of all attending meetings--it was also inevitable that some would turn it into an effective means of securing jobs, getting ahead, or use it to cover up some disagreement with, or even ignorance of, an issue under discussion.

Alec Smart, the "hero" of Déry's The Sycophant, has turned this language into a precision instrument that, almost automatically, would provide the right answer in any situa-

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[27] I myself put in at least three Sundays' work on the first "socialist city" of Hungary: Sztálinváros (Stalin City), formerly, and now once again, called Dunapentele.

tion. He never reveals what he knows, but what he ought to know about a given subject; he does not talk to people, especially to his superiors, but tells them what they want to hear--or what his finely tuned antennae suggest they want to hear. Déry chose an igenious prank to expose Smart. One of the students, Rendes (Nice) is disguised as a professor and is introduced as the invited guest and moderator of a literary conference on the major Hungarian poet, Attila József. When, as anticipated, Smart requests to be heard, he speaks not about poetry, but things he considers others to consider to be important about the poet:

SMART Yes, comrade Professor, Attila József came from the people. I should like to emphasize that even with his birth he had managed to achieve one of the fundamental goals of our Party: peasant-worker solidarity. His father was a proletarian, his mother a child of poor, working peasants... I should like to underline the fact that at the moment of his birth Attila József was prepared to follow the Party's guidelines.

NICE What do you mean? Only at the moment of his birth? Not before?

. . . . . .

SMART (Enthusiastic) Very correctly, comrade Professor, you have carried the question further. I'd like to point out that in fact even in that certain condition, when his proletarian father and his poor-peasant mother fell in love, they showed their child the way. . .

NICE (Nods twice)

SMART . . . prepared him for the struggle. . .

NICE (Nods)

SMART . . .emphasizing the leadership role of the workers. . .

NICE (Nods)

SMART . . .and dealt the enemy a major blow!. . .

. . . . . .

I should like to mention here that, with regards to the poet's parents, literary history has dealt, in any decisive fashion, only with the mother. It is a regrettable phenomenon that the father has a rather narrow [political] profile, which research has not yet adequately explored. Attila József's father was a soap-boiler, a stalwart laborer, a heroic son of the Hungarian proletariate. Now then, what were the perspectives of soap-boiling in the Hungary of 1905?. . .[28]

The prank works, Smart is exposed for what he is. We find out also--with the help of a disguised girl whom Smart takes to be a relative of his--that Smart lied about his own origins: instead of a proletarian family, he comes from an aristocratic background.

Audiences laughed at Smart. They may never have met a character exactly like him, but they recognized him to be the essence of all glib smart alecks that they did meet. As the laughter slowly subsides, Déry also indicates that, although Smart is ejected from his immediate surroundings, the study group, (and he is ejected by a concerted effort of the group), Alec Smart and others like him did not completely

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[28]Déry, A talpsimogató, in Az óriáscsecsemő, pp. 378-380.

disappear: as the characters are saying good-bye to the audience, Smart keeps poking his head through the curtain.

On the same bill with Dery's play was a one-acter by Ernő Urbán (1918-). Earlier in the season, in a full-length play, Uborkafa (Cucumber Tree, National Theatre, November 25, 1953), Urbán attempted to paint a comprehensive picture of a system carried away in the wrong direction by those taking advantage of it. Urbán showed this system in operation with all the attendant institutions and characters associated with the years of the "personality cult;" little and big bosses, bureaucrats and sycophants, positive and not-so positive heroes and heroines. Urbán's canvas was much larger than Déry's, allowing for a great number of shortcomings of the Rákosi years to march past the audience. Déry's play, a caricature, with its relentless concentration on one product of the same system, had a sharper focus. Cucumber Tree, less inventive in language and stagecraft, gave audiences more of the recognizable types of the early 1950's. Both plays came at the time when political doors opened a crack and a sigh of relief in people's homes could be turned into laughter on the stage.

Behind The Scenes

Neither Déry nor Urbán attacked the system of socialism. Their fire was aimed at those bent on making the system work only for themselves. Urbán showed that the subordination

of the many below allowed for great liberties for the few above. Urbán had first-hand experience in working with the few above--in the theatre.

His first play, Gál Anna diadala (The Triumph of Anna Gál, Gaiety Stage, April 4, 1951), a comedy, was among the most "schematic" plays. (The play's climax: Rákosi shakes hands with the heroine.) Urbán's second play, Tűzkeresztség (Baptism by Fire, National Theatre, November 21, 1951), was hailed as "the best Hungarian drama since the [country's] liberation,"[29] and the movie based on it won the Labor Prize at the 1952 Karlovy Vary Film Festival. This play was different from other peasant plays. It had two positive heroes: the head of a collective farm and a former landed peasant who joins the collective. An interesting conflict is suggested--found elsewhere in drama and literature: debating who has more right to an established system, those who establish it, or those who join it once the system proves to be a viable one. But in Urbán's play the emphasis was shifted to the machinations of a kulak woman, and it is her disrupting efforts, rather than the differences between old and new members of the collective, that must be overcome. We may never know what the play was like in its original form[30] --whether a different conflict was developed--but we may

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[29]Márton Horváth's review in Szabad Nép, 27 November, 1951, p. 7.

[30]I failed to locate any early manuscripts of this play, and was told at the Hungarian Theatre Institute that only final versions, or versions that were performed would be preserved.

glance at the way it was helped into its final shape. A twelve page dramaturgical report by András Benedek reveals, in some detail, this process; and sheds some light on how theatres, at least one theatre, helped authors stage their plays. The following are excerpts from Benedek's report:

> The National Theatre began its dramaturgical work on Baptism by Fire in the spring of 1951. Along with other authors, Urbán was requested to write plays, and shortly after this request Urbán submitted his first draft. . .This [version] was thoroughly discussed with the participation of the management and the dramaturgy department, after which the author got right down to work, receiving help all along from director Tamás Major. Urbán was also writing a screenplay based on the same theme. The screenplay was examined by Pudovkin who happened to be in Hungary at the time. Of [Pudovkin's] many excellent observations one was particularly important. . .every character is well conceived, based on accurate observation. . .except the idiot, Miska. The author must not have met such a character, because in reality, there is no such character. . .
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> . . . . . .
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> When the author read the play, the [National Theatre's] Company, independently from Pudovkin's observation, also objected to Miska's character. The reading was followed by a meaningful debate, and by the following day, when the play was debated before the Dramaturgical Council, the author had already decided to make several substantial changes.
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> . . . . . .
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> On the whole, the next-to-the-last version was well received by the Dramaturgical Council. . .but there were still some mistakes, among the few small ones, three important ones: 1. Of the play's two lines of action, the positive characters' line is dramatically less weighty and less interesting than that of the enemy's, 2. The protagonist's character is uncertain at several places, 3. Although the enemy [the kulak woman] receives her just punish-

> ment, her husband who is even more contemptible than she is, comes out a winner.
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> . . . . . .
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> In the past we have used the method of submitting, in writing, to the author, all our requests and objections to be considered in preparing the final version [of a play]. We still believe this to be an open and honest method, but in practice it has not worked. . . One author complained that the dramaturgical department was writing his play--which of course was not the case at all. Another author complied, willy-nilly, with requests for changes--then blamed the dramaturgs for the play's shortcomings. And there was an author who reworked his play far beyond our request, correcting nonexistent mistakes--filling the play with new ones.[31]

It is not very likely that the opinion of a Russian film director was asked about every Hungarian play, or that long, dramaturgical help was given to each submitted play. Urbán's example was cited only to establish the fact that theatre managements did screen and consider plays at least as much for their political as for their artistic value.[32]

Notable Exceptions

The dramaturgical report on Urbán's play does not mention how many drafts of Baptism by Fire were submitted all together, or how many pages were written and rewritten before

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[31] András Benedek, "Tűzkeresztség; dramaturgiai beszámoló Urbán Ernő szinmüvéről," Unpublished dramaturgical report. pp. 2-9.

[32] That Urbán did not care for the methods used by the Rákosi regime's tampering with the life of the people, was made clear in his play, Cucumber Tree. It would be hard to believe that he cared for any method used to tamper with his plays.

production. A director and dramaturg of the Madách Theatre supplies exact figures as he recalls the production of a play by an important novelist and short-story writer, Imre Sarkadi (1941-1961). It took 900 pages to produce the 100 pages that made up Út a tanyákról (The Road From The Farms, Madách Theatre, February 9, 1952).[33] This was Sarkadi's first play. His powerful language and some highly charged scenes hinted at a great dramatic promise in the author, but the play, when compared with other "schematic" peasant dramas, was hardly an exceptional one. His second play, Szeptember (Madách Theatre, December 23, 1955), was free of clichés, slogans and villainous kulaks. Its positive hero was more human than just positive, and despite the rural locale, the play was not a peasant drama, but rather one with universal implications regarding man's adaptability to a changing environment.

On a piece of land so barren only geese could graze on it, István Sipos started a farm. With steadfast labor during fifty years, he and his wife made the land yield and provide well for them. Their four children, three boys and a girl, grew up on the farm and Sipos managed to send all three boys through school. As the play opens, Paul, the youngest son, is expected home. He has completed his studies

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[33]István Horvai, "Sarkadi Imre drámai nyelve," Szinházművészet, March 1966, pp. 44-52.

at the Agricultural University. As a trained agronomist, he is to take over the management of a nearby state farm, adjoining the local collective farm. No one has asked old Sipos to join the collective, but everyone is talking about an imminent general drive to make all small farmers in the area join. Soon after his arrival, with most of the family present, Paul is asked straight out if he would help protect his father and save him from having to give up his farm.

SIPOS . . .will you let them make me join? Will you? Answer me!

PAUL What makes you think it's up to me?

. . . . . .

SIPOS I'm nothing, a nobody already, I just sit here like a prisoner on death row--except I don't know when the hour will come. I think I should have the right . . .I who spent all my life in work, I who made a paradise here where only geese could graze. . .I think I should have the right to know: are they gonna let me alone, are they gonna let me keep this farm; or, tell me, why they wouldn't. . .why wouldn't they let me keep the thing I put together with my own hands in the last fifty years. . .I sent you to school so that in my old age I'd have somebody I could even ask that: why?

. . . . . .

PAUL . . .it's not easy to answer. . .but it would be cowardly to deny [it] or lie about it. . .I didn't come home to guard or save the small farms of the past. . . or even their memories. . .

SIPOS But to destroy them?! Is that it? To destroy them?

PAUL I came home to do something, to
create something new on this land.
Yes, if you like, [I came home] to
do away with mudshacks and hovels,
with this hovel-life, the darkness,
the mud, the endless winter nights
trapped inside miserable mudshacks...[34]

Paul is the "positive hero" but not at the expense of any negative character, or "enemy." Old Sipos, his own father, is the one Paul argues with, but no more, and no more rightfully, than old Sipos would have argued--and did argue--with the land fifty years earlier: ". . .yield you dog! . . .that's what I said when we first moved here. Yield, goddamn' it, yield you wretch; I break you up and roll you over, I give you whatever you need, but yield, 'cause. . . 'cause I got lotsa children. . .and. . .by God, it did."[35]

When the play ends old Sipos and his wife are still on the farm, but their children have moved away. One, already living in the city with his family, would come back to the farm, but his wife objects; the widowed daughter will marry the local teacher; another son and his wife join the local collective. Paul has returned to the land, if not to his parents' farm. His education did not make him anything but an even more dedicated man of the soil. Old Sipos begins to see this; and he also begins to realize that even if his children returned to his farm they would be living his life,

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[34]Imre Sarkadi, Út a tanyákról, Szeptember (Budapest: Magvető, 1956), p. 127-128.

[35]Ibid., p. 148.

not their own, which is not what he, old Sipos himself would do in their place. It is the old way of life, not the people, that has to go, and not because the past was ugly or bad--certainly old Sipos's was not--but because the future cannot be built by holding on to the past. The breaking of ties with the past must be done by each man in his own way. The play ends with Sipos's lines: "They'll do something. Everybody his own. . .that's what's important. I made this farm. . .they'll do something big. (Long pause) I hope they'll make it."[36]

According to the Madách Theatre's dramaturg, Szeptember was the only play Sarkadi wrote directly for the stage--without first writing it as a short story or a novel--and the theatre produced it without "any correction, or changing a single letter."[37] But by then it was the end of 1955, with the political situation rather different from the time, almost four years earlier, when Sarkadi's first play was produced, in February 1952.

Another play, Endre Vészi's Fekete Bárány (Black Sheep), perhaps the best among those dealing with industrial workers, was also written in 1955, but was not produced until the end of the 1956/57 season and had only twenty-six per-

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[36] Ibid., p. 148.

[37] István Horvai, "Sarkadi Imre drámai nyelve," Szinházmüvészet, March 1966, p. 51.

formances.[38] This play's hero, Pál Süveg, was a far cry from the positive heroes of earlier production plays; one is not even sure if he is a member of the Communist Party. His struggle in the factory is his alone, his victories are his, and his private life belongs to him only. Süveg was his own man rather than a personification of Party ideologies.

By the time Black Sheep reached the stage after the 1956 uprising, Zhdanov's stranglehold on Hungarian drama eased somewhat. Plays that served as models for peasant and production dramas and for positive heroes were practically forgotten--along with their authors. Sándor Gergely and Éva Mándi were never again produced in Hungary. The era that began, roughly, with the nationalization of the theatres and the adoption of Zhdanov's theories as the basis for cultural policy, held back the development of Hungarian drama for more than a decade.

Communist leadership under Rákosi extended its strictures to the theatre, which, in turn, held a tight control over the drama. Simplification in dramaturgy, reduction of stagecraft to realistic means were necessary, according to cultural policy, to put drama and theatre in the service of educating the largest possible number of people. Form as well as content were dressed in uniforms, and, in

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[38] Black Sheep opened on May 23, 1957 at the Jókai Theatre.

order to reach the masses they presented the masses--in neatly divided groups. Building a new society required a new man just as quickly as the Party hoped to create a new society by land reforms, collectivization and nationalizing of private enterprise. While in factories and villages the same person who worked under different regimes was called upon to help build socialism, on the stage, it seems, this was not sufficient; the drama's new individual had to be a person without a doubt as to where he belonged or where he was going. And so a strange superman called the "positive hero" was born--although he was by no means an exclusively Hungarian creation. He was swiftly moved about, turning up in factories, schools, villages; wherever he was needed. He was always victorious over assorted villains who were just as two-dimensional as he was.

Against extremely realistic sets, these dramas went on presenting basically the same conflicts and soon grew tiresome.[39] Bloodless heroes and exaggerated villains were all much too predictable, and once the thrill of rooting for a just cause was gone--and it was gone very soon after the first few of these plays--it became apparent that identification with any of the characters was practically impossible.

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[39]Based on a short Karinthy play, The Great Dramatist, in which a playwright coaxes the plot of his next play out of an admiring journalist, a favorite game, popular in my high school years, was to guess the plot of new plays (and films) after mentioning only their titles. Some of the guesses came very close to the actual plots.

I believe these plays failed to move audiences because rewards in the world of these plays were given not to individuals but to groups and collectives while audiences were still made up of individuals; and perhaps because most audiences sensed, in many cases, the insincerity of the playwright and often that of the actors.

Rules and regulations, censorship and dramaturgical interference kept most major authors away from the theatre. Some, like Háy, proved unable to cope with the changing demands of the Party; others, like Déry, entered the theatre of the 1950's but once, to let off some steam while it was possible to do so. Young Sarkadi was just trying his hand at drama; his play Szeptember and a negligibly small number of others--not of the "schematic" mold--were the exception rather than the rule.

Clearly an opportunity to create meaningful drama in Hungary was missed again. There was a drama of new Hungary, it even had a name: socialist realist drama; and it had a purpose as well: to present the life and problems of new Hungary on its way toward socialism. But this drama did not become meaningful to audiences, not so much because it lacked scenic or formal inventiveness, but because it was not allowed to present the struggle of the emerging society through, what Lukács called, "the inner contradictions of men."[40]

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[40]See above, p. 93.

CHAPTER IV

VISIONS IN DESTINY

As the building of socialism progressed in Hungary, cultural policy was most interested in bringing to the forefront of public knowledge those historical events that most vividly demonstrated the country's struggle for independence.[1] In the theatre generally, historical dramas aimed at the condemnation of former regimes, foreign oppression, and called on patriotic identification with national heroes who fought for freedom--a freedom that, according to the Communist Party, was realized after World War II. After the thousand year presence of Hungarians in the heart of Europe, questions regarding the existence of a Hungarian

[1]Failure to gain freedom and independence may, on the surface, be attributable to a simple lack of force in the face of the enemy. But the underlying cause of the country's weakness was always internal disunity. Sharp division between nobility and peasantry created an atmosphere of distrust and indifference. The nobility was afraid to arm the peasants in fear of becoming victims of their own forces, and the peasants often felt that the defence of the country was the business of those to whom the country belonged: the nobility. This situation, most of all, was responsible for the many defeats of Hungary, particularly the most decisive ones: in 1526 at Mohács, at the hands of the Turks, and in 1848 by the combined Austrian and Russian armies.

nation would be raised in the minds of few people.[2] If there were such questions, the Hungarian government, the country's leadership after 1945, had no doubts about the answer: no longer ruled by aristocrats, noblemen and capitalists, Hungary was finally a nation of equals where workers and peasants were building the country's future. Pre-World War II history was the dark background against which socialist Hungary stood out colorful and triumphant. The series of attempts at creating an independent nation in the past, each of which had failed, underscored the viability of socialism.

For two authors, prominent in Hungarian literature since the 1920's, the question not only of the existence, but of the destiny of Hungary has remained a central one. Gyula Illyés and László Németh occupy a special place in Hungarian letters. Even in Hungary the reputation of

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[2]A small Asiatic people, Hungarians settled in the Carpathian Valley late in the ninth century. Too far from the main stream of oriental culture and considered Eastern by nations of the West, Hungary remained isolated between Slav and German races; her role, after a few centuries of relative peace, was that of a buffer zone between Western Europe and invaders from the East. As a result, Hungary had been under foreign domination for the last four centuries. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was officially abolished only in the mid-1940's.

neither author rests primarily on dramatic works,[3] and it is doubtful that their plays would ever be widely known or appreciated abroad. However, for Hungarians, the dramas of Illyés and Németh are significant because they reflect a vital concern with the nation's history, development and destiny.[4] It is for this reason, above all, that Illyés and Németh have been included in the present study.

Gyula Illyés: The Conscience Of A Nation

> There is no artist who would not gladly create to order; provided that he and the customer, and especially those for whom

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[3]As a poet, Illyés has, for a long time, enjoyed popular and critical success not only at home but throughout Europe. He was awarded the Baumgarten Prize four times between 1931 and 1936; he has been president of the International P.E.N. Club and, in 1965, was the recipient of the International Grand Prize for poetry. His poems and novels have been translated into more than a dozen languages. Németh holds both the Attila József and Kossuth Prizes, has written innumerable essays on literature, drama, medicine, applied sciences and aesthetics. Many of his essays and some of his novels have been translated into several languages. His own translations of Gorky, Ibsen, Kleist, Pushkin and Shakespeare are considered to be among the best in Hungary.

[4]Olga Siklós, a scholar and, for a number of years, dramaturg of the Petőfi Theatre at Veszprém, has worked with Illyés on the preparation of several of his plays. She was expressing the view of many Hungarians when she said that "While the outside world may not find Illyés very exciting or even interesting, there is not a single city, town or village in Hungary where an Illyés play would not fill every seat in the theatre, however small or large." (Interview with Olga Siklós in Budapest, July 28, 1972.) Dr. Siklós has worked with László Németh, too, in two of his productions.

> the work was intended, believe in the cause the work was to serve. . . The customer, needless to say, was the conscience of a nation.[5]
>
> --Gyula Illyés

Because his major plays deal with great patriotic figures of Hungarian history, and because of his own stature as one of Hungary's leading--if not most prominent of all--poets, Gyula Illyés (1902-), had succeeded, even in the 1950's, to have most of his plays produced. From very early in life he has considered writing a mission, an attitude he has maintained in his plays ever since he turned to the drama in his early forties. Illyés's mission, simply put, is to serve the cause of the people. This cause, always timely and of first priority for Illyés, is to keep the nation's conscience alive.

Parallels can, and at times, must be drawn between the dramatic action of his plays and the realities of Hungary at the time of the plays' writing, but Illyés's dramatic works go beyond merely speaking of the present through the past. Illyés sees Hungary as a historic continuity: it is a country whose past must be understood more clearly by more of its own people for the sake of its future. For Illyés the important thing is to have a nation aware of itself, and able to control its own destiny while remaining--

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[5]Gyula Illyés, Drámák, Vol. I. (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1969), p. 7.

or perhaps just becoming--an equal member in the family of nations.[6]

Illyés saw in the Hungary of 1945 a particularly crucial challenge for artists and writers:

> People of Hungary today understand and take into account least what is most important: that we are a defeated nation. With enormous loss of blood we must recuperate from terrible ills while at the same time working [at reconstruction] at a furious pace. And the motor of national existence, the spiritual life [of the country] is at a standstill. . . A fainted man first regains his consciousness. With us: it's our limbs that are moving way before our conscience would stir. Who will move it, who will bring that [conscience] back?[7]

In 1945 Illyés was calling on writers to arouse the nation's conscience, but there was also warning in his words,

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[6]During his travels abroad Illyes learned how people in Western countries looked upon Hungary and Hungarians. "Instead of the hospitable, freedom-loving, courteous and cavalier [people], the name Hungarian in the West conjures up a hybrid nation of shifty, lying, cowardly, imperious and bragging people." Out of concern for the image of his nation, at home and abroad, Illyes proposes a threefold plan to alter the prevailing image of Hungary and Hungarians: "First... to collect, sort out and study foreign views and opinions about us. Second, and only strong nations are capable of this. . .to meet unfavorable views squarely. . .to examine calmly [the possibility] that these views might be true. . . and only then can we begin what many would consider to be our first task: to countermand enemy propoganda. Of course not with the denigration and abuse of our enemies. . . We must conquer not with loud words, but with the demonstration of our real and constantly increasing true values." (Gyula Illyés, Ingyen Lakoma V. 1. [Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1964], pp. 413 and 418).

[7]Gyula Illyés, "Újabb Szellemi Front" in Ingyen Lakoma V. 1. (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1964), p. 425.

directed clearly at the authorities:[8] ". . .and if a nation has ten true writers in a generation, that [nation] can count his blessings. . .[But] just a little inconsiderate treatment of ten people and a nation may be mute for a whole generation."[9]

Illyés has made clear the goal of his mission. First among the means towards his end, in his poetry and prose as well as in the drama, is language. Although he seldom uses verse in dialogue, Illyés's language is most often poetic--this aspect of his abundant creativity is not always beneficial to the action of his plays. Always a weapon in the fight for national independence, people tend to take language for granted once nationhood is no longer an issue. To be a nation, for Illyés, means among other things the keeping alive of traditions, and for him there is no greater tradition than one's own language. In a radio interview early in 1974 he still denied that there was a Hungarian nation as it was envisioned by poets 200, 100 or even 60 years ago: "I feel that the Hungarian people must be created now, and through the means of our mother tongue."[10] Attention must be called to Illyés's use of the word "people."

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[8]At the time of writing this piece, (1945), it was not yet certain just what kind of authorities would be in power.

[9]Illyés, "Újabb Szellemi Front", in Ingyen Lakoma V. 1., p. 428.

[10]István Simon, "Irószobám-Beszélgetes Illyés Gyulával," Kortárs May, 1974, p. 797. Text of a radio interview in Radio Petőfi, broadcast on January 1, 1974.

In a feudal, then feudal-capitalist system that lasted in Hungary until the Second World War "people" was the collective name for all those who worked with their two hands; and since the overwhelming majority of this group were the peasants, "people" meant the peasantry.[11] It is in this sense that Illyés refers to the people, with the inclusion, of course, particularly after 1945, of the workers in cities, most of whom came from the peasantry.[12]

All of Illyés's comedies--he has written four to date--have rural settings. They are not only about peasants, but they are also made up of folk-play elements, if not entirely conceived in an old folk-play form. His hilarious "peasant-comedy" Tűvé Tevők (Much Ado About a Needle, József Katona Theatre, May 22, 1955), borrows freely from the Commedia dell'arte, folk music, and the style of other performers of the market place hundreds of years ago. In the preface to the published version of his later comedy,

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[11]Statistical evidence shows that as late as 1950 fifty-two percent of Hungary's labor force was still employed in agriculture. (Miklós Gárdos, ed., Hungary 1971 [Budapest: Pannonia Press, 1971], p. 11).

[12]In the interview above quoted, Illyés expresses fear that today's Hungarian literature and drama pays too little attention to the peasant and the worker! "If someone were to take a look at our novels, dramatic literature and poetry [to see] how the peasant lived in this era--or the worker--he would find no trace of that, or very little of it." (István Simon, "Beszélgetés Illyés Gyulával," Kortárs, May 1974, p. 799).

Bolhabál (Flea Ball, Déryné Theatre, December 10, 1965), Illyés complains that there is no Hungarian equivalent for the French word farce, and goes about explaining Master Pathelin and other French farces.[13] Illyés is so bent on putting the "people" on the stage that he is ready to invent, or rather transplant another nation's folk-tradition in order to emphasize the necessity of tradition. His mastery of the form and the lively action makes the play stageworthy--even if audiences were not aware of the author's efforts to provide tradition with the play.

Flea Ball was written especially for peasants.[14] Migrant workers who had even less rights than peasants in old Hungary, fool some of the younger lords chasing peasant girls to exact their droit du seigneur. The play is full of disguises, men parade about in ladies' dresses, some lords are stripped to their underwear, surprising entrances are made from caskets, and often a kick in the behind puts the period at the end of a statement. Illyés rewrote this farce for a production in Budapest. The new title, Ball on the Puszta[15] turned out to be the smallest of the revisions.

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[13]Gyula, Illyés Drámák, Vol. II., p. 513.

[14]The play's opening took place on December 10, 1965 in the small provincial town of Alsópáhok.

[15]"Puszta", which has been variously translated as lowland, prairie and waste, designates the flat expanses of the Hungarian countryside where cultivating the land is most difficult.

The character of the Student was enlarged: he now filled the role of the Doctor we find in many plays of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The play's social content was not so much sharpened as it was explained, which slowed down considerably the colorful, swiftly moving action of the original version. In his last comedy to date, Bölcsek a fán (Wise Men on the Tree, National Theatre at Pecs, March 18, 1971), Illyés further expanded the role of the Student: he now delivers the prologue, instructs the audience that they are about to witness a seventeenth-century school drama with its action in the fourth century, B.C.[16] The action does move back and forth in time, anacronisms abound, and the author makes good use of the Student who appears in many scenes throughout the play, commenting on events in ancient Greece and in Hungary in the 1970's. The moralizing tone of the play, however, is a bit too heavyhanded, and the Student tends to explain things beyond necessity.

In Illyés's other plays individual heroes dominate the action and it is in their characters that the author searches for his answers, but the true protagonists always seem to be the people. The premise is that the country must belong to the people, who in turn, must be their own masters--they must be free. Freedom, never given to the people, must be fought for and fighters must have leaders. All of Illyés

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[16]Gyula Illyés, Bölcsek a fán in Rivalda 1970-1971 Budapest: Magvető, 1972), p. 345.

questions center around this premise and may be formulated as follows: who is to lead the people to freedom, and by what means? What is the relationship between leader and the people, or rather what should the relationship be? This particular question is especially important to Hungarians because it includes a second one: who is the real enemy the people must fight to obtain their freedom? In his latest plays Illyés attempts to examine the complex problem of individual integrity trapped by corrupt power.

According to Illyés, he did not plan his first play, The Eye of the Needle (1944), to be staged. He hoped that it would achieve the desired effect in book form.[17] This experiment with the drama is a clear first step towards Illyés's later plays and contains more of the author's personal experiences than any of his subsequent ones. Illyés was born in a small village, received a university education and spent some years abroad, mostly in Paris.[18] He has always been concerned not only with the people, but also with

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[17]The play appeared in print on March 18, 1944. . . "when German tanks were rolling through Buda Pest, and thus [the play] remained a silent shout." (Gyula Illyes, Drámák, V. 1. [Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1969], p. 60). The play has not been staged to date.

[18]In Paris, Illyés came into contact with the leading artists of the day, with all the literary and artistic movements of the inter-war years. Although in the midst of this artistic ferment, Illyes's own style, so strongly guided by a self-imposed purpose to serve his people, had remained unaffected. It may be recalled that Illyés translated some of Cocteau's works, including Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel, that Palasovszky's group performed at the Green Ass Theatre.

the role of the intelligentsia growing out of the peasantry. With a loyalty to and a sense of belonging with the poeple, sons of peasants could have helped, Illyés contends in his play, to raise the consciousness of the people in the 1930's and 1940's. János Ercsei, the protagonist of The Eye of the Needle, returns home to his village hoping to help his people. His long years away from home have made him a stranger. His studies, (he holds two diplomas), set him apart from his family and friends, who would only accept him now as a man doing a job which his education has earned him. When he declares his intention to remain and work as a peasant he is turned out of his parents' home; they had enlisted the help of a relative to secure a well-paying, administrative job for their son. For seven years Ercsei tries to function in a job that would give him some authority and even a small chance to help the lot of working people, especially peasants, but he sees his own advancement as an escape from his real task, as a betrayal of his own ideas. He leaves his wife and children and roams the countryside with an old friend. They take on odd jobs and use them as opportunities to talk with peasants, sounding them out, hoping to find a base from which they can, someday, begin their work of channeling a growing awareness among peasants into action. Ercsei has acquired the reputation of a prophet-healer, and peasants begin to listen to him. At the end of the play he is still not satisfied with himself; despite his good intentions he has managed to accomplish only a first step: to be accepted;

but he is unable to bring about progress, he is not yet a leader.[19] The question this play probes most vigorously, but only in a rhetorical fashion, is the way in which people ought to be helped: from above, below or from inside, i.e. where leaders ought to stand in relation to the people. Willingness to help in itself may not suffice, the play makes clear, especially if it comes from someone who is not trusted because he is above the people in education and whose ideas of progress appear to be alien and too

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[19]Gyula Illyés, A tű foka, in Drámák, V. 1., (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1969), pp. 9-149.

abruptly presented to a backward people.[20]

Utopias for the people, conceived by intellectuals not fully aware of the life of the people, cannot work

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[20]In an article on Hungarian history, Peter Kende attempts to find reasons for Hungary's backwardness, especially in the countryside. Although Hungary's social and economic development began to fall behind that of Western European nations as early as the sixteenth century, (due to the Turkish occupation), Hungary's backwardness in the twentieth century may be traced back to the mid-1800's, particularly to the Compromise Treaty of 1867. This treaty with Austria, the act that created the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, meant the partial loss of national independence, but the road was at last open for a ". . .bourgeois civilization and an economic and social regeneration. Then came the great surprise: the bulk of the nation did not take this road. Was there no initiative in the Hungarian people? Or had it been atrophied during the centuries when the nation had to fight for its existence? It is difficult to answer these questions. The fact is that the Hungarian people let the Germans, Jewish, Serbian and Greek elements start enterprises, build towns and develop industries, and continued itself to live as before, as if under the spell of the land. . . The notion of progress, gradually becoming more associated with foreign influence, could not gain the same hold on the public mind as it did in the Western nations. The 'national spirit' took refuge in the fortresses of Christianity and conservatism and remained hopelessly gentry-peasant minded. Its headquarters was the Hungarian countryside, incorrigibly backward.

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The especial feature of Hungarian society was not that it was divided into a progressive and a conservative camp: that division could be found elsewhere. The difference was that progress came to be regarded as 'alien' while the national spirit was identified with some stubborn and hopeless backwardness which found an outlet in chauvinism, boasted of past greatness and stood uncomprehending before the ideals of the new era. This 'national spirit' was not only xenophobe, it was also anti-urban." (Peter Kende, "Reflections on Hungarian History: Yesterday's Hungary," The Review, n. 1. [June 17, 1959], pp. 23-24).

either. In his first produced play, a comedy, A lélekbúvár (The Psychologist, Magyar Theatre, November 13, 1948), Illyés carries the notion of an impossible utopia to the extreme. Arriving in a village as the private therapist of a local woman of means, Dr. Szmuk goes about making plans to cure all peasants of their problems--by treating their souls. It is made clear that there is not an iota of rationality in Dr. Szmuk's theories and he is only interested in creating a myth of being mankind's saviour by advocating a spiritual utopia called "Szmukism." A bright, young peasant, Dudás, who finally chases Szmuk away, is well aware of the true conditions of the peasants, but he has no answers to the real ills of the village either. Having been educated in the city, then returned to the village, Dudás sees through Szmuk's empty phrases, but he himself can do no more than make some noble statements such as "It is impossible to live among the people and be afraid and contemptuous of them; that's what's wrong with you. And it's especially impossible to be above them as it is to be below them; only in the middle, right there, among them, together with them!"[21]

Illyés wrote, or at least began to write another play in 1945, dealing with the intelligentsia's role in saving the people, the whole nation. The question of leadership and the possibility of resistance are raised, but once

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[21]Gyula Illyés, A lélekbúvár in Drámák, V. 1., (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1969), p. 254.

again, only in a rhetorical fashion.[22]

The series of historical plays on which Illyés's dramatic reputation rests, began with As ozorai példa (The Example of Ozora, National Theatre, May 22, 1952). An incident during the War of Independence of 1848 is at the center of the play's plot with which Illyés meant to show that ". . .there is no freedom of any kind without the participation of the people."[23] The peasants of Ozora are concerned with their vineyards; the grape harvest means their livelihood. The War needs the peasants. Leaders of the Hungarian forces are noblemen and aristocrats, but their fight is for the independence of the whole country. In the play the peasants' awareness of their predicament grows to the point where they realize that despite their enmity toward their immediate oppressors, the Hungarian lords, their harvest would not be possible at all if the country lost the war.[24] The character of the peasants' spokesman, and later leader, Börcsök, is faced with the choice of letting the owners of the country, the lords, fight the enemy by themselves, or to join the fight despite the possibility of

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[22]Although Illyés completed the play, Malom a séden (Mill on the Brook), published in 1963, it was not shown until February 20, 1970, at the Petőfi Theatre in Veszprém.

[23]Illyés, Drámák, V. 1., p. 6.

[24]Illyés, As ozorai példa in Drámák, V. 1., pp. 257-386.

domestic oppression after the war. It must be attributed to Illyés's portrayal of this hero--at the time of "positive heroes" on the stage--and to his selection of the War of Independence for his plot, that the play was so well received.[25]

In Illyés's next play, Fáklyaláng (Torchflame, József Katona Theatre, December 12, 1952), the leaders of the War of Independence are at the center of the action. The play is basically a debate over the proper course of leadership--the entire second act is taken up by a dialogue between the two leaders--and has but one aim: to show how leadership that does not trust the people would inevitably bring the country down in defeat. The war had not been going well, but on several fronts where peasants were accepted and joined the fight, imminent disaster was turned to victory. During the last phases of the War, General Görgey argues for surrender, for a compromise with Austria; he sees the odds against Hungary to be too great. Kossuth, political and intellectual leader of the War, favors the inclusion of all peasants in the battle, even if they have to fight with pitchforks.[26]

These two characters, so well known to Hungarians,

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[25]It may be remembered that one of the main objections to Béla Balázs's play, The Ballad of Panna Cinka was that the peasants considered one of their own, Ocskay, a traitor for wanting to fight the Germans, rather than the Hungarian lords. (See Chapter II, p. 76).

[26]Illyés, Fáklyaláng in Drámák, V. 1., pp. 387-496.

gain a new stature in Illyés's play. Görgey, labeled an outright traitor in history books, is here shown not only as a human being, but a cool-headed, brilliant military leader, while Kossuth who had so long been envisioned in Hungary only on a pedestal, pointing towards a bright future, is revealed to have admirable histrionic abilities, which he uses with great skill to turn the debate in his favor.

Although the two leaders are in the foreground most of the time, the true protagonist of the play seems to be the people; the debate is over them, who should lead them and how? Illyés's answer is clear: the one who trusts the people and who, in turn, is trusted by them. This is the issue on which Kossuth triumphs, and despite the lost battle and his own exile, Kossuth emerges victorious.

As Illyés moves further back in history to explore the nature of leadership, the role of the people and the relationship between leader and the people, he chooses the character of György Dózsa, the Székely nobleman who led the peasant uprising of 1514. The play that bears the hero's name (György Dózsa, National Theatre, January 20, 1956), hearkens back to The Eye of the Needle in that it shows how Dózsa declines all the privileges and benefits he is entitled to because of his noble birth--just as János Ercsei's education could have lifted him out of his peasant surroundings for ever--and it points forward to other Illyés plays

in which, beyond the leader's character and his relation to those he leads, the nature of power is examined.

In <u>György Dózsa</u> the Turks are threatening Hungary and all of Europe; Hungarian peasants are called on to fight, but certain lords feel that a large force of armed peasants would be more of a danger than a help to the leaders. Himself a nobleman,[27] but one who lived with and understands the plight of the peasants, Dózsa has a vision of a whole nation, and refuses to disband his peasant units. He is eventually forced to fight the lords. He is captured and is tortured to death by being placed on a white-hot throne, a white-hot iron crown on his head. His lieutenants are made to eat of his burning flesh. Dózsa, despite his origins, had grown to be the kind of folk hero that a nation could look up to, whom power did not destroy or turn into a tyrant.[28] Sitting upon the fiery throne, he literally

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[27]Transylvania, where Dózsa came from, had from the earliest days been a more liberal and enlightened entity within Hungary. It had enjoyed an economic prosperity, and socially it far surpassed other parts of the country. Its princes were excellent diplomats and, in a curious way, raised to office not by birth-right, but by election! (Peter Kende, "Reflections on Hungarian History: Yesterday's Hungary," <u>The Review</u>, n. 1., [June 17, 1959], p. 26).

[28]The failure of the Dózsa revolt is especially painful to Hungarians, since the weakened country, with a reluctant peasantry and ineffectual nobility was unable to withstand the Turks in 1526. The battle lost at Mohács--to this day considered the greatest catastrophy in Hungary's history--marked the beginning of centuries of foreign domination.

and symbolically nourished his people with his own flesh and blood.

Fascinated with Dózsa's character, Illyés wrote, for the 500th birthday celebration of the Székely leader, a new play, Testvérek (Brothers, National Theatre of Pécs, October 1972). It is a four-character play, but, save for a few minutes, only the two Dózsa brothers are on stage. What took up only the second act of Torchflame, has now become the whole play: a debate--ultimately within György Dózsa himself, his brother representing one half of György's self. But Illyés has grown as a dramatist, his dialogue is far more successful in showing character, rather than strategies and other external influences, as a decisive force in decision making. The two brothers debate and weigh the nature of revolution and the choices leaders must make. Having become familiar with the two brothers who are thrust in their midst for three acts, revealing their innermost feelings, audiences could intimately feel the weight of the decision to serve the people's cause, a cause that is most likely to fail.

Twelve years after the opening of György Dózsa, Illyés returned once again to the mid-nineteenth century. Political aftermath, social and economic stagnation that followed the unsuccessful War of Independence in 1848 lasted until the Treaty of 1867 was signed with Austria. In the interim, László Teleki, a talented Hungarian politician and man of letters, had carried the vision of an independent Hungary

further than any man in that country, in or out of politics. In him Illyés found the inspiration for two plays. Teleki himself wrote a play, A kegyenc (The Minion) which, for its content, according to Illyés, should be among the greatest classics of Hungarian drama.[29] However, Teleki was a poor playwright, and even the two attempts at rewriting it in the twentieth century, in 1927 and in 1941, by others, failed to make the play a success.[30] Illyés decided not to rewrite Teleki's play, but, preserving Teleki's title, to write his own.[31] He more than restored this play to Hungarian drama. The Roman setting, the theme of rampant tyranny, and personal convictions buckling under the pressure of a corrupt system did not fail to recall clearly and with force the years of the "personality cult." Illyés was becoming increasingly concerned with the abuse of power. In The Minion he attempted to examine a character whose personal convictions served as the basis for compromises that might correct an existing system. In that play as well as

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[29]Gyula Illyés, Másokért egyedül (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1963), p. 7.

[30]Sándor Hevesi, director of the National Theatre, and Sándor Galamb had attempted to revive and rewrite the Teleki play. (Illyés, Másokért egyedül, p. 8).

[31]Illyés's The Minion opened on April 26, 1968 at the Madách Theatre, five years after it had appeared in print.

in his next one, A különc (The Eccentric)[32] whose hero was modeled on Teleki, Illyés also probed the question: how far can personal beliefs go to accomodate the very power one hopes to correct, or bring down. The heroes of both plays take their own lives, marking the place where, Illyés implies, having no other alternatives, the line must be drawn. Illyés selected moments and characters in Hungarian history who were as well known to his audiences as the figures and events the tragedians of ancient Greece put before their viewers. When he felt that a character might not be as familiar as he should be--such was the case with Teleki--Illyés went to great lengths, within the dramatic action of his play, to bridge the gap between his own research and the audience's knowledge.

In his effort to speak about the people on the stage, Illyés has sacrificed a great deal theatrically. His themes and "messages" are not difficult to arrive at, simply because they are explained--at times over-explained. In his historical plays he followed the conventions of the nineteenth century. Great conflicts were often replaced by great debates. In this, as a young Hungarian critic, András Pályi, has pointed out, Illyés may be going back to the origins of modern Hungarian drama to be found more in

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[32] The Eccentric was written in 1968 and produced in 1972. Teleki, the play's protagonist, was the author of The Minion who in real life, committed suicide, too.

religious debates than in folk plays.[33] When he makes use of a folk-play form, he seems to be a master at adapting it, but at the same time his interest is more in the instructive nature of the form, than in the form itself; his market place and his booths are indoors, inside the proscenium arch.[34]

Beginning with The Minion, however, Illyés shows signs of having mastered more of the craft of drama; more of the dramatic action is in the form of action rather than in debate.[35] Illyés's best constructed play, Tiszták (Albigenses, National Theatre of Pecs, December 19, 1969), is the only one Illyés has labeled a tragedy, and it is his only drama that does not deal with Hungarian history. Here all the characters are well motivated, action flows with the inevitability found in classical tragedies. For Illyés, the story of the Albigenses, the small religious sect that was completely annihilated around 1200, was a lesson for Hungary and Hungarians: "The play is about a perished nation for the still-struggling, still-living peoples and

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[33]András Pályi, "Szinpad vagy szószek?" Szinház, August 1970, p. 16.

[34]Ibid., p. 16.

[35]Illyés completely revised his Torchflame for the play's revival in 1967. His note on the dust jacket of the published new version reads, in part: "...the 'old' Torchflame's first act was full of 'historical lessons.' I hope that these same thoughts have become more theatrical, more dramatic." (Illyés, Torchflame [Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1968]). Several of Illyés's published plays are accompanied by instructions to leave out what "...the pace of the stage action would find hard to carry along." (Illyés, Drámák, Vol. II. p. 392).

communities. Thus, [it is] personally for us."[36] (Italics mine.)

Throughout most of his dramatic career Illyés has used the stage to say what he had to say. He has felt it to be his duty to lead and teach his people. This is what he wanted to do in the theatre also; he wanted to master the stage and use it almost as if it were a pulpit or a platform.

László Németh: Utopia On An Island

I once called the stage the pulpit of fallen lives.

--László Németh[37]

Illyés's contemporary, László Németh (1901-) was in his early thirties when he turned to the drama. As with all of his other writings, essays, studies, novels, criticism and journalistic works, Németh hoped that his plays would make known and win followers for his ideas concerning the Hungarian nation. It is these ideas expressed in his plays that merit Németh's inclusion among Hungarian dramatists.

World War I and the failure of the Hungarian Soviet Republic gave rise to a movement in Hungary. This movement, referred to earlier, in Chapter I (see p. 24), was called

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[36]Illyés, Tiszták (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1971), p. 39.

[37]László Németh, Kiadatlan tanulmányok Vol. I. (Budapest: Magvető, 1968), p. 602.

népi or peasant-oriented, and its members saw the future of Hungary in the peasantry. Both capitalism and socialism were rejected as systems suitable to Hungary, and a third, characteristically Hungarian way was sought. There were different notions within the movement as to how the country might be saved from social and economic ruin. The faction whose spokesman Németh was, advocated the formation of a new class made up of peasants and intellectuals. Because this new class was conceived as a "pure" Hungarian one, ideas concerning it played into the hands of chauvinistic, racist elements, and seemed to fit well the fascist tendencies of Hungarian politics of the interwar years.[38] The mid 1930's was the most productive phase of the népi movement when the "exploration" of the Hungarian countryside by sociographers was supplemented by studies, pamphlets, novels and poems about the untenable situation of the Hungarian peasants. Both Németh and Illyés took a large

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[38]The Treaty of Trianon (1920) at the end of World War I left Hungary with only 32.2 per cent of its original territory. Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia acquired an approximately 30 per cent Hungarian national minority. The Horthy regime that found it convenient to blame many of the country's ills on the new, reduced size of the land, welcomed the idea of a "pure" Hungary filled with "pure" Hungarians. (Peter Kende, "Reflections on Hungarian History: Yesterday's Hungary," The Review n. 1 [June 17, 1959], p. 33). In no small measure the big powers' decision to cut up Hungary in this fashion after World War I was responsible for Horthy Hungary's alliance with fascist Italy and Germany, and ultimately for her entry into World War II on Hitler's side: it was these two countries, Italy and Germany, that supported Hungary's territorial claims.

share in this work.[39] The movement began to show signs of dissolution at the end of the thirties when its left wing took measures to include industrial workers in their plans. Németh still preferred his own "third road."[40] Fascist and Nazi tendencies surfaced in other factions, some of whose members were jailed for their activities after World War II.[41] Both politically and artistically the movement became subdued, if not silent, after 1945. The question of népi authors was among other taboo subjects during the years of the "personality cult," which is partially responsible for

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[39]These were the years during which Németh published the bulk of his essays and studies--most of them in his own magazine, The Witness--dealing with his solutions to Hungary's problems. These solutions were utopian, based on the premise that in the face of organized social systems, be they socialist, capitalist or fascist, man's salvation lies in the banding together of small groups and retiring to an island where, in an atmosphere of honest work and impeccable moral behavior, human existence would still be possible for the individual. Rather than advocating solutions, Illyés published works revealing the true condition of life in areas of Hungary most people had never heard of. The most significant of these works, and possibly Illyés's highest achievement in prose was Puszták népe (The People of the Puszta, Budapest: Nyugat, 1936), a book that was at once a penetrating sociographic study, an autobiography and a novel. This book has been translated into at least seven languages, including English. (Albert Tezla, Hungarian Authors: A Bibliographical Handbook [Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970], p. 227).

[40]Marcell Benedek, ed., Magyar irodalmi lexikon Vol. II., p. 359.

[41]Ibid., p. 360.

the fact that Németh was not heard or seen on the stage until the mid-1950's.[42]

Németh, a most prolific novelist, essayist and dramatist, is also a physician and an elementary school teacher. The latter professions have helped him weather his long, forced and voluntary, silences in print and on the stage. Since 1954 he has been suffering from acute hypertension which he himself has managed to keep in check with great success.[43]

Of Illyés, Németh once wrote: "Gyula Illyés is more of a temperament than a personality. He reflects the changes in his temperament, the weather of his mood. . . He refers to himself as 'the poet,' and does not bother about distinguishing this poet from other poets."[44] Németh, however, is a personality; a strong one, and practically all

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[42]Cultural policy did not, during the Rákosi years, take the trouble to sort out what may have been positive in the népi movement. Between 1945 and 1955 Németh wrote new plays and completed some he began earlier, twelve in all, none of which reached the stage until 1956. (Olga Siklós, A magyar drámairodalom útja 1945-1957 [Budapest: Magvető, 1970], p. 450).

[43]László Németh, "Rövid életrajz egy külföldi lexikonnak," in Kiadatlan tanulmányok Vol. II. (Budapest: Magvető, 1968), p. 617.

[44]Németh, Kiadatlan tanulmányok Vol. I., p. 141.

of his works are, in some way, reflections of this personality.[45] Between 1932 and 1936, after a difference of opinion with the editor of Hungary's most prestigious literary periodical, Nyugat (West), Németh published his own magazine, Tanú (The Witness), in which he wrote every article, study, short story and essay.[46] On the pages of this magazine he became the chief ideologist of his kind of "third road" for Hungary.

Of the nearly thirty plays he has written since 1931 most fall into the categories of "social drama," and "historical drama."[47] A later group of his plays was collected under the heading of "current themes."[48]

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[45]Németh goes so far as to write all introductions to his works; he even composes the dust jackets of his books.

[46]His plans for a theatre that would be his own, just as his magazine was his own, may give us some insight into Németh's attitude towards his works, and the effects he hoped to achieve with them: "When, in the fall of 1936, I closed down The Witness, another enterprise was already waiting to take its place. I wanted to open a theatre in which only my plays would be performed, just as in The Witness only my studies could be read. Of course this theatre would have been only a paper theatre: without capital, actors and audiences, I would have performed the plays in a quarterly publication. First wouldcome the text, then the directorial instructions, followed by rehearsal discussions and dramaturgical arguments." (Németh, "Dráma és legenda," in Kiadatlan tanulmányok Vol. I, p. 599).

[47]These designations are Németh's. Twenty-two of his plays were published under these headings: Társadalmi dramak 2 vols. (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1958), and Történeti dramak 2 vols. (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1956).

[48]Németh, Mai témák (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1963).

If Illyés, in many of his plays, maintained a platform, Németh deliberately chose the stage as a pulpit.[49] In most of his plays he stands alone on this pulpit, or rather has his protagonist stand alone. Hardly ever is there an intrusion by a secondary character whose stature would even approach that of the protagonist. His "social dramas" usually have as their hero a man of great intellect who is held back from achieving a noble goal by constraining ties. The man has either written a book that, should the ideas in it be heeded, would bring about a new society, or he is ready to establish a safe and viable colony of peasants and intellectuals, or he wants to warn the nation against the approach of a destructive force, such as fascism. He is always frustrated in his efforts by the doings of women, usually his wife, who prefer comfort and wealth over social progress and who, in most cases, consider the hero some kind of madman.[50] Németh's point, of course, is that society is mad, and his heroes are defending themselves against this madness by devising alternate ways of existence.

The heroes of Németh's "history plays," according to the author, are either saints, heroes or monsters. In the preface to his play Samson (written between 1945 and 1957,

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[49]András Benedek, "Vivódó lelkek: Németh László dramaturgiája," Szinház, April, 1970, p. 29.

[50]Ibid., p. 29.

published in 1958), Németh writes: "The saint, the hero, the monster; these were the three figures, and at the same time the three steps (paradise, purgatory and hell), with which I have measured the characters of history."[51] Németh is never interested in the beginning or the process of a battle, but rather in the ending, in the winding down of a struggle. Németh's hero struggles only with himself; his antagonist hardly ever appears on the scene and the great conflict is within the hero's soul.[52] Németh's dramas are crisis plays, even if at times, at least scenically, they are panoramic. He consciously chose as his model the Greeks and their modern followers, particularly Ibsen, while acknowledging other forms of theatre and dramatic techniques, in his studies.[53] In his plays the main action has taken place

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[51]Németh, "Előszó a Sámson-hoz," in Kiadatlan tanulmányok V. II. p. 259.

[52]His play As áruló (The Traitor) is about General Görgey, but the action picks up so late in the story that his great opponent Kossuth, does not even appear in the play; Illyés's Torchflame was built around the clash of these two characters.

[53]"From the twenty-year period between 1936 and 1956 I have at least ten such dramas in my head, that if I were to write them (and perhaps I will write one or two), everybody would ask why I didn't write these; or, perhaps [they might even] say that I am aping Western drama. . . What was it that cut one branch, the western one, off my trunk, and nourished the other, the less spectacular one--the one from the "nineteenth century"--into full growth? I can only say, again, that I did not write for my sake, for the fun of it, but on command. The one kind I had to write, the other I could have written. . ." (Nemeth, "A mű védelme: Levél Benedek Andráshoz," in Kiadatlan tanulmányok V. II, pp. 534-535).

before the curtain goes up, and the rolling back of events goes on, usually, for four acts. Here Németh has learned little from the Greeks, and he becomes tiresome, his plays tending to be amalgams of endless monologues. Secondary characters fulfill only functions, not roles, and act as messengers or the chorus in Greek plays--almost always agreeing with the protagonist's views. What is left for audiences to see in practically all of Nemeth's dramas is what would be the agon in Greek plays,[54] but longwindedness, the relentless pushing of ideas of an unopposed hero would make most of Németh's plays almost surely a failure outside Hungary. Some of his heroes are not Hungarians (Galileo, Ghandi, Jan Huss), but they too, suffer from the same lack of action as their Hungarian counterparts. There is not a single hero in all of Németh's plays that would qualify as an agent, an initiator of the action, within the dramatic action of the play. The passivity, the hero's patient-like disposition makes Németh's stage rather uneventful. He has created tragic heroes of super-human proportions whose personal needs and aspirations seem to be non-existent; their eyes are set on no lesser goals than the salvation of a nation, if not all mankind.

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[54] Németh defends his putting only the struggle of the lonely hero on stage, without apparent action. He likens the struggling hero to Hungary, and to himself; both he and the country, Németh maintains, have been forced to fight with hands tied and without allies. (Németh, Kiadatlan tanulmányok, V. II., p. 527).

This study is not the proper place to trace Németh's personality in his heroes, or to take sides in the debate whether he could have written better, more theatrical plays. His sensitive and numerous studies testify to the fact that Németh has always been aware of the course of the drama not only of the past but of this century as well. Few people in Hungary have been able to so clearly formulate the reasons why Hungarian drama in general has been lagging behind the rest of the world:

> What has happened here--not only to me, but to a whole generation, the one in which Hungary has seen more dramatists than in any other before it? When we were up-to-date we could not get on the stage, or if we did we were stifled in a hostile atmosphere; today, when the opportunity is here, Western drama has beat us to it, it got ahead of us. This Western drama was the one whose development we were shut off from, and which now makes our own smell of obsolescence. Our backwardness is most apparent in two points: One is the seriousness of tone: irony is missing from our works, something that, for a Western author, is mandatory even in tragedies, (while we. . .we write even our comedies in a tragic fashion). The other: we do not experiment with forms, as if someone had insisted on maintaining the three unities on the multicolored structure of romantic plays.[55]

Németh seems always to have sacrificed action for words, never budging from his pulpit. Seventeen of his plays have been produced in Hungary since 1956 and nearly as many are still unproduced. Some have not been staged because they

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[55]Németh, "A mű védelme; Levél Benedek Andráshoz," in Kiadatlan tanulmányok, V. II., pp. 533-534.

cut too close to the nerve during the Rákosi era: heroes of undaunted courage fighting for individual dignity--even in a not too theatrical form--would have been explosive on the stage. Many of Németh's social dramas written in opposition to the Horthy regime began to show the signs of time. His liveliest plays belong in his latest period, in the 1960's. This may be due to Németh's closer association with some able dramaturgs.[56]

Both Illyés and Németh had turned to the drama because they felt that the power and immediacy of the stage would convey most strongly their ideas concerning the existence and fate of Hungary. Illyés has chosen for his heroes men who could not only lead the people to freedom, but who also had the freedom of choice in making their own decisions. Németh's heroes inevitably lose their battles and seem victorious only in suffering the consequences of their actions. Up to very recently Németh took it for granted that Hungary and Hungarians were lost in Europe and suggested utopian solutions, usually concerned with some sort of protective isolation for Hungary within its borders. Illyés has attempted to show that opportunities for a better Hungary have offered themselves many times through history, but, for various reasons, they have been bypassed. His plays focus on

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[56]Verbal communication of Olga Siklós, dramaturg of the Petőfi Theatre at Veszprém where three of Nemeth's plays premiered.

moments at which crucial opportunities are missed, or a wrong alternative is grasped. By pointing to these moments and to the possibilities within these moments, Illyés expresses his hope that no more opportunities would be missed. Németh not only accepted the fact that Hungary lagged behind the rest of Europe, that the hopeless situation created by foreign domination and corrupt domestic government left hardly any way out for Hungarians, but for a long time, particularly before World War II, he seemed to have wallowed in this view, feeling that the lower one fell the more Hungarian one became.[57]

Both authors have felt a personal calling to arouse the nation, and when it did not respond, or critical reactions were discouraging, one tried a different approach, the other took offense and retired for long periods. Németh had, from the start, difficulties in having his plays produced. Besides political reasons, working conditions of the live theatre have never suited his temperament. Illyés's reputation as a poet has assured him a hearing on the stage ever since he turned to the drama--his silences have all been voluntary. Németh's pre-World War II attitudes and literary

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[57]This attitude is what Lukács objected to when he wrote: "Németh is right in seeing the fate of the tragically fallen [in Hungary], but. . .he is wrong when he declares 'more Hungarian' he who has fallen, who lags behind. . .And if this kind of view also claims the right to point the way to the future, we are speaking of nothing less than a national threat. Because in this view we find the insistence on and the sticking to all the past illnesses of the Hungarian people--a sticking to the very obstacle of [our] development." (György Lukács, "Népi irok a mérlegen," in Magyar irodalom, magyar kúltúra Budapest: Gondolat, 1970 , p. 364).

activities had kept him silent and his plays invisible for a decade after Hungary's liberation.

In later years both authors have come closer to the theatre, taking advantage of the opportunity of working with helpful, knowledgeable artists, particularly dramaturgs. I feel, however, that despite all efforts, the purpose, in the case of both authors, seems to have overshadowed the means, and what may have been an excellent study or essay turned out to be only an adequate stage piece. The urge to communicate, to be heard by a whole nation can be admired but it is not enough. The plays of Illyés and Németh best qualify as "literature." None of them reached the point, judging by Aristotelian standards, where either plot or character would take precedent over thought.

CHAPTER V

THE WINDSTORM

> History has given us so many lessons in survival that we have managed to develop a let's-start-all-over-again attitude.
>
> --József Darvas[1]

Three days after a play by László Németh finally reached the stage of post-World War II Hungarian theatre,[2] all theatres in Budapest went dark as the city was resounding with marching feet, shouts, and later in the evening, with the rumble of heavy tanks and the sound of machine-gun fire. A process that had begun three years earlier was coming to a head; the easing of tension that reverberated throughout the socialist world following Stalin's death, failed to maintain its momentum in Hungary. Demands that were encouraged by the Communist Party itself were not met in time, and through a number of political blunders, the country was caught up in an armed conflict. What had started out to be a peaceful demonstration--duly licensed by the authorities--and a request to broadcast demands of students

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[1]Bulcsu Bertha, "Interjú Darvas Józseffel," Jelenkor, December 1973, p. 1062.

[2]Németh's play, Galilei opened on October 20, 1956 at the József Katona Theatre.

in Budapest to the rest of the country, turned into a violent confrontation as armed guards of the State Radio building fired on the students. On the evening of October 23, 1956 a rebellion[3] began to take shape in the capital that slowly spread to various parts of the country. It was eventually put down by Soviet troops. When it was all over

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[3]What took place in Hungary in the fall of 1956 has been called a revolution in the West, and it is referred to, officially, in Hungary as a counter-revolution. I find both terms unacceptable. To the best of my knowledge, (I was in Budapest at the time and left Hungary long after the fighting was over), the majority of rebelling people did not wish to create a new social order, only a better version of what had already existed, more precisely, they wanted the promises made by the system to be kept. For this reason communist leadership, I feel, is unjustified in calling the rebellion a counter-revolution, a term they applied to the activities of the Horthy regime after the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. Revolution, I feel to be an inaccurate term also, since it implies a struggle--as was the case in Russia and Cuba--for a totally new form of government. I shall refer to the events of 1956 as either a rebellion or an uprising.

It is interesting to note that János Kádár himself used both "uprising," and "counter-revolution" to describe the same events--and he did this within the period of seventy-two hours. On November 1, 1956 in a broadcast following Imre Nagy's speech, Kádár enthusiastically remarked: "In their glorious uprising our people have shaken off the Rákosi regime." On November 4, 1956 Kádár said: ". . .the very existence of our country has been threatened by the weakness of the Imre Nagy Government and the increased influence of counter-revolutionary elements. . ." Kádár made his second speech following one by Imre Nagy, but he spoke over a newly established radio station. This time, on November 4, Nagy was calling for help against Soviet troops. During his first broadcast Kádár was part of the Nagy Government; when he made his second speech he was announcing a new government of which he was premier--a post he still holds today. (Transcripts of broadcasts by Free Kossuth Radio on November 1, 1956, and of the Kádár Government Radio on November 4, 1956 in Melvin J. Lasky, ed., The Hungarian Revolution: A White Book [New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957], pp. 179 and 236).

and theatres re-opened again in the spring of 1957, theatre-goers were offered a bill strikingly similar to that of 1945 in the days immediately after World War II. The uprising had an immediate effect on the drama. In order to better understand the position of the writer in Hungary, and therefore the course of drama after the uprising, the writers' role in the stage leading up to October 1956, requires a closer look.

Years of demands by the Party's cultural policy to produce works extolling socialism had made the writer who complied not only an artistic but a political asset to the State. Most prominent exponents of communist ideology received coveted state prizes, gained positions in government offices and held leading posts in the Writers' Associations. Some of these authors happened also to be among the most talented literary figures of Hungary[4] who genuinely believed

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[4]Most notable of these, among playwrights, were Tibor Déry, Gyula Háy and József Darvas. Háy and Darvas held high posts in the Writer's Association. Darvas was the Association's president between 1951 and 1953. He also held three separate ministerial posts in the government between 1947 and 1956. (Bulcsu Bertha, "Interju Darvas Józseffel," Jelenkor, December 1973, p. 1060).

in the Party and in socialism.[5]

When the June 1953 meeting of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers Party[6] had denounced former Party policies,[7] admitted mistakes--with most of the blame placed on Rakosi--and lay down new guidelines, it was the younger generation of writers, those whose career began under the socialist regime, who experienced a traumatic awakening. They had known and worked in conditions created by the Party, in an atmosphere where thinking and creativity were

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[5]Statements made, before and during the rebellion by authors like Háy underscore communist writers' loyalty to their ideals: "We have come to the point where the most essential problem. . .is the question of telling the truth. The best communist writers after much trouble, grave errors, and bitter spiritual struggle, have decided that never, under any conditions will they ever write lies in the future... We, Hungarian writers, irrespective of party attachments or philosophical convictions, must pledge our words together to the truth. . . It is a painful and shameful fact that, during the tragic years of schematic literature, the writers of the truest outlook, the communist writers, participated in Machiavellian deviations. But they suffered bitterly in this atmosphere of lies. They paid for [their] faults with the loss of inspiration and standards. . . As we became less truthful and worse writers, we also became worse Marxists and worse communists." (Gyula Háy, "Irók, hazugság és igazság," Irodalmi Ujsag, 22 September 1956, pp. 2-3).

[6]This was the name of the Communist Party at the time. In the post-World War II period the Party has had several names. At present it is called the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

[7]Terrorist tactics, economic miscalculations--particularly the revision upward of the first five-year plan--were most severely criticised. (Péter Gunst, ed., Magyar történelmi kronológia [Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1970], p. 393).

based on Party-approved premises. When Imre Nagy was made premier in July 1953,[8] older writers saw a new chance for artistic freedom within a socialist system which they had envisioned in their younger days. The New Course, as Nagy's policies were called, promised a period of re-assessment of the country's progress toward socialism, including a re-evaluation of the artist's role in society. Change was slow but palpable. However, hopes for a basic shift in policy were dashed when Rákosi and his followers recaptured power in 1955.[9] But even Rákosi's return could not completely erase the memories of hope for a different kind of socialism, one witnessed under Nagy's leadership. Writers, particularly those loyal to the principles of Marxist socialism had become more concerned than ever before with the mood of the country.[10] Their opposition from within

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[8]Gunst, Magyar történelmi kronológia, p. 393.

[9]Ibid., p. 394.

[10]"It turned out that the critical June 1953 resolution of the Central Committee had failed to reveal fully the depravity of the Rákosi regime. The resolution had stated in a general way that many innocent people, including Party members, had suffered imprisonment because the authorities had violated the principles of legality. What had actually happened to these people, however, became clear to the intellectuals only when the victims, released and rehabilitated, turned up in Budapest and told their stories. . ." (Paul Kecskeméti, The Unexpected Revolution [Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1961], p. 65).

culminated in a memorandum[11] calling attention to a free and independent cultural activity guaranteed by the Party in July 1953. Not only was the memorandum not heeded, it was answered by general repression and the expulsion of several writers from the Party.[12]

The decisive break between the Writers' Association's more militant communist members and the Rákosi regime came after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held in February 1956. The open attack on Stalin and condemnation of the "cult of personality" at this Congress was taken by many Hungarian writers as the signal to attack Rákosi. The Writers' Association's Literary Gazette (Irodalmi Újság) was turned into a powerful base for these attacks.[13] In the summer of 1956 the Petőfi Circle was established. Sponsored by the Communist Youth League (DISZ), the Circle soon became a forum for debates on issues

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[11]Tibor Meray, Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin, trans. Howard L. Katzander (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958), p. 39.

[12]Under heavy pressure many of the near-sixty signatories of the memorandum withdrew their signatures, but those who did not, Háy and Déry among them, were summarily expelled. (Kecskemeti, The Unexpected Revolution, pp. 68-69).

[13]Although György Hámos, editor of the Literary Gazette, was removed in late 1955, and some issues of the Gazette were seized, publication continued--a phenomenon that can perhaps be best explained by the very fact that so many writers were members of the Communist Party. I recall reading some articles in the Literary Gazette during the summer of 1956 whose tone and content would have meant certain imprisonment for their authors just a few months earlier.

concerning the political and intellectual climate of the country. Discussions were attended by students, intellectuals and writers. While workers maintained a wait-and-see attitude,[14] and peasants were, due to lack of communication, not fully aware of the situation in Budapest, it was the students, particularly those of the Petőfi Circle who took matters into their hands.

The change in government leadership, Rákosi's replacement with his number one lieutenant Ernő Gerő, failed to improve the situation. Gerő promised gradual changes, made small concessions and spoke of other measures to follow--all in good time. From September on, when the Writers' Association elected a new leadership consisting of militant communist and non-communist authors,[15] events gathered momentum rapidly. The reinterment of László Rajk[16] on October 6, 1956 turned

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[14]Once the armed struggle began, workers joined the fight. Their greatest contribution to the uprising was the organization of a general strike. It began in Budapest on October 24 and quickly spread throughout the country. (Kecskeméti, The Unexpected Revolution, p. 114).

[15]Kecskeméti, The Unexpected Revolution, p. 77.

[16]It may be recalled that the arrest, trial and execution of László Rajk, a former leader himself, was among the first activities of Rákosi after the establishment of his government in 1949. Seven years later Rákosi hoped to save his position by making certain concessions. In a speech at Eger on March 29, 1956 he announced that the Party's investigation of Rajk's case revealed that it was the police who failed in their duties when they arrested Rajk on trumped-up charges. He claimed that those responsible had already been punished. This evasion of responsibility by Rákosi evoked the wrath of many of his closest associates, and, needless to say, that of the whole country. He resigned on July 18, 1956 and left for the Soviet Union. (Kecskeméti, The Unexpected Revolution, pp. 74-76.

into a peaceful but ominous mass demonstration. Imre Nagy was re-admitted into the Party on October 13.[17] Demands concerning freedom of speech, Soviet-Hungarian relations and civil liberties were formulated by students and copies of these demands--hand-written, printed, typed and mimeographed--were circulated in Budapest. Permission was requested and granted for a student demonstration on October 23. Crowds attracted to the students swelled the ranks of demonstrators to unexpected proportions. Students were denied permission to broadcast their demands over the State Radio. When the crowd refused to move from the State Radio building, members of the Internal Police opened fire on the unarmed demonstrators.[18] The fighting, sparked on October 23, 1956, embroiled Hungary in a conflict that involved civilians, police, soldiers of the Hungarian Army and elements of the Soviet Army. The story of the uprising and its aftermath have been amply recorded in the West and in socialist

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[17]Kecskeméti, p. 78.

[18]There are conflicting views even today regarding the question of whether the first shots were only warning shots, and police fired only when fired upon, or that machine-gun fire commenced without warning.

countries.[19] Our concern here primarily is the writer's position in and after the uprising, especially those who played a role in Hungary's theatrical world.

Twice within a dozen years Hungary had to begin life anew. For writers, it seems, the second time was the more painful beginning. For those opposed to socialism the uprising appeared to be yet another defeat; for those who saw the uprising, or at least the events leading up to it, as a chance for re-establishing, perhaps establishing for the first time, true socialism, the years following 1956 became a most crucial period.

Clerks, bureaucrats, office workers, and even peasants and industrial workers could return to their places of employment by openly accepting the new leadership--even if secretly they thought otherwise. Writers could hardly continue where they left off before 1956. During Nagy's term as premier they had to face their own works, in print, written under the Rákosi regime praising that regime, and now

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[19]Despite the numerous books, pamphlets and articles that have been written about the uprising and about Imre Nagy, it is doubtful that the complete story of 1956 is yet known. It is enough to read publications in the West and compare them to those published in Hungary and the Soviet Union to realize that until all the records are made public only parts of the truth are available to us. (For comparison, in addition to the works cited in this chapter, see the following publications: The Counter-Revolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy and his Accomplices [Budapest: Information Bureau of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic, n.d.], and Events in Hungary: The Soviet People's Point of View, [Ottawa, Canada: The Press Office of the USSR Embassy in Canada, n.d.]).

many of them were also confronted with statements and declarations made in 1956 that repudiated their own works of the early 1950's. Of those writers not actively participating in the events of 1956, and there were many like that, it would be hard to tell who sympathized or did not sympathize with their rebelling colleagues. The shock of the uprising seemed to have paralyzed the activity of many authors; with some, the shock did not wear off for many years. An author's silence after 1956 could be taken as a sign of disapproval of the uprising's results, as a confession of guilt--by not participating in the life of the country under the new government--or simply as a state of confusion.[20] Many writers active in the uprising were jailed, like Déry and Háy, others escaped to the West.[21] Háy's dramas, as we noted in an earlier chapter,[22] would never again be visible on the

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[20]Illyés was conspicuously singled out for not having come back into the socialist fold right after the uprising. At the opening of the new Writers' Association, the Party's representative Gyula Kállai took time out in the middle of his speech--that sounded much like an echo of Zhdanov--to mention Illyés and one other poet, László Benjámin, both maintaining a voluntary silence at the time. Kállai said: "If writers like Gyula Illyés and László Benjámin do not understand or do not want to understand the age in which they live, [an age] which they understood before, that can only be their own tragedy as writers. It is possible that [in their absence] Hungarian literature might be a shade paler, but despite [their absence] the Hungarian People's Republic is alive and well." (Gyula Kállai, "Segitse a magyar irodalom a népet," Kortárs, October 1959, p. 597).

[21]There were no major playwrights among those who fled.

[22]See above, p. 114.

Hungarian stage within the period of our discussion; Déry would turn more and more toward writing novels and short stories after his release from prison in 1961,[23] and a whole decade was to go by before Illyés reappeared on the stage.[24]

As Hungary was slowly returning to normalcy, literary and theatrical activity also resumed in the spring of 1957. Theatres produced, just as they did after World War II, a wide variety of authors including Molnár.[25] But it was the new drama that audiences wanted to see. The uprising of 1956 was too close in time, yet it was too much on people's minds to be ignored. Interestingly enough it was the drama of all the arts that first approached the subject. We cannot examine these dramas without considering prevailing political conditions at the time of their writing, and without continuing briefly the investigation of the writer's situation in the months and years after the uprising.

Early in 1957 the Writers' Association was dissolved by the Party and several authors imprisoned. The country's

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[23]Sentenced to nine years in jail in 1957, Déry was released on April 1, 1961, his sentence suspended. In 1962 all further action and charges against him were dropped. (Marcell Benedek, ed., Magyar irodalmi lexikon Vol. I, [Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1963], p. 251).

[24]A dozen years passed between Illyés's György Dózsa (1956), and The Minion (1968), with only Flea Ball (1965) in between.

[25]This time, it seems, Molnár was back for good. Hardly a season has passed without a Molnár play since 1957; in most seasons he has been represented with several plays, often with several productions of the same play.

leadership, János Kádár's government, expected writers to handle the subject of 1956 in accordance with policies of the Party. These policies however, were different, more lenient, than those of the Rákosi years--although not as liberal as they may have been under Imre Nagy. By the time the Writers' Association was to be reorganized in 1959, both its new president and the government's representative could point to some literary achievements that met with Party approval.

This founding session of the Writers' Association brought to light some of the ironies inherent in the role of the writer in socialist Hungary. The writer, called on to support the Party in the early 1950's had grown to be a leader of the people. Now, after he had proved to be too effective a leader, as the 1956 uprising showed, he was reminded that he was not to lead, but to serve the people.[26] Before 1956 the writer was asked to disseminate and praise Party policies, now he was asked to justify the outcome of the uprising which the Party termed the defeat of the counter-revolution. Justification was needed in many areas.

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[26]In his closing remarks at the Writers' Association's founding session, its president, József Darvas said: "In conclusion, we consider it important to speak of the new behavior on the part of the writer that is necessary in our changed society. The writer is not the leader but the servant of the people. This takes nothing away from the significance of the writer. Serving the people as a writer is a great responsibility. We must benefit from the experience of recent years when some writers misunderstood their role and undertook duties that were not theirs to carry out." (József Darvas, "Irodalmunk helyzetéről," [Speech delivered at the founding session of the Hungarian Writers' Association on September 25, 1959.], Kortárs, October 1959, p. 594).

Closest to home for writers was, obviously, the question of the writers' participation in the uprising. Perhaps more important than any other, however, was the problem of the students' role, in a larger sense: the behavior in general of young people in the rebellion.[27] The large number of students and writers in the rebellion clearly proved that neither economic gain nor social advancement was among the aims of the uprising. Writers in Hungary lacked little in goods and privileges when compared with the rest of the population. The overwhelming majority of students were sons and daughters of peasants and industrial workers--universities were to give preference to children of workers and peasants--who never before had a chance of acquiring a higher education. Their studies at the universities would ensure respectable positions in society along with well-paying jobs. Yet it was these two groups, writers and students, who were at the hub of the rebellion, the groups whose struggle could hardly be seen in terms of economics. From another viewpoint, events of October 1956 were youth's rebellion against a system created by their elders, a system that proved to be treacherous, dishonest, one in which young men and women would not want to grow up.

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[27]Although peasants and industrial workers did play an effective part in the uprising, the initial force came from the intellectuals and young people in general. It was these latter groups that remained in the center of interest in works dealing with the uprising.

The writer who attempted to respond to the events of 1956 had to face these issues and a great many more. At the opening session of the Writers' Association in 1959, the Association's president József Darvas mentioned two such attempts in the drama.[28] These plays, along with one by Darvas himself, form a distinct group.

Visible Dramas Of Justification: Dobozy, Mesterházi And Darvas The Beginning Of New Forms

Szélvihar (Windstorm, April 4, 1958, Jókai Theatre), a play by Imre Dobozy (1917-), is set in a village; its dramatic action begins on October 23, 1956. On the strength of news of the rebellion in Budapest, a former landowner, Mácsay, whose family home and estate is now the Red Dawn Collective Farm, threatens to turn time back and reclaim his land and house. The head of the Collective, Kalló, who had grown rather tyrannical in recent years, takes refuge on the farm of his assistant and strongest critic among members of the Collective, Imre Csendes. Earlier in the day Csendes's son, an army lieutenant--the collective sent him to officers' school--came home, excited and enthusiastic about the up-

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[28] "We believe that. . .problems of the counter-revolution thus far have been best approached--ideologically and artistically--by our dramatic literature. Let us mention here Lajos Mesterházi's People of Budapest, and Imre Dobozy's Windstorm. . ." (József Darvas, "Irodalmunk helyzetéről," Kortárs, October 1959, p. 579).

rising. Csendes who sees the uprising as a means of returning to conditions of the interwar years, an era in which he was a landless, impoverished servant, disagrees violently and sends his son away. While Mácsay is supposedly gathering reactionary elements to follow him, Kalló and Csendes return to their earlier disagreements. Csendes maintains that despite his opposition to Kalló's intransigent attitude, the Collective must survive, and Mácsay must be prevented at all costs from taking over the village. Kalló's alienation from the Collective's membership is revealed when he admits that he did not expect them to come to his aid. He picked Csendes's house because it was farthest from the village.

When Mácsay and his small group of followers arrive at the Csendes farm, Csendes's son is with them. At first Mácsay accuses Csendes of helping Kalló escape--Kalló is in an adjacent room--then orders Csendes, as the ranking member present, to dissolve the Collective farm. Csendes refuses, saying: "So long as I live, the collective lives."[29] Mácsay then gives the Collective twenty-four hours to get off his former property, and turn over all their animals to him. Csendes's son now sees that Mácsay is not after only Kalló--which was the reason he gave his followers for coming to the Csendes farm--but in fact wants to return to pre-1945 con-

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[29]Imre Dobozy, Szélvihar in Mai magyar drámák (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1965), p. 66.

ditions and make the members of the Collective his serfs, which they were before the war. Mácsay is determined, and when the younger Csendes orders him out of the house, he fires his gun, but the bullet is caught by Mrs. Csendes who throws herself in front of her son. Mácsay is then shot dead.

The play's action is contrived; it is heavy with the urge to prove a point, indeed several points: The condition of the Collective--or, by easy implication, the condition of the country--has deteriorated because of tyrannical leadership; the young are easily confused by high-sounding promises, understandable in conditions created by such a leadership, but careful attention paid to those steadfast in their belief in socialism would enable young people to see that, correctly executed, socialism is the only viable economic and political system for Hungary--a return to feudal servitude is unthinkable.

Dobozy draws his theses clearly and goes about proving them one by one. The play's structure is anchored in a moral base and it is built on a three-part rhythm: a promise made, a promise broken, and a return to keeping the promise. The entire play follows this pattern, and within each of the three acts the first two steps of the pattern are shown with an indication of the third--so that in the final act all of the strands can be pulled together. In Act 1, Kalló, the Collective's head makes promises of even-handed, fair and

benevolent leadership. Then he is shown abusing his power, treating the Collective as if he owned it, overriding the will of well-intentioned members. In the second act, young Csendes is given the honor of going to officers' school. In a solemn speech he promises to uphold the ideals represented by the red star. Then we see him, in the heat of the rebellion, shoot at a red star atop of an army barracks. In Act 3, it is Kalló once again who is shown making a promise. This time we see him, in 1945, dividing the Mácsay estate among the peasants during the post-war land reform. His promise then was to defend with his life, if necessary, the peasants' right to the land. He broke this promise now by running away from Mácsay.

Young Csendes returns to his promise in Act 3. He realizes that his father is right and turns against Mácsay. Kalló, who ran into the Csendes's bedroom when he heard Mácsay approach the house, does not appear again in the play. It is Imre Csendes who keeps Kalló's promise of not relinquishing the land. Csendes is the hero of the play through his unwavering belief in the socialist system and in the rights of the people to oppose both Kalló's arbitrary authority and the return of the old order as represented by Mácsay. It was also Csendes who guided his own son back to what he so strongly believed to be the right course. The price of Csendes's victory: the death of his wife.

With a neatly worked out construction, Dobozy parallels the uprising of 1956 in the events within one small

community: at the cost of some bloodshed the wrong committed by power-hungry leaders has been corrected and the country saved through the strength and conviction of true followers of socialism. Dobozy leaves no doubt about his aim--to justify the return to power of the socialist order--but his success in getting his points across is not matched by his means of execution. Characters[30] seem to be advocating points of view rather than talking to each other. In several instances their speech is much too elevated, often slipping into sentimental rationalizing. In order to give a comprehensive picture of promises made and broken, Dobozy utilizes the convention of the flashback[31]--rather novel in post-World War Hungarian drama. Almost symmetrically placed within each act, we see three flashbacks: Kalló's abuse of power at a meeting; young Csendes's shooting at the red star, and again, Kalló during the land reform of 1945. The

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[30]Dobozy's symbolism, or rather depiction of symbolic action, is far from subtle. The promise concerning the red star and the shooting of it later on is but one example. His use of names for the main characters help support his theses. "Csendes" means "quiet," indicating the nature of those who, because of their unobtrusiveness may be misled for a while, but will come through in case of real danger. "Kalló," although it has a meaning of its own, (a very special term used in textile manufacturing), is sufficiently close to the verb "kallódni," --which means to fall by the wayside, to get lost in the shuffle, or to have been lost through neglect--to suggest the fate of former leaders who overstepped their authority.

[31]Usually associated with the motion picture, flashback is an appropriate term here, because Dobozy's use of scenes depicting events in the past is exactly the same as the use of flashbacks in the cinema.

flashbacks occur between blackouts in a curtained-off upstage area. Their illustrative function is limited and they add little to the play as a whole, in fact they tend to slow down the action at points where conflicts are about to develop in some depth. Thus, instead of conflicts, we are presented with debates in which the forces of good, represented by Csendes's side, triumph in the end.

Lajos Mesterházi (1916-) built his first play entirely on flashbacks. Pesti emberek (People of Budapest, Theatre of the Hungarian People's Army, October 9, 1958), covers nearly two decades in time; it is an attempt to paint a panorama of events between 1939 and 1957 through the lives of eight people. Sándor[32] has returned to Budapest from China after a sixteen-year absence, and on his first day back he runs into Monika on the street. Sitting over coffee in an espresso-café, Monika recounts the years which Sándor spent away from home.

At the end of their university studies, seven boys engage in open competition for Monika's hand. She had been the only girl in their group, and during their student years, by mutual agreement, no one boy was allowed to date her unless all the other boys were present as well. Upon graduation, the boys declare their former arrangement no longer

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[32]Major characters in the play are identified by their first names only; others are designated according to their function or profession, such as Husband, Waitress and Corporal.

binding. The first part of the play consists of scenes showing Monika meeting each of the boys separately, except Sándor who did not keep the appointment. These dates serve to illustrate that the group, seemingly homogeneous, is really made up of very different individuals who expect different things from life. We learn that one of the boys, László, is a communist, another, Tamás, a Jew. Gyula, already at home in corrupt wheeling-dealing, offers Monika a life of wealth and pleasure. The fourth boy, Deske, is full of patriotic slogans and the belief that Hungary's future lies in an alliance with Germany; he courts Monika by enumerating the glories of being a soldier's wife. Two other boys, despite their perfunctory proposal to Monika, will most likely settle down and live their lives in the neighborhood they were born in, or at best take on tutorial jobs. We also find out that Sándor did not keep his date with Monika because he thought he was being followed--he, too, was a communist then, as he is now. He watched Monika from a distance as she waited for him for over two hours. Monika married a doctor, (not one of the boys) who was critically injured during the war. All the boys except Tamás, the Jew, survived the war.

The second part of the play is about Monika's struggle after 1945. When her husband died she looked for a job, but was unable to find one. One of the boys, Gyula, now an important functionary, refuses to help her because her back-

ground is too bourgeois. Only a recommendation from László, the boy who was a communist even when the Party was forced underground, secures Monika a job. She soon loses it, however, when László is discredited and dismissed. László refuses to join the Petőfi Circle and stands by the system in 1956. After the uprising Monika is completely disillusioned and alone. In the final scenes of the play all eight characters appear, including the two dead ones, (László died in the uprising), and three who fled to the West. As Monika and Sándor listen to their former colleagues, Monika's will to live returns.

Scenically, Mesterházi broke new grounds in post-World War II Hungarian drama. His instructions call for three separate playing areas; he uses a narrator (NEWSBOY) at the opening of each of the two parts and at the end of the play; projections and film montages make up most of the setting; locales change swiftly as Monika walks in and out of each scene as they move forward and backward in time. Mesterházi relied heavily on the play's locale: Budapest. Not only is the city in the play's title, but in his directions the author states that of the three scenes ". . .the complete scene is the third one: Budapest: this is what gives the play. . .its moral unity."[33] Throughout the play

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[33]Lajos Mesterházi, Pesti emberek, in Mai magyar drámák (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1965), p. 187.

several well-known parts of Budapest are projected on the cyclorama with crowds of people moving about in front of them, creating an atmosphere of great vitality that was clearly intended to generate a feeling of well-being and security in Monika, and, no doubt, in the audience. The author seems to be saying that just as the city has survived wars and internal upheavals, so will the people of Budapest. He touches on the injustices of the Horthy-regime and on the wrongdoings of the Rákosi government. Perhaps if Mesterházi had only raised questions concerning the fate of his characters under these regimes, People of Budapest could have been a genuinely interesting, and perhaps truly moving play. But he insists on providing answers in a rather undramatic fashion, and because of this, I feel, the play fails. Monika's disillusionment is similar to that of many people who lived through the same years and under the same regimes as she did. Mesterházi has no solution for all the other people at all, but his peculiar answer to Monika's problem is completely unsatisfactory: her disillusionment fades away on the strength of a message from the martyred communist, her former class-mate, László, and because the city of Budapest looks so beautiful!

> LÁSZLÓ Our fate and future is no plaything. . . I believed our life to be beautiful, that's why I could die for it. But if you cannot feel that, what's the point of my death? What's the use if you cannot believe that you're wanted and needed, and that life must go on, that it's worth living and that it is beautiful. Do you understand me?!
> . . . . . .

MONIKA I was afraid of my memories, Sándor, afraid of seeing my past, my life and the people who shared it with me. I was afraid, but now. . .I'm glad we've met. You see, I'm only a simple woman. . .not so young any more either. . .I'm needed! Sandor! Am I really needed? You think I'll be able to start all over again?

SÁNDOR So long as one lives, one always starts again.

MONIKA (Gets up, Sándor helps with her coat; they're ready to leave.) Our life is not easy. . .

SÁNDOR You're not alone, Monika!

MONIKA It's not easy, but it's beautiful. Really, it's beautiful. (The whole stage lights up; it is full of people of Budapest walking about, with the panorama of the city above them. Monika stops before the panorama.) It is beautiful, isn't it?

SÁNDOR Yes, it is.

MONIKA I've never seen it to be so beautiful before. (They walk off and get lost in the crowd.)[34]

The closing remarks by the NEWSBOY, the play's narrator, continue to appeal to the audience's sentiment as a means of coping with the future. He, the NEWSBOY, draws a somewhat wishful conclusion about this future:

NEWSBOY . . .Well, the past is certainly not easy [to bear]. The simple people of Budapest are bearers of no easy fates. Despite the pain, fatigue, with small joys and unrelenting hope we shall leave such a clean and straightforward legacy

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[34] Ibid., pp. 258-259.

> behind us that no other generation has ever left in history! Evening News! The international situation is easing up! Evening News! Get your Evening News![35]

József Darvas (1912-1973) referred to the above plays by Dobozy and Mesterházi as works about ". . .the temporary confusion among the peasants and intellectuals, their agonizing search for and eventual finding of themselves, and about the doubts, inner conflicts and the truth of the communists. . ."[36] In his own play, Kormos ég (Soot-covered Sky, National Theatre, March 29, 1959), Darvas concentrates on a writer caught up in the uprising. Unlike Windstorm which involved a whole community, and People of Budapest, in which the 1956 uprising was only one of a whole series of events, Soot-covered Sky condenses the "confusion," "agonizing search," "doubts," and "inner conflicts" within the confines of one family, more specifically in the person of a writer, Sandor Joó.[37] The dramatic action of the play takes place almost entirely in the writer's home.[38] There

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[35] Ibid., p. 259.

[36] József Darvas, "Irodalmunk helyzetéről," Kortárs, October 1959, p. 579.

[37] Darvas, like Dobozy, uses the name of his protagonist somewhat symbolically: "jó" means "good;" the writer's name, although spelled with two o's, is pronounced the same way.

[38] In its original version the play included a scene before the Parliament building, recreating in great detail of what had actually happened there--mass rallies, unexpected battles--during the uprising. This was criticised by many reviewers of the initial production. For whatever reason, an unsigned review of the play's seventy-fifth performance reports that the scene was omitted. (Film, Szinház, Muzsika, 27 April, 1962, p. 9).

are no scenic innovations in Darvas's play, its strength comes mainly from the sharp focus on the bewildered and confused writer. Chaos in public life is paralleled by a process of disintegration in Joó's private life: his son leaves to join the rebels, his wife is on the verge of leaving him and the country with an American journalist, and, for the first time in their lives, Joó and his brother disagree over what is to be done. A fellow writer urges Joó to sign a list of demands. Joó is approached with the list because shortly before the uprising he wrote an article criticising certain government policies. When confronted with the petition, and at the same time with reports of violence outside, Joó refuses to sign, claiming that he wrote the article from his heart, and not for "feeding wild animals."[39] When he finally does sign, he believes he is helping to restore sanity and order. To his son's objection he replies: "I signed it so that less blood would be shed." The son retorts: "There is always an explanation, isn't there!"[40] and leaves the house. Joó's brother, András, Party secretary of a factory, was also against the signing. When armed workers from the factory storm into Joó's apartment looking for András whom they consider a traitor, Joó wants to revoke his signature, but his fellow writer would not let him.

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[39]József Darvas, Kormos ég, in Mai magyar drámák (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1965), p. 80.

[40]Ibid., p. 150.

The play raises far more questions regarding the causes of the uprising then either Dobozy's or Mesterházi's play, and Darvas's protagonist listens with equal attention to arguments for and against the rebellion. The result, throughout most of the play, is an ever increasing pessimism in Joó. Feeling confused and helpless, he says: "We've built on quicksand. . .and now the house collapses on our heads."[41] He is unable to provide answers to his Russian translator who happens to be in Budapest at the time, regarding the fighting--he is not even sure whether to call it a revolution or counter-revolution--its causes or its possible outcome.

As events take a decisive turn outside--the rebellion being put down with the help of Soviet troops--Joó's family is beginning to pull together again: Joó's brother is released from jail where the rebels held him; his wife, although she and Joó are not completely reconciled, refuses to defect with the American journalist; and Joó's son returns home, insisting on turning himself in for having taken part in the uprising. Joó feels he has found his place: his son's return and his brother's release convince him that the rebels were wrong. His Russian translator reappears: he came to bury his son who died in Budapest fighting with the Soviet Army. Joó now apologizes on behalf of

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[41] Ibid., pp. 86-87.

the whole nation for the uprising and for the death of his translator's son. As people are fleeing to the West or going about disclaiming statements made during the uprising that could now incriminate them, Joó performs his first positive action that is not accompanied by doubt or hesitation: he sets out on a dual mission: to walk with his son to the police station, and, at his brother's invitation, to address workers at the factory, trying to convince them that they should end their strike and help the country get back on its feet again.

Ultimately then, Sándor Joó, writer, who wrote an article in early 1956 criticising Party leadership, has returned to the Party that proved, to Joó's satisfaction, that only certain of its members stepped over their authority and caused suffering to a large number of people, but the system itself is sound and beneficial to the country as a whole. Joó has found his place, or rather he has decided that he has; much like a one man jury, he allowed the evidence for and against the case to be presented, and then made his choice. This, in fact, is what has happened to all the protagonists of the three plays discussed above. While Imre Csendes, in Dobozy's Windstorm, is perhaps the most active of the heroes in these plays, he is strongest in his refusal to act--to dissolve the Collective--and it is his son who kills the people's enemy, former landowner Mácsay. Sándor and Monika in People of Budapest review the past and

decide that, despite injustices and suffering, they would now go and join the system re-established after 1956. Sándor Joó is engaged in a battle with himself throughout Soot-covered Sky while the fight that will determine the future of the country is taking place outside. Joó, too, is a reviewer. Just as events are brought into the café for Sándor and Monika in People of Budapest, selected aspects of the uprising--theoretical and physical--reach into Joó's home for him to review and make his choice. Just as it was not Csendes, but his son who pulled the trigger in Windstorm, so in Soot-covered Sky it is not Joo but his son who takes up arms, and it is not Joó but his brother who is imprisoned. Csendes, Sándor and Monika and Sándor Joó have only to accept or reject the outcome of the battle. All of the protagonists in all three plays accept the new situation. They reaffirm their loyalties to the restored system which they had criticised earlier but now believe to have been cleansed of its inhumanity.

Something has happened to the "positive hero." He no longer has the unconditional support of the Party--it was the Party that he seemed to be at odds with. While others engaged in open fight with the Party, the protagonists of the above plays were merely shaken in their belief and loyalty. But even this temporary state of uncertainty depicted on the stage seemed to have been enough to give Hungarian drama a mild jolt, taking it in a new direction. Because he is not

one with the Party, because his words are not pronouncements of the Party, and because--despite his ultimate loyalty--the road back to the Party is filled with doubts and confusion, the new hero resembles more an individual facing moral conflicts within himself, than a personification of political ideology. Clearly the correctness of the Party line was established in each of the plays, but the appearance of this new hero meant at least a partial break with the dramas of the early 1950's.

Dobozy, Mesterházi and Darvas came on the Hungarian theatrical scene in 1958 and 1959. The former two turned to drama for the first time, Darvas had written only one play before Soot-covered Sky, and that before World War II.[42] All three authors were in their forties, all with long and distinguished literary careers behind them. Each has continued to write plays and, to varying degrees, maintain the themes found in his first efforts. They repeatedly return to the events of 1956 and there is a noticeable increase in the intensity with which they search for the causes of those events. Their questions have remained the same: how is one to live with one's past; how to explain this past to a new generation--to one's own children--how to explain that it is somehow possible to go along with a system such as the Rákosi regime, and, after a violent shaking off of that system, to

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[42]Darvas's Szakadék (The Abyss) was shown at the National Theatre in 1942 and was revived in 1970.

be reconciled with the regime of the late 1950's. Because in every one of their plays Dobozy, Mesterházi and Darvas manipulate the action so that the outcome justifies current conditions, these three authors have remained visible on the Hungarian stage. The questions they raise are vital, and a truly in-depth examination of them might produce excellent drama, but, just as in their early plays, their insistence on proving a thesis--that the status quo is, after all, the desired way of life--their later works too have been dramas of justification. Nevertheless, technical innovations and the shift in focus from the two-dimensional "positive hero" to individual characters in conflict with themselves, have helped to lift Hungarian drama out of the assembly line production of schematic plays of the early 1950's. Two other phenomenon contributed to the change that began in 1957. While immediately after 1945 the Party did not welcome plays dealing with events of World War II; in 1957, it seems, cultural policy strongly encouraged plays, and other works of art, relating to the 1956 uprising. In the years following Hungary's liberation Brecht was declared decadent, formalist and came under attack by such prominent socialist-realist authors as Hay. The year 1957 also marked Brecht's entry

into Hungarian theatre, theatrical theory and stagecraft.[43]

Considering the differences between Hungarian drama's situation in 1945 and 1957, along with such similarities as the production of authors of the most varied outlook and political persuasion, we may say that in some important respects Hungarian drama in 1957 finally arrived at a starting point where it should have twelve years earlier. It is truly difficult to gauge this belated progress. Even if Hungarian drama had continued in 1945, at the stage it reached before World War II, it still would have been twenty to thirty years behind the drama of the rest of Europe.[44] The process of change that begun in 1957 is significant because dramaturgically, technically and even thematically Hungarian drama took a decisive step towards closing the gap between itself and the drama of the rest of the world.[45]

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[43]Prior to the April 1957 production of The Good Woman of Setzuan only the Threepenny Opera of all Brecht's plays was shown in Hungary. It was first produced in 1930 and it also had a brief run in 1945. Both times Threepenny Opera was mounted, viewed and reviewed as an operetta; still, it failed to fill theatres. Since 1957 most of Brecht's major plays have been produced in Hungary, and Brecht's theories and Brecht's place in socialist drama are continually discussed. (Natália Emődi, "Brecht útja a magyar szinpadon," Kritika, May 1964, pp. 40-44).

[44]In fact that is where Hungarian drama did continue in 1945, filling old forms with politically appropriate content.

[45]Whether Lékai, Remenyik, Balázs and Déry would have meant more to Hungarian audiences than the plays of Brecht, is an open question. I tend to think that they would have. But the whole world knew Brecht and his absence from the Hungarian stage seemed artistically as well as politically somewhat embarrassing. On the other hand, few people were aware of the pioneers of Hungarian avant-garde drama--none of whom commanded the reputation of a Brecht. Thus Brecht is highly visible in Hungary while Lékai, Remenyik and Déry's early plays still await re-discovery.

CHAPTER VI

PARADISE LOST

> Well, come along, I don't really need you any more, but does it matter where you spend your time? To me it's all the same.
>
> --Imre Sarkadi[1]

The uprising of October 1956 has been the last major political upheaval in Hungary since World War II. János Kádár who took power in late 1956[2] is still at the head of the government today. His leadership to date has been characterized not by abrupt and wrenching changes, but rather by slow and steady reforms. In contrast to the 1950's, when the government required some political involvement by every one,[3] the 1960's saw an era of voluntary involvement begin, which, coupled with a tolerance for those not willing to be

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[1]Imre Sarkadi, Oszlopos Simeon, in Ház a város mellett (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1969), p. 201.

[2]On November 4, 1956, the day Soviet troops marched on Budapest, a new government, the Revolutionary Workers-Peasants Government, was formed with János Kádár as premier. (Péter Gunst, ed., Magyar történelmi kronológia, p. 394).

[3]For a more detailed discussion of this, in connection with Tibor Déry's play, The Sycophant, see above, pp. 120-121.

involved, has made for a generally freer and more relaxed atmosphere in which to live and create.[4] While the years immediately after the rebellion saw the production of plays that justified the return to power of socialist leadership, it was this relaxed atmosphere in the early 1960's that eventually allowed the mounting of some plays that focused on painful aspects of life under socialism. By no means were all of these plays staged at the time of their writing, and some still have not reached the theatre, but production after five to ten years can still be considered an improvement over delays of thirty or forty years--or permanent invisibility. Authors of outstanding examples of these plays, visible or invisible, attempted to show two, hitherto taboo phenomena: (1) that socialism in Hungary left the lives of quite a few people in conditions no better than under any previous systems, and (2) that some people who enjoyed the benefits of socialism have remained unhappy in their personal lives, despite, or perhaps because of, these benefits.

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[4]After the Twenty-Second Congress of the CPSU at which Khrushchev's reform policies triumphed, Kádár made his landmark speech, outlining his Alliance Program, in December 1961. The thrust of the speech was the reversal of the Rákosi regim's threat of "Whoever is not with us is against us," into "Whoever is not against us is with us." Kádár further summed up his views in the following lines: "Indeed we do believe that whoever is not against the Hungarian people is with us. . .There are many hundreds of thousands who are not Marxists but who respect our Party and our Government for having created a legal order and a normal atmosphere in the country. They are with us." (Magyar Nemzet, 3 December 1961, quoted in William Shawcross, Crime and Compromise: Janos Kadar and the Politics of Hungary Since Revolution (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974 [Uncorrected proof], pp. 116-117).

In 1962 the publication of a short novel by Endre Fejes (1923-) proved to be an unprecedented popular success--four printings were sold within a few months.[5] Critical evaluation and debates had not yet subsided when the novel's dramatized version was produced and the play turned out to be just as controversial and popular as the book. Rozsdatemető (Scrap-iron Yard) opened on November 14, 1963 at the Thália Theatre. Discussion and debate continued with a renewed momentum. Few critics found fault with the play's theme, content or even Fejes's technical solutions. The questions most often raised had to do with the author's attitude regarding the problems presented in his play.[6]

Fejes tells the story of the Hábetler family from 1918 to 1962. The play's twenty-four scenes unfold the events that culminate in a murder: János Hábetler Jr. (Jani), struck his brother-in-law who fell and, fracturing his skull, died instantly in the scrap-iron yard of the factory where both men worked. Conceived in the form of epic drama, the play has a narrator, the Writer, who traces the family's history back nearly a half century in order to find some explanation for the murder. The Writer provides continuity, relates off-stage action, fills in political events, and

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[5]Ten years after its original publication, Fejes's novel was still being reprinted; its eighth edition published in 1973. (Gábor Szigethy, "A Fejes-ügy," Kritika, August 1973, p. 23).

[6]Various critics are cited in an article reviewing Fejes's collected plays. (Anna Földes, "Lenni és nem lenni: Fejes Endre drámáiról," Színház, November 1971, p. 44).

generally facilitates the smooth flow of the represented scenes.

Members of the Hábetler family live on the periphery of the city and on the periphery of society, in conditions that always border on poverty. Whether it is 1920 or 1960, they seem to be untouched by social or political changes. Survival is the only guiding force in the life of the family; deaths and frequent divorces are accepted as calmly as births and marriages; bodily needs are satisfied while worry over other aspects of human existence is relegated to others. The Hábetlers are not, in any way, active in major events of history. World War II, socialist government policies, the uprising of 1956 effect them no more than does a good fight between János Habelter Sr. and his wife over the flirtatious wife of a neighbor. By any standard, the life of the Hábetler parents, János Sr. and his wife, is only a little better than hell, and the life of their children--now all unhappily married or divorced--promises to be no different. Hábetler Sr. is a simple man with a sense of order and a longing for peace at home. He fools himself into believing that all is well so long as the family is kept together; while Mrs. Habetler, a coarse, powerful woman, manages to keep the family together--at least physically--she does this, most often, to the detriment of all concerned.

Will the cycle of this kind of life ever be broken? Who will break out of it and when, if not now in the 1960's

when it is more possible than ever before? These seem to be the questions Fejes's play poses. János Hábetler Jr. (Jani) is the most likely candidate to change at least his own life. He is hardly different from the others in his family except that he lost the girl he loved and the child they had together. The girl was Jewish. While Jani was serving on the front his family had a chance to leave the city. But they forgot to call for Jan's girl in the ghetto before moving to the countryside. The girl and the child were taken to Auschwitz. When Jani returned from the front and was told of the girl's fate he had a good cry. The following day he started working in a factory and gave all his earnings to his mother. Jani married a girl he met in the factory; they moved in with his family. One after the other Jani's sisters broke off with their husbands. Mrs. Hábetler died. Zentay, one of Jani's brothers-in-law who had high hopes for a university education has taken to drinking after his divorce, and is slowly turning into an alcoholic. He still manages to hold a menial job at the factory where Jani works. In his inebriated state one afternoon Zentay meets Jani in the factory's scrap-iron yard. To head off what he expects to be another lecture on how his drunkenness might cost him his job, Zentay flies into a tirade recounting the miserable life of the Hábetlers and his own misfortunes. Losing control, he does not heed Jani's warning to be silent:

ZENTAY Shut my mouth, eh? . . .I used to drink? That's right! I still drink! The whole world is stepping on me, walking all over me; cheap bastards spit in my eye, rotten little functionaries can break my neck just because they don't like my mug! And you guys dare preach to me? I can beat all of you, even in this damn' regime; I lead a life a hundred times better than yours. . . I made it to Lecturer on Labor Problems, didn't I? I'm still studying, educating myself. . .and I'll keep on studying, you watch, even if I have to fight every damn' functionary man by man. You guys dare preach to me? By what right? This regime is all for you; it begs you: please come into our universities, become doctors, engineers, judges, chief-technicians, chief-policemen, chief-soldiers, chief-good god-damn's; and you guys? What d'you guys do? You crawl out of your shanties and go on living the same goddamn' way, like hamsters. Pop music, dancing, let's go team! That's all you know! Feeding your faces with cheese and noodles and fried fish and then burp and slink into bed, that's what you do, my dear comrade Hábetler. (With shaky hands he lights a cigarette.) Don't look at me like that. How the hell do you live? You make over two thousand forints, plus the paint jobs you do on the side! You wash, cook, clean up, hug and kiss your kids and that's it, eh? Have you seen a theatre from the inside? Read a book? A single book yet? After all, you are the boss here, power and authority is yours, you chief-aristocrat of a tool-and-dye-maker you, martyr of the wars! Wasn't it you whose woman and little girl were burnt to death in Auschwitz because somebody happened to forget about them?

JANI (Strikes ZENTAY in the face who falls back among the wracks. His skull cracks, he dies instantly.)[7]

Although Zentay addresses him as "comrade," Jani is not a communist, in fact he has never been a member of any

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[7]Endre Fejes, Rozsdatemető, in Kéktiszta szerelem (Budapest: Magvető, 1971), p. 135.

organization or movement. Neither Jani or any of the other Hábetlers have ever belonged to any community except their own family, a fact which the play conveys vividly throughout. The Hábetlers represent a separate segment of society whose members live from day to day, whose perspectives reach no further than their basic needs. What was perhaps most disturbing about the play, (and the novel as well), was the clear indication that the Hábetlers and people like them had no desire to reach for the goals socialist society held out for them.

Some critics approached the play by asking pragmatic questions such as: "Why does Fejes not lead Jani into [the world of] socialism today?"[8] Others welcomed the author's attempt to put on the stage people who still lived outside the main stream of socialist life.[9] Most critics seemed to be in agreement that the phenomenon they called "hábetlerism,"[10] had to be dealt with, hopefully done away with. "Hábetlerism" entered the Hungarian language; it has come to mean a way of life characterized by petty bourgeois self-alienation from the rest of socialist society.

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[8]Pál Pándi, "Fejes Endre: Rozsdatemető," in Kritikus ponton (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1972), p. 364.

[9]Critic István Hermann found the play more successful than the novel in realizing characters in situations most readers and theatergoers were not at all familiar with. (István Hermann, "Fejes Endre: Szinmüvek," Kortárs, October 1969, pp. 1674-1675).

[10]It is impossible to determine who first coined the phrase "hábetlerism," but critics and reviewers, without exception, use it freely and frequently.

The merits of Scrap-iron Yard lie in the presentation of characters in a manner free from illusions regarding their characters' present life or their future, and at the same time, passing no judgments over them. Perhaps this reluctance to judge his characters accounts for some critics' questioning Fejes's own attitude toward the Hábetlers and their world. Part of the answer may easily come from the fact that Fejes wrote about the Hábetlers from first hand knowledge: his childhood and a good part of his adult life was spent in places and in conditions described and shown in the play.[11]

A sense of helplessness combined with great indifference on the part of most characters permeates the play's action. Jani's fist flying into Zentay's face at the end seems to be an appropriate resolution: Jani has not reached the point where he could change the life which his family has led for generations, but the truth of this life's grey hopelessness evokes an anger in him that is sufficient for one powerful blow--an act that could possibly be the signal for more and more positive action. Ironically, this blow lands Jani in jail.

Perhaps it would be unjust to blame socialism for having failed to raise the lives of the Hábetlers and others like them from the level of petty dreams and no aspirations.

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[11] István B. Szabó, "Fejes Endre útiránya és új regénye," új irás, March 1969, p. 120.

"Hábetlerism" did not originate under socialism, and an attitude bordering on slave-mentality could not be changed in a few short years. Still occupied with Fejes's work, a young critic, Gábor Szigethy, recently wrote:

> Rereading it [Scrap-iron Yard] after ten years, the question is still the same: can we rest assured that we have arrived at the Promised Land. . .or should we act and think more in terms of families, in terms of the country in relations to families, so that more and more Jani Hábetlers could stay alive. Because the Hábetlers are still rather numerous.[12]

This critic was writing in 1973. The very appearance of Scrap-iron Yard in 1963 was an achievement and a breakthrough. Not only did the play present, in a straight-forward manner, unpleasant and painful aspects of life under socialism, but it also implied what Szigethy noted ten years later, that this way of life was not restricted to a particular family, but was shared by a sizable segment of the population. Fejes's play was not one of justification, as were the plays of Darvas, Mesterházi and Dobozy; Fejes provided no answer to the problem of "hábetlerism." His critics attempted to do that, especially those who strongly believed that socialism would do away with "hábetlerism." It was possible to view the play in that way, to presume that the author hoped, in the best Brechtean tradition, to bring, not his characters, but his audiences to the point where some-

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[12]Gábor Szigethy, "A Fejes-ügy," Kritika, August 1973, p. 23.

thing would be done--in this case, about "hábetlerism." In 1963, when Premier Kádár's vow of "Whoever is not against us is with us,"[13] was still echoing through the country, Scrap-iron Yard fit well into the scheme of prevailing political and social directions. Such was not the case with the plays of Miklós Mészöly.

Author of several novels and essays, a writer of bizarre short stories, some of which have been made into highly successful motion pictures, Miklós Mészöly (1921-) is yet to take his place on the Hungarian stage. His liaison with the theatre began while he was dramaturg of the National Puppet Theatre between 1951 and 1953.[14] His two plays, Bunker and Az ablakmosó (The Window Washer)[15] are now considered by many to be the first Hungarian absurd dramas, but Hungarian audiences are not familiar with them. Bunker had only a reading and The Window Washer, produced on the Experimental Stage of the National Theatre of Miskolc, was closed after three performances.[16] However both plays have had

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[13]See above, p. 201.

[14]Two puppet plays by Mészöly, Terülj táska and Argyilus királyfi were produced by the National Puppet Theatre in 1951 and 1959.

[15]See Appendix E.

[16]This production in the provincial town of Miskolc opened on March 15, 1963 and received only two reviews.

successful productions outside Hungary.[17]

Mészöly wrote The Window Washer in 1957, the Bunker in 1959. The two plays complement each other in a unique way. In both of them a seemingly well-ordered system is upset by an outside force, resulting in a new situation in which the future of neither the system nor the outside force can be predicted with certainty.

In the Bunker a small army unit, holed up in an underground shelter, equipped and supplied to last indefinitely, is in charge of guarding a vast minefield. Under the tyrannical leadership of a lieutenant, the soldiers, three in all, carry out their duties and maintain the bunker as if they were in a combat situation although they have not been involved in any action for many years. Into this antiseptic and sealed world enter two old men and a young girl, all from the same village, who were going to dig up a barrel of lard which the girl's father buried at the beginning of the war. They had strayed close to the bunker and were captured. The presence of these outsiders, particularly that of the girl, upset the orderly ways of the bunker. Fired by their desire to seduce the girl, the men's smouldering resentment

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[17] The Window Washer opened in Augsburg, West Germany in November 1966; the Bunker had a successful run in Poland, opening at the Ludowy Nowa Huta Theatre on April 15, 1967. Bunker was also published in the Polish magazine Dialog (1964 n. 5 pp. 52-88). Mészöly told me that Hungarian authorities attempted to halt rehearsals in Poland because Bunker had not been produced in Hungary. It took the negotiation of the two countries' respective Communist Parties to allow resumption of rehearsals and production of Bunker in Poland. (Interview with Miklós Mészöly August 5, 1972 in Budapest).

toward the lieutenant flares up, but it is kept in check until the youngest of the men, a private, who falls in love with the girl, disobeys the lieutenant and tries to lead the girl safely through the minefield to the buried lard-barrel. The other men follow his example and, after disarming the lieutenant, leave the bunker. Neither the fate of the soldiers, the young girl and the old men, nor of the lieutenant left in the bunker is indicated at the end of the play.

In The Window Washer the Sunday morning quiet of a young couple, Tommy and Anny, is disturbed by a man who claims that he cleans their windows once every year. His intrusion--he entered through neither the door nor the window, but through the cyclorama--brings the young couple to the realization that their small world, fortified only by their love, is brittle and only make-believe. What has seemed up to this Sunday morning perfectly sufficient to sustain Tommy and Anny--their love--now proves to be inadequate, at least temporarily, to cope with the reality of the outside world which the Window Washer brings in with him and which he manipulates with ease. Not only does he have the power to destroy the couple's illusions about beauty, purity and love, he is also able to convince them that it is they who wanted this change in their lives. Before he leaves, the couple undergo experiences they never thought possible. Tommy is seduced by the superintendent's wife and

Anny falls victim to the brutal charms of the Window Washer. Tommy and Anny do get back together again, reaffirm their love; the Window Washer leaves, but it is doubtful that things will go on the way they used to before the Window Washer appeared on the scene. Mészöly uses the theatre as his locale, underlining the make-believe nature of the couple's existence by placing their apartment on the bare stage of a theatre. Tommy and Anny live in an apartment furnished with invisible furniture, save for a sofa and a screen; they openly address and acknowledge the presence of the audience.

Fejes's Scrap-iron Yard, identified and pointed a finger at untenable conditions for which the blame rested as much on the Horthy regime of the interwar years as on socialist Hungary; Mészöly does not identify time and place to the last detail. His soldiers in Bunker are called only by their rank, they have no names. Their actions may be attributed to soldiers of any nationality in any war in recent memory.[18] The Window Washer could represent any force or authority, fascist or socialist. Objections at the time of The Window Washer's appearance in print[19] and in articles published years later, were directed at Mészöly mostly for

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[18]Mészöly recalled that had he been willing to identify his soldiers by their uniforms--American uniforms were preferred--the production of Bunker would have received serious consideration.

[19]The Window Washer was published in Jelenkor in 1963.

equating all powers that may intrude on the life of the individual. One critic, Pál Pándi, found it difficult even to engage in a debate with Mészöly on this point:

> If Mészöly would agree that there are fundamental differences between different kinds of power with regards to individual relationships and human dignity, then we could probably carry on a fruitful exchange of ideas about such questions as the following: so long as state power exists certain restrictions exist as well; or, what new meanings human dignity might take on during the process of the demise of state power, etc.[20]

Pándi labeled private life, as seen in The Window Washer, "existentialist," Mészöly's attitude "nihilist," and refused, after having written ten pages, to get involved in a "meaningful exchange of ideas" unless Mészöly would adopt his, Pándi's, premises.[21]

In an article written in 1969 critic Gábor Mihályi laments the fact that Mészöly ". . .because of his abstract means of presentation equated all sorts of power."[22] But Mihályi, although parenthetically only, touches on the causes of The Window Washer's invisibility on the Hungarian stage. Calling for productions of both Mészöly plays, Mihályi remarks that ". . .time has blunted the plays' edge which, through misunderstanding, could [in 1963] be considered reactionary."[23]

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[20]Pál Pándi, "Mészöly Miklós: Az ablakmosó--A tagadás tagadása," in Kritikus ponton (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1972), p. 568.

[21]Ibid., p. 574.

[22]Gábor Mihály, "Kisérletek és eredmények," Szinház, April 1969, p. 3.

[23]Ibid., p. 3.

It seems that fear of audiences seeing the Window Washer as a representative of socialist State power--and not equating it with any other but the one in office in Hungary at the time--clouded the vision of the critics, preventing them from evaluating Mészöly's play fairly. Basically, what critics failed to realize was the similarities, and more importantly the differences between the "hábetlerism" of the Hábetler family in Scrap-iron Yard and the "hábetlerism" of Tommy and Anny in The Window Washer. Tommy and Anny lived in their own world, away from the rest of society, content with each other's company. But this state was not an outgrowth of generations of self-isolation. Tommy, an actor, refused to play roles he felt were meaningless; he chose unemployment of his own free will. He and his wife had great hopes and dreams, aspirations which they could not fulfill in the outside world. When the Window Washer brings the outside world into their home, insisting that only by becoming part of this outside world would the young couple be able to live truly, the result is that the paradise Tommy and Anny had created for themselves is lost, and, although their future now is uncertain, it is doubtful that forces represented by the Window Washer would be able to make up for this loss or to replace this paradise with anything that would make Tommy and Anny happy. While in Scrap-iron Yard the life of the Hábetler family still had to be lifted to the level of the rest of the country--and socialist

leadership, presumably, could do the job--the power that may have accomplished this may very well be the very same power that, in The Window Washer, could destroy the happiness of Tommy and Anny.

Mészöly provides no alternate ways for Tommy and Anny to effectively resist the Window Washer; they simply retreat into their love and hope that it will sustain them. The battle between the young couple and the Window Washer was uneven because Tommy and Anny were unaware of the nature and extent of the power which their opponent commanded. But it was also this unknown threat that sent Anny and Tommy back to each other, and, despite their changed lives, they expect their salvation to come from being together and continuing their lives together. The Window Washer managed to jolt them out of their paradise, but ultimately he seemed to have failed in corrupting them.

Perhaps the fear and negative reaction to Mészöly's play in 1963 may have had something to do with the fact that The Window Washer, written in 1957, was clearly inspired by the terror of the Rákosi years, and those taking pride in the country's achievements in the years since 1957 wished for a more positive attitude on the part of the author in depicting life in Hungary in the early 1960's.

At the end of 1963, the first play of a young novelist, Károly Szakonyi (1931-), threw a different light on the effects of the years since 1957 on the life of a couple

not unlike Tommy and Anny. Életem, Zsóka. . .! (Sofie, My Life. . .! December 13, 1963, József Katona Theatre)[24] shows not a state of conditions unchanged under different regimes, as we have seen in Scrap-iron Yard, nor a violent disruption of two people's lives, as in The Window Washer, but rather a slow process of disintegration of a young couple's eight-year old marriage. The play begins at the time when divorce is imminent, then through a series of scenes from the past, it rolls the action back to reveal how the couple arrived at this point. It is clear from the beginning that divorce was not brought about by loss of physical attraction, or love for a third party. As the title suggests the life of the husband, Köves, a writer, was linked to his wife's even beyond the bonds of marriage.

As the dramatic action begins, Köves learns from Sofie that his friend Rácz committed suicide. The rest of the play slowly drives home the point that despite appearances: being successful and physically alive, Köves, the writer Sofie met in the 1950's is now spiritually dead. As a beginner, a struggling writer, Köves refused to compromise and adjust his writing to the demands of certain policies or functionaries. Rácz who could have helped him in those days often urged Köves to make these adjustments or corrections in order to get ahead. The strength which Köves

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[24]The play's premiere was held at the Performing Arts Academy's own theatre, the Ódry Stage.

needed to retain his artistic integrity was provided by Sofie, then a typist, who believed in him. During the years after the 1956 uprising Rácz has slowly come to realize that what he thought to be conviction in a cause was nothing more than prostituting himself to a system for a safe life in return. Rácz looked to Köves for support and for help in finding himself. Köves during these same years was being published more and more, his material bought by film studios and television companies. In the process of marketing his works, small, barely noticeable compromises were asked for and made. Financial gains and increasing fame blinded Koves to the point where compromises did not seem to be compromises; he instinctively learned what would be expected, or rather what would or would not sell. Causes, goals, and important ideas to be communicated, all had faded away, the purpose became the good life, a bourgeois good life. Köves has changed, Sofie has not, and Rácz, whose salvation lay in Köves's steadfastness, became completely disillusioned and killed himself. As Köves makes a last attempt to keep Sofie from leaving, she rebukes him by saying:

> Oh how you love to believe in magic. To think that just because you say you're sorry everything's all right again. In order to explain your weakness you have even invented fate! ...But to be honest, and stay honest to the very end, why isn't that possible? Why?[25]

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[25]Károly Szakonyi, Életem Zsóka...! (Budapest: Szerzői Jogvédő Hivatal, n.d.), p. 110. [Typed manuscript]

Szakonyi did not entirely succeed in showing the full extent of the change taking place in Köves; his technique of condensing the action into flashbacks that occur in Köves's mind in the course of one night did not contribute anything new to Hungarian drama, but Szakonyi thereby made an important point. Compromise and prostitution--physical or otherwise--bourgeois attitudes and disillusionment were not peculiar only to capitalist society--as Party dogma had maintained in the 1950's--and this process of becoming more and more bourgeois in one's style of life occurred at the time when more opportunities were opening up for more people in Hungary than at any time after World War II.

Sofie, My Life...! raised no objection to the material gains Koves was pursuing, but to what this pursuit brought along with it. It seemed that the least difficult part of raising the Hábetlers in Scrap-iron Yard out of their substandard existence would be an economic boost. Tommy and Anny in The Window Washer were not content or discontent because of their possessions or the lack of them. Something more fundamental has happened to the characters in these plays. They were all engaged in a battle in which their happiness was at stake. The intensity of their suffering was measured by the participants' awareness of this battle and by the degree to which they valued their happiness. This is why the Hábetlers were more prone to lose: their

awareness of life around them and of their own life's horizons were the most limited.

The shift in focus from communal existence to individual lives that began with the dramas of Dobozy, Mesterházi and Darvas in the late 1950's was, in the early 1960's, becoming more pronounced. Because the stakes were more personal, the losses seemed greater than in the dramas of the 1950's in which, although whole systems and ideologies appeared to be locked in combat, communal victories never proved to be quite satisfying--not to mention the fact that the outcome was always predictable.

Elveszett Paradicsom (Paradise Lost)[26] whose first idea was put on paper on Christmas Day, 1960[27] and opened on May 26, 1961 at the Madách Theatre, was Imre Sarkadi's last play. He committed suicide on April 12, 1961. Unlike his first two plays, Road from the Farms (1952) and September (1955)[28] in which communal efforts and changes on a large scale in the social structure, provided the background as well as the conflict, in his later plays[29] Sarkadi attempted

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[26]See Appendix F.

[27]Judit Kónya, Sarkadi Imre alkotásai és vallomásai tükrében (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1971), p. 199.

[28]See above, pp. 128-131.

[29]Three fully completed plays and sketches for others were discovered in Sarkadi's papers, among them Simeon Stylites, to be discussed in Chapter VII.

more and more to seek out the individual in society. While I do not intend to take part in the still ongoing debate concerning the autobiographical and even prophetic nature of Sarkadi's plays,[30] it would be difficult to ignore some similarities between the author and some of his protagonists. A shy, talented country boy whose first works were published at the age of twenty-one, Imre Sarkadi studied and worked in fields as unrelated to literature as pharmacy, law and farming. He also worked in factories and taught school.[31] When he moved from the country to Budapest, his life, to all indications, grew increasingly restless. He spent much of his

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[30]A great deal has been written about the last years of Sarkadi's life. Many consider his writings during these years, 1956 to 1961, to be a kind of preparation for his suicide. There have been claims that, disillusioned after 1956, Sarkadi was constantly preoccupied with the idea of suicide, particularly after 1957. It was in that year that a young and talented actor, Imre Soós who played the lead in both of Sarkadi's first two plays, committed suicide together with his wife. (Ferenc Hont and Géza Staud, Szinházi kislexikon, [Budapest: Gondolat, 1963], p. 402). The theory has also been advanced that József Darvas's play, Drunken Rain (1964), dealing with the soul-searching of a writer after the suicide of his friend and fellow writer, was written as a memorial to Sarkadi. In her brief book on Sarkadi, Judit Kónya devotes several pages to citing the views of several authors and critics concerning Sarkadi. Arguments are put forward that Sarkadi's disillusionment after 1956 was as natural as the disillusionment of other authors and that it was only a temporary one. Most of those quoted in Kónya's book agree that Sarkadi did falter and made mistakes. Among those paying homage to Sarkadi we find Illyés who says: "Today it is fitting to approve and disapprove Sarkadi's work and his directions. But now we also find out how exacting and farsighted he was, even in his mistakes." (Judit Kónya, Sarkadi Imre alkotásai es vallomásai tükrében, pp. 217-226).

[31]Imre Sarkadi, "Sarkadi Imre egyetlen fönnmaradt önéletrajza," in Judit Kónya, Sarkadi, pp. 227-228.

time drinking, playing cards and seemed always to be driven by a hopeless search for unspecified or unsepcifiable goals. His death at the age of forty left all of Hungary in shock.

When, in Paradise Lost, Zoltán Sheboek enters his father's house in the country he is a doomed man. He performed an unsuccessful abortion on a woman with whom he had an affair. Zoltán faces a minimum of twelve years in jail not only because the woman died, but because, being a brain surgeon, he was not qualified to do the operation. Zoltán has left Budapest not to run away from the authorities, but to be with his father, the constant source of strength in his life. Zoltán wants only a few days of peace; he has resigned himself not to go to jail:

> ZOLTÁN . . .don't feel sorry for me, you have no reason to. I've managed to get out of life everything that was nice and good. What else is left? The repetition of the same thing. I'm not anxious for repetitions. I'm not anxious to see the inside of a jail cell, either. Only your kind of man could profit from an experience like that. It would break me. I'd come out an invalid, an aged, rejected dog. . .this future disgusts me when I think about it. . .I just don't want to be like that. (Pause) Death seems much more interesting than that.[32]

Zoltán does not contemplate death because a woman died on his operating table. Although many of his remarks appear cynical, there are few hidden meanings in his words:

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[32]Imre Sarkadi, Paradise Lost, see p. 536.

he means just what he says. He "has managed to get out of life" a great many things, he is a talented surgeon and lacks nothing money can buy. But he has failed to find a solid base on which to build a life, a future. Work, research, science in general can satisfy only part of his needs. As the family gathers to celebrate old Sheboek's seventy-fifth birthday, and we get a glimpse of how Zoltán's brother and sister struggle with their own marriages--one marriage dissolving during Zoltan's visit--we can understand why Zoltán has avoided marriage up to now. But his siblings and their spouses are not the only people in the house. Zoltán's father, now seventy-five, has made several major discoveries in his studies of botany--which he took up when he was past forty--and is daily setting new tasks for himself, knowing full well that the results of some of his most important experiments will not come until long after his own death. Having inherited his father's interest in science, Zoltán claims to lack all the other necessary qualities: patience, perseverence and faith. He acknowledges his father's wisdom regarding science and life, but dismisses it in the same breath, saying: ". . .what good is your wisdom to me if it's in <u>you</u>?"[33]

With all his understanding and wisdom, old Sheboek could not have changed Zoltán's mind about following his original plan to choose death over a long prison term. It

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[33]<u>Ibid.</u>, p.595.

is Mira, daughter of Sheboek's godson, now visiting from Rumania, who places Zoltán in a most difficult situation. Young, pretty and full of life, Mira disarms Zoltán who tries hard not to submit. Zoltán who strongly believed that when he entered his father's house he had already lost his own paradise is now shown, through Mira's love and simplicity, through her very presence, the possibility of another paradise, one that he has never dreamed would be possible for him. What Zoltán needs, what he has always needed, is another human being whom he could love and believe in and who, in turn, would love and believe in him. Mira could be to Zoltán what Sofie was, at the beginning of their relationship, to Köves in Sofie, My Life. . .! Sarkadi gives no final answer, Zoltán's final choice is left open. At the end of the play Zoltán breaks down as he says to his father; "I would have lived for that girl. . ." to which old Sheboek replies: "Try it. . ."[34]

Has society rejected Zoltán Sheboek, or has he removed himself from society? He has been a rather useful member of society as a doctor and a scientist. He has enjoyed the benefits of life to the fullest extent possible for anyone in Hungary; yet he felt that he has lost everything that might have been meaningful to him. There is very little material, if any, in the play with which to make a case for the impossibility of individual existence in a

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[34] Ibid., p. 595.

socialist society. Sarkadi goes deeper than merely pitting a particular society against a particular individual. The individual is particular exactly because he is an individual, and conflicts do not arise from society's barring his advancement, but out of the acute awareness of the human condition, out of the individual's limited ability to achieve happiness. Sarkadi does not hold society solely responsible for the destruction of his hero, just as he does not consider society to be the source of his hero's salvation either.

In the early 1960's political and economic consolidation in Hungary created a reasonably stable atmosphere. If the events of 1956 could be pointed to as an ultimately beneficial, cleansing process that enabled a better socialism to emerge, one that was more realistic and better suited for conditions in Hungary, it was the same events that gave Hungarian drama the impetus needed for a freer development and a chance to approach more closely the major currents of European drama. This development, I feel, was brought about not only because problems of the 1950's could more or less openly be presented in the theatre, but also because Hungary was going through a period similar to another she had experienced once before in this century. Just as Hungarian avant-garde drama of the interwar period was born out of conditions following a lost war and a lost revolution,[35]

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[35]For a more detailed discussion of this, see above, Chapter I, pp. 55-57.

out of feelings of hopelessness and disillusionment, so were certain dramas after 1956 created out of similar conditions and similar feelings.[36]

As we have seen, the events of 1956 and their effects on Hungarian life found their way into the drama rather rapidly. Stable conditions in Hungary in the early 1960's and the time that had elapsed since the uprising allowed artists to gain a more insightful perspective than we found in dramas written immediately after 1956. The result was a less concrete depiction of actual events--such as we have seen in plays like Windstorm, People of Budapest and Soot-covered Sky--and a more penetrating examination of the effects of these events. The individual had come to the fore. It was the search for his place in the world, for his own happiness and peace with himself rather than his place in society's social and political schemes, that began to occupy center stage.

With Hungary's increasing contact with the outside world in the early 1960's, with the doors slowly opening to foreign drama, both from the West and the East, it was be-

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[36]The analogy between the two periods may not be altogether accurate, but there are strong similarities: a lost war in 1918 was followed immediately by a revolution establishing the Hungarian Soviet Republic which failed within months. The end of World War II to Hungary meant the kind of beginning the Hungarian Soviet Republic might have had if it succeeded in 1919. The possibility of collapse, the system ruining itself, was brought home in 1956. This uprising too, was followed by mass exile and jailings. Déry and Háy who left the country in 1919 were put into prison after 1956.

coming increasingly clear that the trauma and after-effects of 1956 inside Hungary had parallels--not necessarily caused by uprisings--in other lands. Disillusionment, a feeling of hopelessness were not peculiar to Hungary alone. It may be attributed, at least in part, to this realization that Hungarian drama of the middle and late 1960's, despite some residual differences, show many similarities to the drama of the rest of the world.

Paradise Lost was produced right after it was written. It was a moving and disquieting play, but turned out to be, in retrospect, highly optimistic when compared to another Sarkadi play, Simeon Stylites, written earlier and produced much later than Paradise Lost. Interestingly enough, not only did time not diminish the value of Simeon Stylites, but it seems that this play fits well into a trend then present in Hungary, a trend that we have come to label, absurd drama.

CHAPTER VII

ABSURD DRAMA--HUNGARIAN STYLE?

> In a capitalist society "absurd" is not born by accident, because today it is characteristic of that society that in it all [social] side phenomena are meaningful, but the whole system is senseless. . .absurdity in socialism grows out of the fact that [socialist]society's basic tendencies are meaningful, but some of its side phenomena are senseless.[1]

Hungarian theatregoers, critics, playwrights and other artists today speak frequently of Hungarian absurdist drama. What most of them refer to are certain plays that have been produced since the mid-1960's. Due to the efforts of a small number of critics and researchers, at the end of the period covered by this study, attention was also given to some earlier absurdist plays that had been still invisible.[2] Tracing the beginnings and development of Hungarian absurd drama is not without difficulties. Some of the plays that were shown and immediately declared absurd in the late

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[1]István Hermann, Szent Iván éjjelén (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1969), p. 268.

[2]It is worth noting that the exploration of certain invisible dramas of the late 1950's coincided with a vigorous attempt at rediscovering Hungary's avant-garde drama of the interwar years. Rózsa Kocsis, Erzsébet Berkes, Olga Siklós, Béla Osváth and Imre Bori, among others, have done a particularly valuable service in this area.

1960's were actually written in the late 1950's and early 1960's.[3] Accusations by certain critics leveled at some authors of not only learning their trade from foreign playwrights,[4] but of slavishly copying them, warrant, if not a defense, certainly some clarification. It is my conviction that, while foreign drama may have influenced Hungarian playwrights in the 1960's, it was first and foremost the increased artistic freedom that produced what has been called Hungarian absurdist drama. Further clarification is needed regarding the question whether there is a unique Hungarian absurd drama, or may we speak only of absurdist plays written by Hungarians? I hope to make clear in this last chapter that some very able Hungarian playwrights have utilized many elements of the absurdist drama--as they have done with Brecht's epic drama--but the use of these elements would in no way overshadow the plays' characteristically

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[3]Sarkadi's Simeon Stylites, shown in 1967, was written in 1960, Istvan Csurka's Strip-Poker, shown in 1969, was written in 1963. Both plays will be discussed later on in this chapter.

[4]Playwright Gábor Görgey is a case in point. One critic, Péter G. Molnár, in reviewing Görgey's play Noé (Noah) praises the author: "It is undoubtedly his achievement that the grotesque has been re-acclimatized here at home; he has tried to enrich realism with the technique of the absurd." In the same review, however, we can also read the following: "This is a good play. Too good. Görgey has learned his craft too well." (Népszabadság, 14 May, 1970). Another critic, István Hermann, names the source of Görgey's craft: "Görgey took some of his technique from Brecht; some [of it] he learned while translating the works of other playwrights." (István Hermann, "Az átlagmese, az infantilis és az abszurd," in Szent Iván éjjelén [Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1969], p. 135).

Hungarian frame of reference. It is not my intention to engage in a debate about whether absurdist drama constitutes a separate dramatic genre; and in order to avoid lengthy explanations and descriptions, I shall refer to a play as absurdist if it displays elements of the absurd as outlined in Martin Esslin's book, The Theatre of the Absurd, (New York: Doubleday, 1969). In the very best of these plays, absurd and grotesque elements are so well integrated with highly relevant issues concerning Hungary that they transcend geographical and political boundaries.

Preceded by premieres of Beckett, Havel and Mrożek in 1965 and 1966,[5] the appearance of visible Hungarian absurd drama may be dated from 1967. This was also the year when a number of dramas written much earlier became visible, some curiously enough, produced with the direct help of the government.[6] The increasing political and economic stability created by the Kádár government also meant more freedom for the arts and artists. This freedom has never been complete, but often, particularly in the theatre, what seemed

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[5] Waiting for Godot premiered at the Thália Theatre on October 9, 1965; Havel's The Garden Party opened on November 26, 1965 at the József Katona Theatre; and three one-acters by Mrożek were first shown at the Csiky Gergely Theatre of Kaposvár on January 18, 1965.

[6] Gábor Görgey's Rokokó háború (Rococo War) and Istvan Eörsi's Sirkó és kakaó (Tombstone and Cocoa), to be discussed in this chapter, were produced as part of a competition under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, announced in 1967. (Gábor Mihályi, "Kisérletek és eredemények," Szinház, April 1969, p. 4).

to be censorship or rejection of a work on political basis, was no more than the attitude of a particular theatre's management rather than the result of Party policy.[7]

Economic stability and a general improvement of domestic conditions in Hungary allowed the average Hungarian an upward mobility never before possible. Automobiles and summer houses could be owned by anyone able to afford them, and while private enterprise was no more encouraged than at any time since 1945, certain measures were taken to satisfy growing consumer needs.[8] Those who survived World War II as adults and then lived through the Stalin-Rákosi era could not but rejoice in these improvements. But younger generations whose memories, as young adults, would go back only to the 1950's were not always in agreement with their elders in hailing the increased benefits of life--mostly material ones. Growing consumerism and the drive for more material

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[7]Several artists I interviewed in 1972, directors, playwrights, designers and actors, complained not of governmental strictures and censorship but of narrow-minded management in certain theatres that prevented many artists from developing to the best of their abilities.

[8]Decentralization of industrial management, the introduction, or adaption of the idea of supply and demand and profit oriented production in many areas were all part of Hungary's New Economic Mechanism (NEM). Worked out by Rezső Nyers, one of Kádár's long time advisors, the major changes found in NEM included the granting of virtual independence in management and budgeting to factories and other large institutions. The over-all goal was a smoother, more efficient economy. Many years in preparation, NEM was officially instituted on January 1, 1968. (William Shawcross, Crime and Compromise: Janos Kadar and the Politics of Hungary Since Revolution, pp. 156-160).

possessions slowly began to produce a new kind of bourgeoisie within socialist Hungary. This bourgeoisie was not a separate class, but rather a class evolving within another, made up of industrial and agricultural workers as well as intellectuals whose attitude was becoming bourgeois. It was this attitude, not the actual material gains, that some artists, writers and dramatists of the mid-1960's attacked. Their target was the spiritual emptiness that grew almost in direct proportion to improved economic conditions. By no means did government control of the country's economy or its arts disappear; it became less direct. Hungary was still a member of the Warsaw Pact--NATO's counterpart in Eastern Europe--and her political affiliation with Moscow was never in doubt. There have been reminders throughout the 1960's that Hungary's ties with the Soviet Union were as strong as ever, whether these reminders were as far from Hungary's borders as Vietnam or as close as Czechoslovakia in 1968.[9] Hungarian drama of the mid- and late 1960's reflects the internal processes since the late 1950's, and shows the impact of renewed contact with the West due to relaxed conditions on the international scene as well as at

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[9]Fear of, or dependence on the Soviet Union was underscored by Kádár's agreeing to send Hungarian troops into Czechoslovakia in 1968. Rumania refused to do the same. It would be hard to guess whether a refusal to participate in the invasion would have meant a Soviet occupation of Hungary too. To all appearances it seems that Kádár went along with the Soviets in a military move that he, Kádár, could do nothing about, but by complying with the Soviet request he assured the maintenance of Hungary's internal balance which he so diligently worked at for over a decade.

home. Some major factors in creating a new drama in Hungary include the growing up and maturing of a new generation of writers, the freedom to travel abroad, and, in some measure, the availability of foreign dramas.[10]

A Controlled Descent Into Hell
Imre Sarkadi's Simeon Stylites

Sarkadi's Oszlopos Simeon (Simeon Stylites, January 6, 1967, Madách Theatre), was written in 1960.[11] In time then, the creation of this play was close to the plays of Mészöly, Bunker and The Window Washer, which are now generally accepted to be the first products of the Hungarian absurd.[12] It is doubtful that either Mészöly or Sarkadi ever conceived of their plays as absurd.[13] While Mészöly was concerned with power and its effects on the individual, with

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[10]The majority of foreign dramas that reached Hungary came in printed form; productions were still very few in number and came as much as a decade behind original premieres.

[11]Like Illyés, Sarkadi too, was maintaining a voluntary silence during the years immediately after 1956. The play was found among his unpublished papers.

[12]Critic Gábor Mihályi's statement: "The first absurd dramas in Hungary are connected with the name Miklos Mészöly," has not been disputed by any one. (Gábor Mihályi, "Kisérletek és eredmények," Szinház, April 1969, p. 3).

[13]Mészöly told me that he had not read any works by the absurdists until well into the 1960's. (Interview with Miklos Mészöly, Budapest, August 5, 1972).

the possibility of overcoming the destructive influences of power, Sarkadi leaves outside forces outside. He paints a picture of the individual who has lost most of his battle in a fight in which we are not certain that the antagonist is an outside force at all. Anny and Tommy in The Window Washer find their way back to life that can still have some meaning; their love for one another can still bind them not only to each other but to life itself.

Sarkadi's hero, János Kis, a painter, has no illusions left. Intellectual life seems meaningless and unfulfilling. Like the fifth century ascetic, Simeon, sitting on top of his pillar,[14] Sarkadi's protagonist seems to have observed not only his life, but the lives of those around him and he found nothing worth holding on to. By the time the play's dramatic action begins we find Kis-Simeon on a descent. He sends his mistress away, deliberately loses his job--he teaches drawing--by simply not reporting to work, and no longer having a need for a home of his own, he allows a couple to move in with him.[15] He also sells his furniture, the price of which he proceeds to drink away immediately.

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[14]Simeon Stylites (390?-459) is credited with originating the practice, later adopted by early religious, ascetic groups, of sitting on top of pillars without shelter. (Britannica World Lanaguage Edition of Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary, Vol. 2, (New York: Funk & Wagnall, 1959), p. 1246.

[15]Two or more families sharing an apartment is common practice in Hungary's larger cities. For more on this see below, in connection with István Eörsi's Tombstone and Cocoa, pp. 246-247.

Early in the play it seems that Kis is going to destroy himself, to continue and complete the process that has made him bitter, disillusioned and cynical. But Kis does not stop there. He turns his own descent into an experiment: since there is nothing good in his own existence, he sets out to probe the depths of evil. The play's subtitle: "Let's See, God, What The Two of Us Can Do!" accurately describe Kis's activities. Within moments of her arrival, Kis seduces his new new co-tenant--her husband works at night--then plays games with the husband, intimating that he actually seduced the woman, which the gullible husband refuses to believe. Kis would not show up for a date with the woman, and when she returns home the following day he sells her to a neighbor: the unsuspecting woman thought that the man entering her darkened room was Kis. What others only talk about or imagine in their wildest fantasies, Kis tries out in reality. The experiment in evil grows to great proportions. Kis has made his choice: he has opted for evil. He has found a perfect ally in the person of his cleaning woman, a personification of pure evil. She is ugly, she smells and she walks in and out of people's lives, with destruction in her wake, as she does through the apartments which she is supposed to clean. It was she who suggested that by stinking up the new tenants' room--by killing some foul-smelling insects--the woman would have to stay in Kis's room, which is precisely what happened and led to the seduction. It was also the cleaning woman who con-

vinced Kis to pimp for the woman. Kis agreed, knowing full well that the cleaning woman had already made the necessary arrangement: by telling a neighbor that a woman was available in Kis's apartment. And it was again the cleaning woman who called the woman's husband at work urging him to come home because his wife was injured. He arrived home just as his wife and the neighbor emerged from their room. In her humiliation and frustration the woman stabs Kis. His wounds are not fatal, but he is delirious as he speaks to his mistress who has returned to check on him:

> KIS ". . .I sense. . .that I can't help the bad by making it worse. . .because the age of asceticism. . .ended with that stab. . .if I just looked at myself in a friendly way. . .I know this face, I've seen it many times. . .the sad faces of people left alone, left with their troubles, lonely. . .and nobody can help, ever. . ."[16]

Kis was not led astray by the cleaning woman. He deliberately chose to work along with her. He saw through her devious plans and machinations, and accepted her partnership willingly. He has committed a great many sins, abusing and insulting others and hurting people indiscriminately. Kis has found no satisfaction in any function considered acceptable by society. His private hell into which he was descending was to be filled with the ruined remains of people who could not resist evil.

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[16]Imre Sarkadi, Oszlopos Simeon, in Ház a város mellett,(Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1969), p. 250.

Any interpretation of this play must take into consideration the conditions in Hungary at the time of the play's writing; Sarkadi's silence after the 1956 uprising, and the disillusionment of writers and artists in the late 1950's. In Simeon Stylites Sarkadi painted perhaps the darkest picture of Hungarian intellectuals after 1956. He did not see the production of this play because he took his life in 1961. In the same year, János Czibor, another young author, essayist and editor, wit and mentor of many outstanding writers of today, also committed suicide. Czibor, and a small circle of friends served as models for the characters in a play by István Csurka, written in 1963, produced in 1969.[17]

A Long Night's Journey Into Death
István Csurka's Strip-Poker

Four men gather to play poker at least once a week. The oldest one, Czifra, is now thirty-five and writes novels and other books under various pseudonyms. There is another writer, a mathematician and a teacher in the company. István Csurka's (1934-) Ki lesz a bálanya? (Strip-Poker, October

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[17] János Czibor (1922-1961) was considered a very talented author and editor, but his greatest contribution to Hungarian letters was his support of young authors, among them Csurka who openly acknowledged that Czifra in Strip-Poker was modeled after Czibor. (Béla Abódy, "Intimitás vagy közügy?--Csurka István drámája kisérleti szinpadon," új irás, January 1970, pp. 116-121).

18, 1969, Thalia Theatre),[18] was staged so that the audience would look in on the players as kibbitzers.[19] During the course of the game we do not learn a great deal about the men, but we are made strongly aware of one thing: this game is merely a substitute for an existence that none of the players finds meaningful. The game is an escape. Despite having families or well-paying jobs, or both, it seems that only the past exists for these men; not one of them manages to express the slightest hope for the future; and their present is only a game. The playwright does not bring in sociological or political facts and dogma, there is no mention of recent events, only a steady stream of conversation that puts piece after piece of a mosaic on the table for the audience to assemble. Whatever János Kis in Simeon Stylites seemed to have lost, is lost here too, but while in Sarkadi's play the disillusionment and hopelessness ultimately resulted in the near self-destruction of one man, Strip-Poker presents a company of four men who individually and collectively are on the verge of falling completely apart. They appear to be

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[18]Portions of this play have been translated into English and appeared in The New Hungarian Quarterly, 39 (Autumn 1970), pp. 78-91, under the title Fall Guy for Tonight. In his article, "New Developments in the Hungarian Drama," Mosaic, VI/4 (Summer, 1973), pp. 89-99, George Gömöri translates the title as Who Will Pay for the Ball? I feel that the play's theme and particularly its dramatic action are better conveyed by the title Strip-Poker. The quotes from the play are my translations.

[19]Péter Léner, "A Ki lesz a bálanya? probáin," Szinház, May 1970, p. 40.

living corpses who show signs of life only in each other's company, and even this state of affairs is about to change. On the surface the play's dramatic action depicts just another night of poker. Czifra, the host, is winning, he even comes up with a royal flush. But it is going to be Czifra who will kill himself at the end of the session, early at dawn, after winning more than ever before. As the evening progresses the players strip--some even physically when taking a shower. They shed their postures and attitudes, and reveal themselves to be not madmen, but desperate men who are lucid and fully aware of their predicament. They ask themselves, jokingly, if they are responsible for the way they are and the way they have been living their lives. The host answers this question:

> CZIFRA It's not so tragic, kids. You'd like to know whether you're responsible for going to pieces. Well, I'll tell you, boys: yes and no. This world is the way it is, period. If you want to, you can knock yourself out by being honest, sober and moderate, or you can drop dead because you're rotten, depraved and dishonest. But none of you is doing anything that could burn you; you're not on the right or the left, you just sit here in my pad, play cards and turn up your noses as you look at the outside world. The possibility for a different life was there for you and for me, too. But you guys picked this. This, my friends is nothingness. And now you don't like it, eh? Why don't you learn from me: I accept nothingness, I'm proud of it. My motto is: before it's too late. . .[20]

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[20]István Csurka, Ki lesz a bálanya? (Budapest: Magvető, 1970), p. 246.

The game goes on. Csurka's language, a mixture of poker parlance and the seemingly usual small talk heard around card games, flows smoothly, allowing serious reflections to blend almost imperceptibly with good-natured kidding, remarks concerning the game, and general merrymaking. Grotesque incidents slip into the action, but they, too, look perfectly normal as the hours draw into the night, players get groggy and life itself seems to be real only outside the confines of Czifra's living room. At one point one of the players tears some hair out of his chest to change his luck. After a particularly costly hand one of the men declares that he would have to feed his family with his own blood the next day. He explains: he will buy his family food with the money he will receive by selling his blood to the Red Cross. The game is interrupted a few times by telephone calls. The host's nephew wants to bring up a girl to the apartment and urges Czifra to get rid of his companions. As if the men were clinging to life, the game goes on until it is almost light outside. When they all leave, Czifra decides to go to a public bath. He lets his nephew and the girl use his apartment. Before walking out he picks up his soap to take along to the bath. This bar of soap, we learned earlier, has a razor blade in it. His nephew knows about the blade and knows that Czifra is going to cut open his veins. When the girl asks the nephew to go and prevent Czifra from killing himself, the nephew replies: "I'm not going. I love

him. Don't be afraid, he has no other choice."[21]

Strip-Poker was Csurka's first play,[22] but he seemed to enter the theatre as a mature playwright. His dialogue is easy, resembling the meticulous dialogue of Pinter in its remarkable affinity to everyday language. The desperation that characterized Sarkadi's Simeon Stylites seems to have intensified in Csurka's treatment, but not by action that destroys others, but by a relentless stripping away of the vestiges of life, by pulling off any and all layers that may separate men, in this case the four card players, from the naked truth of their life's uselessness. What makes this play seem more desperate, even if not quite so dark in tones, than Sarkadi's, is that no solution is offered or hinted at, least of all accidental ones, such as the proximity of witnesses when Sarkadi's hero is stabbed. We do not get the impression that the playwright meant to keep possibilities open for a further change for the better. Czifra had made his plan to kill himself even before the play's dramatic action began.

This is a play that may be considered a dramatic monument to the generation that could not recover from the events of 1956. They did not recover, not because conditions

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[21] Ibid., p. 264.

[22] Although this was the first play Csurka ever wrote, two of his later plays were mounted before 1969: Szájhős (The Braggart) in 1964 and Az idő vasfoga (The Iron Tooth of Time) in 1965.

in Hungary did not improve, but because this generation lost faith in themselves, in their own ability ever to find life meaningful again. The play has been called a "grotesque requiem,"[23] and in many respects this is an apt description. Over a dozen years had to pass before it could be openly admitted that there were people who threw their lives away, or thrust life away because after 1956 they felt they had no solid moral or spiritual base on which to build. While Csurka goes further than Sarkadi and has his protagonist go through with suicide, he lets the other players find their way back, if not to a meaningful life, at least to a continued existence. Here Csurka counts heavily on his audience being Hungarians. Suicides committed in the late 1950's by artists and writers, like Sarkadi and Czibor, had created an atmosphere of guilt and remorse, not only among intellectuals, but in the general public as well. Csurka's audiences could strongly identify with the surviving card-players as they envisioned the three men's reaction to the news of Czifra's death.

Both Sarkadi and Csurka reduced the stage into a single room, but there were still indications of other places where life went on. The action in both plays, while largely corresponding to the action on stage, had ramifications in the past, if not in the future. Energy expended by characters

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[23]Miklós Almási, "Groteszk rekviem--Csurka István: Ki lesz a bálanya?" Kritika, January 1970, pp. 1-8.

in these two plays was directed mostly at self-destruction. History was a silent partner, so to speak, in the games played, and the stakes were high in human terms. A different picture emerges from a play by another young playwright, Gábor Görgey (1929-) who has attempted to present history as the protagonist of an absurdist play.

The Vicious Circle Of History
Gábor Görgey's Musical Guns

Five characters are locked in a windowless room. Alternately they hold one another in check with a gun which, through oversights and blunders, gets around to all but one of them. Komamasszony, hol a stukker? (Musical Guns, February 23, 1968, Thália Theatre)[24] was Görgey's second produced play, the first to be shown in Budapest.[25] The five characters of the play are recognizable types of Hungary's recent past. They include representatives of the aristocracy, the intelligentsia, the peasantry and two composite figures. One, described by the author as an "underworld figure,"[26] is a man whose instincts tell him that regardless of governments, forms of state, the way to get along in life is through means

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[24]The play's title in Hungarian is the name of a children's game with a twist; hence the English title, alluding to "musical chairs," also a children's game.

[25]Görgey's first produced play, Rococo War was shown at the Gergely Csiky Theatre at Kaposvár; it opened on April 14, 1967.

[26]Gábor Gorgey, Komámasszony, hol a stukker? (Budapest: Magvető, 1969), pp. 9-10.

that lie outside the law. The other composite figure, designated only by his name, K. Müller, sees the key to survival in serving authority, any authority that happens to be in power. He is the only one who never actually holds the gun, although he is instrumental in the transfer of power--in his eagerness to obey orders he accidentally knocks the gun out of the hands of one character into the hands of another. Ostensibly, the purpose of all characters present is to get out of the room. The question is who will lead the group out--the possibility of leaving individually never comes up, it cannot come up, because somebody is always holding the gun. But, as it turns out, once a character takes possession of the gun he immediately becomes more interested in asserting his own power and superiority than in leading the group out.

Görgey called his play a comedy and described it as a ". . .house of wax [displaying] figures of bad memory from Hungary's recent past."[27] If there was a chance that some of these figures might be equated with typical figures of Hungary of the 1950's or 1960's, the play's production made sure that no such comparison would be made by the audience, or the critics. From a review we learn that the "underworld figure," Cuki, wore an Arrow-Cross Party armband,[28] and that

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[27] From the program note of Musical Guns.

[28] Tamás Koltai's review (Népszabadság, 7 March, 1968). The Arrow Cross Party was the Hungarian equivalent of the German Nazi Party during World War II.

it was implied by appropriate noises that a war was going on outside. While there is some indication in Görgey's instruction that he wanted this character to stand for the "biological representative of primitivism and brute force," and that he may have some label, signal or sign hinting at "fascistoid" affiliation, depending on which country the play is being performed in,[29] nowhere does the author mention specific Party names, war or any sort of fighting outside. Whether it is Hungary's recent past or its present that Görgey had in mind, it is the abuse of power that is depicted in the play.

Görgey's language, using appropriate dialects and phraseology for each of the characters, makes this play extremely funny, and, at the same time most difficult to translate into another language. Despite language difficulties, however, the play could prove successful in another Eastern European country where the character types could easily be recognized and where people are not unfamiliar with the action depicted in the play.[30] Musical Guns does not have the impact of such a peculiarly Eastern European play as Mrożek's Tango. Görgey only touches on the possibility of power going to the strongest, he does not explore it. Contrary to Mrożek's

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[29]Görgey, Komámasszony, hol a stukker? p. 10.

[30]According to Görgey the play was very successfully staged in Rumania. (Interview with Gábor Görgey, Szigliget, Hungary, July 14, 1972).

play, in Musical Guns the ultimate possessor of power is not known, and neither is there any responsibility placed on the representatives of different classes for power finally being seized by one class exclusively. In Görgey's play, just as in Mrożek's, the power goes with the gun, but the transfer of power is caused by blunders, accidents, rather than by showing that inability to lead on the part of one class results in another's gaining the upper hand. What is finally made clear in Musical Guns is that no one class, as represented in the play, is fit for leadership. The probabilities established early in the play suggest that power will keep on making its rounds among the various classes, but neither is this power overly dangerous--it is used not for destruction but mostly for self-glorification--nor is there any indication as to where or when, if ever, this power finally will come to a rest. At the end of the play the gun is back in the hands of the underworld figure who held it at the play's opening. Görgey's clever construction, characteristic diction and humor make Musical Guns an enjoyable comedy--even if there is no answer provided as to who should be the leader, or the winner in the game.[31] In a play by another author, shown just a month before Musical Guns, the characters could not be identified with great historical accuracy, but there was no

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[31]For a fanciful look into the future where so many of our present conventions may be turned completely upside down, see Görgey's play, The House of Restitution in Appendix G.

question about who the winner would be as the players engage in a grotesque and deadly game.

To Live And Outlive, Or, Everything's Upside Down
István Eörsi's Tombstone and Cocoa

István Eörsi (1931-) starts his play Sirkő és kakaó (Tombstone and Cocoa, January 3, 1968, Thália Theatre)[32] with a premise that is all too well known to Hungarians, particularly to residents of Budapest and larger cities. A housing shortage that has been acute for many decades produced the phenomenon of two or more families having to share a single apartment. Even with sufficient number of rooms, friction and animosity between co-tenants almost inevitably become a fact of life--whether the co-tenants are related to each other or are total strangers. In a country where nursing homes are not readily available except for the seriously ill, often children or younger tenants have no choice but to wait patiently and care for their elders until death solves the housing problem. This somewhat cynical description is nevertheless an accurate one, and in recent years the number of plays dealing with this problem has increased.[33]

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[32] See Appendix H.

[33] During my visit to Budapest in 1972 I saw a number of plays in which housing problems combined with a sort of generation-gap were treated both humorously as well as seriously. In one, Parents Are People Too, the youngsters wanted both the apartment and the parents' money.

It is not often that a ninety-nine-year old woman outlives her much younger children or tenants. But that is precisely what happens in Eörsi's play. Very simply put, Tombstone and Cocoa poses the question whether it is possible for an ancient woman to outlive people much younger than she is; but what makes this play more than the presentation of a bizarre real-live situation is an examination of why the unexpected happens, and more importantly, how the events unfolding within the walls of one apartment indicate something about the current state of the human condition.

Afraid of the wrath of the Old Lady who provides them with a tiny room in return for every conceivable service, Mr. and Mrs. Petty have lived in total submission for fifteen years. At the suggestion of the Old Lady's physician, the Pettys, somewhat reluctantly, decide to make use of a manuscript in which the Doctor has compiled nearly five hundred cases of young couples' doing away with old ladies who prevented them from having an apartment for themselves, and from establishing a family due to lack of space. From this point on a game ensues in which the players, the Pettys and the Old Lady, try to hide the fact that they are playing the same game. The Pettys do not realize that the Old Lady is aware of the manuscript and that she is more than prepared to counteract any attempt on their part to kill her. In fact, it is this game that keeps the Old Lady cheerful, healthy and vigorous. What the Pettys are also ignorant of is the immense network of allies: children, friends and

employees whom the Old Lady commands throughout the world. Thus the battle is uneven, but it is great fun. The Pettys are always ready to back down as soon as the Old Lady seems to be really dying, and the Old Lady revels in meting out more and more cruel punishments after each failed attempt on her life. In the end it is the Pettys who drop dead, literally, and the Old Lady not only goes on living, but is assured of another couple to succeed the Pettys. The new couple, a former Mailman and his wife, a Policewoman, so completely devote themselves to their "new duties" that they even assume the first names of the Pettys. Another circle has come to a close, or rather, is ready to begin anew.

Undoubtedly, Eörsi is familiar with traditional comic means going back to Molière and Aristophanes, for his many reversals and improbable premises are worked out ingeniously. He takes his situation to the extreme and manages in the course of the dramatic action to shed light on such vital issues as the question of power; the helplessness of little, ignorant men in the face of power; and the slave-mentality that blinds some people to real solutions or a meaningful fight for their rights. Eörsi combines an absurd situation with grotesque visual elements: the Old Lady is twice the size of the emaciated Pettys; the stage is split to correspond to the size, not the need, of the characters. The Old Lady, alone, occupies a far larger room than the Pettys who can barely move in theirs. The sources of the Old Lady's

powers are varied and include a Hydrogen Bomb Factory in New York, The Detectives' International Exchange-of-Experience Council, the Superintendents' World Union as well as a whorehouse in Tokyo. The Old Lady is a billionairess whose wealth, just as her power, is always on the increase. With all her power and wealth, she seems bent on doing nothing but terrorizing and tormenting the Pettys, which makes her more menacing than if she were to put her power and influence to larger purposes. While the Pettys want only to live, the Old Lady is determined to outlive them and everyone else too. What she says about the purpose of her money is true for her power too:

> To help me OUTLIVE, now that's what it's for,
> That's why I need money, money galore![34]

She is ruthless and indiscriminate as to how she acquires power, influence or money. Ideologies and politics are just so many words to her. One of her sons works for the Hydrogen Bomb Factory, another for the World Center for Coordinating Revolutions. Each of her children is carrying out some sort of mission that implies certain political convictions. Her son from the World Center for Coordinating Revolutions sends her whatever she has requested along with a sampling of his principles:

> The [enclosed] skull is my pal Willy Screw's who also turned out to be a traitor because he claimed that with the cessation of the state, the fight against the state will cease too. . .
> . . . . . .

[34]István Eörsi, Tombstone and Cocoa, in Appendix H, p. 687.

> If I get to the helm of any state I shall liquidate all those who do not want to liquidate the state.
>
> To all this the Old Lady merely says: "What's that to me?"[35]

Eörsi in 1968 touched on many of the ideas found in other plays written since the late 1950's. The Pettys' inability to comprehend, let alone do something about their true condition is very similar to that of the Hábetlers' in Scrap-iron Yard; the relentless and brutal power as exercised by the Old Lady recalls the cleaning woman in Sarkadi's Simeon Stylites. Playing games, as a means of construction, is of course found in numerous plays of the period.

In Tombstone and Cocoa, a play rich in ideas concerning power, domination and the blindness to one's condition, the main interest seems to focus around the question: will the Pettys have the courage to overthrow and kill the Old Lady, or will they be rendered helpless by their own bourgeois longing for safety and security which they imagine they have while the Old Lady is alive. While it is this question that triggers the play's dramatic action, one cannot help but wonder what would happen if the Pettys had some able allies, and why the Old Lady is more powerful than the social system in which all the characters live; and, incidentally, what international conspiracy--socialist and/or capitalist--does the Old Lady belong to?

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[35] Ibid., p. 650-651.

Although structurally not as episodic as a Brecht play, Tombstone and Cocoa is a kind of lehrstück full of minor and major lessons, many of them dealing, in burlesque fashion, with the question of whether man should help his fellow man. The play abounds in songs in some of which the characters have a wisdom which exceeds their stage behavior. Eörsi's witty dialogue and amusing songs ensure that this play is not only didactic, and didactic without any normative characters, but also thoroughly entertaining. It would seem that despite the play's basic "situation"--the relationship between co-tenants--a peculiarly Hungarian phenomenon, Tombstone and Cocoa could easily hold the interest of Western audiences.

Acceptance of one nation's drama by another has always posed certain difficulties. Special problems have arisen in the presentation of Eastern European plays in Western Europe and in the United States due, largely, to the socially and politically unfamiliar situations depicted. Despite the recognized merits of such a play as Mrożek's Tango, audience reaction in the United States have been less than favorable. While it is the younger generation of Hungarian writers who seem to be more attuned to the trends and developments in the drama outside Hungary, the man who has managed consistently to break international barriers with his plays during the last years of the period covered in this study belongs to a much older group of authors.

Hungarian Drama--Absurd Style?
István Örkény's The Tot Family

A contemporary not of Mészöly, Szakonyi, Eörsi and Görgey, but of Adamov, Genet and Ionesco, István Örkény (1912-) was fifty-vive years old when Hungary took notice of him as a playwright. More remarkable is the fact that the play that brought him to notice in 1967, Tóték (The Tot Family, February 24, 1967, Thália Theatre), was to be performed in Paris in 1968![36] Örkény matured late not only as a playwright, but as a prose writer as well; his stories and novels were considered to be among the best in Hungary only in the 1950's. Although he wrote a play in 1944,[37] and collaborated on two others, still in the 1940's,[38] it was The Tot Family that brought him national and international recognition as a dramatist.

The Tot Family has been called ". . .the first genuine product of the Hungarian 'theatre of the grotesque'."[39]

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[36]Editor-in-Chief of Hungary's major theatrical magazine, Szinház (Theatre), Iván Boldizsár wrote of his experience of having seen the 42nd performance of La famille Tott at the Gaite Montparnasse in Paris. (Iván Boldizsár, "Örkény Párizsban," Szinház January 1969, pp. 32-33.)

[37]The play, Voronyezs (Voronezh) was written in a Russian POW camp and sent to Budapest in 1946, but remained unproduced.

[38]Örkeny's collaboration with Miklós Gyarfás produced a dramatization of another author's novel, Curious Marriage and a musical, The Zichy Palace, shown in 1948 and 1959 respectively.

[39]George Gömöri, "New Developments in the Hungarian Drama," Mosaic, VI/4 (Summer 1973), p. 95.

and the ". . .outstanding creation of the native absurd drama."[40] Örkény calls his play a "tragicomedy," a description that seems quite appropriate. Örkeny shows great familiarity with the stage and a large variety of dramatic forms and he utilizes them all according to his needs. Elements of the absurd and the grotesque are present, but so are those of naturalism and the well-made play. It is the way Örkény uses all these elements that make for a most interesting play. The play's plot is deceptively simple. During World War II the Tots, Mr. and Mrs. Tot and their daughter Ágika, are more than willing to accomodate a Hungarian army major on his leave from the Russian front because their hospitality, they believe, will ensure the survival of young Tot serving under the Major's command. The Major makes impossible demands on the family until Mr. Tot reaches his breaking point and kills the Major.

Örkény prepares his play's action carefully. The first character to appear is the village's half-wit, a deformed mailman who addresses the audience:

> They say that I'm a half-wit. That I spit into wells. Allegedly I blow my nose in clothes hung out to dry. Not true. Not a word of it. On the other hand I can kick myself in the ass so hard that I jump over two hats one on top of the other. . .They also say that I manipulate the mail. Now that happens to be true. . .Here are the Tots for example. I especially like the Tots. Why? Because there are four of them. Two, four, six. . . That's nice. I like

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[40]Gábor Mihályi, "Kisérletek és eredmények," Szinház, April 1969, p. 4.

> even numbers. And they've got a son on the front. God forbid something should happen to him. I just got another letter from the front. Some letters I deliver, some I don't; some I put aside for later, some I just tear up, 'cause what ain't . . .well, . . . it just ain't. . .[41]

Probabilities are clearly established: in times of war families rely on the mail for news from the front and from home. This vital link in communication, in the play, is controlled by a half-wit who decides what people may know or may not get to know about each other. Specific mention of the Tot family implies that the machinations of this half-wit could easily involve them. The mailman delivers a letter to the Tots from their son on the front. Young Tot persuaded the Major to spend his rest and recuperation at the Tot house which is on the top of a hill where it is quiet and the air is clear. The Tots, under the leadership of Mr. Tot, chief of the local fire brigade, take immediate steps so that the Major who, according to the letter, is sensitive to certain noises and smells, will find everything to his liking. The Tots round up all their neighbors and instruct them how to behave during the Major's visit. The local whore will have to oil her garden gate. She agrees, even though the noise of the gate, signaling to customers the arrival of another, kept her business lucrative due to the large turnover. Another neighbor offers to stop drinking beer because of the smacking sound

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[41] István Örkény, Tóték, in Időrendben (Budapest: Magvető, 1972), p. 175.

he makes each time he drinks. The Mailman agrees to hold his breath for two blocks around the Tot house so that the wheezing of his faulty lungs will not disturb the Major. After a lengthy discussion it is decided that the Tot's outhouse should not be emptied at this time, because its present odor is distinct but not offensive, if they were to disturb it now, according to the latrine cleaner, it might not settle for quite a while, certainly not before the Major's arrival.

With such thorough preparation hardly anything could be expected to go wrong. But the Major is no ordinary battle-fatigued soldier. He believes that physical activity is the best rest for both body and soul. When he discovers that the Tots fold cartons for a bandage manufacturing firm, he asks if he could help. But within moments he takes over and begins directing the work which he calls "cartonizing." Keeping their son's fate foremost in their minds, the Tots go along with the Major, but Mr. Tot finds it difficult sometimes to follow instructions. Unable to sleep at night--presumably because partisan attacks always come in the dark--the Major keeps the Tots up all night. Always insisting that they tell him if they are tired or sleepy, the Major conducts these "cartonizing" sessions night after night until Mr. Tot is reduced to such a state that he can hardly walk, and develops a constant urge to hide under all sorts of furniture--a place in which he could go to sleep. The two women do everything to please the Major and even take his side against Mr. Tot

who must constantly be reminded by the women that it is his son's life that is at stake. At the end of the first act the Mailman reveals to the audience a letter telling of young Tot's death on the front. He does not deliver the letter to the Tots.

The second half of the play is a heightened form of the first; Mr. Tot develops more and more bizarre patterns of behavior; the women redouble their efforts to survive the few days remaining of the Major's visit. They apparently succeed and at last the Major is put on the bus. The family rush home to sleep. Just as Tot is about to stretch out on his bed, the Major appears at the door. A blown-up bridge prevented him from returning to his unit. He will stay with the Tots for another three days. He suggests to the dumbfounded Tots that since he is back, they may as well get back to "cartonizing." He asks for the cutting machine--a huge guillotine-like gadget Mr. Tot fashioned at the Major's request so that four or more cartons could be cut at once. Tot, still speechless, leads the Major into the garden where he threw the cutting machine. The two women listen trembling as the machine is heard to cut something three times in succession. Tot has quartered the Major; the family finally goes to sleep.

Did the Major have any power over the Tot family? Yes and no. If there was a chance to save their son, then the family acted correctly in pleasing the Major. The audience knew after the first act that young Tot was dead.

Not knowing this, the family continued to cater to the Major's every whim. But then why did they kill the Major, thus jeopardizing the life of their son whom they still believed to be alive? Örkény presents the strange relationship between power and submission in a light that is peculiar to Hungary.

The relationship of peasants to the military aristocracy before 1945 was very close to that presented by Örkény in the relationship between the Major and the Tot family. But whether this relationship was not only suffered, but also encouraged by the suppressed, in this case by the Tots, is the question that seems to interest Orkeny most. From the audience's point of view the entire second half of the play is an exercise in futility. The compromise with the Major, particularly on the part of the women, for the possible salvation of their son, makes them accomplices who perpetuate the power that is represented by the Major. One of the merits of the play is that relationships between people and between the forces they represent change dynamically. Mr. Tot himself proves to be a man of unpredictable nature. A man who loves his comfort at the beginning of the play, Tot turns into a hunted animal as the play progresses. During an argument, his wife reveals that Tot, as a young man working for the railroad, pulled off his pants and showed his backside to Victor Emmanuel III passing by on a train. Örkény prepares us to expect things from Tot that may not be easily surmised from his behavior while it is tempered by the need

to consider his son's welfare. But the incident with Victor Emmanuel suggests that Tot would be capable of doing something unexpected, perhaps even violent. In the play Örkény presents an incident in a Hungarian village during World War II. He does this so that characters can expand into representatives of their classes--peasantry and the military establishment--or remain the players in the drama of one family trying to save their son. Örkény also comments on the abuse of power in a way that can be interpreted as a concomitant phenomenon of authority, or as an abnormal activity due to an abnormal mental state. Nowhere does Örkény use language that is obscure or heightened beyond what would be appropriate to a given character. Neither is his language reduced in such a way that one must search for meaning behind each word or phrase. His humor is conventional and effective without relying on any special device such as jokes or word plays or even country dialects. This generally simple use of language becomes as menacing as the physical action of the play, and when the two are juxtaposed at crucial points, the effect is extraordinary. At the very end of the play when Tot returns from the garden, he says: "It's late. Let's go to bed." His wife, Mariska, asks him: "Did you cut him in three pieces, my dear Louis?" The dialogue continues:

> TOT (Counting to himself) Into three? No. Into four equal pieces. Didn't I do the right thing?

MARISKA Of course you did, my dear Louis. You always know what to do.

(Short silence)

(Frightened) My son! My son! My one and only little son![42]

What Örkény has managed to condense into this short scene is remarkable. The grotesque deed of quartering the Major is topped by the absurdly business-like manner in which Mr. and Mrs. Tot make sure that they know exactly how many pieces the Major was cut into--an unmistakable bit of comic specificity. Mrs. Tot, so submissively agreeable to her husband, is the same woman who, in order to save her son has, for two weeks, taken the Major's side against her husband. But now, to all appearances, the Tots are back to normal family routine, without even a word about the possible consequences of the murder. When Mrs. Tot realizes what the killing may mean in terms of her son's safety and she calls out to her son, the audience's prior knowledge and Mrs. Tot's continued ignorance of her son's death create an irony which penetrates beyond the absurd and the grotesque.

The Tot Family may not mean the same thing to every audience, but its success abroad has proved that Örkény did something more than present a picture of class differences

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[42]Örkény, Tóték, p. 248.

in Hungary during World War II.[43] Another play by Örkény, written in 1969 and not yet produced, is an attemp to cover thirty years of Hungarian history.

Pisti a vérzivatarban (Steve in the Bloodstorm, 1969) is a documentary history told in episodes in which Steve is the protagonist, and all the other characters are described by Örkény as "Some of those who upset Steve's peace, or, quite the opposite, have had a good effect on him."[44] Elements of the absurd, the grotesque, surrealism and dada are all found in this strange journey of a Hungarian Everyman who cannot be killed. Steve might have been Dery's Giant Baby had he managed to get away from those who wanted to sell him. Steve is arrested in 1944 for being a communist, but he is also a man who was killing communists. He oppressed people and he incited people to riot; he was executed and he was rehabilitated, monuments are erected in his honor;

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[43]In his report of the Paris performance of La famille Tott, Iván Boldizsár wrote: "Deviation from the original [play] here in Paris is no more than one degree, but as the radius increases, the circle will not remain the same [as the original]. This one degree [of deviation] is caused by the fact that the Major is played by Jabbour, one of France's best comics. As soon as he enters, people laugh. Instead of a major in Horthy's army, Jabbour portrayed a Schweik-like character. . .my French friends did not understand some of my objections. Still in all, they did get a great deal out of the play, and through it, they seem to have learned something about today's Hungarian drama and yesterday's Hungary." (Iván Boldizsár, "Örkény Párizsban," Szinház, January 1969, p. 33).

[44]István Örkény, Pisti a vérzivatarban, in Időrendben, (Budapest: Magvető, 1972), p. 333.

he is denounced and he is worshipped. Constantly forced to lead a split life, Steve finally decides that he wants to be himself:

> I don't want to be split any more. And I don't want to be one Steve among a lot of other Steves. I'll try to become just a single thought. Maybe I'll make it this time. . .But if you won't let me, if it can't be otherwise, if I must, I'll die a few more times. . .Who's going to kill me this time?
> My friend, my enemy?
> My father, my son, my wife?
> Or another war?
> A mushroom-cloud? A stray bullet?
> Or, who knows--how beautiful that would be--
> maybe just time itself![45]

The play closes with the dropping of an atomic bomb on Budapest, but out of the great destruction life starts up all over again. With this ending, which may appear somewhat jarring at first, Örkény seems to be thinking of Hungary's future. For centuries Hungary has been her own worst enemy; her people have done more damage to themselves than outside powers. Although destruction may come again, Örkény seems to believe that Hungary will be ruined only when the rest of the world is also in mortal peril. Besides the indication that even that kind of destruction will be unable to extinguish life, Örkény implies--by forecasting a communal end for all people--that Hungary today belongs in the family of nations. A play written with the charm of a fairy tale, alternating in tragic and comic events, Steve in the Bloodstorm is first

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[45] Ibid., p. 414.

of all a testament of hope and optimism without for a moment denying an arduous and trying past.

Neither Örkény's plays nor those of other playwrights' have been discussed in this chapter to prove or disprove the existence of a peculiar kind of Hungarian absurd drama. The debate over the Hungarian absurd and grotesque is still going on, although the essential points that caused the debate in the first place seem to have been cleared up. The basic question has been: Are there differences between the absurdist drama of Western (capitalist) countries and those of Eastern Europe (socialist) countries? The answer lies with the question. There are similarities, mostly in methods of presentation, and there are differences, mostly in content. The notion of content has caused the greatest stir in Hungary, since it is generally accepted that the author's attitude is revealed in the content of his work. Exceptions exist, of course, but it would seem that, generally, social and political problems appear more in the absurdist dramas of Eastern Europe than in those of the West. In Hungarian dramas designated as absurdist, the question of power, its use and effect on the individual, seems to be a frequently recurring theme, which, in the plays of a new generation of Hungarian dramatists, is informed by the authors' attitude toward their experiences in World War II and in the 1950's.[46]

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[46]Similar experiences in the 1950's in other socialist countries produced dramas on the same theme.

Some Hungarian playwrights have been accused of imitating fashionable foreign trends and presenting situations in their plays that are irrelevant to Hungary.[47] Others have had to remain invisible because their play or plays were, according to critics, too general, not specifically defined in time and place.[48] But a number of authors did get a chance to see their plays produced, even though reaction to their first efforts were not too favorable. By now Hungarian critics and audiences have accepted the existence of native absurdist dramas. A fairly large body of works considered absurdist proved, on closer examination, that the appearance and continued existence of absurdist drama in Hungary (and in other socialist countries) cannot be viewed only as an emulation of Western drama, but rather a logical development in the progress of socialism which has been full of confusing, tragic, alienating and distorting elements. What is truly important, I feel, is that along with the influence of the epic theatre of Brecht, the theatre of the absurd did find its way into Hungary and helped dramatists make Hungarian drama part of the twentieth-century world drama, not by producing Hungarian versions of foreign plays, but by developing a unique drama of their own. If dramas created in societies with different social and

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[47] Gorgey is a case in point. See above p.228.

[48] For details of Meszoly's experiences with his play Bunker, see above, p. 210.

political systems show similarities, it is because man's life in those societies, regardless of politics and economics, show similarities. What was needed to develop a drama that was peculiar to Hungary and at the same time meaningful to people outside Hungary, was not so much foreign models, but room for experimentation, greater artistic freedom and increased support for the artists of the theatre. And that is exactly what began to be happening at the end of our period of study, and seems to be happening today with some encouraging results.

A New Beginning Through Experiments

As I have stated, the history of Hungarian drama in the twentieth century has been one of missed opportunities. This has been the result not only of long periods of isolation from the drama of the rest of the world, but also because of a consistent lack of opportunity for experimentation at home. Dramatists may develop new forms of construction and technical devices, they may create new uses for language, but without the benefit of the theatre as workshop, vital growth is seriously hindered. It was not until the mid-1960's that some experimentation and a closer playwright-theatre collaboration was made possible. This development, it must be emphasized, just as any other in the history of Hungarian drama, has not always been beneficial or free from certain limitations, but the net results tend to be positive. Experimentation has

not been restricted to one theatre or to any one group of playwrights, but investigation has revealed that it was exactly those dramatists who have been referred to in Hungary as cultivators, adherents or imitators of the absurd and grotesque who have been in the forefront of experimentation, and most of their experimentation has been linked to one new theatre.

It may have been noted that several authors mentioned in the last two chapters have had their important premieres at the Thália Theatre.[49] Established in 1963 with Károly Kazimir as its artistic director,[50] the Thália announced, as part of its policies, a program of experimentation in the cause of popularizing theatre.[51] The Thália meant to popularize drama, but also great works of world literature not originally written for the stage.[52] The Thália, under Kazimir's leadership, has been criticised in recent years for overemphasizing theatricalization and spectacular effects

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[49]The list of premieres include: Scrap-iron Yard (1963), The Tot Family (1967), Musical Guns (1968), Tombstone and Cocoa (1968), and Strip-Poker (1969).

[50]Kazimir is the only person to hold the title "artistic director" in Hungary.

[51]Andras Pályi, "Mit keres a Thália?" Szinház, July 1971, p. 33.

[52]Few theatres in the world can boast of having staged such world classics as the Ramayana, Kalevala and Milton's Paradise Lost. The Thália has staged these as well as other, Hungarian classical works.

while sacrificing the essence and meaning of the works performed.[53] With all his faults, miscalculations and artistic mistakes, it was Kazimir who first showed Waiting for Godot (October 9, 1965) in Hungary, and he was the one to provide a stage for such artists as Csurka, Eörsi, Fejes, Görgey and Örkény, among many others. Kazimir's efforts have gone beyond simply providing space for playwrights; it was his direct, personal encouragement that was responsible for dramatizing certain prose works, notably those of Fejes and Örkény.[54] While Kazimir and some of his younger directors at the Thália extended their help in shaping plays of young and relatively inexperienced authors, overzealousness and directorial intervention at times have resulted in misinterpretation of an author.[55] But occasional setbacks in a theatre's

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[53]In 1972 I saw Kazimir's production of the 18th century Japanese play, Chushingura. I felt that the audience was given a small sample of Kabuki acting, an overwhelming display of Japanese costumes, but very little of the play's plot, which Kazimir tried to combine with comments on Viet-Nam.

[54]Both Scrap-iron Yard and The Tot Family were originally written as novels.

[55]Görgey's first play at the Thália, Musical Guns, received, what the author considered, a good production due to meaningful cooperation of all the artists concerned. His next encounter with the Thália was somewhat different. He was not allowed in to see his two one-acters (The Messenger Cometh and Shower Room) until the night of the dress-rehearsal. He felt then that the director completely "schmaltzed up" (Görgey's own words) one of his plays. Görgey had a choice of either withdrawing both plays, and not be performed in Budapest theatres for a long while, or let the production go on as was conceived by the director. Görgey bravely admitted that only prudent considerations ("I was a young and relatively unknown playwright who needed exposure.") made him decide against withdrawing his plays. (Interview with Gábor Görgey, July 14, 1972).

work with playwrights may be found in any country at any given time.

Experimentation has not been limited to Budapest. Several provincial theatres have proved that they are more than able to mount plays as competently as Budapest theatres, and, more importantly, that they were willing to cooperate with authors in workshop situations. Several well-known playwrights have had their premieres in provincial theatres with considerable success. The government itself has encouraged experimentation beyond authorizing the establishment of new theatres such as the Thália. It was as part of a competition announced by the Ministry of Culture in 1967 that Eőrsi and Görgey were first produced.[56] Late in the 1960's the Twenty-Fifth Theatre[57] was created which, according to its director and co-founder, the playwright László Gyurkó, was to be a political theatre. Gyurkó calls a theatre political when "it concerns itself only with important social problems."[58] This theatre is small, intimate, its space is redesigned according to the needs of the play being performed. Characteristic of this theatre's experimentation is the bringing together of artists from many areas. Recently, the Twenty-Fifth Theatre invited famed Hungarian film-maker,

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[56] See above, p. 229.

[57] The name was chosen because Gyurkó's theatre was then the twenty-fifth in Hungary.

[58] Tamás Mészáros, "Huszonötödikék," Szinház, November 1973, p. 34.

Miklós Jancsó, to direct a play that was originally a motion picture.[59]

While all legitimate theatres are subsidized by the government, some amateur groups receive help from local youth organizations, cultural institutions or even from large factories. Universities usually have one or more performance groups; some have produced remarkably competent and interesting works.[60] No theatre exists in Hungary without some supervision by the government, although certain groups have been allowed to function independently--until the point at which authorities sensed political conflicts.[61] Hungary also sends experimental groups, mostly university based, to international festivals, and theatre companies from the West and

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[59]The motion picture Fényes szelek (Confrontations) was made in 1968; the play of the same name opened at the Twenty-Fifth Theatre in January 1974. It was written by Gyula Hernádi who writes most of Jancsó's films.

[60]It was a university performance group that gave the only production of Déry's The Giant Baby. See above, p. 57.

[61]One such group, led by Péter Halász, a former director-actor of a successful university ensemble, called Universitas, was encountering some difficulties in 1972. They were banned, allegedly for having staged a demonstration without a license. Actually, this "demonstration" was a pre-performance parade through Budapest with the actors in costume and carrying huge props and puppets. In 1972 the group was performing in apartments, their shows announced by word of mouth only. In the summer of 1972 they also planned a seven-day performance at an abandoned sand mine on one of the islands in the Danube just north of Budapest. The police raided them on the second day. This group, with whose members I spent a number of days, seemed to be highly professional and surprisingly aware of the theatre of not only neighboring socialist countries but also the theatre of Western Europe and the United States.

the East visit Hungary frequently. It is an encouraging indication of changing attitudes toward the theatre that visits by foreign troupes are not only welcomed, but are looked upon as means of acquiring greater knowledge of current theatrical trends and ideas that might prove of value to Hungarian drama and theatre.[62]

Experiments in the drama will lead to a better theatre; and better, more daring theatres will lead to a better and more exciting drama in Hungary. There is no single standard by which to measure the achievement of Hungarian drama between 1945 and 1970. One may consider this achievement simply an "arrival" at a peaceful coexistence of all kinds of drama. It may also be pointed out that during this period Hungarian drama managed to free itself, to a considerable degree, from the demands of politics, although Party cultural policy still exists. In addition to the fact that the plays of Miklós Mészöly are still invisible in Hungary, one must consider that Steve in the Bloodstorm, a play by so successful and accepted a playwright as Örkény, is also awaiting production five years after it was written and almost three

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[62]An article written after Peter Brook's production of Midsummer Night's Dream by the visiting Royal Shakespeare Company, (Tamás Koltai, "Hogyan játsszunk szinházat a Royal Shakespeare Company vendégszereplése után?" új irás, February 1973, pp. 100-105), sparked a debate over the state of Hungarian theatre--particularly acting--that still has not subsided.

years after it was published.[63] What may have been the result of Party cultural policy in the past--allowing or preventing a play's production--today may be the reflection of an attitude on the part of a single theatre or a manager.[64] Old-fashioned attitudes and ideas still abound in all areas of Hungarian theatre. Many artists with whom I have talked in Hungary find the state of the theatre and drama far from satisfactory. In a country where there is no such phenomenon as Broadway or Off-Broadway and Off-off Broadway, to say nothing of regional theatres and countless other small theatre groups; where there is but one academy for the performing arts--and not over two thousand colleges with theatre departments, as in the United States--experimentation proceeds more slowly and more cautiously.

It has been István Örkény, now sixty-two years old, who has, to a degree, approximated Molnár's feat earlier in this century of making Hungarian drama known abroad. The

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[63]Besides his latest play, Vérrokonok (Blood Relatives), currently playing and stirring up various critical views in Hungary, Örkény's impressive record includes the production in fourteen countries of The Tot Family, and another play, Macskajáték (Catsplay), is at this time on six separate stages of Europe from Leningrad to London. ("Örkény Macskajátéka hat europai szinpadon," Szinház, June 1974, pp. 41-47).

[64]I happened to be with István Eörsi in the summer of 1972 when his latest play, Széchenyi, was rejected by the Comedy Theatre. Ironically, the very same man, Zoltán Várkonyi, director-manager of that theatre who then returned the play as undesirable, has been playing the title role in the play to great critical and popular acclaim.

large number of playwrights and their works mounted on the Hungarian stage today signals an era of experimentation that is bound to produce fresher and more exciting drama than that of the first two decades after World War II. This new drama might help strengthen the impressive, but still tentative bridges Örkény has erected between Hungary and other countries. Perhaps the most important truth regarding Hungarian drama between 1945 and 1970 is not what it has done, but rather what has happened to it: by 1970 it received an opportunity that by all rights it should have had in 1945. This opportunity to develop, experiment, innovate and look at other dramas of the world, while at the same time becoming more and more visible at home, has been supplemented by the welcome opportunity for Hungarian drama to be seen abroad as well. It is to be hoped that this opportunity will not be missed.

CONCLUSION

The course of Hungarian drama during the twenty-five year period between 1945 and 1970 was determined by social and political factors as well as by artistic ones. Two major phases may be observed within the period: the first lasting from 1945 to about 1959, the second encompassing the 1960's.

The first phase may be characterized as an era in which politics dominated all activities, including artistic ones, in Hungary. Drama and theatre had but one function: to fulfill requirements of cultural policy as dictated by the Communist Party. Socialist realism, the accepted means of artistic expression in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, was the sole arbiter of Hungarian drama in the early and mid-1950's. This period has been the most sterile and least creative in post-war Hungarian drama. Conditions immediately after World War II, due to social and political uncertainties, were not conducive to a rapid development of post-war drama; theatres relied on plays written in an earlier era, many of them outside Hungary. By the time a new drama could develop, the direction it was to take was determined not by artistic but by political considerations. Nationalization of theatres and the dissemination of the concept

of socialist realism placed great limitations on dramatic, as well as other artistic creation. With very few exceptions, the period from 1949 to the late 1950's produced a body of dramatic works that had minimal artistic value. Plays written in these years depicted functions rather than characters; character types were not distinguishable by their human traits but only by their political associations. In general, these plays reflected the purpose to which they were put at the time of their writing: political education for large segments of the population. Political-ideological control that so seriously hindered the development of Hungarian drama was felt in many areas. Not only were plays censored and dramatists guided in their writings by political-artistic functionaries in the theatre, but the country's virtual isolation from the Western world kept Hungarian drama out of touch with new developments abroad--including those in such socialist countries as Czechoslovakia and Poland. The situation of Hungarian drama in the 1950's closely resembled the inter-war years when politics, under a fascist-oriented nationalist government, prevented experimentation in the legitimate theatre, banned and closed down experimental theatres and disallowed visits by foreign troupes. It was a traumatic event, the uprising in October 1956, that created a new political situation which, however slowly at first, began to ease restrictions and control on the arts, including drama and theatre. Thus, after a few short years of tentative search

for a new direction immediately following the 1956 uprising, post-war Hungarian drama entered its second major phase.

The gradual economic and political changes in Hungary in the 1960's proved to be beneficial to drama and theatre. Cultural policy retained the power of preventing the production of works considered to be against the country's socialist orientation, but it no longer took part in directly controling the work of writers and artists. While some important plays still remained unproduced, due to this policy, the number of those that were mounted--many of which could not have been staged in the 1950's--increased rapidly. The government's changed stance toward socialist realism allowed production of Brecht's plays, a fact which had an immediate effect: several Hungarian plays showed the direct influence, particularly in construction, of Brecht's epic theatre. Since the government of the 1950's was criticized by the government of the 1960's, plays dealing with the injustices committed in the 1950's could be produced. The critical tone, permitted with regards to events of the 1950's, slowly found its way into plays that probed vital problems of life under socialism not only in the 1950's, but in the 1960's as well. At the same time that new drama was gaining more and more freedom for itself, Hungary's dramatic past was being slowly discovered, and doors were opened to the drama of the West. Due to the absorption of outside influences, and dramatists' becoming aware of hitherto unknown achievements of their counterparts in the interwar years, Hungarian drama of the mid- and late

1960's experienced a creative ferment that is unparalleled in Hungary's dramatic history.

At the time of increased artistic freedom, in the late 1960's, it became evident that Hungarian drama might have had an equally fruitful and productive period immediately after World War II, had it not been for the political direction the country took in the late 1940's. Also by the late 1960's the gap between Hungarian drama and drama of Western Europe that seemed enormous in the 1950's had narrowed somewhat, and today Hungarian dramas are being shown on many stages of Europe. It is not one kind of Hungarian drama that is successful in Europe; the criterion, it would seem, is not that a play be of a certain mold, or belong to a trend recognizable throughout the world--István Örkény's Catsplay, a perfect example of realism, is just as successful as his The Tot Family which has been called absurd and grotesque. Hungarian dramas that are successful abroad and at home are plays that are meaningful to audiences because, at long last, they convey something of the human experience in the twentieth century, rather than advocate some political or ideological point of view. And that, at the beginning of the 1970's, is perhaps the greatest achievement of post-World War II Hungarian drama.

APPENDIX A

LONG WAR

by

Frigyes Karinthy

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Translated by Imre Goldstein

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PLAYERS: First Soldier

Second Soldier

SCENE: Two enemy foxholes about five feet apart.

FIRST SOLDIER (Crawls out of his foxhole, looks around, yawns.)

Ooooh. . .aaaahh. . .Boy, am I sleepy. . .well, well, let's see. . . I wonder if anything'll happen today. (Yells) Hey, enemy! Are you still asleep?

SECOND SOLDIER (Crawls out of the other foxhole, rubbing his eyes)

Yeah. . .what else have I got to do? How are you my dear colleague?

FIRST SOLDIER Thank you for asking, my dear enemy. Did you sleep well? Oh, look how rude I was, I haven't even greeted you properly. . . (He fires a shot into the other's shoulder.) To your ill-health!

SECOND SOLDIER Thank you very much. (He is taking aim now.) Where would you like it?

FIRST SOLDIER Right here, under my shoulder blade, if you don't mind; that spot's been itching all night.

SECOND SOLDIER (Aims carefully, fires into the other's shoulder blade. Politely) Was that the spot?

FIRST SOLDIER Yes, thank you, the very spot, indeed. (He applies an Army-issue dressing to his wound.) How are you otherwise?

SECOND SOLDIER So so. One grows lazy.

FIRST SOLDIER Yep, this is the life. One is a prisoner of one's comfort. . . Once you get used to something it's hard to change, to try new things.

(Fires another bullet into SECOND SOLDIER) Cheers!

SECOND SOLDIER (Applies dressing, returns fire) Cheers!

FIRST SOLDIER (Yawns) Anything happened yesterday?

SECOND SOLDIER Pepe was laughing his head off.

FIRST SOLDIER That Pepe is always laughing; he doesn't know what to do with himself. What happened?

SECOND SOLDIER He bet Milan that he couldn't shoot at him above the belt without hitting him in the heart. We were laughing too because Milan got very mad and was bragging more than usual. He said he'd take on anybody at any odds. So finally he bet Pepe a glass of beer. He was aiming for a long time, fired at last--then Pepe started to laugh like crazy and said: "You idiot, you overdone it; you got me in the head."

FIRST SOLDIER (Yawns) Did he die?

SECOND SOLDIER Of course. Some people have all the luck: actually he lost the bet, still Milan had to pay for the beer.

FIRST SOLDIER Serves him right. (Politely) May I fill up again? (He puts another bullet into his rifle.)

SECOND SOLDIER Thank you very much. You've got nice fresh bullets this morning. Skol! (They clink their rifles, fire, then apply dressings to their respective wounds.)

FIRST SOLDIER Sometimes one feels that he ought to be doing something: read a book, or write, or build something, you know. My conscience has been pricking at me lately. My dear enemy, I think courage is lacking all around.

SECOND SOLDIER One has so many friends that out of consideration for them it's hard to start anything. You always think: 'what would they say?'

FIRST SOLDIER You're so right. If only one had no friends. Believe me, I too have an awful lot of friends, my dear enemy.

SECOND SOLDIER That's it; that's exactly it. Hey, how about a game of bayonets?

FIRST SOLDIER At your service, friend. What are we going for?

SECOND SOLDIER Stomach.

FIRST SOLDIER All right. Whoever falls forfeits all his bets down the whole front line.

SECOND SOLDIER Fine with me. Who goes first?

FIRST SOLDIER Always the one who asks. (They fix bayonets.)

SECOND SOLDIER O.K. A pair of deuces.

FIRST SOLDIER Let's see it, friend, let's see it.

SECOND SOLDIER (Thrusts, draws blood) Red.

FIRST SOLDIER Not bad. (Thrusts. Blood) Here's some more red.

SECOND SOLDIER (Thrusts) Lungs.

FIRST SOLDIER (Thrusts) Kidneys.

SECOND SOLDIER Marrow.

FIRST SOLDIER Whoops, that one missed. Here's an ace in the hole. (Thrusts)

SECOND SOLDIER Ah-ah. . .Liver.

FIRST SOLDIER (Suddenly) Heart. . .

SECOND SOLDIER (Dropping his rifle) You've won. . .You got a good hand. . .Mickey's here just below, he'll take over. . . So long.

FIRST SOLDIER So long, old buddy.

SECOND SOLDIER Ooooh. . .aaaahh. . .I'm so sleepy anyway. . . (He stretches, yawns, dies.)

CURTAIN

APPENDIX B

THE SINGING LESSON

by

Frigyes Karinthy

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Translated by Imre Goldstein

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CHARACTERS: PROFESSOR

PUPIL

(PROFESSOR is discovered in front of a music stand, sheets of music in his hands. A corpse is lying on the floor. PROFESSOR is alone for a second then goes to the door and yells out: NEXT!)

PUPIL (Enters) How do you do?

PROFESSOR Good day. Your name?

PUPIL (Shy) Croaky. I've come to you Professor. . .to learn how to sing. You will remember, Mr. Fellow mentioned me to the Professor, intimating that it might be worth developing my voice. I have a very nice voice. . . (Prepares to sing.)

PROFESSOR (Sits PUPIL down) Oh yes, yes, of course. I remember. Well, we shall see, shall see.

PUPIL (Happy) Hehehehe! (Starts singing.)

PROFESSOR However! Are you aware of my method?

PUPIL Mr. Fellow told me about the Professor's method. (Starts singing.)

PROFESSOR Shush! First of all, young man, remember that I consider each of the auditory organs as separate instruments. That's number one. Do you understand?

PUPIL Yessir. Separate instruments. (Starts singing.)

PROFESSOR Shush! Second of all, the most important thing is that you pay special attention to the auditory canal. Understood?

PUPIL Understood. (Starts singing.)

PROFESSOR Shush! Of course you don't understand. They all say they do, but they don't. (Painfully.) Young man, promise me that you'll be careful with the auditory canal. Give me your hand.

PUPIL (Gives his hands; moved) On my word of honor, Professor, I shall be careful with the auditory canal. (Starts singing.)

PROFESSOR Shush! I thank you. Now then, stand over here. (Makes PUPIL stand in the middle of the room.) Like that. Turn toward the light. Open your mouth.

PUPIL (Opens his mouth, wants to sing)

PROFESSOR (Waves his hand in disgust) Is that what you call opening your mouth? That's how a person opens a purse, or a closet, not his mouth!

PUPIL (With his mouth wide open he rolls his eyes)

PROFESSOR Open it round.

PUPIL (Tries hard)

PROFESSOR Like that. Now sing: "Come to me my melancholy baby. . ."

PUPIL "Come to me my mela. . ."

PROFESSOR Stop! Hold it! For God's sake, stop! Halt!

PUPIL (Frightened) What happened?

PROFESSOR Unfortunate man. . . you actually sing from your throat!

PUPIL (Confused, stammering) Well. . .seeing that you've caught me like this, Professor, I can't deny it. It is true: I was singing from my throat.

PROFESSOR (Pityingly) Hm, of course, of course. Poor man, can't help it. You always do that?

PUPIL (Ashamed) Well. . .I must confess, Professor. . . it's become a habit. . . They spoiled me as a child.

PROFESSOR Well, all right. Listen to me. A singer does not sing from his throat. Anybody can sing from his throat; you'll get nowhere like that. One must lower the voice into the lungs.

PUPIL (Nodding happily) I get it, I understand: into the lungs. Then sing from the lungs. . .

PROFESSOR (Waving his hands) No, no, no! You only lower the voice into the lungs for a split second, then you send it right up into the nose. . .

PUPIL (Gay) And from there. . .

PROFESSOR (Austere) Well?? From there?

PUPIL (Guessing) Into the handkerchief. . .?

PROFESSOR You're not prepared at all. From the nose one lets it out into the air. A singer sings with his lungs and his Eustachian tube.

PUPIL And how much is that. . .that Eustachian tube?

PROFESSOR (Severe) The Eustachian tube, as we know, is the tube connecting the pharynx with the inner ear. . .

PUPIL (Lightly) As we know. . .

PROFESSOR . . .so that if you sing loudly the root of the tongue must be thrust into the larynx, my friend, so that the stomach and the gullet form a resonating space.

PUPIL Yessir. Resonating. (Starts singing.)

PROFESSOR Shush! During the low notes you let out the root of the tongue and close your eyes. (Austere) Why do you close your eyes?

PUPIL (Hesitant) So I won't see the effect, right?

PROFESSOR Dead wrong! You close your eyes so that you may open your mouth wider. Now, open it!

PUPIL (Opens it)

PROFESSOR Like that. Now vibrate your vocal chords.

PUPIL (Thinks for a while, then begins a kind of St. Vitus dance, wriggling his whole body)

PROFESSOR What ARE you doing? Whatareyoudoing, what are you DOING??

PUPIL (Coy) Pardon me, Professor, don't be angry. . .but I'm not sure where my chords are. . .so I thought that if I vibrate the whole thing. . .

PROFESSOR Wrong again! Well. . .all right, we'll see anyway. Sing: "Come to me my melancholy baby. . ."

PUPIL (With feeling) "Come to me my melancholy baby. . ." (Looks proudly at the PROFESSOR.)

PROFESSOR No good. Besides, this song can't be sung like that. Try the whole thing with "Ah," maybe it'll work for you.

PUPIL (Crestfallen) "Cahm tah mah mah mahlahnchahlah bahbah. . .

PROFESSOR (Waves his hands) No good. NO good. Try it with "ooh."

PUPIL "Coohm tooh mooh mooh moohloohncoohlooh boohbooh. . .

PROFESSOR (Holds his ears and screams) No good, NO GOOD, you idiot, you're letting your tongueroot back into your throat!!

PUPIL (Scared, grabs his own throat)

PROFESSOR You're ruining the canal. Don't you understand that the auditory canal is the most important thing? This canal to a singer is like wings to a bird. Great singers use their entire heads as canals. Wait a minute, we'll figure out something. (He grabs PUPIL by the throat, gets hold of his tongue with a pair of plyers and pulls it out a ways.) Now. . .now, sing: "Come to me my. . ."

PUPIL (Rattles, gurgles)

PROFESSOR You see, it's coming already. A little more suppressed. (He is pressing harder on the PUPIL's neck).

PUPIL (is choking)

PROFESSOR Thus. . .Thus. . .like that, you see???!! It's coming, it's coming. . .!

PUPIL (Choking) She. . .khe. . .khe. . .

PROFESSOR (Triumphant) There, you see? Now it's really good, quite good; the root of the tongue is to go JUST a little lower. . .be brave. . .be brave. . .stick with it now. . . Wonderful, now, now, sing: "Come to me my. . ." Now. . .now. . .be brave. . . (He chokes PUPIL to death.) Lower. . .lower. . .

PUPIL (Collapses, dies)

PROFESSOR (Lets go of PUPIL, stares) Well?

PUPIL (Quiet)

PROFESSOR Well. . .will you look at that, this one too?! What a sensitive man. It's a shame, he was really getting the hang of it. .tsk. .tsk. . (He goes to door, yells out)

NEXT!

CURTAIN

APPENDIX C

THE MAGIC CHAIR

A Comedy In One Act by Frigyes Karinthy

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Translated by Imre Goldstein

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Persons in the play

Cabinet Minister

Secretary of State

Alexander Heart, writer

Kallay, in charge of patents

Fulda, doctor

Bertha, wife of Secretary of State

David, attendant

Marcel, attendant

Porter

Genius

SCENE: Office of the Secretary of State. To the right, left, and at center: double-doors. A fireplace at left.

TIME: Afternoon, then evening.

DAVID (Enters, opens shutters letting the afternoon sun in. He begins collecting some papers.)

MARCEL (Enters from left) He's here again.

DAVID Who?

MARCEL The inventor.

DAVID The devil take him. Why didn't you tell him no office hours today?

MARCEL He says he wanna come in.

DAVID Didn't ya tell him the Secretary of State won't be comin' in?

MARCEL 'Course I did. He says he'll wait.

DAVID But if he won't come in this guy's waitin' for nothin'.

MARCEL Nothin', hell. The Secretary will be in soon.

DAVID Of course he'll be in.

MARCEL What the hell then?

DAVID But he ain't comin' in for <u>him</u>! Oh, heck, go send him in. I'll talk to his head.

MARCEL (Calling into the hall) Hey. . .what's your name. . . Professor. . . Well, come in, come in. . .hurry up. . . (Exit MARCEL).

GENIUS (A long-haired, long-bearded eccentric, always excited, his eyes fiery like those of a seer.) Good day!

DAVID Good day, Professor. Well, what seems to be the trouble?

GENIUS Is His Excellency the Secretary here?

DAVID No.

GENIUS Will he be coming in?

DAVID No. He's in Vienna.

GENIUS Hm. How about Kallay, the man in charge of patents?

DAVID What do you want from him?

GENIUS I'd like to talk to him.

DAVID About what?

GENIUS About patents.

DAVID That's impossible. He won't see anybody about patents.

GENIUS Then who can I see about patents?

DAVID His Excellency the Secretary. But he ain't here.

GENIUS (With increasing bitterness) Now look here. I know very well that the Secretary doesn't want to see me. I've been here at least ten times. First, when I invented perpetual motion he was busy with a dandy trying to patent some gadget to lengthen hatpins. . . He had time for that character; I heard how amiably they were licking each other with words. . . The second time I came I invented a plane that would fly to the moon. . . He wouldn't see me. Then he was busy with a Mr. Spitz who invented the illuminated spitoon so you'd see where to spit in the middle of the night. (He spits.) Phooey! . . .Last time I was here was yesterday. I ran like a maniac because I invented the artificial human being, I found the key to life. . . He wouldn't see me. He was busy with some Mr. Berger whose fingernail file would produce scalloped fingernails...

DAVID (Nods) That I know about. It's bein' discussed all over the place.

GENIUS Well, you know something, this time I'm here because I invented nothing.

DAVID Nothing? That's good: Just yourself. It's almost like you invented yourself. That's funny, ain't it?

GENIUS Yes. . . Well, would you please go in there and tell that man of patents that the person he talked to the other day, not me, is here to see him.

DAVID Come off it now.

GENIUS Go ahead, go on, David. This is the last time I bother anybody around here: I'm leaving for America tomorrow.

DAVID Is this true?

GENIUS On my word of honor.

DAVID Well. . . all right. . . In that case I'll see what I can do. . . (Exit)

GENIUS (Looks around quickly, rushes to door, whispers excitedly)

Hey, Green!

PORTER (In the doorway) Well?

GENIUS Bring it in here, quick!

PORTER (Leaves doorway, reappears immediately with an armchair with several wires sticking out of it.)

GENIUS (Excited) That's it. Quick. Wait a second. (Gets hold of chair.) Over here. . .No, this is no good. . . (He is looking at the bottom of the walls.) Where is that outlet? . . .Aha. . . Got it. . . Give me a hand here. . . that's right. . . over there. . . (With the PORTER's help he places chair near the fireplace). Wait, hold it for a second. . . (He quickly produces a pair of plyers; splices and adjusts wires, plugs the chair in and seems to be turning some knobs inside the chair.) That's it. (He makes sure no wire is visible, then sits in chair.) There. . . All right. . . I think it's working. (He jumps up.) You know what you're supposed to say?

PORTER Yessir. . . I say that I've brought the chair which his Excellency the Secretary of State ordered.

GENIUS Good. (Gives him money.) And of course you don't know me, right? Never saw me before.

PORTER Yessir.

GENIUS Look out, they're coming. We don't know each other. (He runs to window and is looking out now.)

PORTER Just leave it to me.

DAVID (Enters right) Well, as I said, he ain't here.

GENIUS (Humming) Hm. .hmmm. . .well, that's too bad. . .

DAVID (Noticing the PORTER) What is it? What d'ya want?

PORTER I brought the chair the. . .His Excellency the Secretary of State ordered.

DAVID (Looking at the chair) You sure you got the right place?

PORTER (Looking at a piece of paper) Second floor. . . Secretary's office. . .

DAVID All right then, just leave it there.

PORTER Please sign here that you got the merchandise.

DAVID (Signs paper) All right?

PORTER So long. (Exit left.)

DAVID (Looking at the chair) Nice piece. (He is touching it now. Realizes that GENIUS is still there.) Oh. . . the. . .Mr. Kallay isn't here.

GENIUS (In mock disappointment) Tsk. .tsk. . Really? He's not here at all, is he?

DAVID That's right.

GENIUS And he won't be in either?

DAVID No. He's in Vienna.

GENIUS And the Secretary won't be coming in either?

DAVID No! I told you that already!

GENIUS He is out of town, isn't he?

DAVID He is.

GENIUS He won't be in tomorrow?

DAVID No.

GENIUS Well. . . In that case. . .tsk. . .tsk. . . Funny, he's even ordered some new furniture. . . really strange. (Points to chair.)

DAVID That's right. . .hm. . .

GENIUS (Looking at the chair as if seeing it for the first time) Nice piece. But only to the eye. It's not very practical.

DAVID Now why wouldn't it be practical?

GENIUS Doesn't look very comfortable to me.

DAVID (Shrugs) Why not? (Sits in chair.) It's very comfortable.

GENIUS (He's been waiting just for this to happen, jumps quickly in front of DAVID, speaks quickly) Is Mr. Kallay here?

DAVID Of course he's here. He's sitting at his desk right now.

GENIUS He hasn't gone to Vienna?

DAVID What the hell would he be doin' in Vienna?

GENIUS (More and more triumphant) Is his Excellency the Secretary of State coming in today?

DAVID Of course he is. He'll be here in five minutes.

GENIUS (Bows) Thank you very much. That's all I wanted to know. (Aside, shaking his fists.) You people will pay for this! (To DAVID.) Tell the Secretary to have a good time, tell him to enjoy himself! I'm off to America. Au revoir! (Bows, exit quickly.)

DAVID (Stands up, strokes his forehead) Whoo. . .that Havana I stole must have been really strong. . .so help me. . . (Rubbing his eyes) He left, eh?. . .Well, let's get on with the work here. (He continues to clean the office.) Hey, what did he say before he left?. . .

KALLAY (Enters right) His Excellency is not here yet?

DAVID He'll be here any minute, sir.

KALLAY Brrr, it's cold. Aren't we getting any heat yet?

DAVID I've just fixed the fire, sir.

SECRETARY OF STATE (Enters center. Conceited, with pompous gestures and artificial manners) Whoo. . .it's cool in here. . .

DAVID Good day, your Excellency.

KALLAY (Subserviently jovial) Good morning, your Honor, on this beautiful afternoon, Your Honor.

SECY OF STATE I left them there, the chairman was still talking. (To DAVID.) What's new? Anybody to see me?

DAVID They brought this chair; Your Excellency ordered it.

SECY OF STATE Oh. . .this is that. . .I didn't order it. . . I just happen to mention the other day that we could use. . .Not bad. It can stay. Anybody else?

DAVID The inventor was here.

SECY OF STATE Oh. . .Master Genius. . . What did he want?

DAVID He said he was going to America.

SECY OF STATE Thank God.

KALLAY He kept pestering me too.

SECY OF STATE I'm really not the kind of person who would keep a real talent from fulfilling itself. . .but he always bothers me just when really important matters need my attention.

KALLAY He's simply impossible. For a whole year I've been trying to tell him that I have no time at the moment.

SECY OF STATE I'm really not that kind of man.

KALLAY Your Honor is really not that kind.

SECY OF STATE I believe it's only fair that people realize that nowadays I'm very busy. This contract for example. . .

KALLAY Oh, the matter of the fingernail file. . .the contract with America. . .fantastic!

SECY OF STATE Very pretty work. Have you read it?

KALLAY Oh, Your Honor! . . .my favorite reading. . .

SECY OF STATE How did you like it?

KALLAY My God, what should I say. . .wonderful. . .

SECY OF STATE I have reason to believe that we've done a good job; I think I may say so in all modesty.

KALLAY Your Honor, history shall be dealing with this file.. . and with the man who filed it, I mean invented it. . .

SECY OF STATE Oh, Councillor, you're flattering me.

KALLAY (Enthusiastic) I'm only candid, Your Honor, that's the truth.

SECY OF STATE So then you really believe that the country is happy with me?

KALLAY (Taking a deep breath) Your Honor and Excellency, it is my strongest conviction that since you have been honoring us by occupying the chair and the position of Secretary of State, every decent man has had an

KALLAY opportunity to be convinced that, although this Department has, in its fifty-year history, elevated many a distinguished and excellent man to the heights of this responsible job, (He's raising his voice, gesticulates, crosses the stage.) never has such a. . . (sits in the magic chair) such a royal ass as you been allowed to spoil the air around here.

SECY OF STATE (Turns around, does not believe his ears, his mouth is open) Wha...what?

KALLAY (In natural tones, dangling his feet. Generally, whoever sits in the chair, while in it, speaks in calm, relaxed, natural tones, without any mannered or fake inflections, just as if he were talking about himself.) What are you gaping at? You don't have to show me your teeth, I know they're black, anyway.

SECY OF STATE (Gasping for air) What's this? What is the meaning of this?

KALLAY Say, partner, but honestly, how much longer do you intend to live?

SECY OF STATE (Screaming) Councillor!!

KALLAY (Reacting to the loud voice, he jumps out of the chair) At your service, Your Honor?

SECY OF STATE Have you gone mad?

KALLAY (Scared) For the love of God. . . Your Honor. . . why. .what happened?

SECY OF STATE (Slowly regaining his composure. Ice-cold) I think a momentary insanity has just taken over your senses, Councillor. This, however, does not excuse your behavior, and I. . .and I shall know what I must do. Please return to your room.

KALLAY (Terrified) For God's sake. . .but what's going on, Your Honor. . .I have no idea. . .someone must have slandered me. . .

SECY OF STATE (Loud) Leave!

KALLAY (Frightened, slowly begins to back out of the room)

SECY OF STATE (Exhausted, throws himself into the magic chair) Would you believe it. . .and Kallay himself. . . I just don't understand. . .because I know. . .(Imploring) I know I'm an ass. . .But does it have to be said right to my face? . . .that's not very nice of you.

KALLAY Jesus Christ! . . .(Gesticulates, indicating that the SECY OF STATE must have gone mad.) What is this? ..Excuse me, sir. . . .so long, sir. . . (He runs out of the room.)

SECY OF STATE (Gets up, paces. To himself) Incredible. He must have found out something or gone crazy? (Stops, starts walking again.) I don't understand! (Telephone, next to the magic chair, rings. He picks up receiver, speaks standing up.) Hello. . .this is the Secretary. . . Hello. . .Your Right Honorable. . .(He bows.) Good

SECY OF STATE morning Your Right Honorable. . .at your service, of course, oh yes, of course, the patent contract with America. . .the fingernail file case. . .right, with scalloped nails. . .hello. . .did I read it? .. Of course I did, Your Right Honorable, of course, . . .what can I say, what can I possibly say. . .grand . . .grandiose. . .please. . .go ahead. . .(Pause) Of course I noticed it. . .how could I not have noticed it. . .simply the work of a genius. . .the rationale. . . I knew that it would be best if you did it personally, you, my Right Honorable, well, . . .you mean how satisfied I am with it? . . .well, sir. . .I really have to search for words. . .I don't think I exaggerate when I say that this contract, although it is your first document of this kind. . .still. . . (sits in the chair) . . .still it is the most idiotic jibberish that I have ever read. . .hello, hello. . .of course you got it right, sir: idi-o-tic. . .jibber-ish. . .Yes, idiotic: I as in infantile, D as in degenerate, I as in imbecile, O as in ogre, T as in Tepid, I as in Incomprehensible, and C as in cesspool. Yes, yes, sweetie. . .My hair stood on end when I read it. . .we'll be the laughing-stock of America. . .and you want me to sign this. . . this piece of junk, this piece of crap. . .this perfectly awful gobbledegook, hello, hello. . .say, man, but honestly, how did you have the cheek, the nerve . . .hello, hello. . .this damn' thing is not good

SECY OF STATE enough to wipe one's . . .(he stands up). . . who said anything about wiping? . . .to erace? . . . no, no, not a word of it, that's the best part. . . hello, hello. . .what's this. . .we're disconnected. . . hello. . . (He waits a second then puts down receiver.) We must have been cut off.

DAVID (Enters left) Alexander Heart. (Exit.)

SECY OF STATE Oh. . .of course, of course. Please do come in.

HEART (Very elegant, affected, nonchalant, rolls his r's a little. His movements are tired and mannered) Good morning, my dear Louis.

SECY OF STATE (Holds out both his hands) My Lexy, welcome.. . my poet. . . Why am I honored?. . .

HEART Oh, nothing special. I happened to be in the neighborhood, I thought I'd drop in. . . Some faint, violent feeling told me you'd be alone. . . and the houses looked at me so strangely.

SECY OF STATE Oh, you eternal poet, you. So I can thank your visit to a mere mood. . . Please have a seat.

HEART I'm not disturbing you, am I?

SECY OF STATE Of course not. I was just talking to the Minister.

HEART You seem to be a little nervous. (Sits by the desk.)

SECY OF STATE Yes, there was a bit of trouble before; a little unpleasantness.

HEART Just in passing I remembered that we perhaps could talk about that matter.

SECY OF STATE What matter is that, Lexy?

HEART My God. (Strokes his forehead.) What was it, I'm so absentminded it's as if a green veil had come between me and the heavens.

SECY OF STATE Well, but perhaps we. . .

HEART Yes. . .the editor mentioned something, I don't know. . . all I know is that the fragrance of almonds is sometimes so hot as a woman's kerchief on a summer evening. . .

SECY OF STATE Oh. . .oh. . .I think I get it. . .It's about this American contract, right? About this fingernail file patent, right? . . .I see. . .so your paper wants you to do a little. . .well, I'm at your disposal, of course, by all means. Well, the way the matter stands now is that the Ministry would like the paper to devote its lead article to this. . .of course sympathetically handled, you understand, . . .how the Hungarian fingernail file industry, and so on and so forth. . .and of course if you undertook the writing. . .that would be very very pleasant for me. . . I'd be delighted if the paper. . .how should I say. . .would express its gratitude to you for all this. . .in some form or other. . . the ministry would not hesitate to make it somewhat easy for the paper to. . .express its gratitude to you. . .

HEART (Interrupts) Oh, please. . .I know nothing about such things. . . matters of economics. . .what do I know about things like that?. . . A lock of hair, yes. . .a beautiful sentence, a phrase. . .a tender chord by Chopin. . . (Gets up, paces) but beyond that, what do I know. . .

SECY OF STATE (Confused) Well, Lexy, I'm not forcing you . . .If you don't want to do it. . .

HEART Whether I take it or not. . .my God. . . (Sits in the magic chair, speaks with a Jewish accent, in tones of a shopkeeper, without rolling his r's.) What's the matter with you? What you mean I wouldn't take it; I wouldn't take it for the right amount of dough? I wouldn't eh? The only question is, my good man, how much do I get if I give you a nice, juicy treatment of this swinerei, eh!

DAVID (Enters) The Right Honorable Minister!

SECY OF STATE (Surprised, jumps up) In person?

DAVID Yessir. (Exit)

SECY OF STATE (Runs to the door) Oh. . .at your service. . . Your Right Honorable. . .

MINISTER (Enters. He is upset, but tries to hide it. Looks around suspiciously)
Good day, Mr. Secretary. . . (Stares at SECY of STATE.)

SECY OF STATE What do I owe the honor, Your Right Honorable. . .Oh. . .pardon me, Right Honorable, I'm very happy to introduce to you Alexander Heart, the great poet. . .whom you have only heard up to now. . .

HEART (Stands up) I'm very happy to make your acquaintance, Minister, Your Right Honorable. . . Allow a modest priest of Apollo to place his homage at the feet of Themis's most worthy regent on earth.

MINISTER I'm very glad, very pleased, master; it was really nice, I've read it. (To SECY OF STATE.) It looks like you really have no idea.

SECY OF STATE About what, sir?

MINISTER Just a while ago. . . (Looking at the SECY suspiciously.) Very unpleasant. . . (bursts out.) Somebody pulled a joke on me. A very distasteful joke!. . .

SECY OF STATE (Surprised) A joke!?

MINISTER Yes. . .I'm glad to see that. . .that you seem to know nothing about it. It seems that. . .that it must have been an outside line hooked in accidentally. . . some shameless snotnose. . .perhaps some journalist. . .

SECY OF STATE But what did he say?

MINISTER (Seeing that the SECY is ignorant of the matter) Oh it's nothing. . . it's all right. . . it's not such a big thing. . .no trouble at all. . .I'd just like to know. . . He really didn't say anything. . .

SECY OF STATE He must have said something!

MINISTER (Making light of it) Nothing, I'm telling you. . . he was rather polite, courteous, I'd say. . .certain . . .he wanted to have certain information, according to which. . . Oh, well, let's talk about something else.

SECY OF STATE As you wish, Your Right Honorable, sir, as you wish.

MINISTER Ah. .ah. . .ah. . .as a matter of fact I did not mean to trouble you. . .about the contract. . .I could . . .I would have liked to exchange a few words, but if you're busy. . .

SECY OF STATE Sir, I believe we can talk in front of Mr. Heart here. . . We were disconnected before, so. . . The thing is that Mr. Heart has honored us with his visit exactly because of the matter of. . .from his paper, you know. . .

MINISTER Ah. . .ah. . .eh. . .eh. . .

SECY OF STATE In the matter of the American contract of that patent. . . the fingernail file case. . . What we were talking about, as I've mentioned to you before, has to do with the paper coming out, in its lead article, about the contract. . .very favorably. . .if certain information is provided.

MINISTER Ah. . .I see, if, accordingly, certain information is. . .

HEART We are terribly interested in this affair, sir. We are fully aware of the international implications of this matter, the European profits. . .

MINISTER Yes. . .the profits, yes. . .it's certainly there. Well, then. . .I'm very glad that I can be of service.

HEART (Taking out a notebook) I'd have a few questions, sir, if I may.

MINISTER Go right ahead.

HEART All I know is that we are talking about an invention which, without a doubt has a great future. Is that right?

MINISTER That's right. (Taking up a pose as if to recite poetry.) In my humble opinion, if we succeed in concluding this contract, which we have so carefully, circumspectly prepared, if we succeed in America. . .

SECY OF STATE Why don't you sit down, sir?

MINISTER (Looks around, then, while talking, sits in the magic chair.) Eh. . .eh. . .so circumspectly prepared, and for which I expect the respect of the public at large, in that case it is quite hopeful that we'll be able to (sits down) to get ourselves out of the goddamn' mess we got ourselves into.

HEART (Looks up) "Goddamn' mess?"

MINISTER (Waves his hand) All right, call it a scandal; a scandal we created, you know, that railroad mess. . .

HEART If I understood you correctly. . .

SECY OF STATE (Stares in disbelief)

HEART Oh, the railroad contract. . .

SECY OF STATE (Restless) Your Honor perhaps would. . .

MINISTER (Waves his hand) Oh, stop jumping around, Louis . . .It was your clever little idea to have that Jew as the go-between.

HEART (Eager) Baron Fuchs?

SECY OF STATE (Forcing himself to smile, gives MINISTER the high-sign; rolls his eyes desperately) Hehehehe. . .His Right Honorable, is deigning to joke, he he he he. . .

MINISTER (Waves his hand) Oh yeah? . . .I'm really in the mood for joking around! We cheated the whole parliament, didn't we? But I'll tell you it would all be O.K. if only I could be young again, goddamn' it! The hell with whole stupid parliament. . .

SECY OF STATE (Turning green) My Right, Your Right Honorable . . .we're talking about this present contract, here. . .

MINISTER (Offended) Leave me alone about that contract. . . We'll stop the mouths of those few who don't like it. Now who can do that job, eh? Who? I know I can't. (To HEART) And neither can Louis here. (Jolly) The old man would have liked to kick him out a long time ago, anyway. . .hehehehe. . .he he. . .

SECY OF STATE Your Right Honorable, Your Ri-ri-ri-right. . .

MINISTER (Laughing) Hehehehe. . . .goofed! . . .messed up the whole thing. . .such an ass! . . .oh. .oh. .ho . . .ho. . .my side. . . (Grabs his side.)

SECY OF STATE Your Honorable, perhaps you're not feeling well. . .

MINISTER Who ain't feeling well? I'm an old warhorse, don't you forget it! What do I care if I sold anything to America? I wouldn't mind selling them remote controlled cholera if only I could make a young chick scream with joy again!!!. . . .

SECY OF STATE Your Honorable. . .Mr. Heart might misunderstand your joking around.

MINISTER Well, just what the hell do you want from me? You got your half million from the file factory. So long as that's kept under the lid we're all right. But if it blows open we'll both go to hell, he he he he he. . .

SECY OF STATE (Screams, plugs up his ears)

DAVID (Enters) Her Excellency, Your wife, sir.

SECY OF STATE Who?! What?!

DAVID Her Excellency, wife of the Secretary.

MINISTER Well, bring her in, let her come, she's some piece, a really fine piece!

SECY OF STATE Oh my God, my wife. . .she must have thought I was alone.

MINISTER (Standing up) No matter, now that she's here. . .

SECY OF STATE (To DAVID) Please ask my wife to wait a moment.

DAVID Yessir. (Exit)

SECY OF STATE (Emotional) Is Your Right Honorable. . . Are you, sir, aware of what this means, the things you have mentioned in the presence of this journalist?

MINISTER (Amazed) What things?

SECY OF STATE (Beside himself) All right. You, sir, claim that I received half a million for. . . Well, how much did you get, my Right Honorable sir?

MINISTER (Gasping for air) Ahh. . .ah. . .Mr. Secretary. . . what is the meaning of this??? . . .Have you gone mad?. . .

SECY OF STATE No, I haven't. But everybody else around here seems to have. . . To expose the government. . . in front of a journalist. . . .

MINISTER Mr. Secretary -- I'm making you responsible for these words! How dare you!. . . You'll pay for this! (Runs out.)

SECY OF STATE (Grabs his head) Well, what is this? Have I gone crazy? Oh. . .I feel sick. . . (Collapses into chair by the desk.) Oh. . .the revolution is about to break out. . .

HEART Holy God, he's fainted. . .David. . .David!. . . Run, quickly. . .to Fulda, the doctor. . .(DAVID runs in and out.)

BERTHA (Enters through the open door) What's this? Is Louis sick?

HEART Nothing, nothing to worry about. . .

BERTHA Louis!

SECY OF STATE It's nothing; I'm feeling better already.

BERTHA But what happened?

SECY OF STATE I just got dizzy. . .please, sit down. I'm having hallucinations. I think my nerves have been attacked. But it's over now. Has His Honor left?

HEART Yes.

SECY OF STATE Oh good. Please sit down. Oh, pardon me, have you met my wife?

HEART (Bows) I haven't had the pleasure.

BERTHA (Extending her hand) I only know you from your pictures and your works. You're Alexander Heart, if I'm not mistaken.

HEART (Kisses her hand) My gracious lady!

BERTHA (Relieved) It's really terrible, that just now. . . I really didn't mean to disturb you, I thought you'd be alone.

SECY OF STATE Where are you coming from?

BERTHA I was at my seamstress, I had to wait an awfully long time -- you're feeling better?

SECY OF STATE I'm perfectly fine now. (Stares in front of him.) Please, sit down.

BERTHA I'm really glad to have a chance to see the great author. (She is heading towards the magic chair.) I've been very curious, I've never seen him (sits down) blinking so stupidly before. Oh, boy, just a half an hour ago at his pad he was sure looking at me differently.

SECY OF STATE What did you say, darling?

HEART What was that?

BERTHA Of course a man looks different in pyjamas.

HEART (In pain) My gracious lady. . .

BERTHA Gracious lady, gracious lady. . . What a monkey you are! . . .A half an hour ago I was still pussycat to you, now "gracious lady. . ." . . .You are a precious little monkey, aren't you (throws him a kiss). . . you. . .you little piggy. . .

SECY OF STATE (Completely shaken) What is this?

BERTHA (Jovial) Look Louis, just look at this little monkey here. . . You have no idea how dumb he is. . .hehehehe . . .we had to fix my blouse with straight pins. . . (she feels the spot) he tore off the snap. . .hehehehe . . .he doesn't even know how to undo a blouse. . . the great Don Juan. . . .

SECY OF STATE (Turns around, attacks HEART) You scoundrel!

HEART (Running around the desk) Oh. . .calm down. . .don't you dare touch me. . .I forgive you. . .we're only human. . .don't run away from me. . .

BERTHA (Jumps up, runs after the men, the three of them circling the desk)

HEART (Exhausted, collapses in the chair) Oh. . .don't hurt me. . .I promise I'll be good. . .don't hurt me. . .

BERTHA (Screams) I'm going to faint! (Throws herself into another chair.)

SECY OF STATE (Scared) Bertha!

BERTHA (Looks up) What's happened to you? Have you gone mad?

SECY OF STATE You've just admitted being unfaithful. . . with him.

BERTHA Who, me? Christ Almighty! You really are mad.

SECY OF STATE (Grabs his head)

BERTHA I was just talking to you about my seamstress. And she's a woman.

SECY OF STATE But what on earth is this? Am I hallucinating?

HEART (Panting) But of course. . .

DAVID (Enters) Doctor Fulda. (Lets the doctor in, then exit.)

FULDA Hello, hello. Well, where is the patient?

SECY OF STATE (Runs to FULDA) Hello, dear doctor, I'm so happy you're here. . .you'll save me, won't you. . . you'll straighten everything out. . .this damnable nightmare. . .this madness that's playing havoc with me. . .or with the others. . .I don't even know. . .

FULDA (Kindly) Well, well, Your Excellency, what is it? (Pats him.)

SECY OF STATE My good professor. . . (Whimpering) something's wrong. Everything got terribly confused. . .this afternoon. . .help me. . .tell me. . .what is the matter with me? Is it true that I'm hallucinating? . . .hearing voices. (Grabs his head.) Terrible. . . Isn't this just a dream?

FULDA Relax, relax, my dear Secretary. There's nothing to it. A momentary malfunction. . .of the nerves. Nothing to worry about. I'm here now.

SECY OF STATE (Gratefully) Yes. . .Fulda. . .the Great Fulda. . .the pearl of medical science. . .only the Great Fulda can help me. . .

FULDA (Holding SECY's hand) Hm. . .Hm. A bit of excited nervibration. It's nothing. It'll be over soon. I'll prescribe something. (Takes out small pad, sits in the magic chair.) Something stupid that will not cure you, but perhaps make you feel even worse, or put you away altogether, about which everybody would be very happy, right? This is the only way, this is the only thing I can do to serve medical science, about which I know as much as a newborn elephant, and which I hate about as much as I do my patients, and you, you old ass. (He is writing.)

SECY OF STATE (Screams, grabs the doctor, yanks him out of the chair and is dragging him by his collar towards the door)

Get out of here, you scoundrel, get out!

FULDA (Defending himself, panting heavily) What are you doing?

SECY OF STATE Get out! Get the hell out! Out!

FULDA I resent this kind of treatment. . . .I demand satisfaction. . .I'm going to see the Minister, right now . . . You haven't heard the last of this. . .

SECY OF STATE Out! Out! (Shoves doctor out the door, returns, wipes his forehead, stares in front of him.)

BERTHA (Moved, approaches SECY) My poor friend. . .you are really ill. (She sits in the magic chair.) But actually the doctor was telling the truth. It would be best if you didn't stick your nose into other people's business; if you just resign yourself to living and be happy about it; if you didn't stand in the way of young people. . .

SECY OF STATE Out! Get out! (Grabs her and starts shoving her out.)

BERTHA Phooey! You coward, you beast! I'm so good to him, and this is his gratitude. . .I'm suing for divorce! (Exit)

HEART (Approaches the SECY) My dear friend. . .I'm terribly sorry all this has had to happen to you. . .but if

HEART after all your troubles you could still believe that you have at least one good friend left, then let me tell you (sits in the magic chair) that the best thing you could do, really, is to flake off. Why should a man as stupid as you be alive?

SECY OF STATE (Runs for HEART) Get out! (He's shoving HEART out.)

HEART (Threatening) I protest! I'll print everything I heard here, don't you worry, The paper will be full of it! Let the revolution break out!! (He is tossed out.)

SECY OF STATE (Returns, stands panting. Slowly it gets to be evening)

DAVID (Enters) From His Right Honorable. (Hands SECY a letter.)

SECY OF STATE (Turns on a lamp, tears open the envelope, reads) . . .tender your resignation. . .without delay . . .before the scandal breaks. . .

(He lets the letter drop to the floor, turns off the lamp. Now it would be quite dark, but the fire in the fireplace begins to cast a strong glow in the room. SECY begins pacing, his hands behind his back. He looks around as if searching for something. Then suddenly, by the chair, he staggers, stops and stares: in the light of the fire stands GENIUS)

GENIUS It's me.

SECY OF STATE (Whispering) Who are you?

GENIUS Don't you know me, Mr. Secretary?

SECY OF STATE (Rubs his forehead)

GENIUS I am Genius, the inventor.

SECY OF STATE (Whispering) What do you want from me?

GENIUS (In a higher voice) Right now only one thing. Draw your conclusions from the collapse of the house of lies.

SECY OF STATE (Whispering) What do you mean?

GENIUS The house of cards is down; you have all built it around yourselves, made of lies and selfishness. . . Now I see nothing but the man, naked and unprotected before me, the man who's been robbed of lies, there's nothing left of him. Admit it, Mr. Secretary: there is no sense in your continued existence, is there?

SECY OF STATE Oh!!

GENIUS You needed fingernail files instead of my machine of happiness, you still remember me, don't you?

SECY OF STATE I remember.

GENIUS (Sits in the magic chair) You knew who I was, but you didn't want to know me. You were all afraid of me, afraid that I'd expose your pettiness, your lies. The genius that lived in my soul you simply called the nightmare of a madman. You never gave me a chance to show you what I was capable of. . .And so I had to resort to a trick to avenge myself, Mr. Secretary.

SECY OF STATE I don't understand.

GENIUS You don't understand. (Gets out of chair and points to it.)

I smuggled this chair in here just one hour ago.

SECY OF STATE (Stares at the chair) This chair. . .

GENIUS Yes. You chased me away, wouldn't see me -- too busy celebrating the scalloped fingernails of the future. You did not notice, did you, Mr. Secretary, that all the catastrophies and accidents that you've been subjected to in the last half hour originated from this chair.

SECY OF STATE (Grabs his head) Ah!. . .You're right. . . Every one of them sat in that chair.

GENIUS This chair is my latest invention. Whoever sits in it speaks his mind. Tells the truth whether he wants to or not.

SECY OF STATE Terrible! (Collapses into chair.)

GENIUS (Stands in front of SECY. In a grave voice) It's too late. The little house of cards, made of lies, selfishness, profiteering, has collapsed. Your deceptive labor has been exposed, and you are swept along with the dirt. I am revenged, Mr. Secretary. You have one more duty left. (Goes to desk, takes out a pistol.)

SECY OF STATE (Stares at the pistol)

GENIUS (With raised arms) The land of lies and injustice has been destroyed, this is the end of the little, small-time operators who rose to the top by cheating and conniving. . .let the real ones come now, the strong ones, let the time of the talented ones come, let the revolution come! Mr. Secretary, the pistol is there. . .your wife has cheated you and left, your friends have betrayed you. . .Mr. Secretary draw your conclusions!

SECY OF STATE (Whining) No way out! No exit!

GENIUS No exit! (Hands SECY the pistol.)

SECY OF STATE (Looking at the pistol) Well, all right, all right, let's just leave it at that with the Secretary, Joe. (Joe is the name of the actor playing GENIUS.)

GENIUS (Taken aback) What are you talking about, Mr. Secretary?

SECY OF STATE Come off it, that's enough. Just call me by my name: Harry. (Harry is the name of the actor playing SECY OF STATE.) Besides, I've had enough of this play. (Stands up) The idea is not bad, but it's stretched a little too far. The audience is getting impatient.

GENIUS (Takes off his beard, wipes off his makeup with a kerchief) God, you say it's not bad? I don't like the idea at all. The Magic Chair! It's stupid.

SECY OF STATE But they laughed.

GENIUS Yeah, but not because of the author. They laughed because of us, the actors. It's always the actor's doing if they like a play. The author has nothing to do with it.

SECY OF STATE (Taking off his makeup) The same old story. The actor means more than the author.

GENIUS (Reciting) No question about it! Acting is the highest art--an author needs only to be talented, an actor must be a genius! I've thought a lot about this. . .I could be an author, I could be twenty authors. I could really write this play beautifully . . .but an author could never play it.

SECY OF STATE Well, let's hear it, what's your idea?

GENIUS (Confused) Well, I would think that, actually, so I would (sits in the magic chair) ma. .ahm. . .meh eh . .meh eh...mi mi mi, me eh eh. .

SECY OF STATE (Scared) Joe! For God's sake, what's the matter with you?

GENIUS (Whimpering, whining) Oh! I didn't. . .I just couldn't. . .I didn't get my cue. . .the role is running down. . .that swine of an author let me down . . .quickly. . . .the curtain. . .

SECY OF STATE (Calls to the rear) Quickly, curtain!!

CURTAIN

APPENDIX D

Tibor Déry

THE GIANT BABY

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Translated by Imre Goldstein

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ACT I

(When the curtain goes up the stage is dark. In the rear sit ten, life-size puppets with heads that can be sunk into their torsoes.

The stage lights up suddenly; the puppet at center drums furiously; a table with chairs emerges out of a trap. At the same time: projection on a screen to one side: first the colors of the rainbow (7) in ribbon fashion, then the letters of the alphabet, the play's title, the author's name and picture, then the alphabet again. Silence. When the puppets speak their heads rise out of their trunks, then fall back when the puppets finish their lines. The puppets' names [indicated in square brackets] are projected on their trunks.)

1st PUPPET [FATHER] Difficult birth! How much longer, doctor?

2nd PUPPET [RELATIVE] This damn' cough is choking me!

3rd PUPPET [RELATIVE] What'll it be, doctor, boy or girl?

4th PUPPET [RELATIVE] This is poor Eulalia's first birth.

5th PUPPET [RELATIVE] Life is short.

6th PUPPET [RELATIVE] How much will the baby weigh, I wonder.

7th PUPPET [RELATIVE] My mother weighed six pounds. It's true she was born in a car.

8th PUPPET [RELATIVE] How much longer, doctor?

9th PUPPET [RELATIVE] Eulalia is a Hardneck girl. No Hardneck girl ever gave birth to anything under eleven pounds.

1st PUPPET [FATHER] Why is the sun shining; the stars have disappeared.

2nd PUPPET [RELATIVE] How much longer, doctor?

3rd PUPPET [RELATIVE] The other day I was strolling in a park of aspen trees when suddenly. . .

4th PUPPET [RELATIVE] The cook broke in on me. . .

5th PUPPET [RELATIVE] Every pregnant woman wakes up with the name of Semmelweis on her lips.

6th PUPPET [RELATIVE] And under the glorious light of the stars. . .

7th PUPPET [RELATIVE] . . .she yelled at me: I'm giving you notice as of the first. . .

8th PUPPET [RELATIVE] How much longer, doctor?

10th PUPPET [DOCTOR] Two, three weeks. The center of Icelandic airflow has now moved over the German lowlands. Bright weather. . .I'd be very honored sir, if

1st PUPPET [FATHER] How

2nd PUPPET [RELATIVE] much

3rd PUPPET [RELATIVE] long

4th PUPPET [RELATIVE] er

5th PUPPET [RELATIVE] yet,

6th PUPPET [RELATIVE] doc

7th PUPPET [RELATIVE] tor?

10th PUPPET [DOCTOR] The capital of Germany is Berlin. Upper-Silesia is rich in aluminum and coal. I'd be very honored sir, if you handed over. . .

1st PUPPET [FATHER] I can't stand this screaming.

2nd PUPPET [RELATIVE] Poor Eulalia.

3rd PUPPET [RELATIVE] One's heart

4th PUPPET [RELATIVE] breaks in such pain.

5th PUPPET [RELATIVE] How much longer, doctor?

6th PUPPET [RELATIVE] When is it going to end?

7th PUPPET [RELATIVE] When will it be over?

10th PUPPET [DOCTOR] I'd be very honored,sir, if you handed over, from the table. . .

2nd PUPPET [RELATIVE] (Making like a trumpet) Ten past three. The child is born. Eleven pounds eight ounces. Mother and child are doing well. Meeting in the smoking room This damn' cough is choking me.

1st PUPPET [FATHER] Go right ahead. (All heads, except the DOCTOR's sink into their trunks, the light designating their names goes out.)

10th PUPPET [DOCTOR] I'd be very honored sir, if you handed over from the table that gynecological crossword puzzle. (He sinks too. FATHER enters with NICODEMUS.)

FATHER The child is beautiful; life is hard. How much do I owe you?

NICODEMUS A piddling amount. Five thousand pesetas. Without interest. If you don't pay up by the first, I'll have you dispossessed.

FATHER What should I do? You must not forget my dire condition. I cannot even pay the midwife. What will happen to the bad check?

NICODEMUS That's your problem. I have piles. I'm irritated by my wife's gallstones. Every night she wakes up and cries for a long time.

FATHER I lost twenty-two pounds in a month!

NICODEMUS Hard times. And what about your dear mother?

FATHER She just quarrels with the maids. Our chambermaid got herself pregnant, the cook cooks without salt; her kidneys, you know. I want a hundred dollars.

NICODEMUS And your dear brother?

FATHER The last I heard he was embezzling. Six months. It's incomprehensible because this year the lilies bloom rather early.

NICODEMUS A fiasco of logic.

FATHER I want a hundred dollars. What should I do? I cannot take a single step of my own will! I am a citizen. I have a savings account. Birth certificate. How could I escape the Christian era? If I want to get on the streetcar I have to raise my feet. The walls resist all around. Where does the world begin, where does it end. Even water finds its own level. I'm locked in. The world is made of obstacles.

NICODEMUS I will not give you any. Have you any other wishes?

FATHER I would love to be the president of the National Union of Seltzer-Manufacturers. But I wear beige neckties, and so it's impossible. One must struggle for every wish. Do you know what happened to me yesterday?

NICODEMUS Yes, I know.

FATHER You don't know. I got hungry.

NICODEMUS I thought so.

FATHER You did not think so. I got hungry. Should I eat white bread or pumpernickle?

1st PUPPET [FATHER] Bread!

2nd PUPPET [FATHER] Pumpernickle!

1st PUPPET [FATHER] White!

2nd PUPPET [FATHER] Black!

1st PUPPET [FATHER] Villain!

2nd PUPPET [FATHER] Murderer!

FATHER (Draws a pistol, shoots 2nd PUPPET whose head sinks, sign goes out) Bread, bread, bread. The bread is in the kitchen.

2nd PUPPET [FATHER] I'm going to the kitchen.

3rd PUPPET [FATHER] Doesn't go. Sits. Lies. Sinks into the ground. Disappears. Black earth in his mouth and in his guts. Cannot go. Doesn't want to go.

FATHER (Shoots 3rd PUPPET whose head sinks) I went out into the kitchen. I found only white bread in the kitchen. Should I go to the bakery for pumpernickle?

3rd PUPPET [FATHER] I'll go down.

4th PUPPET [FATHER] I'd rather eat white bread.

5th PUPPET [FATHER] I'm not even hungry.

3rd PUPPET [FATHER] I'd rather go down than eat white bread.

4th PUPPET [FATHER] I'd rather eat white bread than go down.

5th PUPPET [FATHER] I'd rather not eat than eat white bread or go down.

3rd PUPPET [FATHER] Tyrant.

4th PUPPET [FATHER] Executioner.

5th PUPPET [FATHER] Murderer.

FATHER (Shoots 4th and 5th PUPPETS) I'm going down. I'm going down. My coat is hanging in the dark hallway. I'll turn the light on.

4th PUPPET [FATHER] I can't send my wife for bread, she's in bed with the child. I'll kill her.

5th PUPPET [FATHER] The baker's daughter is sure nice.

6th PUPPET [FATHER] I'm old.

FATHER I'm old. (Shoots 6th PUPPET) This mass-murder is beginning to wear me out. (Screams) How many times should I kill myself for a piece of bread? Please let me have a piece of bread.

9th PUPPET [FATHER] Where should I get it? Towards the tower, under cool apple trees a girl is singing. I have no money.

8th PUPPET [FATHER] The safes are standing on the sand, like birds in the air. I'm weak.

7th PUPPET [FATHER] (Singing) Poor, unfortunate, sightless man that I am. Please have mercy on me.

6th PUPPET [FATHER] I'll borrow from Nicodemus.

NICODEMUS I won't give you any. You appall me.

FATHER (Shoots 6th PUPPET: all heads sink.) I'm a murderer. Every moment is a murder. The world is hopeless like a Chinese toe. I'm a murderer, you're a murderer. Understand?

NICODEMUS No. By the way, I won't give you any money. A beige necktie? What other wishes do you have?

FATHER The National Union of Seltzer Manufacturers. . .I'd like to be... Won't you give me any?

NICODEMUS No.

FATHER You'll die, you miserable. . . (He threatens NICODEMUS with his gun. NICODEMUS flees slowly, with deliberate steps; FATHER pursues him in the same manner. NICODEMUS sits on a chair.)

NICODEMUS (Screams) Help!

FATHER You don't think seriously that I want to kill you. (He sings)

Like the starry sky I am,
Like mercy itself ah yam.

NICODEMUS You've got a good voice.

FATHER That I do. But where is the vitamin content so vital to the maintenance of life, and the lyrical cruelty? Besides, abstain from such gross language, after all I'm a grownup.

NICODEMUS As of today: a father.

FATHER You see? Tell me please, would you happen to know if it's a boy or a girl?

NICODEMUS Who?

FATHER My child.

NICODEMUS I don't know. Ask its mother!

FATHER How could I ask her, she died. Expired in the middle of the birth. Wait, I'll ring for the chambermaid. (Rings)

10th PUPPET [CHAMBERMAID] You rang?

FATHER The sex of my child?

10th PUPPET [CHAMBERMAID] I believe a hermaphrodite. (Head sinks)

FATHER In that case I want two hundred dollars. I get two doses of every kind of trouble. You'll see they'll hit me with luxury tax too. Tell me, those with two sexes eat more than we do?

NICODEMUS I shall give you a thousand gold pieces if you promise. . .

FATHER Anything!

NICODEMUS If you promise to provide the best possible moral education for your male or female child. I am chairman of the Board and Vice-president of Ethical Race and Soulennobling Ltd. We are in need of respectful, God-fearing, patriotic citizens. Do you understand?

FATHER You want the impossible from me, Mr. Vice-president. I'm no holy Joe or slavetrader. Ask me for something else.

NICODEMUS In that case, I'm sorry. (Puts on his hat)

FATHER You are sucking my blood, my very blood! Ask me for something else, anything. . . I'll offer the virginity of my offspring.

NICODEMUS What can I do with a hermaphrodite?

FATHER Hermaphrodites are excellent for family use. I'll throw in a six percent food allowance. . .

NICODEMUS Sorry, no deal. . .

FATHER You want his salvation. . .

NICODEMUS Come on now. If you reject my offer. . .

FATHER I'll accept. (They shake hands)

NICODEMUS (Mechanically declaiming) My experience tells me that correct eating, good fresh air and cleanliness are indispensible preconditions of the baby's development. Krafft-Ebing wrote his Psychopathologia Sexualis, an epoch making work, in 1896. Mind and body are merely two perspectives of the same thing. Let us disseminate the spirit of the natural sciences within the walls of schools. Bourgeois education has been distorted, bourgeois elements are losing ground in all fields. Sitting up forces the spinal column into a position which is highly undesirable for babies.

FATHER I don't understand.

NICODEMUS (Reciting) Of course babydiaries are nothing more than data gathering which is still a puzzle even for experts. A diary from the first birthday to school age is somewhat easier and more interesting. By that age. . .

FATHER (Mechanically) . . .the direction of the mind is set, moral inclinations are established, Nothing is completed but everything is in a boiling state, in the works: the material is gathered from which the spiritual, moral and sexual human being will emerge. Occasionally. . .

NICODEMUS . . .I shall occupy myself in greater depth with the methods of diary keeping. In the meantime. . .

FATHER . . .let us examine the family a bit more closely; the family: this soft, warm nest to which we owe our existence, this hard anvil on which our souls are forged. Tews, the outstanding pedagogue, claims that the most correct development of the baby's spinal column is facilitated by lying on the stomach. The beginner walker is in danger of developing crooked legs. However. . .

NICODEMUS (In his normal voice) I see we are agreed. Hermaphroditos, from this moment on, is my spiritual possession. Morality, God, Patriotism--in the name of this trinity we conquer our base desires. But now I must hastily depart.

FATHER How about the bread, man?

NICODEMUS What bread?

FATHER The price of my child.

NICODEMUS Cut out the text! Deduct the thousand gold from what you owe me.

FATHER Sorry, in that case chuck the whole thing. Cash only.

NICODEMUS That's different. Here you are! (On the screen projected: Bank of England. 1000 gold pieces. Pay to the order of. . . . . Nicodemus. Exit Nicodemus; projection disappears; at the same instant:)

5th PUPPET [PESTALOZZI] The baby's physical development, compared to later years, is so rapid, his bonestructure is so soft, to say nothing of softness caused by rickets, that the baby reacts much more intensely to all external influences directed at throwing its development off course. Such insults. . .

FATHER (Sits down, he is screaming and tearing his hair) That's right: insults. . . That's the correct word. Man's been insulted; I am an insult to Man. Help, I've sold my child, I've sold my roots, my only cure. I shall burn in the yellow fire of old age like Abraham's beard in the desert. (In his normal voice.) I think I'll buy myself a red tie and a basket of sweet grapes.

1st PUPPET [MIDWIFE] Pardon me for intruding: the Newborn has escaped.

FATHER What?

1st PUPPET [MIDWIFE] The Newborn has escaped. Five minutes ago it was lying in its crib happily sucking its innocent toes. From the room next door where the late missus is lying on her death bed suddenly I seemed to have heard some soft, quiet sighs. I changed the baby quickly and hurried into the room of the dead. There was no one in the room. By the time I returned the crib was empty. The Newborn has escaped.

FATHER Was the window open?

1st PUPPET [MIDWIFE] I must admit, it was.

FATHER The Newborn was kidnapped by Lucifer.

1st PUPPET [MIDWIFE] Through the window?

FATHER From my heart, from my pocket, from the warehouse of Ethical Ltd. . . . Help, help! (He runs out. Head of 1st PUPPET sinks. The scene is empty for a few seconds, then: Enter NEWBORN, huge, superhuman size, carrying a baby rattle. He walks lightly, upright, with complete confidence; still, as if he were blind, he keeps bumping into furniture, but the furniture gets out of his way, sliding to the left and right and to the rear, the pieces rise into the air giving free passage to the NEWBORN who has no inhibitions, knows no obstacles or limitations. In complete silence he walks up and down in the room, looking about.)

NEWBORN Behold I am bo..bo..bo..born. Behold I am born. It was da..da..da..dark and became lah..lah..light. That is the sun there. The sun is a heavenly body. Where am I? I am in a room. The room is in a house. How does sunshine get into the room? Through gla.. gla..glass. I will go through the glass. I will take the room into my hands. I will lift up the house. I am hungry. I will eat this table. (Reaches for the table which glides away from him.) I'll eat the chair. (The chair glides away.) Flowers are flitting about in the air. I will drink a mouse. I'll go pee-pee in the stove. Let the clouds spin darkly, like the womb. I cannot see any people. Why am I alone?

10th PUPPET [HEAD OF STATE] Behold, a child is born. In most suspicious circumstances. Although its mother died, society assumed its care without hesitation. A thousand gold pieces is not too great a price. It gives me infinite pleasure that the ideal of maintaining the state is based on the solid foundation of national economic development. (To NEWBORN) My congratulations, sir!

NEWBORN Why are you speaking in the first person. Only I can do that. Besides, what are you congratulating me for?

10th PUPPET [HEAD OF STATE] You are born, sir!

NEWBORN How dare you? What's it to you, anyway? I am alone on earth, I'll kill everybody, or I'll make everybody happy. Now, however, I'm very hungry. Come here, let me eat you up.

10th PUPPET [HEAD OF STATE] Sorry, I'm made of wood.

NEWBORN Doesn't matter, in that case I'll drink you up.

10th PUPPET [HEAD OF STATE] It is my sad duty to inform you that your honored mother had passed away in childbirth.

NEWBORN Come here, let me drink you up!

10th PUPPET HEAD OF STATE Your honored father took this blow valiantly. He was deprived of a loyal wife who in the flower of her life ceased to be.

NEWBORN Tell me, am I a boy or a girl?

10th PUPPET [HEAD OF STATE] (Yelling) "Ten-shun! Present arms!" . . .society, with utter care, is keeping an eye on your life's metamorphosis. . .

NEWBORN Vous m'emmerdez, Monsieur!

10th PUPPET [HEAD OF STATE] You just wait, buddy! You won't always be this impatient, young man. You are now under my command.

NEWBORN Although I don't understand it, I don't think this means anything good. (Sits down) I am not yet familiar with abstract concepts. Explain your words.

10th PUPPET [HEAD OF STATE] Your eyes are my eyes, your hair is my hair, your testicles and ovaries are my testicles and ovaries. Your past and your children are mine.

10th PUPPET [HEAD OF STATE] The willow that you plant, the motion with which you shade your eyes as you look over the desert of your boredom, your house, your land, and your manure: all are mine.

NEWBORN Idiot! (He runs toward 10th PUPPET, bumps into table which does not move away.)

10th PUPPET [HEAD OF STATE] Look out!

NEWBORN (Spits on 10th PUPPET)

(10th PUPPET's head sinks; 1st, 2nd and 3rd PUPPETS come up with the sign CHORUS OF RELATIVES projected on them.)

1st PUPPET My dear son, although material gains play a role...

2nd PUPPET . . .in our interest in your success in life, all of us. . .

3rd PUPPET . . .love you more or less unselfishly.

NEWBORN What does that mean?

1st PUPPET All our devotion. . .

NEWBORN I don't like nouns made of verbs. By what right are you devoted to me?

2nd PUPPET I don't like the extreme analysis of emotional ties. Come to me, hug me.

NEWBORN (Takes a step forward) Gladly, if this makes you happy, but I'm afraid that you will be a drag on me. Drop dead, all of you! (1st, 2nd, and 3rd PUPPETS' heads sink; up pops 9th PUPPET.)

9th PUPPET [MOON] Who are you and where is your home?

NEWBORN I believe I haven't reached the stage where I could answer this question correctly.

9th PUPPET [MOON] You are mistaken already. I'm warning you that you're obliged to maintain relations with me too. I have mysterious influences on society and oceans. (9th PUPPET's head sinks.)

NEWBORN Leave me alone, all of you! What do you want from me? To surround me like a net. And I'm hardly born...

4th PUPPET [WOMAN] I love you.

NEWBORN Don't love me, God bless you, don't love me! What kind of world have I got into! They lock me into cells of their emotions, everybody wants to influence me, everybody wants to use me, but nobody gives me anything to eat when I'm hungry. I'm going back to where I came from.

8th PUPPET [MAN] I love you, in case you are a woman, which I cannot determine just at this moment.

NEWBORN (Runs for the door) Help! Help!

NICODEMUS (Enters) Ah..ah. What's the rush, young man? The correct development of the baby's spinal column is facilitated by lying on the stomach. On your stomach!

NEWBORN Who are you? On second thought, what do I care? Go lie under a streetcar.

NICODEMUS Not so fast, son. I am your foster-father and vice-president. You shall lie on your stomach before

NICODEMUS me. What kind of disrespectful behavior is this? I have bought you for tinkling gold: you are my spiritual and material property. Shuttup!

NEWBORN What's the meaning of this? Let me out of here!

NICODEMUS I represent brute force and the right to property. Understand, my dear sir, that you are obliged to obey me.

NEWBORN But I want you to die.

NICODEMUS Ridiculous.

NEWBORN (Desperate; in an amazed voice) What's this? You don't die even 'though I want you to? This is exasperating.

NICODEMUS Get it through your head that I bought you from your father.

NEWBORN I even have a father? And you just buy me? That's a bit too much. Rather death than this. (From the table drawer he takes out a pistol and puts it to his temple.)

NICODEMUS (Yells) Wait, I'll give you some candy.

NEWBORN (Lowers pistol) You'll feed me? . . .You must be a good man then. I love you.

NICODEMUS No emotions, please. Let us not complicate our hygienic business arrangement. But I think I hear your father's steps approaching. You must love him so that your days may be long on this earth. (Exit)

FATHER (Enters) Hah. . .a stranger! Who are you sir, and why have you invaded my dining room?

NEWBORN Finally a man who thinks he has nothing to do with me. And it just happens to be my father.

FATHER What do I hear? You call me father?

NEWBORN That's right. Although I'm not yet completely familiar with the full meaning of the concept. You sir, if I'm not mistaken, are responsible for my welfare.

FATHER So they say.

NEWBORN . . .for which I am obligated to love you in return.

FATHER My dear son, let us sit down, make ourselves comfortable and exchange a few serious words. This here is a chair, that is a tool upon which one places one's bottom, within which the body's center of gravity rests, placing one into an advantageous position over anyone who stands before him on his two hind legs like a kangoroo. Mark my first advice to you: never offer your competitors a seat.

NEWBORN I'm hungry.

FATHER Son, we must solve a very important problem. The bill for your birth, through some financial transaction, I have managed to pay, but my passion for ties and grapes consumes all of my income. (Yelling) You want me to get into debt because of you, to be thrown into debtors' jail, into an old-age home for the impoverished; you want to remove the roof from over my white-haired head?

NEWBORN I'm hungry.

FATHER There, I thought you'd listen to reason, sir. Let us suppose that I take care of you. What kind of advantages would you gain. . .

NEWBORN I'm hungry.

FATHER . . .and what sort of disadvantages. First of all you'd be forced to love me.

NEWBORN I don't see that at all.

FATHER I don't either, but go fight public opinion. So then, first of all: you must love me.

NEWBORN I'm hungry.

FATHER Secondly: you owe me gratitude.

NEWBORN I'm hungry.

FATHER Thirdly: you will honor me: a superannuated, senile wreck!

NEWBORN Please refrain from insulting my father.

FATHER Fourth: You must obey me like a sheepdog.

NEWBORN I'm hungry.

FATHER When I grow really old, you'll have to keep me.

NEWBORN Give me some candy.

FATHER (Yelling) Don't you understand, you idiot, that this is bad business, bad business! I'll waste the flower of my manhood on you, and you'll waste the best years of your youth on me. To say nothing of the fact that a good child must wear shirts with starched collars and cuffs at all times, tralla-la-la la.

NEWBORN What the hell is that? Forget that little number. I'm not crazy. (Yelling) Freedom and Love: now that's what I love. (In his normal voice) Sir, can you fix me up with a chick?

FATHER (Frightened) What an idea? I have personally vouched for your virginity to the Vice President of Ethical Race and Soulennobling Ltd. Have I mentioned that I got a thousand gold pieces for you?

NEWBORN You're a louse.

FATHER Behold: today's youth! I paid the hospital bills for his birth. I should clean his thighs with cotton and vaseline about eight times a day, powder his milk-smelling skin, buy him milk, pacifiers, a rocking horse, knee pants, pay doctors, when he gets sick, all with my hard-earned money. . .with the sweat of my brow I should teach him about the birds and the bees and other functions of life, so that by giving life to newer, hopeless generations the milk, pacifier and knee-pants industry can flourish? Never! I'd rather reveal to him the great secret.

NEWBORN I'm hungry.

FATHER Son, I have to tell you one great secret: You will die.

NEWBORN Me? Never!

FATHER Every man is mortal. You will die.

NEWBORN Your pessimism bores me. I'd rather you give me something to eat.

FATHER It's not worth it to eat. You will die.

NEWBORN I have a feeling you want to drive me to suicide. Why didn't you kill me while I was still inside the womb?

FATHER I respect the law. But if you hang yourself, who could possibly blame me?

NEWBORN (Stands up) Sir, I want you to know that although I was born a mere two hours ago I am wiser, stronger and more powerful than you. You are forced to distinguish between the soul and reality so that your miserable ship won't sink. I am master over all. I have no problems. I am immortal. Life obeys me, because I am the beginning. . .

FATHER . . .and the end.

NEWBORN Your skepticism is unfounded, although understandable. I am the beginning. (Yelling) Look here. I decide to raise my right hand, and behold: my right hand rises.

FATHER Miraculous.

NEWBORN I decide to raise my left hand, and behold: my left hand rises.

FATHER Oh, mysterious; oh, miraculous!

NEWBORN I don't know that word. Must come from the lowest regions of ignorance and weakness. (Yelling) Look here: my lungs breathe, my leg rises, my ears hear, my eyes see, my nose smells. . .

FATHER Your arse sits, your hair grows! . . .You really think that I don't know all this?

NEWBORN Then why are you so desperate?

FATHER Life is a dream.

NEWBORN (Stands up and with outstretched arms starts in FATHER's direction. The table gets out of his way; from above, on a string, an arrow is lowered pointing toward FATHER. The actors, instead of the somewhat mechanical way of speaking, now talk in natural accents.)

FATHER What's this? A day old and you can walk already? The table!

NEWBORN (Reaches FATHER, wants to sit down in the air: from the opposite direction a chair glides under him.)

FATHER I'm going out of my mind. I'd better see a doctor, I'm hallucinating. I've got to calm down.

NEWBORN A little water, father? (In a thick stream water gushes out of the wall; on the other side of the scene projected on the screen: great barges float by on a wide river.)

FATHER Who are you, sir? What kind of ridiculous clothes you wear for an adult? Why don't you introduce yourself? Don't you know I'm a widower?

NEWBORN I am your son, father.

FATHER Anybody can say that. Prove it!

1st PUPPET [GHOST OF THE DEAD MOTHER] Theodore, I swear he's your son. (Sinks)

2nd PUPPET [MIDWIFE] I brought him into the world with my own two hands. (Sinks)

DOCTOR (Window opens, leaning in with the sign DOCTOR on his chest.) I was absorbed in a gynecological cross-word puzzle when your honored son was born. Eleven pounds. (Disappears)

FATHER If you are indeed my son who was born two hours ago, how come that you're so big, speak English so fluently, that the table. . .no, no, my mind's going!

COLLECTOR (Enters) Mr. Kogutovitz, this check is to be honored today.

FATHER I'll go mad! What are you pestering me for; you know damn' well I've got no money.

COLLECTOR Sorry. We'll be forced to dispossess.

FATHER You want to put me into the grave?

NEWBORN (To FATHER) Should I destroy him?

FATHER If it were only possible!

NEWBORN (To COLLECTOR) Die! (COLLECTOR silently falls dead. FATHER jumps up, rushes to corpse. Yells.)

FATHER Help! Help! What's going on here? He's dead. Holy God, he's dead! I didn't want this. I didn't seriously want this to happen, my God!

NEWBORN Then why did you say you did? Should I make the corpse disappear?

FATHER Could you. . .could you really do it? God almighty, almighty, I didn't want this to. . . You could really make him disappear?

NEWBORN Ridiculous question. You still don't know who I am?

FATHER I am the worm of worms, the miserable of miserables; I sold my son, I killed a man, the whole world is spinning, what is happening to me? Get rid of this corpse! No, wait a minute! (He bends down, unfastens a moneybag from the COLLECTOR's neck, puts it around his own neck, sits down. Corpse disappears through a trap.)

Prices are incredibly high, son. Ham is a buck twenty a pound. I am a poor miserable man. I change my shirt only once a week. I watch ball games from standing room only, and once in a while on a Saturday night I go to the movies. This is no life! I make about four hundred dollars a month, my wife had an affair with the boss. (Cries) Poor Adele. . .who's going to mend my socks from now on?

NEWBORN Is that all you have to say for yourself?

FATHER And my son is a magician. Hey, son, why don't we go partners in a business?

NEWBORN What's <u>your</u> contribution going to be?

FATHER Mine? . . . My fatherhood! (Yelling) What an impudent question! Don't you know you're supposed to take care of your grey-haired father who brought you into this world with the sweat of his brow. The Family, Morality. . .

LIONTAMER (Enters with a large whip in his hand) . . .In the name of Society and the Fatherland you are obligated to take care of your father. I'd be glad to invest a few dollars into the business.

FATHER We could talk about it.

(On the right some workmen push in a side-show booth; "Cashier" sign in the front, above it in large letters: "WONDERBABY.")

LIONTAMER (Constantly cracking his whip) How should we exploit the young man?

FATHER We've got to think about that.

LIONTAMER Maybe I could tame hyenas with him; nobody's succeeded in that yet.

FATHER Not so fast. You've got to think big.

LIONTAMER All right. How about lions?

FATHER Let us think in some kind of organized fashion. First of all let's examine the kind of talent Louie has.

LIONTAMER Who's Louie?

FATHER My son.

LIONTAMER I thought he was a hermaphrodite.

FATHER Just to simplify things, let's call him Louie, O.K.? Now then, what can Louie do?

LIONTAMER Obviously anything he wants to.

FATHER You shock me. Although what you say is true, One just doesn't want to believe one's own eyes. . .or the facts. Incredible. Although if it wasn't true, then the COLLECTOR. . .Sh! (Slaps his own lips.)

LIONTAMER I'm only a simple liontamer, but I know that every man is a murderer.

FATHER Skip it. You've no idea what weight your words carry.

LIONTAMER Maybe we can have him poison all the animals in the competition.

NEWBORN (Notices a large butterfly floating across the scene, runs after it.) Look, a flutterby! (Exit)

FATHER (Looks after NEWBORN lingeringly) The dear child! So then, you claim that Louie can accomplish anything he wants to. Just what do you attribute this to?

LIONTAMER Mostly to his unspoiled youth. Besides, who cares? Come on, let's come to terms and start the show.

FATHER Do you know that Louie can kill too?

LIONTAMER Like everybody. Have him kill a few bank presidents.

FATHER Such petty thinking. Don't you realize what enormous powers he has? For instance: if Louie's in this room and he wants the great synagogue in London to cave in...

LIONTAMER Why exactly the synagogue? Is this some kind of allusion to my beliefs?

FATHER God forbid! No! I didn't realize that animal trainers were religious. So then if Louie wants the palace in The Hague to collapse. . .

LIONTAMER Oh: you're a militarist, eh?

FATHER . . .The Kremlin to fall down. . .

LIONTAMER And a counterrevolutionary as well?

FATHER . . .the Rothschild palace in Paris to. . .

LIONTAMER Antisemitism again?

FATHER Then what the hell should collapse?

LIONTAMER The Hagenbeck circus should collapse!

FATHER . . .then the Hagenbeck circus will collapse.

LIONTAMER So then let the Hagenbeck collapse.

FATHER I told you don't be so petty. What would you gain by that?

LIONTAMER OK. Then let my lions give birth to cubs with seven legs, I want a boa-constrictor with two heads. That's one of the greatest rarities in the world. (Slowly a two-headed lion crosses the stage.)

FATHER Look, why would you want to be such an egotist? You have supernatural powers in your hands with which to move heaven and earth and even hell; you could shake the foundations of the moral universe like a stack of hay, and all you can think of is a cheap trick. Why are you wracking your brains trying to destroy the world instead of helping it? (Dreamily) How beautiful it would be if they elected me President of the National Union of Seltzermanufacturers.

LIONTAMER You're an optimist, sir. If I destroy the bad we get to the same place. . .

FATHER . . .as when I rectify evil. You are right! There are only methodological differences in the world. Let us choose between the two methods then!

LIONTAMER I propose that Louie stand on top of a tower in the middle of the world and destroy all the sick and the suffering.

FATHER I'd like to take him out on the street and have him make a banker out of everybody. I'd be the cashier.

LIONTAMER Let all the old lions die.

FATHER Long live Voronoff!

LIONTAMER I want a flood!

FATHER I want a stock-market inspired by happiness!

LIONTAMER Those with T.B. must be destroyed!

FATHER Let us found ten thousand courses in natural childbirth!

LIONTAMER You softbrained nut! Don't we have enough sick animals in this world?

FATHER You hard-hearted man!

LIONTAMER Steelheaded nincompoop! (They fall on one another.)

FATHER Murderer!

LIONTAMER Jerk!

NICODEMUS (Enters) What are you discussing, gentlemen?

FATHER (To LIONTAMER) Ssh, this is the owner of the merchandise.

LIONTAMER (To NICODEMUS) A little business, that's all. We're bargaining for a young wondermoose.

NICODEMUS Could I join the enterprise?

LIONTAMER Well,. .er. .how should I say. . .perhaps this deal would not lie well with your religious convictions and patriotic feelings.

NICODEMUS We're only talking about an animal, are we not?

LIONTAMER Oh yes, but what an immoral animal!

NICODEMUS I won't insist, gentlemen. (To FATHER) I just want to say that my impression is that from the very first day you seem to neglect your obligations. Hermaphroditos was just complaining to me that you refused to feed him. What kind of a deal is that?

FATHER Oh Lord, thou knowest that my intentions are pure. How should I feed him when I have neither money nor breasts? Please lend me. . .

NICODEMUS Mens sana in corpore sano. The Ethical Race and Soulennobling Ltd. needs specimen that are developed healthily in body and soul. Already Freudenberg, the famous child specialist, spoke of the view that nourishment in the early days, etc., etc. . . . (Screaming) I am warning you, sir, that if you deviate an iota from the ground rules of our society, I'll have you executed. The child must lie on its stomach. (Exit)

FATHER (To LIONTAMER) You see, I'm under constant supervision. No, no. . . I don't want to die the death of a martyr.

LIONTAMER As I understand, you do not agree that your honorable son should, as Siegfried did in the olden days, under a magic-cape, invisibly, with a bloody dagger in hand, sneak into the caves of earthly misery and destroy that which is unworthy of life?

FATHER And you do not agree that he should seek out petroleum and oil fields in Canada? What should we do?

LIONTAMER If we can't agree in general, let us begin with small things. Behold my booth here! Cheap admissions! We shall satisfy everyone's wish. Small profit, great turnover. Whoever enters is entitled to one wishfulfillment.

FATHER All right. Let's begin the show.

(FATHER steps under the roof of the booth, the booth's door opens and out walks the NEWBORN with a huge cigar in one hand, his rattle in the other. He rattles to a rhythm. Drumroll. Puppets emerge in rapid succession.)

1st PUPPET [AUDIENCE] Looka here, a new attraction!

2nd PUPPET [AUDIENCE] How interesting!

3rd PUPPET [AUDIENCE] The wonderbaby! The wonderbaby!

4th PUPPET [AUDIENCE] Hey, let's get in!

5th PUPPET [AUDIENCE] Don't shove, you idiot!

6th PUPPET [AUDIENCE] This we gotta see!

7th PUPPET [AUDIENCE] (Shrieking) Let go of my thighs!

8th PUPPET [AUDIENCE] What are you gonna wish for?

9th PUPPET [AUDIENCE] That you die.

10th PUPPET [AUDIENCE] Drop dead.

1st - 10th PUPPETS (Together) Drop dead, all of you! (Drumroll)

FATHER (In the booth, like a barker) Step right up, ladies and gents! Here you may view Maud, the wonderbaby who was born a mere thirty minutes ago and who will never die. He weighs three hundred and thirty pounds, all mind, all character, and he's growing every second just like a real baby. The whole kid is made of real flesh and blood; come closer and be convinced, ladies and gentlemen, this is no tale, no illusion, no hot air, this is all true. Everything works all by itself: the hands, the intestines, earlobes and brains, to say nothing of the stomach. . .a complete machinery. Step right up and in, ladies and gentlemen, see Maud the wonderbaby who will prove to you that desire is stronger than reality, that is to say that when man's hungry, he'll stuff himself, that is to say that life is a dream. For a pittance everyone's wish will come true: the king and his ministers, the shoemaker, the psychologist, all will leave here equally satisfied. Step right in, everyone can see for himself that this baby is immortal, this is the greatest wonder of the world, this is the best thing that's ever happened; this my friends, is the greatest blessing of mankind! The fat will leave slender, the slender will leave fat, the hungry will be sated, the sick will leave healthy from this institution--step right in ladies and gentlemen, the wonderbaby is born!

(Drumroll. Curtain.)

ACT II

(Behind the curtain: long, strong drumroll, then chaotic yelling out of which one scream is heard repeatedly: "This hippopotamus is wet; sure's wet, this hippopotamus!" Then: two CIVILIANS enter, from left and right, in front of the curtain.)

1st CIVILIAN (Yelling) Bring the beans!

2nd CIVILIAN (Singing) Mary had a little lamb,
Little lamb, little lamb.

1st CIVILIAN Did you bring the beans?

2nd CIVILIAN My beloved aunt lost her hose.

1st CIVILIAN Please bring the beans. . . What beans?

2nd CIVILIAN This hippo is wet. . . What hippo?

1st CIVILIAN Love they neighbor so that you may have a long life. . . .

NEWBORN (His voice is heard from behind the curtain) . . . because experience shows that stellarstatistics are just as unreliable as. . . .

1st and 2nd CIVILIANS (Singing) Mary had a little lamb, his fleece was white as snow.

(Curtain up. Drumroll. NEWBORN stands on a podium, the two-headed lion next to him. Civilians are in front of the podium. On the left an enormus sign: ONE WISH PER PERSON WILL BE FULFILLED HERE.)

NEWBORN Ladies and gentlemen. You are approaching a crucial moment in your lives. Think it over! Turn back before it is too late. You are after something that has never happened to any of you: one wish of yours will come true, completely, with no strings attached. . . Where are we?. . .On earth? Giddiup, giddiup my little horsie, now don't get dizzy, there's no turning back. . .off we go! (In a rasping voice) Ladies and gentlemen, the greatest miracle, nothing like this ever. . . (In his normal voice) Where is that passion, that goldmouthed desire, that swift-footed emotion that can catch up with itself on this earthly course? Beware of sated desires. In the unbearable light of realization you shall drop like flies. (In a rasping voice) Herstellt! Not so fast, ladies and gentlemen; you are in great danger; you are still just grownups; you still don't realize that there's nothing more beautiful (In his normal voice) than unsatisfied hunger, than being cold and having no cover, being ill without hope of recovery. Do not desire your desires to be fulfilled. (In a rasping voice) Ladies and gentlemen, come and be convinced for yourself; this is a genuine baby (Points to his own chest) who grows every minute like a. . . (In his normal voice) Turn back before it's too late! Ladies and gentlemen I have no passions because in this heart de-

NEWBORN (Continued) sire and fulfillment are one. I beg of you, honorable, paying audience: be satisfied with your own Paradise.

1st CIVILIAN How do you mean that?

2nd CIVILIAN You don't want to grant us our wish?

3rd CIVILIAN (Screaming) Are you trying to cheat us out if, you miserable. . .?

4th CIVILIAN (Screaming) Scoundler, swindler!

5th CIVILIAN (Screaming) I want my money back!

1st CIVILIAN (Mechanically) You then,,,

2nd CIVILIAN (Mechanically) . . .according to this. . .

3rd CIVILIAN (Mechanically) . . .are reluctant to. . .

4th CIVILIAN (Mechanically) . . .fulfill your obligation. . .

5th CIVILIAN (Mechanically) . . .as it is laid out in the contract? Unheard of!

(Heads of PUPPETS emerge in order of their speeches)

1st PUPPET Have a little patience, citizens! He knows what he's talking about.

2nd PUPPET He wants the best for us. Behold the celestial purity of his features. . .

3rd PUPPET . . .that no earthly experience has managed to sully.

4th PUPPET He is the child of us all, he is the father of us all.

5th PUPPET Renounce your rights. Go home!

1st - 5th CIVILIANS (In unison) We won't go. We want a long life.

1st - 5th PUPPETS (In unison) You, unhappy ones!

1st - 5th CIVILIANS We demand a lot of money.

1st - 5th PUPPETS Unhappy ones.

1st - 5th CIVILIANS We want to be happy.

1st - 5th PUPPETS Unhappy ones.

1st CIVILIAN (Shrieking) Then I want the bread back!

6th CIVILIAN (Enter from behind the scenes) Gold for iron! Gold for iron! Oh, brothers, this place stinks like cheese!

10th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] I am hurrying home. My dear mother awaits me anxiously in our poor but clean apartment. I'll just take a quick look in here. Ah!

6th CIVILIAN (Pointing to 10th PUPPET) Herr direktor, I wish to die in the arms of this maiden of pure soul.

1st - 5th CIVILIANS He wishes to die in the arms of this maiden.

1st - 5th PUPPETS Let him die!

1st CIVILIAN (Steps forward as a chorus leader) Citizens! Our brother here, this fine mechanic, has voiced his desire to die in the arms of that maiden. With his ticket of admission he has bought his right to love and to die. I hereby call on the management of this firm to fulfill this young man's desire.

CHORUS OF CIVILIANS . . .sire. . .sire. . .

3rd PUPPET (Its head pops up above all others) Ladies and gentlemen, have mercy on this young girl. Gentlemen,

3rd PUPPET do not wish for the end of your fellow man. Don't let these two people get married.

CHORUS OF PUPPETS . . .arried. . .arried. . .

6th CIVILIAN (Steps forward, yelling) I'm in love, I want to live, I want to love, I want to die. Let no one stand in my way, let no one help me. I am alone on this earth under a star that has blinded me.

10th PUPPET . . .me. . .me. . .me! My heart, my love, kiss me!

(The scene darkens. Thunder. One the side screen: a movie, on the opposite side: CIVILIANS dance in semi-darkness. The movie: 6th CIVILIAN and 10th PUPPET in front of the altar. Priest marries them. They step out onto the street, go home in a car, open door to their apartment, enter bedroom, man helps woman into bed; with anxious looks and a watch in his hand he feels and counts her pulse. Enter, with signs DOCTOR and MIDWIFE around their neck, a doctor and a midwife; man goes into adjacent room, paces up and down; bedroom door opens, midwife enters with two naked babies, one on each arm, she's followed by the doctor who congratulates the man. Doctor and midwife leave. Enter wife, asks husband for money; with a worried look he gives her some. She leaves through one door, through another two school-age boys run into the room. With schoolbags on their backs they run around the room

once then leave. Wife enters, asks for money; with a worried look he gives her some. Wife exits left, runs into the arms of a handsome young man; husband exits right, into the arms of a beautiful young woman. All three rooms can be seen simultaneously: the center room is empty, then into this room run the two boys, throw their schoolbags down on the table, light up huge cigars, put on top hats, then leave. Simultaneously, from the right and the left, husband and wife enter the center room. Wife asks for money; with a worried look husband gives her some. Their faces are quite old now; both sit into wheelchairs, nurses enter and wheel them around the table in opposite directions. They are going around and around; slowly at first then with ever-increasing speed. The heads of husband and wife fall on their chests; the nurses wipe tears from their eyes. Two funeral attendants enter with two caskets. Close-up: husband and wife as young man and woman. They are looking at the audience, then turn profile, facing one another. The image rises so that only the breasts of the woman and the man's chest can be seen. Her hand is raised and she drives a dagger into his heart. Lights on. The scene is completely empty. From the rear, behind the scenes, enter FATHER.)

FATHER Business is bad. I'm losing money on my fatherly joys. Where are those fatherly joys anyway? I'm growing old, and with every year my heir obeys me less and less. He alienates the customers, neglects the store, and even his abilities seem to be fading. I've got to have a serious talk with him. (Yells) Louie! (Enter POLICEMAN) Holy God, you've grown a moustache already? And why the policeman's uniform?

POLICEMAN Are you talking to me?

FATHER Is your name Louie?

POLICEMAN On the contrary: I'm Andrew Kovacs the Fifth.

FATHER Then what the hell did you come in for? (Yells) Louie!

POLICEMAN Dear sir, it was my duty that called me in. There are movies being shown in this place. For that you need a licence. Let me see it.

FATHER See what?

POLICEMAN The licence.

FATHER Don't be ridiculous. I'm the president of the National Union of Seltzermanufacturers. Ten years ago I murdered my father, eight years ago I poisoned my mother-in-law, I strangled my wife on her deathbed, I keep my son on a chain. . .

POLICEMAN We'll see about this kind of behavior!

FATHER Get the hell out of here, you old camel-herd! I despise policemen. My house is my castle. (Exit POLICEMAN)

NICODEMUS (Enter) You're incorrigable. Don't you know that the police are the most loyal supporters of the idea of maintaining a state? But there are other troubles, Mr. Kogutovitz. I have just been informed by the newspapers that for the last six years you have been ruthlessly exploiting my protege, Hermaphroditos. This cannot go on.

FATHER Six years already. Boy, we're getting old. When I think of my late lamented wife. . .

NICODEMUS May she rest in peace! But you have been accumulating interest for eight years on the invested innocence of your child. . .

FATHER Eight years! You haven't aged a bit, dear cousin. When I think. . .

NICODEMUS Do you have any idea what a healthy life I lead? But that's not what we're talking about. Mr. Kogutovitz, it's been exactly ten years since you, for one thousand gold pieces, sold me, gross and net, your first born. . .

FATHER Ten years already. How time flies. And how is your dear wife?

NICODEMUS My wife's gallstones have aged twelve years. Please do not interrupt me. Time has come for the settling of the accounts. Hermaphroditos. . .

POLICEMAN (Enter) Please leave! This business has ceased to exist. I'm closing down these premises.

NICODEMUS What are you talking about?

POLICEMAN I am not Louie. I resent the allegation, I have a regular name. Now please leave.

NICODEMUS I am vice-president of Ethical Race and Soulen-nobling Ltd.

POLICEMAN Drink seltzer-water. Now please leave.

NICODEMUS (Screaming) This is too much! If you don't clear out of here immediately I shall lodge a complaint with the minister of interior to whose house I've been invited for supper tonight. The audacity! Scram!

POLICEMAN All right, all right, you don't have to yell like that. Poor people eat supper too, you know. (Runs across the stage and out.)

NEWBORN (Enters dressed like a ten-year old boy, with long socks and a straw hat. He has a cigar in his mouth; he's chasing a cat.)

Hu-hu-ho-mimimimimimi, cicicicici-mieow. . .(Exit)

FATHER The dear child! How fast he's developing!

NICODEMUS (Yells) Louie. . .Louie!

NEWBORN (Re-enters) What is it? By the way, my name's not Louie.

NICODEMUS Dear Louis, come to my arms.

NEWBORN No, I won't. I haven't had breakfast yet.

NICODEMUS Won't you come into my presidential arms?

NEWBORN No! My dear foster-father, let us not complicate our hygienic business relations. My life's difficult as

NEWBORN it is. I'm getting old very fast. Ten years ago I could still smoke cigars; all I can handle today is cigarettes, and if things continue this way, pretty soon I'll have to discover smoking and sex life all over again.

FATHER Poor child!

NEWBORN Life was still so easy in the first act! Today I see obstacles popping up here and there. I have unexplainable desires, and my heart. . . But I've got to go. Adieu!

NICODEMUS You stay right here! That is: you'll come with me. What a spoiled attitude! I have to save you from this den of iniquity! Come along. Louie!

NEWBORN I'm not coming! I'm not <u>that</u> old. Ta ta! (Exit)

NICODEMUS This boy, whom you christened Louis, disobeyed me!

FATHER But he's still so innocent, dear cousin. Believe me, he's remained a Louie in spirit.

NICODEMUS I'm appalled. Please order him to return immediately.

FATHER <u>I</u> should order him? But you don't understand the relationship between the two of us. After all I am his father!

NICODEMUS I'll have you executed.

FATHER Me?

NICODEMUS If you refuse to obey.

FATHER Don't be so ruthless. After all I'm still only a grownup. (Yells) Louie, Louis!

NEWBORN (Enter) What is it? Father, why do you keep bothering me? I'm hungry, my math homework isn't done yet, I've got to go to bed at nine, and I haven't had breakfast yet.

FATHER Son, your country is calling you. Listen to the word.

NICODEMUS You come along with me immediately!

NEWBORN Where to?

NICODEMUS To the training grounds of Ethics.

NEWBORN What else is new?

NICODEMUS I will not permit you to breathe this pestilential air for another moment. Father, order him to obey me.

FATHER Son, get your hat and. . .

NEWBORN What is this, father? With your sober beard unruffled you are now rebelling against me whose shepherd's-fluted words thus far lulled into peaceful grazing all of our familial emotions? Hearest thou not the howls of the runaway herd? Wolf, wolf!

NICODEMUS (To FATHER) I'll have you executed if. . .

FATHER So..so..son, my ho..ho..honor! . . .De..de..death? And remember the forged checks.

NEWBORN Oh come on, leave me alone! I'm hungry and you threaten me with tragedies! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

NICODEMUS (To FATHER) If you can't bring things to order, the police will! (Exit)

FATHER (Runs after NICODEMUS) Listen to me. . .just a minute. . .Sir vicepresident! (Exit FATHER)

NEWBORN Paternal feelings are beginning to surface with uncommon intensity in this gentleman. What will happen to me? I'm encountering more and more obstacles as it is. I don't even know whether I'm a boy or a girl. And I'm so hungry! (Starts out)

1st PUPPET [FATHER] What have you done to my son, what have you done?

2nd PUPPET [RELATIVE] Halt! Can't you hear?. . .

3rd PUPPET [RELATIVE] . . .the calling of the blood? Haven't you got a single iota. . .

4th PUPPET [RELATIVE] . . .of filial love? Inhuman!

5th PUPPET [LIONTAMER] Not only common interests, but friendship binds us together too, Mr. Louis! You are ruining a man and a business, you cruel child!

6th PUPPET [BANKER] And a good heart? Is that a dog to be kicked at? And human solidarity, is that a dog to be kicked at?

7th PUPPET [PRIEST] Dog! Dog! The beast in man!

8th PUPPET [THE FATHER'S DOG] Even an animal sticks to his master!

9th PUPPET [MOTHER'S GHOST] <u>Vae victis</u>! I'm speaking to you from the other world.

10th PUPPET [MIDWIFE] And I even helped the monster into this world!

NEWBORN (Takes a step back) What is this, today everyone's against my having breakfast? Ta ta. (Starts out)

1st PUPPET Honor. . .

2nd PUPPET . . .thy father. . .

3rd PUPPET . . .so that. . .

4th PUPPET . . .you may have. . .

5th PUPPET . . .a long. . .

6th PUPPET . . .life. . .

7th PUPPET . . .on this. . .

8th PUPPET . . .earth!

9th PUPPET Earth!

10th PUPPET Earth!

NEWBORN (Waves his arms, yells) Now this is enough! The meeting is adjourned. Scram, you ancient hags of gossip, sucking each other's bones under police supervision, and believe that through mutual digestion you'll grow fatter on an equal-sharing basis. And you'd eat me too, eh? Away! Away! Go get some fresh air! (Starts out again)

1st PUPPET Honor. . .

2nd PUPPET . . .thy father. . .

3rd PUPPET . . .so that. . .

4th PUPPET . . .you may have. . .

NEWBORN (Yelling) Enough! Abtreten! Go to sleep! (All puppet-heads sink)

EXECUTIONER (Enter. He's tall, lean, wears a black shirt; his face is blindingly white; he carries a sword; speaks in sing-song accents.)
Good day, good day.

NEWBORN What is it?

EXECUTIONER I want to execute you.

NEWBORN I like this frankness, but why don't you just come out and say that you want to kill me?

EXECUTIONER I beg your pardon, I'm no murderer.

NEWBORN That's easy to say. By the way, what is it you do for a living?

EXECUTIONER With your permission, I'm an executioner.

NEWBORN In that case I don't see what we have to do with one another. Besides, I've got things to do. (Starts out)

EXECUTIONER (Whispering) Kogutovitz!

NEWBORN What's that?

EXECUTIONER Kogutovitz Jr., you have killed a man.

NEWBORN Don't forget I'm only ten years old. Besides, who would I have killed?

EXECUTIONER Kogutovitz the Younger, you have killed the COLLECTOR, whom Kogutovitz the Older robbed of his money.

NEWBORN Well, that happened in the first act.

EXECUTIONER And you'll pay for it in the third.

NEWBORN Then what are you doing in the second? And why are you so familiar with me? Strictly human friendship, eh?

EXECUTIONER One has no better friend than the Hangman. (Whispering) Kogutovitz the Younger, repent of your sins!

(In the rear, with bag in hand, COLLECTOR goes across the stage.)

NEWBORN Tell me Mr. Executioner, you too believe that I'm going to die? So many people have told me, that I myself am beginning to. . .

EXECUTIONER Repent your sins! Honor your father so that you may have a long. . .

NEWBORN (Yelling) Get out! Scoundrel! (Chases EXECUTIONER once around the stage, then EXECUTIONER exit.) Even their hangmen are sentimental. There's not a single attractive character in the whole place, and boy, am I ever hungry!

(From behind the scene ten REVELERS, all men, run in. They hold hands and dance around the NEWBORN.)

REVELERS (Singing) Auf der Mauer, auf der Mauer, da sitzt eine grosse Wanze, Auf der Mauer, auf der Mauer, da sitzt eine grosse Wanze.

Sieh dir die Wanze an,

Wie die Wanze tanzen kann.

Auf der Mauer, auf der Mauer, da sitzt eine grosse Wanze.

(REVELERS break the circle)

NEWBORN I don't understand French. What do you want?

(1st REVELER steps forward, dances before the others who accompany him, singing, pointing at the dancer.)

CHORUS OF REVELERS Sieh dir die Wanze an,
Wie die Wanze tanzen kann.
Auf der Mauer, auf der Mauer, da sitzt eine grosse Wanze.

NEWBORN What do you want?. . .What do you want?

2nd REVELER (Steps forward) Your name?

NEWBORN Hermaphroditos.

2nd REVELER Occupation?

NEWBORN Baby.

2nd REVELER Your residence?

NEWBORN I have just moved out of the womb, at the present I am making friends only with the stars.

2nd REVELER Any identifying marks?

NEWBORN I'm always hungry. What about you, gentlemen?

2nd REVELER Same with us. But we don't eat. We live on love and folksongs. (Singing) Gaudeamus igitur. . .

NEWBORN A few years ago I used to share the same view. However, I'm somewhat hesitant now. At times it seems to me that one ought to eat when one is hungry.

3rd REVELER (Steps forward) Life is hard. In two three centuries you too will be convinced of this, Sir Louis.

NEWBORN You too believe that I'm going to die?

3rd REVELER Why don't you join us? The basic by-law of our society is the denial of melancholy. We jump around gayly on our crippled feet.

NEWBORN I don't understand. Why don't you rather sit howling on the ground?

3rd REVELER What would be the advantage of that, my dear sir? (Dancing) One must do his duty, one way or the other.

NEWBORN Oh, I see. (Yelling) But this is cheating, miss, this is the ultimate swindle! This is. . .

4th REVELER (Steps forward) You are not yet familiar with love.

3rd REVELER (Dancing) We honor our fathers dancing, so that we may have a long life on this earth.

4th REVELER Have you ever seen such thick thighs on an old lady?

3rd REVELER (Dancing) Ring around the rosy, ring around. . .

NICODEMUS (Appears on a high platform in the rear) Halt! 'Ten-shun! (REVELERS line up, military fashion) In the name of Ethics arrest that man! Place him in solitary confinement in the Ethics building. Twenty years of house-arrest. If he attempts to escape: shoot to kill.

NEWBORN Arrest, me?? So you're all secret policemen? (He disappears via a trap)

NICODEMUS He's escaped, the cur! Why didn't you bring some women along?

1st REVELER But we thought that. . .

NICODEMUS Faith, hope and <u>charity</u>! Go and bring an able

NICODEMUS woman, immediately. (REVELERS leave at one side, FATHER enters at the other.)

FATHER Did you kill him?

NICODEMUS Not yet. For the time being he'll only be in a correctional institution. But where is the cream-colored tie?

FATHER I ate the whole basketful of sweet grapes. My ties have frayed and vanished like the landscape of dusk. My manly powers are on the wane. Please lend me. . .

NICODEMUS Go to the drugstore.

FATHER Lend me two crowns. I have strong pangs of consciousness. Lend me ten thousand crowns.

NICODEMUS We're living in great times. The catharsis of the twentieth century is rattling behind the scenery. New winds are blowing. . .

FATHER Let me have. . .

NICODEMUS A new spiritual orientation! Forms and colors are constantly changing like the countenance of a woman. Can't you see that I'm turning every shade of yellow?

FATHER Precisely because of that. . .

NICODEMUS Precisely because of that, at the last board meeting of Ethical Ltd., a decision was made. Our new policies are so formulated that we can now adjust our business to the constantly changing times. You want a cigarette?

FATHER How come you're so considerate?

NICODEMUS Won't you sit down?

FATHER Thanks, I don't need all that much space. The other day, when I lay next to Cecilia. . .

NICODEMUS Cecilia?

FATHER Yeah, just a chick. Looks remarkably like my late lamented wife. I sleep with her out of pity. By the way, she promised she would die in childbirth too.

NICODEMUS And what does Hermaphroditos have to say about all this?

FATHER The dear child is still so innocent. The dear child is always hungry. Despite all, however, he's developing rather fast.

NICODEMUS His virginity?

FATHER Still untouched. Check it for yourself, if you want to.

NICODEMUS Now there, you see, my dear Mr. Kogutovitz, this is just it! That is where the problem lies. The new age demands self-made men. Men without sentimentality; cold-thinking, ambitious individuals who can copulate without breathing hard, men who, like snakes, can slither and slide among the resistance of all substance, and who, like canaries, are happy after coitus. A brand new type. Would you like a cigarette?

FATHER Without any further ado, let me know what it is exactly that you wish.

NICODEMUS (Yelling) We'll be losers in the struggle if we cannot come up with the right slogans. (In his normal voice) Ethical Ltd. has revamped and updated its entire machinery. The old firm remains, but under a new banner. "Classconsciousness!" In this symbol we find the way to overcome our base desires. Let us not be sentimental, citizen!

FATHER I'm a citizen, Nicodemus?

NICODEMUS By all means.

FATHER Let me have a cigarette.

NICODEMUS How much do you want for Hermaphroditos' virginity?

FATHER You've embarrassed me a little. I still, somehow, belong to the older generation. . .

NICODEMUS All right, all right, Mr. Kogutovitz. You know as well as I do that life is a dream. But I'm talking about a new invention.

FATHER I don't deny that. Of course. Faith, Fatherland, Family--it felt so good not to believe in those sweet gemütlich concepts. And now, in my old age, I should learn not to believe in something all over again?

NICODEMUS Come on, quit the bargaining.

FATHER The National Union of Seltzermanufacturers, I should like to be the pres. . .

NICODEMUS You old dreamer. Don't you want some sweet grapes?

FATHER Where are the stomachs of yesteryear? (Yelling) I should sell my son twice? (In his normal voice) Why don't you let me have a hundred crowns instead?

NICODEMUS No! Is it on or off?

FATHER What?

NICODEMUS Our deal.

FATHER Oh God, only you know that my intentions are pure. What should I do?

NICODEMUS Exercise your paternal rights.

FATHER Those still exist?

NICODEMUS Call it power.

FATHER Nicodemus, what will you do with the child?

NICODEMUS I shall prepare him for that terribly responsible cultural job that can only be done by a hand that is used to holding the reins. He shall learn how to play tennis.

FATHER Even religious people play tennis.

NICODEMUS He'll learn French, Italian. He'll learn how to box. He'll take singing lessons, he'll study history and create trusts. He'll receive special lessons on the battlefield at Marne. He shall have Mon Printemps cologne in his hair, a self-defrosting refrigerator in his house, blue silk beds in his. . .

FATHER (Screaming, tearing his hair) Stop it, I can't stand it. . .

NICODEMUS A virgin after supper every night, preferably from the lower classes.

FATHER I can't stand it. No! I won't do it.

NICODEMUS Here is my check.

(On the screen: the check as in Act I. 5th PUPPET reads the check aloud to the tune of the national anthem, then his head sinks.)

NICODEMUS Don't you realize that our new method of education lacks nothing in having a new, bold style?

FATHER Lacks nothing? What kind of style is that, Nicodemus?

NICODEMUS Le stil c'est l'homme. I am a tank. Go to hell!

FATHER And the cream-colored tie?

NICODEMUS Please leave. I can hear Hermaphroditos' footsteps, and from the other side the hired Virgin approaches, panting. The sight of their collision is not for your paternal eyes.

FATHER Tell me, will the Virgin know what to do with. . .

NICODEMUS But of course; old and tried material, under strict scientific supervision.

FATHER Couldn't I just try to. . .

NICODEMUS Please leave. (A large black butterfly flies across the stage.)

FATHER (Runs after butterfly) Looka here, a flutterby.

(FATHER runs out, enter NEWBORN with long pants on, chewing American chewing gum. VIRGIN enters at opposite side, remains standing. NEWBORN does not notice her.)

NEWBORN Unbelievable! I still haven't had my breakfast.

NICODEMUS How rapidly this boy is developing. Not too long ago he was running around in shorts, not long after having been in diapers; and look at him now. How old are you, son?

NEWBORN (Yelling) I'm hungry!

NICODEMUS He still has his old temperament. A difficult case. When I think. . .

NEWBORN (Quickly reciting lesson by rote) The ellipse. . . The ellipse is the path of a point that moves so that the sum of its distances from two fixed points called foci is constant. The ellipse is. . .

NICODEMUS Dear Louis! On the occasion of the twilight of your second decennium, time has come for you to choose a profession. With a mature body and mind. . .

NEWBORN Who are you?

NICODEMUS I am your foster-father and vice-president.

NEWBORN Then kiss my. . . (VIRGIN steps forward) And who might this be?

NICODEMUS With a mature body and mind you may decide your own fate. A young man, before stepping out into life...

NEWBORN Shuttup! Why don't you answer my question?

NICODEMUS His temperament is still the same. You are much like an aeolian harp, son.

NEWBORN What is that strange phenomenon on the right there?

NICODEMUS A Virgin.

NEWBORN I don't understand.

NICODEMUS A woman.

NEWBORN Is it a Virgin or a woman? Or is every woman a Virgin?

NICODEMUS In a certain way, yes. Nowadays it is possible to find only differences in degree, and these degrees are thin like breath. . .

NEWBORN And what does that mean: a woman?

NICODEMUS It is the strongest competition of the firm which I represent. Lately there have been some negotiations between us. . .

NEWBORN Now you really think that I know more than I did two minutes ago?

NICODEMUS Son, nobody knows any more. Here you can only feel.

NEWBORN (Yelling) Virgin, come here!

NICODEMUS Well, I'll be leaving then.

NEWBORN Wait. . .Say, is a woman human too?

NICODEMUS That depends on the success of the negotiations. To some extent I am a pessimist. Besides, it is up to you now to be convinced. . . In a hurry then, I'll be. . . (Exit NICODEMUS. VIRGIN has now come before NEWBORN.)

NEWBORN What a peculiar smell she has.

VIRGIN Pleasant?

NEWBORN No, rather unpleasant. What peculiar voice she has.

VIRGIN Pleasant?

NEWBORN No, rather unpleasant. Your voice has a peculiar smell.

VIRGIN Observe my eyes.

NEWBORN You've got eyes! What a peculiar mouth you have. Do you ever use it for speech?

VIRGIN Sometimes.

NEWBORN You've got hair too! Your hair is like mine!

VIRGIN Crew-cut.

NEWBORN In other ways too, you actually resemble people. Say Virgin, are you human?

VIRGIN I'm no <u>man</u>, that's for sure.

NEWBORN I don't understand. My foster-father said that. . . Don't come too close to me.

VIRGIN Say Mr. Louis, what do you think of Tibor Déry's latest works?

NEWBORN I can't understand a single word of what he's saying. Say, what is that here up front? (He is pointing at her breasts.)

VIRGIN <u>Die Halbkugeln einer besseren Welt</u>. I like the classics better myself. Only with <u>them</u> do I get the feeling that life is a dream.

NEWBORN Say, what do you want from me, why do you keep stepping on my foot?

VIRGIN Of course there are people whom literature no longer interests. There are more and more of them every day. They're right. The natural sciences are far more useful.

NEWBORN, Say, Virgin, what else do you use your mouth for?

VIRGIN You're sweet.

NEWBORN I beg your pardon?

VIRGIN The latest theories about light are just amazing. It's just like reading a novel. Light rides the ether bareback, which, like a frisky colt, flies across infinite prairies. 300,000 kilometers per second. On the other hand Helmholtz. . .

NEWBORN I don't understand a word. What do you want from me?

VIRGIN Don't you like Freud? I adore him. It will break out on you too in a minute.

NEWBORN What will break out on me?

VIRGIN Why, Unterbewusstsein. (Subconsciousness)

NEWBORN What the hell is that?

VIRGIN You're sweet. Be patient. It will break out within five to six minutes.

NEWBORN Tell me why you are acting so familiar with me.

VIRGIN We, Virgins of pure souls, usually act familiar with our male playmates. Don't you like it?

NEWBORN Virgin, you bore me. I'm going to have breakfast.

10th PUPPET [NICODEMUS] Hey, miss, hurry up! (Sinks)

NEWBORN (Turns around) I heard some kind of voice.

VIRGIN I didn't hear anything. Maybe in the next room. . .

NEWBORN Well, so long, I'm going to have breakfast. (Starts out)

VIRGIN Are you hungry, Louis?

NEWBORN What a stupid question, of course I'm hungry.

VIRGIN Here's a giant croissant. (She takes it out of her pocketbook.)

NEWBORN Give it here. (He takes it, sits down, eats noisily.) This is very nice of you. You always carry giant croissants with you?

VIRGIN Always.

NEWBORN But now you have no more.

VIRGIN Now I have no more.

NEWBORN Then I'll go. Au revoir. (Starts out)

VIRGIN Wait just a minute. We haven't discussed our next date.

NEWBORN Who the hell wants to see you again?

VIRGIN Well, I just thought that perhaps. . .I could bring some ham. . .

NEWBORN Ham? A lot?

VIRGIN Ham for suffering mankind. Let every worker have ham on his breakfast table. I don't think I have to tell you that I am a member of all the anti-alcohol organizations in central Europe, as well as being a major on active duty in the Salvation Army. Why don't you join?

NEWBORN Look, miss, I'm busy. I've been standing here with you for two months and I still don't know what you want from me. You are a rather peculiar creature, a rather unintelligent being, with peculiar protuberances in

NEWBORN (Continued) front and in back; you speak incoherently, your thinking is sloppy, your muscles are inadequate, your smell is offensive, I have no idea what your purpose is on earth. I don't believe there is much sense in our continued acquaintance.

VIRGIN You'll learn to understand me, you blond poppa. (Yelling) Say, aren't you interested in sports?

NEWBORN Who's talking about sports here?

VIRGIN I just adore water-polo and basketball. Have you ever seen negroes box?

NEWBORN I have. Have you ever seen a gentleman leave a room running? (He starts out)

5th PUPPET [NICODEMUS] Miss, hurry up! (Sinks)

NEWBORN (Turns around) Who's talking behind my back?

VIRGIN Nobody. (Cries) My God, my God.

NEWBORN What are you doing?

VIRGIN (Snivelling) Can't you see, dummy: I'm crying.

NEWBORN Why are you crying?

VIRGIN Because you are ill. You have hallucinations. And my nerves are so exhausted they cannot take anything any more.

NEWBORN I don't know if I should believe her or not. Pitiful and disgusting sight. (To VIRGIN) What's wrong with your nerves?

VIRGIN A man could never understand that.

NEWBORN You mean you don't want to tell me. Then. . .

VIRGIN (Yelling) They murdered me. The dagger which Archipelagos has thrust into my breast, like a twilight ray of sun, is slowly penetrating deeper and deeper. Wild beasts are howling around me in the midnight forest. They murdered me.

NEWBORN Then why are you living?

VIRGIN They were unfaithful to me, they robbed me. I loved, I was loved. I'm not loved any more. And I'm standing here sad like a drenched puppy.

NEWBORN Are you appealing to my good heart?

VIRGIN What else can I do?

NEWBORN All in vain, miss. Unless you learn to express yourself in a coherent, understandable, human fashion, I cannot feel sympathy for you in my heart. I do not understand you, Virgin.

1st PUPPET [NICODEMUS] Forward! The direct approach! We haven't got time. (Sinks)

NEWBORN (Turns around) Again. . .

VIRGIN (Steps over and stands right in front of NEWBORN) My love.

NEWBORN I beg your pardon?

VIRGIN I love you, I love you. (She kisses him)

NEWBORN (Shoves her away) What is it, what are you doing? Have you gone stupid? Why are you fitting, to the accompaniment of smacking sounds, the outer, meaty part of your mouth over mine, thus generating an undue amount of saliva, while your forehead goes pale? Do

NEWBORN (Continued) you believe this kind of action worthy of humans?

VIRGIN I love you.

NEWBORN Is that how virgins let one know?

VIRGIN In most cases, yes.

NEWBORN (Yelling) And why do you love me? Who are you? How dare you? So, this is the way it's going to be: everybody can just love me like that, eh? What the hell <u>am</u> I? Why don't they let me live? Fathers and vicepresidents, relatives and midwives, liontamers and animals, executioners and policemen, all love me; all want to touch me, feel me, look me up in the bloody cages of their love, but nobody gives me anything to eat! Let me live! Let me live! I don't need anything! Leave me alone! I am hungry!

VIRGIN I gave you something to eat.

NEWBORN That is true. Why did you?

VIRGIN I love you. Unselfishly.

NEWBORN I don't know what to do with you.

VIRGIN (Kisses him) I'll teach you. I love you. (Kisses him)

NEWBORN What are you doing? Let me go! (Wants to escape)

VIRGIN (Yelling) Don't you feel anything for me?

NEWBORN No.

VIRGIN Aren't you at least curious?

NEWBORN Yes. That I am. But I'm afraid of you.

VIRGIN Well, look over here, darling!

(Behind a stretched-out sheet with a spot light on it, she begins to take off some of her clothes. Shadow-play: unbuttoning her blouse she shows her naked shoulders and arms.)

NEWBORN What are you doing? Let me go!

VIRGIN Look here, sweet one. (She shows her naked breasts.)

NEWBORN (Long, lingering scream) Oooooooo, what's that?

VIRGIN My breast.

NEWBORN You've got two. Show me the other one too. I do want to be on familiar terms with you. How come you've got two?

VIRGIN So you could kiss them.

NEWBORN I don't want to see you. (Hides his eyes behind his hands.)

VIRGIN Look here, darling!

NEWBORN Your belly is so white. I don't want to see you. (Hides his eyes again)

VIRGIN (Yelling) Louuuuuuis! (She drops her skirt.)

NEWBORN (Does not take his hands away from his eyes) I am not Louis. I don't want to see you. I know that you'll make me very unhappy.

VIRGIN Take your hands away!

NEWBORN I want to stay alone!

VIRGIN Take your hands away!

NEWBORN I want to go blind!

NICODEMUS (Runs in, sneaks behind NEWBORN, grabs his hands away from his eyes, twists his arms, then ties his hands to a column.) Go blind. (Exit NICODEMUS)

NEWBORN (Screaming) Let me go!

VIRGIN Come here!

NEWBORN I can't, I'm all tied up. You come here.

VIRGIN I can't, I'm naked.

NEWBORN Come here!

VIRGIN I don't dare, I'm afraid of you.

NEWBORN (Trying to break loose) Let me get to her!

VIRGIN What a well-built guy you are, why don't you come here?

NEWBORN Let me get to her!

VIRGIN (Dancing and singing behind the screen)
Sweetheart, they say I won't be yours,
Sweetheart, they say I won't be yours.

NEWBORN Turn around, I want to see you all over.

VIRGIN Why don't you come here?

NEWBORN I love you.

VIRGIN I've got no time, I've got to go home.

NEWBORN I want to kiss your hand.

VIRGIN (She is leaving; as she backs away from the sheet her shadow grows smaller and smaller.)
I have no hands.

NEWBORN I want to kiss your breasts.

VIRGIN I have no breasts.

NEWBORN I want to kiss your lips.

VIRGIN (Her voice from the distance) Tomorrow, the day after tomorrow. When the moon is new. Why don't you follow me?

NEWBORN My love, my love, when will I see you?

VIRGIN I can't hear your voice. (Shadow disappears)

1st PUPPET Some chick.

2nd PUPPET What a figure.

3rd PUPPET Do you have household germs? Lysol's your answer.

4th PUPPET Try it, you'll like it.

5th PUPPET Your place or mine?

6th PUPPET Yours and mine.

7th PUPPET Have you seen Budapest by night?

8th PUPPET I have.

9th PUPPET Let us enlighten this young man: Love brings forth roses.

10th PUPPET With a mature body and mind you may decide your own fate. My dear son, you are not alone. Hermaphroditos, man is not alone. Get in line and perform your Sisyphean labor. After that you will die. Hermaphroditos: man does die. Before you die: Love! Hermaphroditos: Man loves. He who loves less than he is capable of is a scoundrel!

CHORUS OF PUPPETS . . .oundrel.

10th PUPPET Then you die. Man is mortal. Don't be afraid of our help in your death; your birth came about through the help of others. Don't be afraid of our

10th PUPPET (Continued) help in your life. You help others too. You cannot get rid of us, and we cannot get rid of you, Hermaphroditos, because man is mortal.

CHORUS OF PUPPETS . . .'cause man is mortal.

10th PUPPET Eat Hershey's chocolate bars.

NEWBORN (Screeching) Ooooooooo, let me get at her, let me get at her, ooooo!

Curtain

ACT III

(Projection on the curtain: "Louis Hermaphroditos deflowered a thousand virgins. Louis Pantagruel made love as many times a night as there were stars in the sky; Ludwig Casanova had three lovers per day. Lewis Romeo Capulet loved only one woman, but HOW! King Lajos Pausolus kept 365 young girls in his harem. Lodovico Borgia killed 4000 women in his bedroom. Bluebeard is on the rampage again, turning day into night he makes love continuously."

From behind the curtain several female voices are heard; sadly, passionately, in various tones, first strong then fading: "Let me get at him, let me get at him!" A few seconds of silence, then curtain up.)

1st PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] He's not here.

2nd PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Not here, either.

3rd PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Nowhere.

4th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Where is he?

5th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] (Yelling) Where are you, my beautiful and cruel love?

6th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Who are you waiting for, ladies, under the cloak of night?

7th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Aaah!

8th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] I was following him, I got tired. I'll just sit here and wait for him. (Yelling) Kyrie eleison! Like a cracked pomegranate whose red red blood has gushed forth, I writhe among the cushions of darkness. This heat will burst me, this fire will consume me; and you, oh where are you, you sharp dagger that penetrated my body? Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison.

10th PUPPET [DEEP VOICE] (Speaking slowly) Good evening, miss. What are you yelling for? You've been deflowered? You don't have to yell because of that. I personally know a lady in Graz whose hymen, like a batallion standard, was captured in hand-to-hand combat twenty years ago. . .and every day since then. And I'm still alive. By the way, have you seen Hermaphroditos?

9th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] I'm waiting for him myself. What have you to do with him, ma'am?

10th PUPPET Don't yell. I want to have him deflower me.

9th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] You too?

8th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] You too?

7th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] She too?

6th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Traitor!

5th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] (Yelling) Louis, my heart's only Louis, where are you; why delay in the night?

4th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] He spent only one burning night with me, then left me with my shame.

5th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] He kissed me one hundred and forty one times between one thirty and three thirty in the morning.

2nd PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] He promised me a pair of alligator-skin shoes, six pairs of Flora stockings. But what is an alligator to me, oh who is a Flora to me?

1st PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] I shall never forget last night.

2nd PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Hey, miss, are you delirious? He spent last night with me!

3rd PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Are you both crazy, ladies? He did not leave my side for a second all night.

4th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] You've got some nerve! From early evening 'till dawn he was in my arms. . .

5th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] . . .that is to say in <u>mine</u>. . .

6th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] . . .he was panting over <u>my</u> bosom...

7th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] . . .and as night slowly turned to crimson dawn. . .

8th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] . . .with closed eyes I listened...

9th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] . . .to the throbbing of his heroic heart.

10th PUPPET [DEEP VOICE] Shuttup. Here he comes.

NEWBORN (Enters, stands in front of PUPPETS with his back to the audience.) What a curious coincidence, ladies, that we all meet here. This is that "so-called" fate which the Greeks call ananke. Greetings, my love. (He stretches his arms, puts them over his heart, then raises them heavenward, then back to his heart in slow rhythm while 10th PUPPET counts slowly.)

10th PUPPET One-two, one two, one-two. . .aren't you bored yet?

NEWBORN Not yet, my only one. Don't forget, my sex life's been rather short so far. (Singing) Hallelujah, haaaaale-halelujah. . .I worship you, my love.

(PUPPETS speak in quick succession)

1st PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Who do you worship?

2nd PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Me of course!

3rd PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Who are you talking to?

4th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Traitor!

5th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Shut up, you with the flat boobs!

6th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] You old whore!

7th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] I'll scratch your eyes out!

8th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Don't shove, just don't shove!

9th PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Drown, you bloated corpse!

10th PUPPET [DEEP VOICE] And what about me?

(During the next scene on the right of the stage old masters' famous paintings, in color, are projected. A barker, long stick in hand, points out the parts of the body being referred to.)

1st PUPPET Quiet, quiet, all of you. He loves only me. Isn't it right, Romeo Capuletti, you love me only? These eyes of mine see only to see you. It cannot be that you have forgotten last night. My sixteen years have been gathered into your lap like sixteen white sheep. Remember mine eyes: two black vessels on the white lake of my countenance. You love me only, don't you?

NEWBORN My love, I love you only.

1st PUPPET You won't leave me, will you?

NEWBORN I will not leave you.

1st PUPPET Come my love!

NEWBORN I am coming. (Starts for 1st PUPPET whose head sinks.)

2nd PUPPET (Shrieking) Stop! Blind youth, you are running to your doom! This tricky virgin's claws will never let you go. Have you forgotten last night? My two blinding shoulders that danced in the moonlight like two orchids in the wind? Have you forgotten my shoulders?

NEWBORN Those cannot be forgotten, my love.

2nd PUPPET Come, the moon is shining outside. My shoulders...

NEWBORN . . .your shoulders. . .(Starts for 2nd PUPPET whose head sinks)

3rd PUPPET (Screeching) Wait, wait, where are you running, unhappy wretch? Have you no eyes? This maiden's tits are flat like the Great Hungarian Plain. Or have you forgotten last night? Have you forgotten my small little boobies that danced under your fingers like kittens in the moonlight? Come! Stroke my boobies!

NEWBORN Give 'em here! (Starts for 3rd PUPPET whose head sinks)

4th PUPPET Not so fast! You're a heedless youth, like Paris with apples in his hands on the plain of Troy. Mine too, are hard as. . .

NEWBORN (Angrily, yelling) No, by Zeus, no! Hers were the most beautiful. Let me go, let me go!

4th PUPPET Naughty boy! What about my back?

NEWBORN That is true. Your back is. . .

4th PUPPET You see. So come on then!

NEWBORN She's right. What should I do? (Starts for 4th PUPPET whose head sinks)

5th PUPPET Tell me Louis, why are these women so familiar with you? Whose tongue could be more sweet and lovely than this honeyed sack which I had bathed in your gums only yesterday? Or have you forgotten last night?

NEWBORN God forbid!

5th PUPPET Push ahead then! Life is a dream. Hurry before we wake up. (Sinks)

6th PUPPET Wake up, Louis! This woman's feet sweat. But my belly is like a freshly laid haystack surrounded by lilies.

NEWBORN That is true; what should I do? (6th PUPPET's head sinks)

7th PUPPET My girlfriends call me Kallypigos, and so does the super's wife who's known me since I was a child. Tell me, is there anything more beautiful than a beautiful ass?

NEWBORN (Screaming) Let me get at her, let me get at her! (7th PUPPET's head sinks)

8th PUPPET (Singing) Have you ever seen such thick thighs on an old lady? Oh, those thighs!

NEWBORN You are like the serpents of Laocoon. (Yelling) But what the hell am I? A prize stud; a rare breed? (8th PUPPET's head sinks)

9th PUPPET Rapist! And what about my soul? Is that a dog to be kicked at? Come to my bed. (9th PUPPET's head sinks)

NEWBORN To go mad, mad, mad! Who am I? I don't know me. What do I want? I want everything. That's not possible? Is it possible that there are things that are not possible?

10th PUPPET [DEEP VOICE] Cut the text, son. You can't fake it in bed. Can you think of anybody who's half as good as I am in bed, eh?

NEWBORN No, I can't.

10th PUPPET Well, come on then. I might even scrape up some grub.

NEWBORN Yesterday I was so hungry, but today. . . Ma'am, don't you think I'm sick or something?

10th PUPPET The women got you, Louie boy; you won't be able to get rid of them any more. Come on then. Gonorrhea today is better than a virgin tomorrow. (10th PUPPET's head sinks)

NEWBORN I'm coming. (Starts, stops) No, I won't go. Actually, I'm a little confused. That's a sign of old age. Am I getting old? (He turns toward the audience. He has a sprouting beard and moustache. He comes down center and addresses the audience.) I woke up early this morning because the sun was so strong. Have you ever heard the rustling of the fog at dawn, as the first rays of sun prick its white waves? I was hungry, but I didn't eat. I haven't eaten for years. For years I have not masticated, chewed, or made a slob of myself to the rhythm dictated by the metronome of boredom, making patterns on people's foreheads with blood and beads of sweat. I want to be free.

CIVILIAN (Crossing the stage) Good day.

NEWBORN Good day.

CIVILIAN Good day. (Exit)

NEWBORN Actually I'm confused. I made a date with several women for tonight. I think I'm in love. But with which one of them?

CIVILIAN (Enters from opposite direction) Good day.

NEWBORN Good day. Say, are you a virgin?

CIVILIAN Are you kidding?

NEWBORN Say, have you ever been in love?

CIVILIAN Look here, sir, I'm a tired old man. Why don't you leave me alone? Just because my business is a little slow that's no reason for you to be nasty. My wife has liver troubles. Otherwise she could have an affair with the board of directors. How could I buy some Crepe de Chine blouses for my daughter who is not such a good match? And what about Victor's tuition at the university? It's been two weeks since I changed shirts. Same goes for my wife too. I want to die. Good day. (Starts out)

NEWBORN Hey, wait a minute. Is it true that women rob a man of his freedom?

CIVILIAN True. But after a while you don't even notice it.

NEWBORN Disgusting. And tell me, is it true that love brings forth roses?

CIVILIAN True. But after a while you don't even notice it. I was blessed with six beautiful roses. I warmly recommend to you the oldest one who is a splendid cook, who sews and plays the piano.

NEWBORN Disgusting. By the way, what's her name?

CIVILIAN Stefanie.

NEWBORN Stefanie. I've already slept with Stefanie. Her shoulders are beautiful, but her boobs are flat as the Great Hungarian Plain. Sorry, I've no use for her.

CIVILIAN What's this I hear? You've seduced my beloved oldest daughter?

NEWBORN I beg your pardon. She did the seduction.

CIVILIAN Ho, ho, I beg your pardon! Stefanie cooks, sews and plays the piano, but she knows nothing about love. Believe me! (Screaming) You shall marry Stefanie!

NEWBORN Have you gone crazy? I've absolutely no intention of marrying her. I don't want to manufacture roses.

CIVILIAN Who's talking about love? You two will do your duty to society, period! (Moved) Two little sparrows! When should the wedding take place?

NEWBORN I'll ask you one more time: have you gone crazy? I'm only a baby, a free person. Who's talking about marriage?

CIVILIAN I see. . .marriage no, wild orgies with my roses yes, eh? Big mistake, young man. I hereby grant your request for my daughter Stefanie's hand in marriage.

NEWBORN You bore me, sir.

CIVILIAN Who cares. You will come along with me immediately. We'll go have supper at my house.

NEWBORN You bore me so much, that I hereby command you to die.

CIVILIAN I wish I could do just that. But I'm the head of a firm, I'm a husband and a father.

NEWBORN What's this; you're still not dead?

CIVILIAN My dear son-in-law, let us go to supper.

NEWBORN I don't understand. What's happening to me? I must be getting old. Nobody obeys me, my least little requests go unheeded. Disgusting! I'm going to Africa.

CIVILIAN If you don't come along this minute I'll call the cops.

NEWBORN (Screaming) Die! (Observing CIVILIAN) You're not dying? I don't understand; what's happening to me? Perhaps the women? I'll give up sex.

CIVILIAN That might be a good idea if you marry Stefanie. By the way, how much do you make a month?

NEWBORN I've given up eating, I'll give up love too. I want to be free. Good day. (Starts out)

CIVILIAN (Stentorian tones) Halt! You're late, Hermaphroditos! Whatever we start, we must finish. Our every move is incorrigible. You think it's possible to escape? You think you have a right to starve to death? You think it's possible to step out of your role before your last breath is drawn? You think man can save himself? Not even I can do that, I who am the head of a big firm.

NEWBORN Stop trying to scare me! You'll see what a simple, unprejudiced baby can do! (Waves to CIVILIAN) Ta ta.

CIVILIAN (Screaming) Mr. Kogutovitz, help, help!

FATHER (Enters) What is it?

CIVILIAN Mr. Kogutovitz, we're both fathers, therefore we are colleagues. Dear colleague, help me. Your esteemed son wants to kill me. (NEWBORN pulls a revolver out of his pocket.)

FATHER I am the president of the National Union of Seltzer-manufacturers, Mr. Kovacs; you may call me president for short. What does he want to kill you for?

NEWBORN (Threateningly to CIVILIAN) Don't you lie!

CIVILIAN Because I wouldn't let him starve to death. This is a heartless child, Mr. President.

FATHER Louis, for God's sake, what's this I hear: you want to starve to death?

NEWBORN What's it to you? Go home!

CIVILIAN There, you see? And here I am, with Stefanie under my wings as I stand here with my eyes closed, like a hero; I grow pale as I recite what alone God has made me say, and I shall not rest until I see these two youngsters lying in their bridal bed.

NEWBORN You keep on nagging me and I'll blow your brains out.

FATHER Son, son, have mercy on society. Think of your white-haired mother who expired in childbirth even as she labored to bring you into this world. With a little bit of luck Stefanie will do the same.

CIVILIAN That I have nothing to do with. Louis, come to supper immediately.

FATHER My son, go to supper.

NEWBORN Gentlemen, I can see that you cannot be helped. Your sadness moves me, but what can I do? I'm leaving for Africa. Au revoir in a better, nicer future. (Starts out)

CIVILIAN (Yells) Wait!

FATHER Wait! (Yells) Nicodemus, Nicodemus!

NICODEMUS (Enters) What is it? (NEWBORN lights a cigarette, sits down)

FATHER (Yelling) Sir, I have trusted you with my child. And what am I compelled to see? Hermaphroditos, like the scourge of God, rages and ravages on this peaceful earth, decent families with bleeding breasts lie in his dismal wake. Is this your modern upbringing?

NICODEMUS What kind of tone is this?

FATHER But please, Nicodemus, is this why I gave you my offspring at a discount rate? I am appalled.

NICODEMUS Control yourself. Or have you forgotten your own youth?

FATHER Indeed I have. Do you think that I could live now if I hadn't?

NICODEMUS But what exactly did happen here?

FATHER Hermaphroditos does not know how to salute. The world is disorderly. Hermaphroditos can neither smile nor lie. What are we coming to?

NICODEMUS Leave that to me. I'm asking you: what happened?

FATHER (Yelling) Well, if you want to know: My son wants to starve to death. If you don't give him something to eat right now, on the spot, then I, right in front of your eyes, shall wind this white beard of mine round my own neck and hang myself from the kitchen-door. Help. . .help!

NEWBORN Calm down, father. I had no idea that you'd take it so. . .

NICODEMUS (To CIVILIAN) But what happened, my young friend?

CIVILIAN (Yelling) I, my dear sir, am the head of a firm. And Stefanie, with heaving breasts, is lying back there, right behind me, all in shame. Doomsday! This young man no longer wants to love.

NICODEMUS What Stefanie?

CIVILIAN Stefanie, my oldest daughter, my precious one, my only Stefanie.

NICODEMUS What do I care about your Stefanie? But what happened to this young man?

CIVILIAN (Screaming) This young man no longer wants to love. Doomsday! What are we coming to?

NICODEMUS Don't get excited. It's not so bad. (To NEWBORN) What's this, son? You don't want to eat, you don't want to love?

NEWBORN Everybody thinks he's got something to yell about. Well, I've got things to yell about too! Right now you are interfering even with my psychic processes! Isn't

NEWBORN (Continued) it enough that, at your command, I have taken all the courses offered at Berlitz?

NICODEMUS And did it hurt you?

NEWBORN It didn't hurt, that's true. . .now what should I do? But I don't want anything from anybody. I want to be alone.

NICODEMUS Man cannot remain alone. Go home immediately and change your underwear for the wedding.

NEWBORN Look here, sir: if I were ten years younger, then I'd tell you to shut up right now. But, since it seems that I have grown old, I'm going to lie down here and go to sleep while you gentlemen finish your quarrel. Wake me when it's over. (Lies down. Loud snoring.)

NICODEMUS If he can still sleep then there's no problem.

FATHER (Screaming) But he hasn't eaten for years.

CIVILIAN (Screaming) But he hasn't made love to Stefanie for years.

NICODEMUS Gentlemen, although your beards are grey, do you not still believe in the moral imperative? There is no real danger, yet. He who has once learned to eat and to love, can never forget those things. He who has reached that stage can never turn back, ever. All he has to learn now is how to die. In the meantime, gentlemen, observe the baby's dreams.

(The scene grows dark; a movie above the NEWBORN's head: An apple tree heavy with fruit. Slowly a

branch moves into close-up, a huge apple falls off the branch, rolls on the ground onto a highway, continues to roll with varying speed, at times it's only a small dot in the distance; at times it grows huge and almost stops. Later, in slow motion, the apple runs onto a plate; the plate rises, the apple turns into a breast; we see a naked young girl with a plate held under her breast. She starts walking, then runs faster and faster on the same highway we saw before. She runs with varying speed: at times she's within arm's reach, at others she almost disappears. She arrives under the apple tree, picks an apple and with gleaming teeth bites into it. From the left a black plane moves into the picture covering all. On this black surface the following signs appear: "Eve, let me have some of that apple or I'll starve to death." "Miss, if you give me some of that, I'll ask for your hand in marriage." "Madame, I'll die if you won't marry me." "Don't go away, please don't go away!" Still in the dark, we hear a female voice: "Don't go away, please don't go away!" The scene lights up; CIVILIAN, NICODEMUS and FATHER have disappeared.)

NEWBORN (Sits up, rubs his eyes) What do you want, and why shouldn't I go away?

STEFANIE Because I love you.

NEWBORN What nerve! Just because you love me I shouldn't go away! Did you ever hear of such a thing?

STEFANIE If you loved me I wouldn't go away.

NEWBORN Is that for sure?

STEFANIE Sure it's sure.

NEWBORN I believe you, If you say so. But what should I do now? I should pay for my former gratitude and buy something I don't need? That's not fair.

STEFANIE How enchanting is the song of the lark.

NEWBORN Why did you tell me that you wouldn't leave me? That's a pretty rotten trick. You want to influence me.

STEFANIE Not true. . .but the moon shines in the sky like a great lily.

NEWBORN How did you say that? . . .I don't understand! You love me? And what if two people loved me? And what if ten did? Should I walk around, smiling and calm like an ox bearing a yoke which strange passions and desires have thrust upon my neck?

STEFANIE Sweetheart, would you buy me an apricot-colored pair of stockings at Zwieback's Department Store?

NEWBORN Don't you "sweetheart" me! I won't buy you anything. What kind of cage of mysterious influences are you trying to lure me into? Behold, even the moon has cast its yellow net over me. What do you want from me?

STEFANIE An apricot-colored slip. . .(Yelling) But don't you get it, idiot: I love you.

NEWBORN Don't utter that word. . .

STEFANIE (Excitedly) I love you.

NEWBORN (Holding his ears) Don't. . .Don't!

STEFANIE I love you, I love you, I love you. . .You can't get out of this now. And if you leave me a hundred times, my memory, like a huge hump, will ride your back, and you won't be able to shake it off. Behold, your brow is still pale from the pollen of my kisses. Look, your hands have bent to keep and preserve the curve of my shoulders. You shall never be alone, Hermaphroditos.

NEWBORN (Yelling) I want to be alone. I'm paying; check, please. What should I pay?

STEFANIE An apricot-colored, silk. . .(Yelling) I love you, I love you, they love you, they love you. You are caught, Hermaphroditos.

(STEFANIE stands up, in an ever increasing tempo she dances around NEWBORN who looks at her for a while, then slowly, almost as if involuntarily, stands up, and with slow, mechanical moves begins to dance. They dance. Then STEFANIE stops, whispers into NEWBORN's ears.)

NEWBORN Never.

STEFANIE (Yelling) I want your baby!

NEWBORN (Yelling) No, no, no! Besides, I've got to go now.

STEFANIE Where to?

NEWBORN Well, over to. . .(Angry) I don't want to tell you. I don't <u>have</u> to tell you.

STEFANIE When are you coming back?

NEWBORN I'm not coming back. I'm coming back tomorrow.

I'm never coming back. Go away.

STEFANIE I'll wait for you. Oh honey, don't forget to bring a pint of cocoa and a stick of butter.

NEWBORN Don't you understand: I'm not coming back!

STEFANIE I'll wait for you anyway.

NEWBORN You sit behind the window, arms crossed, looking out at the highway, get up in the middle of the night and part the curtain a little ways; even in bed you moved closer to the wall, and in the morning you stand by the open door waiting for my shadow as it looms up, blocking the sun from you. At dusk you search for my footsteps around the house. (Screaming) I'm not coming back!

STEFANIE I'll wait for you. Don't forget, a pint of cocoa...

NEWBORN (Screaming) I am NOT coming. . .

STEFANIE What should I do? I must wait for you.

NEWBORN You will not wait for me.

(NEWBORN pulls out a revolver and shoots STEFANIE who falls to the floor. NEWBORN looks at the revolver for a while then puts it back into his pocket and starts out.)

Good day.

STEFANIE (Gets up) I'll still wait for you. I'm immortal, Hermaphroditos.

NEWBORN (Starts running on a treadmill; remains in one place at the left of the stage.)

Help! Help!

STEFANIE (Goes to the right of the stage) . . .and a stick of butter.

(During the following scene stagehands put together a stylized room on the right side of the stage: it has a single wall with a window in front of which are placed an easy chair, a table with chairs and a bed. With puppet-like movements STEFANIE gets into bed, leaving a lot of room next to her, then: gets up, goes to window, looks out, goes back into bed; gets up, goes to and sits at the table set for two; eats, clears the table, sits by the window, looks out, waits, goes to table, sits, eats, goes to window, back to bed, gets up. At the same time, on the left of the stage, behind NEWBORN, people are slowly walking up and down.)

DOCTOR Good day, Mr. Kogutovitz. Where are you off to in such a hurry?

NEWBORN (Keeps running) Good day. What's it to you?

DOCTOR Don't forget that I helped you into this world. I was all wrapped up in a gynecological crossword puzzle when your dear mother gave birth to you. Your dear father still owes me for my services.

NEWBORN And now you want to collect from me?

DOCTOR Well, if it is inconvenient. . .But thank God. . .

NEWBORN What do you think I am? Good bye.

DOCTOR Perhaps on your way back. . .

NEWBORN I won't be coming back.

DOCTOR But of course you will, Mr. Kogutovitz. Well, good bye. (Exit into crowd)

POLICEMAN (Steps out of the crowd) Sir, it's not allowed to run here. Where are you running to? Please stop running.

NEWBORN (Keeps running) Why shouldn't I run?

POLICEMAN Just don't ask! Asking questions and running are verboten. The bourgeois legislature strictly forbids any agitated movements. An even, calm movement of limbs is the only assurance of law and order. Please move about calmly.

NEWBORN I'm sorry. . .

POLICEMAN Then I have to arrest you.

NEWBORN (Stops. Whispering.) Officer, when I was born I killed my mother. I'm on my way now to the district court to turn myself in for murder.

POLICEMAN That's different, my friend. Good bye. (Gets lost in the crowd.)

4th PUPPET [CHORUS OF RELATIVES] (Female voice) Where are you going, son?

5th PUPPET [CHORUS OF RELATIVES] (Male voice) Son, I've heard you want to leave the city of your birth!

6th PUPPET (Same female voice as 4th PUPPET) And you'd go without even saying good bye to your loving aunt?

NEWBORN (Runs out) Merde!

4th PUPPET That's the call of the blood.

5th PUPPET Son, I always told your mother; "Cecilie, don't eat so many beets." But she didn't listen to me. Just kept eating beets, and what's the result? Her son turned out to be a wild animal. Please, dear Louis, do not shame my honest name.

6th PUPPET You have the heart to leave your grey-haired aunt?

NEWBORN No, I don't. What should I do?

4th PUPPET If you leave who'll marry my daughter?. . .

5th PUPPET . . .I shall exclude you from my will. . .

6th PUPPET . . .and here I am with my broken heart.

NEWBORN Forget me, all of you!

4th PUPPET You will come back son, won't you?

NEWBORN I'm not coming back.

5th PUPPET Of course you will.

6th PUPPET Good bye, son. (The heads of the three PUPPETS sink)

LIONTAMER (Cracking his whip he crosses the stage) Anybody seen a two-headed lion? Had a blue silk ribbon 'round his neck.

FATHER (Enters running and yelling after LIONTAMER) Partner, the police revoked our licence. The baby disappeared. (FATHER and LIONTAMER get lost in the crowd.)

EXECUTIONER Well, here I am. Don't run. Pay up. You can't sing around here.

NEWBORN (Stops running) I'm not singing. Tell me, you really believe that I'm going to die? I myself am beginning to. . .

EXECUTIONER You'll pay first. You can't die before paying.

NEWBORN (Desperately) What should I pay, why should I pay? I don't owe anybody anything. I haven't eaten for years, I haven't loved for years. . .

EXECUTIONER The chorus of your creditors stands howling behind you. You think you can get away with it?

NEWBORN (Yelling) Who do I owe?

EXECUTIONER Everybody. Kogutovitz the Younger, you believe that it's possible to come into this world without punishment? You believe that it is possible to live and die free of charge? (COLLECTOR, with a huge bag on his back, crosses in the rear.) Nothing is forgotten here. You yourself are your most merciless creditor. Besides, you've grown old, what are you arguing for?

NEWBORN I have grown old. (Lisping) Not twue, uncle. May ay have a little bitty cereal? (Screaming) True, true: I am old.

EXECUTIONER Animal! To the gallows!

(The scene darkens. Silence for a few seconds, then: a male voice very calmly and clearly counts to ten. On the count of ten: shots of a firing squad are

heard. The shots are followed by chaotic noise, then voices can be distinguished; first just a murmur then louder and louder. Out of all this we clearly understand the following: "Good day, how do you do, how are you? --On the eastern front our troops are advancing victoriously. --Thank you, I'm fine. --A strong, low pressure center here, local showers expected. --Ganz Danubius 104,5, Standard Oil 67-72. --Malvin has fever, he's in bed with influenza. --Peace treaty signed yesterday in Versailles. --What peace? Thank you, I'm fine. --The German syphilis expedition is now underway. --We'll name him Aurelius."

The orchestra plays Berlioz's Rákóczi March. The scene lightens. NEWBORN stands in STEFANIE's room; he has a beard. He is taking off his hat and coat.)

STEFANIE Did you bring the butter?

NEWBORN Yes. On the eastern front our troops are advancing victoriously.

STEFANIE Malvin has fever, he's in bed with influenza. Did you bring the butter?

NEWBORN Yes. Strong low pressure center here, local showers expected.

STEFANIE I've heard the peace treaty was signed yesterday in Versailles. What peace?

NEWBORN I got the butter. The German syphilis expedition is now underway.

STEFANIE We'll name him Aurelius. I'll nurse him myself. He'll sleep in my bed. I'll raise him to be an engineer. Perhaps a poet. He'll be a genius. Did you bring the butter?

NEWBORN I did. What if it's a girl? Where am I going to get the dowry? Maybe we should tell her about free love? Let's call her Isabella. I'm going for the dowry. (STEFANIE and NEWBORN exeunt)

FATHER (Enters, yells after NEWBORN) Wait son, wait! Where are you going?

NICODEMUS (Enters) What are you yelling for? He'll come back in a minute.

FATHER Why would he come back?

NICODEMUS Total capitulation is only a matter of moments. (Rubs his hands) That's right. He'll be right back.

FATHER You really think that. . .

NICODEMUS Come on, sir. You act as if you had felt different after your first birth. All men get their tails between their legs after they've made their ladies' bellies great. Boy, how I hate my profession!

FATHER Hate it?

NICODEMUS The same song-and-dance every time. If only I did not have this great responsibility.

FATHER Could you lend me. . .

NICODEMUS (Yelling) Leave me alone! You still can't see that I've lost interest in you? Why beat around the

NICODEMUS (Continued) bush: your son doesn't interest me any more either. Just one more minute and he won't interest. . .

FATHER But, but. . .

NEWBORN (Enters) Good day, my dear father and my dear foster-father. Nice weather we're having.

FATHER Why did you come back, son?

NEWBORN Because. One just comes back. Don't you remember your own manhood years? Mr. Vice-president, may I have a word with you?

NICODEMUS What is it?

NEWBORN Life is hard. How much do I owe you?

NICODEMUS A piddling amount. Five thousand pesetas, without interest. If you won't pay by the first of the month, I'll have you dispossessed.

NEWBORN What should I do? Please consider my dire situation. I can't even pay the midwife.

NICODEMUS I am bothered by my wife's gallstones. She keeps waking up at nights and cries for a long time.

NEWBORN I lost twenty-two pounds in a month. Lend me a hundred crowns.

FATHER (Breaks into a bloodcurdling laugh) Be damned, filthy competition! I'm shoved out of everywhere. I shall get out of this earthly existence. (Exit)

NICODEMUS What about your dear mother?

NEWBORN Passed away. And here I am, an orphan like a lily-of-the-valley on the North pole. The birds fly slower now. What is happening to me?

NICODEMUS And your honored father?

NEWBORN The sun doesn't shine, I'm not hungry. Lately I have not been hungry. Why do I eat if I'm not hungry? (Screaming) You understand sir, I am NOT hungry any more. Why do I love when I don't like to love? Please lend me ten crowns.

NICODEMUS I won't. Any other wishes?

NEWBORN You won't?

NICODEMUS No.

NEWBORN You'll die, scoundrel! You took away the best years of my manhood, you lured me into your net like a goldfinch whistling gaily. And now, at the dusk of my desires, you leave me in the dark. You'll die, you miserable scoundrel! (He threatens NICODEMUS with his gun. NICODEMUS flees slowly, with deliberate steps; NEWBORN pursues him in the same manner. NICODEMUS sits on a chair.)

NICODEMUS It's raining. I'll give you a thousand gold pieces if you promise. . .

NEWBORN Anything. . .

NICODEMUS . . .if you promise to provide the strictest moral upbringing for your male or female child who's about to be born. I am the vice-president and chairman of the board of Ethical Race and Soulennobling Ltd. We

NICODEMUS (Continued) are on the threshold of a new era. We are in need of disrespectful, atheistic, revolutionary citizens. Do you understand?

NEWBORN You're asking for the impossible. I'm no holy Joe or slavetrader.

NICODEMUS Sorry, in that case. . .

NEWBORN You are sucking my blood, my very blood. Ask me for anything else, anything. . .

NICODEMUS Sorry, no deal. (Puts his hat on)

NEWBORN Should I deny my thousand-year-old moral upbringing that I received with the taste of honey and in the shadow of gallows? And my beloved wife. . .

NICODEMUS Deny her, forget her! Besides, you no longer interest me. If you don't accept my offer. . .

NEWBORN What should I do? Time has taught me to respect the law. I feel that nothing is changeable. And now should I raise my son to be a rebel?

NICODEMUS Have you forgotten your own youth?

NEWBORN (Yelling) Yes indeed, I've forgotten it! You really think I could live if I hadn't? You really think I could die if I didn't forget it? Never!

NICODEMUS The firm which I direct makes absolutely certain that our business orientation is constantly on the correct course. If we were to disregard the new circumstances of the day, we'd go bankrupt. (Yelling) What the hell do you think? But what are we arguing about? If you don't accept my offer. . .

NEWBORN I accept. But my curses on you!

NICODEMUS That doesn't matter. I hereby take moral and material possession of your esteemed male or female child about to be born. Here is my check. (Check appears on the screen.)

NEWBORN Well then, I'm going. I'd love to sit down on a rock and howl, but it's snowing.

NICODEMUS Dear cousin. Why not set an example. Here, take this hat when you go out on the street. (Hands NEWBORN a straw hat.)

NEWBORN A strawhat? But it's snowing.

NICODEMUS Precisely because it is snowing. Get out there in the snow with a strawhat on; that is it: Down with social conventions! We are suffocating in the leaden air of obsolete conventions. Down with all forbidden trees!

NEWBORN What are you yelling for? A strawhat will soak through in the snow. Dear cousin, for a vice-president you behave like a kitten.

NICODEMUS Just leave that to me. Let's go. (Exeunt)

1st PUPPET Difficult birth. How much longer, doctor?

2nd PUPPET This damn' cough's choking me.

3rd PUPPET What will it be, doctor, boy or girl?

4th PUPPET This is poor Stefanie's first birth.

5th PUPPET Life is short.

6th PUPPET I wonder how much it'll weigh.

7th PUPPET My mother weighed six pounds. True: she was born in a car.

8th PUPPET How much longer, doctor?

9th PUPPET Stefanie is a Szentirmay girl. No Szentirmay girl ever gave birth to anything under eleven pounds.

10th PUPPET Why is the sun shining; the stars have disappeared.

1st PUPPET How much longer, doctor?

2nd PUPPET The other day I was strolling in a park of aspen trees when suddenly. . .

3rd PUPPET . . .the cook broke in on me. . .

4th PUPPET Every pregnant woman wakes with name of Semmelweis on her lips.

5th PUPPET . . .and under the glorious light of the stars. . .

6th PUPPET . . .she yelled at me: I'm giving you notice as of the first!

7th, 8th and 9th PUPPETS How much longer, doctor?

10th PUPPET (Making like a trumpet) Ten past three. The child is born. Mother and child are doing well. Weight: twelve pounds. Meeting in the smoking room. This damn' cough is choking me.

1st PUPPET Go ahead, after you.

(All heads sink. 1st NEWBORN is brought in by two men. They lay him down on a couch. He is dead. He holds a straw hat in one hand. Instead of his head there is a huge skull on his shoulders. The two men leave.)

1st NEWBORN (Slowly sits up) Boy, am I full. Looks like I'm dead. (He looks around in the room. There is silence for a few seconds, then: another giant baby enters from behind the scenes.)

2nd NEWBORN Behold, I am bo..bo..born. Behold, I'm born. It was da..da..dark, it became lah,.lah..light. That's sunshine over there. The sun is a heavenly body. Where am I? I am in a room. The room is in a house. How does sunshine get into the room? Through gl..gl..glass. I'll go through the glass, too. I'll pick up the room. I'll lift up the house. I'll eat this table. (Reaches for table which glides away from him) I'll eat the chair. (Chair glides away) I'm hungry. I am hungry. I see no people. Why am I alone?

1st NEWBORN Son, why are you talking so fast?

2nd NEWBORN Well, who is this?

1st NEWBORN I am your father. Your father's corpse, to be exact. I died when you came into this world.

2nd NEWBORN You died in childbirth?

1st NEWBORN No, that was your grandmother. They beat me to death.

2nd NEWBORN (Takes a step forward) My dear father, why did they beat you to death?

1st NEWBORN Slow down, slow down. I'm getting dizzy. Why these quick and purposeless movements? Sit down!

2nd NEWBORN I can't sit down. Why don't you get up instead?

1st NEWBORN I can't get up. Can't you see I'm dead? The infuriated crowd beat me to death on the street. Because I was wearing a straw hat in the snow. Son, never wear a straw hat in the winter.

2nd NEWBORN But I will. All the time. What kind of nonsense is that? I can't be beaten to death. Trara, trara, trara. What's this? (He points at the straw hat.)

1st NEWBORN Why are you shouting?

2nd NEWBORN I can't hear you. What's that in your hand? Give it here, let me eat it.

1st NEWBORN Son, when you grow up take care of your grey-haired mother. I'll be lying cold in my grave and lilies will grow round my headstone.

2nd NEWBORN I've got a mother too; and I should take care of her? Have you gone crazy? Go, fly away!

1st NEWBORN I can't fly. How many times do I have to tell you: I'm dead.

2nd NEWBORN When did you die?

1st NEWBORN Just now.

2nd NEWBORN And you were alive before that? I don't believe it.

1st NEWBORN And why should I fly away?

2nd NEWBORN And you knew how to fly before? I don't believe it. I don't believe that you were ever alive. Who's stupid enough to die if he's already alive. Well, I'm leaving. Ta ta.

1st NEWBORN Wait a little. Why are you leaving?

2nd NEWBORN I can't stand in one place. Everything is moving around me. The birds with strong wings are swimming fast in the air, and the ground is trembling under my feet. Can't you hear the grass grow? Animals howl and flowers sway in the wind. Let's dance! (Starts dancing)

1st NEWBORN We are lying under the ground. Everything is motionless like the cold, autumn-smelling earth that fills the mouths of the dead. The air stands still, the water stands still, and at the bottom of the water stand motionless our souls. We stand still and know nothing: this is life.

2nd NEWBORN I don't believe it.

1st NEWBORN You have cramps, are you raving? Take care, this cramp will last only a second, then you'll be laid out. A brief cramp in the cracks of eternal motionlessness; and you're happy about that? Silence before you and silence after you; who will hear your shouts? A waste of breath.

2nd NEWBORN I don't believe it. My dear father, I have a feeling that you are rather dumb. This one shout is longer than your long silence. I hear a voice here, a shout there; I hear a laugh--I can't hear silence. A little silence in the cracks of a round-dance: and you're happy about that? Adieu, au revoir, I'm leaving.

1st NEWBORN Think it over son, I say it's not worth it to live.

2nd NEWBORN Why?

1st NEWBORN It's unpleasant to live.

2nd NEWBORN Is it more pleasant to die? Come on, I don't even believe that it's possible to die. You're the victim of a big mistake. By the way, tell me your life story.

1st NEWBORN I killed my mother when I was born.

2nd NEWBORN Not a mean accomplishment for a baby.

1st PUPPET [MOTHER] No hard feelings, son. I've even forgotten that I ever lived.

1st NEWBORN Right after that I managed to put my father into a rather critical situation. Midwives and doctors were threatening his mental balance with sharp, pointed bills and accounts.

FATHER (Enters) That's right. And what did I get out of it? A cream-colored tie. I'm a schlemiel. (He dances, most likely a foxtrott)

2nd NEWBORN (To FATHER) Are you angry at your son?

FATHER I hate him. (Continues to dance)

1st NEWBORN I killed a collector. True, it was nothing because I was still young.

2nd PUPPET [COLLECTOR] Why are they bugging me all the time? I lie comfortably stretched out on the coarse, soft grains of earth. I often think of that young killer there--with gratitude.

2nd NEWBORN You mean you didn't like living.

2nd PUPPET [COLLECTOR] Leave me alone! I didn't even live.

LIONTAMER (Enters, with whip) And here I am. This gentleman here. . .

1st NEWBORN I believe I ruined this gentleman. He based his material success on my youth, forgetting that youth is short-lived: here today, gone tomorrow.

LIONTAMER (Screaming) You ruined me! You robbed me. You promised miracles; they never happened. Where is the two-headed lion?

3rd PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] Louie, Louie, my one and only Louis!

1st NEWBORN This woman killed herself over me. She drowned herself in the Dniester, a Russian river.

2nd NEWBORN Why did she go all the way to Russia for that?

3rd PUPPET [FEMALE VOICE] How Should I know? But does it matter? I am lying here among the graves and know nothing. Louie, my dear friend, what is my name?

POLICEMAN (Enters) What kind of gathering is this? (To 1st NEWBORN) What's this, you're dead? I don't know you. The licence is revoked, understand? You can't always have lunch with ministers of the interior; goddamn' your skull, you animal! (Kicks 1st NEWBORN)

4th PUPPET [AUNT] When you ran off to the North pole my heart broke and now I am lying here. Where is the North pole, I don't know. . .

RELATIVE (An uncle, enters) Ho, ho, that my dear, nobody knows. I became a widower because of you, you sad ox. I'd write you out of my will, if I had one.

5th PUPPET [STRANGER, FEMALE VOICE] You don't know me, although you are the indirect cause of my demise. It was summer, the sun was shining. You were walking innocently on Drum street when you kicked a pebble which rolled away hurting my dog's leg. The dog bit my husband who in turn beat the dog. The sight of this gave me a heart attack, sincerely yours, your grateful victim, Malvin.

6th PUPPET [STRANGER, MALE VOICE] I broke my neck when I slipped on your foot-print in the winter snow. But where are the snows of yesteryear?

7th PUPPET [STRANGER, MALE VOICE] I was the son of the former speaker. I died because I was an orphan.

8th PUPPET [STRANGER, FEMALE VOICE] . . .and I contracted syphilis from a friend of your friend, and expired in the women's ward at St. Stephen Hospital.

9th and 10th PUPPETS [MALE AND FEMALE VOICES] We starved to death--thank God--so that you could live.

STEFANIE (Enters wailing) And I shall starve to death too, hangman of my life, lying here with mockingly silent lips and cold breasts; but who will suckle our only child? You beast of prey, starting a family, then recklessly sacrificing your life for a straw hat. Perish! Out of my sight!

1st NEWBORN (To 2nd NEWBORN) Well, you see, son?

CHORUS OF PUPPETS You see?

1st NEWBORN Come to us young man. Or would you rather kill, break hearts, ruin careers, spread syphilis, so that in the end you could fall into your grave: a syphylitic with a broken heart and a ruined, ruined career. And all that sixty years later? Why kill when it's possible to die; why suffer when it's possible to die; why be happy when it's possible to die?

CHORUS OF PUPPETS Die!

STEFANIE (Raving, screeches) Shut up, shut, shut up you wild beasts whose eyes have been chewed out by worms; your marrow and spit have been soaked up by the dirt and now you float in nothingness, and you still bark with no voices, your frothing tongues hang out of nothingness; carrion of carrions: drop dead again and again! Son, my only son, stay with me. It's warm here, I'll give you milk to drink, you can hide under my armpits; how the summer-woods rustle in this wind that whirls and twines our hairs together. I am your mother--don't go away!

1st NEWBORN Stefanie, be quiet! The modern child has the right to decide for himself.

STEFANIE I won't be quiet. Help! They want to take away my child. Help!

RELATIVE (Uncle) This is a bit too much.

LIONTAMER This cannot go on.

FATHER My dear daughter-in-law, have no fear while I am here.

POLICEMAN I believe this is inciting to murder. (Yelling) The dead should shut up!

STEFANIE (Yelling) Help! They want to take away my child. Help!

RELATIVE (Uncle) This is a bit too much.

LIONTAMER This cannot go on.

FATHER My dear daughter-in-law, have no fear while I am here.

POLICEMAN The dead should shut up.

STEFANIE (Yelling) Help! They want to take away my child. Help!

RELATIVE (Uncle) This is a bit too much.

LIONTAMER This cannot go on.

FATHER My dear daughter-in-law, have no fear while I am here.

POLICEMAN The dead should shut up.

STEFANIE (Yelling) Help! They want to take away my child. Help!

RELATIVE (Uncle) This is a bit too much!

LIONTAMER This cannot. . .

1st NEWBORN (Slowly sits up) . . .go on, my dear daughter-in-law, have no fear while I am here; the dead should shut up; help, they want to take away my child. . . aren't you bored with this yet? Don't you see you keep saying the same thing?

2nd NEWBORN That's true.

1st NEWBORN That's life. What's the sense of this? My dear son, believe me. . .

STEFANIE Help! They want to take away my child. Help!

LIONTAMER This cannot. . .

RELATIVE (Uncle) This is really too much.

NICODEMUS (Enters) What's going on? What's this noise all about?

POLICEMAN (Steps forward) Well sir, this corpse here claims...

CHORUS OF PUPPETS . . .aims, aims.

POLICEMAN . . .that life is not worth it.

CHORUS OF PUPPETS . . .earth it. . .earth it.

POLICEMAN Should I arrest them?

1st NEWBORN Die!

CHORUS OF PUPPETS Die! All of you!

STEFANIE (Yelling) Help!

FATHER, LIONTAMER, RELATIVE, POLICEMAN (in unison) Help! Help!

NICODEMUS (Holding his ears) Quiet! After all I am the Vicepresident. What kind of noise is this?

1st NEWBORN You see how angry these living are, all of them. Still, they don't want to die.

NICODEMUS That's only natural.

POLICEMAN And these stinking dead ones don't want to live.

NICODEMUS That's only natural. Gentlemen, stop fighting. Don't forget that you couldn't live without each other. Don't forget that you couldn't die without each other.

1st NEWBORN I will ask one more time: What was the point of my life?

1st PUPPET [MOTHER] That I should die in childbirth?

2nd PUPPET [COLLECTOR] That I should die while collecting money?

3rd PUPPET [WOMAN] That I should die of love?

4th PUPPET [AUNT] That I should die with a broken heart?

5th PUPPET [STRANGER] That I should die of sunshine?

6th PUPPET [STRANGER] That I should die of a snowflake?

7th PUPPET [STRANGER] That I should die as an orphan?

8th PUPPET [STRANGER] That I should die in St. Stephen Hospital?

9th and 10th PUPPETS [STRANGERS] That we should die of starvation?

1st NEWBORN That's right. And I ask you: what was the point of my dying?

LIONTAMER That you leave me here with my ruined business?

FATHER That you leave me here with a cream-colored tie?

STEFANIE That you leave me here with my orphaned child?

POLICEMAN That we might wear straw hats in the winter?

1st NEWBORN Nicodemus, answer them!

CHORUS OF LIVING An-swer them!

CHORUS OF PUPPETS An-swer them!

(Silence. The scene darkens. After a few seconds a spot falls on a platform revealing NICODEMUS and 2nd NEWBORN)

NICODEMUS (In the voice of a barker) Step right up ladies and gentlemen, here you can see Maud the wonderbaby who died only a half an hour ago and is already reborn.

NICODEMUS (Continued) He weighs three-hundred pounds, all brains, all character and it's growing by the minute like a real baby. The child is of real flesh and blood, come and see for yourself, ladies and gentlemen; this is no magic, no hot air; this is true as your presence here. You can touch it, you can grab it; you can beat it to death, you can cut it in half: this baby will live on, this baby is of the highest quality. Step right up and in, ladies and gentlemen, everyone can see for himself that this baby is immortal, this is the greatest miracle ever, this is the greatest gift to mankind. If you pick it up it cries, if you put it down it cries, it cries, cries all the time, and keeps on living. This is the best brand ladies and gentlemen, this one never dies. Step right up, ladies and gentlemen. . .

POLICEMAN (Enters running) The licence is revoked. How many times do I have to tell you. . . . ..

C U R T A I N

NEWBORN (Runs across the stage in front of the curtain) Mommy, suckle me.

APPENDIX E

Miklós Mészöly

THE WINDOW WASHER

A burlesque-tragedy in one act

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Translated by Imre Goldstein

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t h e p l a y e r s

the window washer

tommy

anny, his wife

the Super

nushy, his wife

two stage-hands

(Soft jazz in stereo welcomes the audience. The style of jazz is not uniform; it is a mixture; what is important is that it should suggest something of what is to follow: the action of the play will take place sometime and somewhere in our day. A poster-curtain slowly descends. It is a crowded montage of abstract and painfully naturalistic pictures and images. Most of the pictures are supplementary to the desired atmosphere. They might include the following: superstructure of a bridge, a palm tree, tracks of a tank, a prize-winning swine with her young, naked female thighs, truncated skyscrapers over the ocean, a toilet bowl, a speaker's lectern, part of a ruined city, the statue of Marcus Aurelius, back of a bull-necked man's head, fists held high, etc. Not in the center, but at conspicuous locations: a gas station pump with coiling hoses; a large window-frame with the glass broken in the middle. Various signs throughout, but only two segments should be more or less legible: "Windex, a classic by now," and "Long live the Future!"

The poster-curtain rolls up, and with it the music fades out. Silence.

The stage is almost dark.

On the right: a large, multi-paned window. It rises at an angle and leans a bit to the front. Light from distant neon signs filters through the window. In this reddish semi-darkness we can make out the contours of a sofa on the left. Tommy and Anny, both in pajamas, are lying on the sofa, asleep, their bodies intertwined. Soft whistling is heard from outside. In a short while, from the center of the black cyclorama, a sharp spotlight -- like a burglar's flashlight -- scans the stage. It stops for a moment on the sofa. Tommy, sleepy and disheveled, sits up, puts a hesitant hand in front of his face to block the light, then hugs Anny again. The spot moves away, scanning other parts of the stage, then

goes out. The whistling grows stronger, we almost expect the whistler to walk in. In a few seconds, the spot returns, after a brief search discovers the couple again.
Tommy, after the light has gone out again, gets up angrily, picks up a pink and gold, flower-patterned screen and places it next to the sofa in a semicircular line. Then, as if driven by a delayed suspicion, he cautiously goes to the window, looks out; goes to the rear, to the center of the cyclorama where the spot came from, and listens. In the meantime the stage lights up.
Tommy, reassured, comes forward, but before he begins to speak, he adjusts the screen.)

TOMMY A screen. . .old and frayed, but still serving you. I don't know if you've noticed how stubbornly certain objects resist the iron teeth of time. Great-grandma dies, grandma dies too, mother passes away. . .it doesn't matter. These hardy belongings would probably survive another Noah's flood. They wind up in the attic, get thrown down into the cellar, then up in the attic again; they get buried under an uncle's suitcase, old stovepipes, and God knows what else. . .it doesn't matter. Suddenly they work themselves up to the top, and get discovered all over again: phoo, phoo, phoo, this is not so dusty, not bad at all. Look: a screen! (He looks at the screen musingly.) Not so dusty. . . Just think: how many people have gotten undressed behind this screen! How many generations! What history! Busts and hips. . .the measure-

TOMMY ments change a bit, but otherwise. . . You know, these philosophizing sessions at dawn have a great advantage: at least they're frank. You're lying there. . .then all of a sudden you wake with a start. At first you don't even know where you are, you only know that you're alone: so alone that you cannot be taken advantage of in any way, and you cannot be spied on. . . Nothing is worth more than to believe that this is so. And then we chatter, chatter all the while, in thought only, of course; fiddling with our navel. . .pull the cover off our beloved, the garbage truck rumbles by the window. "Oh, no," we say, "it's too early -- besides, what do I care? Leave me alone. I pay my taxes, I give the right of way. . ." (Moves, with pathos) Just this one dream, please let us have just this one little dream: our screen has not a whole in it yet. This tiny ark on the crest of mighty waves. . . (Puts his hands together as if in prayer) I beg of you, mighty hurricane, please find something else to smash. . . I got married two years ago, my wife is a forever-blooming flower and the nights are so short. The nights are always shorter than they should be. . . (Longer pause) Perhaps I've gone too far. You may not be interested in this at all. I certainly don't want to spoil your Sunday. It's precious to me, too. All week long I collect the paint with which to color Sunday red.

TOMMY Last night my wife asked: "Sweetheart, why is Sunday a red-letter day?" --You see, this is it. These clever little dumb questions. This is where happiness is. One would never ask questions like these in company. At best you'd laugh at them. But in bed, at home. . . If you could only hear me at times like this! God, the things I can come up with! "Bunny-hunch of mine, sweet pussycat; you are the dazzlingest lotus; heliotropes open only for you, and so do the milkwood and daisies; you have no equal in the decimal system, but say not a word now, not just now; some day I shall explain to you the entire new physical panorama of the universe, the mystery of flying saucers; what the newspapers are writing about these things is nothing but baloney; believe only me, then you won't go wrong. . . You believe me don't you?" I don't want to brag, but we're really happy. For my wife I write all the editorials, and I think the newspapers ought to be proud of me. And she actually reads my editorials: "Sunday is a red-letter day, darling, because on Sunday you don't have to deal with the mailman, the salesman, the super, not even a detective or messenger-boy, in a word: no one. And if the sun hits your tummy too early, then all you do is set up this screen that belonged to Aunt Irma, poor Aunt Irma, may she rest in peace, like all those who shed their blood and died, because it is their

TOMMY blood that painted Sunday red. Amen." (Looks at his watch) Five-thirty. It's a sin to get up this early. Say. . .could I ask you something? Do you like kissing at dawn? I must admit. . .I. . .(Pause) . . .Well, yes. That's not quite appropriate. (Pause) But the thing is. . .somehow happiness is not real if we can't talk about it. (Softly) To say that my sweet one is slowly waking up. . .the butterfly of dawn is still on her lips, this is how the poets say it, a tiny droplet of saliva: an infinitesimal jewel . . .and she: so defenseless! A snail without her house. No, this is not quite nice. . .(Shrugs) But, I'm no poet, after all. Only an actor. Well, that's something too, isn't it? I'd be so glad to open myself up to you, wide, wide! --but don't make me confess, I can't stand being interrogated! If you think you can hold me up to the light like some kind of a . . . (From behind the screen we hear ANNY as she wakes, stretches with small noises of pleasure; one of her legs showing at the end of the screen.) Coming, I'm coming sweetheart! (Starts, then turns back) But please, all of you, pray for us. I give you my word that I've paid my taxes, voted, paid the gas bill, I didn't kill anybody in the war, I'm against the spread of atomic weapons, and I want people to love each other, and hate only with good reason. Pray for us. (Brief pause, he motions behind the

TOMMY screen, then winks at the audience.) We'll do our duty. (Goes behind screen, lies down.)

(Music. The same jazz we heard before. Music gets softer; the former whistling is heard again. Spot on the cyclorama. Presently the WINDOW WASHER's head appears in the spotlight. He looks around, continues to whistle. With his hands in his pockets, he comes into the room through the opening in the cyclorama. He carries a cylindrical package wrapped in newspaper. He is about forty, healthy looking, rosy cheeked. His clothes: blue jacket, yellow pants, bow-tie. He belongs in that peculiar species of bar patrons who are able, single-handedly, to entertain all those present; they stroll from table to table, a drink permanently clutched in one hand, and manage to flick their ashes on somebody else's sleeves. He stops at center, very deliberately puts his package on the floor; moving comfortably he takes off his jacket and hangs it on the window. He adjusts it, so it hangs very neatly. Over his loud, checked shirt he wears wide, black suspenders. Returns to his package, opens it on the floor and produces a large piece of soft deerskin.)

WINDOW WASHER Deerskin. (He shows skin to audience, then shows its reverse side.) Empty, nothing in it. (He points to two holes in the skin.) This is where the bullet entered, this is where it came out. Then the skinning, tanning, softening, etcetera. . . Nothing happens all of a sudden, everything takes time. But now it is perfect. So velvety it's a joy to squeeze it. . . (Pokes his fingers through the holes.) This is where the bullet entered, this is where it came

WINDOW WASHER out. . . Pardon me, I've said that already. (Throws deerskin over his shoulder and exits through slit in cyclorama.)

TOMMY (Comes out from behind the screen. Walks downstage, stops. Aloud.) Who is that? -- Who's that? (Grabs his head.) I couldn't have left the door open, could I? (He starts upstage, but notices jacket on the window. Rushes over, looks at it, then touches it, turns it around.) Holy God! A real jacket! (Quickly he goes through the pockets.) Empty, nothing in it. (A bit dumbly) I think I've heard this somewhere before . . . Or did I dream it? (Hurries to the screen.) Anny, my sweet little Anny. . .don't move. . .stay put! A real jacket. . .an alien jacket! (In a changed tone) Nothing to worry about; she's asleep. Afterwards she always sleeps, the little angel. . . (He turns around and notices the newspaper on the floor. Cautiously he squats down, looks at it with great interest, then picks it up and gets lost in reading it. At first hesitantly, then more and more involved; he's reading it excitedly.) . . .in the southern provinces a check was made of early spring unemployment, a gala dinner was given in their honor and they raised the industrial railroads' supplementary budget by thirty percent, according to the latest directives on style, but as the report revealed, a short while later she passed away, she'll be buried this afternoon, more

TOMMY than three thousand seven hundred twenty-five different kinds of mirrors were found in her apartment, a neglected actress, she has no heirs, although she was the greatest, the one and only, but she could not see how a crowd of over one hundred thousand was marching and protesting; the bridges, all the bridges have been blown up in the Congo and they discovered it even there; according to the experts this is even more inexhaustible, and as we reported it yesterday, the world's largest monument will be built to commemorate this event, because, as Varro has already said: those who erected the first statue for the people had put an end to the fear of their fellow citizens and merely increased their directionless ways, closely tied with the ideas of Marcus Aurelius according to which it is difficult to determine when were more people killed: before, so that victory would be won, or after, because victory was already won; the bishop spoke of this himself, and the conference declared that the loaded but unfired weapon is the war of the future, oh, understand gentlemen, we were closer to one another when spears cracked between the ribs of our fellow men, but only in film museums can we see an honest-to-goodness cavalry charge, children admitted free; the announcement calls on all those who were born via artificial insemination: you must report for a check-up in the Central Health Laboratory in ten years. . .(TOMMY drops

TOMMY the newspaper and looks dumbly at the floor. Whistling gayly, the WINDOW WASHER appears in the rear. TOMMY jumps up, stares at the stranger.)

WINDOW WASHER (Cheerfully) Good morning.

TOMMY Who are you? How did you get in here?

WINDOW WASHER Come on, let's not start with that. Just tell me where you keep the bucket. It's not where it used to be. A year ago it was still in the kitchen, under the counter. Now I can't find it. You run some house, let me tell you!

TOMMY I resent that! Besides. . .What the. . .What do you think this. . .The jacket is yours too?

WINDOW WASHER You're funny. What did you think: I came with an assistant? Come on, where is the bucket?

TOMMY I won't tell you.

WINDOW WASHER You haven't got a bucket?

TOMMY Right.

WINDOW WASHER It got ruined, eh?

TOMMY Right.

WINDOW WASHER All right. In that case I'll borrow one from the super. (Laughs, starts out.)

TOMMY (Going after him) Don't you go around borrowing things in my name, you hear? . . .Besides, what kind of madness is this?

WINDOW WASHER (Turns back) Why, have you got a better solution?

TOMMY What are you doing here, that's what I want to know!

WINDOW WASHER At the moment: looking for a bucket. And a ladder, perhaps. Unfortunately it can't be done without that. That's how I'll always start.

TOMMY (Restraining himself) Really?. . .

WINDOW WASHER (Strolls back to TOMMY) Look. . . I understand that you find this whole thing somewhat unusual -- and I am to be blamed for this a little bit too, but you know at this hour, early in the morning I'm so much in the swing of things. . . oh, you got off at the wrong side of the bed, I can see that. . . But I promise I won't be disturbing you for too long. (Confidentially) Do you mind if I ask you a question? (TOMMY listens angrily.) You people never borrow anything from each other? I don't mean big things. . . but still. . .this or that, whatever. . .after all a person is a person! And two persons are. . .

TOMMY Cut out the double-talk! What are you doing here? That's all I want to know!

WINDOW WASHER Haven't you even the foggiest?

TOMMY No, I haven't.

WINDOW WASHER I'm amazed. And you, an intelligent man. You don't start out by throwing things at me; you inquire . . .you'd like to clarify things. (Jovially) Not like your super, no sir. He's really something. He didn't say anything, but did he give me a suspicious look when I walked into the house? He acted as if he didn't know me. But you. . .I know you recognized me.

WINDOW WASHER (Holds out his hands.) Perhaps from my handshake?. . .

TOMMY (Almost hypnotized, shakes hands) Glad to know you. (Angry silence)

WINDOW WASHER (Smiling) I see you've calmed down a bit.

TOMMY Wrong. I haven't calmed down.

WINDOW WASHER Doesn't matter. You will. You're only nervous because your memory has failed you.

TOMMY (Almost bursts out, but forces himself to be calm) There's nothing wrong with my memory. Besides, I think it's about time we stopped this foolishness. If you haven't already noticed, this is a private residence. Have you any idea what that means? P r i v a t e r e s i d e n c e ! Mine.

WINDOW WASHER Of course. Who said it wasn't? What are you so concerned about? I'm not moving in.

TOMMY Don't you tell me what I should be concerned about. You see this key? (He pulls key out of his pyjama pocket.) This is mine also. Could you tell me how did you get into this apartment without a key?

WINDOW WASHER That I couldn't. I haven't got a key. So help me God. I knocked and the door opened all by itself. I was even glad, I said to myself: I could let him go on sleeping in his sleepy-by. . .

TOMMY (Furious) Let him do what?

WINDOW WASHER Excuse me. . . Well, you sure there's no

WINDOW WASHER bucket? Because then I have to go get one.
(Starts out, TOMMY pulls him back.)

TOMMY You're staying right here!

WINDOW WASHER Don't worry, I won't run away.

TOMMY What do you want with that bucket?

WINDOW WASHER You see! If you really didn't know why I came that's what you should have started with. But you do know. . .and you remember me too. Wouldn't it be simpler if we talked openly? I really wouldn't want to criticize the way you run your house, but I'd think it's impossible to live with such dirty windows. They've got to be washed. (Pause)

TOMMY (Aghast) They've got to be what?

WINDOW WASHER Washed.

TOMMY So then. . .you're. . .

WINDOW WASHER Yes.

TOMMY The windows.

WINDOW WASHER Why not. . .seeing that I'm here already. . . I've got plenty of time.

TOMMY But. . .how did you think of this? Did anybody call you? Did you talk to my wife?

WINDOW WASHER There's nothing to talk about. Even the blind can see that I'm needed here.

TOMMY (Derisive) I see. So then, am I to understand that you simply broke in here, into my own apartment?

WINDOW WASHER (Laughing) Now that's going a little too far. I was looking, and. . .this is where I found. . .(With

WINDOW WASHER a small gesture he points all around, not leaving out the audience.)

TOMMY (Aside) If I could figure out where I know him from, he looks so familiar. . .the voice, the face. . . Some Sunday morning. . .

WINDOW WASHER (Blase) Boy, is it beautiful outside!

TOMMY (Surprised) What did you say?

WINDOW WASHER I said it's beautiful outside.

TOMMY So? What is that supposed to do to me.

WINDOW WASHER (Smiling) Put you in a better mood. (Gets serious, speaks more softly.) By the way, you are really mistaken if you think I came only for the sake of "theatre." Not at all. (Points to the audience.) This is only a kind of dressing. . . You don't have to take it seriously. Besides the whole thing may not be true at all, perhaps there isn't any. . . (Falls silent) I really came to see you two. (A longer pause. He breaks into a short laugh.) Of course, it's not a bad game when you just sort of imagine a full house, a stage, the exits with those little red lights. . . they are terribly important, the exits, without them the whole thing is no good. . . and then just soliloquize, and play, just like on the stage. . .

TOMMY (Nervous) Where do you get all this?

WINDOW WASHER (Casually) I don't know. . . (Continues in his former tone.) Of course that is not bad for entertainment. . . only. . .it's a little dangerous. No

WINDOW WASHER comparison, no feedback. . .only the little master. Well, it's just not the real thing. Stays in the family.

TOMMY (Choked) So? You were eavesdropping?

WINDOW WASHER Not that. . . I just didn't want to interrupt you. I waited outside the door until you finished. (Confidentially) By the way, that screen-monologue is not bad at all. Is it from an old role, or did you improvise the whole thing?

TOMMY None of your business!

WINDOW WASHER All right, all right. I was merely inquiring. It's all right to inquire, isn't it?

TOMMY (Very proper) My dear Sir! If you did not know, this is Sunday morning. . .

WINDOW WASHER I know, that's why I'm here.

TOMMY (Louder) And at such times I prefer to be alone when I s o l i l o q u i z e, as you so aptly put it.

WINDOW WASHER (Waves his hand) Telling me? I know my clients. They could not climb out of their own skins, change. . . especially all by themselves. Even with the help, and guidance of somebody else. . .

TOMMY Like you, for example.

WINDOW WASHER Like me, for example.

TOMMY (Flabbergasted) Wonderful! (Aside) Pushier than a salesman.

WINDOW WASHER (Patting TOMMY's shoulder) Pardon me. . .what is your name? Tommy? (Silence) Well, . . .well?

WINDOW WASHER (TOMMY is silent, angry.) You see, even that fits. . . And you wanted me to believe that I came to the wrong place. (After a short pause) But, somehow I was never lucky with you two. When I was here a year ago. . .

TOMMY (Snapping) Not here, you weren't! Never! I think we'd better make that clear right now.

WINDOW WASHER All right, let us make it clear. But at least reassure me that I'm not holding you up. . . I'll be through with the windows in no time.

TOMMY Great! And what else do you do? General cleaning, latrine-disinfecting, intrusion of privacy. . .

WINDOW WASHER (Laughs) Only on weekdays. The last one you mentioned I pursue only on weekdays. On Sunday I go wherever I know I'll be welcomed, where I am understood -- even if they wouldn't admit it.

TOMMY I've got to hand it to you, your technique is not bad at all, are you a salesman? (WINDOW WASHER shakes his head.) I was sure of it. (He walks around WINDOW WASHER, inspecting him as if he were on exhibition.) Who do you work for, anyway? A private firm? (WINDOW WASHER crosses his arms on his chest, and says: "uh-uh.") Federal agency? (More headshaking and "uh-uh-ing") Listen, if you're going to reach into your pocket and pull out some advertising. . .like I should use Windex Window Spray, or something, I really don't know what I'd do to you!

WINDOW WASHER (Shakes his head) I won't pull out anything.

TOMMY (Desperate) Of course, you'd be a fool to tell me before hand. (More quietly) You're lucky, you know that? The only reason that I don't. . . is that you're stronger than I am. The only sport I was ever any good at was ping-pong; even at that I always lost in the finals. (Properly and politely he continues.) Otherwise I would kick you out, believe me, I'd wrinkle you up like a newspaper. . . (Steps up to WINDOW WASHER, pulls away his suspenders, lets them snap back.) Do you know the book: <u>The Two of Us Are One</u>? (WINDOW WASHER "uh-uhs" a "no" answer.) It's not your kind of book. You wouldn't understand. It's a love story. About two youngsters. . .they've got nothing. . .even in a restaurant they sit on the same chair. . .all they've got is a covered baby-carriage they found at a railroad station. . .every afternoon they take a walk with the carriage. . .the carriage is empty but they always cross the street to be on the sunny side -- understand? That's what the book is all about. And then on page forty comes a picture, an advertisement: a gas pump with those disgusting hoses that make me want to puke. . .like an octopus -- understand -- and some lines about what I should do if I want to be happy. . . (Long pause. The two are looking at each other. WINDOW WASHER with arms crossed, stands motionless. TOMMY is coming closer to him.) You know what

TOMMY I did with that page forty? I tore it up and crumpled it up like this. (Shows it) It had no place there, just ruined the story. Do you understand?

WINDOW WASHER (Puts his hands into his pockets) Perfectly. But our case is different. If you allow me. . . (Begins pacing) You two somehow found your way into my heart. This is no sentimentality or intrusion. . . at least I'd like you not to take it that way. Most people think that the work I do can be done on the side. On a house-call, After all what skill does it require. . .they ask. Anybody could do it. . . (Stops pacing) if he wants to. But most of them don't want to. Incredible, but that's the way it is. We have to seek out our own work, if we want to make a living . . . Don't misunderstand me, you two are an exception; even if you offered it I wouldn't take anything from you, except what I've got coming. You're very likable. (Resumes pacing) Whenever I pass your windows I feel a kind of warmth around my heart. . . You probably know the feeling. Occupational passion. I can hardly wait for May 17, when it's your turn.

TOMMY How do you mean?

WINDOW WASHER Just what I said: it's your turn. I was here exactly a year ago today.

TOMMY You're sure full of delusions!

WINDOW WASHER Possible. But without my delusions I'd die. I'm only a body, too; a body that needs nourishment. But if you listen to me, I'll clean all the windows, and I won't charge you for last year's job either.

TOMMY (Snaps) There's no last year's. Or this year's. Nothing. Don't you understand?

WINDOW WASHER (Phlegmatic) I understand. But last year when I was here you two weren't home.

TOMMY So! Sneaked into the apartment then too, just like now, did you?

WINDOW WASHER (Modestly) I knocked then too. And that's exactly what moved me: that your door opened so voluntarily. Is the lock old, or no good? That's really nonsense. . .but I saw a sign in this. You two need me. You live like doves. Quietly, isolated, just for one another. You think this can't be seen from the outside? And in here too. . .you can see it in every corner. (WINDOW WASHER bends down, somewhere at stage center, and looks toward the sofa as if he were peeping in through a door.) Your dear little wife's in the next room?

TOMMY (Nervously) What do you want there? Get away!

WINDOW WASHER How many windows in that room? Two?

TOMMY You have no right to peek.

WINDOW WASHER (With a little smile) I see you've got shades too. You trust so much in shades.

WINDOW WASHER (TOMMY stands, with outstretched arms, in front of WINDOW WASHER as if to cover a crack in the door.)

TOMMY Look, let us part in peace. Why bother each other? It was a neat trick, a wonderful joke, I admit. . . I even admit that there's something irresistible about you, in your free and easy ways, about your freshness. You've got imagination. . .only. . .you don't appreciate the imagination of others.

WINDOW WASHER This is great! I have never heard it put so directly from anybody. You actually mean. . .

TOMMY (Interrupting) I mean it the way it hurts you most.

WINDOW WASHER You think I am mad.

TOMMY I'd rather not decide in such matters.

WINDOW WASHER (Shrugs his shoulders) I'm sorry that you misunderstand me so much. I have only good intentions. (Suddenly) Aren't you cold in here? Look at these sad window-eyes. . . What a shame. . . What a glorious spring. . .outside. Don't force me to go all soft. (Effective silence and gesture) So then, does it really have to happen. . .that I should do my job against your wishes? (Pause)

TOMMY (Alarmed) Against our wishes?

WINDOW WASHER (Modestly, but meaningfully nodding his head) That's what I said. It's your turn. (Makes gesture to indicate his good intention.) And don't you think it's better if I do it. . .? It's better that way. . .

WINDOW WASHER Would you like someone else to come tomorrow? Someone without as much imagination as I have. Just picture it: they come crashing through the door, set up their ladder and go right to it. And they won't even have real deerskin. (Waving deerskin) This is still the real stuff, no imitation, no synthetic junk. This is where the bullet entered, this is where it came out. . . (Throws skin over his shoulder.)

TOMMY (With desperate uncertainty) But. . .but. . .who sent you?

WINDOW WASHER (Looks around, then conspiratorially beckons TOMMY) Come closer. Come on, don't be afraid, I'll whisper it into your ear.

(TOMMY, after a short hesitation steps up to WINDOW WASHER who leans over to whisper into his ears. They stand like this, motionless, while the sound of marching feet is heard, then a hollow, "umpahpah" of a march is struck up: an obnoxious parody of marches that suggest iron discipline. Suddenly TOMMY lets out an inarticulate scream, staggers backward and raises his hands into the air as one giving up. The music stops suddenly.)

WINDOW WASHER (Smiling) But not a word to anybody! Official secret. (After a short pause) Although it doesn't matter. You two are not the only ones. . . I've got plenty of customers. I guess I just say "official secret" out of habit. (With emphasis) But let's not talk about it anyway. . .period. Isn't it better this way? Why shout it to the world? (He smiles again.)

TOMMY (Still holding his hands up, stuttering) But now? Just now, on Sunday?. . .

WINDOW WASHER (Shaking his head) You're sure a stubborn man. Sunday, so what are we gonna do about it? It just happened to be Sunday, by accident. You think it would be better on a weekday? (TOMMY, hands still in the air, shakes his head.) So, you see? (He picks up newspaper and shows it to TOMMY.) Have you read it? 'Cause this is part of it, too. It's a few weeks old, but if you read it backwards it's quite fresh. (TOMMY reaches for the newspaper, then puts his hands up again, holding the paper. WINDOW WASHER puts his hands on TOMMY's shoulders.) I've got to get a bucket somewhere. Believe me, you'll agree in the end. And by tomorrow you'll forget this whole mess in here. The doves will fly out into the world . . . (Pathos in his voice, but very ambiguous) At first they lift their wings, trying them cautiously; the light is blinding. . .they must get used to not having solid ground under their feet. . .but then they fly, fly toward the uncertain certainty! -- and will remember their nest as some cramped cage. Well, well, heads up! Believe me all I need is your good will and intention, only that you two wanted it. I hate force. If all goes well, I promise I won't show for a whole year. (Starts out, turns back) Is the ladder in the attic? It was still there last year.

TOMMY (Confused) No. . .in the cellar.

WINDOW WASHER (Starts out, turns back again) In the big cellar?

TOMMY (Suddenly lowers his arms, screams) There's only one cellar! (Lifts up his arms again; repeats his words quietly.) There's only one cellar. . .

WINDOW WASHER (Jovial) Go ahead and scream. I'm used to it. You know what happened to me once? They threw a grenade at me. It's true. Luckily it was from the last world war. . .or it got rusty. It didn't go off. They kept it in the credenza. Funny custom, eh? (Starts out again, turns back) You've got no credenza? To clean and polish. . .?

TOMMY (Shakes his head) No. No credenza, not even a grenade. We've got nothing but what you see. (As if to himself.) And even this. . .as if, if. . .didn't belong to us already. . . (To WINDOW WASHER) Go on, go! Get the ladder.

WINDOW WASHER (With sympathy) I'll bring the ladder. And the bucket. (Wide gesture) You wanted it.

(WINDOW WASHER exits through opening in the cyclorama. TOMMY stares after him. In a little while TOMMY, with arms still in the air, begins to walk around, dizzily. Goes to the sofa, then to the window on which he draws lines in the dust. He suddenly notices the newspaper in his hands. Slowly he brings the paper before his eyes, turns it around, looks at it from all directions, then lowers himself onto the floor and, totally en-

grossed, reads the paper without having raised his head once throughout this whole process. A yawn is heard from behind the screen, followed by small movements. Oblivious, unbuttoned, with one pyjama leg up, the other down, ANNY appears, and stretches toward the audience. Rubs her eyes, chuckles, giggles)

ANNY That's really something! It's so funny. I dreamt I was in a theatre. We hardly ever go there any more. . . (Sighs) Tommy lost his contract five years ago. I don't really know what we've been living on since then. Five years is a long time. . .Boy, can my Tommy act! If you could only hear him or see him, just once! And you know how he was fired? (Short pause) One morning he was called into the office and the director said: "I'm sorry but there are no parts for you in our plays: You take yourself much too seriously." (With sentimental indignation) My God, is that a sin already? I don't want to interfere, I don't really know too much about these things; nobody asked my opinion, but one thing I know: Tommy never compromises. That is for sure. Not Tommy. (Short pause. She glances toward "the other room," and calls TOMMY but he does not move or say anything.) TOMMY!. . . TOMMY! (Pauses) Where could he be this long?. . .Oh, yes. . .he went down to the store for some rolls. But he should be here by now. . .he'll be here in a minute. (Looks around, lets out a small sigh.) And I haven't even started putting things away. (Busies herself around the sofa--

ANNY as if she were putting various objects away, but of course she just pokes around in the air, talking all the while, interrupting the "cleaning.") The place is small, but you've got a lot of cleaning to do just the same. Especially in the morning. . . But I like it. I like to fuss over the place. It's more like ours that way. (Smiles) The cutest thing about Tommy is that he's so clumsy at home. Leaves everything all over the place, drops things, breaks things, then he gets desperate over being clumsy. . . And does it again next time. (Stops, claps her hands.) And the things he invents: the other day he said: "Don't you ever forget sweetheart, that the two of us are a small universe." That's right. That's the kind of thing he usually says. And things like: "Always think, darling, that if this small universe blows up we'll be like a snail without its house, and we'll just be crawling all over the place and everything will stick to us: dirt, filth, and in the end we won't even recognize each other". . . Tommy's not a poet, but he can say these things beautifully. And he promised that when we'll have our little daughter. . . (Tilts her head, both hands on her stomach, then slides them up to her breasts.) . . .then he'll write fairy-tales for her. And we'll have a little private theatre, just for invited guests! (She stares softly somewhere)

ANNY and in every play I'll be the star. Our house is our playhouse. . . Who said that? (Musing) Who said. . . Sure it was Tommy, only he can say such lovely things. (Making a lot of rustling noise, TOMMY turns newspaper around and leans over it again, completely absorbed. ANNY listens to the noise, and holding up a finger, turns to audience.) I think he's coming! I thought I heard the door slam. . . (She runs to stage center, to the imaginary door, and leaning forward she peeks.) Peekaboo! Anny's hungry! (TOMMY does not move. ANNY walks toward him, stops behind him and bends down a little bit. Her voice is unsure.) Little Anny is hungry. . .

TOMMY (Slowly, stiffly, he lifts his head) Little Anny does not know anything yet.

ANNY (Alarmed) Tommy, what happened?

TOMMY (In a monotone, staring in front of him, as if he were reading a sentence) There's been a cuckoo-egg laid in our nest. The nest's perspectives are rather narrow, one must suffocate in it. The cuckoo-egg must be hatched along with our own eggs; this is demanded by our modern-day generosity. We have been chatting away and fooling ourselves, and now we must do penance. We thought that at least the ground was firm under our feet. But our views are dusty. As dusty as Aunt Irma's legacy. (Slowly he looks at ANNY.) Now you repeat what I've said.

ANNY (Terrified) What. . .how can you talk like that, Tommy? (Points to audience.) Look, so many people out there!

TOMMY (Looks at the audience, waves his hands, as if imitating the WINDOW WASHER) That is just the dressing.. . you don't have to take it seriously. If they're here, they're here. It's all by chance. We have nothing to hide from them.

ANNY (Desperately) But Tommy. . .before even you. . .just a little hour ago. . . (With a loving gesture indicates what she is referring to.)

TOMMY (Cutting in) We were playing a phoney comedy. Blind man's bluff; tag with a blindfold on. From now on we'll be shooting at a target, eyes open, and whoever manages to stay on longest shall have entry to a celestial land.

ANNY (Pulls back) You frighten me. . .I can't recognize you. . .

TOMMY (With sudden fatigue) I can't recognize myself either.

ANNY (Shaking TOMMY who is still kneeling) Come on, speak! What happened?

TOMMY (Stands up, points to the audience) They'll tell you. Since they're here, they might as well play the witness: they saw, they heard. . .and more likely to be less partial than me. Their turn is yet to come. (ANNY hesitantly turns toward the audience, stiffly

she looks over the rows of seats, then slowly, as one who has just heard a long explanation, puts her hand to her forehead.)

ANNY (Quietly) I don't understand. I don't understand a single word.

TOMMY That's how much I understand. But you had better resign yourself that that's the way it is. Plus--it all has a very deep meaning.

ANNY Look at me. You are joking, aren't you?

TOMMY I don't think I am.

ANNY (Hugs him) Tommy. . .I'm afraid. Tell me, what am I afraid of?

TOMMY We were afraid before too, only we didn't want to believe it.

ANNY (Crying a little) Why didn't you send that man away? You're strong. . .Remember? When we got married you carried me up the stairs with one arm. . .like this. . . outstretched arm. . .as if holding a flower pot. . .

TOMMY But did anybody see that?

ANNY Only me.

TOMMY You see?

ANNY But that's exactly what was so beautiful; nobody else. . .

TOMMY Yeah, but try to tell it to somebody. Nobody'd believe it. Me. (Rolls up his sleeve.) With these skinny arms? With these? It couldn't have been true.

ANNY (Kissing him) But it was true. I know. Isn't that enough?

TOMMY I'm afraid not. (Pulls away) Anny. . .what do you see around you?

ANNY What do you mean, what do I see?

TOMMY What do you see? That's what I'm asking.

ANNY Well. . .our apartment. . .our furniture. . .the standing lamp. . .great-grandma's portrait. . .and that picture of the lake-shore that you like so much. . . But what are you getting at?

TOMMY (Confused) No. . .nothing.

ANNY Why are you keeping secrets from me? (Crying a bit) Tommy. . .

TOMMY Will you go. . .and turn on the standing lamp? (ANNY steps over into one of the corners along the window-sill and imitates the motion of turning on the lamp.)

ANNY There you are.

TOMMY (Laughs) Wonderful!

ANNY (She runs to TOMMY) You're making fun of me. You're mocking me. . .y o u d o n ' t b e l i e v e i t a n y m o r e !

TOMMY I'm only testing how it will be.

ANNY When?

TOMMY (Hangs his head down) From tomorrow on.

ANNY (Backs away, frightened, toward the sofa, right through the imaginary wall) Tomorrow?. . .

TOMMY Or today. Does it matter? (Steps after ANNY) Look out, you'll hit the wall. . .(Stops) Or maybe it's better we begin practicing now. . .(Takes ANNY's arm)

TOMMY Look around. Wilderness, desolation. Not a stick of furniture anywhere. Only the sofa, so that we can reproduce all the better. Great-grandma's portrait is a hallucination; mine. I have talked it all into you, just to make believe that we're somebody. . . that we have ancestors too. Then the doors and the rest. . .Fairy tales. An ordinary one room grave. . . yes. . .can you smell the odor of the grave? We locked ourselves in to protect our individuality! Oh, those petty manias. (Yanks newspaper out of his pocket; brandishing it:) Have you read? Of course you haven't. But that's part of it too. Everything's a part of it. Even the fact that you're growing old, darling. I've never told you this before, have I? Well, I'm telling you now. (They're facing each other) And you're graying. . .crow's feet under your eyes. (Softly) I know you have vericose veins. I know that you're carrying a bearded baby inside you. . .it limps, the tiny creature limps, can't you feel it. . .as if it were walking on tips of bayonets. . .just as I limp when I pay no attention. Tram--tram. . .trah-trah. . . the little one's beating the drum - can't you hear it? - can't you feel it? (ANNY presses her hands on her belly, her face is contorted by a suppressed scream; TOMMY continues in a very low voice.) The world of fairy tales is over. . . If you won't go by yourself, they'll take you. . . If you can't see by yourself,

TOMMY they shove things right up to your nose. . .(Screams suddenly) But enough! I lied, I cheated. . .I admit everything!

ANNY Be quiet! I can't stand it. . . (She falls on her knees, hugs TOMMY's legs and stays that way for a few seconds. Then slowly looks up.) What will happen to us now?

TOMMY Whatever must happen. I'm ready to sign a contract now.

ANNY You'll play again?

TOMMY Yes.

ANNY In what kind of play?

TOMMY Any kind.

ANNY And what kind of role?

TOMMY The least like myself the better. The less we recognize each other the better. (Pause)

ANNY (Softly) Tommy. . .could you be unfaithful to me?

TOMMY Up to now we have cheated the whole world, because we turned our backs towards it. You think that was an honest thing to do? That's why we must pay now. And we've got to pay with our own happiness.

ANNY (With sudden passion) Not true! You're wrong! . . . (Falters) . . .of course I can't argue. . .I can only say what you used to say. . .but I don't even know that any more. (After a short pause she points to the audience, her movement indicating that she may have

ANNY found a good argument.) And what about them. . .all these people? They may have been trusting us, . . . don't you care about them? About what they say, believe, think. . . (Silence) . . .Now, all of a sudden you forgot what you've promised. But I haven't forgotten. (As if quoting TOMMY.) "I'll only take a part in plays that don't lie; plays in which we can recognize each other, ourselves." That's what you said. (She lets her arms and shoulders fall helplessly forward.) And these plays today. . .My God! Everybody's a cripple, or mad. . .the characters talk to each other but you can't understand half of what they're saying. . . (Suddenly) Or you want us, too, from now on to. . . (TOMMY is silent. She hopefully waits for an answer, then turns, desperately, to the audience.) Now please tell me, but truthfully, hands over your hearts, isn't it so? Isn't what we want is simply to have a bit of hope before us, a small, however tiny, pink cloud? And what do you get instead? Repulsion... horror everywhere. Madmen and cripples. . .on the stage and on the street. . .but this is not true, it can't be true! We couldn't have been born for this; for this we furnished our apartment, made plans? So that a single hand would squash everything like a bug? (Crying begins to creep up on her.) Well, tell me, is this possible, should this be allowed? . . .Just a tiny

ANNY pink cloud. . .I really don't want anything more. . . is that so much? (To TOMMY) Tommy. . .look at me. . . Wasn't that for that little cloud that we starved, did without a lot of things, wasn't it? And now we should throw everything away? . . .(TOMMY turns away, ANNY cries.) If I don't count, at least tell them. (She is pulling him, trying to make him face the audience.) Look at them, look them in the eye and say it. . .you can see they're waiting. . . (TOMMY turns, willy-nilly, to the audience, casually looks around and makes a small gesture.)

TOMMY What are they waiting for? Don't you worry about them. They sit here today, tomorrow somewhere else. Next time they too will be in the theatre where I'll be appearing. They'll be there and applauding like mad. They can't do anything else anyway. (ANNY stands defeated. Loud noises and voices are heard off stage.)

FEMALE VOICE (Off) Unbelievable! This is terrible! The nerve of him!

MALE VOICE (Off) Believe you me, I'll report you! That's right, report you! We'll see, you just wait! I am responsible for the peace and quiet of my tenants!

FEMALE VOICE Louie! Don't let him! Stand up to him!

(The argument continues behind the rear curtain. We can see that bodies are hurled against the curtain. Suddenly, through the opening in the curtain, the

SUPER backs into the scene, and with outstretched arms tries to block the WINDOW WASHER's path who is pushing his way in. The SUPER is short, comically fragile next to the WINDOW WASHER. He wears glasses and a striped, coffee-colored housecoat. His faith in the importance of his authority is unshakable. WINDOW WASHER pushes the SUPER aside and clatters in with ladder and bucket. Behind him enters NUSHY, the SUPER's wife, wearing a housedress. She is large, about forty-five, full-blooded. Her anger and emotions suddenly soften into a state that radiates a strong bodily presence. ANNY and TOMMY, motionless, are watching this bizarre procession.)

WINDOW WASHER (Pointing to SUPER and NUSHY) Behold: the superintendent and his wife. The kind defenders. Guardians of the family altar. They have yelled all through the stairwell to preserve the peace and quiet of the tenants. (WINDOW WASHER calmly leans ladder against the window, and generally busies himself.)

SUPER (To ANNY and TOMMY) Well, haven't you got anything to say?

ANNY (After a little pause) Oh yes, I've got something to say. (She starts toward the WINDOW WASHER, stops half way, her voice is like that of a condemned prisoner's.) What have you done to my husband?

WINDOW WASHER Oh, the little missus. Pardon me. (He's wiping his hands with a handkerchief.) I don't think introductions are necessary. . .

NUSHY (Irritated) Not true. He's lying! I know his kind; these Sunday loafers; he's got no money for a drink, so he invites himself into other people's home. . .

ANNY (Does not move; repeats her question) What have you done to my husband? (They all look at TOMMY who stands by himself, his head down. WINDOW WASHER steps up to TOMMY, puts his hand on TOMMY's shoulder, looks at him.)

WINDOW WASHER (Innocently) Now really. . .what's with you?

SUPER (With official sincerity) Please tell us. . .very frankly. Well, well? Say something so we could see things clearly. . .

NUSHY No tragedy of any kind I hope?

SUPER I beg you to tell us everything you know. In the interest of all of us. I know we have no right to interfere with each other's lives, I certainly don't intend to; no written ordinance refers to anything like that; but if you allow me, I still would like to clear up the situation. (With emphasis) This man simply broke into our home!

WINDOW WASHER Into the cellar.

SUPER (To TOMMY) And he was referring to you. . .that you sent him.

TOMMY I sent him.

WINDOW WASHER (Shrugs his shoulder) See? What did I tell you?

ANNY (Confused) Of course. . .but my husband doesn't mean. . .surely. . .for the sake of peace and. . .

SUPER (Interrupts) Not caring about our Sunday peace and quiet, you just send a stranger right down to our home! That is a fact.

NUSHY And I was still in my undies. I just thought I'd mention it, although it's not that important.

WINDOW WASHER (Nods) That's true. I mean the undies.

SUPER Would you be good enough to explain? Why exactly today, when you know very well that you can get to the cellar only through my apartment? Have I ever bothered you about the attic, which can be approached only through this apartment?

ANNY (Taken aback) To the cellar. . .only through your. . .?

NUSHY (Taken aback) To the attic. . .only through here?

ANNY Tommy. . .is this true?

NUSHY Louie, is this. . .where did you get this idea?

SUPER That's the truth!

ANNY (Stubbornly) I want the truth. What have you done to my husband?

SUPER (To ANNY) Please, I beg you not to interrupt all the time. . . We'll never get to the heart of the matter.

WINDOW WASHER (Busy at the window, his back to the rest) That's right. One thing at a time. (Derisive) Let's follow some regulation, folks.

SUPER (Irritated, to WINDOW WASHER) Not only regulation, sir, but order! Up to now there's always been order in this house, and we are not willing to give it up now either.

WINDOW WASHER (Phlegmatic) All right, all right. Let there be order, if you want to bicker. . . (Laughs)

NUSHY That dirty loafer!

SUPER (To NUSHY) Don't upset yourself sweetheart. Our tenant here. . .he'll explain everything. This matter must be taken care of among ourselves. (To TOMMY) I know we have no right to interfere in each other's lives, but the clarification of the situation. . .

NUSHY Oh come off this mania of yours. The way I see it's very simply. . .

SUPER What? All right, all right! What is it "very simply?"

ANNY (Steps closer to the WINDOW WASHER whose back is still towards the others.) I want to know the truth. (Silence)

WINDOW WASHER (Turns around, cheerfully) But that's exactly what I want, too.

ANNY <u>What</u> have you done to my husband?

SUPER (Nervously) Please, please, let's have some kind of order!

NUSHY (Shoves her husband aside) The whole thing is very simple: if you wanted something, why did you send this dirty loafer to bother us? After all we're no enemies, are we?. . . (She looks at TOMMY with affection.)

WINDOW WASHER (Aside) Finally!

ANNY (Stubbornly) I want to know the truth.

WINDOW WASHER (Steps forward) May I say something?

SUPER No! Wait for your turn!

ANNY (Staring at the WINDOW WASHER) Speak.

WINDOW WASHER (Bows toward ANNY) Thank you. (Modestly locks his fingers) I knew you'd understand me. I am a simple window washer. Here today, there tomorrow. . . You really can't say that I want too much. Because after all what do I need? A ladder. . .a bucket. . . a piece of deerskin. . . But that I have. An old piece, not synthetic.

SUPER (Nervously) This is just plain rubbish!

ANNY (To WINDOW WASHER) Go on, speak!

NUSHY (To TOMMY, kindly) And you? Why don't you speak?

WINDOW WASHER So then I went down into the cellar. I was <u>sent</u> there. And you know what I found: Augeas' stable. Unfortunately I haven't learned these Greek and Roman things, but this I remember. In the good old days that's how the gentlemen used to say: Augeas' stables.

NUSHY (Appalled) My cellar?

SUPER I resent that! You have no right!

TOMMY (Without moving) Our common cellar.

(Long silence)

NUSHY (Looks at TOMMY, repeats it softly) Our. . .common cellar?

SUPER (Aghast, to TOMMY) So? So then you share the opinion of this, this gentleman? Should we understand this to mean that now we could expect you too to break in on us at any time? Even on Sunday mornings, if the mood hits you? Is that it?. . .

NUSHY (Quietly) Don't blow your top, Louie. You've got to think this over. (Musing) And what if it is really a common cellar?

ANNY (Steps protectively in front of TOMMY, shouts) No!

NUSHY (Turning to audience) And what if it always was. . . only we didn't know it?

SUPER (Dumbfounded, quietly) Nushy!

ANNY (Shouts again) No!

WINDOW WASHER And the attic? What could be up there, I wonder? (To ANNY) On your attic. . .

TOMMY (Stiffly) On our common attic. . .

(Silence. NUSHY turns suddenly, fixes TOMMY with her look.)

ANNY Tommy. . .

SUPER (Desperate) I don't understand. . . What are you trying to accomplish with this. . .

WINDOW WASHER (Phlegmatic) Perhaps some order.

NUSHY (To TOMMY, softly) Come on, say something.

ANNY (To WINDOW WASHER) What have you done to my husband?

WINDOW WASHER (Cheerfully) This is the sixth time you've asked that. I've been counting. On my word of honor: nothing. So help me God, I just asked him for a couple

WINDOW WASHER of things because of the windows. How was I to know that you kept your ladder in a place where you don't dare go in? (To SUPER) Now I would really like to see what you keep up in the attic?

SUPER We keep each other's peace and quite in high esteem. Not like you. (To TOMMY) Or you.

WINDOW WASHER I see. (To ANNY) So you have never been in the cellar, have you? (ANNY shakes her head. WINDOW WASHER turns to NUSHY.) And you have never been in the attic?

NUSHY (Looks at TOMMY, then quietly) Not. . .yet.

SUPER (Irritated) And she won't be either! (To NUSHY) You stay right here! Understand?

WINDOW WASHER Will you look at this: they don't want to know the very house they live in! Isn't this funny? By the way: you people know each other?

SUPER (Stutters) Wha-what? What kind of a question is that?

WINDOW WASHER (Waves his hands) A private one. Not business: it has nothing to do with the windows. (Long silence. They all look at the floor, only ANNY is staring at TOMMY.) Now then, you still feel that you know each other? (Long silence. Slowly they raise their heads and searchingly look at one another. NUSHY is casting some rather flirtatious glances at TOMMY who, somewhat confusedly, is returning the provocative looks.)

NUSHY Well. . .we could find out more. . .about each other...

SUPER (Severely) Nushy!

ANNY (Takes a step toward NUSHY) What do you want from my husband?

NUSHY I just thought we were going to clear up the situation. . .

ANNY You think that my husband. . . (Turns to TOMMY) Tommy. . (TOMMY turns his head away. WINDOW WASHER lets go of a jeering click of the tongue.)

WINDOW WASHER There. You see: if I did not need the ladder and a bucket, all this would never have come to the surface.

SUPER I protest! This is slander. This is incitement! Incitement, plain and simple! This house has been very well off without the use of the cellar or the attic. Besides, ordinances say nothing about how a house is to be used. This particular time is certainly not the right one to go around changing regulations. This is unlawful and I shall appeal it. (TOMMY, with very deliberate steps walks to stage center.) That's right... (His courage slacking) I shall appeal. . .

TOMMY (Silences SUPER with a wave of his hand)
It's too late. It makes no sense to delude ourselves. Everything was true until yesterday, but today it's all ridiculous. I have no secrets. You may touch whatever you want. The passage to the attic is free, and you cannot bar us from the cellar. (Looks at NUSHY.)

NUSHY Well, we didn't mean you, of course. . .you can. . . any time. . .

TOMMY (Politely) That is the least we can do. We cannot lock ourselves up, away from each other. (Lingeringly he kisses NUSHY's hand.)

NUSHY (Shudders) What a kind gentleman. . .

SUPER (Mumbles) Gone mad. . .gone mad. . .

ANNY (Pale) Tommy. . .

TOMMY (In a strange ecstasy, as one finding himself in a new role) Relax darling. . . (Strokes ANNY's hair) We must pay. Or, you take it any way you want to. I think I'm beginning to see it. . . I must lose you, so that we could find each other again.

NUSHY (In raptures) So that we could find each other again. . .Louie, you never said anything like that to me!

SUPER (Mumbling) Gone mad. . .gone mad. . .

TOMMY (To ANNY) If not today, then tomorrow. . . They'll come crashing through the door, set up the ladder. . . Now at least, of our own will. . .for each other!

NUSHY (Whispering) For each other!

SUPER (With sudden hatred, to NUSHY) You slut!

NUSHY (In a sergeant-like voice) LOUIS!

TOMMY (Still to ANNY) We must begin everything anew, darling. . .

NUSHY (To SUPER) You hear that? Listen to that!

SUPER (Stamps his feet, agitated) Madmen! They've all gone mad!

TOMMY (Still to ANNY) I have to descend into the cellar. . .

NUSHY Through us. . .

SUPER (Screams) I forbid it! What do you want there? Tell me, what do you want? I protest. They're twisting words again!

NUSHY Don't listen to him. . . A little senile, the poor dear.

WINDOW WASHER (Aside) Whoopie!

SUPER (Stutters) Se-se-senile. . .did she say. .se. .se.

WINDOW WASHER (Aside) They know the lesson by heart, without coaching.

NUSHY (With increasing affectation) That wasn't very nice of you. . . Why didn't you come yourself. . .instead of sending this ugly man?

ANNY (She's been holding her head in disbelief, now jumps at NUSHY) Get out of here! Get out! Get out of here!

SUPER (Yanking at ANNY's clothes) I resent that. That's an insult to me. How dare you speak like that to my wife? (Shaking his wife) You whore, you slut! (The two women fight, the SUPER is just jumping, and tripping around them.)

ANNY Go! Get out of here!

NUSHY Who wanted to know the truth? Me or you?

(WINDOW WASHER walks over to TOMMY who is staring in front of him as if in a trance, and jabs him playfully in the ribs.)

WINDOW WASHER Well, what d'you say? Was I right or wasn't I? We need a little upsetting mess, so that we can get closer to each other. Too much peace and quiet is not good for you.

ANNY (Yelling) Tommy. . .Tommy. . .Help. . .protect me!

TOMMY (Starts up) Yes. . .I'll help you. (He steps over to the fighting figures and with one motion frees NUSHY, pulls her aside and stands right next to her. SUPER and ANNY are dumbfounded at this.)

WINDOW WASHER (With directorial, cheerful gestures) Pardon me, but I believe we are no longer needed now. A new scene is about to begin. (All look at TOMMY and NUSHY: the picture of Adam and Eve after the fall.) May we leave now? (TOMMY turns his head to the right, NUSHY turns hers to the left.)

TOMMY
NUSHY (Together) Yes.

WINDOW WASHER (To ANNY and the SUPER) You've heard. I didn't say it. Well then, let's go. Let's go. . . (Jazz. ANNY and SUPER, like puppets, begin to back out of the scene, their eyes fixed on TOMMY and NUSHY. Whenever they halt, the WINDOW WASHER goads them on. Exeunt left.)

(Enter from the right two stage-hands in overalls. They remove the windowframe, the screen and the sofa, and bring in a park bench, a knotty tree, and a flat representing the facade

of a building with a HOTEL sign over the door. Taking their time, the stage-hands arrange things. One whistles the other hums a tune now playing off-stage. They take no notice of TOMMY and NUSHY who have been standing there in the "after the fall" pose. The stage-hands are about to leave when an outraged SUPER enters running and screaming.)

SUPER (To TOMMY) I protest! You have no right to do that. This is more than just invasion of privacy. . .This is, this is. . .

(The stage-hands look at each other; they're past being disturbed; they find this disruption much too comical. They get hold of the SUPER, one on each side, and very phlegmatically begin to drag him out by his collar. The SUPER, like a trapped, grotesque bird, gesticulates and talks.)

SUPER (Begging) Nushy my love, the milk needs boiling, the coffee is so bitter. . .I don't know. . .you'll catch a cold. . .you forgot to take your medicine. . .

(Stage-hands, SUPER exeunt left. Jazz grows softer. Silence. First TOMMY moves, as if waking from a dream. He is hesitant. Looks around, brushes his forehead with his hand. NUSHY is uncertain. She smiles with girlish embarrassment.)

TOMMY Funny. I thought it would be much simpler.

NUSHY What did you say?

TOMMY I thought it would be much simpler.

NUSHY Me too. . . I thought I would remember everything. But I don't remember anything. Maybe this bench.

TOMMY (Looking at bench) Brand new.

NUSHY Actually it's very old. At least thirty years old. (Sighs)

TOMMY Don't mention such big numbers. (Quietly) You're not at home now. Here everything is new, fresh, untried. . . You too. It's better if you don't remember anything. (Sighs) It'll be that much easier.

NUSHY (Sits down in a sort of daze) How strange your words are. . . There's so much in them! Oh. . .men. . . Don't you think so?

TOMMY (Sits next to her) I do.

NUSHY Say beautiful things to me. It's nothing for you.

TOMMY That's right. It's nothing for me. And then the rest goes without a hitch.

NUSHY (Overcome with emotion) I love it when you talk of happiness. If you say beautiful things to me I can remember better. Do you have any idea what the word happiness means to a girl? When we put on our first dress with a decolletage. . . What?

TOMMY I didn't say anything.

NUSHY And on our shoulder suddenly that little birth mark which we never noticed begins to smoulder, then burn, and that little nothing suddenly renders us so helpless. . . And how wonderful it feels to be so help-

NUSHY less. (She pulls her housedress aside on her shoulder.) There it is, that's the one.

TOMMY (Leans over) It hasn't changed a bit. (Kisses it.) Brand new.

NUSHY (Looking around cautiously) Look out. . . Is somebody coming this way?

TOMMY Unfortunately no.

NUSHY We are like fugitives now, aren't we. . . As if. . . somewhere on the seashore. . .we're among white palaces . . .long jetties. . .eucalyptus trees. . .no, no. . . they're palm trees!

TOMMY (Glancing at the knotty tree.) One palm tree.

NUSHY (Sulking) You bad boy. Clamming up like this. Men don't say much, do they? Why don't you compliment my velvet dress? (Stands up, spins and curtsies like a little girl in her housedress.) This was my first summer dress. .. And we were about to leave for the Riviera. (A bit uncertain, looks at TOMMY.) You don't believe it?

TOMMY Believe what?

NUSHY That we were leaving for the Riviera.

TOMMY (Giving in) Of course I do. . . You're so silly. . . And then? Then what happened?

NUSHY (Mumbles confusedly) I don't know...

TOMMY Of course you do. Continue as if you were reading it from a book. You'll get the hang of it. . .Let's see,

TOMMY how was it? You were about to leave for the Riviera . . .you lived in the most elegant hotel. . .

NUSHY (Gratefully) Yes, yes! In a magnificent marble hotel. . . You couldn't tell there was a war going on. I really don't know how they managed to do that. I just simply didn't know about the war at all. There was only the sand, the sea. . . (Sits back on the bench, and lovingly puts her head on TOMMY's shoulder.) Just the sand and the sea. . . Even at dusk you could see so far! Even the night was blue. It was blue and shiny. A young man in a panama shirt was walking on the jetty. . . (She buttons up TOMMY's pyjama jacket.) His shirt was just like yours. Exactly like yours. Mother was reading out loud on the balcony of her room. Once she took her medicine she always read a little. (Longer pause. She seems to be expecting some kind of reply.) You bad boy. Cat got your tongue?

TOMMY No, no, of course not. . .

NUSHY (Delighted) Good! (Softly) But don't say anything just yet. . .wait. . .

TOMMY (Sighs) All right. I'll wait. (Pause)

NUSHY Get up, will you. . . (Points to stage right.) . . . If. .from that direction. . .no, not that. . . (Points to stage left.) If you were coming from there. . . in this direction. .

TOMMY (Slowly turning right, then left) Yes. And?

NUSHY You understand, don't you?

TOMMY Of course.

NUSHY (Lowers her head) So that we can find each other again. . .

TOMMY (His hands on his own breasts) Did I say that?

NUSHY Don't you remember? Now we must find. .we must find the jetty.

TOMMY (Long look at NUSHY) You're right. Maybe that's what we have to do. (He leans forward, puts his head into his hands.) But I don't even know where it is.

NUSHY (As if in a trance points to stage left again) If you were coming this way, your hands in your pocket. . . then stop for a moment on the jetty, kick a pebble into the water. . . Are you listening?

TOMMY (His head still in his hands) I was always afraid of jetties. They are like a mousetrap. Always luring me further in on the water, in and in. . .so that at the end everything would open up!

NUSHY Would you rather just whistle? Maybe that would be better. And I would just listen to you, sitting on the bench, listening to you getting closer. .as you are coming back toward the safe shore. . .

TOMMY And then suddenly there's no more jetty. No more. Only darkness and the water. Great, great amounts of water. You would like to pray so that this darkness would open up, even for a tiny second. . . But nothing happens.

NUSHY And then suddenly you'd notice that I'm alone. . .

TOMMY And we could traipse back toward the shore. The miracle did not happen. We could make a little universe for ourselves. . .a little private theatre. . That is a sure thing, they say. Nobody can ruin that. . . (NUSHY stands up, pulls TOMMY along toward stage left.)

NUSHY You understand, don't you?

TOMMY Of course. . .

NUSHY It was you who said it, right?

TOMMY Of course. . .

NUSHY If you walked from this direction. . .no. . .(Looks around, takes TOMMY to stage right.) If you came from here. . .slowly. . .

TOMMY (Mumble) Yes. That's good. Not from there, but from here. After all we're free to choose. . .

NUSHY (Whispering) And there's nobody around. . .Just you and me!

(Strained tones of the waltz from Der Rosenkavalier is heard, but from time to time some sweet beats come in. Girlishly, NUSHY hurries back to the bench, and sits herself down, lingeringly, dreamily. With his hands in his pocket, TOMMY starts walking at the edge of the stage. He softly whistles along with the music. He stops suddenly, as if he had just noticed NUSHY. Walks to bench, and, at a respectable distance, sits down.

Dumbshow: NUSHY is invitingly restrained. TOMMY edges closer to her. She pulls away. Then NUSHY gets into the game more vigorously and TOMMY pulls away. There is one moment when both stare dejectedly in front of them.)

NUSHY I thought it would be much simpler.

TOMMY What did you say?

NUSHY I thought it would be much simpler.

TOMMY Me too.

(They sit motionless. Suddenly the music stops. They look up and with the same defensive movements, gather their clothes about themselves. Their faces show alarm.)

NUSHY What happened?

TOMMY I don't know. As if a spotlight were on us.

NUSHY No...As if something was unplugged.

TOMMY It's the same thing. (After a short pause.) Should we try it again?

(NUSHY stands up, faces audience. Her face is clear and suffering. She shakes her head, but a tear-drop, now in her eyes, does not roll down her cheeks.)

NUSHY No. Come on. (Reaches her hand in his direction.)

TOMMY Shall we get it over with?

NUSHY (Softly) Yes.

(Wild, grating jazz. NUSHY and TOMMY, with writhing, grotesque movements, holding on to one another, begin to dance and jump around the stage; then, taking aim

at the door of the HOTEL, they start for it, flailing their arms. The HOTEL door opens before them, they practically fall in; the door closes behind them. The scene is empty for a few seconds, only the music is heard. Then the two stage hands enter. They are mildly surprised at the tottering HOTEL, but shrug their shoulders, look at one another: they are not to wonder at anything. In their movements they take up the music's rhythm, and with swift steps, half walking, half dancing, remove the bench, tree, and, finally, the tottering HOTEL.

Music continues at a loud volume. Then suddenly: silence. Disheveled, panting, pitifully awkward, the SUPER staggers into the scene. Uncertain, squinting and blinking, he looks around, stops. He is wearing the same housecoat as before.)

SUPER I think, I'm lost. . .I don't know my way too good at night. Not even during the day. Not any more. (He slaps his head.) I've been looking for the court, the precinct since this morning. . . (He suddenly lurches to the right, looks around.) Wait a minute! Wasn't it here? That little pier. .it used to be right here... It was. . .it had to be here. . .Then they tore it down. . The warehouse, the boats, the jetty. . .Even the water! (With a touch of lunacy.) The water (Laughs) They took the water apart. (Softly) And I

SUPER didn't even know about it. They did it all in secret. There wasn't a single regulation about it. And how they promised everything. . .How they weren't going to touch anything without our approval; everything stays in its place! (Walks slowly to stage center.) There used to be a bench here. They took it away. . didn't report that either. . . (Looks around.) Everything's so empty. . . (With an almost comical cry he falls on his knees.) Why did they do this to me? Why did they confuse me so? All my life I wanted to clarify the situation. . .so that at least the facts could be clear. . . (On the offensive, eyes narrowing.) Why, doesn't the regulation prescribe it? The law? (Stands up, eyes closed, at attention.) "First of all let us clarify the situation; the causes and motivations, that is our most important job. If that is done, no cheating, no lie can remain unexposed. Failure to do this may allow an unclarified situation to take on the appearance of necessity, and thus take on the importance and respect of the law." (Opens his eyes, waits a short while, then waves his hand.) This isn't worth a damn' either; I can't say it loud enough. I'm hoarse. I've been scouring the city since this morning, the streets, the piers. . . (Noise of a big city; chaotic cacaphony of horns, brakes, foghorn, etc., all in stereo. The noise is uneven, but never drowns out the SUPER.) But this is

SUPER too much. . . One floor, ten floors,. . .twenty floors . . .the whole city! (Desperately) But I'm responsible for one house only! (Noise increases, subsides) My ears are hoarse already. I'm tired. Too bad... I really wanted to let the authorities know just what happened. . . Maybe there is at least one person. . . one office where they'd understand what she meant to me. Fifteen years ago we had a child. A little girl. (Pause) She had lovely, curly blond hair...she was about this little. (He indicates it with his hand.) Then she grew up like the rest. Only she didn't talk. She was an idiot. She was born that way. Yes. And we really followed every regulation...still. That was the first situation I couldn't clarify. Why her? (Noise increases, subsides) Why did it have to be her? (His head down) Then we got a cat. A little kitten. Just so there would be somebody to whine a little when one gets tired or hoarse. My God, what a beautiful kitten that was! Gray. Didn't even look like other cats. Her legs were short. . .her body so long (Indicates it) . . .And her tail: now here, now there, this way and that...she was always doing something with it, it never stopped moving. And we laughed and laughed; maybe we never laughed so hard and so much in our lives than we did when we had her. And then one fine day, she just threw herself back on the

SUPER floor, banged her head against the floor and meowed... The poor thing was an epileptic. But there is no such thing as an epileptic cat. Yet; there it was. . .That was the second situation I could never clarify. Why did it have to be her? (Noise increases, subsides.) Why exactly our kitten? (He shuffles back and forth.) And now there's this. . .this is the third one. I've been roaming around since this morning like a beggar, like a laid-off clerk. . . (Quietly, as if revealing a secret.) . . .and I don't dare go home either. . . what if. . .what if the house's been torn down in the meantime?. . .What if they'll say: "What? Here? There never was a house here. Come on, your memory's playing tricks on you. Maybe the City Meatgrinding Co-op, yes, that used to be here, but that was torn down a long time ago, it stank too bad." Hmmm? What if that's what they'll say at the police? How am I going to prove that we have lived there, day and night, that's where we drank our morning coffee, that's where I gave my wife her medicine. . . (Choked) How can I prove it by myself. (Suddenly he pulls his neck in, rolls up the collar of his house coat, and cautiously begins to walk around along the cyclorama.) Pst! Maybe it's smarter to keep quiet. . .I might be observed too. Somebody, a man in black,already came up to me a little while ago and asked: "What's the matter

SUPER grandpa? Nobody home? (He stabs his forehead with one finger.) And that's true. Nobody home. Gone. And I'm afraid to go home. . . (Cautiously he continues to walk about. He circles the stage twice then suddenly runs to stage center.) I can't stand it. . .I can't stand hiding any more! (Wipes his face with a handkerchief. Slowly he calms down.) All right. Now it's all right. Look, here I am. (He pulls himself up to his full height, then turns his hands, much like a magician, toward the audience.) Nothing inside, nothing outside...nothing in it. (Looks at his palms for a while.) Nothing in it. Not even a scar. . . (Nervous laughter) You can't get that so cheap! They'd rather not notice me standing here... But if they knew; I've got the Book of Regulations right in my pocket. (He pulls out a small but thick book.) My God, how many hours I spent pouring over this! I know every word by heart. (Slowly flipping the pages.) Instructions for the stairwell ...the cellar. . .the hallways. . .the fire escape... the attic. . . (Nervous laughter) I saw a monkey this morning on a tight-rope. Jumping and beating his breast, yelling: "I protest! I forbid! I'll report it!" (Nervous laughter) Then suddenly it was enough... (Closes book) I don't think I'll need this any more. (Puts book down in front of him.) Maybe somebody will find it here on the ground. The kids. They're

SUPER closer to the ground. They're not so tall. (Nervous laughter) They'll notice it. . .maybe. (Noise grows a bit louder. SUPER raises his head as if into some regions above the children.) Up here. . .above them... Here, even one's eyes go deaf. . How many people, my God! And how they run!. . . one after the other. This afternoon I saw a truck full of truck tires. They were black, but were they ever shiny! Not a spot on any of them. . .nothing. And all of them are going to roll, roll. . .all of them. No, I am not mad at anybody any more. . . (Suddenly great noise, ringing, etc. SUPER stares to the right, steps forward, as if he had noticed something in the distance. Yells into the noise:)

Nushy. . . .Nushy darling! (Noise subsides; SUPER backs into stage center.) I thought it was her. . . but I know. . .(Choked) She is rolling there somewhere too. . . They're all rolling. . . (He takes off the belt of his house coat, awkwardly fingering it for a while he ties a loop at one end of it.) But it's better this way.

(Meanwhile, the stylized image of a gas station is lowered; it halts just over the SUPER. One of the hoses detaches itself from its pump and lowers itself, swinging right above the SUPER's head.)

It can never be the way it was. . .

(The stage is slowly growing darker and darker, but we can still see that the SUPER places the loop around his neck, attaches the belt to the hose and tightens it. Soft jazz. As the scene grows darker, the stage image becomes a silhouette: the SUPER, on tiptoes, head tilted to one side, is hanging off the hose. Into this semi-darkness enter the two stage hands. Alternately, they whistle the melody of the jazz off stage. They bring in the large window-frame, the sofa, the screen and arrange everything the way it was at the beginning of the play. They're almost out when they notice the SUPER. With a surprised little whistle they look at each other, then, putting him over their shoulders, exeunt. Jazz grows loud for a second; at the same time: blackout. Then: silence. The stage lights up, but let's indicate that it's evening: reflection of a neon-sign can be seen on the window frame. The WINDOW WASHER is standing by the window frame, busy folding his deerskin. ANNY, in a catatonic pose, is huddled on the sofa; staring.)

WINDOW WASHER (Sighing) Well, that's done. Sort of. . . (Steals a glance at ANNY then continues folding the deerskin.)

No doubt about it, this is some skin, real good skin . . . Never left me in the lurch yet. Of course you can't rush things; everything takes time, everything

WINDOW WASHER in this whole wide world. Especially for this: the skinning, the tanning, the softening. . .(Another glance at ANNY.) True, it's rather hard at first, a little reluctant you might say, but then. . . This one is so soft that it's a pleasure to twist it and squeeze it. (Takes his coat off the window-frame then puts it on.) Besides, in this jacket I'm simply irresistable. . .God only knows why. Maybe it's my manners?. . . (Laughs) It must be my manners. (Pulls himself up, straightens his jacket.) Well, let's see. (Clears his throat, looks at ANNY who does not move. He seems to be thinking, then hits his forehead.) But of course. Now I know. Poetry is what's missing. . . After all it is evening, a spring evening. .and to greet us, a branch in full bloom leans through our window. . .

(From above a blooming branch leans in, over the sofa. WINDOW WASHER continues with false pathos.)

And our souls suddenly transform into. . .into ancient instruments (Plucking motions) plim, plim, plam-plam... (ANNY does not move.) I think I need more gas.

(He produces a red rose from his pocket, puts it into his jacket's buttonhole, with adoring, sentimental looks he leans against the window frame. First he hums, then sings.)

See how the birds
merrily multiply;

WINDOW WASHER They'll come, they'll be here
In the beautiful Spring
with so many songs
they'll sing of spring.
In places such as this,
as in a fruit garden,
little trees grow,
and so do brave youths
and little children
by the grace of God.
(ANNY slowly gets up, walks downstage, stops. WINDOW WASHER suppresses a smile; he repeats the second six lines. While he sings she walks toward him, step by step. At the end of his song he stands there, and with the shyness of a little boy, plays with the flower.)

ANNY (Softly) Where did you learn that?

WINDOW WASHER Long time ago. A long, long time ago. . . (Sighs, looks up.) Do you know it?

ANNY Where did you learn it?

WINDOW WASHER Actually, this is my little weakness. I like to sing a little after work. . . One never really grows up to be a grown-up. Here, at the bottom of our hearts there lives a teen-ager, a child. The rest is merely a disgusting comedy. . .I know it. But what can we do?

ANNY It has a third verse too. . .

WINDOW WASHER A third one. No, it doesn't. You don't remember right.

ANNY Tommy knows it.

WINDOW WASHER That's strange. I've never heard it.

ANNY Where did you learn it?

WINDOW WASHER You really want to know? That's nice of you... If I didn't know that you trust me I'd be suspicisous: you might want to embarrass me. I'ts not easy for us either, believe me. Where do we hear, or when do we hear an honest word? Very rarely. Year after year. . . nobody asks us about what hurts, what pains us. . . It's always us who inquire: "Where is the bucket? Where is this, where is that?". . . and "We are not in the way, are we?" (Waves his hand.) Every profession has its own grief.

ANNY (Disciplined, but repulsed) Murderer.

WINDOW WASHER (Gently) We hear that too. And I can understand even that. It's so easy to confuse people. You think that we just grab somebody, anybody at random, by the ear, and say to him: you are responsible! We are all responsible. (Points to his heart.) And in here. . .in here the child cries. And can't even remember the third verse. Because we left each other in the lurch. . .because there's no one to hold your hand and tell you: you're no better or worse than anybody else. . .if you enter a room you'll find the switch, the outlets, the bathroom door, everything,

WINDOW WASHER at the same place anybody else would: there is no such thing as a strange apartment; you may feel at home anywhere! But we left each other in the lurch and nobody holds our hands. (He holds ANNY's hand, she wants to pull away, he won't let her.)

ANNY (Softly) Murderer.

WINDOW WASHER (Sighs) My god. . . (Slowly takes ANNY toward sofa, she, as if hypnotized, obeys him.) You know when? I learned it when I was still an apprentice. When a man is just a beginner, his heart is full of songs. Misunderstanding, indifference, that's what kills, that's what makes you a grown up. . . (Stops by the sofa) Please. Sit down.
(ANNY sits silently, the WINDOW WASHER spreads the deerskin out on the floor and sits on it.)
There are no more windows? Somewhere, in the bathroom. . .in the pantry. . I'd throw it in free.

ANNY Murderer.

WINDOW WASHER Well, actually you're right. There was one among us. But even that was due to circumstances. He wasn't a bad guy. . .we started out together in the trade. No, not on higher floors and with beautiful windows like this right away. . . Something like this is really a rarity. It's a pleasure to work on it. . . Look at it, look how it shines! Don't you feel your lungs expanding. . .how everything's changed!

WINDOW WASHER (He moves closer to ANNY, she pulls back, frightened, pulls her legs under her gown.) Boy, in the old days. (Sighs) You know what we started with? Filthy basement windows. But that was the heroic age! (Pulls deerskin out from under him, holds it up.) This is still from that time. Penny jobs. . .draughty cellars. . .then piles of coals, filth. . .and the rats. . . (Grimaces). You couldn't bear it any other way: you had to sing while you worked. But nowadays I do it only after work. One must be considerate of the tenants. (He puts deerskin back on the floor, about to sit on it, but then just squats and puts one elbow up on the sofa.) Now for example, if I were to sit up here. . .something like this. . . (Sits up on the sofa.) . . .that would be a border violation. (ANNY cowers, then suddenly jumps off the sofa.)

ANNY What do you want?

WINDOW WASHER (Points politely at the deerskin) Make yourself comfortable. (ANNY sits on it without taking her eyes off him. He leisurely stretches out on the sofa.) As I was saying, this colleague of mine, well, he just never had any luck. I remember we were working in some dinky old cellar. . .it was spring then, just like now, . . .and suddenly he just took it into his head to go up to the third floor. There was a curtained window, a beautiful double-winged, slender. . .

WINDOW WASHER (He outlines the contours of a shapely figure.) Only it was closed. How exciting these buttoned up windows could be. To make a long story short: this guy went up there. The door gave. They were asleep. The man and the woman. He walked over and tried to wake them up. They wouldn't stir for anything. He shook them, begged them, got down on his knees, pleaded for them to come to. . .not to let down the firm. . .not to bring shame to. . .he'd rather do it free of charge...but they just went on sleeping. Imagine, my colleague broke down and cried. But then he just couldn't control himself. He went to the window, parted the curtains and began to work, without permission. (In the heat of telling the story the WINDOW WASHER gets up, ANNY mistakes his movement, and with defensive gestures flattens herself against the sofa, then slowly climbs up on it and curls up again.)

ANNY (Barely audible) Murderer. . . (He laughs a little.)

WINDOW WASHER And you know what happened then? They threw a grenade at him. He was lucky it was from the last war and didn't go off. But who knew that? Who could have known? When all you have is good intentions--and that's how you get repaid! Was it any wonder that my colleague's will to live got the better of him. . . so he wanted to defend himself. . .to explain. . . (Modestly, he sits on the sofa, penitently lowers his

WINDOW WASHER head.) He explained it. . .a bit too well. And that was a mistake. (Shakes his head.) A big mistake. The competitive firm was laughing up its sleeve. For years we had received no request for our services; our credit was gone, the trust. . . (He leans on his side, on the sofa, getting closer to ANNY who is not pulling away, just shudders a bit.) You see, you're still distrustful. But there's no reason for it. What happened then cannot be repeated. We have learned our lesson. (He pulls up his knees, looks at ANNY.) The important thing is that you two understand each other. . . (Coolly adding) And that you two understand us. (Short pause) Wait a minute . . .I just remembered the third verse. Shall I sing it to you? (ANNY looks at him for a long time, then nods stiffly.)

Thank you. Thank you for allowing me. . . (Clears his throat) Let's see. . .how did it go. . .oh yes. . .I got it. (Sings)

'Cause if things get too messy
Our waterguns are ready,
You know it well. . .

(He hums the second half of the melody, as if looking for the lyrics; then he starts anew.)

I'll train it on your window, and
Should I shoot at you

WINDOW WASHER

You'll all get wet;
Then I wish you
Kind blessings of
God--all set. (Short pause)
Is that how it goes?

ANNY (Softly) Yes. . .

WINDOW WASHER (Moving closer to ANNY) You try it now. . .
I'll start, all right? (Sings)
Summer-winter dirt,
The filth of Spring
You'll wash it all off. . .

ANNY (In a thin, school-girlish voice continues)
'Cause if things get too messy
Our waterguns are ready,
You know it well. . . (She falters, pulls back a little. WINDOW WASHER crawls after her, sideways, on his elbows.)

WINDOW WASHER (Encouraging her) Come on, come on, continue...
The most beautiful part is about to come.

ANNY (Closes her eyes, sings)
I'll train it on your window, and
Should I shoot at you
You'll all get wet. . . (Falters, swallows, continues)
Then I wish you
Kind blessings of
God-- all set. . .

WINDOW WASHER (Moved) There! Isn't it beautiful? You don't hear this kind of thing any more. Only people like you still know them. . . (Aside) And me, if it's absolutely necessary.

(ANNY opens her eyes, folds her hands as if in prayer, and looks out somewhere into the audience.)

ANNY Once upon a time. . .when it was Easter. . .they used to go from house to house. . .from house to house, and greeted everyone. . .

WINDOW WASHER (Triumphantly) You see? There is nothing new, is there? You are saying it even now. . . It's worth learning only from old things. How was that old greeting?

ANNY (Softly, as if to herself) I am come, young as I am, to pour dew over the beautiful young shoot. . .

WINDOW WASHER (Takes it up, continues, but with thinly veiled frivolity.) Water it we shall, only let there be silence; not too powerfully, so that it might grow. . .

ANNY (Hesitantly moves her arms in the air) I see the rooster, walking by the door. . .the hen yells: don't harm the girl! (She shouts this, then her eyes and voice plead with the WINDOW WASHER as she continues.) She'll buy her salvation with two bright-red eggs. . .

WINDOW WASHER (Moves still closer, ANNY is already at the very edge of the sofa) Not only hers. . .but the sal-

WINDOW WASHER vation of all of us. . . (Pause for effect) You understand? You do understand me now, don't you? (Begins to caress ANNY's thighs.) It really takes so little. . . and I'm not begging for alms. Just for a little trust, a belief that afterwards everything will be different. . .more beautiful! You hate me now, but --unfortunately--this is part of it. But think of those who haven't had even as much happiness as you have. . .as you and I have; so that they should at last know that it's worth to make sacrifices--for tomorrow! For all of us! (While the WINDOW WASHER is speaking, ANNY slowly rises, but stays seated on her haunches, and supporting herself on her hands she leans slightly backward. She looks over the WINDOW WASHER's head. She is like a statue. The WINDOW WASHER accompanies his words with sensual gestures, gradually leaning over ANNY. During his last words the sound of marching feet is heard again--this time without the dissonant march--and this rhythmic rumbling, increasing in volume, accompanies the whole dumb-show. At the peak of the sound, the WINDOW WASHER greedily bends over ANNY's breasts, embracing her waist: a demonic image of Rodin's "Eternal Desire." Then ANNY--her head still tilted up--her eyes opened wide and crazed, with puppet-like movements puts her arms around the WINDOW WASHER as they fall back on the sofa. Blackout. Only the blinking reflection of a

neon sign is seen on the window frame. The screen and the sofa are invisible. The sound of marching feet slowly subsides. Silence. Gradually, the scene grows light. ANNY is lying on her back on the sofa, her hands clasped over her breasts as if she were on her deathbed. At one end of the sofa the WINDOW WASHER is squatting, folding his deerskin. He stands up, slips deerskin into his pocket, taps it.)

WINDOW WASHER (Wryly) Well, that's it. That was all there was. Not much, but enough. (Looks at ANNY) She's asleep. . . Afterwards she always sleeps, the little angel. She'll wake up. . . (Grimaces, waves his hands.) Forget it. I would only be repeating myself from now on. My job is done. The rest will go on by itself. (Shrugs) Besides, I'm only a little cog. (Another look at ANNY.) Actually, I feel sorry for her. I won't charge anything. I'm not a bad guy when you come right down to it. (Cynical) The firm can easily afford it. . . But I just can't figure it: not a drop of feeling, not even a little hatred, a little scratching...nothing! Just like a piece of wood! (Shakes his head.) Believe me, I haven't got it easy either. But I've said this a few times too. Doesn't matter. Maybe next year. We'll meet then, anyway. (Takes out a small appointment book, leafs through it.) Yes. The seventeenth of May. Don't forget: a year from now, same time, same place. And

WINDOW WASHER until then? Well, there are no regulations governing that. (His back to audience, turning toward ANNY.) Believe what you will. (WINDOW WASHER exits quickly at left. ANNY does not move. In a little while the WINDOW WASHER returns, walks to sofa, leans over ANNY:)

The seventeenth of May. . . (Exit, quickly.)

(Long pause. ANNY does not move. When anticipation is about to become painful for the audience, TOMMY enters through the opening in the cyclorama. His hair is matted, his gestures are hesitant. He stumbles. His expression is disturbed. Walks to sofa; looks at ANNY for a long time. Sits at the very edge of the sofa, almost as if he didn't dare take up any room. His hands hang down between his knees. This tableau is held for a few seconds. Then: ANNY slowly sits up. They look at each other. ANNY slides her feet and legs off the sofa and sits, just like TOMMY, very tentatively. Her hands also hang between her knees.)

TOMMY (Shivering) It's cold.

ANNY Put on your sweater.

TOMMY Yes.

ANNY It's in the closet.

TOMMY (Looking into one of the corners) There?

ANNY It was there.

TOMMY All right, I'll put it on. (Stays seated.) Aren't you cold? (Pause)

ANNY What did you say?

TOMMY (Puts a hand on his forehead) I don't know. . .I wanted to ask you something. What were we talking about?

ANNY The sweater. You wanted to put on. . .

TOMMY Of course. . . But no, thanks. I don't really need it.

ANNY You said you wanted to put it on. Shall I get it for you?

TOMMY No. . .really, I'm not cold. . . (Pause)

ANNY Tommy. . .

TOMMY Yes.

ANNY (Pulling closer to TOMMY) Aren't you going to say anything?

TOMMY Of course I will. . .

ANNY Shall I sing to you?

TOMMY (With quick movements warding her off) No!. . .

ANNY (Softly) You're right. . .

TOMMY Don't be mad. Not just now. . .

ANNY You're right. (She looks around.) Tommy. . .

TOMMY What is it?

ANNY What do you think the time is? Is it evening. .or getting to be night?

TOMMY It'll be light in a little while.

ANNY Of course. .It'll be light soon, day is breaking.

TOMMY Dawn is coming.

ANNY Looks like it'll be a sunny day.

TOMMY I think we ought to go down for rolls.

ANNY But you got them, haven't you?

TOMMY No. . I think I lost them on the way. Doesn't matter. Maybe a dog'll eat them.

ANNY A cat.

TOMMY (Smiles) O.K., a cat.

ANNY A gray cat. The kind the super had.

TOMMY That one died. (They're silent for a second. Embarrassed, TOMMY looks away; ANNY hangs her head.)

ANNY Tommy. . . (They turn to each other. ANNY moves closer.) Kiss me. (TOMMY takes her face between his hands and looks at her for a long while. Does not kiss her.)

TOMMY You haven't changed at all.

ANNY Neither have you. (Silently, they embrace.)

TOMMY (While holding her) I almost got lost on the way home. . .

ANNY But you're here now. The important thing is that you're here, Tommy.

TOMMY There were so many people on the street. . .such crowds. . I have no idea what kind of day it must have been. . .crowds, even at night. . . And they were so strange. . .they seemed to be getting ready for a procession or something. . .

ANNY Don't think about it. The important thing's you're here.

TOMMY I thought I would never find my way home. I was scared. . .

ANNY To come home?

TOMMY Yes.

ANNY Because you're such a silly. Such a big, big kid. You should know that I'd never. . .not you. . .

TOMMY Because you could really hate me now. You really don't hate me?

ANNY Ssshh. . .

TOMMY Aren't you repulsed by me?

ANNY Don't talk like that. . .

TOMMY Answer me...Hate me a little. . .

ANNY (After a short pause) I have no right to. (Softly) And even if I did...what sense would it make?. . . Listen. . .listen to me. We can't help it. . .it wasn't us. . . (Cries) Not you and not me. . .

TOMMY No. Only me. I knew it would be like this. . .still I went along with it. . I really believed that it had to be this way. . . If I had obeyed, and followed orders only, but no, Anny, I actually believed it! And all the while I was waiting for some miracle to happen, a miracle that would free me. . . (He puts his head into ANNY's lap, and stays that way. Silence.)

ANNY (Softly) But it did free you. You're here. (Pause. She strokes his head.) You know I can't argue. I can only say what you used to say: "Don't you ever forget, sweetheart, that the two of us are a small universe. ." (Leans over to TOMMY's face.) Do you hear? Now I am telling you: nothing is important except

ANNY that we're here again, no matter how, but we're here. Look at the furniture, the standing lamp, the picture of the lake-shore. . .Even they can't take these away from us. I can't argue well, Tommy. . .

TOMMY (Without lifting his head) Sing something. . now I'd like you to. . .

ANNY All right, but stay this way. . .don't move. . . (She is rocking him like a baby, makes soothing sounds as if to a baby, then sings.)

See how the birds
merrily multiply;
They'll come, they'll be here
in the beautiful Spring
with so many songs
they'll sing of spring.

In places such as this,
as in a fruit garden,
little trees grow,
and so do brave youths
and little children
by the grace of God. . .

(ANNY waits a little while, then leans over TOMMY)
You see, they wanted to take this away from us to. . .
But they couldn't!

TOMMY (Suddenly straightens up) Wait. .be quiet for a second . . . (Distant rumbling, then quiet.)

ANNY What was that?

TOMMY I don't know. (Pause)

ANNY Why do you look so strange? (TOMMY does not answer. He stands up and is listening as if for more sounds from outside.)

Tommy. . . (TOMMY says "ssh", and motions to her to be silent. In a little while the rumbling noise is heard; it seems to be closer now.)

TOMMY You hear that? Like knocking on door somewhere.

ANNY (Unsure) Not here. . .some place else. (TOMMY continues to listen.)

In another building, I'm sure. . . (Pause)

In another street. . . (TOMMY does not move.)

TOMMY!. . .

TOMMY And what if he comes back to us?

ANNY (Screams, with her hand in front of her mouth) NO!. . . (In this very moment, we clearly hear the marching feet, then the dissonant march; this time however, the march is not played in stereo but comes clearly from behind the cyclorama as if straining through the window from the street below. At the sound of the march TOMMY holds up his hands and begins to back away. ANNY is still in the pose of the scream: they're looking at each other like this. Then, ANNY sneaks over to the window and peers out.)

ANNY No...you're wrong... (Tries to smile) You see, you're trying to scare me. Nothing out there...nothing like

ANNY that...Come over here...look out...Come on, let your hands down. I'm telling you. . .some kind of procession, or parade, or something. . .with music and everything. . .flowers. . .come on...you can really see it now...they're just turning toward the square... So many flowers! And Chinese lanterns. . . (Choked) (She turns away from the window and runs to TOMMY who's still holding up his hands.) Don't you believe me? . . .Just flowers and Chinese lanterns. . .Maybe because it's spring. .that's what it is, a spring parade. .I'm sure. . . (She puts her head on TOMMY's chest). . Tell me he can't come back. . Tell me that never, never. . . (TOMMY stands stiffly, then lowers his arms. ANNY reaches up and now she holds his face between her hands.) And you won't either. . .you won't sign a new contract, will you?

TOMMY (Hesitantly) No. . .

ANNY Only if you're sure you won't have to play just any old role.

TOMMY Only then. . .

ANNY Swear it!

TOMMY (Raising his arm) I swear!

ANNY (Kisses him quickly) You'll see. .everything's going to be all right. . .

(Suddenly, with exaggerated cheerfulness she begins to clap her hands, and singing, she is jumping around TOMMY.)

ANNY All right. Everything's going to be all right. We won't sign just any old contract. . .no sir! (Suddenly she bends over, and with a gesture peculiar to expectant mothers, presses her hands on her stomach.) Ouch. . .

TOMMY (Reaching to catch her) Hey. . .

ANNY (Smiling again) It's nothing. I was just a little bit too happy.

TOMMY You've got to be more careful now. . .

ANNY Come on, lift me up. Remember?

TOMMY (Lifting her) I remember.

ANNY Can you feel I'm heavier. Can you?

TOMMY Heavier...because I am weak. A coward. (Slowly he puts her down. The march is increasing in volume, the two shudder and hug each other.)

ANNY (With conviction) No...you are brave Tommy. . . You will be brave...I know!

(The sound of the march is increasing further; from left and right the two stage hands enter to the rhythm of the march. They take out the screen first, their movements following the tempo of the march. TOMMY and ANNY pay no attention to the stage hands; they are looking into each other's eyes, quite oblivious. ANNY runs a finger across TOMMY's lips. The sound of the march as well as the lights begin to fade; the two are in a strong spot light.)

ANNY There'll be only flowers and Chinese lanterns. .right, Tommy?

TOMMY ...just flowers and Chinese lanterns. . .

ANNY And if they tear down cities...if they tear down the whole world around us. . . we still, right, we still?..

TOMMY Yes, Anny...yes. . .

(At the last word, the march dies away, the two stage hands enter from left and right. They halt abruptly in the sudden silence, then take out the window frame.)

TOMMY It can never come back, never! (Shaking, the two hold each other.)

(Closing music begins. This is not completely free of anxieties, but it clears slowly, into which the tune of "See how the birds" is introduced, this childish-idyllic motif. While the stage grows increasingly dark, TOMMY and ANNY are standing in the strong pool of light; somewhat hazily we can still make out the only prop left on stage: the sofa. They stand for a few seconds then black-out, music increases until it ends. When the stage grows light, the poster-curtain is descending and the music switches to the opening jazz which is heard until the theatre is completely empty.)

APPENDIX F

Imre Sarkadi

PARADISE LOST

A play in two acts

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Translated by Imre Goldstein

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THE PLAYERS

SHEBOEK

JANOSH

ZOLTAN

GABOR

JOSHKA

SOFIE

MIRA

EVA

KLARI

CHAUFFEUR

A C T I

First Scene

A kind of apartment that gives the impression of a hothouse, or a winter garden. The walls are made of glass with various plants in pots and wooden boxes along the bottom. The plants are not decorative, but those found in a garden. There is a window in the glass wall as well as a door that opens to the outside. To the left and right various entrances, exits. The furnishings of the place is rather varied: in one corner a small mound of earth--obviously some humus--a long table to one side full of different objects: books, plates, an inkwell, notebooks; at one end of it a carpenter's vice, a hand-saw, a plane, various planks and boards. Behind the table a bookcase and a sofa; a camera hangs off a nail, and, leaning in one corner, a flower hoe. On the bed a long-haired sheepskin blanket; crates, discarded beehives and three-legged garden-chairs provide seating; there is a smaller table and an old, crudely made chest of drawers; the place is full of every conceivable tool, it is rather untidy, but it is untidy in a way that whoever lives here wants everything to be handy, someone who is just at home with books as he is with tools.
At rise: Sheboek is standing by the vice, adjusting the edge of a board with his plane. Sofie enters.

SOFIE Ah think ah best take this duck over to my house, professor, 'cause it ain't never gonna git done in this oven, it maht jist git burnt. . .

SHEBOEK (Old, white-bearded, but vigorous, goes on with his work, looks up at SOFIE) If it's better for you, Aunt

SHEBOEK Sofie, go ahead and take it.

SOFIE 'Course it's better, how wouldn't it be, than tryin' to bake in this damn' oven here. It burns everythin'. Didn't jus' yesterday burn the daylight out of that puddin'. . .

SHEBOEK (Smiles, laughs a little, takes board out of the vice, looks at it) You see Aunt Sofie, I never burnt a thing in it, yet.

SOFIE Good Lord, what do you ever bake in it?

SHEBOEK Whatever. I bake in it all winter long. Potatoes, squash, chesnuts. . .

SOFIE Weell...ah guess you could call that bakin' too. . . bakin' is bakin' I reckon. . . But not fo' guests. . . Ah don' want your guests to blame me, cause ah don't. . . Weell, ah'll hurry, professor, my daughter'll keep an eye on it. . .and ah take care of the rest here.

MIRA (Peeks in through the open window of the glass wall. She is young and pretty.) May I come in? Good morning. . .!

SOFIE Come in, come in, missie. . .

MIRA (Disappears from the window and comes through the door. She is carrying an enormous bunch of wildflowers) I've brought some flowers.

SOFIE Somebody shore rises early. That's the way. . .

MIRA Kind as you are, sweet Sofie, I didn't bring them for you. . .Well, maybe I'll give you one, just one. . .

SOFIE What fer?. . . Even one. . .

MIRA Even that I would. . .but I wouldn't, I won't. Because this whole bunch is uncle Imre's.

SOFIE But when ya really take a good look, the professor ain't any younger than me...no sir... He already had a long beard when ah was just a tiny anklebiter.

MIRA (Laughs. To SHEBOEK) That's why you call her aunt Sofie, right?

SHEBOEK The kids always called her that, then the "aunt" just stuck.

SOFIE It ain't nothing. . . Not that ah need it, but ah think ah deserve at least one. . .wouldn't ah. . . (She is walking out toward the kitchen.)

SHEBOEK Where did you pick all this?

MIRA All over the place. Mostly on the embankment. This is a daisy, this is a common larkspur. . .this little green one is I don't know what. . .

SHEBOEK Shepherd's-purse. . .

MIRA A lovely name. And it's so green, too. The rest I don't know at all. But I did read the paper this morning. . .and in it "it is written" that Imre Sheboek, old, retired professor, who for fifty years had taught all sorts of things, since his retirement has been working on all sorts of things. . .the ancient scientist is experimenting. . .

SHEBOEK Where on earth did you read that?

MIRA In the newspaper. Also, he is celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday. . . That's why the flowers. . .

SHEBOEK (Moved) Where do you get to know such things?

MIRA (Hands over the flowers, with girlish curtsy) Now then: as many fish in the river Tisza, as many girls named Ann or Mira; as many blades of grass in the meadow, as many grains in a field of wheat, so many barrels of wine should God bless you with. Long live uncle Imre, many happy returns.

SHEBOEK (Obviously happy) You see, if you haven't mentioned it, I would have forgotten about it. Thank you, Mira. Thanks for the flowers, too.

MIRA And I thank you for having me here. (Suddenly.) Uncle Imre, could I call you by your first name? I know I just did it, and I called you that when Sofie was here, but could I? I love you so much uncle Imre, you have no idea, you just couldn't imagine it. Like guests, or relatives. .we came with daddy to take a look at Hungary, to visit lake Balaton, then we camped out here, at your place; I haven't seen the Balaton, but I got to know you; we'll go home the day after tomorrow, and it's possible that I'll never see you again, or the Balaton, nothing. . .but I will cherish you in my love. . . (SHEBOEK laughs) Don't laugh at me. . .please, uncle Imre, take out some brandy, let's drink to our new pact: I call you Imre and you call

MIRA me Mira, then we'll drink to your birthday, or we'll drink to that first, of course. . .then. . .by the way. . .where are your children? Do they come usually to wish you a happy birthday?

SHEBOEK Well. . .I want to say that they do, but I'd rather not say it, should we find out just now that they don't. . . (Takes out brandy and glasses.) Well, dear...this is very strong stuff. . .I usually give your father a sip in the morning when he wakes up. . .

MIRA That won't be for a long time.

SHEBOEK (Pours, they clink their glasses) Well, here it is ...thank you Mira. . .and now. . .

MIRA My sweet uncle Imre. (Kisses him, giggles.) I give you permission to call me by my first name.

SHEBOEK Great. I never called any girl from Rumania by her first name.

MIRA Never?

SHEBOEK Nope. I have been around in my day, in the First World War all the way to the Yellow Sea, but by the time I got home I had no time to really look around. I was glad to be alive.

MIRA I'm very glad of that too. (She drinks, caughs a little. During this JANOSH enters.)

JANOSH (Heavy set, about fifty) Good morning, godfather.

MIRA Hey, daddy, you're up already?

SHEBOEK You see, Janosh, we've already started drinking. What'll you have? Wild-plum? Pear? Strawberry? Raspberry? Plenty of choice; you can't say I wake you with the same thing every morning. . .I can see you're still half asleep.

JANOSH Because you've spoiled me, that's why. . .

MIRA Daddy dear, I'm drinking because I want to drink. . . although this is the last one. . . Look at the paper, see, a picture report...it says there that uncle Imre is seventy-five today. . . I remember that gallant young man who was here the other day asking uncle Imre this and that. . .he even had a mind to touch. . .a little. . .

JANOSH (Newspaper in hand, looks up, happy) What the devil? You'd be seventy-five, godfather?

MIRA Today. Exactly.

SHEBOEK I want you to know that Mira got up just because of me and brought this enormous bunch of flowers.

JANOSH Then she brought it in my name too.

MIRA Dad, darling, you're a marvelous father, but, no offense: I brought the flowers only in my name.

JANOSH In that case, I'll be forced to congratulate you without flowers. . .really, today? This is marvelous . . . This occasion alone makes our trip worth while. . . What about the children?

MIRA They're not coming. . .or at least we should not count on them.

JANOSH That would be a shame. You've got two sons, right, uncle Imre?

SHEBOEK Right.

MIRA And one daughter.

JANOSH All married?

MIRA Zoltan is still single, am I right?

SHEBOEK Still a bachelor at thirty three.

JANOSH A Christ-like age.

SHEBOEK A dangerous age. . . Now <u>you</u> have <u>my</u> permission to call me by my first name. . . (All clink glasses.)

MIRA (As if the drink had got to her) Well, it certainly would be dangerous for him to come here: I'd seduce him. Strictly out of eugenic considerations. Provided that he'd remind me of you, uncle Imre. After all, humanity must be improved. Our grandchildren, when I'd be seventy, when we'll be doing nothing more than walking; slightly decrepit, indifferent to science and culture. . .so then, these seventy-year-old grandchildren, 'cause I forgot to tell you that the grandchildren will be seventy, not me. . .

JANOSH (While perusing the newspaper) Hey, Imre, this you never mentioned. . .I'm just reading that you've been experimenting since your retirement. . .

SHEBOEK (With a wave of his hand) Newspapers are full of stuff. . .

MIRA Well, of course, . . .when you consider it, 'though, some

MIRA of it depends on the journalist. . . I promised him a kiss for a nice article. . .

JANOSH Is he going to collect it?

MIRA I gave it to him in advance. . .

SHEBOEK (Laughs) You little fool, you. . .

MIRA He begged me, the poor thing. He said: are you from Rumania? A miracle, I said, how did you ever guess? It couldn't be that uncle Imre told you while you were walking in the orchard; he was telling you of poppies but you kept asking him about me, now could it? Yes, it could, he admitted, with his eyes on the ground. Well, I said, your honesty deserves some kind of reward. You've asked uncle Imre lots of things but I bet he didn't tell you that he figured out the third of number ten all the way to the twelve-thousandth decimal. You probably know that even π has been calculated only to the eight thousandth decimal, with an electronic machine. You're wrong, said he. π has been calculated, by a computer down to the forty-thousandth. Forty-thousand, I laughed harshly, Uncle Imre will be finished with that number by next week and will go on to fifty-thousand, without a computer. You don't know what you're talking about, thus he, at that stage it takes about a month to figure out any additional decimal point. Forty thousand decimal points. Have you any idea what that means? No, but do you

MIRA know what one third of ten is? An infinite fraction, he stared at me, and instantly realized how stupid he was.

SHEBOEK Now, either this isn't true, or you did not give him a kiss!

MIRA Why? Don't be jealous, uncle Imre. Idiots are not allowed?. . . . Should they have nothing? No brains? No women? No hope?

JANOSH Oh, my dear little do-gooder. . . Well, I'll go wash and shave, make myself beautiful. . .maybe somebody takes pity on me too. . .

MIRA A waste of effort, dad. You might as well stay. Your age is all wrong. One can feel for some of these twenty-five-year-old kids. . . Uncle Imre could turn the head of any woman: she'd sense that he's the man who's got the law of nature all sewed up, according to which law all living creatures age. . .

SHEBOEK (Shaking his head) This drink sure got to you, Mira.

JANOSH Yes, please don't give her any more. (Laughs) Well, I'll spruce myself up, anyway. (Starts out)

MIRA I didn't mean it for you, uncle Imre, only for daddy. (Giggles) The idea astounds the bourgeoisie.

SHEBOEK Please add the proletariate, too. You know how touchy he is about his class-situation. . . (Laughs. JANOSH leaves, shaking his head.)

MIRA What are you making, uncle Imre?

SHEBOEK (He has already picked up the board he was working on before) Trying to put together a beehive. . . One of its walls will be glass. (Picks up another board, matches it up with the first one, begins to plane it.) I didn't think anybody'd be up this early, that's why I started.

MIRA Aren't you even going to read the article about yourself?

SHEBOEK I probably will. It can't be very useful. You know, I had a feeling that this journalist of yours didn't understand much of what I told him. But I did tell him things. I told him lots of things. That's how you can tell an old man. He likes to talk a lot. Superflously.

MIRA I haven't noticed that at all. And you haven't even told me what you're doing with these plants here.

SHEBOEK Well, I'm trying. . .I've been thinking about changing the blooming and ripening time of certain plants. Either speeding it up or delaying it so that the appearance of harmful insects, parasites will not happen at the same time. But, it's all a long way off. The new breed will not be seen in my life time, but I'm keeping a log of my results, maybe somebody else will continue the work. I've got time.

MIRA Does this take many years?

SHEBOEK Depends on the plant we're talking about. I have managed to hasten the ripening of the poppy. By the time the poppy-bug appears the poppy-head is hard enough so that the bug cannot drill through it. . . But the idea is not exactly taking the country by storm. I gave some of them to neighbors, just to try it. . .very reluctantly they took them. . . (He looks up.) But listen, little girl, hurry into the kitchen and have breakfast, you must be hungry. Aunt Sofie is busy cooking a duck, has no time for us, we've got to take care of ourselves. I'll just get this thing out of the way. . .

MIRA Out of the question!. . . I'll whip up a birthday breakfast in a jiffy; I'll set a table fit for a king, decorate this room, as if to wait for everybody, as if everybody was coming. I shall summon your children, uncle Imre: I'll mix some roasted oats into a wooden bowl, I'll split some smoke towards the ceiling, true, it'll only be cigarette smoke; I'll bewitch the road leading to the house: road, ye roads, you shall bring to me. . . Oh, uncle Imre, I bet you won't believe this, but just this morning I conjured my dress right to my bed. It was still very early, nice and cool, a real September morning, the sun was barely shining; it had a cold, sparkling smell and taste like wild strawberries--and it was cold too, I just couldn't see getting out from under the nice warm cover. So I

MIRA turned on the charm, the magic: I summoned my skirt: come here. . .suddenly it just flew over to me. . . then my blouse flew over too, right to the bed; all I had to do is stick myself into them. . .

SHEBOEK (Laughs) Well, you won't get another drop to drink for the rest of the day. . . (Exit, carrying the two boards towards the garden.)

MIRA (Laughs hard, spins on her heels) They don't believe it...Well. . . (She begins to hum; gathers things at one end of the table, gets a table cloth and covers the free half of the table, putting the bottle and glasses there. She exits to kitchen, returns shortly with a tray, begins to unload it on the table-cloth.)

ZOLTAN (Enters from the courtyard. He is just over thirty, well-dressed, loose of movement. He is surprised at seeing MIRA busying herself at the table.) Hello.

MIRA Hello. . . Are you looking for Imre Sheboek? He's just gone to the beehives, but he'll be right back. He will. . .

ZOLTAN You. . . What is your name? Are you aunt Sofie's daughter?

MIRA No. .I am Janosh Maroshi's daughter.

ZOLTAN Maroshi, Maroshi. . . Not the one who lives by the artesian well, is it?

MIRA No, a little bit farther than that.

ZOLTAN I see. . . I. . . my memory is not that good. . . (Pause) You say my father is with the bees?

MIRA (Stares at him) Your father? Which one. . .I mean which son are you?

ZOLTAN (He is already at the door, now turns) Now don't tell me that you're my mother?

MIRA (Laughs) No. We're not that closely related. But we are, somehow or other. We are the Maroshi's from Cluj, Romania. Some kind of second cousins or something. (Pause) You didn't know we were here?

ZOLTAN (Taking a good look at her) No. I didn't. (Holds out his hand.) I'm Zoltan Sheboek.

MIRA Oh, you're the doctor. Admit it: you have absolutely not the foggiest who the Maroshi's of Cluj are.

ZOLTAN But I do. I think I even remember you when you were two or three. This is an unexpected surprise.

MIRA (Scrutinizing him) Your tone seems to imply that it's an unpleasant surprise. Isn't it what you wanted to say?

ZOLTAN No. That's not what I wanted to say. I haven't seen my father for a very long time and after such long absence one imagines things on the way, such as opening the door and immediately finding the shoulders to be embraced. (Pause. Looking at her again.) What is your name, then?

MIRA Mira.

ZOLTAN (Picks up the brandy bottle. Looks at it, then pours) Let's drink to your health. I'm trying to see the little girl, much like a little doll, in you, the one I saw way back then. . .but I don't think it matters that much if I can't; the fact remains that there was such a doll. How old are you now?

MIRA Nineteen.

ZOLTAN I'm not used to people being nineteen any more. That's how old my classmates were at the university, but my memory tells me, they were grown up ladies.

MIRA (Derisively) Oh. . . you don't say!. . .

ZOLTAN (Ignores Mira's reply; looks at her once again as if to close the whole matter) You still wear your beauty as if you had just gotten it. Like a new dress. Doesn't it bother you?

MIRA Not even your reminding me of it, either. (During her line ZOLTAN pours himself another drink.) Why are you drinking again?

ZOLTAN I've wanted to drink all day, but I was driving.

MIRA I was really curious to see you. Very much. (Silence) Your father has completely charmed me. I was curious to see his children. . . Have you turned out the way he wanted you to?

ZOLTAN I never wanted to be present at my own psychological vivisection. Time comes when there's no more boring subject than one's self.

MIRA And it has come?

ZOLTAN Yes, it has. (He turns because SHEBOEK has just entered.) Father. . . (They shake hands, then ZOLTAN hugs his father, kisses him, and even holds him in his embrace for a short while; then steps back to look at the old man.) Hey, you look fine! It's good to look at you. . .

MIRA Well, uncle Imre, did I tell you I was going to conjure up your family, or didn't I?

SHEBOEK (Laughs happily) She sure did. . .! Take a good look at her: you did not come of your own free will, this little fairy godmother's witchcraft brought you... (To MIRA) Well, then, why don't you continue and get the whole family.

ZOLTAN Phoo, this southerly glass wall. . .like an oven... You really create summer for your plants around here... (Takes off his jacket.)

SHEBOEK (Looking at him) It doesn't feel too hot for me. You look tired. Want to eat something?

ZOLTAN Yes. And something to drink too. Mostly that. (Pours again, hands a drink to his father.) To your health, father.

MIRA You came just by...accident, Zoltan. Just like that... I mean did you just think about coming and then came?

ZOLTAN (Shrugs his shoulder) If you believe in coincidences, then I came just like that.

MIRA (Giggles) I'd like to believe in coincidences. . .this time.

ZOLTAN (Indifferent) All right, believe, then.

MIRA Because if you came just like that. . .and not because uncle Imre's birthday, then I really summoned you here by myself.

ZOLTAN (Looks at his father) That's right, father. . . September 9. . . (Smiles) I truly forgot about it... this time. . . (Hugs SHEBOEK again.) God bless you, father. . .

SHEBOEK You too, Zoli. (He pours for MIRA.) All right, you may have another drop. . .

ZOLTAN (After they have clinked their glasses) Well, . . .I've brought you something. I'll get it, just a minute. . .

MIRA What? A present?

ZOLTAN Curious? Aren't you? (He is looking for his keys in his pocket.)

MIRA Just out of curiosity I want to offer my services; I'll go get it, and you can be alone with uncle Imre.

ZOLTAN (Handing her the keys) All right. Bring it in then. A box on the back seat. (Exit MIRA) You know. . . (Laughs; he's in low spirits.) I was a little disappointed that I didn't find you alone. I'm a little nutty, but I would have loved to spend about two days with you...in profound silence. I don't mind relatives, I even like them, but mostly when they're absent.

SHEBOEK Well, you see Zoli, they've really given me a very enjoyable week. And they're leaving the day after tomorrow.

ZOLTAN Day after tomorrow. . . Well, I can't stay past that either. (Pause. Smiling.) You're seventy-five, father. Every man seems to have an age when he runs true to his best form. The way I see it, yours is just about to begin. . . You know, I envy you for it.

SHEBOEK (Jovial) Well, son, if you and your generation insist on prolonging human life everybody will get a chance to run true and through to his old-age form. . But it's like that old fool of a lilac bush around the corner: it burst into full bloom in this warm autumn.

MIRA (Returns, carrying a small, shiny box) If I knew it was this heavy, I wouldn't have offered to lug it in.

ZOLTAN (Opens box and lifts out a microscope) Well, this would be it. . .maybe you'll get hooked on microbiology in the next ten years.

SHEBOEK (Taken aback. Looking at the microscope, then ZOLTAN) Wait a minute. . . This is <u>your</u> microscope..

ZOLTAN I brought it for you. . .so now it's yours.

SHEBOEK Come on, Zoli, stop fooling around. . . What do I . . .I don't need a microscope for what I'm doing. . . but how can you work without it?

ZOLTAN Don't look a gift horse in. . .

SHEBOEK (Looks at ZOLTAN and seems to register the fact that something is not quite in order) Well, thank you very much. . .

JANOSH (All dressed and shaven) Mira darling. . . (Notices ZOLTAN, after a brief searching look.) Look at this... Zoli, could this be you? (He walks to ZOLTAN, a warm handshake.)

ZOLTAN Well, Janosh, I'm sure I would have passed you on the street!

JANOSH On the street me too. . .but here one gets kind of suspicious. . . We were hoping that some of you would show up. . . How long has it been. . .Sixteen years? Seventeen? I think it was at the Kalmans' wedding. . .

ZOLTAN I remember that too, but the picture I have of you is from way before that: I was just a kid, and you were skinny, smoking cigars, and you wore a derby and had stiff collars. . .

JANOSH (Laughs heartily) Of course, of course, the poor apprentice really decked himself out on Sundays. . . That's right, children's memories are always more accurate. . .

SHEBOEK Mira, did you start setting the table, because I think we're all ready for some breakfast. I'll go see what I can get for us 'till aunt Sofie comes back. (Exit)

MIRA Now tell me honestly: did you forget your father's birthday?

ZOLTAN I already told you: yes.

MIRA But you still brought the microscope!

ZOLTAN (Smiling) You know what? I think you really believe it was your idea and you wouldn't like anybody taking away your glory. . .

MIRA That's not it at all! I was asking for an entirely different reason. But I won't ask again; I'm not sure I'd get an honest answer.

ZOLTAN That is a most pleasant state of affairs: when somebody stubbornly interrogates the world, knowing full well that the answers will be of no use. I think scientists are happiest when the answer they find is ambiguous: then they can go on asking more and more questions without losing the game-like character of the experiment. (In the meantime SHEBOEK returns with a trayful of food, dishes and utensils, which he is now leisurely putting on the table.)

SHEBOEK That kind of game only entertains those anthropomorphic scientists.

ZOLTAN It doesn't entertain them at all: it calms them and soothes them.

SHEBOEK Janosh, let us calm ourselves with this smoked ham, and let these two talk until they find a better use for their mouths. Hey, Zoli, would you mind getting that demijohn by the cellar door. Just last week I pressed a little bit of the honeywhite, must be pretty tart which is just right for this home-made cottage

SHEBOEK cheese, because it's as strong as cherrypeppers. . . we'll see how these two Transylvanians like our national food. . .

ZOLTAN (He has already found the demijohn and is now pouring for everyone) Not the kind of food you find in your city of Cluj. In Transylvania only the Szekelys know about this, even they use only goat cheese. City folks of Cluj never heard of it. . .

JANOSH Now that's not exactly true. In some parts of the country. . .

ZOLTAN But not Cluj. . .

SOFIE (Enters breathlessly) Oh my...a very good day, dear doctor, my, am ah glad to see ya, my little Zoli; so glad to see ya; how are ya, my soul, ain't seen ya in ages. . .

ZOLTAN How are you aunt Sofie. Perky you look, downright perky. . .

SOFIE Oh no, my soul. . .worries, troubles, all the time. . . nothin' else. . . Even now. . .was so lucky ah heard you was here. . .you'll come over an' take a look it my little one, won't ya? ...A week now she's pressin' those sheets in her bed, just sighin' and moanin' "When is doctor Zoltan comin', when is he comin?" You will come over won't ya? . . .Y'know, little Shari. . . you went to school together. . .

ZOLTAN (Annoyed) You know I can't interfere with the district doctor's work, aunt Sofie.

SHEBOEK Well, it's just the third house from here. . .If she wants you; she just wants you to take a look at her too, that's all.

ZOLTAN No. (Clinks his glass to his father's, drinks, and almost immediately pours another drink.)

SOFIE Of course not right away...ah wasn' thinkin' of that, my soul. . .Not for the world! . . .Rest yohself, ya jist got here. . .In the afternoon maybe. Ah tell her you be comin' roun' to take a look at her. . .

SHEBOEK (Seeing that ZOLTAN is not about to answer, gets up, pats SOFIE on the back and gently shoves her out.) All right, of course, he'll go over. . . (After she is out, to ZOLTAN.) You know how it is...every time you come home everybody comes down with some kind of disease just so they can call on you. . . They love you, that's all. . . (Pause) Drop by there in the afternoon.

ZOLTAN No. (His voice is adamant, when suddenly he breaks his glass by squeezing it hard.) Oh, damn' it. . . This glass was cracked. . . (Everybody jumps up. ZOLTAN's hand is bleeding.) Now I really can't go, my hand's bleeding.

MIRA Better bandage it. I saw your bag in the car. I'll get it. (Runs out)

ZOLTAN (To JANOSH) Will you tell Sofie, she's probably still around, I can't go. (Exit JANOSH shaking his head.) (ZOLTAN walks over to the plants.) I'll fertilize

ZOLTAN your plants. Blood is a good fertilizer for plants, isn't it? Even in fairy tales you can read how the grass grows so green on battlefields because of the blood. . .and all those wildflowers. . .

SHEBOEK Was this hocus-pocus worth it? Just so you wont' have to go over?

ZOLTAN It took a lot less nervous energy than to repeat another twenty-thirty times that I won't go.

SHEBOEK And why didn't you want to go at any cost?

ZOLTAN Well, just because. . . (Falls silent as MIRA returns.) You see Mira, this is a tardy cherry, if I'm not mistaken. Should it bear fruit after a second blooming, don't forget that it was my blood that did it. By the way, your trip was for nothing. I carry no bandages in my bag. (MIRA clicks the bag open. Without raising his voice, but as if scolding a child.) Close it. Poking around in a doctor's bag is like putting your hand in someone else's pocket.

MIRA Well, what shall we do then?

ZOLTAN Use a handkerchief. (Takes one out of his pocket.) Like this, with one knot.

SHEBOEK You'll never grow up. (Exit)

MIRA If this was a trick, it was a hard one. I sure couldn't do it.

ZOLTAN It's not so difficult. . .

MIRA Sticking a pin into my finger...well, that's just a question of momentum. . . But to squeeze a glass, knowing that it will break. . . I don't think I could do it.

ZOLTAN Saint Theresa who took some repulsive spittle into her mouth was working with a much more difficult trick.

MIRA Saints don't interest me in the least.

ZOLTAN But my experience tells me that every woman, including you, has a bit of a saint in her. (Pause) This handkerchief soaked right through. Will you hand me a napkin. (He wraps his hand in a napkin.) For fifteen years I've been slicing bodies, living and dead, I still haven't gotten used to the sight of my own blood. Have you?

MIRA (Looks at him, somewhat coldly) No. At those times I feel myself to be rather disgusting. (Short pause) Why do you want to embarrass me? I want to help you.

ZOLTAN (Looks up at her, smiles) Don't be angry. You are very nice, and I'm stupid. Give me your hand, let me kiss it.

MIRA Here you are. (Gives him her hand; he kisses it.) You're nice too. You can make up for your coarse ways. (Pause) I'm glad you kissed my hand.

ZOLTAN Me too.

MIRA It felt good.

ZOLTAN I felt it.

MIRA You felt it? How?

ZOLTAN From your hand.

MIRA That it felt good to my hand?

ZOLTAN That it felt good to you. (JANOSH and SHEBOEK enter.)

SHEBOEK Now you can be a host to all your visitors. I could hardly restrain Sofie: she wanted to dash in here to give you first aid. I'll bet even her sick daughter will leave her bed to take care of you.

JANOSH It's still more comfortable than going over to their house.

ZOLTAN Maybe I'll go and hide in the garden with a blanket over my head. (With one hand he tries to pour from the demijohn, almost drops it.) I've become a cripple, almost missed the glass.

SHEBOEK (Takes over the pouring, then, when he sees that ZOLTAN wants to light his cigarette.) I just got some virgin tobacco. It's very good. Would you want some?

MIRA I've never seen you smoke, uncle Imre.

SHEBOEK I've got a couple of temperamental colonies among my bees--when I work with them I smoke. . . (To ZOLTAN) Wait, I'll roll you one, this bum hand is out of commission for a while. . .

ZOLTAN All right. After that hot cheese and the tart wine, I hope the tabacco'll be real too. (SHEBOEK rolls.)

JANOSH (Finishes his wine, stands up) I guess I walk on over to the post office and the ticket bureau. . . Are you coming Mira?

MIRA (Waits a bit with her answer; looks at ZOLTAN and SHEBOEK, weighing the possibility of staying or being in the way) Yes. . . (Uncertain) I guess I keep you company. . . (They leave)

ZOLTAN Where did you get that tobacco?

SHEBOEK (Finished rolling; hands it over to ZOLTAN who licks it, lights it) At the state farm where I usually go as a bee consultant.

ZOLTAN Still riding your bike?

SHEBOEK No. That's a little too much. Twenty kilometers. They send a car for me once a week. (Pause) Sometimes during the mating season I stay there for a week or two. . .

ZOLTAN Good tobacco. (Silence. ZOLTAN drinks.) This Mira... is a very nice girl.

SHEBOEK She is. I've come to love her this last week. (Silence) Funny. . .some relatives come to see you after fifteen years. . .it's like part of your youth has come back for a while. We got to know each other, spent some wonderful hours together. . .and before you know it you realize that the very people you never gave a thought to for so many years have come to mean so much that it actually hurts when you think about not ever seeing them again.

ZOLTAN Why wouldn't you see them again?

SHEBOEK Seventy-five years is seventy-five years. At that age you sleep maybe three-four hours a day. . . Especially now, with winter coming, the long nights. I really hate that. . .I wake up at three, four in the morning. . .just lying there I look at the window, waiting for it to get light so I can get up.

ZOLTAN As I know your constitution and way of living you are theoretically immortal. I see no reason why you couldn't live to be a hundred.

SHEBOEK (Laughs) A hundred years. . . It's true, my mother was a hundred and one when she died, my grandmother was ninety-eight. . .By then you'd be pushing sixty. . .

ZOLTAN (Clinks his glass to Sheboek's) Of course. . . (Empties his glass.) To your health, father. How is your blood pressure?

SHEBOEK Normal. Maybe a little bit too low. (He drinks too, then asks quietly.) Well, what happened to you? What's troubling you?

ZOLTAN What? . . .I killed somebody this morning. . .

SHEBOEK (Calmly, as if not surprised at all.) Operation?

ZOLTAN Yes. . .

SHEBOEK (After a long pause) Then I can understand. I'm sorry I tried to make you go over to see Shari. . . (Pause) No wonder you can't think about healing for a while.

ZOLTAN The way things are I won't have much time to think about it. . .any more.

SHEBOEK (Disturbed, looks closely at ZOLTAN.) What? I don't get it.

ZOLTAN It was a private operation.

SHEBOEK A what?

ZOLTAN At home. In my apartment. In my office.

SHEBOEK Have you gone mad? Brain-operation at home?

ZOLTAN The point is that it wasn't a brain operation. . .

SHEBOEK (Flares up) What then?

ZOLTAN (Shrugs) Un petit curettage. . .

SHEBOEK And you did it? (No reply) You're no gynecologist...

ZOLTAN (Derisive, in bad-temper) Well, that's exactly why she died. . . (Pause, more quietly.) Unfortunately. . . I was a med-student when I last performed anything like that.

SHEBOEK I'm flabbergasted. (Alarmed) But why? Whatever for? What the hell did you need that for? It's legal now. . .whoever wants it. . .

ZOLTAN Not this kind. . . She was too far gone.

SHEBOEK Then why did you accept it, why did you do it?

ZOLTAN Now looking back I could ask the same thing. . .out of madness.

SHEBOEK (After a pause) Did you get her that way?

ZOLTAN No. Her husband. But she was living with me. . . left her husband. . .because of me. She didn't want the child. She was begging me. . .Threatened with suicide. . .

SHEBOEK Didn't she know that getting under your knife was also a form of suicide?

ZOLTAN She felt it. . .In fact. . .I think she deliberately chose this form of suicide.

SHEBOEK (Flaring up again) All right, all right, but did you have to assist her? (Waves his hand, quietly.) All right. . .philosophizing about it now won't help. (Pause) Was it a technical mistake?

ZOLTAN I don't think they could find it to be anything else.

SHEBOEK And what will be the consequences?

ZOLTAN Well...the autopsy will probably take place today. . . By tomorrow an indictment will be issued. Let's see...the consequences: Very ticklish case, because if the husband will be called as a witness, and I don't see why he wouldn't be, he will testify that he tried to protect her from me. . .he thought I was a cynical bastard, an irresponsible son of a bitch. . . and that I seduced his wife...then I got bored and dumped her. . . At this rate it could be first degree murder, too. They could make a case for it... Just like, God only knows, I would too. (Pause, sips some more wine.) Yes, yes... That's what it was... a kind of murder, at least that's what it must have seemed to her too. When I gave her a shot to prepare her I caught her eyes: she was afraid of me. She was terrified that she was at my mercy; I saw her

ZOLTAN fear and felt that at that moment she no longer trusted me. And she was right.

SHEBOEK (After a long pause) Did you love this woman?

ZOLTAN (Shrugs) I let her love me. (Rubs his forehead, lights a cigarette.) Let's get back to the possibilities. What could happen? Ten, twelve years. Of course I'll never be able to practice again. Confiscation of all property. If I'm lucky I'll get out after eight or ten years. . .in the same suit I went in; I'll be forty plus, maybe closer to fifty. And then? (Nervous laughter) No, I just don't feel like going through with this circus. I've gone through a very bad period. . . I just felt I'd mess up anything I'd touch. I should have done nothing for a few weeks. I should have stayed in my room. . .no matter what I'd started it would have turned out to be a disaster. . . the roof would have fallen on me. . .But. . I never reacted well to feelings of danger. I always thought danger existed for others. Unpleasant, very unpleasant, but. . .what can I do?

SHEBOEK Your nerves seem to be in good condition judging by the way you talk about it all. . .so calmly. . .

ZOLTAN My nerves I inherited from you. (Silence) Besides I am not handling it so calmly as you think. It's still too fresh. Very mixed up. (Pause) When I was coming here this morning I drove that car like a maniac,

ZOLTAN took some curves at seventy, eighty. . . Then I got scared. That's a very uncertain way of death. I could survive it. They'd patch me up and take me to the trial like that. No, it's not good.

SHEBOEK It's rather upsetting just to listen to it.

ZOLTAN To go through it, too. But that's the rule: You've had your drink, you've danced the dance, now you've got to pay. I've still got a few days. . .That's why I came. . .to spend them with you. (Pause) I did forget your birthday, but I'm glad that we could celebrate that too.

SHEBOEK I remember happier visits than this.

ZOLTAN You are wise, father, enviably wise; don't feel sorry for me, you have no reason to. I've managed to get out of life everything that was nice and good. What else is left? The repetition of the same thing. I'm not anxious for repetitions. I'm not anxious to see the inside of a jail-cell either. Only your kind of man could profit from an experience like that. It would break me. I'd come out an invalid, an aged, rejected dog... this future disgusts me, when I think about it. . .I just don't want to be like that. (Pause) Death seems much more interesting than that.

SHEBOEK Death is interesting only for the living, not for the dead. (Silence) There's no such thing that you can't start from the beginning. Even in the same suit. (Begins pacing.) One can never get tired of living.

ZOLTAN You're wrong.

SHEBOEK When depressed, yes. But that's just a mood; the body wants to live, that is its law. And a sound mind is the same way. . .it manages to find its joy in anything. It could be hard, . . .unconsolable. . . still: life is life. That's how we know it exists. . . The other. . .is nothing. (Looking at his plants.) This whole experiment with plants. . .look. . .you know I'm not an expert. My field is Latin and Greek; I still recall a line of Horace much easier than the formula for nucleo-acid. . .I wouldn't have started, just out of boredom, at the age of sixty, to learn organic chemistry. (Pause) I'm doing it against death. (Returns from the plants, as if to himself.) You say you'd be forty plus when you'll come out. I was about that when you were born. What you know about my life is all from the time after that. Things can be done differently.

ZOLTAN Next time I'd do it differently too; only there is no next time. I'm sure Adam and Eve regretted everything, were sorry about being shown out of paradise, but there was nothing to be done about it. The lost paradise was. . .lost.

SHEBOEK One or two more days, right?. . .(Sighs, goes to window, looks out.) You can still taste so many flavors of this lost paradise that you've never noticed up to now.

ZOLTAN I'd love to do that. I thought that you and I could cut down that old dried out chestnut tree tomorrow. . . while we'd discuss the heredity of acquired characteristics. (No reply, he laughs nervously.) I've got a car, a fancy apartment, money. . .if I wanted to do some other kind of tasting, I certainly could have found somebody in Budapest, satisfying all needs. . .

SHEBOEK (Turns to face ZOLTAN) That's true, Zoli. . .true. Thanks for thinking of me. (Comes back to the table, raises his glass.) God bless you, son.

ZOLTAN God bless you, father. Many happy returns, more pleasant than this one; dear dad, to your health.

Second Scene

Evening. The long table is now richly laid for supper. Around it sit all those in the First Scene as well as GABOR, SHEBOEK's older son, with his wife EVA, and KLARI, SHEBOEK's daughter, with her husband JOSHKA.

SHEBOEK (In a good mood) Well girls, go make some coffee in case anybody wants some; you can't say this is not a fancy place. . .You've had three different kinds of wine: one with the meat, one with the fish, another with the cheese, now you'll get a fourth one.

MIRA Made of what, uncle Imre? Red currants? We haven't had that!

SHEBOEK Quiet, you. I've got wine made of grapes too. Hey Gabor, you still know your way around in the cellar? On the right side you'll find two bottles on the shelf, bring them both up. There's a candle right by the entrance.

GABOR (Starts out) What kind of bottles?

SHEBOEK Two one-quart bottles. Green. (Exit GABOR)

KLARI Is that the dry one, dad?

SHEBOEK That's right. Five-year-old dry. We'll open it today.

JANOSH Well, in that case I'd better say a toast.

MIRA Finally, you've come out with it. I know you want to get that toast off your chest so bad. . .

JANOSH That's right, but how can you propose a toast with cherry wine, or apple wine, or currant wine. But if its that dry one, there sure'll be a toast.

JOSHKA You just wait; how do you know Gabor isn't putting away your toast wine. Better look after him.

SHEBOEK All right, why don't you go see how he's doing. (JOSHKA gets up, smiling, starts out.) Only I'm not sure if the two of them down there is a better solution.

EVA (She has got up and poured coffee into a square, old fashioned grinder. She goes to the sofa, sits and begins to grind.) You don't think I'm going to grind all this all by myself, do you? Zoli, you can do it in a while.

KLARI Give it here, I'll help. (She puts an old fashioned coffee pot on the electric range. The pot is large, blue, with a long spout and a lid; coffee making is not usually part of this household.)

EVA I asked Zoli to help. (To ZOLTAN) What's with you? You haven't opened your mouth all evening.

GABOR (Returns with JOSHKA) Well, daddy, only you could find your way in that cellar. First of all it has no right side, because it's round. Second of all, if you start out on the right side you'd trip over potatoes and all sorts of vegetables. And third of all, if you're looking for a shelf, there is one all around the wall, with so many bottles. .you'd have to taste all of them to find the dry.

JOSHKA So we brought up this, maybe this is the one. . .

MIRA (Runs over to GABOR and blows out the candle in his hands) Were you in the cellar at all?

SHEBOEK Two dumb kids. The whole cellar is no bigger than half this table. You'd starve to death if someone didn't feed you. Come on Mira, you hold the candle. (Exit, followed by MIRA.)

GABOR (To JANOSH) Maybe after the toast. . .we could get a game of Kalaber together, what do you say? If you haven't forgotten how to play.

JANOSH Oh no, it's still in where we live. . . But here, I've heard, ultimo just about replaced it.

JOSHKA Completely. (Laughs) The only reason I married into this family is because once a year, on dad's birthday we manage to get up a game of Kalaber.

GABOR But if we knew what a lousy game you play we'd persuaded Klari to find another husband.

EVA (A bit more bitterly than it's called for) My parents have the same kind of story for me too. If they only knew. . .

(GABOR looks at his wife somewhat annoyed, shrugs, does not reply.)

KLARI (Walks over to EVA, takes the grinder from her) Here, let me relieve you. . . (EVA hands it over, gets up, sits next to ZOLTAN.)

EVA (Leans on ZOLTAN's chair with one elbow, with the other on his shoulder) How long will you stay?

ZOLTAN About two days.

EVA Can you take us home then, tomorrow?

ZOLTAN O.K.

SHEBOEK (Appears with MIRA, speaks from the window) Well kids, get the glasses ready.

GABOR Bravo, bravo, the dry wine is here.

EVA Boy, are you quiet. Why don't you woo me, court me, make love to me?

ZOLTAN Woo? I'd rather buy you.

SHEBOEK (Enters and is surrounded by MIRA, GABOR, ZOLTAN) Hey Evie, let me have the corkscrew, it's in that drawer.

EVA Coming up, uncle Imre. (Quietly to ZOLTAN) Buy me? You monkey!

GABOR (Looking at the bottles) You know I just remembered when you put these bottles away. But now you have to put some new ones away for your eightieth. (All: "that's right, that's right.") We'll celebrate your eightieth birthday with a special dry one, too.

SHEBOEK Well, we'll see.

EVA (To ZOLTAN) Fresh. (To SHEBOEK, giving him the corkscrew.) Here you are, uncle Imre.

ZOLTAN If you come to me tonight I'll give you the car.

EVA You're disgusting!

SHEBOEK I'm really curious to see how this one took these five years. About three years ago I drew it off into this bottle. This is the kind of dry that should take it well.

MIRA Well, dad, go to it, let's have the toast.

SHEBOEK (He is pouring wine into some small glasses but runs out of them) Hey Evie, would you rinse out about three or four glasses. . . (EVA leaves, somewhat reluctantly, returns shortly with glasses.)

JANOSH (Stands up) Well, all of you sit down. . (They sit down, laughing a little.) My dear uncle Imre, my one and only godfather. We don't see each other very often, it's true, and in the last few years, each of which might be called a whole decade, hardly at all.

JANOSH You haven't aged a bit. If I didn't look into the mirror to check the passage of time, and if I hadn't come here with my college-age daughter, I would say that hardly anything has changed at all. But the truth is that everything has changed. I remember you from my childhood as the man I owe a lot to. I got from you what was most precious to a working lad of my sort: books, culture, the love of science; the constant search of ideas; the probing, the reluctance of the mind to accept bad and evil. A guiding hand to sort out things in this world. This was the best present I could get. When I joined the labor movement I never forgot those things. I've been to many places, done a lot of things since then. And you, even at the age of seventy five, are one of the greatest prides and joys of your country. . . (SHEBOEK shakes his head and waves his hand.) ...don't wave your hand, godfather, that's the way it is, just as I'm telling you. Because even if you haven't changed in the last seventeen years, the world around you certainly has. It most certainly has, and in no small measure due to those, like you, who keep on working for progress even in their retirement. This is what I want to toast: the untiring man in you, my dear godfather. . I hope we'll all be like you at your age. . .and of course I toast the hospitable man, the gracious host in you. . .

JANOSH where else can one be wakened with wild-plum brandy... and where else would one be treated to such a gargantuan supper at the end of which one can propose a toast, with the finest dry wine to his seventy-five-year old godfather. . . Health and strength. . . God bless you. . . (Goes over to SHEBOEK and they clink glasses.)

SHEBOEK (Hugs JANOSH) God bless you, dear. You know (He turns to the rest, with good natured kidding.) I know it's not proper to say that, "brother I don't recall half of all the things you said I did". . .but. . . (A bit more seriously.) you were truly right about the world changing around us. Well, let it go on its course. . . Well, to your health, kids. . . (All drink.) To yours Mira. .too bad I can't adopt you as my granddaughter, at least. . . (The rest all go up to SHEBOEK, clink glasses, kiss him, when they're finished Klari speaks first.)

KLARI Coffee's ready. Everybody wants some? How about you, daddy?

SHEBOEK All right, I'll have a little. But you won't be able to serve it out of the china; aunt Sofie is the great destroyer of china at dishwashing times. But if you really like it, you'll drink it out of mugs.

GABOR (To JANOSH) Well, the politician finally surfaced, no matter how much you tried to hide it all day.

SHEBOEK He didn't try to hide it, just the other night we stayed up till all hours arguing about something; I don't remember what it was about, but it definitely had to do with politics.

MIRA Oh, yes, that's right. I listened for a while, then I went to bed, and because I was happy not to have to listen any more, and because I was feeling so good in general, I composed this poem, as I was falling asleep.

La vie est belle
Les femmes sont cheres
et les enfents faciles a faire.

But I forgot about it by that morning. It just came back to me, and uncle Imre, please consider it as my toast to you. Two lines are still missing, but I'll have them by tomorrow.

SHEBOEK This is a three-line poem, isn't it? It needs no continuation.

JANOSH Oh, yes, just let her finish it. I won't understand that either, but at least she won't pester us while doing it.

ZOLTAN Mira, you're lying!

MIRA Me? Why would I. . .?

ZOLTAN Because it wasn't the other morning, but right now, you've just made this up this minute.

MIRA (Relieved, laughing) Oh. . .All right, you're right. I was scared you'd say I was lying in the poem.

ZOLTAN (After a short pause, looking at her) No, you weren't lying in the poem.

MIRA Did you like it? (ZOLTAN does not reply, smiles.)

EVA Will somebody please translate it.

SHEBOEK God forbid! To translate a poem into prose!

MIRA Thank you, uncle Imre. (She jumps up.) Now then, let's clean up this mess. . .a little bit, anyway, so aunt Sofie won't have to do everything. (She begins cleaning off the table.)

GABOR And we shall see where our next meal comes from: what's going to be tarot or kalaber? Are you playing, dad?

SHEBOEK Tarot? It's been at least ten years since I played last. When your uncle Alex was still alive...at their house. All right, let's give it a try. (Exeunt JANOSH, SHEBOEK, GABOR and JOSHKA.)

EVA Aren't you playing, Zoli?

ZOLTAN They've got four already. I'd rather drink a little. (KLARI and MIRA, each with a full tray, leave for the kitchen.)

EVA (Pours for herself, clinks her glass to ZOLTAN's) What was that poem about? Translate it.

ZOLTAN You saw how she didn't want me to.

EVA (After a short silence) Did you like it?

ZOLTAN (Laughs meanly) Well, don't you want the car?

EVA (Somewhat angry) Come off it.

ZOLTAN Because you don't believe it. . .Look, I'll tell you something else. This car's worth about eighty thousand forints. I won't offer you the car, but a round one hundred thousand. It's right here in my pocket... (Gets up, picks up his jacket, out of its pocket he pulls out a bank-book, throws it over to her.) One hundred thousand. Is it a deal? (Drinks again.)

EVA Come on, why don't you cut it out. . . Don't be rude.

ZOLTAN Why not? You're not my sister. . . My older brother's wife; at most I can return some of the rudeness you have dished out to him through the years. And I just happen to be in the mood to be rude to everybody. To scratch a little, to bite. . . You now have the opportunity to receive the bite of a mad dog. And do you know what's really mad about it all? That the one hundred thousand forints is really yours if. . . (Laughs) There is not another woman who could boast of a hundred thousand for a single night.

EVA But you really don't want me.

ZOLTAN Don't you worry about that. You've probably cheated on Gabi already. I'd like to make you cheat him so that afterwards you'll be ashamed of it. . . And that's worth a hundred thousand to me.

EVA Worth it? And why?

ZOLTAN What's a hundred thousand to me. What's money? A means with which to get what we want. What I need I can get without money. But you, you've got to knock

ZOLTAN yourself out for it, and endure my treating you like this. . .in your little self you have to make yourself believe that this is really only a joke. . .a good joke at that. . . I'm drunk and that's why the whole thing is perhaps a little bit stronger than it would be otherwise. But you won't sleep all night because you can't decide whether I'd laugh at you if you really sneaked into my room. . . Well, if I had to get mixed up in this family reunion, I'd like to have some fun. . .

EVA (Shrugging her shoulders) Some story. What would you say if I told this to Gabi?

ZOLTAN Nothing. (KLARI returns, ZOLTAN looks at her as if to find out if she had heard anything. KLARI's face is inscrutable.)

KLARI (With blankets in her arms) Well, kids, we've got plenty of room for all of us, but I don't know about blankets. . .

EVA (After an angry silence) What happened to the little girl?

KLARI She went for a walk in the garden.

EVA Do you think she's dreaming of you, Zoli?

ZOLTAN No. I didn't upset her as much as I did you. Forints can't be exchanged for Rumanian currency. . .

EVA (Jumps up) I've just about had enough of this. . . (Runs out.)

KLARI Why are you teasing her?

ZOLTAN Because. . . (Pensive) No special reason, really, just passing the time. . . I wouldn't say that I can't stand her, but it would be going too far to say that I like her. . .

KLARI You probably stayed single because of the examplary marriages in your family.

ZOLTAN Could be. (Drinks) What about you? Is the divorce off?

KLARI (Shrugging her shoulders) It's not a question of just wanting to. (Slowly, in bad spirits.) The kids. . . the apartment. . .

ZOLTAN (With a sudden idea) Why don't you move up to Pest, into my apartment. With the kids. You can start the separation yourself.

KLARI Come on, Zoli, the offer is very generous, but inside two weeks you'd be cursing yourself for letting us ruin your life, your comfort. . .

ZOLTAN No, no. I'd sell the apartment anyway. It could be yours.

KLARI How come?

ZOLTAN I got a new job in the Matra mountains. In a sanatorium. I'm giving up my place in Pest. . . (Quickly, it bothers him that he has to lie, he is bored with it.) Details are not important, listen, here is the key to the apartment; furniture, everything's all yours, just move in, tomorrow.

KLARI (Staring in front of her) Tomorrow. . .it doesn't go that easy.

ZOLTAN It does go that easy. In about two weeks you'll be able to get a job somewhere, . . .if you want to you could exchange the apartment for a smaller one, you can do as you please. Put the key away. I'm not going back there anymore. The stuff I have to have is already up at the sanatorium.

KLARI Boy, do I envy you. . . You move so easily, change your life just like that.

ZOLTAN You go ahead and change yours. Not exactly the way I did mine. . .

KLARI That I wouldn't know how. . .

ZOLTAN Talk it over with father. . . Tonight. . . or tomorrow morning. Tell him what I told you.

SHEBOEK (Enters with JOSHKA) Kids, the places to sleep can be arranged, if. . .

KLARI Leave it to me, daddy, remember last year, there were eleven of us. We have only eight of us here, but I'm not sure about blankets. . .

SHEBOEK I asked aunt Sofie for two blankets. That should do it. Zoli, you'll sleep here on this sofa.

JOSHKA (Who must have come out for a drink, pours, then picks up bottle) I'll take this one inside.

KLARI Is the game over?

JOSHKA No, I just came out for this bottle. Whoever heard of playing dry? You want to play?

SHEBOEK You can sit in for me, if you want to. . .while I take care of this sleep business.

KLARI All right. I'll win some for you. (Exit, followed by JOSHKA.)

SHEBOEK (Sits down, touching his waist) I'm tired, and I didn't do a thing all day.

ZOLTAN You've been on your feet all day.

SHEBOEK Physical work, doing things, tire me the least.

ZOLTAN True. Empty talk, yakking, that tires you most, doesn't it?

SHEBOEK (Shaking his head) Good conversation never does. Only those strands of nerves I see standing at attention...the constant watch, preparedness. . . <u>That</u> you can't rest by physical relief. . . But what am I telling you all this, you know that better than I do.

ZOLTAN Physical rest is still the basis of any kind of rest. I think I'll go lie down soon, myself.

SHEBOEK My cure for nerve-fatigue is a little bit different: grafting of grapevines in the spring. . .or raking up the freshly hoed garden. . .or, if you want to be lying on your back, lie on top of a haycart, piled high, preferably during a starry, warm evening, just listening to the small creaks of the wheels, the hooves of the horses. (Short silence)

ZOLTAN I told Klari I'd give her my apartment in Pest. Let her get her divorce. (Pause) Talk to her, but the sooner the better. . .don't let it get too late.

SHEBOEK Well, another day. . . Hey, let's have another drink of this dry one.

ZOLTAN (Indifferently, kindly) Let's.

SHEBOEK (Thoughtfully looking at the bottle, holds it up to the light, pours, then puts bottle back, still looking at it.) I put this away for you, really. (Pause) This old head retains a lot of superfluous nonsense... when I was drawing this one off into this very bottle, the mailman came in with a letter from you in Paris. It was a cynical letter. . . I remember it because you write so seldom. . . You wrote you were bored with the French red wines. Well, I thought, you'd taste this one. . .

ZOLTAN (Clinking glasses) You want to go for a ride?

SHEBOEK No, and you'd better not go either. You drank too much.

ZOLTAN True, but right now my restlessness is more like alcohol to me than this.

SHEBOEK Neither one can be seen, though.

ZOLTAN I wouldn't want to wear them on the outside, like some decorations. (Smiles, puts his hand on his father's arm.) I'm no weakling, my dear. . . I promise you that by tomorrow I won't even be in a bad mood, you won't be able to tell that there's anything the matter.

SHEBOEK Something will happen.

ZOLTAN Of course something will. But don't bother yourself, don't try to cheer me up, or revive my soul: 'cause that I got: maybe a selfish one, a different one, but I'm sure it's not a wishy-washy one. Come on, let's spend this day and a half as if nothing had happened.

SHEBOEK All right with me, let's. What would you like to do? You want to play cards?

ZOLTAN No. I'm going to bed.

SHEBOEK Go ahead then, go to bed. Leave the window open. The air is nice and fresh. (Exit SHEBOEK)

ZOLTAN (Walks around the room, picks up a book, leafs through it, throws it on the sofa; turns on a reading lamp, turns off the overhead light; lies down on the sofa, opens the book but is not reading it.)
Oh. . .Oh. . . a madman is sitting in my brains shuffling the cards. . .and I. . .the man of reason, the normal human being. . .in a given moment. . .play the cards this madman gave me. . .

MIRA (Appears in the window, leans on the window-sill, watches ZOLTAN who is holding his head as he lies on his stomach. After a little while:)
ZOLI! . . .Are you asleep?

ZOLTAN (Looks up) No. (Pause) You look beautiful like that, framed in the window.

MIRA (Mock-seriously) Yes, I know I'm beautiful when the weather is nice. If you could see me in the gooey

MIRA November rain, then you'd say I'm ugly as a drenched, moulting hen.

ZOLTAN Lucky that I'm seeing you now. But I'd like to see you in November too.

MIRA Really?

ZOLTAN I'd give a lot if I could see you in November.

MIRA You sure have a melancholy way of courting.

ZOLTAN What? Oh, I wasn't courting you, I was just thinking out loud; a kind of inner monologue. I'm just looking at you, and I like you. It's very good for my eyes.

MIRA The ancients said that it was healthy to look at rubies. It improves one's eyesight. (Mocking) Wouldn't you like to call me 'my ruby?'

ZOLTAN That's right. Modern man has laughed at primitive superstition. . .for a while. But neurologists say that looking at and seeing colors, forms, the sight of beauty, and the sight of ruby too, is the supreme good for mankind; it could have very great calming effect. So the ancients may easily have been right.

MIRA Then it's wonderful that I came here. I wanted just something like this.

ZOLTAN To be admired by me.

MIRA No. I didn't come here to be. . . I just wanted to call you out here, to look at this evening in a fragrant garden. I have a feeling that since this morning, some kind of enormous hell is burning inside you. By tonight, the air was getting to be so thick around

MIRA you. . . I'd like it to go away. . . (Pause) Out of selfishness, of course, just out of selfishness. We're going home tomorrow, school starts on Tuesday. . . selfishly, I'd like my memories of this week to be complete and perfect. (Pause) If you don't want to come out. . . if my standing here is enough for you, then don't even come out, just let your eyes feast on me to your heart's content. If you think I'm beautiful. . . flatter me. . .

ZOLTAN Go on. Voice has a soothing effect too, educated people like me know that.

MIRA (Giggles) Have I been talking a lot of nonsense?

ZOLTAN My profession has taught me to be conceited.

MIRA Now, you see, I am awed, like all sophomores, when meeting a real scientist in the flesh.

ZOLTAN I'm not sure whether you meant to flatter with that title or to make fun of me.

MIRA (Cheerfully) Flatter you, of course. You'll return it ten years from now when you call me an architect. That's my profession. Building.

ZOLTAN Building. Yes, that still exists. But architecture doesn't. Not in our century. And there won't be any either.

MIRA That's silly talk. Of course there is architecture, but where do you get the idea that there won't be any in the future? I think that it's literature and the

MIRA fine arts that are on the decline in our age. . .and it'll be architecture that will be the expression of this era. . . Perhaps I'll be the century's Alberti. The reins are there, all we need is someone to get hold of them. And you might as well know it now: I reserve the right to one set of reins. I know they just don't give them away, and there are many applicants. . . (Pause) . . .Well, I'm going. . . We've philosophized enough, and it isn't very proper: me making passes at you from the window.

ZOLTAN You said a while ago that you were just trying to cure me of my hell. Of course, the method of treatment may look like an intrusion to an outsider, but the cure is effective just the same. I thank you for trying out on me your powers of cheering-up magic. . .

MIRA You weren't the one; it's an old tried and true method from way back. Only I had a feeling that I could be of some influence on you.

ZOLTAN How did you know that?

MIRA Quite frankly, from the fact that you had an influence on me.

ZOLTAN As nice it is of you to say this, it is inaccurate, and it proves nothing.

MIRA But. .If two people have similar. . .

ZOLTAN Ah ha, enter the nineteen-year-old. That's what I thought. . .sometime ago: two people; one completely tuned to the other's wavelength: that's love.

MIRA (Short silence) I wasn't talking about love.

ZOLTAN What else would you call it, if a man and a woman have some effect on one another?

MIRA (Stubbornly) I did not say love.

ZOLTAN Well, it's possible that I use the word in a broader sense than you.

MIRA Oh, oh. . . I'd use it in a much narrower sense, that is I would use it. . .but I wasn't talking about that.

ZOLTAN To me it meant this: you are somebody I could fall in love with. Despite the fact that in the November rain you look a mess, like a drenched, moulting chicken. I know almost everything about you. . . I know what you're like in March when you begin to bloom. . . I know how you sulk, what your face is like when you cry... I even know how you'd be naked in bed; how we would love each other when and if we loved each other. . .

MIRA Silly. . .

ZOLTAN . . .but I won't delude myself, so let's take this subject off the agenda. I'd love to go over to that window and gratefully kiss your hand, but I'm afraid I'd really want you then, I'd dream about you tonight, so I'd rather do it tomorrow, in broad daylight, and in front of the others, when we say goodbye; and now say goodnight nicely and go to sleep.

MIRA (After a long pause) You treat me like a kid.

ZOLTAN Good night.

MIRA (After a pause) Good night. . . (Another short pause) Good night. (She disappears from the window.)

ZOLTAN (Stares at the window, then stands up, sighing, goes to table, pours, drinks, then stretches) Hey. . . "another moment and monstrous misfortune--will sit on our chest with icy ass- a laughter is heard; the purse is empty- troubled man, a small somebody--ah, ah, life is a gas. . ." Ooooh, goddamit to hell, you stupid Sheboek, you idiot Sheboek! (He hits himself over the head with his fist. Repeats this a number of times as the lights fade.)

End of act one.

ACT II

First Scene

The stage is slowly lighted, until daylight, or rather early morning light is suggested. From the left a strong beam of the morning sun is coming through the window where MIRA now appears.

MIRA (Very softly) Good morning. . .dear Zoltan, good morning. (After a while, whispering.) Shouldn't I wake you up yet?

(In a little while ZOLTAN sighs and changes his posi-

tion, but continues to sleep. MIRA seems to be giggling silently.)

MIRA Zoltan. . .aren't you going to wake up, little friend? (Murmuring) I couldn't see your face before, you buried it in the pillow. . . (ZOLTAN turns again, he is on his back now.) I didn't dare wake you then, maybe you were having beautiful dreams. (After a pause, softly, as if to herself.) But now that you've turned I can see that your face is relaxed, the wrinkles are smoothed out, you look ten years younger than you did yesterday...and you've become beautiful. The young and the beautiful ought to get up at the first sound of the morning bells.

ZOLTAN (Without moving, on his back, unable to see MIRA, in a very clear voice)
You could have wakened me. . . You couldn't have disappointed me: you are the continuation of my dream. . . I was dreaming of you.

MIRA Oh, why did you say that? I wanted to start with that: I dreamt about you. We were by a rapid, cold river, fishing. . . it was cold like the lakes of Alaska, and we caught large, lazy, white-bellied fish. . . lots of them. . . we fried them over fire, laid them out on huge leaves. . . strangely enough the leaves were some kind of tropical plant's, then we placed them in a circle among green peppers and tomatoes. I can still see the picture, like a Matisse still-life.

ZOLTAN (Still lying on his back, now raises his head to look at MIRA, laughs) Matisse still-life? With green peppers and tomatoes? (Laughs)

MIRA The picture has Matisse's colors. And because you put the things in order, and looked a bit like Matisse, that's why I called it that. You like it?

ZOLTAN (Turns on to his stomach, faces MIRA, laughs) It's flattering.

MIRA Flattering? Are you that vain? And admit it, too?

ZOLTAN Well, the admission of vanity is the only excuse. . .

MIRA I wouldn't say that. On the contrary. . . Until it's not admitted, until it's hidden, you can hardly notice it.

ZOLTAN But one just simply takes responsibility for oneself.

MIRA I take responsibility for myself. . . I would like to have continued our conversation from yesterday. . . I took the risk of waking you up. . . I was afraid you wouldn't be happy about it.

ZOLTAN But I was.

MIRA (After a pause) You want to come out? . . .Into the garden?

ZOLTAN You did right, my dear little Mira, waking me up. (He lies on his stomach, props his chin up on his hands, and kicks his feet back and forth.) Your insight is valid, after all! I woke up, and I'm a different man than I was yesterday when you didn't get anything but

ZOLTAN a taste of my own bad mood. And you deserve a great deal more. Of course you'll be leaving tomorrow. . . in the morning. . .

MIRA At dawn. "By the dawn's light I shall be running far away. . ."

ZOLTAN Hey Mira, do you know that I haven't regretted anything so much in my life as meeting you now?

MIRA What word is the accent on? (Waits a second) That the meeting was <u>now</u>, or that there was a <u>meeting</u> at all?

ZOLTAN I'm no linguist. Come on in, let's have a cigarette.

MIRA All right. (Starts in, stops.) Shouldn't I make some coffee first? I'll bring a bucketful. . . One can be so pleasantly stupid from the morning coffee, believing that the day is going to be just great, everything's O.K.

ZOLTAN Yes, by all means. Make coffee. Quickly. I already saw you yesterday working out as a housewife. Now you may continue by bringing some eggs. . ham and eggs... lots of it, and then, wait, you like swimming?

MIRA Sure do.

ZOLTAN We'll gobble the mountain of ham and eggs, we'll drink up this indescribably well made coffee and then we'll run off for a swim, O.K.? Not to a pool, either. We'll run over to the Tisza and even if it's not so warm any more, it'll give us a chance to feel all the greater heroes for having dunked ourselves in it. . . Forty-five kilometers from here, that's all. . . we could be back by noon. . .

MIRA Oh, it's going to be great! This autumn morning has such a mascadine taste anyway. . . let's go. . . of course we'll be cold as hell... but it doesn't matter. . . Well, I'm off to make breakfast, you'll see how good. . . the coffee will be . . . (Laughs, runs off, away from the window.)

ZOLTAN Boy, the world sure is friendly when you don't want anything from it any more; almost the kind I wanted it to be when I wanted everything. (Hums, lights a cigarette.)

SHEBOEK (Opens door cautiously, seeing ZOLTAN walks right in.) So, you're up.

ZOLTAN (Cheerfully) Got up a couple of minutes ago. . . Hi, father. . . good morning. . .

SHEBOEK Hi. (Short pause, he sits next to ZOLTAN on the sofa.) You must have fallen asleep suddenly last night, while reading. I turned off the light over your head, not too long ago. . .

ZOLTAN I thought it was you. I was reading that book about beekeeping. . . where is it? (Starts looking for it.)

SHEBOEK There it is. . .

ZOLTAN I was reading your article in it.

SHEBOEK (Laughs) And promptly fell asleep. . .

ZOLTAN (Laughs too, gayly) Well, I guess I won't be able to explain this away. (In good spirits, as if everything were all right, he pats his father on the shoulder.)

ZOLTAN Let me have a little bit of brandy, I know you keep it for waking yourself and others up in the morning...

SHEBOEK (Gets up, goes to get the brandy) To take away the bad taste in your mouth.

ZOLTAN By the way, reading your article made me think of the possibility of bees having a personality.

SHEBOEK They don't have one. (Comes back with the brandy.)

ZOLTAN Now that's what I thought at first. Bur your study made me think. I was thinking about it, and fell asleep. You wrote that within certain families the younger generation receive their characteristic traits not from the parent bees but from the nursing-bees. . .

SHEBOEK That's true. (They clink glasses, drink.)

ZOLTAN Well, what is that if not some form of personality?

SHEBOEK Rearing, you mean. . . (Laughs a little.)

ZOLTAN No. Physiology: the nursing bees nourish the larvae with food made and manufactured in their own bodies. So then, now don't get scared, I have no intention of leaving out the environmental factors here. But here then is something that falls in with germination. . . genetic heredity. . .

SHEBOEK You see, that is exactly the problem. The one I haven't been able to crack to this day.

ZOLTAN To say nothing of the fact that bees introduced into the tropics give up gathering within one to two generations. Then the instinctual nature of gathering can seriously be questioned, at least to the extent that it must satisfy that nerve function which we call instinct.

SHEBOEK You see, even the question of bees' personality is a good topic for. . .

ZOLTAN I know. Any topic's a good topic. Don't worry; I'll pull myself together. You can see that it has already happened. Besides, if I were five years younger I'd switch to microbiology and investigate thoroughly your pharynx theory.

SHEBOEK It isn't my theory. I just accept it. The author's name is in the footnotes. . .

ZOLTAN I never read footnotes. .

SHEBOEK By the way, It was a good ten years ago when I first heard of it. I read it in a German trade publication. I struggled with it. You know how I am with German; to this day it's the way good old Lajos M. Kecskemeti taught me. . . he was my teacher in college, you didn't know him. . . He taught German too, among other things. One day some inspector came from the ministry or someplace. . . I think I was a junior then. . . and he walked into our class. He asked questions, he kept asking question after question and we knew nothing. He said, shaking his head: "Professor, these children

SHEBOEK can't speak German at all". . . Old Kecskemeti pulls himself up to his full height, throws his head back and says: "And they won't speak German either, as long as I'm here!" (Laughs)

ZOLTAN You speak with such understanding about him. Then how come I had to learn German?

SHEBOEK Oh, son, you were different. (Pause) You had to be given, as a gift, all the mechanized knowledge, because you'd never have acquired them later. You always thought you had enough brains without those things. . .

MIRA (Peeks in through the window) Breakfast is just about ready, I over-roasted the coffee just a little bit. . . Hi, uncle Imre, darling. (Leaves window, walks through door, kisses Sheboek, then starts for the kitchen.) I'll make some coffee for you too, all right? (Exit. Both men look after her.)

ZOLTAN I think I could fall in love with her.

SHEBOEK Because she's here. Near you. Right in front of your eyes.

ZOLTAN (With self-mockery) And because it's the last chance... right. . . (Pause) No, I meant the kind of love I've been looking for since I was twenty: to fall truly in love with someone. . . (Pause) And because she wouldn't mind either. . . This kind of thing's always tempting.

SHEBOEK They'll be leaving in the morning.

ZOLTAN You've said that. And my time's up right about then. . . But until then. . .

SHEBOEK I wouldn't like it if. . . (Falls silent)

ZOLTAN (Laughing) If. . .? Well, what if? Go ahead, finish what you started saying. . .

SHEBOEK Zoli, cynicism can be put up with only as a style. Something external. But it's very disappointing when somebody really lives his cynicism.

ZOLTAN Wait just a minute. . . the old men who came up with or rather made up this theory, the Kosarges school, Diogenes, and who was that other one?

SHEBOEK (Reluctantly) Anthistenes. . .

ZOLTAN Of course, good old Anthistenes. . . they lived it too. With muddy feet they trampled all of Aristippos' magnificent carpets, each a masterpiece.

SHEBOEK You can muddy the carpet, for all I care. . .

ZOLTAN (Teasing) So it's taboo?

SHEBOEK Well, . . .yes. . .

ZOLTAN All right. . . for your sake. But only for your sake. Because I'm no longer in the situation where I could or would respect any kind of taboo, forbidden things or moral dicta.

SHEBOEK When have you ever been in that situation?

ZOLTAN Well. . . let's just say that right now I'm especially out of that situation.

SHEBOEK I don't believe that. As long as one's alive, one lives according to his own moral norms, regardless of the situation; whether he's young, or living his last years, sick or even on death row. The situation, including yours, may bind you, but it could never excuse you.

ZOLTAN Big issues. This protestant ethic is not really your own. You don't really believe it yourself. . . but, as I've said, for your sake I will honor it. You want to go swimming? I'm going with Mira.

SHEBOEK To the pool?

ZOLTAN No, to the Tisza.

SHEBOEK This cold September water wouldn't be good for my neuralgia.

ZOLTAN We'll be back in two, two and a half hours. (Jumps up.) Let's have a drop before we go.

SHEBOEK Don't drink any more if you're going to drive.

ZOLTAN Mira will drive.

SHEBOEK She knows how to drive?

ZOLTAN What nineteen-year-old doesn't? (MIRA enters, carefully balancing a full tray.)

MIRA Let's hurry up. . . I've got to pack some bathing suits. (Giggles) And because I don't want anybody waking up and coming along with us. Just the three of us are going, right. . .?

SHEBOEK Just the two of you. . . (Exit)

ZOLTAN (Begins to eat, then) I've tried to talk him into it, but he wouldn't come.

MIRA (Putting food on her own plate, acting the housewife) The ham's a little overfried, the coffee is somewhat undercooked. . . but I'm just not used to this stove yet. Why doesn't uncle Imre want to come? (No reply.) What clever excuse did he come up with?

ZOLTAN He said that the water in September is too cold for him.

MIRA The sun will be warm. (Pours the coffee.) I love September. One has such sad thoughts in September, and then it feels so good to take long walks, eat a lot, drink a lot, everything. . . Sad, but consoling month.

ZOLTAN Sad?

MIRA A time of passing away, so it's sad.

ZOLTAN The thought of passing away causes not sadness but anger.

MIRA I'm still in school, I have been for the last thirteen years. . . September is always a new beginning. . . No anger, but curiosity.

ZOLTAN Passing away, new beginning; what's the difference.

MIRA (Laughs) Of course. We know that too, and love to play it at school. We call it: necktwisting. . (Pours coffee for ZOLTAN.) How much sugar do you want? (ZOLTAN indicates "none.") It's a very good game to play on an outing. We lie around the grass and begin

MIRA philosophizing. The idea is that the line of arguing should lead to the third sentence that must be the dead opposite of the first one.

ZOLTAN Ahem. Every Cretan is a liar, but it was a Cretan who said that, so then this isn't true either, therefore not every Cretan is a liar--so it could be true, therefore he is a liar, therefore it isn't true, therefore he isn't a liar, therefore it's true, therefore...

MIRA (Mimicking ZOLTAN) Ahem. . . But: one has such sad thoughts in September because passing away is foremost in our minds. . . Yes, yes, kids, every passing away is a new beginning. It's precisely that. . . that's why the newborn cries--he mourns his birth. No, it's not good like this, you have to say it in unison, and somebody replies with something new.

ZOLTAN Never mind, we've been smart long enough; we could be a little stupid for a while.

MIRA Well, I was just fooling around, anyway.

ZOLTAN I love you anyway, even when you're fooling around.

MIRA (Suddenly putting down her fork) Zoli, . . .now that we're talking like this, I want to tell you. . .

ZOLTAN Tell me. . .

MIRA Just that. . . (Stops, with embarrased laughter she shakes her head, takes a sip of her coffee.) You have an advantage over me. Up to yesterday you didn't know about me. But for the last week I knew that you existed. I saw your pictures as a kid, I even read

MIRA one of your letters; I knew it wasn't right, but I did it anyway. . . I think you wrote it last year. I thought about you a lot. I woke some mornings hoping that you'd drop in unexpectedly. You have raised my curiosity. And suddenly you're here.

ZOLTAN According to this <u>you</u> are at an advantage.

MIRA (Stubbornly) No, you don't understand. . . (Stops) Don't interrupt, don't confuse me. . . I want to tell you.

ZOLTAN This coffee is very good. I won't interrupt you anymore for even this long. Thanks for breakfast and the coffee. And special thanks for bringing it yourself. Now go ahead.

MIRA This is the first time I've been abroad, even if Hungary is not really a foreign country, but you can't just get on the train and travel anywhere you want to. . . so this week at your father's, a week that's been the most beautiful week of my life. . . it's been very consoling. . . Don't you feel (Lively, relieved a little of being able to say what she wanted to say.) happy about the balanced, wonderful life of old people? One tends to discover one's own life in it. . . a later time. . . half a century from now. . .

ZOLTAN He. . (A yelp-like laugh.)

MIRA Just as daddy said last night. That certainly scratched my pride; already I felt myself to be a wastrel,

MIRA because of my B average last year, and this year I fell behind in languages. . . what I'm trying to say is that your father was a big advertisement. . . an advertisement that prepared your arrival.

ZOLTAN But I'm not like him. . .

MIRA You are. (Pause) You are. . .

ZOLTAN The one who arrives unexpectedly. (He stands up, walks slowly to the window, MIRA looks after him. When she sees that he is turning back toward her, she talks more rapidly, more freely.)

MIRA No, you didn't arrive unexpectedly. . . When you got here I believed it was my doing. . . arranged the circumstances so that you'd just pop in. . . (Stops because ZOLTAN does not reply, and is standing with his back toward her.) Yes. . . (Drawn out.) and I was happy because you were just the way I imagined you to be. . . I was toying with the idea of falling in love with you if we ever met, and I was very happy that I was right. . . (Pause) . . . that I really fell in love with you, (Rapidly) and I just had to say it, now, there was no sense waiting with it, besides, I felt that you also felt the same way. . . that's all. (Pause) And we'll be going home in the morning, anyway.

ZOLTAN (Turns around, looks at MIRA who is embarrased but manages to look at him) Trouble is that I fell in love with you too.

MIRA (Barely audible) Trouble? Why? . . .And is it true?

ZOLTAN (Takes out his carkeys, waves them, then throws them to MIRA) Come on, let's go. You drive, I've had too much to drink already. (MIRA catches the keys.)

MIRA Yes. . . (Stands up. . .embarrased, she can hardly speak.) I'll get my bathing suit. Towels. . . and everything. . . yes, I'll bring them right. . . (Exit, as if afraid he'll call after her.)

ZOLTAN (Calls after her, just before she closes the door) I'll be ready in two minutes. . . (MIRA closes the door behind her then suddenly opens it, stares at ZOLTAN.)

MIRA You too?

ZOLTAN (Looks at her, does not reply for a while, then coolly) I love you. You could be the meaning of my life.

MIRA (After a short pause) Dear. . . I'm embarrased. What should I say? But I'm very very happy. . .

EVA (From outside) Hey kids, you got up so early. . .

MIRA Yes. . . I've already. . . (Exit, closes door behind her.)

EVA (Looking after MIRA) The little girl's wild. . . Are you getting anywhere?

ZOLTAN Look Eva, questions like that you couldn't ask even if we did spend the night together.

EVA So that's what you got your mind on, you stubborn mule, eh? (Laughs) As you can see I came to you, I can't help it that it's dawn already. I slep in the girls' room...three of us. . .it's not that easy to sneak away. (Provocatively) You've been asleep anyway.

ZOLTAN (In the meantime he's taken out his bathing trunk, a towel from his briefcase; he wraps his trunk into the towel, puts the bundle under his arm and starts out. Stopping by the door he puts his hand on EVA's breast.)

Let's see what I've missed. . .

EVA Go to, you idiot. . . (Takes his hand away.)

ZOLTAN You've got no bra on. Is it possible that you really came to see me? It's a bit too late, it's light already. . . well, I'll just owe you for this too. I hate to be indebted to anybody. . . for anything. (Exit)

EVA Jerk. . . (Angrily looking after him, annoyed.) Stupid jerk.

JOSHKA (Enters from kitchen) Hi. . . (Sleepy, stumbles, sees cigarettes on the table, lights up.) Well, what are you doing?

EVA (Pouting) Me? (Suddenly) I'm fed up with everybody who's a Sheboek.

JOSHKA Me too.

EVA We sure picked them good.

JOSHKA Hell no. . they're not that kind. . . They picked us. . . You and me too. They're self-willed, miserable, unhappy. . .maniacal, nervous. . . and all that with mighty stubbornness. They idolize their daddy; worship 'round his beard; anytime he yelps they go into ecstasy at his wisdom. Like puppies. Of course after a while they're somewhat threadbare, oldish puppies, and that's disappointing. . .

EVA Poor dear. . . In Klari's place anybody else would be threadbare.

JOSHKA You mean because of me.

EVA . . . because her age doesn't necessarily mean. . .

JOSHKA (Grinning at her) As far as I know she's only five years older than you.

EVA Only?

JOSHKA Five years means so much?

EVA Not the years so much, but she is she and I am myself.

JOSHKA You're making me curious. About the differences.

Curtain

Second Scene

Afternoon. The table has been half cleared. At one end JOSHKA and GABOR are playing chess.

JOSHKA (Moves) Check.

GABOR This is boring, the same move for the third time. . .

JOSHKA You did it too. . .

SHEBOEK (Enters) They're still not back. (Walks over and watches the game.) They'll have to eat their food cold. . . if they're late. (Walks to other end of the room. On the small table he plays with the microscope, puts a glass slide in.)

GABOR Look, let's call it a tie.

JOSHKA Oh, no. Try a different move.

GABOR I'm no fool. I'm satisfied with a tie. . .

SHEBOEK (From his position by the microscope.) You're satisfied? You've got a winning game.

JOSHKA Him? I'll eat my hat if even daddy can win this game with his position now.

SHEBOEK You haven't even got a hat.

JOSHKA How much do you want to bet? I bet you anything.

SHEBOEK How much?

JOSHKA Anything. Tabula rasa.

SHEBOEK All right. . . Now then on white e5 castle takes your bishop.

JOSHKA Marvelous. The white castle's gone, I took it.

SHEBOEK Knight to g3: check.

JOSHKA I took that too.

SHEBOEK Not that one... You could only take that with the pawn, but you can't because you'd throw your king wide open... so you'd have to move. . . (He selects another

SHEBOEK slide, holds it up to the window, then places it under the microscope.) Your king moves to gl. . .

JOSHKA Oh no, I won't! (Leans over the board.)

GABOR (Triumphantly) Oh yes you will, right there, boy. . .

JOSHKA Wait, just a. . . don't you count your eggs. . . well, and what if I move there? What then? All right. . . I move there. . . you got it. . .

SHEBOEK I take f2 with my bishop.

JOSHKA (Triumphantly) That you can. Yessir. I take your bishop. A bishop for a pawn.

SHEBOEK Then castle to dl and mate. So don't rush this bishop thing. (He puts another slide into the microscope.)

GABOR And, boy, is that a mate! Beautiful. . .

JOSHKA Wait a minute, I overlooked. . . this won't do, back to. . . No, I won't take the bishop.

GABOR You made the move, you can't go back.

JOSHKA Of course I can. We're not playing for blood. It bothers me that dad doesn't look at the board, just keeps fiddling around with that microscope. And you bother me too. You can't play like that. (Laughs) I see, it doesn't matter: even if I don't take it now it's mate in two moves. . . Daddy won. . .

SHEBOEK Ahm. . . (Adjusting the microscope, leaning over it.) There are two state farms in your county, right?

JOSHKA Two.

SHEBOEK Well then. . . Let each of them buy a thousand gooseberry shoots and plant them this year. That's what I wrote on the tabula rasa. (JANOSH enters, he's heard the last few words. He stops and listens, curiously looking at SHEBOEK by the microscope.)

JOSHKA I don't think it's fair. I'm not the director of either of those farms, I can't promise anything in their names.

SHEBOEK You don't have to. The county, your county, presents the shoots to the farms as a gift. The rest is up to the farms.

JOSHKA All right, I lost. But boy, am I going to get it? I'll come and tell you about it. (Pause) How much would those shoots come to? In money?

SHEBOEK Two thousand shoots. You know how much that is. It hasn't been three weeks that the local growers offered them to your county. The farms were willing to take them, but the county did not approve. You're the head of the county council; you'll approve it. (Giggles) Well, sonny, losers must pay. . . or you should have learned to play a better game of chess. . .

JANOSH I had some of that gooseberry preserve, my dear godfather; I wouldn't say it was bad, but I'm with those who don't want to grow it.

JOSHKA That's daddy's obsession: gooseberries.

SHEBOEK Ahm. . . (Looking at his microscope) You don't have to eat it if you don't like it. But if they grew ten times as much as they do now, it still wouldn't be enough for the canneries. The whole fruit is full of pectin. Stuff that can be gelatinized. And that is still being imported... for hard currency and gold. . . and the small farmers just around this part of the country could supply so much of it in so short a time that the foreign trade commissioners would drool at the sight of all the money they could save. . . (Giggles) But I don't play chess often enough with a real county council-head to make him do things like this.

EVA (Enters) Zoli and Mira aren't back yet?

SHEBOEK Not yet. Their food is getting cold. I put it in the oven. . .

EVA (Annoyed) Zoli promised me to take us home. The three o'clock bus left already, if he doesn't come in five minutes we'll have to start out to catch the next one, we can't miss that one too because of him.

GABOR Because of him, because of him. . . What is he, our chauffeur? If he takes us home he's doing us a favor.

EVA A favor is a favor until you can count on it. If you can't, then it's just a headache.

GABOR (Stands up, in a bad mood) I wasn't counting on it.

EVA But I was. I have no desire to be a sardine on a Sunday night bus.

GABOR (Looking at his watch) Too bad, because that's exactly what we'll be. . . and we'd better start right now.

JOSHKA (Somewhat reluctantly) It's possible that my car will pick me up. . . then we'll drop you on the way.

EVA And how will you know if it's coming.

JOSHKA If it comes it'll be here.

EVA Very kind of you. And we should miss the next bus in the meantime. Come on, let that chess alone, let's get ready, dear. (Exit, like a hurt princess.)

GABOR Let's get ready then. . . (Exit after EVA.)

JANOSH (To JOSHKA) Your car will pick you up on Sunday?

JOSHKA It's not for sure. . .

JANOSH Ahem. . (Lights a cigarette, sits down, picks up a book, but doesn't read, just keeps turning the pages.) I hope nothing happened to them. (Restlessly) The car could have broken down. . .

JOSHKA (Meanly) New car, nothing happens to that.

JANOSH Then I really don't know. . .

MIRA (Flying through the door) Oh, we're so terribly late... Please don't be angry sweet uncle Imre, but we went on a little sightseeing tour and I ruined the whatya-call it, I don't know what it is, but that's why we're so late.

JOSHKA What did you ruin?

MIRA Doesn't matter, we fixed it.

JANOSH But where have you been for so long?

MIRA All over the place. But let me go into the kitchen and have a bite, I'm starved to death.

EVA (Enters with coat, pocketbook, ready to go) Well, at last, you're here. . . (To GABOR who is coming behind her.) The last minute. We could just catch that bus.

GABOR (To MIRA) Where is Zoli?

MIRA He dropped me off in front of the house, then drove on. He said he'd be back soon.

EVA Very nice. What does soon mean?

MIRA Very shortly, I would think. . . (Exit)

EVA Now the other bus. . .

CHAUFFEUR (Enter after a brief knock) Hello.

JOSHKA Hello. . . so, you've come to get us after all, comerade Kovacs. . .

CHAUFFEUR As we agreed. Are we ready to leave?

JOSHKA Right away. (He starts out, followed by EVA, GABOR and SHEBOEK.) Where's Klari?

SHEBOEK (Stops) She went over to the Szoboszlais. . .

JOSHKA The Szoboszlais? Where do they live? Who are they? How can I find her there?

SHEBOEK I forgot, it slipped my mind: she said to tell you not to wait for her. She won't be going home today.

JOSHKA She won't be coming home?

SHEBOEK No.

JOSHKA (Irritated, shrugs his shoulder) If she won't she won't. . . Well, goodbye daddy, take care of yourself... (Handshake, he hurries out.)

GABOR (Enters, hugs his father) See you dad, take care. . .

SHEBOEK Goodbye children, so long. (He kisses EVA on the cheeks, takes GABOR and EVA out to the car.)

JANOSH (Alone, closes the door, walks back, shaking his head. MIRA enters from the kitchen)
I guess we'd better start packing.

MIRA (Drawn out) Yes. . . (She's eating a chicken leg.)

JANOSH Where else did Zoli say he was going?

MIRA He said he had something to take care of in town.

JANOSH I'm not exactly crazy about him; I haven't seen you all day.

MIRA You'll be able to see me, all next month, next year. . .

JANOSH (Shrugging his shoulder) I don't usually interfere with your business, but listening to all that was said here. . . . and especially what wasn't said. . . I could have lived nicely without it. . . (Exit)

MIRA (Walks to the microscope, looks into it, adjusting it, enter SHEBOEK)
Are you angry too, uncle Imre?

SHEBOEK Me? Why would I be angry?

MIRA (Short pause) The Tisza was beautiful. . . we kept looking at it and time just flew by. . . (Leaves off)
Uncle Imre. . . I'd like to tell you something.

SHEBOEK Go ahead, dear, go ahead.

MIRA Well, . . .something like. . . I'd like to ask, in secret, for your son's hand. . . (Expecting to laugh at SHEBOEK's surprise, but he does not seem surprised at all. He does not reply, walks over to the table and begins to put away the chess set.) Why did you become so serious so suddenly?

SHEBOEK I'm not serious. Go ahead, go on. You already mentioned your eugenic goals yesterday. (Pause) I haven't become serious at all. Go on. We agreed with your father that this afternoon we'll pay a family visit to the Varjus.

MIRA Just take daddy along, I'm not going. (Dejected) Relatives I've never seen and will never see, will say Oh my, what a big girl, has she got a fiance? Not yet? There will be one soon of course. . . For me you are enough for a relative, all relatives.

SHEBOEK Well, all right. . . if it bores you. Janosh thought it would be only proper. We'll say you haven't the time. . . or have a headache. . .

MIRA Uncle Imre, I'm still waiting for an answer.

SHEBOEK What should I answer, my sweet little girl? I appreciate that you have taken me into your confidence, but. . . perhaps it would have been better if you hadn't. (Pause) You know Mira, I'm very happy to be around you young people; I can have wonderful talks with you about

SHEBOEK matters of the objective world, but, after all I am seventy-five, what could I possibly tell you subjectively. . .

MIRA Uncle Imre, you think I'm some kind of fool; I will not be paid off with small change. . .

SHEBOEK Not at all a fool, dear. There's always been one thing that I could never interfere with: my children's business. If I ever tried, I was later convinced that I shouldn't have. (Pause) You see: Klari left on the noon bus for her little daughter so that by the time her husband gets home she wouldn't be there; she would make her escape. She's been wanting to do this for years. Now she's taken the risk. Now, could I say anything about that? No. This is what a seventy-fifth birthday looks like, if you care to really take a good look at it. . . and this is still the smaller, less significant news, what can I do? I acknowledge this too.

MIRA You want to avoid an answer which I really didn't ask for, I simply told you with confidence, with love. Even before I told daddy. And you're not even happy about it.

SHEBOEK Why wouldn't I be happy, dear. . .

MIRA Because if you were happy I could see it on you. And if you loved me--as I felt you did during this marvelous week; and I love your son--and still can't be happy about this, then you either don't love me, or

MIRA you're not what I think you are, but both of these things are impossible, so please say something to me, dear uncle Imre, because you've really scared me.

SHEBOEK Where did Zoli go?

MIRA What do you mean where? (Pause) He'll be here in a minute. (Pause) He went to. .to get me a ring.

SHEBOEK On Sunday?

MIRA Yes. He said he knew the manager of the jewelry store, he's got some rings he can get his hands on now. . . what do I know. (Bursting out.) But don't you keep on questioning me, I'm waiting for a good word from you. All this is some kind of evasion.

ZOLTAN (Enter) Hi. I'm very late, but. . .

SHEBOEK Doesn't matter. You came at the best possible moment. You've saved me from lying to her in your name.

ZOLTAN (To MIRA, after a short pause) You've already told him? I asked you not to. Well, doesn't matter. Hi, darling Mira. (Kisses her.) Well, I did manage to bring something, anyway. (He takes out a little box, opens it.) Give me your hand. . .

MIRA (Frightened, stiffly) What should uncle Imre have lied to me in your name?

ZOLTAN He wouldn't have had to lie, just. . .to keep quiet. But to be quiet in a less ominous way. . . I can see that on your face. . . For now I just got this ring. . .

SHEBOEK May I see it? (He takes it from ZOLTAN, turns it around, looks at it, then takes out a magnifying glass, examines it.) Now look at this, Mira. This is a small ring, not much to look at. . . nothing. One large and six small diamonds in it. This is nothing, truly nothing, because the bunch of wildflowers you got up so early yesterday to bring me was much more valuable to me than this; this is nothing, although it costs about sixty thousand forints, maybe more. For Zoli even the sixty thousand is nothing already, and he doesn't realize that a wildflower from a roadside ditch would remind you of him just as much as this would, although it's possible that he doesn't want it to remind you of him. If that is so, then he's right. (Exit)

MIRA He really upset me. What was it he didn't tell me?

ZOLTAN (After a short silence) There are still sixteen, seventeen hours before you leave. Sixteen hours is a long time if you don't care what'll happen afterwards. But this way? It will be only good for watching our own passing away: now only fifteen and a half, now only seven, now only three.

MIRA (Unsmiling, looking at him) Of course, it'll be bad, terrible, when the train pulls out, but until it pulls out I don't care. And when it has pulled out, when it left for good and I won't see you, even if I would lean out the window, then I'll start thinking about the

MIRA time you'll come to visit, and from then on I'll be waiting for you. You could be there by Christmas. . . even before that. . . in the gooey November rain. . . (She smiles now.) I don't care even if I am a drenched sparrow when you see me; but I won't be one: I'll be waiting for you and waiting will make me beautiful. Yes, believe me, everybody noticed how I became beautiful during the last few days; they said it was the change of climate, the weather, but it was simply that I'd been waiting for you. And then I didn't even know you, I only felt in my nerves that something would happen, life would be different: everything would be very good and very beautiful. (Seriously again.) Now please tell me what troubles you.

ZOLTAN All right, I'll tell you. Although I'd prefer not to. To make believe that everything's all right.

MIRA No. No. Everything is all right. We don't have to make believe that. I don't want to make believe that I love you. I love you. Wait, let me have my ring. (She puts it on.) I'll never take it off. You're engaged to me with this, right? Well, nothing can change that, no matter what you'll say. And now, please go ahead.

ZOLTAN (Takes a few steps, goes to the table, picks a glass, pours, drinks) I've never cried over what's been done, but this is terrible, (With a small, bitter laugh.), if you could only summon me just twenty-four hours

ZOLTAN earlier. . . (Pause) At dawn yesterday during an operation I killed somebody. It was malpractice, I'll have to go to jail for a few years, and will never be able to have a practice again; that's all. (Pause) So... with that ring we're not exactly engaged. . . it's only a keepsake. Think of me sometime, but I won't visit you in the fall, at Christmas, or ever.

MIRA (Pause) Well then, maybe a few years from now. I'll wait. (Pause) In the meantime I'll finish college... (Pause) Even for ten years. I'll be twenty-nine then. Or thirty. . .nowadays that's when women are most beautiful. Well, that's all. I don't even want to hear about it any more. You understand? (Enter SHEBOEK she turns to him:) Uncle Imre, Zoli told me what it was all about, and I told him that it doesn't matter to me.

SHEBOEK (Not really understanding) Of course, of course. . .

MIRA (Forcefully) Yes. I'm just as big an optimist as you are, uncle Imre. Generations, you've said, whole generations are needed before you can really learn the characteristics of a single plant. . . and it's not even sure you'll see the results yourself. And still you're going ahead with it. Well, I'll be going ahead with my waiting. (Suddenly breaks down.) Yes, I will; why do you look so terrified, because I'll be waiting for your son? No matter how long. . For a hundred years even. . . not very cheerfully, of course. . .

MIRA (Wipes off her tears, smiles a little.) And I won't lose my head, not even this much. . .

JANOSH (Walks in) Mira what can I pack, and what are you going to wear on the road?. . .

MIRA I'm coming. . . (Starts out)

Curtain

Third Scene

Early morning. MIRA, dressed for travel, comes in with a tray full of coffee cups. There is no one on the scene. She puts tray down, looks into the inner room. Just then ZOLTAN enters from the garden.

ZOLTAN You'll be leaving in a minute. (Short pause) Let your father get on here, I'll drive you to the border. That gives us another hour.

MIRA (Scrutinizing him, shakes her head) No. . . I don't want you to think about saying goodbye. For me this little time, even if it's an hour, should be very long. I want it to be long and the years that follow it be short, that's what you should want too.

ZOLTAN (Takes her face into his hands, kisses her) You. . . You've grown up since yesterday.

MIRA Yes, I know. And I've grown wiser too. . . that's what I'll do: be wise and waiting.

ZOLTAN (Smiling) Good. It's good to be a student, very good. I want you to take heed and don't be wise or serious. Cheerful and jingling, that's what I want you to be.

MIRA You just leave it up to me what I'll be.

ZOLTAN You mean it's me who needs advice, don't you? Well, don't worry about me: I'm neither a weakling nor a coward. (Pause) I must make you understand something. (Pause) I'm a genius gone to pot. I had all the abilities to be a Pasteur or Pavlov of our age--the only thing missing was my belief that such a thing was possible. And I think that I still don't have that belief. I've been thinking about it since yesterday. Science is no longer what it used to be. It does not progress by spurts due to this or that individual genius, but by conscious, relentless research. My father is the child of this age, I would have been the child of his age. However impossible it may sound, I belong to the past, he belongs to the present. And in my thirty three years I managed to waste and ruin everything I've ever had. I don't want to mislead you, I don't want you to go away with a lie. We'll never meet again. You'd be waiting in vain. It's a shame. . . I'm not glad that I had to tell you this, but it's more honest this way. (Working himself up.) I've never recognized any law except my own--and I still don't. Morality, laws of society I have never

ZOLTAN considered binding for myself, I have eaten of the forbidden fruit, and from this fruit I have sucked death. I have been driven out of paradise, and nothing can change that. The terrible thing is that I had to meet you <u>now</u>, not when it would have been still possible to go on. The cherub with the flaming sword has allowed me one last look into a lost paradise. But it seems that this too was part of the game, I deserved this too, this lesson. (Steps closer to MIRA.) My goodbye is forever.

MIRA (Stands up, walks up to him, puts a hand on his arm) My dear, you may talk all you want, even gibberish like this. You won't succeed: I will not despair. Your desperation is enough for both of us, a bit too much even. We have said goodbye, and when you'll be alone you'll realize that I exist so that you won't be alone, and that I have chosen you. If you want to stick to biblical examples, dear, (Strokes his face.) then serve seven years for me, or twice seven years, as Jacob did for Rachel. (Her voice grows harder.) If you won't, then I'll know that I was merely a momentary diversion in your life, a last chance you couldn't possibly let go by--and if this is so, then why don't you go and hang yourself right on that pear tree out there, I'll even stay to watch. . . (Suddenly breaks down.) Yes...yes... (Short pause). . . I'm sorry, darling, don't be angry. . . I just had to say some-

MIRA thing mean to get back at you for torturing me. Now kiss me. (While ZOLTAN kisses her, JANOSH enters.)

JANOSH Mira. . . (He is taken aback, angry. When they separate he looks as if nothing had happened.) Mira, the suitcases are in the car. We're ready. You sure you haven't forgotten anything?

MIRA No. (Stays right next to ZOLTAN.)

JANOSH Your pocketbook. . .

MIRA Oh... that's out in the hallway. . .

JANOSH I think we'd better be going. . . The station's pretty far. (Exit, MIRA follows him.)

(ZOLTAN remains alone; looking in front of himself, then lights a cigarette, goes to the window. In a little while MIRA runs back in; hurries to ZOLTAN and clings to him.)

MIRA Everything's going to be good and beautiful. . . Understand?

ZOLTAN Understand.

MIRA Let's go.

ZOLTAN Goodbye. I love you.

MIRA Thank you. That was an answer, wasn't it?

ZOLTAN Take it as you wish. I love you.

MIRA I love you. I'll be waiting for you.

SHEBOEK (Looking in through the window) Come on, children... (Short pause) Janosh is a very impatient traveler. He's afraid you'll miss the train. (He comes inside.)

SHEBOEK Well, goodbye, my little girl. . God bless you. . . To say I'm sorry you're leaving, is really saying nothing at all. . . Being alone here now will be doubly hard. . . (Wiping his eyes.) Eh, silly me. . . old men. . .sentimental, talks too much. . . what is there to say. . . (Kisses MIRA and hugs her, then all three leave.)

(The scene is empty for a little while, then, from the kitchen, enter SOFIE. She begins to collect the coffee cups, glasses. Puts them all on the tray, takes them out. She returns and begins to clean up. After a few seconds SHEBOEK enters.)

SOFIE Well. . .the guests are gone.

SHEBOEK Yes. The house is empty. (Sighs) Well, that's the way it is. . . (Short pause.) How's your daughter?

SOFIE Better ahready. She even got up todie. Maybe. . . maybe 'twas jist in 'er silly head, that sickness. Y'know, professor, ah's sixty-two, never bin sick a day in mah life. Shouldn't let yohself go. . .

SHEBOEK That, Sofie, could be very true. (He goes to the microscope, starts to work with it, but it is obvious his mind is not on it; he leaves the microscope.)

SOFIE The doctor'll come back, won't he. He'll lunch here, won't he?

SHEBOEK Yes. He just took the guests to the station.

SOFIE What should ah make for lunch then? What about stuffed cabbage? Ah know Zolti likes that, he did even as a kid.

SHEBOEK Good. That's good. (He hardly pays any attention to her.)

SOFIE An' foh soup, what kind?

SHEBOEK Whatever you think, aunt Sofie. You need some money?

SOFIE We'll take care o' that. Ah already bought the meat, ah'll make it at home, then bring it over. The soup too, whatever we eat, all right, professor?

SHEBOEK All right.

(SOFIE waits a little, would want to talk some more, but, since SHEBOEK is paying no attention to her, she leaves. Alone, SHEBOEK walks to a bookcase, takes off a book, flips the pages, puts it back, goes to the table, puts a board into the vice and begins to plane it. In a short while ZOLTAN enters. SHEBOEK looks at him, but goes on working without saying anything. ZOLTAN goes to the cupboard, takes out a bottle and drinks out of it.)

You could pour me one too.

(ZOLTAN pours one for each of them, takes a drink to SHEBOEK, they clink glasses without a word. Then quietly, almost as if telling a tale.)

I'll take to drinking in my old age. (Laughs a little.) Easy to drink, all you need is a partner. . .

ZOLTAN I'll be your partner for today. (Pause) I'll get drunk. (Pause) Plastered.

SHEBOEK What for?

ZOLTAN To intensify the bad. Can't do anything else anyway. (Roaring.) Goddman' it. . . That's all I needed.

SHEBOEK (Stops working) Zoli. . . I've been thinking. . . (Sits at the table too.) Lots of things can still be done. . . Now wait a minute. They'll bar you from practice, take away your certification. . . possible. But the things you know still remain in your head. Now take microbiology. . . For example. . . if I were you I'd work in that direction. . . during those few years. . . in jail. . . Plants are living things too. . . or insects, bacteria. . . Scientific work is a kind of imprisonment, anyway. Without the joys of every day life, the outside world--which, I know, is the most of any man's joy and happiness, but. . . (Persuasive, almost cheerful tones.) But you wouldn't have to come out just a baldheaded prisoner, a complete scientist could emerge out of the larva of the prisoner. . .

ZOLTAN (Stands up) Come on, let's chop down that chestnut tree.

SHEBOEK All right, let's. But then (Watching ZOLTAN drink again.) leave getting drunk for later. If we go at it drunk, it might fall on us.

ZOLTAN It would fall on me, at least.

SHEBOEK But I wouldn't like it to fall on me too.

ZOLTAN Hey, father. . . (Pause) I'm going crazy. . .

SHEBOEK Calm yourself, Zoli. (Pause) I was thirty when I had to go to war, thirty six when I got back. Five years a POW. I don't think prison could be worse. (Pause) From the war thousands came home complete wrecks. . . I came home with some seeds of the Siberia flora... you know a couple of them yourself... I've managed to acclimatize a few of them. . . (Pause) I was forty two when you were born. Why are you afraid of time, Zoli?

ZOLTAN (Drinks) Dad, . . . I fell in love with Mira. . . so hard that my whole nervous system is one ball of fire when I think about it.

SHEBOEK Of course it hurts, but try not to think about that now.

ZOLTAN I'm gonna kick this world apart. To pieces. . . to smithereens. . . I'm gonna kill somebody. . .

SHEBOEK One wasn't enough?

ZOLTAN Hell. . . what good is your wisdom to me, if it's in <u>you</u>? It's not in me. Only hell. . . (Hesitantly) I would have lived for that girl. . .

SHEBOEK Try it. . .

ZOLTAN (Stands, then sits down at the table, and suddenly leans over the table, his head on his arm, and cries. SHEBOEK is soothingly stroking his head.)

CURTAIN

APPENDIX G

Gábor Görgey

THE HOUSE OF RESTITUTION

A comedy in one act

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Translated by Imre Goldstein

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p e r s o n s _ i n _ t h e _ p l a y :

SIR BLACK	LADY BLACK	MADAME	HANSEL
SIR GRAY	LADY GRAY	GIGI	GRETEL
SIR LILAC	LADY LILAC	COCO	

The downstage area represents parts of a street. At center stage: a house so situated that one could walk around it. It is simply a not-too-high platform on which the contours of the structure are indicated by a white wire frame. The interior of the house is divided into three rooms with wire doors between them; there are no walls here either.

The first room is the largest, it also has the door leading to the outside. Its furnishing suggests a salon; a few characteristic pieces: a divan, two chairs, a table with a vase on it, a few magazines. The furniture jives with the house's frame: they're made of lines of white wire, with arches and curlicues. Wherever possible the wires of the house should rhythmically match these curves and lines.

The two smaller rooms are each fitted out with a bed, covered with pink bed-spread, an old-fashioned wash-stand, water-pitcher. All this in white, curvy wiring. The house is closed off in the rear by a light white curtain with one exit door in it.

On the left of the house--not opposite the audience--two steps lead to a wire-arched gate above which hangs, on very fancy supports, a large red lamp. It is turned on. There is a pull-rope bell on the gate.

Costumes: SIRS BLACK, GRAY, and LILAC are dressed basically the same way, only the color of their garment differ--according to their names. Their suits are something like tails, but not because there is some celebration or because we want to remove the play from our time; the only reason for this is to escape the everyday character of the current fashion. We want to do this with light stylization. The gentlemen wear bowler hats, in the appropriate colors, and carry briefcases. SIR LILAC carries, instead of a briefcase, a silver-handled walking cane.

LADIES BLACK, GRAY, and LILAC--wives of the above gentlemen--are dressed with similar stylized simplicity. MADAME's dress is cut the way as those of the three ladies', but it is bright and multicolored.

GIGI and COCO wear the internationally accepted uniform of stage whores. They both wear net-stockings; blond GIGI has a red, black-haired COCO has a bright yellow slip on. HANSEL and GRETEL should wear nothing resembling costumes. It would be best if he had on blue-jeans, while she could wear a mini-skirt.

At rise: GIGI and COCO each in her respective rooms, MADAME in her own. All are sitting: the girls on their beds, MADAME on her divan. GIGI is reading, COCO is mending one of her net stockings (the other is on her leg). MADAME is crocheting. Faint sound of a waltz (Offenbach?) is heard. The three women are talking in a slightly raised tone as people do when trying to reach someone in an adjacent room.

MADAME Gigi! Did you stir the cabbage?

GIGI Yes, Madame.

MADAME Coco! Don't forget to mend your stockings!

COCO I'm doing it right now, Madame!

MADAME The ones your overheated guest wanted to rip off yesterday?

COCO That's the one!

(From right to left SIR BLACK crosses the scene. He's in a hurry; carries his briefcase under his arm. He stops for a moment just past the red lamp, and looks back discreetly, then hurries out. The women cannot see him, of course, the dialogue rolls on.)

MADAME Girls! You worked real well yesterday. Both of you. Everyone was satisfied.

GIGI It was a tough day.

COCO I wouldn't mind at all if nobody showed today.

GIGI Could use a rest.

MADAME You've got to watch that! In this profession there is no rest: you rest and they forget you.

(From left to right SIR GRAY crosses the scene. Trembles for a second as he passes the red lamp, then hurries on.)

COCO We'll rest when we get married.

GIGI My God! You really think we'll ever get married!

MADAME Listen to the wretches! You're complaining? D'you know how much you've got in your savings account? And yesterday. . . What I put in after yesterday's take is more than you used to make in a week! Such ingratitude!

COCO You misunderstand, Madame!

GIGI Dear Madame, that's not what we meant!

MADAME Getting married! You'll have time for <u>that</u> when you'll be too old for <u>this</u>!

(From right to left, SIR LILAC crosses the scene. Under the red lamp, as if in a magnetic field, he slows down, closes his eyes, then quickly exits.)

GIGI What are you going to do with your money, COCO?

COCO I think I'll buy a stocking factory. Every time I'll get a run, I just throw the thing away. I'd wear a new one every day.

MADAME What dreams!

COCO I'm sick of darning! What are you going to do with your money, GIGI?

GIGI I'll write novels.

MADAME Novels?

GIGI Long, beautiful novels. Tetralogies.

(From left to right SIR and LADY BLACK are crossing the scene.)

LADY BLACK I just can't run the house on this kind of money, Alfons!

SIR BLACK I'm no millionaire, my dear!

LADY BLACK By the time I'm through with the kitchen, pay the rent, the electric bill--I haven't a penny left.

SIR BLACK So why didn't you marry a maharaja? (Exeunt right.)

MADAME I used to do a lot of reading. A long time ago. When I still had time for such things.

GIGI Madame still could. . .while we work.

MADAME And who'd keep the waiting guests company? Have you any idea how hard it is to keep up a decent conversation with a man waiting to see you?

COCO Madame does work very hard, it's true. How would she have time to read?

MADAME Maybe I'll read your novels, my dear Gigi. We shall read them, won't we Coco?

GIGI Oh if only you'd understand them! But they won't be written for people like you.

COCO No? Then who for, eh?

GIGI For higher minds!

MADAME Ah! The favorite lady novelist of decrepit academicians, right?

(From right to left SIR and LADY GRAY are crossing the scene.)

LADY GRAY Then I said: "You don't really think that I'll sit here and watch this, do you?" Then he said: "It's a very healthy spectacle, madame!" Then I said: "Look here, if it's so healthy, why don't you have your own wife watch it?" Then he said: "She's seen the whole thing many times, besides I have no wife!" Then I said: "Now why are you sitting down instead of calling the police?" Then he said: "You call the police madame, I'm going to watch this." Then I said: "Shameless creature!" Then he said: "Sit down madame, let's watch it together." Then I said: "Watch <u>this</u>? Me? Never!"

SIR GRAY And then what happened?

LADY GRAY We watched it. Well, have you ever heard such a thing, Elmer?

SIR GRAY Never. (Exeunt left)

GIGI Wouldn't it be nice to sail around the world?

COCO Sail? I'd rather fly.

GIGI What can you see of the world from an airplane? Nothing.

MADAME If I had a choice I'd take a coach. A mail-coach. God, how romantic that must be! The horn is sounded and the countryside just swims by you on both sides.

COCO And the dust.

GIGI Dust?

COCO On the plane, for example, there's no dust. You look out the window and everything is sparkling clean, crystal clear.

MADAME Don't tell me that stewardesses have cleaned up space.

COCO They certainly did! With Ajax!

(From left to right SIR and LADY LILAC are crossing the scene.)

LADY LILAC To me, Theodore, the theatre is <u>the</u> world! But you'll never understand <u>that</u>, Theodore!

SIR LILAC But I do, of course I do, darling. But what can I do if you're so perfectly untalented?

LADY LILAC Untalented, Theodore? Me, Theodore?

SIR LILAC Not just untalented: a born anti-talent. The way you traipse around the stage!

LADY LILAC Traipse, Theodore, around the stage? Is that how you perceive my queenly carriage, Theodore? The winds howl when I cross the stage!

SIR LILAC It's not the winds, dear; the audience.

LADY LILAC With awe and amazement, Theodore!

SIR LILAC With laughter!

LADY LILAC You? You are telling me all this, Theodore? You whose Hamlet everybody mistook for the second grave-digger?

SIR LILAC My Hamlet was an enormous success!

LADY LILAC As a parody, Theodore, as a parody!

SIR LILAC I think I'd better have you committed!

LADY LILAC I'd pull your hair out if you had any of your own!

SIR LILAC Next time I'll marry I'll be sure to pick a deaf-mute cow!

LADY LILAC I'm leaving for the cemetery, Theodore! Your grave needs taking care of. (Exeunt right.)

MADAME Oh Venice!

COCO Madame's been to Venice?

MADAME Have I? That's where we spent our honeymoon with my dear departed husband.

GIGI Tell us about it, Madame!

MADAME Venice? Venice is the queen of the sea.

COCO Lovely name. Did you invent it?

MADAME St. Mark's! Lagoons! Gondolieri!

GIGI Aaah!

MADAME Canal Grande! Palaces! The Rialto!

COCO Oooh!

MADAME Pigeons! Campaniele!

GIGI Aaah!

MADAME Desdemona! Doge's Palace, Doge's Office; Post Office!

COCO Ooooh!

MADAME Santa Lucia! Pasta sciutta!

GIGI And Venice! Oh!

COCO And how long did the honeymoon last, Madame?

MADAME Until my husband jumped into a lagoon.

GIGI A lagoon?

COCO Lagoon! But why?

MADAME He was running away from our happiness!

GIGI Oh!

MADAME I returned from our honeymoon a widow. Ah, magnificent Venice! Cemetery of my dreams!

COCO Venice!

GIGI Venice.

MADAME Cabbage! Is the cabbage burning, Gigi?

(GIGI jumps up and leaves through the rear exit. Enter SIR BLACK from the right. Very carefully he approaches the gate with the red light, his body is glued to the nonexistent wall of the house. Enter from the left, in the same way, SIR GRAY. They do not see each other. They bump into one another at the gate. Embarrassed greetings.)

SIR BLACK How do you do?

SIR GRAY Hello there!

SIR BLACK How are we doing?

SIR GRAY Oh, just out for a stroll.

SIR BLACK One needs a bit of exercising.

SIR GRAY Indeed.

SIR BLACK How about that Mayor's wife?

SIR GRAY I haven't heard anything. Tell me.

SIR BLACK You haven't heard? She set a new record yesterday.

SIR GRAY You don't say!

SIR BLACK Eleven men!

SIR GRAY Fantastic!

SIR BLACK Eleven in one day!

SIR GRAY A wonderful woman!

SIR BLACK Examplary. Worthy of a mayor's wife. She's no first lady of our city for nothing!

SIR GRAY If everyone would give such free reins to his healthy instincts, sir, the shackles of inhibitions would soon fall off our society.

SIR BLACK Exactly as you say, sir. The unnatural restraint of desires, like wood-worms, undermine the edifice of society.

SIR GRAY Or like termites.

SIR BLACK Yes. Like wood-worms, or like termites.

(GIGI returns, sits down, book in hand.)

MADAME Did you burn it?

GIGI No, Madame. (All three women are absorbed in their respective activities.)

SIR GRAY And what about you, my dear sir?

SIR BLACK So so, thank you.

SIR GRAY How many ladies yesterday?

SIR BLACK Oh, just two. Had a bad day.

SIR GRAY Yes, this awful heat.

SIR BLACK I would not wish, sir, to be suspected of abstinence.

SIR GRAY Of course not, of course not!

SIR BLACK Abstinence is repulsive. To say nothing of its grave dangers to society.

SIR GRAY Desires squelched in us slowly collect in the huge reservoir of society, and one fine day they explode!

SIR BLACK I believe we may safely say that the security of our government depends on the correct or incorrect interpretation of this problem.

SIR GRAY Quite so. And, if I may speak of myself for a second, I have nothing to hide in this respect. I've always been a staunch supporter of our system.

SIR BLACK I, too, have done my duty.

(Enter, from the right, HANSEL and GRETEL. Dreamily, huddled together they stroll about, without noticing the two gentlemen.)

Look at that, sir. A cute little pair.

SIR GRAY A bundle of suppressed desires, both of them.

SIR BLACK Two bodies tense to the point of explosion.

SIR GRAY A rather distasteful disposition.

SIR BLACK I think I'll help them along. (Takes key out of his pocket, walks up to the young couple.)

GRETEL Oh!

HANSEL Oh! (They flit apart.)

SIR BLACK (To HANSEL) Here, son, this is the key to my apartment. Take it, there's nobody home.

GRETEL (Terrified) No!

HANSEL (Terrified) No! (HANSEL and GRETEL run out, one to the right, the other to the left.)

SIR BLACK (Shaking his head) Did you see that?

SIR GRAY Sad, very sad.

SIR BLACK It's because our schools still do not prepare people for life.

SIR GRAY Knowing full well that the raising of our youth is <u>the</u> most important thing. Don't you agree?

SIR BLACK Absolutely, sir.

SIR GRAY Shall we walk?

SIR BLACK Let's. (Exeunt left.)

GIGI Love! Honeymoon! My God!

COCO Madame should be grateful for having had that.

MADAME I was saving myself for my husband. I had given him my maidenhood pure and untouched. I was hoarding my desires so I could make him a present of them all. All. . .

GIGI That is the most wonderful wedding gift, Madame.

COCO Oh Lord! How I'd love to give myself like that to my husband! If I'll ever have a husband.

MADAME I hoarded all my fire so that I could pour this huge heat of my passion all on one man.

GIGI What a honeymoon that must have been, Madame!

MADAME You can believe that! In that Venice hotel room I had created a tropical island of wild, rampant pleasures for my husband. Like Adam and Eve in the luxuriantly flowering paradise, that's how we lived there.

COCO The paradise of happiness!

MADAME When he woke up--I was there, kissing him. While he was enjoying his breakfast--I covered him with kisses. While we took a gondola through the lagoons--I was kissing him. If we ate lobster for lunch in a small, romantic restaurant--I was there kissing him. While strolling at dusk under the arcades of St. Mark's--I was kissing him. In the evening when he took off his shirt--I was there kissing him. At nights I raised him

MADAME from his deepest sleep, yes, I was there kissing him. (Sighs) Oh, those nights of Venice!

GIGI And still, he jumped into a lagoon!

COCO But why? I wonder why?

MADAME He could not stand this huge happiness.

COCO Yes, that must have been it.

MADAME He had a very unhappy childhood. And then, all of a sudden this great, great happiness! I think it was too sudden for him.

GIGI Yes, there's no other explanation. Yes, happiness did it!

COCO That terribly great happiness.

(From the right, in much the same manner as SIRS BLACK and GRAY did before, enters and moves toward the red lamp, SIR LILAC. He is almost there when, deep in conversation, enter SIRS BLACK and GRAY from the left.)

SIR BLACK There's no greater corruption than that, sir. It is a wood-worm in our society.

SIR GRAY Or termite!

SIR BLACK Or termite! Look here! What a lucky coincidence!

SIR LILAC (Embarrassed) How do you do, gentlemen.

SIR GRAY How do you do! Where to, sir, where to?

SIR LILAC Just walking; out for a walk.

SIR BLACK How are you feeling sir?

SIR LILAC So-so, thank you. Feel a bit fatigued.

SIR GRAY What do you think about the mayor's wife?

SIR BLACK Have you heard?

SIR LILAC Have I heard? Among other reasons, that is why I am fatigued.

SIR BLACK How is that?

SIR LILAC Yesterday, I was that certain number eleven.

SIR GRAY You don't say!

SIR BLACK Bravo!

SIR LILAC And it just so happened that by then I was past my own fifth one for the day. As you know we're rehearsing a new play and the theatre is full of young extras.

SIR BLACK But say, how did the mayor's wife happen to choose you?

SIR LILAC You both know what a great patron of the arts she is.

SIR GRAY Of course, of course.

SIR LILAC She looked into the theatre, caught the end of rehearsals. Then she sent a message that she was expecting me after the performance. Only afterwards did I find out that I was number eleven.

SIR BLACK A phenomenal woman!

SIR GRAY Amazing!

SIR LILAC I have a bit of a momento from her too.

SIR BLACK Really?

SIR GRAY What is it? What is it?

SIR LILAC A hickey. On my neck.

SIR GRAY Let's see it!

SIR BLACK Let's see it!

(Sir LILAC loosens his tie, unbuttons his shirt, shows his neck. The other gentlemen are inspecting the neck.)

MADAME (Slams her crocheting down in her lap) I don't understand; what's happening today? Where are the guests?

GIGI Feels good to have a little rest.

MADAME Coco, you didn't forget to light the red lamp, did you?

COCO No, I didn't. Maybe it went out by itself.

MADAME I'll check. (Stands up, busies herself at the "wall" near the entrance as if she were turning a switch on and off.)

It has to be on.

(The red lamp goes on and off about four, five times. The three gentlemen, busy with one another now stare at the lamp--then, suspiciously, at each other. Confusedly, they resume their inspection of SIR LILAC's neck. Meanwhile, Madame looks out of the house to see if the lamp is on. It is. She notices the three gentlemen but they don't see her. She quickly withdraws, closes door. Softly to the girls:)

MADAME Get yourselves ready. There are three gentlemen in front of the door. Maybe they'll come in. (MADAME sits and resumes crocheting. The two girls comb their hair, put on make-up.)

SIR BLACK Nice bite.

SIR GRAY You can actually make out every tooth. Like a row of pearls.

SIR BLACK Yes, she's got beautiful teeth.

SIR LILAC And sharp, let me tell you! (He buttons his shirt, adjusts his tie.)

SIR BLACK Indeed it's a happy city that has a woman like her for the mayor's wife.

SIR GRAY News like this throws the whole city into a frenzy. Did you notice, gentlemen, what went on in the streets this morning?

SIR BLACK An orgy, a veritable orgy. Everybody was picking up everybody else. As if the whole city were coupling.

SIR LILAC I'm sure you allow me, gentlemen, to express my pride in having a small part in causing such a turn of events.

SIR GRAY Sir, you are an outstanding citizen of our city. We have always said so.

(From the left, cautiously, enter HANSEL and GRETEL. The three gentlemen are now talking at right, hidden by the house. The young ones look around, then, seeing that the coast is clear, they stroll dreamily, holding on to one another. SIR GRAY separates himself from the other two gentlemen, and as if he had heard something, looks around the house: he notices the young couple. He steps out; the young ones suppress some frightened sounds.)

SIR GRAY You're here again? Still in the walking stage? Still languishing around? Look, there's the park! At least go into the park! Come on! That way! Quickly!

(The young ones flee in terror. SIR GRAY returns to BLACK and LILAC, shaking his head.)

SIR LILAC And then I said to him: "Cherchez la femme!" And to this he replied: "Let the plague look for her!"

SIR BLACK (To the returning SIR GRAY) What happened?

SIR GRAY Nothing. Just that helpless little couple loitering about.

SIR BLACK We ought to notify the security people.

SIR LILAC What are we talking about, gentlemen?

SIR GRAY A boy and a girl insist on making a spectacle of themselves. It's an awful sight.

SIR BLACK They are nothing but a bundle of tense desires ready to explode. And it seems that they're not willing to give it an outlet.

SIR GRAY And you know how dangerous something like that can be! Just from the standpoint of national security.

SIR LILAC And how!

SIR BLACK Constant threat of explosion! It takes very little to set off a lot of trouble. (Enter LADY BLACK from left.)

LADY BLACK So you're here, Alfons! I looked for you all over this city.

SIR BLACK I don't believe the gentlemen have met my wife.

SIR GRAY (Kisses her hand) Madame!

LADY BLACK Delighted, sir.

SIR BLACK And this here is. . .

LADY BLACK Come, Alfons! Who doesn't know our great artist?

SIR LILAC (Kisses her hand) I'm honored, madame!

(Enter LADY GRAY from left.)

LADY GRAY Elmer! Elmer! You disappeared like snow!

SIR GRAY Darling, I don't know if you've met this lady and the gentlemen.

LADY GRAY (To LADY BLACK) Ta, darling.

LADY BLACK Ta, darling.

SIR BLACK (Kisses her hand) Madame!

LADY GRAY Delighted, sir.

SIR GRAY And this here is. . .

LADY GRAY Oh, I've been dying to meet the great artist of our city, for so long!

SIR LILAC (Kisses her hand) I'm very honored, madame.

LADY GRAY I saw your Hamlet.

SIR LILAC You're not mistaking me for the second gravedigger, Madame, are you?

LADY GRAY What on earth are you talking about? How could you say such a thing? It was a devastating performance.

SIR LILAC Thank you, madame! If my wife could only hear this!

LADY GRAY I've been dying to meet you for ages! Wouldn't you invite me to your dressing room?

SIR LILAC I'd be happy to invite you sometime.

LADY GRAY Not sometime. Now.

SIR LILAC Now? Right this minute?

LADY GRAY Yes!

SIR LILAC (To SIR GRAY) With your permission, sir?

SIR GRAY By all means, of course. Enjoy youselves.

SIR LILAC (Offers his arm to LADYGRAY) May I, madame?

LADY GRAY (Takes his arm. As they go out:) Do you know that there are real legends about town regarding your manliness, sir! The mayor's wife says. . . (They disappear at left.)

LADY BLACK (Looking after them) Well, I must say, they whet one's appetite! (To SIR GRAY) Would you be kind enough, sir, to take me to a more intimate place?

SIR GRAY Of course. . .it would be my pleasure. . .

LADY BLACK Let's get going then.

SIR GRAY (To SIR BLACK) You wouldn't mind if we left you here all by yourself, sir?

SIR BLACK Of course not. Please, go ahead! Good luck.

SIR GRAY May I have your arm, madame?

LADY BLACK (Takes his arm. As they go out:) Decisiveness is one of the most manly traits. I have observed that men with sideburns. . .

(They disappear at right. SIR BLACK is alone. He seems quite content. He looks around carefully, then sneaks over to MADAME's gate and is about to ring the bell when LADY LILAC enters from the left. SIR BLACK tries to cover his movements, tries to stroll on.)

LADY LILAC Pardon me, sir, have you seen my husband by any chance. Perhaps you know him; he's the. . .

SIR BLACK Oh, but Madame, our magnificent actress! Of course I know your husband! But I know you better, through your superb performances!

LADY LILAC You said superb performances? If my husband could only hear this! I like you! I like you, sir, a whole lot!

SIR BLACK Heavens!

LADY LILAC May I invite you to my dressing room? We could have a nice little chat.

SIR BLACK Chat?

LADY LILAC Chat.

SIR BLACK Now?

LADY LILAC Now.

(HANSEL and GRETEL enter from right, looking around cautiously. They can't see SIR BLACK and LADY LILAC, the corner of the house blocks their view. When they see that the coast is clear, they stroll on happily. LADY LILAC is about to leave with SIR BLACK when she notices them.)

LADY LILAC (To SIR BLACK) Pardon me, my daughter. (She hurries over to the frightened youngsters; hissing:) You're sauntering here again like this, in front of everybody? You're feverish, the both of you! Here, here's the key. Go home and get it over with already! I don't ever want to see this murky look on your faces! I'll die of shame! The whole town looks at me funny because of you! Get on with you! (She wants to give them the key; instead of taking it the two run out.)

LADY LILAC (Fighting her tears) What shame she brings on her poor mother's head. . .(She goes back to SIR BLACK. In a melancholy tone.) Come, let's go. (Exeunt right)

MADAME Mark my word girls: there's no greater treasure than a happy marriage.

GIGI Two turtle-doves with some seeds in their beaks. That's what marriage always reminds me of.

MADAME I had tasted it. There. In Venice.

COCO Once I'm married I'll never look at another man. I'll just live only for my husband.

GIGI Me too, me too.

MADAME But you, my dear children. . .in this institution. . . with such a past. . .

GIGI Love buries the past!

COCO Love is stronger than the past!

MADAME (Sighs) I hope you're right. I really do. But. . it's so hard for me. . .that it would be me to tell you. . .what I mean is. . .I mean, after all, you are disreputable girls.

(SIR LILAC flies into the stage in full gallop. He looks around nervously; the coast is clear; runs to the gate, looks around once again, then pulls hard on the bell. He's dishevelled; he keeps looking around as he waits.)

MADAME Well! Somebody remembered us! (She opens door; SIR LILAC practically falls in.) Welcome, sir!

SIR LILAC (Very agitated) Pardon me, madame! Please tell me: is this the brothel?

MADAME Yes sir. We call it the house of restitution.

SIR LILAC One is safe here, isn't one?

MADAME Depends on what you mean by safe, sir.

SIR LILAC What I mean is that here. . .for a certain price... a citizen of the city...could find some rest; am I right?

MADAME Right you are, sir.

SIR LILAC So then. .this means that one does not have to perform any. . .any act. . .That is. . .I. . .

MADAME Sir. You will be welcomed by very attractive girls with whom, for a prescribed length of time, may engage in conversation.

SIR LILAC Nothing else? I will not have to do anything else?

MADAME Nothing at all, sir.

SIR LILAC (With a sigh of relief) Thank you! Then I think I'll stay!

MADAME Gigi! Coco! Come in girls! (Girls enter smiling.) Here you are, sir, the choice is yours: two completely different types.

(SIR LILAC walks over to girls, looks them over, settles for COCO.)

SIR LILAC I choose this one.

MADAME Coco, take our guest with you, please. Gigi, you may return to your room.

COCO (Strokes SIR LILAC's neck) Come on, sweetie. (They enter COCO's room. Gigi goes into her own room; MADAME sits down, resumes crocheting.)

COCO You may begin, my little fatigued man.

SIR LILAC (Pathetique) To behold your countenance is to love you! It was love at first sight! Please, flower of flowers, do not reject me; do not thrust my heart into the deepest abyss of despair!

(With a rejecting motion COCO turns away from SIR LILAC and slowly begins to get dressed. Over the slip goes a blouse with about a thousand buttons; she starts buttoning the blouse. During the following dialogue a very very slow, reverse strip-tease takes place.)

COCO Please, sir, not so passionately!

SIR LILAC What is this passion compared to the vulcanic fire in the gaping crater of my soul? Ah, miss, a look, a mere glance, a single encouraging glance is all I beg! I should be descending, gladly, gladly, into the dark, dark grave if only accompanied by the healing rays of thine radiant eyes!

COCO (She throws him a chaste look) Do not go on! Do not try to spoil me with the fire of your dark desires! Please, be silent!

SIR LILAC I shall not be silent, for silence is death! And I wish to live, live! To live in the worship of your enchanting countenance!

COCO So then you have no intentions, sir, to descend into the dark grave? Thou unfaithful soul!

SIR LILAC No, no, not while there's hope that at least I can look at you! The world is out of joint, and it was turned out of joint by one little finger; it was one little joint of your tiny, porcellain-like pinky. Oh, miss, that did it! Oh, if I could only approach just once, only once, this tiny finger!

COCO How shameless? How dare you? This is quite enough! Leave! I ask you to leave!

SIR LILAC Oh, 'tis the gaping throat of the grave that awaits me after all! Without the life-giving sun of your being, miss, my candle turns to ashes! When the sun sets, my gold-wreathed Sun, I shall perish in the lightless, cold cold night! Thou refulgent countenance, do not leave me alone in the merciless, cruel night! Let me be the dew that evaporates in the airy air, when you deign to turn they Sunface toward me!

COCO What audacity! So brutally to attack a defenseless maiden!

(Already a few sentences earlier, SIR GRAY had staggered in. He too looks around excitedly, runs to the gate, pulls the bell-rope. MADAME gets up, opens door. SIR GRAY enters quickly. We hear SIR LILAC's speech up to the moment MADAME begins to speak. After that the scene between COCO and SIR LILAC continues in pantomime; at the moment he is no longer heard, SIR LILAC falls on his knees before COCO.)

MADAME Welcome, sir.

SIR GRAY How do you do, Madame. Someone gave me this address. I'm not sure I'm at the right place.

MADAME I'm sure you are, sir.

SIR GRAY I have heard that this is. . .how should we say... a. . .

MADAME House of restitution, sir.

SIR GRAY Of restitution? That's good, that's good.

MADAME It is with a lady of course, that you wish. . .to...

SIR GRAY No! God forbid! That is. . .in a word. . .if it's not required..to. . .

MADAME I can assure you sir, that in this house it is not required.

SIR GRAY Then I'll stay!

MADAME Gigi! (GIGI appears in the doorway, smiling) Would she suit you, sir?

SIR GRAY She would, indeed.

MADAME Take our guest to your room Pleasant rest, sir.

SIR GRAY Thank you.

GIGI Come honeybunch. (They go into GIGI's room.) Don't be so nervous my bunny. Relax, you're safe here. If you think you're ready, go ahead.

SIR GRAY Passion, like the thunder of Zeus, has struck me down, as I lay my eyes on you only a moment ago, miss! But this thunder is sweet, it is ecstasy itself; it does not destroy, but rather resurrects! Miss, I shall be your slave forever!

(With a rejecting motion GIGI turns away from SIR GRAY, then, like COCO before, begins slowly to get dressed. The other scene, SIR LILAC and COCO, now continues so we can hear it. The two scenes in the two rooms go parallel to one another; they are not done simultaneously so that dialogues overlap. Cues are picked up by all four characters. It is a quartet.)

GIGI No, no! I do not wish to hear it!

SIR LILAC But you must! You must hear the hymn of my glorious heart!

COCO Perfidious words, ye words of entrapment, penetrate not mine eardrums!

SIR GRAY Her silvery words still tinkle in mine ears! Throw, oh throw before me the silver coins of these shining words, and I shall crouch happily by thine tiny feet! (He falls down by GIGI's feet.)

GIGI Don't you dare touch me!

SIR LILAC It is that cruel archer, Cupid, who is to be blamed for my daring! Behold the arrow: in the very center of my heart! Touch, oh touch my gaping wound with thine marble little hand, and I shall be well again!

COCO My hand? Me? On a man's chest? Ah!

SIR GRAY My chest pounds and rumbles, like the bowels of the earth before an eruption!

GIGI This wild passion frightens me!

SIR LILAC The tempestuous ocean of my passions can be calmed only by a snow-white sail! Thou, thou art that graceful vessel, miss, thou!

COCO I forbid you to speak to me that way!

SIR GRAY I must speak of the firmament, of the stars, of the magic of the moonlit night and of the fragrance of lilacs that spread over us like the canopy of the heart!

GIGI How shameless! I shall never forgive these brazen words!

SIR LILAC Words, these are only words! If only I could prove it with deeds! Should I go to the Holy Land to fight? I'm going!

COCO Go, go! So that I may be free from the temptation of sin!

SIR GRAY Temptation? No. Never! Only the purest feelings in my bosom! If you doubt me, I shall do combat with a basilisk!

GIGI Blood, ah, blood! Not that, please, not that! Is there no other way out?

SIR LILAC I shall set out on my journey and will lay the world before your little feet--for a single word of yours; just one tiny encouraging word, miss!

COCO I hope you did not say "feet", you did not refer to my feet, did you? Don't you dare take my feet on your lips or the very earth shall open up beneath me!

SIR GRAY The earth may open up, fall and collapse--nothing shall extinguish the flames of my passion!

GIGI Enough! Enough! You are trampling on the budding flowers of my innocence!

(Already a few sentences earlier, SIR BLACK had run in. He looks around, hurries to the gate, pulls bell-rope. MADAME gets up, opens door, SIR BLACK slinks in. Just as before, we hear the above two scenes up to the moment when MADAME begins to speak. After that the two scenes go on in pantomime.)

MADAME Welcome, sir.

SIR BLACK How do you do, Madame. I don't know if I'm at...

MADAME Yes, sir. You are at the right place. Won't you sit down? For a short while you will have to content yourself with my humble company; the ladies are busy at the moment.

SIR BLACK But I didn't. . .well, I'm not. . .actually the situation. . .

MADAME I know, sir. Please sit down. One of the ladies shall be free momentarily.

SIR BLACK (Sits down) Perhaps I did not make myself clear, what I came. . .

MADAME Very clear, sir. You'd like to have a bit of rest.

SIR BLACK Yes! You've guessed it!

MADAME You shall have it.

SIR BLACK And I won't have to. . .what I mean is. . .you understand. . .the lady will not have any demands?

MADAME Of course not, sir. You pay, and in return you have to do nothing.

SIR BLACK Perfect!

MADAME That's what we're here for. That's our job.

(At this moment the kneeling SIR LILAC has finished his confession of love. COCO is completely dressed; she's wearing a full dress buttoned to the neck, a mink cape and a large hat. MADAME and SIR BLACK hear nothing of course.)

SIR LILAC Like a butterfly in a flame, I shall turn happily to ashes in the fire of my emotions, miss! (Gets down on his knees; COCO stands magnificently above him.) Allow me to touch, at least the edge of your dress, with my lips!

COCO But nothing more, sir!

SIR LILAC (Kisses the edge of the dress which is dragging on the floor then stands up, and with a few quick movements puts his clothes into order. Soberly.) How much do I owe you?

COCO (Kittenish) Was it good, sweetie?

SIR LILAC It was. How much do I owe you?

COCO You'll pay the Madame. (They start out.)

MADAME (To SIR BLACK) I believe one of the ladies is now free. You're next, sir.

SIR BLACK Thank you, Madame. (He stands up, starts toward the rear. At this moment enters the salon COCO and SIR LILAC. Uncomfortable surprise.)
You here, sir?

SIR LILAC And you, sir?

SIR BLACK I just took refuge in the first doorway. It started to drizzle.

SIR LILAC Drizzle?

SIR BLACK Yes, drizzle. Without looking I just dashed into the first house. I don't even know where I am, Madame.

SIR LILAC I suggest sir that we stop this game. We both know very well where we are. It's an embarrassing situation.

SIR BLACK If the security people get wind of this. . .

SIR LILAC That is why we must agree to keep the matter quiet. We must promise that to one another.

SIR BLACK Of course. Although I'd like to mention that you have actually committed this, how shall we call it. . .

SIR LILAC While you?

SIR BLACK While I can still say that I have not actually been with the lady.

SIR LILAC But you will be very shortly. (Steps out of the way.) Go ahead, sir.

(While SIR LILAC offers his invitation to the hesitating SIR BLACK, we hear the finale of SIR GRAY's confession of love. This can be registered by those in the salon. All listen with interest.)

SIR GRAY And, although I am not worthy; I cannot sully your heavenly purity; allow me, miss, to kiss, at last, the tip of your finger.

GIGI (Who's also fully dressed, buttoned up to her neck) But that is all Orlando, nothing more! (Somewhat reluctantly and bashfully she turns her back on GRAY then offers him her pinky.)

SIR GRAY (Kneels, kisses her fingertip--his eyes closed all

SIR GRAY the while. Then he stands up quickly, with a few quick movements adjusts his clothes. Soberly:) How much do I owe you?

GIGI (Relaxed, puts her arms around GRAY's neck) You spoke beautifully, kitten.

SIR GRAY Well then, how much do I owe you?

GIGI Pay the Madame. (They come out; the three gentlemen meet. Embarrassed looks.)

SIR BLACK Well, looka here!

SIR LILAC What a coincidence!

SIR GRAY You're here, gentlemen?

SIR BLACK Just like you, sir.

SIR GRAY I would not wish, gentlemen, that you believe that I come here regularly.

SIR BLACK Nobody <u>believes</u> anything, my esteemed sir; we are dealing with facts.

SIR GRAY Quite true. It is a fact that all three of us are here.

SIR LILAC I believe that the only thing we could do for one another is to offer perfect and total discretion. We must avoid any possible unpleasantness.

SIR BLACK Of course. However, I should like to point out again that I have not been with the charming ladies. This means somewhat of a moral advantage, I should think.

SIR LILAC I feel that you shall lose this moral advantage very shortly, sir. In fact you may now choose how and with whom. Please, go ahead!

(Noise of female voices is heard. From three directions run in LADIES GRAY, BLACK AND LILAC. They bump into one another, then as if on command, run to the gate, ring the bell and wait. At the same time they are yelling indignantly: "Let us in! Open up! Police! Open the door this minute!")

SIR LILAC (To SIR BLACK) Now I have a feeling that you won't be able to choose.

MADAME (Yells out) Relax, please! (Opens door) Come on in! (The three ladies come charging in.)

LADY BLACK Alfons! You here? Where have you sunk to?

SIR BLACK My dear, I only. . .

LADY GRAY Elmer! You depraved monster!

SIR GRAY My dear, what happened was, you see. . .

LADY LILAC Theodore! My career is finished!

SIR LILAC Look dear, what we have here is simply. . .

LADY BLACK Out of this den of sin, out!

LADY GRAY Out of this swamp!

LADY LILAC Out of this stagnant, foul marsh!

(The gentlemen are herded out onto the street, the ladies follow them. LADY BLACK stays last, stops before the alarmed COCO and GIGI.)

(Contemptuously) Sluts!

(She marches out. On the street the three ladies pull their respective husbands in three different directions. "Let's go home!" "Swindler!" "Depraved wretch!" . .

and similar names issue from the ladies' mouths. Then they all stop--in three different corners of the stage, and suddenly turn around. The ladies, using dumb-show, or perhaps with helping words such as: "You want him?" "Here, he's yours." "Here, take him!" exchange husbands, arrive at a new combination: LADY BLACK drags off SIR LILAC; LADY GRAY makes off with SIR BLACK, and LADY LILAC escorts SIR GRAY off the stage. Silence.)

MADAME That was a nice scene.

GIGI I thought they'd tear us apart.

COCO Beasts.

MADAME You see children, life is deep like a lagoon.

(Enter HANSEL on the left. He's pulling GRETEL by the hand. They advance slowly. HANSEL looks up at the red lamp, rings bell. The three women look at each other, then MADAME goes to door, opens it.)

HANSEL Is this the house of prostitution?

MADAME Yes.

HANSEL Great! Well, come on then my love, we're here! (He steps inside, pulls GRETEL behind him.)

MADAME But...young man. There must be some misunderstanding here! You can't bring women in here!

HANSEL Don't worry, I'll pay. I'll pay for two. (To GRETEL) And now listen to me dearest. (Lets go of the girl's hand, he stands alone at center. Pause. Then very simply:)

I love you.

C U R T A I N

APPENDIX H

István Eörsi

TOMBSTONE AND COCOA

A Treatise On The Extremes Of The Petty Bourgeoisie

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Translated by Imre Goldstein

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PERSONS IN THE PLAY

OLD LADY (the widow Tower)

MR. PETTY (Louis)

MRS. PETTY (Louise) — Co-tenants of the OLD LADY

MAILMAN

POLICEWOMAN, wife of MAILMAN

DOCTOR

The author's humble suggestion: the OLD LADY could be played by a male performer.

SCENE I

An unevenly divided stage:
A large room richly but tastelessly furnished. In a garishly decorated wheelchair sits (and navigates) the OLD LADY. The focal point of this room could be a huge bed.
A small room, meagerly furnished, with a narrow steel bed. Mr. and Mrs. PETTY are crowded together in this room. These two are skinny, insignificant looking; the two of them would not make one OLD LADY. . .in size.
At rise: the OLD LADY is moaning terribly. It is up to the director whether she begins to moan while the lights are still off.

MR. PETTY You hear?
MRS.PETTY I wish I didn't have to hear it.
MR. PETTY Poor, dear old lady.
MRS.PETTY Unfortunate granny. (A huge moan, then silence.)
MR. PETTY She stopped.
MRS.PETTY Is it possible that she. . .
MR. PETTY Don't. . .don't say it, Louise.
MRS.PETTY We're all in the hands of God, Louis.
MR. PETTY You hear how quiet it is?
MRS.PETTY Take a look, Louis!
MR. PETTY I don't dare. . . Your eyes are much better.

MRS.PETTY You're the man. (PETTY opens the connecting door a crack. The OLD LADY howls and throws her wig at him.)

OLD LADY You're spying again? Swine!

MR. PETTY (Whispering) She's alive! Thank God!

MRS.PETTY Thank God.

OLD LADY What? The Pettys are loafing again? (To MRS. PETTY) Come on, let's have my breakfast, one two three: the usual half-quart of cocoa with whipped cream, white bread, jam, butter, honey, three eggs, salami; you know what I'm supposed to get; (To MR. PETTY) and you, scram to the drugstore, my stomach hurts, my heart; I'm on my last leg; if you two are not back in ten minutes I'll break the lease, you sluggards! (Falling all over each other, the PETTYs run out.) I feel terrible! But I will not die! I'll teach them! (Music. The OLD LADY exercises, first silently, then humming and singing.)

<u>One and two and three and four,</u>
<u>Up you jump and climb a wall,</u>
<u>Up and down and right and left,</u>
<u>In you breathe, expand your chest!</u>

<u>Four and three and two and one,</u>
<u>Bend your knees: it's all great fun.</u>
<u>Tough and fresh and slim you'll be;</u>
<u>Death can't touch you, you shall see.</u>

OLD LADY And now for my twenty push ups! (After two or three push-ups she collapses, lies motionless for a while, then, moaning and groaning she crawls out of her room, calling:) Help! Doctor!

SCENE II

(The PETTYs enter running with medicine and breakfast. They find the large room empty. They listen in all directions then retreat, alarmed, into the small room.)

MR. PETTY How our darling suffers.

MRS.PETTY What fortitude. How she clings to life!

MR. PETTY A miracle of nature.

MRS.PETTY How honored we are that we can serve her.

MR. PETTY That we can pay for her maintenance.

MRS.PETTY I'll tell you something, Louis.

MR. PETTY Tell me something, Louise.

MRS.PETTY It's very good that she's alive.

MR. PETTY Very good.

MRS.PETTY Somehow it gives us security. As long as she exists, we know what we have to do.

MR. PETTY Our responsibilities surround us nicely. We don't have to think.

MRS.PETTY Only the children. . .My twenty-one aborted children. . .

MR. PETTY Don't cry, Louise. . .One day we'll have a child too. . . Besides, what would we do with twenty-one children?

MRS.PETTY That's true. . . They'd need a whole classroom. . . But how long could I hope to give birth, to bear children? If the good Lord won't summon her in the near future. . .

MR. PETTY Louise!

MRS.PETTY Don't be angry. . . I didn't mean it that way. But once again I feel myself, oh Louis, to be a mother.

MR. PETTY Terrible.

MRS.PETTY And I don't want to lose.

MR. PETTY Lose?

MRS.PETTY Yes, twenty-one you win, twenty-two you lose. I've got to give birth to this one. This is our last chance.

MR. PETTY Have you gone mad, Louise? The lease is sacred! She could put us out on the street immediately. . .

MRS.PETTY I don't care. Then I deliver on the street.

MR. PETTY I refuse to give birth on the street, Louise!

MRS.PETTY <u>I will give birth, not you, stupid</u>!

MR. PETTY <u>That's the end, my swollen cupid</u>.

MRS.PETTY <u>And if I won't, what then, dummy</u>?

MR. PETTY <u>I'll go mad, my pregnant puppy</u>.

MRS.PETTY You see Louis, no matter how much I adore Her, the future is really in a child. (Moans from the next room.)

MR. PETTY Don't say things like that, Louise. Can't you hear how she's suffering?

MRS.PETTY I'm suffering too, Louis. (More moans are heard.)

MR. PETTY How can you compare yourself to her? The doctor's been torturing her for over an hour. . .Who knows. . .

MRS.PETTY Don't go on! You're right! Let's pray for her!

MR. PETTY Let's!

(They both kneel; in unison:)

Oh, sweet Lord, protect her,
May she live forever.
If your list of dead won't tally,
Kill us in a dark, lone alley,
But, sweet Lord, protect her. . .

DOCTOR (Having entered while the PETTYs were praying) And what might you be doing?

MR. and MRS. PETTY Praying for her.

DOCTOR Funny, I was under the impression that you pray for her tombstone every time you give her her cocoa.

MRS.PETTY Is there hope, Doctor?

DOCTOR That depends. Hope for what?

MR. PETTY Will she live?

DOCTOR Frankly, she's in bad need of your prayers. I don't think we can talk about hope any more.

MR. PETTY And we've been hoping for so long. Always in vain.

DOCTOR In vain?

MR. PETTY We hope in vain: the situation is becoming more and more hopeless.

DOCTOR Oh, I see. We must be prepared for the worst. You will be by yourselves in a little while. You will have to live here and occupy this place all by yourselves.

MRS.PETTY It's simply unimaginable.

DOCTOR I know it's frightening what I'm about to say: Loneliness is the most monstrous cancer of our urban existence. And now you two will have to face it.

MR. PETTY Horrible.

MRS.PETTY And her. . .can't she be helped any more?

DOCTOR Well, we could prolong her life a bit. That is why this injection must be given her every evening between five and six. You'll have to do it, and not be a moment late with it!

MR. PETTY Why not?

DOCTOR Because the delay would mean certain death. I know I can trust the two of you.

MR. PETTY Why us?

DOCTOR Because there are no other two people who would have taken such care of a living corpse for fifteen years to the obvious detriment of their own interests. That's why.

MRS.PETTY Detriment of our interest? . . .But she gives us shelter.

DOCTOR Shelter. . .

MRS.PETTY She gives us work, too.

DOCTOR She gives you work and you pay for it. While she's a billionairess.

MRS.PETTY You shouldn't be so materialistic, Doctor.

DOCTOR Of course I could tell you that you'd really have shelter, an apartment, if she died; I could refer to the many instances I have witnessed in my practice, where people, by the thousands, help little old ladies like her to the. . .other side. . .just for an apartment. . .

MR. PETTY But that's murder!

DOCTOR Watch your words, young man! Excuse me for calling you that, but men in your situation are by definition young, aren't they? Do not forget that between morals and the law there gapes a salutary abyss.

MRS.PETTY That's Greek to me.

DOCTOR In other words: in order to induce death it is possible to go around not only the law, but illegalities as well.

MR. PETTY Wow!

MRS.PETTY The things he says! I don't believe a word of it!

MR. PETTY We want proof, examples.

DOCTOR This very same injection was to be given to another elderly lady. The young couple, her co-tenants, went to the movies. After the show they jumped into a cab, but my God, right in front of their door they realized they had lost the key to the apartment. Back to the movie they went, ran around the rows of seats, in the check-room, everywhere: no use! The keys disappeared. Like madmen they took the cab back to the house, the

DOCTOR woman wanted to have the door broken down, but then they found the keys.

MR. PETTY Where were they?

DOCTOR Slipped behind the seat in the cab. By the time they got in, around six-thirty in the morning, the old lady had gone to happier hunting-grounds.

MR. PETTY Terrible. And what cabfare they must have had!

DOCTOR But, on the other hand, the apartment was theirs. And during the investigation the cabby so movingly described the young couple's concern and devotion.

MRS.PETTY And according to you they had the whole thing planned. That's terrible.

MR. PETTY Let's see; they went to the movies, the woman lost the keys, etc., You hear, Louise?

MRS.PETTY Unheard of. I hear it.

DOCTOR Still in all, I ask you, could we really talk about murder in this case? Especially in the legal meaning of the word? To say nothing of the humane deed of which I, as a physician, should not even talk: they had shortened the suffering of a living dead-person.

MRS.PETTY I still can't excuse such action, Herr Doctor.

DOCTOR In a similar case, the young couple drank with the old lady, for whom a single drop of alcohol meant certain death; they drank to her health on her birthday. They only had a shot-glassful and the celebrant did not survive the celebration.

MR. PETTY What did they drink?

DOCTOR How should I know. . . It must have been cognac.

MR. PETTY Must have been pretty expensive.

DOCTOR If Paris was worth a mass, an apartment of your own would surely be worth a shot of cognac.

MR. PETTY Let's see; just a shot of. . .yes, celebration . . .You hear, Louise?

MRS.PETTY I hear it. Unheard of. I just can't understand how you can joke about all this, being a doctor and all.

DOCTOR The doctor remained in the other room. Here the man is talking to you.

You know what the trouble is?
Life is nothing but a quiz:
Whatever makes Jack draw breath,
For Jill would spell a certain death.
For every big and little fish
The rest are nothing but a dish:
The goblee will the gobbler gobble,
The rate of gobbling your mind will boggle!
Fellow man and fellow-dweller,
Fellow-spouse and fellow-feller,
See how all of us are gor'd
By interest, that twin-edged sword.
This one lives by simple killing;
That one kills by simply living.

DOCTOR Goodwill and the will to live
Gnaw and claw us, each says: "Give!"
You may lean to the right or to the left,
Whether your boobs grow, or hair upon your chest,
Escape you cannot, and don't bother to try:
The spider's fine web is the end of the fly.
This one is young, that one is old,
When they need me I treat 'em all:
The healthy one, the one who's ill,
But judging them? - I never will.

A fact is a fact,
And the fact of facts is this:
(Beside this, all theory
Is just hit-or-miss),
Only the exceptions matter,
Extremes, (like your fellow-dweller).
Look for honesty only in a fairy tale,
In the real world you may walk off your very tail
To find it, but if you do I'll cheer you,
Take off my hat, kiss you and salute you.
Still: it's FACTS, (to them I cater),
Than which there's no power greater.

MRS.PETTY You're a cynical man, Herr Doctor.

DOCTOR The facts are cynical. You two should be happy while ignorant of them; while you are still in the blissful state of original innocence.

MR. PETTY But you have just related two concrete cases, doctor. . .

DOCTOR Come on, that's hack work! (He produces a large manuscript from his bag, flips it open and reads:) "A Small Treatise Concerning Diverse Lawful Methods of Causing Flat-owner Old Ladies to Pass Into Another, Better World."

MR. PETTY "A Small Treatise Concerning Diverse Lawful Methods of Causing Flat-owner Old Ladies to Pass Into Another, Better World."

MRS.PETTY Where is this going to be published?

MR. PETTY And how much will it cost?

DOCTOR It won't be published anywhere. I could not resurrect old ladies with it, and it would probably unleash an avalanche of policemen on young couples. To say nothing of the fact that, having become public property, my experiences, as described here, would have a decidedly positive effect on old-lady mortality. They'd be dropping like flies in September.

MR. PETTY Then why are you knocking yourself out? It can't be too much of a pleasure to write for your desk.

DOCTOR Oh, but you're wrong! It certainly can be! Everybody surrounds and camouflages his own loneliness with objects of his own selection; I collect case-histories, those in my profession, the trickeries of the conscious human spirit. Yesterday I had the pleasure of marking down case number four hundred and ninety nine.

MRS.PETTY Would you mind lending us your manuscript?

MR. PETTY Yes! Let us borrow it!

DOCTOR Now why would you need that?

MRS. PETTY Winter nights are very boring,
This crowded room oppresses us,
To escape, to flee we'd love to

MR. PETTY Anywhere, with my missus.

MRS.PETTY If we touched your evil book,
Darkest hell we'd have to face;

MR. & MRS.PETTY Where we'd learn that after all
This is such a cozy place.

Please let us borrow it, doctor. . .

MR. PETTY We're not interested in the assasinations themselves. . .

DOCTOR Assasinations, Mister Petty? At best we may speak of coincidences, the rearrangement, in a purposeful manner, of circumstances.

MR. PETTY Yes sir, that's right. What I mean is that we're not interested in the rearrangements, but rather how people arrive at the point of rearranging.

MRS.PETTY We'd like to have an insight into the outside world, from which we've been locked out, due to our simple lifestyle.

DOCTOR Your curiosity is not colored by interest.

MR. & MRS.PETTY That's right.

DOCTOR It is merely of an intellectual nature.

MR. &
MRS.PETTY That's right.

DOCTOR Oh well, you may have it for a while, at least until I have to make note of the five-hundredth case. Peruse it, study it, and during your breaks from it take good care of our patient, as devotedly as before. And don't forget: the injection between five and six. Enjoy yourselves! (Exit DOCTOR)

MRS.PETTY This doctor is a bad man.

MR. PETTY He who collects evil deeds, becomes evil himself, right?

MRS.PETTY You're wrong, Louis. He who is evil will collect evil deeds.

MR. PETTY You might be right. Nevertheless. . .

MRS.PETTY Nevertheless?

MR. PETTY Nevertheless however. . .

MRS.PETTY However?

MR. PETTY Nevertheless however our life is becoming more and more difficult and she has a part in this.

MRS.PETTY She doesn't mean to. She really can't help being so tough.

MR. PETTY True, true, but after all we didn't move in here so that we'd live like this to the end of our days.

MRS.PETTY It's been fifteen years already. . .

MR. PETTY <u>Remember, on this bed of steel</u>

MRS.PETTY <u>You became my own at last</u>;

MR. PETTY <u>Even now I can see and feel</u>

MRS.PETTY <u>How our rising passions clashed</u>.

MR. PETTY The old lady was eighty-four then

MRS.PETTY We cared for her and wished her well.

MR. PETTY What's a few years? We could afford them,

MRS.PETTY There was no need to cast a spell.

MR. PETTY In time we'd have our very own flat
Where I could traipse around in shorts,

MRS.PETTY Where I could bake and cook; get fat,
And raise children; a home of sorts.

MR. PETTY I'm no snail or wand'ring fish,

MRS.PETTY I've been too long a newly-wed.

MR. PETTY I confess I sometimes wish

MRS.PETTY The old lady would just drop dead! (Dread silence)

MR. PETTY Louise! You couldn't have said that. That's impossible.

MRS.PETTY I didn't say it, Louis. It just somehow got said.

MR. PETTY Our life may be dreary and bleak, but at least we don't have to be afraid that it will get worse.

MRS.PETTY But she's killed twenty-one of our children and no court will punish her; but if we did away with her. . .

MR. PETTY Who are you talking about? Our patron? You'd murder our benefactress?

MRS.PETTY But Louis, the doctor has just said that this is no murder. We'd only be arranging some coincidences, accidents, chance. . .

MR. PETTY That's true. And chance is there only to help those in trouble. Since the law protects the strong ones.

MRS.PETTY My, how smart you are, Louis!

MR. PETTY And also. . .the doctor was talking about real old ladies.

MRS.PETTY What do you mean? What about our old lady?

MR. PETTY Who knows, she may not be a real old lady. Only an obsession. A colossal vision, you know?

MRS.PETTY I gave my twenty-one children to a vision? She's not even alive, eh?

MR. PETTY Obsessions live too, Louise. They squirm and wriggle, they can set a trap for people. It is also possible to die for them. . . On the other hand it is not such a crime if we treat them more forcefully than people.

MRS.PETTY So that's what you're getting at.

MR. PETTY Right, Louise.

MRS.PETTY That's why you philosophized so much. I see. Correct. So we could do it.

MR. PETTY We can do nothing. We can only rearrange chance. . .

MRS.PETTY That's right. Today, by some sort of chance, forget to give her her injection. If she should survive that. . .

MR. PETTY Your wording is so brutal!

MRS.PETTY Let's hear you say it then.

MR. PETTY Should we not reach the desired result, we shall join her for a few drinks in celebration of our wedding anniversary.

MRS.PETTY A magnificent idea.

MR. PETTY Furthermore, should the need arise, we have another four hundred and ninety seven other ways at our disposal with which to explore the very limits of human capacity, endurance and toughness.

MRS.PETTY We shall learn while we play.

MR. PETTY We shall play while we learn.

MRS.PETTY How wonderfully you figured this all out, Louis!

MR. PETTY I'm proud of us, Louise!

MRS.PETTY Kiss me. . .

MR. PETTY Remember? It's been fifteen years.

MRS.PETTY Yes, Louis. And this time we <u>will</u> have a child.

MR. PETTY <u>We'll start anew</u>.

MRS.PETTY <u>But first: a screw</u>.

MR. PETTY <u>Come to bed</u>. . .

MRS.PETTY <u>Lou, my pet</u>. . .

MR. PETTY <u>Hold me tight</u>
<u>Kill that light</u>.
<u>Now kiss me, do</u>. . .

MRS.PETTY <u>I want you, Lou</u>!

(The small room grows dark.)

OLD LADY (Howling) Stop creaking that rotten bed! You ain't so young either, you two!

(The OLD LADY tears into the small room; lights on, the PETTYs fly apart.)

Whoever heard of such a thing? Lovey-dovey in broad daylight! What are you lookin' at?

Oh, Oh, an orphan widow am I
Nobody loves me, oh, no one at all,
Nobody hears me, oh, none, when I cry,
Nobody answers my desparate call.
Abandon'd, I suffer alone,
But my fate I will not bemoan,
From yonder shore angels beckon,
Saintly virgins all -- I reckon.

Oh, my kidneys, spleen and liver
Smart and ache, and make me shiver
Oh, I feel my end is near
Farewell to everything that's dear.
I wish that those who'll breathe tomorrow
Would drown in horrid shame and sorrow,
'Cause not a one my place would take and die;
I'm good, I'm beautiful, so why should I?

(She flutters into the other room. Enter MAILMAN)

SCENE III

MAILMAN I brought a package.

OLD LADY Package? You mean packages.

MAILMAN Just one came, ma'am. From the World Center for Coordinating Revolutions.

OLD LADY Filthy kids! What the hell do they think? Is this why I gave them birth, for my health, eh? --Well, what has my little boy sent me?

MAILMAN There's a letter with the package. C.O.D., he didn't put stamps on it.

OLD LADY Never mind that. Read the letter, my friend. I can't see small letters any more.

MAILMAN Just the other day, you remember, you managed to get away with not giving me a tip.

OLD LADY Have you no heart? You want to get rich on an old, poor, sick woman? Come on, read the letter, you won't be sorry.

MAILMAN "Dear Mommy, I can't reveal which continent I'm writing this letter from. I have gone into hiding again, all in the cause of world revolution. . ."

OLD LADY Stop! What did he send?

MAILMAN "The content of the package: One skull with thirty two gold teeth." Holy God! Pardon me, ma'am.

OLD LADY My sweet little Eugene. Go on.

MAILMAN "Unfortunately I've been forced to liquidate all members of our group. . ." Holy God! Pardon me, ma'am, "because they have made compromises with society. One of them, during heroism-exercises refused to drown a kitten in a bucketful of water."

OLD LADY This is not interesting at all.

MAILMAN "At the moment I am the entire group, but there's not the slightest doubt as to my world-wide victory."

OLD LADY All right, all right, but what about the skulls?

MAILMAN (Desperately perusing the long letter) Here it is! "The best heads in the world have been laboring for thousands of years. . ."

OLD LADY Look out, buster, that's not it! Nothing about the weight of the teeth?

MAILMAN (Perusal as above) I got it! "They're aching to get their teeth into me. . ." Pardon me, ma'am.

OLD LADY Go on, my good man, read it.

MAILMAN "If I get to the helm of any state I shall liquidate all those who do not want to liquidate the state. For this I shall need a strong state apparatus. . . The workers must be prevented from putting their two cents into the operation of a workers' democracy!"

OLD LADY What's that to me? Continue.

MAILMAN That's it. Only a post script left.

OLD LADY Knucklehead! Why didn't you start with that? My son is a man of principles, and men like him remember the essence of things only incidentally.

MAILMAN "The skull is my pal Willy Screw's who also turned out to be a traitor because he claimed that with the cessation of the state the fight against the state will cease too. . ."

OLD LADY This one can't get at the important things even incidentally.

MAILMAN "Second post script: In a few days I shall mail Mommy all my savings, about twenty thousand dollars . . ." Holy God!

OLD LADY Notice how stingy the kid is? Give me the package! (MAILMAN hands it over, bows.) Well, what are you waiting for?

MAILMAN With all respect, the tip. . .

OLD LADY You dare <u>ask</u> for it? I'll report you!

MAILMAN Oh, Oh, please don't!

OLD LADY Making demands, eh? Extortion, eh? Taking advantage of my feeble state, eh? Just you wait!

MAILMAN Oh, on my knees. . .

OLD LADY All right, all right, I'd forget the whole thing, just pay the C.O.D. charges, and leave in peace.

MAILMAN Thank you, thank you. . .good bye, ma'am.

OLD LADY Come back soon! You're always welcome here! (Exit MAILMAN)

Aren't civil servants sweet?

SCENE IV

(The small room. MR. & MRS. PETTY. The clock strikes five. The OLD LADY, at the director's discretion, could be in the large room in the dark or with the lights on, or even behind the scenes.)

MR. PETTY Five o'clock.

MRS.PETTY Be strong, Louis.

MR. PETTY I wish we'd gone to the movies. . .like they did.

MRS.PETTY Then how could we celebrate our wedding anniversary on Saturday?

MR. PETTY Always this money problem!

MRS.PETTY Besides, would the old lady give us the day off just to go to the movies?

MR. PETTY No, she wouldn't. Still, it would be so much better. We could go see Romeo and Juliet. The death of two young lovers would make us forget. . .

MRS.PETTY Stop whining. . .We've decided on a
course of action, which is not really action,
but rather action's opposite;
let's dare not-act on what must be acted on,
'cause the will to act, and determined action
is what's needed for this active inactivity.

MR. PETTY Into my brain I'd engrave your every word,
if only excitement had not gripped my
throat and nether half.

MR. PETTY She'll still die a cruel death.

MRS.PETTY A colossal vision, you said.

MR. PETTY True, true, but hark: she moans already.

(They listen. The other room is silent.)

MRS.PETTY What's the matter Louis, you're hearing things?

MR. PETTY I can even hear how leadfooted moments crawl by on slow, gooey feet.

MRS.PETTY The more you want to hear it, the slower it goes.

MR. PETTY The slower it is, the more I want to hear it. My heartbeat is skipping, trying to hold back every second. (The clock strikes quarter past five.)

This torture's been waiting for me for 45 minutes. . .

MRS.PETTY Think of our child, oh Louis!

MR. PETTY I can think of him for eight and a half months, why should I think of him just now, when. . .

Can't you hear it, Louise?

MRS.PETTY Not even a fly buzzing.

Never has silence been so uninterrupted.

OLD LADY (An incredibly loud howl) Petty!!

MR. PETTY What will happen now?

MRS.PETTY Nothing. Let's pretend we're asleep.

OLD LADY Mrs. Petty!!!

MR. PETTY What should we pretend now?

MRS.PETTY Shut up, you monkey!

MR. PETTY Don't insult me!

OLD LADY Hey, are you two asleep?

MR. PETTY If you insult me I'll go over and give her the injection.

MRS.PETTY My great hero of the syringe.

OLD LADY One two three, hey, let's get a move on in there!

MR. PETTY What if she comes over here?

MRS.PETTY Before the injection she can't have that much strength.

MR. PETTY You mean she just simply dies in there, eh?

MRS.PETTY Tsk, tsk; to be so afraid of a little death!

OLD LADY Peeeettyyyy! What's with my injection?

MR. PETTY At least you could talk to me.

MRS.PETTY About what?

MR. PETTY Anything you want, but let's talk.

MRS.PETTY When I was a little girl I had braids.

MR. PETTY Me too.

MRS.PETTY What are you talking about?

MR. PETTY Does it matter? The main thing is that we're talking about something, right? (The clock strikes five thirty.)

MRS.PETTY You hear: it's five thirty already.

MR. PETTY Where were we?

MRS.PETTY At your braids.

MR. PETTY We really can't talk too much more about that. Let's find another topic.

MRS.PETTY All right. Let's. He who seeks finds.

MR. PETTY Don't seek where there's nothing. A contradiction between two proverbs!

MRS.PETTY Two proverbs. He who seeks finds. Even a blind hen finds some seeds.

MR. PETTY He who seeks is a blind hen.

OLD LADY In-jection! In-jection! In-jection!

MR. PETTY Go old la-day, go! Go old la-dy, go!

MRS.PETTY Shutup, Louis, she'll hear you!

MR. PETTY So what? If she's going to die anyway let her hear me.

MRS.PETTY I never figured you for such a coward!

OLD LADY In-jec-in-jec-in-jec. . .

MR. PETTY Go go, go go, go go. . .

MRS.PETTY I'll divorce you.

MR. PETTY Now? Right this minute? Immediately? This very moment? This instant? Then I'll run and give her the injection! And you file the divorce papers. (He'd run but his wife trips him. He is sprawled out on the floor.)

MR. PETTY <u>My life is a mess, that is for sure.</u>
<u>I should have been an astronaut from birth,</u>
<u>Communing with the stars in the blue azure</u>
<u>Up high, far above this evil earth</u>.

OLD LADY Pet-ty, Pet-ty, Pet-ty, Pet-ty-Pety-ty-Pet-ty. . .

MR. PETTY No human voice could reach me there,
And free as a bird I'd be.
A celestial ship would calmly bear
My soul to eternity.

OLD LADY Missus Pet-tyyy. . .Missus Pet-tyyy. . . .

MRS.PETTY That was beautiful, Louis! You know what, why don't you recite poetry like you used to.

MR. PETTY How about "The girl's song?"

MRS.PETTY Oh, yes, I'm sure that'd be beautiful.

MR. PETTY When evening descends on my cottage door. . .

MRS.PETTY Beautiful!

MR. PETTY Don't interrupt.
When evening descends on my cottage door,
Patiently, I await my janitor.

MRS.PETTY Shame on you, Louis!

MR. PETTY Why? You don't think I made this up myself, do you? I read it somewhere.

OLD LADY Oh, oh, oh, ohohohohohohoho!

MR. PETTY This is the refrain. (The clock strikes 5:45)

MRS.PETTY A quarter to six. Right on!

MR. PETTY Right on! Da zdravstvuytye! Good luck! Cheers!

MRS.PETTY Are you delirious?

MR. PETTY No. I'm merely greeting you. May the Lord have mercy on your soul. May Allah make your beard grow right down to you. . . If you asked me, I think she's dead.

MRS.PETTY Oh God, let it be true.

MR. PETTY Let's listen.

MRS.PETTY It seems God has shortened her suffering.

MR. PETTY Poor old lady.

MRS.PETTY Granny, oh granny. (She cries) Well, then let's get in there Louis, give her the injection now!

MR. PETTY No, no, no!

MRS.PETTY You've got to. Otherwise they'll think we forgot to give it to her.

MR. PETTY But I don't like sticking needles into corpses.

MRS.PETTY Louis! Duty calls. (Giving up, PETTY starts for the large room.)

OLD LADY (Howls. In the following she may scream and yell whenever the director feels it is appropriate.)

MR. PETTY She's alive!

MRS.PETTY Shall we go on with our conversation?

MR. PETTY About what? We've settled everything already.

MRS.PETTY How should we rearrange the apartment?

MR. PETTY What apartment are you yakking about?

MRS.PETTY At last I'll be able to have my dowry shipped over here: the bedroom set.

MR. PETTY Bedroom set?

MRS.PETTY That's right, the pine furniture, you know.

MR. PETTY The devil should sleep in your bedroom!

MRS.PETTY How can you wish that? Everything'll turn out all right, you'll see.

MR. PETTY All's well that ends bad.

MRS.PETTY Boy, have you got some proverbs! And just now when your child is next to my heart!

MR. PETTY You bore me! Your kids bore me! They haven't even showed their waterfilled heads and already they're sitting on my shoulders.

MRS.PETTY All is over between us.

MR. PETTY At last! I'm bored with you, I loathe you!

MRS.PETTY You had to say this just now?

MR. PETTY I'm bored with you in this dump where you and this goddam' bed try to outcreak each other!

MRS.PETTY Look who's talking! What was the last time you looked into the mirror, you mouldy pickle, you!

MR. PETTY But at least I'm not balding like you.

MRS.PETTY The other night I picked some cobweb off your armpits.

MR. PETTY You, anti-Venus, you! You asex bomb!

MRS.PETTY Fighting with women, are you? Here, take this! (Slaps him in the face.)

MR. PETTY You a woman? Who told you that?

MRS.PETTY Lots of men, if you really want to know!

MR. PETTY What?

MRS.PETTY You didn't think you were the only man in the world, did you?

MR. PETTY Why don't you pick on somebody your own size? Here, take this! (He picks her up, throws her on the bed and begins strangling her.)

MRS.PETTY Murderer!

MR. PETTY Oh no, not me; I won't be a murderer, not on your life!

MRS.PETTY You heard?

MR. PETTY It's almost six. Have you got a heart of stone?

MRS.PETTY Why, what should we do?

MR. PETTY The other methods are more humane, Louise.

MRS.PETTY You think she deserves a different end?

MR. PETTY Yes, a more gentle one. One that would not threaten our nice harmonious life together. (He lets go of his wife's neck.)

MRS.PETTY Well, all right, give her the injection. . . Hey, she's not alive, I don't think.

MR. PETTY It's not six yet, not six yet! (He runs to the door, can't open it.) Louise, help! (PETTY is pushing the door, his wife is pushing him.)

MRS.PETTY Stuck again! Serves her right; why hasn't she had this fixed? (The clock strikes six.) It's all over.

MR. PETTY Over. For her, for us. (They're standing around hopeless.)

MRS.PETTY Shouldn't we try breaking in just once more?

MR. PETTY All right. Get ready, set, go! (He runs and falls into the other room. Long silence, then PETTY re-enters beaming.)

MRS.PETTY Everything O.K.?

MR. PETTY O.K.

MRS.PETTY I'll run down and get some cognac.

MR. PETTY Brandy will do. It's much cheaper.

SCENE V

(The OLD LADY's room)

OLD LADY Hahahaha! Mischievous kids! Naughty brats! Rascally rogues! I'm beginning to enjoy life all over again! I almost kicked the bucket, but it was worth it! What a magnificent play they put on for me, complete with fighting and everything! (Imitating PETTY:) "You anti-Venus!" Fantastic! (Imitating MRS. PETTY:) "You mouldy pickle, you!" Phenomenal! And they can't even grasp, these miserable ones, that they're at such a disadvantage when they tangle with me. They just want to live, like any old way, blindly. Is that a reasonable aim? Does that give anybody any satisfaction, joy?

Any fool can live--
Up to a certain measure,
But to OUTLIVE everyone
That is grand, a real pleasure;
To outlive Mom and Dad,
Kid brother, older sist'
Child, grandchild, everyone,
On that I will insist!

OLD LADY

Look at Moses in the desert
Preparing for the Promised Land:
After forty years of wand'ring
He wound up six foot under sand.
You may be wise, even a leader
(Whether God's man or not)
But if you don't know how to OUTLIVE
Forget it, you will rot!

Everyone just lives--
The stupid, the smart--
And thinks of his life
As some sort of art;
Any living fool can live
So long as he's alive,
But I don't live: I OUTLIVE
My motto is: SURVIVE!

And how! Let me tell you, I'm the greatest when it comes to outliving! All right, let's get on with the fun; ready for the next little episode. I wonder what the kids have planned for tonight. (She is listening at the door. The following scene is accompanied by her dumbshow of grimaces and gestures.)

MRS.PETTY (Enters running) Louis!

MR. PETTY How much did you buy?

MRS.PETTY A pint of apricot-brandy.

MR. PETTY The doctor said a drop would do it.

MRS.PETTY But Louie, I really couldn't ask for a drop of brandy, could I? Besides, we have to drink some, just for the sake of appearances.

MR. PETTY All right. We'll save the rest for Saturday, for our little celebration.

MRS.PETTY When you consider it, it's also a saving that we won't have to leave the apartment to celebrate. Just the two of us in the apartment.

MR. PETTY In our apartment.

MRS.PETTY In our apartment. I must confess, Louis, that no matter how much I scolded you before, I'm really very proud of your kind heart.

MR. PETTY And you even called me a coward.

MRS.PETTY Kindness, cowardice: it's so difficult to tell them apart.

MR. PETTY True, true. And I thought you were cruel, while all along you acted very purposefully and consistently.

MRS.PETTY That's how it is. If words didn't exist, we'd be safe from so many misunderstandings.

MR. PETTY If only they had no meaning. Because talking itself is rather pleasurable.

MRS.PETTY That's it. That's exactly what I wanted to say. You always beat me to it. You are smarter than me, Louis. (A touching silence.)

MR. PETTY Louise. . .hm. . .shouldn't we postpone the brandy till tomorrow?

MRS.PETTY You're starting again, Louis?

MR. PETTY You know what I mean. . . We can't rearrange chance and accidents in such quick succession. This afternoon was just awful.

MRS.PETTY This time it won't be awful, Louis. You'll see. This will be a decidedly cheerful undertaking. The booze will put her in a happy mood and she'll stroll joyfully across the bridge.

MR. PETTY Merely a light little giddiness and the ethereal soul takes leave of the cracked body.

MRS.PETTY You put it magnificently! Now, come on!

MR. PETTY Let sweet rapture
Make me deaf,
Shutting out the
Bark of death. . .

MRS.PETTY Great line! Now let's move!

MR. PETTY Towards the sky I will embark
Like witches on a new stick;
Should I hear that cur still bark
I shall call it music.

MRS.PETTY Wow, is that beautiful! Now let's not stall!

(She is about to knock, PETTY grabs the brandy bottle out of her hands.)

MR. PETTY Wait! Let's dilute it a little!

MRS.PETTY What the hell for?

MR. PETTY Let's just take in half of it. Diluted. We'll have the other half for Saturday.

MRS.PETTY Haven't you got any feelings left? Would you have the heart to give her diluted brandy for her very last drink on earth? She shall have the full sixty proof.

MR. PETTY Have you gone mad; sixty proof? That's pure poison!

MRS.PETTY Poison, Louis?--All right, cut out the angry scene, let's go. (She takes out from under the bed PETTY's bowler hat and her own wedding hat and veil. They put them on: a moving, sentimental scene; then, with the brandy bottle in hand, they knock.)

OLD LADY (Rubbing her eyes) Am I dreaming? You're not going to start drinking, are you? You've won the lottery?

MR. PETTY No, we haven't. . .I just thought we might drink to your health on your birthday.

OLD LADY To my health? On my birthday? Have you gone crazy?

MRS.PETTY Louis! You've lost your mind in your happiness, or something? We've brought this little drink because today we are celebrating our fifteenth wedding anniversary. It was fifteen years ago that you allowed us to move in here. . .

OLD LADY My dear ones. . .

MRS.PETTY Please honor us, on the anniversary of our peaceful coexistence, by sharing with us a small glass of apricot brandy.

OLD LADY By all means, my dear ones. . . But, are you two allowed to drink?

MR. PETTY Are we allowed?

OLD LADY Well, you look pretty lousy to me. Like two rotten plums. I'd really hate to see you get sick.

MRS.PETTY It won't make us sick at all.

OLD LADY Well, I don't know. You know how hard it is to get such trustworthy tenants like you. I must think of my future too.

MR. PETTY Your future?

OLD LADY Of course.

MRS.PETTY Let's drink to that.

MR. PETTY Let's wait a little while with that.

OLD LADY What for? A special invitation? (She pours for all three of them, pouring more for herself.)

MRS.PETTY To your health!

MR. PETTY To your health!

OLD LADY To my health! (They all drink. The PETTYs watch, alarmed, for effects on the OLD LADY.) Not bad at all.

MR. PETTY Hick!

MRS.PETTY Hick!

MR. PETTY How are you feeling?

OLD LADY Splendid.

MRS.PETTY No sickly feeling?

OLD LADY From what, I've hardly had a drop.

MRS.PETTY No sick feeling around the stomach? Dizziness? Urge to puke? Loss of strength?

OLD LADY From this much?

MRS.PETTY Then let's drink some more.

MR. PETTY Louise, hick! This was more than a drop. Let's wait a while.

MRS.PETTY How can you be so stingy?

MR. PETTY There'll be nothing left for Saturday, Louise.

MRS.PETTY The stakes are much larger than that, hick. Pour, you're the man. (PETTY pours, they drink.)

OLD LADY (Smacking her lips) Wonderful drink!

MR. PETTY Hick! Hick!

MRS.PETTY Hick! Hick!

MR. PETTY How are. . .how are you feeling?

OLD LADY Magnificently. Just like I did when I was a young girl.

MRS.PETTY Nausea, hick?

OLD LADY I think you two had better stop. You look awful. I'll take care of the rest by myself. (She wants to pour for herself, PETTY slaps her hand.)

MR. PETTY Not so fast, little girl. I want some too.

OLD LADY You can't have any. Your liver will go kaput.

MR. PETTY You'll go kaput in a minute, hick!

MRS.PETTY Louis! Ssshhh!

MR. PETTY Sshhhh!

MRS.PETTY She might get suspicious!

MR. PETTY So what? Consider her to be a corpse, all right?

OLD LADY Just whom do you mean?

MR. PETTY Shut up! You're dead, little girl. The dead should not talk.

OLD LADY Who's dead?

MRS.PETTY (Measuring things) I think we'll put my wardrobe here, the bed over there.

MR. PETTY No, the wardrobe goes over here and the bed over there!

OLD LADY You put what where?

MRS.PETTY Don't you talk back to us, you hear?

MR. PETTY That huge, goddam' coffin won't fit there!

MRS.PETTY Coffin? Look out!

OLD LADY Take it easy; cool it.

MRS.PETTY What a yukky chandelier!

MR. PETTY That chandelier is the best thing in the whole room.

MRS.PETTY You've got the taste of a spider.

MR. PETTY But it's true: the place is really huge. A regular barn.

MRS.PETTY I don't think I could get the bedroom set through

MRS.PETTY these doors. (Perhaps taking out a tape-measure and measuring door.)

OLD LADY I'm sure you couldn't.

MRS.PETTY Louis, this one's still alive, pour some for her, eh?

MR. PETTY It's not worth it, she's kaput. The two of us will drink the rest.

OLD LADY The hell you will! What about me?

MRS.PETTY Come on, Louis, give her some. . .

MR. PETTY Shut up, you poison-brewing witch!

OLD LADY (Harsh laughter) That's telling her! Atta boy! (With unexpected vigor and speed she grabs the bottle, wants to pour; PETTY grabs the bottle, they fight. She is much stronger than PETTY and yanks him over herself on the wheel chair.)

MR. PETTY Give it here, little girl!

OLD LADY I won't!

MRS.PETTY Let go of my husband!

MR. PETTY You'll get some too.

OLD LADY If you pour me first I'll let you go.

MR. PETTY All right, little girl. (He pours into all three glasses.)

OLD LADY Pour some more for me. Out of yours. It's too much for you.

MR. PETTY It'd be too much for you, hick!

OLD LADY (Crying) Where am I going to get such tenants if you kick the bucket?

MR. PETTY You'll kick the bucket, you understand?

OLD LADY Let's drink to that! (They drink.)

MRS.PETTY You're still alive.

OLD LADY I haven't enjoyed myself so much since my wedding.

MR. PETTY Terrible. Horrible. Hick!

MRS.PETTY Awful. Hick! Dreadful.

MR. PETTY I'm feeling so bad.

MRS.PETTY I'm nauseous. Oh, my stomach!

MR. PETTY My liver! I see two old ladies, hick!

MRS.PETTY Old ladies everywhere, hick!

MR. PETTY The whole world is full of 'em; but these two I'm gonna punch in the mouth! (He staggers to the wheelchair, but the OLD LADY had already gotten out of it.)

MRS.PETTY Punch her, Louis!

MR. PETTY And from now on she'll get not a lousy red cent from me, hick!

OLD LADY All right, I'll take care of you guys! What is this, mutiny? Rioting, inciting to rebellion, eh?

MR. PETTY Mercy, dear lady, mercy!

OLD LADY Nix on mercy! Nix on lady!

MR. PETTY We beg of you! Amnesty, please!

MRS.PETTY Please help us, hick!

MR. PETTY You have our unconditional esteem, our eternal gratitude, hick! (The OLD LADY packs both of them onto the wheelchair.)

Louise, this one's still alive!

MRS.PETTY I can see that, goddam' it!

MR. PETTY Aren't you afraid of death, eh?

(The OLD LADY produces a bottle from a little box attached to the wheelchair, or from the bedpost. She drinks then begins pushing the PETTYs around in her wheelchair. She sings while doing this.)

OLD LADY I'm not afraid of death,
I refuse to be a corpse!
I don't live, remember?
But OUTLIVE you all, of course!

MR. PETTY What the hell is she yelping about?

MRS.PETTY The dead seldom sing, hick!

OLD LADY Every morn' sweet Petty comes
With pills my pains to ease;
Don't fret, I need no tombstone,
Just my cocoa, Louise!

MR. PETTY Don't pee in your pants, Louise; she's trying to bluff you.

OLD LADY I pity all petty women,
For petty males I feel the same;
One by one I out-outlive them,
But what can I do? . . .that's my game!

MR. PETTY Hold on Louise, here we go 'round the bend!

MRS.PETTY Her minutes are numbered.

OLD LADY Let all the days and years just rush by
A thousand of them if they must,

OLD LADY

I'll be here, enjoying myself, when
That Great Time-Maker will bite the dust!
(A spirited last gallop round the room, then she wheels the PETTYs off the stage)

PART II

SCENE I

(The OLD LADY's room. The OLD LADY is on the telephone)

OLD LADY Hello, Valerie? Please keep my tenants under surveillance with your radar thing, will you? For you, socialist atomic scientists this is child's play, but for me it's a question of life or death. (Crying) They broke my wash-basin tonight! My porcelain wash-basin! They put it in front of my bed so I'd step into it and break my neck. But instead the basin broke to smithereens. . .Case number 313. . . Nothing, never mind, it's a game my doctor invented. So then... I can count on you, right? Wonderful! (She kisses the receiver two three times, puts it down and picks it up again.) Get me the president of Superintendents' World Union. . .Mr. Anthony Tower. . .Tony dear? This is mommy. Nothing much. . . Only they keep trying to kill me. . .a little here, a little there. . . Well, they're sort of killing me. . . No, no success yet. . . But they managed to break my wash-basin. My porcelain

OLD LADY wash-basin! I'm afraid they might saw in half the legs of my bed, case number 389. . . You don't have to understand everything. . . This is the only fun your little mommy gets out of life; but it would be a shame if they ruined the bed, it belonged to one of those French Louises. I spoke to Phil already and he's promised to send an atomic sixshooter. From you I want an especially trustworthy superintendent. . . You know I could ask Susie at the Detectives International Exchange-of-Experience Council, but somehow I have more confidence in you. No, no, I'm talking from the experience of a long life. I thank you! Ciau, ciau!

I had to do this; perform
these superfluous maneuvers--
I must prove to the world that I
shall outlive it; I shall remain!
No matter how fast the world spins around, I'll
even have a new wash-basin--it's great to be alive!

SCENE II

MAILMAN (Enters, terribly disheveled, with packages of various shapes and sizes hanging off him in a rather disorderly fashion)

OLD LADY My goodness, what a sight you are!

MAILMAN A man attacked me down by the front door. He turned all my pockets inside out, felt all the packages all over, he even looked into my mouth.

OLD LADY The new super's here already! Bravo Tony, speedy work!--I'll tell him that I require more refined methods than that. --Hey, you, don't tell me you came back for your tip.

MAILMAN Oh, no. . .never entered my mind. . .I know I'll be the pope before I'd get a tip here.

OLD LADY There, you see? You've got the idea.

MAILMAN I already paid the C.O.D. charges too.

OLD LADY You've come a long way, baby.

MAILMAN From now on I'll always pay it. Just please don't report me. I even brought a little present to seal our peace.

OLD LADY Where is it? What's in it?

MAILMAN (Handing over a small box) You see I had this gold tooth myself; I managed to yank it out. You could add it to the ones you got last time.

OLD LADY I'd be happy to, if that makes you happy. Now, what have my little offsprings sent me?

MAILMAN "Sender: Philip Tower. New York, Hydrogen bomb Factory. Contents: one pocket-sized atomic sixshooter." Holy God! Could I read the letter that came with it?

OLD LADY God forbid! Get to the next one!

MAILMAN "Sender: Helga Tower. Tokyo. Whorehouse Center." Hehehehe. (Snaps his fingers or tongue.) Now that's ducky.

OLD LADY What's the matter, don't you like that particular profession?

MAILMAN Of course I do. My dear madame that is the most beautiful profession, if I may so express it.

OLD LADY All right then. Do you realize that one of the houses there doesn't belong to my daughter at all? It's mine.

MAILMAN Oh, it must be wonderful. . .

OLD LADY Stop drooling, hey! Read! What's in the package?

MAILMAN "Contents: porcelain wash-basin."

OLD LADY Now that is quick help! No matter what you say, love conquers any distance. If you only knew how grateful I am to you, my dear Irma!

MAILMAN Isn't her name Helga?

OLD LADY Oh yes, that's right: Helga. Well, look at that: you are more familiar with my situation than I am. Put your packages down, all of them, come on, hurry!

MAILMAN "Jewelled-cross. Gold key. Diamond shackles."

OLD LADY All right, all right, I'll look at them later. Say, how would you like to be my secretary?

MAILMAN Your secretary? That's my ultimate dream. . .only the pension. . .

OLD LADY Come on, don't be so petty. Aren't you ashamed? Look at it this way: you are familiar with my transactions that are constantly increasing. Correspondence, last will and testament, etcetera, etcetera. Or did you think I'd live forever?

MAILMAN Yes, ma'am.

OLD LADY I would leave something to you. . .Let's see. . . how about this apartment, ha?

MAILMAN Wonderful, but. . .

OLD LADY What do you mean "but?"

MAILMAN If I'm going to leave my job, couldn't I get an apartment in Tokyo, hehehe?

OLD LADY You'd manage my affairs from there?

MAILMAN To a certain extent, hehehe. In Madame's ho. . . ho. . .whorehouse. I could really do some useful work there. Like quality controller, or something.

OLD LADY This is very interesting. Go on.

MAILMAN You know, I've been married for thirty years. My wife is some incredible woman. You know, too much of a good thing. . .

OLD LADY Too much?

MAILMAN And how! Besides, between you and me, I'm afraid of her.

OLD LADY And what if I were to write all this to your wife?

MAILMAN Oh no, no, anything but that!

OLD LADY And a letter to the authorities telling them how you'd like to skip the country.

MAILMAN Skip the. . .

OLD LADY Don't tell me that you'd like to quality-control my little Tokyo girls from here?

MAILMAN Oh no. . . Please don't talk about skipping the country. . .and quality controling. . .I was only joking. . .

OLD LADY So then, you want to be my secretary?

MAILMAN Well, actually. . .as a matter of fact. . .

OLD LADY Think about it. You may leave now. As I look at you here, I think you'd make an excellent secretary. Now go ahead, leave, get out! (Exit MAILMAN. While putting packages either into parts of the wheelchair or into the legs of the bed, the OLD LADY talks.) Slowly I must see about replacements for the Pettys. That's clear from yesterday's drinking. She suffers from some kind of hectic-fever, and he's got liver troubles. Their color is downright disgusting. Actually they're still my best bet. They started rebelling only after fifteen years. I almost got asphyxiated. I'd rather not talk about the ones before them. They were just too primitive: they kept leaving the gas on. They couldn't think of anything else. Before those I had a very nice couple. I cried hard when they perished after eleven years. There's no endurance, no perseverence in today's youth. If it's hot they get a sun stroke, if it's cold their ears freeze off, if they drink they collapse like a stack of cards. . .

SCENE III

(Small room. MR. & MRS. PETTY with the Treatise before them)

MR. PETTY That booze has really made me ill.

MRS.PETTY Get to work.

MR. PETTY I wish she'd die of her own will.

MRS.PETTY Get to work.

MR. PETTY For a change I'd like to die, not kill.

MRS.PETTY Quiet!

MR. PETTY I'm bored. Maybe we just lack the skill.

MRS.PETTY Quiet!

MR. PETTY And at the end I'll be truly ill.

MRS.PETTY Get to work!

MR. PETTY Get to work, get to work. Always work, work, work. That doctor ought to be ashamed of himself.

MRS.PETTY Ashamed or not, it doesn't matter. Read it!

MR. PETTY All right. "Case number seventeen. The old lady is told, just before medication time--an optimum time--that she won the lottery. Result: paralysis of respiratory centers; knotting of brainvessels. Heart thrombosis. Exitus. See also case number 37."

MRS.PETTY Doesn't sound bad. Now read number thirty seven.

MR. PETTY "See number 17. The news of winning did not bring about the desired result on this particular old lady. She only suffered paralysis of the left side. Therefore, when she was completely convinced of being a

MR. PETTY millionairess, she was told that it was April's fool's day. Result: unsatisfactory circulation. Urinary brain tumor. Exitus."

MRS.PETTY Urinary brain tumor. .?

MR. PETTY Urinary brain tumor. . .

MRS.PETTY This is wonderful. If number 17 doesn't work, we immediately switch to number 37.

MR. PETTY Yes Louise. . .only. . .

MRS.PETTY What objections have you got now?

MR. PETTY You know it's not April. We can't really tell her that it's November fool's day, can we?

MRS.PETTY Once she's dead, we can tell her even that.

MR. PETTY Besides, the old lady's never bought a lottery ticket in her life.

MRS.PETTY Oh, you ass! Then why in the world are you reading these cases?

MR. PETTY Don't call me an ass, Louise. I'd really like peace to be restored between us.

MRS.PETTY It'll be restored when this job is done. Go on, read!

MR. PETTY "Case number 113. Combination frog-trick."

MRS.PETTY Sounds great.

MR. PETTY "Into the bed of one of the old ladies a well developed toad was placed. The result was not the expected exitus, but it had started chronic insomnia. The old lady developed a fixed idea which concerned whole armies of toads in her room. When, after two

MR. PETTY weeks of total wakefulness, she finally fell asleep, she was awakened by croaking sounds. Although she experienced no toads, the croaking became permanent. Result: soggylungs. Exitus."

MRS.PETTY Soggylungs. .?

MR. PETTY Soggylungs. "It is possible that the permanent croaking may have been provided by a tape recording, since there were no frog prints found in the apartment. . ."

MRS.PETTY Brilliant! This very day, Louis, go and catch me a toad!

MR. PETTY Oh no, not me, not that!

MRS.PETTY What do you mean "no?"

MR. PETTY I don't know how. . .I don't dare touch a toad, Louise.

MRS.PETTY Get a hold of yourself. Think of our child.

MR. PETTY Right now all I can think of is what would happen if she threw the toad at me? I'd die, not her. . . You'd give birth to an orphan, Louise. But I've got a fantastic idea: why don't you catch a toad?

MRS.PETTY The hell I will! Whoever heard of such a thing? Expectant mothers catching toads! That's harmful, Louis. You catch the toads, period.

MR. PETTY Yes, but. . .

MRS.PETTY No more "buts."

MR. PETTY But we don't have the money for the taperecorder, anyway.

MRS.PETTY Then what the hell did you read this case to me for, God's ass?

MR. PETTY If I'm an ass then I won't read any more. I have my dignity, you know.

MRS.PETTY Come on, stop fooling around. Let's move along.

MR. PETTY "Tenant's brother is a policeman. Borrowed uniform, fake arrest. In the course of arrest pointing of gun at old lady. Result: Potentilla, tormentilla. Exitus."

MRS.PETTY Potentilla, tormentilla. .?

MR. PETTY Potentilla, tormentilla.

MRS.PETTY Great! But what a stupid beast you are, Louis!

MR. PETTY Not an ass any more? Why do you keep insulting me, Louise?

MRS.PETTY If you can't catch a lousy toad, how on earth are you going to get a hold of a policeman's uniform?

MR. PETTY There are more policemen than frogs, right? So, it's easier to catch a policeman. . .

MRS.PETTY Well then, catch a policeman and have him arrest her!

(The door is torn open, enter POLICEWOMAN)

POLICEWOMAN Who's got to be arrested? Make way here!

MRS.PETTY Oh!

MR. PETTY Oh! Oh! We haven't done anything, madame sergeant, please. . .

POLICEWOMAN What's this yakking? What the hell are you talking about? I'll run you in in a minute, both of you!

MR. PETTY Don't, please don't! Don't arrest us! All we wanted was to drink to her health.

MRS.PETTY To celebrate our anniversary, you know.

POLICEWOMAN This don't mean nothin' to me.

MR. PETTY At least today you should be merciful. We were studying the book only with intellectual aims in mind.

POLICEWOMAN What's the matter, man, the good life's gone to your brains? You can beg me 'till doomsday; once I get an order, that's it. . .

MR. PETTY Well, Louise, an order's an order.

POLICEWOMAN What order are you squeaking about, eh?

MR. PETTY I'm Louis Petty, the co-tenant.

MRS.PETTY I'm Mrs. Louis Petty, ne Louise Bargain. The co-tenantess.

POLICEWOMAN Hold it! There was no mention of co-tenants at all. This is swinery number one. I knew somethin' was smelly about this deal.

MR. PETTY May I inquire, most revered madame sergeant, what swinery are you referring to?

POLICEWOMAN Does the widow Tower live here?

MR. PETTY Lives, lives, of course she lives!

MRS.PETTY And how! For ninety nine years without interruptions.

POLICEWOMAN I didn't ask if she lived and how long. My question is: does she live <u>here</u>?

MR. PETTY Of course, of course, where else should she live? She has not left here all her life. She's here right now, in the next room.

POLICEWOMAN Is she on her last leg at least?

MRS.PETTY Sshh!

MR. PETTY For a long time, madame, for a long time.

MRS.PETTY Every day we await the unavoidable tragedy..

MR. PETTY In her we lose our future. She left her apartment to us.

POLICEWOMAN Hold it! What kind of apartment?

MR. PETTY This one here, as you can see. The whole thing, that is.

POLICEWOMAN The damn' old hag! You got a lease? (The PETTYs begin to look for their lease under the bed.) Hold it! Swinery number two! I'll teach her a thing or two.

MRS.PETTY Maybe you'll arrest her?

MR. PETTY It might be harmful. . .

MRS.PETTY Still in all, the law is the law. . .

MR. PETTY That's different. Then there's no way out.

MRS.PETTY This way to her room. Go right ahead.

MR. PETTY Do not hesitate. The law is the law. Public interest is sacred. There's no room here for sentimentality. . .

POLICEWOMAN Man, you're off the track altogether. I didn't come here to arrest anybody. I came to look at the apartment.

MRS.PETTY To look. . .

MR. PETTY At the apartment?

POLICEWOMAN What's the matter, are you deaf? This old monster promised the place to my husband, and now I come to find out she done give it to you. She'll pay for this!

MRS.PETTY And who is your husband, may I ask?

POLICEWOMAN Who would it be? The mailman. He almost gave up his job to be secretary to this witch here. A good thing I came to check the spot personally.

MRS.PETTY No doubt about it, your profession sharpens the brain.

MR. PETTY Every other genius is a police officer. Every other police officer is a genius. You sure did the right thing.

MRS.PETTY An irretrievable insult has been dealt to every mailman.

MR. PETTY And to every police officer!

MRS. PETTY The integrity of the police is at stake!

MR. PETTY And through that, the integrity of the state! And the state is the brain and heart of all of us, if I may so express myself.

POLICEWOMAN If only she got some secret dealings. . .

MR. PETTY Oh, I'm sure she has. . .

MRS.PETTY Only we don't know about them, otherwise we would have dutifully reported them.

POLICEWOMAN One thing's for sure: when the police is mad at somebody, it turns out he got some secret dealings...

MR. PETTY But, on the other hand, if it turns out that everybody. . .

POLICEWOMAN Come on, spit it out!

MRS. PETTY . . .it seems the police are especially mad at the old lady; therefore it's quite possible that she has especially dangerous secret dealings.

POLICEWOMAN You're not as stupid as you look, you know.

MR. PETTY Thank you very much, madame officer.

MRS.PETTY Come on, arrest her.

MR. PETTY That would be contrary only to the letter of the law, not its spirit.

MRS.PETTY Just imagine what would happen if your husband left his pensioned job? For a non-existent apartment.

MR. PETTY The old lady cheated. . .

MRS.PETTY Swindled. . .

POLICEWOMAN The rotten witchbitch!

MR. PETTY She wanted to sign a false contract. She broke the law.

MRS.PETTY You storm in there, point your gun at her and scream real loud!

MR. PETTY She deserves at least that much! A good trick, and, as it turns out, appropriate punishment; what do you say?

POLICEWOMAN A police officer's husband should be sacred!

MRS.PETTY Hear, hear!

MR. PETTY You've phrased it beautifully. I shall engrave that into my brains. "A police officer's husband should be sacred." And the police officer's husband's wife, too!

POLICEWOMAN Make way here! (She pulls out her pistol. The OLD LADY who's been listening throughout, now wheels herself, terrified, into the small room. On her lap: an enormous amount of foreign currency.)

OLD LADY Ah-ah! Watch that thing, it might go off.

POLICEWOMAN Foreign bread! And she's flaunting it!

MR. PETTY And how much??? So much!

OLD LADY Put that thing down.

POLICEWOMAN You won't get away with this.

OLD LADY Anybody with this much foreign money, my dear generalina, gets away with anything. Because anybody with this much <u>is the source</u> of currency.

POLICEWOMAN What are you talking about?

OLD LADY (To the PETTYs) Get out of here! Tsk, tsk. . . I'm very angry with you two. (Exeunt PETTYs) Well, my monkey general, you obviously did't think of the possibility that I <u>might</u> panic, and in that case <u>might</u> use my pocketsized atomic sixshooter, did you?

POLICEWOMAN Your what?

OLD LADY And that would have had unforeseen, earthshaking consequences. Is this rotten apartment worth a world war to you? Now get this: as a punishment I will not hire your husband.

POLICEWOMAN I wouldn't let him work for you. He's got a damn' good job.

OLD LADY Did have one, my monkey generalina, did. I had him fired so he could work for me.

POLICEWOMAN You got him fired, an' now you woudn't hire him? Is that a nice thing to do?

OLD LADY And what about arresting me? Is that a nice thing to do?

POLICEWOMAN But. . .but why should he pay for my mistakes?

OLD LADY Don't you defend him, my generalina. He wanted to sneak out of the country.

POLICEWOMAN Come off it. I wasn't born yesterday.

OLD LADY Wanted to fly to Tokyo. To be a quality controler in one of my whorehouses.

POLICEWOMAN That ain't true! The rotten bastard! And what the hell could he do there, anyway?

OLD LADY He seemed dissatisfied in his present job. He was complaining about you too, generalina.

POLICEWOMAN That pimp! He was complaining! I'll break his goddam' neck!

OLD LADY Run along home, he'll be there. You kick him out too, he doesn't deserve any other treatment.

POLICEWOMAN I guess I ought to thank you for openin' my eyes up for me. Wait you goddam' skirtchaser! (Exit running)

OLD LADY (Wheels herself back into her own room) That's done too. At last I can continue my sorting. You little dollar babies, come over here. You, Swiss francs, over here. . .West German marks to the right, East German marks to the left here. Gold pieces right here in the middle. Rubles, you just roll, like that. . .Most important, you pound, come here, the place right on top. I can never make heads or tails of these African moneys. Just stay right there all in one heap. Where are my Swedish cronen? Come here next to me sweet Napoleons.

MR.&MRS.PETTY (Sticking their heads in) Ma'am, what's all that money for?

OLD LADY Eavesdropping again? Get to work! (Exeunt PETTYs)

Lying in the bank
What good is your dough?
And lying around
You are just a shmoe.
To help me OUTLIVE, now that's what it's for,
That's why I need money, money galore!

To silver's jingling sound, my soul
With tiny bells replies;
My pain is gone, my peace is found,
And you may well surmise:
To help me OUTLIVE, now that's what it's for,
That's why I need money, money galore!

OLD LADY

I could buy more years with money,
Embalm myself while still alive,
Pound or dollar, lei or złoty,
By hoarding them I will survive:
To help me OUTLIVE, now that's what it's for,
That's why I need money, money galore!

SCENE IV

MR. PETTY I can't take it any more. I haven't slept a wink for days.

MRS.PETTY Total exhaustion. Nervous breakdown. And now we've got to hunt for a fake burglar. How did they do it in case number 438?

MR. PETTY (Looking at the treatise for a while) It doesn't say.

MRS.PETTY Terrible. Poor Louis. You have to do it then yourself.

MR. PETTY Am I the burglar type, Louise?

MRS.PETTY If you are not, my dear, who is?

MR. PETTY Could my face strike terror in her?

MRS.PETTY You're a milksop, Louis-lover.

MR. PETTY Louise darling, wouldn't you rather be. . .?

MRS.PETTY A man is needed, don't bother me!
What sex does the book specify?

MR. PETTY Forget the words, we must apply
The text to time, place and circumstance. . .

MRS.PETTY And if you'll take your usual stance
You'll kill the action, not the lady.

MR. PETTY The truth is, Louise, I feel so lazy.

MRS.PETTY That's enough chatter! In the closet you'll find a visored cap, a checkered shawl, and you can tie my black stockings over your mouth.

MR. PETTY And what is she shoots at me? Or throws a hand-grenade at me?

MRS.PETTY Oh shuttup, already! The idea is great. You break in on her, like a burglar or robber, you hear! The heroine of case number 438 died instantly.

MR. PETTY Yes, I know.

MRS.PETTY So then what are you vacillating for? Or maybe you have another man in mind for the job?

MR. PETTY No, I can't think of anybody.

MRS.PETTY Go ahead, take your time, think.

MR. PETTY This is terrible Louise. We don't know anybody. Now when we need someone, I just realized I haven't talked to a living soul for five years. . . The two women of my life don't count. . .

MRS.PETTY Two women? Louis!

MR. PETTY Well, yes: you and the old lady. How do they call this nowadays?

MRS.PETTY You're stalling again, Louis!

MR. PETTY I've got it: to-tal a-li-en-a-tion!

MRS.PETTY Come on, put on the stuff and move! You'll have an apartment, you'll have money and then you can de-alienate yourself.

MR. PETTY (Getting dressed) If I could only think of somebody. Anybody. If someone would walk in here right now, I wouldn't mind if he was the nephew of the very devil! (Enter MAILMAN)

Greetings, godsend!

MAILMAN Are you the widow Tower's co-tenants?

MR. PETTY What is it you wish, my good man?

MAILMAN Revenge! Restitution! Justice!

MRS.PETTY Who are you?

MAILMAN The mailman.

MR. PETTY The husband of madame sergeant?

MAILMAN Her kicked-out husband, that's who I am! And the tool of vengeance; the scourge of God!

MR. PETTY Case 438! Case 438!

MAILMAN What? What?

MRS.PETTY Pay no attention to him. What's your problem?

MAILMAN <u>Mrs. Tower wished to buy me, bribe me,</u>
<u>offering me this very flat,</u>
<u>just so I'd become her slave and servant!</u>
<u>But I showed her what honesty was;</u>
<u>my face blank, my shoulders straight,</u>
<u>I sure gave her a piece of my mind</u>. . .

MR.&MRS.PETTY And what happened?

MAILMAN She reported me. I was kicked out of my job. She slandered me to my very wife who gave me the heave-ho; I'm home- and jobless.

MR.&MRS.PETTY Now what?

MAILMAN You two know her real well; you'll be getting this flat. Give me some advice! How could I carry out my revenge?

MR.&MRS.PETTY Case 438! Case 438!

MAILMAN You don't say!

MRS.PETTY Help us in rearranging certain circumstances. Did I say it right, Louis?

MR. PETTY Magnificently! Perfectly!

MAILMAN Are you pulling my leg? I've come to take up arms against injustice!

MR.&MRS.PETTY Correct!

MAILMAN I was not insulted merely as a private person; I am here to present her with a bill for thirty years of fear and anxiety as a public servant!

MR.&MRS.PETTY Correct!

MAILMAN It cannot be that millions upon millions simply wait for more and more, newer and newer plagues upon themselves! Helplessly, too!

MR.&MRS.PETTY That's right!

MAILMAN Then pray tell, what should I do?

MR. PETTY You'll get dressed as a burglar, all right?

MAILMAN All right.

MRS.PETTY And scare the daylight out of her, O.K.?

MAILMAN O.K.

MR. PETTY And in her fright she goes bye-bye. Finito.

MAILMAN Good.

MRS.PETTY Ex. .Ex. . .

MR. PETTY Exitus. She exits. Got it?

MAILMAN I'm sorry, but that's not good enough for me.

MR. PETTY Why not? She dies, you're avenged, no?

MAILMAN I need a kind of revenge and justice that gives life.

MRS.PETTY Well, after her death you can live in this room for nothing.

MR. PETTY, Well, if not exactly for nothing, for next to nothing.

MAILMAN Thank you. That's something, anyway. A place to put my head down.

MRS.PETTY There we are then. Now please get ready.

MAILMAN I need a job too.

MR. PETTY We'll get you one, don't worry.

MRS.PETTY There'll be jobs up the ass.

MAILMAN I don't need a job up the ass, madame.

MRS.PETTY I'm telling you, you'll have a job. . . You'll be able to pick and choose. You could even be a cabinet minister for all I care. But first let's get this job over with.

MAILMAN We'll get over it. So then, prime minister, eh? You can count on me.

MRS.PETTY Here is my stocking.

MAILMAN Thank you, madame. . .what should I do with it? . . . This is. . .

MRS.PETTY Put it on! What's the matter, you don't like it?

MAILMAN Of course I do, I do, it's beautiful. . .Only right this moment I have no urgent need to put the. . .

MR. PETTY On your head, man, on your head; you'll be a burglar.

MAILMAN Oh, of course, of course. (They pull stocking over his head.)

MRS.PETTY Here's the visored cap, the checkered shawl. (They dress MAILMAN.)

MR. PETTY Here is the knife! Stick it in her face and scream: "Your money or your life!"

MAILMAN Yessir! "Your money or your life!" For justice! (He rushes into OLD LADY's room.) My most respected madame, please don't get scared. . .

OLD LADY (Sadly) It's all over for you.

MAILMAN I've come to expose a conspiracy.

OLD LADY Poor mailman.

MAILMAN Your co-tenants want to murder you, madame.

OLD LADY You poor, miserable, unfortunate creature.

MAILMAN I agreed to play this role only to take the wind out of their sail.

OLD LADY Will you take off that stocking!

MAILMAN I've exposed them. I revealed them. And now I'm begging you for the job as your secretary.

OLD LADY Will you put that knife away!

MAILMAN Even without a transfer to Tokyo it's all right. I could be happy here too. I'd move into the murderers' room. . . I'd take good care of you, madame. . .

OLD LADY I'll have my daughter take care of you. She's from the Detectives International Exchange-of-Experience Council.

MAILMAN Mercy!

OLD LADY You can't hide anywhere! You wanted to kill me.

MAILMAN No, I didn't! On the contrary, my dear, dear madame.

OLD LADY Only I cannot be killed. The whole world stands behind me. I live forever. You understand?

MAILMAN Yes ma'am. Your highness.

OLD LADY People understand everything too late. Get out!

MAILMAN Couldn't I just. . .your grace. . .

OLD LADY No. I'm tired, dead tired; you've exhausted me, poor man. I must rest now. But don't you forget: my hands reach everywhere.

MAILMAN Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. God bless you, ma'am. (He returns to the other room.)

MR. PETTY Is she dead?

MRS.PETTY Is it all over?

MAILMAN <u>It's all over for me. I've died here.</u>
<u>I know she can reach me anywhere.</u>
<u>She could have me killed, destroyed,</u>
<u>she could send his supers after me,</u>
<u>hunt me down with her missionaries,</u>

MAILMAN

program me for a corpse as she likes, and
worst of all, she can get me anywhere in
this world. . .And so, farewell!
Life, you've been beautiful! Farewell
to all: superiors, and those in uniform,
old ladies and Japanese whorehouses,
ta-ta my female companion, oh, ta-ta to you;
look world: exit the mailman!
(He makes a stabbing motion: the knife goes under his armpit) This didn't hit home. Maybe with the other hand. (Put knife into his left hand, attempts stabbing himself; same result.) I can't even do this right! (Exit)

MR. PETTY Phew! I'm glad that's over. What would we have done if he really stabbed himself?

MRS.PETTY How should I know? We never had a mailman dying here before.

MR. PETTY And now what do we do, Louise?

MRS.PETTY We can only trust in case number 499.

MR. PETTY Oh, my!

SCENE V

OLD LADY (While sneaking over to PETTYs room and looking into Treatise) Case number 499 This I've got to see. Ever since the doctor gave them this Treatise life's

OLD LADY been a ball. A little bit tiring, but the days so so quickly. Petty as a ghost. This has to be the best one yet. Petty! Hehehe! (Sneaks back into her own room, sits in wheelchair. The clock strikes twelve. Dark. On the twelfth stroke PETTY enters, wrapped in a sheet, as a ghost. MRS. PETTY is pushing him, encouraging him and making scary sounds. PETTY approaches OLD LADY by himself.)

MR. PETTY Wake up, widow Tower, I've come for you! (OLD LADY snores.) The ghost of your tenth great-grandfather, behold, has appeared to you! (OLD LADY continues snoring.) Widow Tower, your great-grandfather cometh! (He shakes OLD LADY.)

OLD LADY What is it? Jeeeesus!

MR. PETTY (Begins dancing, covering the whole room)

Widow Tower, for you I've come,
A friendly ghost in uniform,
Your tenth great-grandfather am I
Don't cry, or sigh, or heave,
It's written: you must leave;
Hop out of bed: it's time to die!

OLD LADY Oh! I'm done for!

MR. PETTY The Council of Ghosts has decided,
Doctor Devil himself presided,
And his command we cannot doubt.

OLD LADY Oh, Oh! (She can barely contain herself.)

MR. PETTY The clock has struck, the spirits gather,
It's past midnight, we mustn't linger,
Get up, get up, time's running out!

OLD LADY Have mercy on me!

MR. PETTY Why let them, before you enter,
Label you a mean dissenter?
Take heed, great-granddaughter!

OLD LADY Mercy, great-grandpa! (She is bursting with laughter.)

MR. PETTY The Council calls, still graciously,
Widow Tower, you come with me,
Get up, let's not falter.

OLD LADY I can't stand it! Oh, my sides! Oh, oh, oh! Ooooh! Oooo!

MR. PETTY I don't see what's so damn' funny! I'm a regular ghost as you can see. . .

OLD LADY Fe-hear mu-hust have ta-haken away my se-henses, that's why I, I ha-have to laugh so-ho ha-ha-hard!

MR. PETTY Enough of this croaking! You're looking at a flesh and blood ghost! Abraca-dabra, kala-mazoo! You're dead!

OLD LADY Sure! In just a second! Oh, my stomach! A little patience! Mercy! Hahahaha!

MR. PETTY I beg of you, have some consideration for me. The Ghost council will punish me if I don't carry out their orders properly. I'll be fined too. Now, I'm asking you very nicely: please die.

OLD LADY This instant, great-granddad. But please do a little more dancing around for me, will you? (PETTY dances silently, with alluring gestures; the OLD LADY is writhing with laughter.)

MR. PETTY Well, come along now. . .BAM!

OLD LADY Oh!

MR. PETTY BOOM! BOOM!

Old Lady Oh, oh! Hehehehe! Oh!

MR. PETTY So, you're not coming, eh?

OLD LADY That's right. Hahahaha. It's great to be alive!

MR. PETTY (In his normal voice) Then drop dead.

OLD LADY (Offended) What did you say?

MR. PETTY Drop dead, old hag!

OLD LADY How dare you talk to me like that, you nobody!

MR. PETTY Talk as I damn' well please. You don't dictate to ghosts.

OLD LADY That's enough fooling around. I can show even ghosts a thing or two.

MR. PETTY (Again making alluring gestures)

<u>Come to me now, come to me,</u>

<u>Old wreck, you</u>.

OLD LADY What?

MR. PETTY <u>Old hag, monster, come to me</u>. . .

OLD LADY Watch your mouth!

MR. PETTY Booh! Booh! Booh!

OLD LADY (Jumps up, chases PETTY) Just you wait! Stick your tongue out at me, did you? You'll regret this! (She pushes him into the other room where he falls against his wife; both of them wind up on the bed.) Well! Now hear this: The lease is hereby broken! Get out this minute! Take all your junk with you too! This is the end of the comedy! You're kicked out! Fired!

MR. PETTY She fooled us.

MRS.PETTY Cheated us. We can't take this lying down.

MR. PETTY No! No! (Staggering, he threatens the OLD LADY who retreats into her wheelchair.)

MR.&MRS.PETTY Swindler! Slanderer! Perjurer!

MRS.PETTY You won't slip out this time!

OLD LADY This wasn't in the treatise! (She falls back silently; does not move at all.)

MR. PETTY She really died.

MRS.PETTY Yep.

MR. PETTY And just now when we didn't even want to rearrange the circumstances.

MRS.PETTY The result is what counts.

MR. PETTY Hurrah!

MRS.PETTY Hurrah! (Shyly at first, then more and more wildly they dance and jump around.)

MR. PETTY We're free at last, Louise!

MRS.PETTY That's right, Louis.

MR. PETTY We can do as we please.

MRS.PETTY That's right Louis.

MR. PETTY But what do we please, Louise? (Silence. Sentimental tune on the piano.)

MRS.PETTY I could play the piano again, Louis!

MR. PETTY Marvelous! Do you still have your old piano, Louise?

MRS.PETTY How can you ask such a question? You sold it yourself a good ten years ago.

MR. PETTY Well then?

MRS. PETTY We could buy a new one. There's loads of money here.

MR.PETTY That's true. Say, Louise, do you still know how to play the piano? (Silence)

MRS.PETTY Louis! We can invite as many guests as we want to.

MR. PETTY That's right! And whenever we feel like it.

MRS.PETTY Who do you think we should invite first?

MR. PETTY The. . .the. . .

MRS.PETTY Well? (Silence)

MR. PETTY I think I'll go back to my old job.

MRS.PETTY Wonderful.

MR. PETTY I still have my oversleeves to protect my elbows!

MRS.PETTY Wonderful! In that office you were the best.

MR. PETTY In that office I was recognized as an expert. My signature was an object of admiration.

MRS.PETTY And where is that office now? (Silence) You'll find another one, Louis.

MR. PETTY To start everything all over again? Why?

MRS.PETTY For our child.

MR. PETTY What if we can't even raise him?

MRS.PETTY Maybe I won't even be able to give birth to him?

MR. PETTY And even if you could, what good would that do? We've grown to hate each other during the last few days, dear Louise.

MRS.PETTY True, we disgust each other, darling Louis. (Silence)

MR. PETTY It's the Treatise's fault!

MRS.PETTY And the doctor's. Why did we listen to him?

MR. PETTY We can only trust ourselves, Louise. If it were up to me, I'd resurrect her.

MRS.PETTY Me too. I'd rather not have a child, ever.

MR. PETTY And what do we need such a large apartment for anyway?

MRS.PETTY True. What for? We've managed in a small place up to now. We would get bored to death in this warehouse.

MR. PETTY Without our mentor.

MRS.PETTY Without our protector. While we loved her we loved each other too.

MR. PETTY If I could revive her!! I'd give half my life for that.

MRS.PETTY I'd give my whole life. And yours too. (They kneel, lock their hands in prayer.)

MRS.PETTY

We beg you, crying, Almighty God,
Quickly may she heaven enter;
We shall follow, just to serve her,
Oh let us follow, Almighty God.

(They cry profusely, lament and moan in thin voices. Suddenly a deep-voiced sob is heard. The OLD LADY sits up)

OLD LADY Now that is really nice of you. Really. . . Of course you can stay on.

MR. PETTY She's alive!

MRS.PETTY Alive!

OLD LADY Of course I'm alive! (Frozen silence) What's this, the Pettys are loafing again? (To MRS.PETTY) Come on, let's have my breakfast, one two three, half-quart of cocoa with whipped cream, white bread, jam, you know what else; (To MR. PETTY) and you, scram to the drugstore. . .

MR. PETTY She fooled us again!

MRS.PETTY Who should we cry over now?

MR. PETTY Murderer! (Falls lifeless to the floor.)

MRS.PETTY Mass murderer! (She falls to the floor too.)

(Dirge. Enter POLICEWOMAN and MAILMAN with flowers)

MAILMAN Madame, your grace, your highness! My wife and I wish to assure you that we share, indeed we do, your grief. Although death has wrested them from our midst, that which they died for shall live forever!

OLD LADY <u>What horrible and fateful penance</u>
<u>I must do, and this to see!</u>
<u>Where am I to find such tenants</u>
<u>Who have lived and died for me</u>?

(POLICEWOMAN and MAILMAN strew flowers over the PETTYs)

POLICEWOMAN In civilian life my name is Louise.

MAILMAN When you really think about it, my name is Louis.

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