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DORKA POROGI

# THE TIME OF THEATRE:

FOUR CASE STUDIES FROM 20TH-CENTURY  
HUNGARIAN ACTING HISTORY



UArtPress

Editura Universitaria

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## INTRODUCTION

Although grounded in longstanding traditions, this book is an experiment: it examines past acting styles, approaching the history of twentieth-century Hungarian theatre through the lens of acting. Its central hypothesis is that, alongside – and around – the history of director-led theatre, it is possible to trace equally compelling histories of acting that have exerted at least as strong an influence on contemporary Hungarian theatre. In this volume, I analyse acting styles, performances, and artistic practices, approaching them through their histories of influence. My aim is to free them from the constraints of legends and stereotypes, and by repositioning them in a reconstructed past of the present, to view them as sites of knowledge transmission. As a theatre director, I frequently observe how actors learn from one another: by watching each other, they acquire the practical knowledge of their craft. Yet these practices largely remain unwritten, preserved only in anecdotes, stories, and metaphors. Commemorative speeches about actors are often so heavily imbued with cultic elements that their actual work and professional achievements remain obscured.

I began to engage with the history of acting because I consider the recognition, appreciation, and even the emancipation of actors' work to be essential. According to Alain Badiou, the theatre's advantage over the sciences lies in its capacity to express ideas sensually and instantaneously through play. Its effect is immediate: the spectator requires no prior knowledge to experience and respond to an actor's performance. Analysis, however, which is necessarily delayed, requires context and background. The audience reacts at once, but articulation takes time: the director reflects a few seconds after watching a scene during rehearsal, the critic reacts days later, and theatre history years, decades, or even centuries afterward.

In this book, I examine the intense presence, appearances, and power of actors, and acting not in theoretical terms, but within the framework of theatre history. Through four case studies, I argue that not only theatre as an institution but acting itself may be understood as a cultural model – and that theatre history is transmitted unwritten through the practice of acting. Methodologically, the case-study analyses of acting in this volume are primarily grounded in Marvin Carlson’s concept of the “haunted stage.” They investigate how past times, condensed into the present, manifest themselves in all acting. The analyses seek to move discussions of acting beyond the long-dominant dichotomy between role and actor, which has shaped discourse since Denis Diderot. Although each study considers the actor’s entire career as a contextual framework, it consistently concentrates on a single, specific performance – understood not as a closed or completed whole, but as one moment within a larger creative trajectory. Accordingly, the volume presents a series of micro-histories whose descriptions and analyses follow Philther’s method of theatre-historical writing; of its six dimensions, however, the focus here falls decisively on acting.<sup>1</sup> Even in research devoted to the history of acting, the object of analysis remains the theatrical performance itself, since it is performance that most precisely defines and frames the tools, possibilities, and limits of an individual actor’s work.

In this book, I select four performances from nearly a century of acting and examine them in great detail. By closely reading these performances and conducting micro-analyses

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<sup>1</sup> The Philther method, developed in the early 2010s by Magdolna Jákfalvi, Árpád Kékesi Kun and Gabriella Kiss, provides a framework for analysing theatrical performances through six aspects: the context of the performance, its dramaturgy, its relationship to the direction and to fellow actors, its visual dimensions (movement and costume), and the impact of the performance. ÁRPÁD KÉKESI KUN, “Philther as a historiographic model”, in *Ambiguous Topicality, A Philther of State-Socialist Hungarian Theatre*, 7–19 (Budapest–Paris: Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church–L’Harmattan Publishing–Édition L’Harmattan, 2021).

of fragments of twentieth-century Hungarian acting history, I aim to gain insights into acting and theatrical work that extend beyond individual or personal examples. The earliest performance examined in this book dates from the 1930s, while the most recent is from 2015. Some of these I experienced live—most notably Lili Monori’s performance in *Faust*—but the reconstructions presented here are based primarily on performance recordings, including József Timár’s *Death of a Salesman*, Éva Ruttkai’s *The Visit*, and recorded performances of *Faust*.

In the case of Árpád Ódry’s poetry recitations, Éva Ruttkai’s Juliet, and Gizi Bajor’s portrayal of Lady Milford, audio recordings serve as important aids to memory. In other instances, such as Ódry’s stage performances, or even the 1963 production of *Romeo and Juliet*—only written accounts of the performances have survived. When viewing these recordings, I am, of course, aware that I am engaging with performances that are long past—finished and concluded. Yet it is crucial not to forget that at the moment of their recording, these performances were still open as acting and creative possibilities: the very same actors might have performed the same roles differently the following day. The recordings on which my analyses are based thus capture only singular, one-off realizations of performances. Nevertheless, they allow for repeated viewing, sustained attention, and careful observation of what those who remain in our cultural memory accomplished – and how they accomplished it.

In the first case study (*Identifying József Timár*), I examine József Timár’s most famous performance. I began my research here, since *Death of a Salesman* (1959) is one of the earliest performances still remembered as legendary by audience members who are alive today. I directed this play in the autumn of 2018, and while working with Ákos Kőszegi, who played the lead role of the salesman, we came to the conclusion that it is inevitable for the actor playing Willy Loman to remember his own career, his craft – that is, a small fragment of theatre history. The

legend of József Timár and the impact of his acting can only be understood in the historical context of his career, and this story reveals that the actor also makes a statement with his work and – for the first time in a series of analyses – draws attention to the phenomenon of “vox humana,” or natural speech.

The second case study (*Exiting the stage: Éva Ruttkai and Gizi Bajor*) focuses primarily on Éva Ruttkai’s acting. Drawing on both collective and subjective memory, she was the first actress whose film performances made a lasting impression on me and whom I continued to remember. In this chapter, I analyse her portrayal of Claire Zachanassien in the 1986 production of *The Visit*. To contextualise this analysis, I first reconstruct Gizi Bajor’s final theatre performance – *Intrigue and Love* (1950) – and then examine another key role in the career of Bajor’s successor, Éva Ruttkai, namely *Romeo and Juliet* (1963). Finally, I highlight the role of self-training and knowledge transfer in acting.

I began writing the third case study (*The words of Árpád Ódry*) in the autumn of 2020, during the rapid and forceful reorganisation of the University of Theatre and Film Arts, Budapest into a foundation university, when the student body, in protest, held its meetings on the stage named after Ódry. In this chapter, I continue to develop my thesis that theatre history is preserved in the tradition of acting. I outline and analyse the impact of Árpád Ódry’s poetry recitals from the 1930s, and examine his acting style – characterised by naturalness, simple speech, and speed – on the basis of contemporary descriptions. Here I will briefly discuss the Hungarian tradition of writing about actors and acting, which this work also follows.

Finally, I conclude with a performance that I witnessed live in the theatre at the time of its premiere. The fourth and final case study (*Lili Monori at the Katona József Theatre*), which brings the discussion into the historical present, focuses on four selected scenes from the 2015 production of *Faust*. I analyse these scenes one by one. On the one hand, I examine how Lili Monori, through her radically natural acting on contemporary

stages, reactivates the neo-avant-garde acting and theatrical experiences of previous decades; on the other hand, I explore how she maintains her independence – how she articulates a sovereign actor’s statement and mode of communication to such a degree that it may be regarded as an “autonomous art form with its own language of form”.



## First case study:

### IDENTIFYING JÓZSEF TIMÁR

*"I envy Molière not for his plays, nor for the roles he wrote. I envy him for his death, my friend, he fell ill in the theatre, on stage, performing in a role, and died the next day – and has been immortal ever since: he lives on stage."*<sup>1</sup>

*"The essence of theatre is memory.[...] To view theatre as memory means, on the one hand, to view it as history, role and play, and on the other hand, to view it as a renunciation of history, as a battlefield of physis and non-play."*<sup>2</sup>

In his book, Marvin Carlson describes theatre as a memory machine, a space where the audience is always haunted by the past, since theatre repeatedly reuses elements drawn from the community's memory.<sup>3</sup> An actor's performance thus reflects not only his actions on a given evening, but is also haunted by his previous roles – and, indeed by everything the audience knows about him.

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<sup>1</sup> József Timár, quoted by Imre DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet... Timár József élete* [Thank you for the light... The life of József Timár] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1971), 157.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald SIEGMUND, „A színház mint emlékezet” [„Theater als Gedächtnis”, The Theatre as Memory], trans. Árpád KÉKESI KUN, *Theatron* 1, no. 3 (1999): 36–39, 39. Originally published in German: *Theaterschrift* 8 (1994): 214–235). Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from foreign-language sources that were cited in Hungarian translation in the Hungarian edition of this book and for which no official English versions exist are translated into English by the author.

<sup>3</sup> Marvin CARLSON, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as a Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001).



In the memory of the Hungarian theatrical community, the name of actor József Timár –who played the role of Willy Loman in the Hungarian premiere of *Death of a Salesman* during the 1959/1960 season – has remained closely associated with the salesman in Arthur Miller’s play to this day. I now investigate the reasons for this unusually strong identification. I seek to answer what and whom audiences of the 1959 performance may have remembered through Timár’s character, and finally – on the basis of the surviving television recording – what Timár accomplished, or could have accomplished, in the role of the salesman.

### *Identification*

“Pop! I’m a dime a dozen, and so are you!” the son shouts at his father in Miller’s play, to which the father replies: “I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!”<sup>4</sup> At the climax of their final argument, the meaning of their names becomes a matter of existential importance for the main characters of *Death of a Salesman*, the father and son. The son believes that they are just like everyone else, but the father clings to the name: its uniqueness, its individuality, its unmistakable destiny.

Both points of view are understandable. The son is only beginning to free himself from the burdensome expectations attached to the family name, having realised that the inheritance of a name is not, in itself, a privilege. Facing his death, the father knows exactly what he must take responsibility for: what he has got, and nothing more. Even if Willy Loman did not live the life he imagined in his youth, but rather that of

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<sup>4</sup> Arthur MILLER, *The Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998). 105. The Hungarian edition: Arthur MILLER, *Az ügynök halála* [*Death of a Salesman*], trans. Kornél HAMVAI, script (Kecskemét: Kecskeméti Katona József Theatre, 2018).

an ordinary man, the uniqueness and irreplaceability of his life cannot be denied or called into question.

In the English title of Arthur Miller's play, the article is indefinite, referring to *a* salesman, whereas the Hungarian translation uses the definite article *the* – a choice that, for linguistic reasons, emphasises the specificity of the death named in the title. The most famous performer of the role of “the salesman” in Hungarian theatre history is József Timár, who first played the part in 1959 at the National Theatre.<sup>5</sup>

Although Timár's contemporaries and those a generation younger remembered him in a wide range of roles, today he is recalled almost exclusively through his final one, that of the salesman. Indeed, Timár himself is now mentioned primarily in connection with this role. In public consciousness, he became identified with his performance in the legendary 1959 production directed by Endre Marton at the National Theatre, and to this day he remains the most iconic and widely recognised Hungarian salesman – *the* salesman. This is all the more striking given the enduring popularity of the play, which has been staged thirty-five times in Hungarian-speaking countries since 1959 and performed by numerous actors.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Endre Marton: *The Death of a Salesman*, 1959. (Premiere: 21 November 1959.)

<sup>6</sup> For example, in 1972, in a production directed by college student Péter Valló in Veszprém, Zoltán Latinovits played the title role, followed by Tamás Jordán in Szombathely in 2011; Gyula Bodrogi in a production directed by Róbert Alföldi in 2004, and László Gálffi in a production directed by Pál Mácsai in 2016. The role of the salesman has been played by Péter Andorai, Péter Haumann, András Kern, Róbert Koltai, Ákos Kőszegi, Zsolt Kovács, László Mensáros, Tibor Szilágyi (twice) and Géza Tordy (twice), among others. The National Theatre last staged Miller's drama in 2017, with Péter Blaskó in the title role (directed by Imre Csiszár). OSZMI Theatre Database. <https://szinhaztortenet.hu/search>. Last accessed: 28 January 2025.

“The analysis of József Timár’s art is hampered by his last role, the fact that his personal tragedy, together with the tragedy he witnessed on the last night, 24 May 1960, transforms from well-functioning double speech into straightforward theatrical speech, a performative statement. A man is preparing for death.”<sup>7</sup>

The situation in which the actor is approaching death just as the character he plays is doing, simply and brutally, gives the performance a stake that neither the analyst nor the contemporary audience can ignore. This theatrical situation was not accidental: József Timár had already been ill for two years when the National Theatre called him back, rehired him, and offered him the leading role in a production directed by Endre Marton.<sup>8</sup> A terminal illness is reason enough, but it does not fully explain the degree to which the actor and the role have been fused and reinforced by collective memory over the decades. There are other celebrated final performances that have not shaped the framework of memory to a comparable extent. In Timár’s case, the *moment* of the salesman has proved stronger in collective memory than any of his earlier roles.

To capture the moment, “if a truth is to be settled in the memory of a group it needs to be presented in the concrete form of an event, of a personality, or of a locality.”<sup>9</sup> Timár’s image has been preserved for later generations in visual form,

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<sup>7</sup> Magdolna Jákfalvi–Dorka POROGI, “Elhallgatás, némaság, depresszió, halál” [“Silence, muteness, depression, death”] 86–98, in *National Theatre History – 1948–1996. Performance Reconstructions*, ed. MAGDOLNA JÁKFALVI–ÁRPÁD KÉKESI KUN (Budapest: Arktisz – Theatron Műhely Alapítvány, 2022), 95.

<sup>8</sup> In the 1957/1958 season, it becomes clear that he is ill with lung cancer. He underwent surgery and spent a season in a sanatorium. Géza BALOGH, “Egy magányos lázadó (1)” [“A Lonely Rebel (3)”] *Critikai Lapok* 31, no. 4–5. (2022): 12–17, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Halbwachs, qtd. in Jan ASSMANN, *Cultural Memory an Early Civilization – Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 24.

most memorably through a photograph by Éva Keleti – perhaps her most famous theatre photograph – which depicts him as the salesman. In the black-and-white image, a man with a slightly stooped posture, a high forehead, and greying hair stands diagonally in the space, oriented from right to left. His right foot is placed slightly ahead of his left. He wears a large, soft-looking, light-coloured jacket and a modern striped tie. In his hands he carries two enormous, accordion-like briefcases – the icon of the performance. He stands in a narrow strip of light on the stage floor; behind him are the shadow of the staircase and his own shadow. Although his face is turned slightly downward, his gaze is fixed straight ahead, as if focused on something above and to the left. He is alone, looking at no one, fully focused.

The identification of Timár as an actor-salesman may therefore stem from the fact that this moment, the moment of acting, has been preserved, documented and made famous. According to Keleti's recollection, she did not photograph this image – one of the most successful of her career<sup>10</sup> – during a performance or rehearsal, but before one of the performances, when Timár was preparing to go on stage behind the scenes and was trying out for himself what it would be like to lift the bags:

“I heard that he was ill, so I went to the theatre to see if he was even capable of performing in such a state. I stood by the curtain and saw him behind the scenes lifting two suitcases, trying to see if he could carry them onto the stage and perform. At that time, of course, I didn't take a single step without my camera. I took a picture that later no one believed was taken during the

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<sup>10</sup> She considers it one of her four best photos: [ N. N. ], “Keleti Éva négy fotója” [ Four photos by Éva Keleti ], *Mai Manó House blog*, 31 May 2012. [https://mamanohaz.blog.hu/2012/05/31/keleti\\_eva\\_negy\\_fotoja](https://mamanohaz.blog.hu/2012/05/31/keleti_eva_negy_fotoja). Last accessed: 29 July 2022.

performance [...] That's when I began to feel that theatre photography was more than just simple reproduction."<sup>11</sup>

Keleti recounts this incident in almost every interview she gives, repeatedly analysing and interpreting the image in retrospect, so that the theatrical anecdote and the historical context of the photograph become accessible even to those who might not recognise the actor depicted. In 2002, the sculptor Péter Párkányi Raab modelled József Timár's statue in the park of the National Theatre on the basis of this photograph.

The figure represented seems to carry ever more secrets, while the story of the photo's creation reveals the borderline situation it both records and embodies. Although the performance has not yet begun, Timár stands before the camera in costume, props in his hands, his expression serious and concentrated: he is at work. He is alone, standing on the stage, yet still in the wings, in the light, but not yet before the audience. With suitcases in his hands, he stands and moves, stops and starts – he is on his way. His entire posture and appearance articulate what the space (on stage yet hidden) and the time (immediately before the performance) of the image signify: the ontological borderline between reality and fiction in theatre, and the transitional process between the two – movement.

“...let us assume the image as a ‘form of relations’ exhibits an ‘image time’ (Bildzeit) that is specific only to it. It appeals to the temporal sense of the viewers to retrace, resense, continue, and in short to ‘produce’ the movement that is immobilized and latent in the image.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sándor BAKCSAI, „Életem felét a színházban töltöttem – Beszélgetés Keleti Éva fotóművésszel” [“I Spent Half My Life in the Theatre – A Conversation with Photographer Éva Keleti”], *Fotóművészet* 48, no. 3–4 (2005): 3–13. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Hans-Thies LEHMANN, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen JÜRS-MUNBY (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 157.

Being on the road is an immediately visible and easily codable sign in the picture, the most basic metaphor for movement, progress, and life.<sup>13</sup> The figure's posture suggests discipline and a sense of duty; although the body is bent, closed, and aged, the gaze remains stubborn. If the viewer knows that the actor was photographed before the performance, they also know that he is preparing to go on stage. The image captures a carefree moment that people outside the theatre world rarely witness, yet one that is an everyday occurrence behind the scenes during rehearsals and preparations for performances. It shows concentration not on the present moment, but on what lies ahead – on the future.

Péter Molnár Gál criticises Éva Keleti for portraying Timár in this way: "With her photograph, she has thoroughly interfered with theatre history. Posterity will see Timár as Éva Keleti saw or imagined him."<sup>14</sup> The critic<sup>15</sup> does not appreciate Timár's last performance in the least, making no secret of the fact that, although Timár was a great actor and excellent in all his other roles, he was not excelling in this one.<sup>16</sup> Audiences who knew about his illness mourned his "public death march" in *Death of a Salesman*, and Keleti's image only "reinforced public opinion".<sup>17</sup> In other words, Molnár Gál does not con-

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<sup>13</sup> KÖVECSES Zoltán, *A metafora. Gyakorlati bevezetés a kognitív metaforaelméletbe* [*Metaphor: A Practical Introduction to Cognitive Metaphor Theory*], (Budapest: Typotex Kiadó, 2005), 19–20, 47. And George LAKOFF – Mike JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 97–115.

<sup>14</sup> Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, "Keleti Éváról" ["On Keleti Éva"], *Népszava*, 27 August 2011, 13.

<sup>15</sup> In the 1959/1960 season, Péter Molnár Gál, as Tamás Major's young assistant director at the Nemzeti Theatre, led the rehearsal in which Timár took over the role of St. Peter in *Az ember* tragédiája (The Tragedy of Man), and was present at his first return to the theatre. Cf. Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, "Timár József koholt színházi pere" ["Timár József's Fabricated Theatre Trial,"] *Népszabadság*, 7 March 2002, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, "Keleti Éváról" ["On Keleti Éva"], 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. And: "I saw humanism weeping pus as József Timár's swan song. The actor, his body ravaged by a deadly tumour, played the lead role

sider the performance to be a professional achievement or professional theatre, precisely because it builds its success on the dying actor in the lead role. He suggests that Timár's performance differed from Keleti's view of him, from his depiction in the photograph, and from the way he was perceived by public opinion. However, from the fact that he considers Keleti's image to be so responsible, it is also clear that he considers the photograph to be characteristic, that in his opinion the image expresses exactly what the audience saw in the performance, so it is not only a good photograph in itself, but also truly testifies to Timár's presence in *Death of a Salesman* (as others perceived it), condensing it.<sup>18</sup>

Éva Keleti's photograph draws attention directly to the very fundamental, ultimate-first question of theatre philosophy in terms of an actor's work: who is it that we are watching on stage? The European tradition – particularly strong since Diderot – tends to think about this in terms of the dual concept of role and actor. In *The Paradox of Acting*, Diderot raises the question of whether, when one actor speaks in a low voice to another on stage that is not part of the play – “in real life,” as theatre jargon would say today – we are seeing the role or the actor. Diderot raises the question of whether, when one actor speaks in a low voice to another on stage that is not part of the play – “in real life,” as theatre jargon would say today – we are seeing the role or the actor.<sup>19</sup> It is important for Diderot to prove that we see the actor, because this also proves his thesis that actors perform with a “cool head.”<sup>20</sup>

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in a formalist production of Arthur Miller's drama. Caravans of people flocked to the auditorium to bid him farewell. Those in the know were swimming in tears.” Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, “Hány éves a hajóskapitány?” [“How Old is the Ship's Captain?”], *Élet és Irodalom*, 5 December 2003, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, “Keleti Éváról” [„On Keleti Éva”], 13.

<sup>19</sup> Denis DIDEROT, *The Paradox of Acting*, trans. Walter Herries POLLOCK (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), 69.

<sup>20</sup> DIDEROT, *The Paradox of Acting*, 64.

However, as Keleti's photograph confirms, the question is more complicated than this. We cannot determine with certainty whether the figure in the photograph is József Timár or Willy Loman. We see someone who is not entirely identical with Timár as he appears in a civilian photograph—someone somewhat more, and in some respects different ("József Timár, actor, in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* at the National Theatre," says the caption in its pursuit of meticulous accuracy, although we know this to be imprecise, since the photograph was not taken during the performance). But if, following Diderot, we refer to the identity of this figure as a role simply because it cannot be considered to be perfectly identical with the actor's civilian persona, then an immediate clarification is required: where does this otherness begin, and where are the boundaries of performance? If these are defined solely on the basis of space, time, or costume use, on the assumption, for instance, that the role exists on stage from the beginning to the end of the performance, then the emergence and existence of the role or performance are attributed to external circumstances, and regarded as entirely independent of the actor's work. This, in turn, renders the actor's work impossible to examine, since the actor will be identified with the role regardless of what he or she does.

It is an almost perfectly acceptable principle – and one I will largely follow here – that at every moment of a performance we watch the actor rather than the role. From this it would seem to follow that the actor can be held fully responsible for what happens on stage, that he acts entirely on his own behalf. Such an assumption, however, ultimately contradicts the fundamental playfulness – and artistry – of theatre. It therefore becomes necessary to clarify what the actor's task is, what constitutes the context of the performance, what the director intends, and which elements do not depend on the actor. As long as the actor's task can be adequately described, the idea that we are watching the actor at work remains viable and, indeed, analytically productive.



Returning to Keleti's photograph: its theatricality stems from the fact that it raises questions, making the viewer uncertain as to whether they know the person they are looking at. One reason why the 1959 performance is so memorable is that it draws attention with extraordinary force to the audience's confusion and amazement that, although we know the actor well, we do not know who we are seeing on stage, we do not know who is recounting his life. Molnár Gál may be right, and people may have gone to see Timár's death in *Death of a Salesman*, but this line of thought completely disregards the actor as a creator (and does not justify why he considers the actor's work to be bad). The actor is able to fill and dominate the space even before he puts his expressive talent at the service of a particular character.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, events from the past can help to make this strong presence interpretable.

### *A career marked by bans*

The memory of the iconic figure bent under the weight of two suitcases is also linked to press scandals: one ban occurring during the Horthy era and another under the Rákosi regime. But there is also a theatrical and artistic career to consider, spanning several decades. Both the monograph written about Timár's life<sup>22</sup> and the television portrait programme dedicated to his memory<sup>23</sup> organise his biography around these scandals, while also discussing his theatrical roles.

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<sup>21</sup> Erika FISCHER-LICHTE, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya JAIN (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), 95. See Hungarian edition: Erika FISCHER-LICHTE, *A performativitás esztétikája*, trans. KISS Gabriella (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2009), 133.

<sup>22</sup> DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [*Thank you for the light...*]

<sup>23</sup> GÁBOR Pál (director), *Színész és változó világ*, [Actor and a Changing World], television program (M1, Budapest, 1980). Broadcast date: March 6, 2013. In the episode about Timár, his former colleagues

Journalist and critic Imre Demeter, writing from the perspective of a knowledgeable close friend, gathers consciously subjective fragments of memory and anecdotes, listing and evaluating the roles. Tamás Major and Hilda Gobbi – who recall him both in writing and orally<sup>24</sup> – present Timár as a colleague. Major was a witness to Timár’s career from beginning to end: at the age of fourteen he was sitting in the audience when Timár first stepped onto the stage of the National Theatre; later, as director, he dismissed him in 1950, then re-hired him in 1959, and delivered the farewell speech at his funeral. Hilda Gobbi, for her part, regarded the remembrance of actors – and thus of Timár, the great actor – as especially important, and perhaps advocated it most insistently. In 2022, Géza Balogh published a biographical study of Timár.<sup>25</sup>

In the following, I will briefly review Timár’s career based on these sources – contemporary articles and reviews – to reveal what viewers of *Death of a Salesman* might remember in 1959 when they saw him on the main stage of the National Theatre. Timár was twenty-two years old in 1924 when Árpád Ódry heard him recite poetry and suggested that he pursue a career in acting.<sup>26</sup> He enrolled at the academy but only completed the preparatory year before being engaged by the National Theatre. The story of his professional engagement can also be read

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recall several of his major performances. <https://nava.hu/id/1528928/#>. Last accessed: January 07, 2025.

<sup>24</sup> Orally, in the program mentioned above; in print, see, for example, Hilda GOBBI, *Közben* [*Meanwhile*] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1984), and Tamás KOLTAI, *Tamás Major: A Mester monológja* [*Tamás Major: The Master’s Monologue*] (Budapest: Ifjúsági Lap- és Könyvkiadó, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> Géza BALOGH, “Egy magányos lázadó (1)”, [*“A Lonely Rebel” (1)*], 14–17; Géza BALOGH, “Egy magányos lázadó (2)” [*“A Lonely Rebel (2)”*], *Critikai Lapok* 31, no. 3 (2022): 23–28; Géza BALOGH, “Egy magányos lázadó (3)” [*“A Lonely Rebel (3)”*], *Critikai Lapok* 31, no. 4–5 (2022): 12–17.

<sup>26</sup> Timár or Tímár, both versions occur (originally Gerstner). Born in Budapest in 1902.

in the press.<sup>27</sup> Tamás Major remembers his debut, his first appearance on stage in the small role of “marble-faced Achmed”, as a “vox humana, a human voice” that everyone noticed on stage:<sup>28</sup>

“I was sitting in the auditorium and witnessed something – the discovery of an actor. The audience discovered him. It was an incredibly great moment. In the scene where the two Turkish envoys appear before Emperor Constantine, an actor with extraordinary declamatory skills recited the lines alongside Timár, and then suddenly a vox humana, a human voice, spoke. The scene is about Emperor Constantine asking the Turkish envoys what kind of fleet will transport his followers. Then Timár spoke and said: ‘A single galley on the marble sea will suffice for you and all your followers, honourable Constantine.’ The audience gasped. They had never heard such a voice in this role and in this scene before. And then a huge storm of applause broke out, lasting several minutes. My luck was compounded by the fact that my ticket was in the last row on the ground floor, under the director’s box, and I could see Sándor Hevesi’s happiness.[...] His acting style marked the beginning of a new era. He fitted in perfectly with this wonderful ensemble,

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<sup>27</sup> The academy students were watching a rehearsal at the theatre, but Árpád Ódry, the lead actor, did not arrive due to illness. Sándor Hevesi, the director asked a boy to read Ódry’s lines – and immediately noticed the exceptional voice of the young Timár. He soon gave him the roles of Ferenc Kiss, who had left the National Theatre, the role of Achmed in the play *Byzantium*. This contract was a memorable moment in his career, mentioned in almost every interview with Timár. For example,[ N. N.] “Timár József elsőéves akadémistára osztotta ki a Nemzeti Színház Kiss Ferenc Bizánc-beli szerepét”, “The role of Ferenc Kiss in *Byzantium*, assigned to a first-year academy student, József Timár”, *Színházi élet*, 9 November 1924, 31.

<sup>28</sup> GÁBOR, Színész és változó világ, [Actor and a Changing World], 12’27”.

among Hevesi's beloved actors: Gizi Bajor, József Kürthy, Károly Sugár, Árpád Ódry..."<sup>29</sup>

From that point on, he remained a member of the National Theatre for twenty-five years, until 1950, working under the direction of Sándor Hevesi, László Márkus, Géza Voinovich, Antal Németh, and Tamás Major. During this period, there were two intervals when he was without a contract and did not perform: for several months in 1928 and for almost a year in 1942–1943. In 1950, he was dismissed. His career was thus closely bound to the National Theatre, and only in the final decade of his life was he forced to perform elsewhere. He considered himself a pupil of Sándor Hevesi and admired Árpád Ódry. He performed alongside Mari Jászai, Emília Márkus, Jenő Törzs, Gyula Csontos, Pál Jávör, and – beginning in 1927 – Gizi Bajor, with whom he enjoyed a successful partnership lasting twenty-two years. He became a theatre star at a very young age, playing nearly seventy roles in his first four seasons,<sup>30</sup> including Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet*, Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, and the Messenger in *Antigone*.

In March 1928, it was reported in the press that he had failed to appear at a performance and was unable to justify his absence. First, the theatre tribunal deducted only one month's salary, then the theatre's "committee of five" led by Nagy Adorján convened and classified the case as a breach of contract and sentenced him to immediate dismissal.<sup>31</sup> On 1 March, Hevesi, the director, did not lift the suspension; instead, he rehired

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [*Thank You for the Light...*], 25. Cf. KOCH Lajos, *Timár József* (data archive), *Színháztörténeti füzetek* 40, [*József Timár* (data archive), *Theatre History Booklets* 40] (Budapest: Institute of Theatre Studies–National Theatre History Museum, 1961).

<sup>31</sup> See [N. N.], "Timár Józsefet azonnali hatállyal elbocsátották a Nemzeti Színházból" ["József Timár dismissed from the National Theatre with immediate effect"], *Pesti Napló*, 21 April 1928, 14; "Timár József színészt azonnali hatállyal elbocsátották a Nemzeti Színházból" ["Ac-

Timár that same autumn. As a result, Timár's career continued essentially uninterrupted. At the age of twenty-seven, he plays Fedia in *The Living Corpse*,<sup>32</sup> and Lucifer in *The Tragedy of Man*. All critics highlight and praise his Lucifer, although they unanimously find him lacking in demonic qualities – he is described as an intelligent, ironic, cold character.<sup>33</sup> Timár also appeared in contemporary plays, performing in almost all of Ferenc Herczeg's dramas, and later taking on leading roles in the plays of László Németh.<sup>34</sup> He first played Ottó and later Biberrach in *Bánk Bán*. The 1936 production – one of the greatest successes of his career – saw him take on a double leading role in *The Treasure of the Ronin*, which evokes the world of Japanese kabuki. Antal Németh directed Miklós Kállay's play, with choreography by Aurél Milloss to music by György Ránki and set design by Álmós Jaschik. The production also prominently featured Erzsébet Somogyi, who would later appear in the role of Linda in *Death of a Salesman*.<sup>35</sup> However, according to critics, his peak performance was Orin in Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning*

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tor József Timár dismissed from the National Theatre with immediate effect"], *Esti Kurir*, 21 April 1928, 6.

<sup>32</sup> "I saw Stanislavski and his company when they were in Pest, they watched *The Living Corpse*'s Fedia with me, they came into my dressing room and couldn't believe that the young actor I was was the same as Fedia on stage. How old was I? Twenty-seven." DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [*Thank You for the Light...*], 191.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. G. J., "Művészet" ["Art"], *Uj nemzedék*, 3 September 1929, 9; [N. N.], "Ádám, Éva, Lucifer – Kapunyitás a Nemzeti Színházban" ["Adam, Eve, Lucifer – Opening at the National Theatre"], *Ujság*, 3 September 1929, 10; [N. N.], "Az ember tragédiája új betanítással a Nemzeti Színházban" [*The Tragedy of Man* with a new rehearsal at the National Theatre"], *Pesti Hírlap*, 3 September 1929, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Németh also writes about Timár, cf. László NÉMETH, "Színész és író" ["Actor and Writer,"] in *A felelősség szorításában I.* [*In the Grip of Responsibility I.*], (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 2001), 437–440. László Németh's letters to József Timár can be found in the OSZMI Manuscript Collection. József Timár manuscripts, OSZMI Manuscript Collection, Gy/2264.

<sup>35</sup> DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [*Thank You for the Light...*], 42.

*Becomes Electra*.<sup>36</sup> This was followed by Orestes, Touchstone, and Edgar in *King Lear*.

From January 1942 until April 1943, he did not appear on stage because of an altercation during a holiday, as a result of which he was accused of denigrating the nation. A gendarmerie investigation and court proceedings were initiated against him, and he was fiercely attacked by the right-wing press.<sup>37</sup> “I said that I would raise my son to be Jewish, because I hate this talentless Hungarian middle class. You can imagine what an uproar that caused at the time,” Timár recalled years later in a letter, referring to the incident.<sup>38</sup> He was drafted into military service in the autumn of 1942. His colleagues and friends – led by Gizi Bajor – signed a petition for clemency, along with László Németh, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, Ferenc Herczeg and others. As a result, he was granted a gubernatorial pardon in February 1943 and the proceedings against him were dropped. However, the series of attacks in the press did not cease. When he took to the stage a few weeks later, he was greeted with de-

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<sup>36</sup> Antal NÉMETH: *Amerikai Elektra* [*Mourning Becomes Electra*.], 1937. Cf. Aurél KÁRPÁTI, “A Nemzeti Színház vasárnapi O’Neill bemutatója” [“Mourning Becomes Electra – The National Theatre’s Sunday premiere of O’Neill”], *Pesti Napló*, 2 March 1937, 14. András HEVESI, “Amerikai Elektra – O’Neill tragédiája a Nemzeti Színházban” [“Mourning Becomes Electra – O’Neill’s tragedy at the National Theatre”], *8 órai újság*, 2 March 1937, 12.

<sup>37</sup> “However, we believe that Timár, in his drunken state, revealed that he couldn’t care less about the worldview of the ethnic Hungarian audience [...] He practically demonstrated this at the ball with this one Jew at the table.” [N. N.], „Botrány a badacsonyi Anna bálon. Timár József súlyos esete” [“Scandal at the Anna Ball in Badacsony. The serious case of József Timár”], *Magyarság*, 6 August 1942, 8.; [N. N.], ‘Vizsgálatot indított a Nemzeti Színház Timár József ellen nyaralási botránya miatt’ [“The National Theatre launches an investigation against József Timár over his holiday scandal”], *Új Magyarság*, 7 August 1942, 8.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from József Timár to Lajos Taussig, January 1946, quoted in DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [*Thank You for the Light...*], 85.

monstrative applause.<sup>39</sup> Hilda Gobbi recalls: "...in that period of increasing tension, everyone had to show their colours. How many times did Jóska and I wander along the boulevard after performances, and if we couldn't do anything else, we scribbled on the walls: Down with Hitler!"<sup>40</sup> He did not belong to the left-wing resistance movement, although he did perform at some of the poetry readings organised by Gobbi. He was arrested in early November 1944. While in captivity at the Arrow Cross headquarters, he encountered László Rajk; he was then taken to the Gestapo, where he briefly met Pál Jávör, and finally escaped from the Margit Körút prison in December with the help of an Arrow Cross detective.<sup>41</sup>

After the war, following some hesitation, he remained a member of the National Theatre.<sup>42</sup> In December 1945, he revived Sándor Hevesi's production of *The Silent Knight* with Gizi Bajor. In December 1946, he played Antonius (Cleopatra: Bajor), followed by the title roles in *Man and Superman* (John Tanner) and *Othello*. He also appeared as a guest in other theatres, playing Vershinin in Endre Marton's production at the Vígszínház and appearing in the *Wedding at Ipafa* (*Ipafai lakodalom*) at the Operetta Theatre (Operettszínház). Almost all accounts mention his humour and stage jokes.

In the film about Imre Madách, directed by Antal Németh, shot in the summer of 1944 and released in the autumn of

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. MARICA BAKY, "Szépanyám. Bemutató a Nemzeti Színházban" ["Szépanyám. Premiere at the National Theatre"], *Az Ujság*, 29 April 1943, 5.

<sup>40</sup> GOBBI, *Közben* [*Meanwhile*], 69.

<sup>41</sup> DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [*Thank You for the Light...*], 109–110. He went into hiding in Buda during the siege. His young son contracted purulent meningitis and became completely deaf in one ear and almost completely deaf in the other. In early 1945, Hilda Gobbi gave them her flat, where they lived for a few months because Timár's had been hit by a bomb.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. BALOGH, "Egy magányos lázadó (3)" ["A Lonely Rebel (3)"], 12.

1946, he plays Madách,<sup>43</sup> and in connection with this, the press refers to him as an actor with a “fascist past”.<sup>44</sup>

In early 1950, following the verdict of the theatre court, he was dismissed from the National Theatre, forced to leave the institution, and banned from practising his profession. This “second Timár affair” was not made public: a letter from the ministry instructed the director of the National Theatre to keep the matter confidential:

“The court proceedings must be conducted in such a way as to expose his complete lack of human and political integrity. His dismissal must rest on explicit political grounds. The proceedings and the verdict must also address the disgraceful conduct committed in the *Szózat* affair. There is no reason to conceal the fact that he recited the *Szózat* in a fascist manner, thereby distorting its true meaning. The verdict must be communicated to the entire theatre community, but without drawing the attention of the press.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Madách: The Tragedy of Man*, directed by Antal Németh, 1944. This was Németh’s only film. “The casting was not based on the ranking of contemporary stars, but on physical likeness and acting disposition. József Timár’s facial features most closely resembled Madách’s mask, and his acting temperament also proved entirely suitable; thus, he was chosen for the title role. This role preserves the only major performance of Timár, who was neglected until the end of his life, on film.” Antal NÉMETH, „Egy emberöltő *Az ember tragédiája* szolgálatában” [“A Lifetime in the Service of *The Tragedy of Man*,”] in *Towards a New Theatre!*, ed. Tamás KOLTAI (Budapest: Múzsák Közművelődési Kiadó, 1988), 467.

<sup>44</sup> “...several actors with fascist pasts appear in it, like Timár.” Quoted from *Képes Figyelő*, published on 21 September 1946, by Tamás KOLTAI, *Az ember tragédiája színpadon* [The Tragedy of Man on Stage], (Budapest: Kelenföld Kiadó, 1990), 157.

<sup>45</sup> OSZMI, Manuscript Collection 2013.91.2. József Révai’s letter is published in its entirety by Magdolna JÁKFALVI, *A valóság szenvedélye – A realista színház emlékezete Magyarországon* [The Passion of Reality: The Memory of Realist Theatre in Hungary] (Budapest: Arktisz-Theatron Műhely Alapítvány, 2023), 318.



According to the official version, Timár incited a demonstration by reciting the *Szózat* on New Year's Eve.<sup>46</sup> Imre Demeter suggests that the real reason may have been an outburst in an actors' café in the autumn of 1949, during the Rajk trial.<sup>47</sup> In Molnár Gál's view, the Party had long been searching for a scapegoat for bourgeois theatre.<sup>48</sup> The tribunal convened at the theatre voted in favour of dismissal, and after deliberation by the works committee, the company also voted on it in the auditorium of the National Theatre.<sup>49</sup> Alcoholism was also

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<sup>46</sup> Tamás Major recalls: "...he caused a scandal [...] he recited the national anthem, pausing in the middle, and a huge round of applause broke out, he was in tears and so on. That was Timár. He suddenly realised – he was already drunk – that he could make an impact, and he said, 'It will come, because it must come, a better age...' – and he couldn't continue, he made praying gestures with tears in his eyes. By the time the audience had smashed up the theatre [...] I didn't know about this, I only heard about it from Ottó Ruttkai..." KOLTAI, *Major Tamás...*, 85. According to Demeter: 'It is a fact that when he reached the line [...] and stepped forward a little, the audience burst into applause.' DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [*Thank you for the Light...*], 139. "It was then that the midday bells were also banned... The call: 'Be steadfast in your faith in your country, O Hungarian' – sounded like a fascist slogan to certain sectarian ears." GOBBI, *Közben* [*Meanwhile*], 71. Neither of them was present at the scene. The only person who remembers being present at the recitation is Timár's wife, who says that Timár simply "recited the *Szózat* well". Cf. GÁBOR, *Színész és változó világ*, [*Actor and a Changing World*], 40'.

<sup>47</sup> "...they were talking about how Rajk had already been planted as an informant during the Spanish Civil War... suddenly, Timár, who had been sitting quietly in the distance, unnoticed until then, burst out, jumped up and shouted at his colleagues: 'What are you talking about? I was with Rajk at the police station [...] I saw him tortured, beaten bloody – informants didn't look like that! A frozen silence ensued; Timár sat back down and asked Härtit for a spritzer. No one answered; the group suddenly dispersed... Timár [...] had probably decided the course of action for the next two years.' DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [*Thank you for the Light...*], 138.

<sup>48</sup> MOLNÁR GÁL, "Timár József koholt színházi pere" ["Timár József's Fabricated Theatre Trial"], 10.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. István ZSOLT, "Nincs vitánk! – Jegyzetek a Major-monológához" ["We Have No Dispute! – Notes on the Major Monologue"] *Képes* 7,

among the charges.<sup>50</sup> Timár's colleagues, partners, and friends testify against him. The event makes the stage of the National Theatre a traumatic site of memory for those involved:

"The decision of the disciplinary committee led by the desperate Maklárý was not enough to reach a verdict. My vote and consent were also required. And at that company meeting, I also raised my hand, approving Timár's dismissal from the profession. My 'courageous' decision is not changed by the fact that another 130 hands were raised, showing complete unity and the exemplary political acumen of the National Theatre company, with which we sent, I sent, Timár away 'to some kind of factory'. It was unforgettable when the disciplinary decision was announced on stage. It was unforgettable, a few hours later, when, on the same stage, at the end of the second act of *Jegor*, Somlay calls out to Maklárý: 'Blow, trumpeter...' The audience was transfixed by the torrent of talent and stared numbly at the curtain at the end of the act."<sup>51</sup>

According to Timár's work record,<sup>52</sup> he was retrained as an iron turner at the MÁVAG Locomotive and Machine Factory,

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21 February 1987, 36–38, 37. István Zsolt served as a stage manager at the National Theatre.

<sup>50</sup> "We are faced with a man who is already drunk at nine in the morning... There is a struggle going on in this country, a struggle between peace and war, between socialism and imperialism. József Timár's behaviour to date clearly places him in the enemy camp, so we have no reason to feel sorry for him. We are very grateful to our party for teaching us, through the decision of the disciplinary court, to be vigilant and to hate the enemy, so that we can expose them." Quoted from the minutes by MOLNÁR GÁL, "Timár József koholt színházi pere" ["Timár József's fabricated theatre trial,"], 10.

<sup>51</sup> ZSOLT, "Nincs vitánk! – Jegyzetek a Major-monológához" ["We Have No Dispute! – Notes on the Major Monologue"], 37.

<sup>52</sup> GOBBI, *Közben* [*Meanwhile*], 280.

and from December 1950 to 3 February 1951 he worked as an advertising agent for photographer Gyula Bóhm, i.e. in other words, as a photographer's salesman. He travelled around rural towns and, in addition to showing photographs, he also recited poems to customers.<sup>53</sup> He then worked for a month as a trained assistant at the Danube Deep Construction Company.<sup>54</sup> In the season of 1951, he signed a contract with the theatre in Miskolc, appearing in the plays *Free Wind* (*Szabad szél*), *Palace Hotel* (*Palotaszálló*), and Gyula Háy's *The Bridge of Life* (*Az élet hídjá*), and spent the following season, 1952–1953, at the Ifjúsági Színház (Youth Theatre) (in the role of István Dobó, for example). From the autumn of 1952 he became a member of the Madách Theatre, where, in addition to Soviet propaganda plays, he finally had the opportunity to play classical roles. In 1954, he appeared alongside Klári Tolnay (Nora) as Dr Rank. Critics praised his performances as Alceste, Mercutio, Vershinin and Otto Frank, but his greatest acting achievement is considered to be his role as the Actor in *The Lower Depths* in the spring of 1956.<sup>55</sup> Although Major had been repeatedly appealing to the ministry since 1955,<sup>56</sup> it was not until 1959 that

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<sup>53</sup> Dunamenti Mélyépítő Vállalat. DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [*Thank you for the Light...*], 151.

<sup>54</sup> Timár's former employers also speak in the portrait film. GÁBOR, *Színész és változó világ*, [Actor and a Changing World], 45'30".

<sup>55</sup> "The most outstanding performance in the play is that of József Timár. His acting is heart-wrenching and ironic, enthusiastic and sardonic, a strange and rare mixture of character traits. Timár expresses the drama and his role with astonishing power in his portrayal of the actor. His greatest scenes are when he remembers the forgotten poem or the illusion of healing – this performance is considered one of the masterpieces of our theatre history. New generations of actors can learn from it what pure role interpretation and the complex expression of simplicity are like." Cf. Miklós GYÁRFÁS, „Éjjeli menedékhely – Gorkij-dráma a Madách Színházban” [“*The Lower Depths* – Gorky drama at the Madách Theatre”], *Népszabadság – Szabad Nép*, 20 April 1956, 4.

<sup>56</sup> MOLNÁR GÁL, “Timár József koholt színházi pere” [“Timár József's fabricated theatre trial,”], 10.

Timár was rehired by the National Theatre, first receiving the Meritorious Artist award in 1956 and then the Kossuth Prize in the spring of 1957.<sup>57</sup> His last role was as Miller's salesman, Willy Loman. He continued to perform despite his illness, but between October and May his condition deteriorated rapidly. By May, he left the hospital only in order to appear on stage. He did not perform in the following season.<sup>58</sup>

The audience of the performance directed by Endre Marton could learn details and fragments from his biography and theatrical past. Timár, who had been discovered by the great figures of the national Theatre and had become one of its leading young stars, disappeared for a few years in 1950 for political reasons, and when he returned to the National Theatre stage, he was terminally ill: the era and the regime had done something to the former fiery young hero.<sup>59</sup>

### *The first television recording*

In the intertwining memory of actor and role, speed also plays a crucial role: immediately after his death, which everyone had foreseen and had therefore long awaited, Timár appeared in the media as the salesman. The obituaries bid him farewell as a salesman<sup>60</sup> even at his grave.<sup>61</sup> Barely two weeks after his death, Hungarian television broadcast *Death of a Salesman* – a singular event in the history of Hungarian television, and the first time such a broadcast had ever occurred.

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<sup>57</sup> Immediately afterwards, the play *Széchenyi*, in which he plays the title role, is banned.

<sup>58</sup> He died on 3 October 1960 at the age of 58.

<sup>59</sup> Recalling Timár's roles in the programme, they find that he stood out most in heroic roles. GÁBOR, *Színész és változó világ*, [Actor and a Changing World], 1. 01' 01".

<sup>60</sup> Cf. [D. L.] [Untitled], *Film, Színház, Muzsika*, 7 October 1960, 14.

<sup>61</sup> Tamás MAJOR, "József Timár," *Kortárs* 4, no. 12 (1960): 849.

The television recording of the performance was made in the spring of 1960, partly with the undisguised aim of preserving Timár the actor and his performance for posterity.<sup>62</sup> The moment when the recording was made was the very first moment from the point of view of television technology and the last possible moment from the point of view of individual life. Television recordings were still a novelty at the time. Although theatre performances had previously been broadcast on television, *Death of a Salesman* was the first production to have been recorded and is therefore the only one to have survived. Moreover, it was not recorded in a single evening: the film stock allowed for only twenty minutes at a time and had to be re-wound and re-spoiled before recording could resume. As a result, the extant version is compiled from several performances. The broadcast was directed by Éva Zsurzs, who recalled that they initially recorded the first, third, and fifth twenty-minute sections of the performance; on another occasion, they captured the intervening segments and even made additional recordings.<sup>63</sup> The final recording probably shows three evenings of performances,<sup>64</sup> and the few minutes when Timár comes out to take his bow at the end of the performance were recorded separately, in front of an empty auditorium, because on the last

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<sup>62</sup> See Péter DUNAVÖLGYI, “Lehet, hogy Timár József utolsó színpadi alakítása még 60 évig dobozba zárva marad?” [“Could József Timár’s final stage performance remain locked away in a box for another sixty years?”], [https://dunavolgyipeter.hu/televizio\\_tortenet/esemenyek\\_emlekek\\_dokumentumok\\_a\\_hazai\\_televiziozas\\_tortenetebol/lehet\\_hogy\\_timar\\_jozsef\\_utolso\\_szinpadialakitasa\\_meg\\_60\\_evig\\_dobozba\\_zarva\\_marad](https://dunavolgyipeter.hu/televizio_tortenet/esemenyek_emlekek_dokumentumok_a_hazai_televiziozas_tortenetebol/lehet_hogy_timar_jozsef_utolso_szinpadialakitasa_meg_60_evig_dobozba_zarva_marad). Last accessed: 27 January 2025. The recording of the performance can be viewed at: OSZMI, Audiovisual Archive, 87.15.1.

<sup>63</sup> [N. N.] . “Párbeszéd” [“Dialogue”], *Film Színház Muzsika*, 20 March 1982, 21.

<sup>64</sup> Erzsébet SEBES, “15 év 16535 tételben” [“15 Years in 16,535 Items”], *Monday News*, 20 November 1972, 4.

day of filming, he “did not have enough strength left to take his bow in front of the curtain”.<sup>65</sup>

Although a great deal of work was undertaken afterwards to eliminate the differences, and the film has since undergone digital restoration,<sup>66</sup> it is still easy to notice where the time jump occurs in the recording, both visually and in terms of sound: for example, in the scene with the salesman and the woman, when Timár moves towards Erzsi Máthé (with whom the joint scene takes place on the right edge of the stage or on the side), he is first wearing a shirt, but can be seen a moment later in a jacket, and then he is wearing a shirt again in the next scene.<sup>67</sup>

Thirteen days after Timár’s death, on 16 October 1960 at 7 p.m., the performance was broadcast on television for the first time.<sup>68</sup> This was the first time that viewers across the country could see a past theatre performance in which the main character was no longer alive at the time of broadcast. This further links the news of the performance with the news of his death:

“...since Sunday, perhaps a hundred thousand more new viewers have felt the loss. I am thinking primarily of those who encountered him for the first time a few days after his death. A strange, wonderful evocation of the spirit!”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> ZSOLT, “No dispute,” 38. The iron curtain is not visible in the recording; Timár comes out in front of the curtain with Erzsébet Somogyi.

<sup>66</sup> DUNAVÖLGYI, “Lehet, hogy Timár József utolsó színpadi alakítása még 60 évig dobozba zárva marad?” [“Could József Timár’s final stage performance remain locked away in a box for another sixty years?”], n.p.

<sup>67</sup> “Timár was already very ill at the time, which is why he began his monologue in a winter coat and then continued in his shirt sleeves – because he was overcome by heat during the second performance.” Éva Zsurzs in [N. N.] . “Párbeszéd” [“Dialogue”], 21.

<sup>68</sup> Budapest television programme (Sunday): 7 p.m. In memory of József Timár – Arthur Miller *Death of a Salesman* (broadcast from the National Theatre, from film recording), *Kisalföld*, 15 October 1960, 7.

<sup>69</sup> (LELKES), “Timár József emlékére” [“In Memory of József Timár,”], *Film Színház Muzsika*, 21 October 1960, 37.

As early as 1967, seven years after Timár's death, they wrote about him as follows:

"The name of one of the outstanding figures in the history of Hungarian theatre and Willy Lohman [*sic!*] from Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* have now become virtually synonymous. Willy Lohman brings József Timár to mind, and when József Timár's name is mentioned, we believe that for many people, the first image that occurs is that of Lohman, bent under the weight of two huge briefcases."<sup>70</sup>

By identifying Timár with the salesman and placing such strong emphasis on this role, the actor's earlier major performances have gradually faded into obscurity. Tamás Major's obituary, although it too contains this tendency toward identification, still refers to other roles. Demeter chose the title of his book on Timár from *A Doll's House* and concluded his memoir with Timár's portrayal of Mercutio. Hilda Gobbi attempted to convey to television viewers what made Timár so exceptional in *The Treasure of the Ronins*. As the years pass, however, and Timár's contemporaries and former audiences dwindle, he is increasingly mentioned almost exclusively in connection with the salesman – that is, with a single role. Today, his name is not as widely known as, for example, Artúr Somlay's or Gizi Bajor's. Although their roles have likewise faded from collective memory, their names – understood as the personas of actors who played many roles – have remained in public consciousness. By contrast, no street or institution bears Timár's name, even though such forms of commemoration would, in fact, be conceivable in his case.

Yet one of his performances has endured. Since the theatrical tradition that sets perfect identification as its goal and

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<sup>70</sup> J. Gy., "A színész és az ügynök" ["The Actor and the Salesman"], *Népszabadság*, 16 December 1967, 11.

ideal remains strong even today, and since the salesman legend rests precisely on such identification, the public continues to remember Timár as one of the finest actors of his profession.

*Playing and directing*

Until now, the role of the salesman has been discussed as a moment in time, as a single point of time in history, even though Timár rehearsed and played the role only for a season – from the autumn of 1959 to the spring of 1960 – during which time his illness became increasingly apparent.

Here, by contrast, I do not regard the performance as a single moment in time, in which it is enough for József Timár to appear as the salesman and immediately produce an effect, but as a 165-minute theatrical performance in which an actor is at work. Miller originally conceived the play as a monodrama, and although he ultimately decided otherwise, the protagonist nevertheless remains on stage for almost the entire duration, enclosed in his inner solitude. Willy Loman speaks incessantly. All his life, he sold himself through speech. He speaks alone to himself; he speaks to the living and the dead; in imagination and in reality; he goes on speaking even when it is obvious that no one is listening to him. Audiences relate differently to Willy's text, to his verbal excess, yet for everyone it is clear that his time has passed, and he is no longer able to connect with others. The actor playing Willy must therefore think in terms of multiple loneliness, using monologue or monodrama techniques. The play's dramaturgical and scenic innovation lies in its simultaneous staging of present and past, with distinct areas of the stage corresponding to different temporal moments. Movement between these spaces thus becomes movement through time on Miller's stage.

The entire space (as defined by the play) thus becomes the inside of Willy's mind: an imaginary space in which fantasy and intra-dramatic reality can interpenetrate. For example,



Willy often remains under the influence of his own vision or memory scene even when the others, firmly anchored in the present, look at him in bewilderment. In the production directed by Marton, the lighting changes are sharp and bold, and transitional music accompanies the memory insertions. The staging seems deliberately to build on the constant tension between the actor's performance language and the playing space. The stage is filled with emblematic, function-signifying theatrical elements: the rooms of the house are tiny, while the suitcases are enormous. Yet between past and future, between home and hotel room or office, Timár's salesman moves back and forth in the most ordinary, everyday manner imaginable. The coexistence of the two theatrical styles – the overtly exaggerated, deliberately artificial theatricality of props and scenery alongside a fussy, filmic, naturalistic or micro-realist mode of acting – produces a compelling and rare effect.

Hungarian theatrical dramaturgy, which for years had been lacking Western plays that nevertheless fit within the communist ideological framework, presumably welcomed the Miller play in 1958<sup>71</sup>; this can be concluded from the unanimously enthusiastic critical response following the premiere, which praised everyone, but first and foremost the author.<sup>72</sup> According to the official reading, Willy's tragedy lies in the fact

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. "CYRÁNÓ". "Cyránó [Miklós Szakáts] report on programming policy issues in the theatre sector to Subdivision II/5 of the Ministry of the Interior – January 1958", in *Szigorúan bizalmas. Dokumentumok a Kádár-rendszer történetéhez* [Strictly Confidential – Documents on the History of the National Theatre during the Kádár Era] edited by Zoltán IMRE–Orsolya RING, 39–42. Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2010.

<sup>72</sup> "The playwright speaks from the stage, true art warms the soul, and the audience leaves shaken. However, this shock is a source of pure joy: we know the 'secret' of life and success, and we have been living according to it for fifteen years now! And we respect Miller, who, even if he cannot say what we know, can say no to the world and life that takes place in the oppressive shadow of skyscrapers", writes, for example, the critic of *Film Színház Muzsika*, who believes that Miller is a good author because he "judges" and "hides nothing". Lajos LENKEI, „Az ügynök halála – Arthur Miller drámája a Nemzeti Színházban”

that (unlike the author) he is unable to resist the inhuman force of capitalism. On Endre Marton's stage, however, there is not a single directorial statement that would foreground capitalist America or the small man crushed by capitalism; instead, the National Theatre production presents a great—or potentially great—figure destroyed by life itself (regardless of the system: by the age). The tragedy is individual, that of a single human being; the family past and its own personal secrets become symbolic and unbearable. The strongest example of this claim to greatness is that after Willy's death Mozart's *Requiem* is heard: the scene – after many small, modern, Sisyphean gestures – becomes monumental and tragic. The performance at the National Theatre is significant:

“The unasked questions and undiscussed topics are an exciting indication of the great national and nationwide silences in Hungary at the end of the 1950s. [...] the large suitcase and the secret on stage can be interpreted in a contaminated situation. [...] secrets are burdensome, deadly; if they cannot be talked about, then death must be accepted.”<sup>73</sup>

Although he speaks incessantly throughout the performance, Willy Loman (Timár), never speaks about the one thing he is unable to share, articulate, or process, and this ultimately leads to his death. His constant flow of speech precisely captures a particular mental state, that of depression. Significantly, a recurring theme in the Timár monograph is precisely what Timár does not speak about.<sup>74</sup> Demeter suggests that this is a matter of personal disposition. However, the scandals – the argument at the Anna Ball, or his defence of Rajk in Härti's

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[“*The Death of a Salesman* – Arthur Miller's drama at the National Theatre”], *Film Színház Muzsika*, 27 November 1959, 5–7.

<sup>73</sup> JÁKFAI-VI-POROGI, “Elhallgatás, némaság...” [“Silence, muteness...”], 98.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. e.g. DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [Thank you for the Light...], 162, 148, 194, 196, 197.

theatre buffet – contradict this: according to these, Timár did not always remain silent, and this caused him serious problems on several occasions. Marton's production does not mention the era or politics, but he chooses Timár as the main character, who ten years earlier, on the same stage, was declared an enemy by his colleagues and banished from this very place. The theatre community and the profession know this and remain silent about it.

Timár spends 120 of the 165 minutes of the performance on stage, and he talks almost the entire time. Keeping the attention of an audience of more than a thousand people for 120 minutes is no easy task. Even if the protagonist's terminal illness may be good publicity for a performance, no amount of tabloid news can hold the audience's attention for 120 minutes. Timár's performance – viewed from the perspective of more than sixty years since the 1959 recording – is not spectacular, nor is it brilliant in its tools or diversity, but in its variety, in that it shows the continuous, intensifying, unshakeable monomania of a man, his relentless, intense self-reflection (talking about other things) over the course of two hours. If Timár's presence had a strong impact, it was not because they knew he was ill, but because during those 120 minutes his illness was not apparent, and the information remained the secret, insider knowledge of the audience. For a stage hero to be successful – this is a theatrical cliché – he must overcome his illness.<sup>75</sup> Without the context of the life-threatening illness off stage, Timár's performance as an salesman may indeed be difficult to interpret, but it is also evident that the stage play must re-

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<sup>75</sup> "The stage is the centre of an actor's life, and as soon as he steps onto the stage, his private life completely disappears. József Timár ceases to be a taxpayer and citizen as soon as the spotlight comes on, and he becomes nothing more than a Japanese prince or a country doctor." [N. N.], „Színház és színész a változó világban – interjú Somló Istvánnal és Timár Józseffel” [„Theatre and actors in a changing world – interview with István Somló and József Timár”], *Pesti Napló*, 2 September 1938, 14.

peatedly overcome the awareness of the illness, divert attention from it (if for no other reason than to make an impression on the audience again and again), and the actor must control his body and concentration.<sup>76</sup>

Although Timár plays the tragic lead role and is the cast member who has been a member of the “old National” since his twenties, a star of a previous theatrical era, his acting is surprisingly and unexpectedly unadorned. To modern ears, of course, his diction is a little old-fashioned, i.e. slow, and his individual style is evident, with Timár mainly elongating the “a” sounds. But compared to his partners, the difference is striking: Timár speaks simply, clearly, passionately and impassionedly, but without false pathos (or any kind of pathos for that matter). He often breaks off his sentences and takes breaths in unexpected places, which makes him seem even more spontaneous, without any sense of rhetorical construction or rehearsal in his speech. Thus, according to the story, the salesman who does not fit into the world and has outgrown it becomes, from the very first moment on the National Theatre stage, more modern, more “contemporary” and more relatable than the characters around him. Timár’s movements and gestures are almost cinematically subtle, micro-realistic – it would take enormous courage for someone to dare to perform like this on a large stage today. The suitcases only play a role at the beginning of the performance, when the salesman returns home, where Marton uses spotlights to highlight Timár’s figure.

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<sup>76</sup> Perhaps the best-known example of a crash course in acting, which universally illuminates the technique of acting, is the example of playing boredom, according to which a bored person must be played in the most colourful, entertaining and eventful way possible. In this way, it is possible to express boredom in the performance without the scene itself becoming boring. The essence of the example is that a phenomenon should never be shown in acting by itself, but often by its opposite. Following this model, it is immediately understandable that, as an actor, it is worth expressing death with a great affirmation of life. In Timár’s case, the actor-director’s statement about affirmation of life employs micro-realistic gestures in monumental quantity and quality.

He has very little interaction with his partners, and the staging creates very few dramatic situations. Even where it would be good in theory, according to the play, the characters do not meet on this stage but talk past each other. It is true that the stage relationships are not easy to follow because the camera focuses emphatically on Timár throughout. In addition, it is really difficult to watch a recording compiled from several performances: the dynamics, momentum and arcs of the actors' performances cannot be followed. The power of the performance – whether as a consequence of these features or from the very outset – is not concentrated in one or two climactic scenes, but rather in the tragic coexistence of the scenes themselves, in a continuous and persistent state of agitated self-suggestion: What is interesting is not the nature of the actions Timár performs, since there is nothing special about them: he sits, stands, drinks, sighs, trudges along, wipes his forehead, fidgets, and speaks without pause, narrating the salesman's story.

As to the extent to which this mode of acting was a conscious decision and objective of the actor-creator, and to what extent it was the director's intention, Demeter's monograph reports as follows:

“During the rehearsal break, he explained to Marton that he was now playing his own life in this role: he himself was Willy Loman, because he too had been dreaming his whole life. [...] Dreams, a whole dream world – that's what I sold to myself, that was my craft. I am Willy Loman [...] That's how they went side by side [...] the role and the actor. And a few days before the premiere, the two suddenly became one; more precisely, Timár identified too much with the role, he played himself very much... He had to be led back not to himself, but to the role he had found [...] by the time of the dress rehearsals, he had gone back to the role, with that strange-sounding but natural duality, identifying with

it and keeping it a little distant from his own human nature.”<sup>77</sup>

What the expression “identified too much” actually refers to is that Timár, effectively playing himself, may have been like his character in the play a few days before the premiere (when there was as yet no audience); how this state compares to the television recording that remains available to us; and how Demeter can be so certain about the moment when Timár “found” the role – all of this is impossible to determine today. It is neither unusual nor, in itself, meaningless for an actor to perceive similarities between a role and his own fate during rehearsals. However, the fact that Timár recognised the necessity of processing and thematising his own craft, his very nature as an actor, through the role of the salesman suggests not merely a general emotional or psychological issue, but an aesthetic position: a concrete conception of acting and artistic creation from which an entire performance may be developed and further elaborated. This is especially persuasive when the result is demonstrable – for instance, when the role is played differently from that point onward than it had been before.<sup>78</sup> According to Timár, the salesman – who lives in a dream world, constantly affirming his own greatness, inept in the practical matters of life and fallible in his private existence – is akin to an actor. He communicated this insight to his director. He then played the role accordingly, without theatrical grand scenes, dazzling virtuoso moments, or expansive gestures: simply reciting Willy Loman’s lines, deeply immersed in his own fantasy world, caring about nothing else. Yet his speech is revealing. Iván Fónagy reports on an experiment in which French students listened to excerpts from Timár’s performance, including sentences such

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<sup>77</sup> DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [*Thank you for the Light...*], 183.

<sup>78</sup> No other stage recordings of him remain, so comparisons can only be made with his film roles at best. However, Péter Molnár Gál, for example, sees a difference.

as “I’m – I’m overjoyed to see how you made the grade, Bernard, overjoyed... It’s an encouraging thing to see a young man really – really....” On the basis of the melody alone, the students concluded that the meaning conveyed was: ‘Now nothing matters anymore. There is no hope. I am old and sick. Yesterday I did not even want to get out of bed.’<sup>79</sup>

In the same analysis, Fónagy describes another test: here, Timár’s question ( “Bernard, was it my fault?”) had to be repeated with the correct intonation and melody after listening to the recording several times.<sup>80</sup> The majority of (native Hungarian-speaking) listeners interpreted the repetition as a clearly declarative sentence, when they heard the text. After the premiere, critics immediately praised Timár’s acting<sup>81</sup>, by unanimously describing it as “being [ ...] in a tense state of alert)<sup>82</sup>, and also praised the performance as a whole.<sup>83</sup> The audience at the National Theatre, if not in October, then certainly by May, knew that the actor was ill, as he had lost a lot of weight, and they undoubtedly interpreted his performance as a farewell to life. “Each night was a drama in itself,”<sup>84</sup> recalls Demeter of the spring of 1960: During the performances, Timár’s wife and son took turns standing in the wings, fearing at every moment that he might collapse. His fever could no longer be controlled with medication; he left the hospital only to attend the performances. The fact of his impending death defined and transformed the performance, without, of course, ever becoming the subject

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<sup>79</sup> FÓNAGY Iván, *Füst Milán: Öregség – Dallamfejtés* [*Füst Milán: Old Age – Melody Interpretation*] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974), 109.

<sup>80</sup> FÓNAGY, *Füst...*, 112.

<sup>81</sup> LENKEI, “*Az ügynök halála...*” [“*The Death of a Salesman...*”], 7.

<sup>82</sup> DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [“*Thank you for the Light...*”], 185.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. for example Tamás DERSI, “*Az ügynök halála – Bemutató a Nemzeti Színházban*” [“*Death of the Salesman – Premiere at the National Theatre*”], *Esti Hírlap*, 26 November 1959, 2. or Ernő BAJOR NAGY, “*Az ügynök halála*” [“*Death of the Salesman*”], *Hétfői Hírek*, 23 November 1959, 4.

<sup>84</sup> DEMETER, *Köszönöm a tüzet...* [“*Thank you for the Light...*”], 194.

of open discussion – thus drawing an even sharper line between Timár and everyone else.

Those who are remembered rarely dominate the discourse about themselves. Yet Timár seems to have known from the very beginning of the rehearsals that the salesman would be his final role. According to those who recall him, he insisted on playing through the season and took pleasure in the success; by the summer, however, he no longer spoke of the theatre, turning instead toward his private life. This appears to have been a conscious process: as an actor, he prepared for death through a role, effectively bringing his professional life to a close and, as his illness progressed and his control over circumstances diminished, at least determining the parameters of how he would be remembered.





## Second case study:

### EXITING THE STAGE: ÉVA RUTTKAI AND GIZI BAJOR

*"We Hungarian actors are all part of a great shared process, learning from each other's acting, both good and bad, even from those whom we have never seen."<sup>1</sup>*

#### *Image and legacy: "Gizi Bajor's successor"*

Gizi Bajor and Éva Ruttkai are remembered not for any single role, but for the "multi-faceted" nature<sup>2</sup> of their acting, which manifested itself in a wide variety of roles. Gizi Bajor was the leading actress – primarily of the theatre – of the inter-war period, while Éva Ruttkai was the star actress of the decades between the Second World War and the regime change. Both appeared in approximately 150 productions.

If we read through the critics' and memoirists' very similar, idolising descriptions of the two actresses, beyond referring to both of them as "queens" endowed<sup>3</sup> with supernatu-

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<sup>1</sup> Statement by Éva Ruttkai, G. M. "Arra törekszem, hogy újrateremtsem magam – Cleopatra: Ruttkai Éva" ["I strive to reinvent myself – Cleopatra: Éva Ruttkai"], interview, *Film, Színház, Muzsika*, 28 September 1974, 12.

<sup>2</sup> From the many examples, see, for example, Aurél KÁRPÁTI, "Emlékezés Bajor Gizire" ["Remembering Gizi Bajor"] *Színház és Filmművészet* 7, no. 3. (1956): 175–178, 175, and László VÁMOS, "Kevés a pártolás, csekély a haladás" ["Little Support, Little Progress"] *Kritika* 17, no. 1 (1987): 15–21, 21.

<sup>3</sup> For example, "She was the queen. The audience did not go to the theatre to see the play, but to see Gizi Bajor." Zita PERCZEL, "Színész-kollégáim" ["My fellow actors"], *Új Tükör*, 4 March 1979, 26. or "Gizi

ral abilities: described as “angels”<sup>4</sup> and “fairies,”<sup>5</sup> we find that both are considered to be exceptionally “feminine” actresses.<sup>6</sup> These texts, often written by men who suspend their analyti-

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Bajor, queen of the stage” (N. s.) “Bajor”, *Pesti Futár*, 15 February 1938, 10. On Ruttkai, see, for example, “She was a queen. [...] She knew she was a queen: she ruled in people’s hearts.” Gábor SZIGETHY, “Ruttkai Éva mosolya” [“The Smile of Éva Ruttkai”], *Új Ember*, 24 September 2006, 11.

<sup>4</sup> “And the summoned medium, the wandering moonbeam, the pale angel descends onto the stage...” Ernő Szép quoted in [ N. N.], “A Bajor hangja” [“The Voice of Bajor”], *Esti Kurír*, 20 February 1930, 9. Quoted in Hilda GOBBI, “Emlék” [“Memories”], in *Bajor Gizi*, ed. Károly ESCHER–Miklós VAJDA, 7–31. (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1958), 14. When referring to Ruttkai, the word “angel” does not stand alone, for example, in relation to her faces in films: “...willful, angelic, charming, silly, foolish, defiant, demonic, adorable, clueless, weak, vain, sober or vulnerable, lazy, naive, feminine, clever, talented and untalented, honest and magical, and then simply beautiful and enchantingly charming.” V. M. “Csodálatos vagy... Ruttkai” [“Being... Ruttkai”], *Szolnok Megyei Néplap*, 25 January 1967, 3. or “Her steps seem to be accompanied by Shakespeare’s ‘choir of angels’.” Imre DEMETER, “Ruttkai Éva”, *Film, Theatre, Music*, 18 March 1960, 12.

<sup>5</sup> About Bajor: Áron TAMÁSI, “Nehéz napok tündére – emlékezés Bajor Gizire” [“Fairy of difficult days – remembering Gizi Bajor”], *Élet és Irodalom*, 23 December 1958, 6–7, 6. Péter Molnár Gál, completely suspending his critical position, summed up Éva Ruttkai’s career as follows: “Éva Ruttkai was a fairy.” Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, “Butasága története – a 70 éves Ruttkai Éva” [“The Story of Her Folly – Éva Ruttkai at 70”], *Népszabadság*, 31 December 1997, 9. And since Zoltán Latinovits came to be referred to as the “king of actors” after László Nagy’s poem (László NAGY, Gyászom a Színészkirályért [My mourning for the king of actors], *Élet és Irodalom*, 2 July 1977, 15), the term “queen of actors” appeared in discussions about Éva Ruttkai – see Zoltán LATINOVITS, *Emlékszem a röplés boldogságára – Összegyűjtött írások [I Remember the Happiness of Flying – Collected Writings]*, ed. Gábor SZIGETHY (Budapest: Magvető, 1985) – and then the term “fairy queen”. Ruttkai’s first line on stage at the age of two was: “Command me, fairy queen”, in her own interpretation, the “fairy queen” is a metaphor for the stage. Cf. Éva RUTTKAI, *Parancsolj, tündérkirálynőm! [At Your Command, Fairy Queen!]* ed. Gábor SZIGETHY (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1989). Later, it is transferred to her.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Tamás KOLTAI, “Ruttkai,” *Kritika* 15, no. 11 (1986): 15–16. or MOLNÁR GÁL, “Butasága története” [The Story of Her Folly],

cal and critical positions, are largely reflective summaries of the actresses' careers rather than their individual roles. From these writings we can discern primarily the impact of their acting and personalities, which the authors cannot and do not want to explain. However, a few specific details can be gleaned from the descriptions: their humour<sup>7</sup> and playfulness,<sup>8</sup> are also highlighted, which presumably also refer to the shifts in acting, their body awareness and movement culture:<sup>9</sup> Bajor's voice and intonation in particular,<sup>10</sup> Ruttkai's gaze, her hands,

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9. or István HERMANN, "Ötéves a Korona-pódium" [Five Years of the Korona Stage], *Színház* 10, no. 5 (1977): 22–24, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Tamás MAJOR, "Bajor Gizi halálának negyedszázados évfordulójára" ["On the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Gizi Bajor's Death"], *Kritika* 5, no. 2 (1976): 18. Béla MÁTRAJ-BETEGH, "A láng és a fénye – jegyzet Ruttkai Éváról" ["The Flame and Its Light – Notes on Éva Ruttkai"], *Magyar Nemzet*, 15 March 1960, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Antal NÉMETH, "Az eltűnt Bajor Gizi nyomában" ["In Search of the Missing Gizi Bajor"] in *Bajor Gizi*, ed. KÁROLY ESCHER and Miklós VAJDA, 57–79. (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1958), 68. and Imre DEMETER, "Színész-arcok: Ruttkai Éva" ["Actor Faces: Éva Ruttkai"], *Film, Theatre, Music*, 20 January 1967, 24–25.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. (About Bajor) "She was able to move with almost limitless freedom. Her mastery of movement could signify every age, every social class, every historical period, and every human type – perhaps with the sole exception of the queenly, majestic mode, which did not suit her in any way – doing so in both genders, in female roles as well as in boyish ones." Rózsa IGNÁCZ, "Bajor Gizi", *Kortárs* 2, no. 8 (1958): 165–182, 171. On Ruttkai: "I always admire the way she moves, creating style. Whether she is wearing a miniskirt, a stylised costume or a turn-of-the-century long dress, she moves and walks on stage in such a way that, even without dialogue, she radiates the atmosphere of the era and character she is portraying." D. I. "Ruttkai Éva", *Képes Ifjúság*, 20 May 1967, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the best-known comment is that of Ernő Szép: "If they had heard this voice in Versailles, they would not have been able to wipe Hungary off the map," quoted by Hilda GOBBI, "Emlék" [Memory], in *Bajor Gizi*, ed. ESCHER and VAJDA, 14. Even Péter Molnár Gál, who decades later took a stand against the Bajor cult, speaks of a "magical" voice. Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, "A Bajor-legenda" ["The Bajor Legend"], *Élet és Irodalom*, 19 May 1973, 12. Hilda Gobbi later remarked that "however prosaic it may sound", one of the secrets of

and her gestures.<sup>11</sup>

Both actresses resisted rigid role and genre classifications. They began their careers as ingénues, but Bajor soon moved beyond conversational plays to Shakespearean roles as well (for instance, Puck), while Ruttkai turned early to Chekhov, initially playing Natasha. They went on to perform the same canonical roles on the country's leading stages, generally with great success and without substantial temporal distance between their interpretations: Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* (Bajor in 1918 and 1931, Ruttkai in 1963), Viola in *Twelfth Night* (Bajor in 1923, Ruttkai in 1968), Katherina in *The Taming of the Shrew* (Bajor in 1923, Ruttkai in 1956), Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra* (Bajor in 1946, Ruttkai in 1974), and St. Joan in George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* (Bajor in 1924, Ruttkai in 1955). To mention roles that were not staged in Pest by other productions in the intervening period, both actresses played Lavinia in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (Bajor in 1937, Ruttkai in 1963),<sup>12</sup> Anna Karenina (Bajor in 1949, Ruttkai in 1964) and Zilia in *The Silent Knight* (both of which were revived: Bajor played the role in 1936 and 1945, Ruttkai in 1955, 1962 and 1966). The fact that Ruttkai was able to cope with Gizi Bajor's legacy is best demonstrated by the fact that she achieved one of the greatest successes of her life in the role which was written specifically for Bajor. She was able to reinterpret the roles that Bajor had played and made her own, so it is indeed logical to see her as a continuator of a theatrical tradition.<sup>13</sup>

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Bajor's powerful voice lay in her "perfect speech technique." GOBBI, "Emlék" [Memory], in *Bajor Gizi*, ed. ESCHER and VAJDA, 14.

<sup>11</sup> For example, "Ruttkai's fluttering wrists, her light hand drawing illegible arabesques in the air, her playful, truthfully deceitful glances turned skyward, freed her from the shackles of obligatory roles." MOLNÁR GÁL, "Butasága története" [The Story of Her Folly], 9.

<sup>12</sup> In 1983, Éva Ruttkai also played Lavinia's mother, Christine. István Horvai: *Amerikai Elektra* [*Mourning Becomes Electra*], 1983.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Tibor BÁNOS, "Megtört pályakép" ["Broken Career"], *Magyarországnak*, 5 October 1986, 26.

This chapter focuses primarily on Éva Ruttkai's acting and raises the question whether her career might be viewed differently: whether – if we do not consider acting only in the present tense and set aside dominant critical and male gazes – another mode of performance can be discerned, and whether acting can be articulated as a form of creation rather than merely as an already given, “fairy-like” mode of existence. To do so, however, I must first examine one stage performance by Gizi Bajor – her final one. This is partly because she and Éva Ruttkai appeared together in this production, and partly because this last performance contains a gesture that every account singles out; perhaps no other acting gesture has generated so much writing in Hungarian criticism over the course of the twentieth century. It is this gesture that Ruttkai recalls and reenacts thirty years later.

### *Gizi Bajor exits the stage*

Gizi Bajor's last theatre performance was in Endre Gellért's production of *Intrigue and Love* in December 1950.<sup>14</sup> During these years, the National Theatre was led and defined by the directorial triumvirate of Endre Gellért, Tamás Major and Endre Marton. They felt it was their professional duty to create socialist realist theatre. Jákfalvi draws attention to the conference of the newly formed Theatre and Film Arts Association on September 1950:

“In his introduction, Horvai links Soviet achievements to Stanislavsky [...] From 1950 onwards, the theatrical language attributed to Stanislavsky came to dominate Hungarian theatre. This phantom point of reference, detached from the Russian-language context and trans-

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<sup>14</sup> Endre Gellért: *Ármány és szerelem* [*Intrigue and Love*], 1950. (Premiere: 8 December 1950.)

mitted through English sources or through successive generations of disciples – effectively recast the existing national style of acting – Hungarian realist practice – as something new (and did so with considerable convenience) ... Within this framework, socialist realism, without any significant experimentation or false starts, came to stand in for national theatrical realism itself.”<sup>15</sup>

The language of national theatre realism was clearly well spoken by Gizi Bajor, who in previous decades “almost single-handedly carried the budget of the National Theatre.”<sup>16</sup> This led to a contradictory situation: in 1948 she received the Kossuth Prize; in 1950 she was awarded the title of Outstanding Artist; yet at the same time she was increasingly pushed into the background as a star of the pre-war period. After the war, she appeared in only eight productions at the National Theatre, and the sequence of roles clearly reflects the management’s programming policy, which replaced former modern comedies with canonical classics. Significantly, Bajor did not perform in contemporary Soviet plays. Tamás Major directed her in *Antony and Cleopatra* (with her longtime partner József Timár), after which Endre Gellért revived *The Lady of the Camellias* with her. She then received the title role in a comedy by Eugène Scribe, before returning to Shakespeare under Major’s direction as Titania in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* –also a revival. Géza Pártos cast her in *The Gardener’s Dog*, and in the winter of 1949, she was given the title role in *Anna Karenina*, directed by Endre Marton. After this, she did not rehearse another role for an entire year, until *Intrigue and Love*.

From the outset, the Schiller play was rehearsed and performed with role doubling – a new practice at the National Theatre. In 1950, Endre Gellért explained in the columns

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<sup>15</sup> Magdolna JÁKFALVI, *A valóság szenvedélye* [*The Passion of Reality*], 33.

<sup>16</sup> MAJOR, “Bajor Gizi halálának negyedszázados évfordulójára” [“On the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Gizi Bajor’s Death”], 18.

of *Szabad Nép* that this was customary in the Soviet Union: alongside easing the burden on actors, the aim of doubling was to encourage competition.<sup>17</sup> At the National Theatre, two actor couples were cast crosswise. Miklós Gábor played Ferdinand in the first cast, while his wife, Éva Ruttkai, appeared as Luise in the second. Lajos Básti was the Ferdinand of the second cast, whereas his wife, Violetta Ferrari, played Luise in the first. Gizi Bajor appeared in the first cast – that is, in the one that premiered first, on 8 December 1950. The second cast, in which the role of Lady Milford was played by Anna Tőkés, premiered on 16 December. This production also received critical coverage, and the press engaged in comparisons between the two casts.<sup>18</sup>

With this choice of play, Endre Gellért returned to the National Theatre's older traditions: *Intrigue and Love* had been part of the theatre's repertoire since 1843 and had previously been directed by Ede Paulay, Jenő Ivánfi, and Sándor Hevesi. In 1950, the play was presented to audiences in a new translation by István Vas. The production ran for more than four hours, beginning at 7:00 p.m. and ending around 11:15 p.m.<sup>19</sup> Two hours and twenty minutes were pure playing time, which was recorded on 22 December 1950 and broadcast the following day.<sup>20</sup> Bajor spent about thirty minutes on stage in the second act (the first part in theatrical terms) and twenty minutes in the fourth (the third in theatrical terms). According to the audio recording, the entire fourth act of the performance consists

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<sup>17</sup> Endre GELLÉRT, "Moszkva színházaiban" ["In the Theatres of Moscow"], in *Helyünk a deszkákon* [Our Place on the Stage], 30–33, ed. Péter MOLNÁR GÁL (Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, n.d.), 32.

<sup>18</sup> Béla MÁTRAJ-BETEGH, "Ármány és szerelem – Schiller szomorújátéka a Magyar Színházban" ["*Intrigue and Love* – Schiller's Tragedy at the Hungarian Theatre"], *Magyar Nemzet*, 20 December 1950, 5; Ernő TAMÁS, "Az *Ármány és szerelem* másik szereposztása" ["The Other Cast of *Intrigue and Love*"], *Kis Újság*, 28 December 1950, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Stage manager reports, OSZK SZT. Hungarian Theatre, 1949–1951.

<sup>20</sup> The recording can be found at: OSzMI Audiovisual Archive, HL367–382.



of the Lady Milford's scenes, while the part where Ferdinand finds the letter and the first six scenes (as well as scene 7 of Act I) are missing from the play, with the announcer briefly summarising these events. If these scenes were only omitted from the radio version, that would explain the discrepancy (if not, it would mean that the set changes and intermissions took up almost two hours).

In 1950, newspapers presented *Intrigue and Love* to their readers as a battle between feudalism and the bourgeoisie, describing Schiller's drama as revolutionary and expecting the production to be harsh and class-conscious.<sup>21</sup> The premiere is described as "revolutionary" and "promising", although some consider it rushed,<sup>22</sup> and some find the acting style uneven,<sup>23</sup> while others describe the acting as natural.<sup>24</sup> The reviews fail to notice the psychological contradictions arising from Gellért's psychological interpretation of the play, nor do they record them in the slightest. According to these critics, both the aristocrats and the bourgeoisie in the play are equally petty and incapable of development;<sup>25</sup> however, this one-dimensionality cannot be sustained on Stanislavskian principles.

In Gellért's view, the director must convey the writer's and indeed the play's style; in his writings and speeches, he emphasises the importance of creating the performance's unique rhythm and the significance of the encounter with the audi-

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<sup>21</sup> Imre DEMETER, "*Ármány és szerelem* – Schiller drámája a Magyar Színházban" [*Intrigue and Love* – Schiller's Drama at the Hungarian Theatre], *Világosság*, 14 December 1950, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Miklós GYÁRFÁS, "*Ármány és szerelem*" [*Intrigue and Love*] *Uj világ*, 14 December 1950, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ferenc FENDRIK, "*Ármány és szerelem* – Felújítás a Magyar Színházban" [*Intrigue and Love* – Revival at the Hungarian Theatre] *Magyar Vasárnap*, 17 December 1950, 6.

<sup>24</sup> TAMÁS, "Az *Ármány és szerelem* másik szereposztása" [*The Other Cast of Intrigue and Love*], 4.

<sup>25</sup> K. J. "*Ármány és szerelem*" [*Intrigue and Love*] *Szabad Szó*, 17 December 1950, 6.

ence.<sup>26</sup> In his 1977 monograph, Péter Molnár Gál analyses the director's interpretation of the play and his direction of the actors, detailing how Gellért developed ideas for the play from the author's instructions,<sup>27</sup> even describing the lighting:

"The stage lighting in *Intrigue and Love* covered the fate of the characters in a single day, from the innocent glow of a cheerful morning to the darkness of night [...] the rhythm of the lighting was in tune with the internal rhythm of the play."<sup>28</sup>

He outlines the stage space, analyses acting performances built on nuance and internal contradiction, and provides an example of how, in the production, Gellért releases the actors from the role categories of romantic drama precisely in the interest of realism and the contradictory nature of reality itself. One such moment occurs when Lady Milford, played by Bajor and, in theory, assigned the role of the intriguer – hears and repeats that Luise is only sixteen years old. Through this detail – more precisely, through the Lady's momentary reflection on her own age—the role is “wrenched from the clichés of intrigue”.<sup>29</sup>

Gellért was also an actor, which is perhaps why he was able to articulate what Bajor Gizi had taught him: “the shocking forms of expressing emotions which can hardly be put into words.”<sup>30</sup> He is a believer in “tension-free rehearsals” and the

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<sup>26</sup> Endre GELLÉRT, “Helyünk a deszkákon” [“Our Place on the Stage”] in *Helyünk a deszkákon* [Our Place on the Stage] 23–29, 25.

<sup>27</sup> Molnár Gál's most characteristic example: Irén Sitkey drinking coffee at the beginning of the performance. Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, “Ármány és szerelem” [“Intrigue and Love”] in *Emlékpróba* by Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, 180–207 (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1977), 180.

<sup>28</sup> MOLNÁR GÁL, “Ármány és szerelem” [“Intrigue and Love”], 184.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>30</sup> Endre GELLÉRT, “Rendezői gyakorlatom tanulságaiból” [“Lessons from my directing practice”] in *Helyünk a deszkákon* [Our Place on the Stage], 123–152, 126.

collaborative work of director and actor. In his view, the director should initially talk about the entire performance and the weight of the roles and then let the actor figure out what to play.<sup>31</sup> Reflecting on correct stage speech, he recalls how he had to warn Gizi Bajor about incorrect intonation in *Intrigue and Love*, and that (according to Bajor's feedback) he was the first director to do so.<sup>32</sup>

In 1950, the theatre building on Izabella Square, the Magyar Theatre, operated as the National Theatre's studio theatre, even though it contained an auditorium with more than 1,000 seats and box seating. The production's set design was described as "large-scale, in places dazzlingly revue-like."<sup>33</sup> Based on the photographs, Miller's home and Lady Milford's salon can be easily reconstructed. In the Lady's room, on the left front, almost parallel to the auditorium but slightly open towards the centre of the stage, there is a chaise longue on which she sits with a mirror in her hand when she receives Luise. On the right is an ornate desk. In the background, behind the chaise longue, a stove can be seen.<sup>34</sup> At the back right is a huge white double door. There are candlesticks on the wall. Halfway across the room, two columns support an arch.

Teréz Nagyajtay's costume designs show that Bajor performed in colourful hoop skirts – green in Act II and yellow with stripes in Act IV – combined with a deep blue coat and hat worn during her exit at the end of the act. When she was not wearing a rice-powdered wig, she appeared with red hair. This was the case in Act II, that is, in the scene shared with Ferdinand, although the costume design also depicts red hair with the blue coat. This means that there was presumably no time for a costume and wig change at that point. It is Gizi

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<sup>31</sup> Endre GELLÉRT, "A rendező alkotó munkája" ["The Creative Work of the Director"] in *Helyünk a deszkákon* [*Our Place on the Stage*], 79–101.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>33</sup> FENDRIK, "Ármány..." ["*Intrigue...*"], 6.

<sup>34</sup> Molnár Gál analyses what the stove reveals about Lady Milford. MOLNÁR GÁL, "Ármány és szerelem" ["*Intrigue and Love*"], 183.

Bajor's exit from the stage as Lady Milford and her final gestures onstage, that memory preserves, for this was how she was seen for the last time, and how she disappeared from the stage in February 1951. Bajor's Lady Milford declared, ironically and almost mockingly, that she would become a day labourer, an intonation underscored by a gesture, one that, although many have written about it (or perhaps precisely because of that), it is difficult to reconstruct exactly: the way she put on of her hat, or the slight tipping of it.<sup>35</sup> This irony, this playful interpretation of the tragic ending can be understood not only as an effective conclusion to the act, but also as the actress's philosophy of life in 1951. Gellért describes how the idea of playfulness was necessary so that the audience would not feel sorry for the aristocratic Lady (who is indirectly responsible for the death of the young lovers), so they would not cry but laugh when she leaves the stage.<sup>36</sup> However, this same playfulness also represented Gizi Bajor's invincibility, her ability to outplay and laugh at the system or fate that would have turned her into a day labourer. Bajor's performance is, of course, praised by all critics, and when comparing the two casts, the paper form is confirmed: Tóké is considered more tragic and serious, while Bajor is considered more direct.<sup>37</sup> However, this stems from the difference in their careers up to that point, not just from their interpretation of the role of Lady Milford.

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<sup>35</sup> On this move, see, for example, MÁTRAJ-BETEGH Béla, "Bajor Gizi," *Magyar Nemzet*, 14 February 1951, 2, or GYÁRFÁS Miklós, "Lady Milford távozik," ["Lady Milford Departs"], *Élet és Irodalom*, 12 December 1957, 11, András BENEDEK, "A titokzatos és kiszámíthatatlan" ["The Mysterious and Unpredictable"], *Film, Színház, Muzsika*, 18 June 1965, 25, or Pongrácz GALSAI, "Bajor Gizi játékai" ["Gizi Bajor's Performances"], *Csongrád Megyei Hírlap*, 26 March 1971, 4. Later: Géza BALOGH, "Földieknek játszó égi tünemény" ["A Celestial Phenomenon Playing for Earthlings"], *Critikai Lapok* 22, no. 4 (2013): 1–7, 6.

<sup>36</sup> GELLÉRT, "A rendező alkotó munkája" ["The Creative Work of the Director"], 82.

<sup>37</sup> MÁTRAJ-BETEGH, "Ármány..." ["Intrigue..."], 5.

Bajor's delivery – which is occasionally aided by a prompter on the day of the radio recording, although there is no indication that this is necessary – clearly shows that this is not a rigid tragedy or comedy; Within the framework of psychological realism, what must be portrayed is a real human being: there are comic remarks and moments, the audience occasionally breaks into laughter, the Lady's unfortunate fate becomes a "subtle caricature,"<sup>38</sup> yet she is also capable of arousing the audience's sympathy.<sup>39</sup>

Bajor makes particular use of simplicity, naturalness and sincerity in the Lady Milford–Luise scene. Although Gellért writes that the audience should side with Luise,<sup>40</sup> it is impossible to tell from the audio recording whether this effect actually worked. The scene is a clash between two women, a competitive struggle for a man. Molnár Gál observes that Bajor's unique interpretation gives the scene an erotic emphasis:

"Lady Milford conceals her anxiety with sophisticated flirtatiousness, which she does not hide too much: she wants to please the girl. She looks at her rival with growing fondness and tries to arouse her sympathy. This flirtatiousness, this hint of eroticism, is of course not directed at Luise, but through her at the man she loves."<sup>41</sup>

Éva Ruttkai, who occasionally stepped into the other role, playing Luise alongside Bajor's Lady Milford on a few occasions, recalls this joint scene as the Lady having an "overwhelming stage presence": "She swept me away like a steamroller."<sup>42</sup> This rather suggests that Bajor, too, played to the audience's

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<sup>38</sup> FENDRIK, "Ármány..." ["Intrigue..."], 6.

<sup>39</sup> DEMETER, "Ármány..." ["Intrigue..."], 4.

<sup>40</sup> GELLÉRT, "A rendező alkotó munkája" ["The Creative Work of the Director"], 82.

<sup>41</sup> MOLNÁR GÁL, "A rendező alkotó munkája" ["The Creative Work of the Director"], 187.

<sup>42</sup> RUTTKAI, *Parancsolj...* [*At Your Command...*], 62.

sympathy – and succeeded in doing so – by revealing the Lady's strength through her vulnerability.

After Bajor's death, due to the double casting, the performance could continue without interruption, and it was even performed on the day of the funeral.<sup>43</sup> The new staging of this classic play was a powerful performance at the time, one of the legendary productions of the era, which ran for more than 150 nights. Nevertheless, its history cannot be separated from the suicides of two of the nation's greatest actors and, a decade later, its director.<sup>44</sup> In the autumn of 1951, the death of Artúr Somlay marked the next tragedy to affect the company. The suicide of star actors was a taboo subject in the communist one-party state; nevertheless, it became fixed in collective memory as an act of artistic rebellion against the political system – much like the death of Endre Gellért later on.<sup>45</sup>

Two scenes from the play were filmed in 1952 (director: Károly Makk, cinematographer: György Illés, Lady Milford: Margit Lukács). In the film *Éjfélkor* (*At Midnight*, 1957), Miklós Gábor was cast in the role of an actor playing Ferdinand. The film also includes a scene from the stage production itself. This scene was recognisably filmed in the set and costumes designed by Endre Gellért.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> [N. N.] [Untitled], *Kis Újság*, 16 February 1951, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Artúr Somlay spoke out on behalf of actor colleagues who had been forcibly resettled. Although the Budapest deportations began only several months after Gizi Bajor's death, Lady Milford's declaration that she would become a day labourer was retrospectively interpreted within this context as well.

<sup>45</sup> "Endre Gellért's theatrical legacy is overshadowed and rewritten by his suicide in 1960. This act is interpreted by his colleagues and the next two generations, who were still his students, as the last opportunity to resist the Sovietised art and power structure." JÁKFALVI, *A valóság szenvedélye* [The Passion of Reality], 147.

<sup>46</sup> Katalin Kócsis, "Egy ifjú Schiller-hős 4." ["A Young Schiller Hero 4.]" *In memoriam Miklós Gábor*, blog. <http://gabormiklos.blogspot.com/2015/03/egy-ifju-schiller-hos-4.html>. Last accessed: 7 January 2025.

Márta Mészáros made a television film about the last phase of Gizi Bajor's life entitled *Intrigue and Love in 1951*, which also shows that the performance became known in the collective memory as Gizi Bajor's final act.<sup>47</sup>

### *Self-education*

"Small secrets or tricks of the trade are passed down from generation to generation," Éva Ruttkai remarked in the late 1970s, describing to audiences what Gizi Bajor had taught her during rehearsals for *Intrigue and Love*: how to lean beautifully against one's partner's chest.<sup>48</sup> Ruttkai signed a contract with the National Theatre in 1948, after the closure of Dániel Jób's Vígszínház, in order to study acting,<sup>49</sup> as she had not graduated from an academy of dramatic arts. Although she had been performing since childhood, she acquired the craft of acting only through private study and practical experience. Margit Makay, with whom she performed in the 1932 Vígszínház production of *Naplemente előtt* (*Before Sunset*), taught her free of charge between 1942 and 1944.<sup>50</sup> During this period, Makay was also a speech instructor at the Academy of Performing Arts, where she was the first to include breathing exercises in the curriculum, seeking above all to make her students aware of the importance of the function of breathing.<sup>51</sup> Her concept was that the

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<sup>47</sup> Adél Kováts played the role of Gizi Bajor.

<sup>48</sup> György FEHÉR (director), "Parancsolj velem, tündérkirálynő!" ["At Your Command, Fairy Queen! Éva Ruttkai's recital"], 1977, 30:00. <https://nava.hu/id/282500/>. Last accessed: 7 January 2025.

<sup>49</sup> RUTTKAI, *Parancsolj...* [*At Your Command...*], 27.

<sup>50</sup> Ruttkai's father was taken away for forced labour in 1942, her brother was imprisoned as an illegal communist, and she was not accepted into commercial school.

<sup>51</sup> Ilona TÖRÖK (director), *Mestersége: színész. Makay Margit* [Profession: actor. Margit Makay] (television programme), ed. Katalin VIRÁG, MTV, n.d. <https://nava.hu/id/2271314/#>. Last accessed: 7 January 2025.

actor should read the role until they “make it their own”: only then could they begin to learn the text.<sup>52</sup> She placed particular emphasis on the role of entering the stage, believing that actors should be taught “from the moment they open the door” how to open it, close it, enter, come in, stop [...] how to look, where to look when performing – all of which must be taught as part of the craft.<sup>53</sup> From the cast of *Intrigue and Love*, Éva Ruttkai had already worked as a child alongside Artúr Somlay, Gyula Gózon, and Anna Tőkés. Somlay later directed her in her first adult role at the Vígszínház, and she would often refer in later years to him and what she had learned from him.<sup>54</sup>

Ruttkai spent a total of three seasons at the National Theatre, with *Intrigue and Love* being performed in the last of these. From the autumn of 1951, she was a member of the Hungarian People’s Army Theatre (Magyar Néphadsereg Színháza). During the three seasons, she appeared in twelve performances. After Marianna in *The Miser*, directed by Tamás Major, rather unexpectedly by the standards of National Theatre tradition – Géza Pártos cast her in the young female lead of Ostrovsky’s *The Forest*.<sup>55</sup> Endre Gellért directed her in *Vasa Zheleznova*, *Happiness* and *The Inspector General*. She worked once with Endre Marton,<sup>56</sup> once with István Horvai<sup>57</sup> and four more times with Major.<sup>58</sup> In one interview, given decades lat-

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 09:28.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 26:02.

<sup>54</sup> RUTTKAI, *Parancsolj...* [*At Your Command...*], 47–48.

<sup>55</sup> Eszter NORDIN, *Apám portréja* [*Portrait of My Father*], (documentary film), 1993. 13:50.

<sup>56</sup> Endre Marton: *Hatszáz új lakás* [*Six Hundred New Apartments*], 1951. The play *Nyári zápor* [*Summer Shower*] was co-written by Marton and Major.

<sup>57</sup> István Horvai: *Jövedelmező állás* [*A Profitable Position*], 1950.

<sup>58</sup> Co-directed twice: Tamás Major–Gyula Kertész–Ferenc Hont: *Dobányon vett kapitány* [*Captain Bought with Tobacco*], 1949. Tamás Major–Endre Marton: *Nyári zápor* [*Summer Shower*], 1950. Tamás Major: *Donna Juana*, 1950. Tamás Major: *Figaro házassága* [*The Marriage of Figaro*] 1950.



er, she spoke of her departure from the National Theatre as having been fired.<sup>59</sup> She then became the leading actress of the Hungarian People's Army Theatre and then the Vígszínház, but her greatest success began at the Déryné Stage on Váci út.<sup>60</sup> Miklós Gábor considers her performance in the female lead role in *The Silent Knight* to be the turning point in her career, and he records the premiere evening in his diary:

...their decision seemed to determine the entire career of Saskia[ Éva Ruttkai - P.D.] . It was not a question of whether they would forgive her for daring to play Zília after Bajor, nor of what kind of actress Saskia was, but rather of whether *she was the right actress*, as if they were choosing a queen... The audience of Gizi Bajor and Jenő Heltai, obeying who knows what instinct, marched out to the proletarian Váci út, elegantly dressed, as if they had no objection to the proletariat but the ministries, and there, on the periphery, they showed *them*, socially and publicly, that the premiere of *The Silent Knight* had been a success. They made a success of the premiere of *The Silent Knight*, and with Saskia's debut, it was as if they had re-inaugurated the Vígszínház, even though it was so awkwardly called the People's Army Theatre at the time... On this evening, among these people, in the first three rows, something in Saskia's life was decided, and when the applause broke out after the first act, it was decided, it was settled. That evening, Saskia was accepted and granted a place, and her whole life until her death was decided: from that day on, Gizi Bajor had a

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<sup>59</sup> András SZEGŐ, "Egyre idegenebb a világ – Szegő András beszélgetése Ruttkai Évával" ["The world is becoming increasingly alien – András Szegő in conversation with Éva Ruttkai"], *Képes* 7, 28 June 1986, 35–39, 38.

<sup>60</sup> Árpád Benedek: *A néma levente* [*The Silent Knight*] 1952. The performance was revived in 1962 and 1966, this time on Szent István körút.

successor. *The queen is dead, long live the queen!* That is what happened that evening.<sup>61</sup>

Ruttkai received her first Jászai Award in 1955 for her role as Zilia (and Erzsike in the film *Liliomfi*), and her second in 1959 for her outstanding artistic performances. In 1960, after playing Natasha in *War and Peace*, she was awarded the Kossuth Prize. The most successful and richest period of her career coincided with the Várkonyi era at the theatre: Zoltán Várkonyi served as chief director from 1962 to 1971; then as director until his death in 1979, leading the theatre for two decades.<sup>62</sup> (He had previously worked at the National Theatre until 1962, but a decade earlier, between 1951 and 1953, he had already served briefly as chief director at the Theatre of the Hungarian People's Army, where he directed Éva Ruttkai twice; he later went on to direct her twelve more times in the theatre.)

One of the theatre's most iconic performances from the early Várkonyi era is *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Éva Ruttkai first appeared alongside Zoltán Latinovits on the stage of the Vígsház.<sup>63</sup> The reviews of the performance reveal what would become more apparent later in her career: the image of Ruttkai that was so powerful – that of a charming woman of a thousand faces. However, when the character played by Ruttkai was not charming, cheerful or feminine, the critics struggled to interpret it,<sup>64</sup> as in the case of Juliet, for example.

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<sup>61</sup> Miklós Gábor, “Naplót olvasva” [“Reading the Diary”] *Színház* 29, no. 9 (1996): 8.

<sup>62</sup> Andrea STUBER, “A Várkonyi-korszak” [“The Várkonyi Era”] in *Várkonyi 100, Tanulmányok Várkonyi Zoltánról* [*Várkonyi 100, Studies on Zoltán Várkonyi*] ed. Magdolna JÁKFALVI, 82–105 (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó – Színház- és Filmművészeti Egyetem, 2013), 82–83.

<sup>63</sup> Zoltán Várkonyi: *Romeo és Júlia* [*Romeo and Juliet*] 1963. (Premiere: 17 January 1963)

<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the best example of this is the film *Ha megjön József* [*When Joseph Returns*], in which Hungarian critics believe that Ruttkai is “not suited” to the character (Gabriella SZÉKELY, “Magányra ítélve”

To demonstrate this, I will briefly attempt to reconstruct the basic contours of the Ruttkai's performance with the aid of photographs, reviews, and an audio recording.

*"Juliet decides she loves Romeo"*

The autumn of 1962 brought significant changes at the Vígsház: Zoltán Várkonyi was appointed chief director alongside the theatre's director, Lajos Lenkei; the former directors Károly Kazimir and István Kazán, as well as director István Somló, departed. This marked the beginning of the nearly two-decade-long Várkonyi era.

The new chief director's ideal was an "interesting," "exciting," and "active" theatre – one grounded in playfulness and success. At the theatre on Szent István Körút,<sup>65</sup> he put into practice the French *théâtre populaire* ideal at a moment when culture still held a privileged position in state socialism yet no longer functioned exclusively as an instrument of ideological influence.<sup>66</sup>

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[Condemned to Loneliness], *Filmkultúra* 17, no. 1 (1976): 39–42.), that it was not right for him, that the role was not good (Pál GESZTI, "Ha megjön József" [*When Joseph Returns*], *Magyar Hírlap*, 5 February 1976, 6.; Ervin GYERTYÁN, "Ha megjön József" [*When Joseph Returns*], *Népszabadság*, 5 February 1976, 7.; András NYERGES, "Ha megjön József" [*When Joseph Returns*], *Kritika* 5, no. 2 [1976]: 28). The film was successful in France, where Ruttkai was also praised, cf. Loius MARCORELLES, "Les vérités sont toujours bonnes à dire" [The Truth Is Always Good to Tell], *Le Monde*, 1 February 1979. [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1979/02/01/les-verites-sont-toujours-bonnes-a-dire\\_2789013\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1979/02/01/les-verites-sont-toujours-bonnes-a-dire_2789013_1819218.html). Last accessed: 7 May 2024.

<sup>65</sup> Magdolna JÁKFALVI, "Várkonyi és a népszínház eszméje" ["Várkonyi and the Idea of Popular Theatre"] in *Várkonyi 100, Studies on Zoltán Várkonyi* [*Várkonyi 100, Studies on Zoltán Várkonyi*], 58–67, 58.

<sup>66</sup> "The Kádár era brought relief to cultural life compared to the dictatorship of the 1950s. Culture was still one of the most important tools of ideological influence, but above all, it was no longer the sole representative of ideology. The privileged ideological role of culture was one

At the beginning of the 1962/63 season, alongside a new financial director, the new management also signed two directors and four actors: István Horvai and Zoltán Fábri as directors, and Zsuzsa Bánki, Zsuzsa Gordon, Tibor Molnár, and Zoltán Latinovits as actors –the latter whom the previous director, István Somló had also wished to engage.<sup>67</sup> On 5, 6, and 7 March 1959, the Debrecen company performed *Romeo and Jeanette*, directed by György Pethes, at the Ódry Stage (Ódry Színpad). It was on this occasion that Latinovits became known within the profession in Budapest, and it was here that Zoltán Várkonyi first took notice of him.<sup>68</sup> A few months later, in the summer of 1959, he was already appearing opposite Mari Törőcsik in the film *Walking to Heaven* (*Gyalog a mennyországba*).

During that season, the theatre presented plays by three contemporary Hungarian authors (Ferenc Dunai: *The Trousers*, Lajos Mesterházi: *The Age of Innocence*, Gábor Thurzó: *Closing Time*, all directed by István Horvai), the “Soviet play” Svarc: *The Dragon* (directed by Péter Makai) and contemporary Western plays *Strange Encounter* (Jacques Robert–Julien Duvivier–Henri Jeanson) and Mary Chase’s *Harvey* – in addition to *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Várkonyi himself.<sup>69</sup> The

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of the consequences of the Cold War confrontation between the two world orders, so the authorities controlled and influenced all areas of culture in the name of fighting on two fronts.” Orsolya RING, “Színház és politika” [“Theatre and Politics”] in *Várkonyi 100, Studies on Zoltán Várkonyi*, [*Várkonyi 100, Studies on Zoltán Várkonyi*], 68–81, 70.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Gábor SZIGETHY, “Somló István levelei Latinovits Zoltánhoz (1961–1963)” [“István Somló’s Letters to Zoltán Latinovits (1961–1966)”], 2000 6, no. 11. (1994): 54–61.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. László MARTON, “Emlékszilánkok Várkonyi Zoltánról” [“Memories of Zoltán Várkonyi”], in *Várkonyi 100, Studies on Zoltán Várkonyi*, [*Várkonyi 100, Studies on Zoltán Várkonyi*], 13–18, 15.

<sup>69</sup> Katalin FÖLDES–Károly SZAKÁTS, *A magyarországi színházak műsora 1962–1963* (adattár), *Színháztörténeti füzetek* 42, [*Programmes of Hungarian Theatres 1962–1963, Theatre History Booklets, 42*] (Budapest: Színházudományi Intézet, Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum, 1963), 14.

director built the production around the actress when selecting a play for Éva Ruttkai; indeed, much of Várkonyi's directorial inventiveness lay in how he placed actors in performative situations.

The premiere of *Romeo and Juliet* was in January, but earlier when the season was announced in the summer, all that appeared in the press was that Éva Ruttkai would play one of the leading roles.<sup>70</sup> A year earlier, in the spring of 1961, a radio play produced as part of Hungarian Radio's Shakespeare cycle, also directed by Várkonyi, premiered with Ruttkai and Latinovits in the leading roles.<sup>71</sup> Although the radio and theatre casts differed in almost every other role,<sup>72</sup> the radio play can still be considered a precursor to the performance concept. After the radio premiere, critics analysed the direction, the performances, and interpretations of the main actors in detail. In these responses, the main motifs of later performance criticism

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<sup>70</sup> [N. N.] , "A Vígszínház tervei az új évadra" ["The Vígszínház's plans for the new season"], *Magyar Nemzet*, 17 June, 8.

<sup>71</sup> The radio play was broadcast by Kossuth Radio on 12 May 1961 at 6.45 p.m. It was later released on record: Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet* – Zoltán Latinovits, Éva Ruttkai, Hungaroton, LPX, 1979. (Recorded by Magyar Rádió. Directed by Zoltán Várkonyi. Music composed and conducted by Ferenc Farkas with the Magyar Rádió and Televízió Symphony Orchestra.)

<sup>72</sup> Cast of the radio play: János Zách (Prince Escalus, Prince of Verona), János Garics (Paris), Samu Balázs (Capulet), László Kemény (Montague), Zoltán Latinovits (Romeo, son to Montague), László Ungvári (Mercutio), (Benvolio), Gábor Agárdy (Tybalt), Ferenc Bessenyei (Friar Laurence), Teri Náray (Lady Montague), Margit Makay (Lady Capulet), Éva Ruttkai (Juliet, daughter to Capulet), Margit Dayka (Nurse), József Horváth (Gregory), Béla Kollár (First Servant), László Márkus (Samson and Second Servant), Sándor Suka (Abraham), Lajos Sugár (Old Capulet), Károly Verebes (Peter), Ernő Szénási (Balthazar), Árpád Gyenge (Apothecary), Ödön Harkányi (Friar John), Tibor Kun (Page to Paris), Géza Sándor (First Watchman), János Gálciki (Second Watchman), István Szatmári (Third Watchman). The prologue and narration are by Várkonyi.

already emerge: cheerfulness, “playful tragedy,” the “childlike”<sup>73</sup> qualities of the title characters, and Juliet’s “naturalness”.<sup>74</sup>

The most important novelty in the interpretation of the roles is the age of the lovers; the fact that Latinovits plays an adolescent boy, and Ruttkai initially plays a shy child, later a “lively [...], courageous” young woman. “However, her performance had a slightly more mature feminine tone than we would expect from a teenage girl, and in this respect there was a certain – constant, though barely noticeable – difference in tone.”<sup>75</sup> The critic is quite right in saying that Romeo is “younger and more playful” (Latinovits<sup>76</sup> was three years younger than Ruttkai. On both occasions, the play was performed in Dezső Mészöly’s translation.

The stage performance “exudes the atmosphere of the Italian Renaissance”, not of northern Italy, but rather that of Calabria, a thousand kilometres further south, where the sun is scorching.<sup>77</sup> According to critics, the performance is “artistically beautiful”,<sup>78</sup> consistent and fast-paced.<sup>79</sup> Várkonyi’s Verona is the Verona of fairy-tale everyday life – where Montague can sit on the stone steps<sup>80</sup> and where orange sellers bustle about – imbued with the cheerfulness, humanity and humour

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<sup>73</sup> SY, “*Romeo és Júlia*” [“*Romeo and Juliet*”], *Film, Theatre, Music*, 19 May 1961, 37.

<sup>74</sup> FENDRIK Ferenc, “Budapest hullámhosszán” [“On the wavelength of Budapest”], *Népszabadság*, 30 May 1961, 8.

<sup>75</sup> András LUKÁCSY, “A Rádiókészülék mellől” [“From the Radio”], *Élet és Irodalom*, 19 May 1961, 10.

<sup>76</sup> SY, “*Romeo*”, 37.

<sup>77</sup> Béla MÁTRAJ-BETEGH, “*Rómeó és Júlia* a Vígszínházban” [“*Romeo and Juliet* at the Vígszínház”], *Magyar Nemzet*, 27 January 1963, 9.

<sup>78</sup> György HÁMOS, “*A Romeo és Júlia* a Vígszínházban” [“*Romeo and Juliet* at the Vígszínház”], *Népszabadság*, 31 January 1963, 8.

<sup>79</sup> Iván SÁNDOR, “*Rómeó és Júlia* a Vígszínházban – Shakespeare tragédiája a Vígszínházban” [“*Romeo and Juliet* at the Vígszínház – Shakespeare’s tragedy at the Vígszínház”], *Film, Színház, Muzsika*, 25 January 1963, 3. Gábor ANTAL, “*A ‘Romeo és Júlia’ a Vígszínházban*” [“*Romeo and Juliet*’ at the Vígszínház”], *Esti Hírlap*, 19 January 1963, 2.

<sup>80</sup> MÁTRAJ-BETEGH, “*Romeo...*”, 9.

of everyday life. Rudolf Láng's costumes are characterised by unexpected simplicity, lack of ornamentation and dull colours: Várkonyi's request was that Juliet's clothes should be as simple as Cinderella's.<sup>81</sup> Juliet wears pink and grey, while Romeo appears at the ball in a morning gown: all of this emphasises everyday life and simplicity.<sup>82</sup> The set is also simple, consisting of walls with unfinished surfaces, slats and rags, giving it a modern feel; the designer used the technique of tachism;<sup>83</sup> at the same time, it depicts a real cityscape, with stone steps, a loggia, a fountain, curtains to create new and new locations<sup>84</sup> – in a total of 22 scenes.<sup>85</sup> The revolving stage also moves frequently, but József Cselényi's space lends itself to constant movement, with critics praising Ágnes Roboz's choreography<sup>86</sup> along with the fencing scenes rehearsed by Rudolf Kárpáti.<sup>87</sup>

There is a great deal of movement and action on stage, with the direction striving for both naturalness in execution<sup>88</sup> and artistry in the actors' movement, supported by choreographic solutions.<sup>89</sup> However, when the love story begins, the

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<sup>81</sup> Éva LELKES, "A Rómeó és Júlia jelmezeiről" ["On the costumes of *Romeo and Juliet*"], *Film, Színház, Muzsika*, 22 February 1963, 17.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Judit NAGY, "A díszlettervezés: dramaturgia – Cselényi József a *Rómeó és Júlia* színpadképéről" ["Set design: dramaturgy – József Cselényi on the stage design of *Romeo and Juliet*"], *Film, Theatre, Music*, 12 April 1963, 16.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> István KARÁCSONYI, "Gondolatok Cselényi József színpadképeiről" ["Thoughts on József Cselényi's Stage Designs"], *Engineer of the Future*, 4 February 1963, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. HÁMOS, "A *Romeo*...", 8.; MÁTRAJ-BETEGH, "Rómeó...", 9.; András RAJK, "Rómeó...", 7.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. MÁTRAJ-BETEGH, "Romeo...", 9.; András RAJK, "Romeo...", 7.; F. F., "Olimpiai bajnok a színházi próbán" ["Olympic champion at theatre rehearsal"], *Esti Hírlap*, 3 December 1962, 2.

<sup>88</sup> See András RAJK, "Rómeó és Júlia a Vígszínházban" ["*Romeo and Juliet* at Vígszínház"], *Népszava*, 27 January 1963, 7.

<sup>89</sup> See Miklós LENGYELFI, "Rómeó és Júlia a Vígszínházban" ["*Romeo and Juliet* at Vígszínház"], *Táncművészeti Értsítő* 1, 1. sz. (1963): 112–115.



spectre of death immediately accompanies it: the air turns cold the moment Romeo and Juliet meet at the ball:

“Zoltán Várkonyi sets the tone of the tragedy with a fleeting moment of acting at the very beginning of the performance: at the ball, where Romeo and Juliet are still merely playing carefree and happy, and where previous productions had generally succeeded only in conveying idyll in Romeo’s first encounter with Juliet. It is true that the two actors, seized by an exceptional moment of inspiration, experience this encounter with a thrilling sense of foreboding; yet the decision to steer the play decisively in the direction of tragedy undoubtedly belongs to the director. It is impossible here to describe in detail the meticulous acting that shapes this brief moment – but its effect is unmistakable. When the hands of the tragic lovers meet for the first time, they are already cold with rapture, excitement, and the sudden recognition of fate, as if all their blood had rushed to their hearts; as if they were already in the crypt, clasped together for the final time, forever. At least, this is how the moment is experienced by the spectator – and from that point onward, whenever the two meet, this chilling premonition breathes frost into their flames.”<sup>90</sup>

In Shakespeare’s play Romeo and Juliet’s first and last encounters (in the ball scene and the end scene with the nightingale, and also at the end of the balcony scene), very precisely determine the direction (and power) of their gazes, prescribing that the actors playing Romeo and Juliet should look at and analyse each other as a form of action, or at least as the focus of their attention. Although we do not know what happened on stage, it is certain that, as in almost every performance, when the two actors looked at each other, it had a “chilling” effect on the audience. Both Ruttkai’s and Latinovits’s acting is sensitive

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<sup>90</sup> MÁTRAJ-BETEGH, “*Romeo...*”, 9.



to humour. In the balcony scene, for example, Romeo hangs from the balcony for almost the entire time.<sup>91</sup>

Várkonyi composed powerful images: before Juliet drinks the sleeping potion, the Nurse brings in her wedding dress: it is as if a white ghost were in the room.<sup>92</sup> And in the crypt scene, there is the most unexpected twist: Romeo dies standing up, the poison acts so quickly: his arm gets caught in one of the rings of Juliet's coffin, and this pulls him back, holding him up. Juliet embraces him, dies, slides down his body, and wraps her legs around him. Thus, the final image in which the lovers could be seen, was much more about permanence than death in its statuesque quality.<sup>93</sup>

The reviews also register the lead characters' shifts in age: within the few hours of the performance, the Shakespearean story unfolds in such a way that the figures embodied by the two title characters seem to age by years. The actors thus traverse a wide span of lived time within the roles; Zoltán Latinovits's "adolescent Romeo," for instance, matures into a man,<sup>94</sup> Ruttkai's "fiery girl has matured into a woman"<sup>95</sup> – these are the observations of two separate critics. This development is also reflected in their movement: Latinovits's gestures slow down, become heavier, gradually leading to stillness at the end of the performance.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Memoirs of György Spiró. Sándor SZÉNÁSI, *Három az igazság* [Three is the Truth], radio programme, 5 August 2024. <https://www.klubradio.hu/archivum/harom-az-igazsag-2024-augusztus-05-hetfo-1500-42860>. Last accessed: 7 January 2025.

<sup>92</sup> MÁTRAJ-BETEGH, "Romeo...", 9

<sup>93</sup> HÁMOS, "A *Romeo*...", 8. The closing crypt image, with Romeo standing with his arms outstretched and Juliet at his feet, evokes Renaissance paintings depicting Christ crucified. HERMANN István, "Rómeó és Júlia a Vígszínházban" [*Romeo and Juliet at Vígszínház*], *Élet és Irodalom*, 26 January 1963, 8.

<sup>94</sup> SÁNDOR, "Romeo...", 3–4.

<sup>95</sup> TREWIN, J.C., "Az újrafelfedezett Shakespeare" ["The Rediscovered Shakespeare"], *Film, Színház, Muzsika*, 29 March 1963, 10–11. 11.

<sup>96</sup> LENGYELFI, "Rómeó...", 114.

One review states this outright: the two actors speak and move differently from all the others; they are the only ones who share a “truly human” relationship – with each other alone.<sup>97</sup> Várkonyi thus sharply separates the two title characters and their scenes from the realistic, humanist environment. In his staging, it appears that neither the feud between the families nor Tybalt constitutes a threatening, chilling force; rather, it is the relationship between the two lovers themselves – in which death is present from the very beginning. The reviews alternately rank Éva Ruttkai’s or Zoltán Latinovits’s performance more highly, offering detailed analyses of both. Critics for *Magyar Nemzet*, *Népszabadság*, and *Népszava* tended to favour Latinovits, while Trewin (an English critic) or a reviewer for *Munka* praised Ruttkai more highly.<sup>98</sup>

Ruttkai is criticised for the “unevenness” of her performance,<sup>99</sup> for her “overripeness”,<sup>100</sup> while Latinovits is criticised for his diction.<sup>101</sup> Ruttkai’s Juliet is too “realistic”,<sup>102</sup> while others consider this a virtue: she is “simple” and “thoughtful”.<sup>103</sup> Some say that Latinovits’s performance is not as mature, but “it is amazing how much he has developed in such a short time”,<sup>104</sup> while at the same time it is clearly his performance that causes the greater sensation: the art of his movements is surprising, and his sensitivity and philosophical nature remind many of

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<sup>97</sup> György HÁMOS, “*Romeo...*”, 8.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Tamás GARAI, “Színházi level a korszerűségről” [“Theatre Letter on Modernity”], *Munka*, 1 February 1963, 24–25.

<sup>99</sup> HÁMOS, “*Romeo...*”, 8.

<sup>100</sup> GARAI, “Színházi level a korszerűségről” [“Theatre Letter on Modernity”], 25.

<sup>101</sup> HÁMOS, “*Romeo...*”, 8.; MÁTRAI-BETEGH, “*Romeo...*”, 9.

<sup>102</sup> HÁMOS, “*Romeo...*”, 8.; SÁNDOR, “*Romeo...*”, 4.

<sup>103</sup> GYÁRFÁS Miklós, “Júlia és Rómeó” [*Juliet and Romeo*], *Film, Színház, Muzsika*, 1 February 1963, 5.; CSERÉS Miklós, “Rómeó és Júlia – Shakespeare felújítása a Vígszínházban” [*Romeo and Juliet* – Shakespeare’s revival at Vígszínház], *Ország-Világ*, 6 February 1963, 19.

<sup>104</sup> ANTAL, “A *Romeo...*”, 2.

Hamlet.<sup>105</sup> Critics are also impressed by the energy and passion of his performance: “You could burn porcelain in Romeo’s heart, the way he [...] heats it up.”<sup>106</sup> Mária Sulyok’s portrayal of the nurse is praised especially for the moment when she discovers the seemingly dead Juliet.<sup>107</sup> Gyula Benkő’s monologue as Mab is not impressive, but his death scene wins the critics’ approval.<sup>108</sup> Károly Verebes and Antal Farkas in the smaller roles are also highlighted.<sup>109</sup>

It is clear, then, that the critics’ problem with Ruttkai’s Juliet is that she is too simple and too feminine. The latter could even apply to the actress’s age, but the practice in the capital at the time was to cast actresses around the age of thirty to play the role of a 14-year-old: Alice Fényes was 26 in 1946, Klári Tolnay was 39 in 1953, and Mari Töröcsik was 36 in 1971 (just like Ruttkai in 1963). Thus, when the role is described as overly mature, this should be understood primarily as referring to its interpretation; and “womanly” simply means that Juliet appears already arrived, fully formed. She is not the type of woman who conquers the hearts of men, nor is she a young girl eager to please. After all, in Act II, Scene 3, she marries.

The English critic was impressed by the actress’s versatility, whereas the expectations of many Hungarian critics suggest that they imagined Juliet as less mature and wise, less sober, less reflective and logical, less simple – as if these qualities could not belong to a woman or girl in love. “She is dangerously unadorned,” wrote Miklós Gyárfás appreciatively of her performance. If we compare what was written about Juliet with,

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<sup>105</sup> HÁMOS, “A *Romeo...*”, 8.; MÁTRAI-BETEGH, “*Rómeó...*”, 9., GARAI, “Színházi level a korszerűségről” [“Theatre Letter on Modernity”], 25.

<sup>106</sup> MÁTRAI-BETEGH, “*Romeo...*”, 9.

<sup>107</sup> TREWIN, “Az újráfelfedezett Shakespeare” [“The Rediscovered Shakespeare”], 11.

<sup>108</sup> MÁTRAI-BETEGH, “*Romeo...*”, 9. György Pálos began rehearsing for the role, but had to give it up due to heart disease.

<sup>109</sup> For example, György HÁMOS, “*Romeo...*”, 8; RAJK, “*Romeo...*”, 7.

for instance, the reviews of her portrayal of Natasha, we find less enthusiasm here, and fewer references to the femininity articulated through her role as Juliet.<sup>110</sup> Critics responded less favourably to Juliet than to Natasha; they were less receptive to her as a woman. Yet the reviews rarely examine why this was the case, or what kind of acting statement lay behind it – for instance, the fact that Juliet’s attention is directed exclusively toward Romeo.<sup>111</sup> The audio recording from two years before supports the observation that Romeo and Juliet speak to each other differently than they do to others. Juliet’s shifts are easy to observe: the way she feels at ease in Romeo’s presence or when she is alone, and the way she seeks to adapt to her surroundings everywhere else, attempting to behave as a well-bred, polite young woman. (This contrast is evident, for example, in Act II, Scene 6 of *Romeo and Juliet*, in the difference between how she speaks to Romeo and how she addresses Friar Laurence.) The rhythm is also striking. Both Romeo and Juliet are quick and impatient: at the moment of the wedding, Romeo comically rushes the “amen,” while Juliet shows little surprise when, upon waking, she finds Romeo dead and, without hesitation, hastens after him (Act V, Scene 3: “I will not away.”)

In her statements, Ruttkai emphasized Juliet’s courage and strength.<sup>112</sup> “Richard III decided to be a villain, Hamlet de-

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<sup>110</sup> “This is how Tolstoy must have imagined the heroine of his novel. She is as if she were always surrounded by flower petals; fragile, delicate, feminine... Natasha is still almost a child, but her movements already reveal the woman, the woman in love. When she first offers her hand to Andrei Bolkonsky to kiss, this simple, self-evident gesture radiates virginal innocence and unnoticed, blossoming love.” Imre DEMETER, “Natasa: Ruttkai Éva” [“Natasa: Éva Ruttkai”], *Lá-nyok, asszonyok*, 11 May 1960, 40.

<sup>111</sup> Perhaps Miklós Gyárfás is the only one who does so, Miklós GYÁRFÁS, “Júlia és Rómeó” [Juliet and Romeo], 5.

<sup>112</sup> A.: “Szeretem Annát – Beszélgetés Ruttkai Évával” [“I Love Anna – Conversation with Éva Ruttkai”], *Ország-Világ*, 2 December 1964, 19.]

cided not to be one. Juliet decides to love Romeo.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, she considers it important that Juliet is not swayed by expectations. She played the role wearing her own hair, using far less dye than usual<sup>114</sup> in order to underscore that, for her, the story was not a costume drama.<sup>115</sup>

In the summer of 1964, the production was unexpectedly removed from the programme following Zoltán Latinovits’s heart attack; by that time, it had already been performed more than seventy times.<sup>116</sup> Latinovits did not return to the stage until October, and Romeo was not performed again.

The fact that *Romeo and Juliet* has been fixed in collective memory as an iconic production in the history of the Vígszínház is also due to developments that followed it. Over the subsequent decade and a half, Éva Ruttkai and Zoltán Latinovits, both among the most frequently employed actors in the country, were partners in life as well as in public perception. Through their stage and film pairings, audiences were able to follow what became the greatest love story of contemporary Hungarian theatre. Latinovits’s early death retrospectively reinforced the tragic dimension of the fate of the lovers of Verona in the memory of the production itself.

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<sup>113</sup> Judit NAGY, „Három hónap, három szerep” [“Three Months, Three Roles”]. *Film, Színház, Muzsika* [*Film, Theatre, Music*], 16 November 1962, 11.]

<sup>114</sup> “...alig használ festéket” [“...she hardly uses any makeup”] Larissa BUHARCHEVA, „Szovjet szemmel – Egy csokor rózsa”, [“Through Soviet Eyes – A Bouquet of Roses,”] *Szovjet Híradó*, 24 May 1964, 3.

<sup>115</sup> NAGY, „Három hónap...”, [“Three Months...”], 11.

<sup>116</sup> Zoltán LATINOVITS–Éva RUTTKAI, *Újvidéki est*, 1969. Hungaroton, LPX 14080-81, 1987.

*The summation of a career*

It is not the critics who perceived Éva Ruttkai's 1986 portrayal of Claire Zachanassien as a summation of her career, but rather the creators of the production.<sup>117</sup> A recording of the performance of Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* has been preserved. Accordingly,<sup>118</sup> the following analysis examines Ruttkai's performance on the basis of this material. Methodologically, the analysis follows Philther's criteria for the study of acting: it considers the context of the performance, its dramaturgy, its relationship to the direction and to the other actors, its the visual dimensions – movement and costume – and, finally, the overall impact of the performance.

*The context of the performance on stage:*

This production marked Éva Ruttkai's final appearance on the main stage of Vígszínház, on 16 January 1986 (her last stage appearance took place in April at the Vigadó).<sup>119</sup> It was also her first collaboration with director Péter Gothár. During the same season, she also performed in *Tango* and *The Encounter* at the Pesti Theatre. In the spring, she began rehearsals for *Devils* with Tamás Ascher, but she was not present at the September premiere.<sup>120</sup> By the winter of 1986, audiences attending *The Visit* became aware that the actress in the title role was seriously ill, although Ruttkai herself neither commented on her condition nor spoke about it. The play was first staged in Hungary in 1959, and this was the eighth production by Vígszínház theatre. Among these, the 1959 performance by Mária

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<sup>117</sup> Péter Gothár: *Az öreg hölgy látogatása* [*The Visit*], 1986. (Premiere: 16 January 1986.)

<sup>118</sup> OSzMI, Audiovizuális Archívum [Audiovisual Archive], 87.144.1.

<sup>119</sup> Olga Siklós: *Gyöngéd kötelék* [*Tender Bond*], 1986.

<sup>120</sup> Tamás Ascher: *Ördögök* [*Devils*], 1986. Éva Ruttkai died on the day of the premiere, 27 September.]

Sulyok was particularly memorable.<sup>121</sup> Ruttkai's portrayal is consciously measured against this tradition.<sup>122</sup>

*The dramaturgy and arc of the play*

Of the three-act play's total running time of approximately 135 minutes, the actors spend a total of approximately 80 minutes on stage. In the middle act, which lasts approximately 35 minutes, she sits above the stage in a balcony-like box, which is occasionally illuminated for a moment: although she only has a few minutes of dialogue, she is present throughout. In the other two acts, she plays for a total of approximately 56 minutes: she has three major scenes in the first act and two in the third, plus the finale. Her first appearance on stage and the moment she leaves the stage are emphatically solo performances without partners, speaking of the relationship between the actress and the place. Ten minutes into the performance, she pushes open the swinging door at the back left and runs onto the stage, immediately rushing forward to the front of the stage, paying

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<sup>121</sup> Ruttkai's face changes constantly in the role, she plays with lively, intense facial expressions. Mária Sulyok also considered a similar portrayal of Claire, but ultimately decided on a stiff, mask-like face: "I did real research on this face and posture. How can I make a living face so stiff and larval-like? I looked at Marlene Dietrich's film roles; she knew how to mysteriously mask her features with a beautiful stiffness. A seductively stiff one. There were other ideas circulating in the theatre regarding Claire's appearance. Under no circumstances should her appearance betray her devilish nature. She should be a simple, cheerful, perhaps even mischievous old lady. That way, it would be all the more shocking when the uninhibited murderer emerged from within her. However, István Kazán and I rejected this idea from the outset, as it would certainly have distorted the atmosphere of the entire drama. Claire must be played as Dürrenmatt created her in his writing. György SAS, "Sulyok Mária albumából 7" ["From Mária Sulyok's Album 7"], *Film, Színház, Muzsika* [*Film, Theatre, Music*], 31 January 1981, 15. In 2019, Barbara Hegyi once again plays Claire at the Vígszínház with a stiff face and a frighteningly cold exterior.

<sup>122</sup> SZEGŐ, "Egyre idegenebb a világ" ["The world is becoming increasingly alien"], 38.

no attention to the crowd of mainly men <sup>123</sup> gathered at the right edge of the stage. She scans the auditorium, looks outward, searching far into the house for Péter's barn and the forest. In other words, she immediately activates the entire space of the Vígszínház: the very first glance is directed toward the spectators seated furthest away. With this initial look, Claire's Güllen is anchored to the space of the Vígszínház itself – this entire space becomes the space of her past. All 1,025 spectators are encompassed within this personal, remembered space, not only the stage.

Two hours and twenty minutes later at the end of the performance, she crosses the now-empty stage alone, wearing a coat. She looks downward, notices something on the floor, steps on it, and tries to smooth it out or smear it away with her foot, to erase it. She presses down repeatedly, drags her foot across the stage; as she moves, the scraping turns into stamping, and she pounds the boards from end to end. All the while she is on the verge of tears, emitting a sound closer to whimpering than to speech. Then she lifts her head, puts on her hat, and exits directly into the wings. In Péter Gothár's staging, Claire's entrance and exit are moments of solitude for Ruttkai. In both emphasized moments, she forges a relationship with space itself: first with the auditorium, then with the wooden boards of the stage. This spatial dialogue forms the frame of her portrayal of Claire.

*The relationship between the play and the staging:*  
Gothár stages the performance around Ruttkai:

“Éva Ruttkai was already an actress when they took us to the theatre as a class. I remember where she sat on stage, but she doesn't remember where I sat down below, and

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<sup>123</sup> There are some women present, but until the 10th minute, only the men's voices can be heard; only the men have lines, so it seems like a crowd of men.



it's difficult to grapple with a symbol, and it's difficult for a person to accept themselves as a symbol. Éva and I decided that she had to remain in this play as I knew her. This was the guiding principle, because what happens to her in the play happens to her at the age of 16, according to the play, and she tries to act as if she has remained 16 years old. For me, this is the basic law of theatre, that everyone is a little infantile."<sup>124</sup>

Trauma preserves the old lady in darkness, tragedy, and loneliness – marked by the death of the other and by finality itself. Claire's life was shattered by Ill's betrayal, and the old woman now reshapes the external world to that decisive moment, endlessly replaying the loss of her love. In doing so, she embodies two ages at once: she performs both the sixteen-year-old girl and the hundred-year-old woman simultaneously. In line with the actor-director's intention, the theatrical, spectacular, sensual solution to this is for the actress to play and distort her former self.<sup>125</sup>

"You are mistaken if you think I have returned to Gullen. I never left it. Everything that has happened to me since my childhood has come to nothing. Every smallest moment of my former life in Gullen has entered my blood forever. At heart I am still the same Claire I was when I was sixteen..."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Tv1, *Studio 86* interview with director Péter Gothár and Éva Ruttkai. Manuscript, Vígyszínház archive.

<sup>125</sup> SZEGŐ, "Egyre idegenebb a világ" ["The world is becoming increasingly alien"], 38.

<sup>126</sup> Marianne GÁCH, "Kimondani a kendőzetlen igazságot – Gách Marianne beszélgetése Ruttkai Évával" ["Speaking the Unvarnished Truth – Marianne Gách in Conversation with Éva Ruttkai"], *Film, Színház, Muzsika*, [*Film, Theatre, Music*], 17 May 1986, 8.

Thus, in Péter Gothár's staging, Dürrenmattian mercilessness lies less in the cruelty of revenge than in the inexorability of time and the passing of love, in the impossibility of coming to terms with this – and in the extent to which a world purchasable by money can do little more than serve as a backdrop to it all.

Claire, while soberly and without illusion calculating everything, preserves a childlike cheerfulness and an unrestrained love of life: she smokes, dresses in pink and bows, marries and divorces, marries and divorces again, and takes pleasure in, even entertains herself by playing out Alfred Ill's life.

A sharply defined counterpoint to this theatricality is Dezső Garas's spare, unadorned performance as Ill, conceived as a vulnerable, powerless everyman. In Gothár's staging, the people of Güllen appear grey and irresolute.

*The tools of acting:*

In the role of Clara, Éva Ruttkai thus mobilises the tools of her own former ingénue persona, transforming the old lady's anticipation of Ill's death into a kind of amorous longing. She smiles frequently, laughs expansively, and watches Ill with near adoration. Then, suddenly, her gaze and her voice harden.

In her first scene, she divides her attention solely between the auditorium and her husband until Ill suddenly calls out, "Clara!" At this, she turns to look at him abruptly (with Dezső Garas standing on stage right, on the same level), as if she had known all along that Ill was there. She looks at him with a smile – curious, yet pitying – taking him in, looking him over and down, seeing him from the outside, without seeking to establish contact, simply observing him. A few minutes later she looks at him in the same way, head slightly tilted, asking, "*Did you think of me, too?*" But the moment Ill begins to respond, she turns away distractedly, turning her back on him. In doing so, she renders the status-based and relational content of *looking down* visible through movement and spatial reorientation, in a manner legible even from a distance – not only through a

close-up of the gaze. Immediately afterward, she turns back again, smiling.

The (admittedly simplified) meaning of looking and turning away applies to the performance as a whole and leads back to its fundamental propositions: Claire both loves and despises the same person at once. Turning her back likewise carries a double meaning: (1) it is not equally easy for her at every moment to watch Ill lie to her; and (2) it signals her status with uncompromising clarity – she is the one who asks questions, she is the one who commands, and she is the one who controls the communication.

Throughout the performance, she boldly incorporates comic elements. As the recording shows, she wins the audience's sympathy as early as the first scene, when she abruptly cuts short the Mayor's presumably tedious welcoming speech – still inaudible at that point, drowned out by the noise of the train – by means of a large, quick gesture: “I must thank you, Mister Mayor, for your fine speech.”

At the end of the first act, before announcing the ultimatum, she sits behind the enormous table placed at centre stage, facing the audience, and eats while listening to the Mayor. She eats at extraordinary speed, her gaze fixed solely on her plate and never on the people of Güllen – only occasionally glancing up for a brief moment when she hears a particularly blatant lie or piece of nonsense. When the audience laughs during the performance, she looks out at them and exchanges a smile, maintaining contact and making them her accomplices.

She performs realistic actions – eating, cracking seeds, smoking – without exaggerating the size of her gestures; instead, she increases their frequency. She moves more often, raises her fork or cigarette to her mouth more and more often. Within the temporal scale of the large stage, she accelerates and condenses everyday action into her act, intensifying it during performance time.

*Visuals (movement, costume):*

The costume likewise reflects an absurdly heightened infantilism: the old lady appears in pale pink, adorned with pearl jewellery and almost doll-like makeup. She does not only wish to be young, but also idyllic and fairy-tale-like. In the second act, she wears an enormous bow; at the beginning of the third act, a bridal gown. At one point she places her foot on the step of her sedan chair and spits tobacco. Later, wearing a large hat and a purple dress, she bids farewell to Ill on the bench, and she enters her final scene dressed in black.

Ruttkai conceals her own physical condition yet also uses it – and even parodies it – in her performance. In the play, Claire has an artificial leg and one of her hands is made of ivory. Ruttkai demonstrates the artificial leg with her left leg, at times moving it in an especially stiff, dance-like manner: the leg bends and turns, but only intermittently, and more stiffly and slowly than the other. She conveys the old lady's immobility through hyperactivity, speed, and freshness; for example, in her first scene she flirts with her prosthesis. She also gestures frequently with her left hand – pointing, keeping it almost constantly in motion, fluttering, hiding her own paralysed right arm in a feather muff in the first part. In the forest scene, when she points to a deer, she briskly pulls her right hand out of the muff with her left hand and lifts it high, holding it extended for a long moment – she is able to point with her finger – then, after the gesture, she replaces it in the same way. She even bends down slightly in order to complete the movement in a sweeping, graceful arc. The playfulness of the gesture, its exaggerated trajectory and cheerful breadth, conceal its necessity: she cannot raise her arm in any other way. At the same time, however, there would be no obligation at all for her to use her paralysed arm in the performance. The moment of pointing at the deer can only be an instance of acting invention: a joke, a deception, an illusion – in which for a second, as if by magic, even the paralysed arm becomes functional. It comes to life on stage, as if it were alive. And it can then be put away again in

full view, before the gaze of a thousand spectators: the movement simultaneously acknowledges playfulness and disability in the open.

In the dining scene, she likewise conceals her paralysed hand by foregrounding it and playing with it. While speaking, she pulls the glove off her intact left hand with her teeth, finger by finger. She holds the fork in her left hand and fits the knife into her right; there is only enough strength in that hand to make tiny cuts, so that the knife occasionally strikes the plate. The rhythm of the knife hitting the plate becomes a form of play: it expresses Claire's implacability and indifference to events. No matter how hard the people of Güllen try to entertain her, she taps the knife against the plate at a steady pace, as if drumming on the table out of boredom, thereby unsettling those who approach her.

In her final meeting with Ill, her right hand is no longer covered by anything; it remains motionless, even when, with her left arm, which describes a wide arc, as if to embrace him, she suddenly seizes Ill by the neck and pulls him so tightly toward herself with her elbow that she begins to choke him. Her physical strength and dexterity, even with one hand, are greater than the man's.

*Impact:*

In collective memory, this performance brings Ruttkai's acting career to a close. Critics register and highlight her mode of acting and interpretation that is at once summative, opening towards new directions. In this reading, femininity, as a promise, becomes a tragicomic and horrific instrument in *The Visit*.<sup>127</sup> Ruttkai conceives Claire as a woman frozen in girl-

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. "Unlike most of the company, Éva Ruttkai does not perform in the conversational style that unfortunately characterises this production by the Vígszínház." P. MÜLLER Péter, "Feloldozatlanul – Az öreg hölgy látogatása a Vígszínházban" ["Unresolved – The Visit to the Vígszínház Theatre"], *Színház [Theatre]* 19, no. 4 (1986): 11–13, 14.

hood, paralysed, in whose presence the past is visible at every moment.

### *Donning the hat*

The way Éva Ruttkai, in 1986, as Claire Zachanassien, puts on her hat as a final gesture before leaving the stage – in the very last seconds of the play and the performance – is a precise evocation of Gizi Bajor's gesture from 1950, a movement that was noted and considered significant by the theatrical profession at the time.

This is the case even though the two ways of putting on a hat differ completely. Ruttkai's hat is small, almost bowler-like; she does not tip it, does not greet anyone, she is not ironic. She simply puts it on – and with the same movement raises her gaze from the floor – then simply exits, with her head held high. Bajor's hat, by contrast, was enormous, and even putting it on must have taken several seconds, requiring a broader gesture. In fact, she did take her leave with it – from the servants in the play, and in performance, from the audience. Yet in both roles, the actress must depart as a solitary, guilty, humiliated, and exposed woman. The hat signifies rank, status, bearing, elegance, the observance of decorum and convention; it restores order and confers dignity.

Even if the realist acting style and costume concept of the 1950 might have prescribed the wearing of a hat (though Gellért's notes make clear that this was not the case), the 1986 production certainly did not require it. Claire could have left without a hat, or she could have remained on stage as the lights faded. Yet for Gothár and/or Ruttkai it was clearly important that the actress should leave the stage in the final scene. And if she leaves – if she exits the space of play – this must be articulated in some way.

The final scene, marked by the stamping of the stage boards, just as the opening scene involved the activation of

the Vígszínház audience – appears, from the vantage point of 2024, forty years later, less as a dramatic gesture than as a performative act. If we interpret the stamping on the floorboards at the spot where Ill's body had lain, as the actress's personal farewell to the stage boards themselves, then the donning of the hat and the exit may readily be read as a reenactment of Gizi Bajor's departure.

Needless to say, nothing characterises acting more than its movement between the dramatic and the performative. The hat is also part of the dramatic illusion: the act of donning it signals that the character's life continues beyond the stage, that she is setting out not merely a few steps away, but on a long journey.

### Third case study:

#### THE WORDS OF ÁRPÁD ÓDRY

*“Photographs of the leading tragediennes of the last century may elicit a cheerful smile – or at least a shake of the head in disbelief – from people today. For an actor to be able to rise again, or to continue living beyond death together with his magnificent creations, it would not be enough for the miracle-working power of technology alone to resurrect him: his own audience would also have to rise again or continue to live on – and that is impossible. We would have to listen to him with our grandfathers’ ears and watch him with our grandmothers’ eyes in order to grasp the credibility, naturalness, and truth of an actor’s creation that belonged to the age for which he “held up a mirror.” Among creative artists, the actor is the one who cannot appeal to posterity and will not be able to do so even when the joyfully heralded age of television arrives. And yet – the actor’s immortality is not a mere fiction, not pure imagination. The great actor possesses a limited, narrower, enclosed, but nonetheless secure immortality – yet this exists, so to speak, only in literature, through the work of the creative critic.”<sup>1</sup>*

From 1865 onwards, the official and professional institution for teaching the art of acting and transmitting theatrical knowledge was what later became known as the University of Theatre and Film Arts.<sup>2</sup> Its stage – operating between 1959

<sup>1</sup> HEVESI Sándor, “Ódry Árpád” [“Árpád Ódry”], *Budapesti Szemle* 245, 715. sz. (1937): 313–328, 315–316.

<sup>2</sup> Színház- és Filmművészeti Egyetem, Budapest.



and 2021– bore the name of the former acting instructor and director Árpád Ódry.

The following chapter examines the oeuvre of Árpád Ódry, one of the earliest representatives in Hungary of an acting school that consciously sought naturalness in performance through disciplined craft and sustained effort. His career spanned the turn of the century and the first decades of the twentieth century. I aim to highlight those characteristics and qualities of his acting and creative practice that did – or may have – exerted an influence on acting in the later twentieth century. In researching Ódry's acting portrait from a hundred years ago, the abundance of written sources is particularly striking. Accordingly, before turning to the specific features of his individual career and acting style, I will devote a few paragraphs to a more general discussion of acting practices of the period.

### *Sándor Hevesi and the tradition of discourse on acting*

In the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, Hungarian criticism and professional writing devoted extensive attention to actors, reporting on them in considerable detail. Critics did not confine themselves to a brief judgment of the leading or title roles in theatrical performances; they also attempted to describe the actors' modes of performance, addressing readers who had not been able to attend the theatre. Their primary aim was to register the effect of a performance: they often indulged in general expressions of admiration, but on many occasions they also described what the actor actually did in the role. That is, they singled out a characteristic moment of the acting, sought to connect physical action with its result, event with effect. From Sándor Petőfi's review, for example, we get to know that Gábor Egressy delivered Richard III's final monologue almost lying down, whispering it to a

chair after leaping from the bed and falling to the ground.<sup>3</sup> From the *Pesti Napló* we find out that Mari Jászai jumped for joy in the role of Electra when she recognised Orestes.<sup>4</sup> These acting ideas were inventions of the actors themselves. Before the emergence of directorial theatre, acting was regarded as entirely the work and responsibility of the individual performer. When Vörösmarty Mihály wrote theatre reviews, he expressed himself in a manner similar to that of later practising directors: he determined who was “good,” corrected emphases, and drew attention to technical errors and negligence.<sup>5</sup>

The truly thorough and noteworthy analyses of plays can be found in the writings of the first directors. György Molnár – the first theatre director to consider ensemble acting important, and thus considered to be the first Hungarian theatre company director<sup>6</sup> – analyses dramatic texts, Shakespeare or Molière, as a matter of course, while reviewing the performances of the actors he has seen playing the leading roles: Rossi’s,<sup>7</sup> Dawison’s,<sup>8</sup> Dessoir’s,<sup>9</sup> Salvini’s<sup>10</sup> or Prielle Kornélia’s. He interprets and

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<sup>3</sup> PETŐFI Sándor, [C. n.], “Nemzeti Színház” [“National Theatre”], *Életképek*, 1847. február 20. 248–252. 252.

<sup>4</sup> Details from Dr. Landau’s Berlin correspondent column.[ N. n.] , “Jászai Mari és a berliniek” [“*Mari Jászai* and the Berliners”], *Pesti Napló*, 22 September 1891, 8–9, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Mihály VÖRÖSMARTY, *Complete Works 14, Dramaturgiai lapok – Elméleti töredékek, színbírálatok*, [Dramaturgical Notes – Theoretical Fragments, Theatre Reviews] ed. Károly Horváth–Dezső TÓTH, s.a.r. Andor SOLT (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Antal NÉMETH, ed., *Színészeti Lexikon II* [Dictionary of Acting II.] (Budapest: Győző Andor kiadása, 1930), 557–558.

<sup>7</sup> Ernesto Rossi (1827–1896) was an Italian actor, memorable for his portrayal of Hamlet. His studies and autobiography have also been published.

<sup>8</sup> Bogumil Dawison (1818–1872), Polish-German Shakespearean actor, was a member of the Burgtheater for a time.

<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Dessoir (1810–1874) was a German actor. He was also the leading actor at the German theatre in Pest for two years (1837–39). He is famous for his role as Othello.

<sup>10</sup> Tommaso Salvini (1829–1915), Italian actor, often praised for his intellect and physicality, performed in tragedies and comedies in Eu-

evaluates both their conception of the roles and their delivery.<sup>11</sup> The international range of names is self-evident in the cultural life of the period: until the First World War, Budapest was a world theatre city in which European star actors appeared regularly as guest performers. One of the most influential of such guest appearances was that of Adelaide Ristori in 1856,<sup>12</sup> and critics – Pál Gyulai, Jókai – gave advice to Hungarian actors based on her performance.<sup>13</sup> Ira Aldridge<sup>14</sup> also performed

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rope and America. His famous roles included Othello and Iago. His son Gustavo Salvini (1859–1930) was also an actor.

<sup>11</sup> For example, he condemns Rossi for portraying Lear in a dressing gown and slippers, almost like a grandfather in a comedy, and Devrient and the elder Lendvay for playing Othello as a seductive Don Juan, in contrast to Salvini, who remains modest and simple. György MOLNÁR, *Shakespeare's Tragedy of King Lear and its Performance* (Szeged: Gusztáv Burger and Co., 1885), 31, and György MOLNÁR, *Shakespeare's Tragedy of Othello and its Performance* (Szeged: Gusztáv Burger and Co., 1885), 17–18. The tradition of Molnár's descriptions was continued in the 20th century by Antal Németh, who prepared so-called director's books during his productions: as a preliminary study for the performances, he summarised how the given role had been played throughout Europe up to that point.

<sup>12</sup> Adelaide Ristori (1822–1906) was an Italian actress who appeared primarily in tragedies.

<sup>13</sup> "Our artists must learn to make careful use of the smallest poetic gestures that highlight the character's personality and inner emotions; not to let a single word be lost in the air, but to give it its true power and expression in facial expressions, movements and intonation; to devise movements appropriate to the situation, not only acting during speech, but empathising with the speaker; not to be frightened by the rapid transitions between contrasting emotions, to study the masterpieces of painters and sculptors and the greatest sculptor of all, nature, to reject the coldness that has become so common in recent times, which, although it suits our serious character and allows us to make fewer mistakes, does not really take us forward. In a word, fire! Fire! Fire! And to hell with that phlegm!" [Mór JÓKAI] Márton KAKAS, "Kakas Márton a színházban" ["Márton Kakas in the theatre"], *Vasárnapi Újság*, 30 November 1856, 422. On Ristori's guest performance, see DEMCSÁK Katalin, "Ristori vita. A tévedés köz-játéka" ["The Ristori Debate: The Public Performance of Error"], *Theatron* 2, no. 2 (2000): 3–8.

<sup>14</sup> Ira Aldridge (1807–1867) was an American-British tragic actor.

in Pest in 1853 and 1858. Actors look to each other in general: Gábor Egressy travelled to Paris to see Rachel<sup>15</sup> perform. After the turn of the century, the tendency towards a loosening of role specialisation affected not only Hungarian theatre, but theatre throughout Europe; Italian *versatile* actors performed everything, in both tragedy and comedy.<sup>16</sup>

Pál Rakodczay, who, in addition to his practical work as a theatre director and occasional actor, was one of the first theatre critics. He published his writing on Mari Jászai in 1891, which was not a biography but a mimography: an analytical description of the actress, with the aim of capturing her performance.<sup>17</sup> Rakodczay was the first Hungarian author to place the actor at the centre of his research.<sup>18</sup>

Sándor Hevesi uses specific examples to illustrate the reforms of the new generation of Italian actors in his theoretical writings – Duse,<sup>19</sup> Gustavo Salvini, Ermete Zacconi,<sup>20</sup> Novelli<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Rachel (Elisabeth R. Félix, 1821–1858) was a French actress who recited classical tragedies naturally, “without singing”.

<sup>16</sup> ALPÁR Ágnes et al, „Francia és olasz vendégjátékok” [“French and Italian Guest Performances”], in *Magyar színháztörténet II. 1873–1920* [*Hungarian Theatre History II. 1873–1920*], ed. SZÉKELY György, ed. GAJDÓ Tamás, 428–444. (Budapest: Magyar Könyvklub– Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> RAKOCZAY Pál, *Jászai Mari mint Elektra* [*Mari Jászai as Elektra*], (Budapest: Singer és Wolfner, 1891).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. ALPÁR Ágnes et al, “Rakodczay Pál rendszere” [“Rakodczay Pál’s System”], in *Magyar színháztörténet II. 1873–1920* [*Hungarian Theatre History II. 1873–1920*], ed. SZÉKELY György, ed. GAJDÓ Tamás, 364–367. (Budapest: Magyar Könyvklub– Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Eleonora Duse (1859–1924) was an Italian actress who had the greatest influence on 20th-century European theatre. Her most famous roles were in plays by Dumas, Goldoni and Ibsen.

<sup>20</sup> Ermete Zacconi (1857–1948) was an Italian actor and representative of verismo: he used naturalistic devices such as epileptic seizures in *Othello*.

<sup>21</sup> Ermete Novelli (1851–1919) was an Italian actor, one of the most versatile, who had a great influence in both comic and dramatic roles.

– but also discusses in detail the performances of Garrick,<sup>22</sup> Talma,<sup>23</sup> Rachel, i.e. actors from the past whom he could only get to know through secondary accounts. Although works on acting had been published before, Hevesi's<sup>24</sup> *The Art of Acting* [*A színjátszás művészete*] is unique in the way it simultaneously presents and interrelates theory and practice. He wrote his book with practical aims in mind and, drawing on practical experience, analysed the work of actors. *A színjátszás művészete* [*The Art of Acting*] was published in 1908 – ten years before the founding of Konstantin Stanislavski's acting studio in Russia – and at the close of the Thália Society's three-year run.<sup>25</sup> The small volume records the experiences of the Thália Society: from it one can discern what kind of actor ideal this free theatre workshop – experimenting with new modes of performance and staging demanding literary works – sought to approach in the course of actor training, and what exercises and conceptual

<sup>22</sup> David Garrick (1716–1779) was an English actor and one of the most significant figures in modern theatre. A versatile actor, he rose to prominence in Shakespeare's *Richard III*. François Joseph Talma (1763–1826) was a French actor and the greatest of his era.

<sup>23</sup> He is famous for his costume reform: in the autumn of 1789, in the play *Brutus*, he played the role of Proculus the tribune in a Roman toga, with short hair and Roman footwear. He is famous for his costume reform: in the autumn of 1789, he played the role of Proculus the tribune in the play *Brutus* wearing a Roman toga, short hair and Roman footwear, and from then on he insisted on wearing costumes from the period of the play throughout his life.

<sup>24</sup> For Example, Gábor EGRESSY, *A színészet könyve* [*The Book of Acting*] (Budapest: Gusztáv Emich, 1866); Ede PAULAY, *A színészet elmélete. Iskolai kézikönyv a Színészeti Tanoda növendékei használatára* [*The Theory of Acting. School textbook for use by students of the Acting School*] (Pest: Sándor Kocsi, 1871); György MOLNÁR, *A színpad és titkai* [*The Stage and Its Secrets*] (Budapest: Müller, 1875); Pál RAKODCZAY, *The System of Acting* (Budapest: n.p., 1884).]

<sup>25</sup> Sándor HEVESI, *A színjátszás művészete* [*The Art of Acting*] (Budapest: Stampel Publishing House, Révai Brothers Literary Agency, 1908). New edition: Sándor HEVESI, *Az előadás, a színjátszás, a rendezés művészete*, [*The Art of Performance, Acting and Directing*], ed. Géza STAUD (Budapest: Gondolat, 1965).

principles the director and artistic leader proposed for beginning actors. Here, Sándor Hevesi, like Stanislavski, refers to Eleonora Duse<sup>26</sup> as an inspiring model, and for him also, the practice of acting (Duse's, for example) – inspires theory. Thus, at the turn of the century, directors engaged in performance theory, both at home and abroad, and sought to determine what makes a good and great actor.<sup>27</sup>

In his book, Sándor Hevesi treats acting as an autonomous art, not necessarily dependent on that of the dramatist. He identifies his earliest source of theatre theory as Lucian of Samosata, who wrote a dialogue on pantomime. For Hevesi, the aim of acting – following the definition of August Wilhelm Iffland – is the representation of the human being. He rejects the notion that acting is mere imitation or rather insists that everything depends on what we mean by “imitation,” since alongside observation he considers the role of imagination to be equally important. This effect can be achieved only through emotional involvement (*átélés*); such involvement is the condition of stage illusion. With regard to Denis Diderot's *Paradox of Acting*, he maintains that the question is posed incorrectly and on purely theoretical grounds: “the actor should preserve the utmost calm on a personal level, yet be as sensitive as possible in artistic terms.”<sup>28</sup> He addresses the notion of “external illusion” – mask, costume, and voice – as well as that of “internal illusion,” and turns to the question of tragic acting. Comedy, he argues, can be performed naturally more readily, whereas tragic acting is problematic: it becomes the site of a struggle between acting and declamation. He distinguishes between the lyric actor (for whom emotional involvement is easier) and the mimic actor (for whom the depiction of numerous external traits comes more easily), and later between the rhetorical ac-

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 295.

<sup>27</sup> STANISLAVSKI, Konstantin, *My Life in Art*, trans. G. IVANOV-MUMIJEV (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 351.

<sup>28</sup> HEVESI, *Az előadás, a színjátszás...*, [*The Performance, Acting...*] 188.

tor (for whom speech is easier) and the mimic actor (for whom movement is easier). He regards the mastery of performance – actor guidance – as the most important task of the director; his primary concern is the actor, and the question of stage naturalness occupies him above all.

“The conception that an actor must be natural is correct. But naturalness does not mean everydayness. Through the transformative vessel of art, the writer’s intention must be rendered natural. What we see on stage should be reality, and at the same time, art.”<sup>29</sup>

Sándor Hevesi’s statements on acting and his aesthetic views may be seen as the backdrop to Árpád Ódry’s portrait of the actor, as the two were colleagues at the National Theatre for two decades, belonged to the same generation, and influenced each other. A few weeks after Árpád Ódry’s death in 1937, Sándor Hevesi published a study on him in which he does not describe their friendship or his own grief but instead seeks to record Ódry’s path as an actor. In this text, he warns that images surviving of actors long deceased are unreliable – and that even recordings to be made in the future, with the advancement of technology, will likewise be unreliable –because they are incapable of conveying what is most essential in an actor’s work: his relationship with the audience. Only the spectators themselves can bear witness to the relationship between actor and audience; therefore, in every age, it is the responsibility of theatre criticism to document the actor and to make him the object of analysis (not of gossip).

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<sup>29</sup> SZÉKELY, Júlia, “Emlékezés Hevesi Sándor rendezői tanfolyamára” [“Memories of Sándor Hevesi’s Directing Course,”] *Színház* 6, no. 11. (1973): 15–21, 18.

*“Naturalness”: Ódry’s portrait as seen by his contemporaries*

In addition to Hevesi, numerous other contemporary writers wrote analytical or descriptive portraits and career sketches of Árpád Ódry, including Oszkár Ascher,<sup>30</sup> Sándor Galamb,<sup>31</sup> Dezső Kosztolányi,<sup>32</sup> Tivadar Rédey,<sup>33</sup> Aladár Schöpflin.<sup>34</sup> Many reviews offer detailed descriptions of individual performances or particular moments. Antal Németh discusses his portrayal of Ellák; Tivadar Rédey writes about his Othello; and Zoltán Szász about his Joseph II.<sup>35</sup> Dezső Szomory does not hide the fact that Ódry’s acting and character inspired him as a playwright,<sup>36</sup> while Rédey notes that he also had a major influence on analytical theatre criticism.<sup>37</sup> The monograph on

<sup>30</sup> Oszkár ASCHER, “Ódry Árpád” [“Árpád Ódry,”] in *Nagy magyar színészek [Great Hungarian Actors]*, ed. Miklós GYÁRFÁS AND Ferenc HONT, 305–320. (Budapest: Bibliotheca Kiadó, 1957).]

<sup>31</sup> Sándor GALAMB, “Ódry Árpád” [“Árpád Ódry,”] *Napkelet* 6, no. 2 (1928): 136–140.]

<sup>32</sup> Dezső KOSZTOLÁNYI, “Ódry Árpád” [“Árpád Ódry,”] in *Theatrical Evenings*, II. 532–535, ed. Pál RÉZ (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1978).

<sup>33</sup> Tivadar RÉDEY, *Ódry Árpád [Árpád Ódry]* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1942). <https://mek.oszk.hu/10400/10462/10462.htm>. Last accessed: 20 July 2022.

<sup>34</sup> SCHÖPFLIN Aladár, “Színházi figyelő – Ódry Árpád” [Theatre Reviewer – Árpád Ódry], *Nyugat* 23, no. 6 (1930): 478–479. Aladár SCHÖPFLIN, “Ódry Árpád” [“Árpád Ódry”], *Nyugat* 30, no. 5 (1937): 354–355.]

<sup>35</sup> For example, Antal NÉMETH, “Ódry Ellákja”, [“Ódry’s Ellák”], *Élet*, 6 May 1923, 194–196; Tivadar RÉDEY, “Ódry Árpád Othelloja” [“Árpád Ódry’s Othello”], *Napkelet* 7, no. 22 (1929): 688–691; Zoltán SZÁSZ, “Ódry mint II. József” [“Ódry as Joseph II”], *Színházi Élet*, 12 May 1918, 3–4.

<sup>36</sup> Dezső SZOMORY, “Józsefről, a színészekről, magamról” [“About József, the actors, and myself,”] *Színházi Élet*, 14 April 1918, pp. 2–3.

<sup>37</sup> “Theatre critics also felt that it was both cold and undeserved to confine themselves to a narrow field attached to the end of their reviews as an appendix and to offer praise without justification. Many returned to the largely forgotten tradition of analysing acting, the revival of which



Ódry, published in 1982 – forty-five years after his death – was written by Ilona Csillag, one of Antal Németh's students, who had completed a course in directing.<sup>38</sup>

When examining the work of an actor, the boundaries between character and performance can easily become blurred.<sup>39</sup> Contemporaries describe Árpád Ódry, or Odry, as blue-eyed, having a warm voice, a man of fanatical intensity: worldly, sure of movement, with a bald, gleaming forehead, fair-haired, steely, and hard.<sup>40</sup> According to Sándor Hevesi, it was in London, together with G. B. Shaw, that they discovered how accurately John Tanner's characterisation in *Man and Superman* suited him:

"There is something youthful and lanky about his figure, although he makes no effort whatsoever to produce a youthful effect. His black coat would suit a prime minister. [...] He speaks with remarkable fluency; he is restless and irritable (one need only observe his dilating nostrils, his restless blue eyes, which always open wider than necessary), and perhaps slightly mad. He is a sensitive, excitable, very serious man who exaggerates everything and who would be lost were it not for his sense of humour..."<sup>41</sup>

A few years later (the premiere took place in 1921 at the National Theatre), Ódry played the role of John Tanner for 99 nights, which is a significant number even in European

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we so often urge in theory, but which, let's face it, rarely provides an enticing and inspiring opportunity in practice." RÉDEY, "Ódry," n.n.

<sup>38</sup> CSILLAG Ilona, *Ódry Árpád* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1982).

<sup>39</sup> Older people still pronounce his name with a short o.

<sup>40</sup> Zsolt HARSÁNYI, "Shakespeare a Nyúorkban" ["Shakespeare in New York,"] *Színházi Élet*, 21 October 1917, 36–38, 36, and SZOMORY, "Józsefről..." ["About József..."] 3.

<sup>41</sup> HEVESI, "Ódry...", 321–322.

terms for a Shaw play.<sup>42</sup> Sándor Hevesi emphasises that although Árpád Ódry was indeed well suited to the role of the self-deprecating, intelligent, marriage-averse John Tanner, mere suitability would not in itself have guaranteed success. In a three-hour one-man performance – delivered with “wonderful fluency,” “chattering, firing, sparkling, and crackling” – the true achievement lay elsewhere: “Tanner’s pace of speech was the triumphant, jubilant victory that Ódry, the intellectual artist, won over Ódry, the man of heavy speech.”<sup>43</sup> Galamb concludes that only Ódry’s “galloping yet intelligible” speaking technique could have enabled this otherwise “unstageable” play to become a repertory piece in Budapest.<sup>44</sup> Pukánszky also believes that the performance is excellent and does not feel tiresome, thanks to Ódry’s “brilliant verbal flow”.<sup>45</sup>

“With sparkling high spirits, prodigal humour, and a crushing verbal torrent, John, battling the woman, swept through the comedy with a feminine torrent of words. He performed it as parody.”<sup>46</sup>

“[He delivered his lines] with slight modulations of pitch, with youthful, cheeky, and vigorous swagger; it was an overwhelming flood of speech – everyday, modern, agitational, and commanding. [...] As if he were playing a two-manual, six-register organ on only one

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<sup>42</sup> HEVESI, “Ódry...”, 323. Tanner John later became one of Miklós Gábor’s most successful roles. The reason for this may be Árpád Ódry’s first portrayal of Tanner John, as the play was later staged many times in Hungary, directed by Endre Gellért in 1948, Ottó Adám in 1963, and Miklós Gábor in 1985.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> GALAMB, “ÓDRY...”, 137.

<sup>45</sup> PUKÁNSZKY KÁDÁR Jolán, *A Nemzeti Színház százéves története I. [A Hundred Years of the Hungarian National Theatre, Vol. I.]* (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1940), 452.

<sup>46</sup> RÓZSA IGNÁCZ, “Prospero,” *Kortárs* 3, no. 10 (1959): 535–570, 540.

keyboard, and with only one hand. [...] The full orchestra of his voice resounded in heroic roles.”<sup>47</sup>

In the 1923 production of *Richard III*, for example, his vocal inflection was at first described as “harsh, hard, and coarsely rough, with a soldier-like edge.”<sup>48</sup> This performance was rewarded with the profession’s highest distinction: the Greguss Prize for the best performance of a five-year period, awarded by the Kisfaludy Society in 1927. The interpretation was regarded as a work of perfect artistry not only by Károly Szász, who presented the award,<sup>49</sup> but also by Aurél Kárpáti according to whom, Ódry’s Richard “brushed against the ultimate possibilities of art”.<sup>50</sup> The critics’ praise focused primarily on the fact that he captured not only the scheming nature of the role but also its “grandiose bloodlust [...] to perfection”; they also highlighted his ability to be both powerful and attractive in the role, with Richard’s “velvety, soft middle-range voice lending a dangerous human charm” to the character.<sup>51</sup> The repulsive-attractive duality was also characterised by his appearance: “The contrast between his interesting physique and his face is striking. He is stooped and lame, but his face is more beautiful than ugly”.<sup>52</sup> There are also opposite readings: “he was a muscular colossus with the movements of a tiger [...] the edges of his lips

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<sup>47</sup> IGNÁCZ, “Prospero,” 536.

<sup>48</sup> Sándor GALAMB, “Színházi szemle” [“Theatre Review”], *Napkelet* 5, no. 6 (1927): 567.

<sup>49</sup> [N.N.]. “A fejlődő Csontos, az intelligens Góth és a szépen játszó Törzs... Szász Károly kritikája a színészekről abból az alkalomból, hogy Ódry Árpád kapta a Greguss-díjat”, [“The developing Csontos, the intelligent Góth and the beautifully acting Törzs... Károly Szász’s critique of the actors on the occasion of Árpád Ódry receiving the Greguss Award”], *Magyar Hírlap*, 5 January 1928, 5.

<sup>50</sup> KÁRPÁTI Aurél, “III. Richárd, a Shakespeare-ciklus ötödik estje” [“Richard III, the fifth evening of the Shakespeare cycle”], *Pesti Napló*, 10 May 1927, 13.

<sup>51</sup> HEVESI, “Ódry...”, 317.

<sup>52</sup> GALAMB, “Színházi szemle” [“Theatre Review”], 567.

were completely covered with body paint, turning his mouth into a huge, cruel opening without a rim”.<sup>53</sup> *Richard III* is considered to be one of Ódry’s most elaborate and conscious role-playing performances.<sup>54</sup> A moment from the performance, in which the Duchess curses him, is described by Rózsa Ignác and serves as a concrete example:

“Ódry stood unperturbed amid the torrent of curses, like a bulletproof vest. But when his mother left, his eyes darted in two directions, his thin lips curled and he waved his hand... And he ran off to do ‘men’s work’: to kill, to destroy, to rule [...] to play out bloody reality as a monstrous boy-child.”<sup>55</sup>

In other words, Ódry emphatically (and presumably in a way never seen before) highlighted Richard III’s childlike traits and his relationship with his mother in his performance. The “passion escalating to the point of fainting”<sup>56</sup> also characterises “how” the actor interpreted his role. He is criticised only for his “excessively violent movements”,<sup>57</sup> but critics praise the moment when, as a sign of manly courage, he rushes at the halberdiers and beats the armed men with his bare hands.<sup>58</sup> Hevesi, Ódry’s director, compares the roles of Shaw and Shakespeare and concludes that Richard and John Tanner are

“...both intellectual and fanatical souls [...], fanaticism and fervour, exaggerated independence to the extreme,

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<sup>53</sup> IGNÁCZ, “Prospero,” 539.

<sup>54</sup> GALAMB, “Színházi szemle” [“Theatre Review”], 567.

<sup>55</sup> IGNÁCZ, “Prospero”, 539.

<sup>56</sup> SAS György, “Major Tamás albumából 4 – interjú” [“From Major Tamás’s Album 4 – Interview”], *Film, Theatre, Music*, 19 January 1980, 15.

<sup>57</sup> GALAMB, “Színházi szemle” [“Theatre Review”], 567.

<sup>58</sup> For example, [ N. N. ], “Shakespeare-sorozat a Nemzeti Színházban” [“Shakespeare series at the National Theatre”], *Magyarország*, 28 June 1923, 6.

heightened fierceness, and a vivid imagination are common to both, and perhaps Ódry's most characteristic acting trait is his passion, fervour, ardour and rush."<sup>59</sup>

The descriptions thus speak simultaneously of a fierce, impassioned, explosive acting temperament and of intellectual acting, vocal, and movement techniques, as well as of novel role interpretations. Speed and agility may be qualities characteristic of both a sharp intellect and a sensitive acting nervous system – traits so central to Ódry's speech that every writer remarks upon them. Some critics even explicitly connect his speech technique to his conscious understanding of acting:

"However, this nervous agitation can hardly be attributed to temperament alone. Beyond its subjective determination, it is also a deliberate and carefully considered element of his acting style. In contrast to the more comfortable, expansive manner of older actors, this style – with its heightened nervous energy, swifter pace, and more heated rhythm – constitutes a conscious response to earlier traditions. It is perhaps here that one of Ódry's stylistic contributions to the history of acting may be located. His speech technique, in particular, becomes intelligible in this light: through his rapid delivery, he appears almost to be striving to match the tempo of French actors' speech."<sup>60</sup>

Thus, the "nervous agitation" and haste often noted in descriptions of his performances should be understood as technique – as elements of Ódry's conscious acting concept. The statements quoted above mark the peaks of an acting career; moreover, they were not written retrospectively, but during

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<sup>59</sup> HEVESI, "Ódry...", 325.

<sup>60</sup> GALAMB, "Ódry...", 137.

his lifetime when he was performing these roles, or only a few years later.<sup>61</sup>

Ódry's early career was not unequivocally successful. During the provincial years following the Academy, and later at the Vígszínház, as well as initially at the National Theatre, he was cast primarily in the amoroso roles of second-rate plays – parts in which he did not find himself<sup>62</sup> and in which he was not particularly successful either.<sup>63</sup> His Romeo was also criticised, with critics feeling that it lacked “warmth and emotion”.<sup>64</sup> At the National Theatre, however, he and Imre Pethes quickly became the theatre's leading male duo, and Ódry's repertoire rapidly expanded. In addition to playing handsome lovers, he increasingly played characters who were uninhibited and cynical – womanisers and “successful men” – and gained popularity in these roles.<sup>65</sup> In 1907, the National Theatre staged *Hedda Gabler*. Tesman, the husband, was the first Ibsen role Ódry encountered, and it was followed in quick succession by others.

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<sup>61</sup> He graduated in 1898, then became a member of theatre companies in Nagyváradi, Kolozsvár, Temesvár and Debrecen-Kassa, only starting to perform in Budapest in 1904 (at the Vig Theatre from 1904 and the National Theatre from 1905).

<sup>62</sup> “I sweat here from seven to eleven so that melting women can cling to me! [...] But that's not why I became an actor! Give me roles! Interesting, colourful, meaningful characters: people! People who can be played.” Quoted in CSILLAG, *Ódry...*, 68.

<sup>63</sup> “No matter how hard he tries [...] nothing, not even the most courteous friendship, can make up for what God did not give him. He is a handsome boy, yes. Beautiful, even. But a romantic and heroic actor: no.” (CSILLAG quotes József Keszler's criticism, *Ódry...*, 70.) “Bölöny calls me over and says, worried and irritated: ‘Well, Réthy has tricked me again. This Ódry knows nothing. He's dull. He can't recite a single line. He walks and talks as if he weren't on stage, but at home in his room.’” Quoted from Jenő Janovics, CSILLAG, *Ódry...*, 45.

<sup>64</sup> GALAMB, “Ódry...”, 139.

<sup>65</sup> CSILLAG, *Ódry...*, 54–92. His monographer also notes: “... it is difficult to shake off the assumption that the better or worse, but successful roles that accompanied his entire career – through the interaction between the actor and his roles – also contributed to some extent to the consolidation of these traits.” Ibid., 81.

In modern psychological roles that reveal divided, fractured, ironic figures marked by failure – such as Borkman and Solness, or Rank and Rosmer – Ódry's performances became increasingly outstanding. The same was true when he portrayed intellectual figures struggling with themselves, such as Faust or Ivan Karamazov. His Bánk and his Hamlet, by contrast, were controversial and did not meet with unequivocal approval, yet both were unusual and powerful performances.<sup>66</sup> Alongside all this, and in parallel with it, he played a great many leading roles in drawing-room plays, French comedies, and even burlesque, all with great success and with keen intelligence.”<sup>67</sup> He played both classic heroes and schemers: Adam and Biberach, Lucifer and Christ. The National Theatre's Shakespeare cycle could not be imagined without him: in addition to his critically acclaimed Hamlet and Richard, he also played the role of Petruccio, Macbeth, Othello, Antony and Prospero.<sup>68</sup> In the Lady Anne scene in *Richard III*, which he missed out on in his youth, he is celebrated even as a lover.<sup>69</sup> Ódry himself notes that he had never before experienced an audience so powerfully held under his spell as during this love scene.<sup>70</sup>

Aladár Schöpflin observes that Ódry was a *par excellence* intellectual actor, in whom purely operating instincts were guided by a sharp intellect; an actor whose artistic performance followed a steady upward arc, “a man of measure,” of conception – one who, once a certain level has been reached, always

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<sup>66</sup> His Bánk is not dignified enough, but he is excellent in the parts where he “fights with himself”; his Hamlet is “perhaps more nervous than necessary, but [...] he plays him with such inner conflict that we are unwittingly drawn under his spell.” GALAMB, “Ódry...”, 137.

<sup>67</sup> [N. N.], “Magyar fejek” [“Hungarian Heads”], *Képes Krónika*, 28 June 1931, 17.

<sup>68</sup> Member of the National Theatre between 1905 and 1937. He only very rarely took on roles elsewhere, for example in 1915 at the Hungarian Theatre, where he played the role of Rabbi Lyon in a play by Sándor Bródy.

<sup>69</sup> HEVESI, Ódry..., 324.

<sup>70</sup> CSILLAG, Ódry..., 177.

remains at it, never falling below it, but never leaping highly above it either.”<sup>71</sup> Critics gradually discover Ódry and hold him in ever higher esteem, noting the sensual impact and power of his acting, but still considering his most important acting quality to be his work ethic. The reason for this is largely Ódry’s speech technique, which is known to be the result of hard work. Almost everyone noted that the young Ódry initially had speech difficulties – a speech impediment or even stutter. His speech exercises, which he performed for several hours a day until the end of his life, are legendary. For example, he practised speaking with a cork between his teeth, articulating in front of a mirror, using only the texts of his former roles. He recited monologues behind a burning candle to master imperceptible breathing techniques, and the candle flame was not allowed to go out.<sup>72</sup>

In light of all this, it is hardly surprising that in 1906 Endre Ady mentioned a National Theatre performance in which Ódry was the only actor who did not declaim (“Ódry felt and knew that today speaking is not a disgrace”).<sup>73</sup> Yet even earlier, in December 1896, the critic of *Pesti Napló* – signing with the initials *h. s.* – praised Ódry’s speech almost at the very outset of his career, when he was still only a second-year student at the Academy:

“... tonight another student appeared, Árpád Ódry, who [...] played the minor role of the prince. He is a fine stage presence, with a pleasant, expressive voice, and most im-

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<sup>71</sup> SCHÖPFLIN, “Ódry...”, 478–479.

<sup>72</sup> ILONA CSILLAG, “Ódry Árpád, a beszédművész” [“Árpád Ódry, the Orator”], *Színház* 13, no. 3 (1980): 46–48. He also performed exercises to improve his mobility and endurance, e.g., he stood up and sat down many times in succession from a deep armchair without using his hands, recited texts while standing on one leg, etc.

<sup>73</sup> ADY Endre, “Három kis darab” [“Three Short Pieces”], *Budapesti Napló*, 2 February 1906.



portantly, his speech is natural, intelligent and authentic, as if he did not attend the same school as the others.”<sup>74</sup>

A few months later, in April, the newspaper reported again on an exam taken by the academy students:

“Árpád Ódry speaks most naturally among all the students. It seems that he learned this technique from his father.”<sup>75</sup>

In June, the following report appears:

“... Árpád Ódry, a second-year student, stood out, having already performed in several exams... Árpád Ódry is not very affected by formal schooling, so we can look forward to his future with the best of hopes. Among all the students, he speaks the most intelligently and naturally.”<sup>76</sup>

The report on the third-year exam highlights that

“...only one or two students showed signs of true, independent talent. Among the latter is Árpád Ódry, who is clearly a thoughtful young man who shapes his role on his own. He is unconventional and does not simply recite.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> H. S., “Növendékek a Várszínházban” [“Students at the Castle Theatre”], *Pesti Napló*, 13 December 1896, 11.

<sup>75</sup> [N. N.], “Az új nemzedék” [“The New Generation,”] *Pesti Napló*, 2 April 1897, 9.

<sup>76</sup> H. S., “Az új nemzedék” [“The New Generation,”] *Pesti Napló*, 5 June 1897, 12.

<sup>77</sup> [N. N.], “Növendék-előadás” [“Student performance”], *Pesti Napló*, 31 January 1898, 5.

Contemporary criticism – or, more precisely, the young Sándor Hevesi – thus takes note of him and records<sup>78</sup> – that Ódry, even during his years as an academy student struggling with speech, distinguished himself by the naturalness of his delivery and by an unusual intelligence (he understood what he was saying). The critic recognized the close connection between speech and consciousness; that the acting student was in command of his thoughts and his speech as well. Naturalness is not an exact concept: it is difficult to determine how it should be understood, in relation to what; or what it might signify in a temporal or spatial context entirely different from our own – for example, in a young actor’s performance at an examination over a century ago. Nevertheless, it is important to register the moment when this quality is attributed to someone, for it usually signals that a spectator or professional has come under the influence of an actor’s performance and judges it to be effective. Naturalness cannot be tied to a particular style or historical period; rather, it serves as an indicator of the quality of the actor’s work. Sándor Hevesi writes that one of the most significant dates in the history of European theatre is 20 April 1720, for it was on that day that Michel Baron, a pupil of Molière, returned to the stage after several decades’ absence, and

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<sup>78</sup> “Forty years ago, I saw him for the first time at the Buda Castle Theatre, where students of the National Academy of Theatre Arts performed Lajos Dóczy’s *Csók* [Kiss]. Ódry played a supporting role in the play, the prince, and as a young critic, I noted that he was the only one among the students who could speak. Later, I realised that my impression was accurate and authentic, but my wording was misleadingly poor. At that time, Ódry could not yet speak, and in fact could only move well when he remained motionless. Yet he was the only one in the ensemble of beginners who made an impression with his individual character, who was able to lend expression to the words and, instead of rehearsed moves and parroted verse melodies, showed a human face on stage, however rudimentary it may have been. HEVESI, “Ódry...,” 318–319.

“...it was at this moment that an actor first appeared natural in a tragedy written in the style of Corneille. [...] “How uninteresting, how colourless! Baron had no effect until, according to tradition, he grew pale and then blushed. It was then that the audience sensed what was unfolding in his soul and believed in him.”<sup>79</sup>

The source of the quotation is probably Riccoboni; Hevesi obviously could not have seen Baron’s performance. Yet he recognizes the phenomenon from his own twentieth-century theatrical practice – the behaviour of the actor and the audience, and the effect they exert on one another. In Baron’s example, natural acting is almost imperceptible; when it does offer describable signs, however, these signs are extraordinarily powerful, because they take the form of instinctive bodily reactions, such as blushing. When such reactions or signs occur in the right place within the drama and the performance, it becomes clear to the spectator (in Hevesi’s words, he “senses”) that the actor performs them deliberately – that he is at work. It is to this work that the critic’s remark also refers when he notes that one can see in Árpád Ódry that he is clearly a young man who can think.<sup>80</sup>

### *On reciting poetry*

Although Sándor Hevesi warns against drawing serious conclusions, I will nevertheless devote a couple of paragraphs to a surviving audio recording of Ódry’s perhaps most famous poetry recital, a recording of Endre Ady’s poem *Sírni, sírni, sírni* (*To Cry, Cry, Cry*), which can still be heard today.<sup>81</sup> I will not

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<sup>79</sup> HEVESI, *Az előadás, a színjátszás...*, [*The Performance, Acting...*] 250.

<sup>80</sup> [N. N.], “Növendék-előadás” [“Student Performance”], 5.

<sup>81</sup> Árpád Ódry, *Ady Endre versei* [*Poems by Endre Ady*], Hungaroton LTD, 1959. (Recording: June 1930).

attempt a detailed phonetic analysis of the recitation – firstly because I lack the necessary equipment, and secondly because of space constraints,<sup>82</sup> but I will test the literary-critical observations I have read so far. The methodology of the analysis was developed by Iván Fónagy, who examined recordings of Milán Füst’s poem *Öregség* (*Old Age*). He transcribes the poem, translates it into musical language, looks at the intonation and tone colour of the lines (high and low vowels), rhythm and stress, the duration of beats and phrases, and examines what several interpreters of the poem have in common and what differs between them.<sup>83</sup>

In Ódry’s recitation, the listener’s impression is that even in this elegiac poem he speaks with extraordinary speed throughout, yet the performance remains easy to follow, because this rapidity – though driven by strong emotion – is strictly disciplined and intellectually lucid. The Ady poem consists of twelve rhyming couplets; the lines are paired in rhyme and alternate between iambic and trochaic rhythms. Ódry’s distinctive manner – one that strikes modern ears as archaic – lies partly in the fact that although his overall tempo of speech is exceptionally fast, he articulates individual sounds not only clearly but at times with unusual length and extension.

For example, in the first line he lengthens the *á* and *ó* sounds in *várni* and *óra*; the *r* in *koporsó* in the second line; the *m* in *nem* and the *r* in *kérdeni* in the third; the *n* in *csengetyűzni* in the fourth (while the *ty* remains short, as required by the

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<sup>82</sup> Composers are currently developing (artificial intelligence-based) programmes that are accessible to ordinary users for transcribing speech and measuring and visualising its rhythm, pitch and overtones. Composer Dániel Dobri, for example, not only analyses poetry recitations, but also uses them and “translates” them into music. Cf. Zoltán Latinovits’s interpretation of József Attila’s poem *Nagyon fáj* [*It Hurts a Lot*] used by Dániel DOBRI, *Speaking Orchestra* (musical work). (Premiere: Academy of Music, 24 March 2025. Conductor: Rémi DURUPT. Electronic music producer: Barnabás TÓTH.)

<sup>83</sup> Iván FÓNAGY, *Füst Milán: Öregség – Dallamfejtés* [*Milán Füst: Old Age – Melody Interpretation*], (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974).

rhythm) and the *á* in *gyászmenet*; in the, the *á* in *sátrak* and *lóbálni* fifth and sixth lines; the *á* in *állni*, the *á* and *n* in *gyászbán*, the *ú* in *súlyos*, and the *n* in *ezüstben* in the seventh; the *l* in *fuldokolni* in the eighth; the *r* sounds in *zörgő* and *árnyakkal* in the ninth; and so on.

Thus, Ódry lengthens not only vowels but certain consonants as well – generally the word-final *n* and *m* sounds (which are easily swallowed in everyday speech), and, most characteristically, the *r*, which he tends to prolong in almost any position, not only at the end of a word.

Fónagy draws melody lines for each line of the Füst poem; in Ódry's case, the twenty-four lines of the twelve verses could be represented by a single, slowly but surely rising curve, which then falls steeply at the end. The conscious nature of the interpretation and the carefully planned character of the performance are revealed above all in the structure of the recitation, which unfolds as a single, expansive crescendo. Line by line, Ódry builds tension, rising with increasing intensity through the first twenty-three lines toward the climax. He then delivers the closing, twenty-fourth line word by word: a four-beat sequence in which the voice drops by a single note after each of the three pauses, much like the release of tension in sobbing. The rapid tempo creates an impression of spontaneity, the intonation conveys mounting passion, and the overall structure suggests a musical-mathematical precision.

Comparing the recitation of the poem with the performances of four other actors reveals that three of them build the same structure in the poem as Ódry, while one of them does something completely different. Ferenc Kállai<sup>84</sup> works decisively against musicality, making simple, prosaic statements. In the first line, for example, everyone else somehow conveys the trochaic rhythm, but he does not: the first syllable of “várni”

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<sup>84</sup> Ferenc KÁLLAI. *Menekülés az Úrhoz. Ady istenes és Halál versei* [*Escape to the Lord. Ady's poems on God and Death*], Hungaroton LTD, SLPX 14151, 1990.

(to wait) is given much greater emphasis than any other syllable in the sentence. This is also characteristic of what follows: the syllables at the beginning of the verse are regularly the most emphatic (as in spoken language). The two lines thus become similar in sound, and in the recitation of the poem, the intensification appears in the form of increasing emphasis in the lines: from the eighth verse onwards, Kállai practically emphasises the beginning of every word. József Gáti,<sup>85</sup> Zoltán Latinovits<sup>86</sup> and László Sebestyén Szabó,<sup>87</sup> on the other hand, all use musical editing in their own way, with an upward intensification lasting until the last moment of the verse, followed by a counter-intensification in the last line, a gradual release. Ódry is fast compared to the others: he recites the poem faster (in 1 minute 36 seconds) than Latinovits (1 minute 48 seconds), József Gáti (1 minute 46 seconds) or Ferenc Kállai (1 minute 40 seconds). Only Szabó Sebestyén László (1 minute 30 seconds) recites faster than Ódry, but in this latter case there is the least movement, change, extremity, clarity and technique in the speech (which is no surprise, as he is the youngest and most inexperienced of the reciters). He also maintains the structure, increasing the intensity line by line, but the intonation does not reach a climax, rather the speech accelerates only slightly. József Gáti's performance – he had already been a speech instructor at the Academy of Theatre and Film Arts for nearly twenty years at the time of the recording and had also authored a textbook on verse recitation – creates tension by means of an almost linear, even intonation. He restrains and suppresses the speech, much as the litany is restrained in the poem itself, yet throughout he still makes the crescendo

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<sup>85</sup> József GÁTI, *Kiadatlan irodalmi felvételek* [*Unpublished Literary Recordings*], Hungaroton LTD, 1969.

<sup>86</sup> *Ady Endre–Latinovits Zoltán*, Hungaroton, LPX 13735, 1976.

<sup>87</sup> Ady Endre: *Sírni, sírni, sírni* [*To Cry, Cry, Cry*]. Performed by Szabó Sebestyén László. Déri Balázs (director, broadcast date: 4 January 2018) *Vers mindenkinek* [*Poetry for Everyone*], M5, Budapest. <https://nava.hu/id/3241063/>. Last accessed: 29 July 2022.

perceptible, raising his pitch very subtly every two lines. He is the only one who utters the words of the last line continuously, without pauses, interpreting the last line as a single beat (thus signifying flowing, unstoppable crying).

According to Fónagy, every poem has an immanent melody, “the structure of the sentence and the traditional intonation patterns of the structures determine to a certain extent the pitch and melody with which the poem is read, whether by others or by the poet himself, by his contemporaries or by later readers.”<sup>88</sup> In the cases of Szabó and Gáti, the structure similar to Ódry’s may in principle be attributed to this immanent melody as well; Latinovits, however, explicitly adopts Ódry’s construction.<sup>89</sup> He considers the interpretation so compelling that he cannot, and does not wish to, break away from it. He does not imitate Ódry but follows his structure with logical precision.

One can hear in Ódry’s recitation, too, that within the great crescendo there is a brief hesitation halfway through the first line of the eleventh stanza – a near-climax that anticipates the final one. After the phrase “*megbánni mindent*” (“to regret everything”) – which in the poem is closed by a full stop, forming a completed declarative sentence, with the strongest stress on the first syllable of “*mindent*” – he almost halts, nearly breaks off the poem. Latinovits perceives this moment and intensifies it in his own interpretation: at the same point he cries out (placing stress on both syllables of “*mindent*,” pronouncing the word in a closed manner, as if clenching his teeth), comes to a decisive stop, and thereby almost retracts what has come before – only then to continue, to raise the tension further, and to complete the crescendo.

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<sup>88</sup> FÓNAGY, *Füst...*, 24.

<sup>89</sup> “Incidentally, on the Ady album I made with Tamás, I couldn’t say *Cry, cry, cry* any other way than in his structure... You can’t break away from it.” Zoltán LATINOVITS, *Verset mondok [I recite poetry]*, ed. Ibolya SURÁNYI (Budapest: People’s Education Propaganda Office, n.d.) 85.

Structurally, then, he follows Ódry; in the manner of delivery; however, he diverges, employing his own more irregular and bolder solutions. For example, between the repetitions of “*sírni*” (“to cry”) in the final line he inserts very long pauses, so that the line evokes the sound of sobbing breaking forth. At the poem’s peak, in the final stanza, at the line “*testamentumot, szörnyűt írni*” (“to write a testament, something dreadful”), Latinovits emphatically – indeed excessively – lengthens the sounds, already in the word “*testamentumot*,” which he makes sound more archaic as “*testámentum*,” extending the *s* and the *á* beyond their usual duration. In “*szörnyűt*,” he rolls the *r* thunderously and with striking length: in this he precisely evokes Ódry Árpád’s long *r*’s, articulating the sound exactly as Ódry did.

In this way, he presents and transmits Ady and Ódry together, through his own voice and his own interpretation of the poem – while at the same time offering yet another example of the conscious nature of the Ódry school of verse recitation, in which not a single sound is accidental. Incidentally, this solution can also be heard in Kállai’s performance, though less characteristically – or rather, even his entirely different, more simply narrative mode of recitation is influenced by Ódry (or by Ódry filtered through Latinovits).

And when it comes to sound and emphasis, perhaps a very small detail, a single emphatic syllable in the word “*szolgákkal*” can be used to illustrate the individual intentions and interpretations (decision-making responsibility and possibilities) of the reciters: Ódry, Gáti, Latinovits and Szabó emphasise the second syllable slightly more, seemingly contradicting the rules of the Hungarian language: “*szol-gákkal*”, or they give equal emphasis to both syllables, while Kállai clearly emphasises the first syllable: “*szol-gákkal*”. Ódry’s (and his followers’) decision is not illogical in the context of the entire poem. On the one hand, because this musical emphasis is very subtle and slight, the word remains easily understandable, and no information or meaning is lost. On the other hand, this is also how he is



able to convey the iambic movement: it is precisely through these micro-devices that, alongside – or rather, during – the clear, rising large-scale structure of the crescendo, he makes the speech evoke the sounds summoned by the poem, recalling the monotony of clock strokes and the back-and-forth tolling of a bell.<sup>90</sup>

The example of Ady's poem *Sírni, sírni, sírni* demonstrates that a single act of verse recitation – one single instance of an actor's performance – can exert an influence in acting practice that extends for nearly a century. Ódry's interpretation, whether directly or indirectly, continues to permeate diverse acting approaches and modes of theatrical thinking to this day.

### *Schools of recitation*

In his study of Ódry, Oszkár Ascher reviews the contemporary theatre trends and the acting styles seen on the stages of Budapest in order to vividly illustrate how, and from whom, the acting style that Árpád Ódry represented diverged, one that he pursued with clear aesthetic intent and conscious

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<sup>90</sup> Of course, musicality and content cannot be separated from each other. *Sírni, sírni, sírni* (Cry, Cry, Cry) is "one of those eerily visionary Ady poems that are based primarily on musical effects. Therefore, the monotony of the infinitives, the onomatopoeic and sound-painting expressions, the alliterations, the large number of sombre-sounding words... If someone who does not understand a word of Hungarian listens to Árpád Ódry's performance, for example, which renders the musicality of the poem particularly well, they will immediately say that they hear a dirge, the pounding of clods on the coffin, funeral music accompanying not the burial of one person, but of the whole world. However, if we also pay attention to the meaning of the words, it becomes clear that although the poem has almost all the characteristics of the sublime, its basic experience is still a simple village funeral. Erzsébet Vezér is quoted by József BREUER, "Ady-hatások Kodály művészetében" ["Ady's Influence on Kodály's Art"], *Kortárs* 21, no. 11 (1977): 1780–1785, 1782. In his study, Breuer suggests that Kodály may have been familiar with Ódry's recitation.

purpose.<sup>91</sup> Ascher distinguishes four theatrical styles, three of which compete with each other at the National Theatre, while one is characteristic of the Vígszínház Theatre.

The first is called the “German school tradition”, which is the old national tradition of “recitative-declamatory” tragedy acting, originally of French origin, which is also known as “declamatory-tragic” or “cothurnus-style” acting. The greatest and most exceptional figure of this school is Mari Jászai, who often carried the performances on her own shoulders.<sup>92</sup> The representative of the “old National” style of acting at the turn of the century was the actress who made Electra a box-office success in 1890 with her naturalness, simplicity and dismantling of the poses of the acting tradition; When portraying Electra, Jászai was described by authors as “realistic”<sup>93</sup> and even

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<sup>91</sup> ASCHER, “Ódry...”, 306.

<sup>92</sup> However, according to Mari Jászai’s own definition, the term *cothurnus*—and the expression “to play in *cothurnus*”—has little to do with the stylistic features of a particular period. She understands it instead as a matter of acting technique and explains it from the perspective of acting pedagogy. For her, *koturnus* refers to the capacity to perceive the greatness inherent in a role—that is, a particular kind of imagination. “When I learned what *cothurnus* really meant,” she writes, “I realized that it was not the high-heeled boots and oversized masks worn by Greek actors, but a spiritual capacity: the ability to see the events that happen to us and around us on a broader scale, to assign greater significance to things than they might otherwise seem to deserve. As the saying goes, everything has a big bottom.”

Mari JÁSZAI, *Emlékirat és napló* [*Memoirs and Diary*] (Budapest: Athaeonum Publishing House, 2016), 58. Zoltán Latinovits – perhaps following Jászai, perhaps not – defines it similarly in the second half of the 20th century: “Since poetry is by no means a simple product, but rather a kind of distillation [...] to recite poetry simply, or as we understand simplicity, casually, in the same way that we say to each other listlessly and indifferently, ‘How are you?’ or ‘Good morning!’, well, you can’t recite poetry like that. Consequently, a buskin is indeed necessary, and that buskin is the buskin of the soul, a kind of elevation of human composure and concentration, in which one can then calmly and simply recite.” LATINOVITS, *Verset mondok* [I Recite Poetry], 80.

<sup>93</sup> PUKÁNSZKYNÉ, *A Nemzeti Színház...* [*The National Theatre...*], 316.

“naturalistic”<sup>94</sup>, and they were outraged by her “naturalism”.<sup>95</sup> In the first decades of the 20th century, Mari Jászai was still a controversial artist at the National Theatre,<sup>96</sup> but most of her colleagues probably adhered to the routines, forms and externalities of recitation. Tamás Major says of the National Theatre in the 1920s that

“It may have been the worst theatre in Europe or the world [...] despite the fact that Sándor Hevesi did everything he could to bring something new, to ensure a certain standard... it was not customary, nor was it worth giving instructions; they smiled and looked down on it. In general, the actors were unwilling to rehearse... it was a terrible company, but there were six or eight people... it is clear that Mari Jászai also practised at home.”<sup>97</sup>

In other words, during the years when Ódry was active at the National Theatre, the “old, classical school” could signify a multitude of entrenched routines of recitation and declamatory acting, as well as the outstanding solo performances of individual actors – but by no means ensemble play. According to Ascher, the second category was the contemporary “French school” represented by Jenő Ivánfi. This tendency was in effect a modern, refreshed version of *déclamation*: the emphasis fell on the musical subtleties of literary texts, and the actor – much like an opera singer – developed artistic mastery through sound, almost through the singing of the text itself. Following

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<sup>94</sup> HEVESI, *Az előadás, a színjátszás...* [*The Performance, Acting...*], 263.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. SPECTATOR [ARANY László], “Nyílt levél a szerkesztőhöz – Jászai Mari asszony Elektrája” [“Open letter to the editor – Mrs Mari Jászai’s Elektra”], *Budapesti Szemle* 65, no. 170. (1891): 318–320.

<sup>96</sup> “The beautiful second flowering of Mari Jászai’s art is linked to Ambrus [...] even at over sixty years of age, she refuses to fall back on routine and is able to create something new in every role... By this time, she was already above all criticism.” PUKÁNSZKYNÉ, *A Nemzeti Színház...*, [*The National Theatre...*], 458–459.

<sup>97</sup> KOLTAI, *Major...*, 18–22.

French models, Ivánfi and his circle tended to stress the final syllable.

Their exemplar was Benoît-Constant Coquelin, who made a guest performance in Budapest in the role of Cyrano. According to Sándor Hevesi, in the first act Coquelin easily surpassed his Hungarian colleague, the National Theatre's Cyrano, Imre Pethes, through the sheer virtuosity of his speech. In the balcony scene and the death scene, however – where the performance demands “intimacy and humanity” – he fell far short of Pethes. For example, he confessed his love toward the auditorium and the prompter's box so as not to have to speak upward, and he died in a posed manner. Hevesi regards this type of acting as virtuoso, capable of eliciting the audience's “cold admiration,” yet he does not approve of the way, in such cases, the actor's personality comes to the fore at the expense of the playwright, the director, and the dramatic whole.

The third group at the National Theatre was the circle associated with the names of Árpád Ódry, Imre Pethes, Erzsí Paulay, and Sándor Hevesi. They were proponents of modern tragic performance and of a natural, sense-driven mode of speech on stage that stands as close as possible to everyday language. Speech, in their view, cannot be an end in itself or a form of ornamentation; rather, it is a tool that always constitutes an essential attribute of the role. Every role – like every human being – speaks differently, and it is the actor's independent creative task and responsibility to determine how.

Dialogue and the situational nature of utterances, however, are given their context by the play as a whole and by unified direction. Hevesi and his circle's ideal was a form of “classical” acting that is not natural at first utterance, but first undergoes the stylization demanded by the material and, after many trials, “ripens into simplicity,” becoming purified and retaining only its most essential features.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> “Since the classical style is nothing more than the most condensed, abstracted, and filtered representation of life and humanity, it is in fact a style that operates with only the most essential signs and therefore

Finally, the fourth – perhaps the most influential – stage style, which is also connected in certain respects to the previous one, is naturalism (sometimes also referred to as *verismo*). In the early twentieth century, this was the modern acting and speech style associated with the productions and artists of the Vígszínház, most notably Gyula Hegedűs and Irén Varsányi. Its aim was simplicity, unpretentiousness, and naturalness; technically, however, it required a command of speech just as rigorous as that demanded by the “classical school.” Hegedűs Gyula himself authored a textbook on speech, and he was widely regarded as the Hungarian actor who spoke most beautifully.<sup>99</sup> Naturalistic simplicity, however, differs fundamentally from the simplicity associated with the National Theatre, owing to differences in repertoire. At the Vígszínház, prose and contemporary conversational plays were performed, bringing to the stage the spoken language and social types of salons, streets, and the city of Pest. This theatrical situation was particularly conducive to the ensemble’s development; through repeated performances requiring similar modes of speech, shared experience could coalesce into ensemble play, a common stage language, and eventually a unified Vígszínház style.

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leaves out the greatest amount. Perhaps the surest path for an actor toward the classical style is through naturalistic acting, which works with an abundance of signs and represents reality not lyrically but mimetically. [...]

The great artist, who creates from lived experience and emotion, once fully in command of his means—once he no longer seeks effect through tricks or nuances, knowing that the conditions for the greatest effect lie dormant within his soul—becomes monumental, classical. This, of course, is not a matter of will or taste, but purely of talent. Such great simplification is often the result of a lifetime’s work; it can never be the product of schooling.” HEVESI, *Az előadás, a színjátszás...* [*The Performance, Acting...*], 295.

<sup>99</sup> In 1928, Károly Szász stated that Gyula Hegedűs was “the Hungarian actor with the most beautiful and clearest diction, but even he is given roles that are not worthy of him”. The journalist cites *Játék a kastélyban* [*Play in the Castle*] as an example. [N. N.], “A fejlődő Csontos...” [“The Developing Csontos...”], 5.

At the National Theatre, by contrast, the “classical” ideal could not – simply by virtue of the repertoire – constitute a single style. Indeed, it was not so much a style as a form of competence: the actors’ ability to speak verse and classical literary texts (Greek, French, and Shakespearean tragedies) naturally, with ease and humanity – not by conspicuously translating them into prose or street language, but by rendering the style of the written work, of which form is an integral part, intelligible, perceptible, and accessible to the audience.

Acting style, therefore, is a concept bound to direction. The actor, the individual performer, acts (speaks, moves) in accordance with the acting style and within its framework, yet in a personal manner, shaped by his or her own interpretation of the role. In “classical acting,” this means that actors must always arrive at different solutions,<sup>100</sup> and make language that is very far removed from everyday use sound natural. According to the recollections of Tamás Major,

“...Ódry,[...] must have prepared fantastically for the role, like a pianist, because suddenly, during the final rehearsals, he spoke up and dictated such a tempo; he had practised so much, that he completely surprised the others with his shifts, his voice, and the structure of his role. In fact, he was the first to strive to build a role.”<sup>101</sup>

“We Hungarians have been acting since the second generation... we are at the very beginning,” wrote Mari Jászai in 1897.<sup>102</sup> The generation she considered to be the second was in fact the fourth, if the history of Hungarian-language theatrical performance can be dated from 1790 (László Kelemen’s theatre group), although the scholarly literature still describes

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. “The actor is the only being responsible for words. What makes his situation even more serious is that he is almost always responsible for the words of others.” Ódry quoted by RÉDEY, “Ódry...”, n.n.

<sup>101</sup> KOLTAI, Major..., 20–21.

<sup>102</sup> JÁSZAI, *Emlékirat és napló* [*Memoirs and Diary*], 97.

this group as a group of amateurs.<sup>103</sup> The members of the second generation – including Wesselényi's Transylvanian troupe, who later came to Pest – were representatives of the “crying and singing” style.<sup>104</sup> The third generation trained themselves without directors or an official school – although figures such as Károly Megyeri and Zsigmond Szentpétery did teach younger performers. To this generation belonged Gábor Egressy, Róza Laborfalvi, Márton Lendvay the elder, Lendvayné, and others. It was only with the fourth generation, in 1865, that professional actor training began: first in the form of the *Színészeti Tanoda* (School of Acting); from 1885 as the *Országos Színésziskola* (National School of Acting); from 1887 as the *Országos Magyar Királyi Zene- és Színművészeti Akadémia* (Royal Hungarian National Academy of Music and Theatre); and finally, from 1893, under the name *Országos Magyar Királyi Színművészeti Akadémia* (Royal Hungarian National Academy of Dramatic Art). Árpád Ódry attended the Academy between 1895 and 1898; from 1929 he served as a teacher there, and from 1930 as its director. His opening and closing addresses reveal that he consistently upheld the principle that an actor requires broad education in order to practise the profession at a high level – that culture itself is a source of inspiration.

Among his students, he was regarded with near-cult devotion. In her writings, Rózsa Ignác recalls that during a chance encounter at a swimming beach he explained to her the difference between a trochee and a spondee. István Egri recounts that, already as a mature actor, he once turned to Ódry when he was afraid of a particular role and was struggling with it. Ódry advised him to listen repeatedly to the fourth movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony until he became capable of dissolving into joy: “...carrying over the

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<sup>103</sup> NÉMETH, ed., *Színészeti Lexikon I. [Dictionary of Acting I.]*, 490.

<sup>104</sup> According to Antal Németh, only Kántorné was able to achieve greatness in this style. *Ibid.*, 496–497.

otherworldly flight of the music into the role”.<sup>105</sup> The instruction is exemplary because its first step is easily grasped and universally accessible – anyone can listen to music – yet it is also broad in scope, since it connects the actor’s immediate, everyday problem in a single gesture with European music history and culture (thereby strongly suggesting that a solution exists, provided one is willing to work for it). If an actor listens repeatedly to Ludwig van Beethoven with the explicit aim of using the music as a tool for work and role construction – that is, with focused attention – he or she will almost certainly gain or learn something from it. If nothing else, at least a sensual, liberating sonic experience, a musical memory, can become associated with the process of preparing for the role and with the time spent inhabiting it.

Fear of a role constitutes a fundamental obstacle to work; the primary aim, therefore, is to eliminate or dispel that fear – a process that often takes place involuntarily as soon as one begins to work, or, in this case, simply allows the music to act upon oneself. Ódry also defines the next task, the subsequent step: freedom and joy must be transferred into the role. Reflecting on how to accomplish this is already a purely professional question – at this point, the actor is no longer concerned with whether something can be done, but with how it is to be done. Yet anecdotes from his students testify not only to Ódry’s intellect. Tamás Major recalls that as an academy student, when he appeared as an extra alongside Ódry in *Hamlet*, he was so frightened by the intensity of Ódry’s performance on one occasion that he could barely manage to respond to him on stage.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> EGRI István, “Emlékezés Ódry Árpádról” [“Memories of Árpád Ódry”, *Pesti Napló*, 27 August 1939, 19.

<sup>106</sup> “Neither then nor since have I seen such a sudden burst of passion in a person. Ódry’s eyes flashed like lightning. And from this, I learned a fleeting yet eternal lesson about the magic of acting and suggestiveness. You can’t learn that at any college,” says Tamás MAJOR in an interview, „Major Tamás albumából...” [„From the album of Tamás Major...”], 15.



Ódry's main argument in favour of training actors is time:

"How is one to portray something one has never known through direct experience? After all, anyone who insists on waiting until he has come to know the fate and character of all humanity through lived experience alone would have to wait until he was no longer fit to step onto the stage at all. Culture is the sole force capable of fertilizing the actor's imagination for the creation of the unknown. And it is for the actor's education in drama that the Academy of Dramatic Art was founded."<sup>107</sup>

### *Lexicon entries*

Ódry himself wrote very little; nevertheless, anyone interested in how he articulated his own aesthetic credo has two principal sources at their disposal. One consists of the opening and closing addresses he delivered during his tenure as director; the other is *Dictionary of Acting*, edited by Antal Németh, to which Árpád Ódry contributed several entries.<sup>108</sup> He addresses recitation and text delivery in two lexicon entries, under the titles "Recitation and Performative Art outside the Stage" and "Stage Speech and Recitation." The first focuses on the recitation of poetry. Here, Ódry considers form and reduction to be of crucial importance. He understands form in a manner analogous to music: the same score can be performed differ-

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<sup>107</sup> Lajos SZENTESY, ed., *Az Országos Magyar Királyi Színművészeti Akadémia 1934/35. tanévről szóló értesítője* [*Bulletin of the Hungarian Royal Academy of Performing Arts for the 1934/35 academic year*] (Budapest: Hungarian Royal Academy of Performing Arts, 1935), 7. At the Academy – which operated as the College of Theatre and Film Arts from 1948 and became the University of Theatre and Film Arts in 2000 – masters passed on their knowledge to their students. This teaching tradition was broken in 2020.

<sup>108</sup> NÉMETH, ed., *Színészeti Lexikon I. és II.* [*Dictionary of Acting I– II.*] (Budapest: Győző Andor Publishing, 1930).

ently by each interpreter, and the stricter and more closed the form, the easier it is for the audience to follow. Reduction – the poem’s conciseness and economy of language – likewise entails interpretive freedom. Ódry emphasizes that for this very reason the genre is not suited to those who have nothing of their own to say. “The performing artist does not seek a poem, but himself,” he writes. <sup>109</sup> His goal is for the listener to experience the poem for themselves. However, this is very difficult to achieve, as it is impossible to prepare adequately for a poetry recital in less than a year. As it is completely unadorned, it is the most difficult genre to perform, but at the same time it is wonderful because the performer can be independent in it.

He divides stage speech (i.e. speech in a theatrical performance) into two elements:

“Stage speech consists of two elements: dialogue and soliloquy. Dialogue belongs to the scene; soliloquy belongs to character. In dialogue, it is very often not the speaker who stands at the center, but the partner, or even a character who is not present among the speakers. The artistry of dramatic form – that is, of dialogue – lies precisely in the fact that everything can be inferred from it: the place, the time, the event, and above all the characters. The more oblique and indirect this form is, the more artistic it becomes. Dialogue is therefore always continuation, never a beginning – indeed, it is a continuation even of the counter-dialogue. At this point it differs from all other forms of performance, most notably from verse recitation. Verse summarizes; dialogue disperses. Verse generalizes; dialogue specifies. Verse seeks to disclose emotion; dialogue makes the listener infer it – and thus conceals it. This is why the actor must first find the center of a dialogue. Several figures move toward a com-

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<sup>109</sup> NÉMETH, ed., *Színészeti Lexikon II. [Dictionary of Acting II.] (Acting Lexicon II)*, 806.

mon goal; therefore, they must continue one another's words. They must contribute fragments to a whole and fit those fragments together. Everything that produces the drama must find its place within this structure. The performer's task is to discern what belongs to construction and what belongs to lived experience, and to employ the richness of his or her expressive means accordingly. Dialogue must be very close to the sounds of life, yet it must also be an exaggeration of them. On stage, the value of time is multiplied tenfold, which entails considerable danger: the audience is prone to fatigue. It must be kept alert. The means of maintaining this alertness are speech and movement. Both must go beyond reality, because the audience is not satisfied with no more than what it already possesses within itself."<sup>110</sup>

In other words, Ódry defines the actor's task in a strikingly unpretentious and practical manner: the spectator must not be allowed to grow tired; it is the actor's responsibility to make good use of the audience's time. Exaggeration, and the shifting or altering of the proportions of reality, can serve this purpose. In the "tenfold" time of the stage, ten times as many stage events—words, actions, transitions – must take place in order for interest to be sustained.

Ódry also regards it to be the actor's task to distinguish the structure of the work from his own experiences. This remark is notable not only because it emphasizes, from the actor's perspective, the necessity of being conscious of the structure of the work as a whole, but also because it clearly delineates the creative domains of director and actor. Everything that belongs to structure – the joint creation – derives from the work as an integrated whole; experiences, by contrast, belong exclusively to the actor. In the same passage, he also clarifies the point at

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<sup>110</sup> "Színpadí beszéd és szavalás" ["Stage Speech and Recitation"], *ibid.*, 907.

which pathos becomes a mistake on stage (even though, according to Hevesi's aesthetics, pathos is an indispensable element of tragedy, marking the moment when an individual story assumes universal significance):

“Many people consider recitation on stage to be an exaggeration of speech. There is no doubt that pathos can convey a great deal, and there is also no doubt that actors with extraordinary emotional richness are not satisfied with ordinary messages. So they look for ways to heighten them. However, this is only justified as long as they can remain connected to the other performers, and if the acting is not an end in itself. Recitation means emotional separation. In other words, it does not seek companionship and increasingly distances itself from dialogue: the main element of the stage, which becomes fragmented as a result. In addition, it easily leads to affectation, precisely because it does not take up the tone set by the other speakers. Affectation is not an exaggeration of one's own personality, but a lack of colour.”<sup>111</sup>

In his view, pathos is only justified and should only be used as long as the partners are also present in it, that is, as long as the play is joint and the experience is shared. As soon as this is no longer the case, the pathetic moment becomes self-serving, its opposite, that is, a lie, is the result. Ódry's approach to pathos (which, like Jászai's, is practical, almost textbook-like) also explains why, regardless of their quality, the passionate recitations of olden times may seem comical to posterity: simply because the actor is “alone” in the performance, unable to reach the pathos (as understood by Hevesi, as a shared experience) because his audience, with whom he once created

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<sup>111</sup> “Színpadi beszéd és szavalás” [“Stage Speech and Recitation”], *ibid.*, 907.

his performance, is no longer present. This is how the word “pathetic” can take on a negative connotation.<sup>112</sup>

The most striking feature of Ódry’s concept of “role” is that he does not talk about the play, nor the framework, or the context and style, but about what is available to the actor in all circumstances: he emphasises the role of memory and imagination.

“There are two primary sources for understanding a role: the actor’s memories of experiences and the actor’s imagination. [...] It is hardly possible to prescribe a role for a professional actor, because everything he has experienced, observed or read in his life influences the creation of each new character; [...] the greater part of great acting performances comes not from the role, but from the actor’s experiences. [...] Understanding a role is essentially revealing the role. [...] Understanding a role is a constant process throughout an actor’s life, and not a renewed excitement according to roles, because the actor’s wealth of individual experiences is the main factor. It is not a question of knowledge, will or determination, but least of all a question of study. The actor does not “study” the role, but himself, and when he succeeds in creating something great, he encounters himself. The future of a role is nothing more than the actor’s past.”<sup>113</sup>

This confirms what he emphasised in his poetry recitation: the actor does not bring the material to the stage, but himself.

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<sup>112</sup> Even in Ódry’s time, the word had negative connotations and began to take on the meaning defined as „álpátosz” (false pathos). Ascher, Ódry, Hevesi and Németh’s *Lexikon* also distinguish between pathos and false pathos: this, however, is a question of quality rather than style. ‘False pathos’ was considered to be insincere, sensationalist, and unjustifiably passionate pretence.

<sup>113</sup> NÉMETH, *Színészeti Lexikon II. [Dictionary of Acting II.]*, 815.

Despite the acting conventions of his time – which he himself naturally practiced, and according to which the actor's task was to shape a character in its entirety, physically and psychologically, by devising costumes, masks, movements, voices, and life histories, and thus constructing a role – Ódry here speaks almost in terms of a deconstruction of the role. In doing so, he articulates an idea strikingly close to that expressed by post-dramatic theatre studies at the end of the twentieth century concerning the decomposition of the individual. For Ódry, it is not the actor's task to compose a dramatic character; rather, the actor must bring his own self to the stage. Ódry continues to think in terms of dramatic roles but he does not conceive of the role as something external to himself. Nor does he regard a succession of roles as separate creations unrelated to one another. Instead, in his view, roles function as forms: frameworks that enable interpersonal communication.



## Fourth case study:

### LILI MONORI AT THE KATONA JÓZSEF THEATRE

*“Acting is an autonomous art form with its own language of form.”<sup>1</sup>*

I first saw Lili Monori on stage in 2015. I don’t remember exactly what she was doing, but I do remember the quality, power, and atmosphere of her presence. She was a guest performer in the Katona József Theatre’s production of *Faust*.<sup>2</sup> Although the history and context of her career make it understandable that her acting is different from that of the actors in the Katona, in this chapter – after observing recordings of Monori’s acting – I am concerned not only with how her absence, career break, years of exile, and time spent away from the stage are reflected in her acting, or how these experiences surface in her performance; and what the “Lili Monori phenomenon” means in 2015, but also with whether a close reading of performance recordings (of certain scenes) reveals moments in which the actor’s work and decisions can be discerned and grasped – that is, whether what she does on that particular evening, at that moment, can be separated from the history of theatre.

There is currently no established practice for analysing acting. The most comprehensive method is offered by Patrice Pavis in *Analyzing Performance*,<sup>3</sup> although he believes that a

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<sup>1</sup> Definition by Lili Monori. Rozália SZÉKELY, *Szentkirályi utca 4. Pince [Szentkirályi street 4. Cellar]*, thesis (Kaposvár: Kaposvár University, Faculty of Arts, 2012), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Árpád Schilling: *Faust I–II*, 2015. (Premiere: 25 and 26 April 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Patrice PAVIS, “The Actor” in *Analyzing Performance: Theatre, Dance, and Film*. Trans. David Williams. (Ann Arbor: The University of Mi-



global theory of acting would be necessary to analyse acting. In the long term, he aims to outline an anthropology of acting. He presents two performance analyses: an excerpt from Louis de Funès's performance in *The Miser* and Ulrike Meinhof's performance. In the former, he assigns meticulous gesture analyses to individual lines of text. He then introduces the concepts of *performance score* and *underscore* in his discussion of acting: the score designates the surface-level, systemic, and general features of performance, while the underscore refers to what remains "when everything else has been forgotten" – the invisible element, that which is memorable.<sup>4</sup>

Pavis's gesture analysis results in a parallel, time-consuming stream of text: since describing and explaining every gesture takes longer than performing or watching it, and since devoting equal descriptive time to each gesture makes them appear of equal importance, the play itself comes across as monotonous. For this reason, I will use his method only insofar as I also attempt to compare certain parts of the play and particular gestures with the text. However, instead of describing gestures in exhaustive detail, I will rely on what practice shows, and on what Pavis himself also acknowledges:<sup>5</sup> what is it, that stands out from the play as memorable or new. I will analyse fragments, selected somewhat randomly and in large number, because my assumption is that by describing many examples of acting – however imperfectly, but as accurately as possible – we can arrive at concrete results. These results concern not the overall structure of a performance, of course, but individual

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chigan Press, 2003), 55–130.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 45, 107.

<sup>5</sup> "...it would be more judicious to take into account the spectator's aesthetic perception... Semiological description of actors and their scores therefore need to integrate the aesthetic perspectives of the spectator and evaluate how conscious the spectator is of her own corporeal and tactile presence." Ibid. 103. Pavis quotes Bert States: "... our unconscious demand that there be something constantly *emergent* in the actor's performance." Ibid., 104.

acting techniques, tendencies, and even structure-forming or structure-generating practices. Many different acting theories are conceivable; however, if we observe acting practice in order to make use of it or learn from it, or if we focus on the work of a single performer rather than on a general method, there is neither the time to wait for such theories to emerge nor to record them in the manner suggested by Pavis.

Below, I examine Monori's performance in Árpád Schilling's *Faust* performed across two nights at the Katona József Theatre. I wish to focus on this production in particular since the Katona stage represents the mainstream theatrical public that Monori left behind in 1976.<sup>6</sup> I will attempt to describe the production by highlighting four major scenes from the performance and by examining three aspects of the actor's work: the relationship with their partner, with the text, and with the space. Finally, twining these strands together, I will seek to capture the relationship between the production and the direction.

Based on Lehmann's categories, I consider this performance an example of scenographic directing, in which "the meaning, functioning as a possible synthesis, is entirely left to the observer", <sup>7</sup> and which "questions plans of meaning" rather than producing a single, universal one. <sup>8</sup> I will examine what this definition entails in the present case, particularly in relation to the actor, the actor's work, and role construction, as well as the associations and interpretations evoked by the combined signs of the individual scenes.

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<sup>6</sup> In 1990, Péter Kárpáti appeared at the Játékszín Theatre, in 1996 in productions directed by Sándor Zsótér at the Új Színház Theatre, and then from 2007 in productions at the Proton Theatre.

<sup>7</sup> Hans-Thies LEHMANN, „Az előadás: elemzésének problémái” [„Staging: Problems of Its Analysis”], trans. Gabriella KISS, *Theatron* 2, no. 1 (2000): 46–60, 50. Originally published as Hans-Thies LEHMANN, „Die Inszenierung: Probleme ihrer Analyse” *Zeitschrift für Semiotik* 11, nr. 1. (1989): 29–49.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

*The partner: the other*

In the ninth minute of *Faust I*, on the director's stage left, a single downward-facing spotlight shines on an open trap-door. Within the vertical shaft of light, dust is clearly visible as it falls in a thin stream into the opening; then, as the trap rises, it settles onto the crown of a red wig, from where it begins to spill and scatter. Beneath the red wig, brown hair falls past the shoulders. A female figure stands with her head lowered, wearing a blue cloak, her hands in her pockets, her feet set in a small yet firm stance, heavy boots planted on the ground. She remains motionless.

The trap mechanism jolts in short, uneven movements. The figure does not resist; she lets her body yield, surrendering to the jolts, her head shaking with the motion. Finally, the mechanism gives one last lurch and settles level with the stage. Silence. The dust is still drifting down from above. Monori Lili waits, disciplined, still, until the light fully reaches her – that is, until the stage comes into focus. Only then does she move. She removes one hand from her pocket and brushes a little dust from the front of her clothing, then touches the wig on her head, like someone mildly annoyed that it, too, has become dusty (or perhaps that it is there at all). Even as she does this, she has already begun to move toward the right of the stage, toward Faust, who has called her up to the surface. She glances back at her hand, as if she would like to examine what kind of dust this is, what it might consist of, if only there was time. But she keeps walking; the boots creak. At last she pulls off the wig, stops, looks at it, and shakes the dust from it. With her other hand, as she turns toward Faust, she runs her fingers through her hair – but does not complete the gesture. She turns forward instead and looks out at the audience, positioning herself midway between the two trajectories she has so far followed – between dust and wig on the one hand, Faust on the other. As she quietly shakes the last traces of dust from the wig, softly and with faint reluctance, she speaks her first line directly to the audience:

*Who is calling me?*<sup>9</sup>

*(Ki hívott?)*

The question sounds more like *why have you called me*. It is spoken quietly, in a voice that pretends to be indifferent: a plain, almost declarative line, yet edged with hesitation, as if curiosity still persists despite itself. Gábor Máté's Faust reacts with a squint and a shudder. Monori turns her head toward the voice and looks at him.

*You have drawn me...*

*(Szólítottál)*

She utters these words in an exemplary, articulate manner, with a slight challenge in her voice: Am I the one you need? Then, while Faust is answering, she starts adjusting hair again, smoothing it back.

*And I have come! What pitiable fear / Seizes you, Faust, the superman!*

*(Itt vagyok, mi ez a hitvány ijedtség, te übermensch)*

Her speech accelerates; with her left hand she gestures toward Faust. The elongated *í* (ijedtség, 'fear') with its faintly dialectal colouring – renders the word *Übermensch* ('superman') ironic, faintly mocking, as if she were saying: *I knew this wasn't*

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<sup>9</sup> The performance uses the latest Hungarian translation of Faust by László Márton (Faust, the performance script, Budapest: Katona József Theatre, 2014. Published in a volume: Johann Wolfgang GOETHE, Faust, translated and annotated by László MÁRTON, Budapest: Kalligram, 2016). The actor's words are almost identical to those in the script, though not entirely. In brackets I record the spoken text in Hungarian as I hear it, rather than exactly as it appears in the script. Before that I quote the English translation of the lines by David Luke (Johann Wolfgang GOETHE, Faust - Part One, translated by David LUKE, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 and Faust - Part Two, translated by David LUKE, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). I did not aim to develop a fully consistent system of description or notation, because that would have taken the research in a completely different direction: such a lengthy, complex task would once again divert attention from the actor.

*what you were expecting – you have lines meant to frighten me, but I know you weren't frightened:*

*Where is the call / Of your creative heart  
(Hol a lélek szava és hol az ember)*

She speaks awkwardly, yet reproachfully, accusingly, nervously.

*that carried / The world and gave it birth...  
(Ami az egész világ maga)*

She chooses this line to wipe her nose.

*Where are you?  
(Hol vagy te?)*

She holds out her arm, pointing at Faust: it is a sudden, decisive, and radical gesture after the hitherto hesitant, half-finished ordinary hand movements.

*Can this be you? Now that my breath blows round you / In the depths of terror I have found you  
(Te vagy az, aki a jelenlétemtől reszket meg megtántorodik eldől)*

She pronounces these words quickly, reluctantly, stumbling over her words, staring down, looking at and twirling the wig in her hand.

*Shrinking and writhing like a worm!  
(Rémülten görbedő féreg)*

Hurriedly, ashamed, as if she were a little embarrassed to have to say such things, but that's how it is, that's the truth, she looks at the wig.

*In life like a flood, in deeds like a storm / I surge to and fro  
(Élet-árba, tett-viharba lépek)*

She takes a step forward, changing her position. She is doing what her words reflect; her actions illustrate the text, her intonation is indignant.

*Up and down I flow!*

*(És járok fel s alá)*

She walks across the stage to the right, then back: she is completing the text.

*I weave<sup>10</sup>*

*(Szövök)*

She says this indignantly to the audience, as if she were almost offended, as if saying “I deal with what is important”.

*This and that<sup>11</sup>*

*(Ezt meg azt)*

She snaps her fingers, looks out, speaks out.

*Birth and the grave / An eternal wave*

*(Születés, halál – ez áraszt – meg apaszt)*

She emphasises every word, like someone who is reluctant to go into detail concerning her work, in which there is nothing special: life and death are just everyday realities, patterns.

She moves behind Máté Gábor, who is sitting cross-legged on the floor and stands close behind him, pulls the red wig over his head, grabs his head and pulls him towards him, hugging him to her lap, rocking him a little, both of them with their eyes closed. It is like a female version of a blessing (the opposite of the call for oral sex so often seen on stage), a reference to childbirth.

*Turning, returning / A life ever burning*

*(Változó szövődmény, de folyton izzó élmény)*

Outwardly, she makes a gesture to aid speech, then she adjusts her hair, puts emphasis on the adjectives. Before the next sentence, she steps to the side, bends down to Faust, smoothes her hair behind her ear, then places her left hand on Faust's

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<sup>10</sup> Only in the Hungarian translation.

<sup>11</sup> Only in Hungarian.

shoulder and speaks to him, articulately, as if explaining to a child:

*At Time's whirring loom I work and play / God's living garment I weave and display.*

*(Az idő zúgó székén ülök s szövök S létre az istenség leplével jövök)*

She straightens up, stands upright, and opens her cloak wide:

*Hm?!*

and with a smaller gesture, opens her cloak a bit more as an afterthought.

She buttons a button.

*You match the spirit you can comprehend: / I am not he.*

*(Arra hasonlítasz, akit megértesz, nem rám)*

Meanwhile, she points again (always with her left hand) at Faust, with a resigned intonation. She pulls the wig off Faust's head and starts walking backwards. She shifts the wig from her left hand into her right and spits to the left – she spits in the direction of the audience and her partner, Faust; she spits on the stage, and leaves.

Faust is praying to a spirit. The spirit arrives, aided by stage machinery, but lacks any dignity or pathos. She looks around, then moves off in a third direction, fiddles with her costume, starts doing something and stops, speaks softly, gestures, illustrates, carries out instructions, adjusts her hair, looks at the ground. Every movement she makes on stage gives the impression of someone who is unfamiliar with her surroundings, inexperienced, awkward and clumsy. However, her delivery of the text contradicts this. Even if she is sometimes much quieter than the audience would expect; her intonation at times becomes uncertain (her voice trembles). She recites the verse text at a completely different level of professional skill. Com-

pared to a neutral, interpretative delivery – or even compared to the meaningful, simple, sentence-based diction emphasising sentence stress that the audience heard from Gábor Máté in the previous nine minutes of the performance – Monori delivers the text sometimes too prosaically, sometimes too poetically (emphasising rhythm, rhyme and syllables), sometimes more slowly, sometimes more quickly, sometimes more weightlessly, sometimes more emphatically (emphasising every word). In other words, in terms of delivery, her shifts and swings are not only excessive but also unexpected, just like the way she breaks up the lines. However, the meaning of the text is not compromised, the scene and the situation remain perfectly clear, and the manner of delivery does not distract attention from the meaning of the text; on the contrary, the surprises and shifts demand even greater attention. The delivery of the text, the technique of communication and the movement and acting in space contradict each other, and both are extremely different from the acting technique that the audience has seen so far (until the ninth minute).

The staging and the situation in which the actress moves are contradictory tools. She is given an emphatic, strikingly simple, and highly prominent entrance; yet it takes place in silence and is accompanied by the jolting of the stage machinery. This creates an awkward, even ridiculous effect, through which error and deficiency become visible. According to the dramaturgical logic of the production, and the monologue that precedes the appearance of the Mothers,<sup>12</sup> Faust expects something great – someone great. When she finally arrives, however, he becomes helpless and powerless, because the spirit who, in his own words, is the weaver of life and death appears, by all visible signs – costume and movement – to stand far below

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<sup>12</sup> In the script, she appears here as 'the Mothers'. In the book, this character is the Earth Spirit. 'The Mothers' in Goethe's *Faust* exist as conceptual figures rather than dramatis personae: they have no lines and do not appear on stage.



him, beneath Faust in terms of status. Faust does not understand. The gesture of blessing-as-birth – the pressing of Faust's head to her bosom – is the moment when the production clearly places the Mothers above him. The opening of the cloak and the display of the artificial hair form a grotesque and primitive theatrical device that breaks with the otherwise naturalistic use of costume up to that point. The gesture is unexpected, and Faust does not know how to react.

Yet in this situation, under these directorial conditions, even on the level of acting Monori Lili (appearing as a guest on the stage of the Katona József Theatre), one of the company's leading actors, its core member, Gábor Máté cannot respond. Faust's text itself is difficult to handle: it is written as if he were to regard the appearing spirit as horrible and terrifying – but Monori's spirit figure is not horrible, not frightening, at most, it is surprising and shamefully ordinary, and only here and there suggestively grotesque. Máté-Faust's words do not fit her.

Máté watches his partner with suspicion, eyes narrowed, allowing himself to be lectured in an almost childlike manner. The intensity with which Faust protests against the Mothers in the final line is fully present in Máté Gábor's Faust; yet, given the situation on stage, it is unclear where this anger comes from or what sustains it. Either this intellectual Faust fails to see through the Mothers' outward appearance and from the very first moment looks down on her as a worn-out cleaning woman; in this case he is immediately disappointed, does not regard her as an equal, and therefore has neither reason nor need for such vehemence in his shouting. Or, possibly, he does see through her, looks up to her, and projects ancient wisdom into her primitive maternal gestures. In this case, however, he would need to muster far greater inner force in order to shout at her and would resist her far more reluctantly. Monori's performance cannot be interpreted at all – there is no interpretive key whatsoever – within the framework in which Máté shouts at her ("Oh busy spirit! from the end to end / Of the world

you roam: how close you are to me!”) that is, within an implicit mother–son dynamic dialogue. Máté, on the other hand, becomes a passive and helpless witness, a helpless partner, if we try to interpret his acting according to the key or system in which Monori acts. Their acting styles are different, although this should not necessarily be the case: they attended the same school and spent years at the same theatre in Kaposvár, although by the time Máté joined in 1980, Monori had not been a member for four years.

Of the two actors on stage, the man playing the lead role appears in this theatre almost every night, while the woman never does. The audience may not know her and may see her simply as a stranger, or they may know that they are watching Lili Monori, who – despite having avoided repertory theatres for decades – has been regarded by László Krasznahorkai, Péter Esterházy, and leading theatre critics alike as one of the greatest actresses.<sup>13</sup> Critics see her striking character in Faust as reminiscent of her most famous film role in the 1970s:

In her roles as the Mothers, the Witch, the Earth Spirit, the Porter, Manto, Phorkyas I, Markecolnia, and Care, Lili Monori – with her grown-out roots and dyed hair; a grimy light-blue work coat, the bottom two buttons left undone, exposing a thicket of pubic hair beneath – performs a distorted, feral caricature of Gustave Courbet’s 1866 painting *L’origine du monde*. Yet present with her on stage is also her “primordial” body from thirty-eight years earlier, from *Nine Months* (1976) by Márta

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<sup>13</sup> In Esterházy’s view, “on the one hand, Lili Monori is one of the greatest Hungarian actresses, but on the other hand, if an actor is someone who acts, then she is not, although she is still fantastic, of course”. Péter ESTERHÁZY, „Monori, Székely B.”, in *IBID.*, *Egy kékharisnya feljegyzéseiből* [*From the Notes of a Blue Stocking*], 31–32. (Budapest: Magvető, 1994), 31.

Mészáros: in the repulsive figure of the present, the raw aesthetic power of the former remains.<sup>14</sup>

The production does not make any decisions for the spectator, so it can be understood either way: whether it is a strange, alien woman in a blue cloak, or the world-famous movie actress<sup>15</sup>, who once portrayed gaunt, apathetic, shy working-class girls. The point is the impropriety that she commits at every moment with her behaviour on the Katona stage, which is demonstrated by her spitting on the stage. A woman – alienated from her gender, defying stereotypes – is not ashamed of herself, but lectures Faust and criticises him. “Where is the call of your creative heart... where are you?” she asks him. The lack of artifice; simplicity, deliberate awkwardness and apparent amateurism emphasised in her movements and use of space reinforce the message: the intention, the carefully crafted power of the sentence. Lili Monori does not pretend that she is not reciting poetry.

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<sup>14</sup> Zoltán HERMANN, “Faust öregszik” [“Faust is getting old”], *Színház* 48, no. 6. (2015): 2–7, 5.

<sup>15</sup> “Now they are recruiting Monori. She is a soldier. Just as the military forcefully recruits a young man with a strong physique, so do major and minor directors recruit this actress of »radiant talent« and force upon her »socially marginalized« roles. They too realise – with good sense – that she should be present, even if in better or worse roles. In this she is forced to follow the more ascetic Törőcsik – with a wry smile. »Don’t dress her up... don’t give her any human clothes...« – this is what I imagine the directors are whispering in the dimly lit MAFILM slide projector room – »it’s fine the way she is. Fine? It’s brilliant. « Images. Sequences of images. Monori is gaunt, Monori is listless, Monori is shy. We can no longer imagine a working-class girl in consolidated, prosperous Hungary who does not resemble Monori.” Tibor GYURKOVICS, “Két portré” [“Two Portraits”] *Film, Színház, Muzsika*, 1 May 1976, 19.

*The text and the message*

Goethe's *Faust* is written in verse. The dramatic nature of the text and the invention of theatrical devices to accompany the verse text are one of the greatest challenges of any production. The most divisive scene in Schilling's production is the Witch's Kitchen<sup>16</sup>, and the production itself responds to this. Blanka Mészáros, playing Margaret, is seen here for the first time as she stands up and leaves the auditorium. Faust also sees her here, looking from the stage into the auditorium, and falls in love with her. Although the scene is understandable and clear, it has no theatrical significance, since it does not produce any effect at that moment. Máté's Faust passively withdraws and observes the triumph of stylized sexuality: three young men whooping and laughing as they clutch enormous artificial phalluses and spit semen. He helplessly allows himself to be bound, his face wrapped in plastic, and is forced to suckle the Witch's huge, wrinkled artificial breast (played by Monori), before the act concludes in a group-orgy tableau.<sup>17</sup> The strangeness of the scene lies in the fact that, although the production works with bodily fluids, oversized fertility symbols, and young male bodies (even if the stylized, human-sized phallus and Kulka's realistic, naturalistic lowering of his trousers seem to reflect different theatrical modes), it remains at a standstill. The play loses momentum; its pace stalls. What remains is a cold provocation consisting of the display of costumes and the recitation of the text. Pleasure is occasionally indicated, Faust recoils in hesitant disgust, observing the scene

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<sup>16</sup> For example, Miklós FÁY, „Faust visszatér” [“Faust Returns”] *Mozgó Világ* 41, no. 6 (2015): 108–110, 109.

<sup>17</sup> Those few spectators who saw the Szentkirályi Workshop's first production in 1990 may see the female figure from the performance *Műtét* [*Surgery*], padded with artificial breasts, evoked in this Witch as well. At the time, Monori spent years preparing to perform Molly Bloom's monologue, yet on the evening of the premiere she suddenly decided otherwise.

almost from outside the stage, yet the energy of the actions fail to cohere. The boys' manifestations remain independent and disconnected episodes rather than parts of a unified theatrical process. Monori's voice enters the stage from the back left before she herself appears: a loud, powerful, initially inarticulate sound that gradually clears and becomes easy to understand and follow in this scene. Before her entrance, the sound of her staff striking something is heard, announcing and effectively opening the scene.

*Ow! ow! ow! ow! (...) You damned filthy sow!*  
*(Jaj! Jaj! Jaj! Jaj! Mocsok disznók!)*

She enters the stage with almost twice as many hoarse cries as originally written, stepping onto the stage when the last cry is heard, reaching the middle of the left side of the stage by the end of the second sentence, where she bumps into Faust, who is standing alone: the young men with the artificial phalluses scatter at the first sound.

*What's this here? Who / the hell are you?*  
*(Byh! Ez ki az ördög?)*

In her rage, she swings the staff in her right hand toward Faust, looking at him in an unfriendly manner.

*Who let you in?*  
*(Ide betörtök?)*

Her tone and momentum remain unchanged, she does not wait for an answer.

*What does this mean?*  
*(Mit akartok?)*

She turns around; her roar is directed toward Kulka-Mephistopheles in the blue suit.

*You two clever males:*<sup>18</sup>

*(Ti két ügyes hím)*

Both of her arms are raised high, the one with the staff and the left one as well. She means the adjective (ügyes, 'clever'), acknowledging manhood even as she berates them.

*May that hell's hot pains / Burn in your bones!*

*(hogy az a nagy...! tüzes kín*

*Gyötörjön benn s kinn!)*

As if about to swear, she launches into the sentence, then suddenly pulls up short, closes her mouth, as though biting something off or as if she were momentarily unsure of what to say (as if she had forgotten the text). Yet in the phrase "tüzes kín" ("hot pains") the modifier receives an unusually strong, meaningful emphasis: it bursts out abruptly, so forcefully that the noun it qualifies – "kín" ("pains") – is barely audible. A trace of contempt now mingles with the earlier loud, generalized invective, as if the elaboration of the "tüzes" ("hot") element could continue, though the speaker does not pursue it. She lingers instead, satisfied, having struck upon something (hence the insertion of the little word "that"), and pokes and swishes her staff toward Faust's genitals. At this point Mephistopheles calls out to her and reveals himself; Monori's Witch, in a gesture of recognition, raises both arms again as she realizes who she is facing – her costume constrains the movement. She then looks out toward the audience with a conspiratorial, almost pleading glance (do *they* know who this man in the blue suit is?).

*Oh master, pardon my rude greeting!*

*But where's your cloven hoof, your horse's leg?*

*(Bocsáss meg, ha a jó fogadtatás hibádzott, / De hát a lólábad nem látszott.)*

After establishing contact with the audience as a pretext for her apologetic gesture, she moves off toward Kulka – down-

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<sup>18</sup> Only in the Hungarian translation.

stage right – now swishing her staff in Mephistopheles' direction. The staff strikes the air rhythmically at the beginning of the last words of the lines ("hibádzott" and "nem látszott..."). The Witch's relationship to the men positioned on stage does not change in light of the new information she has received. Kulka-as-Mephistopheles jumps down from the cart on which he has been standing and kisses her once, then twice; at first she would return the embrace, and Monori's left hand remains on Kulka's shoulder as he sits down on the edge of the cart. After the kiss, her vocal delivery changes.

*I'm crazy with excitement now / I see  
(Jaaaj, a boldogság mindjárt megőrjít)*

She laughs, giggles, turns around, takes a seat on Mephistopheles' lap, facing the audience:

*Our young Lord Satan's back again!  
(Hogy viszontlátom Sátán úrfit!)*

Satisfied, she rocks in Mephistopheles' lap with her eyes closed, holding his head with her left hand and pulling his huge wig back into place as it starts to slip off. Mephistopheles then lets her go and stands up to greet her by pulling down his trousers and showing his bottom ("you can lick it"), then rejoicing, they waddle over to Monkey King, who also has his trousers down, to combine their nakedness. Monori looks at the audience again in the middle of the stage, giggles, but spreads her arms and says reproachfully:

*Tell me now, / Gentlemen, what might be your pleasure?  
(Urak, urak, mi az, amire volna kedv?)*

Her lord orders a drink, and the Witch removes her right breast from her purple dress and turns to Faust.

*Certainly! I've a bottle on this shelf  
(Ebben a palackban az fortyog)*

She interjects casually, collegially, to Mephistopheles:

*I sometimes take a swig from it myself*  
(*Néha én is iszok egy kortyot*)

Faust asks for an explanation and turns to the Witch, who continues to giggle. The stage moves, the boys draw a circle, someone neighs, Faust is tied up. Monori walks around the arc of the circle (in the opposite direction to the person drawing in front) and when she arrives, she taps the largest, ground-sweeping phallus with her staff.

(*Folyik. Folyik. Folyik. Folyik. Folyik.*)<sup>19</sup>

She considers the phalluses seriously one by one with her staff. Each one is an almost serious, sad observation. She starts to make a smaller circle around Faust, in the opposite direction from before.

(*Folyik, mint víz.*)<sup>20</sup>

She looks at Mephistopheles very seriously as she speaks. She makes a vertical gesture with her staff.

*From one make ten,*

She shows one finger, then five fingers, and the intonation goes down at the end of the sentence.

*Take two and then*  
(*Kettőben bízz*)

She raises her staff as if pointing at something, still looking at Mephistopheles.

*At one take three*  
(*A hármát hagyod*)

She makes cutting, horizontal movement.

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<sup>19</sup> It flows. It flows. It flows. It flows.

<sup>20</sup> "It flows like water." This is the first line of the witch's twice-times-table in Hungarian translation. In the English version, this line is replaced by "Now hear and see!"



*And you are rich!*

*(Nyerhetsz nagyot)*

She raises her finger warningly.

*Four doesn't score.*

*(Négy ennyi, hogy semmi)*

She takes her eyes off Mephistopheles, glances at Faust and the men standing around her in a circle in a friendly manner and seems not to explain anything as her left hand makes a horizontal motion (without the staff).

*From five and six / Make seven and eight*

*(Öt és hat helyett töltsé be a helyet a hét meg a nyolc)*

She looks at Mephistopheles again, then at his assistants and Faust: she connects her audience on both sides of the stage.

*That puts it straight.*

*(És sorvéig hatolsz)*

She points her staff at Faust's chest.

*And nine is one,*

*(Mert a kilenc az egy)*

The staff remains on Faust's chest, but she raises her left hand again, pointing her index finger towards Mephistopheles.

*And ten is none.*

*(Tíz már nem megy)*

She repeats the cutting gesture with her left hand.

*The witch's twice-times-table's done.*

*(Ez a boszorkány-egyszeregy)*

She utters these words separately, addressing Faust. Máté responds immediately, asking for an explanation and protesting. The wrapping of his face follows; all the performers begin to move, and the process of arranging the final tableau is set in

motion (after the administering of the potion, Monori still has one more line: *I hope my potion whets your appetite*).

The Witch's "twice times table" is a clearly articulated, almost demonstratively segmented text – clean, slow, and delivered by Monori with marked seriousness. It functions as a counterpoint to the men's – boys' – earlier infantile giggling. Placed within a rigorously static stage situation, the incantatory text proves effective as a speech act: it brings the previously chaotic phallic exhibitionism onstage to a halt. Even so, the nature of the relationship remains unclear; what kind of initiation Faust is undergoing here is not fully clear either.

Earlier, during the display of the phalluses, it was precisely the scene's intellectual discomfort and humour that proved operative (for instance, the joke of the snake biting its own tail), while the tempo of the performance remained hesitant rather than forward-moving. By contrast, in this scene – where the verse is spoken within a static stage image – the Witch's text and the dynamics of its delivery begin to drive the action. On a theoretical level, it may remain difficult to decipher precisely what signifies what; on a practical, sensory level, however, the scene becomes easily legible, tangible, and concrete. For brief moments, Monori's figure evokes and activates familiar attitudes associated with brothel madams, scolding mothers, conspiratorial girlfriends, or prostitutes. Through the simple recitation of the spell, she unmistakably instructs the man – or the men – in something, transmitting a form of knowledge to them. What once again constitutes a dramaturgical impropriety is the fact that the Witch, as played by Monori, is entirely equal to her lord: she is in no way subject to Mephistopheles' power, nor does anything onstage suggest otherwise. She handles the devil as she does any other man – perhaps with only a slightly more complicit familiarity. When Monori is not speaking, her performance comes to a halt as well, freezing on the spot. In this scene, the dynamics of her acting are dictated and summoned exclusively by the verse: it is the text that determines her energy and, through its rhythm, shapes her gestures.

Even the earliest reviews of Monori, written when she was still in her twenties, considered it important to note that she “speaks Hungarian beautifully,”<sup>21</sup> and her uniquely natural delivery of text soon became her trademark. When critics wrote about the Szentkirályi workshop as “making the texts a breath of her own” (szövegek magukévé lélegzése),<sup>22</sup> this observation was based on her “excellent speech technique” (remek beszédtechnika)<sup>23</sup> and her intention to communicate clearly as possible. Monori began her career as a poetry performer even before college. Imre Montágh held courses for amateur groups at the Fehérvári Street cultural centre, and as a student typist Monori read the *Magyar Nyelvőr* magazine, which could be ordered through her school. At home, in addition to countless poems, she read books on speech technique by Stanislavski, Mari Jászai, and Sándor Fischer.<sup>24</sup> Her earliest experiences and successes in acting and theatre are closely linked to poetry recitation. From the perspective of the art of reciting poetry, it is evident that speech, communication and words can also be considered as action (as in *The Witch’s teaching*). Partly as a consequence of this – this “non-playing”, seemingly amateurish, “tool-less” mode of acting also becomes intelligible. According

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<sup>21</sup> FENCSEK Flóra, „Az első idei premier: *Légy jó mindhalálig*” [„The first premiere of the year: *Be True Until Death*,”], *Esti Hírlap*, 22 September 1969, 2, and BERKES Erzsébet, „Nyilas Misi, IV. b osztályos tanuló: Monori Lili,” [„Nyilas Misi, fourth-year student: Monori Lili”] *Színház* 2, nos. 11–12. (1969): 22–24, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, “Lili,” *Mozgó Világ* 31, no. 7. (2005): 125–128, 128.

<sup>23</sup> Tibor HEGEDŰS, „A rádió mellett” [„Next to the Radio”] *Népszabadság*, 9 May 1972, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Dorka POROGI, „»Alice voltam Csodaországban« – Monori Lili pályája a Szentkirályi Műhely előtt.” [„I Was Alice in Wonderland» – Lili Monori’s Career Before the Szentkirályi Workshop”. Dorka Porogi in Conversation with Lili Monori] in *Színházi szavak – A megszólalás alakzatai a magyar színházkultúrában* [*Theatre Words – Forms of Expression in Hungarian Theatre Culture*] ed. Magdolna JÁKFAI, Árpád KÉKESI KUN, Tamás OLÁH, and Dorka POROGI, 149–172. (Budapest: Arktisz – Theatron Műhely Alapítvány: 2024).

to the Hungarian tradition of poetry recitation, the performer identifies, experiences, and acts like an actor, yet at the same time remains himself, without any external signs of acting. All acting takes place internally, in the imagination, or in the act of recitation itself. Oszkár Ascher and Zoltán Latinovits, who also studied the theory of poetry recitation, both began their careers with the idea of acting through experience and identification attributed to Stanislavski:

“Poetry recitation as a genre necessarily requires that reciters should always identify with the poet in their emotions and thoughts, that is, by making the poet’s experience their own, they must bring every character in the poem to life through the poet’s imagination! Thus, the deeds and acts of the characters written in the poetic work express the poet’s deeds and acts through the work! [...] unlike the visible mode of representation in the performing arts: the reciter must perform his task without the possibility of stage representation [...] complete immersion is also necessary.”<sup>25</sup>

My idea is that the performer must play the poet himself, that is, he must summarise the long process of creation as briefly as the poem itself; he must bring the poet to life as the poet imagines him when he is first experiencing the work, in the struggle of creation.”<sup>26</sup>

In other words, the actor performing the poem must imagine that, as an actor, they are not merely a fragment or subordinate detail of the work – as is the case with many roles in dramatic theatre – but also its creator, maker, agent, and author. This entails a fundamentally different creative responsibility,

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<sup>25</sup> Oszkár ASCHER, *A versmondás művészete* [*The Art of Reciting Poetry*], (Budapest: Művelt Nép Könyvkiadó, 1953), 10–13.

<sup>26</sup> LATINOVITS, *Verset mondok* [*I Recite Poems*], 22.

both in kind and in scope, particularly with regard to the communication of the work as a whole. The performer must identify with the poet and experience their role; yet this does not mean identifying with the poet as a person. Rather, it involves attaining the mental and emotional state in which the poem itself can be created. The task, then, is not personal identification, but the re-enactment of the act of creation – the assumption of the consciousness from which the poem emerges.

However, there can be no external, visible signs of this; all acting must be focused exclusively on concentration (memory and imagination) and expressed in speech, in the vocal delivery of the text. The poetry reciter's performance, even in the 1950s and 1960s, does not require the same acting tools as a dramatic stage role. It lacks the kind of external acting or performance that later appeared in Monori's theatre on Szentkirályi Street. The reciter therefore plays, or rather "experiences" not a person, but the moment of creation, the poem as it is written. Thus, as a performer, he remains himself throughout the performance, even though in the meantime (according to the Stanislavski method, step by step, during a lengthy acting process) he has identified with the work. The basic experience of working alone with a text and taking responsibility for the entire work was the primary and early theatrical experience of Lili Monori, the actress.

After finishing college, alongside a strong and successful start to her career in leading roles at institutional theatres, she came to understand – at home in the Józsefváros caretaker's flat, while working with the text of *The Maids* – what it means to spend five years with the same text outside the pressures of theatrical production: to use the same text, to think about the same text, and to live with the same text without any instrumental purpose, together with another person.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The premiere took place on 16 June 1973, the second performance was cancelled on the 17th, and it was performed again on the 24th. Before the performance of *The Maids*, Bódy screened his film *A bar-*

In 1972, Gábor Bódy took his qualifying television drama examination.<sup>28</sup> In the summer of 1973, he directed a theatrical performance – an all-arts production – based on Jean Genet’s play, starring Lili Monori, Sarolta Jancsó, and Éva Ruttkai. The production was performed only twice at the Csili Cultural Centre and received no professional acclaim whatsoever.<sup>29</sup>

Genet’s play, written in 1947, was first published in Hungarian in the autumn of 1965 in *Nagyvilág*, and by 1967 it was already featured in the Universitas programme.<sup>30</sup> Lili Monori came across the text in 1968 as a third-year college student: she and Ilona Shütz and Gabi Jobba performed *The Maids* for their speech exam (their teacher was János Gosztonyi). This marked the beginning of the years of “doing the *Maids*”: Monori took the script home with her and soon began weaving Genet’s words into her everyday life with Bódy. They did not rehearse the text or prepare for a performance, but simply began to recite, repeat, and play with it.

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*madik* (*The Third*) and invited important figures from the official and avant-garde theatre to the event.

<sup>28</sup> The recording can be found in the SZFE library. Only 22 minutes have been preserved of the 40-minute recording of the television drama examination, with Claire played by Monori and Solange by Sarolta Jancsó. Bódy asked Éva Ruttkai to play the role of Madame who, however, does not appear in the film since it ends before Madame enters. According to Lili Monori, Bódy received news of the sudden death of a friend and therefore, did not continue filming. This friend was Erzsébet Gombás, who also appeared in Bódy’s film *The Third* and was one of the inspirations for Bódy’s concept of servants. See Gábor BÓDY, „Levél Ruttkai Évának” [„Letter to Éva Ruttkai”] in *Bódy Gábor – Életműbemutató* [*Gábor Bódy – Retrospective*], ed. LÁSZLÓ BEKE AND Miklós Peternák, 178. (Budapest: Műcsarnok, 1987). It was probably after this event that the idea for a theatrical performance came about.

<sup>29</sup> For an analysis of the performance, see Dorka POROGI, “Második tekintet” [„Second Look”] – Gábor Bódy: Cselédek, 1973, *Theatron* 17, no. 1 (2023): 42–51.

<sup>30</sup> Directed by József Ruszt in the autumn of 1967, the two maids were played by Anna Cserhalmi and Katalin Sólyom.

“...and then this madness began in the apartment. I can’t really say what it was – we were coming and going, living, and then suddenly *The Maids* arrived, like some kind of spasm. Certain fragments of text. I might say to him, for instance: put on a white silk blouse! And he would put it on. But don’t button it at the wrist here! And play the piano! And then he played the piano, and I stood there and said ‘Madame,’ and something else – I knew both parts –and he replied. [...] The two of us did this for a long time—but you shouldn’t imagine it like a rehearsal. Rather, like when someone is on drugs and this manic state comes over them. And so time passed like that, while we were ‘doing the *Maids*.’ And we enjoyed it enormously. Bring in the cup, Madame! And [we were] in a different state an altered state of consciousness. It was like when you say something over and over again until it becomes infinite.”<sup>31</sup>

This game went on for years, later becoming Lili Monori’s method of working.<sup>32</sup> The unusually long period of time spent living with the text, the relationship between reality and theatrical fiction, ultimately illuminated something different for Monori and something different for Bódy, leading them to different artistic conclusions.

“For some reason, Gábor – and I was angry with him for this – started to open things up. I think that’s when we lost it. We lost what was real in the flat, and that’s why I started to withdraw more and more from the official theatre. An experience that is the only meaning of acting for me. [...] I wanted us not to do the performance. We had many arguments about this...”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Bence BÍRÓ, „Monori Lili Bódy Gáborról mesél” [„Monori Lili Talks about Gábor Bódy]” manuscript, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. SZÉKELY, *Szentkirályi*...

<sup>33</sup> BÍRÓ, “Monori,” n.p.

A few years after her “doing the *Maids*”, Monori left the public theatre sphere and, a decade later, founded the Szentkirályi Cellar with Miklós Székely B.<sup>34</sup>, where she began experimenting with acting without an audience or performances. In order to delve deeper into the text and material, and to experiment with theatre, she needed her own workshop. Gábor Bódy, on the other hand, wanted to make the experiment and their experiences public. Although, according to Lili Monori, they lost the essence when they moved out of the apartment, Bódy’s production also reveals a commitment to the shared experience of “doing *The Maids*”. as a starting point: the central theme of Genet’s drama is role-playing, or, in one possible interpretation, the psychological compulsion to create theatre. It is not the clearly distinguishable theatre within theatre, but its continuous unstable presence, the interplay of reality and fiction. Later, when Sarolta Jancsó takes part in the rehearsals in the apartment, it is also the thorough psychological analysis and the indistinguishable blending of reality and fiction that dominate.<sup>35</sup> Bódy’s metatheatrical directorial experiment,<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> SZÉKELY, *Szentkirályi...*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> „They knew this very well. A glance, or a pause. Or Lili’s strange giggles, which were impossible to understand. She obviously had a mind of her own, Lili’s and Claire’s, and suddenly she let out a strange little laugh. It could have been directed at me, at Solange, at the situation, so it was impossible to know exactly who she was laughing at, or why she was laughing, or what it was.” Dorka POROGI, “»Mélyebben szállt le ezekbe a poklokba« – Bódy Gábor *Cselédek*-rendezése” [“He descended deeper into these hells» – Gábor Bódy’s production of *The Maids*.” Dorka Porogi in conversation with Sarolta Jancsó], in *Színházi szavak – A megszólalás alakzatai a magyar színházkultúrában* [*Theatre Words – Forms of Expression in Hungarian Theatre Culture*] ed. Magdolna JÁKFALVI-Árpád KÉKESI KUN–Tamás Oláh–Dorka POROGI, 183–199 (Budapest: Arktisz – Theatron Műhely Alapítvány: 2024), 186.

<sup>36</sup> The term *metatheatrical* was introduced into drama analysis by Lionel Abel; however, Tadeusz Kowzan uses it in a way that makes clear that metatheatricality and “theatre within the theatre” are not synonymous. The latter is only one component of the former, since what Kowzan calls “theatre about theatre” – that is, a play that continually



consists precisely in alienating, revealing and exposing their totally intimate theatre, talking about the process and situation of creation alongside its creation. In Csili, the large space, the distances, the poor acoustics of the hall, the spectacular set elements and costumes emphatically contradict Genet's stage directions, that his drama should be performed "secretly".<sup>37</sup> The actors' performances, which explore psychological depths, are overshadowed by the spectacle, losing the power of intimacy and personal experience felt in the apartment. "Doing *The Maids*" initially consisted of placing the elements of fiction, the sentences of the text, into their own everyday reality (they did not try to make the fiction seem real). Monori later considered the situations and conditions that arose through this method to be "the sole meaning of acting".

This kind of engagement with the text – this method (this amount of work) – appears in every respect to become a need for Lili Monori, one that an institutionally organised, production-oriented theatre is unable to satisfy. If the meaning of acting can be constituted in this manner, then for Monori acting is not something whose existence or essence depends on

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reflects upon itself – is also considered metatheatrical (see Tadeusz Kowzan, *Théâtre miroir: Métathéâtre de l'Antiquité au XXe siècle* [Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006], 12). In this sense, I consider Gábor Bódy's production to be a metatheatrical experiment. For instance, the relationship between *The Third* and *The Maids* becomes easier to recognise and understand – perhaps even to read – once we realise that the two are linked by the director himself. This suggests that Bódy aims to achieve the same effect through the performance as an artistic creation as he does through the event as a socio-artistic action: namely, to thematise his own generation's relationship to officially sanctioned art. This context is further reinforced by Bódy's casting of Éva Ruttkai in the role of Madame. A celebrated and institutionally successful actress embodies the power under whose shadow the two maids – a second-year college student and a novice actress – struggle with their fate, their vulnerability, and the roles assigned to them.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Jean GENET, Comment jouer »Les Bonnes?« in *Les Bonnes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1976.

whether others are watching. A single other person is enough, or perhaps not even necessary.

Thus, when in 1982 she and Miklós B. Székely applied to the Cultural Department of Budapest's 8th District Council for permission to use a basement in order to practise "acting as an art form with its own autonomous language,"<sup>38</sup> what they received for the continuation of the *Maids*-type creative process was time.

The essence of this process is not imitation but repetition: the articulation of the texts in as many situations and on as many occasions as possible, their everyday use without any pre-existing plan. This way of working with the text is not motivated by execution, nor guided by rehearsal aimed at achieving a hypothetical goal located in a distant future. Rather, it is driven by attentive observation – by registering what happens, what is already present and operative in the act of speaking the text itself: the testing of quotations within their infinite contexts. When a text is spoken repeatedly, some elements remain unchanged, while others are transformed entirely. Attention focused on this process constitutes both the basis and the method of theatrical rehearsal – creation and interpretation unfolds simultaneously, within the same moment of time. Through observing the variants that emerge in the act of speaking (that is, in rehearsal), choices and explanations gradually take shape: certain moments prove workable or effective, while others do not. Theatre's everyday language therefore speaks of *moments*, since in rehearsal there is rarely time to observe and disentangle the movement of every single element in isolation. It is faster and more reliable for the observer to rely on experience. (One measurable indicator of professional expertise, for instance, is that the more experienced someone watching a rehearsal is, the more confidently they can identify which element of the system requires adjustment, and what kind of small intervention is needed to affect the whole—often in such a way that

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<sup>38</sup> SZÉKELY, *Szentkirályi...*, 15.

a minor, seemingly external instruction is enough to bring an entire performance into alignment.)

Moreover, taking the concept and logic of acting seriously also dictates that the act must listen to what feels right. This kind of solitary – thus self-reflective – method of rehearsal turns the actor (or poetry performer) into their own director, who must immediately interpret and evaluate the variants as they arise (though without being obliged to provide explanations that are intelligible to others as well).

If the demand for communication is understood not only at the level of individual sentences but also at the level of the performance as a whole, it becomes evident that the actor can no longer be regarded merely as the executor of the director's concept.

### *Space and context*

Monori likes to quote Pilinszky's words: "the place holds the greatest power".<sup>39</sup> Her theatrical work with Miklós Székely would not have come about without the cellar on Szentkirályi Street. She is bonded to the cellar by powerful emotions and memories: "For me, this cellar was everything, my mother, my parents."<sup>40</sup> In *Faust*, the movement through space and the play with space may be influenced by the cellar as a spatial envi-

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<sup>39</sup> János Pilinszky's poem *A tett után* [*After the Act*] was first published in August 1973 in *Kortárs*: János PILINSZKY, *After the Act*, *Kortárs* 17, no. 8 (1973): 1255 –, then a year later in a volume – János PILINSZKY, *Végkifejlet* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1974), 29. – „...at the time I read (...) I didn't understand. The place? – that's not important – I thought. It took this cellar for me to realise: yes, it is.” Zsuzsa LÁNG, „Szentkirályi u. 4. – Monori Lili és Székely B. Miklós arról, hogy miért fontosabb a karriernél a nyugalom” [„Szentkirályi u. 4. – Lili Monori and Miklós Székely B. on why peace of mind is more important than career”], *Népszabadság*, 24 December 1999, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Rita SZENTGYÖRGYI, „Jött a gyomorgörcs” [“The stomach cramps came”], *Magyar Narancs*, 19 October 2012. <http://magyarnarancs>.

ronment; at the same time, the actor's experience is shaped by spatial memories drawn from numerous theatres in both the capital and the provinces. Movement in space expresses the actor's perception of space; it reveals the conceptual and imaginative context within which a participant in the performance situates themselves. In Márton Ágh's set design, the second part of the play unfolds within a dilapidated, naturalistic apartment which once must have belonged to that once belonged to a former middle-class family. This does not imply that *Faust* is literally set in an apartment; rather, it takes place amid the scenographic traces – memories – of such a space. On the second evening, in the 113th minute of *Faust* II, after the scene with Philemon and Baucis, as the play draws to a close, Faust begins to vomit and cough in the kitchen, on the right-hand side. The sounds of coughing are taken over by female voices, and the toilet cubicle at the back left fills up. First, Care (Monori in a blue cleaning smock) looks into the toilet, then Want (Anita Tóth), Debt (Blanka Mészáros) and Need (Erika Bodnár) arrive. They remain in the small cubicle at the back left, as if some invisible force were stopping them at the door and they were unable to enter the spacious stage, the living room. They shake hands, introduce themselves, hug each other, kiss each other, their female bodies pressed tightly together, all of which Faust had something to do with during the previous evenings and hours.

*You are locked out, sisters, you cannot stay.*

*(Az ajtó bezárva, be nem léphetünk, Ez gazdag ember, itt tilos nekünk.)*

They echo and interpret what Monori says, each repeating the text at their own pace, in their own way.

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hu/szinhaz2/jott-a-gyomorgorcs-monori-lili-82107. Last accessed: 29 July 2022.

*But through his keyhole Care finds a way.*

*(Ti nem keresitek fél az ő otthonát, De a Gond besurran a kulcslyukon át.)*

Suddenly the four women begin to giggle, then they burst out laughing, almost bubbling over, as Monori, mid-speech, flutters the blue cleaning gown. At once they realize that the keyhole, the free passage, is none other than the womb of Care, the primal mother. They clap, reach out, and in good spirit playfully ruffle Care's hair. Then Want announces that she will wait no longer; Need joins her, followed by Debt. The paths of the four women are thus about to diverge, and the other three begin to gather their things. But just before they leave, Monori stops, notices something, and suddenly flings her arm into the air.

*the stars disappearing*

*(Eltűnik a csillag.)*

Monori points decisively behind and above the auditorium, her eyes fixed on a single point.

*From far off, from far off, another is nearing! / Our brother is coming; he comes – brother Death.*

*(Felhő szalad össze. Ott hátul, ott hátul, ott messze, ott messze Ott jön a bátyánk, ott jön a – Halál.)*

The four actresses look upward and beyond the auditorium. Care is the soloist: she usually speaks first, and – following the director's instructions – it is her words that the others repeat, or, even if a word is first uttered by someone else, it is hers that becomes emphatic, loud, and decisive. This is the case here as well. The word "death" initially appears only as a faint suspicion; when she speaks it, however, it hardens into inescapable certainty. Monori places the full stop at the end of the sentence and lowers her arm. Then, immediately and decisively, she raises it again in greeting and waves her hand, having just uttered the word. It is unclear whether this effect is a coincidence or a matter of camera sensitivity: as if her gaze

were the one falling closest to the lens, Death – whom she glimpses from the stage – suddenly comes uncomfortably close to the viewer watching the recording. Her eyes flash, triumphant, omniscient. She looks beyond the stage toward someone with whom she shares the same blood – someone who understands. She smiles slightly.<sup>41</sup> With this gaze, with this surplus of knowledge, she takes control of the space – not merely the stage, but the entire room. From this point on, the whole of the next scene can unfold from that position of mastery. The omniscience remains with her: it follows her as she enters the stage area and turns toward Faust. He does not notice her at first. Anxiously, he asks whether anyone is there.

*You ask, need I reply?*

*(Kérdésben a válasz.)*

She speaks quietly, with a rasping tone, almost soothingly. She stands in the middle left, on the green stepped platform, shifting her weight from one foot to the other.

*I am here; here I am.*

*(Itt vagyok; elég már az.)*

She says with a shrug. Faust tells her to get lost. She sighs reluctantly, finds it difficult to speak, and raises her hand apologetically.

*I am here where I should be.*

*(Itt a helyem éppen.)*

She scratches her face with her left hand under her eye.

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<sup>41</sup> The professional literature deals little with the actor's gaze, line of sight, and "play with visual coordinates," except within the framework of the director's oeuvre. Magdolna JÁKFALVI, "Zsótér in és off" ["Zsótér on and off"], *Színház* 36, no. 10 (2003): 30.

*On the roads and on the sea / Anxiously they ride with me;/  
Never looked for, always there / Cursed and flattered. I am Care: /  
Have I never crossed your path?*

*(Veled vagyok vízen, erdőn, Keserítőn és kesergőn. Bárki meg-  
kap, bár senki se kér, Ha elátkoz, ha dicsér. – Sohasem ismerted a  
Gondot?)*

She shrugs her shoulders several times as she speaks dutifully and naturally: she cannot help being this way, this is her job. She utters the lines with her chin held high, only lowering her head for a moment when she reaches the part about no one asking for her. The last question, however, sounds strict and provocative in its restraint.

*When a man is in my keeping / All his world is dead or sleeping  
(...) And on time-to-come intent / Comes to no accomplishment  
(Aki álám rendelődik, A világgal nem törődik. (...)) A jövőt  
csak számíthatja, Önmagát így félbehagyja)*

She stresses the “m” in “álám” (“in my keeping”) almost like a diction or speech-technique exercise, accompanying it with an instructive gesture of her left hand. Faust has had enough. During his next line he crosses over to her, grabs her by the arm, pushes her toward the left side of the stage, and closes the glass door behind her. A few seconds later, however, Care reappears from behind, emerging from the toilet cubicle. She wipes her nose, then grumbles angrily at the audience – almost in a farcical manner – pointing accusingly at Máté-Faust:

*Shall he come or shall he go? / He can't choose, he does not  
know. / In the middle of the road / See, he staggers, tremble-toed!  
/ Wanders deeper in the maze / Sees the whole world crookedways.  
(Vajon menjen? Vajon jöjjön? / Nem tőle függ, hogy eldőljön.  
/ Bejárt úton botorkálva / Lépked előre meg hátra. Szánalmas zül-  
lése gyorsul, Látni nem tud már, csak torzul)*

Máté-Faust starts walking backwards, between the doors, Monori-Care following him. Left, right, she follows him every step of the way, her hands in her pockets, head bowed, reciting

as she walks up and down. She stresses the beginning of the lines, as if to underline the stressed octosyllabic verse, working with completely identical pauses, like Hungarian sounds, speaking simply, with a single emotion:

*Burdening himself and others; / Still he breathes, yet chokes  
and smothers / Not quite choked, yet life-bereft, / Stubborn, though  
with hope still left. / (...) Now released, now re-pursued, /*

*Restless sleep and tasteless food, / Binds him in a static state, /  
Makes him hell's initiate.*

*(Terhe magának és másnak, Levegőt szív fulladásnak. Nincs  
élete, nincs halála, Nincs benne harag, se hála. Fél-szabadság szen-  
vedéssel, Fél-álom rossz ébredéssel: Az útján ezek kísérik; Míg a  
pokolra megérik)*

Máté comes forward, stops, turns around, and finally faces Monori, announcing that he will never recognise the power of Care. Monori, as if surprised, is almost embarrassed by such foolish insolence, and almost laughingly, hesitates a little.

*Suffer it then; for as I go / I leave a curse where I have passed  
(Hamar beteljesül az átok.)*

She is almost serene.

*Men live their lives in blindness: so  
(Az ember, míg tart az élete, vak;)*

She becomes serious.

*Shall even Faust be blinded at the last!  
(Faustus, végül te is mondd, hogy "Nem látok".)*

A curse is pronounced with full awareness of the responsibility of having uttered such words. Care hesitates for a moment longer: at the beginning of the sentence, she looks downward, then grimaces, rolling her tongue in her mouth. Finally, she makes up her mind. With ritual deliberateness she raises both hands, moistens the tips of her index fingers, and, holding them aloft with refined composure, steps up to Faust and



gently strokes his closed eyes from both sides, from the outside inward. She studies him for a while, then wanders off backward, her hands in her pockets.

"With her portrayal of the cheeky concierge in Sarkadi's play, performed in the Kaposvár Theatre's laundry-room rehearsal space, Monori marched out of institutional theatre thirty-one years ago," commented Péter Molnár Gál in 2005.<sup>42</sup> Lili Monori recalls that in her last role in a repertory theatre (as *Vincéné*), she almost walked off the stage.<sup>43</sup> By the time she makes the decision to perform only in front of a camera and in basements, she already possesses extensive spatial routine, experience, and knowledge acquired in large institutional theatres – both in the capital and in provincial venues. From then on, she plays for the eyes of one or two spectators only, allowing herself to be seen by just a handful of gazes. At the same time, her stance appears almost demonstrative: she is indifferent to who is watching and unconcerned with how she appears. When she is young, she does not only undress in films,<sup>44</sup> but also permits the camera to record her own act of giving birth...<sup>45</sup> The foundation of her theatrical workshop is a space, a place underground: a basement where she is safe and enjoys complete intellectual freedom. The stage space itself is

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<sup>42</sup> Péter MOLNÁR GÁL, „Lili,” 127.

<sup>43</sup> POROGI, „»Alice voltam...«, [„»I Was Alice...»], 166.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Zsolt Kézdi Kovács: *Ha megjön József [When József Comes]*, 1975; Márta Mészáros: *Örökség [Legacy]*, 1980.

<sup>45</sup> Márta Mészáros: *Nine Months*, 1976. "I looked like a young girl who had fallen from a branch, to whom Márta told that Agnès Varda had filmed her own birth. At first, I didn't understand that they were going to film my birth. I thought it was just another role... In the end, I could have cancelled. My waters had broken two weeks earlier. [...] I went to the hospital and asked the midwife to call the doctor. I phoned the filmmakers and from then on there was no turning back. I was given two accelerants, which made me feel like my spine was breaking. My blood pressure shot up to 260. Cinematographer János Kende fainted at one point, but they filmed the birth anyway. [...] We received a lot of abusive letters at home." Rita SZENTGYÖRGYI, „Jött a gyomorgörcs” [„The stomach cramps came”], n.p.

the invention of the director and the designer, but it becomes concrete – experiential reality tied to action – within the actor’s imagination, since it is made for her. From the moment Death is glimpsed in Monori’s Care scene, she dominates the theatrical space, because she knows what is going to happen. Without doing anything particularly demonstrative, her relationship to Faust maps exactly what Lili Monori herself has said she thought when she first read the play: she did not like the figure of Faust; he almost made her feel physically unwell.<sup>46</sup> She plays the role of an older female figure, one who could almost be Faust’s mother, but decidedly is not. She is simply a woman who knows more than he does. She pities him, patronizes him, provokes him, scolds him, and takes a certain pleasure in his misfortune. At the same time, she carries within herself the drama of nausea as well: if Faust is like this, if this is what intellectual saviours are like – even the cleverest of them –, then there is no solution.

Lili Monori’s statement as an actor – her reading of the play – appears on stage in the minutes preceding Faust’s death, not only in the gestures of the figure she plays, but also in the spatial organization of the production itself.

The years spent in the basement count not only in terms of time, but also in terms of conceptual space and breadth. Monori clearly thinks on a different scale about a text, a material, an actor’s mode of address, and the spatial relation between stage and auditorium than either Kulka or Máté. In this sense, they do not seek to step above or alongside the directing concept, nor to move outside it. When nothing happens in a space, when nothing moves, that is when the workings of an actor’s imagination become most legible.

Gábor Máté (Faust), for instance, after forcing Care out through the door, remains alone for a few seconds and idly

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<sup>46</sup> Éva MARTON, [„Lólépésben közlekedem”] [„I walk at a trot”], *www.revizoronline.com*, 8 September 2015. <https://revizoronline.com/hu/cikk/5713/beszegeltes-monori-lilivel/>. Last accessed: 28 July 2022.

looks at, shifts, and nudges the suitcase lying within reach on the stage, already sensing that he cannot escape. I single out this moment of acting – although, in itself, it would merit detailed analysis for its richness – only because it perfectly highlights a different kind of conceptual spatial network, one that Monori, for instance, neither uses nor activates: the notion according to which the living room is not merely a site of scenery and memories, but a real living space, an apartment in which Faust wanders alone among objects that have become superfluous and meaningless.

No matter what she does, the figure played by Monori evokes a cleaning woman, although at the beginning of the scene she looks into the toilet and earlier is even seen wearing yellow rubber gloves, or at times she is fussing with props; From her words, her gaze, and her entire handling of theatrical space – that is, from her presence – it becomes clear that it matters far more that her name here is Care, and at the beginning of the act Manto: she is a mythical figure, in costume.

Taken as a whole, Monori's stage figures in *Faust* – that is, the roles she plays across the two evenings – are fundamentally built on the fact that the actor performing them maintains a specific, individual, and conscious relationship to the entire Faust material at every moment. Solutions of staging or characterization beyond this – for example, refinements visible in movement – clearly do not interest her, except perhaps insofar as she deliberately avoids being conventional, “good,” or “stageable” (that is, automatic and thoughtless). Her conceptual space is different: wider than the stage itself, and she does not give up this autonomy.

*The direction*

„I have a very poor opinion of Faust as a human being. I have reread the work recently. I did not remember Faust being such a monster. I read both parts in a single day, then went to bed. I felt saturated, as if I had taken in too much. I cannot identify with Faust's problem. I identify far more with the Earth Spirit, whom I play. What matters is Goethe's text itself – its poetry, its musicality, so that these can be preserved. But since I am constantly reciting poetry and reading verse, the text itself did not present any particular difficulty for me; only the structure did, the way it takes such a long time before Goethe finally reveals what it is he wants to say.”<sup>47</sup>

According to Monori, when she encountered the text of *Faust* prior to rehearsals, she was regarding it both as a director and as an actress:<sup>48</sup> She had a clear idea of what Goethe “wanted to say” and raised the question of how the structure of the text worked as a technical problem to be solved – she did not need a director's vision for this. At the same time, she immediately entered into an actor-human relationship with the details of the work, with the roles – in accordance with Schilling's directorial intention: Faust annoyed her, she agreed more with Earth Spirit. In the two-evening production of *Faust*, Lili Monori played a total of eight roles. In Part One, in addition to the Mothers, she appeared as the Witch, the Evil Spirit, and the Porter; in Part Two she played Manto, Phorkyas I, Marcolina, and Care. These roles might also be regarded as forming arcs within each part separately, but they were also interpretable together across the two performances.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> After receiving her degree in Acting, Monori attempted to complete a degree in directing while working, but this was ultimately not permitted. [N. n.] , “Nyilas Misi szeretne rendezni” [“Misi Nyilas wants to direct”], *Film, Színház, Muzsika*, 23 August 1969, 9.

Wearing a blue cloak, the entrance of the Mothers and the exit of the Porter framed Part One; in the same blue cloak, Manto and Care framed Part Two. The Evil Spirit of Part One—a wheelchair-bound old woman in black gloves who cursed Gretchen—reappeared in Part Two in the guise of the grave-robbing Marcolina. The Witch, who appeared only once in Part One with her exaggerated stuffed breasts, short pink dress, and wig, was mirrored by the black-hooded Phorkyas I in Part Two.

In these smaller stage appearances, different variants of femininity and evil were brought into focus, while the framing roles played in the blue cloak functioned as bearers of wisdom, being an outsider, and possessing surplus knowledge. The texts were also linked together by their frequent reliance on acts of magic, prophecy, and cursing: the Witch's Arithmetic functioned as a spell; both the Evil Spirit and Care pronounced curses; the Mothers bestowed blessings; Manto appeared as a prophetess who showed the way to Helen in the underworld; and the Porter served as the narrator of the epilogue – remaining, according to the text itself, “outside,” narrating and reflecting on the performance.

In Part One, Lili Monori spent seven minutes of the 132 performance time on the Katona stage; of the 134 minutes of Part Two, she spent approximately sixteen minutes.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> In *Faust I*: as Mothers, 2 minutes (in the Katona József Theatre recording: 0:09:09–0:11:20), which is 20 lines of text. As the Witch, 3 and a half minutes (1:02:50–1:06:32), with 29 lines of text. The Evil Spirit recites a curse in 1 minute (1:49:20–1:50:30), consisting of 10 lines. The Porter's epilogue and exit lasts half a minute (1:57:39–1:58:11), 6 lines. In *Faust II*, Manto's scene lasts 2 minutes (ending at 0:22:46–0:24:40, he stands to the side to cook, but it is not clear when he leaves), with 6 lines of text. Phorkyas spends 4 minutes on stage as 1, wearing a black hood (0:35–0:38:45), which may be a few lines, but the script does not indicate this. Marcolina is on stage for 2 and a half minutes (1:30:21–1:32:13), with 10 lines. The last and longest stage appearance is that of Gondé: 6 minutes (1:53:00–1:59:00), 33 lines.

“I gave up traditional theatre a long time ago. I don’t miss it; I couldn’t find my way back to that “operatic” mode of acting, that elevated, declamatory manner of speech. When Árpád Schilling asked me to appear in *Faust*, I voiced my reservations immediately, telling him that I didn’t think I was right for the role. I even said that if he wanted someone to play the director, I would do that instead. Schilling accepted this without objection. I don’t believe he had ever seen me perform before. Perhaps it was only last year, when I received the Independent Performing Arts Association (FESZ) award, that I came to his attention. Árpád Schilling himself works in the independent sector. Since 2010, the alternative scene has lost two thirds of its state funding, and its artists are now rarely visible at award ceremonies or among nominees. In *Faust*, Árpád intended for me to play the role that sends everyone to hell – the figure who, according to the director’s concept, was meant to put the entire company in its place.”<sup>50</sup>

Monori’s statement makes it clear that she understands why it mattered to Schilling, himself an independent theatre-maker, that she – likewise independent – should appear in his production. The staging of the new Hungarian translation of *Faust* at the Katona Theatre in 2015, directed by Schilling, promised to be a significant moment in theatre history. Schilling’s reading of *Faust* was not only a portrait of the Hungarian intellectual and social landscape, but also one that foregrounded theatrical metaphor itself,<sup>51</sup> life in the professional theatre. At the end of Part One, speaking the Porter’s lines, Monori looks the audience directly in the eye and tells them that “the author is an amateur and the theatrical company is amateurish,” while smiling slyly and jerking her thumb

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<sup>50</sup> MARTON, „Lólépésben” [„At a Gallop”], n.p.

<sup>51</sup> For example, HERMANN, „Faust öregszik” [„Faust is ageing”], 2–7.

backward toward the uniformed, soldierly actors crowding behind her. She then adds that she herself, by contrast, is “an amateur curtain operator,” and descends through the trapdoor by which she entered, repeatedly opening and closing her cloak as she goes, exposing her simulated nakedness and breaking into laughter. The blue cloak – blue like the robe of the Christian Mother of God, and blue like Mephistopheles’ blue suit, thus unmistakably transcendent, while at the same time resembling the most basic garment of a cleaning woman – functions as a curtain: it conceals and reveals the theatre itself. In Robert Wilson’s 1990 Frankfurt production of *King Lear*, the motif of buttoning plays a prominent role: in the prologue, twelve figures dressed in royal-blue cloaks stylize the gesture of fastening buttons. “This gesture explicitly refers to two particularly emphasized passages in *Lear*’s text [...] those passages in which Lear crosses the threshold between madness and death.”<sup>52</sup> Through the buttoning and unbuttoning of the cleaner’s cloak, Schilling links not only the tradition of East-Central European grotesque, but also the conceptual field of childbirth and birth to this gesture – drawing attention to the fact that physiological and aesthetic interpretations of boundary-crossing occasionally coincide. (In Márta Mészáros’s film, Lili Monori did in fact give birth on screen.)

If buttoning is an obvious instance of theatrical self-reflexivity, then all of Monori Lili’s stage appearances may be read as such – the figures in the blue robe most certainly. Their appearance in the ninth minute of the performance, their rising from the trapdoor, is to be read in this way, just as the

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<sup>52</sup> Erika FISCHER-LICHTE, „Átkelés az árnyékok birodalmába: Robert Wilson frankfurti Lear-rendezése” [„Crossing into the Realm of Shadows: Robert Wilson’s Production of *Lear* in Frankfurt”] trans. Árpád KÉKESI KUN, Gabriella KISS, *Theatron* 2, no. 2. (2000): 125–137, 127. In original German: Erika FISCHER-LICHTE, „Auf dem Weg ins Reich der Schatten. Robert Wilsons Frankfurten King Lear Inszenierung” in *Welttheater–Nationaltheater–Lokaltheater?* ed. Erika-FISCHER-LICHTE, Harald XARALD, 203–229 (Tübingen-Basel: Francke, 1993).

closing speech of Care on the second *Faust* evening, delivered in the same blue cloak. It therefore follows from the director's concept that in this production, a solitary, independent actress "tells off" the director of one of the capital's leading repertory theatres. Schilling creates the conditions and the possibility for this situation. The manner in which the action is carried out, however – the *how* of the acting, the technique of performance – is Monori's own; it is a distinct performative language. (This is no doubt also why Monori warned Schilling in advance that she was unsuitable, unmanageable, impossible to direct, so that he would not even attempt to "direct" her acting.)

The production nevertheless offers a moment in which this language is not spoken alone. In the twenty-third minute of *Faust II*, Lili Monori and Miklós Székely B. meet on the Katona stage in the roles of Manto and Chiron, and for the span of half a minute Schilling completely suspends the dramatic action. In preparation for the Helen love story, he simply allows the two actors, in the roles of the prophetess and the centaur, to look at one another.

Before this scene, Chiron has delivered a brief lecture to Faust on female beauty, wheeling him about on a cart. Faust implores him to take him to Helena – and thus they arrive at Manto. The short episode is, in effect, a fleeting encounter; its dramaturgical function is to orient Faust on his path. Wearing the blue cloak, Manto – Monori enters the room from the toilet at the back left; she is now also wearing yellow rubber gloves and – counterpointing the lyricism of the scene—carrying a toilet brush.

The following dialogue unfolds between a cleaning woman and a man with stubble, wearing a worn brown jacket:

MANTO Demigods are approaching.

CHIRON It is so! Open your eyes to know!

MANTO Welcome! You keep your tryst, I see.

CHIRON Your temple stands and waits for me.

MANTO So tirelessly you wander still.



CHIRON Yours is the peace by stillness bounded

I need to circle round at will.

MANTO I wait, by circling time surrounded.

What stranger's here?

CHIRON His mind is much elated:

With Helen he's infatuated,

And has no notion how to start.

MANTO On the impossible he sets his heart;

Such men I love.

So enter with good cheer.

Monori, here, where she reveals who she loves, inserts a very emphatic “whom” and waves the toilet brush toward the Chiron-Faust pair, pointing at them – it is not clear exactly which one. Although the sentence refers to Faust in theory, through this confirmation and emphasis – and through the fact that she then gains new momentum, shifts to a new topic, and exits – the object acquires at least a double meaning. Then Monori-Manto moves away, goes to the stove and shows Faust the way, no longer paying attention to Chiron. However, while the above dialogue takes place, the two men stand facing each other. Monori speaks ironically; Székely B. responds cheerfully, with a smile. Monori then speaks softly and sharply, greets him seriously, and glances down at the rag and the toilet brush in her hand. Székely B., meanwhile, remains sly. The toilet brush circles around the sentence where Manto says that time is running out for her, a serious sentence with a slight sigh in it. The scene completely abandons the main plot of *Faust* (Gábor Máté, who meanwhile longs for Helena, waits patiently in Chiron's carriage for the play to end) and focuses on two actors who, in theory, play minor roles but who have a particularly complicated, deeply personal relationship – something that is not necessarily related to the theme of *Faust II*. However, the director decides that this encounter between a man and a woman must have a place in this performance and

material that encompasses the entire universe.<sup>53</sup> Schilling also adds two beautiful young people to the pair standing at opposite ends of the stage: Blanka Mészáros and Bence Tasnádi lie on the bed and look from Monori to Székely B. and from Székely B. to Monori.

Schilling's direction not only creates the space and allows it to function freely but also relies on the actor to mobilise and bring in his experiences and stories from outside the space, i.e. outside the performance time. As Schilling highlights in *Notes of An Escape Artist* (*Egy szabadulóművész feljegyzései*:

"The starting point and ultimate meaning of creation is the human being – that is, the actor – whom I regard as a creative partner, not as a mere instrument of communication. I place myself (ourselves) at the center of the inquiry. We must be able to speak and make statements not about others, but about ourselves, without quotation marks. [...]

It is not grand, representative performances what we need, in which the recipient – the spectator – rewards the professionalism of refined composition with applause, but personal acts of commitment that lead either to the silent shock of despair that comes with looking into the mirror, or to bursts of irrepressible laughter."<sup>54</sup>

This remark suggests that the close relationship between the work, the performance as a whole, and the actor's person-

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<sup>53</sup> "Péter Molnár Gál, who watched all our performances for many decades, saw clearly that we delved deeply into male-female relationships. That was not our intention, but that is what happened." Cf. Rita SZENTGYÖRGYI, "Nem kell az arcom. Székely B. Miklós színész" ["They don't need my face. Actor Miklós Székely B."], *Magyar Narancs*, 2 June 2015. <https://magyarnarancs.hu/szinhaz2/nem-kell-az-arcom-94840>. Last accessed: 29 July 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Árpád SCHILLING, "Face 2 face," in *Egy szabadulóművész feljegyzései* [*Notes of a Freedom Artist*], 35–40. (Budapest: Krétakör, 2008), 35–36.

ality is a fundamental condition, rather than merely a link between an actor and a role or task to be played. Like a poet or performer, the actor formulates a conscious and responsible attitude toward acting. This, in turn, makes possible something that becomes evident when watching Lili Monori's performance in *Faust*: on the stage, it is the actor who determines the characters' level of awareness and how much they know.<sup>55</sup> The roles performed by Monori Lili know no less about either the work being performed or the scenographic context than the actor herself: their effect is immediate, but they become readable only in conjunction with the experiences of the actor's past.

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<sup>55</sup> The basic concepts of Manfred Pfister's theory of drama, which enable analysis: the flow of information and the degree of informativeness of the characters. I am familiar with the theory from Ágnes Váradi's thesis-translation, which is based on Manfred PFISTER, *Das Drama* (Paderborn: Wilhem Fink Verlag, 2001). Ágnes VÁRADI, *Drámai hősnők típusai a századelő magyar irodalmában* [*Types of Dramatic Heroines in Turn-of-the-Century Hungarian Literature*] (doctoral dissertation), (Budapest: Színház- és Filmművészeti Egyetem, 2022), 114.

## IN PLACE OF AN AFTERWORD – ON THEATRICAL TIME

While writing the studies collected in this volume, alongside my work on my doctoral thesis and my exploration of micro-histories of performance, I was consistently preoccupied with the relationship between theatre and time, and with the temporality of acting. From the outset, I was drawn to a central paradox: although actors are artists of the present and artists of presence, their creations nonetheless continue to exert an influence from what is no longer present – from distances of decades or even centuries, and even in the absence of presence itself.

This concern guided my research toward theatre history and led me to examine legendary, memorable performances and acting practices from the past hundred years. As I engaged with these materials, questions of time resurfaced repeatedly – not only in the ways historiography and memory account for time, or in how memory operates within performance, but also in a far more everyday sense. Theatrical practice is continually compelled to reckon with time in the course of its work, much as actors continue to work with time today.

For example, in my analysis of József Timár's performance as the salesman, the reciprocal relationship between time and theatre becomes apparent not only in the haunting presence of past times, but also in the structural demand that the (ill) actor speak almost alone for 120 minutes. In the chapter devoted to Éva Ruttkai, this temporal dimension is illuminated from a different angle: not only in that she ages as Juliet while remaining ageless in *The Visit*, but also in her handling of gesture on the main stage. Rather than enlarging her movements, she multiplies them. Her movements do not occur on a broader

scale than in everyday, realistic behaviour; instead, they occur more frequently.

Árpád Ódry, by contrast, articulates every single sound yet speaks at great speed, thereby enacting what he taught – that the actor must be quick, since time on stage is intensified, multiplied tenfold. Lili Monori, meanwhile, infuses every seemingly “idle” moment with the possibility that events might unfold otherwise than they ultimately do. All of these are techniques, situations, or tasks that remain viable within the theatre of the present; they can still be tested and experienced today. In this sense, performances of the past also open themselves toward the future.

Performance theories that operate with the duality of text and performance, as well as institutional structures, tend to place responsibility for theatrical time primarily on the director. Anne Ubersfeld defines theatrical time as the relationship between the temporality of the performance and that of the represented action.<sup>1</sup> Patrice Pavis describes theatrical time as having a dual nature, distinguishing between onstage time and time beyond the stage, the latter encompassing both the temporal horizons of the fiction and the conditions of reception that frame the performance.<sup>2</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte and post-dramatic aesthetics do not conceive of performance as the staging of a dramatic text, but rather understand it as an event in which spectators and performers are present together.<sup>3</sup> If we reflect on these approaches, we may say that theatrical time is constituted by the relationship between the performance as a work of art (the rehearsed, idealized piece) and the performance as an event (its singular realization). Viewed in this way, it becomes apparent that the director’s influence on theatrical time is, in fact, much more limited than is often assumed. In

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<sup>1</sup> Anne UBERSFELD, *L'école du spectateur, Lire le théâtre 2*. (Paris: Édition sociales, 1981), 239.

<sup>2</sup> Patrice PAVIS, *Dictionnaire du théâtre* (Paris: Édition sociales, 1980). 397–400.

<sup>3</sup> FISCHER-LICHTE, *The Transformative Power of Performance...*, 38–42.

Hungarian theatrical lore, the image of the director who measures performance time for artistic reasons is associated with Peter Brook.

Following the Budapest guest performance of Brook's *King Lear* in 1964, a story began to circulate according to which the director timed the length of the performance with a stopwatch and expressed his dissatisfaction when it turned out to be seven minutes longer than usual.<sup>4</sup> When asked about this, Peter Brook did not claim that a shorter performance was always better, nor did he establish a rule. Rather, the measurement of time served as a point of reference for him in evaluating individual performances and in analysing actors' work.<sup>5</sup> (This may be so because acting cannot be analysed in isolation: either it must be repeated in order to be discussed, or it must be related to other performances; those seen earlier, or those of fellow actors.) Brook could have scheduled a rehearsal of *King Lear* for the following day to trim the seven minutes that had caused his dissatisfaction, but during the performance itself that evening he could no longer intervene from the wings. The time of that particular evening's performance is singular, unrepeatable; the performance as an event is borne and governed primarily by the actor. This is partly because the actor is in direct contact with the spectators and shares time with them, and partly because it ultimately depends on the actor whether the performance "takes place" on that given night – that is, the actor is the one who brings about the transfer.<sup>6</sup> Theatrical performance does not endure. Even when it is recorded, it does not truly remain; only certain elements become visible. It survives solely in memory – both in collective memory and in

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<sup>4</sup> Tamás KOLTAI, *Brook szemtől szemben* [*Face to face to Brook*] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1976), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Tamás KOLTAI, "A csúcson hideg van – Beszélgetés Peter Brookkal" ["It's Cold at the Top – A Conversation with Peter Brook"], *Színház* 25, no. 8 (1992): 5–9, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Alain BADIOU, *L'éloge du théâtre* (Paris: Flammarion, 2016), 39–40.

the memory of the individual subject – and is therefore also directed toward memory. Its very purpose is that it should never be forgotten.

The moment a performance begins, it is always possible to know what will happen – yet anything may happen. For the actors, the future is at once determined and open. I sought to keep this openness in view, along with the tension it creates, while studying events of the past and observing actors at work.

## PRODUCTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS VOLUME

### **Gellért Endre: *Intrigue and Love*, 1950**

Title: *Intrigue and Love*. Premiere: 8 December 1950. Venue: National Theatre, Chamber Theatre (Hungarian Theatre, Budapest). Director: Endre Gellért. Author: Friedrich Schiller. Translator: István Vas. Music: N/A. Set Designer: Mátyás Varga. Costume Designer: Teréz Nagyajtay. Cast: Artúr Somlay / Samu Balázs (Chancellor Von Walter), Miklós Gábor / Lajos Básti (Major Ferdinand von Walter), Lajos Gellért (Master of the Court Von Kalb), Gizi Bajor / Anna Tőkés (Lady Milford), József Juhász / János Horkai (Chancellor's Secretary Wurm), Gyula Gózon (Miller, town musician), Irén Sitkey / Márta Fónay (Miller's Wife), Violetta Ferrari / Éva Ruttkai (Luisa), Gyula Bartos / József Bihari (the Prince's Valet), Teréz Bod / Mária Kovács (Sophie, Lady's First Maid), Zoltán Galamb (Lady's Valet), Gellért Raksányi (Chancellor's Valet).

### **Endre Marton: *Death of a Salesman*, 1959**

Title: *Death of a Salesman*. Premiere: 21 November 1959. Venue: National Theatre, Budapest. Director: Endre Marton. Author: Arthur Miller. Translator: Jenő Rácz. Composer: Gál János Gyulai. Set Designer: Gyula Hincz. Costume Designer: Piroska Laczkovich. Cast: József Timár (Willy Loman), Erzsi Somogyi (Linda), György Kálmán (Biff), Ferenc Kállai (Happy), György Linka (Bernard), Erzsi Máthé (Woman), László Kemény (Charley), Samu Balázs (Ben), Sándor Hindi (Howard Wagner), Etelka Selényi (Jenny), János Gosztonyi (Stanley), Edit Soós (Miss Forsythe), Éva Gerber (Letta).



**Zoltán Várkonyi: *Romeo and Juliet*, 1963**

Title: *Romeo and Juliet*. Premiere: Friday, 17 January 1963. Venue: Vígyszínház, Budapest. Director: Zoltán Várkonyi. Author: William Shakespeare. Translator: Dezső Mészöly. Music: Ferenc Farkas. Set Designer: József Cselényi. Costume Designer: Rudolf Láng. Choreographer: Ágnes Roboz. Fencing: Rudolf Kárpáti. Cast: Zoltán Latinovits (Romeo), Éva Ruttkai (Juliet), Mária Sulyok (Nurse), Tivadar Lőrinc (Friar Lawrence), Lajos Pándy (Escalus, Prince of Verona), Frigyes Harsányi / Kálmán Szabó (Paris), Gyula Benkő (Mercutio), József Fonyó (Benvolio), István Prókai (Tybalt), Gyula Koltay / Gábor Koncz (Friar John), Gyula Árkos (Baltasar), Antal Farkas (Peter), Károly Verebes (Samson), Péter Haumann (Abraham), János Zách (Montague), Ilka Petur (Lady Montague), Gábor Mádi Szabó (Capulet), Iza Sándor (Lady Capulet), Sándor Deák (Old Capulet), István Nagy (Apothecary), Gábor Koncz (First Guard), Ferenc Vész (Second Guard), István Lontay (First Citizen), Péter Czibulás (Paris' Page).

**Péter Gothár: *The Visit*, 1986**

Title: *The Visit*. Premiere: 16 January 1986. Venue: Vígyszínház, Budapest. Director: Péter Gothár. Author: Friedrich Dürrenmatt. Translator: Árpád Fáy. Music: György Selmeczi. Set Designer: Róbert Éberwein. Costume Designer: Márta Jánoskúti. Cast: Éva Ruttkai (Claire Zachanassien, née Wäscher), Attila Kaszás (Seventh, Eighth, Ninth Husband), István Szatmári (Chief Valet), Károly Korognai (Koby, blinded eunuch), Péter Rudolf (Loby, blinded eunuch), Dezső Garas (Ill, shopkeeper), Teri Földi (His Wife), Márta Egri (Ottília, his daughter), Zoltán Szerémi (Karl, his son), Gyula Szombathy (Mayor), Sándor Sörös (Priest), Géza Rácz (Doctor), Gábor Reviczky (Teacher), János Kovács (Hanke,

Policeman), László Németh (Hoffbauer), András Ambrus (Helmberger, Second Citizen), József Szarvas (Kühn, Third Citizen), Pál Bajka (Hauser, Fourth Citizen), András Sipos (Painter), Antal Farkas (Train Conductor), Attila Hankó (Ticket Inspector), Imre Szabó (Executor), Sándor Szűcs (Journalist), Károly Korognai (Radio Reporter), Antal Cserna (Film Correspondent), Györgyi Kari (Miss Luise).

### **Árpád Schilling: Faust I, 2015**

Title: *Faust I-II*. Premiere: 25 April 2015. Venue: Katona József Theatre, Budapest. Director: Árpád Schilling. Author: Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Translator: László Márton. Dramaturg: Bence Bíró. Music: Marcell Dargay. Set Designer: Márton Ágh. Costume Designer: Márton Ágh. Cast: Gábor Máté (Faust), Lili Monori m. v. (Mothers, Witch, Evil Spirit, Porter), Tamás Keresztes (Wagner), B. Miklós Székely (Old Peasant), Mephistopheles (János Kulka), Zsolt Dér e. h. (Student), Ervin Nagy (Monkey King, Bálint, Master of Ceremonies), Bence Tasnádi (Animal I, People), István Dankó (Animal II, People), Blanka Mészáros e. h. (Margaret), Péter Haumann (Minister, Oppositionist), Erika Bodnár (Famous Actress), Réka Pelsőczy (Woman), János Bán (Proctophantasmist), Anita Tóth (Beauty). Choir: Zsuzsanna Bagaméri, Zsófia Dániel, Anna Demszky, Katalin Domokos, Viktória Fülöp, Viktória Gubucz, Zsóka Incze, Erzsébet Hajnalka Juhász, Mónika Kiss, Timea Molárovits-Gyöngyösi, Nóra Nádudvari, Kata Törley, Réka Vajda, Szilvia Veréb, Gyöngyi Zalaba. Boys' Choir: Levente Bámlí, Ágoston Bárány, Lázár Boros, Barna Csibrán, Márk Dargay, Gábor Dehlén, Milán Égner, Jakab Felföldy, Áron Gál, Gergő Artúr Gombás, Andris Himmler, József Karczagi, Bence Kazi, Kamill Kökény-Hámosi, Dávid Lengyel, Olivér Tivadar Molnár, Bence Páhok, Ádám Prior, Borisz Stollár, Vitold Tamás Tóth, Dániel Vass.

## **Árpád Schilling: Faust II, 2015**

Title: *Faust I–II*. Premiere: 25–26 April 2015. Venue: Katona József Theatre, Budapest. Director: Árpád Schilling. Author: Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Translator: László Márton. Dramaturg: Bence Bíró. Music: Marcell Dargay. Set Designer: Márton Ágh. Costume Designer: Márton Ágh. Cast: Gábor Máté (Faust), János Kulka (Mephistopheles, Phorkyas), Zsolt Dér e. h. (Student), Tamás Keresztes (Wagner, Euphóron, Philemon), Anita Tóth (Homunculus, Wanderer, Want), Blanka Mészáros e. h. (Sphinx, Galatea, Girl, Debt), Bence Tasnádi (Griff, Dolphin, Scout I, Chorus III), István Dankó (Ant, Dolphin, Scout II, Chorus II), B. Miklós Székely m. v. (Chiron, Nereus, Commander), Lili Monori m. v. (Manto, Phorkyas I, Markecolina, Care), János Bán (Seismos, Anaxagoras, Archbishop), Réka Pelsőczy (Lamia, Phorkyas II, Chorus Leader), Péter Haumann (Thales, Minister), Ervin Nagy (Proteus, Tax Collector, Chorus I), Erika Bodnár (Helena, Baucis, Need). Choir: Zsuzsanna Bagaméri, Zsófia Dániel, Anna Demszky, Katalin Domokos, Viktória Fülöp, Viktória Gubucz, Zsóka Incze, Erzsébet Hajnalka Juhász, Mónika Kiss, Timea Molárovits-Gyöngyösi, Nóra Nádudvari, Kata Törley, Réka Vajda, Szilvia Veréb, Gyöngyi Zalaba. Boys' Choir: Levente Bámlí, Ágoston Bárány, Lázár Boros, Barna Csibrán, Márk Dargay, Gábor Dehlén, Milán Égner, Jakab Felföldy, Áron Gál, Gergő Artúr Gombás, Andris Himmler, József Karczagi, Bence Kazi, Kamill Kökény-Hámosi, Dávid Lengyel, Olivér Tivadar Molnár, Bence Páhok, Ádám Prior, Borisz Stollár, Vitold Tamás Tóth, Dániel Vass.

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*Abbreviations:*

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This book, although rooted in a long-standing tradition, is also an experiment. It explores acting practices of the past and approaches twentieth-century Hungarian theatre history as a history of acting. Its central hypothesis is that, alongside and beyond the history of director's theatre, it is possible to outline equally distinctive histories of acting that have shaped contemporary Hungarian theatre just as profoundly. Through four case studies—analyses of the work of József Timár, Éva Ruttkai, Árpád Ódry, and Lili Monori—the book demonstrates that not only theatre itself, but acting as such, can be regarded as a cultural model, and that theatre history is transmitted, even without being written, through the practice of acting.

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