

NEW  
HUNGARIAN  
DRAMA

PLAYS

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TWENTY TWENTY-ONE

*Everyday  
Isolation*

Petőfi  
Cultural  
Agency



**THE  
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HAYS**

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*Everyday  
Isolation*

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I was Khrushchev's  
Waiter



## László Garaczi

was born in 1956 in Budapest. He is a poet, essayist, playwright, and a literary translator, and he has also authored screenplays. In 2020, his drama *Stranded* won the Best Hungarian Drama of the Season Award from the Guild of Theater Dramaturgs. Garaczi's dramas experiment with linguistic forms, fragmentation, poetic language, and familiar personal problems, offering sensitive portrayals of the inner worlds of the characters and the raw, harsh outside world. His works show the disintegration of human relationships as characters suffer in isolation, searching for words, sentences, and forms of expression to communicate with one another, and failing.

### *other works*

*Imoga, Prédales, Amazing Wild Animals, Plasma*

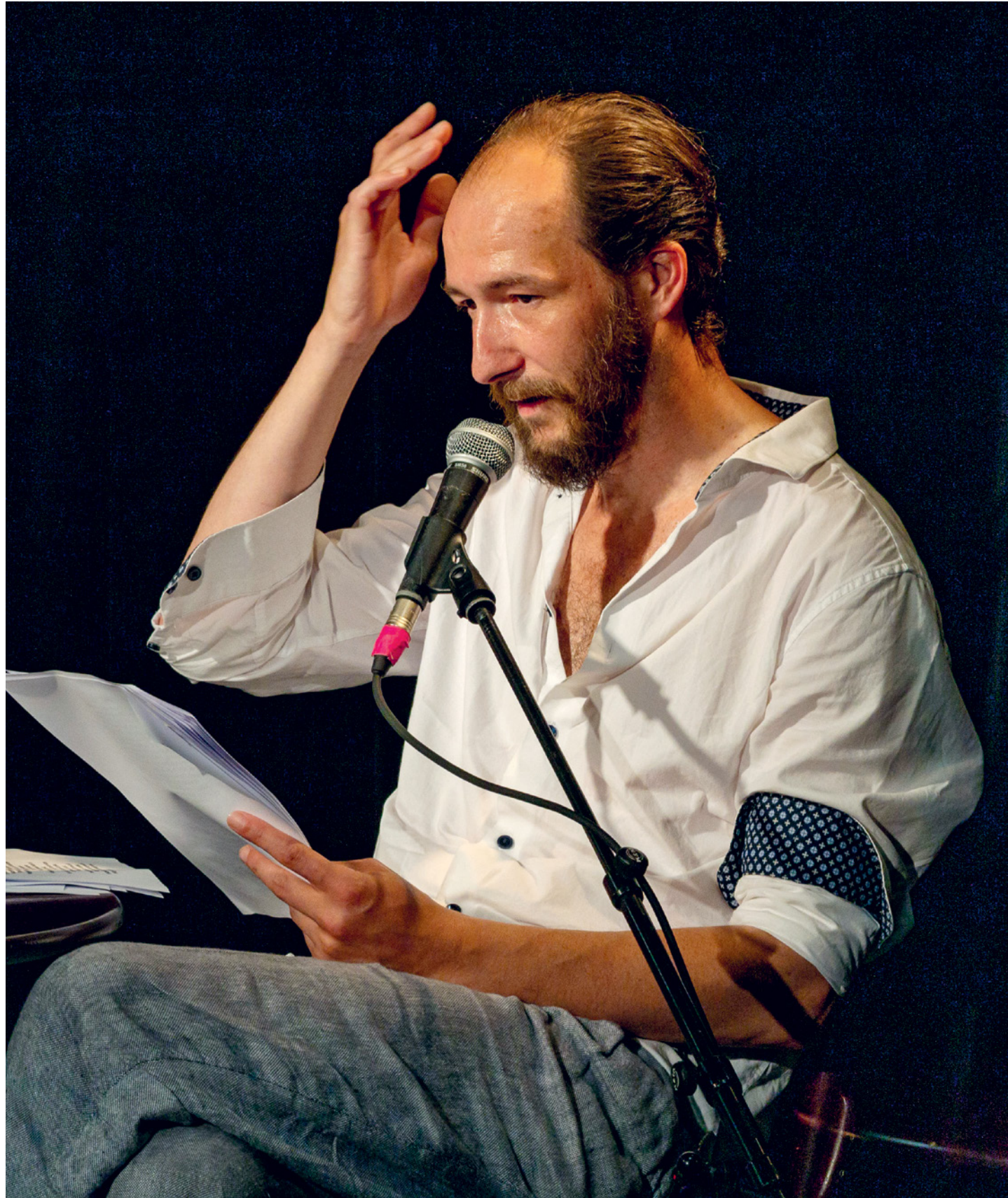
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# *Stranded*

The play is about a man and a woman who not long ago were husband and wife. The man walked out on the marriage because of another woman, but now he is alone. Farewell. Closure. Loneliness. Separately, the two former spouses try to come to terms with the trauma of their separation. They describe their relationship and their ways of surviving the pandemic situation in separate soliloquies, in parallel internal monologues. The man escapes into the online world, while his ex-wife has no such escape from her emotions and the traumas she has endured. In the one-act play, which consists of twenty-one “sound pictures,” there is no plot in the traditional sense, no real dialogue, and no coherent storytelling either. The audience has to figure out for themselves just what has happened and what is happening to the characters. This process is both aided and hampered by the “third character” of the play, the chorus, which acts as an independent voice reflecting on the world and the acts of the two psychologically unstable protagonists. The monologues of the man and the woman are set against the backdrop of the reality of quarantine, which includes isolation, unpredictability, deserted night streets, faces covered with masks, the virtual impossibility of physical contact with another person, and an omnipresent sense of fear. This adds to the tension between the two characters, yet the play is not a “quarantine” drama. Although it touches on the situation caused by the virus, forced isolation and the consequences of this isolation go beyond the world of life in a time of pandemic, and the vision of a society in disarray is almost apocalyptic. The harshness and cruelty of our real world is revealed, especially in the tense yet everyday situations. The play is a post-dramatic work told in fragments in a concise, staccato, poetic language. The sensitive depiction of the trauma of divorce sometimes becomes almost absurd or surreal, while at other times, it dips into a kind of objectivity and realism. But in the end, it always returns to the lyricism of free verse. *Stranded* is a play that is both lofty and everyday, action-packed and psychological, experimental and reminiscent of ancient Greek drama, and as it moves between online and offline spaces, it offers poetically expressive close-ups of the mourning that accompanies a break-up.





TRIP Theatre in Budapest, director: Bence Biró. Károly Hajduk in the picture. Photo: Ádám Kuttner

“

*The thoughts  
splinter  
my skull.*

*Premiere: 28 June, 2020. Trip Theatre*

”





## János Háý

was born in 1960 in Vámosmikola. He is a József Attila Prize-winning Hungarian writer, poet, and playwright. His drama *The Dead Man* won the Best Drama of the Year Award in 2017. His works usually present the stories of lives derailed, marriages gone wrong, and life journeys built from childhood memories. At the heart of his work, one finds the human being stripped down until nothing remains but his desires. Háý creates a world of strong contours in a small space. He often composes adaptations of his own works, rewriting his own prose texts into scripts for the text. One recurring theme in his work is the failure of social mobility. Háý often presents individual failures of socialization as tragedies caused by unintentionally fateful human acts.

### *other works*

*Kid Géza, Ferike Herner's Pop, The Girl Who Worked with a Hand-Me-Down Soul*

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# *The Dead Man*

A dramatic, stirring confession, a harrowing almost-monodrama, a ballad of a young woman left alone with her young child. The protagonist of the play, which is set during the Second World War, is Anna, a woman in her early thirties who is left alone with her young daughter when her husband is sent to the front. One day, she receives a telegram informing her that her husband has died. His body is brought home in a sealed coffin, and the decomposing, putrid corpse is buried at the edge of the village. With her husband's body, Anna buries her old life, her old self. She then begins to live the life of a widow. She must fend for herself to keep from starving to death. She must face the villagers' indifference, judgment, and gossip, and she must grapple with her own material and moral vulnerability, sexual harassment, and the fact that her spiritual needs and physical desires remain unsatisfied. His response to her bleak loneliness is forgetfulness, withdrawal from relationships, total emotional isolation, and work from dawn till dusk. Anna's daughter responds very differently to the tragedy that has befallen her family. She is convinced that her father is not dead because he never said goodbye. Every day, she waits for him to come home. One day, when Anna has grown accustomed to her life as a widow, her husband comes home, and she learns that he was being held as a prisoner of war. He has suffered terribly and has come face to face with murder and death, but he wants to love, to feel, and to live. He does not give Anna time to adjust to his unexpected return. He cannot wait for her to be emotionally prepared to be close to him again, because for him, Anna and Anna's embrace are life itself. Anna, however, cannot change so quickly and unexpectedly. She cannot bring her husband, who she had thought was dead, back to life. His impatient, demanding, and ultimately violent advances inevitably end in tragedy. *The Dead Man* is not just a war story. It is the story of every woman who has lost the man she had planned to live with because he leaves her, or because he comes home every six months from his work abroad, and she must deal with this absence. It is also the story of every man who wants to return to the reality of the past after having been distant as if not a day had passed in the meantime.



Szkéné Theatre in Budapest, director: László Bérczes. Sára Mészáros in the picture. Photo: Csaba Mészáros

“

*I should have felt  
as if he were there,  
but for me, he wasn't  
there at all.*

*Premiere: 20 October, 2020. Szkéné Theater*

Translated into: Polish

”





## Csaba Kiss

was born in 1960 in Târgu Mures. He is an Attila József Award-winning Hungarian director, playwright, theater director, and university professor. His oeuvre is diverse and unique. His use of text is largely determined by his dramaturgical thinking, and he often uses tools associated with postmodernism, such as text deconstruction, mosaic editing, and citation. In his dramas inspired by classical drama (authors such as Shakespeare, Chekhov, and Büchner), he is driven by a precise and deep analysis of the original text, which he breaks down into its smallest details and then reconstructs from a contemporary perspective. This enables him to reveal the human motivations of the characters and the humanity inherent in the text.

### *other works*

*The Beast, Evening Rehearsal, Judas, Homecoming to Denmark, The Blind*

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# *But What Became of The Woman?*

The play is based on excerpts and motifs from Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's short stories "The Reception," "Enemies," "Son of Fortune," "General Cultivation," "Surgery," "The Diplomat," "A Lost Cause," and "Romance with a Double Bass." The cluster of dramatic narratives is arranged into a play by a frame story: three actors, Yura, Alyosha and Dyabkin, are on their way to a ball being held by Bikulin, the banker. The central character of the drama, called "a man's tale," is the passionate, radiantly beautiful Irina Bikulina, who is courted by men, but whom all three actors knew in passing, but all three missed the opportunity to deepen their relationship with her. The stories told about the woman make Irina ever more intriguing, though she takes shape only in our imaginations as we move from story to story, as she is represented in the play only by a shawl. Yura is the only one who knows what happened to Irina, but he too only know this information second hand, from the perspective of the men she left in her wake. The humorous, grotesque, and even tragic anecdotes told by Yura are brought to life by the three actors. One man from the village is hanged because he is believed to have killed Irina. Another runs to the district doctor's office because Irina, he claims, is dying, but when he returns, she has run away with another man. As the stories are told about Irina, right at the moment when she might appear, she is gone, and the men cannot find her anywhere. The last anecdote is about a poor dentist with whom Irina falls in love. She falls ill, however, and the dentist goes to borrow money from a rich colleague. But he fails, and by the time he gets home, Irina has died, disappearing from the story without ever actually appearing in it. The structure of the performance is quite simple, with one actor, Yura, seamlessly transitioning from narrator to question-master and then actor, while the other two actors transition from audience to participants in the same story. The essence of the play is the almost imperceptible shift between being an "everyday" person and being an "actor," between "life" and "performance," a shift so subtle that it is almost impossible to perceive the moment when the "actor" playing the "everyday" person steps into the role of the "character," while the "actor" who has changed back into an "everyday" person continues to experience the "actor's" passions, promptings, shock, Schadenfreude, pain, and joy.





Jókai Theatre in Komárom, director: Károly Rédlí. Ottó Culka in the picture. Photo: Gábor Kiss Gibbó

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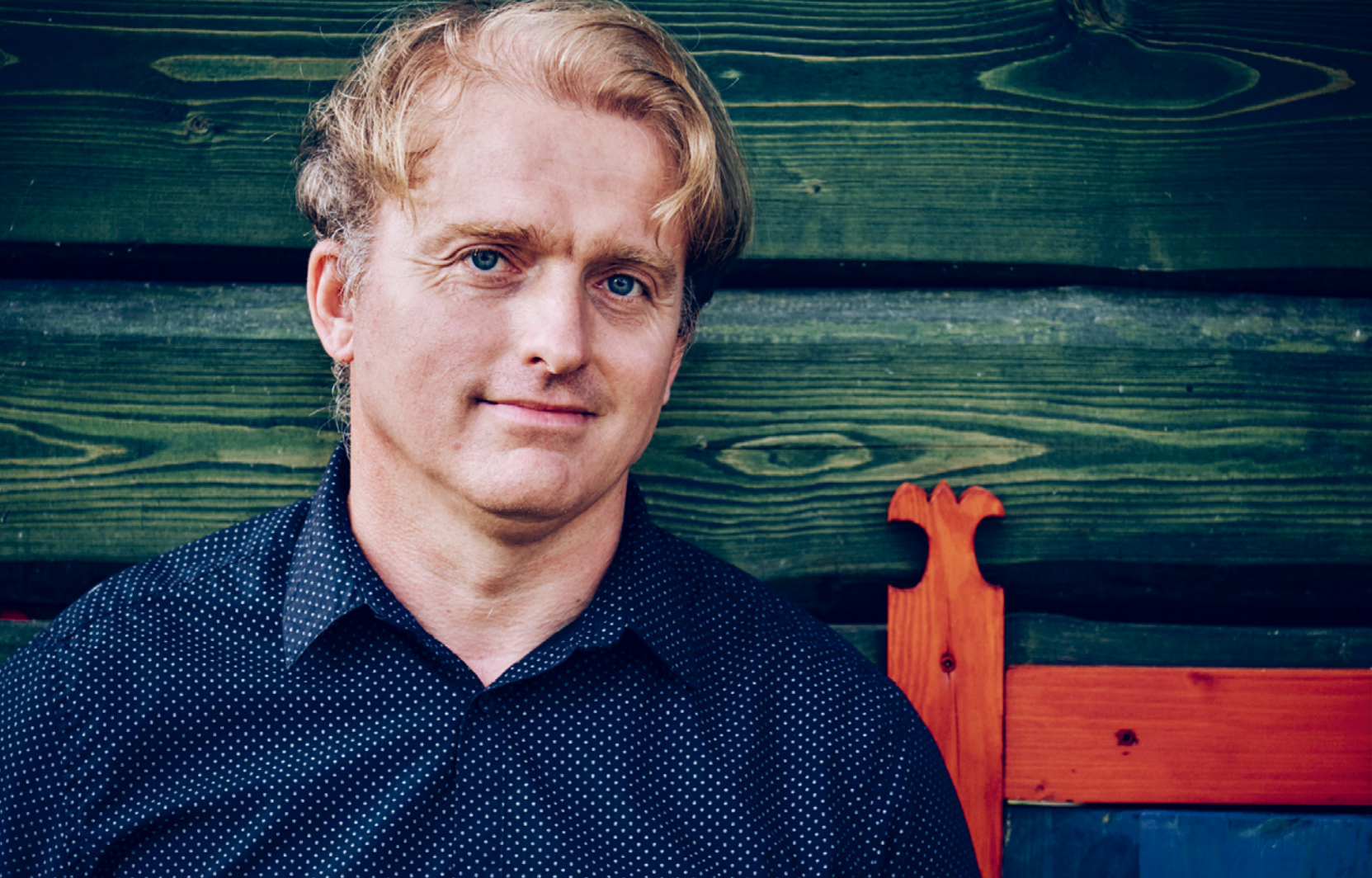
*Love is not  
a strand of hair  
that can just  
be plucked out.*

*Premiere: 7 May, 1997. Győr National Theater*

Translated into: Russian, German, Romanian

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## János Lackfi

born in 1971, is an Attila József Prize-winning Hungarian poet, writer, playwright, and literary translator. He translates French, Belgian, Swiss, and Canadian contemporary and classical prose, poetry, and drama. He began his career as a poet, and the language of his plays is strongly marked by his poetry, even when he writes in prose. His plays have concise structures, clear sequences, and emphatically ethical points of view.

### *other works*

*Cédra, And the Bus Goes, Precisely Measured, Hambi-pipóke*

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# Swings

In this drama, based on a true story, we walk in the shadow of a tragedy, following the dynamics of the sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes heartwarming bond between a bedridden daughter and a mother whose faith in divine grace is tested. We move forward in time as everyday events are presented in scenes dense with meaning. A 16-year-old girl falls in love, gets married, chooses a profession her mother doesn't like, and then can't get pregnant. She is involved in an accident, is paralyzed, and two years after the accident, her husband leaves her. She begs her mother to let her kill herself, and finally, she dies. The relationship between the mother and daughter is extremely deep and complex, driven on many levels by a multitude of emotions and feelings. The attraction and repulsion between them offer reflections of the conflicts and collisions of the desires and fears that define their lives. The play presents the mother-daughter relationship as if in a kind of distorted mirror. It highlights the fact that it is the same-sex parent that we most seek to break from, while the same-sex parent is the one who lives most strongly in us. Over and over again, the daughter realizes how often she looks, speaks, and behaves like her mother. The personal story of the two women is interwoven with the legends of Saint Teresa of Ávila and Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, which show how universal our problems and feelings are and how we live not only our own lives, but also the lives of those who have come before us. Lackfi subtly and sensitively highlights the issues of faith through the relationship between the mother and her daughter. A complex chain of emotional micro-events is played out in a kind of swing-like motion. Faith and the lack of faith sometimes propel the soul and sometimes restrain it. The personal beliefs of the two women, like their relationship, are in constant flux. One of the main motifs of the play is flying: the girl loves to fly, so she chooses a pilot for a husband and takes a position as a flight attendant. Of course, flying in the play is much more about a parent trying to decide whether she can let her child leave, let her child fly, leave the nest, or will she instead clip her child's wings and possibly even lock her in a cage.





Zsámbéki Theater Base, director: Judit Galgóczy. Bözse Soltész in the picture. Photo: Éva Juhász

“

*...if I had given  
birth to you as a bird,  
I don't doubt you  
would want to swim.*

*Premiere: 12 May, 2017. Zsámbék Theater Base*

”





## Ákos Németh

was born in 1964 in Székesfehérvár. He is an Attila József Prize-winning Hungarian playwright, literary translator, and theater director. His plays have been performed in several theatres abroad. In his dramas, the value of human life seems to fall below any discernible measure or value. The decisions made by his characters, who are drowning in their own helplessness in life's struggles and floundering on the margins of society, are often guided by petty self-interest instead of moral values. His works for the theater have intricate, fast-paced plots, dialogue which brings the characters to life, and scenes that are rich with tension and drama.

### *other works*

*Lili Hofberg, Müller's Dancers, The Red Ball, Profit, Car Thieves, Deviance*

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# *Prostitution*

The theme of the play is ultimately the question of market value, the surrender of personal freedom, the betrayal of spiritual and moral values, service in the cause of a principle which is contrary to our convictions for material or other benefits, or in other words, prostitution in general. Ákos Németh's work explores the different situations and stages of prostitution: what is it like to sell one's body, one's soul, one's talent, one's knowledge, one's relationships, one's spirit? How does one prostitute oneself? Under what circumstances? Where is the line between free will and material or spiritual need? How much can any given person stand, what does one's pride allow, and when does one have to give up one's pride? The play presents four separate, seemingly unrelated scenes: three two-character dialogues and a final monologue. One reading of the drama might be that the last three scenes are a flashback by the female character we see in the first scene. In the first scene, an aging, once-renowned Kossuth Prize-winning dancer compromises her professional pride and applies for a job teaching choreography to prostitutes. In the second scene, a regular at the strip joint is emotionally drawn to the girl who is selling her body, but she refuses his advances because her soul is not for sale. In the third scene, a young drug-addict mother offers her body to her former high school boyfriend, a drug dealer who also happens to be the father of her child, in exchange for some drugs. The fourth scene is a mini-monodrama in which a preschool girl tells a story about her new acquaintance from the playground who, in exchange for ice cream, persuades her to lure little boys into his car. The first two scenes offer a grotesque, darkly humorous portrait of life, featuring adults who make conscious decisions as to whether to engage in prostitution. In the third and fourth scenes, the world becomes darker, and the children appear, for whom there can be no question of a conscious decision. They are the helpless, vulnerable victims of adults, and they cannot assert and defend their boundaries. The fourth scene of the play was performed in 2015 at the Theater Nestroyhof in Vienna under the direction of Bernhard Studlar.





Jurányi Theatre in Budapest, director: Ákos Németh. Kátya Tompos and Gergely Kocsis in the picture. Photo: Annus Badinszky-Tolvaj

“

*I am  
completely  
immune  
to sensitivity.*

*Premiere: 10 January, 2016. Jurányi Ház*

Translated into: English, Turkish

”





## Sári O. Horváth

was born in 1988 in Veszprém. She is a playwright and theater director. She has won the Vilmos Prize of the Open Forum of Contemporary Hungarian Drama three years in a row, in 2018 for *To Be or Not*, in 2019 for *Life Affirming*, and in 2020 for *You Won't Believe What*. Horváth's plays explore exciting topics and often break taboos, delving into fundamental questions of existence. In her dramas, objective and subjective images and planes of reality interact with one another and with life. She examines her themes from many different angles, giving us a sense of how we relate to one another, ourselves, and the world around us. She also writes plays involving characters from a broad social spectrum, and she goes beyond personal stories to touch on the issues and influence of public opinion, with its spoken questions and unspoken answers, or conversely, its unspoken questions and all too readily spoken answers.

### *other works*

*Cool, Life Affirming, You Won't Believe What*

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# *To Be or Not*

Sári O. Horváth's play features seven women between the ages of 26 and 45. It focuses on a single question: having children. The seven women are all very different in age, and their circumstances, social backgrounds, and pasts are similarly different. One of them is a very young woman, almost a girl, who is afraid to give birth because her mother died when she was born. Another is a young girl who wants more than anything to have a baby but has had her uterus removed because of cervical cancer. A lesbian couple is also considering having children. Another woman has a child born of rape. A middle-aged woman wants to save her failing marriage by having a second child, but a test reveals that the fetus has Down's syndrome. At first, the female characters seem to be linked only by the issue of having a child, but as the drama unfolds, their lives seem to intersect more and more, revealing an increasingly complex set of relationships which become more complicated as the play progresses. And at these points of intersection is the eighth character in the play, a man in his forties, a gynecologist who often lets his gaze wander to women other than his wife. The drama is composed as a series of seemingly parallel, independent passages, which sometimes converge, turn into short dialogues, and then move forward again independently. The text dwells for a moment on a particular life situation, highlights a character at a particular stage in her life, and then moves on. The theme of childbirth and childbearing is explored in a sensitive, subtle manner and from many different angles. The play tackles the problem openly and boldly, digging deep and confronting the existential issues involved in having or not having a child. Is a child a moral obligation or a personal desire, a tool with which to try to shape a relationship or the crowning glory of a bond? *To Be or Not* is the first part of a trilogy in which Horváth explores different life choices, fundamental questions of human destiny, and the nature of personal freedom. The second part in the trilogy, *Life Affirming*, focuses on the right to life and death and on disenfranchisement. The final part of the trilogy, *You Won't Believe What*, takes an in-depth look at faith and religion.





Jurányi Theatre in Budapest, director: Kristóf Widder. Zsuzsa Száger, Gábor Róbert, and Mara Dobra in the picture. Photo: Dóra Gulyás

“

*We never  
wanted  
a father  
for the child.*

*Premiere: 31 January, 2020. Jurányi Ház*

”





## Eszter Anna Szilágyi

was born in Pécs, Hungary. She studied aesthetics and film directing. She is a poet, screenwriter, playwright, dramaturg, and theater director. In 2018, the Theater Dramatists' Guild chose her play *Nyíregyháza Street* as the Best Hungarian Drama of the Season. She is a dramatist. Her dramas, which are written in verse, are rich with aesthetic and formal variation and experimentation. Perhaps the most striking feature of her plays is the diversity of voices. Szilágyi's language is poetic, associative, and interwoven with borrowed passages. The great linguistic intensity often counterpoints and ironically (even self-deprecatingly) analyzes the problems outlined in her plays, often from a feminist perspective.

### *other works*

*Nyíregyháza Street, Noncoronat*

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# *Make Love, Not War!*

In Aristophanes' Athenian comedy *Lysistrata*, the Athenian and Spartan women, led by Lysistrata, resolve not to let their husbands into their beds until they have made peace in the Peloponnesian War. Aristophanes' witty, sweet-and-sour Attic comedy is not only an amusing satire, but also a profound reflection on the roles and positions of men and women in society. Eszter Anna Szilágyi's play *Make Love, not War!* is a sort of paraphrase of *Lysistrata* written from a feminist position. It is set in 2085, after the Third World War, on an island in New Attica, when people find themselves locked again in a catastrophic war. The play opens on the evening before Women's Pride Day, when everyday habits are turned upside down. Women are given a day off, a day on which they can live as men, but in the evening, they celebrate as women. The women are getting ready for the celebration in the yoga room when Lysistrata comes up with the idea of the women depriving their husbands, who have returned from the battlefield, of physical love. The central source of tension in the comedy is timeless and an excellent source of humor. The impish comedy of the play, which is woven into the playful language, is petulant at times, and the occasionally blunt sexuality is enough to make one blush. The psychological warfare between the men and women, the collision of contrasting views, and the wordplay offer a rich burlesque of the thorny issues of male-female coexistence and the entrenched ideas of a patriarchal society about the roles of women in society and in relationships. The spirit of the play combines the legacy of Greek culture with the society and culture of today. The play does not adhere rigidly to the structure of a classical drama. The dialogues are interrupted by personal confessions, poems, songs sung by women or men, commentaries by the cadre of elders crouching on the steps of the Agora. Two goddesses enter the story, Diké and Niké, who are responsible for the traditional course of everyday life and for maintaining the male-oriented "divine order." And Philemon and Baucis appear for a scene or two as a cautionary tale against long marriages.





Jókai Theatre in Komárom, director: Iván Hargitai. Fanni Hostomský, Krisztina Holocsy, Éva Bandor, Csenge Horváth, and Katalin Holocsy in the picture. Photo: Gábor Kiss Gibbó

“

*We call what  
is pleasant  
honorable  
and what is  
useful just.*

*Premiere: March 27, 2020. Jókai Theater in Komárom*

”





## István Tasnádi

was born in Budapest in 1970. He is an Attila József Prize-winning playwright, screenwriter, theatre director. His plays have won the Theatre Critics' Prize several times, and his dramas have been performed with great success on foreign stages. He is a leading figure in contemporary Hungarian drama. His plays are mostly written for existing companies, in collaboration with the actors and the director. His texts are virtuoso literary stylistic games which have their own internal dynamics, as there is always a strange tension between the text and the ways in which the characters perform, suggesting that what is being presented is perhaps not actually what happened. Hence the wide range of possible interpretations, which is heightened by the fact that these plays are themselves rich allusive. There are many shifts of emphasis in the plays. Pronounced slightly differently, a given utterance can take on an entirely different meaning. Tasnádi's texts are fundamentally defined by grotesque associations and the juxtaposition of irreconcilable extremes.

### *other works*

*Cocaine Courier, College of the Art of Watching, Public Enemy, A Hungarian on the Moon, Transit*

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# *Finito*

Gáspár Blondin, a 44-year-old resident of Nagybán, or “Grand Mirage,” falls into a deep depression after the local meat factory closes and he loses his job. He feels useless, and his emotionally empty marriage offers him little support. He locks himself in the outhouse at the end of the garden and decides to hang himself. Word of his intentions gets out, and more and more people show up in his yard. Everyone wants to profit from his suicide in some way: a neighbor, the village mayor, a poet, a psychologist, a pop diva whose career is going down the toilet, and a showman who is determined to get ahead. Blondin's life, it seems, is worthless, but his death is worth a great deal. It makes for an interesting headline and perhaps an eye-catching spectacle. It will boost ratings, especially if it's broadcast live. Even the national tabloid media has come to the scene. At the beginning of the play, Tasnádi ironically admits that the idea for *Finito* came from Nikolai Erdman's world-famous 1928 satire *The Suicide*. In Erdman's play, there is a half-sentence about citizen Podsekalknikov, who is contemplating suicide, running to the toilet and doing some harm to himself. Erdman has pity on his protagonist and lets him live, but Tasnadi is not so softhearted. True, Blondin does not die by his own hand, for in the meantime, he has realized that there is some good to be found in life. But he still dies, because his wife, alas, has come to the realization that her life would be better without him. This witty, existential tragicomedy and media satire, which is rich with comic twists and turns, is a brilliant combination of the absurd, the satire, the farce, the medieval morality play, and the black comedy. Alienating effects give the drama a certain lightness: the ballet interludes which evoke intermezzi, the figure of the Official lord, who plays the part of the deus ex machina, the poetic form (iambic verse), the lyricism of the characters' speech. Tasnádi “stole” the verse and the mannerisms from Molière, and it is hardly surprising that the play has been characterized as “pseudo-Molière.” With these alienating effects, Tasnádi creates a grotesque, ironic dichotomy between vulgarity and elevation, between theme and form, while preserving the depth and poignancy of his message.





Jókai Theatre in Komárom, director: Bertalan Bagó. Tibor Tóth and Éva Bandor in the picture. Photo: Gábor Kiss Gibbó

“

*He lives in a free country,  
and if he's having  
a bad day, Let him die  
in peace if that's  
what he wants.*

*Premiere: February 6, 2006. Hevesi Sándor Theater in Zalaegerszeg*

Translated into: English, Czech

”





## Krisztina Tóth

was born in 1967 in Budapest. She is an Attila József Prize-winning Hungarian poet, prose writer, playwright, and literary translator. Her dramas capture the tragedies of absence and loneliness presented against a backdrop which seems the product of a grotesque vision. Her characters are infinitely lonely, each locked in his or her own little world. Communication often takes place online or by telephone, but even when the characters meet in person, they still always seem to be speaking to and listening to themselves more than anyone else. In her plays, Tóth creates scenes which present the little “everyday” things that weigh on the shoulders of the characters, until eventually one of them collapses under the weight of these “everyday” burdens, because the relationships are missing the essential pillars of attentiveness to and responsibility for one another.

### *other works*

*Bat, Wind Chime*

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[www.tothkrisztina.hu](http://www.tothkrisztina.hu)

# *Pokémon Go*

*Pokémon Go*, the title of the play, is a role-playing game that is played half in the real world and half in the virtual space of a smartphone, and it unquestionably can be addictive. It ushers the player into a world in which relationships, situations, and decisions are not as confusing and unresolvable as in real life, and where it is much easier to achieve success. The play opens with a darkly absurdist premise, with the insufferable, cantankerous mother-in-law inviting her daughter Adrienn and son-in-law Feri to Sunday lunch so that the three of them can dig up the garden of her house and to search for the urn in which her great-grandmother’s ashes were buried. The middle-aged couple live a life of married solitude on the eighth floor of a block house in a small town, waiting for the day when they will be able at last to move into a self-standing home of their own. And this is why they need to dig up the garden. If they can find great-grandmother’s remains, they can sell grandma’s house and buy a new one. As the drama unfolds, the outlines of a multi-generational family story emerge more and more sharply. The selfish grandmother, we see, always feels sorry for herself. The mother, who is battling cancer, is exhausted, and she is compelled to live her remaining days in a cold marriage with her unemployed husband, who is an insensitive man with a serious addiction to news and gambling. Letters found in the attic reveal the image of a grandfather who hid the fact that he was gay from the world. The two members of the younger generation are Gabika, the son, and Dorka, his girlfriend. Gabika is disappointed both in his grandfather and in Dorka, and he uses suicide as an escape. Dorka suffered abuse at her parents’ hands as a child, and as an adult, she is a victim of sexual violence. The main catalyst is an unscrupulous neighbor with criminal inclinations who embodies the archetype of the dangerous man of our times, the aggressor who manipulates and runs roughshod over everyone. The play has dark overtones, and it offers sensitive depictions of the fallen and the victims of our society. At the end of the story, which is riddled with tragedies, there is some hope for a continuation. Adrienn, an abandoned woman with cancer who has lost her son, and Dorka, who has twins who are children of rape, join forces to provide support for each other.





Rózsavölgyi Salon, director: Tibor Csizmadia. Júlia Ladányi and Pál Sztarenki in the picture. Photo: Vera Éder

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*You don't  
have to rot.  
You have  
to do  
something.*

*Premiere: February 20, 2018. Rózsavölgyi Szalon*

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## István Vörös

was born in Budapest in 1964. He is an Attila József Prize-winning Hungarian poet, prose writer, playwright, literary historian, and bohemian. His works balance on the border between the real and the surreal. His plays offer a rich intellectual experience through paraphrase, intertextual adventure, and reinterpretation. As a poet, Vörös often strikes a strong lyrical note in his dramas, lending a parodic quality to even the most dramatic situations. His works are imbued with a wry humor and a grotesque vision of the world. They are less driven by plot and more by the shifting focus on the small events taking place in the shadows of the great watershed moments of history.

### *other works*

*Pilot's License - For Angels, He Who Was Born Laughing, Happy Hour, The Comet, The Death of Hegel*

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# *I was Khrushchev's Waiter*

*I Was Khrushchev's Waiter* is an imagined sequel to the world-famous classic *I Served the King of England*, by Bohumil Hrabal, one of the most important Czech writers of the twentieth century. The play is both a homage to Hrabal and a critique and parody of the Czech author. Its genre designation suggests that it is a “mono-drama” interwoven with Hrabal motifs. The backdrop is the restaurant in the Paris Hotel in Prague, on Wenceslas Square. Marcella, the main character of the play, has been working as a waitress in this restaurant for eighteen years. We learn from a passing remark that the restaurant is closed at the moment because someone has set themselves on fire. That someone is none other than Jan Palach, a Czech university student who set himself on fire on Prague's main square as an act of political protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops and the crushing of the Prague Spring. Thus, we realize that the play is taking place on January 16, 1969. Through Marcella's account, we learn about the life of the hotel, and the characters of Hrabal's work emerge: Díte, who shrewdly navigated the storms of history and became a millionaire hotel owner, only to lose his fortune after the war and the communist takeover, and Sk ivánek, the head waiter, who knows the guests entering the restaurant at first sight. In this grotesque, dreamlike play, even the unimaginable can become reality, such as a surreal lovemaking session just below the ceiling, during which a lusty shout sets off the Prague air-raid sirens, or the appearance of an Abyssinian skeleton bellowing out Karel Gott's *Lady Karneval* in the closet. We also meet a heavyweight boxer with a voracious appetite who forgets to pay, and there turns out to be a secret liquor store and a set of gold cutlery for 300 people in the hotel cellar. A Russian party leader with thick eyebrows dances to the ear-splitting music of bagpipers, until finally a drill boring tunnels for a subway bores a path through the cheerful past into the soil of the future which is more drenched in alcohol than any other land in the world. Where else but Prague? And this is hardly surprising. As Hrabal has cautioned us, “in Central Europe it's better not to sober up,” and here, anything can happen. Even the most unthinkable things.





Babits Mihály Theatre, director: Ádám Kaj. Krisztina Irma Tarjányi and Ferenc Ótott in the picture. Photo: Gyula Kovács

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*No one will ever  
know the truth.  
Everyone is looking  
for it, but no one  
really wants to know.*

*Premiere: 10 April, 2019. Babits Mihály Theater*

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JÁNOS HÁY