

NEW
HUNGARIAN
DRAMA

THE

PLAYS

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TWENTY TWENTY | *autumn*

socio
horror
history

PETŐFI
LITERARY
FUND

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*socio
horror
history*

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Petőfi Literary Fund



bio

Kristóf Kelemen was born on January 4, 1990 in Pécs. After the high school, he studied Hungarian literature at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Pécs for two years, and in 2010 he was admitted to the University of Theater and Film Arts to the dramaturgy studies. He received the Bécsy Prize in 2020 for his research on theater history, and in 2019 the Contemporary Hungarian Drama Award for his play *The Observers*.

The dramas of Kristóf Kelemen tend to take real-life events as their points of departure. His works blend fact with fiction while also offering reflections on pressing social and political issues.

other works

Nurturing Talent While Tasting Wine, While You Read This Title, We Speak of You

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kristof.kelemen1990@gmail.com

Observers

Kristóf Kelemen's drama *Observers* takes us back to Hungary of the 1960s, a time when very few people went unnoticed or unobserved by the state security forces. Fishy characters from abroad were considered particularly suspicious, which is why Michael Besenczy, a man of Hungarian descent who has come to the country from England, is being kept under close surveillance by several people at the same time. He has come to Hungary to pursue studies in film directing at the Academy of Theater and Film Arts. Lieutenant Horváth, however, is quite certain that he has been sent by the English secret service to work as a spy. Horváth uses compromising documents to recruit Sándor, Michael's friend, and force him to keep the target under surveillance. Sándor fears he will be unable to lie, but he is compelled to accept the job. He regularly reports on everything Michael is doing. An agent who goes by the codename Puma joins Sándor, as does Erzsi, who has been working for the state security forces for years. She is instructed to win Michael's trust, get as much information out of him as she can, and report to the criminal division. Judit, Horváth's niece, also provides info indirectly, but Judit also happens to be Sándor's fiancé. Seemingly innumerable people have been brought in to keep Besenczy under observation, ranging from the woman who works at the snack bar at the academy to the old lady from whom Michael is renting a beautiful house with a panoramic view at a surprisingly low price. The play offers a remarkably detailed and subtle picture of what it was like to be kept under observation in communist Hungary and what it was like to work for the regime. In his opening monologue, Horváth notes that the work he does as part of the state security services offers him a distinctive perspective on the lives of its citizens. He and his colleagues get glimpses into the lies people tell one another and the acts they put on. Kristóf Kelemen's drama captures the past while reflecting on the mechanisms of social media, which is also a form of mass surveillance.



“

*Alright. But first,
I owe you a confession.
Last time we spoke,
I didn't tell you the truth.
The place where we met,
I'm a regular there,
and I'd seen you there
before.*

Premiere: Trafó, November 24, 2018

Translated into: English

”



bio

Dániel Ambrus Kovács was born in 1978 in Budapest. He studied English and French at university, and in 2011, he completed a degree as a theater director. He often does the visual design and scripts for his performances. In 2012, he won the Vidor Capitano Award.

Dániel Ambrus Kovács often makes pettiness, vulnerability, exploitation, and the subtly portrayed sensibilities in everyday life central themes of his dramas, in which the awful blends with the ridiculous. He often works with the Neptune Brigade and the Kava Theater Educational Society, which combines improvisational theater with education.

other works

Lady Lear, Troll, One-Way Street

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You're In It

Rural Hungary is often interpreted as a metaphor for despair or, more simply, the absence of any way out, at least when it is not being cast as the embodiment of Romantic escape, but it rarely figures in contemporary narrative as the best of all possible worlds. With its mere title, Dániel Ambrus Kovács's play suggests a new context in which one does not seek to judge, does not talk about morality or the difference between good and bad, because in this play, everyone is equally stuck in the mud. Roland spends his daily life in the forgettable village of Dágvány (which might as well mean "sludge") as a store manager for a doormat company. He tries to put his own life and the life of the company on more promising footing after a class reunion. His old pal Endre reminds him of their past adventures together, which they thought of as little more than student pranks at the time, but which were an early sign of Endre's shrewdness and his fondness for living on the edge. Endre persuades Roland that one can make an excellent living working with companies that have ties to the government and siphoning off EU funds, so, he asks, why not work together? And the cogs in the machinery begin to turn. The owner of a small business that makes doormats, who is the embodiment of honesty in the play, observes the changes with an ever more oppressive sense of despair. He sees how corruption seeps into their lives, lives which really were little more than day-to-day survival. His assistant, the alcoholic Tibi, who, though kind-hearted and devoted, is an infinitely simple figure, is a refreshing character in the drama because he raises moral issues without moralizing, while his apparent simplicity provides a foil against which the sly falsehoods are vividly seen as (self-)deception. As Roland gets richer and richer, he loses his moral compass entirely, and the world around him captures the prevailing ethos of Central Eastern Europe: the absence of ethics in the chaos which came after the change of regimes.



“

*What? What corruption?
You go to the store,
get two bread rolls,
pay for them, eat them,
and now that means
you're corrupt?*

Premiere: Jurányi Ház, April 10, 2019

”



bio

Writer and playwright Csaba Mikó was born in 1980. Alongside his work as a playwright, he also writes young adult novels. In 2013, his play *Without Fathers* won the Best Hungarian Drama prize.

Csaba Mikó first rose to the fore in Hungarian cultural life as a playwright.

His drama *Father* has been translated into several languages, and it has won several awards and competitions. He also writes popular novels for young adults. His dramas create strange versions of dialogue which sometimes seem more to resemble monologues and which always involve a degree of trauma, frustration, and family tension and conflict.

other works

'84, *The God of Slaughter*, *Agave*

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Without Fathers

Csaba Mikó's play *Without Fathers* can be regarded as an exciting event in the history of the theater in Hungary, as it is the first Hungarian play the premiere of which was held in Germany as a guest performance. In the production held by Theater Regensburg, *Without Fathers* touches on an important and even burning issue, specifically the common practice in Hungarian society of making a given subject taboo, sweeping problems under the rug, and in general failing to speak about tensions and concerns. The distinctive dramaturgy and the ways in which the lines of dialogue intertwine to form a dramatic fugue offer innovations in the art of the theater, while in the meantime the play compels its audience to confront very serious problems. What will a society without a father grow up to be? The issue is not simply a matter of physical absence. Rather, it is a question of presence as shadow, though absence nonetheless strengthens and amplifies the father's role, which remains the center of attention precisely because of his absence. Absence is also a determining element in the relationship between the mother and her children, who suffer from typical psychological problems and embody typical trajectories of life and familiar attitudes. The menagerie includes a neglected mother who loves to play the martyr, the older son who supports the family, the good-for-nothing rebellious teenager with his grandiose visions, the girl who fancies herself an artist, and her younger sister, who is a committed environmentalist and who battles against social inequalities, and an injured child. The tensions among these characters often find expression in bursts of aggression and the angry moan of impotence. The characters seem to hear nothing but their own individual monologues, acting out the familiar drama of people failing utterly even to notice one another. The almost 20 years which pass in the play bear witness to the collapse of a family, raising the question of how Hungarian society was able (or unable) to react and respond to the events which came to pass after the fall of the regime.



“

*I'm going to fix
everything that they
fucked up in this country
over the course
of the past 40 years!*

Premiere: Theater Regensburg, November 8, 2014

Translated into: German, Russian, Czech, Polish

”



bio

Andrea Pass lives in Révfülöp and works as a writer and director. Her play *Impulses Evanescing*, which is about her father's death, received an award as Best Drama of the Season in 2019.

Andrea Pass writes and directs her dramas, in which she often addresses current problems and social issues that leave many people alarmed or anxious. Indeed, sometimes she even seems to incorporate struggles which seem of a private nature into her works.

other works

Sunflower, Hide and Hide, Nothing Else Happened

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Impulses Evanescing

Endre's life changes in the course of one afternoon, when he is taken to the hospital after having suffered a stroke. After having led what seemed an idyllic family life, he loses his ability to speak, and his failing memory prevents him from doing routine tasks. Andrea Pass's play *Impulses Evanescing* gradually explores the process through which the debilitation takes over Endre's body and mind, with family and workplace problems also coming to the fore. Endre works for a newspaper as an editor and journalist. Before his stroke, a student of his had been appointed editor-in-chief, and this creates a series of unpleasant and humiliating situations. The new boss wants to make Endre move out of the office, and he intends to give him simple reports instead of articles on culture. Endre's family conflicts, especially with his teenage daughter, are portrayed in absurd and dramatic scenes with leaps in time. Nóri used to get on well with her father, but at the age of 15, as she becomes increasingly independent from her parents, she demands a certain distance and space for herself, which she can only get by quarreling with them. Nóri begins to take interest in new things, including drinking and boys, and Endre finds this hard to cope with, while his wife Anna, the other extreme, tries to fix the bad relationship between father and daughter. Nóri's rebellion, her "new" life without her parents, is portrayed alongside the hardships her father endures. Andrea Pass's play, set in the late 1990s, portrays everyday situations with an exceptional sensitivity, and she crafts fascinating minor figures with distinctive characters. While in the hospital, Endre meets Pali, who his neighbor, who is also his only visitor, calls papa. He also meets the Strange Fellow, who only he can see. The Strange Fellow helps Endre first begin to find words again and then to face his inevitable death.



“

*Here
in neurology
we don't
make a habit
of talking
politics.*

Premiere: Trafó, December 14, 2018

Translated into: English

”



bio

Béla Pintér was born in Budapest in 1970. Winner of the Jászai Mari Award, he is an actor, musician, playwright, and a key figure in alternative theater life in Hungary. He taught himself the basics of acting, and he is the founder and leader of Béla Pintér and his Troupe.

Béla Pintér's life as a director has not followed a familiar trajectory. He experimented with collective improvisation, but he soon turned to writing, composing dramas primarily for his own theater company and devising engaging roles for his actors. He has created works in a veritable cavalcade of genres, in which he often uses autobiographical elements. His company has performed in the United States, Germany, and Austria.

other works

The Champion, The Queen of Cookies and Cake, The Glorious Mediocre, Muck

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Our Secrets

One of the most important elements of Béla Pintér's play *Our Secrets* is an element which characterizes so much of his work, namely that we find ourselves laughing at something we would prefer to cry about. Life in Hungary under the socialist dictatorship is a recurring theme in contemporary Hungarian literature, film, and theater. With *Our Secrets*, Pintér offers an exciting vista on this period and new perspectives for interpretation. We see not the little man or the leading elite, but rather the layer suffocating between the two. We get a bit of air thanks to irony, the tension created by language rich with naivety and implication, and many grotesque tools, and we find to our surprise that the most brutal situations are created by life itself. The stalwart folk music collector and dance house activist István uses his seven-year-old adopted daughter to satisfy his pedophilic desires. He has grown distant from his wife, who knows nothing of his diseased yearnings and entrusts the girl to him day after day. However, thanks to the observation techniques used by the regime, the confession he makes to his psychologist is recorded. István is put under pressure by the network of informants to become an informant himself, and he gives in. He must submit reports on his dance house colleagues, all of whom are part of the underground opposition. From the petty, offended character who makes threats to the talent who edits a samizdat publication and is increasingly a victim of alcoholism and the woman who is perfectly willing to work for any regime and is thriving as a state secretary, everyone is part of the hierarchy for which the dance house movement serves as a stage. The characters arguably have been deliberately sketched as caricatures in some ways, and precisely for this reason, they are relevant beyond the context of the world of Hungary under socialism, while the language in which they communicate is itself a caricature of the failure to speak honestly, making all of the characters both precise and unnervingly familiar.



“

*But you should know,
after all, that the
Iron Curtain is the
country's toughest
samizdat publication.
Anyone who gets
caught here has a lot
to lose.*

Premiere: Székény Theater, September 28, 2013

Translated into: English, German, Slovenian, Croatian, Italian, Romanian, Czech, Greek

”

Shadow Play On János Térey

“I jump over my own shadow,” wrote János Térey in his poem “Good Friday Speech.” As author and intellect, he knew his way around the cultural world of Europe. He had come a long way, jumping over his own shadow, from the impressionist magical garden of his adolescence across the snow-covered fields of Stalingrad to the pitch-black shadow of the Icelandic volcano.

Born in Debrecen in 1970, Térey was known for his superb poetry, which sometimes has almost militant tones and other times hums with a serene Mediterranean balance. He at times adorned his lyrical verses with references to popular culture, which, with the publication of his second volume, *Natural Arrogance*, took the world of Hungarian literature in new directions in the 1990s.

Térey dexterously weaved mantras and phrases familiar from MTV (such as “Hi, Steve Blame here with MTV News”) into his texts, and later he borrowed topoi from gangsta rap in his *The Nibelung Housing Project*. His provocatively virtuoso, colorfully written books thus evince curiosity about disasters and at the same time a cheerful will to live. It is a world we all know from some perspective. In Térey’s poetic labyrinth, we take one sharp turn after another and find ourselves wandering the streets of Újlipótváros or Svábhegy, neighborhoods in Budapest, only then to end up in Rome or, say, Barcelona. This unusual poetic topography vividly illustrates how well Térey knew Antiquity, 20th-century world literature, and pop culture. Such a vast breadth of knowledge has only rarely been interwoven into the textual tapestry of Hungarian literature with such impressive dexterity, and Térey’s oeuvre could even be said to rival that of the late Péter Esterházy. Térey wove lyrical patterns from the poetry of Antiquity into many of his poems in a manner that even echoed with the tones of the working-class lyric poetry of Attila József and Lana Del Rey’s melancholy pop songs.

Almost anything Térey happened to say was ready to go to press, whether he was asking about his reserved tickets at a theater box office or giving an interview about architecture or contemporary Hungarian drama. His relentlessly honest interviews exposed how strongly he felt about authors who felt compelled to comply and conform and his disdain for canons. He sedulously delved into contemporary literature and conscientiously read the works of young authors, and he maintained an extensive correspondence. He was in some sense a one-man literary institution. He could write poems anytime, even when doing daily physical exercises or taking walks, which yielded surprisingly engaging works of literature. His rich oeuvre reveals great discipline and devotion as an author. He was 30 when he finished one of his greatest works, *Paulus*, an epic novel written in *Onegin* stanzas.

Térey wrote poetry, dramas, prose, criticism, essays, and song lyrics. His ideas on architecture and the state of public affairs are especially fascinating.

He spoke about burning moral issues while remaining completely independent in his thinking. Almost all his utterances contained something striking, something strikingly bold. He was fascinated by language, and he could take the same passionate interest in a Derrida text and a critical article about a heavy metal record. When he was asked to write a report on a concert by the industrial band Test Department, he wrote it as a poem. His writings are characterized by a certain grandiosity; he was as intrigued by philosophical superstructures as he was by the other extreme, the minimalism of pop.

Térey’s art was characterized by an insurgent radicalism, an astounding gift for form, and a respectful and also impudent conversation with tradition. His radicalism had no other goal than to map the impossible. He did not care how many actors the stage could hold or how many minutes or hours an audience would give him and his players. He cared about his own truth and the genuine representation of this truth.

Casemates is a historical tragedy which recounts one of the most inspiring chapters in Hungarian history: the tragic hours of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, the attack against the headquarters of the Budapest Party Committee on Köztársaság Square on October 30, which turned into a lynching. *Casemates* is a creative reconstruction and a historical deconstruction of that fateful day, with Térey and his co-author, András Papp, bringing all facts and non-fiction to a common denominator, portraying both sides, the “outside” and the “inside,” the state of mind of the revolutionaries and the communists, and also demonstrating the group dynamics of aggression.

Térey and Papp show no mercy. They portray the dark day of 20th-century Hungary, a link in an exceptional chain of events of world-historical importance, with micro-realism. The play is a lyrical attempt to show how the sacred and the profane, ideals and beastly violence come together on the cobblestone streets of Pest. How the individual and the crowd change from one second to the other in front of the hated party headquarters on Köztársaság Square, both on the level of the street and in the imaginary casemates, that is, in the deep realm of instincts. The hip-hop of Richard III and philologist Sickratman, gangsta rap and Cioran meet here, while the play offers a model of history itself, showcasing the petty figures, the lynchers, and the victims. In Térey and Papp’s tragedy, the memory of the revolution, which now has its own rituals and which has stiffened into commemoration, breaks into 1,956 pieces, leaving the audience to put them all together again and arrive at a collective story after all.

One of the recurring motifs of *Table Music* is introduced with the sentence with which Győző makes his entrance: “Everyone died last year. / Everyone who was an ornament on the Christmas tree.” János Térey, one of the greatest figures of contemporary Hungarian lyric poetry and drama, died last year, in 2019. The central element of his dramas is passing, decay, but in this seemingly light conversation piece, everything has a fancy shimmer, as Térey places an extremely bright chandelier – a bit like an interrogation lamp – in the middle of the backdrop, White Box, a restaurant. Térey wants to know not only what the characters order from the menu of the posh restaurant but also how many of their dreams and visions have come true and what they would order from life itself if they could, if it were still one of the dishes being brought out from the kitchen. *Table Music* is like a high school reunion for thirty-somethings, where everyone lists the things which have befallen them since graduation, but it goes way beyond the

mere gestures of passing around baby photos, in part because there is Alma, for instance, a successful lawyer who alleges not to want children. The lyrical dialogues, which often resemble metrical verse, blossom into lively conversations, which offer not only a catalogue of a life of luxury but an endless mix of intrigue, gossip, adultery, and big little lies. As they sample everything on the menu or, in other words, have a taste of one another's tragedies, our heroes gaze down from the fancy restaurant onto the city of Pest below them, where they only go to work or run errands. They live in Buda, the elite part of the city, and they take hardly any notice of the natural disasters or a crowd being dispersed "down there."

Following the order of an imaginary elite ceremony, they recall the current codes, but nothing can really be enjoyed without a bit of fine food or a sip of good wine, much as how their façade lives only make sense in *White Box*, this aquarium-like space where the big fish eat the even bigger fish.

In front of the emblematic Reformed Great Church in Debrecen, which is Térey's hometown, there used to be an underpass which was used for a short time and then quickly bricked up. This "casemate" offers an apt metaphor for the local people's yearning for a metropolis, while for decades there was only one tram line in the city, which is the second largest in Hungary. Térey liberates the bricked-up underpass in front of the most important building of the Reformation in Hungary in *Jeremiás, or the Coldness of the Lord*, a mystery play told in eight scenes, and he even extended it, thus making the dream of every citizen of the town a reality: a subway. The drama is set in the future, but it is founded on centuries of history. In eight scenes which take place at eight subway stations, it tells the story of member of parliament Jeremiás Nagy, who is stuck at a subway station in his hometown, Debrecen, due to a strike. Though the title alludes to the coldness of the Lord, the play is set in the August heat, so this cold clearly is measured not in Fahrenheit but in something else. The relatives and half-forgotten acquaintances appearing at the stations hold up a mirror to Jeremiás. The drama is both a sociology and a history of the city, but we get to know Jeremiás and rural Hungary quite well. Térey often returned to his hometown in his poems and fiction, to the so-called Calvinist Rome, the origin of his identity. He always found the impact of the weather to be pivotal: in his play *The Shortest Ice Age*, the frost puts people to the test, whereas in *Jeremiás* they suffer a heat wave and in *Table Music* they grapple with a storm. In *Jeremiás*, shards of memories come together to form a picture of a life (the first cigarette, the first kiss, the first dance) which then breaks into pieces at the boiling hot stations. The city is Jeremiás himself. "Calling it a town is like calling man a little fellow – humiliating." Meaning, "Let's see the metropolis in it," that is, let us notice the potential in everyone, even Jeremiás. This ministry play is about the obstacles that prevent us from "seeing the expanse of a city."

Zoltán Poós

JÁNOS TÉREY (1970-2019) was born in Debrecen. After having completed a degree at the teachers' training college in Budapest, he pursued further study in the faculty of humanities at ELTE. In 1990, he began publishing poems. In his impressively ambitious and remarkably varied oeuvre, alongside his poetry, the genre of the novel also played an important role, as did drama and innovative experiments with the genre of the novel. His death was a major loss for Hungarian literature and culture.



ASZTALIZENE

Premiere: Radnóti Theater, October 20, 2017



PROTOKOLL
Premiere: Radnóti Theater, January 22, 2012



JEREMIÁS AVAGY ISTEN HIDEGE
Premiere: National Theatre, October 2, 2010



“

*János Térey
is no longer among us.
The curtains have fallen
on his stunning and
ambitious dramatic oeuvre.
It remains unfinished.
The world of the theater
is now left with the task
of filling this gap as best
it can and determining
exactly how to bring
this lack of closure
to a close.*

Zsuzsa Radnóti, theater critic
An Ambitious Dramatic Oeuvre
- Unfinished -

”



bio

Mihály Schwechtje was born in 1978 in Budapest. In 2010, he received his degree as a film director. In 2011–2014, he was a doctoral student at the University of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest. He won the Contemporary Hungarian Drama Award for his play *The Legacy*.

Hungarian audiences first came to know Mihály Schwechtje as a film director.

He took part in the directing of the Hungarian version of the series *Therapy*, and his latest film, *I Hope You Manage to Die*, is about teenagers exposed to harassment online. He is a director, screenwriter, and film-editor.

other works

Gina; Attention Please, the Doors and Closing!

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The Legacy

Sometimes, an inheritance may suddenly become something one would rather not have had. In this play, Schwechtje wrestles with this problem, much as he has done in his earlier productions for the cinema and theater. A young pediatrician who has come from Germany to deal with the administrative complications arising from the division of his mother's estate realizes when he arrives in the village that the locals are grappling with the problems which have arisen not only because of the lack of doctors in the area but also the lack of children. One hardly comes across a child in the village, whether in the more affluent parts or in the poorer areas or the Roma neighborhood, called "Korea" by the villagers. Our protagonist's sibling, in the meantime, is trying to find a way to bring new life to the village with the money his mother has left them. He wants to encourage the more prosperous families to have children and transform the depressing, hopeless little settlement into an idyllic rural town. The private drama behind this is that the two siblings once parted ways, one of them to be with their mother, the other to be with their father, and they have had very different lives. The drama is interwoven with a devastating depiction of the isolation of the Hungarian countryside. Often, life abroad seems unimaginably simple when seen from this perspective, both free of grief and fair and democratic. Things are not as simple as they seem in Germany, however, and the sibling come from abroad for a few days struggles to handle the complications of the inheritance, however little he wishes to have to deal with such a task, and he does so with the conscientiousness one would expect of a doctor. Gradually, it comes to light that there are fewer children in the part of the village where the Roma live not because the locals have lost all interest in having children. Rather, they have given in to pressure put on them by their parents (and the mayor's office and the police and the other denizens of the village) and also to the hopelessness caused by poverty and destitution, and they are selling their children, perhaps into a world where they will find a better future and perhaps simply into prostitution. If for a moment we would want to reassure ourselves that this is mere fiction, we should keep in mind, alas, that the play offers a very precise depiction of a situation and a fate not entirely unfamiliar to many rural communities.



“

*And now I've got
this hunting trip,
and fortunately
Italians and Frenchmen
are coming
to shoot quail.*

Premiere: Jurányi Ház, February 28, 2019

”



bio

Borbála Szabó was born in 1978. She lives in Budapest and works as a playwright, novelist, script editor, and actress.

Borbála Szabó writes in many different genres. She has written children's stories, an opera, a one-character burlesque, a novel which at times is autobiographical, and short stories.

Her works touch with striking sincerity on themes and problems with which many readers can identify. Her favorite genre is the comedy.

other works

*Lyrical and Epical, Parent-Teacher Conference,
The Complete Tenth Season*

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Phone Doctor

Gynecologist Dr. Dénes Békés's life is turned upside down when he locks himself in his office and can only contact the outside world using two cellphones and a landline. In Borbála Szabó's one-man farce *Phone Doctor*, Békés's life comes together and falls apart through the conversations he has on the phone, or rather the half of these conversations that we hear. One cellphone he uses for private conversations, the other one and the landline phone to talk with his patients, but, as the play unfolds, his private and professional life merge, and anyone can reach the trapped gynecologist using any of the phones. Although we only hear Dr. Békés speaking on the phone, we also get to know the invisible characters of the play, and we can tell that he has a different relationship with each of them. He speaks patiently with his mother, whose only pastime is calling her son every other minute. He converses in an affected voice with his wife, Judit, saying anything to convince her that he has their lives under control. The play would not be complete without a patient, who is having a baby, and Békés has reserved and understanding conversations with the husband and the woman in labor. He talks honestly and candidly with his friend Barnabás, who he asks to pick up his twin daughters from pre-school, since he is stuck in his office, but Barnabás sends his girlfriend, a prostitute named Tündi, to get the girls, and thus the doctor's trials and tribulations begin. As the phone calls keep coming, Békés tries to salvage the situation and hold his life together using white lies. He is reluctant to admit to anyone but Barnabás that the key to his office broke in the lock, lest someone, especially Judit, think he messed up again. The lies, however, begin to get out of hand. Borbála Szabó presents the little lies we all use for the sake of everyday survival with unparalleled humor, and she sheds light on how easily an unexpected blunder can knock over a house of cards built on fibs.



“

*Hello, darling!
Yes, I am writing it.
Go ahead.
Aha, bread, milk.
Yes, yes.
Is white bread ok?
I take it back
What kind of bud?
And what does it look like?
Like a tadpole?
Never mind, I'll find it.*

Premiere: Bárka Theater, May 7, 2011

Translated into: Polish

”



bio

Csaba Székely was born in 1981 in Târgu Mureș, where he lives today.

He works as a writer and playwright. His drama *Mine Flower* won the Theater Critics' Award in 2012, and in 2020, he won the Contemporary Hungarian Drama Award for his work 10.

The dramas by Csaba Székely are remarkable not only as compositions for the stage but as fine works of literature. Alongside the rich, varied, and engaging use of language, one also finds a deep knowledge of the human condition and the human which transforms his plays into complex character sketches. He creates situations and characters which are both vividly real and familiar.

other works

Don't Regret Anything, Foreigners, Joy and Happiness

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Mine Flower

After the mine closed, the standard of living began to decline rapidly in the Transylvanian village where the first part of Csaba Székely's play trilogy *Mine Flower* takes place. The world of Transylvania is sometimes not in the slightest bit as romantic and idealistic as the Székely world described in guidebooks. Unemployment, alcoholism, and a series of suicides are familiar parts of everyday life. Ivan, the former miner, can't climb out of the ditch either. The loss of his job and his addiction to alcohol have left him in ruins, and he also has to take care of his sick father. For a good year and a half, the doctor, the only one in the village, has been insisting that Ivan's father is dying and has little time left. Dr. Mihály Csillag has gotten stuck almost as if by accident in the village, where he is slowly crushed by the need to provide for his family (including his three children) and deal with the many tragic cases of death and the patients who are beyond all help. Though he too longs to leave the village, he cannot break out. He regularly drops in on Iván to check on Iván's father and to have a few shots of the family brandy. The only person apart from the doctor who helps Iván care for his father is his half-sister, who gave up life in the city to look after the head of the family. Iluska, Iván's half-sister, grapples with the misery and destitution of rural life. She tries in her own manner to make something of her circumstances, though she soon realizes that any potential husband she might find in the village will be an alcoholic, including even the family doctor, on whom she has had her eye. Before Iluska came to the village, Iván got help from Irma, his neighbor's wife, who has become noticeably smitten with the morose Iván. Irma's husband Illés is perhaps the only man in the village who doesn't drink. Indeed, because he has an orchard, he even has a modest income. Thus, though he is unhappy like the rest of the characters, he has entirely different reasons. Using wry irony and scathing black humor, Csaba Székely offers a portrait of the baser sides of life in the village.



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*Did you really not see
one single cloud
in the sky? Are you
a hundred per cent
sure about that?*

Premiere: Marosvásárhely, Yorick Stúdió, September 15, 2011

Translated into: English, German, Italian, Mari, Polish, Romanian, Russian

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bio

Edina Tallér, an author of five books and a playwright, was born in Kiskunhalas in 1971 and currently lives in Budapest. She has been publishing in literary journals since 2007. Her first short novel, *The Carnivore*, was published in 2010. Her drama *One Minute More* won the main prize at the I. Vallai Péter Contemporary Performing Arts Festival.

Edina Tallér began her career as a journalist. Her writings have been published in several newspapers and cultural periodicals, and she has also worked as a television reporter. She has written several novels for both adults and youth. Her dramas are characterized by an amplification of the various registers of the spoken language and portrayals of the complexity of human relationships, portrayals which sometimes border on the grotesque.

other works

Untouchables, Just a Palmful of Blood, The Woman Sitting in Seat 42

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talleredina@gmail.com

One minute More

In the best-case scenario, love brings and binds two people together, but we all know perfectly well that no one comes to a relationship with an empty backpack. Edina Tallér's two-person drama grapples with the question of the ways in which traumas from the past can poison a budding bond between two people which seems to promise nothing but joy. We listen to a dialogue between a man and a woman throughout the play, but for a long time, it seems as if we are listening to the woman give the man instructions on how to behave and what to do in this relationship. This unusual way of presenting the communication between two people dramatizes the very experience of failing to hear each other or even refusing to hear each other. We see the loneliness which the woman endures even when not alone, because she continues to relive her sufferings. Delicate references to her past offer the audience hints of the abuse she suffered as a child at the hands of her stepfather, and her memories mix with her impressions of the present, making vividly clear that she is quiet unable to escape from this past. Indeed, it seems very clear that every new relationship she forms will fall victim to her memories of these traumas, as indeed will she. As she speaks, we are given a panoramic view of the torments of fear and anxiety, and the language is unsparing. We see very clearly how her understanding of herself is fragmented and distorted. Drawing on images shaped by fictional situations, commercials, and scripted desires, she tries to construct a notion of the ideal couple and the ideal relationship, which of course makes it more and more impossible for her to be in a real relationship. She grows increasingly distant from reality and from the other person. The play offers no reassuring solutions, and the sad ending suggests that traumas of the past can indeed make a relationship in the present quite impossible.



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*What do you mean
'your sentence'?
What are you,
a screenplay?
It's all figured out,
man, woman,
it's all written down
who says what?*

Premiere: RS9 Theater, April 23, 2011

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bio

Zsófia Znajkay was born in 1986. She lives in Budapest, where she works as a writer and director. *And I in Her Lap* won the Theater Critics' Award for the best new Hungarian drama in 2016/17.

She is a creative figure with many sides. She has performed in the theater herself, and she has written scripts and dramas and held hands-on creative activities for children. In her dramas, she confronts complex problems head on. Her works are rich with playfulness and a keenly analytical rationality.

other works

Director's Cut, A

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zznajka@gmail.com

And I in her lap

Tihamér, a little boy only five years old, has difficulty sleeping. His is tormented by nightmares, and he always seeks refuge in his parents' bed, though his mother has forbidden him from bothering them in the night. In Zsófia Znajkay's play *And I in Her Lap*, we are presented with the story of Tihamér and his family. The drama focuses primarily on the dramatic moments of confrontation between Tihamér and his mother. There are leaps in time, and we bear witness to the ways in which the childhood traumas he endures affect Tihamér as an adult. His passive-aggressive mother is incapable of love, and she sees her son as an obstacle who comes between her and her husband. When she found out she was pregnant, she considered abortion, even though she had always claimed to want a child. The unstable woman terrorizes her family, and her abrupt changes of mood find expression in threats, humiliation, and a ruthless insistence on control, but also in exaggerated, affected expressions of concern, all mixed with self-pity. Over the course of the play, we see Tihamér as a child, an adolescent, and an adult. As a boy, he tries to grapple with his fears, but by the time he has reached adulthood, he has suffered rejection so many times that he is crippled by anxiety. He puts his last hopes in Bojána, a young woman who, in contrast with him, is sincere and open about her feelings. She surrounds him with love and confesses her attraction to him. The space in which the action unfolds is Tihamér's inner world, in which his parents' house, the apartment in which he lives as an adult, and the world of his nightmares all mix. The intertwining of dream and reality is one of the essential themes of the play, and the border between the two is increasingly blurred. As we jump from scene to scene, we jump from nightmare to reality, childhood to adulthood, shocking moments of trauma to everyday events. The play thus offers a complex picture of the darkest corners of the subconscious and the long shadows cast by childhood traumas.



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*Mom, I dreamt
that other grownups
came and took me away,
forever, for good,
and you and dad just
waved, and you were
like characters in
a popup book, a popup
book like... we saw
a cartoon on TV where
everyone was cut out
of paper, but they could
still move.*

Premiere: MU Theater, February 9, 2017

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