

Gábor Tompa

label curtain

a private theatrical
dictionary

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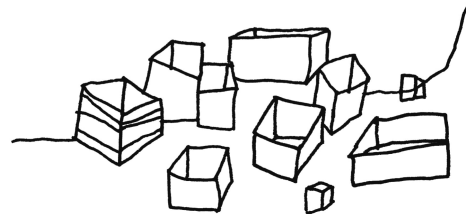
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A Lost Letter **absurd** acting school of Cluj Apáczai's model
audiences authentic awards **The Bald Soprano**
Olga Barabás **Beckett** beginnings Bibles bridge Brook
children's performance Chinese Defense clown company of Cluj
complementary events copyright **creation** crisis
democratic didactic directing multiple times
Directors training in Târgu Mureş Disciples drugs energy flow
failure Festival of Avignon festival of Sibiu film
financing **Godots** good show György Harag
Hamlet Hamm Hungarian drama **influence** Interferences International
Theatre Festival Jacques jew **King Lear** Long Friday management
Medeia Circles meeting place mission Mrožek

Mugur-era musical structure novel
openness / creativity openness / sensitivity opera directing
order oriental theatre permanent props playwrights
poor training professional judgement purpose Quartet
rehearsal process Richard III Romanian school of directing
sacrality scenery Shakespeare shoes spoken languages
stage poetry stylized surveillance Tango Târgu Mureş
Tartuffe theatre criticism theatricality Three Sisters
László Tompa Miklós Tompa translation Transylvanian acting
Union of the Theatres of Europe vertical András Visky
visual theatre ways to understand
world travesty work rhythm young directors

absurd

The secret of the theatre of the absurd is that there are extremely sharp **shifts** in it. Therefore one of the keys of the **Beckettian** absurd play is **accuracy**. This applies to anyone else of course, but especially to his plays. And there's always the **sharp** shift of thoughts. The writer shouldn't build up any processes, which is not easy, obviously. This is problematic for an actor who was brought up by the **Stanislavsky** school and tries to represent emotional **processes**. Just as I pointed out so many times at the rehearsals of **King Lear**: we do not necessarily reach a very intense emotional degree by building it up step by step previously. It doesn't go this way in real **life** either. We rage, fight with our children or wives, but suddenly the phone rings, and a bank clerk asks us about our assets – and we certainly won't quarrel with him. I feel that **naturalism** isn't necessarily the precise representation of reality. There are so many things in life to which we don't have any immediate logical explanations. However, the majority of Hungarian actors try to understand everything with their minds, which obviously can't be achieved all the time and it's not even their strongest side.

absurd

We can tell from the first scene of most of the absurd plays who their characters are. In these works it's not the evolution of the **character** which matters, but the behaviour of the different **types** in different situations. In his **Tango, Mrožek** touches something of the narrative level of the **traditional** play. But the actions are **unusual** already at the beginning of the play. A young man, sending his grandmother to a catafalque and making her play her own death, or drawing a birdcage to his uncle's head as a punishment, that is pretty unusual.

But I choose Mrožek, Beckett or **Ionesco**, not because they represent the absurd, but because they wrote **masterpieces**. Now they are considered **classics**, though they would heavily object against this. They phrased the basic **feelings** of the **20th (and 21st!)** century's humanity in the most powerful, most striking way and in the most perfect form. The new generation of playwrights which followed them wasn't really able to seize the essence of this age yet.

The reason why there are so few who choose these works may be that they are very hard to perform. Not because they aren't stage-like, but because they demand extreme precision and a great deal of **humbleness** in their **interpretation**, and there are only a few actors in our culture, who can - and dare to - play placing the **score** ahead of their

personality. And maybe there are a few directors who can explore the multiple layers of these works, recognizing the **biblical** layer behind the existential one and the great deal of playfulness and **humor** hidden in these plays.

These works are said to be pessimistic, but they in reality are like existence itself. Therefore they can't go without that particular humor and games of survival which can be found in **Godot**. If we were thinking all the time about the fact that we know already, namely that we will **die** anyway, life would be unbearable.



A lost letter

Beyond the deep and eternal observations of the national characteristics which are always present in the works of **Caragiale**, and because of which these works met a big deal of indignation and rejection, especially among the members of different extremist groups, I think that **A Lost Letter** raises two actual questions.

One of these is a historical **stagnation**, which is a tragical fact and a nonsense: since 1848 we stand in one place politically and socially. The methods which had always characterized the fight for power haven't changed, they've just become more sophisticated technically. We have to say though that this isn't just limited to our region – that is why this work is **universal**.

The other thing is a very important one being an existential characteristic of our region: the way he describes **blabbing**, as one of the most important manifestations of freedom and even as a way of existence. There is a famous book of Mircea Iorgulescu, *Marea trăncăneală* – The big blabbing (this isn't the original translation, but it should be translated like this), in which he writes about the blabbing which substitutes **action**. In this sense, **Ionesco** can be considered as Caragiale's intellectual heir. Our set looks like a luxury toilet, but there can be find some specifics of the traditional architecture as well. That is because today's societies tend to invest big amounts of money in lots of **pointless** enterprises. If we visit the Romanian Parliament, which has previously been the famous Ceausescu-build 'House of the People', we can observe the demonstration of the 'grandeur' from the armchairs to the toilets.

A lost letter

There is also a long path, one with a red carpet which leads to nowhere, with which every character has to be connected in a way. This carpet represents our dreams and desires, and it incorporates a sort of temporal distance, which is strange for those who think that only the so-called **karamazovian** time is important (this meaning the way we can seize the most in the **present**). It is, in the same time, a symbol of a centralization, because as the tree sisters long for **Moscow**, these characters want Bucharest, and they are afraid from Bucharest, they are acting as **marionettes** of Bucharest.

I wanted to free my actors from the pressure of the **tradition** of the 'big performances'. I wanted to free them from the pressure of playing **characters**. The fact that they have been inverted – male characters played by women, the female character played by a man – proved to be enough for achieving this. (The idea came to me from one of the famous lines of the play, which in Romanian goes Zoe, Zoe, fii bărbată!, which means: Zoe, Zoe, be a man!). Women don't have to desperately seek playing males and the man doesn't have to play a woman, everyone just needs to find their true selves and so, be able to play the score. I emphasize it one more time: **score**, not characters. The score is strong when we don't want to make it too artistic. On the other hand, I think that the hysterical **identity** known from the parliamentary debates is a substitution for the kind of political free-speaking and **manliness**, which would be required for a consensus at some times, and in order to have this parliamentary language reach the minimum level of civilization.



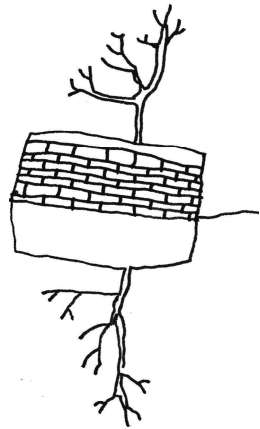
acting school of Cluj

I think it is safe to say that the reason of the decline of the theatre education in Romania – not only in Transylvania – is that they started to **institutionalize** it. When I was assisting at the founding of the Department of Theatre, I didn't think that it would become an institution producing young graduates on a conveyor belt. I was hoping that it would offer an alternative option to the shallow college educational system of Târgu Mureş. (I assisted at the birth of the department of Cluj, because I learned that they were going to reinstitute the Department of Theatre in Romanian language, I paid a visit to the responsible ones in the Ministry of Culture and I convinced them that a **Hungarian** department is needed as well, because there had been something like this before; or if not exactly like this, it was still worth starting it because there were excellent teachers available at the time there who would become great **masters** to the young apprentices of acting).

Now the same thing happened in Cluj as in Târgu Mureş, namely that the actual Head of Department, who later became the director of the Romanian National Theatre said the same thing as his colleagues in Mureş – that if we don't start a class every year, they will terminate us, the Faculty won't be '**accredited** and authenticated'... This **phantom** is usually

used by the mediocrity. They only fear for their position, though that isn't the one they should fear for.

I don't even want to question the fact that rejuvenation is important, when I took over the leadership of the theatre, my most important task was to ensure that there is a capable **young generation**. (There weren't any young Hungarian actors, because back in the '80s the communist regime reduced the number of Hungarian graduate recruits to only 3...) That was a different situation. Then we needed the rejuvenation. However, they can't give everyone a **diploma** of acting! This can only happen when anyone can teach. I put it this way and I repeat myself now: some people arrived to their faculty positions from the **cow shed**. I hold by this statement even now, I said that, I don't want to deny it... the whole thing's becoming shallow.



Apáczai's-model

I believe in the so called Apáczai-model which reads that one can be a **European** or a cosmopolitan in Transylvania as well, and by assuming it I can integrate my company of the Hungarian Theatre of Cluj into a wider, more universal spiritual and cultural system of values. The reason why **János Apáczai Csere** is a great example for me is because he travelled from Transylvania to The Netherlands, he studied and wrote his Encyclopedia in Utrecht and **took it back and published it at home**. With all the knowledge and experience he had there. This is extraordinary. It's true that he has been called back by Governor Ferenc Rakoczi II. in person. It's also true that he died at the age of 34... The problem today is that there are some closed communities which tend to **bury their heads into the sand**. This kind of exclusiveness doesn't bring any good, because it results in **prejudices**, and this kind of people won't ever know other's way of thinking. I believe that its opposition, **open-mindedness, curiosity and empathy** can be developed by theatre – good theatre of course.

audiences

After December 1989 there was a short period of **transition** when audiences seemed to come less intensely to the theatre. We had a lot to deal with back then, some of us weren't willing to go out on the streets, some of us followed the events on a day-to-day basis. On the other hand, there is this very fitting remark of János Székely: theatre works only in stable, consolidated **societies**, let that be a democracy or a dictatorship, and it can't really work in societies with an unstable structure. Under this statement he meant the attendance as well, obviously. I completely agree with that. After this short transition period of time the attention of the audience eventually turned back to the theatre, even if not to that extent as before.

Unfortunately, the most **sensitive** and **receptive** part of the audience, the intellectuals, who were the most supportive of the theatre in the sixties and in the beginning of the seventies, have left the country. So it's not only the loss of a great artistic staff that we can talk about but also the changing and the decreasing number of Hungarian audiences, not only in Cluj, but in Oradea and Timișoara too.

Now the audience of the Hungarian theatres of Transylvania was isolated for years not only from the international theatre but also from the world famous Romanian theatre. Of course, there are ignorant or **conservative** audiences everywhere, even if not to the same extent, considering their

audiences

education and theatrical knowledge. Fortunately, the interest in theatre of today's youth of Cluj is increasing visibly these days, and they represent the **audience of the future**. They cannot be dazed by steamy tales and demagogical mission-theories, they want to learn about the subject, theatre itself, so we have to give them what they are interested in. Just like generations of young audiences were raised by the **Szekler Theatre** in Târgu Mureş or by the Bulandra theatre in Bucharest, we have these young audiences, mostly students who come back to see many of our productions several times. The performances are for those who come to see them anyway. No one really thinks that theatre isn't for the audience, so it is quite stupid to start endless polemics on this subject.

Thoughts that bear meanings that are completely controversial (as in Ionesco's) have to happen authentically. Only the **faith** of the actor can help here: he/she believes what he thinks and in the next second its' opposite as well. This comes from the nature of theatre itself.

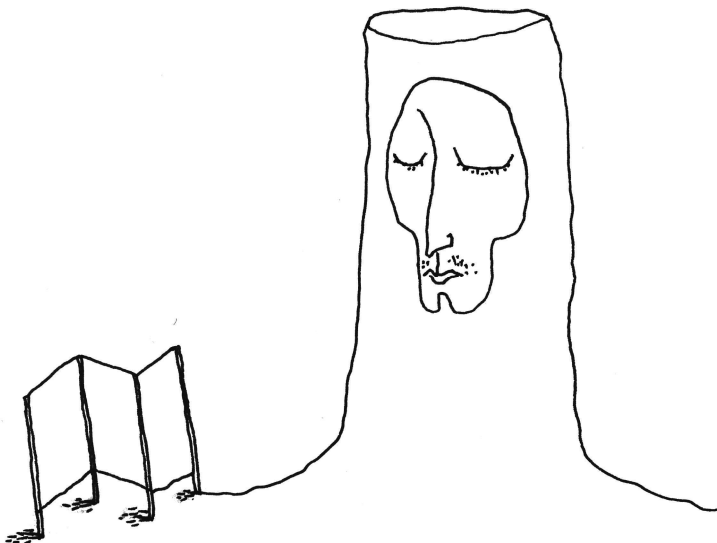
This is true for the **form** itself too. In every Shakespeare-play and other stilistically sensitive plays the same form can be brilliant and – if we don't make it authentic – embarrassing.

awards

In my twenty four years as general and artistic director of the Hungarian Theatre, our company has been awarded in Romania eight times for The Best Performance of the Year. In addition seven different shows got nominations for the same Award. We received a lot of awards for directing, acting and design, which are very important for us, because they represent the recognition of the theatre professionals nationwide, and the awards are preceded by a very long selection process. From our **foreign** awards, the most significant was the Best Foreign Performance of the Year Award which we received in England with **The Bald Soprano**. The latest important event in the company's life, which marks the beginning of a new period in the future artistic program of our theatre is the unanimous inclusion of the company into the **Union of the Theatres of Europe**, founded by the legendary Giorgio Strehler, within which, among 18 member theatres, ours is the only **Hungarian**-speaking company at this moment.

Olga Barabás

Olga is a special and very individual case in our theatrical landscape. In the past seasons she mostly directed her **own stories** or scenic adaptations. These are very interesting, kindly **naive**, lovable stories, which also transmit a kind of a moral purity from the stage to the audience.



Beckett

I am interested in the **sacred layer** of his plays and his worldview. I am impressed by this ruthless **accuracy**, with the help of which he shows us different situations and the most important questions of human **existence**. He never accuses the outside world, he's much more interested in the individual. I am impressed by his playfulness, the **clowning** which is important both in theatre and life.

I was sixteen when the journal Igaz Szó (True Word) published my first poem. I took them to János Székely, an important poet, novelist and playwright of the time: he was a strict but a honest guide of me. He taught me the discipline of the **closed and precise forms**. This way of thinking affects my theatrical works even today. By the way, my change of career was determined by some performances I've seen in Bucharest and one or two directions of György Harag in my hometown, Târgu Mureş. I admired how these performances explored the possibility of the **scenic poetry** and **theatrical metaphores** as opposed to the realist tradition exclusively seen before. I was much more excited by this form of expression than the perspectives I would have had as a Hungarian literature teacher/poet.

Bible

Without the knowledge of the **Bible**, eighty percent of the European culture can not be understood. It is one of the most important hands of my work as well, because one can find a biblical layer in all of the most significant theatrical plays. Without **sacrality** and **love** there is no real work of art. In Christian art, this is how the Old and the New Testament are connected. Every **masterpiece** 'hails' the glory of **God** and the faith in **resurrection**.