



Plays from Contemporary Hungary

'Difficult Women'

and Resistant Dramatic Voices:
Prah, Prime Location, The Dead Man,
Sunday Lunch, The Bat

Krisztina Tóth, János Háry, György Spiró,
edited by Szilvi Naray

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METHUEN DRAMA
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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First published in Great Britain 2024

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this record is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3503-7073-9
PB: 978-1-3503-7072-2
ePDF: 978-1-3503-7075-3
eBook: 978-1-3503-7074-6

Series: Methuen Drama Play Collections

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

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To Leo and Melody

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Prof. Alan Williams, Prof. Ursula Hurley, Dr Helen Pleasance for their professional guidance and encouragement throughout this process as well as my graduate students Jessica Bradshaw and Charlie Hinkley for their script editing skills and enthusiastic support of the project. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the ‘difficult women’, friends and colleagues who have inspired the angle on this book. Special acknowledgement goes to my daughter, Melody Davey, whose astute observations on drama and deep insights into ‘difficult womanhood’ have shaped my work.

Introduction: ‘Difficult Women’ and Resistance

By the editor/translator Szilvi Naray

The common thread that binds these five Hungarian contemporary plays together is that they all share a female protagonist who expresses her resistance through anti-social and destructive behaviour. Anti-social is to put it mildly as, out of the five leading female characters, two commit murder, another one is accused of attempted manslaughter, the fourth quasi-abandons her eldest child who gets in the way of her social climbing via a new marriage, and the fifth one demands that her husband burns his winning lottery ticket and therefore throws away the opportunity for her family to climb out of poverty. What also unites these mothers, carers and wives is that we meet them at their breaking point. In all five plays the women are faced with questions such as: success but at what cost? Or, what is the real cost of having an emancipated voice?

As a translator and theatre maker, what attracted me to translating and introducing these plays to the English-speaking world is precisely the fact that they all have ‘difficult women’ as protagonists. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to go into detail and into the genesis of the culturally accepted misogynistic term, so let it suffice to say that the leading female characters in this collection all challenge the status quo, make themselves heard, do not back down, are difficult to please and headstrong – to use vocabulary under a patriarchal lens. Yet, the semantic equivalent to describe a male would be the positive traits of ambitious, driven and discerning, perhaps. For the sake of this analysis, I will engage with and embrace Cheryl Strayed’s definition, that saying difficult woman is ‘really another way of saying female and brave enough to express the full range of one’s humanity’ (Karbo 2018).

I would suggest that this concept needs to be seen as a spectrum. These women all express or embody a different form of resistance and, hence, express rather differently the full range of their humanity in varied contexts. Jane Goodall’s famous, ‘It doesn’t take much to be considered a difficult woman. That’s why there are so many of us’, is a sober reminder of how being on the full spectrum of humanity is still a threat to the patriarchal status quo.

So, indeed, they can be viewed as ‘difficult’ as they all refuse to conform – albeit to a different degree, but all actively resist and push back against the status quo, resisting victimhood to the best of their abilities and asserting their individualism through their often-anti-social actions.

Yet, the women and their actions are not judged, which is not the case for the women of today’s Hungary. These female characters were born out of a society that often judges women; we only need to look at Hungary’s family policies, which are built on traditional Christian values, to see that they only reward women who stick to their prescribed gender roles. The self-proclaimed non-liberal democracy’s government policies have encouraged an atmosphere of judgement towards women who choose not to conform. Refreshingly the plays do not judge them: their environment does. All these female protagonists express their resistance through destructive behaviour. We happen to meet them when they crack, at a time when they express their different levels of resistance, albeit via destruction. This makes for good drama.

Another uber theme that engaged my interest in pioneering these plays is that they are all set in the dramatic milieu of the family. As such, I will show that the family unit

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in these plays can be seen as a microcosm for Hungarian contemporary society. Each play examines, albeit through different configurations, the idealized or archetypal family, and as a collection they offer various permutations of it. This is of particular interest because, as the title of this book tells us, I have chosen to represent works of playwrights who are also resisting today's anti liberal government, led by Viktor Orbán. I was drawn to these plays as their protagonists, like their creators, resist their environment, the status quo and, via their actions, question the established way of how things are. These playwrights have often been vilified by the Hungarian press as being part of the left-wing intelligentsia. They are demonised by the 90 per cent-government-owned media. These plays highlight the tension between the individual and the community in two ways. The women protagonists either embody an extreme form of capitalism or they actively resist these capitalist tropes and favour the values of Hungarian 'Goulash Socialism'. The 'difficult women' in these plays, in their various ways, resist the leading traditional heteronormative nuclear family structure, which in Hungary still encourages and casts women (whether child-free or not) in the roles of servile carers. These female protagonists either have been actively victimized by the patriarchy or have internalized its misogyny. All five plays have tragic endings often centred around a woman whose tragic blind spot leads her to these tragic endings.

A note on the Hungarian language

Hungarian is a 'hopelessly isolated language in the centre of a continent and hardly penetrable for anyone not born Hungarian' (Nagy 2000: 153).

Hungarian, being a non-Indo-European language and a Uralic language, has neutral pronouns so 'he' and 'she' are the same word. This degenderization creates a fascinating effect for Hungarian speakers as both genders are referred to by the same one word. Decoding the gender is dependent upon paying attention to the context. The very fact that the translator of Hungarian into English must clarify gender is an act of interpretation. Another linguistic challenge for the Hungarian to English translator is the moderate lack of specificity of time in Hungarian. Hungarian does not differentiate between the three different past tenses as English does (I did, I have been doing, I had been doing). Being an agglutinative language, Hungarian does not have prepositions; instead, all personal pronouns and conjugation suffixes come attached to the word, making the language a very efficient and powerfully blunt tool for dialogue-writing. Register is another challenge as Hungarian language does not contain the same class distinctions as English.

Before introducing the authors and their plays I believe that it is essential to gain a basic understanding of the overall political climate under which most of the plays were born, as this will shed light onto the nature of these resistant dramatic voices.

Political and historical context of the plays: the family as political weapon

Hungary has a history of politicizing and weaponizing families. Current and past governments have politicized the family by attempting to control women's reproductive

functions. It may be of interest to know that, contrary to expectations, the socialist and the now reigning anti-liberal democracy share a common gender-centred ideology in which, under the false promise of equality, the state's 'generous childcare system and pronatalist financial incentives' are in fact capitalizing on women's reproductive labour.

Pronatalist family policies, even though often linked to right-wing politics due to their link with patriotism, believe in the narrative that having children is the natural duty of women and that motherhood is a patriotic obligation. Yet, during Hungary's dark-state socialist era, between 1953–6 there was an infamous ban on abortion. The Orbán government, in power since 2010, in return questioned the 'superiority of Western democratic models and envisioned a bright national future while criticizing the EU and the UN for their migration policies' (Bajnay 2022: 10). This administration has been advocating domestic population growth as the desirable alternative to immigration. 'Population growth has been connected to traditional gender roles and what Orbán calls "gender ideology" soon became public enemy No 1' (Bajnay 2022). Eva Fodor indeed confirms in her outstanding book, *The Gender Regime of Anti-Liberal Hungary*, that, 'The need for women's paid work has a long history in Hungary, as does the unequal division of household labour. Communist parties proclaimed their intention to socialize child and elderly care as well as domestic work' (Fodor 2022: 22). I would like to acknowledge that, unlike their Western counterparts, Hungarian mothers were not treated as a problematic workforce when they went on maternity leave as we know that, 'In Hungary, new mothers (and mothers only) could withdraw from paid work for up to three years upon childbirth and were guaranteed their jobs back upon return' (Ghodsee 2005 in Fodor 2022: 22). This is now oddly echoed by the Orbán regime's family protection laws, which actively encourage married and working couples to have more children. Parents with one or more children receive tax relief which increases with the number of children. The family housing system is the current government's star policy, as families can apply for the equivalent of EUR 2,400 in grants which do not need to be repaid if they spend it on a house and agree to have children. Another blatant incentive to benefit from women's labour in both senses of the word is personal income tax exemption for women with at least four children. 'This policy encourages women to take on roles as a parent and in their careers as it is only provided to women in formal labour, which does not change the wage gap between women and men which is still an issue in Hungary, as it has the fifth biggest wage gap amongst EU countries' (Bajnay 2022: 3).

Non-liberal democracy

Hungary's right-wing prime minister held a referendum on anti-LGBT law in 2021. This was in the wake of the Budapest Pride march held on 24 July 2021. A cursory internet search reveals a plethora of articles with titles such as 'EU urged to suspend funds to Hungary over "grave breaches of the rule of law"' 'Hungary fines bookshop chain over picture book depicting LGBT families' and 'EU launches legal action over LGBTQ+ rights in Hungary'. Andrea Pető, a professor in the department of gender studies at Budapest's Central European University, has said: 'While others have progressed [with women's representation in politics], Hungary has stayed in the same place or even got

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worse since 1990.’ She adds that ‘the country has ranked among the worst in a list of twenty-eight EU nations when it comes to gender equality’. Two years previously, Hungarian education came under attack as gender studies departments were forced to close in Hungarian universities. Maya Oppenheim, the women’s correspondent from the *Independent* newspaper, a leading UK liberal daily publication, says ‘Hungary’s far-right prime minister has banned gender studies programmes at universities – with his deputy arguing the area of study is an ideology rather than a science’ (Oppenheim 2018). This idea that gender studies is an ideology and therefore needs removing without any consultation from the universities is a threat to free speech and liberalism and may explain why de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex* is out of print in Hungary.

Given Orbán’s myopic and binary view of society, with his homophobic, transphobic and misogynistic policies, I believe it is more important than ever to translate plays that bring attention to women, their surroundings and their experience. These plays, analysed together, can offer a microcosmic view of today’s Hungary. Given the reigning myopia regarding *otherness* it is in my interest to translate the works of resisting playwrights. Both these men, Spiró and Háy, have told me in an informal interview setting that they prefer to write female characters as they are both interested in ‘The Other’, in their case, ‘The Female’. Overall, Hungary’s literature scene is gender-divided, as drama seems to be dominated by men whereas poetry and prose by women.

Rationale

I wanted to choose plays that had entered the Hungarian dramatic canon as I hoped to represent the zeitgeist of modern Hungary. These plays were all written between 2004 and 2021 and have enjoyed some notoriety. The playwright trio, Spiró (born in 1946), Háy (born in 1960) and Tóth (born in 1967), are part of the Hungarian intelligentsia and have responded dramatically, often controversially, to the fragile new Hungarian democracy. These playwrights have clearly declared or stated to me that they are not being political, yet their astutely observed characterizations, set in a Hungarian domestic setting, cannot totally be seen as divorced from their modern Hungarian socio-political context. They are by their very existence critics of Hungarian society, which has been battling with serious social problems since the end of the Cold War. They all engage with Hungary’s communist regime (1945–89). András Forgách rightly quotes Spiró’s unapologetic view that theatre of that period in Eastern Europe became, ‘to some extent, a cultic site, a veritable church in which one could procure symbolically packaged and emotionally unfalsified truths and, all being well, take part in a ceremony of purgation and purification’ (Forgách 2000: 12). Theatre practitioners, like other artists, will react to their environment via their creative practice. Hungarian theatre has been no exception by using metaphorical language to communicate to its audiences. The shared fate and restricted freedom of expressions that Hungarians have experienced has created a fertile ground for the emergence of subtext-heavy drama. As a result, a certain camaraderie – a wink to the audience – has evolved between Hungarian theatregoers and Hungarian contemporary playwrights. ‘In the 1950’s and the 1960’s a complete system of political restrictions and ideological expectations was consolidated under the name “theatre coordination”. Some artists, however, found an antidote to this. A kind of

conspiracy developed between the performers on stage and their audience, a mutual understanding as a form of public protests against the ruling regime' (Szabó 2004: 13). Clearly, Hungarian audiences have been sensitized to read between the lines and to rightly see theatre as a place of reflection and not solely entertainment. Post-1989 theatre is still not free from political censorship: it is less overt, and also appears to involve a degree of self-censorship. Interestingly, since the end of the communist dictatorship state, funding has not ceased and 'despite several changes in financing methods, the state remains the single most dominant sponsor' (Szabó 2004: 14). The state funding and subsidies that keep the theatre companies afloat are not free of political involvement, of course. The governing party will indirectly but ultimately control which playwrights are produced. In this sense, I was particularly interested in Spiró's work as he is often seen as a controversial figure. He had to wait sixteen years before having his plays produced and his no-nonsense depiction of Hungarian lives has offended in the past, as Hungarian critical tradition is to interpret many texts politically. This has resulted in good writing being judged by political and not artistic criteria – which still prevails. He is often attacked by the Orbán government, and the right-wing press has always marginalized him. Spiró explains the trend in Hungary in his article 'Rettegés a drámától' ('A Shaking Fear from Drama'): 'It has become a widespread assumption in our country that the writer is not driven by the desire to characterize humanity but rather by his desire to develop and promote his/her own political ideology' (Spiró 2001 [my translation]). This is not surprising as Spiró is uncompromised; he is not in bed with/doesn't have allegiance to any political party. He told me in one of our interviews that two of his recent plays (*Prime Location*, trans. Naray-Davey (2012) and *Elsötétedés* (2002) (*Blackout*)) have attracted controversy. Spiró is, without doubt, a controversial literary figure. He started writing plays in 1962 but only started to be produced in 1978. A few of his plays were banned in the 1980s, namely *Hannibal* and *Balassi Menyhárt*. His play *Kálmár Béla*, which he also directed in the spring of 1980, was banned by the autumn. Another play, called *Árpádháza*, which he wrote after the changes in 1993, is not produced by the bigger theatres. Overall, many of his older plays are not played any more, according to Spiró, 'because producers don't dare to'. His big success *Csirkefej* (*Chickenhead*) 'is only produced outside of Hungary', he tells me. The two plays in this volume by Spiró have received much-polarized critical receptions. *Prah* (2004) became a commercial and critical success while *Prime Location* (2012) enjoyed a polemical three-week run and received damning reviews. Spiró tells me in our meeting that the reviews he receives for his writing vary in venom and in praise depending on who is in the government at that given time. The current trend seems to be to accuse him of being a 'traitor', accusing him of painting an unrealistically dark view of Hungary.

There is a new kind of censorship at work under the Orbán government. This has meant that new theatre companies are being formed by dissatisfied actors and directors wishing not to adhere to the government's idea of what people should see. The situation was dire in 2012 when, following the election of the right-wing Fidesz party, the mayor of Budapest sacked the director of Új Színház (the New Theatre), and appointed actor György Dörner in his place. Dörner supports the anti-Roma, anti-gay and antisemitic political party, Jobbik.

Jobbik and other extreme-right groups are campaigning and demonstrating against the Hungarian National Theatre, calling its work 'obscene, pornographic, gay, anti-national

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and anti-Hungarian'. The campaign against a liberal Hungarian theatre, open to the world, is part of a move in Hungary towards intolerance and democracy (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/26/liberal-theatre-under-firehungary>).

According to Spiró and Háy (source: informal conversation), state-funded theatre companies will be discouraged from producing playwrights whose stories and characters illuminate Hungary's severe social and economic problems. It is a strange situation: Orbán's strategy of attacking not only political opposition but also cultural opposition is frightening. The new media laws mean that insulting the 'spirit of the Hungarian nation' is now a crime. For theatre-makers this means making controversial work will become more and more difficult. Government funding has shifted to effectively cut out the avant-garde, but it was only just over twenty years ago when all the radical art was amateur anyway, with the communist state only funding what they liked. This is not surprising as Orbán, from Hungary's Fidesz party, has 'faced constant accusations of undemocratic tendencies throughout his term. Fidesz rewrote the constitution without consultation and has already amended it five times. The opposition say Fidesz have turned state media into government mouthpieces' (Jones 2014: 1).

Both Spiró and Háy told me in an interview context that their job was to observe. The observer who is a dramatist notices and then dramatizes his observations: 'I live in Hungary so my starting point of observation will be Hungary and its people', Háy tells me in an interview in 2013. These three authors create drama from what they know and can observe. These plays are not didactic as they do not preach or offer solutions. They act as mirrors, reflecting our humanities back to us, and hence possess a universal dramatic and humanist message that would contradict any didactic element. These authors were clear in emphasizing their non-didactic and non-political involvement as they are keenly aware that Hungarian theatre has a long history of being a platform for political debate. This, of course, has arisen from censorship during communism.

I have chosen to translate the plays of György Spiró, János Háy and Krisztina Tóth as they all voice resistance via their dramatic voices, albeit very differently. Even though communism is gone, social problems are enormous in Hungary and Spiró's characters' dilemmas echo the real social problems of his country. The starting point for these playwrights is the family unit, which is a well-established dramatic setting, to explore the individual versus society themes. Whether they're represented by a nursery, a village, or an old people's care home, they are microcosmic of the greater contemporary Hungarian society from which they were born. Spiró's plays clearly remind us of Lukács's view that drama is conflict: 'Drama is the dialectic of colliding wills' (Lukács cited in Muller 2004: 5). Háy's characters often resist their environment, which is often the family unit, and he puts his overwhelmingly female protagonists in extreme situations where he explores the individual society paradigm with a particular talent in characterizing people living in bad faith. Tóth's resistance is a refusal to bow down to the binaries that her environment encourages her to do. Her astute characterization of bourgeois hypocrisies and sexist behaviours are developed through a feminist/feminine lens.

Playwrights' Biographies

György Spiró (b. 1946) is an eminent and prolific award-winning Hungarian novelist, playwright, essayist and translator with twenty-eight awards so far, including the prestigious Kossuth award in 2006 as well as the Hungarian Republic's special achievement award (2005) for his internationally recognized literary career. Most recently, in 2021, he was awarded the Hungarian Contemporary Dramatist award. His plays have been set texts in Hungary's high school literature curriculum. He has become one of the most prominent contemporary Hungarian literary figures, yet he has often been vilified by the right-wing Hungarian press as the '*artiste maudit*' of his native Hungary, due to his nonpartisan involvement with Hungarian politics. His plays are known for their straight-talking, harsh language, depicting the lives of ordinary Hungarians. His brutal depiction of disenfranchised youths in his play *Chickenhead* (1987) brought him recognition as a dramatist; dramaturg Zsuzsa Radnóti has described him as the Hungarian Edward Bond. His play *Blackout* (2005) deals with the dark theme of Hungary's antisemitic laws between the wars and has only recently been produced in a non-government-funded, independent small theatre in Budapest, creating controversy whilst winning a major award. *Prah* (2004) is one of his most frequently produced plays, having been translated and produced by other Central and Eastern European nations. Spiró's work, with the exception of a few plays and his colossal historical novel *Captivity* (2005), translated by Tim Wilkinson, has not been translated into English.

János Háý (b. 1960) is a popular novelist, short-story writer, poet, essayist and playwright. He is Hungary's leading commercially successful contemporary author, who is also critically acclaimed. *The Dead Man* (2016) won the Prize of the Theater Playwrights Guild in 2017. Its first performance was at the Szkéné Theater, directed by László Bérczes. He has many awards to his name including the Best Hungarian Drama award in 2002 and the Máraí Sándor award in 2009, the Gold Medal prize in 2013 and the Heidelberg Drama Festival Audience's award in 2005. It was the publication of *Gézagyerek* in 2004 that brought him notoriety as a dramatist. The collection contains four dramas and a short story. His latest novels (*Mélygarázs A Cégvezető, Házasságon Innen és Túl*) topped the bestseller list. It is hard to keep up with his publications as he is incredibly prolific and publishes about two books a year on average. Háý has had to overcome die-hard prejudice from his bourgeois and urban Budapest colleagues as he is from a rural background, born into a peasant family. He started out as a Russian teacher and faced many failed attempts to gain entry to university. Háý's literary career started in 1989, the year that Hungary broke with communism. His voice is fresh, dynamic and occasionally experimental. Háý's dramatic language is very particular as its playful exploitation of the Hungarian language brings a harshness to the dialogue, making it a challenge to reproduce in English and a challenging task for the translator. He achieved critical success with *A Gyerek*. His work to me is a mixture of Beckettian minimalism and circularity with a mixture of kitchen-sink realism. Háý, himself, describes his style as 'not writing from above but writing in parallel' (interview 2015). This, to Háý, translates as 'writing with love' for his characters. He describes his language as a

‘special language that is very familiar and domestic in style while simultaneously nursing depth of meaning’. Háy, too, has not escaped some unfounded accusations from the right-wing conservative press. Just recently he received very harsh criticism for his novel *Mamika*, which was written from the point of view of a Roma older woman. Háy was accused of being racist as he wrote the whole novel in the Romani vernacular. The attacks were politically motivated – as all attacks on the liberal intelligentsia are politically motivated in Hungary. Háy’s riposte was that he simply wrote a character, a fragment of his imagination; that he was interested in exploring this otherness.

Krisztina Tóth (b. 1967) is one of the most important voices in Hungary today. She began a brilliant literary career very early, and was first recognized as a poet when she was just twenty. She is the recipient of numerous awards. She studied sculpting and literature in Budapest and spent two years in Paris during her university years.

Krisztina Tóth has published almost forty books of prose, poetry, drama and children’s stories. Her children’s books treat topics that are considered unusual, even taboo, for example, or: *Mum had an Operation*, a story about cancer, and *Pig and Goose*, a successful series of children’s tales. *The Girl Who Wouldn’t Talk* was inspired by the story of her own adopted daughter. In 2015, her novel *Aquarium* featured on the shortlist of the German Internationale Literaturpreis. Her works have been translated into twenty languages and can be read in Arabic, Czech, English, Finnish, French, German, Polish, Spanish and Swedish, amongst others. In her review of *Pixel*, entitled ‘The Hungarian Author who Foresaw the Future of Nationalism’, Stephanie Newman writes, ‘Tóth muses that generations of humans, like bobbing needles, are “seaming together the fraying layers of the past and the present”. Their countries of origin don’t matter; neither do their religions, genders, or ethnicities. What Tóth creates in *Pixel* is emblematic of Europe as she sees it: a place in which “everything is sewn together while the thread itself is invisible”’ (Newman 2019: 1). Difficult relationships, manipulative characters, uncertainties, and life’s harsh realities and strange twists of fates are common themes that Tóth has developed in her writing, whether expressed in poetry (‘Whale Song’), drama (*Pokémon*, *The Bat*) or prose (*Pixel*, *Barcode*). Her latest novel, *The Monkey’s Eyes*, was Hungary’s best-selling work of fiction in 2022 and has rapidly become an indispensable work of contemporary literature. No stranger to controversy, Krisztina Tóth does not shy away from bringing to light the hypocrisies, mind games and the injustices she perceives in her society whilst painting grotesque portraits of her Central European homeland with a tinge of the region’s dark and absurdist humour.

Attacks on Tóth

Following her remarks about a novel by Mór Jókai, Tóth was the target of numerous attacks, particularly from media close to the government of Viktor Orbán. Asked by a journalist to give her opinion on the list of compulsory readings for school curricula, Krisztina Tóth suggested that, if a book had to be removed from the school curricula, it would be *The Golden Man* (1872) by Mór Jókai because she was of the view that he depicted women characters as servile and docile, subjected to silent men who lead

double lives. Krisztina Tóth expressed her view that this is an image contrary to that of the twenty-first century and that new more contemporary and relevant works should be added to the curriculum as these novels perpetuate gender stereotyping and offer a chauvinistic world view. This comment unleashed what can only be called a witch hunt against Tóth, who was brutally shamed on national television and received misogynistic and ageist abuse on live television – especially from a politician presenter who asked his audience why should they listen to an ‘ageing saggy-breasted stupid woman about what we should read’. This was in parallel to an outpouring of hatred via social media and from people on the street.

The outpouring of hatred came from social networks as well as from members of the public on the streets of Budapest. Her mailbox was filled with dog faeces. The Hungarian press, which does not shine in its plurality and diversity, has accompanied this surge. In a government-owned TV station news programme, *Sajto klub*, four middle-aged men – pro-government journalists – shamelessly engaged in Krisztina’s sexist and misogynistic character defamation. They systematically called her a ‘misguided crazy woman’, mocked her and aimed to convince their viewers that her motivation to speak her views was solely to get her fifteen minutes of fame. Their behaviour was patronizing with full intent to vilify her. They concluded their demonization by saying that she was not the only one with these ludicrous gender ideas and ended up talking about how women can absolutely serve hot soup to their husbands and have a career at the same time. From a liberal gaze, this retrograde, right-wing, openly chauvinistic, non-liberal and Christian rhetoric was offensive. Their final thought, after calling her names, was that she should just go back to writing and not express her stupid opinions on books. I must stress that we are talking about one of Hungary’s most read and critically acclaimed authors, who has been translated into many languages. Krisztina Tóth explained to me that this is not just a unique and personal case, but rather a general position of the Hungarian press towards a certain type of intellectual and writer. Right-wing trolls even threatened her life and her daughter’s to the extent that she had to move house and move her child to another school. In 2021 she had to go into exile to France for six months as l’École Supérieure de Lyon reacted swiftly by offering her accommodation and some work. This is deeply shocking as it highlights the cost of freedom of speech in today’s Hungary. This censorship has led to a kind of self-censorship that is reminiscent of the communist regime.

Incidentally, Ms Tóth told me in an informal conversation that a prominent theatre director said that he would only produce/direct *The Bat* if she changed the ending and gave a concrete and neat ending. He wanted the audience to know whether our protagonist, our ‘difficult woman’, was guilty of pushing that child in front of the car or not. He did not like the author’s ambiguous ending; he claimed that audiences needed the certainty. Tóth was not willing to compromise, and the play will not be produced by this theatre company now. She is the ultimate resisting voice. Due to this resistance she will no doubt be thought of as being a ‘difficult woman’.

The Plays

The following plot-revealing introductions to these plays are written with a feminist lens. In this case, this will mean that I will primarily be paying attention and notice to the female characters' behaviours, and their consequences. I will notice when women act or don't, or when they speak and when they don't and how, by looking at the conflicts within the family unit in which these plays are set, we can gain insights into Hungarian contemporary society.

Prah by György Spiró

An impoverished and politically disillusioned couple from a small Hungarian town have a winning lottery ticket. The play dramatizes what the cost of winning will be. The couple conclude that this winning is problematic as the money has come too late for them and too early for their kids. Through a mixture of tragi-comedic scenes, the wife falls out with her husband as she realizes that his hypothetical spending spree has unveiled his real personality, by which she is disgusted. She fell in love with a poor man, she says. She is so appalled by how he will spend the money and how it will impact her family that she decides she wants none of it; she breaks up with him and lets him keep the lottery ticket. He realizes that he wants her and what they had and that the only way to get it back is to . . . yes . . . burn the winning lottery ticket! The winning forces them to ask themselves troubling questions about what they want and who they are. The narrative in *Prah* has often been interpreted as a metaphor that chronicles Hungary's communist past and the transition to capitalism with all its growing pains. Although I do agree with this microcosmic interpretation, I would like to bring attention to the female protagonist: a mother, a wife, a carer who can be seen as a 'difficult woman' as she is not afraid of expressing views that contradict the status quo and the traditional maternal instinct of providing. Her strong unwavering voice leads the play as it is her actions that are responsible for the cathartic ending. She is certainly brave enough to inhabit the full spectrum of her humanity.

She, in her long panic-stricken and humorous speeches, shares her fears to her husband about how this money 'came too early for the kids and too late for us', echoing some Hungarians' reluctance to embrace the new world order and free-market economy. In a tragi-comic rant she extrapolates on her conviction that this money will corrupt her teenage kids as they will become drug addicts and pimps, who will want to accumulate things without limits which will lead to their catastrophic downfall.

She is concerned that her husband will turn into a horrible person. Her line 'I fell in love with a poor man' may hit multiple nerves with Hungarian audiences as it, I would argue, is microcosmic of the generation that was already middle-aged when the regime changed.

The threat that this unearned money represents seems to echo a distrust of capitalist self-motivated gain. She sees the destruction of the lottery ticket as a valid choice in saving her family from the inevitable destruction that capitalist greed will engender.

The Woman, who is a wife, a former carer for her elderly father and a mother, basically feels lacking in agency, having had to compromise due to family duties and the regime difficulties. Yet this, on the surface, senseless act of destruction is the self-destructive action of the scared. The Woman in *Prah* is scared by the freedom that money would bring. She is very much like a caged animal who, when released from captivity, willingly goes back to its cage as the free world is too terrifying. The Woman sabotages her freedom in the same way: she goes back to the confinement of the kitchen walls as that is what she knows and has been conditioned to feel safe in. She wants them to burn the ticket as it is a vessel for a world that she does not see herself in. Her identity is so deeply rooted in her servile roles that she cannot conceive of a self that is not about serving others. The first things she wants to buy with the winnings are curtains and beds for her children, wanting to enhance her domestic environment. Her husband, on the other hand, talks about spending the money on cars and private jets, all thrilling experiences for himself, situated outside the home and benefiting only him. So, what we have here is possibly microcosmic of a segment of Hungarian society in the early 2000s as the Woman's action to turn her back on this non-honourably-earned money represents a rejection of profit money, the foundation of capitalism. The family is radicalized in a way as it turns itself against the status quo and, in the absurd act of burning money, the family rejects the values of its nation; the final dramatic tour de force of the burning lottery ticket on the dark stage could be interpreted as an idealization of poverty and/or a pessimistic view of Hungary's place, as the family is paralyzed by fear and inaction, in a free-market capitalist European Union.

The Woman's individualist choices are in resisting the state of affairs. She chooses to 'other' herself. It is as if the idea of compromising is out of the question for her. She can only conceive of what she knows, and that is her tragedy: that she fell in love with a poor man. The Woman keeps her nuclear family at the cost of economic gain which, ironically, would have saved her from servitude. If she had allowed her husband to cash in the winning lottery ticket, she would have had to engage with change which is clearly challenging. She would no longer have to clean for the rich Austrians, and she would be able to get help with her own household. She chooses poverty and that is her act of defiance. This time it is not inflicted on her; she is not occupying the victim status. This female protagonist has been brave enough to engage with the full spectrum of her humanity.

***Prime Location* by György Spiró**

This play dramatizes a series of strange and uncomfortable events that are taking place in a care centre for the elderly. The dramatic force of the play is that we, the audience, are as incredulous as the characters but, unlike them, we see the tragedy unfold in the perfect location of 'The Woodland of Peace', as we witness the shocking scene of the elderly residents in their wheelchairs, manically trying to wheel themselves away from gunfire. Yes: they are being hunted. The puzzle is slowly put together by us, the audience, while the other characters are blind to the fact that the care centre is, in fact, killing off their residents to create places for the new arrivals. If it sounds brutal, it is; yet the play is also very humorous and hence its success. We are trapped into laughing

at the absurdity of the characters' choices and actions. The characters are deprived of heroic status as they leave the stage unchanged; we the audience are faced with pondering why they did not see the signs of impending evil. Or, rather, did they choose not to see it as collaboration was easier? Are the elderly . . . a burden? The play encourages us to reflect on the ethics of how society deals with the obsolete and non-profit making: the elderly.

Prime Location can be seen as the opposite side of the same coin as *Prah* as it dramatizes, via absurdist tropes, an extreme engagement with profit making. Our 'difficult woman' in this play is Miss Judith, who has embraced capitalism to its extreme and sees nothing wrong with playing with its rules despite its criminal and immoral outcome. She runs a care home, 'Prime Location', and provides a very sought-after service: the outsourcing of care for the elderly. Indeed, she gets rid of what capitalist society finds encumbering: the non-productive, the commercially obsolete: the elderly. Her individualism could be seen as the opposite of the Woman in *Prah* as she has actively freed herself from familial servile duties, playing against the caring roles women are prescribed. She is not maternal, she is not caring; she wants to be successful and plays the capitalist game to its extreme. She goes to the absurdist extreme and, under her management, the 'sweet oldies' who are wheeled out to the Woodland of Peace for fresh air never return. The useless, the obsolete, the non-productive must be recycled into the system. She feels no remorse; she is representative of an extreme form of brutal individualism. The dramatic setting of the elite care home, which is attached to a hotel that provides hunting holidays for wealthy foreigners, attracts the adult children of their elderly parents who hope to skip the waiting list and secure a place in this hyped-up care home with a surprisingly quick turnaround. The irony is that here the family is painted as a flawed, unloving and toxic institution where the elderly parents are burdening the productivity of their children. Miss Judith is a resistant dramatic voice as she is acting against the nurturing expectation of her sex. She is emblematic of the survivor who must adapt the best to survive. She is the future; she will survive because she can prioritize her interest over the interest of the community. This could also be interpreted as Hungary trying to survive at any rate and compete with the top dogs of the European Union. Her right-hand man and partner in crime is Mr Sneak, the voice of the old socialist regime, who reminisces in his speeches about how cleverly he was able to play that system, almost gloating about his adaptability. He worships Miss Judith and is learning from her about the new capitalist way (the free-market economy way). Miss Judith, herself, is very authoritarian and is a feared character. Dramatically, she is used as an omnipresent figure as other characters talk about her, show reverence to her and wait for her to show up throughout the first act. She would fit the 'difficult woman' label because she is unwavering in her voice and has no problem with forceful leadership, and for not apologizing for her success. On the 'difficult woman' spectrum, she is up there, because being a murderer is part of her humanity. A possible way to interpret *Prime Location* is to see it as an allegory for Nazi Hungary. The disappearance and eventual murder of old people uncomfortably resonates with the disappearance and mass murdering of Hungarian Jews. The Hungarian collaborators, without whom the tragedy could not have happened, are echoed by Mr Sneak, who does not ask questions but only follows orders.

***Sunday Lunch* by János Házy**

This play follows the life of a family whose members live in a state of Sartrean bad faith. The artifice of the Sunday lunch ritual is what apparently holds them together. This is clearly expressed by the recurring ‘powdered cream of parsnip sachet soup’ motif that the mother serves every Sunday lunch, adding a bit of ‘sour cream’ to it. The bourgeois pretences and forced civility finally give way to the main character’s realization of her flaws. The anti-heroine finally cracks at the family Christmas lunch: in a moment of lucidity and pain, she realizes that she has practically sacrificed her relationship with her now estranged adult son from her first marriage to remarry and move up the socio-economic ladder. In this case the difficult woman is paired with the bad mother trope. Our protagonist is resisting her role as a good girl and her values are set against her parents, who have chosen to live inauthentically and have stayed together for the sake of the family even though they clearly hate each other. The daughter refuses to adhere to the prescribed family unit if it does not serve her. She simply changes husband and does not dwell on the consequences of this new union with relation to her first-born son by her first husband. She is in pursuit of material gain but, in her case, this comes with sacrificing her relationship with her son. She denies her maternal instinct in order to climb the socio-economic ladder. She is an individualist in the sense that she chooses her actions for herself over the collective which, in this case, would be represented by the extended, reconstituted family that she does not allow to flourish. She marches to the sound of her own drum.

If the ‘difficult woman’ is a spectrum scale, then the protagonist named ‘The Girl’ of *Sunday Lunch* may sit in the middle of that scale. She is certainly brave enough not to be easily pleased, and will not accept her marginalized status as a divorced single mother – however short in duration. She swiftly remedies her ‘divorced single mother’ status by hiring the no-nonsense, practical-minded Matchmaker character who sets her up with her next husband. In her case, the expression of her humanity is also the expression of her tragic flaw, as her pursuit of the perfect family unit at any cost will result in a tragedy of her own making. Her tragic flaw, the playwright told me in an interview (April 2023), is that she suffers from an emotional deficit and is unable to relate to the world emotionally. Due to this lack of emotional approach, she instead fills that void with societal expectations which sublimely whisper to her that she mustn’t be seen as difficult, that she isn’t allowed to be seen as a person engaging with the full range of humanity because she is a mother, a wife and a daughter. Following societal expectations gives her a fake sense of connection to her world, an artificial sense of belonging. So, what motivates her is what conventions tell her she should do. She accepts and adheres to the expectation that, for a woman to be happy, she must have children and a successful husband: this is what she will want. To be a divorced single mother is not a traditionally societally advantageous position and so she needs to get to a position that is more acceptable to her society. The play is very much a critique of the capitalist market economy, which succeeds through creating desire for more new things. Materialistic culture can cleverly manipulate us by creating a false desire for things: we did not need a product until brilliant advertising created a desire in us for that product. This is what is echoed in The Girl’s actions. Her desire, her goal, is to be married and start a new family – with a better husband this time around. This desire was

artificially created and is shown through her interactions with her parents who shame her for being single. She has been brainwashed into thinking that this is the way to happiness: a better husband, a better house in a better location. She wants the construct, the unit, but she is not emotionally connected to that desire. As her relationships are not built on emotional connection but on cerebral decision-making towards a goal, she is able to make calculated decisions that will have serious repercussions for others, but mainly for her son. The play's dénouement and tragic ending is that she realizes too late that her life cannot be fulfilled without emotional connections and investments. Her breaking point is her own realization of her tragic flaw, which is that her life has been an emotional desert. We witness her cracking when she ragefully turns her inner anger onto the innocent and well-meaning unmarried uncle by accusing him of taking her son's seat at the Christmas table. It is easier to scapegoat him than face her own mistakes. This makes her live in bad faith and make decisions that lead to the loss of her relationship with her son who rejects her at Christmas. The bad mother is also a trope here, which makes this an uncomfortable play as the other main female character, her mother, has played along with what is expected of mothers: to stay married in an unhappy marriage for the sake of the child, so as not to disrupt the family unit. The play highlights that both women end up compromised as they cannot win in a patriarchal system that favours men. The Girl's mother, called The Mother, holds the family together every Sunday lunch and the powdered soup sachet is a brilliant metaphor for the artifice that acts as a social glue to keep the family together. Both generations of women are financially dependent on their husbands, as they seem to be unable to survive financially on their own, and the fear of the divorced label makes them stay and seek the safety net of the nuclear family and therefore accept their dependency. The men in the play are not trouble-free either as they also seem unable to escape living up to the societal expectations asking them to be the provider, the safety nets.

***The Dead Man* by János Háý**

The Dead Man is a powerful wartime story about grief, absence and reinvention. Originally set in rural Hungary, the universality of the themes permits geographic relocation without affecting context (with the playwright's blessing). Annuska's husband, János, has been captured and held as a prisoner of war in a foreign land. Annuska and her daughter, Anna, nervously await his return. However, when he returns in a coffin, life inevitably changes. Annuska is forced into a world of independence, becoming a landowner and managing the family farm alone. She strives to overcome the resistance of the village people who struggle to accept a woman in a position of power. Battling for acceptance, she discovers true emancipation as she moves into this new phase of her life. She no longer needs a man to feel complete and puts a close to the place in her heart where her husband once lived. She accepts that her old life is no more and chooses to live and thrive in the present. However, Anna lives in tormented denial, believing wholeheartedly that János her daddy would not have died without telling her. She clings to the hope that he will return: the discordance from Annuska's perspective develops into a great source of tension between them. The two women represent two different ways of dealing with grief. Nonetheless, life goes on, and

Annuska thrives while Anna lingers in the past. The second half sees Annuska's new-found freedom challenged when a stranger is spotted in the village. Rumour rapidly spreads that it's Annuska's husband – they buried the wrong man. The rumours reach Annuska and Anna: Annuska is horrified; Anna elated. It is indeed János, who has returned as a skeleton from being a prisoner of war – most likely with post-traumatic stress disorder. He moves back into the family home, expecting that nothing has changed and that they can return to family life. He expects sexual intimacy from his wife; it is the thought of her soft warm body that kept him alive after all. However, everything has changed for Annuska, and she struggles to return to her subservient former role. Going back to being a wife represents a huge step backwards for Annuska – for her, János is still dead; he died for her, and she refuses to go back in time. János, on the other hand, simply believes that they can go back to how they were. Anna, of course, is thrilled to have her family back. With growing tensions and nightly non-consensual sex, Annuska finds herself pushed closer and closer to the edge. She hides a carving knife underneath her pillow, intending to use it if János once more forces himself on her during the night. That night, János forces Annuska into sex but, pushed too far, she eventually reaches for the knife, repeatedly stabbing him to death.

By losing her husband, Annuska gains her freedom and realizes that she does not need a man to survive. She can work the land by herself and has enough support from a sorority of women. She creates a successful life without being subjugated.

Annuska in *The Dead Man* is further on the difficult woman scale than the 'Girl' as she fully pushes back the status quo by destroying the unit that her society values the most: the patriarch of the family. She kills her husband and deprives her daughter of her father. The tragedy is that Annuska does not tell her husband how she feels. She does not take the opportunity to communicate with him. She bottles it all and cracks. Once again, we meet the protagonist under huge pressure. She is part of that silent generation of women who were conditioned not to speak. She does not use her words and does not actually tell him that she does not want sex with him. She thinks she has no choice but to accept that it is her duty as a wife to have sex with her husband. We can ask ourselves the question whether it even occurs to her that she has agency, that she can speak and object to the nightly intercourse with the man who, for her, has died years ago. It seems that it cannot occur to her that she can express her own volition. There has been no precedent. Women have no voices and very few choices. She sees herself as her society sees her: as a wife, a second-rate citizen, and that role entraps her even more following her experience of emancipation and life without a husband. The village she lives in operates on that level. It functions well if everybody sticks to their roles, and they do but mostly live in bad faith. The priest is corrupt and a rapist; the men drink and cheat. The women silently accept their lot. Annuska chooses to kill her husband in a very violent and premeditated act. She could have, albeit with great difficulty, chosen to leave the marriage, but she chose to murder him as if to kill the part of her subservient self. She is responding to violence by violence. The nightly unwanted sex is obviously an act of aggression but so is her society's silencing of women. This murder can be seen as an act of rebellion at the institution of marriage as such, which I have mentioned is a revered institution in today's Hungary. Her only way not to be a subservient docile wife is to be a widow, which gives her freedom and emancipation. With her husband not coming back, she is unable to be anybody's wife. She can just be Annuska and not

be defined by the patriarchal conjugal coupledom. She will not be confined to that narrow life engendered in 1940s rural Hungary. To murder her husband is to murder the chance of the reconciliation of the nuclear family unit. She has chosen to kill him as he was already dead for her. Janos Háy tells us in his notes to the play that this story is a metaphor for dead relationships.

‘When I was writing, I thought of all the grief that comes from when a woman loses the person she had planned her life with because he either abandons her, comes home every six months or because he dies, and she has to adapt to the absence, and I thought of all the men who wanted to return from this abandonment and return to past reality as if no time had elapsed. I have thought of all the men and women who think they can just seamlessly re-enter another person’s present and, like pigs before Christmas fasting, they will most likely be slaughtered down, unnoticed’ (my translation).

This murder is an act of self-sabotage with devastating consequences for her daughter who will be orphaned as such. Annuska’s actions make sense as she knows that, as a woman in 1940s Hungary, she will have no voice. Her ultimate act of destruction is perhaps a brave act as she refuses to be a victim any longer by ending the suffering herself; she takes control over her own fate. The story is symbolic on many levels, but the village is a symbol for community, and so a powerful theme is the individual versus community. Annuska is a ‘difficult woman’ in the sense that she expresses the full range of humanity by opting out on her own terms, by her own hand, and therefore escaping the victim narrative for herself. The stage directions after the murder scene tell us that the curtain rises to reveal a law court. The playwright told me it was not a necessary scene; however, it certainly echoes the inevitable judgement Annuska would have faced.

The family, like the village, is most likely a microcosmic representation of the wider Hungarian society: the village being patriarchal and hierarchical, functioning with strict, socially prescribed roles with no chance of social mobility. It is not dissimilar to a caste system where existence is predestined; there is no possibility of self-transformation for most, but for women even less. The killing is no doubt a futile act but is nevertheless authentic for Annuska. It is perhaps emblematic of the tragedy that can happen to the desperate generation of silent women who cannot articulate their trauma.

This play is undoubtedly a tragedy and my directorial eye was attracted to the symbolic representation of grief and how the mother and the daughter, a difficult woman in her embryonic stage, represent different ways of dealing with loss. As the work’s creator told me, these two different ways can co-exist together in the same person. Beyond the attraction to her archetypal story, I was taken by the lack of sentimentality of the writing – which is very much the playwright’s signature style.

***The Bat* by Krisztina Tóth**

A rubber bat disappears from the school nursery, and this unleashes hate, blame and suspicion, and eventually leads to tragedy. Each apparently mundane domestic scene tackles with dark humour and absurdity the sexist attacks and demonization of the heroine, who is a working mother: an actress. We follow her descent into hell as she becomes obsessed with blaming a nouveau riche family for the toy’s disappearance. The play is a grotesque portrayal of the traps that the Buda Hill bourgeoisie sets itself.

The ‘difficult woman’ in *The Bat* is accused of the serious crime of premeditated attempted manslaughter. We follow the downfall of another protagonist, The Mother, who is a well-known actress, a mother to a preschool-aged boy and who has recently separated from the boy’s father, a barrister.

The play is trying to shed light onto how many roles women must compete in and the prejudices they must face and fight if they are successful or well known. The nursery stands as a microcosm for Hungarian society, as Krisztina herself told me: narrow-mindedness, envy, racism, class war and divisions. We end up not knowing whether The Mother is guilty or not; we remain in limbo. The Mother’s own mother (The Voice) puts everything into perspective and never acknowledges her daughter’s reality. When the daughter says that the nursery teacher is mean, her mother (The Voice) replies by saying that she, the teacher, is very nice to her. When the daughter is upset about not being cast, her mother calls her a forty-year-old when in fact she is thirty-eight. Whilst trying to soothe her daughter she is also guilty of minimizing everything and seems to represent an unchallenged bourgeois morality that does not question her unexamined gender roles, nor does it want to be engaged in progress. Her reluctance to not use the video Skype properly is emblematic of favouring the old ways by refusing to learn new ways of communicating. Her *raison d’être* seems to be to care for others and this revolves around cooking and feeding. The women in the play all act individually without any sorority between them. I would argue that is partly why The Mother loses herself in her paranoid fabrications. If she chose to communicate with, and even befriend, the nouveau riche, pink-jacketed mother from the school gate, instead of seeing her as the enemy, fuelling her snobbism and her blatant classist views, she would not end up in the vortex she creates for herself. Women do not help other women in this play and the consequences are tragic. We could almost borrow Middleton’s *Women Beware Women* as a subtitle for this play. The Mother’s only confidante is her own mother who represents aspects of her own self, of her internalized judgements. One could see this as her own voice attacking her and, dramatically speaking, it is rather uncanny that The Voice, that of her own mother’s voice, is played by the same actor playing the protagonist – as well as the nursery teacher and the psychologist. Her own worse sides, her own internalized misogyny, racism, ageism and short-sightedness are given voice in ‘The Voice’. The nursery teacher is a bully to the boy and is actively uncaring. As the nursery is microcosmic of wider Hungarian society, the uncaring nursery teacher is an interesting trope. The message perhaps communicated is: do not trust someone because their role seems trustworthy. As an interesting plot twist, we find out that the bully teacher is the sole carer for a seriously disabled son: she too is at breaking point. The council has not put a ramp in, so she has no other option but to carry her son to the metro. The psychologist, seemingly a healing trusted professional, isn’t all that she appears to be either as she seems to engage with her duties as an apparatchik – yet paradoxically also flirts with The Father. She creates binaries and shames the parents for not living together. She, like the nursery teacher, is a female authoritative and judging figure and the voice of anti-liberalism. The unbroken nuclear family is also a theme as the protagonist and the father of her child are separated, which is shown to be a threat to society. The nursery teacher’s snide remarks also represent society’s views of a career-driven mother who is not tied to a man, yet we find out she is single too. The teacher is a very good example of internalized misogyny as she

attributes the ‘difficult women’ characteristics to our protagonist and shames her for having a career and for being driven and self-assured. The irony here is that The Mother needs to outsource childcare to other women who are lower in the food chain as such. Class judgements and misogyny go both ways and the working-class characters are not exempt from it either; this constant like of solidarity, and attack on each other, symbolizes the grotesque Hungarian dog-eat-dog society Tóth is painting. The judgement that The Mother must deal with echoes what the author has had to contend with, as she too has been viciously shamed and attacked on numerous occasions for no other reason than for having a voice and using it. Our ‘difficult woman’ here, like the playwright, is ambitious, driven and challenges the status quo. The environment around The Mother is judgemental and punitive. A successful woman in a creative industry must prove herself more as she is not allowed to exist and embody the full range of her humanity. The Mother bravely pushes back and dares to express the full range of her humanity, but the cost is huge stress, emotional instability and obsessive behaviours.

At the end of the play, the audience find themselves in the same state of uncertainty and stress as the protagonist, The Mother. The audience, like the characters in the play, have lost their points of reference. Krisztina Tóth told me that she believes this happens when an authoritarian system promotes absurd values and makes them the norm, messing with people’s inner compasses and leading to uncertainties and confusion. Who is guilty and who is the victim? Is the father without guilt? And are the others completely innocent? These are the questions we are left with.

The author’s notes on multi-roling are of importance as it is a device to express the theme of the play which is that women multi-task and multi-role. The two mothers and the nursery teacher are all trying to stay afloat and make sense of their servile roles. The Mother is the only one questioning this servitude, but it comes at huge cost. The psychologist perhaps represents The Mother’s guilt about breaking the nuclear family structure. The child psychologist is a reminder that the innocent child is the victim of the breakup. The clinical tone and judgement echo the teacher’s and The Voice’s (the protagonist’s mother) views as they all stand in judgement of the broken family. The appointments are a painful reminder that, if the unit is broken, outsiders will need to be brought in to fix the damage, discouraging individualistic choices such as leaving the safe, nuclear family, bourgeois comforts that coupledom brings. Our protagonist, The Mother, is the only one actively resisting her gendered duty. Her self-fulfilment is not just linked to her being a mother; she actively seeks self-fulfilment through her creative professional role. The irony is that she can only do that by outsourcing childcare to either her own mother or the nursery teacher. She is an actress and that is another metaphor for women having to play roles, for having to embody artifice. The scene where she breaks down, as she was not cast as any of the *Three Sisters*, is a clear nod to the double standard that women are faced with regarding society’s acceptance of the aged female body. When she finds out that she was not cast due to her age, it unravels her and the quasi breakdown that follows is a cry for help, a symbol of the unheard cry of all women victims of agism and therefore injustice.

I hope that this introduction has created an appetite for these plays. I have translated them with a performability criteria above all but have not wished to erase the foreignness of the text and have therefore engaged with a foreignizing translation strategy as well.

This has meant that the translations do not pretend to have been written in English; they are translations and, as such, they too offer a resistance to the domesticating trend that prevails, which can sometimes lead to the ethnic violation of the text (Venuti 1995) by erasing its foreignness in order to make it more digestible to the receiving culture. So, if we agree that translating equates to translating cultures (Nord 1997) then I hope I will have done justice to both source and target cultures.

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