

PROSCENIUM

Judgment Day

By Ödön Von Horváth

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Wednesday 18th January to Saturday 21st January 2012
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

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By Ödön Von Horváth

Translated by Christopher Hampton

Cast:

Thomas Hudetz, stationmaster	Charles Anthony
Frau Hudetz	Linda Hampson
Alfons, her brother, a chemist.....	Keith Bayross
The Landlord of the 'Savage' Inn	David Pearson
Anna, his daughter	Lynette Shanbury
Ferdinand, her fiancé, a butcher	Jevan Morris
Leni, waitress at the 'Savage' Inn	Caroline Bronne-Shanbury
Frau Leimgruber	Izzie Cartwright
A Woodsman	Alan Bailey
A Travelling Salesman	Colin Hickman
A Policeman	Michael Wells
Kohut, a stoker	Richard Kessel
A Public Prosecutor.....	Alan Bobroff
A Deputy.....	Anne Gerrard
A Detective.....	Ben Morris
A Platelayer.....	Ben Morris
Pokorny, an engine driver	Colin Hickman
A Customer	Colin Hickman
A Child	Archie Brookes
A Singer	Clare Wooster
Villagers	Arnold Glickman, SheilaHarvey Mark Brookes, Imran Ahmed

Directed byCrystal Anthony
Stage ManagerMargaret Rudolph
Assisted byHannah Lester
Set design and construction.....Mark Brookes
Sound effects.....Sim Hill
Music arranged and composed byLewis Lev
CostumesEvelyn Moutrie
Lighting operated byPaul Davies

The play is set in a small German village in 1937.

Scene 1 : A small railway station.

Scene 2 : The same, several hours later.

Scene 3 : The 'Savage' Inn four months later.

Scene 4 : Under the viaduct.

Scene 5 : The 'Savage' Inn three days later.

Scene 6 : At the chemist's three days later.

Scene 7 : Under the viaduct.

The Author

Ödön von Horváth was born in Fiume, near Trieste in Hungary, in 1901 and began his education, in Hungarian, in Budapest. His father was a diplomat, Joseph Horvát, who was ennobled in 1909, entitling him to use ‘von’ in his name (German) and add an ‘h’ to his surname (Hungarian). As a result the family moved a number of times throughout Hungary, Austria and Germany.

“If you ask me what is my country, I answer I was born in Fiume, grew up in Belgrade, Budapest, Bratislava, Vienna and Munich. I have a Hungarian passport but no fatherland. I am a typical mix of the old Austro-Hungary at once Magyar, Croatian, German and Czech. My country is Hungary, my mother tongue is German.”

He attended university in Munich in 1920 but left in 1922 without taking a degree. While at university he began to write poetry and short stories and met the composer Siegfried Kallenberg who commissioned him to write lyrical texts for a music/dance performance, *The Book of Dance*, which was performed in Munich in 1921. In 1924 he moved to Berlin where he felt inspired by the stimulating artistic and political atmosphere and, always severely self-critical, destroyed all his early writings.

In the early 1930s Horváth became one of the foremost German writers. His novel, *The Eternal Philistine*, was well received and in 1931 two plays were premiered in Berlin: *Italian Nights* caused considerable excitement – possibly for the fury it aroused in the Nazi party who described him as ‘a high-society Bolshevik’ – and *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, a comedy about complacent townspeople who stand idly by while extreme right-wing forces rise to power. As a result he was awarded the Kleist Prize, the most important prize for German Literature, awarded annually by the Weimar Republic.

In 1933 he had a new play, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, in rehearsal, but when Hitler and the Nazi party were elected the play was not allowed

to open and his parents' home in Bavaria was turned over by the SA. He left Berlin and lived for a year in Budapest, where he renewed his Hungarian passport, and Vienna, where he married a Jewish opera singer, Maria Elsner, to provide her with a passport: they divorced the following year.

However, he returned to Berlin in 1934 because, he said, he wanted to study National Socialism at close quarters. This inevitably led to some compromises; for example, he had to join the Nazi Writers' Union in order to make a living taking some minor screenwriting jobs. Between 1934-8 he wrote seven plays including *Don Juan Comes Back From The Wars*, *Figaro Gets a Divorce* and *Judgment Day*, though none was performed in Germany, and two novels, including *A Child of our Time*, the inspiration of Michael Tippett's oratorio.

“It may seem grotesque at a time like this, unstable as it is, and when no one knows what tomorrow may bring, to set oneself a programme writing plays. All the same I make so bold as to do so, even though I have no idea what I am going to eat tomorrow.”

In 1938, after the Anschluss, Horváth moved to Amsterdam and then to Paris, from where he intended to emigrate to America, as so many German writers, actors, directors had done. However, as he was walking down the Champs Elysees, after *seeing Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, a storm blew up and he joined a group of people sheltering under a giant chestnut tree outside the Theatre Marigny. A few minutes later he was killed instantly by a falling branch: no one else was injured.

Horváth, on being a writer

“In 1920 I was a student at the University of Munich and was as they say ‘interested in the arts’, but had never actually been artistically active in any way. Inwardly there had always been a voice within me saying: why don't you try to be a writer. You like going to the theatre, you've

experienced a lot, you like to contradict, and above all you have this strange urge to write down the things you see and experience and the things you imagine others to see and experience.”

“For a modern folk play to succeed it’s important to put modern people on the stage. We have to put those sections of society on the stage that are defining for our contemporary climate. In our time this is the petit bourgeois and in order to realistically capture their speech I have to appropriate the disintegration of dialogue through educated jargon. As a dramatic chronicler of the times I have invented a new form of folk play.”

“I’m a big friend of satire. I can’t help but write satirically. It is to do with a misunderstanding of this satirical stance that my plays are often met with outrage from the press. This is always rather confusing to me. I’m accused of being too vulgar, too cynical and all these adjectives, and people fail to see that I’m simply trying to describe the world as it is. The disgust my plays provoke in certain areas of the public might result from the fact that they recognise themselves on the stage. There are, of course, people who can’t laugh about themselves.”

The Play

Judgment Day was the last of Horváth’s plays to be performed in his lifetime, but he did not see the performance at the Czechoslovakian town of Mährisch-Ostrau. It was the first of his plays to be produced after the end of the war, at a theatre in Vienna.

The dramatic event at the end of the first scene has profound moral implications for all the characters in the play: Thomas Hudetz, Frau Hudetz, Annie and Alfons, in particular, are presented with individual decisions to make about responsibility, conscience and guilt.

However, as in almost all of Horváth's plays, the village community has a vital role to play, and is most important in embodying the political message of the play. This petit bourgeois society presents people with whom fascism struck a particular chord: those prone to follow the powerful and hate the weak; a narrow-minded outlook, closeted jealousy of their neighbours, spying on them and engaging in gossip, yet rationalising this jealousy in moral outrage. The townspeople, largely represented by Frau Leimgruber and the Landlord, are of one (albeit swinging) opinion, favouring the victor and condemning the downtrodden. 'Justice', the very concept of right and wrong, is a moveable target, and in such a place, can anyone claim to be truly innocent?

Written at a time when fascism was a rising force in Germany and Austria, *Judgment Day* is a vividly characterised portrayal of a society that refuses to take responsibility for its actions.

Horváth was a contemporary of Brecht, and equally concerned with presenting the dangers and the follies of fascism, but Horváth's commentary is more indirect. "What's different from Brecht, is that Brecht is an out and out political writer. Brecht knows the answers, Horváth asks the questions." (James Macdonald).

Although the play is, of course, particularly relevant to the European world of 1937, the power and significance of the play is much wider. Christopher Hampton, translator of many of Horváth's plays:

"I think narrowly 'relevant' plays are not usually interesting 70 years later. What it deals with is people's paranoia, people's suspicion, people's rush to judgment, people's self-righteousness, all those things that are still unfortunately – though acutely present in that era in that country at that time – very much with us."

Bedroom Farce

By Alan Ayckbourn

Delia and Ernest are celebrating an anniversary. Nick stays at home, bemoaning his lot and his bad back, whilst Jan heads off to Malcolm and Kate's housewarming party and Susannah and Trevor effortlessly sabotage everyone's plans.

Four couples, three bedrooms, one eventful night.

Vintage Ayckbourn.

Directed by Shirley Wootten

Wednesday 14th to Saturday 17th March 2012

7.45pm, Compass Theatre, Ickenham

Box Office : 020 8866 7075

About Proscenium

Proscenium was founded in 1924. Since then, the aim of this experienced group has been to present classic and contemporary plays to as wide an audience as possible. Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

The company meets three times a week, at the Harrow Arts Centre for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

Artistic Director : Michael Gerrard

Secretary : Izzie Cartwright

Chair : Crystal Anthony

Contact us at www.proscenium.org.uk