

PÁL BÉKÉS: C E L L A R P L A Y
A play in 2 parts

(Pincejatek)

Cast: 8 actors, 1 actress

Premiered: at the Sándor Hevesi Theatre, Zalaegerszeg
December 1, ~~1985~~ 1986.

In the play, which was also produced in another town during the 1986-87 theatrical season, the trials and tribulations the Hungarian people went through in the twentieth century are compressed into a fantastic parable. People belonging to several different generations are still with us, people who carry with them memories of the painful experiences of one or more periods of great difficulty; and the young writer believes that young Hungarians /of his generation/, who grew up in a period of peace and consequently have no painful memories must be carrying in their genes at least a sensitivity to earlier traumatic experiences.

The "play" gets off to a trivial, everyday start. Bélu, a carefree young man who has inherited his father's job of caretaker in the house, brings down to the cellar, where unwanted articles and seedy pieces of furniture are stored, Zoltán, a young computer programmer tenanting a flat in the building. The gas heating system's got some sort of trouble, and Zoltán happens to be expecting a visit from a charming young girl he is going to propose to, so he is trying to collect some kindling in the cellar to get a fire going in a stove in his flat.

When he is about to pull out the first piece of wood from under a decrepit bed, an old woman stirs on the bed. And wherever he reaches his hand, more characters come to life. The cellar is chock full of people in hiding, people on the run from one of several storms of Hungarian national history whom the sympathetic caretaker, Bélu's father, provided a shelter to by concealing them in the cellar. There is an armyman from the first world war who in 1919 became so panic-stricken by the dizzying succession of bourgeois revolution, red revolution and white counter-revolution that he never dared to leave his hideout again. There are three refugees from Fascism; they are Hermin, an old Jewess, and two young soldiers, a Soviet and a German, who hit it off excellently - heaping abuses on each other over a chessboard. Two joined the company in 1956: a communist on the run from armed insurrectionists gunning for

him - and the head of a detachment of armed men hiding to escape retribution. The latest addition to their number came in the 1960s; he is a gynecologist who went through years in a POW camp, followed by long spells of imprisonment, one with good cause and another without, and in the end got scared by the Cuban missile crisis. The refugees, who afterwards were reluctant to abandon the safety of the cellar, have all remained as old as they were at the time they moved into the cellar. They have a big common goal - to erect from all those masses of wreckage there a fortress for the day nuclear war does come. For this reason they look askance at Zoltán's eagerness to rob them even of a few pieces of wood.

Zoltán is both repelled by and attracted to these strange people. Twice Bélus calls out to him from upstairs /he cannot see the inmates of the cellar/, but it's no use - Zoltán starts to climb the stairs, but turns back. And yet he learns some unsavoury things about his beloved parents /who died ten years ago/: according to Hermin, Zoltán's father denounced her for being a Jewess in hiding - actually he coveted a fine antique writing-cabinet she owned. And the gynecologist tells Zoltán confidentially the truth - that Zoltán is his son.

Bélus calls out for the last time: the girl whose visit Zoltán has been expecting has taken offence at being kept waiting for so long, and won't hear of him anymore. His is a voice crying out in the wilderness - Zoltán is now out of his sight, just like the other dwellers in the cellar are. Again Zoltán starts for the open door, then he stops once more. The nightmare seems to have no ending.