

Gyula Illyés:

B R O T H E R S

First performed at Pécs. on September 29th 1972.
Performance directed by Róbert Nógrádi, sets designed by
Emil Vata, costumes by Nelly Vágó.

First performed at the Budapest National Theatre on 19th
of April 1973.

Performance directed by Ilona Vadász and Endre Marton,
sets designed by Árpád Csányi, costumes by Nelly Vágó.

3 male and 1 female parts.

Gyula Illyés /Rácegrespuszta, 1902- / the poet, a
major figure in Hungarian literary life. He studied at the
Sorbonne, and his first poems were published in Hungarian
papers printed in Paris. His first volume of verse appeared
in 1928. He was one of the leaders of the populist writers
in the 1930s. Following the liberation, he was awarded
the Kossuth Prize, the highest Hungarian literary distinc-
tion of his merits. He has written much for the theatre.
His first play, The Eye of the Needle was written in 1944,
it deals with the calling felt by professional men who have
their roots in the people. This was followed by a long
series of historical plays each dealing with the fate of
the Hungarian nation at one crucial turning point or another
The Example of Ozora - 1952; Torchflame - 1953; György
Dózsa - 1956; Mill on the Séd - 1960; The Outsider - 1963;
Brothers - 1972; The Celebrated - 1973/ In a number of
works he tried hard to create a type of comedy that fed
on popular roots/Where is the needle; Ball on the Puszta./
His works have been published, both in volumes of their own,
and as parts of anthologies, in English, Bulgarian, Czech,
Esperanto, Polish, German, Italian, Russian, Rumanian,
Slovak and Serbo-Croat.

The great Hungarian peasant revolt of 1514 forms
the basis of The Brothers. The peasant leader, György Dózsa,
was placed on a fiery throne and so put to death after the
rising was suppressed. For centuries now Dózsa has been a
symbol of revolution in Hungarian literature.

György Dózsa and his younger brother Gergely bid farewell to each other. György is a Captain of Mercenaries who serves at the country's frontiers, Gergely studies theology and visits his older brother on his return to the university at Cracow. György is waiting to be received in audience by the local bishop who is due to pay him. He returns in unbridled fury, since he did not get any money. His soldier's pay is held back by the lords for months. He decides to go to Buda, to complain to the Cardinal. The two brothers start out together. Before they have come to the crossroads they are attacked by the Bishop's men come to arrest György. In a fight, Gergely, saving György's life, stabs the commander. Being worried about what his temperamental brother might get up to talking to the Primate, he follows him to Buda.

In Buda, coming from the Primate György tells his young brother what happened. The Primate lent him his ear, though Dózsa had not only expressed his own grievances but also the fact that the whole nation was fed up with the grasping, merciless lords of the land. The Primate, by way of an answer, had appointed Dózsa the leader of the Crusaders assembled in Hungary in answer to a Papal Bull. Gergely warns his brother not to put his trust in the high and mighty. The Pope had not been disinterested when proclaiming a Crusade, political reasons and the hope of gain prompted him. The Primate as well wished to exploit György and the Crusades in pursuit of his own interests, but György feels sure of himself and Gergely's arguments do not convince him. Gergely wants to be off on his way, but György asks him to stay since he is in need of his brother's knowledge and support. The assembled Crusaders, most of them peasants, demand that their Leader decide, since a new command had arrived from the Primate, the Crusading Host must be dispersed. The brothers know very well that this new command is an expression of the fear felt by the lords. Fiftythousand dissatisfied peasants stood under arms. György decides to lead the hungry, despairing masses against the Turks, in spite of higher instructions. Gergely however does not accept joint responsibility for his brother's decision, though he, as joint commander, also has to sign the orders. He expresses his doubts, there is not enough money for war, there are no victuals or arms. Their argument gets to the stage where Gergely points a dagger at György. Dózsa is called from his tent by ever louder clamour. Gergely, on his own, thinks of his love, Julinka. György returns with dreadful news: Julinka had fallen into the hands of the lords, who returned the body of the girl to the camp mutilated and ravished. On hearing this news, Gergely sweeps all

doubts aside, and signs the proclamation calling for a peasant war.

The last argument between the two brothers takes place after a number of victorious battles. Gergely asks György to show mercy to the lords they have captured since revenge and murder throw a shadow on the purity of the revolution as such. As soon as Gergely says his farewells, on the way to Cracow, György has his enemies executed. Gergely returns, and as a result Zápolya, the Duke of Transylvania, who is approaching with fresh forces, manages to capture both brothers. The war ends in failure.

In gaol, in their cell, the two brothers take an oath in support of the justice of their common cause. They know they cannot betray each other, they may have argued a lot, and gone their own way, but they always served the same cause.