

Gyula ILLYÉS:

THE ECCENTRIC

First performed: February 11th 1972, at the Petőfi Theatre, Veszprém.
Directed by György Pethes,
sets designed by József Bakó,
costumes by Nelly Vágó.
8 male and 2 female parts.

Count László Teleki, living as an emigré in Dresden, meets Baroness Orczy, whom he has passionately loved for twenty years, in a hide-out in the town, in 1860. László Teleki had been the Paris representative of the 1849 Hungarian revolutionary government, a friend and supporter of Lajos Kossuth, and one of his advisors in the years of emigration. He tells Baroness Orczy of his plans and actions. He had negotiated with Napoleon III and the Prince of Piemont, and had included Hungary as a third partner in their anti-Austrian alliance. He had arranged for an audience to be granted by Napoleon III to Kossuth, in this way showing himself one of the most dangerous opponents of Austria's foreign policy.

Karlovitx, the head of the Saxon Secret Police disturbs their tête a tête. He is carrying a warrant for Teleki's arrest, Saxony had agreed to extradite Teleky to Austria. Death sentence is awaiting Teleki, since twelve years but Francis Joseph is more interested in breaking Teleki's spirit and in dirtying his reputation in the eyes of Hungarian public opinion at home, and emigrés living abroad led by Kossuth, than in his execution. The Count is unexpectedly brought to the Emperor's presence on New Year's Eve, and offered a deal. He would be allowed to return to Hungary as a free man if he agreed not to participate in any activities hostile to the Court. Teleki argues, he does not say "yes" but he does not say "no" either and he returns to Hungary.

The press abroad distorts the story of the audience with the Emperor. They say Teleki humiliated himself and Kossuth also considers him a traitor.

Within a few weeks the Court tacitly offers him a public role. He is in a difficult situation and he accepts. He is elected a Deputy his intention being to realise the most radical demands of the revolution. His talents and the respect in which he is held would allow him to plunge the whole country into revolution within weeks. He is shocked to find out that the nobility, longing for prosperity, political consolidation and a compromise with the Court, does not support him. His own party do not like the sharp tone of a speech Teleki has prepared for Parliament. His nephew, Kálmán Tisza, a later Prime Minister, wishes to persuade him to rewrite the speech, toning it down. He has nasty things to say about Kossuth, and he wants to obtain various property and status advantages for his supporters.

Teleki feels that a revolution right then would only lead to senseless sacrifices on the part of the people, but he also knows that, if he is prepared to compromise he would betray his principles and cheat those who put their trust in him.

Karlovitz appears once again as he hesitates, offering his services to the Count. He paints the prospects of a dizzy political career for the sake of power that does not stop at anything, and that pays no heed to morals and revolutionary principles. Teleki says "no", and as the spy departs, he puts a bullet in his own head.