

GYULA KRUDY: THE RED MAIL COACH

A play in two parts

First performed on November 15th 1968 by the VIGSZINHÁZ Budapest /written in 1918/. Sets designed by Gábor Szinte, costumes designed by Fanny Kemenes. Music by Frigyes Hidas.

22 male and 14 female parts

The story takes place during the second half of the 19th century. Eduard Alvinczi is in his fifties, a rich, backward landowner, who hides in sleepy inactivity a long way from the world, in a chateau on the shores of Lake Balaton, amidst the already obsolete props of the ancient traditions of the lesser nobility. Esztella and Piroska, his orphaned nieces live with him, under the supervision of an elderly relative, the widowed Mrs Bágyi who is also in charge of the household. All business connected with his horses that he races abroad and other affairs of his estate are looked after by Sylvester, the butler. The emptiness of time forced to come to a stop is filled by Alvinczi's fin de siècle mannerisms, which find expression not only in the way the house is furnished but also in Alvinczi's poses and speech mannerisms.

The arrival of Kálmán Rezeda, a sensitive, cynical adventurer who is a writer, disturbs the artificial peace of the chateau. He wants to do research in the family archives. Alvinczi gives his permission, The attention of Rezeda, however, is suddenly arrested by Esztella. He knew the two sisters when they were little girls, and he had followed them daily in Budapest, on their way to their convent school. At that time Esztella wanted to be a nun or a ballerina when she grew up, but all that became of her was a village young lady who set broody hens on clutches of eggs, waiting for them to be hatched. Youthful memories stir Esztella's soul. Rezeda's words awaken a longing for big city life in her, and the cunning courting of the city slicker captivates her also.

Alvinczi guesses the danger that threatens Esztella while they attend the St Anna's Day Ball at Balatonfüred. He unexpectedly reveals himself to her and confesses his secret love for her, which he had concealed until then to ensure Esztella's peace of mind. Jealousy however opened his lips. He had put the chateau and part of the estate in his nieces name since he could not live without Esztella. Esztella however was already completely enthralled by Rezeda's sentimental rhetoric and elopes with him from the St Anna's Day Ball. Alvinczi, who al-

most collapsed, was able to listen to the post-boy's horn signal as the red mail-coach departed, that was all.

It becomes clear in the capital that the lies of the world are even more oppressive than the lies of the harmonious chateau. Rezeda soon becomes bored by Esztella, to get rid of her he puts her in charge of a lady who runs a demi-monde establishment, who gives her orders in the midst of eager gentlemen and floozies.

That is where Alvinczi finds the unfortunate girl. He had at one time been a frequent visitor at that establishment himself. He listens to Esztella's entreaties and takes her home to the chateau. He disappears however, unconfirmed rumours report that he lost his fortune at the races and playing games of chance.

Kálmán Rezeda turns up at the chateau once again. He would now seriously like to reconquer Esztella, but the girl no longer trusts him and Rezeda leaves, a broken man. Finally Alvinczi returns. He has really lost his fortune, all that is left is the chateau and the part of the estate he had put in the girls' name. Alvinczi settles in the chateau as a guest at Esztella's side who resignedly accepts as does her uncle that their lives are meaningless and superfluous and that nothing can be done about it.