

# Early Lukács

on

## Hungarian Drama

### 1.

The failure of philosophical culture has kept the truest and deepest talents of Hungarian drama, Katona and Madách, from developing and having an effect. The life work of both has remained a fragment in itself as well as in its effect. Of our dramatists who possessed the greatest sensuous force and the most abstract thought, nothing came from them that might have carried on what they started. For even they were only a beginning, they hardly revealed paths in the direction of drama. Katona was one of the greatest dramatic talents of the previous century. The hard, bleak pathos of his language is really dramatic. His characters — aside from the superfluous, lyrical sentimentality and the psychological affectations — are full of poetic life. His individual scenes are full of dramatic and tragic vehemence and symbolic riches. But even he is unable to unify organically the human and historical problem: the characters and the background, the mental and political tragedy connect only the identity of the persons; in the final analysis the entire structure is epic. With this tragic attempt which demonstrated promise of greatness, Katona ended his poetic career, and it would be senseless here to try to determine whether it happened because of internal or external causes, whether the lack of response silenced him or the feeling in any case of the inability to achieve the purity of a successful form. Madách's situation is precisely the opposite, the causes, however, indicate the same thing: he too — in spite of his great philosophical erudition and the depth of his thought — did not possess a vigorous philosophical culture. His thoughts remained thoughts. They did not become actions, they did not become dramatic. In *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*) the thoughts and their sensualisation remain separate. All actions symbolize, illustrate some kind of world-historical or cosmological thought, but they do not resolve themselves completely in it, they remain separate. Each and every scene is the beautiful, allegorical expression of a deep thought; the only manner of dramatic thought however is the symbolic. Madách's poetic work is thus not drama. From the point of view of sensualisation it is epic: the

unity of the hero's personality connects the colorful adventure. From the point of view of the expression of content of thought it is a didactic poem in dialog: thoughts remain thoughts, the struggle is at most a conflict (and the external struggle is at most the illustration of it), the dialectic is only intellectual, it is not yet dramatic.

And aside from the talent of both of these, the dramatic qualities of the other poets are quite small. The meaningful literary drama of the classical epoch of Hungarian literature was influenced by French romanticism, which externally imitated Shakespeare; the best poets of this direction did not produce a single great work. We mention only László Teleki's *Kegyenc* (*The Favorite*) as a drama, which among these came the closest to an original drama, although even this play is more extravagant than monumental and his character sketches can only be brought to life by the animation of wild oppositions. Vörösmarty's *Csongor és Tünde* (*Csongor and Tünde*) is the most animated, perhaps the only truly organic work of Hungarian drama. And it is a drama which should not remain alone, without continuation and successors. For this success was brought about not by the accidental meeting of external and internal conditions, but by the conscious and artistic merger of Hungarian fairy tale elements, of Hungarian folk humor with the mood and technique of Shakespearean comedy. If later Hungarian fairy tale comedy became inorganic, the main cause was that it lost its existing connection with Hungarian life, that it lifelessly imitated Shakespeare and the Spaniards, and even their epigones. For it no longer brought the essential, the mood and the organically developing form into connection with its own Hungarian content, but took over the externalities (the loose connection of scenes, the technique of misunderstandings, word plays, etc.). Thus empty, meaningless things with a second-hand "poetic" language came into being which express an assumed, second-hand decorative effect. Although the stylistic actuality of *Csongor és Tünde* still exists today, it was perhaps even never as great as today, even if throughout a portion of drama has gone in the direction of the fantastic, Platonic, anti-tragic fairytale drama; and in order to be able to concretize its airy content, it is forced to revert to the atmosphere of the fairy tale (Hauptmann, Yeats, Synge, etc.). It would be the necessary consequence of the situation if a related intellectual direction would appear for us, the artistic expression of which Vörösmarty began. But that remains to the present a merely theoretical construction.

The poets who rule the stage at the middle of the century are followers of a foreign dramatic literature. Their Hungarian themes are only seemingly Hungarian; they are merely a dressing up of dramatic writing with Hungarian names and Hungarian words who work with motifs brought in externally and with foreign techniques. We characterize here of course as in the following — as already in the discussion of foreign developments — only the main types; this work does not strive for completeness, it cannot.