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## Canadian Plays on Page and on Stage in Hungarian

### Abstract

The focus of this article is how Canadian works appear on Hungarian stages and what has been translated in the genre of drama; mention will be made of stage adaptations from other genres, and also of guest performances of Canadian companies. Hungarian audiences and readers had to wait until almost the end of the millenium to experience a play written in Canada, more exactly, in Québec: Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Sœurs* has since 1996 been performed by almost half a dozen companies in Hungarian. The publication of an anthology of seven plays in 2007 marks another division line: two of the plays in it have already been staged. The guest performances of alternative theatre and modern dance companies have also contributed to the perception of Hungarian audiences with regard to theatre life in Canada.

### Résumé

Notre étude se concentre sur la problématique de la traduction hongroise des œuvres et de la mise en scène en Hongrie des drames canadiens ; nous parlons également sur l'adaptation des autres genres, ainsi que sur les tournées en Hongrie des compagnies canadiennes. Le public et le lectorat hongrois on dû attendre jusqu'au tournant du millénaire pour pouvoir jouir d'une pièce réalisée au Canada, à savoir au Québec : depuis 1996, une demie douzaine de compagnies ont présenté en hongrois *Les Belles-Sœurs* de Michel Tremblay. La publication en 2007 d'une anthologie rassemblant sept pièces de théâtre signifie également une ligne de démarcation importante : deux œuvres en ont été déjà présentées. Les compagnies de théâtre et de danse alternatives jouent aussi un rôle indubitable à faire connaître en Hongrie la vie de la scène canadienne.

Because of the distinctness of the language, Hungarian readers do need translations: we take pride in a long tradition of leading writers and poets translating world literature. In our culture we generally accept Ortega y Gasset's assertion that "no writer should denigrate the occupation of translating, and he should complement his own work with some version of an ancient, medieval or contemporary text" (111).

The issue of 'translatability' must be raised as a possible starting point, because it concerns theoretical considerations as well as the very practical field of choosing what to translate and publish or perform in a foreign language. Walter Benjamin, in his essay "The Task of the Translator", raises this question and considers translatability "an essential feature of certain works" (72). He refers to this element by pointing out that certain original texts lend themselves to translation or even call for it. Ortega y Gasset also speaks about "two classes of writings: those that can



be translated and those that cannot” (95). At the same time, he stresses that “languages separate us and discommunicate, not simply because they are different languages, but because they proceed from different mental pictures, from disparate intellectual systems” (107). If we choose to apply Benjamin’s observations to Canadian literature, we have to face the phenomenon of ‘Canadian content’ in certain works: sometimes what makes them important, or even emblematic, for Canadian readers poses a problem in view of their ‘translatability’. To continue thinking along the lines of Benjamin, we have to count with the fact that there may be elements in Canadian literature, drama included, that do not lend themselves to translation (76).

## Canadian and Québec plays published and performed in Hungarian

Apart from sporadic translations of a few plays<sup>1</sup>, Hungarian readers could have the first ones in translation in their hands only well after the political changes: *Les Belles-Soeurs* by Michel Tremblay was published in *Lettre internationale* in 1997 and Sharon Pollock’s *Blood Relations* came out in a bilingual edition ten years later (translated by the writer of this survey), timed for the Budapest Book Fair with Canada as guest of honour and launched in the playwright’s presence. The two plays attest to two different publishing practices: while Tremblay’s came out in print after the successful first run at a popular downtown mainstream theatre in the Hungarian capital, Pollock’s play has not yet been performed. The year 2007 proved to be a watershed concerning the dissemination of plays written in Canada and published in Hungarian translation: the drama anthology *Történet a hetediken* (*Seven Stories*) deserves a passage of its own. Not only was the editor, László Upor, led by his love for the theatre and his expertise in North American drama (he also edited a collection of contemporary American plays and wrote an insightful afterword to it), but he also took the trouble to consult the two ‘experts’ of Canadian drama in Hungary, namely Péter Szaffkó and myself, and commissioned us to write the afterwords about English-Canadian and French-Canadian theatre life and drama respectively. This careful editing practice was highly appreciated by one reviewer who pointed at the need for and the usefulness of background information when readers are faced with less-known literatures: in the online issue of the best-known national theatre journal ([www.szhaz.net](http://www.szhaz.net) 2008 október), László Sz. Deme wrote about two anthologies of plays in Hungarian translation, one from Czech, the other being the Canadian volume. The reviewer found the seven plays from Canada manifesting mature and clear perspectives, artistic approach and dramaturgy. The stories are breath-takingly exciting, with complex characters, who are still close to life, showing human fates and conflicts worth our attention. With regard to the story, *Incendies* by Wajdi Mouawad is probably the most remarkable play in the collection.

... several plays show a marked interest toward story-telling as a metaphoric motif: although in some cases they call Hollywood dramaturgy into mind, they not only reflect reality, but also reflect upon

1) E.g. *Le diable en été*, by Michel Faure, translated by Natália Emödi, published in a collection of one-act plays in 1971 (1,000 copies).

it, benefiting from new versions of traditional dramaturgies, so each one of these texts are true challenges for staging and acting.  
... in general, these Canadian plays attest to exact and clear structure, offering a message in pictures and in stories ... (Deme)

The other book review about this anthology was published a few months after its publication in *Magyar Narancs*, a widely read weekly of non-conformist intellectuals. For Bálint Kovács, *Incendies* is a masterpiece of world literature and one only wonders why it is not known by everyone. He thinks that Mouawad's story could satisfy the expectations toward a traditional big novel – at the same time, it calls for film adaptation, too (the review was written two years before Denis Villeneuve's film version). For him, the selection offers plays of different qualities, still each of them represents an individual voice, and the choice of topics in these dramas is brave, showing more lively plots than Hungarian audiences are accustomed to. His favourite is *Incendies*, closely followed by *The Drawer Boy*. Speaking of this latter play and of *The Rez Sisters*, Kovács sadly concludes how seldom ethnic minorities, people living in rural areas or those pursuing unusual professions are represented in Hungarian drama: "We need not cross the ocean for an exotic story" (Kovács).

*Seven Stories* contains seven plays, namely *Incendies* by Wajdi Mouwad, *The Rez Sisters* by Tomson Highway, *Des fraises en janvier* by Evelyn De La Chenelière, *Le ventriloque* by Larry Tremblay, *The Drawer Boy* by Michael Healey, *Half Life* by John Mighton and *Seven Stories* by Morris Panych. During the selection process Upor kept us updated and it became obvious that his main concerns were translatability on the one hand and 'stageability/performability' on the other hand, to borrow and modify Benjamin's terminology.

The background idea behind the anthology – and in this respect the present edition can be regarded as the follow-up of pre-change editorial policies at Európa Publishing house – is partly to acquaint Hungarian readers with a lesser known dramatic corpus, and at the same time to inspire theatre directors and companies to broaden their programme-scope and include Canadian plays so that the success story of Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs* (*Sógornők*) could be continued. So far two of the plays published in the anthology have been produced: Pinceszínház in Budapest premiered *Des fraises en janvier* (*Eper januárban*) by Evelyn De La Chenelière in November 2009, staged by Péter Valló, a director well-known nation-wide – this staging was still on in October 2011. In July 2010, it was toured in a provincial summer festival (Szentjakabi Nyári Esték, Somogy County). In an online vote, the production of *Eper januárban* received 8.5 points out of 10. The same play – with the addition of a subtitle, "Ha elmész, veled mehetek?" ("Can I go with you if you leave me?") – was also staged for Budaörsi Játékszín, directed by Attila Magyar, in March 2011 and is still running in 2012. In March 2011, Ádám Bálint praised the well-conceived direction and the excellent acting, adding that the play itself is like a film of a sequence of short situations. The reviewer also gave a summary of the playwright's career.

The other drama from the anthology to be produced on a Hungarian stage is *Incendies* (*Futótűz*), directed by Anna Erdeős as her thesis project at the University of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest in February 2012, starring Dorottya Udvaros, one of the most celebrated Hungarian actresses, in the role of Nawal, the mother. Given that the film version was being shown just a short while before the theatrical performance, comparisons were hard to avoid –



and critical responses to the stage version were rather controversial. *Futótűz* was commented upon partly because its realization meant the final stage of Erdeős's studies, partly because she chose two very popular artists for the leading roles (the other one being Krisztián Gergye in the role of the brother/father). The complicated story of Nawal was played without intermission – one reviewer (simply signed as tssu) found it too confusing that the actors stayed on stage, regardless of whether the given scene was in another space and time. For Nikolett Antal, reminiscences of classical Greek plays are of greatest importance in the play. She, too, found it difficult to follow the action if one had not read the play before going to see it – but for her, Terhes Sándor in the role of the lawyer was excellent, while the first mentioned reviewer found him very bad, particularly because in his view, Terhes often made the character comical. Antal found the acting of Rita Kerkay and Rada Bálint in the role of the twins very colourless. Balázs Zsedényi thought it was difficult to tell when exactly the performance got de-railed – Dorottya Udvaros and Sándor Terhes, in his view, acted excellently, with remarkably good diction, but the use of white and red as dominant colours was too simplistic, and the young director was not able to guide the audience's attention in this complicated action. However, Krisztián Gergye's wordless dance-scene proved to be most memorable with its innovative stage language. Before the Hungarian premiere of Mouawad's drama, Zsolt Takács posted eighteen photos taken at the rehearsals at [www.foto.szinhas.hu](http://www.foto.szinhas.hu) (21 February 2012.), and Anna Erdeős was interviewed at [www.funzine.hu](http://www.funzine.hu) (3 February 2012). Berta Tóth talked with both the leading actress and the young director for [www.szinhas.hu](http://www.szinhas.hu) – for Udvaros, the main challenge was how to present space situations reminding her of close-ups in films in a classical theatre. Anett Lavati praised the staging for its brave use of space and the minimalist approach in the scenery. She was told by Erdeős that it was the intense emotional content of the play that grabbed her, and she was impressed by the way Mouawad could connect past and present.

## Tremblay in Hungary

The fortune of Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs* (*Sógornők*) in Hungary clearly shows the complexity of drama translation. Before the first staging of the play, the translation was revised on the basis of a comparison with the original, since the 'literary' translator (Lajos Parti Nagy) made changes that triggered varied reactions from scholars and translators alike. During the period between 1997 and 2008, the play was staged by four different directors in Hungary: first in the capital (Pesti Színház, 1997 by Géza D. Hegedűs), then in a small provincial town (Jókai Színház, Békéscsaba, 1999 by László Konter) and in a big provincial one (Kamara-Tantusz, Szeged, 2002 by József Székelyi), still later, in another, medium-sized provincial city (Kisfaludy terem, National Theatre of Győr, 2005, directed by Gábor Szűcs). In 2007 the private theatre school of Mária Górnagy also staged *Sógornők*, directed by Attila Lőte. *Sógornők* was most recently produced by Budaörsi Játékszín (directed by Attila Magyar) in 2011. The Hungarian version of Lajos Parti Nagy was published in a review of world literature (*Lettre internationale*, no. 26, 1997) at the time of the first staging. The same play has been performed several times since 2004 by one of the major Hungarian minority theatre companies in Romania (Marosvásárhely) using different titles (*Montreáli sógornők*, *Bingo! Bingo!*).

The ‘translatability’ of *Les Belles-soeurs* was particularly complex. First, as far as the language is concerned, Hungarian does not have an argotic level as Québec French does. Secondly, before the political changes brought about the quick appearance of the ‘benefits of consumer society’, the basic situation of Tremblay’s play would have been completely unfamiliar for Hungarian audiences. Therefore what Walter Benjamin defines as the key element of “the traditional theory of translation”, namely “conveying the form and meaning of the original as accurately as possible” (74), could not be carried out before quiz shows and consumer catalogues appeared in our country. Parti Nagy followed the guidelines of traditional translation theory, phrased by Schleiermacher when, instead of “an imitation, or a paraphrase of the original text” he decided to “force the reader from his linguistic habits and oblige him to move within those of the author” (cited by Ortega y Gasset, 108). Keeping these principles in mind, the translator could successfully guide the readers, or rather the theatre audiences, to “leave [their] language and go to the other [...] carrying the possibilities of their language to the extreme of the intelligible so that the ways of speaking appropriate to the translated author seem to cross into theirs” (Ortega y Gasset, 112).

Reviewers of the first staging devoted several paragraphs to the special aspects of the translation.<sup>2</sup> The translator himself, on the occasion of a ‘meet the author’ event (Grand Café, Szeged, 29 April 2008), stressed that for him translation is not a ‘third rate’ activity. Rather, he feels the translated texts are his own products. For Parti Nagy *Les Belles-Soeurs* was his very first experiment at ‘re-writing’ a foreign play (in this same paper we will also look at how he used motifs of Tremblay’s play as palimpsest in a short story of his own). Parti Nagy has been particularly interested in the various registers of language in general and in urban slang in particular. For him, literature is not the terrain of observing and guarding the rules of a given language (this activity is the task of the Academy in his view); rather, it is a live phenomenon and can make use of special registers and layers, including four-letter words.

In a major downtown theatre of the Hungarian capital Tremblay’s play was performed more than fifty times during several theatrical seasons (1997-2001), acted by leading actresses, and later on, it was well-received in provincial towns, too. Personally, I found László Konter’s staging in Békéscsaba (a small rural town in southeastern Hungary) most exciting: since the theatre there does not have a studio stage the director used the stage area both for acting and for the audience as well. With some basic knowledge of theatre semiotics, we can easily realize that the theatre in general and the stage area in particular are heavily loaded metaphoric spaces. In this version the audience could enter the space usually reserved for actors, so that in *Les Belles-Soeurs* the actresses were within arm’s length of the spectators, who surrounded the acting area in a horseshoe shaped range of chairs. The audience section of the stage was also lit so individual members of the audience could not help but see and observe how other members were reacting to the play. In this way, audience reaction and other members in the audience became part of the performance.

2) Concerning the Hungarian stagings of *Les Belles-soeurs* see my articles “To Remember the Ephemeral: *Les Belles-Soeurs* on Hungarian Stages” in: *Place and Memory in Canada. Global Perspectives*, M. Paluszkiewicz-Misiaczek, A. Reczyńska, A. Śpiwak (eds.), Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 2005. 241-247; and “*Les Belles-Soeurs* en Hongrie.” *JEU*, 2000.1. mars, 169-173.



Looking at the stage-bills, one could observe that Székelyi, director of the Szeged show, gave most emphasis to the 'Québec-ness of the play – and he pointed out the universal features as well. The actress Bori Markovics 'domesticated' joul and used a suburban Szeged dialect in the role of Angeline. She was awarded first prize in the annual national contest of theatres as supporting actress in Tremblay's play.

Marosvásárhely is one of the cultural centres of the Hungarian minority living in Romania: the city has a Hungarian language university of acting and a theatre as well. Tremblay's play was first staged in September 2003 and ran for several seasons. The title was slightly modified by adding the name of the city, i.e. Montréal, to it. As Kinga Boros's review reveals, for financial reasons director Péter Bokor used a different translation than the Hungarian companies did. Parti Nagy being a popular poet, playwright and writer, who is not shy when asking for royalties, István Nagy made the Hungarian text based on the Romanian translation of the director. We are aware that under certain conditions, translations have been made from translations, but we can also agree with Benjamin when he stresses that "[t]ranslations [...] prove to be untranslatable not because of any inherent difficulty, but because of the looseness with which meaning attaches to them" (82). In this case, instead of the "elegantly low-class" text of Parti Nagy's translation, the Hungarian version for the Marosvásárhely company proved to be too theatrical and barnstorming, thus depriving the performance of its ability to talk about language itself, its independent life and power to articulate a world of its own, and its capacity to underline the absurd features of the original play (Boros). Still, in Marosvásárhely *Les Belles-Soeurs* was a big success – the staging stressed the multiple features of Tremblay's play, touching on political theatre and on cabaret. As the review says, the text allows for all these and makes it impossible for the creators of the stage version to make bad decisions. Péter Bokor, however, consciously avoided giving a gender-based rendering – he was more interested in the general misery and manipulation of everyday life: in his eyes, the characters function like kitchen gadgets. Like Székelyi in Szeged, he chose to use spot-lights for the characters' monologues, which were accompanied by honeyed tunes to evoke a Hollywood atmosphere. Boros in her review disliked not only the music but the mixed style of this staging and found it inappropriate to evoke a circus-like arena feeling on the stage at the same time as referring to the small, over-crowded kitchen of the original.

In October 2011 the 'female division' of Budaörsi Játékszín (Playhouse) showed *Sógornők*, advertised as a "tragic comedy" told in blasphemic language. The company functions more or less as a community theatre, serving a residential suburb in the southwest district of the Hungarian capital and making their programmes public online. Before the premiere of Tremblay's play, the link cited Vera Papp, an actress in the very first run fourteen years ago, saying that *Les Belles-Soeurs* is still "highly relevant". The first performance was preceded by online information about the cultural and historical context of this Québec play, citing several passages from the "Afterword" of the Canadian drama anthology (written by the author of these lines).

Another Québec play staged in Hungarian was Carole Fréchette's *Les Sept Jours de Simon Labrosse* (*Simon élete* – Merlin Theatre, Budapest, 2002), and we had two English-Canadian plays on Hungarian stages in translation: *Seven Stories* by Morris Panych, translated by Péter Szaffkó in April 1996, Debrecen, and *Előhívás*, based on plays by Michael Mackenzie, translated by Tamara Török, directed by László Bérczes at the Budapest alternative theatre Bárka



in March 2002. This latter was reviewed in the monthly *Színház* by Andrea Stuber, XXXIV/7, 2001, and in *Ellenfény* by Balázs Urbán, 2001/6.

## Stage adaptations from other genres

Before the political changes, an alternative theatre company made a stage version of “Sorrows of a Super Soul” by Stephen Leacock: István Malgot’s adaptation and mise-en-scène blended Leacock’s parody of sentimental autobiographies with a strong element of self-reflection, using an empty mirror-frame as key prop on stage (1984. Movement Theatre Division, Katona József Theatre, Kecskemét)<sup>3</sup>. Leacock’s stories have been available for the Hungarian reading public since the mid-1920s, the years when his work was very popular among European writers and readers alike. Frigyes Karinthy, himself a leading writer of nonsense literature and literary parodies, translated the first collection of Leacock’s work in 1926 (2nd edition four years later, 3rd edition in 1955), to be followed by the Hungarian version of *Arcadian Adventures of the Idle Rich*, translated by the well-known novelist and literary history writer Szerb Antal (1943, 2nd edition in 1955 in 25,100 copies). In 1969 an enlarged selection of Leacock’s stories was published in 41,000 copies, using Karinthy’s translations and further stories translated by János Aczél and Tivadar Szinnai. In 1985 an even more enlarged collection of his work was published in 29,000 copies. So it is not an exaggeration to say that this Canadian writer has been spectacularly present in the Hungarian book market for almost ninety years<sup>4</sup> (and we can add that his stories could be found in dozens of literary journals for various target groups) – no wonder that a story of his would be adapted to the stage.

Another widely read and very popular Canadian work was also chosen for a stage adaptation: Grey Owl’s *The Adventures of Sajo and Her Beaver People* was first translated by the Orientalist Ervin Baktay (1940), with a second and third edition in 1976: 83,000 and 110,000 copies in a single year! Several generations of Hungarian youth grew up reading these animal stories published in the Communist era by a publishing house (Móra Ferenc Könyvkiadó) specializing on high quality reading for children and young audiences. In the 200/2005 season Budaörsi Játékszín showed *Két kicsi hód* (Two Little Beavers – the title of the 2nd and 3rd editions) as a “musical play of a fable in two parts with puppets and actors”. The performances were held on weekday and week-end afternoons alike, inviting nursery and primary school children and attracting families as well. The company is a typical community type theatre, directed by a well-known director; among the actors we can find some who are popular all over the country, while others are less widely known. Budaörs itself is a suburb of the capital with residential areas and huge shopping centres.

3) For more detailed reports about this show by the writer of this article see “The Alternative Theatre Adaptation of Leacock’s *Sorrows of a Super Soul* in Hungary”. *Theatre History in Canada-Histoire du Théâtre au Canada*. 11.1, Spring 1990: 86-93; and “Reflection of Leacock in Budapest”. *Canadian Theatre Review* 56 1988: 81-82.

4) I first systematized the Hungarian translations of Canadian writing in 1987, offering a table with publication data, including copy numbers when available: “Kanadai könyvek magyar nyelven” [Canadian Writing in Hungarian Translation]. *Acta Historiae Litterarum Hungaricarum* Vol. XXIV 1987: 56-69.. An enlarged English version of that research was published in the *Central European Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d’Études Canadiennes en Europe Centrale*. Vol.1: 2001. 24-29.





## Tremblay recycled in Hungary

Lajos Parti Nagy, the Hungarian translator of *Les Belles-Soeurs*, is a highly reputed and popular poet, playwright and writer himself, using ironical approaches verging on the absurd, and keen on exploiting all the possibilities language offers. In a short story entitled “Grátis Dolórisz” he introduces a pastry-maker and carpenter called Tremblay who prepares a gigantic wedding cake for the daughter of the narrator. The narrator – whose description and point of view evokes well-to-do members of the Hungarian Roma minority – explains that she decided to give everything possible for her daughter Hortenzia Ambipur (the latter word is a toilet freshener brand-name) to compensate for her own failed life. She herself did not have a wedding cake, not even a slice of cake – she had to get married because she was pregnant. Unfortunately, the father of the baby did not want to marry her, and though her brothers managed to ‘convince’ him, he was still trying to persuade her even on the stairs leading to the church to say ‘no’ at the wedding.

Hortenzia’s wedding was originally scheduled at a later date, but her fiancé won a honeymoon trip to the Canary Islands in a TV quiz show and they did not want to miss the great occasion. Ronald, the young man, proved to be best at running knee-high in plastic bottle caps with a case of Coca Cola on his head. The girl’s parents spent as much money on the wedding cake as the prize of the package tour to the Canaries, and she touched her mother deeply by giving her the top decoration of the cake (the newly-weds in marzipan) as a souvenir of their wedding.

These elements clearly show Parti Nagy’s indebtedness to Tremblay. Other elements hint at the extravagancies of Roma weddings, e.g. when he describes how the newly wed couple were leaving for the Canary flight from the wedding party, crossing the whole city in a horse-drawn carriage, followed by six Mercedes cars carrying the suitcases and the musicians to the airport. The style of the story abounds in ironic elements as well as the use of slang typical of under-educated ‘nouveau riche’ people in Hungary.

This quick glance at stagings of Canadian plays by Hungarian theatre companies shows that the selections are very often made at random, and except for *Les Belles-Soeurs* it was mainly small companies that ventured into this terrain: this fact has a major role in the choice of plays (small cast, few props). Since the changes in 1989, theatres have always been under financial constraints – consequently they hesitate to risk showing ‘less known’ works.

## Canadian stage companies in Hungary

While in most cases the lack of critical response (reviews), or very few comments on the translations of Canadian books, had to be faced by researchers in the CEACS Translation Research Project, it should be noted that there are areas of artistic expression where several Canadian artists are household names, well-received and returning several times to show their new work: these fields are modern dance and experimental theatre. Over the past decade, at least fifteen companies visited Budapest (some of them even toured in provincial cities, e.g. *I, Claudia*, a one-woman show acted by Kristen Thompson, could be seen in Debrecen, Szeged

and Pécs at the beginning of the new millenium), bringing movement theatre, modern dance and occasionally shows with the spoken word to venues as varied as the large new Palace of Arts, a traditional theatre (Thália) and – most frequently – a typically ‘alternative’ location (Trafó) which specializes in offering an excitingly wide range of shows to a dedicated audience. These performances are not only well attended, but also well documented by the host institution and most often they are reviewed and reflected upon. These factors confirm a truism of theatre semiotics, namely that we can count on a “much more obvious participation and contribution of the ‘reader’ to the theatrical event than to the novel or poem” (Carlson, 10), especially in our age of the internet when members of the audience can even comment on performances.

O Vertigo visited Budapest several times – *La chambre blanche* in 2008 was appreciated as a “masterpiece” and “one of the most significant guest performances in Budapest” shown by “one of the most highly reputed creators of contemporary dance” (Halász, 42). The same review in *Színház*, the national monthly of theatre criticism, mentions that O Vertigo came to play in Budapest for the fourth time, calling them an “excellent Canadian company with an outstanding performance”, introducing Rémi Laurin-Ouellette as a “true dancer-acrobatic phénomène ... with a breath-taking knowledge of acting” (41, 42). Marie Chouinard’s company also received similarly raving reviews in Budapest: they presented in Thália Színház (a downtown theatre specializing in hosting guest performances) and in the alternative venue of Trafó alike four different shows between 1999 and 2004 (*Les Solos*, 1999, in the framework of the Fall Festival; *Le Sacré du Printemps*, also in 1999; *Les 24 Préludes de Chopin* and *Cri du monde*, 2002; *Chorale, Cantique 1*, 2004). In 2007 Dave St. Pierre – advertised as “the ‘daredevil’ of contemporary dance in Canada, who refuses conventions and dogmas ... showing grotesque humour” – participated in the VIth Festival of Contemporary Drama, organized by Trafó, with *La pornographie des âmes*. His work is classified as neo-expressionist. The following year he came to this festival with the second part of his trilogy, *Un peu de tendresse bordel de merde!*, performed in English with Hungarian subtitles. The homepage of Trafó introduced him as an artist who “speaks not only to us, but also about us”. Kidd Pivot/Crystal Pite brought *Lost Action* in 2008: Zsuzsa Lukács interviewed Crystal Pite before their shows for the conservative daily *Magyar Nemzet*, where the Canadian choreographer underlined that for them “the quick transformation and disappearance of movements” are of greatest importance. These features are mentioned in the title of another interview (by Éva Kelemen for *kultúra.hu*) where the young artist said that she wanted to highlight the common features between ‘loss’ and dance, the art of permanent annihilation: “A dance performance cannot exist without disappearing immediately. I think this is a beautiful metaphor for life itself, too.” After the two performances, she also held a workshop.

In 2006 Théâtre Ubu was the guest of Trafó with two short plays, *Dors Mon Petit Enfant*, by Jon Fosse, performed in French with English subtitles, and *Les aveugles*, by Maurice Maeterlinck (in English): Denis Marleau’s technical tricks grabbed the audience. The well-known Québec man of the theatre revealed his secrets in a talk after the performance (the most distinguished Hungarian theatre artists also participated in this event, including Tamás Ascher, Rector of the University of Theatre and Film Arts, and Zoltán Balázs, Director of the alternative Maladype Company).



## Conclusion

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This survey convincingly proves that – in spite of the differences in linguistic and cultural background and the difficulties money-wise – there have been many activities in theatre life that could introduce Canadian plays and artists to Hungarian audiences. Behind most of these events there is a well-functioning grant system in Canada, a dedicated team at the local embassy and a good number of Hungarian festival organizers, theatre managers open to exciting new work from an otherwise less-known culture. The balance is better than one would expect given the conditions: all age-groups and widely different strata of theatre-goers were faced with plays, adaptations or guest performances originating in Canada. With regard to drama, although several plays have been translated from English, the great majority of Canadian plays performed in Hungary have been by Québec playwrights. In the field of critical response and reviews, drama and theatre seem to significantly precede other genres.

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