



## And a nation turned against a nation, intending murder

Bratislava, January 16, 2025 – *Sonnets about war that call for peace; a response to the scorched earth and the irreversible destruction of millions of innocent lives. DPOH will premiere the timeless work of Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav, **The Bloody Sonnets**, on **January 17th**, in its first-ever theatrical English language version.*

**Alas, that we have witnessed these disasters  
the gashes that made innocent blood flow!  
and seen this spectacle: we were spectators,  
deep in our hearts participants also.**

The Bloody Sonnets were written shortly after the outbreak of World War I. This cycle of 32 sonnets is a fierce protest by Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav against war, its horrors, brutal killings, cruelty, and the destruction it wreaks. The first war, the second war, the war that devastates the land of our neighbouring country today, all are senseless destructions of humanity and the world. The land is polluted, nature is ravaged, and landmines remain. Above all, there is suffering that some heartlessly deny or fail to recognize. They say: 'There is no war in Ukraine.' A statement that contradicts humanism. It's inhumane, incomprehensible.

Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav's Theatre has staged The Bloody Sonnets in English, translated by the Irish poet **John Minahane** and directed by **Dávid Paška**. The audience will see **Annamária Janeková** and **Katarína Morháčová** in the leading roles. In the autumn of 2025, the production will move from DPOH to theatres in New York.



**Sídlo:**  
Divadlo P. O. Hviezdoslava  
Laurinská č. 20  
811 01 Bratislava

**Korešpondenčná adresa:**  
Divadlo P. O. Hviezdoslava  
Gorkého 478/17  
811 01 Bratislava

[dpoh@dpoh.sk](mailto:dpoh@dpoh.sk)

[www.dpoh.sk](http://www.dpoh.sk)

At the outset and during the early months of the First World War, many were writing celebratory and pro-militaristic poems. Hviezdoslav's *The Bloody Sonnets* were an anomaly at the time, partly because writing anti-war texts was dangerous and could even result in punishment. The world was swept up in a frenzy and fascination with the conflict of enormous proportions, against which only a few dared to resist. In the stage production of **The Bloody Sonnets**, the creators juxtapose Hviezdoslav's work with other well-known poetry from the war years (1914-1918), allowing these works to contradict and complement one another, while broadening the scope of war's aftermath through the eyes of poets. The production will feature quotes from Rilke's poems in German, Ungaretti's in Italian, Apollinaire's in French, and paraphrases of Pushkin's Pan-Slavic poems in Russian.

The artistic team of *The Bloody Sonnets* decided to address the circumstances, horrors, and consequences of the First World War, and this decision was both conscious and urgent. As a society, we are entering a state in which direct parallels can be drawn to that of 1914: global conflicts, wars, societal tendencies toward populism, misinformation, and propaganda, as well as submission to or retreat into the hands of demagogic leaders.

It is the duty of artists to warn about the direction we are heading, towards absolute decay.

*"Deciding to stage Hviezdoslav's sonnets in Slovak might seem a bizarre idea at first, let alone in English. How could one hundred and ten-year-old poetry, written in iambic verse, Hviezdoslav's version of blank verse, (which he used to demonstrate that Slovaks were worthy of great literary works) serve as the dramatic foundation for a performance that aims to be contemporary and modern? And can it remain free of pathos while still addressing one of humanity's most emotional constructs, war? A cruel and painful experience that has marked history, bound to civilization and humankind. In Europe, we've enjoyed unusually long periods of peace. Or, more accurately, we did—until February 24, 2022. We can no longer pretend we are not part of this war. We can only hope it's not merely one of the flashpoints of a future world war. The anxiety that accompanies this reality becomes both the starting point and the source of contemporary creative expression: the misuse of fear, the need for pacifism, and calls for peace. When Hviezdoslav wrote *The Bloody Sonnets*, he was committing a crime (the original manuscript of the sonnets was likely hidden during the war in the Evangelical church in Dolný Kubín, beneath a tile, across from Hviezdoslav's house, where his brother-in-law was the priest). But we live in a democratic country, where we can name the aggressor and the victim truthfully. Despite the fatigue many feel from the constant talk of war, it does not disappear. It will not end simply because we don't want to talk about it. It exists beyond our borders, and it affects us, just as it affected Hviezdoslav, even though he never left his homeland of Orava during the war,"* says DPOH managing director **Valeria Schulczová**.

*"Lyrics used by a poet from a tiny European country, as expressed through an international language to appeal to the world to think twice about entering another destructive global conflict, is a naive aspiration. It is meant, however, with the best possible intention, even if to be treated with caution. Particularly as declarations of the "desire to live in peace" or "peaceful cooperation in all global directions" are becoming a tool of populism used by political forces across Europe. Just as the*



**Sídlo:**  
Divadlo P. O. Hviezdoslava  
Laurinská č. 20  
811 01 Bratislava

**Korešpondenčná adresa:**  
Divadlo P. O. Hviezdoslava  
Gorkého 478/17  
811 01 Bratislava

[dpoh@dpoh.sk](mailto:dpoh@dpoh.sk)

[www.dpoh.sk](http://www.dpoh.sk)

*First World War propaganda promised “a war that will end all wars forever”, the present tendentious rhetoric about peace draws us nearer the bestowal of state sovereignty and civil liberties into the hands of totalitarian powers. Sooner or later they, too, will lead us into conflict or gulp us wholly. One must define an aggressor (with elements of autocracy) instead of succumbing to an approach that relativises the aggressor and the victim. Hviezdoslav's pacifism is not merely historical or pathetic. It reaches into the depths of civilisational consciousness and conscience. It is an archetypal defence of humanism. It condemns violence as the essence of evil. His Bloody Sonnets present a prophetic premonition of the apocalypse and mass destruction by modern technologies,”* says the director of The Bloody Sonnets **Dávid Paška**.

**Teaser:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkeP2fWfcdk>

*“I was aware of Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav's work because we studied it in school, but I admit that I didn't understand it at the time. He was a writer whose works we had to study, which is why I wasn't interested in getting to know him on a deeper level. After reading his sonnets in both English and Slovak, I was surprised—both by the original version and by the adaptation created by our director, Dávid Paška. The richness and symbolism reminded me of my years at acting school, when we studied Shakespeare's plays. And then, I felt sad. Hviezdoslav's sonnets are a reaction to the First World War, but I realized how much hasn't changed since then. We live in an age where politicians with big egos are becoming more and more popular due to their imperialistic, nationalistic views and populist speeches. Sadly, more and more people believe them. The First World War was supposed to last four months. How long has the war in Ukraine been going on? What will happen during a second Trump presidency? Why hasn't humanity and respect yet triumphed over human vanity and selfishness? Our performance also addresses, among other things, these existential questions. And although we don't pretend to have all the answers, I hope our play will offer new perspectives, the possibility of thinking differently, and, ultimately, some hope,”* says **Katarína Morháčová**. *“Hviezdoslav's sonnets are timeless. Just as they couldn't be published during the First World War due to his critical stance and uncelebratory content, they remain relevant today. And what does life mean today? Art? Solidarity? Peace? We are living in a strange era, where people die because of the arrogance and greed of individuals abusing their power. Fear and hatred are being spread. Society is polarized, and we lack the education and the ability to engage in constructive debates that could move us forward, debates in which we could come closer to one another and understand our fears and beliefs about our perceptions of the world's reality. What, then, is the reality of the world? Just because I perceive it one way doesn't mean you do. I would love to hear, see, and understand how and why your reality differs from mine. Perhaps in it, I can find something useful, and maybe you can find something useful in mine. Then we can count sheep. Maybe, together, we can both dream of our worlds,”* adds **Annamária Janeková**.

In the upcoming Theatre Podcast Országh Hviezdoslav, **Michael Szatmary** will discuss the legacy of Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav, the rehearsal process in multiple languages, recent wars, and current conflicts with actresses **Annamária Janeková** and **Katarína Morháčová**. Listeners and viewers can find it on DPOH's Spotify and YouTube channels.



**Sídlo:**  
Divadlo P. O. Hviezdoslava  
Laurinská č. 20  
811 01 Bratislava

**Korešpondenčná adresa:**  
Divadlo P. O. Hviezdoslava  
Gorkého 478/17  
811 01 Bratislava

[dpoh@dpoh.sk](mailto:dpoh@dpoh.sk)

[www.dpoh.sk](http://www.dpoh.sk)

*"I've had an exceptional relationship with Hviezdoslav since my early reading years. I was even considered eccentric and amusing among my classmates because of it. I didn't care how many streets, schools, and institutions were named after him. I was proud that we have our greatest poet, and even though I didn't always understand his words and phrases, it only increased his uniqueness in my eyes. I always understood what I read or heard from my fellow reciters. Such nobility—a mystery from a higher realm. I was invited to the project only after the decision to stage *The Bloody Sonnets* was made. But it didn't bother me at all; on the contrary, it was a privilege. To be with Hviezdoslav, alongside a fantastic team, in the great space of this theatre, and to immerse myself in the themes of conscious pacifism and the beauty of words, is an honour. Hviezdoslav's English translation is not only brilliant and, in some ways, more accessible and communicative, but it also clearly expresses that, even in the broader context of the world, we can be proud of Hviezdoslav. Not because he is ours, but because he is our great poet. I hope that, through this new performance, today's young generation will come to love him too,"* concludes **Darina Abrahámová**, the dramaturg of *The Bloody Sonnets*.

### **What caused this wreck, this brutal and ignoble collapse of morals?**

.....

The fourth premiere of DPOH's third theatre season.

**Tickets for *The Bloody Sonnets*:** <https://dpoh.sk/inscenacia/the-bloody-sonnets/>

**Performed in English, with Slovak and English subtitles.**

**Cast:** Annamária Janeková, Katarína Morháčová **Written:** Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav **Translated** into English by John Minahane **Directed by:** Dávid Paška **Dramaturgy:** Darina Abrahámová **Stage Design:** Julius Leon Seiler **Costume Design:** Maria-Lena Poindl **Music:** Samuel D. Abrahám

**Premiere: January 17th, 2025**

**DPOH repertoire:** <https://dpoh.sk/repertoar/>

**Online ticket sales:** <https://vstupenky.dpoh.sk/>

**DPOH Box Office – Kiosk DPOH:** Laurinská 20, Bratislava

Monday to Sunday from 8:30 AM to 7:00 PM, and always an hour before a performance.

[www.dpoh.sk](http://www.dpoh.sk) / [FB/IG](#) – DPOH