

## The Danube

by Maria Irene Fornes

**The Play:** Breaking the formula of linear realism, *The Danube* explores what Susan Sontag calls the "psychology of tortures"—in this case the ever present threat of nuclear war. Under this weight, a collection of "well-mannered working-class" characters live out a series of scenes that leads to a final flash of annihilation.

**Time and Place:** Budapest. Beginning in 1938, the play quickly shifts back and forth in time.

**The Scene:** *A waiter in a small, working-class restaurant, addresses the audience in a rapid, declamatory style on the difference between the European and the American way of life.*

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*(The Waiter speaks rapidly in a declamatory manner. Through the course of the speech he gradually raises the tray which he holds with both hands in front of him.)*

WAITER: We are concerned with quality. That which is lasting. Craftsmanship. A thing of quality always ends up being heavy. We have preferred quality to anything else. We wish for things to last but we tire of them. We are buried under the stones of buildings, iron grates, heavy shoes, woolen garments, heavy sheets, foods that smell potent like the caves in the black forest. Hands that cut, knead and saw and measure and chisel and sweat into everything we see. Pots that are too heavy to use. Shoes that delay our walk. Sheets that make our sleep a slumber. Americans sleep light and wake up briskly. You create life each day. Here, the little trousers a boy wears to school are waiting for him at the store before he is born.

We are dark. Americans are bright. You crave mobility. The car. You move from city to city so as not to grow stale. You don't stay too long in a place. A person who lives too long in the same house is suspect. It's someone who is held back. Friction keeps a stone polished. Mobility. You are alert. You get in and out of cars limberly. That is your grace. Our grace is weighty. Not yours. You worship the long leg and loose hip joint. How else to jump in and out of cars. You dress light. You travel light. You are light on your feet. You are light hearted and a light heart is a pump that brings you to motion. You aim to alight, throw the load overboard. Alight the flight. You are responsible. That is not a burden. You are responsible to things that move forward. You are responsible to the young. Not so much to the old. The old do not move forward. You will find a way for the old to move forward, have them join in your thrust. Solving a problem is not a burden to you. A problem solved is a lifting of a burden. Egyptians lifted heavy stones to build monuments. You lift them to get rid of heavy stones. Get rid of them! Obstacles! You are efficient. You simplify life. Paper work. Your forms are shorter, so is your period of obligation. Work. Your hours are shorter and you have more time to sit on the lawn in your cotton trousers.