

**Medium of Change: Criticism and Literature in the Early Modernization
of Hungarian Theatre in the 1890s**

by

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Abstract

The last decade of the nineteenth-century is an important and interesting period of the Hungarian theatre history going through a process of modernization. After an overview of the early history of Hungarian, especially Budapest theatres, the modernization process is discussed from the view of theatre criticism and literature. An outstanding role in this development was played by two literary weeklies, *A Hét* and *Új idők*. The authors of these journals had a wide outlook on the artistic and literary tendencies in Europe especially in France and Germany. This accentuated interest met a vivid and young theatrical life in Budapest refreshed also by the cultural transfer by visiting troupes. In this environment the permanent theatres of Budapest made the Hungarian audience acquainted with naturalism, symbolism and Neo-Romantics. Hungarian playwrights, who in the same time wrote critiques about these plays themselves, wrote dramas in these new styles. The outstanding members of this so-called first generation were Zoltán Ambrus, Sándor Bródy and Tamás Kóbor. The achievements of this first generation were developed further by even younger theatre-goers who after writing critiques, later formed their own theatrical society, the *Thália Társaság*. The progressive reforms were appeared in the work of this society with the new interpretations of performances and plays alongside with new productions, using up the traditions of the first wave of modernization and new Western ideologies of theatre. They were the second generation of Hungarian modernization, more progressive and initiative in theatre and critic alike. This mutualism was abruptly terminated by the First World War with the shock of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

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Introduction. The contextualization of the theatre reform in Hungary from an international and local perspective as a part of the social and cultural modernization

The topic of this thesis is a specific segment of Hungarian theater history, the process of modernization from the view of theatre criticism and literature in the last decade of the nineteenth-century, focusing on Budapest. This section of theatre arts seems small and specified, but the reports of magazines about the plays and performances provide a unique perspective that reveals several angles of history of theatre art, helping to understand the process of modernization and reforms in the Hungarian theatre, since criticism became an active factor of stimulating the reformation of this field.

I argue that Hungarian theatre modernization occurred in two waves from the 1890s until the first decade of the twentieth century. The first stage of this process was affected by urbanization and the changes of population, concentrated on the establishment of the structure of permanent theatres and its specialization.

The second stage departed in the first years of the twentieth-century from the achievements of a fringe group, an amateur theatre troupe called Thália Society. That company was initiated by a few very young university students who were theatre-goers, and was a mixture of amateurs and professionals. Understanding their roles and finding the inspiration behind their activity demands fresh research which concentrates on the preceding development from a new perspective. Because of this small society gathered around Georg Lukács they have been studied several times by literature and theatre historians. Nevertheless these works neglect the fact that most of the modern plays which they chose were already known and played in Budapest (Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Hauptmann's *Drayman Henschel* or Gorky's *The Lower Depths*). It was partly the National Theatre which staged them but also

famous foreign (German, Austrian, Italian) companies played them in Budapest when they were visiting en-route.

My research focuses on these preceding events, and is deeply related to the issue of cultural transfer within modernization and will reveal the cultural network in the theatre scene in Central Europe. It will map up diachronically the chronology of the visiting tours of Otto Brahm's theatre and the very young Max Reinhardt who were the decisive inspiration in the dramatic experiments of the Thália Society. It will also offer the first attempt to reconstruct the reactions to the modern performances of visiting troupes and their stars (Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse) in the contemporary Hungarian press.

The aim of this thesis is to present the importance of theatre criticism in the 1890s and its influence on the development of modern Hungarian theatre. My work focuses on the plays and dramas which staged by the permanent theatres with a strong focus on literature history. Because of this, I will point out the importance of literary journals in that time and their contribution to the emerging modernism up to the first decade of the twentieth century.

According to this, the methodology of this dissertation relies on a comparative examination of the development of foreign and Hungarian theatre, concentrating on the plays and literary tendencies, based on the analysis of theatre critiques of two weekly journals, *A Hét* (*The Week*) and *Új Idők* (*New Times*). *A Hét* was an elite literary journal founded by József Kiss in 1889, and written and edited in a liberal spirit. *Új idők* was a popular, but more conservative periodical, actually a family magazine which focused on satisfying the expectations of a wider public.

The structure of my four-chapter thesis is set up in a form in which the first and last chapters are around the main ones as frames. The first explains the institutional development of the

Hungarian theatre until the 1890s, and the last describes the influences and continuation of modernist efforts.

The first chapter presents an overview of the early development of the theatre system in Budapest, the first permanent theatres in Pest and Buda, as well as in the unified capital. I focus on the development specifically in Budapest because of various reasons. On one hand Budapest was not only the capital of Hungary, but also the heart of cultural life at that time. On the other hand, the young intellectuals who created the modern plays and stimulated the changes lived here and were strongly connected to this city, even including it in their dramas.

I focus on the founding and early operation of the *Nemzeti Színház* (National Theatre), stressing its main ideology at that time which was aimed at the creation of the scenes of Hungarian national culture. Then I present that their role as a public space was changing in line with their increasing importance and that specialization of theatres began with founding the *Népszínház* (People's Theatre). This led to other specializations with different stresses, guided by commercial rules. Alongside the founding of commercial theatres, another phenomenon had special significance: the original German was replaced by Hungarian on stage, influencing strongly the further development of modern theatre. The aim of this first chapter is to present the institutional environment of the Hungarian theatre in the 1890s, and contextualize the process of modernization, the noted performances and the critics' underlined ideas.

The second and third chapters include my main argument, concentrating on the synchronic analysis of foreign and Hungarian theatrical and literary tendencies and their appearance on Hungarian stage. The second chapter contains the analysis of the most significant foreign literary trends according to the critics of *A Hét* and *Új idők*. The third one function as a

response to the second chapter, since it analyzes the Hungarian writers of modern dramas and plays who were the contributors of *A Hét* and *Új Idők* and the authors of the included reviews about the foreign productions. I show the cultural transfer in the theatre with this division, which I underline more with the presentation of the visiting performances in the second chapter.

I emphasize the influence of the press in the modernization processes, since it had an important role in the shaping of public opinion about the theatre and stage productions, facilitating new thinking about these performances, spreading new ideas about this field. Nevertheless, I also find it important to underline the differences between the two periodicals and their articles, and the public who read them. While *A Hét* was a liberal weekly which focused on mainly literary and artistic subjects, reading by the young generation of middle-class intellectuals, *Új Idők* was more conservative and published not only articles about arts, literary works in series, but also wrote about the important news of public life and was read by a wider public. Thus, their comparative analysis makes possible to present various opinions, describing a wider perspective of these processes.

The structure of the second and third chapters is based upon the analysis of the naturalist, symbolist and Neo-Romantic drama by the plays of Hungarian and foreign writers. I present the appearance of foreign works on the stage of Budapest theatres in productions by Hungarian creators and visiting performances of great foreign artists of the international stage, highlighting the visits of Sarah Bernhardt, Eleonora Duse and Max Reinhardt. The inclusion of visiting performances in the thesis is especially significant, because this medium of cultural transfer is not stressed enough in the Hungarian context. However I find that it is highly important in Hungary where theatre criticism was acting oriented and those reforms proved to be stable in Hungary which concentrated on the actors' play.

The most decisive literary tendency of this period is naturalism, thus it has a dominating part in the thesis. Not only because this was the most determinative movement in the 1890s, but also because naturalism was the primary motif in Hungarian modernist literature since this was the most expressive form to write about the social problems in Hungary and define the significant issues of social transformation. Therefore the writers included in the third chapter, Zoltán Ambrus, Sándor Bródy, Tamás Kóbor and others, were working in a specified Hungarian naturalism which reacted to the social conflicts and crisis of Hungary. Together with them, I introduce those Hungarian writers who represented the Neo-Romantic playwrights, such as Jenő Heltai, and the historic drama, such as Ferenc Herczeg to stress the context of the birth of modern drama and show other trends in contemporary literature, strengthening the comparative character of my analysis.

The sources which I used in the analysis, in addition to the critiques, are the published databases of the repertoire of the *Nemzeti Színház* (the National Theatre), the *Vígszínház* (the Comic Theatre) and the *Magyar Színház* (the Hungarian Theatre).¹ I used these databases to get statistics about the premieres of foreign performances and the visiting troupes and observe their presence in the Hungarian theatre sphere and the regularity of the premieres. I complete the reports, critiques and statistics with the related secondary literature to present the context of the initiatives in theatre history and Hungarian literature. My goal is to process these in a scholarly manner and to show the importance of this side of theatrical development.

¹ The databases of the repertoires came out in a series of books in 1960, and the program of the National Theatre was published as an appendix in the book: *A Nemzeti Színház 150 éve* (*The 150 Years of the National Theatre*), edited by Kerényi Ferenc, 213-316. Budapest: Gondolat, 1987.; Berczeli A. Károlyné, *A Vígszínház műsora 1896-1949 (Adattár)* (*The Program of the Comic Theatre 1896-1949 (Database)*). Budapest: Színháztudományi Intézet, Országos Színháztudományi Múzeum, 1960.; Koch Lajos, *A budapesti Magyar Színház műsora (Adattár)* (*The Program of the Hungarian Theatre of Budapest (Database)*). Budapest: Színháztudományi Intézet, Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum, 1960.

My main literature in the examination of the Hungarian writers' works is Aladár Schöpflin's book, *The History of Hungarian Literature in the XX. Century* which came out in 1937.² I find this book and the personality of Schöpflin are especially significant to include in my work, because he represented the same generation as Zoltán Ambrus, Sándor Bródy or Ferenc Herczeg. Schöpflin knew these writers, being a member of the same circles as a critic, writer and translator, engaged with the history of literature. Thus, Schöpflin not only knew all of the protagonists of modernization but he saw their plays on stage, had direct experiences about the original premieres and public response. Nevertheless, he was not connected strongly to any of the literary or aesthetical schools, resulting in that his critiques are characterized by undeniable, fine aesthetic sense and quality, thus his analyses can give an accurate image of the Hungarian literary life of fin-de-siècle period.³

The other volumes about Hungarian literature which I use in this part of my analysis are the book by Lóránt Czigány, *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature: From the Earliest Times to the Present* and the synthetic book about the history of Hungarian literature, edited by Tibor Klaniczay (*A History of Hungarian Literature*).⁴ Furthermore another study is important in my research that tells the history of Hungarian avant-garde theatre, written by Rózsa Kocsis and published in 1973.⁵ This book, *Igen és Nem: A magyar avantgárd színház története* (*Yes and No: The History of Hungarian avant-garde play*) was the first important volume about Hungarian theatre experiments, concentrating on the history of avant-garde theatre in the twentieth-century. Kocsis focuses on the events of later decades than my studies but she presents her argument in a comprehensive manner and describes

² Schöpflin Aladár, *A magyar irodalom története a XX. században*. Budapest: Grill, 1937. The references which are related to this book come in my thesis from an unchanged edition which published in 1990.

³ Székely György, editor-in-chief., *Magyar Színházművészeti Lexikon* (Hungarian Encyclopedia of Theatre Art). Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994, p. 674.

⁴ Lóránt Czigány, *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature: From the Earliest Times to the Present*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.; Tibor Klaniczay, ed. *A History of Hungarian Literature*. Budapest: Corvina, 1982

⁵ Kocsis Rózsa, *Igen és Nem: A magyar avantgárd színház története*. Budapest: Magvető, 1973

also the early endeavors, giving important considerations to my research too. Although her book reflects some of the socialist/communist ideology of the time of publication, it stays on the level of scholarly research and remains a significant work in the topic.

The fourth chapter of my thesis deals with the continuation of theatre modernization with a second, more progressive generation. These young people who grew up reading those writers who I presented in the previous chapters wanted to make radical contributions to the theatre under the influence of Western ideologies, which also became more progressive. They made the first amateur troupes in Hungary, wanting to reform the Hungarian theatre, staging the same authors such as Gerhardt Hauptmann, Henrik Ibsen and Hermann Heijermans but in a different manner and for different reasons. The first independent group, the Thália Society founded in 1904 by Georg Lukács, László Bánóczy and Marcell Benedek, existed for only four years but they developed their ideology according to the actual leading Western reform tendencies and their impact on further initiatives is determinative. They represented a progressive side of theatre modernization at the beginning of the twentieth-century, working as a continuation of the initiatives of previous decade.

The construction of institutional frames of nineteenth-century theatre-life: traditions and agendas in high and popular culture

To understand the theatrical development of Budapest at the turn-of-the nineteenth and twentieth century and the more groundbreaking changes caused by the avant-garde tendencies I find important to draw up the early history of Hungarian theatre.

The early construction of the Hungarian theatre

The construction of the Hungarian theatre in the nineteenth century was determined by various aspects which resulted from the population and different character of Buda and Pest which were two separate towns until the unification in 1873. The other determinatives that affected the founding and working of theatres can be found in the content of the population and the language they were speaking. The inhabitants of Buda and Pest was mainly German speaking from the beginning of the Habsburg rule; even the Hungarians preferred German and the language of performances followed this phenomenon. The tendency of used language was changed by the time following the transformation of public who was started to speak even more Hungarian than German. The process of Magyarization in theatre resulted in that the newly opened playhouses at the second half of the twentieth-century were Hungarians and the German speaking performances disappeared from the repertoire of the permanent theatres of Budapest.

I find it necessary to take a look at the characteristics of population of Buda and Pest, before the detailed description of the first permanent theatres, because the original character and the changes of the content of inhabitants highly affected the founding of new playhouses.

The theatrical-life of Buda and Pest was started in the eighteenth-century and it was highly connected to the character and the population of the two towns. The growth of Buda and Pest was started in the eighteenth-century and it was remarkable even in the preparatory

stages, as Péter Hanák states in his book about the development of Vienna and Budapest (*The Garden and the Workshop: Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest*).⁶ An estimated population of 20,000 became 50,000 by the time of the Josephine census in 1787, and 60,000 by the turn of the next century. The data of Károly Vörös complete these statistics showing that the population of Budapest jumped from 280,349 to 617,856 between 1869 and 1896. This number grew to 717,681 in 1900, and the city became more colorful and multi-ethnic.⁷ This vast increase of population was mainly the result of immigration, and an inside migration of young people from the countryside. The economic historians Iván T. Berend and György Ránki argue that the most decisive factor in the flow of masses to the capital throughout the period between 1815 and 1867 was the capitalist development in the wake of the revolution of 1848, and the high number of investments that resulted in the increase of working possibilities. This large scale economic development of the second half of the century gathered momentum in the early 1860s.⁸

These analyses prove that the theatrical life of Buda was affected by its situation as a royal capital. Joseph II placed the state court offices to Buda in 1784. Following this, he passed a decree in 1786 to transform the old Carmelite Church into a theatre which could supply similar entertainment to the officers and civil servants of the court administration like in Vienna. It was the *Várszínház* (Burgtheater), which was opened in October 1787, satisfying the aim of the emperor to create a similar imperial cultural scene in Buda as it was in Vienna. It housed mainly German theatre troupes; the first Hungarian performance took place in 1790. The *Várszínház* was visited by the German population of Buda, especially

⁶ Péter Hanák, "Urbanization and Civilization: Vienna and Budapest in the Nineteenth Century." In *The Garden and the Workshop: Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998, 4.

⁷ Károly Vörös, "Birth of Budapest: Building a Metropolis, 1873-1918" In *Budapest: A history from Its Beginnings to 1998*, edited by András Gerő and János Poór, 103-138. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, 104.

⁸Iván T. Berend and György Ránki. *East Central Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries*. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977, 37.

those people who it was made for, the officers and civil servants of the court.⁹Ferenc Kerényi mentions in his article which deals with the subject of Hungarian theatre as a space of public life in the nineteenth-century that the Hungarian Academic Society also had a box in the theatre, but he states that their appearance was rare and became a subject of a report in journals, for example when they went to the première of the play *Vérnász* (Blood Wedding) by Mihály Vörösmarty on 8 November 1834.¹⁰

The quality of the *Várszínház* decreased by the 1830s and got a small town character where all the visitors knew each other and they could see dramatic plays and low quality operas. The theatre made performances on Sunday too, which were light comedies, melodramas and other types of comedies for entertaining the petite bourgeois public, reacting less to the novelties by the directors and the audience.¹¹The building was renovated in 1854 and then German companies played there for another few years. However the city of Buda prohibited the German performances in 1870 starting a new stage in the life of the theatre. There was an experiment by a Hungarian company to put performances on stage here but it failed soon. The *Várszínház* became the playing space of the *Nemzeti Színház* (National Theater) and remained that until the second half of the twentieth-century.

The beginning of theatre acting in Pest showed a different image also reflecting the character and history of the town. The first permanent public theatre with a regular program opened in 1774 when the municipality of Pest decided to rebuild the *Rondella* into a city theatre. The *Rondella* was the southern bastion of the old city wall of Pest, which was reconstructed for its new function. It worked between 1774 and 1815 when it was

⁹ Ferenc Kerényi, "A színház mint társaséleti színtér a 19. századi Budapesten" *Budapesti Negyed*, 46 (2004):67-89, 67.

¹⁰ Kerényi, "A színház mint társaséleti színtér," 74.

¹¹ Ibid., 75.

demolished.¹² The *Várszínház* and the *Rondella* were both small buildings with a limited 500 seats. There were several other small playhouses in Buda and Pest next to these places, such as comedies which were visited by the poor workers, an arena in Pest for spectacles with animals, and summer theatres. The language of the performances was exclusively German.

The first large permanent theatre of Pest was also German, the *Pesti Német Színház* (German Theatre of Pest) which was opened in 1812. It played classical dramas by Schiller, Lessing, Goethe and Shakespeare; operas by Mozart and Rossini and light comedies at the same time. The diversification of theatres along the line of performance types did not exist at that time, since that was the only larger theatre of Pest. There were visiting artists from all the German territories from various genres. This theatre took up the audience of the previous smaller cheap theatres, which were closed as a result. According to this, not only the repertoire was colorful but the audience too, both socially and ethnically, because the newly arrived immigrant workers also visited it.

Kerényi describes that the inauguration performance was on 9 October and had two parts: the opening was a play about Saint Stephen by August Kotzebue with the music of Beethoven, which was followed by another piece by Kotzebue about the Mongol invasion of Hungary called *Belas Flucht*.¹³ The inauguration plays make visible the aim of the creators of making performances for a Hungarian national public, which was speaking German. The attitude of visiting artists also reflected this duality: as Kerényi recalls the

¹²I used the text of Ferenc Katona in the description of the *Rondella*. This text was one of the answer statements to the conference lecture made by Károly Vörös at the 1974 memorial conference of Budapest unification. It was published in the periodical *Tanulmányok Budapest múltjából. A Budapesti Történeti Múzeum várostörténeti évkönyve* (Essays from Budapest Past. Yearbook of Budapest Historical Museum), Budapest, 1974. pp. 114-116.

¹³The Encyclopedia of Hungarian Theatre Art names two other plays from Kotzebue as the opening performance: Ungarns erste Wohlthäter and Die Ruinen von Athen. Magyar Színházművészeti Lexikon, Székely György, editor in chief, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994, 609.

visiting artists felt it their duty to sometimes speak Hungarian to the audience and sing a verse in Hungarian.¹⁴

The *Pesti Magyar Színház* (Hungarian Theatre of Pest) and the *Nemzeti Színház* (National Theatre)

The *Pesti Magyar Színház* (Hungarian Theater of Pest) was opened twenty five years later than the German one from public contribution. The theatre went under state support in 1840 and from this time they started to use the name *Nemzeti Színház* (National Theatre). The program was colorful similarly to the German Theatre; only it was visited by the Hungarian speaking public. The repertoire contained classical dramas, contemporary plays, comedies, operas, singspiels and other performances. Until the opening of the *Népszínház* and the unification of Pest and Buda these two institutions were the only permanent theatres of Pest.

The mission of the founding of the first Hungarian speaking permanent theatre linked to the Hungarian national cause from the beginning, namely to build up the places of national culture. This underlines the importance of the usage of Hungarian language on stage and the nature of the program in the new theatre, even its name change to nemzeti-national recalled this cause. The first idea about the program of the *Nemzeti Színház* or *Pesti Magyar Színház* reflected this ideology, being a public space and a tool of national education beyond the administrative reasons.¹⁵ Kerényi describes that the leaders of the theatre wanted to introduce and present the original Hungarian drama. This initiative was ambiguously received. Kerényi mentions the historical dramas of Ede Szigligeti as an example. These

¹⁴Kerényi, "A színház mint társaséleti színtér," 72.

¹⁵The role of the Nemzeti Színház is debated continuously since its founding up to the present days. These discussions focus on the functions of the Nemzeti Színház and what it symbolizes. Zoltán Imre studied this perspective in his essay about the founding of Pesti Magyar Színház from the point of view of creating the theatre of nation. He explains how can these ideas embodying in the creating of a theatre and draws up also the meaning of national culture in Hungary and other foreign countries. "'Nemzeti Színház': A Pesti Magyar (1840-től Nemzeti) Színház (1837) létrehozása." In: *Átvilágítás. A magyar színház európai kontextusban*, szerkesztette: Imre Zoltán, 23-34. Budapest: Áron Kiadó, 2004

plays met with success because of their political message but they did not attract the audience. Kerényi remarks that the aristocracy had boxes in the German and Hungarian theatre too, but they visited the German Theatre and sent their servants to the Hungarian one, which tendency speaks well about the early recognition of the *Pesti Magyar Színház*.¹⁶

Although the founders were on the same opinion about the mission of the theatre, the architecture and structure of the building was debated from the beginning. One of the conceptions was supported by István Széchenyi. He propagated the leading role of the aristocracy in society, thus he imagined the *Nemzeti Színház* in the manner of court theatres such as *Burgtheater* in Vienna. However the idea of the builder Pest County was different about the construction. It supported to build the theatre in the style of the people's theatres of post-revolutionary France, because they wanted to underline the significance of the building as a public space which is open to all social classes. There is a difference also in the structure of the two types of buildings, namely that in the case of the people's theatre the audiences of the boxes and the ground floor enter the auditorium from a common hall washing away the differences of classes. The construction of the building followed this solution, completing at the corner of today's *Múzeum körút* and *Rákóczi út*.¹⁷

The inauguration of the *Pesti Magyar Színház* was held on 22 August 1837 with a performance which contained a prologue by Mihály Vörösmarty (*Árpád's Awakening*), a play by Eduard Schenk (*Belizár*), Hungarian dances and the compositions of József Heinisch and Márk Rózsavölgyi. This theatre was almost 2.5 times larger than the *Várszínház* and this height made it like a middle-sized European theatre.¹⁸

¹⁶ Kerényi, "A színház mint társaséleti színtér," 77.

¹⁷ Ibid., 77.

¹⁸ Ibid., 76.

After the first decades the directors of the *Nemzeti Színház* recognized the audiences' dissatisfaction about the repertoire which based on the historic plays, classic dramas and light comedies, thus they decided to change it. There was a circumstance which also affected the changes of the public opinion which was related to the appearing of bourgeois modes of theatre attendance up to the 1830s. This means that people could subscribe to the play-bills of the theatre and they could decide which plays they preferred with their family. If there was a famous visiting artist, they could go to see the plays several times; they could express their appreciation with claps, repeated callings and girdles. They could read the critiques, and bought almanacs and engravings. They could discuss the plays in salons and inns with their company.¹⁹ These new phenomena also influenced the program of the theatres, and affected their repertoire. The *Nemzeti Színház* recognized these tendencies and that a new audience grew out of this celebrity cult that is more interested in the light genres of entertainment with their new type of plays.

Because of this, the *Nemzeti Színház* started to reshape its program. It could afford the changes easily, even if the audience turned away from the theatre temporarily, because it was supported by the Hungarian Parliament. In contrast, the *Pesti Német Színház* lived only from its incomes, thus they played what the public preferred. In the decade which followed the founding of the *Nemzeti Színház* the audience liked more the *Pesti Német Színház* because it had more qualified musicians, actors and staff, but this tendency changed at the end of the 1840s, because of the continuous Magyarization, resulting in that when the *Pesti Német Színház* burned down in 1847 that was only an endpoint of a declining process.²⁰ Although the building was renovated its significance and the number of audience decreased, and when the building was burned down again in 1889 and the capital decree

¹⁹Ibid., 73.

²⁰Ibid., 76-78.

denied its reconstruction it caused no emotions in the public. The reason of that can be found in the changing expectations by the members of the audience. They wanted to hear Hungarian words from the stage which resulted that the performances became dominantly Hungarian at that time.

According to the changes of the repertoire and the new thinking about the role of the *Nemzeti Színház*, it became a place where various kinds of performances and events took place. This was the place of patriotic events such as the première of the Hungarian national tragedy, József Katona's *Bánk bán* on 15 March 1848 which the revolutionary public coming from Buda interrupted and they started to sing a mix of pieces from Ferenc Erkel's opera of *Hunyadi László*, Mihály Vörösmarty's *Szózat* and Ferenc Kölcsey's *Himnusz* and songs from popular plays. All of the pieces originated those Hungarian works which presented the Hungarian patriotic spirit.²¹

At the same time, the theatre also worked as a people's theatre in the first decades of its life. Kerényi mentions the première of Ede Szigligeti's drama in this perspective (*II. Rákóczi Ferenc fogsága – The Imprisonment of Ferenc Rákóczi II*) what happened on 4 November 1848, and the audience ridiculed the practices of the court and enthused on the word of Ilona Zrínyi in one play.²² The audience of the *Nemzeti Színház* was reorganized from the 1850s. On one hand the directing and partly the sustenance went in the hands of the aristocracy and their committee (the so-called Comité) that gave more attention to the opera and ballet performances, as well as the classic dramas.²³ On the other hand the immigrants and the

²¹ The première was repeated on 23 March 1848.

The première of József Katona's drama was a patriotic event also in itself. *Bánk bán* was canonized as the Hungarian epic at that time and still lives like that in the Hungarian common knowledge. This aspect raises again the question of the role of the *Nemzeti Színház*.

²² Kerényi, "A színház mint társaséleti szintér," 79.

²³ Ibid., 80

members of the petite bourgeoisie also demanded from the theatre to put plays on the stage which were closer to their traditional, rural based culture.²⁴

There is another perspective which was highly influential in the history of the *Nemzeti Színház*. I argue that the increased population in the 1860s and 1870s was a determinative factor in the development of public spaces and cultural institutions, such as the theatre as well since this new urban population was various socially, ethnically and educationally. This variety vitally affected the theatre since this represented a special place in the life of the people, especially of the urban population, because it was the most important leisure activity before the age of the cinema. The expectations of the high number of new audiences affected the program of the theatres and resulted in the founding of new types of theatre buildings.

The differentiation of audience – founding of the *Népszínház*

The first was the *Népszínház* amongst these new buildings. I find that it is also important that not only new buildings were founded but this social shift made possible the differentiation of mass and elite culture, as Gábor Gyáni demonstrates in his book, *Identity and Urban Experience: Fin-de-siècle Budapest*.²⁵ He argues that the *Nemzeti Színház* typically illustrates the definition of mass and elite culture on the pattern of social composition of the Budapest theatre-going public. Although this development went through also in other urban environments, this was significantly visible in Budapest where there were few theaters and they simultaneously met the demands of both types of cultures.²⁶ He explains that the reason of this circumstance can be found precisely in the lack of stratum-

²⁴ Vörös Károly, szerk. 1978. *Budapest története a márciusi forradalomtól az őszirózsás forradalomig* (The History of Budapest from the March Revolution to the Aster Revolution), vol. 4. of the series *Budapest története* (History of Budapest), edited by László Gerevich, Budapest: Budapest Főváros Tanácsa, 1973-1980. 288.

²⁵ Gábor Gyáni, "Acculturation and Mass Culture" In *Identity and Urban Experience: Fin-de-siècle Budapest*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 181-182.

²⁶ Gyáni Gábor, "Acculturation and Mass Culture," 181-182

specific theater structure in Budapest before the turn-of-the-century. This situation changed only after a more diversified structure came into being.²⁷

The public, especially members of the lower classes, felt the lack of this demand of popular plays. The entrepreneurs and theatre creators wanted to close this hiatus with organizing new theatres. The trials to make an adequate people's theatre (*népszínház*) in Budapest were started. The first playhouse that engaged with this mission was opened in 1861 in Buda, founded by the theatre director, actor and theatre organizer György Molnár. Vörös describes that he went back to the traditional musicals and popular plays about village life in the program which he completed with the refreshed version of the successful plays of the National Theatre following a rousing and realistic style. Molnár also announced applications for new popular plays (folk plays) when the theatre's repertoire became empty. These plays failed because, as Vörös explains, the taste of rural people from the country changed with urban life and moved away from these old-style works. In line with this development Molnár started to introduce operetta plays in his theatre (*Papa Dunanan* and *The Devil's Pills* by Offenbach), which were huge successes. But that came late, Molnár went bankrupt and the company was disbanded.²⁸

The next significant trials to create a people's theatre took place in Pest. Two small spaces were founded by theatre investors in the 1870s, namely the *Hermina téri Színház* and *István téri Színház*, proving to be more successful, because the population of the suburbs of Pest could maintain a larger audience. A theatre was opened on *Hermina tér* in 1870 (*Hermina téri Színház* – Theatre on Hermina tér, one half of the square is the site of the Opera House today). This was a German language theatre which played operettas, musical folk plays and

²⁷ Ibid., 182.

²⁸ Vörös, "Budapest története," 289.

parodies. It was closed in 1876, because of the beginning of construction of the Opera House.

Gyula Miklósy built and opened the small building of *István téri Színház* in 1872 (Theatre on István Tér, today it is *Klauzál tér*). The main body of the repertoire was the operettas of Offenbach and Suppé, folk plays and French comedies by Meilhac. The theatre burned down in 1874 and was not reopened. These theatres worked in *Theresienstadt* and *Elisabethstadt*, in the living area of immigrants and workers and this was not an accident, because the directors and owners of these institutions counted on the audience of the suburbs.²⁹

Although the efforts to make a specific people's theatre failed temporarily, the ongoing demand for this kind of plays remained and the city leaders recognized this. The *Nemzeti Színház* continued to play these types of performances, but they learned from Molnár's experiences and when they continued to put folk plays on stage they produced urbanized popular plays which went close to the realist people's drama. The theatre drew its program of popular plays upon the work of Szigligeti, but instead of these efforts the need of the petite bourgeoisie for a separate theatre was apparently visible.³⁰

The unification of the city in 1873 and the constant grow of population gave another push to the founding of one large *Népszínház* (People's Theatre). Parallel to this, another perspective made the question of *Népszínház* more complex. The patriotic rhetoric saw the theatre as a tool of Magyarization: around 1870 only the 46 per cent of the population of Pest-Buda-Óbuda had Hungarian as a mother tongue.³¹ This aspect draws the attention to the context of changing tendency of used language in the theatre which I find significant also

²⁹ Ibid., 289.

³⁰ Ibid., 289.

³¹ Kerényi, A színház mint társaséleti színtér, 2004, p. 83.

because the city leaders at that time stressed the educating role of the theatre in the relation of Magyarization. Ferenc Katona argues that the opening of *Népszínház* (People's Theatre) which was the first step in the process of theatre specialization is important in the context of language too. He draws the attention to the significance of the tendency which was opened by the *Népszínház* and the *Opera House* who inauguration was followed by it in 1884, being exclusively Hungarians and not German, and following by the later developments, replacing the earlier phenomenon about language.³² That means that the German theatre acting forced into the background on the stages of the orpheums and cabarets and the *Városligeti Színkör* (Small-theatre of Városliget).³³ This also shows that the theatre participated greatly in the Magyarization process. As well as that the *Népszínház* started that process which resulted in the bourgeois metropolitan theatre structure.

According to these conditions, the new theatre had to satisfy two criteria, the demand of workers to watch popular plays that entertained them and the language of performances being Hungarian. Therefore the building of the *Népszínház* was planned in Josephstadt, present day *Blaha Lujza tér* in the line of the future *Nagykörút*, the living area of petite bourgeois people, as a musical-entertaining theatre.

The *Népszínház* which built up in the proposed area, opened on 15 October 1875 in the presence of the emperor.³⁴ The new theatre was a great success because it gave home to the popular and folk plays in Budapest and gave quality entertainment to its audience, but its existence also affected the program of the *Nemzeti Színház*.

Károly Vörös describes that the *Nemzeti Színház* gave its whole repertoire of popular plays to the newly built institution with the two stars of the genre, Lujza Blaha and József

³² Katona Ferenc, conference answer, 1974, p. 116

³³ Vörös Károly, "Budapest története," 496.

³⁴ Ibid., 496.

Tamássy, obliging itself to show neither folk plays nor operettas. These circumstances forced the *Nemzeti Színház* to reshape its repertoire, which resulted in a different audience too. The public became less heterogeneous but more faithful than earlier. I find interesting to see the results of these changes through the eyes of a contemporary protagonist. Gábor Gyáni helps in this when he presents the memoirs of Baron Frigyes Podmaniczky, who was the superintendent of the theatre from 1875. Podmaniczky's words present the immediate consequences of the opening of the People's Theatre for the National Theatre.³⁵

“Podmaniczky writes that when the *Népszínház* was opened, almost the entire public of the *Nemzeti Színház* left it and moved over there to enjoy the popular pieces. He explains that the reason for this move was that the new theater could better serve mass culture than the *Nemzeti Színház* and this provided an irresistible attraction for almost every segment of the *Nemzeti Színház*'s former patrons.”³⁶

Gyáni concludes that following these events, the *Nemzeti Színház* was forced to specialize to elite culture. This transformation went together with a change in the architecture of the building, which had significant consequences regarding also to the audience, and the building reconstructed according to the plans of Antal Szkalnitszky.³⁷ They modernized the stage, improved its fire prevention and built a block of flats to both sides of the building. The management ceased the cheap standing room tickets which the poorer public could afford.³⁸

³⁵ Gyáni, “Acculturation and Mass Public,” 182.

³⁶ Ibid., 182.

³⁷ Ibid., 183.

³⁸ Ibid., 183.

Kerényi states that this reconstruction was in 1882, but I found in another source that this happened in 1875. Kerényi, “A színház mint társaséleti színtér,” 86.

The *Népszínház* was very successful in the first decades of its life but by around 1900 the theatre and the folk plays lost their popularity. The *Népszínház* went bankrupt in 1908, and the owners had to close it. The leaders of the *Nemzeti Színház* announced at the same time that the building was in such a bad condition that it was life threatening. The company moved in the empty building of the *Népszínház*, and the old building of the *Nemzeti Színház* was demolished in 1913. The *Nemzeti Színház*, the *Népszínház* and the *Pesti Német Színház* were the only permanent theatres in Budapest for dramatic plays until the 1890s.

The emergence of commercial theatres

At the time of the Millennium, Budapest became an especially lively and multicultural big city that was represented in its theatre life; the opening of the *Népszínház* was followed by other specializations. The new foundations were opened by a different mission than the earlier ones, since the previously stressed idea to establish the buildings of national culture had been fulfilled by then. The new foundation policy was similar to contemporary marketing practices, they tried to find the gaps in the working structure, to see what kind of public expectations were not fulfilled and target them. This led to the opening of the *Vigszínház* (the Comic Theatre) and the *Magyar Színház* (the Hungarian Theatre) which worked by the rules of commerciality, although they did not miss the catchword ‘Magyarization’ in their propaganda activity.³⁹

The *Vigszínház* opened in 1896 to be the regular haunt of high and middle-class people; the directors based their repertoire on French comedies, on some of the plays of Hungarian naturalist writers, such as Sándor Bródy and the visiting performances of foreign troupes. The *Magyar Színház* opened in 1897 to give similar entertainment as the *Népszínház* for the

³⁹Ibid., 88.

new type of petite bourgeoisie and working class. Because of this, it specialized in operettas in the first years but after the opening of its rival, the *Király Színház* (King's Theatre), in 1903 it changed the program to be a dramatic theatre with a concentration on modern tendencies, becoming a high standard art theatre which could satisfy the taste of a newly emerged generation of urban bourgeois intelligentsia.⁴⁰ The weekly journals, *A Hét* and the *Új Idők*, constantly published reports about these new theatre buildings underlining their importance in the urban environment.⁴¹

⁴⁰Vörös Károly, *Budapest története*, 1978, pp. 699-700.

⁴¹P. P. (Pató Pál=Ignotus), "A Vígszínház megnyitója" (The Opening of Vígszínház), *A Hét*, 3 May 1896, p. 291.; Billy, "Magyar Színház" (Hungarian Theatre), *A Hét*, 17 October 1897, p. 674.; Ambrus Zoltán, "A Vígszínház" (The Comic Theatre), *Új Idők*, 25 October 1896, pp. 355-356.; Anonym, "Magyar Színház" (Hungarian Theatre), *Új Idők*, 24 October 1897, pp. 364-365.

Literary movements from the early 1880s on: naturalism, symbolism, neo-romantics and their theatrical aspects

As I described in the previous chapter, the diversified and many-sided theatrical structure came into being in the 1890s in Budapest with several permanent theatres and other places of entertainment. These theatres formed their stable repertoire up to this time according to the public's taste and the contemporary literary trends. On the basis of the program one can map up the most significant popular dramatic styles in Hungary and Europe which is a relevant context also in the question for theatrical modernization, since the performances are only partly visual artworks on stage. The new intellectual and spiritual message of the plays and the written word also counted in the new thinking about theatre and had a vital role in the modernization of the Hungarian stage in this decade.

Because of this, the next chapter focuses on the most significant literary movements in the 1880s and 1890s and their theatrical aspects. I will also analyze their arrival at the Hungarian stage using the theatre critiques of *A Hét* and *Új Idők* as basic sources of information. I will focus on those writers and performances which the contemporary critics found outstanding.

By way of introduction I can determine generally that the naturalist dramas with a social message do not focus on the spectacle but they are engaged much more in issues of the socio-political modernization of society. Therefore those reforms that went through with a concentration on the message of the plot and action show a closer relation to the character of the theatre which is a socially determined art. They are more aware of the social processes of the surrounding environment, and they are text-oriented. From the mid-1890s up to the First World War they dominated the Budapest stages, and had a major role in modernizing this field, and underlined more the importance of acting. This was a strong tendency in the Hungarian theatre at the end of the nineteenth-century, and it remained so until the first

decade of the twentieth-century, resulting in that the modernization of the theatre started in literature.

Naturalism

The most dominant literary tendencies of the age which I will analyze are naturalism, symbolism and neo-romantics. The most significant is naturalism amongst them, chronologically the first, thus the writers of the other styles defined their works in the context of naturalism, reacting against it. Generally the term ‘naturalism’ is applied to every drama which depicts recognizable characters in everyday situations, and all of its elements aim to be true to life. Naturalism in literature was born in France in the theoretical works and dramas of Émile Zola, and the influence of the style of his works became dominant in the 1880s in Europe.

The creators of naturalist plays want to avoid everything that is fake or idealized both in the story and performance; naturalism is marked by a realistic representation of contemporary life, in acting, writing and mise-en-scène with an emphasis on revealing the darker corners of social experience which was usually not acknowledged on the stage by the bourgeois society.⁴² The characters are acting the way they would in real life, and they behave as if the public was not there. Naturalism in the theatre opposed itself to sweeping entertainment and heroic and stiff historicism.⁴³ The naturalist movement rapidly spread in the countries of Europe and the creators required the producer’s faithfulness to reality from the theatre and dramatic literature. They were influenced by positivist sociology, natural history, the empirical scientific method and the milieu-theory of French politician and literary critic, Hyppolite Taine (1828-1893) who stated in this theory that heredity, environment and time

⁴²Dan Rebellato, “Naturalism” In: *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, vol. 2., edited by Dennis Kennedy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 925.

⁴³ Peter Simhandl, *Színháztörténet* (Theatre-story), Budapest: Helikon Kiadó, 1998, 209.

are the only determinative effects in the destiny of man. Furthermore the statements of Zola in the foreword of his 1867 psychological drama, *Thérèse Raquin*, that he did not want to depict characters but temperaments in his work also became very influential among the followers and the spirit of their works.⁴⁴ The success of naturalism is due to the fact that unlike the classical dramas and the light historicist plays which told about the life of the high class in the name of entertainment,⁴⁵ it was speaking about real problems and placed the life of the middle-classes in the center, which attitude caused also its burnout because of two main reasons. On one hand the public did not want to go in the theatre to see the same problems that they had to encounter in real life. On the other hand, the idea to form everything on the stage similar to real life led to schematic and boring performances that lost their force and theatrical value.

Nonetheless, I argue that naturalist theatre acting was a pioneer movement similarly to the avant-garde later. It was as progressive as the avant-garde and it stimulated the reform in the theatre and the thinking about theatre arts in a new spirit. That was especially relevant in Hungary where the avant-garde movements made their influence a decade later than in other parts of Europe.⁴⁶

The artistic principles of Zola were realized in practice by the *Théâtre Libre* in Paris that was founded by André Antoine in 1887. The theatre played only naturalist dramas, not only by Zola, but all the significant representatives of naturalism, such as Henrik Ibsen, Gerhardt Hauptmann and August Strindberg. This theatre was visited by a narrow layer of the public,

⁴⁴ Pál József (editor in chief), *Világirodalom* (World Literature), Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2005, 676.

⁴⁵ The popular classic dramas were represented in the French theatre by the plays by Friedrich Schiller (*Don Carlos*, *Intrigue and Love*) and the representatives of the light historicist plays were the farces and operetta plays by Ludovic Halévy, Henri Meilhac and Georges Feydeu. The plays by Halévy, Meilhac and Georges Feydeu were regular part of the repertoire of the Hungarian *Nemzeti Színház* too.

⁴⁶ I defined my opinion following the argument of Rózsa Kocsis who made her statements in the book, *Igen és Nem: A Magyar avantgárd színház története* (Yes and No: The history of Hungarian avant-garde theatre acting). Budapest, 1973, 70.

only a small elite group was interested in these performances. Since the attendance was that limited and the theatre supported it from donations, they were always struggling with debts and after ten years it closed.⁴⁷ But its influence was huge and numerous theatres opened in the countries of Europe which were engaged with the presentation of naturalist plays. The most important and influential amongst them was the *Freie Bühne* in Berlin founded by the German theatre director and organizer Otto Brahm in 1889. It had no home of its own, and played only matinees in different theatres. The theatre was attached to the *Deutsches Theater* in 1894 when Otto Brahm became its director, continuing its program to present new plays up to the turn of the century.⁴⁸ Otto Brahm and the company of the *Deutsches Theater* became a significant part of the Hungarian theatre-scene since they made regular visiting performances in Budapest from the end of the 1890s securing one form in which naturalist play could be continuously present here. I will analyze the visiting performances of the *Deutsches Theater* in a later phase of my thesis. The naturalist theatre of London, the Independent Theatre, opened in 1891 and the latest but also significant *Intima Theatern* in Stockholm was opened relatively late in 1907 by the playwright August Strindberg.

The presence of foreign naturalist dramas on the Hungarian stage

Naturalist plays were presented in the Hungarian theatre both in Hungarian productions and by the visiting performances. However the presence of French naturalist writers on the Hungarian stage was not significant between 1880s and 1910s. The analysis of the *Nemzeti Színház*'s program in this time period shows that French culture was represented by romantic light plays and tragicomedies.⁴⁹ The most popular authors were Victorien Sardou and Alexandre Dumas fils. The second most important French naturalist writer after Zola,

⁴⁷ Simhandl, "Színháztörténet," 212.

⁴⁸ The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, edited by Phyllis Hartnoll, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 306.

⁴⁹ Kerényi Ferenc, ed. A Nemzeti Színház 150 éve (150 Years of the National Theatre), Budapest: Gondolat, 1987, 257-274.

Guy de Maupassant's plays are appearing only two times amongst the premières: one of them is called the *Musotte* which was presented on 9 October 1891 and the other one is *Yvette* which played on 11 June 1902. Maupassant was only the co-writer in both cases.

Contrary to the French case, the German and Scandinavian naturalist writers were presented a slightly more often in the Hungarian theatres. The most popular writers amongst them were Gerhardt Hauptmann and Henrik Ibsen. The recognition of Ibsen is ambivalent, the first première of Ibsen's key work, *A Doll's House* (Hungarian title is *Nóra*) was in 1889 in the *Nemzeti Színház*, only ten years after its original publication, but the regular display of the writer's works did not follow.

The Hungarian philosopher Bernát Alexander wrote a long article about Ibsen in *A Hét* two years after this event on the occasion of the turnout of Ibsen's drama, called *Hedda Gabler*.⁵⁰ He writes about the reasons of Ibsen's huge popularity in the previous years and that the Hungarian public discovered him only recently. The perspectives which Alexander underlines in this review are pointing out the reasons of the author's popularity both in Hungary and outside the country then and now. He finds interesting that "we celebrate this poet who became housed only one or two years ago. We know fewer examples of this.....One of the reasons of his influence on the contemporaries without doubt is his original and strongly stamped literary individuality....."⁵¹ Alexander determines this is because his works represented a new voice in literature and the German spirit was always

⁵⁰ Alexander, Bernát (1850-1927) was a Hungarian philosopher and aesthete. He was the theatre critic of the *Pester Lloyd* (1869-1874 and 1914-1919) and the *Budapesti Hírlap* (Budapest News, 1893-1914). He edited the series *Filozófiai Írók Tára* (Collection of French Writers) with József Bánóczy and the philosophical periodical *Athenaeum* between 1915 and 1919. The journals and periodicals of that time published continuously his great number of philosophical, aesthetic and literary articles and studies. His work extended to education, issues of public life and the academic literature; translated the classics of philosophy (Diderot, Hume, Kant) and provided them with professional commentary. The world view of his works was characterized by classic civilian liberalism, neo-Kantian philosophy and a high aesthetic standard in form. Source: Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon (Hungarian Encyclopedia of Biographies), editor-in-chief Markó László, I. kötet, Budapest: Magyar Könyvklub, 2001, 82.

⁵¹Alexander Bernát, "Ibsen" *A Hét*, 26 April 1891, 272-274.

more “eccentric” than the French or the Hungarian, and Ibsen is a typical representative of this spirit. “He was educated in a small town of Norway with a strong willingness to deepen in himself, lamenting on the ancient problems of human nature as they were brand new as no one had seen them”⁵²

I find these statements especially interesting, because Alexander determines those aspects which are relevant also to the later reputation of the writer. The scholars, litterateurs such as Richard Gilman in his 1999 book about modern drama, looked to Ibsen as the writer who could present the real problems of middle-class life.⁵³ Alexander states that it was possible, because he rethought the issues of modern life from their original sources in an environment untouched by modernity, and describes why the people who live in the big city cannot recognize this. He writes that

these big mechanisms are pressing on us with that weight in these huge culture-centers! Where thousands, tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands are doing one thing, there the individual sees the struggle to be pointless.....Who can disarrange the social institution here, where we can find this or that shelter.....Almost all of Ibsen’s play are set in Norway, in small towns, in straight life situations, where brave originality seems to be more natural, the rebel against the existence reassuring more success...⁵⁴

As opposed to Alexander’s enthusiasm, the critic and literary historian Aladár Schöpflin points out in his book that the presentation of Ibsen’s plays in the *Nemzeti Színház* and the *Vígszínház* was received by moderate success. The audience liked more the great hits of the French stage.⁵⁵ The article about Ibsen in the 1898 issue of *A Hét* by Ignotus, who wrote this short text on the pseudonym of Kádár, unfolds the reasons of this situation.⁵⁶ He describes

⁵² Alexander, “Ibsen,” 273.

⁵³ Richard Gilman, *The Making of Modern Drama : A Study of Büchner, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Pirandello, Brecht, Handke*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999, pp. 45-82.

⁵⁴ Alexander, “Ibsen,” 273.

⁵⁵ Schöpflin Aladár, *A magyar irodalom története a XX. században* (The History of Hungarian Literature in the Twentieth-century), Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1937 (x. edition, 1990), p. 104.

⁵⁶ Kádár, “Ibsen” *A Hét*, 27 March 1898, 204-206. Kádár was one of the pseudonyms of the theatre critic and writer Ignotus. Ignotus (Hugó Veigelsberg, 1869-1949) was one of the most influential literary critics in the Hungarian literature from the 1890s up to the Second World War. His father was the main editor of the *Pester Lloyd*, and he studied law than became a journalist. He made some trials on the field of poetry but these were

that “not many people know Ibsen in our country and a few of them likes him. Except a couple of them who understand everything and another couple who swot with everything, his real audience are those youngest men who see everything to be sacred what is literature, they are speaking about Shakespeare and Sudermann with the same piety.” He lists the reasons of the negative attitude about this author, and he mentions first of all that Hungarians can have Ibsen's works only in a written form, without seeing them on stage. However “we are talking about a drama-poet and if it is a real drama, its text on paper is hardly more than the opera score, it has to be on stage.” Ignotus points to an important issue here, because since the showing of *Nóra* (A Doll's House) in 1889 his plays were presented only two times on the stage of the *Nemzeti Színház* in the 1890s: *A Népgyűlölő* (An Enemy of the People) in 1891 and *John Gabriel Borkman* in December 1898 with the greatest Hungarian actress of that time Mari Jászai in the leading role. *A Hét* also wrote about this première, where the writer only put the short version of his name under the article, but the letters “I-s” imply that it was Ignotus.⁵⁷ Furthermore the Vígszínház put on stage *A kis Eyolf* (The Little Eyolf) in October 1899, but this play turned away from naturalism.

The other factors which Ignotus mentions about the understanding of Ibsen are relating to the language and cultural differences. He determines that Hungarians hardly can understand these stories because we (Hungarians) hardly know anything about Scandinavia unlike about France and Germany. I find more important those statements of Ignotus which he makes about the nature of Ibsen's story. He explains that “our story is the aristocracy's and the Norwegian is the peasantry's story; religion, moral and ethics were ruled by politics in

not proved to be successful. He became the writer of *A Hét* in 1891, and starting to work to the *Magyar Hírlap* in 1892. He became the leader of the writer's circle of these journals soon. He was the co-founder of the *Nyugat* (West) in 1908, which was the leading periodical of literary modernization in the first half of the twentieth-century in Hungary. He was one of the first who recognized the talent of Endre Ady, Mihály Babits and Attila József and he made big fights with the conservative literary forces of that age for their recognition. (Markó László, *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*)

⁵⁷ I-s., “John Gabriel Borkman,” *A Hét*, 1 December 1898, 800-801

our country. Our people are not fighting for expressing their identity, but for the victory of their home, party, sect or classes. Our great men are not confronting dramatic but epic heroes.”

Therefore, I assume two things about the presence of Ibsen in Hungary according to the papers of Ignótus and Bernát Alexander. Firstly he could not be successful here because he was engaged with the problems of a different social environment, historical background and class struggles than Hungarians. Secondly, it seems that there was a wave of his success in Hungary at the beginning of the decade but later this faded and up to the time when Ignótus became a mature participant of the Hungarian cultural sphere, Ibsen somewhat disappeared from common knowledge. This made possible for the next generation of young intellectuals in the following decade to rediscover Ibsen’s plays.

It seems another naturalist writer was more popular in Hungary, the German Gerhardt Hauptmann (1862-1946). This author was introduced by Otto Brahm and the *Freie Bühne* in Germany. He was born in Silesia, and he introduced naturalist drama in German literature with his 1889 play *Before Dawn*. The *Új Idők* published a short article about him in 1895 in which the correspondent calls him the only original playwright of Germany at that time.⁵⁸ The writer mentions that the small-theatre of Buda (*Budai Színkör*) presented his play, *A takácsok* (*The Weavers*). He states that he liked it, it was affective and furthermore it was an event also from a political point of view.

I find important to note some words about this play at this point to make the author’s statement understandable. The plot of this play is built on a real story, the Silesian weavers’ rebel in 1844. Hauptmann applied techniques on stage that made possible to move not only one individual but a whole mass, picturing the miserable situation of the exploited. It shows

⁵⁸ Anonym, “Hauptmann Gerhard” *Új Idők*, 11 August 1895, 106.

how they take their destiny in their own hands and do something against it. This was not only a huge technical novelty on the stage but also a political statement, resulting in that the German ruler William II denounced his box in the *Deutsches Theater*.⁵⁹

Therefore, the drama of *A takácsok* became a political act and its political message got in a special context in Hungary where people were continuously arguing against the foreign German authority. This could be the main reason of Hauptmann's popularity, and the long article of *A Hét* about this performance. It is interesting that while *Új Idők* published only a short report about this performance, *A Hét* devoted a long review to it. This difference represents the priorities of the two journals, and which issues thought to be important by the critics. The author of the review who put only his initials (K.T.) at the end of the article underlines that this play is not important because of its great dramatic or artistic value particularly but because of its topic.⁶⁰ I can be informed from this paper that the journals after the presentation of the play put it as a subject of their leading article and the performance had a huge response even though it was presented by a small summer theatre. The writer notes that these articles overrated this play in a good sense, putting its social relations in the center, because this makes this drama important. It concentrates on people, and the writer can depict their real nature, apply their speaking style and accent because he knows them, and the characters can evoke this atmosphere on stage. This is the reason why it troubles the rulers and gains importance to the socialists.

⁵⁹ Simhandl, "Színháztörténet," 218.

⁶⁰ K.T., "Gerhart Hauptmann," *A Hét*, 11 August 1895, 515-516. I suppose that K.T. probably signs Tamás Kóbor (Kóbor Tamás), who was a dramatist and influential critic of *A Hét*. I will refer to him in more details later in my thesis. Here I only mention that he started his writing career at *A Hét* which he got engaged through the editor József Kiss who was his brother-in-law. He came from a Jewish middle class family and this newly assimilated group, especially the problem of its poorer layer formed his subject-matter. He saw and described their world from inside taking the form of chronicles and better short stories. (Tibor Klaniczay, edited by, *A History of Hungarian Literature*, Budapest: Corvina, 1982, 309.) The issues which he were committed with also prove my idea that the writer of this critique is Tamás Kóbor.

The reporter of the *Új Idők* further remarks that Hungarians were under the influence of German literature for a very long time but nowadays new German dramas did not come in the country but, on the contrary, the Hungarian ones went there, which is a “good habit.” The writer notes also that Hauptmann has more significant plays amongst which the *Hannele* is the nicest that is “likely we can see in this winter when the author himself will visit us.”⁶¹

The audience had to wait for the première of *Hannele* until 1897. The *Magyar Színház* (Hungarian Theatre) put it in the program of its first season, but *Hannele* (in English known as the Assumption of Hannele, original title: *Hanneles Himmelfahrt*, 1893) was not made in a naturalist spirit. As the program of the *Magyar Színház* describes, this is an image of a dream.⁶² The story tells the dream of a girl who rises to the Heaven and meets Christ and other protagonists there. The journal *A Hét* published a review on the occasion of the turnout of the Hungarian translation of the play, and the writer notes that some members of the intellectual elite questioned the style of the translation which recalls the stylistic manner of the Hungarian poet Mihály Vörösmarty’s fairy tale, *Csongor és Tünde* (Csongor and Tünde). The writer argues that the story itself is tale-like, thus Hauptmann’s words stand real close with Vörösmarty’s, therefore this is the proper style, and he admits that this makes impossible to put the work on stage.⁶³

The visiting performances of Max Reinhardt and the Deutsches Theater

Alongside with the presentation of the plays by German naturalist writers, another type of cultural transfer counted special importance in the mediation of this tendency, namely the regular visiting performances of the German and Italian theatre troupes. The Italian artists

⁶¹ Anonym, “Hauptmann Gerhard,” 106.

⁶² The première of *Hannele* in the Magyar Színház took place on 13 November 1897.

⁶³ Anonym, “Hannele”, *A Hét*, 5 Decembre 1897, 787

were regular performers on Hungarian stages, firstly in *Népszínház*, than the *Vígszínház*. The well-known company of the actor Ermete Zacconi put his program by Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Hamlet* together with Ibsen's *Ghosts* on stage between 27 December 1898 and 2 January 1899 in the *Vígszínház*.⁶⁴

The *Deutsches Theater* in Berlin became the basis of naturalist theatre-acting up to the 1890s under the directorship of Otto Brahm. They started their visiting performances in Budapest in 1901 at the same time with the *Berliner Theater* which was managed by Paul Lindau.⁶⁵ According to the usual practice of the visiting groups the *Deutsches Theater* introduced its performances in a frame of a one week program in blocks between 20 and 29 April. On the first occasion they were presented the dramas of Gerhardt Hauptmann (*Fuhrmann Henschel* - Drayman Henschel, *Die versunkene Glocke* - The Sunken Bell, and *Der Biberpelz* - The Beaver Coat), Henrik Ibsen (*Gespenster* - Ghosts), Max Halbe (*Jugend* - Youth) and M. Dreyer (*Der Probekandidat* - The Candidate).⁶⁶ The *Deutsches Theater* repeated its Budapest visits in every year until the 1910s.

However the director became Max Reinhardt from 1904. Reinhardt became the member of the *Deutsches Theater*'s company in 1894. At the time of the *Deutsches Theater*'s visits in Budapest he already diverged from the naturalist engagement and tried to open to other types of acting, wanting to leave Otto Brahm's theatre. He founded his small secessionist theatre, *Schall und Rauch* in 1901, and made performances in Budapest with his own company on the stage of *Somossy Orpheum* (*Fővárosi Orpheum*, today it's the *Budapest Operettszínház* – Budapest Operetta Theatre) in 1901-1902 after he finished his official

⁶⁴ Berczeli A. Károlyné, *A Vígszínház műsora 1896-1949 (Adattár)* (The Repertoire of the Vígszínház 1869-1949 (Database)). Budapest: Színháztudományi Intézet; Országos Színháztudományi Múzeum, 1960, 14.

⁶⁵ The *Új Idők* published an article about their arriving at the same time, picturing the importance of Budapest with stressing their fight around the debut. T.R. Színházi élet – Otto Brahm és Lindau Pál (Theatre Life – Otto Brahm and Lindau Pál). *Új idők*, 28 April 1901

⁶⁶Berczeli A. Károlyné, "A Vígszínház műsora 1896-1949," 19. I used the dramas German title to be faithful to the database of the Vígszínház what wrote them in this format.

program with the *Deutsches Theater*. Reinhardt left Otto Brahm and his company in 1903 and became the director of the *Kleines Theater* that he was founded in the previous year.⁶⁷ He came to Budapest with this company in 1903, presenting an influential program in the *Magyar Színház* in which the most significant production was Gorky's *Éjjeli menedékhely* (Nachtasyl – Lower Depths, 1902).⁶⁸ Gorky's play was a novelty on European stage and Reinhardt made a performance from it which reflected the drama's naturalism and Reinhardt's reform ideas at the same time. This performance had a strong influence on the theatre reform movements at the beginning of the twentieth-century in Hungary.

Symbolism

The descriptions about *Hannele*, the determination of its style show that this work by Hauptmann is already distanced from naturalism; it carries the characteristics of symbolism. Numerous tendencies were generated from the relatively closed movement of naturalism from the 1890s, resulting from the weaknesses of the style, one of which was symbolism.⁶⁹ Symbolism, contrary to naturalism, put the mysticism, the imaginary and metaphysics in the center. The general idea to express the spiritual and untouchable was always presented in the theatre, but symbolism put the idea to deliver meanings which were otherwise unavailable as its basic concept. The style was a response to naturalism, the creators turned away from its materialist concerns of economics and class represented through detailed psychological depictions. In contrast, symbolism used representation of imagined psychic states between life and death to establish difference and dramatic flow.⁷⁰ The specific theatre movement began in Paris similarly to naturalism in the late nineteenth-century when the director and manager of Théâtre d'Art, Paul Fort and the director and

⁶⁷ Staud Géza, Max Reinhardt. Budapest: Gondolat, 1977, 18, 45-46.

⁶⁸ Koch Lajos, "A budapesti Magyar Színház műsora (Adattár)" (The Repertoire of the Budapest Hungarian Theatre (Database)), Budapest: Színháztudományi Intézet; Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum, 1960, 21.

⁶⁹ Kocsis Rózsa, "Igen és Nem," 72-73

⁷⁰ Simhandl, "Színház történet," 231-232.

manager of Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, Aurélien-Marie Lugné-Poe decided to introduce new playing forms on the stage to create the new representation of metaphysical realms and depiction of occult and spiritual material.⁷¹

Symbolist performance theory developed without any previous actual productions, it grew out of the writing of Mallarmé, Maeterlinck and Gustave Kahn. I find the most interesting from these ideas the ones which were related to scenography. Symbolist scenography attempted to depict a space of mystery that would lead to the representation of the unknown phenomena of the metaphysical, and I argue that symbolism contributed to theatrical modernization with these endeavors. The purpose to express unspeakable contents and abstract notions on stage accompanying with that attempt to depict a space of mystery which leads to the representation of the unknown phenomena of the metaphysical required new forms of stagecraft and a new way of thinking about the visual image. The first theatre initiatives which engaged with the creation of symbolist performances employed fine artists such as Paul Sérusier and Édouard Vuillard to produce the most suitable stages.⁷² They were followed by numerous reform thinkers both from the field of theatre and fine arts. The most interesting angle of these initiatives was concerned with the role of the actor, whose bodily materiality would always confine the theatre to naturalist representation. The problem of the body on a stage was developed later in the theory of Edward Gordon Craig, the Italian futurist, the experiments of the Bauhaus theatre and Oskar Schlemmer's works.

The presence of foreign symbolist dramas in the Hungarian theatre

The literature of symbolism shows some overlap with naturalism, since generally the oeuvre of an artist is not related to one artistic style. I described Ibsen's naturalistic works but his later work, the *Ghosts* which is a symbolist play turns away from the spirit of the previous

⁷¹ Matthew Causey, "Symbolism" In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, 1309.

⁷² Ibid., 1309.

pieces. As well as Hauptmann's symbolist drama, *Hannele* and his other play *Crampton mester* (The Master Builder) also carry the characteristics of symbolism.⁷³

The symbolist drama got on stage relatively late in Hungary, because of the above mentioned criteria about the challenges of its technique and its whole new spirit. Those theatre initiatives which wanted to reform the stage independently from institutional theatre frames had more freedom to include the ideas of symbolism, thus this tendency was represented in the program of experimental theatres. The most influential Hungarian experimental theatre group in the first decade of the next century, the Thália Society made several performances of symbolist dramas by Henrik Ibsen or Arthur Schnitzler, they made the performance of the *Ghosts* on 17 October 1908 for the first time in Hungary.

The symbolist dramas were introduced by the permanent theatres relatively late too and due to different reasons or circumstances. The *Nemzeti Színház* preferred the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck's works, but the directors did not concentrate on the drama's symbolist nature and message, they produced these works in the thinking that the public will like the plays' light, tale-like character. The première of *Monna Vanna* was in 1902 and his drama *Pelléas és Melisande* (Pelléas and Melisande) arrived to the Hungarian stage in 1907 (published in 1892; first performed in 1893) which put fatality and mysticism in the center of its plot. *Új Idők* published a review about the performance of *Monna Vanna* in its 4 January 1903 issue.⁷⁴ The author of the review underlines the great talent of Emília Márkus in the leading role, naming her as the greatest actress of the world. The writer states that he would prefer to write only about Márkus, but he has to describe the play. The reader can see in his description that this play by Maeterlinck shows less the value of symbolism but

⁷³The *Master Builder* was presented by the *Nemzeti Színház* on 8 October 1897. *A Hét* and *Új Idők* both wrote about its premiere.

⁷⁴MD, "Monna Vanna", *Új Idők* 4 January 1903, 38-39.

connects more to the French romantic play. The writer underlines that Maeterlinck wants to escape from the world of mysticism and symbolism and he tries to find the way out through the Renaissance but he cannot do it, this is why his modern female characters are so strange and his dramas stand so close to operettas.⁷⁵

The other play by Maeterlinck, *Pelléas és Melisande* which is a lyrical fairy-tale is very different from *Monna Vanna*. László Márkus wrote a review about it in *A Hét* in 1907 under his usual pseudonym, Marco.⁷⁶ He describes that the poetry of Maeterlinck's plays “unbearably deform in the reality of the stage, whose artistic elements that we can immediately feel when reading were lost as soon as they became realized as true events. The lyrical and abstract elements which we imagine during reading lost their force on stage because of the actor.”⁷⁷ Thus, he suggests that Maeterlinck's plays are not possible to realize on one hand because of their abstract world and on the other hand because of the actors who transform every lyrical element into prosaic one. He also focuses on the actors similarly to the critic of *Új Idők*, analyzing that Odry and Emília Márkus misunderstood the drama and they interpreted their characters according to their professional practice. He argues at the end that maybe a good director could make them understand the real essence of these roles.⁷⁸

I can conclude from these two very different analyses that firstly the theatrical reviews were highly concentrated on the actors at that time and they found important the artistic skills of the actor in the theatrical experience. Secondly the symbolic character of the works was

⁷⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁶ Marco (László Márkus), performance review about Maeterlinck's *Pelléas and Melisande* in the column of *Theatre Week. A Hét*, 27 January 1907, 63. László Márkus (1881-1948) was a writer, critic, director of films and plays, stage and costume designer, theatre director. He began his career as a critic in the daily called *Alkotmány* (Constitution) in 1900 than his critics and theoretical writings were published by *A Hét*, *Magyar Szemle* and *Művészet*. He was one of the founding members of the Thália Society in 1904.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 63

taken into account in the decision to put them on stage. *Monna Vanna* was produced in the *Nemzeti Színház* because it was similar to those successful French plays which often appeared there, *Pelléas és Melisande* was a tale whose uniqueness and character was not analyzed by these performances in its real depth. It seems that although Maeterlinck's plays were symbolist dramas, their performances on Hungarian stage defined in Neo-Romanticist sense, cleared a way to irrational.

One of the most significant works of symbolist literature is Oscar Wilde's *Salome* which was presented in Hungary by the *Kleines* and *Neues Theater* of Berlin in 1903 for the first time. Wilde wrote this one-act play in 1891 about the biblical heroine Salome who seduced his step-father Herodes with her dance and he asked the head of John the Baptist as a reward for her production. This drama was an epoch-making piece and became the basic work of symbolism on every field of art. The original production of the two German theatres were directed by Max Reinhardt, employing only fine artists to create a suggestive a scenery and costumes to match the symbolism and message of the play, but as Géza Staud argued in his book, the result showed a true secessionist display filled by its morbid sadism and eroticism.⁷⁹ Reinhardt gave an entirely new program to the visual image with this play and cleared the way to the new stage designer artists. This performance made possible to eliminate the schematic stagecraft and painting studios from theatre art and replace them with the fine artists. The scenes and the costumes of *Salome* were made by Max Kruse and Lovis Corinth. They applied the revolving curtain, putting the palace of Herodes before it, not only framing the play but involving to the mimic character of the performance.⁸⁰ This performance took place in May 1903 in the *Magyar Színház* where Reinhardt's company

⁷⁹ Edda Fuhrich and Gisela Prossnitz, edited by, Max Reinhardt: *The Magician's Dreams*, Salzburg and Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1993, 30.; Staud Géza, *Max Reinhardt*, Budapest: Gondolat, 1977, 47.

Reinhardt's idea to employ fine artists to make the visual image of the performances became a general practice and he continued this program in his later directions.

⁸⁰ Staud Géza, "Max Reinhardt," 46-47.

could present only the reduced version of their *Salome*, because the theatre and the stage were much smaller than in Berlin.

The première of the Hungarian version was in 1907 in *Vígszínház*, *A Hét* published a review about the performance which was written by Gyula Szini who made the original Hungarian translation of Wilde's play.⁸¹ He really likes the performance, describing that the audience made a standing ovation after the curtain rolled down; he also refers to the few years' earlier production of the German ensemble: he finds it to be misguided with his wrongly determined naturalism and realism which harmed the symbolism of the poem. Szini explains that these mistakes must have no problems in the great sceneries of Louis (!) Corinth, but they ruined the play on the small stage of the *Magyar Színház*. Thus, it seems that the direct influence of Reinhardt's adaptation on the Hungarian stage is not obvious.

Neo-Romantics

The third important tendency at the end of the nineteenth-century was that of the Neo-Romantics whose existence was in relation with the decadence and the spirit of fin-de-siècle that saw itself as a golden age. The term 'Neo-Romantics' generally refers to those literary tendencies and movements which are characterized by the resurgence of Romanticism. The Neo-Romantic movements were divergent at the end of the nineteenth-century and connected to each other with their topic related to extraordinary, miraculous or mystical subjects; the adaptation of myths, epics and legends and the affinity to exotic. It is also characterized by the concentration on emotional motives, the cult of beauty, musicality and

⁸¹ Szini Gyula, *A színházi hét rovat: Salome* (The column of Week in Theatre, *Salome*), *A Hét*, 24 March 1907, 193. Szini Gyula (1876-1932) was a writer and journalist. He studied law and became the theatre critic of *Pesti Napló* from 1900 and the *Budapesti Napló* from 1903, published also in *A Hét* and *Nyugat*. His work as a translator of plays is also highly significant, next to Wilde's *Salome*, he translated the plays by Goldoni and Gárdaly, making also an own oeuvre as a dramatist and short-story writer. Magyar Színművészeti Lexikon, 1994, 762.

the freedom of thought.⁸²These subject matters, similarly to naturalism and symbolism, were always presented in dramatic works of art, but fin-de-siècle gave a new force to them, and stimulated their spread.⁸³The main characteristics of Romantic dramas were different in every country according to the cultural traditions and society.

The most famous representatives of Neo-Romantic drama in Hungary were the French playwrights Victorien Sardou, Émil Augier and Alexandre Dumas fils. The various plays of Victorien Sardou were presented in every season of the *Nemzeti Színház* in the 1890s.⁸⁴ Alexandre Dumas's most popular play, *La dame aux camélias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*, 1848) was also presented at that time by the *Nemzeti Színház* and enjoyed great popularity. Dumas's drama was presented on Hungarian stages not only by Hungarian creators. The visiting groups that came to Hungary also put this play in the center of their program, especially when the two greatest primadonnas of those years came in the city. Their visiting performances are not only important because it reveals the international embeddedness of the Hungarian theatre but because of its nature as the tool of cultural transfer.

The visiting performances of Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse in Budapest

The main role of *La Dame aux Camélias*, Margherite was a legendary character played both by Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse. Their rivalry and dual presence determined European theatre life at that time and their art of acting represented two main stylistic tendencies. I argue that these two stars, who represented two different generations, introduced various conceptions of acting on stage, making possible the diverse interpretations of the same play, and vividly showing the differences in artistic thinking.

⁸²Király István, editor-in-chief. *Világirodalmi Lexikon* (The Encyclopedia of World Literature), vol. 9. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1991, 211.; Pál József, editor in chief, *Világirodalom* (World Literature), Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2005, 676.

⁸³Király István, "Világirodalmi Lexikon," 211

⁸⁴Kerényi Ferenc, "A Nemzeti Színház 150 éve," 264-268.

This was especially significant in Hungary where the theatre criticism was highly actor oriented, and those theatre reforms were influential which concentrated on the role of the actor, such as Reinhardt's or Constantin Stanislavski's ideas. Therefore I argue that their visiting performances were tools which made it possible to mediate the old and new thinking about theatre acting, they confronted the public with various values and their performances contributed to the development of new ideas in the Hungarian theatre. The review of *Új Idők* in 1895 about Duse's visit verifies my emphasis on the comparison of the two stars. The writer mentions that there are famous impersonators of the role of *La dame aux Camélias* in the *Nemzeti Színház*, thus the comparison of Duse's acting with their play is especially instructive.⁸⁵

The short analysis of the life of the two stars gives more explanation to the reasons of their different style. Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) started her career in the Comédie Française in Paris in 1862; she met with success in the plays by Racine first, then she starred in modern plays too. Her art of acting was characterized by virtuosic manner of performance with technical perfection and attitudinize, self-contained theatricality; her characters are artistically designed.⁸⁶ Her most popular roles were in dramas by Augier and Meilhac. She founded the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt in 1893 where Sardou became a kind of household writer. Her style became old-fashioned at the time of her rivalry with Duse. Her first visiting performance was in 1881 in Budapest in *Népszínház* and it was followed by another five until 1908.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Anonym, La Duse, *Új Idők*, 24 Novembre 1895, 392. The actress who played this role in the *Nemzeti Színház* was Mari Jászai who was a greatness of Hungarian acting, similar to Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse. Her style stood closer to Duse's, she also wrote an article about another actress of that time, Ellen Terry where she pictured that she did not like Sarah Bernhardt and named Ellen Terry as the greatest actress of the world (*Új Idők*, 6 October 1895, pp. 248-250.)

⁸⁶ Nyerges László, "Idegen nyelvű színjátszás," In *Magyar Színháztörténet 1873-1920*, 427.

⁸⁷ These performances took place in 1888 and 1893 in the *Népszínház*, in 1899 and 1908 in the *Magyar Színház* and in 1904 in *Király Színház*. (Nyerges László, "Magyar Színháztörténet," 426)

Eleonora Duse (1858-1924) one of the greatest personalities of theatre acting at the turn-of-the century, had a style highly different from Bernhardt's, since her acting was more simplistic and focused on filling it with poetry and psychological authenticity. She started with the same plays by Sardou and Alexandre Dumas fils as Sarah Bernhardt, but after she played in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, she turned to the more serious works of naturalist literature. She became engaged with Zola's naturalism, the Italian verismo writers (the Italian movement of naturalism) and Ibsen's social realism. She had a personal and working relationship with the Italian author Gabriele D'Annunzio whose symbolist scripts offered a new challenge and put her at the forefront of the new experimental drama.⁸⁸ The Hungarian public could see her four times in the 1890s and twice in the first decade of the twentieth-century in her every great role.⁸⁹

I assume that while the art of Sarah Bernhardt represented kind of old-fashioned virtuosic stage acting with a lot of professionalism, the natural acting and true to life attitude of Eleonora Duse brought the modern ideas somewhat closer to the Hungarian public.

The writers of *Új Idők* and *A Hét* regularly informed their readers about the actresses' Hungarian and foreign performances in their issues. *Új Idők* published a report in 1899 that the divine Sarah Bernhardt would come to Budapest supposedly in autumn and will play Hamlet in the *Vígszínház*. Because of this role, the writer calls her Madame Hamlet which name she got from the London and Paris audience after she had played there, and he express that it has to be affective, new and interesting rather than suiting to Shakespeare's ideas.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Helen Sheehy, *Eleonora Duse: A Biography*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003, 161.

⁸⁹ Eleonora Duse was in Budapest in 1892, 1893, 1895, 1899, 1904 and 1907. (Nyerges László, "Magyar Színháztörténet," 438.)

⁹⁰ Anonym, "Madame Hamlet," *Új idők*, 16 July 1899.

Eventually Sarah Bernhardt came to Budapest in October that year and made a performance in the Hungarian Theatre: her repertoire included *La dame aux Camélias*, *Tosca* and *Hamlet*.⁹¹ The Hungarian writer and critic Zoltán Ambrus made an interview with the actress when she was in Budapest.⁹² The tone of the interview is ironic, as Ambrus concentrates on the living conditions of his interviewee: he keeps asking about the actress's pets and mentions how busy her schedule is and they talk about other superficial topics. The reason of this familiar manner is because Ambrus and Bernhardt had already known each other for years. Ambrus wrote the first report about her performance in the 1880s when he was in Paris.

The *Új Idők*'s report about Duse's visit in 1895 notes that although the Duse fever on the stage is falling off, her original, multi-faceted and self-conscious talent is recognized by everybody.⁹³ "That is also a fact that we hardly know about anybody who had such influence on her fellows as this thin, pale-faced little woman. It is not a small credit to the Budapest audience's artistic taste that it regarded and can be said: discovered Duse's phenomenal talent already at that time when they hardly spoke about her outside Italy."⁹⁴

The writer of the 1899 review of *Új Idők* also spoke about her talent with great fascination. I find this article important also because while the critic expresses his opinion about Duse, he describes also her acting style. He states that "Duse not only played her character but she

⁹¹ The performance took place in the Magyar Színház in 16-19 October 1899. Koch Lajos, "A budapesti Magyar Színház műsora," 15.

⁹² Ambrus Zoltán, Sarah, *A Hét*, 22 October 1899, 711-712. Ambrus Zoltán, Sarah, *Pesti Napló*, 18 Novembre 1888., republished in Ambrus Zoltán, Színház, selected and maintained by Fallenbüchl Zoltán, Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1983, 56-61.

I will write about Zoltán Ambrus later in my thesis because he was an important member of the first generation of modernist writers and a representative personality of *A Hét*. Here I only mention that Ambrus studied law at the Budapest University then in 1885 he went in Paris. He came back in 1886 but he visited the city for several times in the following years, affecting his whole writing style by the French literature. He was the collaborator of *Fővárosi Lapok* (Capital Papers), *A Hét* and the *Nyugat* (West) from 1908. He became the play reader of the National Theatre in 1916 and the director of it between 1917 and 1922. He was a highly acclaimed critic of his time who was characterized by a high level of irony.

⁹³ Anonym, La Duse, *Új Idők*, 24 Novembre 1895, 392.

⁹⁴ *Új idők*, 24 Novembre 1895, 392.

lived them on stage before us.....She is always Duse in those situations which the writer presents her but in those state of mind as Duse were be if she were get in those situations. For example she is not Duse in the role of *La dame aux Camélias* or Cleopatra but she is Cleopatra or Magda as she was them in real life.”⁹⁵

The most memorable event of the two actresses’ rivalry was when Sarah Bernhardt invited Eleonora Duse to Paris in 1897 to make a series of performances there. Jenő Ivánfi wrote a longer report in *A Hét* about this event, describing the unfair attitude that surrounded Duse in Paris and he takes a stand on Duse’s art.⁹⁶ This opinion is the same that *A Hét* made two years earlier when they published a short review about a Budapest performance and named her one of the best actresses of the world. The writer of this 1895 article presented that the Hungarian public could see her in her old hits, in *La dame aux camélias* and *Sudermann’s Heimat* as Magda.⁹⁷ “She played with her daring simplicity and seductive charm....We abandoned ourselves to her eye’s talk that expresses her message more than the clankingly whirling word.” The comparison with Mari Jászai turns up in this article too.⁹⁸

I argue that the presented articles are important because they give important details about the reputation of these actresses in Hungary and they can help to form a clearer opinion about their art and their supposed influence on Hungarian stage. Ambrus’s interview with Sarah Bernhardt depicts a cosmopolitan high bourgeois lady who lives a glamorous life with

⁹⁵ She made an appearance in the *Népszínház* in 1899. The report about this performance was published by the 5 November issue of *Új Idők*, page 426. She and her group played Dumas’s two plays, one of them is *La Dame aux Camélias*, as well as she presented the characters of Cleopatra and Magda from Hermann Sudermann’s play, *Heimat*.

⁹⁶ Ivánfi Jenő, “Duse Párizsban” (Duse in Paris), *A Hét*, 13 June 1897, 387.

⁹⁷ Hermann Sudermann (1857-1928) was a German dramatist and novelist. He started his career as a journalist, he met with success for first by his short stories, which he published in few series of collections, and the first amongst them was *Im Zweilicht* (*At Twilight*, 1886). His first play, *Die Ehre* (Honour, 1889), was a great success and made him the main exponent of the new theatre of Realism in Germany. His most successful drama which he is chiefly remembered is *Heimat* (1893). It was translated into English as *Magda* (1896), and became a popular melodramatic vehicle for many famous actresses, such as Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse. (*The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, edited by Phyllis Hartnoll, Oxford-New York-Toronto-Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1983, 799.)

⁹⁸ Anonym, “Duse,” *A Hét*, 1 Decembre 1895, 771

pets which resonates with her theatrical style that connected to a historizing Neo-Romanticism. The critiques about Eleonora Duse concentrate on her acting style and how influential is she to her contemporaries. This context is especially significant because Duse's acting introduced naturalism on Hungarian stage.

The Hungarian Neo-Romantic drama

Béla G. Németh explains in the book about the history of Hungarian literature that a new school arose in Hungary at the beginning of the period of Realism, the Neo-Romantics, akin to the work of Nestroy and the Viennese *Volkstück*.⁹⁹ He describes that it was primarily designed to provide light entertainment to the new middle-class audience, which showed a two-faced image: on one hand it was a protest against the peasant life concentrating on middle-class problems in a light way, and on the other hand, the demand to depict a unique Hungarian 'exoticism' put the peasant life in the center, making possible to refresh the topic of *népszínmű* (popular play) and increase the popularity of the genre again. Therefore, the dominant theme of Neo-Romanticist plays was love with certain eroticism which introduced under the cover of myth and legend, and a light form of social plays which gave a voice occasionally to a shelter against the prevailing social hierarchy.¹⁰⁰

As G. Németh points out, the dramatists were mostly lower middle class in origin, more particularly from the newly assimilated German and Jewish groups who put the plays in remote and romantic places such as Spain and India and times like the Middle Ages and the Hellenic Age.

According to this, the Neo-Romantic dramas were the representatives of mass entertainment, not the elite, unlike naturalist and symbolist plays. Although a new type of

⁹⁹ My references are the related chapters about the Hungarian Neo-Romantic drama by Németh G. Béla in A History of Hungarian Literature, edited by Klaniczay Tibor. Budapest: Corvina, 1982. 313.

¹⁰⁰ Béla G. Németh, "A History of Hungarian Literature," 313.

play was born in the seventies that engaged with social problems and treated them realistically in the works in its own way (such as the socially sensible plays of Gergely Csiky), the *népszínmű* or play about peasant life was more popular.

The idyllic, pseudo-Romantic, half-operetta plays, the *népszínmű*, making use of singing and dancing, taking over the genre of “pleasant life” drama were exceedingly popular. They became almost a symbol of the common social illusions of different classes and made a revival for this genre in this period.¹⁰¹ I find interesting Lóránt Czigány’s argument relating to this context which he wrote in his 1984 book about the history of Hungarian literature.¹⁰² He describes that the problems of the middle-class were expected to be treated on the stage in both a light and a serious fashion, and amongst these performances the Neo-Romantic plays provided novelty for a time, taking over determinative elements from the *népszínmű*. He explains that the playwrights of this new type of plays carefully avoided genuine conflicts whether in a historical or a contemporary setting. They did not worry unduly about psychological validity, or characterization; their Neo-Romantic works took place in the same make-believe world as did the *népszínmű* in its later stages.¹⁰³ He also notes that “it is quite interesting that at time when social problems were being treated in fiction with varying degrees of realism, the majority of contemporary plays gave no clue to the society in which they were conceived. In an age when social problems were generally glossed over in public, the theatre carefully avoided confrontation with reality, significantly contributing to the sense of false security which prevailed in the pseudo-Victorian Hungarian society.”¹⁰⁴

A prominent representative of this make-believe world, as Czigány calls it, was Jenő Rákosi (1842-1929), an influential public figure and editor-in-chief of the *Budapesti Hírlap*

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 314.

¹⁰² Lóránt Czigány, *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

¹⁰³ Lóránt Czigány, “Oxford History of Hungarian Literature,” 256.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 256.

(Budapest News) whose impressive rhetoric made him the leading figure of the era.¹⁰⁵ He was not only a journalist, but also a stage director, and playwright, as well as the initiator and first director of the *Népszínház* between 1875 and 1881.¹⁰⁶ He met with success for the first time with his comedy *Aesop* in 1866 presented by the *Nemzeti Színház* in 1866, but it did not pass the test of time. *Aesop* became successful in that age, because it met with the audience's taste. But one can also observe that he was a talented playwright who could create lively figures and colorful dialogue; he also had a strong sense of tragedy (*Andrew and Johanna*).¹⁰⁷ As a director he had the great dramatic skill to bring new color and power into the plays with fantasy and profession.¹⁰⁸

The works of Jenő Heltai (1871-1957) are also connecting to the spirit of Neo-Romantics involving the perspectives of French bohemian culture in Hungarian context. He wrote plays, prosaic fiction, and he was also a lyric poet, producing various combinations of the French chanson, which type of song can be found in Heine's works, *népszínmű* and the cabaret. His works depict the hidden face of the life of coffeehouses, presenting the characters of these places with a kind of realism in that sense that they chase a mirage (*délibáb*) much in the same way as do their real life counterparts, as Czigány points it.¹⁰⁹ Already his first volume of verses (*Modern Dalok - Modern Songs*, 1892) caused a scandal and was declared to be immoral, because of the unusual frivolity of the tone and subject since nobody had sung about showgirls before.¹¹⁰ His originality can be found in the sarcastic, often biting free associations that were consisted of the lyrical situations of romances, the neo-sentimentality of the period, the grotesque poems, and the idealized

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 256.

¹⁰⁶ "Magyar Színházművészeti Lexikon," 556, 638.

¹⁰⁷ Lóránt Czigány, "Oxford History of Hungarian Literature," 256.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 638

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 284.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 284.

sentiments of the old-fashioned idealized sentiments at the same time.¹¹¹ Czigány argues about Heltai's art that although he had a cheeky tone that looked unserious on the surface, "his writing reveals human compassion behind the facade of flippancy, cynicism and grotesque humor."¹¹² Later he became an excellent author of the cabaret because of his special ability to write light satirical verses. Although Heltai's characters were the protagonists of low, popular culture, its literary value enabled them to appear on the pages of *A Hét*, which gives him recognition and helped him become a valued member of the editorial board.

¹¹¹ Béla G. Németh, "A History of Hungarian Literature," 325-326.

¹¹² Lóránt Czigány, "Oxford History of Hungarian Literature," 284.

The Hungarian literary tendencies according to the circle of *A Hét* and *Új Idők*

I presented previously that *A Hét* and *Új Idők* published reviews regularly about theatre performances in Budapest which told about the dramatization of the pieces of Western and Hungarian literature. These critics shaped public view about these productions and foreign literature, but they were also playwrights themselves, the representatives of Hungarian literary modernization who could mediate the new ideas to the readers through their own dramas. The periodicals regularly published their novels and short stories, thus the reader could see the international works and the Hungarian dramas side by side, thus setting a full image. However, the magazine editors' taste and the writers determined which plays got a place in the journal. Thus to understand the influence of these periodicals, I will analyze the writers of *A Hét* and *Új Idők*.

I will analyze the writers, stressing which journal they were engaged with, because although there were overlaps in the writers' circles of the two magazines, the spirit of the articles and the basic members of the writing-editing groups created a well-defined character for the journals. Therefore this analysis can contribute on one hand an overall picture about Hungarian literary tendencies, on the other hand to identifying the spirit of the periodical and their role in modernization. Because of the overlaps between the two magazines' creators, I present those writers in the case of *A Hét* who were introduced as inner colleagues of the journal: József Kiss, Tamás Kóbor, Zoltán Ambrus.

I start with the founder of *A Hét*, József Kiss, who was a writer and a poet himself, but his contribution to the history of literature as the founder of this literary journal is more important than his writing oeuvre. The only significant element of his poetry, as Arnold Schöpflin points out, is that he put the problems of conservative rural Jewry in the center of his ballads who lived their life according to traditional rules. More precisely, he chose those

problems as the subject of his tragedies which originated from the interrelations of Jewish and Christian lifestyles.¹¹³ He was the first to show the problems of assimilation of Jewry from this tragic perspective, unlike the former caricaturist representation.

Kiss started *A Hét* in 1889 with his young fellows with the vocation “for a public who does not yet exist with those writers who only will be.” Dorottya Lipták describes this sentence in her 2002 study about the journal, and explains that this sentence hides that purpose which advances the fin-de-siècle modernity for its readers which unite the demand to closing up to the European cultural capitals with the unhidden love of Budapest.¹¹⁴

Czigány describes that after some initial financial difficulties in the founding; *A Hét* established itself as a leading literary journal. Czigány notes that the weekly was edited without a political viewpoint, the profile was moulded by the needs of the readership, thus the leading articles were written by convinced socialists and conservative writers alike, but since the spirit of the journal was freer than other ones, it attracted mainly the liberal writers. The readership consisted predominantly of middle-class people, and the contributors worked under the influence of French culture, propagating enthusiastically the contemporary European literature.¹¹⁵ Another feature of *A Hét* was that it showed little interest in rural matters and the problems of the peasantry. I find that Lipták’s words about *A Hét*, calling it “the paper of urban poetry” is really telling.¹¹⁶

Schöpflin underlines the important aspect in his book that it seems that the main protagonists of literary modernization were from the community of assimilated Jews, and

¹¹³ Schöpflin Aladár, *A magyar irodalom története a XX. században* (The History of Hungarian Literature in the XX. century). Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1990 (first publishing: 1937), 56.

¹¹⁴ Lipták Dorottya, “A Hét – a városi poézis lapja” (The Week – the paper of urban poetry) , In *Újságok és újságolvasók Ferenc József korában: Bécs-Budapest-Prága* (Newspapers and readers in the time of Franz Joseph: Vienna-Budapest-Prague), 88-95, Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2002, 88.

¹¹⁵ Lóránt Czigány, “Oxford History of Hungarian Literature,” 280.

¹¹⁶ Lipták Dorottya, “A Hét – a városi poézis lapja,” 88-95.

the world view of this middle-class marched to the Hungarian literature this way, and the other professionals from traditional Hungarian family background only accompanied.¹¹⁷ This context becomes more interesting if I include Schöpflin's further remarks that although *A Hét's* contributors were Jews, a particularly Jewish flavor was provided only by Tamás Kóbor who came from the same lower-middle-class background as the editor. I argue that the reason was that they were second generation assimilated Jews and Jewishness was not determinant in their identity. They grew up in the city, and the major aspect was in their life that they are part of this urban community and reflected on the overall problems of the Hungarian society.

Thus, the only exception was Tamás Kóbor (1867-1924) who I mentioned previously relating to one of his reviews, but his oeuvre as a writer is also significant. Czigány described him as a prolific writer who ambitiously portrayed the monotonous daily life of the Budapest lower classes. His heroes represent the same layer of the society as Kiss's works, only in an urban environment. He was a naturalist writer who brought something new to literature with the topic of Jews living an urban life as the new feature of the big city. Those people became his heroes who lived in the poverty created by the sudden industrial growth of the Hungarian capital; they are often workers without prospects. He wrote about the conflict between conservative fathers and their modern sons, as well as the painful process of breaking out of ghetto and the fight of Jews against racial and religious prejudices in his 1911 novel, *Out of the Ghetto*.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Schöpflin Aladár, "A magyar irodalom története a XX. században," 56.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 94.; Lóránt Czigány, "Oxford History of Hungarian Literature," 280

Zoltán Ambrus

The two leading writers of *A Hét* were Zoltán Ambrus and Sándor Bródy, both of them working also for *Új idők*, creating a strong connection between the two journals. Zoltán Ambrus' novels such as *Giroflé és Girofla* (*Girofle and Girofla*, 1901) and *Midas király* (*King Midas*, 1906) were published by *Új Idők* in a series, *A Hét* published some of his short stories, and his theatre criticism came out in both places. Thus, one can see that although he was an inner member of *A Hét*, he was also present on the pages of *Új Idők* at the same time, proving that these circles were not separated from each other. The French school made a vital impact on him which he got acquainted with on his first trip to Paris in 1885-86, keeping the works of these authors as a literary ideal in his whole life. The basis of his thinking relied upon Taine's ideas and Positivism, "what was colored pessimistic by his sensitivity and disappointment with life."¹¹⁹ As Schöpflin described, his literary ideals were also the French dramatists, he recognized the talent of Ibsen, but he did not like him, the German naturalists and the art of George Bernard Shaw was alien for him, his method stood closer to Flaubert and Maupassant. Completing Schöpflin's previous explanation, I also mention the works of Anatole France as inspiration, since the literary historians also compared Ambrus's works to this French writer as Béla Németh G. presented it.¹²⁰

Ambrus's works usually set in the world of the middle and upper-middle classes, but he wrote also about the artists' life in his well-appreciated novels: *Midas király* and *Giroflé és Girofla*.¹²¹ *Midas király* depicts the story of a painter, adopting different styles in the various parts: the first half is naturalistic with a detailed background; the second one is more impressionistic.¹²² The story of *Giroflé és Girofla* is set in Bácska County and tells the story

¹¹⁹ Schöpflin Aladár, "A magyar irodalom története a XX. században" 97.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 97, 99; Németh G. "A History of Hungarian Literature," 310.

¹²¹ Németh G., "A History of Hungarian Literature," 311.

¹²² Németh G., "A History of Hungarian Literature," 311; Lóránt Czigány, "Oxford History of Hungarian Literature," 282.

of a passionate middle-class young man who fall in love with an actress, but this affair leads to a miserable end. However the real main protagonist of this novel is theatre-acting in the country-side, depicting Ambrus's true passion for the theatre.

Béla Németh G. notes that many critics accused him of emotional tepidness and cool intellectual analysis.¹²³ Indeed Ambrus was not interested in exact social questions, but Schöpflin's words reveal the real nature of his attitude about describing the human personalities. Schöpflin describes that he liked to see the people as they saw themselves in a mirror, in the game of their feelings, in their sufferings, loves and thrills, their relations to life and death, being realistic in this way.¹²⁴ Czigány verifies these words when he explains that Ambrus did not excel in descriptions, and the traditional elements of Hungarian prose about colorful story-telling and anecdote are missing in his stories, but

“his development of plot and his unfolding of character through lively dialogues counterbalanced his ostensible shortcomings in description....While the dialogues of *Midas király* are lively and carry the rhythm of action and convey the writer's message convincingly, *Giroflé és Girofla* proves that behind the façade of light composition there is Ambrus's profound knowledge of human nature and his intellectual disposition to philosophize.”¹²⁵

According to these statements I assume that Ambrus's naturalism lies not in a strict depiction of outer characteristics of a personality or stereotypes, but in his capability to describe the real inner personality of his characters.

The tone of Ambrus's theatre criticism is elegant but carries irony, as I described in the case of his interview with Sarah Bernhardt, but his perspective was always clearly literary. His reports about the opening of the *Vígszínház* were also well-fitted to his engagement with French culture, since this institution focused on the French type of entertainment in many

¹²³ Németh G., “A History of Hungarian Literature,” 311.

¹²⁴ Schöpflin “A magyar irodalom története a XX. században” 98-99.

¹²⁵ Czigány, “Oxford History of Hungarian Literature,” 282-283.

perspectives, such as the layer of public that frequently visited it. I find that he expressed this commitment also in the report about the opening performance, because he notes that the audience got so much under the influence of the presented play that they started shouting, “Paris! Paris!,” and I find that the meaning of this comment that the public thought that it was such a performance that it would stand its ground on the stages of the French capital too.¹²⁶ Ambrus was not only a theatre critic but a play-reader and the director of the *Nemzeti Színház* from 1917 to 1922.

Similarly to the previously analyzed foreign dramatists, in whose work naturalism was only one stage, there are Hungarian writers who wrote in a style that carried some elements of this tendency but did not base their whole oeuvre on that. This was the case for the great classic of Hungarian novel, Géza Gárdonyi whose 1901 drama, *A bor* (The Wine) shows elements of naturalist spirit in the sense that he depicted the real world of peasants without the *népszínmű*’s romantic idealization. But Gárdonyi’s other works was not characterized by naturalism specifically.

The naturalism of Sándor Bródy

A special kind of naturalism appears in the most popular genre of the first period of Hungarian realism, the short-story, objective in attitude and concerned with social conditions. The two most successful writers of this genre were Zoltán Ambrus and Sándor Bródy. Ambrus’s short stories also represented a high value and were successful but the greater significance of Sándor Bródy in this field is apparent.¹²⁷

In addition to Bródy’s oeuvre and the increasing popularity of short stories, I find it important to include another aspect related to a relatively new phenomenon in Hungary,

¹²⁶ Ambrus Zoltán, “A Vígszínház,” *Új idők*, 25 October 1896, 357.

¹²⁷ Németh G., “A History of Hungarian Literature,” 315.

although it was already a well-established institution in Western countries. This was the time of the emergence of the new type of official playwright in Hungary; they were a new kind of short-story writers who made their plays especially to be performed in the theatre, writing directly in a form that fitted to this medium. Most of these plays were adaptations of their short stories.¹²⁸ I argue that the emergence of this type of writer was related to the transformation of theatre productions in the 1880s-1890s, and the impact of modern tendencies, such as naturalism.

Bródy's works influenced by Zola's naturalism made him a well-appreciated writer at the turn-of-the-century. He made his name with a collection of short stories (*Szegénység - Poverty*, 1884), whose style that originated from the ideology of naturalism shocked the public, especially his female characters' admission of sexual desires, even the middle-class mothers.¹²⁹ This choice of subject draws him close to the German and Scandinavian naturalist writers, starting the Hungarian tendency of socially critic naturalism, although Bródy's dramas also contained the elements of French drawing room drama and the Hungarian *népszínház*.¹³⁰ I find that Schöpflin's descriptions interestingly sums up the style of Bródy, although it makes visible Schöpflin's aptitude to poetry. Thus he writes,

“Bródy thought himself naturalist, but he was Romantic by his nature. He was hesitated between opposite ideas in all of his life. He wanted to conform to the Hungarian taste but his inner emotions made him in opposite standing with the public opinion. There was a commitment to social responsibility in him, but there was not enough responsibility over himself and his art; the discipline and persistence of art were missing in him.”¹³¹

Czigány's words underpin these statements when he says that “Bródy was a born rebel, yet never espoused any of the fashionable political creeds: his rebellious nature longed for an ultimate reconciliation between reckless desires and lofty ideals, as the young Bródy had

¹²⁸ Ibid., 315.

¹²⁹ Czigány, “Oxford History of Hungarian Literature,” 280.

¹³⁰ Rózsa Kocsis, „Igen és Nem,” 14.; Németh G., “A History of Hungarian Literature,” 315.

¹³¹ Schöpflin “A magyar irodalom története a XX. században” 96.

attempted to reconcile Jókai's romantic idealism with the blunt naturalism of Zola."¹³² Thus I assume that Bródy's style was contradictory: he wanted to unite the Romantic taste and Hungarian literary traditions to satisfy the public's taste but he was well-aware of the important tendencies of contemporary drama, and the social problems of Hungary which he had to present in his dramas to make contemporary works of art.

His two most important works *A dada* (*Nanny*, 1902) and *A tanítónő* (*The Schoolmistress*, 1908) are well illustrating this conflicting character. *The Nanny* was adapted from Bródy's previous work, *Nursemaid Elizabeth* (1900-1901), depicting the tragedy of a servant girl, who comes up to the capital, after a boy from upper class seduces her, give life to a baby, then sells the girl to a middle-class family who abuse her and her innocence, revealing the low morale and depravity of the upper classes and the humiliation of poverty. Eventually the circumstances force the girl to leave her job and that leads to a tragic end.

Ignotus wrote a review about this play in *A Hét* right before the premiere.¹³³ He praises Bródy's truthfulness and states that he does not know a man who could lie less than Bródy or Eleonora Duse. He describes that the writer always has to be ready because he could never know what grabs his attention, since true life has to define drama not taste; social conditions define the real playwright's work. I find this means that recognizing the real problems of society and reacting to them creates the mission of the playwright. Ignotus explains that the social specificity in Hungary is the middle class and Bródy voices them in a great manner and form. I believe that these lines not only present Bródy's play but also the world view of Ignotus, who became the leader of modernization at the beginning of the next century.

¹³² Czigány, "Oxford History of Hungarian Literature," 280.

¹³³ Ignotus, "A dada." *A Hét*, 19 January 1902, 47-49.

In contrast to Ignotus's enthusiasm, *A dada* did not find a good response, already Ignotus wrote that the audience would not be happy if they saw the dark side of their own life from the stage, and the public response verified his intuition. Lóránt Czigány explained it that the middle-class viewers were not over-enthusiastic to watch a play, which accused them of corrupting the country girls who were babysitting and ironing for them while they spent the evening in the theatre.¹³⁴

The story of *A Tanítónő* (*The Schoolmistress*) was different from *A dada*, although the subject was similar. The main protagonist is a young teacher who arrives in a country village full of true ideologies about educating the poor children and showing them the world, but her work becomes impossible when she gets in a struggle for profession and love against the official and ecclesiastical authorities who control the distribution of her teaching post.¹³⁵ The play turned the public's attention to the case of those young girls who tried to get on in life without fortune and some powerful relative, as well as to the new independent educated woman who wanted to live on her own work. The modern rebel woman who tried to break out of traditions and demands her own right was a true naturalist's subject.¹³⁶

Nevertheless, this play was also corrupted by Bródy's aim to correspond to public taste, writing two endings to this drama: one was tragic, in accordance with the logic of the play; the other was a happy ending designed to please the public, which practice he continued also in his other writings. Thus on one hand he describes an important issue and on the other hand he wants to meet the expectations. Czigány describes that he combined both solutions more often, usually at the expense of the inherent dramatic conflict of the play.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Czigány, "Oxford History of Hungarian Literature," 281.

¹³⁵ Németh G., "A History of Hungarian Literature," 315.

¹³⁶ Kocsis Rózsa, „Igen és Nem” 15.

¹³⁷ Czigány, "Oxford History of Hungarian Literature," 281.

The contrast of the subject's seriousness and the play's romantic form was reflected in *A Hét's* review.¹³⁸ The writer starts his text as if he would tell the fairy-tale of Sleeping Beauty, describing that the success in that year was sleeping in the Hungarian theatres, and nothing could wake it up, until Bródy's play. Then he starts to detail this play's naturalism, stating that there was no more Hungarian play since Gárdonyi's *A bor* in the theatres, but immediately describes the nice and naïve Romantic which radiates from the main protagonist girl, stating that she puts one into a mood for story-telling. He also perceives this duality when he writes: "the whole stage breathes back the air of the village, mixing the substance of naturalism with the form of tale-play."¹³⁹

I find important to mention shortly another writer who represented a similar kind of naturalism, as Bródy. Zoltán Thury (1870-1906) was also a short story writer, but he died in a very young age, thus he could not draw up a whole mature writing oeuvre but his few writings represented a vehemence and conscious engagement to the problems of poor people and working class. His two most significant drama, are *Bolondok* (*Fools*, 1897) and *Katonák* (*Soldiers*, 1898). The heroes of *Bolondok* are unbalanced persons "who caught in dramatic situations in which passions erupt and repressions are swept away by uncontrolled fury, like in *Bolondok*."¹⁴⁰ He had definite attraction of extremes in writing that might be considered Romantic, for example he used harsh colors in the description of social evils in the world of urban lower classes and poor peasants. The same vehemence characterized him when he wrote about the conflicts of private life behind the glittering façade of uniforms in *Katonák*.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, instead of the Romantic elements in his writing style, his subject matter, which concentrated on the working class and social struggles, definitely connects

¹³⁸ N. P. (Nádai Pál), „A tanítónő” a Vígyszínházban („The Schoolmistress” in the Vígyszínház), *A Hét*, 29 March 1908, 205-206.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 206.

¹⁴⁰ Czigány, "Oxford History of Hungarian Literature," 285.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 285.

him to naturalism with a certain resemblance of Chekhov's plays. Consequently, he deserves a place among those writers who established the traditions of modern Hungarian short-story, especially because Ady and the whole radical wing of his generation regarded Thury as their immediate predecessor.

Bródy had a double presence in *A Hét* and *Új idők*, since the periodicals continuously published reports about the premieres of Bródy's plays, and he was the theatre critique of *Új Idők* for years. He started his own periodical with the title *Fehér Könyv* (White Book) in 1899 and he announced it on the pages of *Új Idők* in the 24 December issue, where he also summarized his goals with the new paper.¹⁴² This was a kind of literary periodical that was written totally by Bródy. It came out every month and went on for one year. I find the case also interesting when Ferenc Herczeg reported about an appreciative article about the success of Bródy's play, *A dada* in Vígszínház in 1902, and Bródy wrote about the premiere of Herczeg's grandiose historic drama, *Bizánc* (*Byzantium*) two years later, which I will analyze later.¹⁴³

The works of Ferenc Herczeg

Ferenc Herczeg (1863-1954) was the editor of *Új Idők*, a writer and leading figure of conservative literature from the turn-of-the-century to the 1930s. The publishing house Singer and Wolfner started *Új Idők* in 1894, five years after *A Hét*, positioning it as a counterpoint. The founder József Wolfner wanted to make a more conservative journal which stresses its national and gentlemen-like being, employing writers with a modern but basically traditional spirit. Because of these reasons he chose Herczeg's program despite

¹⁴² Bródy Sándor, "Fehér Könyv: Bródy Sándor havi folyóirata" (White Book: The monthly periodical of Sándor Bródy), *Új Idők*, 24 December 1899, 600.

¹⁴³ Herczeg Ferenc, "Bródy Sándor színpadi sikere" (Bródy's success on stage), *Új Idők*, 26 January 1902, 102; Bródy Sándor, "Herczeg Ferenc új darabjáról," (About the new play of Ferenc Herczeg), *Új Idők*, 1 May 1904, 421-422.

Bródy's plan who wanted to make a revolutionary modern magazine similarly to the *Nyugat* only a decade later.¹⁴⁴

The great achievement of Ferenc Herczeg is that he brought the figure of urban gentleman into the Hungarian literature with his short-stories. Those young gentlemen, who came from impoverished noble families, moved in the city, working as a civil officer and living a fake luxurious life; they were the urban gentries. In contrast to the gentries, Herczeg came from a different background: he was born in the southern part of Hungary, into a well-to-do, provincial middle-class family of German settler origin. He learnt Hungarian at school, but his Hungarian was not fluent even at the beginning of his literary career. First he became a lawyer, and he started to write in the eighties, first novels and short stories then plays.¹⁴⁵ He put the criticism and description of gentries' life as a subject of his plays, such as the *Gyurkovics lányok* (*Gyurkovics girls*, novel, 1893), which was published in a series by the *Új Idők*.

He regarded the gentry from a liberal, middle-class standpoint and criticized them, especially their frivolity and idleness. But the lifestyle of the upper class, filled with the elegant superiority of self-assurance and irresponsibility which he made visible through his didactic criticism also attracted him. After some time he felt embarrassed about this attraction, saying that he needed a close knowledge of the milieu in order to describe it. Nevertheless, this close knowledge was eventually so successful that in the course of a few years he became overwhelmingly popular, the darling of the middle classes and their first entertainer, adopting the central principle of the gentry that the national character was

¹⁴⁴Lipták Dorottya, "A magyar család 'Új Idők'-et él" In *Újságok és újságolvasók Ferenc József korában: Bécs-Budapest-Prága*. 96-100. Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2002, p. 96

¹⁴⁵Németh G., "A History of Hungarian Literature," 311.

concentrated in them. Thus, he became the champion of the gentry from being their critic and this was visible in his plays too.

Herczeg's first drama *A dolovai nábob lánya* (*The Daughter of the Nabob of Dolova*) staged by the *Nemzeti Színház* in 1893. Following this the *Nemzeti Színház* and the *Vígszínház* showed his plays in a row, with the most popular amongst them the *Ocskay brigadéros* (*Brigadier of Ocska*) in 1901. He gained fame in a wide-range and soon he occupied the liberal-Romantic role of "writer of the nation," which was followed by his historical dramas and plays about the turning points of history, such as *Pogányok* (*Pagans*, 1902).¹⁴⁶

The most significant amongst these plays is his 1904 work, *Bizánc* (*Byzantium*) which was shown by the *Nemzeti Színház*. The story of *Bizánc* tells the siege of Constantinople, the last day of the ruling of Constantin, the last Emperor of Byzantium; the plot is the story of one day when the desperate fight to save the town and Empire against the Arabic conquerors is coming close to its end. The story focuses specifically on the personality of Constantin, who had to see that his closest counselors betrayed him together with his people, and even his wife is no more faithful to him, while the Sultan gets the power step by step. Only a young, innocent Roman soldier and a handful of people stand by him. In addition to the story, it also depicts the moral dilemmas of the Emperor and the nature of betrayal in the behavior of his court.

¹⁴⁶ Similar type of historic drama like *Bizánc*, appears in Dezső Szomory's oeuvre. Dezső Szomory (1869-1944) appeared in literary spheres in a relatively old age, when he was forty, because he went to Paris in 1890 to run away from military service, and came back in 1906. Therefore his dramatic work connects more to the later generation of *Nyugat* than to the writers of *A Hét* or *Új Idők*. His first drama, *A nagyasszony*, (*The Grand Lady*) was presented by the *Nemzeti Színház* in 1910, and it was followed by a production of many short stories and historical plays tempered with subtle psychological studies of his characters (*Mária Antónia*-Marie Antoinette, 1913; *II. József császár*-Emperor Joseph II, 1918). He also wrote social dramas with echoes of art nouveau, such as *Györgyike, drága gyermek* (*Little Georgina, Dear Child*, 1912). After a promising beginning Szomory committed himself to the requirements of the commercial theatre in his later works. (Németh G., "A History of Hungarian Literature," 395.) Czigány finds that his best work is an autobiographical novel, called *Párizsi regény* (*Parisian Novel*) from 1929 which is leitmotif is the desperate loneliness and homesickness of the expatriates, including his own experiences in the story. (Czigány, "Oxford History of Hungarian Literature," 342.)

The contemporary press highly praised this drama and Herczeg's talent, calling him the reformer of historic drama. Bródy's critique about this performance in *Új Idők* details all the reasons that made it such a great success.¹⁴⁷ Bródy starts with the praise that it is very honorable for him to write about Herczeg's play because he has a lot of thoughts about it, that he is afraid that this small space will not be enough for him to record all of them. He gives a great laudation about this performance and claims that this is the first piece of the great new national drama.¹⁴⁸

Since my faith that Bizánc stands high above everything that Herczeg wrote up to this time, I had that impression right after the first act that a treason happens here: one of our fellows wrote the historic play by stealth while seemingly worked on common literature, the romantic drama, that kind of work which stands above the standard, (above) the greatest that we see from the greatest writers in our place.

Bródy thought that there would be a revolution in the theatre under the influence of this play, which is especially remarkable from a drama that is actually not about Hungarians. He considered that “this play open up all the conflicts of life from the simplest to the greatest, and captivate the public's attention to forget about the outside world.”¹⁴⁹ This horrifies Bródy because he starts to think that they (the playwrights) had such power in their hands. I find that line is the most thought-provoking, because it refers to Bródy's idea that the real mission of the theatre and these performances, whether a historic play or a naturalist drama was to affect public opinion, and they have the power to this. Furthermore Bródy declares that a new Herczeg was born, we can see the transformation and absolute emergence of a new author, while the old one also remained.

¹⁴⁷ Bródy Sándor, Herczeg Ferenc új darabjáról (About the new play of Ferenc Herczeg). *Új Idők*, 1 May 1904, pp. 421-422.

¹⁴⁸ The question of recreate the great national drama was a political and literary issue in Hungary since the eighteenth-century. The play of József Katona, *Bánk bán* has fulfilled this role for a long time, but around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth-century, several members of the Hungarian intelligentsia thought that the style of this play is too old-fashioned to be representative.

¹⁴⁹ Bródy Sándor, “Herczeg Ferenc új darabjáról,” 422.

However the judgment of posterity differs from Bródy's eulogy to a large extent. Rózsa Kocsis describes that Herczeg tried to make subtle characters and a complex spiritual and historic message but it became a punctually calculated classic drama which did not step over the traditional practices of playwriting.¹⁵⁰ Kocsis also describes that the contemporary press attributed a symbolic message to this work, which Bródy also notes in his article, and Herczeg admitted too that "he wanted to write the clinical portrait of a nation sentenced to death."¹⁵¹

Indeed, the play had a critical intention, because Herczeg, as the Member of Parliament and adherent of István Tisza's politics, judged the behavior of Tisza's dissident. He found that the Hungarian nobility dig their own graves if they do not support Tisza's politic.¹⁵² However *Bizánc* grew to be the big classic of that age, Herczeg and this play disappeared from the program of the theatres later, because of several reasons. On one hand their quality did not show a high standard, on the other hand Herczeg became the supporter of Horthy's politics and anti-Semitic ideologies in the interwar years. In contrast to Herczeg, Bródy's dramas have remained prominent pieces of the Hungarian theatres. The other noteworthy historic drama of Ferenc Herczeg from the later period is *Árva László király* (*The lonely King Ladislaus*) from 1917.

¹⁵⁰ Kocsis Rózsa, "Igen és Nem" 27.

¹⁵¹ Quotes: Kocsis Rózsa, "Igen és Nem," 27.

¹⁵² Count István Tisza (1861-1918) was a politician and prime minister of Hungary. He was the representative of the Liberal Party, the president of Hungarian Chamber of Industry and Economy, as well as the member of few companies. He recognized right at the beginning of his political career that the Monarchy will go in crisis and war conflict, thus he urged the preparations of these situations, made decrees to support the military, and demanded forceful measures against the dissident's obstructionist activity in the Parliament. He tendered orders against their activity between November 1903 and June 1905, at the time of his first office as a prime minister. He was against the workers and agraric socialist movements, and suppressed forcefully the national rebel of railway employees in April 1904. He dissolved the Liberal Party and withdrew from the direct political activity in 1906. (Online form of Új Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon – New Encyclopedia of Biographies, <http://mek.oszk.hu/00300/00355/html/>).

Kálmán Mikszáth and the rural gentry

I find it important to include the work of Kálmán Mikszáth in the context of the depiction of the gentry's life, because as Herczeg described the urban life of the gentry, Mikszáth depicted the gentry in the rural environment, creating originally the term of 'gentry'. I will not analyze his oeuvre in its totality; I only include his novel, *Szent Péter esernyője* (Saint Peter's umbrella) which came out on the pages of *Új Idők* in a series in 1895.

This novel was the most popular and perhaps the best work of Mikszáth, and illustrates the working of Mikszáth's craft in a fine way.¹⁵³ The story starts with an image in which an old Jew fixes an old umbrella in the door of the poor priest's house, where the priest's young sister is sleeping, while outside the rain pours down and he is thinking about the girl's destiny. The title of the novel relates to the umbrella, because the peasants spread a rumor about it which comes from an anecdote: they had never seen an umbrella before so they say that this is Saint Peter's gift to the girl which he delivered to her personally, protecting an abandoned girl.

A detailed review of the story is irrelevant. I only draw the attention to how Mikszáth could fill this story with the various characters of the real Hungarian countryside, and the rural gentry is the most significant in my analysis. The young generation of gentry represented by the character of Gyuri Wibra, who begins a treasure-hunt, because the boy's eccentric father put his fortune in an open-bank draft and hid it in the handle of an umbrella. As well as, the depiction of this boy, as he tells the story of his father, Mikszáth also reveals the older generation of gentry, not to mention the colorful peasant characters, the old priest and others. The boy constantly chases the lost family fortune, revealing that side of the gentry which Herczeg suppresses when he prefers to depict the urban life of these young

¹⁵³ Czigány, "Oxford History of Hungarian Literature," 236.

gentlemen. The real reason of the presence of these young men in the capital, because they worked in the civil service offices in the city, because they did not have a place in the countryside anymore without their money and land.¹⁵⁴

This is the real achievement of Mikszáth; he described the colorful characters and put them in their real environment, involving the modern social critique in the Hungarian literature, recording one significant segment of the world-view of post-Compromise Hungary. As Schöpflin describes “Mikszáth’s life-work is the document of the state of mind and lifestyle of the Hungarian gentile class in a permanent state of assimilating to modern urban life. Mikszáth’s Hungarian gentleman is the gentry who remained a landowner living in the country, coming to the capital only to do politics, his social culture is simple; the scenes of his capital life are the Parliament corridor, the party club, maybe a better restaurant.”¹⁵⁵ Mikszáth knows these people from direct experience, because he lived amongst them as a Member of Parliament. He not only included them in his novels, but also wrote reports and sketches about the life of Parliament, revealing the life of these gentlemen to the public. He was not shocked by them and their conditions, but laughed at them and mocked them. He was the true child of his age, the child of fin-de-siècle disillusionment.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 236. Németh G., “A History of Hungarian Literature,” 298

¹⁵⁵ Schöpflin “A magyar irodalom története a XX. században” 63, 65.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 62.

The paradigm change: the modernization of Hungarian stage and breakthrough of a new generation

The modernization in the theatre and literature which had started at the end of the nineteenth-century continued in the beginning of the next century. The writers who I presented in the previous part were still working at that time, such as Sándor Bródy who wrote his most successful plays, *A Tanítónő* and *A Dada* were still active. In these years the guest performances of Max Reinhardt and Eleonora Duse were continued. Furthermore, as I presented Max Reinhardt made his most influential debuts between 1903 and 1907 after he left Otto Brahm's company and staged his most influential productions by Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, Maxim Gorkij's *Éjjeli Menedékhely* (or *Nachtasyl - Lower Depths*, 1902) and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and brought them to Budapest. These productions were seen also another rising generation of theatre-goers who grew up on the parallel influence of these visiting performances and modern Hungarian plays by Zoltán Ambrus, Sándor Bródy or Kálmán Mikszáth and started to shape their own ideas about the theatre at this time.

In other words, alongside with the first generation of modern writers other social networks were born, that generation of young intellectuals who created the second wave of modernization. As Judit Frigyesi explained in her book, *Béla Bartók and Turn of the Century Budapest*, the appearance of this generation which was stamped by the works of those revolutionary poets, writers and musicians, such as Endre Ady, Dezső Kosztolányi, Béla Bartók, and others, continued the modernist trends of the 1890s, but their activity had a greater impact.¹⁵⁷ Frigyesi describes that the reason of this that the previous generation of modernists broke with the conventions of romantic forms, but their art remained somewhat decorative and light. Nevertheless the members of this new wave of modernism could build

¹⁵⁷ Judit Frigyesi, *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1998, 72.

on the achievements of their predecessors, creating an art that depth and power of expression superseded them.¹⁵⁸ Thus, the activity of the next wave of modernization was more progressive than the previous one, and concentrated on other perspectives of reforms. They could re-think the role of the theatre with the background of a modernist tradition, making new ideas in the relation of that which made possible that their ideologies and activity developed in an absolute synchrony with the most progressive trends of Western European reforms.

Frigyesi explains that this new modernist generation consisted of small intellectual circles, occurring without any formalized framework; they discussed their ideas among friends at private gatherings and around café tables.¹⁵⁹ The most influential person of these intellectual circles was Georg Lukács who became a radiating figure already at that time and founded the first experiment theatre group, the *Thália Társaság* (Thália Society) in 1904 with other young intellectuals: László Bánóczy, Marcell Benedek and László Márkus, who were university students at that time, except László Márkus who was an employed theatre critic. I mentioned him earlier, because he was the writer of the report about the performance of Maeterlinck's *Pelléas és Melisande*.

I argue that the achievements of Georg Lukács and his circle represented a special spirit which gave them a lead on a new kind of thinking about theatre and productions on stage. Mary Gluck described the sources of this new spirit in her 1985 book about Georg Lukacs and his generation, demonstrating that the modernism appearing in the works of these young intellectuals is originating from an opposition between fathers and sons, resulting in an alienation of society.¹⁶⁰ I find that Mary Gluck somewhat simplifies this generational break

¹⁵⁸ Judit Frigyesi, *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest*. 72.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁶⁰ Mary Gluck, *Georg Lukács and his Generation 1900-1918*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1985. 84. Gábor Gyáni also describes this theory in his 2004 book in the references of cultural

and one can see a more complex image of correlations and circumstances, especially because these young personalities did not turn radically from their traditions and environment. Nevertheless, I agree with Gluck that the attitude of Lukács and his fellows resulted an alienation from society, liberalism and bourgeois modernity in an extreme degree which was also expressed by their aesthetics and thinking about theatre and arts. I argue that this secession from the actual world, which Gluck determines as a total withdraw from a reality into an internal world of the soul, made possible to Lukács and the reformist of the *Thália Társaság* to create a distance from the well-constructed literary tendencies of their age to approach a new kind of thinking about the theatre and its mission. The aim of the *Thália Társaság* was to break with the national theatres' formalism and elitist isolation to bring new forms of dramatic works to masses. However I argue that their new theories were an integration of the existing tendencies of naturalism, symbolism and Neo-Romantics together with the fresh ideas of Western reform tendencies in the theatre. This combination made them possible to shaping new ideologies.

Another perspective is highly important in the analysis. The young university students who founded this experimental amateur company, Bánóczi, Benedek and Lukács were at the beginning of their careers. László Bánóczi studied law and philosophy at the time when they founded the *Thália Társaság*, similarly to Marcell Benedek who was a student at the Faculty of Arts at the Budapest University, becoming a literary historian, aesthete and critic later. The career of György Lukács was in a more pre-mature stage even in that time. He studied philosophy and aesthetics in Budapest, starting to write theatre critics in 1902 in the journal called *Magyarság* (Hungarianness) and *Magyar Salon* (Hungarian Salon).

modernism and identity crisis in the work of Lukács and his circle. Gábor Gyáni, "Cultural Modernism and Identity Crisis" In *Identity and the Urban Experience: Fin-de-Siècle Budapest*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. 218. I include Gluck's argument in my analysis because it was published earlier than Gyáni's book, thus he also refers to Gluck in his examination.

The Thália Társaság

I strongly argue that the early life of these personalities, who founded the *Thália Társaság* and started to reinterpret the idea of theatre art, proves that they made their efforts under the influence of theatre criticism of the previous decade. They were young critics and literati who saw modern stage productions from the lines of the audiences, initiating the greater reforms by drawing the lesson from these productions and their criticism published in the fashionable middle class journals. Therefore, the acts and achievements of these young men who initiated the first progressive experimental private theatre in Hungary and their background prove the significance of theatre criticism in the modernization processes.

Thus, I assume that the achievements of the Society showed a two-fold image which resulted from their aim to follow the traditions and constructing something radically new on the bases of contemporary Western ideologies. I find that the study of Zoltán Imre about this group describes several reasons of this dual nature. The author starts with the statute of the society in which the founders determined the two main points of their fundamental purposes: the first is to reintroduce of those old and new pieces of drama literature which are hardly presented by the programs of the permanent theatres. The second one is to do experiments to reform the actors' play and the tools of staging with new performances by the artists of the Thália.¹⁶¹

According to these statements the repertoire of the *Thália Társaság* set by the plays which the foreign independent theatre companies brought to Budapest. These naturalists, symbolist and secessionist dramas were also shown by the foreign visiting troupes in Hungary. The

¹⁶¹ Imre Zoltán, “‘Színházi reform-mozgalom’Thália Társaság (1904-1908)”(Theatrical reform-movement Thália Society (1904-1908) In *Alternatív színháztörténetek: Alternatívok és alternatívák*, (Alternative Theatre-histories: alternatives and choices) edited by Imre Zoltán, 141-155. Budapest: Balassi, 2008. The study came out in an unchanged version in the 2009 volume by the author's compiled papers. *A Színház színpadra állításai: Elméletek, történetek, alternatívák* (The Stagings of the Theatre: Theories, Stories, Alternatiives). Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2009.

texts of these plays were translated (or re-translated) by the members of the Society or their friends (except the existing translations, such as Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in the interpretation by Gyula Reviczky) and they wanted to introduce also new Hungarian plays. They initiated a competition for playwrights in 1907, giving a chance for a debut of the young Lengyel Menyhért who became acknowledged member of the theatre-world.

Nevertheless, the duality not only represented in the repertoire of plays, but also in their staging practice, especially in the activity of their leading director, Sándor Hevesi. Rajnai Edit points out that the critiques about the Thália's performances are not speaking about the solutions of the scenes, lighting and costumes.¹⁶² Probably they designed their own stage designs and costumes which could be definitely poor, and not worthy to the standard of the official stage productions. The author states that the financial account of the Society to the period between 2 November 1906 and 3 May 1907 shows that they could spend only a few crowns per premieres to rent costumes and properties, spending nothing to settings.¹⁶³

One of the reasons of this is that *Thália Társaság* was a small group of university students which was supported by Lukács's father and other friends and relatives, playing in small spaces with small stages, such as the dance-hall *Folies Caprice* where they worked in most of the time of their existence. However I argue that it had another reason which originated from the Hungarian theatre traditions.

Zoltán Imre describes a critic from Ignóty about Thália's production of Ibsen's *Nóra* which was published by the periodical, *Szerda* (Wednesday) on 7 November 1906.¹⁶⁴ Ignóty explains that the actors are present in this play as if the audience was watched them through

¹⁶² Rajnai Edit, "A Thália Társaság (1904-1908)" In *Magyar Színháztörténet 1873-1920*, edited by Gajdó Tamás, 536-550. Budapest: Magyar Könyvklub; Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, 2001, 544

¹⁶³ Rajnai Edit, "A Thália Társaság," 544.

¹⁶⁴ Ignóty, "Nóra a Tháliában," *Szerda*, 7 November 1906, 289-291. Quotes Imre Zoltán, "'Színházi reform-mozgalom' Thália Társaság (1904-1908)," 147

a key-whole. “The Thália perform this in a modern way, namely intimately, simply, not in separate roles, but make the protagonists to play as an orchestra if it is good, when sets to be one instrument.”¹⁶⁵ As Imre assumes, Ignotus’s description pictures Sándor Hevesi’s ideas about the stage correctly, namely the “the stage has to give the illusion of life, as if the stage would give life.”¹⁶⁶ *A Hét* also reported about the Thália’s performances, amongst them the two most informative relating to this perspective, are the critique about Gorkij’s *Nachtasyl* (*Éjjeli menedékhely* - Lower Depths) in 1907 and Schnitzler’s *Hagyaték* (Heritage) in 1908.¹⁶⁷

The reporter of the 1907 article, László Márkus, the co-founder of the Thália, focuses on the comparison of Reinhardt’s adaptation, defining the inspirational source of their production and points out the parts which the German company left out from the original text. He underlines the significance that the Hungarians put the drama with the missing parts on stage, because this gives back the original essence of the play, illustrating his argument with Russian examples. I find that one can estimate this as a foreword of the performance where one of the creators summarizes the characterizing ideas of the production, concerning also their ideological determinations. The other review about Schnitzler’s drama is only describes the events of the story and the quality of the original text with some notes about the actor of the main character, János Doktor who is not making his best in this play as the writer concerns. Therefore I assume that the critiques present that while an insider could write about their performance in an enthusiastic and detailed manner about one of the production, an outsider wrote only a note about it. Nevertheless, it is clear that both authors focused on the quality of the written words and how the performance adapts it.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 147.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 148.

¹⁶⁷ Marco (Márkus László), “A Thalia-társaság,” *A Hét* 3 February 1907, 76-77.; I.-i. “Thália – Schnitzler, *Hagyaték*,” *A Hét*, 6 December 1908, 796

Therefore, I assume that the contemporaries regarded the play's mise-en-scène and acting to be modern, but they were concentrated more on the manner of depicting the original text. Similarly to Hevesi's practice to subordinate the realist acting and the director's interpretation to the priority of the text is harmonizing with the tradition.

Imre argues that this ideology resulted in that theatre performance absolutely depended from the previously written word, the will of the director and dramatist, as well as the actor's dialogues. This resulted in that the stage hierarchy ruled by the text, subordinating the visual theatrical elements.¹⁶⁸ I argue that this circumstance was one of the reasons of its tremendous and undeniable impact, consequently that they experimented with new solutions in the theatre, but they did not questioned the contemporary text based tradition, resulting that its initiatives could adopted other theatres, directors and actors in their practice.

Nevertheless, there was another side of their experiments which are somewhat not recognized enough in the research of theatre history. Although as I mentioned previously that they could not spend so much money to stage settings and costumes, there were trials to synthesizing the stage design with the plays on stage. There were two premieres of the troupe when they called upon fine artists to make stage designs which could unite the visual depiction of the drama's atmosphere on stage: the production of Alma Tadema's drama, *A láthatatlan kormányos* (The Invisible Steersman) in 1905 and Gabriele D'Annunzio's *A holt város* (The Death City) in 1906. The scenes of the dramas were made by two young painters, Lajos Gulácsy and Ödön Márffy.¹⁶⁹ The stage designs of Alma Tadema's play was made by Lajos Gulácsy who represented a unique symbolist-secessionist style in his art and which he also adopted to this designs, suiting to the essence of Alma Tadema's drama. Ödön Márffy planned realist-symbolist settings for Gabriele D'Annunzio's play which was

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 149.

¹⁶⁹ Rajnai Edit, "A Thália Társaság," 544.

well-completed D'Annunzio's words. Although it seems that these stage designs remained only in plans and sketches, the aim to put these productions on stage in an artistic frame, resembling the presented dramas' atmosphere demonstrate the influence of the modern ideologies of stagecraft, familiarity with the initiatives of Max Reinhardt which they could see in his guest performances. I find possible that they also read the texts of Edward Gordon Craig who was the great reformer of visual image in a symbolist spirit at the beginning of the century. Craig started cooperation with Otto Brahm around 1904 but their ideas could not materialize on stage. Craig's influence remained determinative in the German theatre, affecting also the Hungarian reforms. Furthermore Sándor Hevesi and Edward Gordon Craig established a fruitful friendship and started a long correspondence from 1908 on. Hevesi wrote the foreword of Craig's theoretical work, *On the Art of the Theatre* in 1911.¹⁷⁰

Therefore, I assume that although *Thália*'s initiatives hold up to the traditional attitude of written text, they also brought a complex thinking about stagecraft which they unfortunately could not fulfilled at that time because of various reasons. Nevertheless, their idea to make a consistency between the visual image and acting on stage was significant and showed a definite aim to follow the Western tendencies and reform the Hungarian theatre in the meaning of the most progressive contemporary ideologies.

¹⁷⁰ Edward Gordon Craig, *On the Art of the Theatre*, London: Heinemann, 1911

Conclusion; the continuation of reforms and the theatre before the First World War

The thesis presented the early modernization of Hungarian theatre through the criticism of two weeklies, *A Hét* and *Új Idők*. These two periodicals stressed the importance of theatre criticism, and *A Hét* devoted significant extent for theatrical articles. I described the development of the theatre structure in Budapest from the beginning to the 1890s, the visiting performances of the contributors of international stage and the first generation of Hungarian modern literature, which was followed by a more progressive second generation. These modernization endeavors started a process in which the urban radical intellectuals became main protagonists. The specialization of theatres continued at their influence and the artistic experiments got an accession both in the permanent theatres, and in the newly founded smaller companies. Relating to the appearance of this new tendency, the *Magyar Színház* in Budapest changed its repertoire to a more artistic character.

Following the conception of *Thália*, new smaller companies were established, the two most important amongst them are the *Kamarajátékok* (Chamber Plays) and *Új Színpad* (New Stage). *Kamarajátékok* was founded by the actress Irén Feld in 1910 on the scheme of Max Reinhardt's *Kleines Theater*, playing the naturalist dramas by Strindberg and Ibsen. Being without permanent playing space, they worked in the small halls of *Várszínház*, *Uránia* and the *Academy of Music*. *New Stage* was founded by the theatre director Artúr Bárdos in 1912, producing the same repertoire as Feld and the *Thália*. I find also important that although the founders of *Thália* were a group of young theatre-goers, the follower groups came from the area of the theatre profession, meaning that it had a great impact on the theatre sphere. Although these groups existed for a short time, and their audience was a small elite from the public, they carried on the spirit of reform in Hungary.

The reforms and modernization were more progressive and visible in literature, which shows the contemporary importance of this field. This second generation of modernization is represented by the progressive literary journal, *Nyugat* (West), founded in 1908 by some of the writers of *A Hét*, such as Ignóty and Zoltán Ambrus. It is declared justly that no single event was more significant in the history of modern Hungarian literature than the first appearance of *Nyugat* on 1 January 1908.¹⁷¹ This opinion is proved by that the Hungarian common knowledge refers to the circle of writers before the First World War as the *Nyugat* generation. That is true, but I believe that *Nyugat* could not come into being without *A Hét* which gathered the most progressive poets, writers and critics in the previous decades who continued the modernist efforts until the founding of *Nyugat*. Thus, although I underline the importance of this progressive literary journal, which became the most important medium of modern art right after its founding, I find more important the decade which anticipated it.

The breaking out of the First World War and the dramatic effects of its events broke the progressive development of modernization in Hungary both on stage and in literature. The shock of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy changed the whole Hungarian society and artistic life. The writers and artists together with the majority of the society had to get acquainted with new circumstances and environment in which all known characteristics were changed. The whole country had to redefine itself and the importance of modernization movement fell into the background to wake up again only in the 1920s.

¹⁷¹Lóránt Czigány, "Oxford History of Hungarian Literature," 289.

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