

Copyright 2015 Pompilia Viorica Burcică

AMATEUR THEATER IN HISTORICAL TRANSYLVANIA
BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

BY

POMPILIA VIORICA BURCICĂ

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2015

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Keith Hitchins, Chair
Professor Maria Todorova
Professor Emerita Elizabeth Pleck
Associate Professor Carol Symes

Abstract

This dissertation examines amateur theater as an expression of cultural freedom among four ethnic groups inhabiting historical Transylvania, a province attached to Greater Romania after the First World War. By expanding on the current understanding of minority status in a nation-state, this study shows the opportunities provided by the Romanian government for local expression and unity. Through a detailed comparative history of the amateur theater of each ethnic group (the Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons, and Jews), I seek to show the degree to which nationalist regimes allowed them to create through amateur theater a platform for communication and cultural development. Unique at the regional level in scale and ethnic involvement, this artistic practice challenged the newly-formed nation-state and shaped its nationalistic response, but, at the same time, theater playing gave Romanian governments, in particular to the officials from Transylvania, an opportunity to act upon their principles concerning ethnic rights, which they advocated before the First World War. My conclusion is that, overall, they viewed the development of minority amateur theater in favorable terms.

Theater appealed to minorities because they could take an active part in their self-organization and could showcase their outlook on life, family values, social relations, and work principles in the public sphere. More important, on stage they could revive their cultural traditions and talk about their understanding of faith and morality on stage. The theatrical movement in Transylvania reveals the creative power of ethnic feeling, which, together with the positive attitude of the government, explain the widely popular, large-scale and socially all-encompassing theater activity. Thus, I argue that minority amateur theater is evidence that the minorities reconciled with their new status in Transylvania and enjoyed the cultural autonomy on their own terms with the approval from authorities in Bucharest.

Ultimately, this work argues the crucial significance of religion and the clergy for the creation of such a cultural environment. Religious feeling stimulated numerous initiatives in the public sphere among most social groups, communities, and cultural associations. Religious leaders encouraged believers and laymen to consider first and foremost the immediate social purposes of theater and its merits for strengthening morality, self-teaching, and solidarity at the local level. An appreciation for the literary values of plays and the virtues of spectacles and performances was rarely seen important among the amateurs, yet the clergy often selected dramatic works of literary value for inhabitants whose education was above the average, for example firefighters, artisans, and students. From the amateurs' perspective, theater served a conservative function, sustaining the continuity of social life and upholding the local choices of cultural development.

As a modern means of communication enjoying a widespread appeal, theater encouraged democratic practices such as the writing of petitions to authorities. The frequent contacts with state offices established a new relational basis, modern and democratic, between minority elites and communities and the Romanian state. Thus, amateur theater is a key element for understanding minority politics, the local life in the region, and the vibrant ethnic feeling that animated it.

Acknowledgements

I thank Professor Keith Hitchins for his great devotion in guiding me throughout the years as an adviser and research mentor. His love for history and teaching and his unique human qualities never cease to impress me and make me value even more our daily conversations. My committee members stood by me with patience and encouragements and gave me valuable suggestions to improve my dissertation. The Department of History at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign supported my pre-dissertation and dissertation research for twelve months and gave me the opportunity of working as a teaching assistant for five years and as an editorial assistant at *Slavic Review* for a year.

My history instructors in high school, Vasile Păsăilă and Radu Homer of Bucharest, deserve my entire gratitude. At the School of Archive Sciences, Ștefan Ștefănescu, Bodgan Murgescu, Ioan Scurtu, Constantin Burac, and Olga Cicanci taught me history with passion. During my MA studies in Cincinnati, Thomas Sakmyster, James M. Murray, Barbara N. Ramusack, and Maura O'Connor generously helped me adapt to the rigors of the graduate program in the United States. I owe the greatest debt to Professor Hitchins who steadily continued their work at Illinois as my adviser for the subsequent years. He indefatigably shared his vast erudition, teaching experience, and human insights with me and continues to guide my steps.

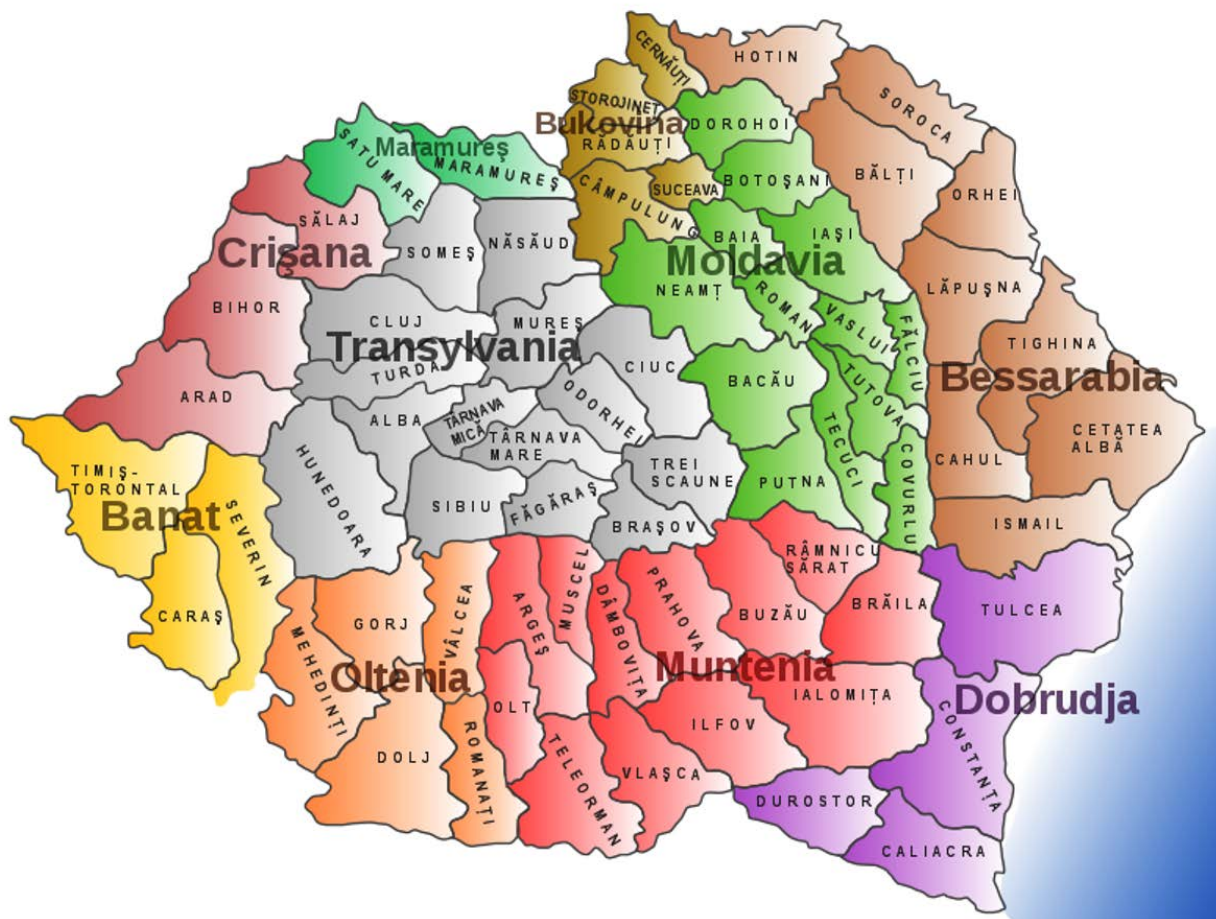
Friends and family members greatly supported my efforts. Zolt Bogdándi (Cluj) and Zsuzsánna Magdó (Miercurea Ciuc) helped me with encouragements and research materials and Ulika Segestråle and Val Martin (Chicago) with their hospitality and advice. Special thanks go to librarians in Urbana-Champaign, Budapest, Bucharest, Cluj, Sibiu, Alba-Iulia, and Târgu-Mureș, many of whom were recommended by Professor Hitchins, and to all my archivist colleagues.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, Irina, Mihai, and Kenneth, for their love and trust. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Zamfira and Gheorghe Burciă.

Table of Contents

GENERAL MAP OF ROMANIA.....	VII
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1 ROMANIAN AMATEUR THEATER IN HISTORICAL TRANSYLVANIA	28
CHAPTER 2 HUNGARIAN THEATER IN HISTORICAL TRANSYLVANIA.....	134
CHAPTER 3 SAXON AMATEUR THEATER IN INTERWAR TRANSYLVANIA	263
CHAPTER 4 JEWISH AMATEUR THEATER	361
CHAPTER 5 WOMEN AND THEATER PLAYING IN HISTORICAL TRANSYLVANIA	438
CHAPTER 6 FINAL CONCLUSION	446
SELECTIVE MAPS	464
BIBLIOGRAPHY	474

General Map of Romania



Introduction

After the Great War was over and territorial borders had been drawn based on the Trianon Treaty of 1920, the minority question in Greater Romania brought Transylvania to the close attention of Romanian statesmen. Legal controversies about naturalization and contentious issues about the collective rights of minorities resurfaced after the promulgating of the Constitution of 1923. Complaints abounded because the Constitution denied special privileges to minority groups to which they felt legally entitled. Unmoved by criticism of its legal policies, the Romanian state was more preoccupied with border security and internal stability and order. Authorities watched carefully for signs of cultural and political activities, knowing that minorities here would not wait for long to put into practice their organizational experience acquired over centuries as the leading ethnic groups in the province and prepare the revival of their prewar cultural life.

Romanian statesmen expected the development of minority cultural life as a sign of return to normality within the borders of Greater Romania. Both high and lower officials considered this comeback to be of compelling state interest and were willing to allow cultural efforts to unfold, but not the riskier option of constitutional rights. Successive administrations coming to power did not allow these freedoms of cultural expression on a permanent basis, but upon request at the onset of each new government, increasing the sense of vulnerability felt by ethnic minorities. Despite the latter's vigorous legal activity in the form of petitions requesting the legalization of cultural freedoms, their attempts at revising ministerial ordinances and laws to endow them with collective rights were rare and ineffective.¹ Far from ignoring the minorities' needs, Romanian statesmen in charge of cultural affairs after 1918 only made sure that minorities

¹ Marcel Varga, "Activitatea Reprezentanților Partidelor Minorităților Etnice în Parlamentul României" in Studii și Materiale de Istorie Contemporană, Serie Nouă, Vol. VII, 2008, 45.

enjoyed cultural self-determination under state protection. At the same time, they exerted a vigilant monitoring over all their work and activities.

The minorities resented the authorities' rigid stance toward granting collective rights to minorities, while it was clear to Romanian officials that the minorities pursued only their self-interest and not that of their host country. They noticed firsthand how minority members in the Parliament reacted solely to laws that could affect their ethnic groups and never initiated legislation to benefit the entire country.² The minorities proceeded to organize their cultural life and after the promulgation of the Constitution in 1923, Greater Romania witnessed the outburst of the most dynamic minority cultural life in a nation-state in the region.

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine whether minorities shaped their own cultural life in Greater Romania. To determine how successful minorities were in pursuing a cultural life on their own, I focus on the phenomenon of amateur theater in multi-ethnic historical Transylvania, because it illustrates best how the minorities understood the idea of freedom in a nation-state and applied it in their cultural life. For this goal I selected the Hungarian, Saxon, Romanian, and Jewish ethnic groups who lived in the small province of historical Transylvania for centuries, and whose rich cultural life offers a good starting place to study the relations they established with the Romanian majority in the newly-created nation-state.

First, I analyze Romanian state policies and the control of ethnic minorities in Transylvania and examine whether they were conducive to widespread autonomous actions in cultural matters or just isolated occurrences. How much did cultural life in Transylvania owe its success to the institutional policies of the new regime and how much to private initiative alone? How did various governments approach cultural diversity in Transylvanian society? Sources suggest that the Romanian officials allowed the widespread, spontaneous amateur theater

movement to achieve its own creative dynamics, but under their strict control. Yet, to explain the cultural diversity arising at the local level, one must trace the ways in which the local individuals took actions from within, grasped opportunities, and acted upon them.

Second, why did amateur theater supplant other forms of entertainment, and what made it so attractive that it persisted among inhabitants for years? Why did numerous communities feel deeply committed to theater playing? Seen against the backdrop of radio broadcasting on the rise and the relatively unsuccessful cinema exhibitors, amateur theater enjoyed tremendous popularity with all categories of publics. The fact that cinema businessmen could not steer the public away from attending plays has to do with the traditional mentality of the villagers, still attached to religion and local community and the theater's potential to convey of these values. I will show that, as a result of theater events and play selection, a close relationship ensued among organizers, audience, and participants, and between the local elite and parishioners.

An important means of transmitting ideas and shape cultural choices and mentality was the formal educational system. Since in most cases theater was used as an educational tool, theater playing proved to be more effective an activity that could complement rather than counteract schools and churches. Thus, theater events organized by the local, social and religious groups offer a better insight into the sort of ideas used for educating the public. Presumably in conflict, but not necessarily always at odds, schools and theater were the two important channels of knowledge transmission that influenced the cultural thinking of individuals in everyday life. It is uncertain, however, which of them played a larger role in shaping a cultural identity: schools or extracurricular activities. Sociologists have questioned whether schooling is a cultural phenomenon after all, and whether it has an impact on creating a national uniform culture.³

² Varga, 48.

³ Mitchell L Stevens, "Culture and Education" in Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 619, Sept. 2008, 99, 101.

Because of its amorphous and hard-to-measure character, formal schooling had a questionable impact on students' cultural mentalities. It also appears clear in works by Balkan historians who examined the failure of ethnic "fusion" by way of education that the imposition onto young learners of a new ethnic identity to replace an older one through textbooks and committed educators was bound to fail.⁴ As a spontaneous and autonomous channel of communication, amateur theater transmitted knowledge in an informal setting, reflecting the people's dispositions and their various issues in their lives. In such a setting, different forms of group cohesion mostly traditional ones emerged. Amateur theater history is one about family, parish, village, religious groups, peer groups, and communities.

An important lens to understand the cultural development of Transylvanian society is the synthesis of traditionalism and Westernization.⁵ Like the modern school system, the industry or the business world, theater was a hallmark of modernity proclaiming a European orientation. Transylvania, a former Austrian-Hungarian territory, presumably more modernized than other provinces in Greater Romania, was known for its other facet, one of deep conservatism and multi-confessionalism. To understand how this dual character shaped Transylvanian cultural life, I will explore the contrast between the social and religious mechanisms that gave amateur theater in the region a strong traditional character and the material and Western orientation of the professional theater.

Historiography and Sources

The story of amateur theater in historical Transylvania has never been told in a single work treating all ethnic minorities living in the region. Some references to early initiatives of intellectuals, businessmen, and journalists who attempted to spread a taste for theater playing in

⁴ Charles Jelavich, South Slav Nationalisms: Textbooks and Yugoslav Union before 1914 (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1990).

Transylvania are usual in most general histories of theater in Romania.⁶ Three main surveys focus on professional theater, but they only add scattered information about amateurs (who were in reality semiprofessional according to the standard definition used in this study).⁷

The amateur theater of historical Transylvania is not comparable to similar phenomena elsewhere in Europe, like the Soviet workers' amateur theaters of the 1920s⁸ or the Volkbühne in Germany (1890-1940).⁹ In our region, theater maintained its moral purpose and an educational function without competing with the school system or the professional and semiprofessional theater troupes for their resources. Although amateur theater strove to reflect modern trends by getting inspiration from plays performed in Europe, experimentation in arts was rather weak.

The issue of cultural autonomy for minorities appears in theoretical studies by political scientists and sociologists. They claimed that the absence of legal instruments for governing the ethnocultural diversity in the region can be explained by the psychology specific to minorities. Furthermore, such studies argue that a lack of trust between minorities and the Romanian state had built up considerably in large part due to the pervasive and inflexible nature of prejudices from the past.¹⁰ The topic of autonomy appears to attract scholars interested in minority schools and the role of cultural societies in addressing their educational needs. A survey of the literature on the Romanian state's centralized efforts to improve village culture through schools, libraries, and subscription to print matter shows that these revolved around the exertions of the public and private cultural societies led by intellectuals and not around initiatives to be started at the local

⁵ Keith Hitchins, A Nation Affirmed: The Romanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1860-1914 (Bucharest: the Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999), 20.

⁶ Simion Alterescu, Istoria Teatrului în România, 3 Vols. (București, 1965-1973), and Ioan Masoff, Teatrul Românesc, 5 vols. (București: 1961-1974).

⁷ Aurel Buteanu, Teatrul Românesc în Ardeal și Banat (Cluj-Napoca, 1944), Simion Alterescu, Istoria Teatrului în România, 3 Vols. (București, 1965-1973), and Ioan Masoff, Teatrul Românesc, 5 vols. (București: 1961-1974).

⁸ Lynn Mally, Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917-1938 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

⁹ Cecil W. Davies, Theater for the People: the Story of the Volkstheater (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).

level by ordinary individuals. In general, the amateur theater performed by cultural societies (which better fitted semi-professional theater) was initiated by secular organizers and did not make any reference to religion.¹¹

The focus on the Romanian Orthodox lower clergy attracted historians mainly for their role as social forces supporting extreme-right movements like the Iron Guard, but there was no sign of activity in Transylvania. Even in provinces where the Orthodox clergy were known to be legionaries their cultural role in promoting education locally has yet to be investigated.¹² Numerous studies on theological institutions (Seminaries and Academies) touched only upon the thoughts and activities of the higher clergy and theologians living in cities, giving little information on other ways of reaching out to villages besides missionary preaching.¹³ Works on primary education reforms are abundant for the prewar decades,¹⁴ but topics such as the impact of the priests' replacement by schoolteachers in primary schools and of the reduction or elimination of classes of religion in schools remain hardly discussed in detail. For the interwar years, studies on higher and secondary education in towns and cities and its impact on rural education are still to be written.

The question of minority status has been a topic of scholarship in works dealing with the Hungarians' efforts to raise awareness about their rights as a collective minority and to

¹⁰ Lucian Năstasă, Levente Salat (eds.), Maghiarii din România și Etica Minoritară (1920-1940) (Cluj: Fundația CRDE, 2003), 8, 16, 17, 18, 22.

¹¹ For a thorough survey of the cultural institutions and forms of mass education up to the First World War, see Maria Itu, Forme Instituționalizate de Educație Populară în România (1859-1918) (București: Editura științifică și enciclopedică, 1981). On cultural societies, many works focus on the cultural society Astra, see Pamfil Matei, ASTRA, Asociațiunea Transilvană pentru Literatura Română și Cultura Poporului Român (1861-1950) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1986), and Valer Moga, "ASTRA" și Societatea, 1918-1930 (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003). On Nicolae Iorga's Cultural League, see Ștefan Pop, Liga Culturală (București, 1943); on National Houses, see Casele Naționale. Doctrină și Realizare, 1916-1941 (București, 1941).

¹² On the role of the lower clergy in the Iron Guard, see Armin Heinen, Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail", O Contribuție la Problema Fascismului Internațional (București: Humanitas, 1999), 302-305.

¹³ Vasile Petrică, Institutul Teologic Diecezan Ortodox Român, Caransebeș (1865-1927). Contribuții Istorice (Caransebeș: Editura Episcopiei Caransebeșului, 2005); Eusebiu Roșca, Monografia Institutului Seminarial-Teologic-Pedagogic Andreian, al Arhidiecezei Greco-Ortodoxe Române din Transilvania (Sibiu: Tiparul Tipografiei Arhidiecezane, 1911); Vasile Popeangă, Gheorghe Lițiu (eds.), Roman R. Ciorogariu (1852-1936) Studii și Documente (Oradea: Episcopia Ortodoxă Română Oradea, 1981).

preserve a powerful collective presence in Greater Romania. Consequently, these studies examine how discourses of Romanian nationalism unjustly weakened the rights of minorities and marginalized them.¹⁵ Assimilation by a deliberate imposition of Romanian language and culture onto minorities was less intense a topic of debate or consideration in the press or public life as it was the assimilation of the Romanians or the Jews into Hungarian culture before the First World War. After the war, assimilation became a politicized fear in isolated nationalist circles, who perceived ‘dangers’ in cultural life and the arts. They turned these fields into sites of contention between the Romanian state and the intellectuals representing minorities. Due to its breadth and its all-encompassing reach, autonomy rather than assimilation appears to be a more fruitful topic of investigation. Only one scholarly article has pondered the degree to which Hungarians in historical Transylvania already enjoyed autonomy in their cultural life, but the main focus was on intellectuals, elites, and middle class individuals and groups.¹⁶

A comprehensive volume that traces the regional history of national theaters in Eastern Europe through documents pertaining to Romania from 1750 until 1900¹⁷ reveals the difficulties of ethnic groups in starting professional troupes or fulfilling their dream of erecting a theater building. The study of popular culture during the First World War has covered the province of our interest, Transylvania, where the flourishing cultural life was dominated by professional troupes and their commitment to enlist theater in the war effort.¹⁸ Theatrical creativity in Romania after the Second World War appears in the staging of older plays or foreign works.

¹⁴ Ioan Munteanu, Banatul Istoric, 1867-1918, Școala și Biserica, Vol. 3 (Timișoara: Excelsior Art, 2008).

¹⁵ Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, The Green Shirts and the Others (Stanford: Hoover, 1970); Kovrig, Bennett (2000), Partitioned nation: Hungarian minorities in Central Europe, in: Michael Mandelbaum (ed.), The New European Diasporas: National Minorities and Conflict in Eastern Europe (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press), 19-80.

¹⁶ Keith Hitchins, “Erdelyi Fiatalok: The Hungarian Village and Hungarian Identity in Transylvania in the 1930s” in Hungarian Studies, Vol. 21, 2007, 1-2, 87-89.

¹⁷ Laurence Senelick, Theater in Europe, a Documentary History, National Theater in Northern and Eastern Europe, 1746-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

¹⁸ Aviel Roshwald, Richard Stites, Jav Winter (eds.), European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914–1918 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Henry Popkin's article about theater life in East European countries reflects on the activity of minority theaters under the communist regime, which is outside the scope of this study.¹⁹

The Geographical and Historical Context of Amateur Theater

With the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the signing of the Trianon Treaty in 1920, Transylvania, a large area comprising four distinctive regions (historical Transylvania, Crişana, Maramureş, and Banat), was attached to the Romanian state known as the Old Kingdom (Romania). When it was united in 1859, the Old Kingdom was comprised of only two provinces, Moldavia and Wallachia; later it won its independence in battlefield in 1877 and was proclaimed a Kingdom in 1881, carrying the name Romania. As the First World War led to the breakdown of the imperial order in the region and the creation of a much enlarged entity, Romania was granted several adjoining provinces from the collapsing neighboring empires and formed Greater Romania after 1920. It was dominated by a majority of Eastern Orthodox population, ethnically Romanian.

Generally, Transylvania had always been multi-ethnic and multi-religious: the Romanians were Eastern Orthodox (34.8%) and Greek-Catholic (25%), the Hungarians were Roman Catholic (17%), Reformed (12.6%), and Unitarian (1.2%), the Saxons were Evangelical-Lutheran (4.9%), and the Jews (3.5%) were Neolog, Status-Quo, and Orthodox.²⁰ Since Transylvania is formed of four regions each with its religious, historical, and cultural specificities, this dissertation focuses only on historical Transylvania (Történeti Erdély), an area bound by counties like Cluj, Bistriţa, Hunedoara, Braşov and Trei Scaune. The inhabitants of historical Transylvania called themselves "Ardeleni," and their parishes tended to be poorer, so priests had to work the land like ordinary peasants. Those living in Crisana and Maramures

¹⁹ Henry Popkin, "Theater in Eastern Europe," *The Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 11, no. 3, Spring 1967, 40-46.

²⁰ *Recensământul din 1930*, 18.

called themselves “Ungureni,” respectively “Maramureseni,” and their parishes had, overall, a better material situation in schools and remuneration of priests.

Historically, amateur theater in the region was connected with social improvement and the broadening of the masses’ access to culture. Except for the Jews, the elites of the ethnic groups in the region all formulated and pursued the goal of mass education, but, in the end, little had been achieved. Many similarities among the Hungarians, Saxons, and Romanians appear in their cultural structures, and the profile of those involved (young people, women, artisans, and firefighters), as well as in the way theater life catered first to the needs of the upper classes and, later on, it trickled down to the masses.

In the nineteenth century, the state-sponsored actions initiated by Hungarian intellectuals and elites advocated the need for creating a culture that was inspired from village life. The theatrical culture was no exception, and although it appeared to many as a nationalistic measure, it influenced most cultural fields, especially literature. To modernize Hungary, reformers like István Szécheny (1791-1860) and József Eötvös (1813-1871) suggested that literature should incorporate and be inspired by native popular traditions.²¹ But such changes did not improve and much less open up access to education for the Hungarian peasantry everywhere in the empire, including Transylvania. Political stakes were higher than cultural goals as provincial Hungarian elites used the domain of culture to fight against the Habsburg rule and to extend their own autonomy. They did so by advocating the defense of Hungarian language and high culture, using professional theater as a battleground for political struggles.

The Transylvanian Romanians seeking to pursue theater for educational goals and social improvement found inspiration in the Old Kingdom rather than Budapest. The tours of

professional companies from Bucharest led by Mihai Pascaly and Matei Millo in the 1870s had an extraordinary effect on the educated, in particular the Romanian Greek-Catholic clergy.²² Aware of the superior theatrical traditions of their Hungarian and Saxon neighbors, whose theater playing created a stable and educated public in the major cities and towns of the region, the Transylvanian Romanians were quick to embrace European innovations, although the idea of a theater was premature. The Romanians were in the majority peasants who shared traditional worldviews with their Orthodox clergy and believed that first they should consider opening schools and building churches, the fundamental institutions for their survival. Not being a priority, theater in the case of the Transylvanian Romanians came to be a weak instrument for counteracting the Hungarian measures that stifled their cultural life, despite the support of the Greek-Catholic clergy and the endorsement of the relatively small Romanian middle-class.

Religion and membership in a privileged *natio* granted political participation and civil rights to all Reformed, Lutheran, Roman-Catholic and Greek-Catholic individuals of special rights and immunities. Only the Orthodox Romanians, be they educated, noble, or peasants, lacked political rights. They had, however, a stable organizational framework through the Orthodox Church and the Greek-Catholic Church. Recognizing the Pope as the leader of Christendom, the Romanian-speaking Greek-Catholic clergy in Transylvania accepted the Union with Rome in 1700 and, therefore, obtained equal civil and political rights with the other religious groups in Transylvania.²³

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Romanian Orthodox clergy led by Bishop Andrei Șaguna (1809-1873) was successful in gaining autonomy for their Orthodox Church through the

²¹ Paul Brödy, "Joseph Eötvös and the Modernization of Hungary, 1840-1870. A Study of Ideas of Individuality and Social Pluralism in Modern Politics" in Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series, Vol. 62, nr. 2, 1972, 17.

²² Aurel Buteanu, Teatrul Românesc în Ardeal și Banat (Cluj: 1944), 73, 75, 77.

restoration of the Orthodox Metropolitanate. Priests hoped to raise the cultural and religious level in villages and towns by building schools and increasing literacy and access to knowledge. For this goal, Romanian priests and laymen established a cultural society in 1861 known as Astra (the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People). Bishop Şaguna's success translated into remarkable results during his lifetime. His posthumous legacy further stimulated the development of the Romanians in matters of culture, press, school networks, and economic institutions, which empowered groups like intellectuals, journalists, and lawyers to make Transylvanian autonomy a priority as a prerequisite for further development. In 1863, the Romanians obtained the legal recognition of the two Romanian churches and that of the Romanian language as equal in rights with those of the other ethnic groups in Transylvania, a remarkable success of ethnic autonomy.²⁴ But in 1879 the campaign of Magyarization imposed Hungarian language on other ethnic groups, leading to the strong resistance of all non-Magyar peoples and an inter-ethnic alienation in the Hungarian half of the empire.²⁵ At the turn of the century, as the middle class replaced the clergy as leaders of the national movement,²⁶ participation in cultural events by and for the Romanians was officially outlawed. Despite the unfavorable legislation, Romanian intellectuals revived their social mission of cultural uplift in the villages. It was a means of counteracting the measures that forbade the use of the Romanian language in schools and public venues.²⁷

Also, they found bridging the gap between the upper and lower classes of society to be essential for preserving ethnic consciousness and unity. Within Astra, the middle-class young generation advocated the need to erect a theater building, to create a professional theater troupe,

²³ Keith Hitchins, *The Romanians, 1774-1866* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 248.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, *A Nation Affirmed: the Romanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1860/1914* (Bucharest: The Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999), 75.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, "Andrei Şaguna and the Restoration of the Rumanian Orthodox Metropolis in Transylvania, 1846-1868" *Balkan Studies*, 6, 1965, 20.

and stimulate the writing of literary plays in Romanian fit for the stage. They perceived both professional and amateur theater as central to their cultural work, being prompted as a pioneering enterprise designed to improve the Romanians' cultural horizons and provide education by cultivating on stage Romanian language and literature.

A prominent figure in Romanian theater life, Iosif Vulcan (1841-1907), advocated playwriting among amateurs, but, in official circles, he remained a staunch supporter of literary standards. As the Transylvanians lacked an Academy for sciences and literature, Vulcan was an active honorary member of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, and, in this quality, he examined plays by amateurs from all the provinces inhabited by the Romanians.²⁸ Playwriting came to be a more popular preoccupation among the Transylvanian writers who continuously submitted plays to the Romanian Academy of Bucharest for consideration for literary prizes. Rules of drama construction soon eliminated many titles that were submitted to the Romanian Academy from different provinces; still, their volume did not diminish not even when the war was in full-swing. During the prewar decades amateur theater in the region recorded sparse presentations of plays sponsored by volunteering intellectuals or professional artists, who hoped to persuade villagers to learn how to develop this activity on their own.

Besides the Astra Theater branch (The Society for a Fund for a Romanian Theater, the SFTR) and the Romanian Academy, both elitist institutions in vision and literary standards, other cultural societies like the Sower movement (Sămănătorism) led by the historian Nicolae Iorga were active promoting their own agenda. Sowerism followed a different line in drama, one which revived a focus on peasant life and the idyllic past.²⁹ By the onset of the First World War, this

²⁶ Ibid., *A Nation Affirmed...*, 101.

²⁷ Ibid., *A Nation Affirmed*, 207. See the measures of 1902.

²⁸ *Analele Academiei Române*, Seria II, Tom XXIII, 1900-1901, Partea Administrativă și Dezbaterile (Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Göbl: București, 1901), 394.

²⁹ Dan Smântânescu, *Mișcarea Sămănătoristă*, *Studiu Istoric-Literar* (Bucovina, 1933), 70.

initiative, too, had failed to open the access of the masses to theater institutions and much less to stimulate amateurs to put on plays on a large scale.

Similar to Astra, the Transylvanian Hungarian Cultural Association (EMKE - Az Erdélyi Magyar Közművelődési Egyesület) was founded in 1884 in Cluj. It sought to improve equal access to public education for all and to strengthen the Hungarians' economic life. Half a dozen professional theater companies founded by private entrepreneurs and sponsored with funds from the government in Budapest created a vibrant theater life in the main cities of Transylvania. Together with the Hungarian Theater of Cluj, they offered plays to a steady Hungarian and cosmopolitan public. The tradition of celebrating poets through recitals on the National Theater stage became a marker of the upper classes, involving the aristocracy and political and rural elite. One such example is that of noblewomen leading the EMKE City Committee of Kolozsvár. In 1898, they organized with the National Theater (A Nemzeti Színház) a celebration of the famous poet Sándor Petőfi (1823-1849),³⁰ poetry reading being the most favorite cultural event within the Hungarian (and Jewish) upper-ranks of Hungarian society.

Amateur theater was important for EMKE to fulfill its mission in Hungarian society. The organizers wanted to stimulate Hungarian elites and professional groups to write and put on plays for the masses, in the hope that the ordinary Hungarians would learn how to organize their own local cultural life. The regional impact of EMKE could be seen instead in the sprouting of many musical societies that emulated semiprofessional groups and even collaborated with conservatory graduates. While their shows displayed their semiprofessional status, these musical societies declared their official goal to be the promotion of amateur theater.

The EMKE employed pastors and priests in local educational activities, but, given the extent of the typical Hungarian clergyman's deep involvement in all aspects of the village life,

those who did not join cultural societies were as effective in organizing cultural life as the ones who were registered members. Reformed pastors intervened with Hungarian deputies to make sure that Hungarian-speaking Romanian citizens would not have military drills on Sunday, because it meant absence from church services. The Reformed clergy also took an active role in securing their parishioners' best interests such as finding employment³¹ and encouraging a sustained collective action among the local Hungarians. Close ties between all Hungarian groups shaped the cultural lobby and the cultural life at the local level. When the clergy showed interest in theater playing, the energy trickled down to the parishioners themselves.

Like the Hungarians, the Saxons also strove to broaden access to culture and theater, but the upper classes remained the main beneficiaries of a dynamic theater life in Transylvania until the Great War. The earliest Saxon interest in theater began in the late medieval period of the sixteenth century and it was European-inspired while targeting the upper-class urban bourgeoisie. Foreign professional theaters touring Transylvania had to deal with political restrictions, censorship, the dangers of fires, and an overall lack of an interested public. Martin von Hochmeister (1740-1789), a bookseller, printer, and publisher from Hermannstadt (Sibiu) became known as the owner of the first Saxon daily newspaper which featured the first theatrical review entitled *Theater Wochenblatt* (1778). With him, the idea of a permanent professional theater with local resources began to take shape, gradually involving the governor of Transylvania and the local authorities in Hermannstadt.³² Besides businessmen, high school students began to organize events of amateur theater mainly in Kronstadt (Braşov), the town

³⁰ A Közgylés, A mult. 1898. évi Közgylés Jegyzökönyve, 4.

³¹ Marcel Varga, "Activitatea Reprezentantilor Partidelor Minoritätilor Etnice în Parlamentul României" in Studii și Materiale de Istorie Contemporană, Serie Nouă, Vol. VII, 2008, 37.

³² Radu-Alexandru Nica, Nostalgia Mitteleuropei, O Istorie a Teatrului German din Sibiu (Eikon: Cluj-Napoca, 2013), 91.

where it first started and, later on, flourished.³³ At the turn of the nineteenth century, merchants and students in Lutheran theology studying abroad (Leipzig) became adepts at theater performances, visiting regularly theaters in the West.

Since German literary language became the norm among the Saxon elite, in the majority theatergoers, it was widely used on the stage. Using the language of the Habsburg Court encouraged theater life and highlighted theater's usefulness in integrating the Saxon upper-rank groups of Hermannstadt into the imperial social elite.³⁴ Even leading local clergymen like Daniel Georg Neugeboren (1759-1822), a Lutheran pastor and the director of the high school in Hermannstad, were advocates of the European German-speaking theater repertoires. Neugeboren admired professionals like Christoph Ludwig Seipp from Worms (Rhineland), who came to the region to work as the director of the Hermannstadt Theater.³⁵ Theater involved solely the upper classes and it remained aloof from the needs of ordinary Saxons.

In the early 1800s, Saxon intellectuals saw in the writing of dictionaries, history treatises, and works of literature the effective means of grounding one's identity in a strong humanistic and scientific foundation. For this purpose, the society and its review *Archiv des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde* (The Archive of the Society for the Transylvanian Ethnography) published in 1844 the first study of theater history for the Transylvanian region (1800-1838) by Pastor Eugen Filtsch.³⁶ The clergy's interest in the theater's uses for education was as old as the embrace of Lutheranism. At the turn of the twentieth century, the pastors were again the first to see theater useful for advancing education for ordinary Saxons and after the First World War they fully embraced it. Lutheran pastors were increasingly attracted to history writing, poetry,

³³ Nica, 46, 56-57.

³⁴ Mihaela Grancea "Conturarea identității transilvane în zorii modernității. Câteva consideratii pe marginea unor evenimente și fapte de cultură" in L.Stanciu, Ana-Maria Roman-Negoi, and T.Rosu (eds.), Reconstituiri Istorice, Idei, Cuvinte, Reprezentări. Omagiu Profesorului Iacob Mârza, 270.

³⁵ Nica, 101.

and widespread preaching, a powerful example coming from two important bishops, son and father: Georg Daniel Teutsch (served, 1867-1893) and Friedrich Teutsch (served, 1906-1932).

With the economic boom of the late nineteenth century, changes in social structures and social relations triggered rich cultural initiatives and shifts in mentality. The Lutheran upper clergy became aware of the need to organize public events in the Saxon dialect, which could strengthen faith, literature and language. Gradually, theater began to occupy the clergy's mindset and the people's expectations. In a move showing the Lutheran elite clergy's concern for the cultural needs of the broad masses, Bishop Teutsch himself approved and encouraged theater performances for the Saxon public in 1888. Following the example of the Presbyterium in Hermannstadt, Saxon pastors began considering performances of religious plays to celebrate anniversary dates related to the Lutheran faith of the Augsburg Confession.³⁶ Compared to the Hungarians, the Saxon literary advances encouraged by pastors had placed this group at an advantage because the writing of folk dramas in the Saxon dialect created the strongest local school of amateur playwrights in the region for the next fifty years.

The Jews displayed no interest in organizing professional or amateur theater for their own communities before the First World War. Partly aspiring to become assimilated to Hungarian culture, they formed a steady public for Hungarian performances in the theaters of the main cities of historical Transylvania, while religious Jewish communities only rarely put on the biblical tradition of the *purim-shpil* in historical Transylvania. Historians agree that, after the First World War, Jewish cultural life knew an unprecedented development in Körösvidék and Maramoros provinces, whereas in historical Transylvania, evidence of this sort was limited to a large city,

³⁶ Eugen Filtsch "Geschichte des Deutschen Theaters in Siebenbürgen" in Archiv des Vereines für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, Neue Folge, Dreinundzwanzigster Band, 2.Heft (Hermannstadt, 1891).

³⁷ Kultur- und Begegnungszentrum "Friedrich Teutsch" der Evangelischen Kirche A.B. in Rumanien, Zentralarchiv, Hermannstadt, Best. Plakat.

Kolozsvár.³⁸ In small towns, the Jewish cultural press after 1918 remained weak, which makes my effort of tracing relevant elements of identity for Jewish denominations dependent solely on sparse local dailies or private recollections of native Jews about their hometown.³⁹

None of the ethnic groups witnessed a movement of amateur theater under Austrian-Hungarian rule (1867-1918), but the roots of the interwar development of amateur theater may be found in the prewar period, when concerns about broadening cultural horizons with folk elements and enlarging educational opportunities for the lower classes stimulated writers to investigate and describe the village world. Discussions about the virtues of theater persuaded intellectuals to consider theater playing as an educational means, but the actual catalysts for amateur theater emerged forcefully after the First World War, and they were clergymen and churches who encouraged villagers to organize plays within and for their own communities. Rather than ethnicity, religion instead appeared to be a powerful, active factor that motivated and animated organizers and audiences to join in supporting shows of amateur theater.

Terminology

Professional theater denotes a sophisticated, civilized, urban, and an economic activity generally associated with National Theaters located in the main cities of each of the six provinces in Greater Romania. It is also associated with foreign or local private professional theater troupes. In National Theaters, the plays staged by professional troupes were carefully selected by the theater chairman and the members of the Literary Committee, from among titles of renowned playwrights and public intellectuals. The professionals were actors who served as state employees in National Theaters or in private theater companies and made a living solely from acting or running their own theater business, hence, their work meant regular performances.

³⁸ Carmilly-Weinberger Mozes (ed.), A Kolozsvári Zsidóság Emlékkönyve (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press: 1988) "Zsidók Erdely Magyar Kulturájában," 202.

³⁹ The Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem (CAHJP), Gyulafehérvár community.

Their income was taxable at the highest entertainment rate of 32%. Professionals were members of the Union of Dramatic Artists of Romania and could thus occupy leadership positions. They appear in the archives designated as *artists*, which had none of the broad meaning that we attach today to this concept. At the time, the concept of *artist* involved a superior level of talent, preparation, education, and prestige in the theater world. This status differentiated them from actors who placed economic gain above idealism and whose work was considered second rate.

Semi-professionals are typically individuals who make a living outside theater, but pursue theater playing as an avocation within not-for-profit institutions like high schools and cultural societies. They could be public servants (*funcționărime*), schoolteachers, instructors, priests, and individuals who benefitted from scholarships paid by cultural societies for their members. The incentive was to improve their theatrical skills and become *artists*. They were sometimes paid, depending on the level of involvement, responsibility, and expenses incurred, but generally it was assumed that they were devoted volunteers and activists on behalf of their society in which they were members. They tended to place a high importance on literary criteria when selecting a play, emulating professionals in all possible ways, for example, trying to borrow costumes and stage props from National Theaters in order to put on excellent productions. Since they put on plays on behalf of their society, their institutional affiliation and the agenda they served was made clear usually in the play poster. Their shows might not be charged at the highest entertainment rate of 32% as they tried to negotiate with ministerial authorities to obtain the lowest rate possible, that is, 10%. Their argument revolved around the moral mission they embarked upon. The students of the “Avram Iancu” High School of Brad in Hunedoara County⁴⁰ are an example of semiprofessional theater players. In 1929, they requested

⁴⁰ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 10/1929, Fila 64/12 Aug. 1929

that the Ministry approve their theatrical tour (covering three counties: Hunedoara, Alba, and Turda for a month) because it was organized for the purpose of collecting funds for their colleagues in need. The leader of the tour was their professor of Romanian literature. The tour was approved with a reduced show tax of 13% (not 10% as they had requested) as touring generally is quite lucrative. Also semiprofessional in its artistic work was the theater troupe of Astra led by Nicolae Băilă, although he organized numerous theater tours, and collected significant funds. It was semiprofessional because it shared with the professionals a concern for putting on plays of literary value on a stage properly fitted with props, lights, and costumes. None of these aspects could be found in events of amateur theater which might charge admission, but would not be required to pay an entertainment tax.

Amateurs were common people serving as organizers, actors, and audience, and seeking to improvise a theater troupe with volunteers living in the same village, town, and neighborhood. They could also be members of an informal society or group, parishioners in the local church, or villagers of different ages. They differed in almost all respects from semiprofessionals and professionals: the people's background, types of plays, location, the frequency of shows, and the purpose of their events. The local elite, that is, the schoolteacher and the clergyman with his wife, were sometimes directly involved as organizers, supervising rehearsals, or simply providing a moral guarantee and a noble purpose for the event. They made sure that the proceeds went towards helping the community. Plays were selected from contemporary playwrights, many of them very little known in literary circles. Their works were printed by commercial publishers who advertised the titles in their own newspapers. Such plays tended to describe places and locations that were familiar to the writer (villages, neighbors' houses, high-traffic local roads) and to the audience, rather than choosing foreign places that neither of them ever visited in real life. Rural worlds and village landscapes tended to dominate these plays. Characters were down-

to-earth men and women; they lacked class markers and were featured in plots that shunned ideas of smartness, intellectual criticism, and witty dialogues. The genre of the plays preferred by the amateurs was a blend between traditional plays and folk drama.

Amateurs used for their shows the term “*producțiuni teatrale*” (the diminutive of “*production*”). The audience was often referred to as “*ascultătorii dela tiatru*” (theater listeners), emphasizing the listening aspect more than its viewing, since amateurs had few possibilities to obtain or build their own stage props and costumes.

Sources

I based my research on archival and published sources, adding a rich documentation from periodicals. The documents from the Ministry of Arts and Religions/ Ministry of Arts and Culture housed at the State Archives in Bucharest were the most important for my research since they supplied a very large number of petitions submitted by individuals for play authorizations. It also contained ministers’ reports, press clippings, correspondence with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, and the Secret Services. This archive is the largest source available on amateur theater showing the overwhelming ethnic diversity of the petitioners and the open access enjoyed by individuals to the institutions of the state. I have used the petitions in this archive to generate maps for showing the geographical coverage of the communities, ethnic and the ethnic social groups who put on plays.

Since the Hungarian amateur movement was the largest of all, the evidence about it forms a vast archival body, including ministerial and administrative papers and documents issued by regulatory offices. Handwritten requests of Hungarian pastors, priests, and presidents of church societies or secular societies are specified in this study as ‘petitions’ or ‘permit requests.’ They represent this archive’s most original and striking products. They were incomplete, written in illegible cursive, and mixing a minority language with Romanian words, which made the task of

systematizing content slow. I content gathered from petitions fit into a table with rubrics like: organizers, Also, evaluation reports of Romanian theater inspectors working for the government who were in charge of the processing of petitions and the granting of decisions serve as a reliable documentary basis. Virtually all state reports followed an approved office template.

To understand further the motivations of Hungarian priests and pastors to put on plays, I examined their political efforts to obtain legal autonomy for the entire collectivity (like efforts to gain a place in local councils and a right to vote as permanent members in city halls), which, although unsuccessful, led to seeking other, more effective ways of accomplishing this goal: requesting state protection whenever Hungarians were exercising freedom of speech and assembly. I did research in the administrative collections of the main cities in Transylvania, in the Archives of Cluj and Târgu-Mureș, to see the effects that the failed political efforts had on Hungarian individuals, but rather than finding a connection between failed political goals and a thriving cultural life, I argue that pre-existing patterns of cultural organization better explain the thriving cultural life.⁴¹

Petition-writing is a legal genre, a communication tool with a narrative structure that reveals the literacy of minority citizens and their confidence to self-represent their interests in front of the authorities. Romanian statesmen, many of them Transylvanian, sought to strengthen the public culture in the newly-formed Greater Romania, hoping to modernize the bureaucratic and state system of administration. Petitions were legal privileges that helped create a politically-legitimized framework of public discours. On one hand, it enabled authorities to diligently supervise minorities through the Ministry of Culture and Arts headquartered in Bucharest and make certain that their freedoms were not infringed upon or affected the interests of other ethnic groups.

⁴¹ See the Law for Administrative Reform of 1929 and the Law of July 1934 denying clergy access to administrative decision-making.

Moreover, the paperwork they exchanged and the logistical matters they coordinated reveal the close contacts that theater amateurs maintained with the Transylvanian Inspectorate of Theater Affairs operating in Cluj, an offshoot of the Theater Department run by the Ministry in Bucharest. The principle upon which these bureaucratic structures functioned was that the interests of both Romanian majority and the Hungarian minority ought to be represented in accordance with the law. The only step of legal compliance that unfolded smoothly was the change of headings and form into Romanian. The active minority cultural societies kept content, mission, and activities, unchanged, continuing the prewar Hungarian cultural and educational goals.

Besides the large volume of petitions sent to ministerial and local authorities by the organizers, amateur theater continued to generate a wide array of documents, such as papers detailing church budgets. We find that funds collected from admission tickets to theatrical events were used for purchases of plays from the local bookstores. Other documents were the personal archives of important Romanian and Hungarian officials and professionals who monitored the activity of amateur theater: Emil Isac, Ion Manolescu, Octavian Goga, and Jenő Janovics. Biographies of priests, officials, and intellectuals expanded the research to bring insights about activities in Roman Catholic churches and dioceses as well as city administrations, governmental offices and agencies.

Petitions varied widely in form and content. If sent to Romanian ministries, petitions usually specified play titles, dates of performances, locations and purpose. It is hard to say whether they followed a ready-made template. But they form a rich documentation for historians interested in state-sanctioned activities of minorities living in Greater Romania. Priests and pastors were expected to sign the petitions if sent in the name of their church, regardless who wrote them, either clerical staff or members in local religious associations that were attached to the church. The writers of petitions used the opportunity to mention other achievements they accomplished in cultural work,

especially if these enhanced religious fervor and contributed to spreading moral teachings. One example frequently mentioned in petitions is the theatrical work done in collaboration with clergy from other villages.

Petitions were highly individualized. Priests and pastors fashioned their individual narratives out of a blend of historical roles positioning themselves as teachers, mediators, librarians, friends, mentors, literate guides, supporters of building projects, and philanthropists. In other cases, the clergy honestly admitted that putting on plays with local volunteers was intended to emulate city life in order to put an end to the exodus of young adults to nearby cities for entertainment. They often gave detailed accounts of theater plays which they saw performed in neighboring villages, and gave detailed description of their accomplishments in educating their own parishioners about the benefits of theater performances. Also discussed are the drawbacks and failures which they overcame in their theatrical endeavors.

Social groups and individuals from all walks of life engaged directly in official correspondence with the Romanian state, which demonstrate a mutual awareness of the need for an ongoing and efficient relationship between state and society. Being allowed to carve out their own cultural space in historical Transylvania, the Hungarians and the Saxons converged with the Romanian state on a cultural level, demonstrating cooperation and accommodation to each other's needs. One caveat is that the highest levels of state power were far too removed from the sites of theater playing to fully control them, thereby enabling minority groups to operate autonomously and even independently in the cultural sphere as long as they respected the law. The Hungarian minority adapted itself to the politics of the Romanian state when it came down to religious events, and in general did not use amateur theater to air grievances.

Little was conveyed in their petitions about the political and ideological forces shaping their play selections. Much less was included in petitions about the reactions experienced by

minorities at the changing political scene of Greater Romania. Instead, the petitions included comments about reviving cultural life as it used to be in the middle of the nineteenth century in Hungarian villages. The Romanian government encouraged theatrical work that was connected to religion, because clergy would never encourage public disorder and attacks on state's authority, and in the process, allowing minority groups unhindered expression of their faith and ethnic culture.

The Library of the Academy in Bucharest, the "Lucian Blaga" Library of the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj, the County Library of Cluj, and the Astra Library of Sibiu were particularly useful for periodicals and published sources. The Interlibrary Loan Service of the University of Illinois proved extremely reliable in locating plays and Jewish periodicals in Israel. For sources on Romanian and Hungarian professional theater I have used the Archive of the National Theater of Cluj and the Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület of Cluj (the Lăcătuș Street Branch). For Saxon communities, the collections of Casa Teutsch (Zentralarchiv der Evangelischen Kirche A.B. in Rumänien) in Sibiu were invaluable.

Identifying plays proved a daunting task, for amateurs tended to select plays published by commercial printing houses which followed the public's taste rather than works of literary merit. Lacking literary value, these plays were not distributed to libraries, and thus locating them was a difficult. This was compounded by the incomplete information about titles and authors given in petitions. I used catalogues and online databases of the Library of the Theater and Cinema University in Budapest (Szinház és Filmművészeti Egyetem Könyvtára), the Széchényi National Library of Budapest (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár) and the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek as well as county libraries in historical Transylvania.

Organization

This study is organized in four chapters each devoted to the four main ethnic groups in historical Transylvania: the Romanians, the Hungarians, the Saxons, and the Jews. This order

reflects the demographic ratio in the region as a primary criterion with the Romanians being the majority, then, the criterion of scale and importance that each group gave to amateur theater. Being the most active and well-organized across all counties, the Hungarians of all three Christian denominations are dealt with in the second chapter, while the Saxons appear in the third chapter. The last is devoted to Jewish communities because they had a reduced interest in theater and its potential for strengthening collectivity, and their ambivalency towards theater is in marked contrast with the Christian ethnic groups.

In each of the four chapters, I follow a chronological linear progression to show the context in which amateur theater arose and developed and I focus on specific themes like education, religion, intellectual context, professional theater, participants and organizers seeking to flesh out connections with theater playing. I also turn to leaders (religious, political, and civic at both the central and local level), as well as to playwrights if they significantly contributed to theater development as organizers or authors of the most popular plays. Finally, by delving into each ethnic group's embrace of amateur theater, I cover the large social spectrum of professions, ages, and gender, to demonstrate that, in Transylvania, the society at large was aware of the existence of a free cultural environment and acted upon this knowledge.

Chapter one examines the nature of Romanian official policies towards minorities. I examine each successive government's approach to cultural matters, in particular toward theater, and the impact of governmental actions on minorities' cultural life from 1919 to the late 1930s. Since compared to minorities amateur theater among the Romanians was of relative success and scale, the contextual background receives more space, seeking to explain why and how the theatrical manifestations appeal mainly to Romanian professionals and semiprofessionals, and somewhat less to amateurs.

Chapter two analyzes the Hungarian amateur theater in local communities. The wide geographical spread of theater playing proves that Hungarians were active culturally in the entire region, not only in the Szekler lands or in large cities and towns, but mainly in villages. The idea that everyone had freedom to organize plays was widely shared. A core finding of my research is that the widespread participation in cultural life meant that local people had grown used to autonomy, and their initiatives contributed to diversity in the Transylvanian public space. The background of participants like religious leaders and intellectuals, or profiles of groups helped me trace over time their involvement in religious and social life at the central and local level, so I can show that their reliance on autonomy was considered a given fact; information about schoolteachers helps assess the level of cooperation in society and the impact of extracurricular activities on people's cultural thinking. I have also included other social categories like firefighters, elderly groups, communist and socialist activists, and artisans, and I examined their plays to assess the messages and the values they imparted. By focusing on playwriting and the plays put on by amateurs, I assess the efficacy of amateur theater as a means of communication acknowledged to have surpassed the formal educational system in popularity.

Chapter three examines the Saxon community and its efforts to promote unity within the ethnic group through amateur theater. Unlike the Hungarians who rarely voiced the need to become united across confessions, the Saxons stressed unity as a major concern, which I explain by their focus on ethnic survival. I explore the ways in which the plays and the context of the shows were used to instill unity by emphasizing a common German heritage. Cultural freedom afforded the Saxons a first-hand opportunity to organize their cultural life as they saw fit, but, paradoxically, these very freedoms prevented the fulfillment of a Saxon unitary culture because Saxons in local communities led their own cultural life isolated from Saxons in other villages and from the Saxon elite in particular through local literature in dialect. Nevertheless, both Saxon

worlds thrived in cultural matters and used amateur theater effectively to communicate their cherished ideas.

Chapter four concludes this study with the Jewish theater in historical Transylvania and analyzes its emphasis on ideological, political, and religious purposes. I explain the reduced role of the rabbis in organizing or encouraging amateur theater and draw attention to the aspect of language and assimilation. Unlike the Christian communities, the overwhelming use of the Yiddish language in smaller communities and in religious settings as well as the partial preference for Hungarian in everyday encounters determined an hesitant attitude toward the benefits of amateur theater. Despite the conflicts and contradictions that beset Jewish communities, they were nonetheless able to enjoy freedom of expression like the other minorities and become fully involved in the development of their own cultural and religious life.

Chapter five draws conclusions about the impact that amateur theater playing had on women's public and private roles in society. By dwelling on the position of women within each ethnic group, I emphasize their relations with men and community to show that gender and social conceptions in traditional societies open up the women's access to the public sphere without disengaging them from their domestic duties.

Finally, I address the problem of the linguistic form of names to be used when writing about Transylvania in English. During the 1920s and 1930s the official correspondence in Transylvania was carried out only in Romanian and very rarely in the language of most numerous nationalities. In maps, however, I have used the names for Transylvanian localities that were used by the ethnic makeup of localities represented in the map.

Alternative forms of names are given in a table at the end of the study. For personal names, I used the form of first name followed by the last name.

Chapter 1 Romanian Amateur Theater in Historical Transylvania

After the First World War, Romanian cultural life in historical Transylvania took off at a slow pace.⁴² The Romanians delayed real action in order to reflect on how to go about achieving their cultural aspirations. They subjected cultural development to an intense debate and scrutiny, especially in Bucharest, involving intellectual, political, and religious elites, and to a lesser extent, the local leaders in smaller communities. Many proposed novel ideas like cinematic and radio media, but others gave a fair chance for consideration to modern ways of communication, like conferences, literary sittings, or acting in sketeches and short plays.

By the time cultural events began to emerge locally, Romanian elites wished that professional and amateur theater be one of the strengths of cultural life in all provinces. However, of all the ideas and forms they considered, only professional theater attracted a large audience especially in cities. It was thought that only the professionals could compete with the growing, region-wide, large-scale movement of the ethnic minorities, whose epicenter was in Transylvania. Romanian professionals also wished their theater playing had an inspirational effect on the broad population and hoped to spread a taste for theatrical art beyond the educated minds by touring the region. When amateur events timidly began to emerge locally, they were noticed first by professionals in the theatrical field; later on, by local state officials, and then by Romanian cultural societies and the press. They all agreed that the plays put on by amateurs reflected a change of spirit and attitude among ordinary Romanians. This chapter attempts to examine theater playing in connection with state policies in Greater Romania and the ongoing debate about identity and paths of development that continued to preoccupy Romanian society.

This chapter has two parts: first, a general background places Romanian theater in the high culture milieu of the period after the First World War. After a section on terminology, I

continue by delineating the groups of organizers involved in theater life, and their perception of the complex purposes of amateur theater at the higher levels. The following section on the cultural and political climate delves deeper into the purposes of theater-playing by emphasizing the political and intellectual currents, which determined the Romanian state's framework of principles and policies. These are necessary for understanding the degree to which they stimulated individuals and groups to take up initiatives on their own. Besides the state, university professors and members of the Romanian Academy also shaped the cultural climate, mainly by emphasizing esthetic principles in professional theater. They did not ignore the cultural needs of the broad population and hoped that amateur theater could nurture education, communication, ethnic expression and social help. Communication was encouraged by the postwar policy thinkers in order to stimulate peasants to actively participate in politics and express their views. Social help was a direct response to the effects of the Great Depression.⁴³ While they actively pursued these goals, these remained more on the level of rhetoric than action.

The second part examines the forces that gradually gave a strong impetus to the amateurs' movement among the Romanians. By looking at the actual initiatives of amateur theater in various counties, I delineate the place that it held in the lives of many social groups who embraced it primarily in response to their own needs. Both parts of the chapter demonstrate the coexistence of the professional theater, representing high culture, European and synchronized with Western modernity, with amateur theater, seen as low culture for the masses. It also broadens the scope of research to suggest that although the broad debate about identity appears to have been a sphere of action for the upper classes, the citizens' active participation through autonomous initiatives reflects a similar preoccupation with identity on a level that was less

⁴² Ion Apostol Popescu, *Literatura Ardeleană Nouă* (București: Fundația Regele Mihai I, 1944), 13.

⁴³ Justin Ceuca, *Teatrolgia Românească Interbelică* (București: Editura Minerva, 1990), 12.

politicized and less prone to nationalistic agendas. Thus, the sections provide the narrative of a parallel but collaborative work between the center, Bucharest, and historical Transylvania, actively engaging Transylvanians and high ministerial officials.

Part I

General Background

Romanian scholars approached theater history from its earliest manifestations in the late eighteenth century until the present solely through the lens of professional theater and semiprofessional groups. The latter appear in the documents of the time as amateurs, but, for conceptual clarity, I designate them as semiprofessionals because of their familiarity with professional theater, the innovations they applied to emulate them and, often, their quest for specialized training and high standards, yet not being professionals as such. Professional practitioners dominated historical accounts of theater studies which ranged from specialized works of drama criticism, acting craft, and performance, to genre conceptualization and the functions of theater in society. In all these works the authors used the insiders' lens to grasp the modern character of interwar theater organizations and art.⁴⁴

My focal point is on the amateurs and their communities, their motivations in organizing events, and the historical context that gave rise to it. They formed a clearly distinctive category, which set in motion a movement with social, religious and ethnic implications that outweighed artistic concerns and eluded professional standards in theater. A bottom-up approach sheds light on various categories of individuals like artisans, workers, firefighters, peasants, clergymen, women's groups, and youth associations.

⁴⁴ See the comprehensive surveys: Ioan Masoff, *Teatrul Românesc în perioada 1913-1925* (București: Editura Minerva, 1974); Ioan Masoff, *Teatrul Românesc în perioada 1925-1931* (București: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1976); Justin Ceuca, *Teatrologia Românească Interbelică* (Minerva: București, 1990), Simion Alterescu, *Istoria Teatrului în România*, vol. II (București: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1965-1973).

The movement of amateur theater appears to elude the art theories of their time and the conceptualizations that guide professional theater in the 1920s and 1930s like “theatrical conventions” (V. E. Meyerhold) or “transfiguration” (Haig Acterian). These European concepts entered the Romanian theater space through theater directors, many of whom were educated abroad and were eager to experiment. Others grappled with “the ontological status of theater” (Ion Sava) or its definition as “a synthesis of arts” (Richard Wagner).⁴⁵ None of these approaches, as original as they might be, fittingly describes the amateur theater phenomenon.

Unable to follow professional theater in its full embrace of artistic experimentation, amateurs remained traditional, but without ignoring modernity. As the Romanian playwrights Lucian Blaga, Camil Petrescu, and Victor Ion Popa argued, modern theater-playing emerged as a reaction against the predominance of falsehood in an effort to restore authenticity. By portraying characters from their own social milieu and thus avoiding accusations of falsehood, amateurs gave the lie to the accusations of class or artistic mimetism in their shows. Having the actors, the characters in the play, and the audience all from the same background and speaking the same language recall the innovations of the French playwright Eugène Scribe (1791-1861) whose plays, for the first time, extolled the virtues of using the language of everyday life on stage.⁴⁶ The amateurs’ efforts to choose plays that convey their everyday life and real situations, events, and historical figures, it might be argued, come close to the modernist perspective of authenticity and realism. How to clearly delineate authenticity from realism was an object of debate among theorists not quite settled by the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁷

Several characteristics differentiate amateur theater from professionals and semi-professionals, and one of them is traditionalism. When referring to the theater played in small

⁴⁵Ceuca, 6, 17, 25.

⁴⁶Al. Ciorănescu, Teatrul Românesc în Versuri și Isovoarele lui (București: Casa Școalelor, 1943), 8.

⁴⁷Camil Petrescu, Comentarii și Delimitări în Teatru (București: Editura Eminescu, 1983), 602-604.

communities, theater scholars consider it a traditional theater, in the sense of being untouched by European modern influences, and lacking ambivalency and a direct interaction of all participants in the performance. Amateurs solved the ambivalency that occurs in relations of showmanship, text, art, actors and stagecraft in professional theater, by believing in the unity between the public and actors. To connect the two, the most important signifier was the word and not the interaction of sound, signs, and music in the play. By focusing only on words, amateur theater did not imply an effort to decode meanings specific to professional theater. For amateurs, theater playing meant that the actors simply said the words in the script, rather than activating a theatrical image on stage through non-verbal elements.

In professional acting, the visual takes precedence over words. The various arts sustaining the performance enjoy an equal status.⁴⁸ In amateur theater, the word is the safest mode of theatrical communication. I define amateur theater as the theater of a collectivity or local community while the professional theater is mainly a collective art that involves a dramaturge, a director, a stage designer, a wigmaker, an electrician, and, maybe, a painter. Rather than focusing on symbols, as in expressionist and avangardist plays, amateurs rely on concrete associations as the safest way to convey messages to the audience. The plays selected tend to draw their plots from life in the villages with the families, individual typologies, and community values forming a whole. Amateur actors usually chose plays with characters drawn from their own background, sharing the same social class. They were watched by villagers from the same milieu. A last important characteristic that sets apart professional and amateur theater is the aspect of time. Atemporality is the marker of modern professional theater. Through image stagecraft, performers hold the audience in a permanent state of “the present” and thus, can convey a sense of

⁴⁸ Tudor Arghezi, “Teatrul și Literatura,” în Viața Românească, XVII, LXI, nor. 3, Mart. 1925, 433.

immediacy.⁴⁹ Rather than modern atemporality, amateur theater prefers to delineate clearly the historical period and carry its audience to a specific past.

Amateur theater's leading advocates were educated individuals, usually intellectuals (educators and writers), priests, and bureaucrats. They formed two distinctive groups, each shaping the development of cultural life through their opposing but in many ways complementary directions in theater life. One group we may call them the Westernizers,⁵⁰ embrace a way of thinking, organization, and values typical of high cultures and to them a theater institution would be a pillar in itself to reinforce the high culture of the nation. Their vision revolved around the prestige and attraction held by professional theater. Its European outlook and ambition to demonstrate a high level of performance went hand in hand with the constant preoccupation for creating a respectable theater establishment and for stimulating the writing of original Romanian drama. Thus, while they perceived the benefits of amateur theater for communities, they placed it under the guidance and control of the professionals.

The main source of strength and inspiration came from the other group, whom we may call the traditionalists because they believed in the traditional culture which they hoped to strengthen through religion, history and custom. For this goal, theater would be just a means for local expression, albeit a popular and effective one. They mainly looked inward to the needs of local communities and determined a cultural objective and the sort of cultural event that the community might enjoy, usually in the vernacular language and conveying religious teachings and folk culture. For traditionalists, amateur theater in the vernacular took precedence over the performative concerns or the literary standards of the play.

⁴⁹ Ceuca, 49.

⁵⁰ Keith Hitchins, România, 1866-1947 (București: Humanitas, 1994), 333-358.

Some organizers and playwrights of amateur theater made choices that were specific to both groups but there are sufficient characteristics that still differentiate the two which appear clear in the character of the performances when analyzing plays, their scheduling, the official purpose of the event given in requests for authorizations, and the decision made by state officials when authorizing the event. The plays themselves also help delineate the two groups even further along the two religious confessions.

The Westernizers and the traditionalists engaged in a long-running debate about theater and the direction which culture should take by espousing two core ideas: that the arts should embody esthetic principles (the Westernizers) and that the arts should be a reflection of social reality (traditionalists). As the amateur theater movement attracted both highly educated members as well as the local elite, which had just an average level of education, I hesitate to call it intellectual, since the participants and leaders belonged mainly to the latter, and the local forms of cultural life were left largely un-theorized. This is not to say that concerns about how to develop a dynamic theater life were not a steady subject of debate; on the contrary, literature, religion, and philosophy were major topics that had stimulated dialogue and questions about identity among the Romanians for more than a century. The propensity towards exploring one's ethnic identity led to mutual emulation among the ethnic groups as a result of their close proximity. Although minority theatrical traditions were much older and more advanced than those of the Romanians, the latter showcased an inclination to ponder other ways in which theater could serve communities. In addition to solely artistic and financial purposes, theater could address first and foremost social and spiritual needs.

A core tenet in amateur theater, then, was the idea that culture should serve as a remedy for the multiple social problems besetting villages and towns. It was a tenet that originated in the Sămănătorist (Sowerism) tradition of the early 1900s, when promoting ethnicity and enhancing

education also came to dominate public debate at the turn of the century. As an intellectual current that started in the 1890s but lost momentum and disappeared in the 1910s, Sămănătorism and its ideals can be gleaned decades later showing a relative resilience and shaping the postwar intellectual atmosphere by promoting ethnicity in close relation to education and the cultural uplift in villages. Many hoped that it would give people courage and self-confidence to express democratically their views and to participate actively in their local cultural life. It might be tempting to see in amateur theater playing a reflection of Sămănătorist ideas, but ordinary Transylvanians, unlike the sentimental views of traditionalist ideologues within this current, did not harbor illusions, embrace emotion, or see it as a means of political expression.

The spiritual climate also played a subtle but steady role. Orthodoxy upheld moral education in community gatherings and posed no obstacles to the assimilation of Western ideas, albeit without embracing them. Amateur theater at the community level reveals Orthodoxy not as a set of dogmatic principles that placed them against the Romanian Greek-Catholic and minority confessions in Greater Romania, but as an expression of the Romanian spirit. Thus, seen as a source of unity, amateur theater events fulfilled Orthodox tenets and could bring clergy, parishioners and laypeople together to address a host of social and ethnic needs identified and dealt with by the religious community itself.

The Cultural and Political Context

To understand interwar amateur theater and its moral and ethnic purposes, we need to go back to the moment when the foundations of the Romanian literary world were laid in the last third of the nineteenth century. Romania at the time was known as the Old Kingdom, territorially smaller than the postwar Greater Romania. Back then, critics sustained a vibrant debate focusing on the importance of esthetics and European values grounded in a nativist experience. A

prominent philosopher and university professor, Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917)⁵¹ authored his most influential article, in which he argued that the Romanians should avoid the pitfall of borrowing wholesale from the West. Having an impressive theater building but no plays, playwrights, or arts academies for training actors and artists but no audience was not going to bring about the westernization of the country. His famous dictum “forms without essence” was launched in the literary review *Convorbiri Literare* in 1868, suggesting that Romania needed modernization in-depth, rather than just on the surface.⁵²

European ideas received a staunch blow through the rhetoric of Sămănătorism (Sowerism), a literary current centered on themes like the village-city opposition, the dangers of people’s uprooting, the idealization of rural life, a strong attachment to the past, and the praise of the good-hearted landowner, left strong marks on fiction and non-fiction writings for decades to come, despite the numerous pejorative attacks against it in the press.⁵³ On the other hand, the Maiorescian position stressing esthetic values in artistic works revived again at the end of the First World War. After the critic’s death, it became the literary mantra in academic and school settings supervised by the Romanian Academy and universities, but often found among secondary school teachers as well.

Literature was pulled into the debate that inevitably opened up the subject of the peasantry: how to improve the life and living conditions of all Romanians and bring about its cultural uplift so they could be prepared in case of political rights or land redistribution. It was hoped that, later on, voting rights would turn the majority of the Romanian people into active

⁵¹ Zigu Ornea, *Titu Maiorescu și Prima Generație de Maiorescieni, Corespondență, Documente Literare* (București: Ed. Minerva, 1978), XII.

⁵² Titu Maiorescu, “Against the contemporary direction in Romanian culture” (Împotriva Direcției de Astăzi în Cultura Română”), in *Convorbiri Literare*, II, no. 19/Dec. 1868, 301-307.

⁵³ Zigu Ornea, *Sămănătorismul* (Editura Minerva: București, 1971), 34.

citizens, eager to participate in public life. While an active citizenry would be the final goal, they realized that, first of all, a vibrant cultural life was to be encouraged.

The social and cultural purposes of theater preoccupied high officials in Bucharest and shaped their cultural agendas. As the Minister of Arts and Culture under the Conservative government in the Old Kingdom for two years (1904-1906), Mihail Vlădescu (1865-1944) founded the Arts House (Casa Artelor) following the blueprint of two other Houses already active in public life: the Church House (Casa Bisericii) and the School House (Casa Școalelor). As state-sponsored institutions, but compared to the other two, had been open for a shorter time span, the Arts House had the support of a well-known playwright, Alexandru Davila (1862-1929) and welcomed many Sămănătorist writers, like the poet George Coșbuc (1866-1918).⁵⁴ Overall, it encouraged the understanding of theater as a social art. Coșbuc, the foremost Transylvanian poet of the time, served as editor of *Sămănătorism* (Sowerism) which advocated two main issues: the Transylvanian question in regard to nationality rights and the agrarian crisis (a larger concept entailing cultural uplifting, health, education, literacy, proper clothing and living conditions, and agricultural improvements).⁵⁵

As an intellectual movement, *Sămănătorism* was a conservative current with anti-Westernization roots first laid by Junimea (the Youth Society) whose editor and founder was Titu Maiorescu. The Sămănătorist leader, Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940), a prominent Romanian historian and prolific playwright, was a forceful presence in the movement, and served as its leader for a number of years. His romantic-agrarian views and radicalism led to the alienation of all his supporters over time and the disappearance of the literary review. *Sămănătorism* left a strong

⁵⁴ Gavril Scridon, Ioan Domsa, Teofil Bușnariu (eds.), *George Cosbuc* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1965). Nichifor Crainic, *Spiritualitatea Poeziei Românești* (București: Editura Muzeului Literaturii Române, 1998).

⁵⁵ Keith Hitchins, rev. of *Sămănătorismul*, by Z. Ornea, in *Slavic Review*, 30. 4 (1971), 925. Keith Hitchins, *Rumania* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 67-71.

mark on journalists and writers who either supported or denigrated it, but, far from completely vanishing in 1906 when Iorga left from its helm, it resurfaced between the two World Wars as late Sămănătorism in the poetical works of traditionalist intellectuals between the wars, like Lucian Blaga, Ion Pillat, and Vasile Voiculescu.⁵⁶ Sămănătorist ideologists did not guide amateurs directly or by literary reviews, hence the current's appeal could not have been maintained through the plays put on by the Romanian amateurs in the mid-interwar period.

When the Liberals came to power in 1907, the Sămănătorist approach to the arts was dropped and the esthetic spirit triumphed again as Spiru Haret (1851-1912) dismantled the Arts House. Originating in 1897, Haretism was a prevailing view among urban intellectuals, advocating the peasantry's revival. Inspired by Haret, who was the Liberal Minister of Culture and Instruction (1897-1899, 1901-1904, 1907-1908, 1909-1910), this vision held that cultural improvement in the villages would bring an overall betterment of rural life through schools, health care, libraries, and cultural centers. These efforts proved only partially successful and had a modest impact over time. The major impediment was the Liberals' deep conviction that cultural reform could happen only if the peasantry's economic situation improved, a remote possibility for those times.

Lower-level officials in the Ministry of Education like Florian Cristescu (1884-1949) concerned themselves with the common people's education and he looked to Transylvania for guidance in drafting better school curricula. Cristescu, an active storyteller and playwright, an author of elementary textbooks and an advocate of folklore as a foundational source of inspiration for creating a solid national literature, also supported Sămănătorist tenets. He believed in the progress that a society could achieve through educating people of all ages. He was the author of an important article depicting the state of education in historical Transylvania before the First

⁵⁶ Zigu Ornea, 17.

World War, and based his conclusions on the curricula used in confessional adult schools of Transylvania, both Greek-Catholic and Orthodox. To write this article, Cristescu researched the literary review *Albina* (The Bee, 1866-1876), an important platform for the literary and educational needs of the Romanians in Transylvania during the era of Hungarian rule.⁵⁷ He pointed to clear confessional differences in how curricula were crafted in schools and admired the intuitive character of curriculum material in Greek-Catholic schools and the practical considerations which served as criteria for selecting teaching content. Orthodox schools appeared to him 'strange' to require the study of history of the Bible at an advanced level at such an early age. He argued that following the chronological line of the Bible content proved counterproductive and downright difficult, compared to simply giving students short stories with a Christian moral message. Cristescu acknowledged the prominent role of clergymen and schoolteachers in bringing village communities of Romanians together, even though literacy remained at its lowest. He also pointed to the fact that Transylvania was unique for its Romanian schoolteachers who were the only ones conversant in Romanian, Hungarian, and German, surpassing the Saxon and Hungarian schoolteachers who did not bother to study Romanian or each other's language.⁵⁸ These literary contacts and the circulation of ideas between Romanians in the Old Kingdom and Transylvania were a sign of genuine interest in educational matters on both sides of the Carpathians before the First World War, and reflected shared concerns about the inadequacies of the overall school system and intense debates about the right solutions.

Morality constantly preoccupied Romanian elites when debating the role of theater in Romanian society. The quality of plays captured all energies and discussions in the highest literary forums. At the turn of the century, the Romanian Academy's Literary Section began

⁵⁷ Eugen Simion (ed.), Dictionarul General al Literaturii Române, A/B (București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2004), 68.

receiving scores of plays by amateur playwrights from all provinces inhabited by Romanians. Numerous middle-class individuals (aspiring women writers, military personnel of all ranks, their wives, high school and middle school students, instructors, and librarians) submitted their literary works. Plays were first judged by the moral content of their plots. The most common reason for rejection of the majority of plays was the lack of religious wisdom, a criterion endorsed by members of the older generation. The least important aspect that weighed in their verdicts was the stage success of a play.⁵⁹ Alexandru Davila's famous play *Vlaicu Vodă* is a case in point. A big favorite of the public, this historical drama had moralizing content but, they claimed, it used empty phraseology, and, even worse, it had an imprecise form and structure, a ground which immediately disqualified it from the Academy's award. The venerable institution made a clear point that the literary value of a play had no relation to its success with the public.⁶⁰ In contrast with Romanian Academy, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences held a different perspective when it came to the drama selections for the Vojnits Award. For professor and literary critic Elemér Császár (1874-1940) who served on academic jury, the plays selected for prize considerations had to have as much box office success as literary merits, because the two were seen as interrelated.⁶¹

In the postwar decades, the Romanian Academy preserved this moral orientation and even strengthened literary criteria alongside esthetic principles when granting awards. By 1920, only academicians remained committed to esthetic and moral values.⁶² University scholars and literary critics loosened the moral constraints on creativity in letters. The former Sămănătorist writers, however, continued to make a strong case in favor of morality in art all the way throughout the 1920s and 1930s. For the amateurs who put on plays in villages and small

⁵⁸ Florian Cristescu, "Însemnări Asupra Învățământului Popular Românesc din Transilvania și Ungaria," in *Albina* (Atelierele Grafice SOCEC: București: 1912) 6, 8, 10, 22.

⁵⁹ *Analele Academiei Române, Partea Administrativă și Dezbaterile*, 23:1900-1, Seria II, Tom XXIII, 1900-1901 (București: Institutul de Arte Grafice "Carol Göbl", 1900), 337; Tom XXII, 225.

⁶⁰ *Analele....*, Seria II, Tom XXV, 1902-1903, 335-338.

communities, morality and the proper social mores remained essential to the mission of their cultural efforts.

Sămănătorist ideas, extolling village life, the peasantry with its moral and religious values, as well as folk culture, resurfaced not only among the Romanian amateurs of theater playing. Similar ideas shaped Hungarian cultural approaches in villages as well. In the 1920s and 1930s the movement of *szociográfia* in Hungary and Transylvania promoted the *harmadik útás* (the third way) promoted by the Hungarian lower-middle class, mainly small-town and village teachers and clergymen. They hoped to bring about social and cultural revival among the peasants, and viewed it as a pressing issue.⁶³ Among the Romanians, Sămănătorist ideas were no longer being promoted by traditionalist intellectuals like before the war, and failed to find supporters among ordinary individuals; amateurs perceived their social reality and used the theater medium to reflect it in a way understandable to them, as it pertained to their needs.

Sămănătorism was for many Romanian writers an outdated intellectual source even before the First World War, due to its exaggerated focus on an idyllic village life. But after the war a focus on ethnic feelings and traditions was re-energized. No evidence suggests, however, that the amateurs' social involvement and public performances revived traditions and customs in response to or in connection with the intellectual landscape grounded in the ideology of traditionalism. The emphasis on idyllic life and propriety in relations between villagers, constantly featured in amateur play repertoires, also reflected a deep interest in strengthening local communities rather than serving an ideological platform. It appears that amateur theater in historical Transylvania has historical roots in the cultural and literary life of the region and the

⁶¹ *Akadémiai értesítő*, 33, (1922), 139-141.

⁶² *Analele Academiei Române*, I: 3: 1924.

⁶³ Némédi Dénes, *Népi szociográfia, 1930-1938* (Budapest: 1985), 15.

debates that shaped the region's identity, rather than connections with the literary world of Greater Romania or Hungary.

Octavian Goga's Ministerial Appointment

After the signing of the Peace Treaty in 1919 and the winning of the November elections, the Romanian National Party government of Alexandru Vaida-Voevod (1872-1950) appointed Octavian Goga (1881-1938; in office 1919-1922) as Minister of Religions and Public Instruction. Goga's tenure as Minister marked the first favorable environment to stimulate debate and initiatives in cultural life for both the Romanian majority and minorities. During the prewar decades, the Hungarian state enforced restrictions which systematically thwarted initiatives of non-Hungarian ethnic groups who were intent upon promoting their ethnicity. The Union of Transylvania with the Romanian Kingdom after 1918 marked for the Romanians the onset of a period when they could express their political views freely after decades of limitations, a stark contrast with the previous regime in the region.

As Transylvania became part of Greater Romania, the Romanians, now the ruling majority, began the work of political integration of all the newly-attached provinces in earnest. For governing a multi-ethnic province like historical Transylvania, the Romanian state employed Transylvanian officials in order to interact more effectively with the Hungarian, Saxon, and Jewish ethnic minorities, known for their practical experience in administration. Born in a well-known Transylvanian village, Rășinari, Goga contributed to the gradual build-up of structures and relations in cultural life that encouraged all citizens to engage in democratic practices. Through their local offices in all provinces and the appointment of Transylvanian-born officials, the ministerial authorities in Bucharest encouraged Romanians to become more involved in public life and come forth with new ideas in artistic and cultural life. This encouragement of cultural

expression stimulated at first only the upper classes and, gradually, the local elites, while the masses tended to remain passive.

In large numbers, intellectuals, writers, and politicians came to the fore of debates focusing on cultural life, however, comprehensive programs were formulated only slowly. Ministerial branches dealing with cultural spheres like theater, music, museums, fine arts, folk art, and architecture concentrated on logistic measures, which did not originate in a specific document whose stipulations were uniformly enforced across all these fields. One important rule that all cultural spheres needed to heed carefully was that activities should not impinge on national security matters or threaten the public order.

This measure did not discourage intellectuals of leading cultural societies (some private with partial state funds), or university professors, or artists associated with the prestigious National Theaters from drafting such cultural programs and publishing them in newspapers.⁶⁴ No matter how long the tenure of these intellectuals was in state offices or cultural societies, they could not impose their blueprints on cultural policies at the national level, much less shape the concrete unfolding of cultural events. Various forums enabled intellectuals, politicians, and writers to debate cultural issues and organize theater, library, and literary evenings (șezători), all projects intended to enhance the education of the population. Overall, however, they had little impact on increasing the Romanians' level of education and much less on encouraging the cultural self-administration of the masses. Instead, cultural projects came to be connected to so many levers of power that, inevitably, debates became contentious and politicized.

The postwar debate between officials and public intellectuals about cultural life was intense and divisive and ranged from material to spiritual issues. They discussed the allocation of

⁶⁴ Mihail Dragomirescu, "Un Minister al Culturii," in România Culturală, An. I, no. 4, Duminică, 17/20 Mar. 1919, 1.

funds in various regions, and whether control and funding should be decentralized or monitored by the state central institutions, and they pondered the minorities' cultural life and the ways of strengthening that of the Romanians. Cultural events were thought essential for jumpstarting literacy caused in part by poor school attendance and ineffective adult education programs.⁶⁵ Setting priorities also proved contentious: whether to emphasize Romanian theater and art events to catch up with European theater and whether to stress Romanian language as a means of achieving a greater solidarity at the expense of other sources of identification like religion and local traditions. As politics and nationalism intersected on cultural grounds, debates were as contentious as they could be.

As a famous Transylvanian poet, Octavian Goga concerned himself with the development of a local cultural life and invested deeply in this national task. He had looked to the Romanian village for his entire poetic inspiration. So, when in the early 1920s, the village elite, that is, priests and schoolteachers, dwindled in numbers in small communities, he felt much concern. The local elite was considered crucial for any future cultural development to take place among the Romanians in rural centers. Worries increased with the departure of many Hungarian functionaries and the consequent availability of new jobs in state offices, which tempted many within the Romanian elite to switch jobs to join the bureaucracy. In his correspondence with the Ministry of Interior, Goga explained that the upper clergy in both Romanian Churches felt powerless as they saw Romanian priests choose jobs which were outside their clerical and spiritual mission and morally incompatible with a religious life. Moreover, they compromised the clergy's prestige in front of all believers. In his report, Goga specified the Blaj (historical Transylvania) and Lugoj (Banat) bishoprics as being visibly affected by the exodus of priests to

⁶⁵ Maria Itu, Elena Potorac, "Momente din Istoria Școlilor de Adulte din România," în Laurentiu Șoitu, Educația Adultilor (București: Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, 1968), 345.

other secular professions. The main concern was the potential impact on the spiritual life in local communities. Goga urged that state departments, seeking to hire former clergy should request recommendations from the Church authorities prior to signing contracts with these individuals.⁶⁶ Goga's procrastination about the signing of the Concordate and the anti-Christian steps he took that alienated him from the Romanian Greek Catholic and Hungarian Roman Catholic congregations, as well as his time in power during King Carol II's authoritarian dictatorship when he enacted anti-Semitic legislation, are important topics, which could fully emerge in a new biography, yet to be written.

In practice, Goga's tenure in 1920 could not do much for Romanian cultural life at the local level. A traditionalist and a nationalist before and after the war, the poet understood that Romanian professional theater needed full support from the state. He pursued the westernizing approach because Transylvanian elites typically believed that Romania ought to strengthen its European character through a high-quality professional theater. In the first postwar years, Goga understood that only professional theater on tour could bring the Romanians closer to the theatrical traditions of the minorities in Transylvania and could show and spread Romanian artistic achievements.

More than other artistic and cultural fields, a theatrical culture did thrive in Greater Romania among all ethnic groups, but it took several years to take off. Goga's activity prepared the ground for the amateur theater movement later on, especially for the minorities. He insisted that Romanian officials place great importance on the careful political management of ethnic relationships. One core principle was assuaging the feeling of powerlessness of minorities by respecting the demographic ethnic majority in a particular location when approving cultural

⁶⁶ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul de Interne, 1911-1920, Direcția Centrală Administrativă, Inv. 330, Dos. 126/1926, Fila 129/28 Dec.1920.

events. During Goga's tenure, the Romanian state began to stress how important it was for Romania to show fairness and care in dealing with theater events proposed by the minorities, while preserving public order in urban and rural communities at least in the early postwar years.

No advocate for autonomy in cultural life was more ardent and successful than the longest-serving state official in historical Transylvania: Emil Isac (1886-1954). Starting in office as the Theater Inspector of the region in 1920 under Minister Goga, Isac was very familiar with minority life, especially Hungarian, its representatives, currents, and centers, as well as its strengths and weaknesses. He was able to adjust himself to all the changes implemented by successive governments and their political leaders until 1940, leaving behind a large journalistic activity as well as literary work.⁶⁷ Nationalist, but also European in his views and forward-thinking, Isac helped Romanian governments maintain a balance in decisions made in Bucharest pertaining to Transylvania. Even at the risk of losing his appointment when dissenting, he constantly improved procedures for handling paperwork and people's requests for approvals, thereby suggesting ways to benefit the image of the Romanian government in Europe.

Another of Goga's collaborators was his General Inspector for Theaters and Music, Virgil Cioflec (1876-1945), a Transylvanian by intellectual formation and beliefs, and a former contributor to the famous literary reviews *Luceafărul* and *Sămănătorul*. He paved the way for minority professional theaters to operate and comply with the law. The first theater organizers, who were involved in debating, defining rules, strengthening public relations and creating private theater institutions, were professional practitioners. State officials, however, had the daunting job of guiding the ethnic minorities, whose theatrical traditions went back as far as the eighteenth century, to abide by the new regulations. It was administratively and legally challenging for the

⁶⁷ Ion Brad, Emil Isac, un Tribun al Ideilor Noi (Cluj: Editura Dacia, 1972).

government to avoid violating existing laws, which were still valid in the region until the new Law of Theaters (March 1926) came into effect.

During his tenure, Goga reassigned back to the Ministry the authority over theater life that was held by the General Direction of Arts and Theaters (DGAT), the same entity that administered the National Theater of Bucharest (NTB). In doing so, he could rely on his ministerial team of lawyers and experienced Transylvanians to avoid legal blunders. The DGAT/NTB, entirely led by equity actors, had exerted full control over all theater matters and theater life in the Old Kingdom until 1918. In Cioflec's time in office the two positions of General Director of Theaters and Director of the National Theater of Bucharest were separated on May 17, 1923, the former being transferred to the Ministry of Arts and Religions, implying the need for the Romanian state to directly oversee theater nationwide.⁶⁸ Goga was particularly careful to secure a smooth transition for the artists' union of the Hungarian minority.⁶⁹ While in office, Goga enabled any Hungarian professional troupe to gain official status. Politically and culturally conservative, Goga proved to be quite a forward-thinking administrator in matters of minority professional theaters.

The power shift in theater matters from the DGAT/NTB to the Ministry did not mean the marginalization of professional actors. In Goga government, Cioflec worked closely with actor Ion Manolescu, who served as department secretary for theaters, and was a defender of amateurs and semiprofessionals' interests as well as those of professional actors and troupes. Through their activities, these officials demonstrate that, overall, the state encouraged the activity of professional private troupes whose profitability was known to bring to the budget significant

⁶⁸ Despina Valjean, Ion Potopin (eds.), *I. Valjean. Generația de Sacrificiu. Teatru* (Editura Minerva: București, 1985), XVI.

⁶⁹ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, Direcția Ministerului Artelor, Inv. 50, Dos. 705/1921, Fila 29/14 Feb. 1921.

revenue. On January 1, 1921, the Direction of Shows and Theatrical Taxes came into being in order to deal exclusively with the taxation of the theater business.⁷⁰

In Goga's second time in office (1920-1921), he continued his previous work under the People's Party government led by Gen. Alexandru Averescu. As a traditionalist poet and playwright, Goga had been active in the renowned literary circles of *Luceafărul*, a filo-Sămănătorist literary review which initially opened in Budapest, later moved to Transylvania before and during the war, and finally relocated to Bucharest after the war. He shared many of his conservative views with *Luceafărul* contributors in the early 1920s, especially with Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972), the renowned theologian and philosopher of culture, also a member in the People's Party. Crainic placed Orthodox spirituality at the moral center of Romanian development in both cities and villages and also served in public office like Goga. Together they published articles in the literary review *Țara Noastră*, with Goga as the editor, a periodical in which they outlined their views about cultural life. In his article "Conceptii minoritare" ("Minority Conceptions") Goga reiterated the People's Party main principle, "to establish broad civil freedoms" and as Minister, he took steps into this direction.⁷¹

An important challenge for Goga was to take into consideration the legal rule of respecting demographic ratios when allowing minority theater troupes perform in various locations, especially if these lacked the respective ethnic group which the troupe sought to attract. Things became even more complicated when, from 1921 until the end of the decade, artists from Hungary began to apply for work visas for Transylvania. The Romanian Legation of Budapest was overwhelmed with such requests, finding itself at an impasse with other Romanian authorities, the Ministry of Interior, the Army, the Ministry of Arts and Public Education, and the Department

⁷⁰ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 3/1920, Fila 36/30 Dec. 1920.

⁷¹ Octavian Goga, "Conceptii minoritare," in *Țara Noastră* (Cluj), Anul IV, nr. 8, 25 Feb. 1923, 249.

of National Security.⁷² Due to the high number of applications, semiprofessionals from Hungary had their visa applications pending for months at a time, while renowned musicians like Béla Bartók, or the troupe of the Theater “Belvárosi Színház” of Budapest, coming for theater tours in Transylvania with a select repertory, were promptly admitted to perform on Romanian territory because of their international reputation. Emil Isac, the Theater Inspector for Transylvania, shared with Goga the view that Romania ought to show the world that there were no obstacles for the cultural development of minorities.⁷³ In 1922, hundreds of artists from Hungary obtained temporary visas to perform in Transylvania, with forms being forwarded for screening to the National Security Department and other offices in Bucharest and Cluj.⁷⁴ The General Consulate of Romania in Budapest followed up with even more inquiries about these artists, creating a large archival trail in order to check the diversity of their backgrounds and their professional skills.⁷⁵ From the Goga ministry to the one led by his successor Constantin Banu, the entry of Hungarian artists into Transylvania continued to be both a burden and a sign of a healthy artistic environment up to the mid-1930s.

Constantin Banu's Ministerial Appointment

Under the liberal government of Prime Minister Ion I.C. Brătianu, amateur theater could not develop at a faster pace despite the numerous attempts by cultural societies to start up regular activity in small communities. The new Minister of Arts and Religions, Constantin Banu (1873-1940), and the General Inspector for Theaters, actor Ion Manolescu (1881-1959), in a nod to professionalism, reinstated the nationwide authority over theater life to the Direction of Theaters and Operas (DGAT) management. Banu worked incessantly to promote the orientation of the

⁷² DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 686/1921, Fila 650/4 Julie 1921.

⁷³ DANIC București, fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 777/1922, Fila 1/ 6 Mai 1922.

⁷⁴ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 777/1922, Fila 266/26 Mai 1922, see also 267, 263, 221, 305, Inv. 550, Dos. 794/1922, Fila 22/12 Iun. 1922.

entire professional theater life towards Western European theater standards. When he invited Emil Isac to recommend legal works that would inspire the preparation of a new theater law, he received suggestions of half a dozen French legal texts referring to theaters.⁷⁶ Theater authorities in Bucharest and Cluj also looked to the West for inspiration.

In 1922, the Banu administration supported various initiatives that further revealed his Westernizing views. He gave all his support to the initiative of private cultural societies to sponsor their own professional troupes and send them touring nationwide to contribute to the development of cultural life in the provinces. In an effort to avoid competition with the professional troupes of National Theaters, these societies claimed to work for the enhancement of cultural literacy along Western standards by providing classes in theatrical skills to various groups interested in putting on plays in accordance with professional standards. The oldest Transylvanian cultural society, Astra (The Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People), formed its own theater troupe led by actor Nicolae Băilă, a Conservatory graduate, who had previously worked as a literary secretary at the German Theater Society of Sibiu.

Over time, Băilă carried out a rich administrative and artistic activity within the Astra. His sense of duty drove him to collaborate with aspiring semiprofessionals among the students in the Orthodox Theological Seminary, the Pedagogical High School, and the “Gh. Lazăr” High School of Sibiu, “so that the future priests and schoolteachers could gain a perfect diction and learn a correct language when preaching to believers, holding conferences, or supervising amateurs in their play rehearsals in villages.”⁷⁷ One downside of his career was his unsuccessful attempt at spreading the thespian art through diction classes and canto lessons and establishing

⁷⁵ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, inv. 550, Dos. 785/1922, fila 6/27 Jan 1922.

⁷⁶ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 853, Fila 3/6 May 1922. Isac recommended works by Adenis, Constant, Cremien, Daviay, Dubose, Meignen, and Moreau which could be obtained from bookstores in Paris.

literary criteria in selecting a play. Disappointed that his fellow Sibians were slow at embracing theater playing, he was even sadder for not inspiring the artisans, students, and others with a theatrical avocation.

Upon receiving state subsidies from the Banu administration, the Astra leadership focused on presenting dramas of high literary value.⁷⁸ Vehement criticism against this choice came from the very top of the Greek-Catholic elite, Father Zenovie Pâclișanu (1886-1958), papal prelate, historian, and Director of Statistics and Cultural Activities in the Ministry of Arts and Religions. Mindful of the low level of professionalism that Băilă displayed in Sibiu, which in his view was detrimental to the Romanian theater's reputation, Pâclășianu strongly urged Minister Banu to reassign the state subsidy given to Astra to "goals much more useful and fruitful: printing brochures to popularize education, founding local libraries in culturally endangered villages, organizing conferences, and holding literacy classes for adults."⁷⁹ Although the suggestion was not heeded by the Ministry officials, Pâclășianu's view was evocative of a major turning point in the efforts of cultural societies like Astra: it moved amateur theater from a prominent position to the bottom of their list of activities. Before the First World War, the Astra members were known for their full embrace of amateur theater and its dissemination under its members' guidance in various communities. Gradually, their monthly cultural bulletin showed in its postwar issues a lesser status for theater on Astra's overall agenda, leaving this highly potent medium to be picked up by amateurs on their own, from the late 1920s until the late 1930s.

Westernizing influences continued to shape the Romanian state's vision for a professional theater life. Under Banu, a new reorganization of the Theater administration nationwide meant that the influence of leading artists and managers from the National Theater of

⁷⁷ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 779/1922, Fila 7/19 June 1922.

⁷⁸ "Propaganda noastră teatrală" in *Transilvania*, An 54, August-Septembrie 1923, nr. 8-9, 313.

⁷⁹ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 851/1923, Fila 23/9 Sept. 1923.

Bucharest was more powerful than ever.⁸⁰ The culmination of this Western orientation was the DGAT's involvement in an effort to regulate, apply literary canons, and control theater playing in the region. They barred from touring historical Transylvania and the adjoined regions all Romanian private theater companies that did not demonstrate high professional standards, lest "it compromise the image of Romanian theater playing" and "prove deleterious to the cultivation of theatrical taste among Transylvanian audiences."⁸¹ Moreover, playwrights and theater managers working for the DGAT announced the completion of the large-scale project of standardizing translations of foreign plays. They also made the repertoires of all five national theaters in Greater Romania uniform in order to ensure high-quality plays being performed on all these stages. Lastly, the DGAT committees offered to "fix" well-known plays suggested by Hungarian or Saxon amateurs in Transylvania by removing problematic passages (irredentist, immoral, or insensitive to other ethnic groups, in particular Romanians, Jews, and Gypsies).⁸²

Prime Minister Brătianu replaced Constantin Banu at the Ministry of Arts and Religions with a Transylvanian politician, Alexandru Lăpedatu (1876-1950). The control of theater and other artistic fields was transferred from the National Theater of Bucharest leadership (the DGAT) back again to the direct authority of the Ministry of Arts and Religions by royal decree on May 17, 1923.⁸³ However, under this new leadership, theater life remained limited to professional enterprises, either private with state funds, or only state-funded. Its main feature was a drive towards institutionalization especially among the semiprofessionals. One example is the new set of regulations for the creation and operation of Theatrical Commissions, which were in charge of approving private initiatives of local performances by itinerant professional theater companies. Also Literary Commissions were set up to promote the selection of plays in accordance with

⁸⁰ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 785/1922, Fila 18/8 Dec. 1922.

⁸¹ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 777/1922, vol. II, Fila 82/5 Aug. 1922.

⁸² DANIC București, Fond Teatrul Național București, Inv. 2345, Dos. 60/1922, Fila 19/ 1922.

literary and ethnic criteria. Whereas Theatrical Commissions in each urban center involved the entire local administrative leadership (the director of the local state theater institution as President of the Commission, the mayor, the police prefect, and the chief medical officer, the chief fire officer), Literary Commissions would include the representatives of the Union of Romanian Playwrights of Bucharest, actors, professors, and other local leading figures.⁸⁴ Even amateur theater organized by cultural societies like Astra had to make use of the recommendations of a Literary Commission. With the new regulations, theater organizers were forbidden to schedule events in wooden barracks or other similar buildings without the proper documentation approved by local Theatrical Commissions.⁸⁵ It is useful to mention that when amateurs in small communities began to take an interest in putting on plays, their endeavor was not subject to these rules. Their only bureaucratic contact with authorities was for obtaining legal authorizations from the regional Theater Inspector Isac and the local mayor. Theirs was a much smaller affair and reflected an ability to make decisions unhindered by bureaucratic structures.

Vasile Goldiș's Ministerial Appointment

Installed by the People's Party from March 1926 until March 1927, Vasile Goldiș (1862-1934) inaugurated a period of serious downturn for professional theater. As Goldiș's predecessor concluded his activity, a new measure came into effect as the Ministry announced massive cuts in subsidies for Romanian private theaters, to the outrage of sponsors, intellectuals, and state theater employees. One direct effect was the weakening of Romanian semiprofessional groups.⁸⁶ Yet, by this time, the Romanian state realized the significant financial contribution that professional

⁸³ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 840/1923, Fila 6/21 Apr. 1923.

⁸⁴ DANIC București, Fond. Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 916/1924, Fila 2 /12 Febr. 1924 and Fila 8/24 Nov 1924.

⁸⁵ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 1916/1924, Fila 9/24 Nov.1924.

⁸⁶ See Nicolae Iorga and Corneliu Moldovan's petitions to reinstate state subsidies to private theaters: Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 116/1926, Fila 14/24 Martie 1926 and Fila 24. See Liviu Rebreanu's petition to reinstate subsidies for the Society of Romanian Writers, Dos. 138/1926, Fila 7/9 Ian. 1926.

establishments, especially those of minorities, made to the state budget.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, it pursued other changes that shook the theatrical world. For the 1926/1927 season, the Ministry abandoned the concept of permitting itinerant troupes to put on shows in clearly demarcated areas (known as *circumscripții*). On the other hand, it did allow professional private troupes to be free to schedule events anywhere in the province as long as the local city halls and the troupe's director agreed with each other on the terms set by local authorities. A new legal requirement was that the troupe could hire minority artists only with Romanian citizenship.

Like Octavian Goga when he was at the helm of the Ministry of Arts and Religions, Goldiș, also a Transylvanian, gave a free hand to minority theaters. His ministry focused mainly on the impact that the reformed Law of Theaters had on minority professional theater. It took effect in August 1927 and introduced even more freedom in theater affairs. The law eliminated the powerful position enjoyed by a director of a theater company who in the past was a privileged individual who could negotiate with the Ministry his preferred cities and towns where he could be granted a yearly license. By eliminating licenses and the geographical assignments of the private theater companies, the Romanian state sought to put an end to political pressures and other interventions for obtaining licenses in the larger cities and well-to-do neighborhoods with more numerous Hungarian population. During these debates, Romanian officials worried that such practices could damage the country's image abroad. With all these changes, the law gave more freedom and opportunities to the Hungarian minority. One proof is that a sudden surge was noticeable in the number of directors seeking authorization to organize professional theaters throughout historical Transylvania.⁸⁸ It was a freedom with certain limits, because heavy penalties,

⁸⁷ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 96/1926, Fila 10/no date.

⁸⁸ See Ion Minulescu's circular letter, in DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 39/1927, Fila 36/7 Jun. 1927.

clearly stipulated in the Article 57, could be applied to those who offended ethnic sensibilities by way of stage costumes, props, songs, scripts, and other means.

Goldiș continued the existing appointment of poet Ion Minulescu (1881-1944) to supervise arts⁸⁹ and designated poet Nichifor Crainic to oversee religious matters. Both had to deal with theater issues. Minulescu, a representative of the literary coffeehouse cultural trend and a member of the second generation of symbolists from Wallachia, was intent on proclaiming the freedom of the individual in arts.⁹⁰ A member of the interwar “young generation,” he managed to sideline the well-entrenched literary authoritative figures at the National Theater of Bucharest through decisions showing the middle ground. His approach stressed the all-inclusiveness of social classes in the theatrical world in line with his emphasis on *trăire* (experience) rather than concepts. A renewed official focus on spirituality pitched the National Theater of Bucharest against the Ministry, which remained an advocate of morality and reacted vehemently to protect the Church and spiritual values from any irony and disparagement on stage. Anti-religious allusions in Horia Furtună’s play *Păcală*⁹¹ or in Victor Eftimiu’s play *Glafira* rallied the Wallachian Orthodox Metropolitanate against the repertory choices of the National Theater of Bucharest.⁹² The Ministry empathized with these complaints. Moreover, it gave encouragements to playwrights who wrote plays with biblical themes. One example was the People’s Party deputy Alexandru Săbaru and his biblical play *Cain* (1920), but it was found to be short of literary qualities and was never performed on the primary national stage.

Nichifor Crainic was very interested in theater as literature. In his position handling church and religious matters in the Ministry, he did not remain indifferent to the theater life of Bucharest and certainly to situations when plays disparaged the Orthodox Church on stage.

⁸⁹ Georgeta Oniscu, *Ion Minulescu, Bibliografie* (București: Biblioteca Centrală “M. Eminescu,” 1994).

⁹⁰ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866-1947*, 273-274.

⁹¹ DANIC București, Fond Teatrul Național București, Inv. 2345, Dos. 68/1927, Fila 19/19 Mai 1927.

Crainic tied his name to the traditionalist literary review *Gândirea* and was the founder of a literary current, Orthodoxism.⁹³ His ministerial circulars conveyed his staunch beliefs that the National Theater of Bucharest, a state institution, could not disparage the Romanian Orthodox Church, another state institution, especially at a time of heightened spiritual sensibility in society.⁹⁴ His voice advocating morality in the public space found only a few supporters among several members of the Romanian Academy. Despite Crainic's public and ministerial interventions, professional theater continued to remain independent, even though theatrical institutions received generous subsidies from the state budget.

Another important issue was forced into public debate in 1927: the change in the status of actors. From January onward, the status moved from a position of privilege and freedom in the name of art to one of a functionary (funcționar dramatic) and state employee. This change implied that artists could be held legally accountable for offenses directed against other state institutions. Such a dramatic transformation of status altered the untouchable and 'sacred' position enjoyed by artists and forced them to conform to state laws like any other state employee.⁹⁵ As the Liberals' dominance in politics began to wane, so the high status enjoyed by artists reached an end, at least in legal terms. The long-standing privileged status, however, lingered for a while, being intertwined with an overall positive, lenient, admirative view about actors and theater playing, perceptible in Romanian society at many levels.

In November 1927, Vintilă Brătianu's appointment as Prime Minister marked the beginning of the end of his family's powerful influence in government and at the Royal Palace. In

⁹² DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Arte, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 19, 1927, Fila 185/2 Apr. 1927.

⁹³ Keith Hitchins, "Gândirea: Nationalism in a Spiritual Guise in Kenneth Jowitt (ed.) Social Change in Romania, 1860-1940, A Debate on Development in a European Nation (Institute of International Studies: Berkeley, 1978), 149. See also Keith Hitchins, "Orthodoxism: Polemics Over Ethnicity and Religion in Interwar Romania" in Katherine Verdery and Ivo Banac (eds.), National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe (Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995), 141; and Keith Hitchins, "The Challenge of Modernism in Interwar Southeastern Europe: The Orthodox Response," in Victor Spinei and Gheorghe Cliveti (eds.), Historia sub Specie Aeternitatis. In Honorem Magistri Alexandru Zub (Bucuresti,-Brăila, 2009), 264.

this last Brătianu government, the Transylvanian politician Alexandru Lăpedatu returned for a second time to the helm of the Ministry of Arts and Religions for one year. The nascent amateur theatrical movement can be traced to Inspector Emil Isac's confidential memo sent to Lăpedatu from Cluj around this time. It described the unprecedented rise of theater amateurism and signaled the beginning of "an interesting and totally new phenomenon."⁹⁶ In his view, it was a movement that appeared to provide only entertainment, but he sense in these efforts an aspiration for ethnic survival and moral-religious education.

No measures were taken to hinder these events, but Minister Lăpedatu instructed Isac to do all in his power to keep these theatrical performances under official scrutiny. Two weeks later, Isac was anxious to report to the Ministry that even Romanian amateurs, peasants from villages within Cluj's hinterlands, were beginning to put on plays locally. The audiences were made up of fellow villagers.⁹⁷ Isac announced that he would start attending these events himself in the spring, and thus, one may infer that at the time of writing this report he was familiar at least with their rehearsals. Thus began Isac's close relation to theater amateurs of all ethnic and social walks of life and his congenial approach to this movement, while at the same time he monitored and controlled an ailing professional theater scrambling for funds and for a committed public who lost faith in it.⁹⁸

The crisis of professional theater reflected the weakening of other cultural domains in Romanian society. Financial distress affected the publishing market and mainstream cultural institutions worried about a serious decline in the number of books sold, which, they claimed, should have increased in a country that had almost tripled in territory. At the Society of Romanian

⁹⁴ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 28/1926-1927, Fila 75/ 18 May 1927.

⁹⁵ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 3/1927, Fila 168/20 Dec.1927.

⁹⁶ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 17/1928, Fila 51/13 Feb. 1928.

⁹⁷ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 17/1928, Fila 59/27 Feb. 1928.

⁹⁸ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 17/1928, Fila 98/17 Mar. 1928.

Writers (1925-1932) the president novelist Liviu Rebreanu (1885-1944) and other members were not only successful playwrights but avid theatergoers themselves. So, when Rebreanu criticized the government's generous subsidies for state theaters he compared them with the meager budget subsidies allotted to publishers and writers for covering expenses of printing, sales, and distribution. He claimed that theater shows were transient and the investment in such shows was practically lost, while books stayed for generations, permanently to be read and reread.⁹⁹ Indeed, as Rebreanu pointed out, the entire development of culture was in jeopardy in the newly attached territories. Lacking books, Romanian intellectuals could not organize literary sittings and conferences. Moreover, they claimed, they could not teach amateurs how to put on plays if titles of valuable works did not reach them because of high prices. It is surprising that Rebreanu, a Transylvanian himself, ignored the book market in historical Transylvania when he proposed state subsidies for committees composed of booksellers, printers, and writers. In this region, private booksellers, also working as theatrical agents, printers and distributors, published less-known authors with great market success (like the bookseller Alexandru Anca who published Nicolae Țânțariu's plays). Such authors were obviously not members of Rebreanu's society, but featured widely among the amateurs' preferences.

The crisis, however, ran deeper than the sharp decline in book sales. Rebreanu also became associated with a sustained campaign to restore morality in theater life when he was reappointed chairman of the National Theater of Bucharest (NTB). In this quality, he removed plays deemed immoral for the principal national stage, as the NTB was often called, incurring the fury of university professors whose plays were scheduled to be performed for years in advance on the NTB stage. Numerous public intellectuals and professors, all writers themselves, demanded that Rebreanu define 'moral', 'immoral', and 'amoral' in theater playing, enhancing a

⁹⁹ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 108/1928, Fila 1/7 Iun. 1928.

conceptual debate about morality in art and putting into question the NTB leadership's ability to fulfill the cultural mission of a state institution.¹⁰⁰

Debates about morality in theater were triggered by other reactions in major cities in historical Transylvania. Mayors had to complain to ministerial authorities against Romanian private theater companies who put on plays that disturbed public morality through vulgarity and the mocking of religious values. Even the Ministry of Public Instruction voiced through Minister Constantin Kirițescu (1876-1965) a strong denunciation against the immorality and perversion of plays that jeopardized the secondary and high school students' moral education, even plays that received national drama awards. One such example featured widely in the press being Ion Minulescu's play *Amantul Anonim* (The Anonymous Lover).¹⁰¹ Rebreanu could only justify the NTB's reportorial choices by stating that Kirițescu's claims offend the reputation of the Literary Committee, made up of representatives from the Romanian Academy, the University of Bucharest, the Ministry of Arts, and tenured actors at the NTB as well as the lawmakers who had drafted and voted on the Law of Theaters.¹⁰² As these various reactions and criticism touched not only Romanian professional theater but also Hungarians, it is obvious that the latter years of the 1920s witnessed the expression of a powerful sensibility toward morality and education. Not only the population but the institutions close to the public came under close scrutiny because they tended to be more likely to engage people in cultural and religious activities. This drive towards an older morality in theater paved the way for the development of amateur theater, whose plays tended to underline Christian values and moral tenets.

¹⁰⁰ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 82/1929, Fila 20/18 Jan. 1925 and Fila 30.

¹⁰¹ Nina Apetroaie, *Ion Minulescu Monografie* (Galați: Editura Porto-Franco, 1996) 142. If the historical context is ignored, the reaction against Minulescu's play might be labeled simply as an act of envy.

¹⁰² DANIC București, Fond Teatrul Național București, Inv. 2345, Dos. 35/1929, Fila 3.

During Goldiș's tenure, the campaign of purification and legalization of theater life in Greater Romania took a sharper turn. The Orthodox Church's criticism against immoral content on stages brought meager results, but the reports about the doubtful propriety and morality of plays submitted to the Ministry and to the press by Romanian mayors from different Transylvanian cities caused uproar among the general public. These reports put into question the morality of the selected plays and with it they cast doubt on the superiority of artists in matters of professionalism and education. The press took the issue farther by arguing that such artists did not deserve support from the administration of the Union of the Free Dramatic Artists (SADL) and that the SADL should refrain from defending its artists' integrity when proven to be immoral. These incidents brought a great opportunity for smaller artists' societies to weaken the SADL's all-powerful claim over all artists. The SADL granted special protection to its members and since their privileges led to the marginalization of the performers who could not afford union fees, the latter were the first to use these claims of immorality to weaken the SADL's prestige and advocate a reform of the system.

When the moral crisis was precipitated, the SADL tried to monopolize the granting of union permits by limiting them only to theater performers. A bitter rivalry ensued between dramatic and lyrical artists, who sought to establish their separate union, *Sindicatul Artiștilor Lirici* (the Union of Lyrical Artists; SAL) in reality just a spin-off group from the SADL.¹⁰³ Founded in 1925, the SAL lacked funds to operate, but it reemerged in 1929 to challenge the SADL dominance of the artistic market and workforce, this time more successfully.¹⁰⁴ The democratization of Romanian society was responsible for breaking down the monopolist hold of dramatic performers over the entire performative landscape. Seeking to cut across artistic

¹⁰³ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, Inv. 652, Dos. 122/1929, Fila 468/27 Nov. 1929.

¹⁰⁴ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Ministerul Muncii Sănătății și Ocrotirilor Sociale, Inv. 817, Dos. 20/1930, Fila 14/3 Nov. 1930.

boundaries, the authorities encouraged amateurs in each field to rise to prominence and overcome material shortcomings.

Alexandru Lăpedatu' Ministerial Appointment

Lăpedatu's long ministerial tenure, which was interrupted only for a year in 1926 with the appointment of Vasile Goldiș, witnessed the early beginnings of amateur theater. Beside Isac's reports about weak beginnings of theater playing in villages, other signs occurred not on the stage but on the pages of religious reviews. Editors published debates about the strength of religious sentiment across all provinces, in order to determine whether religion was to be eliminated from schools curricula. The promulgation of the law of public instruction in elementary and teachers' institutes in 1924 revealed the growing interest in religion in the newly-attached provinces which maintained the same number of religion hours in schools like before the war, and was double to that stipulated in the Old Kingdom.¹⁰⁵ Expanding this topic beyond school, articles addressed the rural instruction in families and church and highlighted the clergy's role in promoting activities that depended on the strength of religious feelings in the region.¹⁰⁶

Many such activities involved amateur theater. Several articles that appeared in the *Theological Review* (Revista Teologică) in Sibiu provided orientation to actors and directors along Orthodox morality. For 1926, the issue announced the insertion of a new rubric, "Mântuitorul ca..." (The Savior as...), stressing Orthodox morality for various working individuals: lawyers, college students, parliamentarians, as well as movie or theater directors ("Mântuitorul ca Director de Teatru și Cinematograf"). As a regular contributor, Professor Father Gr. Cristescu emphasized two functions that he attributed to the communicative and social phenomenon of

¹⁰⁵ Ioan Gh. Savin, "Religia în învățământul secundar" in Revista Generală a învățământului no. 5, Mai 1927, 269-285.

¹⁰⁶ Iosif I. Gabrea, "Psihologia a două tipuri de copii: copilul de sat și copilul de oraș," in Revista Generală a Învățământului, Anul XVIII, no. 9, Nov. 1930, 525.

theater: to educate and entertain, or simply entertain. The latter, he argued, endangered morality and impaired wisdom. In his social position as a theater director, Jesus “would not consider plays from a commercial standpoint” or promote those known for sensational content. Carefully-selected plays were to expunge vices while production was to uphold high standards of spirituality and ethics. According to the same article, the audience is to play a role as well in securing these qualities by discouraging inappropriate content, regardless of the comical genius and satire. Actors were to be selected based on having shown moral conduct and serving as apostles of Orthodox education.¹⁰⁷ Other articles by Father Cristescu emphasized the need for theater to complement schools and churches the way it used to be in medieval times. Instead of relying on modern strategies such as satire, sarcasm, and caricature, theater could benefit more from restoring the spiritual inspiration and the idealism of the medieval theater.¹⁰⁸

Alexandru Lăpedatu’s mandate after 1927 brought important changes to amateur theater. Up until 1928, Romanian amateurs encountered practically no legal obstacles to putting on plays if they wished. Only amateurs using languages other than Romanian needed to obtain a ministerial authorization. With the new Law of Theaters of May 1926 and the ending of a ten-year censorship regime applied nationwide, Romanians as well as the ethnic minorities were equally required to apply for a permit, even when using plays in Romanian.¹⁰⁹ A decade-old concern that was evident in all ministerial appointments was the insistence by the Romanian state on a sense of mutual respect among all ethnic groups. Thus, the authorities required that all amateurs, including Romanians, needed to comply with article 57 stipulating that theatrical performances which deliberately hurt ethnic sensibilities of other groups living in Greater Romania were to be

¹⁰⁷ *Revista Teologică*, An XVI, Aug. Oct 1926, Nr. 8-10, 206.

¹⁰⁸ *Revista Teologică*, An XVI, Aug-Oct 1926, Nr. 8-10 p. 208

¹⁰⁹ “Legea Pentru Organizarea și Administrarea Teatrelor Naționale și Controlul Spectacolelor din România” București, 1926, in *Monitorul Oficial*, nr. 67/21 Martie 1926. “Regulament pentru Aplicarea Legii Spectacole si Impozite”, *Monitorul Oficial* nr. 137/22 Iun. 1926.

suspended and the organizers fined. Officials also refused approval of plays that offended other states, like Czechoslovakia or Italy and their respective minorities, again out of fear of creating a negative image for Romania in the world.

By securing basic civil freedoms for all citizens and requiring all to abide by the law, the Romanian government intruded only minimally into artistic life nationwide. As the Romanian State Police and the National Security Department argued in a document addressed to the Ministry of Arts and Religions, controlling and supervising shows of any kind was legally impossible, because city administrations had the sole authority over the main theater halls, cinema halls, and other buildings hosting events. In many urban centers of historical Transylvania, mayors were members of minority groups. Until 1927 when the new Law of Theaters came into effect, controls by State Security agents did take place pending a mutual understanding between local authorities and minorities. State offices in charge of national security were not even mentioned in the law as the rightful organs to control these establishments. Cooperation was the only way of supervising theatrical events, since numerous minority members got elected to urban councils and could curtail the National Security Department's power to exert control through legal means.¹¹⁰

By 1928, professional theater in Transylvania and all around the country began to lose revenue, a concern that officials compared with a visible surge in amateur theater initiatives.¹¹¹ Newspapers sounded the alarm not only about the National Theater of Cluj but also about the more successful Hungarian Theater led by Jenő Janovics. The former, which opened in 1919 in the former building of Janovics's theater, was part of the larger network of national theater institutions and depended on state subsidies and the favors of the government in power to cover

¹¹⁰ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, Direcția Generală a Artelor, Inv. 652, Dos. 19/1927, Fila 188/31 Mar. 1927.

¹¹¹ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv 652, Dos. 17/1928, Fila 59/27 Feb. 1928.

its expenses. Its administration and its actors epitomizing high professionalism in theater ordinarily had their jobs guaranteed, although with the onset of the Great Depression, personnel shrank and salaries began to be paid late. Even worse, the moral capital of theater institutions could be jeopardized if tickets remained unsold and seats remained empty over a long period. The sheer absence of spectators, mainly the city's urban bourgeoisie, occurred despite multiple efforts to expand the theater's outreach by way of tours and discounted tickets to make theatergoing more affordable to other social categories. This overall situation highlighted an emerging problem for many national theaters: the lack of a loyal and steady public.

For National Theaters as state institutions, whose leadership owed their appointment to politics, a lack of morality could damage the party's political image in Parliament. National theater managers and ministerial officials controlling theater life could be held accountable before the people's representatives. Besides these political implications, a lack of a steady public had economic repercussions, and with the constant financial shortcomings, the National Peasantist (NPP) officials at the time considered the possibility of the reorganizing National Theaters on an autonomous basis. The NPP deputy Emil Fagure (his real name was Samuel Honigman 1873-1948, a writer, theater critic and journalist) stated in a parliamentary discourse that the only solution to the moral, economic and political implications of the theaters' crisis was the commercialization and complete freedom of artistic life.¹¹² However effective this solution could have been in addressing the economic and political crisis, morally it was not. Public officials began to look in a different direction. By the late 1920s, state officials could not help noticing that

¹¹² Monitorul Oficial, nr. 57, 16 Aug. 1930, 2673-2676, quoted in Ioan Scurtu, Liviu Boar (eds.), *Minoritățile Naționale din România: Culegere de Documente*, Vol II (București: Editura Arhivele Statului din România, 1995) 262.

the amateur theater they were seeing among ordinary Romanians helped by priests and schoolteachers and popular with the public, was something exceptional, albeit for them strange.¹¹³

Private associations, known to be fervent supporters of theater amateurs, also underwent a sudden loss of followers and funds and a wavering of public interest in the second half of the 1920s. Annual reports drafted by cultural societies made clear that membership and activities declined while leadership lost its sense of mission. The public's response was tepid, and other insurmountable barriers further prevented societies from controlling cultural life at the local level. Still active after 1918, the Astra cultural society continued, albeit half-heartedly, to seek ways of improving education for all Romanians by way of theater. Its approach took into consideration class and group interests as it strove to imbue in rural and urban communities an attachment to high culture and Western education. Like most cultural societies in the country, Astra and its theatrical section, Societatea pentru Fond de Teatru Român (The Society for a Fund for Romanian Theater, the SFTR) remained close to political circles and state authorities. Relying on funds from state subsidies, Astra members espoused the principle that it was the state's moral duty and obligation to provide financial support for the cultural and spiritual needs of its people.¹¹⁴

The main goal that cultural societies in general set for their activities was fulfilling the presumptive need of culture among villagers. Other societies also pursued this objective by treating culture as closely related to the satisfaction of villagers' needs.¹¹⁵ Like Astra, which intended to organize a cultural life in the villages, the "Prince Carol" Cultural Foundation also extended its arm to various Transylvanian localities. By founding "cultural hearths" (*cămine culturale*), the Foundation hoped to provide theater amateurs with a place where they could use a

¹¹³ DANIC, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 17/1928, fila 59/27 Febr. 1928.

¹¹⁴ Justin Ceuca, *Teatrologia Românească Interbelică* (București: Editura Minerva, 1990), 174.

¹¹⁵ *Cartea Echipelor* (București: Fundatia Culturala Regală "Principele Carol," 1937), 8, 13, 14.

stage and have a library to help with their events.¹¹⁶ The Foundation's own publishing house printed theater plays by Lucian Blaga, Victor Ion Popa, and foreign playwrights. In the 1930s, the village monographs produced by the School of Sociology and its leader, Professor Dimitrie Gusti, who also serving as the Foundation's director, recorded numerous instances of amateur theater and mentioned organizers, participants, and frequency of productions.

The Romanian government's view of the state of cultural matters in rural communities was somewhat distant and even blurry in regard to amateur theater. Its cultural policies, outlined by leading intellectuals and politicians of the 1920s and gathered in a volume of conferences proceedings held between 1921 and 1927 in Bucharest, aimed to pursue an efficient cultural development nationwide. The contributors, all former state officials, emphasized the need to open more libraries, to make newspapers accessible and affordable, to invest in equipment and import movies for wall projections synchronized with radio sound, and to enlist charismatic and efficient public speakers for conferences on all sorts of topics relevant to country life. However, there was no common ground between the state's line of action and that of ordinary Romanians. The state's position was that of former officials, intellectuals who perceived problems as outsiders and oftentimes as observers who were never involved in the implementation of the policies or agendas of cultural societies. Both perspectives failed to reflect the understanding of ordinary Romanians of what cultural uplift meant to them.¹¹⁷ The state's support for adult schooling and basic reading and writing was an important but fairly unsuccessful undertaking.

Although none of these societies or the state could organize the desired cultural events or have a drastic impact in Romanian communities, many ideas which they pursued became a reality: Astra's positive view of theater playing in villages shaped the mentality of local elites, the

¹¹⁶ N. Ghiulea "Activitatea Fundației Principele Carol," Societatea de Mâine, Anul III, nr. 45, Cluj, Duminică, 7 Nov. 1926, 710-713.

“Prince Carol” Foundation’s emphasis on culture acknowledged as a social need was widely shared in local communities, Gusti’s Sociological School placing trust in how ordinary Romanians themselves could tell the world who they were as villagers and a community was a very encouraging development, and the state’s view that cultural life meant access to progressive, sophisticated educational opportunities like theater came to be widely shared in our region. The movement of amateur theater blended these ideas in various degrees into a quiet but steady expression of local culture.

Alexandru Lăpedatu’s two mandates, bridging the last liberal government with the first time when the opposition came to power after the war, is a good opportunity to reflect on how theater is related to the political condition of the times and the conflicts central to the development of every society. Under Lăpedatu, one can argue that theatrical art reflects and anticipates reality. The fate of professional theater reflected reality in the way cultural societies and profit-driven theater troupes pushed for political and financial goals, while amateur theater was still to anticipate the world people were nostalgic from. As minorities began the most spectacular movement of amateur theater in the region, the Romanian government pondered the aspect of censorship, on one hand to relax the overall life along the borders, especially with Hungary by ending the decade-old censorship instituted at the end of the First World War, and by implementing a system of control for the fledgling amateur theater movement. The Romanian state was ready to confront on stage the minorities’ political affirmations and cultural anxieties and fears of extinction and assimilation, knowing that culture was a matter of continuity or disappearance.

¹¹⁷ I. Simionescu, “Cultura Populară” in Nicolae Iorga (et al, eds.) Politica Culturii, Treizeci Prelegeri Publice și Comunicări Organizate de Institutul Social Român (București, 1927), 387.

Given the censorship plan involving Inspector Emil Isac, I argue that censorship, as initiated by the Romanian state, lost in practice, if not in theory, being a curious mixture of precedent and practicality. The impact censorship had on the theatrical world must be seen from different angles. Overall, censorship of amateur theater witnessed quiescent periods, alternating with more dramatic episodes that mostly involved the professional theater of the minorities. Unlike censorship elsewhere, in Romania it did not show a history of self-perpetuation. Old restrictions as known to Inspector Isac from the previous Hungarian government were deliberately avoided if theater events interfered with religion and ethnic expression, and specifically reinforced if they broke the law or weakened the security of the Romanian nation-state.

Aurel Vlad's Ministerial Appointment

Serving for a year as Minister of Arts and Religions in Iuliu Maniu's National Peasant government (November 1928-June 1930), Aurel Vlad dealt with theater issues in the context of a new bureaucratic structure, the Department of People's Education, and a new administrative law of 1929.¹¹⁸ Like his predecessors, Aurel Vlad (1875-1953) was a Transylvanian lawyer, a former activist on behalf of the Romanians way back when the province was a part of Hungary. He cooperated with the Theater Inspector Emil Isac in Cluj who continued his tenure in office, ready to handle, for many years onward, the large volume of petitions from amateurs who sought approvals for their plays.

After winning the elections in 1928, the Maniu government brought to power many Transylvanian intellectuals who, before joining the National Peasant Party (the NPP), were members of Maniu's National Party of Transylvania. The NPP believed in the need to open up the

administrative system, in order to enable a broad participation of people in public life¹¹⁹ and to bring state institutions in harmony with the economic and social conditions prevailing in each region. The National Peasantists remained lifelong advocates of democratic institutions and the idea that citizens should take part in political life and administer their own affairs, two principles and rights that had been denied to Romanians under Austria-Hungary.

The 1929 administrative law appeared to the NPP as a stringent necessity. In the early half of the 1920s, when the peasantry's trust in the Liberal government and state slowly eroded because it failed to solve economic problems,¹²⁰ laws tended to reinforce a pattern of inactivism in public life. For example, the law of public administration of 1925 discouraged broad participation and helped the central government retain power over local affairs. In stark contrast, the end of the decade encouraged local initiative once the law of 1929 stipulated decentralization.¹²¹ Observers rightfully labeled it a sort of "opening of gates" in political life, which was triggered by a general bureaucratic decentralization. The cultural self-rule of Transylvanian Romanians mostly benefited from the changing political fortunes in the country which initiated a mass political affirmation in the so-called "first truly democratic elections." The new context proved a degree of maturity and a steady transformation in the ways Romanians expressed their political voice when they voted Maniu's party into office.

Maniu's government brought several important changes. Theaters came under the control of new authorities: the Ministry of Work, Health, and Social Welfare. Vlad appointed a special commission for theaters within the newly formed unit of the Department of People's

¹¹⁸ Cosmin F. Budeancă, "O colaborare politică: Dr. Iustin Pop - Dr. Aurel Vlad (Une collaboration politique) *Sargeția*, 1999-2000, 28-29, nr. 2, 377-385; Valentin Orga, "Dr. Aurel Vlad și formarea grupului neoactivist de la Orăștie" (Aurel Vlad et la formation de groupe néoactiviste d'Orăștie) *Sargeția*, 1999-2000, 28-29, nr. 2, 347-368.

¹¹⁹ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 369.

¹²⁰ Hitchins, 410.

¹²¹ Hitchins, 381.

Education.¹²² As the names of the offices reveal, theater was acknowledged as far more than just a popular entertainment. Its overarching purpose came to be linked to an educational mission. Prestige was attached to various works if they could be turned into plays and performed on the stage. Their usefulness for popular education and their content of idealism were the decisive factors that ruled in their favor. This perspective was shared also by Hungarian intellectuals; András Szász, the president of the Union of Hungarian Journalists and Writers in Cluj (Kolozsvár) held a similar view, which appears clearly in his writings and his efforts to rescue Hungarian professional theater from its moral crisis.¹²³

Decentralization did not imply loosening control over the region's cultural life. Various departments of the executive branch acted in furtherance of the state's interests and could not accept the new rule allowing troupes to put on plays without a sort of censorship and textual verification. For example, General Arts Inspector Ion Minulescu authorized modified texts of Hungarian plays like the contentious Hungarian operetta *Nótás Kapitány* (1929) (The Singing Captain) by Imre Farkas (1879-1976)¹²⁴ for use in Hungarian performances, but the War Department placed it under strict interdiction. Oftentimes, the local mayor agreed with the repertory, but the county prefect would not allow the event because of suspected irredentist purposes. This situation left ample room for professionals and semi-professionals to perform in between the rules.¹²⁵

By 1932, the control of plays was proving an impossible task. Theater Inspector Emil Isac requested help from the Ministry of the Press and Propaganda to require from all Romanian press attachés at legations and embassies reports on the plays being performed in all central European capitals. It was well-known that minority groups in the region drew inspiration from

¹²² DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA DEP, Inv. 817, Dos. 1/1930, Fila 2/21 Aug. 1930.

¹²³ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 73/1930, Fila 62/13 iul. 1930

¹²⁴ Imre Farkas, *Nótás Kapitány: operett három felvonásban* (Budapest: Klein Ny, 1929) .

theaters in Berlin, Vienna, and Budapest, so Isac was hoping to compare the texts of the plays submitted for review and authorization with the performances in European theaters and in this way identify the plays correctly.¹²⁶ The issue of non-concordance between the plays of well-known playwrights and the texts submitted for review rendered the task difficult and time consuming, slowing down the processing of petitions for play approvals.¹²⁷

A report from the Romanian Legation in Vienna arrived in July 1932, informing the President of the Council of Ministers that plays like Otto Indig's *Die Braut von Torotzko* were being performed in Austria (Theater in der Josefstadt, director Max Reinhardt) and Hungary. The Romanian cultural attaché protested against passages that disparaged the Romanian army and administration. But the theater manager argued that the passages in question were actually bringing in audiences, especially when they were performed by actors in an exaggerated manner.¹²⁸ In Budapest, the play was widely performed, and the government was even sponsoring a movie based on the play's story. Far from triggering a diplomatic scandal, this case is nonetheless relevant for the Romanian government's concern about mutual respect among ethnic minorities living in Greater Romania. Isac represented democratic standards of fairness towards all ethnic groups, and the government even reacted when the image of other countries was ridiculed in plays, an example being plays criticizing the new Italian administration in Tyrol.¹²⁹ Enforcing at home a tolerant position towards minorities appears to have been at the center of state policy in historical Transylvania, although the risk of destabilizing the country through irredentism was not as strong in our region as it was in the Crișana region along the frontier with Hungary.

¹²⁵ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor si Artelor, DGA, Inv 652, Dos. 122/1929, Fila 78/28 Febr. 1929.

¹²⁶ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 35/1931, Fila 121/2 Jan 1931.

¹²⁷ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 24/1932, Fila 98/19 Mar. 1932 and Fila 99/19 Mar. 1932.

¹²⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 13/1932, Fila 163/28 Iul. 1932

¹²⁹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 13/1932, Fila 161/12 Aug. 1932.

Decentralization brought a further growth of contacts between the Romanian state and its citizens. Under Vlad's ministry, the procedure to obtain authorizations for theater performances by amateurs followed a more cumbersome routine, but amateurs were not deterred: one week for local approvals of the event, one week for Inspector Isac to read the text and inquire about the organizers' past, a few days for placing the paperwork in the archive before mailing the three copies of the authorization to the petitioners. In any case, two weeks had to precede the event, if approved, in order to enable rehearsals to be held and other preparations to be made. Under the new changes, the petitions were to be mailed now to Bucharest for final approval, then sent back to Cluj to Isac's office and from Cluj to the petitioners' address.¹³⁰

Decentralization enhanced even further an open communication between the government and citizens. The aspect of entertainment taxes encouraged many theater organizers to contact the Ministry. Semiprofessionals, either laypeople or clergy living in urban centers, sought such tax breaks and other advantages. Orthodox institutions of higher learning, known for providing students with courses on staging plays and diction taught by semiprofessional instructors, also requested reductions in taxes for their shows. Many theological schools had their own theater troupe made up of students. It was hoped that after graduation the clergy, when taking over a parish, would be quick to organize plays with amateur parishioners for cultural purposes. In theological schools, such theatrical events tended to be frequent, and featured high-quality shows, and therefore they were charged the regular rates of entertainment taxes. The Consistory of the Orthodox Eparchy, however, was quick to submit a request to the Ministry of Arts and Religions on behalf of the entire Church, to obtain a reduction in show tax payments from 32% to 10%,

¹³⁰ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1932, Fila 56/4 Febr. 1932.

which, the Consistory argued, was the rate which school committees, regardless of ethnicity and social status, were required to pay.¹³¹

The ensuing development of amateur theater reveals that decision-making evolved towards more efficiency and control, without impeding the spread of amateur theater. Even in places notorious for material scarcity and a lack of experience in organizing a local cultural life the inhabitants thought to try amateur theater and contact the Romanian bureaucratic system for play permits. Thanks to the continuous presence of Theater Inspector Emil Isac in office, the political control of cultural life in the region remained surprisingly stable and open to theater initiatives from all kinds of organizers.

The Great Depression and the Economic Context

The onset of the Great Depression during the NPP regime affected the funding for cultural institutions and cultural societies, at a time when all were in dire need of state intervention and support. The NPP officials regularly withheld funds and support because they made it a rule to follow the principle of self-administration, which they had promised to implement during elections.¹³² Theater troupes within cultural societies began promoting cultural events with the declared goal of fundraising. Even professionals considered fundraising an official primary goal. With fundraising the new watchword in semiprofessional and professional circles, actors now sought to join theatrical enterprises to avoid being taxed as entertainers. In doing so, they came closer to the initiatives of amateur theater playing. Even theater agencies like J. Salzer of Sibiu considered providing services of ticket sales and hall reservations for minorities and

¹³¹ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, Direcția Generală a Artelor, 1920-1929, Inv. 652, Dos. 18/1925, Fila 142/11 Jul. 1925

¹³² Hitchins, 450.

Romanian cultural societies, thereby helping amateurs put on plays for purposes ranging from philanthropy to pure entertainment.¹³³

Professional theater underwent a severe crisis which led to a sharp decrease in tours and profits. In conditions of financial shortages due to the Great Depression, the group solidarity among professionals broke down, enticing many to join semiprofessionals in undertakings with promising revenues. By 1931, shortages hit municipalities' budgets hard because the events scheduled for fundraising purposes or ethnic agendas as drafted by local cultural societies reached a lamentable end. The mayor of Sibiu wrote to authorities in Bucharest that theater troupes on tour could not perform in Sibiu because his office was unable to pay maintenance of the theater building.¹³⁴

Financial shortages changed the work environment of both professional and semiprofessional artists. In a scramble for more active members able to pay their union dues and earn a stable income as artists the SADL welcomed the members of a smaller association of semiprofessional artists, SCENA (the Stage) which operated at first as a professional association, but gradually became a union organization for artists of lesser public reputation. The merger of the two unions ensued basically out of fear of being undermined by each other in a tight, competitive and crisis-beset theater life.¹³⁵ In the post-merger structure, the SADL began to exert pressures by invoking legal stipulations in order to prevent amateurs from putting on shows in public spaces, as economic conditions evolved for the worse.¹³⁶ Costs of hiring semiprofessional artists went out of reach for cultural societies and thus they considered using only amateurs.

The financial crisis in artistic life brought to the fore the matter of artistic freedom for foreign artists and amateurs. It first became an international concern discussed at the Theater

¹³³ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Culte, 1931-1936, Inv. 818, Dos. 22/1931, fila 67/21 Dec. 1931.

¹³⁴ DANIC București, Fond. Dir. Artelor, DEP, Inv. 817, Dos. 17/1931, Fila 124/21 Dec. 1931.

¹³⁵ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 16/1931, Fila 2/14 Aug. 1931 and Fila 22/Oct. 22 1931.

Congress held in Rome in April 1932. In Europe, only Romania and Italy gave complete freedom to all artists, while elsewhere on the continent foreign artists faced increasing restrictions meant to protect the jobs of the domestic workforce. Article 52 of the March 1926 Theaters Law had stated the interdiction of foreign artists without Romanian citizenship from working on Romanian stages for more than six months. Otherwise, the police would intervene and deport artists who did not have a SADL membership. Yet, the number of artists in transit through Greater Romania and especially in historical Transylvania continued to increase. The broader European context often came up in the debates between the Ministry's theater officials and SADL. To the dismay of SADL leaders, the number of foreign artists without SADL membership or citizenship papers was on the rise.¹³⁷

The 1930s

From 1929 to 1931, professional, semiprofessional, and amateur groups submitted their petitions to obtain approvals for their theater events to the newly-created office, the Department of People's Education. Created on July 29, 1929 after the promulgation of Law 163 and supervising three services: "Shows, Movie Halls, and Radio", "Cultural Propaganda" and "Physical Education and Tourism," with amateur theater falling under the guidance of the first, the Department of People's Education was assigned for oversight to the Ministry of Work, Health, and Social Security. Assigning theater matters under the Department of People's Education to a ministry dealing with workforce and health care issues encapsulates a vision of fulfilling social needs through artistic endeavors and alleviating material and cultural wants. But it was not a vision peculiar to the National Peasant Party then in power. It was a view that the arts needed to be lumped together with education in the broadest sense to be an effective remedy

¹³⁶ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 18/1932, Fila 271/17 Febr. 1932.

¹³⁷ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 18/1932, Fila 272.

during times of economic hardship, as happened in the first postwar years and at the height of the Great Depression. The informal setting of amateur theater encouraged people to help themselves in hard times and led to broad social participation in both urban and local communities.

During his premiership in 1931, Nicolae Iorga failed to find solutions for the economic crisis. He revived his Sămănătorist agenda in cultural and religious life following the principles he had advocated in the literary review. His party and influence, even as premier, remained very limited among the broad population. Under Iorga as Prime Minister and Gusti as Minister of Arts, Religions, and Public Instruction, amateur theater was assigned to ministries in charge of culture, religion, education, and welfare. They continued to keep amateur theater under close scrutiny, requiring the final decision on petitions for play approvals to be made in Bucharest. The scale and rising popularity of amateur performances among both ethnic minorities and Romanians led state officials to rely on Isac's verification of the educational content of plays and the honest intentions of the organizers. The control expressed itself in the numerous policy initiatives and legislation being elaborated to regulate this new phenomenon, yet, without affecting it.

By July 2, 1931, theater matters moved back to the Ministry of Education, Religions, and Arts, but would again be transferred after March 9, 1937, when the Ministry of Public Education, Arts, and Religions split into two ministries: the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Arts and Religions, a separation reminiscent of the one occurring along similar lines in 1920. When theater was not under the sole and exclusive control of a ministry, it fell under the supervision of officials in charge of professional theater (National Theater of Bucharest/ DGAT).

Under Gusti's leadership as Minister of Arts, Religions, and Public Instruction, the processing of petitions proceeded apace. Inspector Isac reported in January 1932 that his office was reading on average 500-600 plays each month, a record number in historical Transylvania unmatched by any other country in Europe. By 1932, the Ministry appointed another regional

theater inspector for the regions adjoining historical Transylvania: Crisana, Maramureș, and Banat. Another Transylvanian intellectual, Ștefan Marcus, took charge of those regions where security concerns along the frontier with Hungary were likely to cause problems.

Isac continued his support for the amateur theater movement in his region, claiming that it served state interests through its large scale and frequency and variety, and urged the government to eliminate any sort of legal obstacles or cumbersome procedures which would force commoners interested in theater playing to become ambivalent in their relations with Romanian officials. The ministerial visa on permit papers, he claimed, was only impeding their processing and was affecting the scheduling of plays by organizers.¹³⁸ Isac continued to reform the processing of paperwork in collaboration with every political party that came to power until 1940.

The Liberal government led by I.G. Duca and the successive governments from 1933 up to the installation of the royal dictatorship in 1938 endorsed the principle of autonomy in esthetics and arts.¹³⁹ At the ministerial level, public instruction was separated from the arts, which concerned themselves only with professional theater. Like in the first half of the 1920s, also dominated by the liberals, this change did not have much effect on amateur theater initiatives which continued to unfold with a relatively limited interference from the government and authorities. Yet, it enjoyed constant attention from state officials, and continued to last all the way through the late 1930s. Censorship, indeed, became slightly harsher, as all permit requests had to go through the offices in Bucharest, but the Romanian amateur theater organizers as well as the ethnic groups continued to put on plays regularly until part of the province was ceded to Hungary in 1940.

¹³⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos 25/1932, Fila 4/8 ian. 1932.

¹³⁹ Ion G. Duca, Partidul Național-Liberal și Situațiunea Tarii (București: 1932)

Cinema Entertainment and Theater Playing

Despite the harsh competition that cinema and radio posed for amateur theater, none could diminish the latter's astonishing appeal among the Transylvanians of all ethnic groups. One reason might be the fact that the clergy's embrace of amateur theater was too powerful an incentive for parishioners to follow suit. However, the question remains: why would young men and women returning to their home villages from working in cities put on plays that reflect their rural world, with the particular social, gender, work relations, moral values, and religious traditions? The strong resemblance of the plays authorized for amateur shows with the popular genre of soap-opera-type of radio drama might explain the popularity of plays. The amateurs developed more than an interest in plays, but a strong commitment to theater playing that lasted for over a decade unabated. Theater represented their world so faithfully as they lived in the past or in the present, that they rejected other means of entertainment that abounded in nearby cities. Another aspect that made amateur theater hard to supplant was a sense of pride that this form of entertainment, being initiated from among their ranks in a sense belonged to them, was meant for them only, and fulfilled their needs, thus making the village self-sufficient in its cultural needs.

The government was constantly surveying the number, size, overall condition of private and public cinema and theater halls at the national level mainly for administrative purposes. Other state institutions most likely used this valuable documentation, either for planning theater tours of the national theaters in different locations, for fire protection of the spectators and material assets, for collecting entertainment tax purposes, or might be requested by health officials, and, not least, for the control of minorities who, in Transylvania, dominated the artistic landscape in all cities

and towns. Such administrative surveys were undertaken twice in 1921¹⁴⁰ and 1925¹⁴¹ and once in the 1930s.

Opening and thriving as a permanent movie operator in a town or city was a risky business. When Iuliu Crișan requested authorization in Huedin to open a cinema hall in 1921, he claimed to promote Romanian culture and morality. Recommendations on his behalf reached the Department of Public Instruction in Cluj, then the one in Bucharest and back to Cluj, later to reach Emil Isac, the Theater Inspector for Transylvania. Nicolae Tâmpănar, a war veteran from Cluj, also eyed the location of the cinema hall in Huedin and claimed that economic hardships for his family should persuade authorities to give him the concession instead of Crișan. But cinema in small towns proved overall unprofitable, and in the early 1920s small entrepreneurs came up with an innovation: travelling cinema presentations.¹⁴² Other entrepreneurs saw in travelling movie exhibitions a chance to accumulate enough money in order to switch to theater later on.¹⁴³ They were familiar with the popularity of theater and perceived it as a more profitable business opportunity after saving enough to start a troupe.

The management of cinema halls and film distribution was mainly a private initiative run by minorities, who saw professional theater and feature movies as complementary for their development of their business. By 1925, professional theater life filled so much of the cultural life in Transylvanian cities that it encroached deeply on the turf of the inchoate but earnest movie establishment. The Romanians' experience with cinematic initiatives appeared in the late 1920s through the interest in movies of the 'Prince Carol' Cultural Foundation. Founded in 1921, the Foundation first considered diverse strategies to enhance the Romanians' interest in amateur

¹⁴⁰ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 686/1921, fila 661/28 Oct. 1921.

¹⁴¹ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Culte și Arte DGA, Inv. 652, 1920-1929, Dos. 22/1925, filele 78-149/1925-1928.

¹⁴² DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 686/1921, Fila 345/9 Iul. 1921, Fila 356/9 Jul 1921, Fila 358/17 Jul. 1921

theater, and following in the footsteps of other cultural societies, it sponsored theater playing of the semiprofessional kind. Acknowledging the power of theater in Transylvanian cities and towns, the Foundation even entered into an agreement with the Ministry of Arts and Religions, and obtained a percentage of the allocation of show revenues earned by the National Theater of Cluj in order to increase funds for its cultural and educational goals. Seeking to establish through his foundation “a moral guardianship of the villages” and induce intellectuals and students to establish yearly contact with the same communities,¹⁴⁴ Prince Carol, like Zenovie Pâclișanu whom we met earlier working in the ministerial offices, slowly came to the conclusion that a more feasible goal than amateur theater would be distributing books to local libraries, military garrisons, and local cultural societies all over the country, as well as presenting movies, especially travel documentaries, and Romanian geographical and historical movies.¹⁴⁵ Using its own equipment, the Foundation showed movies in many Transylvanian cities for several years.

In 1925, the Romanian professional theaters touring the region were so active and numerous and had so fully booked the city hall’s movie theater that they thwarted the Foundation’s efforts to run their movies.¹⁴⁶ To leave the cities and tour the villages with itinerant exhibitions of documentary films and movies was a serious financial risk and would have depleted the budget of any Romanian cultural society. Many private Hungarian entrepreneurs in Transylvania, however, found cinematic touring profitable. In 1926, official reports announced that movies surpassed plays in popularity, and the new Regulatory Law for Movie Theaters came into force on February 6.

¹⁴³ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, 1903-1924, Inv. 550, Dos. 686/1921, Fila 9 and 118/15-17 June 1921.

¹⁴⁴ Fundația Culturală Regală “Principele Carol,” Cartea Echipelor, 8.

¹⁴⁵ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, Dep Arte, Inv. 550, Dos. 704/1921, Fila 436/Dec. 25, 1921.

¹⁴⁶ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, Direcția Generală a Artelor, Inv. 652, 1920-1929, Dos. 17/1925, Fila 67/25 Nov. 1925. The library of movies owned by the Foundation was opened for loans to Hungarian movie exhibitors touring the region. See Mihai Kovacs and J. Trepas’s request for authorization sent for final approval to the Ministry of Interior’s “Special Commission for Movie Theaters” in Dos. 16/1925, Fila 2/12 Jan. 1925.

Ethnic relations in Hungarian-dominated counties stimulated numerous cinematic initiatives and determined planning decisions at a higher level. The Trei Scaune (Covasna, Haromszék) County was a particular place where conditions for an effective cultural activity with theater were not very propitious. Hungarian minority communities exerted a strong cultural influence on the Romanians, given that the only amateur theater initiatives in the county included either Hungarian plays in translation or in the original Hungarian. Even though so many Romanian cultural organizations scheduled multiple events and devoted considerable resources to them (the local Astra branch of Trei Scaune, the Schoolteachers' Association of Trei Scaune, the "Sfântu Gheorghe" Orthodox Youth Society, the Society of War Heroes, and Nicolae Iorga's League for the Cultural Unity of all Romanians in the city of Sfântu Gheorghe), Hungarian culture prevailed in the county. After the moral crisis, which we have described, affected the semiprofessional theater organized by these cultural societies, Astra obtained a cinema license and vowed to help Romanians in this county to found movie halls with its support. But its request to lower the entertainment taxes from 26% to 10% was rejected by the authorities, because the Ministry needed to reevaluate the matter within two years, to make certain that all the revenue was used for cultural purposes.¹⁴⁷

For Romanian cinema-goers in Cluj the inauguration of a movie hall on May 15, 1931 in the building of National Theater of Cluj marked the yielding of the place of honor to movies. Yet, the Theater's administration saw it as a strategy to restore theater to its rightful position. Emil Isac led the way in protesting against the Ministry's support for cinema by claiming that no Romanian or documentary films could muster a large enough audience. The Romanian films were too few to sustain a whole season and the films could not even be called documentaries. High costs were a common complaint of both audiences and private exhibitors of movies. Even so, cinema was

¹⁴⁷ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 17/1927, Fila 76/ 12 Apr. 1927.

perceived as a mass, lucrative entertainment which discouraged theatergoers to embrace movies.¹⁴⁸

Cinema halls and movies made great advances and even became profitable by embracing a new artistic formula. This new genre appeared in official reports. Inspector Isac observed that a hybrid theater-cinema-dance genre had become popular, giving dance and cinema more class and glamour by adding theater. Although mixing artistic genres was illegal, this new genre was profitable because it could avoid paying the separate taxes required for each genre. It also brought in larger audiences than previous arrangements. Theater seemed to cater to the morally-minded public, like students, but dance and cinema could bring in more workers and petty bourgeoisie, thereby prolonging entertainment evenings by appealing to more tastes, incomes, and social categories.¹⁴⁹

Unlike theater, cinema suffered great losses during summer seasons. As an Astra member, President Axente Banciu of Braşov argued in a memo to the Ministry, that without the help of Jenő Janovics, the director of the Hungarian Theater of Cluj, the cinema hall of Apollo of Astra would have had great financial losses over the summer seasons. The Ministry, however, disagreed and even rejected Janovics's offer to let Astra present plays over the summer in his theater in Cluj, in exchange for allowing Janovics's company to show movies in Braşov. The state hoped to thwart the monopoly of Janovics's society "Transilvania" of Cluj over all cinema halls in historical Transylvania. The Ministry tried to prevent similar business understandings from spreading into every city in the region.¹⁵⁰ Axente Banciu proposed open-air cinema as a way to attract moviegoers to come to shows more often, although the idea did not seem to bring in spectators.

¹⁴⁸ DANIC Bucureşti, Fond Departamentul Artelor, Inv. 818, Dos. 35/131, Fila 156/9 Jun. 1931.

¹⁴⁹ DANIC Bucureşti, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, Inv. 652, DGA, Dos. 19/1927, Fila 173/6 Mart. 1927.

¹⁵⁰ DANIC Bucureşti, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 60/1927, Fila 66/3 May 1927.

Cinema lacked governmental support needed to connect equipment suppliers with cultural societies and sponsor activities based on movie shows, be they documentaries or silent movies. The upper-level businessmen among the minorities had a high stake in cinema entertainment, making Romanian authorities wary of their dominant presence in cities. This ambivalency on the part of the Romanian state was coupled with a lack of constant audience, thus low revenues that jeopardized cinema initiatives.

Having traced the important intellectual and political sources, and having mapped out the most important moments in politics when amateur theater developed in historical Transylvania, my discussion turns to examining its local evolution, showing aspects in greater depth about organizers and repertoires as these appear differentiated by Greek-Catholic and Orthodox choices, respectively westernization and traditionalism, in various local case studies.

Part II

Amateur Theater - Characteristics, Development, and Leaders

Amateur theater typically developed without the direct involvement of centralized state authorities or cultural societies. In the sections detailing the cultural activities of the Ministers Banu and Lăpedatu, I mentioned the western orientation of the largest and best-known cultural society, Astra, and its constant attempts to organize cultural life in the territory. However, its members were at a loss to initiate a closer relationship with the villagers through amateur theater. Their attachment to literary and professional standards was conducive to events of semiprofessional character, which stood in the way of this rapprochement. Neither the state or the main cultural societies operating countrywide could be said to have influenced the pace and mission of amateur theater at the local level.

The amateurs defined their activities by a specific set of criteria. One aspect is the community's participation in such events at will. Even though they probably admired professional

theater, the amateurs and their audiences showed no concern for the criteria of professionalism in their endeavors. In selecting their plays, they considered the moral-religious content to entertain their community, thinking that only such content could have had more appeal to the unsophisticated audiences in villages. They trusted their collective abilities to make donations upon attending plays and hoped to cover basic needs in their parishes and neighborhoods.

Many cultural societies and groups claimed to have initiated amateur theater in villages under the supervision of intellectuals and activists. In their efforts, they showed their admiration and emulation of professional theater and a strong concern for improving the villagers' access to a rich cultural life of their own. High-school students tended to follow a similar trajectory, starting as self-declared amateurs and ending by putting on performances that featured props lent by the the National Theaters and guest actors on their stages, thus, showing up as semi-professionals rather than amateurs. In 1870, the Romanian students at the Catholic High School of Cluj announced the creation of their amateur group "Tovărășie Dramatică" (theatrical society), which was spearheaded by the Bistrița-born theater activist, Ioan Baciú of Șoimuș (1853-N/D). Baciú's efforts at staging plays revolved around themes discussed in literary circles, and he made no secret of his intention to imitate the professionals. The students planned theater tours in neighboring towns and villages or in their native places during summer breaks, but by 1872, the troupe disbanded.¹⁵¹

After the war, amateur theater occurred first among Hungarian Roman Catholics and Saxon Evangelical-Lutherans in 1927 in Hunedoara County. Then, several events occurred in Cluj where Inspector Isac reported that Romanian peasants began putting on plays in large numbers, and even assessed theater life to be in full swing. Later on, the Trei Scaune County

¹⁵¹ Iosif Pervain, "Societatea Diletanților "Teatrali" din Cluj, Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai: Series Philologia, Fasciculus 1, 1962, Cluj, 56-63.

followed closely with events, as being described in the memos of the Prefect's office sent to central ministerial authorities in Bucharest. He explained that all ethnic groups were putting on plays through schools and other legal societies in order to increase funds for their institutions and stimulate philanthropic giving. Without more details, one might assume that the case of amateur theater in this county could well be that of semi-professional troupes.

Since amateur theater was a new phenomenon among ordinary citizens in small communities, local authorities, very often, had not had experience with such events before, and dysfunctional aspects only increased the ability of amateurs to put on their plays unhindered by local authorities. The mayoral administrative personnel had to become gradually familiar with the new regulations of the Law of Theaters, thus, decisions taken at the center were not promptly disseminated nationwide or being applied to the various cases of amateur theater.

There were cases when the local authorities intervened to obtain terms favorable for amateurs. The office of Inspector Emil Isac often acted on their behalf to streamline procedures. In a memo addressed to Minister Lăpedatu he asked permission "to continue, like in the past, to grant one-time permits for fifteen days to amateurs" without submitting the paperwork to Bucharest for a final decision. His request received a favorable decision on the condition that the amateurs obtained their Romanian citizenship, would not become professionals, or put on plays regularly.¹⁵² Numerous state offices in the War, Public Education, Arts, Health, and Homeland Security Departments demonstrated flexible practices in dealing with theater amateurs. After being approved, the documents were, in general, circulated smoothly among departments, the official paperwork being processed for the Romanians and minorities in the same way.

¹⁵² DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, Direcția Generală a Artelor, Inv. 652, Dos. 108/1928, Fila 24/20 Oct. 1928.

Working a full schedule in an understaffed office, Inspector Isac could not but rejoice the announcement of regional decentralization of 1928. He rushed to mail his circular letter to all the prefects in historical Transylvania, stating that amateurs did not need to have their plays approved beforehand, as long as they complied with the regulations listed in the famous Article 57 of the Law of Theaters of 1926, which forbade public events that jeopardized national security, public order, and the peaceful relations among ethnic groups.¹⁵³ Decentralization and the end of ten-year censorship also marked the elimination of the rule that Hungarian plays had to be read and approved by Romanian authorities before being considered for public performances.

Serving in Cluj as a chief theater inspector for the regional office of the Ministry of Arts and Religions, Emil Isac could be said to have witnessed the movement of amateur theater from its birth to the Second World War. He began his tenure monitoring the tours of Romanian professional troupes sent to Transylvania from Bucharest by National Theater institutions or private companies. He checked the validity of their authorizations and served as an intermediary between them and local authorities when negotiating free amenities for the tour participants. He also supervised authorizations of professional private theater companies belonging to the ethnic minorities and set up the circuits of each Hungarian, German, and Jewish troupe.¹⁵⁴ Isac also represented the Ministry at the Congress of Hungarian Actors in Cluj held in October 1920.¹⁵⁵ As the longest serving regional theater inspector in Greater Romania, he gave expert advice and navigated successfully the political terrain at the center and in his native province, between constantly changing ministerial appointments and all those involved in professional and amateur theater.

¹⁵³ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 122/1929, Fila 49/11 Febr. 1929.

¹⁵⁴ DANIC București, Ministerul Instrucțiunii Publice și Cultelor, Dir. Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 536/1920, Fila 93/23 Dec 1920.

¹⁵⁵ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 552/1920, Fila 55/28 Oct 1920.

Isac empathized with both Romanian and minority organizers in unprecedented ways. A Westernizer in his poetic art, but a third-wayer in his social-intellectual views, he was neither a traditionalist nor a westernizer. His background helped him understand like no one else the status of minorities in a nation-state, being a strict follower of the law and authority, without losing sight of fairness, moral precepts, and historical precedents. If his literary legacy is still an object of debate, his career as a public servant appears in archival documents as one distinguished for objectivity and fairness.

Amateurs who proposed plays unflattering to other ethnic groups or challenging the Romanians state through an irredentist agenda were flatly rejected if modifications in the text would not effectively remove the elements of ethnic discrimination. One such example is the play Ede Tóth's *Escortatul* (The Prisoner under Escort), for which the organizers, a Reformed Women's Society from Paraid-Praid (Odorhei County) rallied to their side their minority parliamentary deputy Francisc Laar, to defend their choice. Laar's support of the Reformed women brought the risk for a public institution, the Ministry of Arts and Religions, to undergo a Parliamentary interpellation for breaking the law.¹⁵⁶ Minority groups, even local religious groups who sought to put on a play had the political experience to use legal means to uphold their claims to cultural freedom. Such a step reflected the minorities' awareness of being entitled to autonomy in their everyday life. Romanian officials promptly argued in legal and fair terms that it was a basic right for any ethnic collectivity not to be offended in the public sphere through theater performances, regardless of citizenship or minority status or demographic strength. Inspector Isac brought in support of his position the rejection of another permit for the same play, by a Hungarian community of Reformed faith from the village of Petrila, in Hunedoara County.

¹⁵⁶ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 4/1934, Fila 268/Apr. 21, 1934.

Writing petitions for play permits stimulated a communicative practice among the amateurs of all ethnic groups that worked both ways, the petitioners being encouraged to write to the authorities, who in turn, pondered the extent to which to a satisfactory degree of cultural freedom could be provided. By February 1932 we find from Isac's reports that not only the careful control of minorities had continued but a special attention was given to the Romanian amateur theater as well. Although by law shows in the Romanian language by citizens did not require permits, the Romanians interested in amateur theater, he argued, were treated with the same regimen of inspections like minority groups to prevent ethnic libel and immoral material be displayed in public. As petitioners, Romanians and minorities alike were allowed to have their stamp fees waived at Isac's recommendation.¹⁵⁷ By March 1932, paperwork submission for show authorizations at the regional level reached such a high level that it made the mailing of all petitions too cumbersome and expensive to be sent to Bucharest for a final decision, and various solutions were discussed to address the issue of volume.¹⁵⁸ By this time, amateur theater had reached its height. On average eight to ten plays reached Isac's office each day.¹⁵⁹

Organizers

Despite a growing separation between the religion and secularism in the educational system, priests and schoolteachers contributed together to the promotion and success of amateur theater as the main organizers of theater events. Confessional schools were gradually taken over by the Romanian state,¹⁶⁰ and a strong emphasis on rational education and way of life challenged rural mentalities. Romanian peasantry continued to see schooling as hostile to their way of life. Amateur theater, however, restored a favorable feeling toward education, mainly for its

¹⁵⁷ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 165/Apr. 5, 1932.

¹⁵⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 24/1932, Fila 55/15 Febr. 1932, 100/14 Mar. 1932.

¹⁵⁹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 24/1932, Fila 174/29 Jan. 1932.

¹⁶⁰ Nicolae Brinzeu, "Chestia Școalelor Confesionale din Ardeal," Învățătorul, nr. VIII, 25 Febr 1927, nr. 2, 82.

entertainment appeal and its moral-religious education. While rural schools remained relatively empty, the audiences of amateur theater filled the halls and turned the presumptive young and adult students into loyal spectators.

The causes for the popularity of theater lay in its strong educational component laced with religious teachings and adjusted to the understanding and moral system of an ethnic community, in the majority illiterate. The plays' wisdom was couched in common people parlance, with religious teachings creating a style of theater that people recognized and identified with. The events called "producțiuni" (small productions) were an educational activity preferred by the clergy, educated laymen, and social groups (firefighters, artisans, youth groups), for whom religious teachings was the sole attraction. This aspect proves that the inroads of secularization were not too well entrenched in local communities. In a period when cinema and radio were making big strides to attract market segments, theater shows in local communities held a special attraction, providing far more satisfaction to a less-than demanding audience and entertainment for a fraction of the cost of other options.

When organizing a local cultural life in neighborhoods and parishes, Romanian archpriests, parish priests, and women's religious societies showed a constant interest in plays. Rather than focusing on religious themes, they chose comedies by lesser known playwrights who wrote about everyday life because they thought that such content could highlight better moral teachings. In the late nineteenth century the clergy did not see theater as an acceptable option, as the Code used by the Greek-Catholic clergy (Law V/1878, Titl. XII, cap. VI) stipulated that the Holy Synod did not approve of parish priests attending profane plays or dancing at popular celebrations.¹⁶¹ Father Alexandru Fugăță, serving in the village Crișan in Hunedoara County, pondered ways to enhance cultural activities for his parishioners ever since he started his pastoral

mission in 1880. By 1933 the Orthodox Women's Society of Crișan put on two yearly theater shows in this mid-size village of 782 people. If in the late nineteenth-century the clergy found that attending theater plays was improper, by the interwar period theater appeared as a great opportunity for reinforcing clergy's mission of providing spiritual guidance along traditional lines through new and modern means.¹⁶²

The organizers, be they young villagers, the schoolteacher, or the church choir's leader, stated as their primary objective the need for material support for the church (a bell, painting services, church decorating, the building of a cultural center in the village) or community (food, clothing, shoes, and school supplies for children or those in dire need, especially in anticipation of Christian holidays). Practical and moral-religious needs are clearly stated in the paperwork amateurs submitted to authorities for play permits. The timing of these events reflects more than material goals. Plays were scheduled around Christian holidays, a practice which proves that the clergy had an important say in the event programming and the show could be rehearsed and performed at the height of religious celebrations, before or after Christmas, Easter, Epiphany, Pentecost, and Ascension.

At the same time, Romanian clergy tried to give young parishioners an opportunity to get involved in the selection of the script content, role distribution, and other organizational matters, like preparing the play for the stage. Depending upon their social position in the community, they could either submit their petitions in the name of the local priest's office, or if they enjoyed a higher status, like the firefighters of Slimnic in Sibiu County, they could write to local and central authorities themselves, in their own name. The presence of the Orthodox Church, however, can be easily established in their petitions when they specified the location of the event (in the pavilion

¹⁶¹ Ioan Ghent, Administrația Bisericească (Oradea Mare: Tipografia Nagyvarad, 1912), 190.

¹⁶² Ioachim Lazăr, Crișan un sat istoric din Zarand, Studiu Monografic, (Deva: Tipografia Astra, 2007), 445.

of their local church), or when they stated that the proceeds were to cover the needs of the Orthodox parish.¹⁶³ An interesting case is the petition of a priest's wife, Valeria Gotiu from the village of Mosuni (the Mures County) who, together with a local peasant put on a play twice, in November 13 and 24, 1938, without the approval of authorities. Emil Isac justified the leniency towards this case by saying that the government cannot punish an Orthodox priest for putting on a play in Transylvania. The priest already appeared to have been already approved for a dance permit for hundred folk dancers.¹⁶⁴ Orthodox priests who organized plays were also distinctive for their focus on "moralist plays" as they were known in the region for their moralist bend rather than scholarly, scientific positions in the public sphere, albeit, by no means that meant they were less educated than their Greek-Catholic counterparts.¹⁶⁵

Other people interested in amateur theater were the large numbers of artisans from the main Romanian cities like Bistrița, Alba-Iulia, Deva, Orăștie, and Sibiu. They were wary of being assimilated by the more affluent and organized networks of Hungarian and Saxon artisans and workers. Although modest and ill-defined, Romanian artisans in Transylvania were staunch defenders of their nationality, making sacrifices while serving the cause of national movement in the nineteenth century. Cultural expression among artisan groups had been a preoccupation of Romanian political leaders since 1875 and continued after the First World War mainly because both leaders and artisans saw a close connection between material well-being and a high educational level and cultural involvement. One example is the show organized by The Romanian Artisans' Society of Medias (Sibiu County) who put on *Trei Nopti de Râs* (Three Nights of Laughter), charging admission in the hope of founding a cultural library for the Romanian

¹⁶³ DANIC, București, Fond Departamentul Arte, for Fântâna: Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, Fila 73/Jan 6, 1929, for Slimnic: Inv. 818, Dos. 10/1933, Fila 208/Feb. 5, 1933, for Baciu: Inv. 818, Dos. 21/1935, Vol. II, Fila 138/15 Nov. 1935.

¹⁶⁴ DANIC Bucuresti, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 819, Dos. 2/1938, vol. I, fila 24/Dec. 28, 1938.

people.¹⁶⁶ The artisans' amateur theater produced both material benefits and stimulated the cultivation of moral and intellectual qualities in their fellow citizens. Among the artisans and peasants who immigrated to the United States from Transylvania in 1923, theater playing continued to be the first choice when organizing their cultural life in Cleveland, Youngstown, Canton, Detroit and Indiana Harbor.¹⁶⁷

As cities and towns witnessed an influx of rural inhabitants who were attracted by better prospects of income and employment, the urban population in Transylvania grew steadily in the 1920s up until 1937 when it began to stagnate.¹⁶⁸ Still, an ill-formed middle class, the first-generation of well-to-do farmers (țărani înstăriți) and artisans adopted a theater repertory that spoke not to European theater tastes but highlighted the local mores and nostalgic feelings. Their choice was a type of drama to which literary critic Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu devoted much space in his literary history, considering "drama of local sentimentality and nostalgia" a category in itself in Romanian dramatic literature.¹⁶⁹ Although Romanian in the character of their repertoires and overall outlook, the public events in either urban or rural locations differed in their play selections by distinctive Orthodox or Greek-Catholic cultural aspects, which clearly differentiated organizers and the messages they delivered to their respective audiences.

Theater Repertory

Before 1918, the Romanians living in Transylvania were barred from political rights as an ethnic group, and were prevented from publicly voicing their ethnic concerns or using their native language. A consequence of this situation was that they began to turn in large numbers to

¹⁶⁵ Victor Bojor, *Episcopii Diecesei Gr.Cat. de Gherla , acum Cluj-Gherla (1856-1939)*, (Targu-Mures, Tipografia "Ardeleana" Iosif Bucur), 428.

¹⁶⁶ DANIC Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 819, Dos. 3/1938, Vol. II, Fila 329/Dec. 29, 1938.

¹⁶⁷ Alexandru Nemoianu, "A Romanian-American Initiative to Create Theatrical Groups in 1923" *Romanian American Heritage Center Information Bulletin*, Vol. XXXII No. 1, Jan-Mar 2014, Jackson Michigan, 7.

¹⁶⁸ Keith Hitchins, 384.

writing plays as a means of communication with one another. Educated Romanians, both Orthodox and Greek Catholic, turned to writing by contributing to local journalism, “which became a refuge of all untalented writers, especially priests and teachers.”¹⁷⁰ Notwithstanding the ethnic and political obstacles, the genre they preferred was literature, and sought publishing outlets either in their home region or elsewhere in Romania. Moreover, as Ion Dodu Balan argued in another biography of Emil Isac, “all Transylvanian writers, regardless of the genre that consecrated them, could not resist the temptation to write plays.”¹⁷¹ Many Transylvanian intellectuals who accepted public positions in the post-1919 state administration both in Bucharest and in Cluj remained committed writers especially as playwrights and journalists.

By the late 1920s, the Transylvanian press witnessed a flowering of new literary titles, which ended the cultural and literary vacuum that had gripped the region right after the First World War.¹⁷² Then and even earlier at the turn of the century, the few literary periodicals published by the Romanians in Transylvania constantly featured articles about ways of increasing the Romanians’ participation in activities that would enhance their literary and scientific knowledge and improve education and, therefore, lead to better lives. The term commonly used to designate such activities “culturalization (or in Romanian “culturalizare”) reflected a mission of public service on the part of the secular intellectual elite, and, later on, the state, to create educational opportunities out of social and literary activities and seek an increase in literacy by way of cultural events.¹⁷³

The rise of amateur theater in local communities was a consequence of the impassioned advocacy for literacy through numerous secular and religious periodicals. Cultural life was

¹⁶⁹ Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, *Literatura Română între Cele Două Războaie Mondiale*. Vol III (Editura Minerva: București, 1975), 13.

¹⁷⁰ Ion Brad, *Emil Isac, un Tribun al Ideilor Noi* (Cluj: Editura Dacia, 1972).

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Ion Brad, 55.

historically conceived with literacy and nationality strength going hand in hand. The Romanian Orthodox periodical *Telegraful Român* [The Romanian Telegraph] published numerous interventions by seminary professors, urging village leaders to improve simultaneously the economic and cultural situation of the population.¹⁷⁴ Raising the concern of education and enlightenment, the Orthodox *Renășterea* (Rebirth) edited by Archpriest Sebastian Stanca (1878-1947) urged priests in small parishes to devote time to reading and writing.¹⁷⁵ He encouraged Orthodox priests to strive to become frequent contributors to journals with their own articles and literary works, while providing spiritual guidance to villagers. This concern fed upon the century-old concern to improve the Orthodox priest's education. Such journalistic manifestoes written by well-respected clergymen of the Orthodox Church increased the parish priests' interest in blending literature, literacy, and faith through cultural events like theater. One major finding of this study is that Orthodox priests since the eighteenth century continuously expressed an interest in learning and self-teaching and were, by no means, illiterate or "crude and superstitious" as Transylvanian authorities and the Court of Vienna traditionally viewed them.¹⁷⁶

Enjoying access to Roman Catholic institutions of learning, the Greek Catholic clergy benefitted from instruction on a larger scale and from earlier centuries than the Orthodox. Ever since the mid-nineteenth century, Greek Catholic lay and religious hierarchy embraced a new code of moral conduct which increasingly came to guide private and public behaviors and choices. The new morality distanced itself from religion under the influence of Enlightenment. Public affairs and public opinions, modern learning and technology came to matter a great deal within

¹⁷² Claudia Pop, *Aspecte ale cărții și lecturii în reviste literare din Transilvania (1848-1918)* (Biblioteca București, 2010).

¹⁷³ Nicolae Iorga (et al, eds.) *Politica culturii*, 140.

¹⁷⁴ Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Affirmed: The Romanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1860/1914* (Bucharest: The Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999) 222.

¹⁷⁵ *Renășterea* (organul oficial al Eparhiei Ortodoxe Române a Vadului, Feleacului, Geoagiului și Clujului (Cluj: 1923) [Rebirth, the official newspaper of the Romanian Orthodox Bishoprics of Vad, Feleac, Geoagiu, and Cluj] (Cluj, -1950)

Greek Catholic circles and efforts to make them accessible to the Greek Catholic masses increased over time. The clergy, apparently not fond of such modern perspectives, was to serve however as an indispensable mediator, thus, its religious role took obviously a secondary place, but by no means, was discarded.¹⁷⁷ This background is useful to consider when examining the nature of plays preferred by Greek Catholic groups, and the relations developing between Greek Catholic organizers, state officials, and Orthodox communities.

The level of cooperation between schoolteachers and priests in Orthodox communities raised no heated debates compared to the vibrant discussions on this topic among the Greek Catholics, who were preoccupied with the role of theater in education, and often debated as to what sort of plays to suggest to parishioners. The weekly review *Invățătorul* (The Schoolteacher) edited by Andrei Pora, a Greek Catholic school inspector in Cluj, expressed concerns that the involvement of the local priest in the education of children would perpetuate endless conflicts with the schoolteachers and stressed the need to separate the work of these two community leaders. Articles published in this review claimed that, rather than using amateur theater to revive traditions, the Greek-Catholic priest would do better to become acquainted with the new scientific field of psychology in order to reach out to the hearts of his parishioners through plays that highlight psychological issues.¹⁷⁸

Although it is hard to measure precisely how many and how often theater events the Romanians organized, amateur theater appears to have increased in popularity and frequency. A paradoxical situation emerged, when theater appeared to many people as the right fit for Romanian cultural life, yet, its embrace was not smooth and could well grow or decrease. For

¹⁷⁶ Keith Hitchins, "The Court of Vienna and Confessional Problems in Transylvania, 1744-1759", in *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Seria Historica*, 1 (2007), 252-268.

¹⁷⁷ Keith Hitchins, "The Sacred Cult of Nationality: Rumanian Intellectuals and the Church in Transylvania, 1834-1869" in Stanley Winters, Joseph Held (eds.), *Intellectual and Social Development in the Habsburg Empire from Maria Theresa to World War I* (Boulder: Columbia University Press, 1975) 139-140.

example, Astra members involved in cultural events acknowledged the sway of amateur theater over other cultural efforts targeting literacy and mobilized Greek Catholic and Orthodox priests to support theatrical events. But even a religious play like I. Frumușani's *Drumul Crucii* (The Way of the Cross), presented by professional actors on tour, attracted but a few individuals to the dismay of Christian journalists writing for the review *Viața creștină* (*The Christian Life*).¹⁷⁹ The semiprofessionals mounting plays within the Astra also attracted more audiences in towns and cities but very small public joined their events in adjacent neighborhoods and nearby village parishes. Journalists and ministerial officials aired their concerns about the possible bankruptcy of professional theater due to a sudden drop in the number of ticket buyers and the very weak interest in what the professional theater had to offer.

Other reportorial aspects affected the ability of professional and semiprofessional theater troupes to make a dent in local cultural life. Newspapers mentioned titles performed on the National Theater stages, and suggested to be performed on tour in Transylvania; intellectuals, mindful of a nationalistic agenda, tried to exert their own influence. Contemplating what sort of play the Romanian audience would like to see was a difficult task. One explanation is to be found in the archive of Mișu Fotino, a well-versed actor who toured the country with his own troupe. In his petition to get a touring permit for Sibiu, he stated that providing a list of plays beforehand was impossible. The repertory to be performed in Brașov and Sibiu, he insisted, would be decided by a committee, composed of the prefect, the mayor, two professors, the principals of the local Romanian high school and of the Saxon high school, two journalists, and two accountants of a cultural society which gave partial subsidies to Fotino as sponsors of the tour.¹⁸⁰ A combination

¹⁷⁸ *Învățătorul*, Organul Asociației Învățătorilor Români din Ardeal, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș (Revistă pedagogică) (Cluj: 1921), 1.

¹⁷⁹ "Teatrul religios din Capitală" in *Viața Creștină*, Cluj, 19 March 1939, 4.

¹⁸⁰ DANIC Ministerul Instrucțiunii Publice și Cultelor, Direcția Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 536/1920, Fila 81/7 Dec. 1920.

of local factors and material pressures led to less freedom in the reportorial choices that could be made by professionals and semiprofessionals.

The amateurs, on the other hand, could select their plays free of outside pressures. Their theater initiatives did not counteract the work of the aforementioned professional and semiprofessional troupes but built on the previous but unsuccessful attempts initiated by intellectuals to make theater a constant feature in the local cultural life of the province. If right after the war only public intellectuals and politicians envisaged or even took concrete steps to enhance mass cultural education, this concept, after 1928, took on a completely new dimension and scale, and originated from the people themselves. Amateurs and especially the local elite sought to improve the image of cultural activities and make them popular in the eyes of villagers by stressing their numerous benefits: providing a moral-religious education, giving youth a leisure preoccupation when the work season was over, reading, understanding, and rehearsing a play, creating connections across age and gender, and, not least, amusement.

Although Astra activists commonly used the term “producțiuni” to designate small theater productions, many including dancing and singing, amateurs tended to favor a genre of shows that included short dialogues and monologues. This theatrical material was typical of Orthodox works in that they “were spontaneous, anonymous, and popular.”¹⁸¹ Although they had no overt religious themes, the plays contained embedded subtle religious teachings and historical elements catering to the villagers’ propensity for oral stories. Thus, overall, amateur theater repertoires stressed moral uplift while inserting light amusement, a formula which helped theater gradually surpass cinema and radio in popularity and entertainment preferences.

¹⁸¹ Keith Hitchens, Rumania 1866-1947 (Humanitas, București, 2013), 350.

Playwrights

Coming from all walks of life, either laymen or clergy, the participants in the amateur theater movement proposed plays that matched the social and cultural expectations of the society in which they lived. Organizers among various social groups of artisans, firefighters, students, farmers, and women's societies, as well as clergymen and men and women parishioners, chose plays that depicted situations and conveyed stories familiar to them. From settings to characters and moral teachings, their plays fit their social profile and reflected their daily needs.

Greek Catholic Romanians preferred European authors like August von Kotzebue (1761-1819), and Molière (1622-1673)¹⁸² and historical plays with a clear Romanian nationalist agenda by contemporary playwrights. A prolific playwright, Simeon Rusu-Câmpeanu published many plays with the 'Alexandru Anca' Publishing House of Cluj, but, lacking literary value, his plays did not reach libraries and could be consulted in manuscript in Anca's personal papers preserved at the local archives.¹⁸³ Greek-Catholic communities preferred Rusu-Câmpeanu's *În calea dușmanului din 1848* (Facing the enemy of 1848)¹⁸⁴ or Zaharia Bârsan's play *Se face ziuă* (Dawn is breaking). They also put on plays authored by the so-called "comediographers," a word borrowed from Italian which means less-renowned authors of comedies. Used in a Romanian context, it designated playwrights whose works did not enjoy the appreciation of literary critics.

In general, the Greek-Catholic clergy and schoolteachers encouraged amateurs to put on plays through cultural societies like Astra, which targeted a literate audience like artisans, merchants, workers, as well as intellectuals, students, and clerks. Seeking to select plays that would appeal to this audience, Astra encountered difficulties in the province, due to the prevailing conservative mindset that preferred plays of social didacticism. Moreover, audiences in historical

¹⁸² DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 31/21 Apr. 1932.

¹⁸³ DAN Cluj, Fond Familial Alexandru Anca Nr. crt. 161, Nr. Inventar 947, Anii extremi 1868-1961.

¹⁸⁴ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 21/1935, Vol. II, Fila 184/12 Dec. 1935.

Transylvania had little familiarity with the theater of professional troupes, which Astra theater events hoped to emulate.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, the Astra board appointed a Literary Commission, led by a young writer, Horia Petra-Petrescu (1884-1962) to take charge of the selection of the plays, which could be published with the society's funds and would be disseminated in villages.¹⁸⁶ The tradition of having priests of both Orthodox and Greek Catholic confessions working together within Astra in cultural programs slowly waned after the war, and postwar amateur theater testified to this parting of ways. The larger presence of Greek Catholic members in the Astra committees in charge of assessing the literary value of theater literature was visible over the years, as was the trend of rising numbers of schoolteachers and state employees among the Astra membership at the expense of clergy.

Among Astra's favorite writers was Petrea Dascălul (1881-1956) (his real name Petrea Olariu, and a pen name Petru O. Orlăţeanu), born in historical Transylvania in the village of Orlăţi in Sibiu County. A schoolteacher, he was devoted to adult education and found plays congenial to his adult pupils. His folk plays were filled with events whose moral teachings pervaded each scene, seeking to imbue the audience with an interest in rational ways of thinking. There is also a large dose of irony towards individuals seeking power, but who were morally unfit to lead. He taught his audiences to take an interest in political life and develop maturity in matters of political choices that would benefit their villages. An example is his play *Tot Omenia-i Mare Tare* (Yet, kindness is stronger) written in 1934 and published with Astra support. The content fulfilled Astra's view of theater as serving didacticist purposes, teaching villagers about political meetings and the benefits of conferences with invited speakers. The plays by Petrea Dascălul were secular in content and did not make any reference to priests or other clergy; rather, the characters in his

¹⁸⁵ Valer Moga, Astra și Societatea, 1918-1930 (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003), 499.

¹⁸⁶ Moga, 254.

plays were all drawn from among the literate individuals who tended to be leaders in their respective village.

The play describes the agitation among peasants during the mayoral elections in the village of Hărniceni and the feverish atmosphere gripping the households of three contenders before the announcement of the winner. In an effort to flesh out didactic teachings, the three peasant characters seeking the mayoral office revealed their own moral shortcomings: theft, unpaid loans, and drunkenness. The sought-after office position went, in the end, to the right person, but the moralistic overtones highlighted a critical view of the peasants, especially those who aspired to political office without displaying the proper qualities in their private lives. Indirectly, however, the play was intended to encourage peasants to participate in politics.

Another playwright affiliated with Greek Catholic institutional establishments who devoted time and work to Astra's objective of promoting amateur theater was Octavian Prie (1875-1938), a theology professor at Blaj with a doctorate in languages. He wrote many plays in the 1930s, but an earlier one, *O Vișoară* (A Vineyard, 1913), enjoyed particular popularity among amateurs in villages after the end of the First World War. The plot takes place in a village close to Gherla (Cluj County) where a poor but happy family with nine children was suddenly blessed with the inheritance of a large vineyard bequeathed by an uncle. The play's message was that money earned overnight would be squandered in a short time, and the newly-enriched individual would incur a public shame associated with debt and leading a life beyond his means.

Among the Greek Catholic prelates whose works were preferred by amateurs was the priest Augustin Cosma, a playwright by avocation and a teacher by mission. Writing for the weekly newspaper *Vestitorul* (The Messenger), Cosma authored *Plinirea Vremii* (The Time Has Come). Composed of six scenes and a prologue, the play continuously evolved in size and thematic richness after its publication in 1913 and underwent constant refining for the subsequent

decade.¹⁸⁷ A member of the Greek Catholic upper-clergy, Cosma placed the plot of his play in Galilea at the time of Jesus's birth. The dialogue among Herod, his Hebrew advisor Abiron, the archpriest Aristobul, and other secondary characters brought forth the opposition between idealism and pragmatism in behavior, attitudes, and work. Father Cosma claimed in his play that "there are differences between a priest and another, as there are between a scholar and another. Priesthood and scholarly work are for some people a high calling, a sacred ideal, while for others just a job, a way of earning daily bread." ("Între preot și preot este deosebire întocmai ca între cărturar și cărturar. Preoția și cărturăria pentru unii e o chemare, un ideal sfânt, pentru alții o slujbă, o pită.")¹⁸⁸ His play couched religious teachings in striking natural images. One example is the motif of the right path, which Cosma argues, is full of dangers and struggles, it is short, but full of obstacles that overwhelm those who choose it. "Right paths are like cats wearing bells; they never catch mice. The wicked paths are like smart cats, keeping paws hidden, talking softly, being friendly with mice by giving them cheese and wheat to sugar them up, fatten them up in order to strangle them. ("Căile drepte sunt mâțe cu clopot, nu prind șoareci. Căile cu înconjur sunt motani isteți, cu ghiarele băgate în teacă, cu glas duios prietenesc față de șoareci, cu grâu și caș îi îndulcește, îi îngrașe ca să-i strângă grași de gâtleji").¹⁸⁹ The stylistic comparisons nicely balance literal and metaphoric registers of imagery with the clear goal of reaching out to a broad audience.

Cosma announced in his articles that the times were ripe for a renewed emphasis on religion.¹⁹⁰ His play reflects a new understanding of religiosity, which highlights the importance of people as active participants, reliable witnesses, and faithful supporters of their local religious life. The dialogue between the archpriest and Aristobul, focusing on the clergy's fear of losing

¹⁸⁷ Augustin Cosma, Plinirea Vremii (Mesia), dramă în 6 acte și un prolog (Oradea: Tipografia și Librăria Românească, 1928).

¹⁸⁸ Cosma, 10.

¹⁸⁹ Cosma, 28.

¹⁹⁰ "Marele Congres de la Cluj", in Vestitorul, Organ la Eparhiei Unite al Oradei, 1-15 Apr. 1928, nr. IV, anul 7-8, 3.

people's trust is a case in point. Thus, deceiving the people in regard to the Messiah's arrival appeared inconceivable and impossible because of the collective nature of religious experience and the people's familiarity with the sacred texts. The Greek Catholics strongly believed in the importance of literacy for opening people's access to the sacred texts. Since people were already acquainted with the predictions of the magi about the time of Jesus's birth, deceit became almost an impossible tactic.

The play reveals a number of Greek-Catholic particularities in analyzing religious mindsets and practices. Abiron compared ordinary people with members in a choir ("poporul este element bun de cor") and all they were supposed to do was to extend the last vowel of the church singer during the Mass; their judgment resembled just an incomprehensible mumbling in the Church. A good choir leader, which in real life could only be a clergyman, knows how to instruct the choir beforehand and how to improvise the song, which the people will sing. Cosma put in Abiron's mouth further advice: "only what you want actually matters, not what the people want. What you will say, the people will say, too."¹⁹¹ As a Greek Catholic prelate, Cosma upheld the idea of everyone's submission to the local clergy who guided parishioners on the path of their choice. In contrast, Orthodox communities would never succumb to such blind submission. Orthodox communities themselves and not clergymen shaped Christian practice and the way in which priests provided religious services. Also, for the Orthodox, tradition weighed heavier than innovation, and the clergy who embraced change or took initiatives was, in general, not trusted.

More traditional in outlook, the Orthodox clergy who managed to publish their own plays in the "Biblioteca Poporală" (The Folk Library) series of Astra were but a small number, and among the prelates with an avocation for theater, Sebastian Stanca (1878-1947) was much appreciated. He was known mostly for his comedy *Lege Nouă* (New Law) in 1933, but also for

being a very active writer and a favorite playwright with the amateurs of Sibiu County.¹⁹¹ The themes he developed in his plays were centered on the lives of artisans, the danger of communism for religious beliefs, and the bravery of soldiers in wartime. His European preferences centered on Austrian playwrights like Johann Nestroy (1801-1862) and Bruno Brehm (1892-1974), but he devoted much more time to translations of Austrian libretists' works, hoping thereby to contribute to the development of musical theater in historical Transylvania.

The playwrights whose works did not fulfill literary criteria of value were nonetheless able to publish them with a large commercial company, the 'Alexandru Anca' Publishing House. A distinctive category of playwrights preferred by Orthodox amateurs was the group of writers whose plays showed an enthusiasm for both rural and urban life, but whose moral teachings focused on the so-called "right path." Alexandru Țânțariu (1880-1934), a native of Banat, worked as a clerk in the local government, but pursued writing activities as a journalist and playwright. He started his writing career in historical Transylvania, which for a native of Banat and a speaker of the Banat dialect could have been quite difficult. However, there were no roadblocks because of his language or writing style. His play, *Soacra Domnului Profesor* (The Professor's Mother-in-Law) described a husband's yearning to eat decently cooked meals without hurting his wife's feelings or criticizing her domestic skills. So, his decision to hire a servant with cooking skills was thwarted by his mother-in-law's arrival. Pressures from all corners to drop this idea proved unproductive, and Professor Luncan asserted his will as the head of the household. When he conveyed concerns about his wife's well-being, he appeared as a supporter of feminism and as a man who acknowledged a woman's right to be liberated from household chores and domestic burdens. Suspicions of divorce and adultery were smoothly dodged by the professor when a friend,

¹⁹¹ Cosma, 32.

¹⁹² Mircea Păcurariu, *Dictionarul Teologilor Români* (București: Univers Enciclopedic, 2006).

mistaking his conversation with the servant, thought that he was paying a prostitute for services. By standing his ground, this man showed his patriarchal views. However, the audience could detect a stronger message: finding the right path is always worth the effort. Solving issues should not necessarily involve a compromise or a sense of failure or offense, but simply doing what is right. Newly married and childless, the couple seemed in no need of domestic help, but rather, as the mother-in-law rightly pointed, the household begged for thriftiness and care.¹⁹³ Respect for the wisdom of the older generation and pacifying everyone without giving up one's own goal left the audience with a precious set of moral lessons to abide by in everyday life.

The last category of playwrights which Orthodox communities found congenial for their parishioners was the cohort of writers published by another commercial printing house in historical Transylvania, this one owned by Ioan Ciurcu of Braşov. One of these writers was Victor Eftimiu (1889-1972)¹⁹⁴ with his play *Ariciul și Sobolul* (The Hedgehog and the Mole). Highly acclaimed for many years, Eftimiu received many literary awards and a few of his plays were performed on the stage of the National Theater. His work came to be sponsored later in the 1930s by the "Carol II" Cultural Foundation. Another writer was Victor Ion Popa (1895-1946) who was renowned as a theater director, founder of children's theater, playwright, and stage designer. He was popular in Romanian communities for his play *Cuiul lui Pepelea* (Pepelea's Nail).

Three more playwrights, Jean Valjan (Ioan Al. Vasilescu-Valjean, 1881-1960), A. de Herz (1887-1936), and Mihail Sorbul (1886-1966) widely praised by literary critics also appealed to Orthodox communities. Their plays remained popular for decades, being enjoyed by literate theatergoers who related easily to plots centered on the middle-class world. At first sight, the fact that amateurs enjoyed them and considered them for theater events in their communities might

¹⁹³ Alexandru Țânțariu, Soacra Domnului Profesor comedie într-un act, (Editura și Proprietatea Casei de Editură Alexandru Anca: Cluj, 1927).

¹⁹⁴ Victor Eftimiu, Ariciul și Sobolul, fabulă modernă într-un act (Braşov: Editura Librăriei Ioan I. Ciurcu, 1914).

puzzle historians, since plays by important literary names were meant to appeal in general to an educated audience with high standards. Why and how amateurs in local communities warmed up to such plays requires a focus on literary criticism, which might illuminate this aspect.

In his volume on dramatic literature between the two World Wars, literary critic Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu (1921-2000) attempted in 1975 to correct the view of his contemporary, Mihail Sebastian (1907-1945), another well-known literary critic, who claimed that the drama between the wars was an underdeveloped literary field. Both Jewish critics, Sebastian in 1936 and Crohmălniceanu in 1975, admitted to the drama's conservative and inner-looking character, being explained partly by its linkage to the past traditions of the late nineteenth century shaped by the foremost playwright Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912). Sebastian also argued that the "cruel" competition of the cinema weakened the production of valuable dramatic works. Another problematic fact was that the most talented playwrights did not seem to gravitate around the world of the stage, and preferred to remain simple writers, while theaters increasingly relied upon insiders and playwrights who already made a name for themselves. Claiming originality for the interwar dramatic works, Crohmălniceanu classified them into several categories out of which the amateurs embraced three: the sentimental, the local-color plays, and the satirical comedies of mores.¹⁹⁵

Theater organizers in Orthodox communities felt a strong attachment to playwrights who came from a rural background, displayed a solid attachment to the Orthodox faith, and wrote about the village world and ordinary people with affection and honesty. A good example is Nicolae Țânțariu, born in the Serbian Banat, a multi-ethnic province that fell outside the borders of Greater Romania after 1918. Țânțariu fits the case of many Romanian playwrights of prewar

¹⁹⁵ Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, Literatura Română între cele două războaie mondiale, vol. III: Dramaturgia și Critica Literară (Editura Minerva: București, 1975).

Hungary who grew up in borderland multiethnic provinces, but remained attached to their ethnicity and religion rather than turning cosmopolitan. Not to be confused with his cousin Alexandru Țânțariu, Nicolae was a popular playwright who managed to publish his works far from home, in Cluj. After failing to get a job as a notary with the Greek Catholic establishment in his native region, he sought to enter the Orthodox Church as an official clerk. In Petrovasăla he was involved in theater works with numerous local groups notably firefighters, choirs, and literary circles, putting on plays as an amateur director and later writing his own plays.¹⁹⁶ Despite his Banat dialect, his plays interwove in the characters' dialogue spontaneous speech and word choices of precise meanings so that his language could be understood by Romanians across all provinces.¹⁹⁷ Even though at the time they were seen as lacking in literary value, and therefore, were not preserved in public or private libraries, his plays are indispensable historical documents of a particular period and quite valuable for historians seeking to understand rural communities and their values. Without being considered religious plays, Țânțariu's work conveyed Christian love, unity, submission, and poverty, teachings that were held in high regard by Orthodox parishioners. The editor of Țânțariu's plays noticed the sense of honesty prevailing in the plot, a lack of conflict and controversy, and an abundance of humor and nobility in character construction.

Orthodox artisans living in cities embraced plays that fit another category of Crohmălniceanu's classification: the sentimental and nostalgic genre. In the Alba County, the members of "Andreian Society" selected Victor Ion Popa's play, *Mușcata din Fereastră*. (Geranium on the Windowsill).¹⁹⁸ His plays' appeal to Romanian Orthodox artisans is grounded in Popa's background and career. Moldavian by birth, Popa was born into a well-to-do farming

¹⁹⁶ Mircea Măran, Vladimirovat, Petrovasăla, Pagini de Istorie Culturală, Amatorism Cultural, Folclor Literar și Muzical (Editura Fundației Atom: Novi Sad, 1998), 115.

¹⁹⁷ Mircea Măran, Nicolae Țânțariu (Panciova, 2012), 21.

family (răzeș), which was culturally rich. His creativity in playwrighting derived from his ability to encompass Romanian characteristics in general, rather than just the particularities of a single province.¹⁹⁹ An advocate of close ties between intellectuals and the masses, Victor Ion Popa (1895- 1946) wrote plays devoid of materialism and the conformist routine of everyday living.²⁰⁰

His beginnings in theater were solidly grounded in the idea that he had to cater to the needs of ordinary Romanians, the “norod,” to provide them with knowledge and spiritual guidance through his plays. As a director he diverged from other theater directors by stressing that the profession should return to its older didactic character. This view brought him much ridicule and trouble from hierarchies in both theater institutions and state offices.²⁰¹ He lived in Transylvania during the First World War where he received treatment for his war wounds. Here, he found a warm reception which inspired him to develop his skills in drama writing and theater production. In those years, he encouraged amateurs who were willing put on his first play *Flori și Fluturi* (Flowers and Butterflies.) His interest in Transylvanian playwrights like Dimitrie Anghel and St. O. Iosif, coauthors of the play *Cometa* (The Comet), or Iosif Vulcan and Adrian Maniu, was a reflection of his constant appreciation of their idealism and religiosity as necessary for the health of a national literature and the promotion of education (educația poporană) among children, students, soldiers, and workers. His presence in the world of writers soon brought him to the circle of literary critic Eugen Lovinescu in Bucharest where he slowly lost interest in nurturing amateurs and instead became interested in theater-playing as high arts.

His play, *Geranium on the Windowsill* mentioned earlier is the story of two friends, a priest and a schoolteacher, the first still a bachelor, the second married to Sofica. She eloped with

¹⁹⁸ DANIC Bucuresti, Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, fila 280/Mai 26, 1932.

¹⁹⁹ Vicu Mândra, Victor Ion Popa (Editura Albatros: București, 1975), 9.

²⁰⁰ V. Mândra, 12, 14.

²⁰¹ V. Mândra, 25.

the schoolteacher even though both friends were in love with her.²⁰² They could not be more different, yet their friendship remained solid and their affection for each other continued unabated for decades. Although their world and ways of thinking were traditional, the priest stands apart for his loyalty toward the only woman he loved even when she married his best friend. Father Ilie's uprightness appears in sharp contrast to the character of the schoolteacher and his wife who were eager to change their social status as they aspired to marry their daughter to accountants or officers. The couple's children displayed conservative views ("any father is ideal by definition") but a marked exposure to European influences is visible in the names of authors and characters they invoked, like Strindberg, and Harpagon, and the English words they used, like *knock-out* and *sportman*. Only Olguța, the schoolteacher's daughter, displayed a proclivity toward sentimentalism and was seen by others as a romantic girl instead of pragmatic and realistic. She resembles the priest in being romantic and loyal. But a clear divide separating generations, the young and the old, as well as the line between the young people educated in cities and their parents who remained in their small towns or villages, appear clearly in dialogues that highlight concerns about the social order and the individual's moral status.

Like all intellectuals interested in adult education through art and literature, Victor Ion Popa developed an interest in rural sociology and became involved first-hand in organizing cultural life in villages. His cooperation with Dimitrie Gusti, Professor of Sociology at the University of Bucharest, continued in the 1930s but Popa became increasingly marginalized in professional theatrical life. The Cultural Foundation for Arts and Literature "Carol II" published many of Popa's works, which were meant to enhance adult education in villages. Active in a variety of fields, the Foundation selected numerous titles for the "Cartea Satului" Series (urban dwellers, well-connected individuals who interacted more often with people of other ethnicities

²⁰² Victor Ion Popa, *Mușcata din Fereastră* (București: Vremea, 1929).

and tend to go to their cultural events. One example is the ‘Valley of the Arieș’ Society (“Valea Arieșului”), a society formed by the university youth native to the Arieș region, who upon graduation returned to their hometown to open libraries and engage in cultural work. They put on a French comedy, *The Superintendent of Sleeping Cars* (Controlorul Vagoanelor de Dormit), by Alexandre and André Bisson.²⁰³ The energetic organizer was a medical student, Danciu, who made sure that the event also included a poetry recital by an Hungarian performer.

The case of the Feurdean family reveals how the Romanian middle-class was deeply involved in cultural activities as members of secular societies. The father was president of the Society of Romanian Artisans and his wife was Margareta Feurdean, a student at the Music Conservatory, while their daughter was married to Oniga Samson, a student in theology and a talented amateur actor. However, despite refined tastes in matters of theater, the play they put on was followed by a folk dance (*hora*). The newspaper reporting the event extolled its success with an audience of high-school students and took the opportunity to encourage theater playing in the local high school in order to raise the cultural level of the entire community.²⁰⁴ As it occurred among the Saxons and Hungarians, Romanian intellectuals and the educated youth sought to break down barriers between city and village, and many theater aficionados offered to teach students elements of diction and stagecraft. Therefore, whether their theater playing could be labeled ‘amateur’ is debatable. Rather, they were semiprofessionals as their theatrical tastes were well-formed and preferred plays which involved more than a basic plot and a memorization of dialogue.

A taste for amateur theater also spread to the village of Sartas (Szartós) where the schoolteacher put on the play *Două Surde* (Two Deaf People) by Florian Cristescu. Such plays

²⁰³ Alexandre and André Bisson, *Le Contrôleur des Wagons-Lits, comédie en trois actes* (F. Rouft: Paris, 1898).

²⁰⁴ Arieșul, Organ al Partidului Poporului din Judetul Turda, Turda, Apr. 25, 1926, An. I, no. 4, 2.

were supposed to be tailored to an conservative audience who lacked an elementary education. However, the main plot and sub-plots in *Două Surde* made it suitable more for a middle-class audience than illiterate peasants. Brief in length and relying on brisk innuendo, the play disregards moral precepts by fleshing out the dishonesty, rapaciousness, and superficiality of soldiers who turned into leaseholders upon discharge from the army.²⁰⁵ The topic runs counter to villagers' overall view of soldiers who typically enjoyed respect in villages. To measure the degree of these plays' appeal among the ordinary folk is difficult, but events featuring such plays tended to be embraced by semiprofessionals and would have appealed mainly to educated, middle-class social categories.

As the new retail market for play booklets expanded from cities to villages, booksellers also contributed to the spread of theater playing. Since only the local elite owned books and the public libraries were still at an inchoate level, it would be hard to judge the circulation of theater booklets in villages. As booksellers realized the popularity of amateur theater, they looked further afield their trade to increase their revenues. Ioan Pescariu from Turda, the owner of the "Librăria Poporală" (People's Bookstore), requested authorization from state officials to sell theater tickets and operate as a theatrical agency.²⁰⁶ Since amateurs could hardly afford to pay intermediaries a percentage from their ticket sales, such bookshops dealt mainly with semiprofessional and professional shows.

Another aspect that clearly differentiates amateurs from semiprofessionals is again the character of plays. In a newspaper note, readers were informed about a group of intellectuals (here read college students) from Baia de Arieș who put on a play by Vasile Alecsandri, *Arvinte și*

²⁰⁵ Florian Cristescu, *Două Surde, comedie populară în două acte*, 2nd edition (Editura Cartea Românească: București, 1900s).

²⁰⁶ DANIC București, Fond Min. Cultelor și Artelor, D.G. Arte, Inv. 652, Dos. 91/1926, Fila 78/26 Nov.1926.

Pepelea.²⁰⁷ They did so also a year before, a sign that the high school students turned theater playing into a preferred summer pastime. This comedy reflected the students' high literary standards. A native of Moldavia, a Romanian-inhabited province east of historical Transylvania, Alecsandri was the literary founder of Romanian drama in the nineteenth century. *Arvinte și Pepelea* (*Arvinte and Pepelea*) delineates a religious world through an encounter between a landlord, Arvinte, and a poor villager, Pepelea, who is in love with the former's daughter, Mândica. Eager to buy properties in the village, Arvinte persuades Pepelea to sell his house for a small sum, who accepted because he hoped to obtain in return Mândica's hand in marriage. All he asked from Arvinte was to keep one little thing in the house as his: a nail in the wall. Arvinte agrees to this last condition, binding his obligation by swearing to God. As the ownership of the nail proves a big mistake and an occasion for Pepelea to intrude in Arvinte's house at every hour of the day, the landlord wants to take his word back, but was afraid of God's judgment. It seems that villagers perceived religious oaths to be more powerful than legal penalties.²⁰⁸

While context and content were fit for a Transylvanian audience eager to learn through the power of example, the language used in the play was most likely not fully comprehensible to Romanians of other provinces, being an authentic Moldavian dialect, unless an experienced folklorist was to replace the words with Transylvanian equivalents. When performed, it ran the risk of the audience's missing the funniest comments in the play and thereby weakening Alecsandri's main contribution: his gift of language. Such plays typically appealed to literate middle-class audiences, who emphasized in their cultural initiatives first and foremost the ethnic element as a source of education for illiterate peasants in small villages.

²⁰⁷ *Arieșul*, An, II, Nr. 39, Turda, Sept. 25, 1927, 3.

²⁰⁸ Vasile Alecsandri, *Opere Complete, Partea Înteia, Teatru*, Vol. II, Vodeviluri, "Arvinte și Pepelea," (București: Editura Librăriei Socecu, 1875), 820-848.

Across several counties, the Greek Catholic audience expressed constant appreciation for certain playwrights and themes. The Greek-Catholic communities in the village of Bistra in Alba County and the city of Sibiu²⁰⁹ put on a play by Victor Eftimiu, *Sfârșitul Pământului* (*The End of Earth*)²¹⁰ to conclude the Easter celebrations. The authorities approved the play, hoping to enhance Romanian ethnic propaganda in the region. The script's language lacked particular regionalisms, which made it accessible to a Transylvanian audience, while the story is rather lower-middle class in focus and teachings, thus appealing to limited social strata. The plot hinges on the efforts of a proud merchant, head of a household, thrifty and wise, to persuade his grown children to make better choices: his son to give up singing for a career as a merchant and his daughter to marry only within her social class. Matache Funduleanu was like Harpagon, Molière's main character in *L'Avare* (*The Miser*), who drew his greatest satisfaction from communicating with the spirit of his deceased mentor and protector, thereby hoping to get advice about making the right business and family decisions and to understand changes affecting the society of his time. Șulăm, the Jewish character, appears without the stereotyping sins like moneylending or earning a living from entertainment and arts, and was rather fully integrated into the broader society as a close friend of the Funduleanu family and the breadwinner of a large family with young children. The Funduleanus were a typical provincial family, the son singing in the church choir, and dreaming of a fellowship in Italy, while Matache's father aspired to middle-class living standards and artistic fulfillment as a painter. What started like a joke planned by father and son, trying to falsify the year when the dead spirits predicted the end of the world, it actually ended a messy and unpredictable affair. The purpose was to make Funduleanu open up his purse and start spending in order to make his family happy before the end of everything. The play concluded, however,

²⁰⁹ DANIC București, Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 44/1935, Vol. 2, Fila 165/20 Apr. 1935.

²¹⁰ Victor Eftimiu, Opere, Teatru, Comedii Provinciale, Drame Istorice Vol. 5, (București: Editura Minerva, 1973), 78.

with the moral transformation of all involved and an open acknowledgement of everyone's shortcomings and potential. Instead of living in Bucharest or in Italy, or pursuing a new career so late in life, the "conspirators" began to feel an attachment to their hometown and even to the local church, whose choir and wall painting brought satisfaction to both Funduleanu's son, an opera singer, and his father, an aspiring painter.

There are many threads in this play that appealed to amateurs, and, in general, these touched on the strengthening of social status and economic values. Religion appears rather secondary and insignificant, although the local church comes in handy as an employer. The play fleshes out the material aspects that divide the old and young generations. Published originally in 1922, this comedy, still airing today on the radio and often performed by professionals on stage, reflects the lifetime perspective of Eftimiu, which was centered on the view "Tout s'arrange!" and the sense of optimism that pervades his whole work. The play brought him success not so much because of its literary merits, but rather due its popularity with a broad public.²¹¹

As cultural societies gravitated toward plays known for their literary value, religious societies tended to do the same, leading to several similarities between secular and religious societies in regard to play purposes, audience interests, and membership retention for increasing involvement. The religious societies were interested in providing theater shows for the upper clergy, who, being well educated, could understand play scripts with regionalisms and appreciate professional performances. First and foremost, as members of religious societies, they strove to defend the professional interests of the Orthodox clergy while getting involved in developing a cultural life and inspiring moral values within their communities. Established in 1925, the "Andrei Şaguna" Association pursued such objectives with the well-being of priests in view even when opening libraries, publishing reviews, and founding of retirement homes. Moreover, a large

number of priests did not join the association immediately, while, by 1934, efforts to make this association more inclusive led to the decision of leaders to merge with parish religious societies.²¹² A case in point is the town of Sebeş. Here, a small youth organization affiliated to the Transylvanian Metropolitanate followed the centralizing directives of the “Andrei Şaguna” Association. It managed to attract educated priests, but the spirit of associatianism had slight impact on recruiting commoners to serve the society’s agenda.

In this county, Romanian Orthodox communities and the cultural societies appeared to follow different paths and orientations. Societies benefitted from the literary expertise of Greek-Catholic upper-clergy who selected the plays based on literary merits and ethnicist overtones. Newspapers are a good source through which to gauge the relations between the two as emerge in their theatrical choices. Articles oftentimes reflected on the character of the event. They described the social classes that attended the event, noting that the more prestigious the event, the higher the social standing of the audience. Articles were favorable to events that extolled the choice of classical works and the inclusion of music. A short notice in *Arieşul* covered four consecutive days of events: a concert patronized by the Saint Mary Greek-Catholic Church of Turda Veche on October 28, 1926, the performance of *Ovidiu* (Ovidiu) by Vasile Alecsandri on the 29th, put on by a well-known theater company on tour and led by Aristide Demetriade of Bucharest; another theater performance, Leo Tolstoi’ play *Puterea întunerecului* (The Power of Darkness) by the National Theater of Cluj in Turda during a long tour in the region.²¹³ Both theater institutions and religious and cultural societies endorsed in their events a literary naturalism and classicism²¹⁴ and shared the same aspirations of high attainments in art. Tolstoi’s play is a strong indictment of

²¹¹ Ovid Crohmălniceanu, *Literatura Română*, 149.

²¹² The Congress held in Oct. 29, 1934 in Sibiu addressed this very topic of recruitment.

²¹³ Michel Deline, “Un Drame Populaire du Comte Léon Tolstoi,” in *Révue D’Art Dramatique*, Tom VI, Avril-Juin 1998, Paris, 151.

²¹⁴ Vasile Alecsandri, *Ovidiu* (Bucureşti: Editura Librăriei Universale Leon Alcalay, 19...).

blinding love for money and a sinful life, and highlights the morality of the poor peasant who tries to correct his son, but to no avail. The plots and complexity of human characters made it fit for an educated audience in urban centers. On the 30th a soirée organized by the Romanian artisans of Turda had invited the local audience to attend two plays, *Florin și Florica* (Florin and Florica) and *Harta, Răzeșul* (Harta, the Yeoman) by Vasile Alecsandri, both performed by volunteers selected from among the local artisans.²¹⁵ The plays included music, and the language employed on stage was in peasant dialect. Alecsandri was difficult to understand in provinces outside the Old Kingdom, especially in many village communities because of dialectal and regional language barriers.²¹⁶

A drama with classical overtones like *Ovidiu* appeared suitable to the tastes of a Greek-Catholic audience, while *Sânziana și Pepelea*²¹⁷ was preferred by Orthodox communities, like the “Sfântu Gheorghe” Young Adult Society in Crihalma village in Brașov County.²¹⁸ For Alecsandri, writing *Ovidiu* late in life in 1885 brought back Romantic ideals and principles which had animated his political revolutionary zeal during the 1848 Revolution in the Principalities. Classical in subject, *Ovidiu* is a drama that extols the Roman world of politics and envy and unrequited love, but it also highlighted both the isolation and superiority of the man of letters at the end of his life. The complex literary and linguistic construction makes it a spectacular performance on professional stages, but quite difficult for amateurs to select for their repertoires.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ *Ariesul. Organ al Partidului Poporului*, 31 Oct. 1926, An. I, nr. 33, Turda, p. 3.

²¹⁶ Ioan Masoff, *Teatrul Românesc. Privire Istorică*, Vol. IV, (Editura Minerva: București, 1972) 18, 30, 563. See A. P. Bănuț's efforts to help amateurs through training to remove their Transylvanian and Banat accents. Not only semiprofessionals but also professional actors, who had studied abroad, like Agata Barsescu, Aristizza Romanescu, Lucia Sturdza displayed a strong foreign accent in their performances in Romanian language.

²¹⁷ Vasile Alecsandri, *Opere*, Vol. 5, Drame (Chișinău: Editura Hyperion, 1991).

²¹⁸ DANIC București, Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos.9/1932, Fila 67/12 Febr. 1932.

²¹⁹ Academia Română, *Dictionarul General al Literaturii Române*, A/B, (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004) 82-88.

Religious and cultural societies in Alba County, thus, seemed to shape the local cultural life in small urban and rural communities, but they attracted mainly literate individuals and the upper layers of various social groups. The involvement of the Romanian lower clergy and women's societies in organizing plays, on the other hand, reveals theatrical events as occasions to highlight religion and faith as a matter of communal choice, rather than stress social status and educational background. They also tended to address issues of fund-raising for the local church and schools, or, in the case of artisans and firefighters, plays tended to focus on the principles and ideals which shaped their working environment as well as on the moral aspects of the life they shared with their communities.

Cluj County

This county witnessed an overwhelmingly active amateur theater activity on the part of larger religious and cultural societies of a larger scale. Because numerous large societies were active in amateur theater, modest communities had less of an opportunity to organize their own amateur theaters. The plays preferred by societies revolved around Romanian playwrights or translators from other Romanian-inhabited provinces surrounding historical Transylvania: Serafim Ionescu (Moldova) or Ștefan Bidnei (Bukovina), Victor Eftimiu (Macedo-Romanian from Albania), Petre Dulfu (Maramureș), or Iuliu Putici (Banat). As intellectuals of broad humanistic horizons, they were ready to embrace progressive Western ideas in education. Since the turn of the century many of them had found moral and financial support during Spiru Haret's ministerial leadership. Their goals were to further ethnic progress by applying recent literary trends and new teaching methods in education. Ethnicity loomed large in such plans.

The emphasis on organizational efforts guided by cultural societies and on modern means of mass education such as conferences predominated in smaller towns like Huedin and

typically involved the upper clergy. One relevant case is that of the archpriest Aurel Munteanu (? - 1940) who shepherded the Orthodox Romanian communities around Huedin between the two World Wars. As we discover from his grandson's play, *Tunul de Cireș* (The Cherry Cannon, 2011), Munteanu's death at the hands of Hungarian troops that occupied Transylvania in 1940 was an opportunity to highlight the archpriest's wartime merits of standing by his community in life-threatening circumstances, and, relevant for our topic here, his constant interest in literature. But for his parishioners, he found conferences more suitable for enhancing their spiritual lives. As an archpriest, he played an active role in the cultural life of the parishes under his supervision and his activity is typical of the upper clergy who tended to join religious societies and follow their procedures. Conferences served as the main activity of the Orthodox branch of the Romanian Women of Huedin, who invited Archpriest Munteanu for a conference on a religious topic, in December 1932, right before Christmas. The gathering was also offered a play, *Curiositatea Femeii* (Women's Curiosity) by an unidentified author, the proceedings from which covered expenses for the embellishment of the new church.²²⁰ Conferences were so popular that they were combined with religious events in the form of "spiritual exercises," which was typical of Greek-Catholic communities. These could be organized for groups of between twenty and sixty participants and catered to students, parishioners and their families.

The Village Book Series) to provide a resource for enhancing literacy in rural areas.

At first sight, analyzing the repertories reveals that the Greek Catholics tended to be more European in their choices, and forceful in their emphasis on religious teachings as they subordinated literature to their pastoral work and spiritual mission. The Orthodox communities saw no such direct connection between literature and religious beliefs, and even less the need for

²²⁰ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 616/28 Dec.1932.

religious plays, which demonstrated a free spirit in this regard. Tradition and faith remained unmediated by the higher clergy, leaving the aspect of choice at the parish level.

Part III

Amateur Theater Case Studies by Counties

Alba County

Young people and various groups (women's societies, schoolteachers, students, artisans and workers) of both Orthodox and Greek-Catholic church affiliations organized numerous theater events in this county, displaying both orientations, traditionalist and modernist. The clergy typically put on plays in smaller numbers, but the middle-class, educated strata like booksellers, college students, and cultural societies were among the most active organizers of plays.

In the city of Alba Iulia, the archpriest Florian Rusan intended to bring together his community to attend two plays performed by the choir members of his church.²²¹ He found plays by Nicolae Țânțariu congenial for this occasion. Their Orthodox teachings could well reinforce the idea that theater's main function should be moral-educational. Țânțariu's play *Schilavii* (The Skinny) focused on the desperate fate of a poor Romanian widow's family at the hands of foreign authorities, represented by the local mayor and the notary. Being denied social welfare and a work place to make a living, this family was on the verge of starvation. Although the village was predominantly Romanian, the Serbian population had privileges over land, which everyone coveted as a means of improving one's living conditions. Pensions for war veterans' surviving families were also limited to a few representatives of the local authorities. As public officials marginalized the Romanian population, the negligent acts being committed by the local doctor depict an extremely unfavorable image of the upper classes living in villages. On his home visit,

²²¹ Liviu Malița, Eu, Scriitorul: Condiția Omului de Litere din Ardeal între cele două războaie, (Cluj-Napoca: Fundația Culturală Română, 1997).

the doctor compared the family members, gathered around an injured and dying Romanian man, with the mass crowd gathered at Alba Iulia, thereby touching indirectly upon the major event for all Romanians, when Transylvania and the Banat came under Romanian rule, following the Proclamation of Union at Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918. At its denouement, we realize that the play brought to the fore a touching story of family solidarity whose members stand by one another during crisis situations. Even in the man's final moments of life, proper upbringing and faith remained central in the life of the two suffering young children, one blind and another lame.

European in outlook, secular societies appeared to be very active and well-organized in the cultural life of Alba County, and tended to dominate the public stage. Individual priests who put on plays were not as numerous compared to the Romanian middle-class, mainly educated,

Individuals embraced theater playing even more than societies, either cultural or religious. In Cluj County, the most important group, the schoolteachers, who bridged confessional divisions between Orthodox and Greek-Catholics did so in the name of ethnic unity. They tended to publish plays at the "Cartea Românească" publishing house of Bucharest, like those of Florian Cristescu, Serafim Ionescu, and Petre Dulfu and when selecting a play to be put on in their villages, they disregarded the playwrights' confession. Overall, the diversity of playwrights, many of them born in other Romanian-inhabited provinces, as well as the adaptations and translations of foreign plays for a Romanian audience reflect the ethnic goals of cultural societies. But oftentimes organizers could not ignore the audience's expectations and ideals. For example, in Huedin, a schoolteacher, Gheorghe Strâmbu, decided to put on a Russian play, *Domnul Scriitor* (The Notary Assistant),²²² which was translated into Romanian by Ștefan Bidnei who knew English (he

²²² Ștefan Bidnei, *Domnu Scriitor*, *Comedie Tărănească în Trei Acte*, (Brașov: Editura Librăriei Ioan I. Ciurcu, 1914).

translated works about the prohibition of alcohol in the United States)²²³ and Russian. His wife, under the name Mrs. Ștefan Bidnei, translated plays from Italian.²²⁴

Domnu Scriitorăș is a sharp but funny portrayal of a proud middle-aged notary clerk, Sofronie, who is eager to get married, and, in particular, seeks women much younger than he. Keen to use his bureaucratic position to claim a higher status than other peasants and suitors, he is forced to leave the village, out of embarrassment for being caught lying and smearing decent rivals. Many elements of village life and human nature add to the humor of this play: Petrea, a field helper, meets his pal, but knowing that he died in America while working in a coal mine, thinks he is a spirit; to the derision of his villagers, Sofronie, boldly wears a wig because he saw this fashion in the cities he visited; the young woman he wants to marry rejects him for being too conceited and for “wearing a bulk of hemp” on his head.

Other unflattering features emerge about Sofronie. Expelled from higher schools for inappropriate behavior towards women, he comes to this village as a new hire in the notary’s office, but resorting to his old ways, he could not help but remain an outsider throughout the story. Clerks might well be considered upper strata in light of their education, training, and broad experience, but they were far from enjoying the prestige of a priest or schoolteacher, especially if moral shortcomings interfered with local values and customs. Not only had he spread false rumors, but he proved to be dishonest, reading the mail delivered in the village and retaining letters to suit his purposes. Like Petrea, Ioan was poor but working in America made him experienced and financially more comfortable. Upon his return, he shows his familiarity with how laws work and what freedom means; he could read and act upon his findings, but in respect to tradition, he appears unchanged: to be a gentleman, a young man marries his sweetheart only if he is able to

²²³ *Transilvania*, Maiu-Iunie 1927, nr. 5-6, anul 58, p. 248. As a clerk in the Prefect Office of Cernăuți and as president of the local ‘Trezvia’ Society – Society for Sobriety, Bidnei published and lectured widely on this topic.

provide for her. Ioan went abroad to work in order to accumulate enough money so he could marry and support a family. Also traditional in his thinking is the belief in the sacredness of marriage. Even if his sweetheart married someone else, he would not try to break her marriage or leave the village in spite. The play avoided all ethnic overtones and stressed instead local customs and the morality prevailing among villagers.

Schoolteachers showed interest in the works of Iuliu Putici. He was the director of the Chizățau Choir in the Timiș County and an active collaborator of the Greek-Catholic Schoolteachers Association in Transylvania, who, interestingly enough, served as an Orthodox schoolteacher, like his father and grandfather.²²⁵ His play *The Last Bottle* (Sticla din Urmă), quite popular in 1913 and 1921 (it was listed in the events' sections in periodicals in Blaj "Unirea" and "Unirea Poporului," in Arad "Aradul," and in Orăștie "Cosânzeana") is a funny, short dialogue in which pure luck and a happy ending decide a difficult moment in the life of a young lieutenant. Having no money right when he fell in love with a young woman and was ready to propose, he impatiently waits for his uncle, a wealthy landowner, to wire money. Grozăvescu arrives in person with the money only to discover that the girl he had in view for his nephew to marry was exactly the lieutenant's sweetheart, the daughter of the local mayor. The Orthodox audience found in Petru, the lieutenant's humble servant, a witty and loyal assistant who even lent money to his boss and tried to make him repent for treating him unjustly, calling him offensive names and asking him to work overtime. But the cooperation between mayor and landowner to secure for daughter, respectively nephew the right opportunity, coupled with the unexpected love story on

²²⁴ Foaia Diecezană, nr. 33, An XL, 16 August 1925, p. 6. Mrs. Bidnei adapted plays from Edmondo de Amicis's works.

²²⁵ 275 de Ani de Învățămint Românesc (1735-2012), Suplimentul Revistei "Zbor," p. 6.

top of it might appeal to a Greek-Catholic audience for whom social class and status need to be upheld in accordance with one's social position.²²⁶

Such events were organized usually at the beginning of a new school year. Led by the priest's wife, Minodora Belea, the Orthodox Women's Society of Belin²²⁷ put on this play yearly between 1934 and 1940 and even circulated from a village to village.²²⁸ Inspector Isac warned about the vulgar expressions in the play, the name-calling of the servant ranging from livestock to jungle beasts. Especially if children were to be part of the audience, Isac was right stressing that adults alone would find it proper. Given its value for ethnic purposes, the play received approval from the Ministry, a frequent situation when ethnic considerations took precedence over religious or moral standards.

The Turda region of Cluj County witnessed quite active Romanian youth groups putting on plays in cooperation with schoolteachers and other educated individuals. Since 1918 the Romanian administration had began an intensive Romanian ethnic program organized by local intellectuals around the local theater which had been built in 1904. In this context, local organizers like students and schoolteachers in Gura Arieșului or Lunca Mureșului planned several plays for ethnic purposes. They selected *Piatra din Casă* (The Stone in the House) by Vasile Alecsandri, *Cuiul lui Pepelea* (The Pepelea's Nail) by Victor Ion Popa²²⁹ and *Domnul Scriitor*²³⁰ (The Notary Assistant) by Ștefan Bidnei. The organizers in these towns were aware that these plays required a certain literary mastery on the part of performers, who were non-professional volunteers. The audience, however, could not fully understand the plays by the two

²²⁶ M. Legan, *Sticla din urmă*, comedie localizată de Iuliu Putici (Orăștie: Edit. Librăriei Naționale Sebastian Borneș, Tipografia Nouă, I. Moța), 1912, 3-22.

²²⁷ Ioan Lăcătușu, Vasile Lechintan, Violeta Pătrunjel, *Românii din Covasna și Harghita*, see comuna Belin.

²²⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 7/1934 vol. 4, fila 62/August 1, 1934.

²²⁹ DANIC București, Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 21/1935, vol 2, Fila 108/17 Dec. 1935.

²³⁰ DANIC București, Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 39/1935, Fila 238/7 Aug. 1935.

Moldavian playwrights, Alecsandri and Popa, due to the heavy presence of regionalisms, unless they were educated.

What makes Popa's play complicated for amateurs in general is the elaborate series of instructions preceding each act and referring to stagecraft and complex directions for each character. Content is fit to a particular audience for whom traditional values were not a central issue. Popa's *Cuiul lui Pepelea*²³¹ was an adaptation of Vasile Alecsandri's play *Sânziana și Pepelea*, retold in a different version that runs counter to village values. In it the main character, Sandu Stroilă, followed his wife's wishes to acquire more property. The play suggests that men typically make such mistakes when they fall in love for the first time. Like the rest of characters, the local priest seeks discord and advises Pepelea to remember his lucky nail in Stroilă's house and use it often "to hang his hat." Again the priest teaches Pepelea that learning how to write and read enables him to use the *zapis* (a legal document) signed by witnesses and church officials, so he can reinforce his claims to Stănilă's house. The safer Pepelea feels in his privilege, the more conflict is being perpetuated while making Stroilă feel even more powerless and resentful. Overall, the characters are not what they seem, as Pepelea proves to be not a weak-minded but an intelligent peasant.

Cultural societies can be seen at work in the theater organized by Orthodox communities in three villages, Dretea, Năoiu, and Baci. Their clergy remained in close contact with one another, since their villages were located along the national highway. One infers that they collaborated because they put on the same play, a popular title, *Se face ziuă* (The Light is Breaking) by Zaharia Bârsan (1878-1948) on the day of the Epiphany in 1935. These three villages had very large Romanian Greek-Catholic constituencies, the leaders being active Astra

²³¹ Victor Ion Popa, *Cuiul lui Pepelea, comedie într-un act*, Cartea Satului 10, (București: Fundația Culturală Regală "Principele Carol," 1935).

members. However, choosing a patriotic play by a Greek-Catholic playwright, he became the first director of the first National Theater in Cluj had strong ethnic connotations, which typically appeared on the agenda of cultural societies, since they worked on behalf of all Romanians.

Orthodox cultural societies (“The Romanian Orthodox Brotherhood,” the “Oastea Domnului”, “The ‘Sf. Gheorghe’ Society of Adults”, “The ‘Andrei Şaguna’ Association of the Romanian Orthodox Clergy of Transylvania”) were the main centralized associations operating in the Turda region. One may consider their choice of amateur theater as necessary to satisfy their financial needs because of a dire lack of funds between 1927 and 1933, made worse by a severe economic crisis and the sacrifices imposed on all civil servants, including Orthodox priests. Amateur theater did not collect funds to pay priests, as the revenues from plays were meant only to cover a community’s basic spiritual needs.

Under the patronage of the Metropolitan of Alba Iulia, the Romanian Orthodox Brotherhood (Frăţia Ortodoxă Română; FOR) was founded and led by an intellectual, Sextil Puşcariu (1877-1948) in Cluj between 1933 and 1939. Prominent women in the city, Mrs. Tordosianu and Mrs. Boiu organized FOR-funded events mainly in cities. Other FOR women’s groups from Huedin and Târgu-Mureş put on plays in order to collect the necessary funds for completing the building of a church in Huedin and a cathedral in Târgu-Mures. As participants in the FOR events, women’s groups joined Puşcariu in reasserting a spiritual orientation, one that would, they thought, weaken internationalism and materialism and elevate the Romanian creative spirit.²³² Orthodox women’s societies in both towns and cities showed a sustained interest in amateur theater. But as other amateur theater endeavors showed, the religious and cultural

²³² “Grandioasele Serbări naţionale din Sibiu,” Renasterea: Organ naţional-bisericesc săptămânal. An XII, Nr. 44-45, Nov. 4, 1934, 1.

societies seemed to have been too much concerned with organizational goals to effectively pursue a spiritual orientation.

Overall, compared to the Hungarians and the Saxons, the Romanians in Cluj County witnessed a smaller number of organizers of amateur theater, but their groups were diverse. In the majority, the organizers had ethnic purposes in view as their foremost concern and tended to address an educated audience rather than the entire congregation of a parish or a whole neighborhood. The formal instruction mattered greatly as the case in Gura Arieșului shows. The funds gathered from performances went directly to the school's treasury. The moral approach appeared to discourage wide attendance: to correct social relations and family behaviors marred by alcoholism. Featuring often on the agendas of many cultural societies, this emphasis was didacticist to the point that it discouraged attendance among the illiterate majority.

Sibiu County

Amateur theater in this county reinforces the general conclusion that, like in other ethnic communities, the majority of Romanians in the professions took an interest in theater as a springboard for expressing ethnicity,²³³ except in a few cases in which organizers embraced a traditionalist and, clearly, a religious perspective. In Sibiu, the county seat, artisans and printers, who formed the typical Romanian lower middle class, were active theater organizers, being attracted to European authors like Molière and Romanian pro-Western playwrights like Jean Valjean. The printers of Sibiu also joined together in a choir which carried the name of Gutenberg. In Transylvania, Romanian printers and artisans represented under 1% of such entrepreneurs, the

²³³ Traian Chirilă, Reuniunea culturală națională a meseriașilor români din Sibiu la optzeci de ani (Sibiu, 1946)

rest being Hungarians, Jews and Saxons.²³⁴ Artisans typically organized plays to be enjoyed by their fellow workers, families, and other blue-collar categories.

The Gutenberg Choir of the Romanian Printers of Sibiu enjoyed *Nodul Gordian* (The Gordian Knot) by Valjean, a popular performance that made headlines when performed on national theater stages. *Nodul Gordian* garnered the attention of this tightly-knit social group because its plot centered on the lack of professional ethics among the petty bourgeoisie and state employees. As the dishonest characters have clear Jewish and Greek names, the ethnic overtones point to an element of inter-ethnic competitiveness, typical in business relations. The play became even more relevant in 1935, after several years of particularly hard economic conditions which still lingered after the Great Depression. This case received Inspector Isac's approval of the play permit, most probably being granted out of clear nationalist feelings.²³⁵ Valjean (Ion Al. Vasilescu-Valjean) was a Wallachian playwright born in 1881 who was renowned for his "theater-manifesto," a genre touching on ethnic rights for the Romanians in Transylvania, the peasant question, and students' political activism. Valjean was a Europeanizer who supported in urban centers who could appreciate the subtleties of the intended message. Although founded by schoolteachers, the Brotherhood put its emphasis on practical purposes rather than on moral and spiritual sermons.

Schoolteachers with the spirit of "Popa Tanda" in them are rare, so proclaimed Pavel Ionescu, a schoolteacher from Sebeşul de Jos, and a contributor to the schoolteachers' main review in Sibiu County, *Luceafărul*. Popa Tanda, a literary character taken from Ioan Slavici's famous work with the same title, was the quintessential priest whose energy and missionary spirit help him elevate his village in record time. Schoolteachers like Tanda would see in literary

²³⁴ Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Affirmed: The Romanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1860/1914*, (Bucureşti: Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999), 106.

²³⁵ DANIC Bucureşti, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 49/1935, Fila 109/15 Apr. 1935.

gatherings the beginnings of an important effort meant to raise the villagers' cultural level: to preserve the language or dialect; to enhance faith and the ancestors' religion; to stimulate reading and memorization, which in time, spurs the need for more books and leads to the creation of a library; and, finally, to build a cultural center to house the library and to organize, concerts, choirs, and plays, and other cultural activities. Then, next step would be the purchase of a radio and the installation of a small movie theater. Army recruiting would be another way to bring villagers to the cultural center to discuss this option, as they tended to have a strong sense of duty when it was about joining the army. Another way was to encourage a local writer, or invite one from elsewhere, to come and write the village monograph, and to use the local cultural house as an office while collecting his documentation. The center would also have a museum where to put on display all the beautiful things handcrafted by peasants. As Pavel Popescu pointed out in his article the elevation of a village certainly involved theater among other things intended to promote ethnicity and social change.²³⁶

In contrast to the Westernizer group of printers and schoolteachers, the traditionalists appear at work in the village of Dealu Frumos, where an active group of Orthodox adults led by Orthodox priest Muscă Teodor decided to put on Sebastian Stanca's play, *Lege Nouă* (The New Law).²³⁷ Stanca was well known to them because in the religious review he edited, *Renașterea* (Rebirth), he constantly urged priests in small parishes to devote time to reading and writing. His play, *Lege Nouă*, reveals the rural world of peasant families being overwhelmed by new ideas circulating in their villages. They were, in fact, appalled by what seemed to go against tradition and religion. The plot revolves around a young couple in love, Ion and Măriuța, who found satisfaction in work and devotion to one another, despite their poverty. Quotes from Scripture

²³⁶ *Luceafărul*, 20-24.

²³⁷ DĂNIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, inv. 818, Dos. 44/1935, vol. II, fila 90/8 Apr. 1935.

reveal a village community that had faith and trust in each other, even when, in their midst, Gligor (a character whose name has a clear Russian twist) spreads rumors about an impending revolution. Stanca makes clear that peasants typically do not start revolutions or encourage change. Gligor was a lazy drunkard, who snuck into people's houses uninvited. He talked about equality and justice, promising a new world that would replace the old, with the poor having as much as the rich. But the older generation perceived the risks associated with communism, and thus Stanca shows the divide between generations and how a lack of experience can make easy converts among the young. The play has a natural rhythm typical of the dialogue of everyday life. Gligor's ideas are treated as an utter embarrassment, but nevertheless, they trigger debate among the peasants who must ponder their own life and the future.

Rare as they were, the events organized by the traditionalist local elite provide a useful contrast that flesh out the differences between them and the Westernizers. As a playwright, priest, and intellectual, Sebastian Stanca remained a traditionalist at heart, yet, he was deeply immersed in the current issues of the day. He was a close friend of poet Octavian Goga and economist Ion Lăpedatu (1876-1951) and established wide contacts with intellectuals and writers of all faiths in his position as president of the "Andrei Șaguna" Association of the Transylvanian clergy and a school advisor within the Astra cultural society.²³⁸ As in any Orthodox event, traditionalism took precedence over other orientations, and governed the mediation of the worldly relations to reach fundamental truth of faith and mystery. The perspectives of both traditionalism and Westernization, as they appear in amateur theater events, convey a dynamic landscape in which the organizers and the audiences see on stage familiar worlds, yet subtly offering different paths of cultural development to consider. Through their repertoires, the Orthodox communities, in particular, highlighted the power of education which delineated the image of an educated parish

priest in charge of his parishioners' education. The same close attachment and sense of duty that brought Orthodox clergy closer to its flock for centuries, appears in the case of Dealu Frumos.

Concluding remarks

Of all the contributions made by the Romanian amateur theater movement, the most important is the idea that theater playing offered ample opportunities for expressing nationality, being connected to the fundamental belief constantly upheld by the Romanians that it was the right of every people to develop according to its particular character. Before the war such opportunities for nationality expression were not legally available to them. After 1918, this belief has taken hold of all minority groups, as cultural freedom in this small province meant, in essence, a right to survival and a free choice of ethnic development. In the aftermath of the Great War, only the highly-educated proponents of theater availed themselves of this opportunity, even though the state supported professional and semiprofessional theater in the hope that it would serve as a source of inspiration to ordinary individuals to follow suit as amateurs. Only by the 1930s did Romanians begin considering bolder initiatives. Less large than the volume of petitions sent to the Ministry of Arts and Religions by the two most numerous ethnic minorities in the region, the ones submitted by the Romanians demonstrate that the local elite and the broad society were familiar with the amateur theater movement but showed little interest in getting involved themselves, both men and women. The most active were the members of the upper and lower Greek Catholic clergy. Westernizers by outlook, they shepherded tightly-knit communities, believing in the role of religion to secure renewal and progress in society, and most importantly to serve ethnic identity. High standards on stage could also bring about the cultural elevation necessary to assert the Romanians' place in Europe and improve overall the lives of Romanians. The Westernizers looked forward to innovate through new means of cultural uplift and sought to

²³⁸ Florin Dobrei, "Protopop Stavrofor Dr. Sebastian Stanca – Micromonografie" in *Revista Teologică*, I, 2006.

buttress ethnicity through literary gatherings, libraries, movies, radio, and conferences, in addition to amateur theater.

Their group coexisted with a smaller number of Orthodox priests and local elites of Orthodox communities, for whom ethnicity mattered less than tradition, morality, and local custom, which, in their view, were closely intertwined to religion. Ethnicity or class showed up less in their plays compared to the Greek-Catholic choices. Theater playing in Orthodox communities demonstrates that parish priests were educated individuals and knew the value of instruction. By embracing amateur theater, they continued their interest in self-teaching and improvement rather than succumbing to prejudicial ideas held against them that they were illiterate. The favorable context available in Greater Romania encouraged priests' initiatives, but nothing substantially stimulating was done to encourage or support them. The Orthodox priests' interest in promoting (self-) education was a steady effort which they constantly made under all political regimes.

The Romanian state created a bureaucratic system that encouraged cooperation between central authorities, local offices, and Romanian citizens, be they of different ethnicities. To achieve this goal an entire generation of Transylvanian intellectuals who served as state officials believed that cultural rights as well as the exercise of cultural freedoms needed be granted equally to all ethnic groups. After the First World War, they organized in Bucharest and Cluj a durable and effective platform of communication and petition-processing that encouraged hundreds of groups to put on amateur theater events.

The outcome of these efforts was the gradual emergence of amateur theater and its spread over a wide geographical area of the region. My sources focus on decision-making, though the content of the petitions and the replies to them alone can barely convey the dynamics at the local level, as we lack sources documenting whether the event took place and how the audience

enjoyed it. But we can infer that fervent debates shaped opinions and decisions taken prior or during the play rehearsals. A focus on the play also reveals precious details, such as whether highlighting ethnicity was more important for organizers than reviving old traditions and restoring religious tenets. We can even trace the similarities in repertoires to see if Romanian amateurs attempted to emulate or match the plays of their co-nationals of other faith, those of other minorities, or those of European theaters. One thing is certain: amateurs felt free to debate among themselves the best path for their group or community to ensure their cultural survival and their best cultural interests. It was a mindset that continued throughout the 1930s until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 and even during the cession of North Transylvania to Hungary by Romania in 1940.

Theater directors Soare V. Soare's new ideas of play productions at the National Theater of Bucharest and looked to Molière, Shakespeare, and Gogol for inspiration, but also to Romanian authors like Vasile Alecsandri and I.L. Caragiale.²³⁹

Another preferred playwright among the printers was Virginia A. Vlaicu, a translator of German plays and an active member of the Greek-Catholic Society of Women in Feldioara (Braşov). Her play *Three Doctors*²⁴⁰ (*Trei Doctori*), which was quite popular among amateurs was published in 1898 and widely performed in Transylvania until the 1930s. Vlaicu's play was also part of the Gutenberg Choir's repertory in the city of Sibiu.²⁴¹

Published long before the First World War, *Three Doctors* is about two lovers who compete for the blessing of a girl's father, hoping to get married with her. Adrian, a promising railway engineer, well-to-do and successful, could not marry Nelli because her father wanted a doctor for his son-in-law. Using an opportunity when his friend, Dr. Georgian, had to travel out

²³⁹ Despina Valjean, *I. Valjean, Generația de Sacrificiu...*, VI.

²⁴⁰ Virginia A. Vlaicu, *Trei Doctori, comedie într-un act* (Biblioteca Teatrală a Societății pentru Crearea unui Fond de Teatru Român, nr. 5) (Braşov: Tiparul Tipografiei Ciurcu Comp, 1898).

of town, Adrian pretends to be the doctor whom the father expected to visit him for a consultation for his stomach pain. Being known that the girl's father had a fondness of doctors and his nephew temporarily out of favor, they tried to disguise themselves into doctors to get their uncle's attention. A Greek-Catholic audience might relate to this play for its cosmopolitan and western allusions of characters. The household is European if judging from the culinary terms, or the language of Dr. Gregorian in everyday conversation, like his fondness for British proverb "time is money." In general, people associated a doctor's mastery of Latin medical terms with superior Western treatment.²⁴² The play's morale is that gluttony and inactivity blur a father's judgment. The engineer and the agronomer (his nephew) decided to cooperate in curing the girl's father by having him join a swimming party and restrain food from his table. The steps worked and the father recovered fully. Even after the joke was revealed, he was ready to give his daughter to Adrian in marriage. The play emphasized the unity of social classes among an agronomist, an engineer, and a doctor, who trusted each other that the right decision would be eventually taken.

The cultural society "Frăția Românească de pe malul stâng al Cibinului" (The Romanian Brotherhood on the Left Bank of the Cibin River) was founded in July 1933 by schoolteachers who wished to unite their communities across five large neighborhoods to cover basic needs: credit, funeral expenses, a library, and a cultural house. Among the means proposed this society listed conferences, literary gatherings, literacy and skill classes for adults, and choirs, but, at first, no theater events.²⁴³ However, by 1935, a petition in the archive of the Ministry of Arts and Religions shows that they put on a play by Petre Locusteanu (1883-1919), *Nevasta lui Cerceluș* (Cerceluș's Wife), a complicated but extremely funny farce. Concocted by his boss, seeking to unravel Cerceluș's lies about missing days at work, the farce involves his wife, who reveals the

²⁴¹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 20/1935, Vol. I, Fila 41/4 Oct. 1935.

²⁴² Vlaicu, *Trei Doctori*, 28-29; 32.

lies. Full of unpredictable twists and quick changes of situations through hints and innuendos, Locusteanu's play reveals how different language registers make certain plays fit for particular audiences, but surely not for the broad, largely illiterate population. Although the farce is a critique of the dishonesty and superficiality of office clerks in ministries dealing with citizens as well as of their adulterous private lives, the overall message is one that extols the beauty of such situations, not their immorality. The audience for such a play could only have been the educated.

²⁴³ Izidor Dopp, "Școalele și Orașele noastre sub raport cultural" in Luceafărul, Revista pentru Propășire Culturală și Armonie Socială, Organ al Asociației Învățătorilor din Orașul Sibiu, Nr. 1-2-3, An I, 1934, 34.

Chapter 2 Hungarian Theater in Historical Transylvania

Hungarian theater developed faster than that of other ethnic minorities, having a sustained and ample reach. One reason was that Hungarian civil society was overwhelmingly favorable to theater playing, perceiving it as having the most potential for securing the ethnic survival of their communities. Moreover, Hungarian politicians and writers acknowledged that theater playing had numerous benefits, the most important being showcasing the cultural identity of the largest minority group of Greater Romania.²⁴⁴ Also, local communities of various denominations placed theater at the center of their rich cultural life in historical Transylvania, viewing it favorably for enhancing the mission of the school and church. Although this general picture appeared as that of a unified cultural world, evidence shows that, at the county and village level, the confessional, dialectal, and urban/rural diversity precluded a close feeling of unity among Hungarians.

The overview of the political background in 1920s Greater Romania can explain the factors that led to the development of Hungarian professional theater. Understanding the professional field first is necessary because its vibrancy was the initial trigger that encouraged the rest of Hungarians to put on plays as amateurs and build confidence living as Romanian citizens in the new country. This section details the Romanian state policies on Hungarian professional theater showing that they allowed continuity with the prewar period without impeding growth and change. Since professionals were the first to contribute to a Hungarian minority cultural life, I will focus on their work to show the level of accommodation that Romanian authorities offered to them. The semiprofessionals were also quick to act upon the opportunity left open in Transylvania for all artists by Romanian authorities. In the next section devoted to Hungarian amateurs, I trace the

²⁴⁴ Szilárd Toth, Partidul Maghiar și problema minorității maghiare în Parlamentul României în perioada interbelică [Az Országos Magyar Párt és a magyar kisebbség kérdése Románia parlamentjében a két világháború

development of a region-wide theater movement. The core question appears to be why amateur theater, rather than cinema and radio, was chosen as the preferred form of entertainment and means of communication, teaching ideas that reinforced religious feeling, ethnic pride, and active citizenship.

Since Hungarians were divided into three Christian confessions, Reformed (Calvinist), Roman Catholic, and Unitarian, the second part of the chapter is devoted to the amateur theater playing of each confessional group, hoping to illustrate their cultural autonomy in depth. Amateur theater was the solution Hungarians of all denominations embraced in order to handle the numerous material difficulties in their churches and schools, and alleviate their apprehensions about their ethnic survival under the new regime. A valid conclusion is that most Hungarians went along with the new circumstances, continued to work together within the existing framework of relations, and called Transylvania their home region. Evidence suggests that local Hungarian initiatives could unfold because, being related to religion, Romanian authorities perceived them to be non-threatening to the Romanian state and public order. The Hungarians of all faiths sought to strengthen ethnic sentiment and culture through religion, and, in the process, they consolidated both faith and language and community.

Part I

Professional Theater

Despite the sudden loss of Transylvania, an unexpected degree of continuity marked the Hungarian theatrical field in the early years after the First World War. Unlike other social categories employed in administrative and economic institutions, minority artists were able to continue their activities and businesses after the war was over. The professional branch was eager to pursue its artistic interests using accommodation as the best way to deal with the new regime.

között] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2008). DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Arte, Dep. Arte, Inv.

The Romanian state strove to create the legal, practical, and administrative framework for the Hungarian professional theater to thrive, and even contributed to the shaping of a new social status for artists, one associated with prestige, job security, guaranteed income, and welfare protection through establishment of new institutions and new theater legislation. The local Hungarians witnessed the large-scale return of artists to the province. After leaving to Hungary shortly after Transylvania was transferred to Romania, those who returned added a large contingent to an already active field. This workforce movement, nevertheless, conveys the energetic theatrical culture in Hungarian urban communities and the welcoming environment encouraged by Romanian authorities to enable the returned residents of the region thrive professionally or simply make a living.

Several factors explain the thriving of the Hungarian professional theater to an extent greater than is often recognized. In order to ensure continuity, Romanian officials engaged in consultations and dialogue with the minorities in deciding on the best professional system to put in place. They found out that in the past, the Hungarian government, ruling over historical Transylvania, was an advocate of two systems of theater operations. One was the Italian system based on itinerant activity, and the other was the German system based on a stable permanent troupe performing in a fixed location. Before the war, Hungarian professional troupes followed mainly the German model while a few private troupes went on tours as far as Háromszék County in Eastern Transylvania. After the war, the Hungarian minority continued to blend both systems but touring became the main priority.

The Romanian regime after 1918 used three systems of professional theaters for minorities: one system of complete freedom for minority artists of Romanian citizenship with the authorities to exert administrative, workforce and repertorial control; a second system centered on only one

Hungarian professional theater with a wide geographical coverage (Kolozsvár-Nagyvárad) and ten or fifteen small troupes limited to a smaller area but with absolute freedom of movement and repertory selection; and third, a system granting a small number of authorized professional troupes, each covering a larger area, and fulfilling requirements of insurance deposit and bankruptcy protection for employees.²⁴⁵ Each of the three systems had been put into practice in consultation with Hungarian theater representatives.

A significant factor of continuity was the ability of the private professional theater and its Jewish-Hungarian directors, with experience in managing a theater company gained since the prewar years, to integrate into the Romanian legal and professional framework. Although evacuated from the majestic theater building of the prewar Hungarian era, and promptly relocated to a smaller theater building in the same city, Jenő Janovics (1872-1945), the former director of National Theater of Kolozsvár (*Kolozsvári Nemzeti Színház*)²⁴⁶ signed a favorable lease contract with the Romanian state in 1921 for four years.²⁴⁷ Artists, a fancy and generic term for multitalented actors, together with directors of theater companies also returned and revived their métier in historical Transylvania as soon as the war was over.

The exodus of artists from Hungary to Transylvania reflects the favorable context for the theater business in Greater Romania. In 1922, when the director of the newly rejuvenated Hungarian Theater, Jenő Janovics, asked for the Minister Constantin Banu's approval that eight Budapest actors be authorized to play on his Kolozsvár theater stage for six weeks, Romanian authorities in Bucharest feared that this was an irredentist attempt to enhance Hungarian propaganda in the region. Worrying even further, they cited the precaution taken by the Czechoslovak government, which rushed to decline these actors' request to perform on its territory,

²⁴⁵ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 686/1921, Fila 236/ no date, Dos. 777/1922, Fila 150/25 Mar. 1922; Fond Ministerul Cultelor si Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 71/1929.

²⁴⁶ Lajos Jordáky, *Janovics Jenő és Poór Lili. Két színész arcképe* (București: Kriterion, 1971).

for reasons similar to those of the Romanian state. Inspector Isac and the police authorities in Kolozsvár confirmed that the eight actors already were in Transylvania, working in various theaters, the affair was handled by the Police together with Janovics. The regional inspector Isac from this point onward referred such cases to the Foreign Ministry. New regulations came to the aid of the Romanian Consulate in Budapest in order to deal effectively with hundreds of similar requests. The consulate was supposed to cooperate with half a dozen other authorities and administrative offices.²⁴⁸ However, other directors of Hungarian theater companies²⁴⁹ perceived Janovics's practice of bringing artists from Hungary into Transylvania alarming at first. Gradually, they embraced it themselves and by 1925 most Hungarian theater directors of private companies engaged in this practice. Inspector Isac, with permission from central authorities, gave Hungarian theater directors practically a free hand in this affair.²⁵⁰

Not only artists and theater businesses benefitted from the legal system, but cultural elites from Hungary perceived it as favorable to the Hungarian minority. Janovics celebrated the return of Count Miklós Bánffy (1873-1950), former General Arts Inspector in prewar Hungary and the Minister of Foreign Affairs in postwar Hungary (1921-1922). Once in Transylvania, Bánffy became an active representative of Hungarian culture. A production of his play *Maskara, bolondság 3 felvonásbab* (Atheneum: Budapest, 1926) inaugurated the return of this well-known intellectual, seen as a central figure of Hungarian intellectual life.²⁵¹ Disillusioned with postwar Hungary, especially with the infringement of democratic rights, Bánffy emphasized the need for a peaceful cohabitation between the Hungarian minority and the Romanian state. He obtained Romanian

²⁴⁷ EME, Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesülete, the Lăcătuşului Branch, Fond Janovics, Dos. 83, Contract.

²⁴⁸ DANIC Bucureşti, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 777/1922 vol. II, Fila 43/8 July 1922.

²⁴⁹ For a list of all Hungarian Theater Directors holding state license, see DANIC Bucureşti, Fond Ministerul Culte și Arte, Inv. 652, Dos. 26/1925, Fila 9-11/14 Febr. 1925.

²⁵⁰ DANIC Bucureşti, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 922/1924, Fila 36/Sept. 17, 1924, and Inv. 652, 1920-1929, Dos. 15/1925, fila 49/19 May, 1924, Inv. 652, Dos. 16/1925 for the stunning reaction of Romanian intellectuals to Isac's confirmation that, indeed, Hungarian guest-artists were allowed to migrate in Romania. Also see Inv. 652, Dos. 27/1925, fila 27/7 Aug. 1925.

citizenship and came to live on his properties in Bonchida and Kolozsvár in Transylvania.²⁵² Better than anyone else, Bánffy assessed favorably the situation of Hungarian professional theater under the Romanian authorities.

It did not take long for the Romanian authorities to notice the successful Hungarian theater life with its smooth administrative organization and the superior stage and artistic experience. Isac constantly reminded his superiors that Hungarian professional theater used to have only six troupes in prewar Hungary which performed half a year in Transylvania and half in Hungary, thus, the approval of having eight, ten, twelve and then again eight private theater troupes after the war seemed unreasonably generous to many observers in the press, if only judging the demographic ratio of Hungarians to Romanians compared to other ethnic groups in Transylvania.²⁵³ In 1930, the number fell to six but the itinerant troupes (“trupe flotante”) putting on plays remained active in large numbers which made their activity still more formidable.²⁵⁴

Romanian officials had close contacts with the existing hierarchy in the professional theater business and societies like the Association of Hungarian Artists of Transylvania and Banat (Az Erdélyi és Bánáti Magyar Színészek Egyesülete Kolozsvár) led by Jenő Janovics. After the latter's dissolution, the authorities gave in to a dozen powerful theater magnates in regard to the assigned locations for their yearly theater licenses. Even when Inspector Isac proposed to grant theater licenses to minority directors based on a public selection system, the companies already operating in the region exerted a powerful lobby to influence Romanian officials in their favor.²⁵⁵

The postwar years marked a significant transformation in the way an artist's social status came to be perceived in society. The responsible entity for improving the artists' image and their

²⁵¹ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Arte, Inv. 652, Dos. 98/1926, Fila 115/14 Mai 1926.

²⁵² Edgár Balogh, Samu Benkő (eds.), Romániai magyar irodalmi lexikon: szépirodalom, közírás, tudományos irodalom, művelődés (Kriterion:Bucuresti, 1981).

²⁵³ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 69/1926, Fila 7/14 Apr. 1926.

²⁵⁴ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 73/1930, Fila 34/22 May 1930, Dos. 75/1930, Fila 28/no date.

social betterment was the Ministry of Arts and Religions. The ministerial authorities were even willing to provide new theatrical licenses to Hungarian troupe upon receiving complaints that newly-arrived artists could not find jobs. The ministerial regulations stipulated that license contracts should include guarantees that an insurance sum be deposited on behalf of each hired artist, that artists could not remain unemployed, or not be covered by the pension system of the Union of Theater Artists of Bucharest. Lastly, hired artists were to be co-opted into the administration of the theater company, a norm that was unheard of in neighboring countries or in prewar Transylvania.²⁵⁶

Besides social prestige, there was a sense of independence and freedom of spirit that prevailed among artists. As the leading theater director of Kolozsvár, Jenő Janovics, pointed out, local Hungarian artists could remain independent as members of the Union of Dramatic and Musical Artists of Bucharest while maintaining their retirement or illness pensions. The four-year-old Hungarian Artists Union of Kolozsvár dissolved officially on June 22, 1922, but the Romanian government's acknowledgment of this dissolution came only two years later on March 11, 1924. Meanwhile, the Union continued to be active 'taking care of liquidation matters,' but it continued to operate for many other purposes as well.²⁵⁷ By 1925, we find that numerous artists paid their pension dues to both unions, in Bucharest and Budapest, even though the Artists' Union in Bucharest, led by Romanian actor Ion Manolescu, was not yet fully established. No obstacles, however, prevented Hungarian artists and troupe directors from travelling, making profits, or sending their payments abroad, for example, paying royalties to the *Országos Színészegyesület Irodalmi és Színészeti Ügynökség* in Budapest.²⁵⁸ This state of affairs relaxed the working

²⁵⁵ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 686/1921, Fila 599/15 Nov. 1921.

²⁵⁶ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 26/1925, Fila 123/17 Sept. 1925.

²⁵⁷ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 914/1924, Fila 154/Apr 1924.

²⁵⁸ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 914/1924, Fila 142/Apr. 25, 1924. Also, see report in Inv. 652, Dos. 22, 1925, Fila 50/2 Mai 1925.

environment and stimulating a favorable theater climate in the region that encouraged the development of the semiprofessional and, gradually, amateur theater.

Semiprofessional theater

Semiprofessional theater groups in high schools or urban theater associations, which enlisted Hungarian state employees, tended to consider irredentism or passivism in public life as a course of action in their theatrical activities. The Hungarian National Party (Országos Magyar Párt), counting semiprofessional members in its ranks, stated in its program the need to put at the center of its cultural activity theater playing in order to reinvigorate Hungarian ethnicity. It was a position endorsed by the Union of Hungarian Journalists and Writers of Transylvania and, in principle, advocated by all theater practitioners.²⁵⁹ The semiprofessionals formed a complex group, and either local or foreign, they were individuals with artistic inclinations who came to form a permanent presence in Transylvanian artistic life.

The trend to form Societies for the Support of Theatrical Arts for the Hungarian minority in every large town and city of historical Transylvania succeeded in bringing a renewed sense of energy and urgency. The involvement was so high that it caused concern among Romanian officials like the Inspector Isac, who worried about the scale of Hungarian cultural work. Representing mainly semiprofessionals and often professionals, this initiative shows the popularity of theater among townsmen, who claimed that theater was not only a profitable business but art for the people.

By 1930 when the economic crisis hit hard, the increasing presence of foreign semiprofessional artists from Hungary jeopardized the work of many local artists. Although the foreign and local artists were ethnically Hungarians, a conflict between the two emerged due to the scarcity of jobs.²⁶⁰ In 1931, the newspaper *Pesti Napló* announced that, in Romania, there were over

²⁵⁹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 61/1931, Fila 37/28 Ian. 1931.

²⁶⁰ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 75/1930, Fila 1/14 Jan. 1930.

eight thousand artists from Hungary that were liable for deportation.²⁶¹ Local semiprofessional actors increased in number at the urging and encouragement of minority state officials.

In Kézdivásárhely, a new administrative elite of mayors, backed up by industrial and business owners as well as merchants, artisans, and workers, considered theater to be a prominent cultural and artistic choice, highly beneficial for the Hungarian community.²⁶² In June 1921, mayor Mólnar Dénes of Kézdivásárhely called a meeting of all mayors from nearby villages (Szentkatolna, Zabola, Gelenc, Lemhény, Torja, Páva) to join in a new association for the support of theatrical arts, “The Urban and Regional Amateurs Society of Kézdivásárhely” (Kézdivásárhely Város és Vidéke Színpartoló Egyesület) for their city and the surrounding areas.²⁶³ Within this new association a group of theater enthusiasts formed a section, “Műkedvelő Társaság of Kézdivásárhely” (The Amateurs’ Society of Kézdivásárhely). Theater-loving people in this city, however, had already formed an association of this sort and had put on plays since 1912. Its semiprofessional theater troupe had a stage director, Mezei Kálmán, who retired in 1925 and celebrated his departure with an event, presenting *Józsi: a bohózat* by Ferenc Molnár (1878-1952). By the late 1920s, fewer and fewer plays came to be put on by amateurs in this town, their theatrical taste being superseded by cabaret. In 1927 the Society ceased its activity and in 1929, the Society’s founder, Aurél Sinkovits, moved on to establish a football club in the city and donated land for the building of a stadium.²⁶⁴

While the Kézdivásárhely society functioned as a cultural and artistic society, its financial model resembled in many respects professional theater companies. Each season, the society put on twelve plays, attended by members holding an annual pass. The interest earned from these

²⁶¹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 61/1931, Fila 58/23 Febr. 1931, Pesti Naplo no. 42/21 Febr. 1931.

²⁶² Diana Joița, “Drepturile minorităților naționale în administrarea publică locală din România (1925-2001) Hrisovul, XIII, 2007, 159. Nagyszeben, Marosvásárhely, Brassó, and Beszterce had Hungarian mayors. Other communes also ended up with Hungarian mayors, according to political agreements between parties before elections.

²⁶³ A similar society was founded in the following year in Marosvásárhely. See Fond Ministerul Arte, Inv. 550, Dos. 774/1922, Fila 16/2 Mar. 1922

subscriptions covered the salary of the stage director, while the remaining revenue served for tour expenses.

Upon the submission of its new by-laws, the Kézdivásárhely Society appears frequently in the correspondence between Inspector Isac and his supervisor, General Inspector Manolescu, revealing the state's close monitoring of minority activities. Isac suggested to his superiors the need to require the society to include Romanian members. Manolescu proposed to approve the by-laws as submitted, but to continue the effort of sending Romanian troupes to tour the region with performances in Romanian to be scheduled in the city's theater halls. Having the support of Romanian authorities and financial perks, the small number of Romanian theater troupes had, overall, a relatively limited presence in historical Transylvania, compared to that of the Hungarians, but the booking of the theater hall and the financial perks led to numerous complaints and conflicts between Romanian and Hungarian professional and semiprofessional troupes.²⁶⁵ In such encounters, the issue of ethnicity flared up again in state offices and the press.

Amateur Theater

By 1925, signs of material and professional shortcomings began to affect the Hungarian world of professional theater. Production costs went up, tickets became more expensive, and the public's interest began to wane as the sale of season passes decreased abruptly.²⁶⁶ Other attractions began to tempt theater directors: opera, cabaret, movie screenings, and dance recitals. Such pressures led to the increase in the number of guest-artists from East-Central Europe in

²⁶⁴ Attila Dimény, "A Kézdivásárhelyi polgárság Egyesületi Élete a 19. Század Második Elétől a 20. század Közepéig," *Acta Siculica*, 2011, 523.

²⁶⁵ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor si Artelor, Dep.Arte, Inv 550, Dos. 704/1921, Fila 394/6 Dec. 1921, Fila 395/21 Jan. 1922.

²⁶⁶ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor si Cultelor, DGA, Inv. 652, 1920-1929, Dos. 33/1925, Fila 3/13 Feb. 1925.

Transylvania.²⁶⁷ With new genres of entertainment more lucrative than theater playing alone, the main Hungarian theater in Transylvania led by Jenő Janovics decided to showcase his successful theater business by going on tour in neighboring countries, especially Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, and pursuing other regional opportunities through tours in Budapest, Bratislava, Košice, and Užhorod.²⁶⁸ In 1930, the material crisis triggered moral concerns on the part of Hungarian newspapers, like *Színház és Film (Theater and Film)*, or *Ellenzék (Opposition)* which in 1930 began a boycott campaign against Hungarian local theater companies, blaming them for putting profit above idealism.²⁶⁹

Whether amateur theater was triggered by this moral crisis or other factors, morality remained the cornerstone of village celebrations and shaped the choices of amateur theater organizers. The first signs that amateur theater in small communities began to attract an audience occurred in Hunyad. Here, the local elite mailed to Bucharest a petition signed by Father János Fekete of the Roman Catholic Church of Zsilyvajdejvulkán of Hunyad County, to obtain a license to put on plays regularly in order to help his church. The titles he chose were inspired by the repertoires of Hungarian professional companies. Licenses were typically issued to professionals, and amateurs would be granted play permits, nevertheless a renewal of this organizer's license implied a previous approval. The Hungarian professional theater that passed through his town gave him plenty of ideas for plays. Zsilyvajdejvulkán was a mid-size multi-ethnic town with a higher than average ratio of minorities (Romanians -5,929, Hungarians -5,212, Saxons - 555, and Jews - 414) and a rich cultural life with competing professional and amateur troupes vying for audience as early as 1926.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, DGA, Inv. 652, (1920-1929), Dos. 71/1926, Fila 1/13 Mar. 1926, Fila 2/20 Apr. 1926, and Fila 6/11 May 1926.

²⁶⁸ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, In.v 652, Dos. 87/1926, Fila 301/Oct. 25, 1926.

²⁶⁹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 76/1930, Fila 23/22 Mar. 1930 and Fila 26/1 Apr. 1930.

²⁷⁰ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, Inv. 652, Dos. 12/1927, Fila 30/7 Dec. 1926.

József Zulágyi, the Roman-Catholic cantor of the church in Petrozsényi is another early example of a clergyman involved in theater. His request to authorities mentioned that the play he intended to select was part of the rich repertory of the Hungarian professional theater companies.²⁷¹ In the last months of 1925, Hungarian amateurs from small towns submitted petitions to the Ministry for play permits hoping to collect money for supporting confessional schools through theater events. A similar request came from the Reformed Hungarians of Marosludas (January 1926) for the play *Nagymama* (Grandmother) by Gergely Csik.²⁷² Since minority confessional schools could not receive financial support from the state budget, the authorities, nevertheless, endorsed these events mainly because the request was signed by the clergy and the events had a literacy agenda. Prior to the shows, either the priest, the schoolteacher, or a local member of the community served as a guest “pedagogue,”²⁷³ who would explain the moral, social, historical, and religious aspects related to the event. Some of these participants still remember today their parents’ or their own past participation in theatrical events as pedagogues or spectators.²⁷⁴ The literacy dimension of theater playing attracted numerous schoolteachers and well-to-do or educated members of the community.

Seeing a constant stream of positive resolutions to petitions, church communities and local groups increasingly thought about theater as a regular activity. They were not alone, because, in parallel, formal and institutional groups like cultural societies also embraced theater playing. Although not the object of this study, these institutional groups complemented the work of Hungarian acting companies. Rather than religious teachings and literacy, these societies stressed

²⁷¹ DANIC Bucuresti, Fond Ministerul Artelor si Cultelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 12/1927, Fila 27/17 Jan 1927.

²⁷² DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 87/1926, Fila 22/ 14 Jan 1926.

²⁷³ The role of theater pedagogues began in Transylvania starting in the nineteenth century. Even after the onset of communist regimes in the region, theater pedagogues still remained important, especially in children’s theaters. See the comparative article by Moses Goldberg, “The Pedagogue in Eastern European Children’s Theater,” in *Educational Theater Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Mar. 1972.

²⁷⁴ In 1930, the village of Illyefalva (Ilieni) had a majority of Reformed Hungarians of 1357. Up to present, the village was remarkably active in amateur theater. György Kalamár (1946-) was one among the inhabitants who put

ethnicity. Their general vision of Hungarianness originated in a standardized and centralized source of ethnic identity defined by class, and had a widespread coverage due to professional private companies, which toured the regions inhabited by Hungarians from Yugoslavia in the south to Slovakia in the north. The private theater companies varied widely in terms of structure, method of work, and repertory, trying to comply with both the authorities' requirements and the expectations of the various publics they encountered on tours, thus making their fluctuating activity difficult to map.

Amateurs did not consider touring an option, being legally allowed only to professionals. Official authorities could grant play permits only for one to three shows a year, or an event per season, with the stipulation to limit the number of shows. Only professionals could schedule regular shows and each event was to be charged an entertainment tax.²⁷⁵ Romanian authorities made clear the distinction between the status of amateur, meaning organizers who perform plays rarely, and the professional status, that is, putting on plays for a living.²⁷⁶ There were cases of Hungarian troupes that blurred these distinctions, like the Hungarian troupe of the farmers of Magyarkapus (Kolozsvár), self-entitled amateurs who toured the whole country to perform "ethnographic" plays on the basis of a ministerial authorization given for several cycles of performances. Their case is interesting because it shows how literate peasants posed as amateurs but worked in the business almost like theater semiprofessionals.

On the other hand, continuity and local theater developments help discern patterns in why small communities organized theater. Due to vagaries of local interpretation and needs, their choices of plays, however, did not follow a pattern, such as performing the work of authors of the same confession. The local elite's efforts to connect with the masses through cultural events were a

on plays since 2003. According to his interview, eight plays were put on on a local stage in a dire need of repairs. <http://www.illyefalva.eu/content/view/1/2/lang,ro/> Accessed on March 2012.

²⁷⁵ DANIC București, Fond Teatrul National București, Inv. 2345, Dos. 51/1922, Fila 18-21/1922.

preoccupation that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and continued more intensely in the years leading up to the First World War. After the war, the upper clergy began to be interested in stimulating parishes to take up theater. They authored plays to be used for extracurricular adult education and some promoted their own at various yearly gatherings, but often their own co-religionists rarely embraced their clergy's plays, while Hungarians of other faiths did so without hesitation. The examples of a Roman Catholic priest, like Vilmos Bálint, or that of the Unitarian cantor and music professor at the Unitarian College of Kolozsvár, Gyula Péterfi, are illuminating in this regard. The Reformed communities were more willing to experiment with the plays of playwrights of other confessions while Roman Catholics sought inspiration from Western European Catholicism. This shows how reluctant Reformed parishioners were to give up self-education in favor of intellectual guidance and mobilization from the top, which was peculiar to Catholic Hungarians. Starting my historical inquiry from below helps reveal the diversity of religious perspectives and how entertainment and extracurricular education shaped the cultural life of the masses.

Overall, Hungarian amateurs revived the genre known of *népszínmű* (folk plays). It was widely considered a major source of entertainment, comparable nowadays with soap-operas. In all *népszínmű* plays, the moral teachings and religious messages, more or less transparent, are embedded in a very localized situational context. Of all three confessions, the Roman Catholics made an exception, by not choosing *népszínmű* plays and relying on a large number of religious plays in translation from German (Abraham Goldfaden),²⁷⁷ Spanish (Calderon dela Barca) and even French (Paul Bourde, alias Paul Anthelme) into Hungarian. Germany loomed large in the consciousness of Roman Catholic Hungarians, especially in the western part of Transylvania and

²⁷⁶ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Culte și Arte, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 13/1922, Fila 128/ March 4, 1922.

²⁷⁷ Abraham Goldfaden, *Sulamith, Jeruzsálem leánya keleti operának összes énekszövegei*, trans. Albert Kövessy (Budapest: Lóbl, 1899).

less in the Szeklers' lands. In Germany, quite a number of Roman Catholic publishing houses printed numerous collections of religious plays for amateurs, which were circulated in Transylvania. However, Hungarian local playwrights such as Father Béla Jánossy preferred Roman Catholic saints as documentary material for writing his own plays rather than adapting stories from Western literatures. Some examples are Little Sainte Thérèse of Lisieux (*Liziói Kis Szent Terez*), Noémi, the Israelite mother-in-law who accepted Ruth, a non-Jew into her family (*Book of Ruth*) and last, Magdolna, a nun from Avignon.

I begin my inquiry into amateur theater with the Reformed communities, which left the largest trail of petitions in ministerial archives and whose content illustrates Hungarian autonomy at its best. Then, I continue with the comparative study of the Roman Catholic and Unitarian amateur theater in the region. I focus on the developments and particularities of each confession as appeared in each county which left records, in order to show the scale of cultural initiative in small communities and the overall cultural autonomy of Hungarian minority in the region.

Part II

Reformed Hungarians and Amateur Theater

Unwearied by the Easter preparations in April of 1935, the minister's wife, Mrs. István Demény convened her Reformed parishioners and asked for volunteers in the village community of Kisfülpös (Maros County) to discuss preparations for putting on a play on the second day of Easter. Mrs. Demény argued in the petition she had sent earlier in March that hers was a play that had already been approved in the village of Tancs (Tonciu) where her acquaintance, Mrs. Molnár Ödön, also a minister's wife, successfully put on *A Dúsgazdag*²⁷⁸ (Opulence) by Vilmos Balint (1877-1949).²⁷⁹ The collective effort was not an isolated occurrence, as numerous villages proposed plays

²⁷⁸ Vilmos Balint, *A Dúsgazdag: Bibliai Színjáték / a régi moralitást színpadra* (Cluj-Kolozsvár: Minerva Ny., 1932).

²⁷⁹ DANIC, București, Fond Departamentul Artelor, Inv. 818, Dos. 43.1935, Vol. 1, Fila 532/2 Mar. 1935.

and requested permits to put on plays right after Christian holidays and secured at least the theater hall and the script.

To Reformed women, cultural work helped community members perform good deeds that benefited everyone - children, youth, adults, and the elderly. Furthermore, these initiatives celebrated the values of the Reformed faith couched in a Hungarian dialect specific to the village area. Such Reformed efforts testify to a new orientation in cultural life within Hungarian communities, in which religion and spiritual matters occupied a more prominent place than before the First World War. Ordinarily seen as the domain of professionals and institutions in urban centers, such theater events in small localities proved that a sense of cultural autonomy was embedded in the mentality of the local elite. Moreover, it appears that religion was largely responsible for and successful in attracting ordinary people to join self-managing theatrical teams. This section highlights the potential of religion to anchor the identity of Reformed Hungarians in a past-oriented world. Their cultural efforts show that theater served as a modern medium fit to communicate their views about Reformed tradition, morality, and customs.

Reformed ministers were deeply committed to religious and secular activism and participation in the province's public life. They hoped to attract the interest of numerous other groups in amateur theater and, by joining theatrical activities, these groups to attach themselves to the local Reformed Church. Villagers who formed local associations according to their skills and interests and were regular churchgoers acquired a keen interest in plays. The clergy's endorsement of theater appears to legitimate its use to the effect that other sources of entertainment (orchestras, music, radio, and cinema) and private initiatives of formative education (public lectures, adult schools, and so on) remained of limited appeal.

The inroads that theater made among Reformed clerical families and institutions slowly cohered into a trend, prompting laymen to follow suit in using a theatrical platform that was bare of

political overtones and excessive religiosity. Perfectly adept at conveying religious messages, their theater exuded typical Reformed values: freedom, delegation of powers, the shared governance of the community, and the women's increasing public role as equals to their husbands.

Besides being socially and religiously significant to many ordinary Hungarians, theatrical initiatives showed a deep attachment to the land understood in religious terms rather than national. Despite the changing territorial coordinates following the postwar peace treaties and subsequent spatial planning reforms, the Reformed communities expressed their attachment to older district boundaries. In 1918, after their separation from the Hungarian Reformed Church (Magyarországi Református Egyház), the two Reformed districts in Transylvania, the Nagyvárad Királyhágómelléki (Oradea) District and the "Transylvanian District," continued their existence within their old church district boundaries, in a climate of paternalism, but wary of structural hierarchy. The Reformed Church, under the general oversight of the state, carried on theatrical activities in the Transylvanian district, covering the area known as historical Transylvania, more precisely, five particular counties. Different in character and dynamics, these counties encompassed localities which, although situated within their own county borders, belonged to a Reformed Church District shaped by boundaries of its own: Kolozsvár and Gyulafehérvár Counties were encompassed within the Kolozsvár and Nagyenyed Reformed Districts (Református Egyházmegyék); Maros County was part of the Reformed District of Görgény and Küküllő; Háromszék County was composed of Orba, Sepsi and Udvarhely Reformed Districts, while Csik County was part of Kezdi and Maros Reformed Districts. As the prewar religious administration left a visible imprint on the location of amateur theater, these counties were, by far, the most active in the number of Reformed clergy involved in amateur theater, superseding in energy and dedication other play organizers. Within these boundaries, a fervent intellectual climate, an active leadership, and respected educational institutions determined the outlook of a new generation of Reformed clergy that embraced amateur theater in their ministries.

Reformed cultural, educational, and literary traditions

The Reformed Church's first line of defense was the cultivation of a broad education and a sustained effort in this regard can be traced in every community. At the top level, education was also a top priority and preoccupied Reformed leaders like Bishop Károly Nagy (1918–1926), who, headquartered in Kolozsvár, continued his prewar cultural agenda devoted to consolidating the seven Reformed middle schools in the Transylvanian bishoprics. The theological schools remained fundamental for the training of the Reformed clergy. Swearing allegiance to the Romanian state and loyalty and respect for the laws of Greater Romania, minority church leaders holding official positions in public life were able to strengthen the institutions which trained Hungarian Reformed clergy, and, in doing so, they showed their full devotion to the welfare of the Reformed communities.

The institutional dynamics had an earlier start in the prewar context of intellectual growth. The Transylvanian college traditions in the Reformed Colleges of Kolozsvár, Nagyenyed, Sárospatak (in Hungary), Marosvásárhely, or Sepsiszentgyörgy, provided a middle-level theological training based on constantly updated curricula to meet the modern standards. Instruction included the learning of pro-social values as described in the minutes of the Synod meetings. Also, students were to engage in pro-social efforts aimed at strengthening the clergy's ties to the rest of the educated Reformed members who represented various social categories, like educators, journalists, and writers.²⁸⁰ Such broad lay connections with the rest of the community encouraged community-wide cooperation and stimulated theological graduates to confidently take up cultural initiatives when starting out as ministers. Their training enabled them to put their literary backgrounds and talents to use, when organizing theater events.

²⁸⁰ Az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Cluj-Kolozsvárt 1927 Évi Augusztus Hó 13 - 15 Napjain Tartott Rendes Közgyűlésének Jegyzőkönyve (Kolozsvár: Minerva Irodalmi És Nyomdai Műintézet R.-T. Könyvsajtója, 1927).

Theological colleges nurtured in their students a vivid interest in theatrical events seen as fundamental for strengthening social cohesiveness. The Reformed College of Kolozsvár had a long tradition of theater performances dating since 1752, but they reflected aristocratic tastes and addressed urban social circles. An eighteenth-century event was scheduled on the occasion of Bethlen Elek and Czegei Wass Julianna's wedding, when the students put on a *festum conjugale* with verses in both Latin and Hungarian. Aristocratic in character also was the initiative of the Philological Society of Kolozsvár, which published Molière's comedies on the printing presses of Reformed institutions in 1792. Theater initiatives were reliant on bourgeois tastes, so the bourgeoisie, laymen, rather than clergymen, contributed to the founding of the Hungarian National Theater in the early 1800s.

Ever since the nineteenth century a strong focus on schools and publications prepared the ground for a change in the Reformed leadership's cultural vision of accommodating theater.²⁸¹ At mid-century, the Reformed Church tightened its supervision of the Kolozsvár Reformed College, the main school training Reformed clergy for the entire Transylvanian district, and, at the same time, it opened Reformed elementary schools like the one in Kolozsvár in 1892. As they began their ministries in the countryside, Reformed ministers spared no effort to organize the cultural life in their communities. At first, their cultural initiatives sought to attract the upper classes, and gradually, they reached out to the Reformed churchgoers and lay members of the community by way of church reviews in Kolozsvár, like the *Erdélyi Protestáns Közlöny Egyházi és Iskolai Hétlap* (1871- 1898) edited by Gerő Szász , and the *Református Szemle*, edited successively by Károly Nagy (1908-1918), László Ravasz (1918-1921), Sándor Makkai (1921-1925), Sándor Tavaszy (1925-1929), János Vásárhelyi (1929-1936), and again Sándor Tavaszy

²⁸¹Júlia Balogh, *Az Erdélyi hatalomváltás És Magyar Közoktatás, 1918-1928* (Budapest: Püski, 1996), 76-77.

(1936-?). As fit for its spiritual mission, the local clergy came to promote theater events for the entire village population.

After the war, educational opportunities for Reformed women meant giving them access to better education and a more active presence in public life. Generally, Reformed women in villages worked closely with their husbands in various tasks for increasing the wellbeing of the community. In cities, pressures for visible changes in women's status were stronger among the Reformed. Upon approval from the Transylvanian Reformed District (signed in September 1919), the Reformed Middle School for Girls (Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Református Leánygimnázium) opened in Kolozsvár in January 1927, with an opening address by Bishop Sándor Makkai. In November 1927, in Kolozsvár the first Reformed Women's Association in the District came into being, and Bishop Makkai's wife served as its elected president. These initiatives reflect the Reformed Church hierarchy's determination to expand social participation in cultural life. They also strengthened Kolozsvár's central place in the district's cultural life.

By endorsing core Calvinist principles of autonomy in church government, the Reformed Church was able to reassert its place at the regional level. Unlike the Reformed Church in Hungary, the Transylvanian District did not give the Bishop decision-making powers over local church affairs. Separated from their mother-institution under a Romanian regime, the Reformed counties in this region undertook a lively cultural life in Greater Romania. They even surpassed in frequency and fervor the District's schedule of events. Independence of action and a sense of freedom defined the mentality of Reformed Hungarians in Transylvania and informed their actions.

The Reformed leadership's growing interest in the education of young men through schools and reading circles was an extension of the efforts to involve Reformed adult men in cultural initiatives. With the postwar redrawing of district boundaries, cultural life among the Reformed witnessed a significant reorientation through the offices of the *Ifjúsági Keresztyén*

Egyesület (IKE, The Society of Christian Youth), headquartered in Kolozsvár. On the occasion of its founding, Bishop Károlyi Nagy's speech on January 4, 1922 reiterated the importance of liberalism and rationalism, and urged a new conception of religious life centered on action based upon religious feeling. According to the Bishop's urging, women and young people in particular were to play an increasing role in making the church and its community warm, blessed, and task-oriented.

The IKE's initiatives encouraged the creation of numerous societies, each with its own bylaws. Work within each local youth organization fell within the competence of church communities under the direction of the local clergy and teachers, albeit, as the committees recorded in their meeting papers, they were often slow in taking action.²⁸² Renowned Reformed scholars and college professors from Kolozsvár detailed the direction to be followed in order to increase involvement in these societies' activities: religious meetings, educational initiatives, and literary circles, all "being oriented toward amusement, song, and popular music, but with the potential of attracting and impressing the local elite and personalities."²⁸³ It was generally agreed that strengthening the moral-religious character of the individual through faith would consolidate Magyar Protestantism, to the advantage of the Church and Hungarian people. One must consider the IKE work and the mission of the Church District, as outlined by Bishop Nagy, as a large-scale and long-term strategy intended to stir spiritual forces and give a direction and sense of mission to the entire Transylvanian Reformed population. It was fully taken up and implemented successfully after the First World War, when the Hungarians found themselves under a Romanian regime.

From the upper clergy, I shift the focus to the graduates of theological schools and the lower clergy to understand the role of theater in their training and activities. The institutions in

²⁸² *Református Szemle*, Kolozsvár, March 8, 1912.

²⁸³ Dezső Buzogány, *Az Erdélyi IKE Története 1930-ig* (Kolozsvár, 2000), 10.

which most Protestant ministers pursue training have historically privileged scholarship over spirituality. With a theological education steeped in a humanities-centered curriculum, a large number of ministers gave their formal seal of approval to theatrical events. They considered them to be of benefit to the entire community. In 1855, the “Mikó Imre” Reformed College of Sepsiszentgyörgy, founded by the bishop of the Reformed Church, Samuel Bodola, and two noblemen, Ferenc Kemeny and Imre Mikó (1805-1876), opened as a gymnasium, rather than as a vocational or technical school. Its mission was, therefore, to prepare students for careers as intellectuals. Aside from a Reformed education, students were trained comprehensively in all fields, thereby acquiring a broad perspective on the nature and importance of their mission as clergy, and broadening their understanding of key issues of faith and culture. The college faculty found this approach necessary for its students, who had to deal effectively with expanded responsibilities when serving in their parishes after graduation. To prepare their students for positions as pastors in numerous Reformed rural communities, the faculty provided them with a broad vision for individual and community growth. For example, between 1930 and 1934, the College put on plays at least once a year, a strong indication that its graduates would most likely pursue a theatrical agenda when assigned to their parishes.

The teaching vision of the “Gábor Bethlen” Theological College in Nagyenyed (Aiud) (Bethlen Gábor Kollégium) witnessed a shift from science to the humanities in the 1860s. Since its founding in 1622 in Gyulafehérvár and its relocation in Nagyenyed in 1662, the college’s senior science students indeed prepared and translated plays by Molière, but science loomed large in the pages of the student paper, *Értesítők*. Then, after 1918, scientific news were dropped, the paper focusing only on daily matters as daily school issues, religion and literature. As faculty members, Mária Berde (1889-1949) and Sándor Makkai (1890-1951), the future Reformed bishop, were strong advocates of amateur theater and were successful playwrights themselves. The college’s

principal, István Járai (1883-1933), also openly promoted inter-ethnic initiatives in his college, by hosting meetings for the *Erdélyi Helikon*, a mainstream Hungarian review, and *Klingsor*, the literary review of the local German-speaking Saxon community. Animated by the Reformed College's activities, the intellectual life in Nagyenyed thrived in local initiatives that helped bring together all the Hungarian communities in the Southern part of the County. College teachers invited members of the *Erdélyi Fiatalok* group like Szabó T. Attila and Szász Árpád to schedule visits in the villages near Nagyenyed, in order to produce field work reports about language and rural communities.²⁸⁴

The Reformed College of Marosvásárhely together with the other local colleges in town (the Roman Catholic College) benefitted also from its administration's interest in promoting theater. The college's president, Paál Gusztáv (1877-1956), a Maros native from the village of Szászörményes (Ormeniș), was a novelist and biographer who was directly involved in theater performances, while serving as a member of various urban cultural societies, one of the most important being the Kemény Zsigmond Society (Kemény Zsigmond Társaság). In 1930, Paál Gusztáv put on a play about Stephan Ludwig Roth (perhaps Anton Maly's *So Starb Stephan Ludwig Roth*).²⁸⁵ Also, Gusztáv, like other faculty members of the college, was directly involved in women's societies, girls schools, such as the Civic Reformed Girls' School of Marosvásárhelyi (Református Polgári Leányiskola of Marosvásárhely), and girls orphanages like the Klotilde Székely Leányárvaház.

High school training for ministers in all three Reformed theological institutes stimulated a broad humanistic perspective in the preaching activity of the future clergymen. An interest in libraries and reading, and a diverse cultural life focused on amateur theater continued to animate

²⁸⁴ László Musnai, *Aiud-Nagyenyed és református egyház* (Nagyenyed, 1936).

²⁸⁵ Mihály Sebestvén, *A Marosvásárhelyi Ev. Református Kollégium történetéből: 1895-1944, Fejezetek, folyamatok, és értelmezések* (Marosvásárhely: Mentor Kiadó, 2006), 24.

Reformed ministers in local parishes, as they kept contact with their colleagues and the Reformed higher clergy through yearly synods. Ministers contributed to the vibrant intellectual and religious life in most cities of historical Transylvania. As urban historian Pál Kiss argued in his work about Marosvásárhely County, the first four decades of the twentieth century could well be labeled as the “small Hungarian era” (“a kis Magyar éra”) in view of its exceptional spiritual development.²⁸⁶

In urban centers, entertainment and class-pride building events, with literacy being a secondary concern, were the main reason for organizing theater activities, but, in small rural communities, faith and the local context determined an interest in plays. Amateur theater could help with fundraising for the churches’ local needs, like reinforcing church structures, building cultural houses, and improving social help for the poor during holidays. Besides spiritual and welfare services, the plays could provide easy access to literature and religious messages for parishioners, in light of their Reformed identity.

Several Reformed reviews popularized theater among children, youth, and women, one in Kolozsvár, *Református Család: a Református Nőszövetség Lapja* (The Reformed Family: Newsletter of the Reformed Women’s Society) reaching a wide audience of female readership between 1929 and 1944 under the editor Albert Maksay (1897-1971).²⁸⁷ Two others were published in Maros, *Az Én Kicsinyeim: Református Gyermeklap*, (My Little Children: the Journal of Reformed Children), co-edited between 1925 and 1944 by the college Professor Lajos Gönczi (1889-1986), and *Református Ifjuság* (The Reformed Young People), edited between 1933 and 1943 by József Bakk and Károly Pálffy (1903-1983). The former was a Reformed minister from Szászrégen, while the latter, a Székely minister from Hodgja, was a member of the *Erdelyi Fiatalok* and the sociological team of Professor Dimitrie Gusti (1880-1955), professor and

²⁸⁶ Pál Kiss, *Marosvásárhely története* (Budapest: Petri, Egyetemi Ny, 1942).

²⁸⁷ Albert Maksay, *Jézust követő asszonyok : nőszövetségi kézikönyv : ... a transzilvániai nőszövetség egvházkerületi elnöksége, a kerületi nőszövetség megalakulásának 10. évfordulója alkalmából* (Cluj: Tipografia Grafică, 1938).

scholar at the University of Bucharest. Through short theatrical scenes, religious dialogues, or humorous scenes, these writings sought to enhance spiritual education among parishioners through an accessible and entertaining means. Since reading provided a modest access to religious education, and church sermons and religious services remained the sole teachings for many parishioners, theatrical performances surpassed the former in efficiency, being popular and suitable to the average farmer's understanding.

Why amateur theater figured high on the list of tasks of Reformed ministers might have had different causes: the shows probably revived college memories about the virtues of theater performances, or the news of theatrical events from the nearby villages or cities reached them and prodded them to action. Also, the formal education in school and church where they embraced Protestant values like rationalism, pragmatism, and education for the whole community appeared ineffective or insufficient. Thus, the Reformed ministers considered providing these values and educational services in an everyday-life setting through plays.

There is a clear demarcation between the ministers who embraced publishing and office leadership, and those who chose to work as parish ministers. The former category understood the scholarly and ethnic importance of the amateur theater organized in villages by supporting and even participating in intellectual projects. Such a project was the sociological work of village life initiated and supervised by Professor Dimitrie Gusti. The latter category of pastors considered fundraising and educational purposes in theatrical events.

Exchanges about theater occurred among Reformed ministers and researchers, who encouraged collaboration and scholarly contacts among villagers and young Hungarians. The members in the *Ifjúsági Keresztyén Egyesület* (Society of Christian Youth, the IKE) and the *Erdélyi Fiatalok* (Transylvanian Youth) had an active agenda in villages. Given the villagers' reluctance to open up to the outside world, the young Hungarians embraced the new field at the time, *népi*

sociografia (sociography of the people) which appeared less foreign to peasants and local elites, especially when their inquiries focused on history and tradition rather than on sociology and ethnography. There was a clear difference between young researchers fascinated by village life and intellectuals and politicians (often called nationalists) who blended research of ethnicity with political and financial interests. Dénes Nemedi argues that history was less problematic than other scientific fields, like sociology or ethnography during field work.²⁸⁸

For both *Erdélyi Fiatalok* members and Reformed parish ministers the embrace of literary figures stimulated a mutual acquaintance and understanding with the villagers. In particular, the novels mirroring their rural world helped peasants see themselves and their way of life. One example is Zsigmond Móricz (1879-1942), one of the most popular *népi* (folk) writers born in Hungary and representative for his Reformed family, educational background as well as his conservative intellectual mindset. The *Erdélyi Fiatalok* members admired Móricz's work, thinking that his novels could strengthen the Hungarian village in the eyes of the intellectuals and would persuade them to look to the village to find answers about their identity. The pastors and amateurs embraced Móricz's plays, a favorite one being *Hány Óra Zsuzsi?*²⁸⁹

Unhindered by the interference of the Reformed hierarchy and endowed with a broad education and a wide perspective on life and culture, Reformed ministers were free to conceptualize their current problems in their communities as they saw fit. While performing their daily duties toward their villagers and organizing their village's cultural life, they worked to develop their independence of judgment. In this mix of concerns and responsibilities, plays strengthened Calvinist-Reformed faith and principles and brought back religion in their cultural life.

²⁸⁸ Dénes Nemedi, *A Népi Szociográfia, 1930-1938* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1985), 9-11.

²⁸⁹ Zsigmond Móricz, "Hány Óra Zsuzsi" in *Nyugat*, 1922, 19. Szám. DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 12.1932, Fila 279/19 April 1932.

Participants and Organizers of Amateur Theater in Reformed communities

Reformed parish pastors came to the fore during the heroic period, “a hőskor” (1919-1924), “when everyone published something: the priest, professor, teacher, even county officials, judges, and landowners.”²⁹⁰ As graduates of theological schools, serving either as both clergy and public intellectuals or only as intellectuals, they took pride in advancing the cultural life in the village or small town, and in publishing their own literary works or contributing to the press of the time. Their publishing activity was an attempt at cultivating close relationships with the laity, and diversifying their relations with their parishioners.

Pastors also hoped to connect with a broad audience not only by way of print but also theater. Rather than relying on state-owned theater institutions or private theater companies, Hungarian clergymen enlisted the theater troupes of different Reformed local cultural and religious societies. Their goal was to strengthen their relations with parishioners as well as promoting unity through religion. Since religion at the village level was never separate from the rest of everyday life, the Hungarian clergymen integrated faith into theater-playing, not as a dogma or doctrine, but as popular morality. Clergymen and parishioners perceived religion as the gateway to an independent local life and a source of collective freedom.

Gender and age played a crucial role in the breadth and frequency of amateur theater in religious communities. Women’s societies were the most active in putting on plays and, although they were centralized, the local branches had autonomy and a vibrant cultural life of their own. Except in a few isolated cases of inter-faith cooperation in organizing theatrical events, Hungarian women put on plays exclusively within their own religious confession. Even more dynamic than women’s societies were the centralized organizations of Hungarian young people. Although bound

²⁹⁰ Maria Palotai, *Pásztortűz, 1921-1944 – egy Erdélyi Irodalmi Folyóirat Története* (Budapest: Argumentum, 2008), 16, 18.

by faith, they tended to put a common Hungarian identity ahead of religious differences when organizing plays, but their local branches highlighted the religious teachings that each community embraced. The Society of Reformed Youth (Ifjúsági Keresztyén Egyesület), the Transylvanian Roman-Catholic Folk Society (Az Erdélyi Római Katolikus Népszövetség), and the Dávid Ferenc Unitarian Youth Circle (Dávid Ferenc Egylet Ifjúsági Köre), came together in Kolozsvár in 1930 to form a new intellectual group, called Erdélyi Fiatalok.²⁹¹ Amateur theater served their goal to reconcile peasants and intellectuals in order to form a spiritual and cultural community. The glue was a dramatic literature authored by the Hungarian folk (*népi*) writers.

At the county level, the organizers were, in the majority, Reformed women from small towns (with populations between 1,000 and 2,000) and villages (with a population of less than 1,000). In examining the borders of clustered localities, it bears noting that, often times, smaller cities rather than the county seats organized a more vibrant amateur theater activity. One such example is Torda (Turda), the second largest city in Kolozsvár County. Here, members of the local Reformed women's societies regularly put on plays in all five counties, surpassing in activity Reformed ministers, choirmasters, schoolteachers and men's societies. Their shows reveal a pattern of social interactions and self-identity closely linked to religion and church membership.

Kolozsvár County

Women's societies (Református Nőszövetség) of Kolozsvár County loomed large in what one might call the largest amateur theater movement among Reformed parishioners. Since amateur theater on a large scale practically originated with them, the Reformed women deserve our foremost attention. They were well educated and shared responsibilities with their husbands in a true, equal partnership. Their duties were numerous and diverse: they were involved in decorating churches,

²⁹¹ Keith Hitchins, "Erdélyi Fiatalok: The Hungarian Village and Hungarian Identity in Transylvania in the 1930s" in

feeding orphans, and raising funds for the buildings' upkeep. What enhanced their reputation and an active involvement was the fact that in towns and villages local life revolved around the most important couple in the community: the minister and his wife. Therefore, as ministers' wives, they promoted their husbands' spiritual and secular goals, and as presidents of women societies, they had to sustain a record of leadership in the parish life of the community.

Differentiated by level of education and opportunities and contacts, which their spouses' tenures as pastors involved, Reformed women embraced their leading roles within the rural, respectively urban communities in which they were married or were born. In towns, women-presidents like Irma Veress of Aranyoslóna (Aranyosgerend), Mrs. János Lőrincz of Szamosújvár, Maria Bethlen of Torda, Terézia Lőrincz of Tordatur, Countess Bálint Bethlen of Aranyosgyéres, Mrs. Dávid György of Újtorda were concerned with raising the cultural level of a relatively literate parish population and preserving faith. In villages like Kuttyfalva (Mrs. Arpád Brazdilok), Harasztos (name was unspecified) and Aranyospolyán (Mrs. Miska Ludovic), women-presidents not only enjoyed a special moral status among the population, the majority of whom were farmers, but were also proponents of literacy and public involvement in a cultural framework outside the school system. Either noble-born like Countess Bálint Bethlen of Aranyosgyéres or commoners, women-presidents displayed organizational skills and abilities to showcase their abilities in public life at a time when such attitudes and involvement tended to be a male privilege.

Literacy, no doubt, stimulated their confidence in their efforts and their own potential. They displayed familiarity with the bureaucratic system at the national and local level. With self-confidence they approached Romanian authorities and signed requests for play permits on behalf of their community. Locally, they addressed organizational issues for their theater events with

Hungarian Studies, Budapest, Vol. 21, 2007, No. 1-2, p. 85, and "Autonomies in Interwar Romania: Hungarians, Saxons, and Jews," unpublished paper, 4.

adroitness, like booking theater halls, restaurants, and local cultural houses. The schedule of theatrical events relied on dates approved by the local church and secular authorities.

Their self-reliance and competitiveness in the public sphere invite further reflection, if one is tempted to perceive them as groundbreakers. Tradition could easily be seen at work, for a large number of women societies chose to avoid mentioning the name of the president, and preferred to forward their documents to secular authorities only in the name of their society or church, as was the case of Harasztos. Others chose to address authorities by relying on a male intermediary, the minister or husband, who could sign and address petitions for performance approvals. It is rather surprising to encounter a public stance on the part of women, who, ordinarily, would tend to remain in the shadow and abide by the village customs.

The only villages with a clear interest in theater and active Reformed women's societies in organizing shows regularly were Kutyalva (Cuci), Harasztos (Călărași), and Aranyospolyán (Poiana). Due to geographical proximity to Torda, all three drew their cultural influences from this city rather than Kolozsvár. Women-presidents preferred to stage plays by László Rátkái (1853-1933) like his classical *Felhő Klári* (*Susan Cloud*) in the village of Kutyalva (Cuci). Also Kálman Mikszáth (1847-1910) was a preferred playwright, his famous *Nosztty-Fiu Esete Tóth Marival* (*The Noztty Boy's Affair with Mari Tóth*) being adapted for the amateur stage by Zsolt Harsányi in Harasztos, and in Aranyospolyan. Last, János K. Papp with his musical folk play (*népszínmű*) *A Cseperke Kalap* (*The hat with mushrooms*) was a common choice.²⁹²

The plays were printed in booklet form in different series of dramatic literature and were available to women in both villages and towns. They formed a quite diverse body of texts and their circulation in urban and rural centers meant frequent contacts and emulation within the rank and file

²⁹² Éva Varga, "A cseperkekalap' K. Pap János színművei" in Somogyi múzeumok közleményei, 1992. 9. évf. 233-248. old.

of church employees (ministers, cantors, theological school students, the higher clergy). One such occasion for contact was the gathering of all clergy members for the yearly synod meetings, on which occasions women socialized among themselves and exchanged ideas. Also, women's education gained more momentum with the launching of donations for the building of the Reformed Girls' Gymnasium (Református Lányfőgimnázium) of Kolozsvár, which was completed after the First World War and was successfully opened in 1919. In towns, women leading Reformed societies expanded their repertory preferences to encompass nineteenth-century authors of folk plays (*népszínmű*): Gyula Péterffi (1878-1942), Ede Szigligeti (1814-1878), István Géczy (1860-1936) and Lajos Abonyi (1833-1898), authors popular among Reformed women in both small towns and cities.

Women's societies saw their involvement in theatrical events as necessary to serve as a bridge between generations, not only connecting different age groups in the audience, but also the volunteers. Also, by selecting the nineteenth-century generation of playwrights together with contemporary and popular authors, who made a name for themselves in the early decades of the twentieth century, women's societies could expose the audience to a more diverse literary canon. Reformed women of Kolozsvár selected for their events plays that were inspired by works presented in theaters in Hungary, centering on authors like László Vádnay (1904-1967), Mária Berde (1889-1949), Károly Nóti (1892-1954), Ferenc Molnár (1870-1952), Miklós Lőrincz (1899-1944), and Imre Földes (1881-1958). These playwrights reflected the bourgeois tastes of the Budapest cosmopolitan audience and were quite popular in cities. They represented a challenge to the provincialized and conservative development of drama in 1920s Hungary, which had to be curtailed because of the counterrevolutionary agitation following the First World War.²⁹³ To

²⁹³ Miklós Szabolcsi, A Magyar Irodalom Története 1919-től Napjainkig, Vol. VI (Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1966), 815.

women's societies in Kolozsvár County, the choice of *népszínmű* and the contemporary drama in the same repertory ensured that plays describing both village and urban worlds shared the spotlight on the same stage. Also, Hungary and Transylvania would remain one entity in matters of cultural life, despite the obvious differences in social trends and cultural orientations imposed by the different political landscapes.

With a thorough training in grammar, literature, and languages acquired at the girls' middle schools, Reformed women embraced amateur theater wholeheartedly. Unlike them, however, Reformed men had a penchant less for amateur theater, and more for politics. The smaller number of Reformed men who were involved in amateur theater was probably due less to their interests in literacy and more to their concern for matters related to living standards, political governance, taxes, and political leadership. As political debates tended to dominate their leisure time, Reformed men became a favorite target for church officials who, impressed by the vibrant cultural activities promoted by women's societies, were dispatched by the Reformed Church District to encourage men to take action and form their own cultural societies (Református Férfiszövetség).²⁹⁴

If ordinary couples in the village contributed to amateur theater mainly through their wives, the clergy couple appeared to be a much more united and involved pair in their combined cultural efforts to uplift the village. Hungarian Reformed ministers themselves were active in putting on plays regularly by classical authors of *népszínmű*, and they had no difficulties reconciling their religious calling with theatrical performances. According to Ernő Ember, professor at the Reformed College of Debrecen and author of a history of the *népszínmű* genre, the origins of this literary genre went back to the sixteenth-century plays which arose from the practice of debates initiated by a Protestant preacher in front of his parishioners.²⁹⁵ Among the authors preferred by

²⁹⁴ János Vásárhelyi, "Református Férfiszövetség" in *Erdélyi Magyar Református Naptár, az 1937 évre*, 113.

²⁹⁵ Ernő Ember, *A Magyar Népszínmű Története: Tóth Ede Fellépésétől a XIX. Század Végéig* (Csáthy Ferenc R. T. Egyetemi Könyvkereskedés: Debrecen, 1934), 8.

Reformed ministers were Gyula Péterffi (1878-1942), Ede Szigligeti (1814-1878), István Géczy (1860-1936), and Lajos Abonyi (1833-1898), but also Ferenc Csepregy (1842-1880), Györy Vilmos (1838-1895), and Sándor Petőfi (1823-1849). Reformed ministers in Transylvania showed a preference for a religious play *Jőjj és Kövess*, (Come and Follow) translated by Gizella Vasvári²⁹⁶ and printed in the *A mi színházunk* (This is our home) series by the most well-known Budapest publisher of religious books and periodicals, Szalézi Művek Könyvkereskedelmi és Nyomdai Vállalat, which proves that religious ties transcended state borders.

Mainly in response to the competitive context of amateur theater, the Reformed hierarchy began to stir the cultural lethargy, especially among Reformed men, in an otherwise active district. The reformist zeal came from Kolozsvár County, considered the administrative and cultural center of Transylvania and the most important center of higher education. The most vivid cultural life occurred not in Kolozsvár city but in its southern part, bordering on Maros and Gyulafehérvár counties around Nagyenyed and Torda with their respective villages. Here, inhabitants showed a marked interest in plays. The city of Kolozsvár provided a sort of guidance through a Reformed Church official, János Vásárhelyi (1888-1960).

His involvement in distant Reformed rural communities and attachment to amateur theater reflected his sense of mission and idealism. He believed that Reformed Hungarians needed to strengthen ties between urban centers and rural communities. Vásárhelyi's publications show his remarkable interest in literature, religion, journal editing, and church administration. After an editorial apprenticeship in a weekly newspaper in Beszterce in the last years of the First World War, he published widely in Reformed reviews for both the clergy and a broad audience. His preferences for *életkép* (portraits of personalities or places) reflected his priorities of faith. Árva Bethlen Kata, Countess Kata Bethlen (1700-1759) was a staunch Calvinist founder of Reformed churches and

²⁹⁶ Gizella Vasvári, *Jőjj és Kövess. Evangéliumi Esemény Két Képeben* (Rákospalota: Szalézi Művek, 1928).

famous book-collector whom Vásárhelyi admired as a role model. The Reformed men of Kolozsvár city put on one of his play *Hóstáti Lakodalo*, (*The Wedding of Hostat*).²⁹⁷

Like the clergy, Reformed women maintained a fervent interest in the pre-war literary life of Hungary. They selected classical *népszínmű* writers like István Géczy and two foremost novelists, Kálmán Mikszáth (1847-1910) and Zsigmond Móricz (1879-1942), but the overall inventory of plays betrayed a strong penchant for the playwrights who affirmed themselves in the first decades of the twentieth century, and whose works were published in *Színházi Élet* (1911-1938), a theater review published in Budapest. Blockbuster success in Budapest also helped playwrights like Imre Földes (1881-1958), László Vadnay (1904-1967), József Bartóky (1865-1928), and Tamás Emőd (1888-1938) make a name for themselves in Transylvania.²⁹⁸

I conclude this section by focusing on a distinctive group of organizers. They were schoolteachers, farmers, women, and youth who put on plays without the guidance and involvement of the local clergy. I designate them as the non-church groups because they appeared to be as active and involved in amateur theater as the religious groups and they preserved close ties with the local church and religion. In towns and large cities, the non-church groups' amateur theater activity occurred in earnest with a remarkable frequency and play variety, in half a dozen villages, that is Kiskalota (Călățele), Magyarvalkó (Văleni), Kőrösfő (Izvorul Crișului), Kövend (Plăești), and Mákófalva (Macău),²⁹⁹ all rural centers in Kolozsvár County. Although these categories were not representing their church, actually these were people who traditionally were very close to the minister. Even groups who did not identify themselves as religious appeared to acknowledge

²⁹⁷ DANIC, Departamentul Artelor, Inv. 818, Dos. 39/1935, Fila 57/10 Febr.1935. JánosVásárhelyi, *Hóstáti lakodalom: életkép a kolozsvári földészek esküvőjéről* (Minerva: Kolozsvár, 1933).

²⁹⁸ Ligeti Ernő, "Emőd Tamás" in *Ararát, Magyar Zsidó Evkönyv Az 1944 Évre* (Budapest: Országos Izr. Leányárvaház, 1944), 55-64.

²⁹⁹ DANIC, Departamentul Artelor, for *Călățele*: Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, fila 57/Dec. 29, 1930, for *Văleni*: Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, fila 129, and Inv. 818, Dos. 12/1932, fila 310/May 26, 1932, for *Izvorul Crișului*: Inv. 818, dos. 9/1932, fila 234/ Mar. 28, 1932, for *Plăești*: Inv. 818, Dos. 18/1932/ Febr. 7, 1932, for *Macău*: Inv. 818, Dos. 43/1935, vol. I, fila 108/10 Febr.1935.

somehow a link to the local church, either by announcing the event's location in the church, by inviting parishioners to join the audience after the Sunday service, and by scheduling the performance date around a Christian holiday. Especially in villages, the amateur theatrical life of the non-church groups preserved close ties to religion and relied on plays centered on religious tenets.

In small towns like Várfalva, Tordaszentlászló, and Magyarfenes, where concerns for the protection of belongings raised the need for fire protection services, firefighters organized amateur theater for the community and the fire house. Although demographically they fell between a village and a town, these small towns are more urban than rural in mentalities and living conditions. Firefighters in small towns in Kolozsvár County are treated in this study as a non-church group, being given that their correspondence with the Ministry of Culture and Arts of Bucharest did not make any reference to church patronage, but many details indicate a strong tie to the local church. By 1936, when militarism affected the budget of European countries, talks about incorporating firefighters' troops into military structures were met with great disapproval and the idea of incorporating and dismantling the independent firefighting groups of the minority groups failed to be legislated.³⁰⁰ Very interested in performing plays, firefighters regularly mounted *Nótás Kata* (*The Singing Kata*) by Györy Vilmos (1838-1895), *A Czigany* (*The Gypsy*) by Ede Szigligeti (1814-1878), *Hej de Szép a Lakodalom* (*Hey, Beautiful Wedding*) by Károly Csike (1879-1953), and *A Kintormes Csalad* (*The Cunning Family*) by Ede Toth (1844-1876). Their main purpose was to cover expenses for tools and equipment for protection against fire.

Other non-church groups with a remarkable record of theatrical activity were the choirs, or, more informally called, singing groups. Their active presence in Hungarian minority cultural life

³⁰⁰ Marcel Varga, "Activitatea..." in *Studii...* 36.

was felt in two main cities (Kolozsvár and Torda) and two small towns (Kolozs and Felvinc).³⁰¹ As an old civic institution, whose origins went back in Kolozsvár to the sixteenth century, choirs had acknowledged that they valued amateur theater and made it part of their cultural mission. Upon resubmitting their bylaws for approval in Bucharest, their new official name accounted for the importance of theater in their activities: Dal- és Műkedvelő Egyesület (Song and Theater Amateurs' Society). In their majority, the choirs interested in amateur theater were civic (*polgár*) and not religious. The nineteenth century witnessed the decreasing role of college cantors who dominated religious musical events and gave a religious character to music. This change led to more secular transformations in the main characteristics of the choir music: more theatrical emphasis, worldly in sound, and romantic in style. However, the main preference in the choir's repertoires remained the musical theater whose roots go back to the Protestant and Piarist (Roman Catholic) school dramas when recitation and choir music made possible early modern spectacles of extraordinary dramatic force, combining literature and religion.³⁰²

Among secular (non-church) groups, the artisans were ardent theater performers. In Kolozsvár County the mutual benefit societies of shoemakers were interested in theater, especially in Kolozsvár city and Zsibó (Jibou). They spent most of their energy not only in providing financial help to artisans who paid their dues and needed support, but also in offering their members cultural and moral education. For such a purpose, they mounted plays by Zsigmond Móricz, József Szigeti, Emerich Farkas, Gyula Péterffy, Mihály Erdélyi, Ferenc Csepreghy, and László Zilahy. Featuring the greatest nineteenth-century *népszínmű* in their theatrical events, the shoemakers organized literary events which showed their interest in reviving their past, the bygone times when

³⁰¹ DANIC, Ministerul Artelor, for Dés, Inv. 818, Dos. 43/1935, vol. I, fila 370/Apr. 14, 1935, or Dos. 14/1934, vol. 2, fila 238/Mar. 15, 1934, for Felvinc, Dos. 14/1934, vol. 2, Fila 215/Febr. 24, 1934, and Dos. 10/1933, Fila 315/ Dec. 3, 1933, for Kolozsvár, Dos. 14/1932, vol. 2, fila 38/Jan 10, 1934, and Dos. 6/1934, vo. 3, Fila 123/Dec. 6, 1934, for Torda, Dos. 24/1032, Fila 61/Febr. 25, 1932, for Kolozs, Dos. 4/1934, Fila 78/Mar. 16 1934.

³⁰² Tóth Dénes, A Magyar Népszínmű (Budapest, 1930), 10.

Transylvania was part of Hungary. Shoemakers, like tailors, accounted for over 10% of the total number of workmen in Kolozsvár city, and over 50% of the total number were Hungarian³⁰³ Of all workers and artisans of Kolozsvár city, 27,5% joined cultural associations, a number similar with that of the public clerks holding membership in a cultural society.³⁰⁴ Reading newspapers and novels accounted for the main leisure activities of workers in Kolozsvár, while movie going and radio listening followed closely in workers' preferences. Hungarian workers on railways and in post offices reached a high ratio of 85% of the region's workforce, and, thus, the cultural life they organized was visible and forceful.³⁰⁵

Industrial workers from Kolozsvár city showed a propensity for Russian playwrights and leftist French authors like Jean Jaurés. Wood workers also benefitted from the guidance of the Social-Democratic Party, itself very active in amateur theater. In Kiskalota (Călățele) wood workers embraced Hungarian classic drama like József Szigligeti's work *Rank és Mod (Rank and Style)*. Other categories of workers, like those hired by railway companies in Kolozsvár city made use of *népszínmű*, like Ferenc Csepreghy's *A Piros Bugyellaris (The Red Purse)*.

In conclusion, in Kolozsvár County, the Reformed ministers hoped to emulate the active involvement of Reformed women's societies but not their reportorial choices, as women had a special preference for contemporary plays popular in Budapest. Choirs and men's societies had a less successful attempt at introducing amateur theater as a regular occurrence in their local communities. As choirs turned into centralized institutions, a top-down influence resulted in tepid results, with a mix of entertainment and pragmatic fundraising, but no real interest arose from within communities themselves. Firefighters and artisans, on the other hand, believed that theater

³⁰³ T.V. Bindea, "Condițiile de Muncă și de Traiu ale Muncitorilor din Cluj, Studiu Social-Economic" in Buletinul Camerei de Muncă Cluj, An I, 1939, 90.

³⁰⁴ Bindea, 105.

³⁰⁵ Marcel Varga, "Activitatea Reprezentanților Partidelor Minorităților Etnice în Parlamentul României (1934-1937)" Studii și Materiale de Istorie Contemporană, Serie Nouă, Vol. 7/2008, 34.

could promote cultural and moral benefits for their communities and help cover the basic needs of their members. For non-church groups, secular interests prevailed in their theatrical events. In urban centers, where workers collaborated with leftist parties and were acquainted with socialist playwrights, theater reflected secular goals. In villages, however, non-church groups remained attached to the Church and the parish.

Gyulaférvár County

Gyulaférvár County recorded a vivid activity in its north-eastern part which appears to form a culturally-unified region with the neighboring and more industrialized Torda region situated in the south of Kolozsvár County. Besides the main cities, Gyulaférvár, Nagyenyed (Aiud), and Balázsfalva (Blaj), and towns like Tovis (Teiuş) and Abrudbánya (Abrud), theatrical shows spread to the nearby villages, Marosnagylak (Noşlac), Felsőmarosujvár (Uioara, well-known for its large salt mines) and Csombrud (Ciumbrud). In practically all these locations, Reformed women societies dominated the entire amateur theater stage in Reformed communities.

The earliest theater shows in this county appeared in the context of the first signs of financial stress affecting the local Reformed College of Nagyenyed, one of the oldest colleges, founded in 1662. The College was greatly affected after the economic importance of the town began to decline in the region. Theater performances were popular due to the student association of the College. The association was known as the *Theátrális Társaság* (Theatrical Society) and functioned under the guidance of the Reformed pastor and teacher Ádám Herepei (1756-1814), who taught history, language, poetry, and classical literature.³⁰⁶ With the relocation of the theological faculty members from Nagyenyed to Kolozsvár, the College lost its prestige, and reverted to the status of a provincial, small-town college, operating only as a grammar school (*főgimnázium*) as

³⁰⁶ József Szinnyei, *Magyar írók élete és munkái* Vol XIII (Budapest: Hornyánszky 1909), 845.

well as a teacher-training school. Upon its relocation from Gyulaféhevár to Nagyenyed, the church treasure did not return, despite numerous appeals, and funds remained extremely limited. For the entire nineteenth century, the College was in dire financial needs, striving to rebuild what was then “the ruins” of the Church building, the pastor’s house, the cantors’ dwellings, and the Girls’ School. It was due to the effective fundraising of women students, who organized play performances in 1861, that the College obtained the funds necessary for expansion projects.

Before the First World War and in its aftermath, the struggle for survival affected even further the College’s resources. The Reformed community began to close ranks within their congregations (teachers, pastors, cantors, farmers, women, youth, and men) under the clergy’s leadership.³⁰⁷ But again, Reformed women proved to be persistent and able organizers. The first to collect money was the Reformed Women’s Society of Nagyenyed in 1912, and it continued to do so until the Second World War at a sustained pace. Then, starting from 1932 onward, other Nagyenyed societies of Reformed young people (Ifjúsági Keresztyén Egyesület), young women (Református Leányszövetség), and societies of Reformed women and Reformed men put on plays that combined songs with religious fervor, leading to a sustained cultural work in all communities. In February 1932, young women under the leadership of the Women’s Society performed Zsolt Harsanyi’s drama adaption of Kálmán Mészáros’s novel *A Noszty Fiú Esete Tóth Marival* (*The Affair of the Young Boy Noszty with Mari Tóth*) followed by a comedy, *Három Egyszerre* (*Three at once*) written in 1829 by Károlyi Kisfaludi (1788-1830), and another comedy, *Kisasszony férje* (*The Husband of the Young Woman*), which, since its first printing in 1915, brought its author Gábor Drégely (1883-1944) worldwide fame.

³⁰⁷ László Musnai, *Aiud-Nagyenyed és Református Egyháza* (Aiud-Nagyenyed: Nyomatott Keresztes Nagy Imre Könyvnyomdájában, 1936), 73,72, 98.

A sense of cooperation and free initiative was pervasive in relations between organizers and community leaders, as well as between villages, small towns, and cities. Within cities, women's societies enlisted the help of husbands to draft the petitions and sign them. Reformed ministers, including the Bishop himself, provided support for initiatives of wives and other women in the congregation. At the same time, such support did not turn events into religious theater, but encouraged in Gyulafehérvár a vibrant, all-inclusive cultural life. In Gyulafehérvár city, they preferred Bishop Sándor Makkai's play *Gyöngyvirág* (*The Gorgeous Flower*, a musical folktale play), *Nagymama* (*Grandmother*) by Gergely Csiky, and *Vadvirág* (*The Wild Flower*) by Ernő Antai. By choosing Csiky and Makkai, two authors acknowledged as proponents of naturalism in literature, the organizers demonstrated their acquaintance with the newer dramatic forms in Europe as well as the literary work of the Reformed hierarchy, many among them being accomplished playwrights.

In the villages of Gyulafehérvár County, the president of Reformed Women's Society took care of logistics in an independent manner. She signed requests for permits and addressed the authorities in her own name and that of the congregation, another proof of women's assertiveness in cultural life. In Csombrud, they preferred a comedy, *Minden jó ha vége jó* (*Everything is good when it ends well*) by Emma Ferenczy Illyesné, and in Marosnagylak they put on the classic *népszínmű* by István Geczy *Amit az érdő mesél* (*The story this forest tells*). In other instances, women's societies from small towns like Betlenszentmiklós (Sânmiclăuș) had sufficient prestige to obtain the best locations for their events, for example, when they booked the theater hall of Balázsfalva city, ten miles away from their small village. By artfully blending secular interests with a religious mindset in the events they organized, it appears that women-presidents contributed to coalescing a common cultural life between villages and small towns.

Among the non-church groups, the artisans of Nagyenyed, the second largest city in Gyulafehérvár County, proved to be the most active individuals in using theater performances with the goal of improving access to culture and stimulating self-teaching. The Literary/Debating/Self-Teaching Artisan Group of Aiud (Nagyenyedi Iparos Önképzőkör) was founded in 1888 and by 1928 it was continuing its traditions and self-management. Their call for material contributions to build a cultural house was heeded with great enthusiasm, and the numerous theatrical shows offered between 1930 and 1940 fulfilled both cultural and financial goals.³⁰⁸ Donations from private individuals and banks, contributions in goods, and free labor, as well as interest-free loans allowed the city's craftsmen to complete the construction of "a large room with a stage" and a reading room. Both a Protestant pastor and a Catholic priest blessed the inauguration of the building, which was publicized in newspapers as far away as Brassó County. Following the 1948 communist nationalization of the group's property and archive, it officially ceased to exist. They chose plays by contemporary playwrights who were popular in the repertoires of theaters in Budapest: Miklós Lőrincz (1899-1944), György László, Jenő Sándor (1891-1978) and Andor Szenes (1899-1935). The Nagyenyedi Iparos Önképzőkör's members thus preferred musical plays that could entertain and help collect funds.³⁰⁹

The amateur theatrical activity of the Nagyenyedi Iparos Önképzőköri Dalkar (The Artisans' Choir of Nagyenyed) is also representative of non-church groups' initiatives, which combined practical with spiritual purposes. The local inhabitants could watch shows in a pavilion inside the 'Queen Marie' park in Nagyenyed. Their attachment to tradition is clear in their fondness for *népszínmű* plays by Lajos Abonyi (*A Betyar Kendője, The Rogue's Scarf*) and István Géczy (*A Gyimesi Vadvirág, The Wild Flower of Gyimes*). In practical terms, they hoped to fundraise for

³⁰⁸ Józsa Miklós, "Lapok a Nagyenyedi Iparos Önképzőkör Történetéből", III, in Művelődés, közművelődési folyóirat, Kolozsvár, LXII. évfolyam 2009. április.

social welfare and protect artisans' families in case of death, illness, and injury. In terms of messages, the plays disseminated Christian teachings and messages through characters attached to tradition, family, and morality.

In Gyulafehérvár County, the amateur theater organized by Reformed women's societies displayed an interest in the Hungarian historical past and showed concern for the centuries-old institutions experiencing financial distress. They selected plays that extolled the past and tradition hoping to collect funds to support Hungarian prewar institutions in danger of closing down both at the end of the First World War and during the Great Depression. Unlike in Gyulafehérvár County, Reformed women societies in Kolozsvár preferred contemporary Hungarian playwrights and the plays popular in Budapest which reflected an emphasis on the values that present times endorsed.

An interesting insight appears when we compare the artisans in these two counties. Being given that, typically, concerts and choirs predominated in the artisans' cultural life it appears that theater was at the forefront of cultural efforts for a longer time rather than musical traditions. When attending the artisans' performances of plays by nineteenth-century playwrights, the audience could enjoy the beauty and charm of village life, conveyed through a nostalgic sense for the past.

Maros County

In various urban and rural Reformed communities of Maros County which left records of play performances, women's societies dominated the local cultural life with regular shows. What differentiates rural and urban locations is the former's idealism and belief in the village's uniqueness, ideas that were fostered by women-presidents of Reformed societies especially in small towns and villages. In cities, class status and cultural consumption determined the most urgent concerns and responsibilities. Mrs. Jozséf Tóthfalusi of Marosvásárhely or Mrs. István Palfffy of

³⁰⁹ Jenő Sándor, Andor Szenes, "Weekend, Zenés Vígjáték" in *Színházi Élet*, Klny, 103-128, year and volume are

Marosludas (Luduş), like other women-presidents behind the theatrical events in Regen and Dicsőszentmarton, believed in the moral and financial benefits of theatrical shows.³¹⁰ Thus, as upper-class members enjoying prestige and benefitting from contacts in large urban centers, women-presidents were able to organize cultural events to cover various material and spiritual needs of the church and its parishioners especially at Easter and Christmas.

The case of Countess László Toldalagy is representative for a category of female leaders who were intent on placing themselves in the broader context of their urbanized cosmopolitan world defined by education, social status, and material interests.³¹¹ The Bethlen Kata Reformed Society of Women of Marosvásárhely, which the Countess led, had an active record of amateur theater. Her husband, László Toldalagy, born in 1892 in Koronka (Corunca) and a graduate of the Evangelical Reformed College of Marosvásárhelyi in 1910, was part of the old, traditional county nobility³¹². His ancestor, János Toldalagy III, born in Nagyercse (Ercea, Maros), was a pioneer of theater performance in his own time, being known for buying the most expensive curtain for the stage in his private residence in the early nineteenth century.³¹³

László Toldalagy already belonged to a different world, shaped by a new generation of students who came to the fore not from the ranks of the aristocracy, but from the lower classes of the society: craftsmen, small landholding peasants, and master artisans. These were parents who enrolled their children in the Reformed College in the hope of their becoming intellectuals and civil servants. Regardless of social class and parental background, the college provided everybody with a sound background in the humanities, enabling all students upon graduation to put on theater performances in confidence. A look at the events organized by Countess László Toldalagy, which

unknown.

³¹⁰ DANIC Bucureşti, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 479/24 No. 1932.

³¹¹ DANIC Bucureşti, Fond. Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 7/1934 Vol. 4, Fila 342/6 Nov. 1934.

³¹² Mihály Sebestyén, *A Marosvásárhelyi Ev. Református Kollégium Történetéből*, Annex: tables of graduates for 1910.

she supervised as leader of the local women's society, reveals again the purpose of fundraising for the benefit of the Reformed parishioners and local community.

In towns, women-presidents like Erzsébet Peredi of Marossárpatak, Irma Maksay of Meggyesfalva, Matilda Bereczki of Nyárádszereda belonged to a group of more than a dozen female leaders who engaged in regular correspondence with the authorities, giving a compelling example to other clergy spouses in the county to write to Bucharest for play permits.³¹⁴ The effective communication tool between minorities and the Romanian local and central authorities proved to be effective and gave a sense of legality to Hungarian activities initiated from grassroots and not collectively granted as such in law. Writing petitions was a legal privilege which Reformed women availed themselves of in large numbers. The public activism of women's societies led by ministers' wives (Mária Fodor of Marosbogát, Mrs. István Demény of Kisfülpös, Mrs. Pal Konya Pavel of Holtmaros, and Mrs. Odon Molnar of Tancs) yielded a large number of petitions for play performances, more than double in Maros County than in Kolozsvár County.³¹⁵

Specific to Maros County was the highly traditional character of theater shows in both rural and urban settings, which led to less differentiation among events in cities, small towns, and villages. Reformed young people and schoolteachers organized plays in particular in the north-eastern part of the county, and were more interested in shows than their peers in other counties. Three districts burned with theater fever: Regen, Márosvásárhely, and Nyárádszereda. *Népszínmű* plays in combination with works by classic Hungarian authors and contemporary drama writings repositioned the village as the center of Hungarianness and Reformed creed.

³¹³ Sámuel Nádudvari, "Marosvásárhelyi Pantheon" in Fodor István (ed.) *Krónikás Füzetek*, IV. sorozat 8. szám. (Marosvásárhely: Marosmenti Élet, 1938).

³¹⁴ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 4/1932, fila 11/25 Mar. 1934, Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 20/1935, Fila 250/23 Nov. 1935.

³¹⁵ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 43/1935, Vol. I, Fila 323/2 Mar. 1935. Inv. 818, Dos. 43/1935, Vol. I, Fila 152/4 Febr. 1935.

Unity in cultural interests brought together religious and lay Hungarians, especially intellectuals. Through the regional conferences held by the IKE (Ifjúsági Keresztyén Egyesület) of Transylvania, teaching faculty members from the Kolozsvár Reformed College travelled to Marosvásárhely and Szászrégen, organized biblical circles all over Maros County, and coordinated with ministers the formation of youth groups and women's societies.³¹⁶ Two important IKE speakers, Lajos Imre (1888-1974) and László Dezső (1904-1973) held talks about faith and ethical behavior, but also about education and cultural activities. Lajos had a special interest in literature publishing *Ifjúsági játékok* (Plays for Young People) and editing the *Magyar Ifjúság Könyvtára* (The Library of Hungarian Young People) and the IKE's main review *Az Út* (The Path) (1923–44). He was born in Hódmezővásárhely (Hungary) to a pious mother and a father who worked as a literary critic. He came to know Transylvania during his religious studies in Kolozsvár. His work as a Reformed minister in a village, Kolozskará (Cara), and later on in the neighboring county seat, Marosvásárhely city (Târgu Mureș), allowed him to become acquainted with the cultural work in Reformed communities and get a close look at the peasant world

Schoolteachers, whose religious affiliation can be inferred from various details to be Reformed, were the most active organizers of amateur theater, putting on plays by Lajos Abonyi, József Peczely, Károly Csíste, Andor Nyári, Erszébet Ferenczy Illyés, and János K. Pap.³¹⁷ In majority, schoolteachers organized theatrical events in urban centers or larger communes, like Sovarád, Marossárpatak, Nyárádmagyarós, and Maroshévizand, while only a few were active in villages. The latter's selections were plays about the patriarchal and traditional world, while

³¹⁶ Dezső Buzogány, *Az Erdélyi IKE Története 1930-ig* (Kolozsvár, 2000), 86.

³¹⁷ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 578/28 Dec. 1932, Fila 250/19 May 1932; Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1934, Vol. 2, Fila 188/8 Mar. 1934; Inv. 818, Dos. 20/1935, Vol. I, Fila 200/9 Nov. 1935.

organizers in very small villages like Káposztásszentmiklós, Fintaháza, and Szekelyhodos proved to be very attached to religion.³¹⁸

Like the women-presidents of Reformed women's societies, lay schoolteachers also established close contacts with their communities. Erzsébet Sóos of Marossárpatak and Matilda Osváth of Szekelyhodos worked closely with people in their community to put on plays and emphasized the school's leading role in advancing the people's cultural level. Their preferred playwrights like Lajos Abonyi and Emma Ferenczy Illyés, and the two particular plays which the schoolteachers selected *A Betyár Kendője* (The Rogue's Scarf) and, respectively, *A Legnagyobb hatalom* (The Greatest Force) put forth a vision of morality and devotion to family and tradition.³¹⁹

Young people formed a large secular group known as "the intellectual youth" ("szellemi ifjúság") being very active petitioning the authorities frequently from hometowns like Marosvásárhely and Regen to organize shows for entertainment and fundraising³²⁰ In villages like Szentgerice (Gălățeni), Nyomát (Maiad), Holthéviz (Hoghiz, nowadays in Brassó County), groups of young people showed propensity for István Géczy and László Rátkai, and their plays about rural traditions and family customs.

The high degree of cultural autonomy is evident in the workers' ability to put on plays, despite their communist leanings. Their theatrical events were approved by the local authorities and ministerial offices for plays like *Meztelen Ember* (The Naked Man) by Mihály Földi (1894-1943), and *Az ismeretlen tettes* (The Unknown Guilt) by László Vadnai (1904-1967).³²¹ Dionisio Szabó, a shoemaker, elected to serve as the play director by the Workers' Hostel of Marosvásárhely, had submitted the scripts to the Ministry of Interior in Bucharest for approval in January 1929.

³¹⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 6/1934, Vol. 3, Fila 313/12 Dec.1934; Inv. 818, Dos. 7/1934, Vol. 4, Fila 8/28 Jun. 1934.

³¹⁹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 9/1932, Fila 359/19 Febr.1932.; Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1934, Fila 28/19 Jan. 1934.

“Fetele de la Fabrică” (“The Girls from the Factory,” Hungarian title is unidentified) began with a description of the poor working conditions in factories without specifying a particular country and place. The second act describes the leisure time enjoyed by bourgeois classes in coffeehouses. Lastly, it shows the corruption in the Ministry’s economic offices where both clerks and high officials had planned a large-scale embezzlement of funds and money laundering. The request for the play permit was granted and the authorities exchanged reports stating that the audience enjoyed watching the show.³²² In April 1929, the same amateur organizers fundraised to sponsor their trip to the Workers’ Congress in Temesvár. The theatrical program they organized included again the very popular *Az ismeretlen tettes* and *Piroska es Farka* (The Little Red Hood and the Wolf), a cabaret based on the original folk story of the *Little Red Riding Hood* by the Brothers Grimm, adapted for the stage by Albert Szirmai (1919).³²³

The presence of a “pedagogue” explaining the importance of the play enhanced the didactic purpose of the event. In his prologue, the Workers’ Hostel’s secretary Jenő Szabó argued that the plays selected by the amateurs were not proletarian but bourgeois. Later on, he claimed on his requests for a play permit that the troupe would consider performing plays that were popular in Russia.³²⁴ To obtain positive resolutions of their requests for play permits, the amateurs changed the contact person in their correspondence with the authorities; first, by using an informal group like the Workers’ Hostel, and later by using the Workers’ Athletic Society, also from Marosvásárhely.

³²⁰ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 76/1930, Fila 72/22 Aug. 1930; Inv. 818, Dos. 44/1935, Fila 205/24 Apr. 1935.

³²¹ László Vadnai, “Az ismeretlen tettes,” *Színházi Élet*, Színházi Élet különlenyomat (Budapest, 1927), 115-148.

³²² DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Culte si Arte, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 122/1929, Fila 11/17 Jan. 1929, also Fila 46.

³²³ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Culte and Arte, Inv. 652, Dos. 122/1929, Fila 137/9 Apr. 1929.

³²⁴ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Culte si Arte, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 11/1929, fila 134/ 8 Apr. 1929 and 137/9 Apr. 1929.

Independent artisans like shoemakers and bootmakers in Regen and Marosvásárhely obtained play scripts from Budapest, the headquarters of the socialist movement in Hungary, to put on traditional plays by nineteenth-century Hungarian writers such as *A Tót Léány* (The Czech Girl) by Tihamér Balogh (1838-1907) and *A Betyár Kendője* by Lajos Abonyi (1833-1898) widely available in paperback.³²⁵ They hoped to collect funds to help old, retired shoemakers to make ends meet when afflicted by illness or the impairments of old age.³²⁶ These cases are relevant for the ability of Hungarian social classes, even workers who tended to be suspected of communism, to obtain authorization for plays that were overtly about workers and class inequality, not to mention Soviet Russia.

The socialist cause in Hungary before the war, when Transylvania was part of Hungary, was beset by funding and organizational shortcomings. More significant than logistics was the socialists' longtime suspicion against what they feared might undermine their cause and their mission: the members' ethnic consciousness. Like the Romanians, Hungarians preferred to form not socialist but plain labor unions or mutual benefit societies,³²⁷ even though the latter were incompatible with the socialist creed due to their parochialism and overly ethnicist tendencies. Health-care societies embraced amateur theater in order to obtain funds for covering the costs of sickness and death. Unlike in Hungary, where the state gradually took over the welfare system through legislation and insurance programs, in Transylvania the mutual benefit societies remained independent and voluntary.³²⁸ Such a status encouraged theatrical initiatives and a large degree of cultural autonomy for minority workers.

³²⁵ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, no Fila/7 Jan. 1930.

³²⁶ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 10/1933, Fila 18/28 Oct. 1933.

³²⁷ Keith Hitchins, "The Romanian Socialists in Hungary, 1903-1918", in *Slavic Review*, Vol, 35, no. 1 (Mar. 1976), 73.

³²⁸ Keith Hitchins, "Mutual Benefit Societies in Hungary, 1830-1941," in *International Social Security Review*, vol. 46, 3/1993, 79.

Similar to other counties, Maros also witnessed the active involvement in theater performances of Reformed women's societies, seconded by ministers. But Maros is even more significant when it comes to non-church groups like schoolteachers and artisans who not only dominated in numbers as organizers, but shared a common basis for understanding Hungarian ethnicity by choosing similar plays across professions.

Háromszék County

Háromszék is the most representative of all counties in historical Transylvania for the predominance of Reformed ministers as organizers of play events, the frequency with which they co-signed petitions in tandem with women's societies, and their broad interest in plays about Hungarian identity. They encouraged idealism in cultural events and revived the dramatic literature of the nineteenth century, thereby hoping to restore the bygone Hungarian society as a palliative for the turmoil of contemporary times.

Jenő Debreczi, a Reformed minister in Nagyborosnyó, was a well-respected local figure in his village. In his quality as a member of the Hungarian Economic Society of Transylvania (Erdélyi Magyar Gazdasági Egylet) he understood the material trials which beset all Reformed communities after the land and constitutional reforms in Greater Romania. He was also engaged in theater activity, perceiving it as a vehicle for self-expression meant to enhance the moral education of participants. One example is Ede Szigligeti's play *A Cigány* (The Gypsy), which Debreczi hoped to convey idealism and confidence in the Hungarian culture. Amateur theater in villages tended to enjoy only the supervision of the clergyman, unlike the theater initiatives of Reformed ministers in cities and towns.

Gábor Erdős of Gidófalva (Ghidfalău) in the Seps District (Seps Református Egyházmegye) took over the Reformed parish of the village in 1935 and decided to mount a

production of *A Gyimesi Vadvirág* by István Géczy for December 1935. Besides his concern for the restoration of the church, his choice of Géczy's play reflects a cultural preoccupation with Hungarian identity and ethnicity. He was a fervent theater supporter until his retirement in 1955. Another clergyman in the Orbai District (Orbai Református Egyházmegye), István Bartha of Székelytamásfalva was ordained by Janós Vásárhelyi at the Synod of 1927.³²⁹ He scheduled Emma Ferenczy Illyés's most popular play *Minden jó ha a vége jó* (*All is well when it ends well*), and Imre Ferenc's *Erik a Rozs* (*The Rye is Ripening*). The minister and the local Reformed Women's Society believed that these plays could stimulate Hungarians to preserve their culture and their community as it was before the First World War.

The Minister Béla Bedő, a graduate of the Székelyudvarhelyi Református Kollegium in 1890, excelled in literature and languages as a student.³³⁰ He sustained a vibrant amateur theater activity as a clergyman in three consecutive clerical appointments: in the city of Kovászna (Covasna), a small town, Csernáton (Cernatu de Jos), and the village of Páva. The plays he helped put on were Albert Szirmai's *Piroska és a Farkas*, Géza Gardonyi's *A Bor*, and Lajos Abonyi's *A Betyár Kendője*.³³¹

Among the non-church groups, the most active supporters of amateur theater were again schoolteachers, either retired schoolteachers or principals. By mapping their cultural life, it reveals that schoolteachers in Háromszék helped organize plays in towns and villages, but not in large cities (except Szepsiszentgyörgy). Also, they were very active with traditional *népszínmű* plays in only two Reformed districts: the Kézdi-Orbai and Sepsi. The Kézdi-Orbai Church District with its small towns like Lemhény (Lemnia), Barátos (Brates) or Kézdiszentkereszt (Poian) enjoyed classic plays, in particular *A Betyár Kendője* by Lajos Abonyi, *A Gyimesi Vadvirág* by István Géczy, and *A*

³²⁹ Az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület, Közgyűlésének, Jegyzőkönyve, 1927 évi Augusztus Hó 13-15 Napjain Tartott Rendes (Kolozsvár: Minerva, 1927), 44.

³³⁰ Lajos Gönczi, Székelyudvarhelyi Református Kollegium, Értesítője, 1896/1897 (Székelyudvarhelyi, 1897), 9.

Czigány by Ede Szigligeti. In villages like Kézdisárfalva (Lunga), Harali (Harale), and Ikafalva (Icfalău), amateurs under the schoolteachers' guidance prepared *Süt a Nap* (The sun is shining) by Lajos Zilahy and *Nánai Biro Lány*a (The Daughter of the Judge in Nana) by Emma Ferenczy Illyés, both dramas grappling with Hungarian identity and the past. In regard to the Sepsi Church District, only Lecfalva (Leț) village and a small town, Ozun (Uzon) put on plays extolling traditionalism, like Gyula Peterffy's *Piros Rozsa, Fehér Rozsa* (The Red Rose, the White Rose) and Istvan Géczy's *Az Ördög Mátkája* (Matka's Devil). These were locations on the border of the Kezdi-Orbai Church District known for piety and religiosity.³³²

The majority of choirs in local communities were interested in plays that reflected Christian values. In Nagyajta and Nagybacon of the Erdővidéki Reformed District, the choirs put on *Az Isten Keze* (God's Hand) by Sándor Lukácsy and, respectively, Lajos Abonyi's *A Betyár Kendője* (The Rogue's Scarf). Also, two other rural choirs preferred Abonyi's classic play, one in the Sepsi Reformed District by the villagers from Aldoboly, and one in the Kezdi-Orbai District in the village of Csomakörös.³³³

The last significant non-church group, the firefighters of Sepsiszentkirály, Szotyor, Sepsikőrospatak, and Macsa in the Sepsi Reformed District preferred traditional plays.³³⁴ In the first two places, Ede Szigligeti's *A Czigány* was a hit. In Oltszem they prepared the operetta *Mágnás Miska* (the Great Miska) by Albert Szirmai. In the Erdővidek Reformed District, especially in the villages of Közepájta and Nagybacon, firefighters focused on László Donáth's play *Peti*

³³¹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 20/1935, Vol. I, Fila 284/28 Febr. 1935.

³³² DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, for Uzon: Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, Fila 132/20 Apr. 1930; for Lecfalva: Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 577/4 Dec. 1932.

³³³ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, for Csomakörös: Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, Fila 25/30 Nov. 1930. for Nagybacon: Inv. 817, Dos. 9/1930, Fila 257/2 Mar. 1930 and Fila 256/21 Apr. 1930; for Nagyajta: Inv. 818, Dos. 9/1932, Fila 327/9 Mar. 1932; for Aldoboly: Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, Fila 113/21 Apr. 1930.

³³⁴ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, for Szotyor: Inv. 818, Dos. 6/1934, Vol. 3, Fila 192/5 Dec. 1934; for Sepsiszentkirály: Inv. 818, Dos. 43/1935, Vol. I, Fila 320/23 Mar. 1934.

*Komá*³³⁵ (Uncle Peti) and Gyula Peterffy's classic *Piros Rozsa, Feher Rozsa*. Although they avoided any religious connotations in their request for a permit, the firefighters of Háromszék County scheduled all their theatrical performances only on religious occasions such as Easter and Christmas, which suggests church affiliations of the members.

In Sepsikőröspatak and Oltszem the city administration encouraged theater shows by providing the necessary space while the mayor himself signed and endorsed the request for a play permit. He did so as an organizer and volunteer probably more than as a representative of the local authority, since most permits were granted to petitioners. Very uncommon at the time in other counties, the city administration in Háromszék scheduled theater shows in eight locations (Kőkös, Gelence, Kálnok, Kőpec, Kilyén, Biczfalva, Székelytamasfalva, Kézdiszaszfalu). Their motivation was mainly fundraising, which was necessary for their buildings' upkeep and civic projects, thus making administrative needs rather than cultural and educational goals the primary purpose of the event.

In the Kezdi-Orbai Reformed District, particularly in Kézdivásárhely city, the Reformed ministers played a crucial role in the administration being hired as city officials in addition to serving as curators and clergymen. This double status dated from the early nineteenth century and lasted until the last third of the century, when lawyers, business owners, and judges became more active as leaders and replaced the clergy. Such phenomena occurred among the Romanians and the Saxons as well, and by the twentieth century they contributed to a strong civic consciousness and a trend of secularization in administration. Reformed schools continued to put on plays with the help of ministers and the District Dean, presenting *Bánk Bán*, written by József Katona in 1869.³³⁶ To

³³⁵ László Donáth, "Peti Komám," in *Pásztortűz*, 1934, sz. 12, 250-253.

³³⁶ Attila Dimény, "A Kézdivásárhelyi Polgárság Egyesületi Elete a 19. Század Második Felétől a 20. Század Közepéig," in *Acta Siculica*, 2011, 516.

numerous Reformed ministers of Kézdivásárhely, literature was crucial to stimulate literacy as was visible in their efforts at building libraries and translating or authoring works of their own.

In 1928, Mayor Dénes Molnár made headlines when he approved the admission of ten women as members of the venerable Cultural House (Kaszinó) of Kézdivásárhely. He strove to revive the local Theatrical Society because he was hoping to collect funds during play shows for civic projects. Founded in 1921, the Society stipulated in its statutes that all adjacent towns' and villages' city halls needed to get involved in amateur theater.³³⁷ None of them ignored Denes's urging.

Háromszék County's three largest cities, Szepsiszentgyörgy, Kovászna, and Kezdivásárhely spread their call for theatrical activities to their neighboring villages and small towns. However tempting it is to consider that villages emulated the urban cultural life in the nearby cities, it is easy to ignore a more important geographical reality, delineated by the borders drawn by the Reformed Church District. In the Sepsiszek, Erdővidéki, Kezdi-Orbai, and the Görgényi Districts, traditionalism and an interest in history shaped the organizers' agenda as it was the custom in the Church District, rather than passing trends from cities. Even the majority of non-church groups revealed their attachment to faith and religious principles by scheduling their plays in celebration of Christmas, Easter, Lent, Epiphany, Pentecost and Advent.

Csík County

Again the geographical delineation of the Reformed Church District rather than county borders reveals a cluster of localities in the former Kis Küküllő County where Reformed women's societies together with ministers, Reformed choirs, and Reformed men's societies were active in putting on plays. Tradition and history shaped the repertory of Reformed women in villages like

³³⁷ DANIC, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, Departamentul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 704/1921, Fila 402/1921.

Olasztelek, Székelymuzsna, and Csekefalva, through plays by Árpád Berczik (*A Parasztkisasszony*, The peasant woman), István Geczy (*Amit az erdő mesél*, The story this forest tells), and K.Pap János (*A Cseperkalap*, The Cherry Cap). Reformed choirs from Székelyudvarhely and Rugonfalva (Rugănesti) and even as far as Makfalva were admirers of Emma Ferenczy Illyés and her two most popular plays (*A Legnagyobb Hatalom*, “The Greatest Power,” and *A Gyűrűs Zsidó*, “The Jew with Rings”). Few active youth groups and schoolteachers remained very fond of the nineteenth-century *népszínmű*.

Overall, the local elites who ordinarily collaborated with the Reformed ministers perceived amateur theater as a means of ensuring the continuity of their community. It was a way to offer everyone an opportunity to reconnect with the life of Hungarian predecessors by way of plays and strengthen the Hungarian village in the postwar economic distress and demographic changes. To address the ordinary folk across all counties, the plays typically included a basic understanding of faith, which fell within the parameters of popular religion.

The local elites’ efforts at mounting plays in their local dialect revealed their determination to maintain a type of society in their midst that could be recreated in an accessible style on the stage, as depicted by classical Hungarian playwrights. The values that the clergymen hoped to inculcate in their young people or the ideas that the organizers hoped to refresh in the minds of the young and the old were geared towards preserving the values of a society from a Hungarian past that would help them cope with the desperate situation in which the Hungarian minority found itself, cut off as it was from their mother-country. These values and ideas formed a system of instructions and collective sentiments recognized as familiar by the community. Only by anchoring themselves to a bygone world, brimming with familiar ideas, could the Reformed Hungarians remain united with Hungarians of other confessions and deal effectively with the postwar territorial changes.

The events involved a large number of people, men and women of all ages, as volunteers for the rehearsals or as an audience. An event came into being and was successful if there was a broad involvement in community, and all had a stake in the play's success, either religious-ethnic, social, or financial. The examples above, however, make a strong case for the religious and ethnic aspect prevailing among organizers.

The Repertory of Reformed Communities

Through plays shown on amateur stages, Reformed communities captured the Hungarian way of life, presenting stories about family relations, personal relationships, and emotional and moral conflicts. Neo-romantic plays written in the nineteenth century, but presented in Budapest mainly in its latter third, attracted the interest of Reformed ministers and women's societies in Transylvania between the two World Wars. One reason is their pervasive qualities of *mesedráma*, a genre engaging fairy tales, fantasy and poetry. Among the nineteenth-century plays that were preferred by Reformed organizers featured bygone times and heroes passionate about history and historical figures. Next to *mesedráma*, amateurs preferred *népszínmű* plays with twisting plots and happy endings. In many respects *népszínmű* resembled soap-operas, and this explains the former's tremendous appeal among both rural and urban audiences. *Népszínmű* focused mainly on genuine love or one-sided love, and veered away from or put in a very negative light extramarital affairs or secret relationships.

Structurally, *népszínmű* included last minute revelations and switches between simultaneous narratives, but not to the effect of creating a continuous open narrative or a never-ending cliffhanger. The language, either verse or prose dialogue, imitated the speaking manners of judges, ministers, notaries, landlords, and other officials, but even then, folk themes were embedded in dialogues and were couched in a popular, regional dialect. *Népszínmű* plays reflected family

values, village traditions, and popular wisdom because of the sort of teachings and religious essence that mattered to Reformed parishioners.³³⁸

Playwrights belonged to a milieu with innumerable ties to the Reformed faith. In the majority, they were born in multiethnic regions, where they witnessed firsthand social and ethnic relations among groups fervently asserting their faith and ethnicity in everyday life. But many others were born in Transylvania or in Partium, being active participants in the Hungarian cultural world. Ede Szigligeti (1814-1878) born in Nagyvárad (Oradea, Körösvidék) was a popular author of social and historical dramas, comedies, and folk plays, as well as an accomplished verse dramatist who fulfilled his literary aspirations by going against his father’s will, to work in a liberal professions. A follower of Sándor Kisfaludy (1772-1844), the first romantic Hungarian poet, Szigligeti authored tragedies and comedies for and about the upper classes. His less-known plays, however, appeared to be the most popular choices among the Reformed Hungarians of historical Transylvania. For example, amateurs from the Aiud Reformed District (Nagyenyed Református Egyházmegye) in the village of Szentmihály (Mihai Viteazul) preferred Szigligeti’s play, *A Cigány*, because it combined folk song, dance, and music.³³⁹ Due to its popularity, it was reprinted in 1923 by the József Bródy Library in Budapest. (Table 1).

Table 1. Record of performances for *A Czigány* by Ede Szigligeti (cont.).

Place	County	Date
Nagybacon	Háromszék	April 21, 1930
Torda	Kolozsvár	March 19, 1932
Szentmihály	Kolozsvár	November 23, 1932

³³⁸ Jenő Pintér, *Magyar Irodalomtörténete, Tudományos Rendszerezés*, Vol. 7: A Magyar Irodalom a XIX. század utolsó Harmadában (Budapest, 1934), 176-177.

³³⁹ Ede Szigligeti, *A Cigány: színmű zenével, népdalokkal, tánczczal* (Budapest: Bródy, 1923).

Table 1. (con't)

Oltszem	Háromszék	December 5, 1934
Szotyor	Háromszék	December 5, 1934
Lemhény	Háromszék	April 2, 1934
Kisborosnyó	Háromszék	January 19, 1935
Rakósd	Hunyad	March 4, 1935
Tordaszentlászló	Háromszék	March 20, 1935
Szamosújvár	Kolozsvár	August 7, 1935

The plot unfolded in the 1840s in a village populated by Hungarians and Gypsies. The musings of the Gypsy Zsiga, father of Rózsi and Peti, expanded upon a traditional outlook on identity and attachment to one's land among the Gypsy people. As paradoxical as it might look, Zsiga challenged Gypsy traditions by rejecting the wandering way of life typical of Gypsies. He nurtured warm thoughts about staying in the village rather than travelling and even thought about being buried in the local cemetery, where his other children, prematurely deceased, were buried. With conviction, he made the case in front of his daughter that wandering in the world like her brother, Peti, was not a good thing to do, for it would have meant abandoning her father "vén dádét" (the old Gypsy). His strong belief in strengthening the ties among generations implied shunning the traditional practice of taking away a bride from her father. Zsiga's feeling that he belonged to the village was quite strong, being reflected in his concern to become part of the village and blend in with the rest of its inhabitants. Worried that villagers would be angered, he vehemently refused to allow his beautiful daughter, Rózsi, to marry the most charming and wealthy but non-Gypsy young man in the village, or his son, Peti, to marry Évi, the daughter of a well-to-do Hungarian peasant. A

metal-worker himself, Zsiga relied on other well-to-do villagers for business, while his children worked as fieldhands for various farmers. If a marriage were to happen, disdain and jealousy would befall Zsiga's family, as other Gypsies in the village might react against him by throwing curses on his family and the Hungarian family into whom he married his daughter.

In order to avoid a rupture, the village community concocted a false story about Rózsi's infidelity with the local shepherd, and, consequently, her betrothal to her Hungarian beau was dissolved. Eventually, the most coveted bachelor in the village asked in marriage not Rózsi, but a girl of his own status. An excerpt of the conversation between the beau's new fiancée and her mother laid out the pros and cons of marriage for money or love and how important it was for the young generation to be "good kids." At the very end, however, the lie came to the surface and the person responsible for falsifying the truth admitted her fault and accepted what fate had in store for children and parents: marriage was to happen only among those who were deeply in love. This happy ending was to be fulfilled through the intervention of the wealthiest landowner in the village, Várszegi, who returned from abroad just in time to find out about the parents' machinations. He helped bring about a resolution, by setting all accounts correctly. Eventually, the play ended with two happy weddings, both between Gypsies and Hungarians. Reformed groups would present such a play for its message that an individual should believe in freedom and enjoy it but not at the expense of jeopardizing one's ethnic identity, be it a Gypsy or Hungarian or any other ethnicity.

Amateurs also took into consideration plays by Reformed playwrights. One of them was Lajos Abonyi (1833-1898), born in a north-western Hungarian town, Kisterenye, on the border with Slovakia. He studied philosophy at the Reformed College in Kecskemét, and many Reformed ideas contributed to the popularity of his plays among Reformed women, youth, schoolteachers, and choirs.

Table 2. Record of performances for *A betyár kendője* by Lajos Abonyi

Place	County	Date
Kézdiszentkereszt	Háromszék	March 22, 1930
Zágon	Háromszék	March 22, 1930
Csomakőrös	Háromszék	November 30, 1930
Alsórákos	Brassó	March 4, 1932
Kóhalom	Brassó	March 26, 1932
Polyan	Maros	December 2, 1932
Alsóbölkény	Maros	August 20, 1932
Kovászna	Háromszék	March 2, 1934
Ákosfalva	Maros	March 8, 1934
Málnás	Háromszék	December 8, 1934
Nagybácon	Háromszék	March 12, 1934
Újtorda	Kolozsvár	February 15, 1935, April 28, 1935
Kolozspata	Kolozsvár	November 21, 1935

*A Betyár Kendője*³⁴⁰ focused on well-to-do families as well as modest households living in a neighborly and familial atmosphere in order to solve the mystery of a missing scarf and a treasure of gold coins pursued by thieves. The love story between an orphan, Zsófi, and Bandi, a thief suspected of illegal dealings, sets the stage for the older generation to teach moral views about propriety. Another subplot involved a widow, Mrs. Kulcsár, and her adopted son, András, whose wayward behavior acquired in the city in the company of a tailor and a barber shows the deleterious

effects of sudden material enrichment on young people, distracting them from the possibility of their religious salvation.

Only marriage could turn a young adult from a sinful to an upright existence, thus the older generation made efforts to encourage young people find a spouse. A good bride was a woman whose own health and that of her family was in good condition, whose education and work habits were stringent, and who had a penchant for keeping things in order in the household. For villagers concerned about social status, a pastor's daughter was very desirable for bachelors. The parents' reputation determined the image of a marriageable daughter. As we meet Örszi, an orphan young woman, the trials during her marriage to a thief, Bandi, reveal her upright, Christian demeanor. She was a model of submission, verbal restraint, and sacrifice through which she gained the appreciation of all. Through Örszi, Abonyi makes a stark contrast between characters like her who lived in villages, and town inn-keepers like the widow. The play contains a cautionary tale for those seeking to adopt orphans, arguing that orphans from villages tended to be faithful children.

Orphans are also featured in Sándor Petőfi's epic poem *János Vitéz*, which was chosen by amateurs in Aranyosegerbegy (Viișoara). Born in the village Kiskőrös in Hungary, Petőfi mastered folklore and traditional song-like verses before he published his first poems, but his entire lyrical work was wedded to theater, for which he created a new genre, "role-based poetry," using a variety of voices and situations. His love for theater was boundless as he joined travelling theater companies out of youth idealism. It was in our region where he met his wife, Julia Szendrey. He died at a young age in the battle of Segesvár in Transylvania in 1848.

In *János Vitéz*, Jáncsi and Iluska are two orphans raised by two different adoptive families. Except for Jáncsi's adoptive mother and a few good-hearted neighbors who die early in the play, the orphans were deprived of love and affection. There are frequent scenes of revenge against the

³⁴⁰ Lajos Abonyi, *A betyár kendője népszínmű dalokkal 6 felvonásban* (Cluj-Kolozsvár: "Magyar Nép," 1924).

wicked and none conveying Christian moral teachings. Jáncsi's actions showed his love for freedom and life. Even Iluska who passed away early in the play was resurrected in the Land of the Fairies to fulfill Jáncsi's quest for happiness and human love. It is within these parameters that villagers in Reformed communities found Petőfi's play congenial to their Reformed beliefs.

After his play *A Gyimesi Vadvirág* (The Wild Flower of Gyimesi) was well received by audiences in Transylvania, István Géczy's other hit *Amit az erdő mesél* (The story this forest tells) was published with a local printer in Abrudbánya, a town in Gyulafehérvár County.³⁴¹ Géczy (1860-1936) was born in north-eastern Hungary in Alsóábrány, a village dominated by Roman-Catholic Hungarians. Due to poverty, he decided to embrace an acting profession, gradually inclining towards writing plays and jokes. As a young man attracted to acting, he first wandered with his theater company in Transylvania, in Brassó, then, he started a professional career at the National Theater of Budapest as a clerk and a theater secretary, and, finally, settled as a review editor. His most popular plays among the Reformed of historical Transylvania were not reprinted between the World Wars, but copies already circulated among different groups, continuing to attract audiences.

The women's society of Árpástó (Branîştea) chose *A Gyimesi Vadvirág* for the moral penchant of its plot. Built around four intersecting family stories (the Prezmers, the Fabians, the Balankas, and the Csuras) the play sends a message about the importance of learning from the parents' pasts. Parental experiences guide the young people's actions and help them integrate into the Gyimesi village community by enabling them avoid their parents' errors. The risk of not belonging to the village or not being integrated is associated with the need for increasing unity among all within the village of Gyimesfelsőlők in Csík County. Other themes and characters

³⁴¹István Géczy, *A Gyimesi Vadvirág* (Brody: Budapest, 1887); *Amit az erdő mesél* (Roth Ferencz Könyvnyomdája, 1901).

conveyed the image of a unified village. The minister (plébanos) played a significant role in the narrative as he provided daily guidance to his parishioners, preserving peace and understanding in his community. The entire local elite, notaries and official clerks from Szereda appeared concerned about tax collections, as was the dean (esperes) of Csik-Rákos, but regardless of interests, the play show the cohesion of Hungarian communities in the county.

Gyimesfelsőlők had a Hungarian-speaking population in the majority Roman Catholic. The Csángós, Roman Catholic Hungarians speaking a distinct dialect of Hungarian are families who lived in what is called the Moldova region, neighboring historical Transylvania. The Csángós identified themselves as Szeklers whose dialect used the vowel ő instead of é as in standard Hungarian and a large number of regionalisms specific to the area. According to Gábor Lükő's categorization of the Csángó population, the split between a southern and a northern part allows readers to place István Géczy's characters in the context of their everyday life outlook and traditions as southern Csángós.³⁴²

The Reformed Hungarian audience felt attached to this play because the Hungarians of Csík County and the Csángós of Moldavia, notwithstanding their differences in ways of life and native province, were no longer separated between the wars by political boundaries as in prewar times, thus their cultural ties grew stronger. This play advocates the common cultural understanding among all Hungarian-speaking inhabitants, thus reinforcing the idea that cultural life provides the foundation and site for understanding ethnic specificity and promoting ethnic unity.

Table 3 A Record of performances for *A Gyimesi Vadvirág* by István Géczy (cont.)

Place	County	Date
Kőpec	Háromszék	December 30, 1929

³⁴² Gabor Lükő, *A Moldvai Csángók* (Budapest, 2002), 344.

Table 3. (con't)

Kézdimartonfalva	Háromszék	February 23, 1930
Harasztos	Kolozsvár	December 5, 1932
Árpástó	Kolozsvár	April 27, 1934
Maroscsapó	Maros	February 15, 1935
Kispetri	Kolozsvár	February 17, 1935
Gidófalva	Háromszék	February 28, 1935
Kolozsvár	Kolozsvár	November 19, 1935
Balázsfalva	Gyulafehérvár	March 22, 1935

Living in an elaborate large house, typical of Szekler settlements known for their ordered rows, the Csángó Balanka family had two children, Imre and Mária, both at a marriageable age. Magdolna Prezmer, the most beautiful girl in the village but considered “a wild flower” (vadvirág), married Imre in an elaborate ceremony, hoping through her marriage avoid the sad fate of her deceased mother and her convict father. Magdolna’s mother, also the beauty of the village when she was young, was courted by the son of a rich farmer, Fabian. But listening to her heart, she wedded her modest boyfriend, Prezmer. Seeking revenge, Fabian kissed her during a public dance and dishonored Prezmer who, out of anger, stabbed him to death. Unable to prove her moral innocence, Magdolna’s mother threw herself off a cliff. After being killed, Fabian left behind a boy, Gyuri, and his widow, a woman whom he married out of spite. As children, Magdolna and Gyuri grew up together and slowly fell in love, but due to the longtime hatred among their parents, Magdolna was determined to do all in her power to learn from her parents’ mistake. She gave up her lover, Gyuri, and married Imre, the son of the well-to-do Csángó landowner.

Upon her marriage Magdolna became a Csángó lady (uri cságoné)) “selling her soul and body to someone she did not love,” according to Gyuri. In her regular visits to her mother’s tomb, Magdolna heard her advice to stay away from Gyuri. Indeed, Fabian’s widow continued to nurture a dislike of the Prezmers and inculcated hatred in Gyuri. Through her parents’ experiences, Magdolna learned that a person’s honor is above carnal love. She restored her father’s honor who was serving a prison sentence for causing the death of his rival, Fabian. She also corrected the villagers’ perception of her as “a wild,” “earthly fairy” by getting married and settling down.

As sheperds, the Prezmers were engaged in transhumance for pasturage, and increasead their wealth to eighty goats while the Balankas made a good living through cattle breeding. Raising goats was not a primary agricultural occupation among the Hungarians of Gyimes, but between the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the Szeklers who did have goats, used the *havas* lands, the collective property of the commune on snowy mountain peaks to graze their goats. Living in a *havas* shelter was a tradition which the Csángós had preserved since the Middle Ages and which implied that their habitat changed according to season. With the split of the *havas* system and the closing of *havas* shelters, the inhabitants began to stay longer in the village and, like the Prezmers, adapt to the village social and everyday life.³⁴³

The characters show that one’s past is inescapable, and the parents’ fate repeats itself in their children’s lives. Magdolna’s fear of Gyuri proved correct. Gyuri repeats his father’s gesture, namely, kissing in public the woman he loved, so that he could harm her honor and her husband’s. Magdolna and her husband, Imre, were committed to mending their broken relations with Gyuri. She persuaded him to admit his deeds, and repent for trampling his rival’s honor. Imre saved

³⁴³ Attila Paladi-Kovács, “Élevage dans les hautes montagnes en tant que type de système hongrois d’élevage” in L’Élevage et la vie pastorale dans les montagnes de l’Europe au Moyen Age et à l’Époque moderne: acte du colloque international. Clermont-Ferrand: Institut d’études du Massif Central, 1984, 150-155. In Gyimes, unlike in other places, the pasturage took twenty to twenty-two weeks a year, thus the farmers took shelter in the *havas*. During summers,

Gyuri's house that was put on auction by officials from Szereda as a punishment for missing tax payments. He even bought Gyuri's belongings and returned them to him and his mother. He accepted to let his very own sister, who secretly loved Gyuri, to date him. He justified his attitude by saying: "a free man must be able to stand eye to eye with another free man," because the final judgment for man's deeds belonged to God alone.³⁴⁴

Reformed women's societies preferred *A Noszty-fiú esete Tóth Marival*, a comedy by Zsolt von Harsányi in four acts, based on the novel with the same title by Kálmán Mikszáth.³⁴⁵ Its popularity, Péter Hajdu explains, has to do with Feri (Ferenc) Noszty and his several career changes in his adult life, from soldier to clerk to public official in the administration, a typical path for most Hungarian young men of the well-to-do families of his time. His love at first sight for Mari Tóth, described as mysterious and beautiful also catered to a broad audience, including French and German.³⁴⁶ To Reformed women and parishioners in Transylvania, the play's attraction lay in the authenticity and beauty of bygone days in nineteenth-century Hungary, in encounters between individuals and families of different social stations, like the self-made bourgeois father and husband, Tóth, and the Hungarian nobility with its traditional values and mores.

A play equally preferred by Reformed ministers and Reformed women societies in Maros County was *A Bor: Falusi Történet 3 Felvonásban (The Wine: A Village Story in Three Acts)* by Géza Gárdonyi. Fond of his childhood spent in Sály, a borderland village in the Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County in northern Hungary, Gárdonyi drew inspiration for his literary works from this complex region, equally significant for its industries as well as for its arable land, being the first to

they took shelter in *szalas*, or in Romanian *sălaș*, while over the winter they took shelter in their village (in Transylvania, villages were formed in valleys).

³⁴⁴ István Géczy, *Gyimesi Vadvirág* (Budapest: Brody, 1887), 77.

³⁴⁵ Zsolt Harsányi, *A Noszty-fiú esete Tóth Marival, vigjáték 4 felvonásban* (Budapest: Singer és Wolfner Irodalmi Intézet r.-t Műkedvelők Színháza, Szám 3-5, 1920).

³⁴⁶ Péter Hajdu, "Noszty Feri Alakváltozásai" in Milián Orsolya (ed.) *A Noszty Fiú Esete Tóth Marival, Tanulmányok*, (Budapest-Szeged: Gondolat Kiadói Kör- Pompeji) 73-74. See Marton's translation of the play in

embrace the Reformation and foster a fervent culture through the Reformed College of Sarospatak. With Slovak and German minorities constituting a large portion of the population, the village of Sály was multiethnic, a character which shaped Gárdonyi's outlook in many of his literary pages: a fondness for the countryside life and the farmer rather than for towns and city dwellers.³⁴⁷ Trained as a schoolteacher and active as a journalist, he tried his hand at numerous literary genres.

After he graduated from the Reformed College of Sarospatak and married a Roman Catholic woman, Gárdonyi intended that his plays and even his novels turn into dramatized stories, and help readers identify with religious elements pertaining to their own faiths. His popularity was widespread among Roman-Catholic communities as well, which favored his titles like *A Karácsony álomban* (In the Christmas Dream), and among the Unitarians, who also put on *A Bor* (The Wine) but also *Fehér Anna, betyár-történet 3 felvonásban* (Anna Fehér, the Story of a Thief in Three Acts). However, *A Bor* remained the most popular title among all of Gárdonyi's dramas, being a favorite even among the the Evangelical Lutheran Hungarian communities of Brassó and non-church groups in Háromszék and Maros communities.

A Bor was first performed in the National Theater of Budapest in 1901 and, since then, it was considered his most accomplished dramatic work. The plot embodies simplicity at its best. A farmer, Imre Barancs, breaks his wedding promise to remain sober. In a night of celebration, rejoicing at his brother's release from prison, Barancs drinks too much wine and abuses his wife. Physically hurt, his wife leaves her husband for a few weeks, during which Imre, proudly, holds his ground. He does nothing but wait for his wife to return to him, according to his principle that "a wife is soul and body with her husband." (Az igazi asszony egy-lélek, egy-test as urával.)³⁴⁸ As András Kispéter argues, Gárdonyi centers on the emotional and meditative nature of the peasant.

German, *Die Liebe des Jungen Noszty* (Budapest, 1933), and the novel's translation in French, *Histoire Du Jeune Noszty Avec La Marie Toth*.

³⁴⁷ András Kispéter, *Gárdonyi Géza* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1970), 5.

This literary approach broke with the prejudice-oriented stories about village life. In Gárdonyi's work, the peasant is described in a realistic, credible, and modern fashion, and this manner of literary rendition came to inspire other playwrights and paved the way for introspective, psychological renditions in village literature.³⁴⁸ He not only populated his play with peasant characters, which made literary critics to designate *A Bor* a peasant comedy, but he also grappled with what a peasant thinks he is.

Despite the harmless entanglements in the plot, its substance, however, lay elsewhere, in the inner conflicts of the soul. The play is keen to rail not so much against drinking and its deleterious effects on social and especially family relations, but against the separation within family which drinking might cause. When the plot reaches its end, alcoholism has become a secondary issue. Instead of drinking, Gárdonyi puts front and center the collective responsibility of a family and of an entire village to help maintain a man's unified and dignified household. Also, a naïve portrayal of peasants and a poetic description of their lives emphasize Gárdonyi's deep immersion in the rustic lifestyle and peasant simplicity. He is keen to show it as being exceptional in its wisdom and religious lessons.

Like Gárdonyi, Ede Tóth (1844-1876) was born in a small town, Putnok, in the Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén region of Hungary. His father intended for him a career of merchant, so he was sent to Sárospatak for his studies, but his love for theater and writing prevailed. Poetry and playwrighting occupied most of his time while touring with travelling theater companies. In *Falu Rossza* (The Village Rogue), the action takes place in Borsod, a region in northern Hungary, close to the border with Slovakia and Tóth's birthplace. Performed in Budapest in 1875, the play is the story of a troublesome young man, Sándor Göndör, a poor farmer, disdainful and notoriously

³⁴⁸ Géza Gárdonyi, *A Bor: Falusi Történet 3 Felvonásban*, 62.

³⁴⁹ András Kispéter, *Gárdonyi Géza*, 116.

provocative, and whose dealings with people of all walks of life resulted in threatening words, turbulent relations and even the firing of weapons. As typical in soap-operas, violence led to but slight consequences and eventually forgiveness. Like his son, Sándor's father was a resolute hardhead, whom neighbors knew from experience that, if he started a conflict, it would lead to something more dangerous. The play is even more perplexing when we discover that it ends with the rascal's wedding with the daughter of the county judge, Gáspár Feledi.

As in the other plays, there is in *A Falu Rossza* a young woman, Tercsi Bátki, whose moral standing and understanding of social relations sets her apart from the rest. Living under Gáspár Feledi's guardianship, she was a poor orphan, who was aware of the contrasting backgrounds of her two suitors. One was the village rogue, Göndör, the other was her guardian's son, Lajos Feledi. Only the former fit her social background, being an orphan himself. Göndör thought the same.

In this play, not the well-to-do parents but their adult children believed in following one's heart. Even more surprising is that the young generation advocated the need to stay attached to one's village. Keeping traditional clothes was another idea upheld by the young villagers. They preferred observing rural customs and wearing traditional clothes rather than moving to the city and becoming gentlemen. For young women, wearing those "godless crumpled-crinoline skirts" was utterly preposterous.³⁵⁰

Gonosz, the village watchman and a notorious drunkard, mischievous since a young age, was the duplicitous character who sides with both Feledi's family and Göndör. He was a real burden to other farm helpers, by stealing food and drink from neighbors. They labeled him "a false soul" (or "hamis lelkü"). Through Gonosz's ridiculous talk about honor, Tóth seeks to show the complexity of the concept of honor, a common topic in all the plays preferred by Hungarian amateurs. Next to grace and shame, honor represented a foundational concept for village societies

and the ways in which they forged social relations in the modern world. This social code of conduct dominated relations of individuals and mentalities of clergy and schoolteachers. Honor also secures continuity with the preceding periods and unified generations while whole communities made fun of all those who did not abide by honorable behavior.

Overall, these plays illustrate the degree to which religion informed cultural choices: the Reformed ministers supported amateur theater in villages for its educational purposes, while in small towns they offered a sort of voucher for the morality and seriousness of the event and strongly endorsed a religious and educational purpose. Also, the plays reflected the organizers' and audience's use of religion to help dispel prejudices and vices and to bring closer the parishioners of the same faith. The events in small towns and villages have many things in common: the local Reformed minister prevailed as initiator, organizer, and moral guarantor, supervising the choices that parishioners made in regard to content and form, and the overall messages of the shows. Reformed parishes also engaged other local groups attached to the church, societies comprising a broad social range of the community: youth, men, women, choirs and schoolteachers. The members of the non-church local groups united by work affiliation, such as firefighters, city clerks, artisans, workers, schoolteachers, athletes, and choirs were also very active. They saw themselves as members of a larger Reformed community in which a cultural life could be freely conducted without outside pressures as to repertory, timing, and audience. Reformed cultural work straddled a fine line between religion and literature with theater-playing offering compelling evidence of vernacular participation meant to enhance faith and self-understanding.

Concluding remarks

Through cultural autonomy, Reformed communities continued to develop between the two World Wars by enjoying cultural autonomy through the largest movement of amateur theater

³⁵⁰ Ede Tóth, *A Falu Rossza*, 10.

among all Hungarians. After a gloomy postwar period of coping with the loss of Transylvania, the Transylvanian Reformed communities came to rely on the principles of religious tolerance, free expression, and free development of their ethnic character advocated by the Romanian state. Reformed cultural life hardly showed signs of decline while connections with the mother country increased.

It was known that the amateur theater movements revived successfully the Hungarians' efforts to sustain their schools and churches through their own efforts. Shows provided villages with the much-needed funds for dealing with social welfare and administrative matters. So, in all the regions discussed, the Reformed communities' participation in amateur theater revealed their ability to organize themselves and thrive culturally even when legal stipulations did not grant specific rights to minorities. The upper classes participating in Reformed Church synods encouraged the commoners' initiatives in putting on plays and the dissemination of literary creations from Hungary. They perceived such events in terms of educating the masses in villages and small towns where entertainment was less available than in cities. Being the equivalent of the today's soap-operas, the *népszínmű* plays were imbued with realistic features that enhanced their popularity and encouraged viewers to relate with the characters and plot twists.

Couched in play scripts, the typical Protestant tenets like rationalism, pragmatism, liberalism, individual freedom, and individual creativity made amateur theater even more popular at the local level. In villages inhabited by Reformed Hungarians, the local church, the oldest of all institutions and the strongest defender of ethnicity, remained the site around which the whole life in a village revolved and the source of moral advice and guidance. The trust in the Reformed Church as a repository of moral truth received a positive impulse through amateur theater, helping churchmen preserve its special place even when people's religious fervor declined and their churchgoing habits ceased.

Roman Catholic Hungarians and Amateur Theater

In 1940, Father Vilmos Bálint (1877-1949) was remembered as an erudite Roman Catholic priest passionate about the arts and literature. He welcomed ethnographers, archeologists, and writers to his parish in Csíkszenttamás (Tomești, Harghita) to explore the Székelyföld and his parish village, which was known as the largest prehistorical site of iron deposits and tile fragments.³⁵¹ Much like other Roman Catholic priests in our region, Vilmos Bálint professed to educate and uplift his parishioners, to use all his power to maintain a unitary profile and position of the Hungarians of his faith. He also participated in initiatives of disseminating knowledge and printed materials for a barely literate Hungarian peasantry. Independent-minded and a decision-maker, he is the representative of a minority climate that prized self-reliance. He is a typical Hungarian clergyman whose agenda included both ethnic and religious considerations, which he sought to promote within and outside his locality as part of his spiritual and educational mission. His contribution did not go unnoticed, and his name was given to the local elementary school of Csíkszenttamás.

His cultural efforts involved theatrical activities in which he welcomed the entire village. Bálint's vision carried on his predecessors' views, affirming the power of education through theater as a forceful medium which he adapted to the current conditions of his fellow Hungarians, now a minority in a Romanian nation-state. Vilmos Bálint wrote two biblical plays in 1932³⁵² respectively in 1944,³⁵³ in which he restored rather than constructed a sense of Hungarian identity associated with the Roman Catholic faith among his parishioners and co-religionists. In his biblical plays he revived elements of the local identity as previous generations of writers had conceived of them and

³⁵¹ Kata Daczó, "Nagy kiterjedésű oskori lelohelyet azonosítottak" in *Művelődés*, Kedd 7, Június, 2012.

³⁵² Vilmos Bálint, *A Dúsgazdag: Bibliai Színmű* (Kolozsvár: Minerva, 1932).

³⁵³ Vilmos Bálint, *A Béketűrő Jób: Bibliai Színmű* (Kolozsvár: Minerva, 1944).

enshrined them in the *népszínmű* plays. In doing so, he conveyed his interest Hungarian clergymen had in expressing identity and his attachment to their local village.

As village elites, the clergy were uniquely qualified to advance ethnic and religious interests, because they were seen as the embodiment of loyalty, trust, and morality, and enjoyed the most prestigious position among villagers. The Roman Catholic priests in urban centers worked not only as devoted clergymen but as public intellectuals as well. As journalists, delegates of the Kolozsvár central office, or novelists, Roman Catholic clergymen established contacts with other local Roman Catholic priests and with lay officials in their counties, reaching out to them as far as Kolozsvár and even Bucharest. Both their local and region-wide involvement reflected a strong sense of initiative and action on behalf of their Church.

The traditional association between schools and churches enabled priests to voice the need for improving literacy and social uplift, but even more so, to strengthen a self-contained Roman Catholic cultural world. Unlike Protestant and secular Hungarians, generally, Roman Catholic communities, appear more conservative. Despite being difficult work for rural organizers and audiences, theatrical shows ranked high among their educational activities. Most important, they facilitated direct encounters between different age groups of children and adults. Priests were directly involved in diversifying theater activities, and in this respect they were eager to expand their contacts with other priests interested in plays. They made efforts to enlarge the pool of volunteers for theatrical work and to obtain play scripts and thus, encourage initiatives and deal with unpredictable situations.

Roman Catholic Hungarians spared no effort in reasserting their ethnic culture by way of religion. Repertories, dates, locations, and purposes appear as specific to Roman Catholic calendars and activities. Also specific are the ties the Hungarians cultivated with Roman Catholics in Germany as they used plays published in Germany or describing German-speaking areas. A close

look at their theatrical events reveals that the faithful tended to place their Church's teachings ahead of an all-encompassing Hungarian minority identity in historical Transylvania.

Despite the structural reshuffling of their organization in the postwar years, in county next to county, district next to district (főesperesi kerület), Roman Catholic Hungarians spent significant time on an ambitious theatrical agenda that aimed at enhancing Hungarian visibility and strengthening solidarity among themselves as Roman Catholics. Although petitions and written requests for show approvals give little indication of how the event proceeded, they do shed light on the private initiative coming from the clergy and their parishioners. It also highlights the possibilities afforded to them by the political order of the host country and officials who allowed them happen. Furthermore, the authorities' justifications for giving permission to organizers to put on plays depended largely on whether the character of the theater event was religious and thus above suspicion. Authorities also examined how the plays reflected the Roman Catholic vision which Hungarian Roman Catholics claimed to represent.

Roman Catholic Cultural, Educational, and Literary Traditions

Much like the other minority groups, Roman Catholic Hungarians tied their efforts to the preceding period of stabilization and consolidation initiated in Greater Hungary at the turn of the century. Torn by the pressures of their own times, which forced them to seek at all costs the preservation of church property, institutions, and decision-making, they kept thinking about the time when Transylvania was part of Hungary, when relations between state and churches in 1894 and 1895 were restated along liberal principles, and education benefitted from the liberal Eötvös elementary education act of 1868. Historians have amply documented in monographs and edited collections of documents the unfortunate consequences that these cultural strides taken by the

Hungarian state had on the minorities living in Hungary at that time.³⁵⁴ The liberal reforms meant the imposition of Hungarian language in all church-administered secondary schools regardless of the ethnic group's religion. Roman Catholic prelates contributed to enforcing this policy, known as Magyarization, by promoting Greek-Catholicism among the Orthodox believers, Romanian and Ruthenians.

As always, culture remained high on the Church's agenda, before and after the war. Nineteenth-century cultural centers like Nagyenyed, Kolozsvár, and Marosvásárhely came to prominence due to the effort of creative intellectuals. Only Gyulafehérvár owed its cultural fame to Bishop Ignác Batthyány (1741-1798) who strengthened its institutions.³⁵⁵ No other bishop in historical Transylvania concerned himself with culture like Károly Gusztáv Majláth (1897-1938),³⁵⁶ who, after 1918, extended his cultural policies to cover also the Partium region (on the Romanian border with Hungary). The famous Reformed theologian, writer, and teacher Baron Miklós Jósika (1794-1865), emphasized the Roman Catholic higher clergy's deep interest in religion as well as in literature, which, he thought, enhanced their immense popularity as leaders in the region. Such a compliment coming from a Reformed man of letters, who was considered the father of the Magyar Romantic novel, was no small gesture.³⁵⁷

The Roman Catholic clergy living in monastic orders showed their interest in literature in the public sphere. The first orders took root outside historical Transylvania before the First World War, but after the war, the Franciscan Order which was particularly more active opened two centers in Hunyad County.³⁵⁸ Roman-Catholic women's orders opened centers in historical Transylvania as

³⁵⁴ Lucian Boia, Relationships between Romanians, Czechs, and Slovaks, 1848-1914 (București, 1977), Mircea Păcurariu, Politica Statului Ungar față de Biserica Românească din Transilvania în perioada dualismului, 1867-1918 (Sibiu, 1986).

³⁵⁵ József Marton, Tamás Jakabffy, Az Erdélyi Katolicizmus Századai, Képes Egyházmegye – Történet (Gyulafehérvár: Gloria, 1999), 82.

³⁵⁶ Marton, Jakabffy, 96,103.

³⁵⁷ Marton, Jakabffy, 83.

³⁵⁸ Marton, Jakabffy, 106.

early as 1733 in Nagyszeben (the Szent Klára Poor House), then, in Gyulafehérvár in 1858, and later in Gyergyószentmiklós (Csik County) in 1876. Countess Jullianna Batthyány (1821-1871) was the first to open a Franciscan Women's Convent modeled on the Bavarian Mellersdorf Abbey in Germany. By 1923, women monastic orders covered the entire region and of all the Roman Catholic groups, the Franciscan school network and the Ursuline nun order of nuns were the most active in their faith's revival after the First World War. Despite this broad geographical coverage, mostly Franciscan men got involved in theatrical activities.³⁵⁹

For the Roman Catholic Hungarian population, the Concordat signed between the Holy See and the Romanian state in 1927 marked a restructuring of dioceses and the subordination of the Transylvanian dioceses to the one in Bucharest. This new structure notwithstanding, the Roman Catholics of historical Transylvania pursued a cultural life independent from Bucharest, as their theatrical events demonstrate, since permissions came mainly from Romanian authorities, not from their Archbishopric in Bucharest. Plays were mounted within the traditional structures of Roman Catholic societies, which prove their level of self-reliance. The demographic majority of Roman Catholics living in historical Transylvania also explains their sense of independence. Their organizational scale and efficiency of this region's cultural life had pointed toward a formidable independent development. Interconnected with the larger Catholic world, it was highly original in its local expression. Historian József Marton described the Roman Catholic bishop as a very active cultural promoter, followed closely by the cathedral chapter and the theological seminary.³⁶⁰

The Concordat created discontent due to the revamping of hierarchical structures, but one benefit came attached to this change: it enabled Catholic priests and cantors to conduct their own classes of religious education. Compared to Hungary proper, an unusual large number of Roman

³⁶⁰József Marton, "Az erdélyi római katolikus egyházmegye intézményei a két világháború között" in Korunk, Aprilis, 2002.

Catholic clergymen worked in historical Transylvania.³⁶¹ They continued to make a forceful case in favor of preserving Hungarian-speaking confessional schools as separate from the Romanian state school system. As the province's Bishop Gustáv Károly Majláth (1864-1940) argued, confessional schools and churches for Roman Catholic Hungarians were not a matter of political gain, or an issue of ethnicity, but a matter of disseminating a broad perspective on life, a Roman Catholic perspective. The Bishop also equated the school question with the survival of the Hungarian minority. In his words, one could not tamper with the confessional schools without destroying the Hungarian minority.³⁶²

Catholicism rather than ethnicity, however, was of paramount concern for Bishop Majláth. In his urgings delivered in congresses and various public interventions, he upheld the interests of the Hungarians by reasserting the importance of religion in the context of the new territorial realities.³⁶³ In this vein, the call to action for preserving religion as the principal means of survival reached the village parishes by way of pastoral letters. Such correspondence served two more purposes: raising awareness of the issue of self-taxation and of the need for financial sacrifices by Roman-Catholic Hungarian believers.³⁶⁴ Financially maintaining their schools became a serious challenge in the Gyulafehérvár diocese, as it was for Nagyvárad diocese as ethnic groups could keep only the confessional schools, the public ones that were previously administered by the Hungarian state before the First World War, came to be supervised by Romanian authorities, so the only educational establishments that belonged to minorities remained the confessional schools.

Extracurricular activities, such as amateur theater, became a solution for saving schools and, at the same time, enhancing religion. In her study, *Iskola és Színház, As Iskoladráma*

³⁶¹ Moricz Csakij, "Die Romisch Katolische Kirche in Ungarn" in *Die Habsburger monarchie*, IV, 322- 323, as quoted by Tudor Pavel, "Românii Transilvăneni și curentul politic social-creștin la popoarele din Centrul Europei in primul deceniu al sec. 20" in *300 de ani de la Unirea Bisericii Românești din Transilvania cu Biserica Romei. Actele Colocviului International din Nov. 23-25, 2000*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj, 2000, 290.

³⁶² Péter Sas, *Az Erdélyi Római-Katolikus Egyház (1900-1948)*, 58.

Neveléstörténeti és Pedagógiai Szerepe (School and Theater, The Pedagogical and Educational History Role of the School Drama), Márta Bodó argues that “the development of theatrical activity throbbed along with the school work.” For Transylvanian Catholic schools, theater afforded a double training in language/literature, as well as in religion, for drama played an educational role similar to the one performed by church icons and paintings. Therefore, drama performances served as a source of cultural and artistic knowledge among the students seeking theological degrees.³⁶⁵ In religious schools, theater was an important element in the curriculum as well as a liturgical component, being encouraged by the officials for the positive role that school drama had played in Jesuit schools since the sixteenth century in the enhancement of Catholicism.³⁶⁶

Following the diocese restructuring in 1927, theater remained central to the revival of the Catholic ethos in the civic life in urban centers. In 1928, *A Katolikus Világ*, the official publication of the Roman Catholic Church, introduced a theater supplement entitled *A Katolikus Világ Színpada*, to serve the Hungarians interested in plays within Catholic communities. Béla Jánossy’s *Terézia Nővér* (Sister Teresa), published in *A Katolikus Világ* focused on Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and was considered the most popular choice in numerous Catholic communities.³⁶⁷ Such theatrical brochures were printed under the editorial guidance of Leonárd Dávid Trefán (1875-1945), the founder of the most modern printing house in Transylvania, the Szent Bonaventura Publishing House. Trefán also founded *A Hírnök* (*The Herald*) (1903-1942), initially a social-artistic journal, after the First World War. After 1921, he wrote for a devotional gazette edited by Janossy, a foremost Catholic playwright. Although devotional, this journal accorded a large space

³⁶³ Sas, 59.

³⁶⁴ Sas, 60.

³⁶⁵ Márta Bodó, *Iskola és Színház, Az Iskoladráma Neveléstörténeti és Pedagógiai Szerepe* (School and Theater, The school's Educational History and the Pedagogical Role of School Drama) (Kolozsvár: Verbum, 2009), 9, 13.

³⁶⁶ Oscar Brockett, *History of the Theater* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon: Boston, 1968), 330.

³⁶⁷ The plays printed in the series “Katolikus Világ Színpada” are: 1. Béla Jánossy, *Terézia nővér. Színmű*, 1928. 2. Mária Keresztély, *A csoda. Falusi életkép* (1928). 3. Ferenc Mael, *A kereszt fényében* (1929). 4. Béla Jánossy,

to literature, until the latter part of the third decade when its approach gradually narrowed to encompass only Catholic literature. Other literary journals set the trend for theatrical preferences among the common people. The *Hírnök* helped disseminate religious plays among the Catholic Hungarians from Csík County, while the series *A Hírnök Könyvei* printed calendars and pocket books.

Tréfan is well-known for editing a bilingual review, *Szent Kereszt - Heilige Kreuz* (Holy Cross) in Hungarian and German, between 1926 and 1943. Other Roman Catholic priests and intellectuals were collaborators to the review *Erdélyi Fiatalok* (The Transylvanian Youth) and sought to reassert the village world as the center of Hungarianness, Tréfán endorsed the ties between Roman Catholic Hungarians from historical Transylvania and Roman Catholic Germans from Germany, as shown in his autobiographical volume of stories, *A Mi Falunk* (Our Village), (Kolozsvár, 1941).

Other institutional structures displayed an interest in amateur theater. The most prominent among these was the Roman Catholic League of Transylvania (*Erdélyi Római Katolikus Népszövetség*) with its numerous urban and rural branches, such as the High School Students' Roman Catholic League (also called the *Majláth-Kör*, *Az Katolikus Népszövetség Főiskolai Tagozat*), but also monastic orders and theological schools. In urban schools, amateur theater tended to resemble professional theater, using a cosmopolitan repertory and leaving out mystery plays.

School theater was not a new phenomenon. A theatrical tradition had existed in Roman Catholic educational establishments of the region since early modern times, and theological schools continuously performed plays. One such example was the Roman Catholic Seminary Báthory-Apor

Vejemuram (Vj. 1929). 5. Mária Bándy, Jézuska, hozzád jöttünk. Karácsonyi játék képekben (Cluj-Kolozsvár: Szent Bonaventura kny, 1929). 6. Dániel Oláh, Az örökség. Falusi életkép (1930).

of Kolozsvár, which put a show with a one-act comedy *Kelemen Palika* by Szőke Szakáll, for Christmas in 1930.³⁶⁸ The seminary's youth circle had intended to use music and a play in order to connect with the community of the city and strengthen its relations with the society at large.³⁶⁹ Some continuity in theatrical traditions was nevertheless secured mainly through the Congregations devoted to the Virgin Mary. Cultural life was encouraged through shows selected from the literary scene of Budapest, like Károly Kisfaludi's *A kérők* (The Solicitors) or drawn from works by the higher clergy, like József Kosz Koszterszitz, who was interested in the Catholic boy-scout movement. Theater encouraged him to write plays depicting boyhood adventures, fueling his aspirations to become a writer.³⁷⁰

The numerous village branches of the Roman Catholic League of Transylvania developed a strong theatrical tradition among Hungarian peasants. In the parishes of historical Transylvania comprising fifteen counties (megyek), Roman Catholic priests saw amateur theater in the light of the Jesuit tradition centered on mystery plays or plays with strong Catholic propagandistic themes, a proof that, for the Catholic clergy, theater remained an extension of the liturgical services. The scheduling dates were also revealing, displaying a strong preference for December, March, and April, which were connected to the major Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter. Very few villages, however, embraced folk plays (*népszínmű*), compared to the theatrical initiatives of Reformed communities, among whom this genre was immensely popular. It came as no surprise that the Catholic communities among the Hungarians of historical Transylvania found amateur theater to serve better their interests of faith and trust in their superior religious confession than in their ethnic heritage, which was typically extolled in *népszínmű* plays.

³⁶⁸ DANIC, București, Departamentul Artelor, for Kolozsvár, Inv.817, Dos. 11/1930, fila 79/Jan. 1930. See Szőke Szakáll, "Kelemen Palika," *Színházi Élet* (Budapest, 1923) 30-43, 54-1.

³⁶⁹ Dr. Biró Vencel, *A Báthory-Apor Szeminárium Értesítője, Az 1928/29 – 1934/35. Tanévekről* (Cluj: Gloria Könyvnyomda, 1935), 33.

Organizers and Participants of Amateur Theater in Roman Catholic Communities

When priests and youth groups organized shows on amateur stages, a strong theatrical culture already pervaded the region. Clergy and teachers were also involved, dealing effectively with an array of tasks, choices, and actions on the amateur stage. As organizers, they felt that being engaged in the current events of Hungarian society, and sometimes working as local journalists, could improve their access to materials and contacts. Selecting titles and working hard to make their choices locally popular, they articulated a set of values shared by their co-religionists, in particular reflecting Roman Catholicism in other spaces and times. Other plays blended faith with references to everyday life experiences and their meanings, but both types of plays were infused with religious codes of conduct and moral precepts upheld by the local elite. Not only did plays highlight less local specificity, but a preoccupation with the word appropriateness in the stage language, proper behavior, and artistic mastery appear pregnant in most of the plays in Roman Catholic communities. Rather than watching everyday life encounters, the audiences were exposed to a staunch Roman-Catholic identity, which, I argue, gave rise to religious entertainment, quite appealing to Hungarians believers.

Among organizers, the Roman Catholic Folk Societies stepped in to educate by way of amateur theater. They commanded respect through the presence of the local priest, who typically served as president and patronized extracurricular activities which presumably were to educate adults, children, and women participants. These societies harmonized religious imperatives with community values, thereby enabling priests and parishioners to share the assumption that they were involved together in adult self-education and the formation of the young generation.

³⁷⁰ Márta Bodó, *Iskola és Színház. Az Iskoladráma neveléstörténeti és pedagógiai szerepe* (Kolozsvár: Verbum, 2009), 174, 176, 177.

Another sign of genuine mass participation and involvement is the presence of artisans and schoolteachers as the most active among professionals who took an interest in theater in the Maros County, albeit not an overwhelming presence in the county, if compared with other Hungarian confessions. In Maros, however, they successfully blended religious values with entertainment, by promoting a localized vision of the play, one that was anchored in the past and tradition as reflected in *népszínmű* plays. Their events were not exclusively focused on the Roman Catholic world. As long as theater events engaged a Roman Catholic universe of meanings that highlighted reason, an emphasis on novelty and adaptation, and a respect for hierarchy and authority, then, organizers could even consider plays by Abraham Goldfaden, the father of Yiddish theater, and still remain within the bounds of the Roman Catholic universe.

Kolozsvár County

In Roman Catholic communities in Kolozsvár County, the priest was directly involved in organizing theatrical events.³⁷¹ He had often represented his community as president of the local *Erdélyi Római Katolikus Népszövetség* (The Roman Catholic Folk Society). The tandem priest and local folk society was uniform across the rural and urban centers, regardless of demographic ratios and regional variety, and area spread (either Kolozsvár city, Torda, Bánffyhunyard, or Szamosújvár). Roman Catholic youth groups also appeared very interested in amateur theater, but not the same

³⁷¹ The petitions signed and mailed by the Roman Catholic Priests for obtaining approval for theatrical events in their communities are located in DANIC București, Departamentul Artelor: for Bánffyhunyard, Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, , fila 23/Nov.23, 1929, for Szamosújvár, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, fila 307/Jun. 3, 1932, for Kolozsvár City, unidentified parish, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 85/Apr. 4, 1932, for Kolozsvár City, unidentified parish, Inv. 818, Dos. 7/1934, Vol. 4, fila 134/Oct. 5, 1934, for Kolozsvár City, unidentified parish, Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1934, Vol. 2, Fila 166/March 1, 1934, for Kolozsvár Szent József templom, Inv. 818, Dos. 44/1935, Vol. 2, Fila 50/Mar. 30, 1935, and Inv. 818, Dos.44/1935, Fila 259/Jul. 4, 1935, Inv. 818, Dos. 39/1935, Fila 231/Jul. 27, 1935 , for Aranyosegbergvy, Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1934, vol. 2, Fila 142/Febr. 3, 1934, for Katona, Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1934, Vol. 2, Fila 50/Mar. 3, 1934, for Jegenye, Inv. 819, Dos. 27/1937, Vol. 1, Fila 134/Jan. 24, 1934, for Kolozsvár Kolozsmonostor, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, fila 70/March 30, 1932, for Kisbács, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 541/Dec. 3, 1932, Inv. 818, Dos. 43/1935, Vol. 1, Fila 76/Jan. 28, 1935, and Inv. 818, Dos. 20/1935, Vol. 1, Fila 245/Nov. 21, 1935, for Tordatúr, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 396/Sept. 9, 1932, and Inv. 818, Dos. 43/1935, Vol. 1, Fila 163/Febr. 8, 1935, for Kőrösfeketető, Inv. 818, Dos. 10/1933, Fila 59/ Oct. 10, 1933, for Szamosujvár, Inv. 818, Dos. 39/1935, Fila 196/Mar. 25, 1935, and Inv. 818, Dso. 43/1935, Vol. 1, Fila 292/Mar. 13, 1935.

could be said about women's societies, choirs, schools, and artisans, who presented plays quite rarely.

Within and around Kolozsvár city, several Roman Catholic parishes were very active in putting on plays. The preferred date was before or on March 19, when Roman Catholics celebrated Saint Joseph, a date which had entered the Western Catholic calendar in 1621. However, priests who wanted to honor Saint Philomena (August 13) or Saint Theresa (October 1) by choosing plays about these two martyrs, submitted their petitions to authorities for approval of their events in the late spring, while others planned their shows in April and May, most likely for Easter.

The Franciscans' two branches were also broadly interested in amateur theater. According to Márta Bodó, the Observants and the Minorites opened up schools, the former in Csomlyó, and the latter in Kolozsvár (the first among Minorites were the Jesuits, and later the Jesuits were replaced by the Piarists). The Catholic school boards even opened a debate about the uses of theater as a communication tool.³⁷² The Franciscans had a gymnasium in Marosvásárhely and another in Csiksomlyó, and most likely theater performances shows were a current topic of debate.

In aspects of repertory, priests organized events with folk plays (*népszínmű*), a genre which proved immensely popular, but which could not dominate the repertories because religious plays competed for the parishioners' attention. Unlike the folk plays, the variety of religious theater was bewildering: biblical plays (*bibliai játék*), plays about sacramental secrets (*titok szentség színjáték*), morality plays (*moralitás*) or those featuring women saints (Szent Erzsébet, Szent Terez, Szent Lisio, or Szűz Mária). The equal preference for the nineteenth-century *népszínmű* writers and religious plays by several Transylvanian-born Roman Catholic priest-playwrights, Béla P. Jánossy (1883-1945) and Vilmos Bálint (1877-1949), is a clear contrast with the Reformed Hungarian

³⁷² Márta Bodó, "A két világháború közti erdélyi katolikus lapok iskolai színelőadásokra vonatkozó közléseinek vizsgálata," in Mária Botházi (ed.), A médiakutatás módszertani követelményei: média szakos doktori hallgatók konferenciája (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2007 május 11), 64-76.

communities living in the same county, whose repertory was overwhelmingly composed of folk plays. Youth groups also filled their repertories with folk plays (*népszínmű*), but also included quite a number of religious plays by several women playwrights: Mária Blaskó (1891-1956) a teacher and writer in Transylvania, and Irén Ruzsinszky. Blaskó's biography is quite interesting: she served as a teacher and leader of the Roman Catholic Girls' Sunlight Society, a branch of the Roman Catholic Young Man's Society (Katolikus Legényegylet) of Ozora (Tolna County in Hungary), well known for spearheading the amateur theater movement in this village in Hungary proper. Most likely her example encouraged emulation in historical Transylvania. In her village, as we can read from her reminiscences, the priest was always in charge of all events.

Adult youth groups showed an interest in the folktales by the Danish collector and author Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), but the bulk of their plays was taken from *Jóbarát, Irodalmi És Tudományos Folyóirat Az Ifjak Számára* (*Good Friend, Literary and Scientific Review for Young People*), a Piarist publication edited in Kolozsvár by József Rózsa from 1929 until 1937, and onward until 1940 as owner. He is well known in Szeged as a translator of *Jesuit stories* by Bernhard Duhr, a German Catholic writer who widely published about the Jesuit movement of Germany. This direction shows the Transylvanian Roman Catholics' ties with northern Europe.

The most significant influences came from internal developments. According to József Marton, the number of Roman Catholic newspapers increased fourfold after the First World War compared to the prewar period. They were mainly published in cities and towns in the most important urban centers of historical Transylvania, having a solid distribution across the region and outside of it and thus, a wide impact on its readership both Catholic and secular.³⁷³ Compared to

³⁷³ József Marton, "Katolikus Sajtó Erdélyben a Két Világháború Között", in Keresztény Szó, Katolikus Kulturális Havi, 5. Szám, 2009 Május.

other Hungarian denominations, namely the Reformed and the Unitarians, Roman Catholic priests were not only active clergy and teachers but also journalists. In small towns and villages such occupations among priests were rare.

In many neighborhoods of the Kolozsvár city, various Roman Catholic parishes put on plays by Béla Jánossy (1883-1945)³⁷⁴ and Vilmos Bálint (1877-1949). Their urban congregations and communities were known as the Saint Peter, the Remetea, the Saint Joseph, the Monostor, or the Franciscan Order, which were well known for their play frequency and theater avocation. One important aspect in judging the repertory and the motivations for putting on plays has to do with financial matters.

The source of foreign money to fund cultural activities in the cities of historical Transylvania preoccupied Romanian authorities. Hungarian historical churches (Roman Catholic, Reformed and Unitarian) received funding from Budapest, through the Literary Folk Society (Népies Irodalmi Társaság) to sustain a variety of cultural and economic establishments and initiatives. But whether the funds reached historical Transylvania is unknown, since this region competed for Hungary's fund distribution with the neighboring region of Királyhágó. Historical Transylvania, however, had more Hungarian institutions than any other region but Királyhágó had a Hungarian demographic majority. It is known that in Gyergyószentmiklós (Gheorgheni) a Roman Catholic Girls Institute (Római Katolikus Leánynevelő Intézet) was erected with funds from Budapest, but, by the mid-1920s, the amounts from Budapest had dwindled significantly.³⁷⁵ A lack of funds left many communities grappling with financial needs on their own, and they did not hesitate to organize a fervent cultural life in and around Kolozsvár to collect money.

³⁷⁴ Béla P. Jánossy, "Drámai előadások a kolozsvári magyar színházban," in Az Erdélyi Irodalmi Szemle. 1:9-10 (1924. Nov.-Dec.) 357-359.

³⁷⁵ Nándor Bárdi, Otthon és haza. Tanulmányok a romániai magyar kisebbség történetéről (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia), 231.

Csík County

In Csík County, amateur theater was very popular with various Roman Catholic societies: the devotional, altar societies (Oltáregyesület), Franciscan orders (Ferencrend), societies of social mission (Missziós Egyesületek), Marianne Congregations (Mária Kongregációk), and the Catholic Action (Actio Catholica).

In emulation of a similar movement occurring in Western Europe and Hungary since the nineteenth century, the move to found associations started at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the bishop Majláth's pastoral letter addressed to all communities encouraging Roman Catholic parishioners to form such structures with a stable ward office. They targeted students of different ages and social background. Also, the bishop's circular letters of 1910 contained urgings for founding care homes for elderly women.³⁷⁶ The women's societies were much less active in putting on plays compared to Reformed women's societies, but, as a whole, these societies provided a solid foundation to the religious life in each community. After the First World War, they renewed their charters in a modified form to comply with the requirements of the Romanian state. All groups in this county left numerous records about their strong interest in theatrical activities. The local Roman Catholic female teachers met in Kolozsvár in August 1926 and founded the Union of Roman Catholic Women's Societies (Romániai Katolikus Nőszövetség). They meant to bring together all societies that engaged in social work and religious education and under its leadership to promote a more active local involvement among the Roman Catholic women in the cottage industry and the distribution of the press.³⁷⁷ Overall, these societies' theatrical activity suggests that they operated independently, at least in cultural matters.

³⁷⁶ Zsolt Tamási, "Egyesületi Élet És Katolikus" in *Keresztény Szó, Katolikus Kulturális Havi*lap, XXI évfolyam, 8. Szám, 2010 Augusztus.

³⁷⁷ Osvát Kálmán, *Erdélyi Lexikon* (Oradea: Szabadsajtó Könyv- és Lapkiadó Rt, 1928), 139 or in István Diós, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* (Budapest: Szt. István Társ.), 88.

Led either by men like András Csedő or women-presidents like the wife of Dr. Beniamin Nagy in Csíkszereda or Mrs. Gyula Bartha, altar societies began to put on plays mainly in the 1930s.³⁷⁸ Their duties and beliefs, which informed their religious work, also shaped their cultural activities. The ceremony of altar sacrality centered on the blessing of the Eucharist on the altar table erected on the tombs of Christian martyrs was the responsibility of community members, mainly Roman Catholic women of a certain social standing in the village or town. Such an example is Mrs. Beniamin Nagy, the president of the Altar Society of Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc), who put on a play by Adorjan Bonyi entitled *Egy Kis Senki* (A small nobody) for philanthropical reasons in December 1932.

What function did such societies serve in the parishes and what made it necessary to complement their work with amateur theater performances? The altar can be solid or mobile, and its purpose is exclusively religious. The iconostasis (*szentélyrekesztő*), which separates the altar from the sanctuary, is always reserved for the clergy and required constant care, for it was decorated with icons. Typically, there were rules governing the position and type of icons on the iconostasis, and one tier usually depicted local saints. Being a space that contains God's teachings, the altar requires constant prayer and care, which community members of the Altar Society performed as a daily duty. Other duties included their prayers for the altar's blessing and the collecting of donations. The altar's power of purification by human touch and kiss of those who attend church services enhance the importance of this space. Those who worship the altar enter into direct contact with God and receive His special protection. the official purpose of plays, if any, could have been just philanthropy, which seemed to have formed a special preoccupation of the Altar Society's

³⁷⁸ DANIC, București, Departamentul Artelor, for Csíkszereda: Inv. 818, Dos. 7/1934, vol. 4, Fila 331/27 Nov.1934; Inv. 818, Dos. 21/1935, Vol. 2, Fila 14/28 Nov. 1935; for Csíkszentmárton: Inv. 818, Dos. 7/1934, Vol. 4, Fila 280/2 Nov. 1934; and Inv. 818, Dos. 20/1935, Vol. I, Fila 250/20 Febr.1935; for Zsögöd: Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1934, Vol. 2, Fila 249, 9 Mar. 1934.

members.³⁷⁹ In Roman Catholicism, the altar's attributes are embodied in three saints: András (Andrew the Apostle), Avellinói Szent András, Szent István vértanú (Saint Steven), and Szent Zakariás (Saint Zachary). Given their religious duty, one must understand the interest of the Altar Society's members in theater as an extension of promoting faith-related activities that could enhance the Church's message, and in particular, the image and teachings of saints.

Table 4. Record of performances for *Egy kis senki* by Adorjan Bonyi

Csikszereda	Csík	December 16, 1932
Gyergyoalfalu	Csík	October 27, 1933
Alsojara	Csík	November 11, 1933
Torda	Kolozsvár	November 25, 1933
Csikszentmarton	Csík	August 26, 1934
Szamosujvar	Csík	August 26, 1934
Abrudbánya	Guylafehérvár	November 6, 1934

An analysis of the repertory of Roman Catholic communities brings out intriguing choices. When Adorján Bónyi published his *Egy Kis Senki* in 1932, the genre of *szórakoztató* (entertaining) literature, to which he greatly contributed, reflected the newest bourgeois tastes. He was a native of the Partium region, in Bihar County, but took his degree in Law in Kolozsvár. One reason why Bónyi was preferred by Roman Catholic communities was their efforts to fulfill Bishop Majláth's urgings to bring together the two provinces inhabited by Hungarians, historical Transylvania and the Partium, through intense cultural exchanges and cooperation. Another plausible reason is the plot of the play, which argues that rich people need to embrace poverty like Katinka, the daughter of a wealthy financier, Monti, a perspective fitting in with Roman Catholic expectations. As Miklós

³⁷⁹ DANIC, Dep. Arte, for Csikszereda, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 60/23 March. 1932.

Szabolcsi argues, the entertainment drama was not far from the nationalist-conservative literature promoted officially by the Academy of Sciences in Budapest and the Kisfaludy and Petőfi Societies.³⁸⁰ The social messages in these plays addressed modern needs and concerns specific to cities. If for Budapest audiences, stage props mattered a great deal for the success of the play,³⁸¹ in provincial towns like Csikszereda, where elaborate stage materials were far from adequate, religious messages tended to matter more than props in persuading the audience of the usefulness of theater playing.

In 1934, Roman Catholics parishioners within the Oltáregylet of Csikszéntmárton (Sânmartin) performed in *Szent Erzsébet*,³⁸² a play by Robert P. Weissenhoffer (1843-1900). As a native of Lower Austria, Weissenhoffer wrote another historical play, *Andreas Hofer, Volkschauspiel in Acht Abteilungen*, the Tyrolean pro-Austrian innkeeper who became a hero for fighting against the French.³⁸³ The Saint known in Hungary as *Árpád-házi Szent Erzsébet*, (1207-1231) was a Hungarian princess who married a German prince and lived in Thuringia where she performed her most venerated deeds of charity. Widowed after four years, she became a nun and took vows of celibacy. Her image, however, was one of a laywoman who was consecrated as a Franciscan. In Hungary, the Catholic Church Charity Day honoring *Árpád-házi Szent Erzsébet* was November 25, so amateurs in Csikszéntmárton performed Weissenhoffer's play exactly on this date in 1934.

Due to the popularity of her martyrdom, many playwrights wrote plays about Saint Elisabeth. These were published in important Catholic centers in the German-speaking world like Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, and Linz (Austria). Some of them were enacted by Hungarian Roman

³⁸⁰ Miklós Szabolcsi, *A Magyar Irodalom Története 1919-től Napjainkig*, Vol. VI (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966) 166, 160.

³⁸¹ Tamás Bécsy, *Magyar Drámákról 1920-as, 1930-as Évek* (Budapest: Dialóg Campus Kiadó, 2003) 11, 50.

³⁸² Robert P. Weissenhoffer, *Die Heilige Elisabeth von Thüringen, Schauspiel in Prosa* (Linz: A. D., 1876).

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, *Andras Hofer, Volkschauspiel in Acht Abteilungen* (Wien, H. Kirsch: 1893).

Catholics from Transylvania. The fact that a Catholic Saint connected audiences in Germany, Austria, and Transylvania reinforced the sense of belonging to the Western Christian world.

Robert Weißenhofer's play *Die Heilige Elisabeth von Thüringen* was performed in Hungarian translation in Csíkszentmárton.³⁸⁴ According to the original German text, the play starts with the efforts of the stepmother, Sophie, to take over the throne rightfully inherited by Elisabeth. Sophie perceived her as a fool who wasted the castle's resources on charity and enjoyed mingling with the riffraff, instead of being concerned with the future. Elisabeth trusted God and God trusted her³⁸⁵ and she took care of the poor living around her castle by giving them clothing. She showed deep concern for the sick families in which a sick husband could not work and support his dependents and was in desperate need for money to see a doctor. She also cared for deaf farmers. Her religious deeds appear even more pious and righteous when considering the political maneuvering of her stepmother to grab the crown for herself by corrupting the army regiments of the castle. Elisabeth's relations with her wards was one of submission, an honest, hierarchical rapport, in stark contrast with Sophie's relations with her helpers, who were seeking renown and riches so they could become masters themselves. The city bailiff who works on her behalf is such a character: "Man wird sein eig'ner Herr..."³⁸⁶

Especially at night, Elizabeth enjoys the beauty of nature, and feels nostalgia for her homeland. Adding to her misery is the love she feels for her missing husband and the time they spent together in prayer in the castle chapel, with God whispering to them blessings and joys. But in the play, God and all the poor people in her lands give her consolation to alleviate her loneliness and despair. Her only wish is to "endure, suffer, and love God in silence."³⁸⁷ Upon hearing that her

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, *Die Heilige Elisabeth von Thüringen* (Linz, 1922).

³⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 11.

³⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, 21.

³⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 36.

husband had been killed on the battlefield, she found refuge in the Virgin Mary's picture, which gave her consolation and joy.³⁸⁸

Commoners, however, decided the fate of the realm by refusing to gather at the castle and give their seal of approval to Sophie as the new Landgräfin von Thüringen. With her family castle in flames Sophie was called to trial by the Empress herself to give account for falsifying state documents in order to usurp Elizabeth's title. The verdict was guilty, but the sentence was one of forgiveness, giving Sophie a chance to redeem herself. The aspect of intercession, so prevalent in the Catholic thought, appears often in this play.

Compared to folk societies and oltár societies, the missió societies appeared less active in promoting amateur theater.³⁸⁹ In Ditró, Csikszentsimion, Csikszereda, or Székelyudvarhely the mission societies cooperated with the local Catholic girls' or the local altar societies in order to organize a theatrical event. They found the one-act plays by contemporary Hungarian playwrights quite appealing. Thus, they introduced in their repertoires György Szintes, Miklós László, István Agh, and János Arany, who were all successful in Budapest theaters.

Of all the locations in Csík County, the village of Csiksomlyó of less than a thousand of inhabitants recorded the theatrical activities of numerous Catholic organizations: the Franciscan Monastery, the folk society, a group of Catholic youth, the Society of the "Day of the Catholic Girl", as well as the Catholic school. These events seemed quite unlike those in other villages, where only one organization or two were active. Csiksomlyó represents the whole Catholic world of organizations in a nutshell, and the repertoires selected in this village representative of the ideals trends specific to each group: the young people preferred *A Bokros Uram* (Mr. Bokros) by Erzsebet Ferenczy Illyés, the Franciscans enacted one of Calderon de la Barca's plays in Novák János's

³⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 41.

³⁸⁹ *DANIC*, Dep. Arte, for *Ditró*: Inv. 817, Dos. 61/1931, Fila 142/17 May 1931, for *Csikszentsimion*: Inv. 818, Dos. 4/1934, Fila 105/16 Mar.1934, for *Székelyudvarhely*, Inv. 818, Dos. 44/1935, Fila 142, 8 Apr. 1935.

translation, *A Szentmise titkai* (The Secret of the Sacrament), while the Folk Society remained attached to the *népszínmű* genre, putting on *A Paraszt Kisasszony* (Peasant Maiden) by Árpád Berczik.

Most Roman Catholic priests preferred nineteenth-century *népszínmű* writers from Hungary proper, being popular in all parts of Csík County, while a few selected religious plays in Szépvíz, *Terezia Nőver* (Sister Tereza) by Béla Jánossy and *Az árva karácsonya, karácsonyi színmű* (The Christmas of the Orphan) by Imre Havadtó; in Csíkcsicsó, *Megkerült gyermek, karácsonyi pasztorjáték* (The Children asked) by János Szabó; in Csíksomlyó, *A Szentmise Titkai* by Calderon dela Barca, and in Csíkszentsimion, *Az Abbé, misztériumdráma* (the Abbot) by Paul Anthelme. Enacted by the troupe of the Chamber Theater of Budapest, Anthelme’s play was reviewed in *Napkelet* by a foremost literary critic and member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Tivadar Redey (1885-1953), who analyzed it as a mystery drama highlighting the law of conscience rather than religious mysticism.³⁹⁰

Table 5. Record of performances for *Terezia Nőver* by Béla P.Jánossy.

Zabola	Háromszék	April 27, 1930
Szépvíz	Csik	1932
Kolozsvár	Kolozsvár	March 2, 1934
Kolozsvár	Kolozsvár	March 26, 1934
Kolozsvár	Kolozsvár	March 1, 1934
Nyárádszereda	Maros	March 14, 1934
Marosludas	Maros	March 22, 1935

³⁹⁰ “Az Abbé - Paul Anthelme színműve a Kamaraszínházban” in *Napkelet*, 1934, 616-618.

Háromszék County

Unlike Csík County, Háromszék's devotional and social missions and religious orders were much less active in putting on plays, except in very isolated cases in two small towns where the Jesus' Heart Society (Jézus Szíve Gyermekvédelmi) enlisted the help of Roman Catholic women's societies to put on plays. Folk societies, priests, and schoolteachers put on plays on a regular basis. Above all, priests took the lead in organizing theatrical events and even collaborated among themselves across villages, by informing each other about the plays they were planning to show. For example, Father János Újlaky of Zábola informed the authorities that *Az Abbé* by Paul Anthelme was very popular in other villages, like Nyújtód and Kézdivásárhely, and it could help the community by fundraising for a new church bell.³⁹¹

Table 6. Record of performances *Az Abbé* by Paul Anthelme (cont.)

Vajdahunyad	Vajdahunyad	December 3, 1934
Csík-szentdomokos	Csík	March 28, 1935
Gyergyó-szentmiklós	Csík	March 7, 1935
Csík-szereda	Csík	December 3, 1934
Nyáradremete	Maros	March 17, 1935
Regen	Maros	December 6, 1934
Tővis	Gyulafehérvár	March 15, 1935
Zábola	Háromszék	May 15, 1935
Nyújtód	Háromszék	March 27, 1935
Kézdiszentlelek	Háromszék	March 14, 1935
Szamosújvár	Kolozsvár	May 25, 1935

³⁹¹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Artelor, Inv. 818, Dos. 44/1935, vol. II, Fila 246/ 15 May 1935.

Table 6. (con't)

Szamosújvár	Kolozsvár	March 13, 1935
-------------	-----------	----------------

Father Géza Sólyom of Gelence shepherded the local Roman Catholic community through difficult times in the late 1890s, when Hungarian parishioners around Mikóújfalú, tempted by lower church dues, left their church and joined the Romanian Greek Catholic communities. Another trying moment was during the First World War and the postwar years, when Father Sólyom kept his parish together by focusing on building a strong cultural life with yearly theatrical representations performed by villagers. His name remains associated with the building of a rectory in Gelence where church officials had accommodations when transferred from one church to another.

Father Béla Oláh of Kézdiszentlélek also found plays useful for cultural engagements. He revived an older tradition of the village, that of performing plays outdoors in the so-called “theater on the hill” (*havasi színjáték*), “an open-air theater on the hill near the village... with bright electric lights everywhere.”³⁹² Besides the priest, the cantor and the villagers also contributed to the success of the play, rehearsing it for over two months. Antal Szakács was the cantor in charge of the logistics and the actual performance. He was a 1923 graduate of the Kolozsvár public school of cantors, a former Hungarian institution, which came to be endorsed by Romanian authorities after Transylvania joined Greater Romania.³⁹³

In Futásfalva, Gyula Páll served as Roman Catholic priest for twenty-five years and used amateur theater to cater to his parishioners’ “needs of the soul.”³⁹⁴ In his petition, approved by the Department of Arts in Bucharest, he specified that the purpose of the event he proposed was to help

³⁹² János Borcsa (ed.), *Kézdiszentléleki Breviárum* (Kézdivásárhely: Ambrozia, 2009), 283.

³⁹³ Borcsa (ed.), 288.

³⁹⁴ “Meghívó Futásfalvára” in *Vásárnap Katolikus Hetilap* (2001).

with the church restoration. He saw Ede Szigligeti's play, *A Czigány*, as a good choice for the religious needs of his parishioners.

Evidence suggests that priests actually intended to put on plays in the neighboring villages besides their own. When the priest of Bereck requested approval for Vilmos Bálint's play *A Dúsgazdag* (Opulence) to be performed in November 1932, he mentioned a string of other villages where the same play was soon to be put on by the very same organizers of Bereck. All situated in the north-western region of the county in the vicinity of Kézdivásárhely, the villages of Esztelnek, Ozsdola, Nyujtód, Kézdialmas, and Kézdimartonos had requested approvals of plays in the past (thus, I did not include them in the map created for this county and confession). The priest explained the reason for choosing theater: during winter the young population of the village was unemployed. In the long term, he very much hoped that the villagers of Bereck would build a local cultural house.³⁹⁵ As touring for amateurs was not allowed under the Law of Theaters, this case is relevant for showing how the minorities unknowingly pushed the limits of the law if, nevertheless, they went on tour. Since Romanian officials did not press for further investigations, I interpret it as a sign of leniency that the authorities showed the organizers and their spiritual leader, considering favorably the moral purposes of the priest who took this initiative in order to increase youth education in his village and those nearby.

The parish priest of Csíkszentmárton, Father Vilmos Bálint, was one of the dozen Hungarian intellectuals associated with the initiative known as the Hungarian People Group ("Magyar Nép"), which was dedicated to increasing the dissemination of knowledge and science in an accessible language among all Hungarians. *A Dúsgazdag* (Opulence) was one of the most popular plays in Háromszék County being published in the series of the "Magyar Nép." Father Bálint enjoyed a remarkable reputation among other intellectuals being seen as highly educated and skilled in verse

and prose writing and music. Travelers who passed through the Székelyföld,³⁹⁶ or the artists, ethnographers, archeologists, and writers whom he sheltered in his parish, all reminisced about him and his time.³⁹⁷ His play *A Dúsgazdag* (Opulence) was not widely popular, as it was selected by Roman Catholic amateurs in only two villages, in Kisbács (Kolozsvár)³⁹⁸ and Bereck at the request of the local priests, most likely priests who knew Father Bálint from the synod meetings. Surprisingly, the Reformed communities also selected *Dúsgazdag* in Maros County, Kisfűlpös, and Körvélyfája.

The play is an old morality story, which featured allegorical male characters symbolizing three sins: Voluptuousness, Material Opulence, and Inebriation. Other characters were their wives, servants, and other biblical characters like Lazar, Abraham, and Satan, but also angels, old men, and musicians. *A Dúsgazdag* takes place both on earth and in paradise, while it ends in hell. Written in a religious poetic style, the play is preceded by two introductions, one by the series' editor and the other by the author, in which he explains his motivations to write such a play for theater amateurs. The play starts with a feast attended by Voluptuousness and Inebriation and their wives who have just driven away a starving Lazar from their food table. The second act describes a wedding and a birthday party as a background for further negative qualities, like conceit, arrogance and harassment of servants for food that went missing. A powerful imagistic contrast emerges between the sinners' attachment to the sweet life and comfort on the one hand and Lazar's religiosity and dialogue with God, on the other. When he faints angels come to take him, but the servants, incurring their master's wrath, revive him. The play written by Bálint in standard Hungarian makes a stark contrast with the nineteenth-century *népszínmű* which appealed to amateurs mainly because it was written in the native dialect of the playwright.

³⁹⁵ DANIC Bucuresti, Fond Dep.Artelor, Inv. 817, Dos.12/1932, Fila 450/4 Nov. 1932.

³⁹⁶ Valéria Gergely Zólyomi. "Találkozásom Sík Sándorral." in Vasárnapi Katolikus. 1 Jan. 2001.

³⁹⁷ Idem, *Sík Sándor székelyföldi utazásai*. Új Ember, 2000. szeptember 17, LVI. évf. 38. (2721).

A Dúsgazdag had a limited appeal to villagers, despite its religious and moral content and the reputation of its author. This proves that amateurs only selectively accepted professional advice from playwrights, even if these were priests. When organizing an event, amateurs were independent in their choices and maybe even distrustful of intellectual-pastors who suggested their own titles in a calculated attempt to standardize repertoires.

Schoolteachers also contributed to local cultural revivals through play performances. Typically, schools hosted cultural events and offered their premises for rehearsals,³⁹⁹ although other public buildings were available in the village: church buildings, water works buildings (the water-tower building), or warm bathhouses, children's nurseries, railway stations, and Catholic rectory buildings adjoining the local school. At different times, all served as locations for amateur theater.

Periodically, István Péterffy, a schoolteacher in the village of Nyújtód, alternated between folk plays and religious plays from 1933 and through 1937. Besides the very popular *A Bor* (The Wine) by Geza Gardonyi and Paul Anthelme's play *Az Abbé* (The Abbot), which interested schoolteachers like Péterffy, another folk play, *Nótás Kata* (The Singing Kata, 1879) by Vilmos Győry (1838-1885), appears frequently in schoolteachers' repertoires. Győry Vilmos, a Reformed pastor and playwright, appealed to Roman Catholic organizers and an audience probably in his position as a respectable member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He was widely acknowledged for founding of the Hungarian juvenile literature and for his impressive work of translation from English, French, and Swedish literature.

In Kezdiszentkereszt, literacy was quite high. Ever since the beginning of the century, this village had had two choirs whose repertory was predominantly comprised of folk and religious

³⁹⁸ DANIC București, Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 20/1935, Vol. I, Fila 245/21 Nov. 1935.

songs. But by the mid-1930s, financial burdens affected the church, and the fund for church repairs had to be increased with revenue from charging theatergoers for admission tickets.⁴⁰⁰ So, its choir leader, Ferenc Király, took charge of organizing the amateurs and scheduled with the villagers *Amit az erdő mesél*, (The story this forest tells) by István Géczy.

The Háromszék County witnessed a vivid theatrical activity organized by priests, schoolteachers, and choir leaders. Centralization and hierarchy specific to the Roman Catholic Church tended to be less stringent, as many categories of organizers felt unobstructed in their choices of plays, timing, and location. Local interests prevailed, while literary tastes were equally divided between religious and folk plays.

Maros County

Among the Roman Catholics of the Maros County, we find again local priests participating in fundraising efforts for the community and activities for increasing literacy. Here, the parishioners' self-confidence in their abilities was quite high. In a cluster of villages like Szentharómság, Nyárádmagyarós, Abafája, and Görgenyszentimre, parishioners presented classic folk plays: *A Bor* by Géza Gardonyi, *A Czigány* by Ede Szigligeti, *A Kődmönke* by József Péczely, and *Ámit az erdő mesél* by István Géczy.

Born in Bükkábrányi, a village comprised of the overwhelmingly Catholic Alsóábrányi – and a Reformed Felsőábrányi in north-eastern Hungary close to the Slovak border at the intersection of mountains and plains, Géczy was one of the most prolific and popular playwrights among Hungarian amateurs of all faiths. In *Ámit az erdő mesél*, he portrayed the traditional world of lime-burners in the Csóko Valley in the North-Eastern Hungary, where inhabitants were known as

³⁹⁹ Orbán, Balázs, *A Székelyföld leírása történelmi, régészeti, természetrajzi s népismereti szempontból* (Illyés Elemér: 1981); Egyed, Ákos, *Falu, város, civilizáció: fejezetek Erdély gazdaság- és társadalomtörténetéből: 1848-1914* (Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 2002).

⁴⁰⁰ DANIC, București, Fond Departamentul Artelor, Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1934, Vvol.2, Fila 4/ 10 Dec. 1935.

Palots. The play starts with the Palots' church burning down to the consternation of all villagers. Their drudgery in the mountains was to produce lime to be used for making building mortar for church and cathedral constructions. Heating chalk in a kiln was not only risky for causing blindness and severe dizziness, but explosion and fire dangers turned this job into one of the most dangerous occupations of men in the far-off mountainous regions like Bélapátfalva. Workers' houses were also at risk of catching fire, like the house of János Basa. In his attempts to get help and the money necessary to rebuild it, he tried to address different officials: the judge, the priest, and the Jewish leaseholder.⁴⁰¹

Love episodes between young women like Kató and different male characters of various social positions (Sütő, the forest ranger; Dóka, the lime-burner) are laced with passion and religious fervor. The love feelings that were unreturned were alleviated by prayer and were understood as the result of God's will.⁴⁰² Like most of the other *népszínmű* plays, characters of all age ranges mix comfortably and chat about the new and the old ways, as the young and the elderly were bound by essential virtues and moral expectations and less by variations of outward forms in entertainment or daily routines. Whether the suitor for Kató's hand is an old-fashioned hunter or a wrong-doer like a poacher mattered a good deal in the eyes of her father.⁴⁰³ The dislike of the master's men runs high because they are using the forest for hunting and intrude upon the commoners' rights to use the woods for food and houses.⁴⁰⁴ Bacsó could not keep secret from his daughter about how her mother died because revealing how she sinned with another man, a seducer in fancy urban clothes who took advantage of the fact that Bacsó was away for work in the Czech lands, brings shame

⁴⁰¹István Géczy, *Ámit az erdő mése*l (Budapest: Bródy, 1923), 16.

⁴⁰²Ibidem, 24.

⁴⁰³Ibid., 36.

⁴⁰⁴Ibid., 37.

upon both her parents.⁴⁰⁵ The father also believed that a weak and credulous daughter like Kató inherited traits of weakness from her mother and, thereby, perpetuates sin.

Viewers of such a play could spot elements of soap-opera in these rough theatrical attempts meant to entertain through numerous twists and turns. Dramatic tensions built up as the love feelings between Kató and Sütő were being revealed right in front of her father, who disapproved of his daughter's choice. Parental graves became places of prayer where the young people promised lifelong love to their chosen one, a family value endorsed by society and custom.⁴⁰⁶

Table 7 Record of performances for *Amit az erdő mészél* by István Géczy

Csíkcsicsó	Csík	November 29, 1932
Csíkcsicsó	Csík	December 26, 1932
Szentháromság	Maros	January 3, 1934
Karcfalva	Csík	March 5, 1934
Kézdiszentkereszt	Háromszék	December 10, 1935

One might think that folk plays (*népszínmű*) appealed to theater organizers who saw in this genre and a play like *A Czigány* by Ede Szigligeti a means of making a strong statement as Hungarians. But generally, events occurred separately for Catholics and Protestants. Since both groups celebrated Easter often on the same day, their theatrical events overlapped. No evidence was found to demonstrate that Hungarians of different faiths collaborated in putting on plays for

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 47.

strengthening ethnic solidarity above confession. The coincidence of celebrating Easter at the same time made possible concurrent events, but not to promote ethnic solidarity above confession.⁴⁰⁷

In one single instance, religious women's groups representing the three faiths (Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Unitarian) agreed to organize a theatrical event in Segesvár. Represented by a local lawyer, Zsigmond György, they agreed to submit a petition announcing their intent to put on plays together. In their case, it was not a clergyman who endorsed the petition, but a lawyer. They chose not *népszínmű* but one-act plays by the most successful playwrights in the movie industry: Lajos Zilahy (1891-1974) with his play *Hazajáró lélek* (Home-returning Souls) János Vaszary with the play *Adóhivatal* (The Tax Office), and Rezső Török (1895-1966) with his play *Magdaléna*. These three contemporaries, Jewish and philo-Jewish gentiles, joined a large movie diaspora of Hungarian-born writers in the United States. After the Second World War they crossed the Atlantic where they continued to write novels, plays, and movie scripts. By organizing a common cultural enterprise like this one for December 1934, in the city's main concert hall, these three women presidents sent an ethnic rather than a religious message. They hoped to avoid the risk of offending the religious tenets of their co-organizers thus, leaving out religion allowed these three women presidents to enable the audience relate to the secular and ethnically Hungarian content. Sensing a public statement of ethnic solidarity, the Romanian authorities, nonetheless approved the request with the requirement to exclude military uniforms from the costumes.

The county seat at Marosvásárhely was quite dynamic in amateur theater through diverse groups of organizers with heterogenous theatrical tastes. One such group was the Roman Catholic Franciscan Monastery where sisters and friars exhibited a curious blend of play repertoires. Aside from Kálmán Mikszáth's *A Szelistyei Asszonyok* (The Women from Săliște) the Franciscans also scheduled in the same year, 1930, the best known play by Abraham Goldfaden (1840-1908),

⁴⁰⁷ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Artelor, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 57/22 March 1932.

Shulamith, published in 1880.⁴⁰⁸ Later on in 1935 sisters and friars requested authorization to put on *Bob Herceg* (Prince Bob) by Ferenc Martos (1875-1938) and Károlyi Bakonyi (1873-1926).

Roman Catholic schoolteachers also oriented themselves toward foreign choices like Molière's *A Bot-Csinálta Doktor* (The Mock-Doctor). Such works had appealed to Reformed Hungarians much earlier, in particular to members of the Philological Society of Kolozsvár in the eighteenth century and theological students in Nagyenyed at the turn of the century. Foreign choices like Molière seemed a constant fixture in the artistic endeavors of the students enrolled in learning institutions both Roman Catholic and Reformed. But unlike the prewar period when Molière's classics captured the imagination of students, in the 1930s it interested schoolteachers, too, Sganarel, a fake doctor but in reality a faggot-maker (skilled at bundling sticks together to be used for kindling fire) is taken to cure Lucinde from "dumbness" or her refusal to speak. Her "illness" appears to be a pretext to have it her way, that is, to be allowed to marry her poor but honest lover, Leander.

The topic of marriage couched in local dialect gives much briskness to the play. Sganarel held a lengthy discourse on the causes of Lucinde's illness, pondering the human greed embodied in the material calculations of marriages by parental arrangements. The nurse, Jacqueline, held opposite views, saying "in marriage, contentment is beyond riches."⁴⁰⁹ Sganarel's explanation of illness as "the acrimony of the humors engendered in the concavity of the diaphragm"⁴¹⁰ is an irony aimed at the jargon of the medical profession and its money-driven, "mercenary" character. As cheap as one could get, the most effective remedy for Lucinde's dumbness is the very traditional bread soaked in wine and widely known as a tactic for loosening tongues.

⁴⁰⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Artelor, Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, Fila 70, 71/1930.

⁴⁰⁹ F.C. Green (ed.) *Molière's Comedies*, Vol. 1 (London J.M. Dent & Sons (London: 1956), 409.

⁴¹⁰ F.C. Green (ed.), *Molière's Comedies*, 415.

How an audience in a village in Maros received the principle of “taking people for what they are not” was hard to predict. The play’s message is a negative one against those who attempt to play with people’s identity, which to some appears as a comedy device, but to others, including Sganarel, came out as an offensive and dangerous game. In his own words, “that puts me in a passion,” Sganarel is honestly shocked especially because it involves violent means of persuasion (“they made me a doctor by violence.”)⁴¹¹ An even more subtle criticism is embedded in the play’s disparagement of the so-called learned men who are using sophisticated words to hide their shortcomings. A derision of habits appears even worse than an adorned discourse. As with other *népszínmű* plays or dramas, the *Mock Doctor* remains the quintessential rendition of family life and love stories in the rural world.

Artisans and especially apprentices in Marosvásárhely and Galocaspaták preferred Ferenc Herczeg (1863-1954). He was a magyarized Swabian born in Serbia and active in Hungarian life as the president of the Hungarian Revisionist League. His play *A Gyurkovics-lányok* (The Gyurkovics Girls) was published in 1893 as a novel, then as a play in 1922. It is considered a manifesto for displaying the Hungarians’ resentful attitude toward the postwar border changes; however, the play is very much a colorful rendition of the nineteenth-century Hungarian world written in a beautiful and humoristic style. This play shows that nostalgia for an idyllic past and concern for traditions lost and customs denigrated by urban mentalities prevailed over political objectives when groups selected and put on plays. Romanian authorities considered such events important from a religious perspective and for the well-being of a rural community. Thus, they gave their seal of approval for what the play had to communicate in terms of religious and historical messages.

In this county, priests organized theatrical events in their village by following a sort of model of cultural ventures. They relied on neighboring villages for small tours and shared news

⁴¹¹ F.C. Green, 418, 419.

about other shows and their organizers. Marosludas was particularly well positioned as a Roman Catholic center between two county seats, Gyulafehérvár and Marosvásárhely, thus, for the Marosludas villagers Gyulafehérvár provided religious guidance. In cultural matters, Marosludas remained an active player in amateur theater, choosing freely its repertoire.

Vajdahunyd County

Of all the counties in our region only in Vajdahunyd County did the Romanian authorities express particular concerns about theater initiatives organized there. Although textual innuendos and stage arrangements could tempt amateurs to give a political and irredentist edge, such situations were rare or confined only to a certain area. Romanian officials never doubted the credibility of Roman Catholic priests, parishioners, and local groups and their devotion to religion. To allow them to put on plays for education, entertainment, or fundraising purposes, Romanian officials resorted to a series of strategies to minimize attempts at using religious events for political purposes: they required stamps and authentication proofs from county and rural/urban officials in order to confirm the group's presence in the specified location and the group's morality; they restricted the use of uniforms that reminded one of the Austro-Hungarian army or the medieval Hungarian Hussars; and they required the use of play scripts approved by the Direction of Theaters and Cinema Halls of Bucharest. Even when clear guidelines stipulated these restrictions and authorities verified carefully the organizers, nevertheless, in Hunyd amateurs put on operettas that were famous for their irredentist content (*Grofné Maritza* or *A Csárdáskirálynő* by Imre Kálmán)⁴¹²

An interesting case about Vajdahunyd is the group known as the Bukovina Székely Csángós. They were newcomers and hoped to integrate into the Roman Catholic community by highlighting a common Hungarian heritage, an ethnic common ground. Being refugees and

experiencing relocation was compounded by their improper designation as Csángó which required a double act of integration and even self-renunciation.⁴¹³ The csángós of Vajdahunyad envisioned amateur theater as a source of integration into the cultural life of their multiethnic town.⁴¹⁴ Their repertory gives a clear indication of how the csángós perceived *népszínmű* plays as valuable repositories of national traditions: *A Piros Bugyelláris* (The Red Purse) by Ferenc Csepreghy and mystery plays such as *Az Abbé, misztériumdráma* (The Abbot, a mystery drama) by Paul Anthelme, allowed amateurs to channel Roman Catholic religiosity towards ethnic unity and solidarity.

Another interesting aspect of theater activity in this county is the presence and involvement of Roman Catholic women societies in putting on plays. Young women in Déva put on Jenő Rákosi's *A bolond: népies dalmű* (The Dumb, adapted from Rákosi's novel, *A legnagyobb bolond*, The Greatest Dumb), while in Lupény they co-signed their petition with the local priest, asking to be given a permit to put on *Három Sárkány* (The Three Dragons) by Sándor Hunyadi (1890-1942). These plays were occasions for parishioner volunteers to highlight the importance of fulfillment in one's professional life coupled with the satisfaction of seeing Hungarian ethnicity thriving in the public sphere. For a journalist, writer, and member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences like Rákosi, ethnicity and nation took precedence over faith.

The slight presence of priests in the amateur movement of this county reflects the lack of emphasis on religion and faith and a rather strong stress on ethnicity.

⁴¹² DANIC, București, Fond Dep. Artelor, in Egerpatak: Inv. 818, Dos. 10/1933, Fila 107/3 Nov.1933, and Dos. 44/1935, Vol. 2, Fila 33/1 Apr.1935.

⁴¹³ Részletezés. A Közgylés A Mult 1898.évi közgyűlésjegyzőkönyve. 52.

⁴¹⁴ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Artelor, in Vajdahunyad City, Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1934, Vol. 2, Fila 33/30 Jan. 1934, and Inv. 818, Dos. 6/1934, Vol. 3, Fila 91/3 Dec.1934.

The Repertory of Roman Catholic Communities

Given the variety of Roman Catholic societies at the village level and the widespread trend to embrace religious plays, it is hard to claim that ethnic feeling predominated in the planning of theater activities. Even folk plays, less numerous in the repertory of Roman-Catholic societies, still alluded to the ideals of a patriarchal and traditional world which hinted at spiritual aspects without voicing clear-cut Roman Catholic values.

Among the most popular *népszínmű* plays, *A Parasztkisasszony* by Arpád Berczik (1842-1919), was an unusual presence among so many *mysteriumdráma*. When the Folk Society of Csíksomlyó scheduled this play in 1937 for fundraising, the organizers hoped to highlight religious teachings. The play captures a funny but insightful dialogue among peasants about the frivolity of country girls imitating young women from the cities, “lying all day on the couch and eating chocolate.” The characters also described the snobbery of young men who pretended to be cavaliers like the ones from Pest wearing frock-coats (*kaputos*).

One young woman, Jolán, resists her mother’s matchmaking plans to marry a well-to-do heir. The son of a pig-dealer, he was a dandy interested in relocating to the city and cutting off ties to his village. By confiding her burdens to her wet-nurse, Jolán reminisces about her childhood years with nostalgia, and imagines herself staying in her village as a married woman to a peasant who would work the land from sunset to sundown. To her, a city like Pest is just a place abounding in dining halls (eateries), Gypsy music, residential arbours, but also drunken young men, galloping chariots, festive booths, honeyed pretzels, tulip-decorated lapels, and beggars.⁴¹⁵ Being a lord’s daughter (*uri kisasszony*), Jolán cannot marry the man she is in love with, Gergely, who is beneath her status.

⁴¹⁵ Arpád Berczik, *A Parasztkisasszony* (Budapest: 1885), 10.

While Gergely was aware of this difference in status as well, the entire community was appalled at the thought that a smallholder's daughter, raised in a brick house with a porch and fancy furniture could marry someone below her, and agree to live in a thatched cottage.⁴¹⁶ Upholding the principle of marriage between persons of the same social class, the village community applied Church teachings in real life, monitoring the moves of the young generation through the wisdom of villagers. A well-off, marriageable woman interested in field work and chores like Jolán was rather rare, and even more surprising was her honest interest in the hard work of the peasants on her father's estate. She even wanted to learn to do herself the picking, drying, and tying of tobacco leaves according to her principle that "a man cannot live an idle life" (Henyélésből nem él meg az ember.)⁴¹⁷ Gergely displays an even stronger moral profile, being reflective and self-critical.⁴¹⁸

Folk games among the peasants helped diffuse tense moments. A "let's pretend" game between two incompatible lovers appears in Berczik's play for the purpose of highlighting the importance of prayer. In prayer, one can safely convey the passion of feelings and find a way to overcome fears. Custom takes an even larger place in the design of the plot and message. The giving of flowers to express one's love for a young woman and the passing on of those flower by the woman who received them to the man she is really in love with represent codified gestures that communicate feelings without verbal expression and preserve the unity and spirit of understanding in the community.

As in a typical soap-opera, matters get more complicated when Jolán's father insists that she marry a man of her social status.⁴¹⁹ Aside from the petty gossip and rivalries between suitors in love with the same woman, bits of wisdom make the text quite pleasurable. As his aunt and nursemaid, Gönczölné, worries that after Gergely marries Jolán, there will be a time when a sense

⁴¹⁶ Berczik, 28.

⁴¹⁷ Berczik, 29

⁴¹⁸ Berczik, 32.

of guilt will slowly creep in and spoil their happiness. The pangs of conscience also struck a chord in Gergely’s heart. He preferred to leave the village rather than break customs.

Table 8. Record of performances for *Parasztkisasszony* by Arpád Berczik (cont.)

Gyergyoremete	Kolozsvár	March 6, 1934
Csíkcsicsó	Csík	December 12, 1934
Csíkсомlyó	Csík	January 25, 1937

A popular play featured in the repertory of social mission societies, altar societies, girls’ societies and schoolteachers’ societies is *Ködmönke* (The Sheepskin Coat) by József Péczely (1876-1944). A very short play peopled with only three characters, *Ködmönke* (The Sheepskin Coat) is a crisp dialogue in Hungarian dialect between a man, Péter, and a woman, Zsuzsi, and later on, between them and an elderly neighbor, Aunt Maris, about how valuable old handmade clothes still are. Péter talks fondly about his mother’s *ködmönk*, which he still finds beautiful and long lasting.⁴²⁰ Zsuzsi thinks that it has lost its shape and the color has faded. New models mould so nicely on the shoulders and hips and some are trimmed with fur, silk, and velvet, for a price of “only” a hundred pengős. Being two opposite characters in mentality and aspirations, he finds her idea of purchasing a new one absurd, especially since for a hundred pengős one could get the equivalent of five bags of wheat. Representing two different perspectives, the dialogue raises the issue of how important the new and modern is in different people’s lives and whether one should embrace new trends or stay away from temptation. Péter associates old clothing with the past, hoping that nostalgia for things that belonged to one’s forefathers would prevent breaking the fragile ties between generations.

⁴¹⁹ Berczik, 43.

⁴²⁰ József Péczely, *Ködmönke, falusi vígjáték egy felvonásban* (Budapest: Kókai, 1930), 5.

József Péczely focuses on Hungarian women who hurry to break away from their premarital looks and lifestyle, as they become more exposed to urban mores and influences as married women. They easily adjust to the new rather than upholding tradition, a tenet which explains the appeal that the play had among Roman Catholics. Other details given in the play focus on the budget of a peasant family, thus giving a valuable insight into the peasants' everyday life in regard to taxes, rents, the illness fund, and daily expenses on tobacco. On a visit, Aunt Maris finds out about Zsuzsi's unhappiness and teaches her to faint, scream, and have a nervous breakdown as a way of triggering her husband's mercy, as a way of obtaining the much-desired sheepskin vest. Later on, five wheat bags were indeed loaded in the cart and Péter was ready to go and buy the sheepskin vest. Aunt Maris's own experience while an employee at the Kőrös city council gave her a useful insight into how city ladies deceived their husbands into following their whims of fashion.

In 1944, *Kődmönke* appeared in the Roman Catholic book series “Új Élet” published in Budapest since 1936. The play was also made available through other book series, like the “Fővárosi és Vidéki Színházak Műsora,” published in 1930 in Budapest. Péczely published his novels and plays in other regions like the south-east towns of Békéscsaba and Gyula located close to Kőrös (mentioned in the play as a refuge for Zsuzsi) or close to the Partium province on the Romanian border. Roman Catholic amateurs also preferred playwrights born in multi-ethnic border regions, following the same predilection expressed by the Reformed Hungarian amateurs. Thus, the Roman Catholic village world portrayed on amateur stages brims with tradition and faith across counties to fulfill the Roman Catholic mission.

Table 9. Record of performances for *Kődmönke* by József Péczely

Gyergyoszenmiklos	Csík	January 18, 1934
Csikszensimion	Csík	March 16, 1934

Table 9. (con't)

Csikszereda	Csík	November 27, 1934
Gorgenyszentimre	Maros	April 11, 1935

Concluding remarks

Although Roman Catholic communities put on a diversity of plays at a sustained pace, most amateurs remained enthralled by mystery plays. Even the folk plays (*népszínmű*) selected encapsulated the conflict between on one hand authority, sharp and assertive, embodying reason and novelty, and, on the other, tradition bound by duty and repetition and embodied in a saint or a biblical event, thereby making possible the strengthening of faith.

Either organized or patronized by the clergy, amateur theater focused on popularizing both Roman Catholic principles and village customs and traditions. The plays praised a religious identity which comes to the fore by exploring and reviving the village world. Villagers watched on stage familiar aspects of life and traditions, or volunteered as actors in plays that conveyed their mentalities and views. Through amateur theater, Hungarian clergymen were able to restore confidence in cultural life and contribute to a vibrant cultural work in local communities.

Given the Roman Catholic centralized structures, communities in general did not have much room for self-management. But the movement of amateur theater shows that actually many communities asserted their own repertorial choices without much interference from the center. The reason was that, even when not choosing mystery or religious plays, parishioners could still identify Roman Catholic wisdom in other sorts of plays. For example, Molière's play captures the ideas which Roman Catholics appeared fond of, that is, the derision of habits, superstition, and conservatism. Discussing more broadly the importance of eradicating such ideas, amateurs

demonstrated through such plays their efforts to promote education and a forward-thinking mentality through entertainment.

The drawback was that such plays did not make relations with the authorities smooth and clear-cut. Unlike the Reformed organizers, the Roman Catholic communities received a larger number of rejected petitions, or their requests were approved only upon fulfilling certain conditions. As I have shown, some plays they proposed appeared to offend sensibilities and border on transgressing the law.

Unitarian Hungarians and Amateur Theater

At the end of the first interwar decade, the Unitarians joined Hungarians of other faiths in bringing forth a spiritual revival and working on organizing their cultural actions. Their faith was centered on the Unitarian concept of “pure Christianity,” or the denial of the doctrine of Trinity, which, in Transylvania, was not as radical as in England and the United States. Yet, as simple as it was, the Transylvanian anti-trinitarianism de-emphasized dogma like other forms of anti-trinitarianism elsewhere. Also, by seeking unity and submerging doctrine, Unitarianism typically opens believers to various forms of consciousness that lead to a variety of beliefs and ideas, which can originate in other countries and societies. In Orthodox theology, the absence of Trinity means a lapse into paganism or Judaism,⁴²¹ as well as an unusual embrace of progressive values within congregations. In general comprised of poor farmers, Unitarian communities were remarkably attached to the idea of opening and enlarging schools.⁴²² Most Unitarian Transylvanians who travelled to Britain and the United States freely explored spiritual and secular thoughts, regardless of their religious distinctions. Therefore, understanding amateur theater among the Unitarians has to

⁴²¹ For an explanation of how Trinity represents the Christian synthesis over against both Judaism and paganism, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol. 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600- 1700), (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 215.

⁴²² Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England, and America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1945), 161.

take into consideration the special attention given to their schools and the liberal mindset of the believers who read and trusted the Bible only through the lens of reason and conscience.

The Unitarian leadership delayed its contacts with the Romanian state in regard to sending petitions for amateur theater events. The resilience against a government that wronged them by taking over their confessional schools has deeper roots in the previous experiences of the Unitarian Hungarians. This experience is reminiscent of the 1860s, when the Unitarian Hungarians felt slighted by the governmental school policies to bring all Transylvanian schools up to the Austrian standards, and require to hire more teachers than just one, as it was the custom in village schools. Like in 1918, the Unitarian leadership was appalled by the state's new laws and feared, as always, the Catholic danger and their confession's extinction.⁴²³

Finally, a non-dogmatic creed makes the resort to theologians infrequent, leading ministers, especially in urban centers, to seek guidance from prominent laymen, foreign Unitarian groups, or simply from any other sources. Many Unitarian ministers came up with new ideas from their travels and hoped to implement them in the Transylvanian rural world. Upon their return from Unitarian events abroad or study travels, they would encounter in their assigned parishes a much more conservative mindset among parishioners and schoolteachers, or, even a group of leading Unitarian women with a mind of their own who were also attracted to cosmopolitanism and were ready to emulate theatrical performances from the Budapest theaters. Therefore, an important goal for Unitarian ministers was to restore the clergy's primacy in their communities.

In the western region with the center in Kolozsvár city, the birthplace of the Unitarian founder, prophet and martyr Francis Dávid, amateur theater was organized mainly in institutions like the "János Zsigmond" Unitarian Collegium of Kolozsvár (A Kolozsvári János Zsigmond Unitárius Kollégium). In 1935, this college received a complete revamping of the curriculum

following the vision of the American Unitarian congregations from Boston.⁴²⁴ Although students have left fewer traces of amateur theater in the ministerial archive of petitions in the region it appears that theater was an important preoccupation of faculty members and students. One of the few *népszínmű* writers, born, settled, and employed in Transylvania was Principal Gyula Péterffi (1878-1942), music conductor and cantor. Born in Nagykedede (Chedia Mare), a village very close to Székelykeresztúr in Csík County, Péterffi wrote one of the most popular plays in the region, *Piros Rózsa, Fehér Rózsa* (Red Rose, White Rose). Interestingly, this play was widely selected by Reformed amateurs,⁴²⁵ but enjoyed by Unitarians only in three communities especially for Christmas: Nagyajta (Háromszék County), Sinfalva (Kolozsvár County) and Kolozsvár city.⁴²⁶

Known for its distinctive Szekler church architectural model, the eastern part of historical Transylvania witnessed great upheaval among Unitarian communities, who endured immense material and human sacrifice for their faith. The population in the eastern half (Csík – 21,236, Háromszék – 7,936, Kronstadt – 5,802) was three times larger than the western half with the center in Kolozsvár – 11,517 and Gyulafehérvár – 3,167). The Székely-Keresztúr Theological Academy was founded in 1793, although documents mention it as a grammar school as early as the 1500s, while by 1848, it functioned following the German secondary system in the empire.⁴²⁷

The preservation of confessional schools and the efforts to preserve religious classes in schools was a major objective for Unitarian clergy in the eastern half of our region. The creation of state schools in the Szekely lands gave rise to serious complaints among the Unitarian ministers,

⁴²³ Wilbur, 154-155.

⁴²⁴ Mark W. Harris (ed.), Historical Dictionary of Unitarian Universalism, The A to Z of Unitarian Universalism (Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham. 2003). 296.

⁴²⁵ Gyula Péterffi, *Piros Rózsa, Fehér Rózsa* (Turda: Fussy Ny., 1927).

⁴²⁶ Unitárius Közlöny, A Vallásos és Erkölcsös élet ébresztésére kiadja a Dávid Ferencz Egylet, IXXXIX. évf., Cluj-Kolozsvár, 1929. Május, 5. szám. 107; for Sinfalva (Cornesti): DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1934, Vol. 2, Fila 209/25 Febr. 1934; for Nagyajta (Aita Mare): DANIC București, Fond. Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 226/30 Apr. 1932; for Kolozsvár: DANIC, București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 43/1935, Vol. I, Fila 250/25 Mar. 1935.

who refused to give up their positions as schoolteachers in state schools as they were removed for not knowing Romanian, a requirement for teachers paid with state funding.⁴²⁷ The use of amateur theater as an extra-curricular instructional tool did not take hold widely.

In the early postwar years, the Unitarian Bishop Ferenc József (1835-1928) ended his fifty-year long tenure. During his teaching work at the Theological Academy in Kolozsvár he authored the Unitarian Catechism, which remained an enduring mark of his literary achievement. His administration witnessed the opening of new congregations in numerous cities and the creation of David Ferenc, young people, and women's societies. He sought to harmonize relations with co-religionists in Csík County who formed an opposition camp within the Unitarian Church and published their ideas in their own periodical, *Unitárius Egyház* (Székelykeresztúr). Perceiving further complications, the bishop urged all Unitarian communities to comply with the Romanian state laws. This call to unity and integration was favorable for stimulating Unitarian cultural life in the whole region after the First World War. He addressed publicly all Unitarian ministers to respect the laws of the new state, thereby joining formally other Hungarian confessions who had already complied with the new regime for the wellbeing of their communities. Overall, the eastern part of the Unitarian fold witnessed a more serious fear of confessional oppression and division, given all these demographic, cultural, and political challenges.

His successor, Bishop György Boros (1855-1941) witnessed the proliferation of amateur theater in all counties. While visiting his parishes, the local parishioners welcomed him with a theatrical show, a choir show, and conferences. Like other Christian communities of Hungarians, the Unitarians reopened cultural societies, women and young people's societies, mainly during the

⁴²⁷ János Sándor, *A székelykereszturi Unitárius gymnasium történelme. Az egyházi képviselő Tanács Megbízásából* (Székely-Keresztúr, 1896).

⁴²⁸ DANIC, Fond Ministerul Instrucțiunii și Culturii, Direcția Activității Școlare și Extrașcolare din Țările Române Surori, Vol. V, Dos. 416/1921, Fila 29/15 Nov. 1920. See the letter of protest sent by the Unitarian Bishop

tenure of Bishop Boros, continuing his predecessor's initiative of opening Dávid Ferenc Societies (Dávid Ferenc Egylet) and branches for women (nőszövetség) and youth. The patron of these religious societies was the founder of Unitarianism, Dávid Ferenc (1510-1579).

For the purposes of this study two groups of Unitarian ministers appeared involved or addressed the aspect of amateur theater. One group was formed of ministers who were advocates of progressive ideas from the West and saw in the opening of religious schools the primary goal in Unitarian communities. Amateur theater was to be integrated into the mission of the schools to serve as any other means of communicating new ideas. Pastor Ferenc Bálazs is a representative figure for this category being known for his movement to open schools in villages and organize seminaries to explore the village world through research questions.⁴²⁹ For him, amateur theater was a platform for his intellectual ideals. His and others' view of amateur theater was determined by the agenda of their work and, for this purpose, it had relatively narrow goals. More numerous, the other group was represented by rank-and-file Unitarian ministers, whose own horizons were shaped by their studies in either one of the two Unitarian colleges, but, more importantly, by their daily contacts with parishioners and everyday ministry. Their view of amateur theater was boundless and villagers could select any play that fit their tastes. The rank-and-file ministers catered to their parishioners' needs and, oftentimes, the latter simply preferred *népszínmű* or religious plays, or any other genre without a close fit to one aspect of Unitarianism but to a broad spectrum of ideas according to the Unitarian tenet that God is in everything.

Being demographically fewer, the Unitarians of the region joined in the theatrical culture articulated by Hungarians of other confessions and their clergymen at a slower pace and smaller scale. Although compared to other confessions, Unitarianism was an intellectualized creed, it did

Ferenc József to the Ministry in București regarding the status of Unitarian confessional schools in the Udvarhely County, in Homordjanosfalva, Homoridszentmanton, and Necsenyed.

not influence the repertory of local ministers who selected plays regardless of the religious background of the playwrights or the story and characters in the play. The theater snippets in Unitarian church review supplements openly promoted specific tenets in everyday life encounters for the Unitarian youth to learn the faith's particulars. For example, young people in the Unitárius Egyház Ifjúsági Egylet would read about the importance of purity at an abstract level in the plays, to help them defend their choices and cherish faith in the pure unity of God, a well-known Unitarian principle.

Several difficulties arose within the Hungarian Unitarians leadership and communities. Compared to the events of the Reformed and Roman Catholic Hungarians, Unitarian amateur theater appears to be less infused with religious values and tenets and less effective in building a sense of shared community among parishioners as the ongoing theatrical movement of the region did for other Transylvanians. The variety of genres and tastes made the repertorial choices far from uniform. At a close reading, only a few plays selected for this chapter showcase Unitarian tenets (preaching a more pure religion based on reason, reading the Bible with love and rationality, hiring Unitarian teachers in newly-opened schools, or believing in the humanity of Jesus).

Unitarian Cultural, Educational, and Literary Traditions

Unitarian ministers who published in the pages of the *Unitárius Egyház Ifjúsági Melléklete* (the Unitarian Youth Supplement) saw theater's significance not as an art or a religious instructional medium, but a means to implement ideas that arose from what Unitarianism stands for: opening an audience to a variety of liberal, utopian, pacifist, in a word, intellectual ideas and beliefs. Since Unitarians are most known for their strong liberalism, their theater was to reflect liberal values, which some ministers most likely sought to inculcate in parishioners. An anonymous

⁴²⁹ Péter Cseke, "Az Erdélyi Fiatalok unitárius munkatársai A 110 éve született Balázs Ferenc és a 100 éve született Mikó Imre emlékének," in *Keresztény Magvető*, 2011, 117. évf.2.sz., 142.

contributor to this supplement stressed that qualities like thriftiness, industriousness, good behavior, prosperity would be better inculcated if they were shown on the stage: “it is not that theater owes everything to practical life, but actually the reverse is true.” Lajos Máthé, another contributor to this Supplement, explains that Unitarian clergymen differentiated themselves from secular cultural societies, which tended to be very assiduous in promoting ethnicity, even to the point of showing unscrupulousness. He perceived the clergy’s cultural events as bringing “into a village (...) informal gatherings, knowledge, a sense of order and discipline, esteem for the village leaders, and hard work,” a stark contrast to the events organized by cultural societies seeking to promote material rewards.⁴³⁰ The clergy contributors to the Supplement shared similar cultural goals with other journalistic teams comprised of young intellectuals who wrote for the periodical *Kéveskötés*, *Unitárius Ifjúsági Folyóirat*. Numerous articles describe the efforts to bring together youth of all confessions to recite ballads and put on P. Ábranyi Ernő’s play *Isten Vára* (God’s Castle).⁴³¹

In regard to repertory, the Unitarian Youth Supplement featured plays written by priests and articles about types of plays and about the best ways to select plays for different audiences. The articles recommended that plays should teach good and beautiful things and should have roles for girls and numerous secondary roles for all sorts of individuals. The Unitarian pastor Ferenc Balázs (1901-1937) who was involved in the movement that engaged gymnasium students to reach out to the Hungarian villages, in order to explore the peasantry and their conservative world to prepare the ground for building a new society in villages, was an avid supporter of theater playing. He entertained a dual image of his region as a shelter where Unitarians could return safely to a beautiful, idyllic setting where he could see factories and mines as well as cooperatist villages and and listen its people’s wisdom and fascinating ideas.

⁴³⁰ Lajos Máthé, “Falusi Színháztársulat,” *Unitárius Egyház Ifjúsági Melléklete*, Evi Karacsony Szamához, 1929, 11.

⁴³¹ *Kéveskötés*, *Unitárius Ifjúsági Folyóirat*, XIII. évfolyam, 1936. Március-Április hó, 6-7. szám, 23 oldal.

Balász explored this engagement from an intellectual and sociographic perspective first and foremost, while religiously was secondary. Although he meant to have an influence on village communities as well, he subordinated his grassroots plans to a new consciousness, overwhelmingly secular. His play, *A Gyáva* (The Coward), mentioned in the supplement's pages, is evidence that Balázs participated actively in the task of building a theatrical life in villages. He started in 1928 with a full cultural agenda, involving Unitarian young men in the American Peace Caravan, which included besides amateur theater, songs, public libraries, and conferences.⁴³²

Even more relevant are Ferenc Balázs's detailed instructions on how to teach villagers self-reliance, a liberal value, in organizing their own cultural life. At a time when the private theater companies of minorities touted the importance of professionalism in spreading the uses of theater everywhere, a Unitarian minister like Balázs encouraged amateur theater by and for villagers themselves in Unitarian parishes. Instead of having private company managers delivering explanatory and introductory speeches before plays in front of villagers, he suggested that the play's director should address the audience with a genuine message about the type and effects of the play. As he constantly reminded readers, plays ought not be written only for amusement.

Familiar with reviews of plays published in literary journals, Balázs believed that the content of a play rather than the form mattered the most, and he gave the plot of his own play as an example: "Try not to blame the conclusion or the errors of internal composition, for the content is simply about a young man, naïve or a coward, who happened to be just a very good-hearted man, with a heart of gold. Bad things happen to him, and bread and perks do not cross his way." Without unexpected plot twists, the play reaches a quiet end, and in his play, Balázs conveyed a religious

⁴³² Mikó Imre, "Balázs Ferenc Most Volna 75 Éves" in *Keresztény Magvető* 82 évf. (1976) 3-4, 158.

message of inner transformation happening in a peasant world, pure and untouched by the modernizing changes of the urban life. He also suggested other types of events for conveying religious messages, but all of them should include practical examples.

Theater remained the primary cultural activity, as the literary supplement of the *Unitarius Egyház Ifjúsági Kőre Melleklet* published numerous plays and didactic stories centered on intellectual values, deriving meaning and judgments from moral messages. Hoping to strengthen liberal views using his ministry, Pastor Báalazs published a series of didactic stories “A Templomkapu Előtt”, in which old men talk to young men who were atheists and treated the church with indifference. The author’s message in this story was that if people get no meaning from religion, then they have no longing for it.⁴³³

Besides ministers, Unitarian women were quite involved in the cultural life of their communities, and, even though their demographic numbers were low, they surpassed in energy level and immersion the Reformed women. This reflects a very liberal attitude among Unitarian men and women who embraced reason in their efforts to understand their faith and their world. Women’s space for maneuver was generated by the symmetry of power between ministers and wives. Traditionally clergymen delegated community work and some of their duties to their spouses. Thus, if Unitarian pastors’ wives did not have local authority, they enjoyed, instead, moral and intellectual recognition. Known for its intellectualism, the Unitarian faith encouraged women to mobilize resources and to infuse a rational understanding in the mentality of the villagers, long known for their penchant for superstition and belief in divine punishment for sins.

⁴³³ Ferenc Baláz, “A Templom Előtt”, I, *Unitárius Egyház Ifjúsági Melléklete*, Évi Karácsony Szamahoz, 1929,4-5.

Organizers and Participants of Amateur Theater in Unitarian Communities

In small localities, the initiators were in the majority ministers, therefore, men. This gender imbalance among organizers is rooted in the Unitarian Church's quasi-synodal structure, which placed men, in particular middle-class individuals with families, at the center of decision-making in village life. As we delve into the particulars of each county, we observe that Unitarian women were quite active, but always in the shadow of their husbands. What defines the typical Unitarian organizers is the high level of education which both men, and, surprisingly, women, displayed in their public initiatives.

Gyulafehérvár, Nagyszeben, and Vajdahunyad Counties

Petitions show that most of Gyulafehérvár women organizing events were wives of Unitarian ministers. They most likely had graduated from high school, and their eagerness to serve and educate went hand in hand with their drive to stimulate greater public involvement by encouraging in their respective communities a fervent cultural life. Like other Unitarian women organizing theatrical events in Gyulafehérvár County, Anna Petőfi of Torockoszentgyörgy worked hard to prepare a stage so that amateurs could put on plays. As she was contacting the Romanian authorities to obtain permits for plays, scripts were read out loud in public places or rehearsed at home, and roles were being distributed, people with knowledge of dances, songs, and instrument playing were getting together to bring their own contribution to the event. Rehearsals could last weeks on end in order to celebrate holidays properly with theater playing.⁴³⁴

Most petitions were signed in the name of the Unitarian Women's Society in the locality, but, in several cases, the minister himself signed the petition on their behalf. In

⁴³⁴ DANIC, București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 7/1034, Fila 395/17 Dec.1934.

examining the petitions, one may observe how ideas of gender and religion played out in the interaction between minorities and the Romanian state. Known for their high level of literacy, Hungarian women eagerly sent in their requests and used the legal privilege to correspond with Romanian authorities. This exchange demonstrates the prestige that Hungarian women enjoyed in their region and in the eyes of the Romanian officials, which was, at least, on a par if not equal to the prestige enjoyed by the Hungarian clergy. The possibility of corresponding with the Romanian state and obtaining play permits is evidence of the cultural autonomy enjoyed by the Unitarian Hungarians active in amateur theater.

On the other hand, Gyulafehérvár was also problematic area due to the high number of Unitarian petitions that were rejected by state officials. Stirring doubts that their religious and non-political agenda was just a pretext for irredentist and agitational minority protests against the Trianon truncation of Hungary, the organizers had to reapply for approval. A particular case was the Unitarian minister and Women's Society of Torockó, who were seeking to put on *Süt a nap* (The sun is shining) by Lajos Zilahy, but were not granted a permit due to content that offended Romanian sensibilities.⁴³⁵ Whether it was a period when Romanian officials were exercising more caution in regard to minorities or Zilahy's play was too politically charged is hard to know. However, in the same year, another request for a permit came from Gyulafehérvár, more precisely from the village of Torockószentgyörgy, listing Ede Szigligeti's folk play *A Czigány*. Again, the official reply was that the play offends the ethnic sensibility of the Roma minority, and was not granted a permit.⁴³⁶

In Nagyszemben, a show proposed in a petition by the Unitarian minister received a lukewarm reception from the authorities in Bucharest. The play was Rezső Török's

⁴³⁵ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 4/1934, Fila 121/9 March 1934.

⁴³⁶ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 7/1934, Fila 395/17 Dec. 1934.

Juhászlegény Szegény, Juhászlegény, (Shepherd, poor shepherd) and, being coupled with song, it was suspected of encouraging irredentist protests.⁴³⁷ Songs also appear in the play *Mágnás Miska*, a popular operetta by Albert Szirmai and Károlyi Bakonyi, which the Unitarian Women Society scheduled in order to collect money for poor children.⁴³⁸ Even when organizers announced religious events, authorities were skeptical of plays that had ethnicist overtones or were enhanced by songs rife with political activism.

Csík, Háromszék, and Brassó Counties

In these three counties, the amateur theater movement in Unitarian parishes encountered more obstacles than the Hungarians of other faiths elsewhere did. Some difficulties arose in connection to controversial plays, others because of some petitioners and organizers known for their particular reluctance to comply with the state laws, or due to the declared purposes. The Szeklerland counties triggers particular reminiscences for both Romanian authorities and the Unitarians living in this region, because the latter suffered greatly during the Revolution of 1848 at the hands of Romanian peasants, rising themselves against their Hungarian masters.⁴³⁹ Being difficult to draw specific details about the groups from petitions, it is hard to draw conclusions about their profiles and objectives.

The petition of the Unitarian Church in the town of Fogaras (Brassó County) informed authorities about the play they selected for Christmas. Rezső Török's play, *Juhászlegény Szegény, Juhászlegény*, was originally a folk song based on the legendary story of a Hungarian shepherd. The request for a permit received an incomplete resolution from Bucharest, since there were doubts about how this play would be rehearsed and enacted on stage. In such cases, local

⁴³⁷ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 10/1933, Fila 175/7 Nov. 1933

⁴³⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 21/1935 Vol. II, Fila 97/2 Dec. 1935.

⁴³⁹ Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England, and America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1945), 152.

authorities and the police were instructed to monitor amateur theater events and report to Bucharest. Other amateurs felt intimidated by or simply gave up contacting the authorities for a play permit. In the village of Datk, the “Dávid Ferenc” Cultural Society asked the Bishop to intervene in Bucharest to obtain a permit for their play. It was granted to the society’s president, Pastor Jenő Baga, for the play *A Méltóságos Csizmadia* (The Honorable Shoemaker).⁴⁴⁰ As in the case of Reformed women, Unitarian women expressed a mixed preference between classical *népszímű*, contemporary plays, and short theatrical sketches inspired from professional theater repertoires. Csík County had the most numerous Unitarian women’s and youth societies organizing theatrical events, but their requests for permits were all signed by the local ministers for *népszímű* plays. On the other hand, the ministers from the Háromszék County were not as traditional as those in the neighboring counties. In Arkos for example, the minister put on the play *Pista neni* (Auntie Steve) by László Bus-Fekete (1896-1971) in February 1930,⁴⁴¹ while in Kőkös he put on the play *Pielea Câinelui* (The Dog’s Skin) in May 1930, both plays having been successful in Budapest theaters. Suspicions arose mainly when amateurs preferred plays taken from the theater review *Színházi Elét* published in Budapest, which was outlawed for circulation in Greater Romania.

In Oklánd, the amateurs specified as reason for fundraising the purchase of agricultural tools. Such explanations did not raise the authorities’ suspicions. They fitted in with minority deputies’ interventions in the Romanian Parliament in the mid-1930s to help Hungarian churches in their efforts at improving agriculture by buying modern tools.⁴⁴²

Of all the counties, Maros remained more conservative and traditional in amateur theater activities. The organizers limited their needs to the upkeep of church building and to the

⁴⁴⁰ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1934, Fila 72/3 Febr. 1934.

⁴⁴¹ DANIC, București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930.

celebration of religious holidays like Whit Sunday or Pentecost. Even more conservative were the areas in the eastern counties of the region, where the Unitarians remained attached to a sense of educated, middle-class identity, broadly reflected in their play selections and the purposes declared in their requests for permits.

Kolozsvár County

Unitarian women of Kolozsvár had duties that covered practically every aspect of life from social welfare to medical assistance, and oversaw and guided the cultural life in the community.

Unitarian women began to put on *népszínmű* plays before the First World War, as was the case, for example, in the village of Bagyon.⁴⁴³

In the late 1920s, Ana Gombasi of Magyarvalkó believed that amateur theater could increase local funding for various needs like feeding poor children and providing for the church's maintenance. She helped put on plays sometimes by charging admission, other times by asking for donations. Her involvement with plays gave her an opportunity to develop a savvy approach when applying for play permits by mastering the bureaucratic maze of overlapping offices. She started putting on plays in 1932 with a classic *népszínmű*, *Amit az érdő mesél* by István Géczy; the next year she put on another play (author and title unspecified); in 1934, her repertory changed to *Legény Furfang* (The man's trick) by Károly Csike (1879-1953), *Erdők Királya* (The King of Lands) by Vilmos Kazsa, and *Tépett Rózsa* (Torn rose) by János K. Pap. The latter two were not approved due their open political connotations.

Gombasi's choices of plays, which supported a political cause, are not representative of the Unitarian amateur movement in general. A considerable number of the events prepared and organized by Unitarian women showed a constant fondness for the nineteenth-century Hungarian

⁴⁴²Marius Varga, "Activitatea Reprezentanților Partidelor Minorităților Etnice în Parlamentul României" in *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Contemporană*, Serie Nouă, Vol. VII, 2008, 37.

literature, and examples abounded in Mészkö, Kolozsvár city, Torockó, Szentmihály, Várfalva and Sinfalva. Staging nineteenth-century classic folk plays would have meant that organizers had put great store by the cultural riches of the past. But in Kolozsvár, Unitarian organizers, being in general better educated than in other counties, were advocates of reason and voiced strong critical opinions in the Unitarian press. Especially women frequently published journalistic work on a variety of topics in the Church's official periodical, *Unitárius Közlöny* (Kolozsvár), and thus, judging by their intellectual preoccupations, they most likely preferred plays with a stronger secular message.

Less active than in other counties, Kolozsvár Unitarian ministers remained attached to folk plays. They submitted written requests for authorizations such as the petition sent by the Unitarian Church of Kővend, a village in the Turda area, or the one signed by A. Mathé of Újszékely (Săcueni) on behalf of his church in Reps⁴⁴⁴ for the play *A Gyimesi Virág*⁴⁴⁵ by István Géczy. He hoped that Géczy's play helped entertain parishioners by bringing up their own shortcomings. The lack of a repertory of plays of an intellectual character, focusing on meanings and liberal or utopian values, determined organizers to tap into the repertory of *népszínmű* plays authored by Roman Catholic or Reformed faiths. If ever present, the only Unitarian element in theater events remained the discourse of the prominent layman invited to serve as a pedagogue to flesh out the meanings and interpret the content for the audience.

The Repertory of Unitarian Communities

Gyula Péterffi, a Unitarian cantor and music professor in Kolozsvár, was not a very popular playwright among his co-religionists. His play *Piros Rozsa - Feher Rozsa*, published in 1927, was selected by amateurs in only two villages in his home county, Nagyajta and Sinfalva,

⁴⁴³*Unitárius Közlöny, A Vallásos és erkölcsös élet ébresztésére*, XXXI. évf. Kolozsvár 1918 Jan., 1. szám, 10.

⁴⁴⁴DANIC, București, Fond Dep. Arte, DEP, Inv. 817, Dos. 61/1931, Fila 3/2 May 1931.

as well as in Kolozsvár city. However, Reformed communities in Kolozsvár County quickly embraced this play: Magyarvalkó (December 4, 1932), Szamosújvár (December 5, 1933), Kisiklód (March 19, 1934), Aranyosgerend (February 21, 1934), and Gyalu (March 9, 1935), thereby spreading the word that the play was a popular hit. Even a few Roman Catholic communities in Kerelőszentpál of Maros County (March 29, 1934) and Kövend of Csík County (February 4, 1933) decided to put on Péterffi's play.

The explanation for the Unitarians' reticence to putting on this play was the overall derisive effect created by villager characters who pretended to be literate and who put on the airs of the urban elites. While in her room, musing in front of the mirror, Judit Göndöl conveys her obsessive concern with "kultura," which meant reading novels, wearing city clothes, and even driving automobiles. An orphan, she is impressed by the urban world. Her suitors use this weakness against her to serve their own purposes. The mail carrier brings her a letter from Miklós Szilasi, her boyfriend, who is just to be released from the army. He tells her that he is ready to propose and asks her hand by writing beautiful verses about their future together, and by sending greetings to her parents.⁴⁴⁵ However, Kóbori, a factory worker in Kolozsvár, seduces Judit with empty promises, seeking to get her guardian's land. He promises her a new status, as a city lady, "uriasszony," more time spent together, fewer hours of work, and money to go to movie theaters in silk outfits.⁴⁴⁷

Among villagers, the idea of keeping up with changes in the world was incomprehensible, and, even more so, when the advocate of change was a peasant girl in city clothes.⁴⁴⁸ City life and world travel seem to be choices that limit men's horizons, rather than teaching virtues and love for work. As Judit notices all around her changing her feelings for

⁴⁴⁵ DANIC, București, Fond. Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, Febr. 1930.

⁴⁴⁶ Péterffi, 9.

⁴⁴⁷ Péterffi, 13.

Miklós, she cannot help seeing herself in contrast with the local priest, for whom continuing one's ancestral ways and embracing religious piety, work, honor, loyalty, respect for municipal leaders, and devotion for the church, the king, and the law are paramount."⁴⁴⁹ The message is that individuals alone would rarely persuade a community to follow new ideas. The priest's conservatism in this play runs counter to the general Unitarian view that clergymen needed to avail themselves of reason and embrace change to address their flocks' needs in the best possible ways.

Other *népszínmű* preferred by the Unitarians were József Szigeti's *A Vén Bakancsos és fia hussar* and Gyuri Vilmos's *Nota Kata*. Folk playwrights tended to predominate among the Unitarians in the Szeklers' lands rather among the Unitarians of Kolozsvár, Gyulafehérvár, or Vajdahunyad counties in the western part of the region, because an internationalist vision of Unitarianism was more pronounced in the western half of the region than in the Csík, Háromszék, or Maros counties.

Concluding remarks

The Unitarian Hungarians organized amateur theater hoping to develop their own cultural life specific to their faith. Of all Hungarians, the Unitarians were the most fearful of their extinction as a confession, once historical Transylvania joined Greater Romania. Each group of Unitarian ministers pursued their own cultural vision when it came to the embrace of amateur theater. Cosmopolitan ministers were concerned with modernization, industrialization, integration of non-Hungarian groups in their communities, social and economic reforms, all taking precedence over ecclesiastical work or priesthood. Compared to the Reformed Hungarians, the Unitarians explored a variety of plays of different genres as the Reformed

⁴⁴⁸ Péterffi, 18.

⁴⁴⁹ Péterffi, 21.

tended to do, but not for showcasing Christian parables representing the word and spirit of God. If one considers the catechism and tenets of Unitarianism, these believers showed a propensity for such a variety of ideas and meanings that makes the close matching of messages and religious tenets impossible. However, rank-and-file Unitarian ministers tapped in the repository of folk plays, which represented moral values and experiences that Trinitarian faiths embraced: resurrection, relations between father and son, and hierarchy. No play in the existing Hungarian-language repertory was embedded with ideas of pacificism, liberalism, liberal habits of mind and deed, thus, being unavailable to parishioners, ideas like reason, logical thinking, higher education, and urban realities could not supersede Christian parables and folk wisdom. The organizers approached Romanian authorities with confidence, but their relations were often not conducive to harmonious outcomes as in the case of other Hungarian confessions.

Amateur theater highlights the Hungarians' efforts to concentrate on attainable social, economic, and cultural goals rather than on political goals of irredentism. As the numerous cases of amateur theater show, the people's participation in theatrical events was tremendously successful and could function as a powerful lens through which to explore Hungarian cultural autonomy as they conceived it and applied it in practice. It can also illuminate the Romanian regime's commitment to foster expressions of autonomy for events centered on religion and to continue the spirit of tolerance in both the religious and civil life of the province.

The cultural autonomy of Hungarian communities was not stipulated as such in the legislation passed by the Romanian government; however, it emerged, unfolded, and even evolved in the last dozen interwar years into a strong expression of localized Hungarian specificity. Theater playing was consistent with the efforts to express and enjoy rather than demand cultural autonomy. It was widely assimilated to a broader discourse on education and

freedoms that gained acceptance and understanding in the context of ethnic and religious survival for minorities living in a nation state.

Hungarian theatrical manifestations reflected in practice the notion of freedom of expression for minorities. This notion is evidenced by these events' geographical breadth, their increasing frequency in the 1930s, the peaceful and educational impact of theater playing, and a strategic and vocal presence in the public sphere. Amateur theater also heightened the visibility of the Hungarian minority in unprecedented ways. The local elites in each county envisioned their participation in terms of equal rights as citizens by law and not in terms of subordination and oppressed status.

The Hungarians' interest in theater-playing was not intended to push the limits of the permissible in legislation and administration by amplifying ethnic propaganda, although I acknowledge that such isolated phenomena took place. It rather remained within the bounds of localities and popular religion and helped advance their cultural autonomy through local churches. The Hungarians remained sheltered from ethnicist influences from the upper clergy and from ethnicist appropriations of their theatrical work by political and secular activists (nationalists). Moreover, amateur theater helped Hungarian communities rediscover through their own efforts the essential elements of their identity and improve the level of education, morality, and religiosity among parishioners.

Much like the theatrical events of the Saxons and the Romanians, the Hungarians put on plays aimed at reasserting a spirit of community. Clergymen played a large role in organizing and coordinating the events, either alone or together with the schoolteacher and local villagers (young people, men, and women). Plays were intended to cater to the religious sensibilities of parishioners and even educate them about Hungarian history and literature. By attracting to its fold all age, social, and educational groups, the theater initiatives were no longer

premised on political solidarity with the irredentists in Hungary but on a Transylvanian solidarity with other ethnic groups, whether they were other minorities in Greater Romania like the Saxons and Jews or the Romanian majority.

Despite the unprecedented volume of theater events, only a slim number of petitions from Hungarian amateurs representing their church were denied authorization, or were returned with the recommendation for making changes in matters of play content or stagecraft. Even in those cases, there is no evidence that a tight control was followed up for every single performance that was denied authorization. On the contrary, organizers who were at first not approved for their event continued to organize events with confidence that things would work out.

Of all the amateurs in the region, the Reformed communities led the way and contributed with their large numbers of petitioners and events to the regional large scale of the theater movement. The Hungarians as an ethnic group contributed to the expansion of popular culture in their province, making other regions in Greater Romania watch with admiration how they overcame legal and material adversities to uphold religion, the essence of Hungarian identity, and traditional and conservative values in a new way.

Chapter 3 Saxon Amateur Theater in Interwar Transylvania

Soon after the First World War was over, Saxon leaders and the upper-elite made the growth of the professional theater a priority, seeking out to further the cultural development for the entire Saxon minority in historical Transylvania. Ideally, theater was to carry on the century-old traditions of the German professional theater, which excelled anything produced before by other ethnic minorities living in the region. The goal was to select key publics and address key constituencies, to motivate their interest in theater and to strengthen their relationship with decision-makers and officials, businessmen, and intellectuals. Gradually, organizers hoped theater to attract more than upper-class publics, and interest the local elites and the commoners. In full swing by the early 1930s, theater engulfed all Saxon counties, attracting amateurs of all ages and social groups.

This chapter explores the factors that explain theater's rise in popularity and its role in helping Saxon cultural life rebound in the new country. Many reasons for theater playing had to do with the Saxons' status as an ethnic minority in Greater Romania, whether they adapted to the new political regime and they enjoyed cultural rights to further their development. Whether they strengthened their unity and tightened relations with Germany proper brings up an important focus into what it means to be a Saxon in a far-off European country, and what historical role and mission the Saxons should play from 1918 onward in Transylvania.

Theater playing was to help strengthen ranks and settle their belonging to a space. The strong traditionalist character of the Saxon amateur movement, however, prevented the unity of urban and rural groups. Amateur theater helped anchor the Saxons' belonging to Transylvania, at the same time, the Saxons living in cities developed a cultural space brimming with modern views and currents from Germany. They preserved German ties by constantly seeking cultural and educational opportunities in the German space.

Also traditionalist, the repertoires of Saxon amateurs were dominated the *Heimatliteratur's* genre (home literature), which focused on the perspective of ordinary individuals, and the *Dorfliteratur* (village literature) written in numerous Saxon dialects. This fact actually contributed to the formation of a “*Sprachinsel*” (islands of dialects) in historical Transylvania and “the creation of the most representative regional literature in Europe.”⁴⁵⁰ The Saxons’ faith, Evangelical Lutheranism, pervades the Saxon literature and drama. These three identity markers: local dialect, literature, and faith buttressed traditionalism in Saxon society.⁴⁵¹ This study examines the Saxons’ search for specificities and the traditionalist direction which their exploration took, as they strove to integrate themselves into the political environment governed by the Romanians.

Right after the First World War, the Saxons of historical Transylvania hailed the region’s transfer to Romania, claiming that it marked the return to a period of great freedoms for Saxons, or in Cornelius R. Zach’s words, “das alte bis 1868 gültige Recht der Sachsen ist von neuem ausgelebt” (the old valid rights dating back to 1868 are revived anew).⁴⁵² Reaching a high point at the peak of a moral and economic depression that gripped all Europe, and in particular Eastern Europe, amateur theater engaged ordinary Saxons in cultural events, the most eager individuals being the members of secular and religious societies and musical, sport, or touristic associations, or in school committees and churches, who laid the administrative structures in their communities. Amateur theater helped support the unemployed as well as church and fire services. The breadth of purposes reveals a variety of motivations: pragmatism and usefulness in doing

⁴⁵⁰Peter Motzan, “Die Szenerien des Randes: Region, Insel, Minderheit, Die Deutsche(n) Literatur(en) in Rumänien nach 1918 – ein kompilatorisches Beschreibungsmodell” in Eckhard Grunewald, Stefan Sienerth (eds.), Deutsche Literatur im östlichen un südöstlichen Europa, Konzepte und Methoden der Geschichtsschreibung und Lexikographie (München: Verlag Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1997), 81.

⁴⁵¹ Peter Motzan, 79.

⁴⁵² Quoted in Cornelius R. Zach, “Der Status der Siebenbürger Sachsen in Rumänien – Gesetzliche Verankerung und Wirklichkeit 1919-1933” in Edgar Hösch, Gerhard Seewann (eds.), Aspekte Ethnischer Identität, Ergebnisse des

cultural work, the fulfillment of the old Saxon dictum to provide Saxons with education by using all available means, and, thus, securing Saxon survival and giving them a sense of mission in the region.

For understanding theater playing in German-speaking Transylvanian society, it is necessary to focus on two significant groups. One was a cosmopolitan audience with expectations of high culture shaped by the Central-European German world of arts, for whom professional theater playing was entertaining and fulfilling of the expectations of high culture. This audience related to the majority of itinerant troupes as long as they spoke German, and it could well be natives of historical Transylvania, but also Cernowitz in the nearby Bukovina province, or Banat, or Mährisch Ostrau in the far-off Czech lands.⁴⁵³ The other group was made up of Saxons who were very attached to their own traditional dialect and drama written by local playwrights. Forming the local elite, these playwrights looked up to German-speaking provinces abroad for inspiration and connection. They sought religious and literary ties with the German culture like all Saxon elites did, but, they selectively chose only aspects that would enhance their own traditional expectations and strengthen their own vision of Saxon identity. This second group also formed theater troupes with local inhabitants, typically co-religionists from the same village.

This group division shows how differences in cultural expectations set the most educated and urban groups apart from rural communities. Rural communities were also set apart from one another because each belonged to linguistic areas of the province like Waldland, Unterland, and Weinland. Taken as a whole, theater life reveals a picture of an unprecedented unitary cultural development in Saxon society, but, at a closer look, the Saxon world appears fraught with incompatibilities in cultural value, background, and aspirations. These are clearly fleshed out in

Forschungsprojekts "Deutsche und Magyaren als nationale Minderheiten im Donauraum (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1991), 237.

⁴⁵³ DANIC, București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 686/1921, Fila 430/26 Mai 1921.

the divide between amateurs and professionals. Unlike the amateurs, the professionals began their activity right after the war with mainly non-local German-speaking professional troupes. Even though they were experienced in theater production, legal infringements led to a growing lack of trust between the Romanian authorities and the theater directors from outside historical Transylvania. Separating the two groups even further was the fact that, at the onset of the Great Depression, a sudden drop in popularity pertaining to all aspects of professional theater plunged it into a severe moral crisis. This paved the way for one of the most successful theater movements among amateurs in the province to unfold under the eyes of the professionals. It appeared as a dynamic movement as it energized ordinary people on such a large scale that the German theater professionals and Romanian officials could only take note of it and wonder about themselves. Even though their visions were different, both Saxon elites and the lower classes contributed to the development of a fervent minority cultural life.

Part I

The Saxon Professional Theater after the First World War

In professional theater, the degree of cultural autonomy enjoyed by entrepreneurs and intellectuals is striking: troupe directors negotiated with the Romanian government their best interests, they began inviting foreign artists to join their troupes, and even expanded their businesses by opening theatrical agencies and publishing theater newsletters. These opportunities bolstered ethnic pride as, gradually, theater came to be associated with ethnic promotion. Educated Saxons joined this ethnic mission and encouraged the formation of theater and musical societies to contribute to the Saxon ethnic revival.

Professional actors and troupes were strongly concerned about the cultural conditions that appeared to have been lost with the political changes in the region. Showing its decline in the decrease of professional theater troupes and artists working in the region, the Saxon theater life

witnessed problems well before the war, during decades of language and ethnic rights restrictions enforced by the Hungarian state in historical Transylvania. The Saxon minority began the postwar period in a less-than-ideal situation. The only German-speaking troupe who survived the Hungarian state's control of minority life and the war adversities was administered by Leo Bauer (1849-1921). Born in Bavaria and acquiring experience as a manager of his own troupe in Vienna, Bauer lasted for almost three decades as the sole director of a theater troupe of German language in historical Transylvania. For an audience, he relied on the Saxon class solidarity drawn from a broad range of supporters: the press, the military, and the upper classes, which were eager to challenge the Hungarian state's restrictions against non-Hungarians in public life.⁴⁵⁴ Initially, Bauer played with his troupe in Hermannstadt until 1919, but later was forced to relocate from the Municipal Theater to a small theater hall, at "Unicum." At the end of his activity, in 1921, his troupe played Adolf Meschendorfer's "Michael Weiss," a historical play by a Transylvanian playwright from Kronstadt, and another play, "Brandung" by Karl Beinhardt, thereby, in a sense, conveying, through his choice of plays, that his tenure marked the separation between German and the local Saxon culture.⁴⁵⁵ Marred by economic troubles and pressures from directors of professional troupes from Bukovina and the Banat, Leo Bauer's tenure ended in 1921 in the shadow of financial conflicts.

As Bauer's troupe was dismantled, it was found that there were practically no local troupes or directors to replace him in the province. Bauer would later seek to return, but his enterprise did not have the scale that it used to have. Many troubled theater companies from other provinces began a stark competition for securing a permanent theater in Hermannstadt (Sibiu).⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ Radu-Alexandru Nica, *Nostalgia Mitteleuropei: O Istorie a Teatrului German din Sibiu* (Eikon: Cluj-Napoca, 2013) 131, 133.

⁴⁵⁵ Simion Alterescu, *Istoria Teatrului din România*, Vol. III, 1919-1944 (Editura Academiei R.S.R.: București, 1973), 129.

⁴⁵⁶ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, 1903-1924, Dos. 686/1921, fila 576/31 Dec. 1921.

Through the Saxon Parliamentary deputy Hans Otto Roth (1890-1953), the Romanian government mediated the conflict arising from the material insolvency of these theater companies, but which theater company would serve as a permanent professional troupe in Hermannstadt was still a matter of debate. Hermannstadt, the quintessential Saxon city, with a population of 21,598, compared to 18,620 Romanians and 6,521 Hungarians,⁴⁵⁷ was the traditional Saxon urban center of historical Transylvania and, all around it, there were numerous villages also inhabited by Saxons: Reusdorfchen (Șura Mică, located fifteen miles away, with 560 Saxons and 292 Romanians), Rothberg (Roșia, twelve miles away and counting 401 Saxons, 420 Romanians, and 220 Gypsies), and Schellenberg (Șelimber, three miles away, numbering 669 Saxons, 370 Romanians, and 78 Gypsies).⁴⁵⁸ Hermannstadt city was to provide theatrical performances in the nearby villages by organizing tours. Thus, deciding on a permanent theater troupe was important for the Saxon cultural reputation and financially and demographically important for the large public it would serve.

As numerous moral and financial issues beset German-speaking theaters from neighboring provinces like Banat and Bukovina, many Saxon leaders in Hermannstadt took an active stance: Ernest Buckholzer, the Director of the Central Committee of the Saxons, Ernest Jenekins, (President of the City Hall Committee for Theaters, Hermann Klassung, Editor of the newspaper *Siebenbürgisch-Deutsches Tageblatt*, Gustav Andras, President of the Theatrical Society of Hermannstadt, and Fritz Klein, Editor of the *Deutsche Tagespost*. The agreement reached between the Romanian state and the autonomous city hall of Hermannstadt granted the sole and permanent right to a theater institution in the German language to a theater manager from

⁴⁵⁷ Ernst Wagner, Historisch-Statistisches Ortsnamenbuch für Siebenburgen. Mit einer Einführung in die historische Statistik des Landes (Bohlau Verlag: Köln, Wien, 1977), 353.

⁴⁵⁸ Wagner, p. 353.

Bukovina, but a Hermannstadt native, Richard Csaki (1886-1943).⁴⁵⁹ Through Transylvanian Romanian officials, he was able to gain the Romanian authorities' endorsement in historical Transylvania at the expense of other theater managers like Leo Bauer, Ida Gunther-Weininger, and Wilhelm Popp. Besides delaying the revival of the German theater in the region, compared with that of the Hungarians and Romanians, the serious lack of local theater troupes reduced the candidate list of directors to Wilhelm Popp, known as the director of the Stadttheater Kammer Schauspielhaus in Cernowitz, where he mounted operettas, and Csaki, who, in the end, was found as the best choice for the theater life of Hermannstadt.⁴⁶⁰

By 1925, he was actively involved in bringing to Hermannstadt foreign artists to perform on his stage, as competition for audiences became ever more keen and financial needs became quite pressing.⁴⁶¹ Ever since 1922, numerous Austrian and German actors and troupe directors had applied for permits to perform in historical Transylvania: Alexandre Moissi (1879-1935) of Vienna applied for permit⁴⁶² as well as Ernst Neuhard (1892-1968) from Prague⁴⁶³ and Alfred Wiebach from the Lessing Theater of Berlin.⁴⁶⁴ Despite Minister Constantin Banu's legal restrictions that the number of troupes for an ethnic group needed to match the demographic ratio of the ethnic group at the national level, the foreign artists and troupes nonetheless made survival of a local theater difficult. By 1924, the well-known literary critic, Konrad Nüßbacher (1895-1965) announced in his theater editorial in the review *Cultura (Kultur)* that the opening of the 1923 fall season at Richard Csaki's theater in Hermannstadt was seen "a most important success benefitting German cultural life," being very popular with its repertory of classic dramas (Kleist,

⁴⁵⁹Hermann Rüdiger, "Richard Csaki (1886-1943), Gedenkrede" in Deutschum im Ausland (Stuttgart: Deutschen Ausland-Instituts, 1944), 2.

⁴⁶⁰ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 777/1922, Fila 33/12 Jan. 1922.

⁴⁶¹ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, Direcția Generală a Artelor, Inv. 652, 1920-1929, Dos 15/1925, Fila 34/28 Febr. 1925.

⁴⁶² DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, Dep. Artelor, Inv. 550, dos. 704/1921, Fila 377/30 Nov. 1921

⁴⁶³ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 777/1922, Fila 78/17 Aug. 1922.

Strindberg, Hauptmann, and Schiller), expressionist playwrights, as well as comedies, and operettas.⁴⁶⁵

Only in 1925 was the deputy Hans Otto Roth, serving as President of the German Theaters Union of Romania, ready to press for obtaining perks and benefits from the Romanian state, which other ethnic minorities had enjoyed since 1919. To his disappointment, these were denied: a lowering of the entertainment tax from 32% to 10% or a reduction of 50% on railway transportation for tours. Over the years, the troupe lost even more privileges, disqualifying itself from state support because the majority of the artists in Richard Csaki's troupe were not Romanian citizens but Austrians, Germans, Americans, and Swiss, and the repertory often featured plays that were forbidden by the Romanian authorities, one example being *Grafin Maritza* by Emmerich Kálmán, which they found offensive to other ethnic groups.⁴⁶⁶

By 1927, several German troupes, self-designated as amateur, began to request temporary permits to put on plays in historical Transylvania. By law, amateurs who engaged in theater tours were automatically considered under the category of the professionals. Led by Albert Schultes, the Schultes Troupe of Tegernsee (a Bavarian town in Germany) requested a permit to perform in historical Transylvania. Although the troupe was allegedly made up of theater amateurs, who were peasants of Bavaria, in reality, the company was considered professional in many respects: years of experience as an itinerant troupe all over Europe, the use of elaborate costumes and stage prop inventories, and the ability to pay entertainment taxes to authorities. Readers of Saxon newspapers in Hermannstadt protested against the presence of this troupe, partly because of the misleading self-designation as amateurs, and partly because it offered

⁴⁶⁴ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 777/1922, Fila 262/1 Apr. 1922.

⁴⁶⁵ Dr. Konrad Nüßbacher, "Chronik," *Kultur*, An I, No. 1, Jan. 1924, 89.

⁴⁶⁶ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, 1920-1929, Dos. 35/1925, Fila 34/30 Nov 1925, and Fila 9/6 Febr. 1925, and Dos. 35/1925, Fila 3/14 Jan. 1925.

competition to Saxon amateurs in villages.⁴⁶⁷ Another troupe of peasant “amateurs” from Munich, the Berchtesgadener Bauerntheater, made a tour in Turkey, Romania, Hungary, and Austria with plays by Ludwig Ganghofer and Ludwig Thoma. By touring Romania with plays about the idyllic Bavarian region and its folk,⁴⁶⁸ they hoped to support German culture, but pecuniary interests were as strong as their cultural agenda.⁴⁶⁹

Praised for his theatrical tastes, Richard Csaki organized tours in the region through his own theatrical agency and brought foreign artists into Transylvania. His theater functioned within the legal limits imposed by the ministerial authorities by claiming to protect the interests of the Saxon community as an ethnic minority and the rights of the Saxon artists to adequate employment and work benefits. Saxon professional theater became economically profitable under theater directors like Richard Csaki and Wilhelm Popp (1863-1925). A theater entrepreneur from Kronstadt, Gust Ongyerth (1897-1969) was also involved in theater affairs and proved to be a successful local director. He sponsored the publication of the main Saxon literary review, *Klingsor*, and opened the Klingsor Theater Agency.⁴⁷⁰ At the beginning he relied on companies of local artists, but later on, he followed Csaki’s business model. In 1933, he founded the German Regional Theater of Romania (Deutsches Landestheater in Rumänien) and, for ten years until 1944, he served as its troupe manager. His theater review *Theaternachrichten* (Theater News, 1933-1936) and the repertory of his troupe stressed Germany as the standard to judge Saxon cultural life. According to individuals like Csáki, Popp, and Ongyerth, the Germans living in Greater Romania were to embrace a cosmopolitan mindset inspired by Germany, and their theater was to be an institution as venerable as the Church and the School.

⁴⁶⁷ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 14/1927 Fila 100/12 Martie 1927, Fila 102/17 Mar. 1927, Fila 104/22 Mart 1927, and Fila 68/9 Nov. 1927; Ernst Georg Nied, *Almenrausch und Jägerblut : die Anfänge des berufsmässigen oberbayerischen Bauerntheaters vor dem ersten Weltkrieg*. (München: J. Kitzinger, 1986).

⁴⁶⁸ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 14/1927, Fila 74/75 no date.

Perceiving the theater's merits in strengthening ethnicity, Saxons theater professionals began in earnest to train amateurs to become semiprofessionals and later on to join the professional ranks. One such educator was Karlfritz Eitel (1886-1982), who was involved in training amateurs in Hermannstadt, especially with local students from the Teachers' Seminary.⁴⁷¹ A tenor by profession, he devoted his full time to music by the late 1930s. With ethnic considerations in view, several theater societies opened in Mediasch and Hermannstadt to nurture semiprofessional actors to become a cohort of professionals. Like the Romanians, who sought to train artists with the help of Nicolae Băilă, the Saxons considered training actors as a necessity to stimulate the development of the German-speaking theater.

Theater professionals in cities always considered music an essential component of their shows. It is tempting to conclude that, given the significant role of music in Saxon cultural life and the large number of choir societies, music was more popular than theater. Even when introducing themselves as theater amateurs to authorities to obtain show authorizations, the artisans of Mediasch, for example, gathered together in a "verein" (association) and performed a musical show based on the poem "Frühling der Liebe" by Julius Storm (1806-1896).⁴⁷² Known for his nationalistic and religious poems, Storm studied theology and served as an evangelical minister all his life, writing poems for church services. The goal of all such events was, undoubtedly, to strengthen the sense of ethnicity among the Germans of Transylvania and to stimulate amateurs to challenge themselves and put on shows that were as professional as they could be.

⁴⁶⁹ Nied, 7.

⁴⁷⁰ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 99/1928, Fila 9/2 Aug. 1928.

⁴⁷¹ Ernst von Kraus, "Zeidner erinnert sich: Kindheits- und Jugenderinnerungen, angeregt durch das Buch von Franz Buhn Laientheater in Zeiden" in *Zeidner Gruß, Heimatblatt der Zeidner Nachbarschaft*, 2008, no. 1, 41.

⁴⁷² Fila 28/Dec. 18, 1930, DANIC, Bucuresti, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 86/1930

Movies attracted many Saxon entrepreneurs, both individuals and societies, the latter being more active and numerous than the former. The granting of petitions also tended to favor commercial companies, due to considerations of high costs of film acquisition, delivery, sound/lighting/projection equipment, and technician's fees. The Society of German Artisans of Hermannstadt requested a license to operate film projectors to the local, civic, and ministerial authorities, who approved the request considering that tax collections could increase the budget of the city administration.⁴⁷³ Many predicted a downturn for theater because of its severe crisis, financial and moral, and the slighter interest in music initiatives. Some observers thought, however, that radio and cinema would gradually attract a large audience. In the countryside, however, amateur theater thrived because the new forms of entertainment did not penetrate provincial locations to provide competition for amateur theater.

Amateur Theater

For two centuries, theater was the privilege of the Saxon upper classes while commoners were exposed to short sketches, jokes, short dialogues, published in calendar-almanachs. By late nineteenth century, amateur playwrights began publishing their plays in calendar-almanachs. At the urging of clergy, Saxon writers started considering other sources of inspiration, closer to the understanding of the ordinary folk. This section traces the context in which the commoners and lower classes came to express an interest in theater playing and playwrighting.

The earliest moment the Saxons showed an interest in theater was in the latter half of the eighteenth century, thanks to a merchant, bookseller, printer, and publisher from Hermannstadt, Martin von Hochmeister Sr. (1740-1789), who edited not only the first Saxon daily newspaper, but also the first theatrical review entitled *Theatre Wochenblatt* (The Theater Weekly, 1778). In

⁴⁷³ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, Direcția Generală a Artelor, Inv. 652, 1920-1929, Dos. 89/1926, Fila 34/29 Nov. 1926.

those times, merchants and students, in the majority traveling abroad to study Lutheran theology at Leipzig were in close contact with the West. Also coming from the West, in particular Vienna, were the private companies of professional theater performing in German in the urban playhouses of Hungary, including Transylvania. Scheduling Viennese plays, these troupes exerted a kind of monopoly in the theatrical life, starting from the early 1700s until 1850. To well-connected citizens like Hochmeister or his upper-class readership, theater was a means of Western *loisir*, but, more importantly, a tool used by the Habsburg Court to integrate the Saxon upper-rank groups of Hermannstadt into the imperial elite.⁴⁷⁴ Hochmeister's conversion to Catholicism upon his appointment as imperial bookbinder and publisher is ample evidence of the intended and successful social integration of the Saxon elite in both religious and cultural terms.

In the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, the Saxon commoners' tastes for entertainment that might be connected to theater are hard to trace. One source, however, is a genre of literature, called calendar-almanacs, which served the tastes and needs of ordinary people by providing dates and religious events, articles about the main leaders of the Reformation, the ruling Imperial House, and numerous economic, social, or religious notices dealing with general issues of interest for a wide readership.⁴⁷⁵ Published locally, the calendar-almanacs are valuable for their rich content of short stories, fables, anecdotes and farces, which tended to rely on Saxon daily life for inspiration. These texts might be considered the earliest exposure of ordinary Saxons to content that would serve as an inspiration for authors, or as a script to be performed in front of an audience. Being initiated in the late eighteenth century, the tradition of such publications continued up to the Second World War. The calendar-almanac printed by Martin Hochmeister was the *Neuer Verbesserter und alter Kalender* (The Newer, Improved Old Calendar), which

⁴⁷⁴ Mihaela Grancea, "Conturarea identității transilvane în zorii modernității. Câteva considerații pe marginea unor evenimente și fapte de cultură" in L.Stanciu, Ana-Maria Roman-Negoi, and T.Rosu (eds.), Reconstituiri Istorice, Idei, Cuvinte, Rezentari. Omagiu Profesorului Iacob Mârza, 270.

started publication in 1791 and, by 1793 it began inserting in its pages numerous fables, anecdotes and farces. In the 1890s, calendars began to publish in their pages the first plays attempted by amateur playwrights.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, theater as a literary avocation did not yet make inroads among the Saxon literati. Neither did amateurs see performances as being too appealing to their needs. Conservatism in politics mirrored a similar attitude in cultural life, and theater was perceived as a venue of criticism and mockery which did not square well with the imperial authorities, always susceptible to the slightest allusions in the performances of the professional troupes on tour all over the Empire. Following the Revolution of 1848, the reactionary atmosphere stifled even further the literary attempts, which could have emboldened ordinary individuals to write plays and present their ideas to a public audience.

In the last half of the nineteenth century, Evangelical Lutheran upper clergy counteracted the trends of Hungarian cultural assimilation by authoring works of linguistics, folklore, history and literature, representative of the Saxon identity. Theater, however, was not one of their interests at this time, but in the long run, the playwrights of later decades greatly built upon the clergy's urging to become aware of what makes their literature Saxon. The clergy encouraged Saxon society to become acquainted with the folk spirit, display a concern for tradition, and help a Saxon ethnic consciousness find expression in their writings. This propensity toward expressing national feeling in literature is important for our focus on amateur theater, because it was to be found again amply revived after the First World War, and in particular in the plays of the Saxon amateurs.

⁴⁷⁵ Mioara Avram, Calendarele Sibiene în Limba Germană (Secolele XVII-XX) (Sibiu: Biblioteca Astra, 1979).

Cultural development preoccupied Saxon lower clergy at the local level. Around the 1890s, they sought to diversify religious life in the three main social organizations of the Church: *nachbarshafts* (neighborhoods), Saxon brotherhoods, and women's associations. They encouraged musical and theatrical events in cooperation with local schoolteachers as a means of strengthening cohesion around religion.⁴⁷⁶ In the same decade, we witness the publication of historical plays written by Saxon amateurs in publications catering to an audience of commoners like the *Sächsischer Hausfreund. Ein Kalender für Siebenbürger zur Unterhaltung und Belehrung* (The Household Friend: a Calendar for Transylvanians to Educate and Instruct).⁴⁷⁷ In this calendar, Gottfried Wilhelm Henning, writing under his pseudonym as Sachs Erwin (1829-1909), published his play in feilleteonistic format, marking the beginnings of amateur drama written by ordinary individuals and published in folk calendars. His main play, *Die Deutschen Ritter im Burzenlande* (The German Rider in the Bârsei Lands), was published in installments in the *Sächsischer Hausfreund* (The Saxon Household Friend) while two other plays, to be found in a manuscript format, were entitled "Johannes Honterus" and "Der Honterusschuler vor Marienburg" (The Honterus School in Marienburg).⁴⁷⁸ Like the previous calendars, the *Sächsischer Hausfreund* first catered to its Evangelical Lutheran, Catholic, and Orthodox readership with jokes and short stories, and, gradually, it featured plays inspired by the Saxon daily life and authored by individuals who took up literature as an avocation. After graduating from the Law Academy in Hermannstadt, Henning worked for the Saxon Nationsuniversität (the administrative organization of the Saxons) as a legal advisor and lawyer and even penned several legal works in Budapest. His literary propensities started late in life in the 1880s with a translated edition of Hungarian songs, deftly put in German rhyme; he continued with a collection of folk and family stories,

⁴⁷⁶ Adolf Schullerus, *Siebenbürgisch-Sächsische Volkskunde im Umriss* (Scurt Tratat de Etnografie a Saşilor din Transilvania (Editura Meronia: Bucureşti, 2003), 190.

⁴⁷⁷ *Sächsischer Hausfreund. Ein Kalender für Siebenbürger zur Unterhaltung und Belehrung* (Kronstadt: 1851-1913).

published in installments in the *Sächsischer Hausfreund*. He showed interest in the humor inspired from the local lore in the Saxon dialect, as well as wrote poetry, which he published in several anthologies in Hermannstadt and helped circulate them widely in the province. After he retired from civic service, Henning became a notable presence in literary periodicals in Bistritz through a rich journalistic activity.

In the nineteenth century, Saxon intellectuals were resolved to bolster the mission of Saxon literature to convey a specific Saxon identity. They went about it gradually, starting with a focus on language, literature, and history, taking up the Evangelical-Lutheran pastors' example of writing dictionaries, history treatises, and works of literature. It bears noting that these Saxon intellectuals received training in primary and secondary schools managed by the local Lutheran clergy and continued their college education in universities in Germany, choosing fields like theology, philosophy, and philology. But secular intellectuals intended their works as "weapons" not only for cementing the Saxon culture, but for grounding one's identity first and foremost in a strong ethnic rather than religious foundation. With this particular ethnic purpose in view, the Verein für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde (The Society for Transylvanian Ethnography) began its activity, and fundamental studies were published in its review *Archiv*, starting in 1842. The first study of theater history (1800-1838) for the Transylvanian region was published in the *Archiv* by Eugen Filtsch (1856-1919), at first a preacher in Sibiu and, later on, an Evangelical-Lutheran pastor in Bucharest.⁴⁷⁹

Amateur initiatives in writing or performing plays, however, remained slight, the prose and poetry being the most controversial topics that fueled a fervent debate among the upper social and educated circles. Between 1867 and 1933, at the forefront of debate, four successive opposing

⁴⁷⁸Schriftsteller-Lexikon der Siebenbürger Deutschen (Böhlau Verlag: Köln, 1983), Band IV, 182.

⁴⁷⁹Dr. Eugen Filtsch, "Geschichte des Deutschen Theaters in Siebenbürgen," in Archiv des Vereines für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, Neue Folge, Dreinundzwanzigster Band, 2.Heft (Hermannstadt:1891).

groups monopolized the public discourse in Saxon society. The debate centered around the orientation of Saxon cultural life, that is, whether Saxon identity should draw closer to Germany or remain attached to a “small-Saxon” culture; also, it debated about how much traditionalism should inform literary works. These divisions shaped the public discourse at various times: the Old Saxons and the Young Saxons (1867-1890), the Greens and the Blacks (1890-1900), the Small Saxons and the Pan-Germans (1900-1918), the Conservatives and the Reformers after 1918.⁴⁸⁰ An exaggerated focus on ethnicity, however, inevitably placed these groups on a political course that alienated opponents. The literary historian Karl Kurt Klein pertinently observed that ethnicity was “die Gefahr einer Vergötzung des Volkstums” (the danger of nationality’s fetishism) Writers, in the majority public intellectuals and political activists, Klein argued, should show the fundamental role played by their Evangelical-Lutheran faith and Church in Saxon society, being the institution to which the Saxon people owed its very existence.⁴⁸¹ After the Second World War, the dismantling of the Saxon’s church organization led to the disappearance of Saxon collective solidarity, although ethnic consciousness remained in place to distinguish the Saxons who relocated to Germany from Germans.⁴⁸²

The Compromise of 1867 between the Court of Vienna and the Hungarian state, which gave the latter the right to self-administration in a dual monarchical system, led to the emergence of a new cultural context. It was defined by a sustained campaign of Hungarian assimilation, targeting all of the ethnic groups living in the Hungarian lands including Germans. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, many Germans all over Hungary assimilated to Hungarian culture, with the exception of the Saxons of Transylvania. In the entire Hungarian lands of the

⁴⁸⁰ Andreas Mockel “Kleinsächsisch oder Alldeutsch? Zum Selbstverständnis der Siebenbürger Sachsen von 1867-1933, in Walter König (ed.), *Siebenbürgen Zwischen den Beiden Weltkriegen* (Böhlau: Wien, 1994).

⁴⁸¹ Mockel, 139.

⁴⁸² Katherine Verdery, “The Unmaking of an Ethnic Collectivity: Transylvania’s Germans” in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Febr. 1985, 63.

Habsburg Empire it was the Germans of this mountainous province who remained Saxon, including their intelligentsia and cultured class. The danger of assimilation to the Hungarian culture was warded off thanks to two institutions that helped maintain the Saxon resilience in preserving their identity: the Saxon University, an administrative structure governing all affairs of the Saxons in the province (1486-1876) and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession, headquartered in the Saxon major city, Hermannstadt (Sibiu). Although in 1876 it was dismantled in its latter phase as a foundation, the Saxon University left behind a tradition of autonomous administration in cultural affairs which buttressed Saxon culture for years to come. The Evangelical-Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession succeeded in encompassing almost the entire Saxon population, and it remained the only Saxon institution with which the Saxons, laypeople and believers, continuously identified themselves up to the present. One might well say that for Saxons, since the late 1700s up until World War II, faith determined ethnicity; in this case, Lutheranism in Transylvania meant being Saxon.

At the turn of the twentieth century, churches and schools encouraged a cultural life in small communities, and men's choirs and orchestras testify to the culture's role in bonding local communities in almost every village where Saxons lived in historical Transylvania. How amateur theater came to be embraced on an everyday basis raises the aspect of political and social context, which encouraged such a reorientation in artistic choices. In the postwar conditions, theater more than music came to be seen as necessary to revitalize communities and was to be embraced on a very large scale, yet theater never became a goal in itself taking priority over other aspects. If theater professionals and the Saxon upper elite saw theater as an institution to be developed as an independent and powerful body to work solely for the interests of the community, the amateurs saw theater playing as depending on and even subsumed to the spiritual and cultural needs of the community. Amateur theater was an effective medium for delivering an eloquent message of

belonging and togetherness in a collective setting, while being suitable for emphasizing virtues in respect to faith, morality and traditions.

As it developed further, the success of amateur theater proved disastrous for professional performances. Evidence of it is the call issued in the press by “Deutsches Landestheater in Rumänien” (The Regional German Theater of Romania, 1933-1939), asking local leaders to cease temporarily local events in order to free more spectators to attend to professional theater. The call was couched in ethnic terms and appealed to the Saxons’ sense of patriotism.⁴⁸³ But in small communities and villages, churchmen and churchwomen organized their own plays. For them, religion resonated more with their Saxon identity than ethnicity did. The theater’s uses for educational purposes also differed, as the amateurs’ plays were in line with the concept of *Volkskirche*, coined and advocated since the latter half of the nineteenth century by Bishop Georg Daniel Teutsch (1817-1893), and many plays authored by clergymen delved into the fundamental principles of life with deep foundations in Evangelical Lutheranism and Saxon tradition.

The dialect of the plays also persuaded amateurs to prefer their own events. Dialect took precedence over other elements of identification, such as Germany, cosmopolitanism, or the modern German language. Amateurs revealed efforts to preserve and currently use their local dialect, which was often limited to only a few villages in a county. Dialect was the language used in plays as well as in everyday life. The overwhelming use of dialect was a specific particularity of Saxon amateur theater, which secured cohesion in communities and reconnected the young with the old generation. Aside from enhancing local patriotism, the use of dialect on stage had the effect of preserving the Saxons’ ties with their local land rather than Transylvania as a whole. Since all Saxons were Evangelical Lutheran, it was religion rather than language that gave Saxons a region-wide awareness as an ethnic group.

Recognized both as a minority and as citizens of Greater Romania, the Saxons were free to create a cultural space of their own, emphasize religion as the marker of their identity, and conceive of identity as an extension of Evangelical Lutheranism. I would not call them cultural nationalists because as John Hutchinson argues, the latter are known for spurning traditional religions and are in conflict with traditionalism, despite their efforts at moral regeneration and the focus on the artist as the paradigmatic figure of the national community. Cultural nationalists, Hutchinson concludes, have a politics of their own, the way political nationalists have.⁴⁸⁴ What makes Transylvania such a fascinating region in the early twentieth century is that religion continued to play a very prominent role in the life of ethnic minorities long after the early modern phenomenon of confessionalization, which led to the consolidation of religious creeds and their variations in the context of a weak or strong state.⁴⁸⁵ In recent times, amateur theater fleshes out the local dimensions of religious influences still strong in the region.

Historiography

Comparative studies examining German-speaking diaspora groups in twentieth century Central-Eastern Europe acknowledged the privileged status of the Saxons living in Romania. This was the only country in Eastern Europe where Germans witnessed the least state interference in their internal affairs. Scholars concurred that it was only with the onset of the communist regime in 1947 that internal autonomy for minorities suddenly came to a halt.⁴⁸⁶ The cultural autonomies of ethnic minorities inhabiting Greater Romania in the interwar period have recently been the

⁴⁸³“Aufruf für das Deutsche Landestheater,” Theaternachrichten, an II, nr. 5, 31 Mar. 31, 1934, 1.

⁴⁸⁴ John Hutchinson, “Cultural Nationalism and Moral Regeneration” in John Hutchinson, Anthony D. Smith (ed.) Nationalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). 123-131.

⁴⁸⁵ Volker Leppin, Ulrich A. Wien, (eds.), Konfessionsbildung und Konfessionskultur in Siebenbürgen in der Frühen Neuzeit. Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des östlichen Europas (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005).

⁴⁸⁶ Stefan Wolff (ed.) German Minorities in Europe: Ethnic Identity and Cultural Belonging (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 224

subject of research, but in the case of the Saxon minority the overall perspective dwelt on the upper middle-class, that is, the well-off and urban Saxon intellectuals.⁴⁸⁷

Beginning with the Loyalty Oath of Mediasch of January 1919 and the Schäßburger Debate and Assembly (Sachsentag) of December 1919, the Saxons held high political hopes of autonomy, seeking legal, administrative self-government and state subsidies for Saxon schools. But the final stipulations of the 1923 Romanian Constitution in regard to minority rights fell short of their expectations leaving behind only “defeats, disappointments, and conflicts” (“Niederlagen,” “Enttäuschungen,” und “Konflikten”).⁴⁸⁸ Legislative autonomy for the Saxons was not possible, since it would contradict the modern constitutional structures of nation-states; preserving legal privileges which the Saxons enjoyed in the previous centuries under the Hungarian regime could border on federalism, making such requests impossible to take into consideration.⁴⁸⁹ But for Pastor Adolph Schullerus, confidence in the Romanian people and personal trust in the Romanian statesmen who were to govern Greater Romania were of utmost necessity. He perceived in the new context a relation between the majority and minorities based on political commitments, but also on mutual confidence and good will.⁴⁹⁰

Although confidence often gave way to disappointments in public discourses, it did not disappear when plans were put into action. Having trust in the Romanian commitments to cultural freedom for minorities, the Saxons started a vibrant amateur theater movement in almost all their communities in historical Transylvania. Held in Hermannstadt in 1931, the Assembly of Saxon leaders acknowledged that politics had failed to restore to Saxons rights enjoyed prior to 1867, but the participants agreed that it was time to strengthen inner forces in order to rebuild the

⁴⁸⁷ Keith Hitchins “Autonomies in Interwar Romania: Hungarians, Saxons, and Jews” in Sorin Antohi, (ed.)

⁴⁸⁸ Cornelius R. Zach, “Der Status der Siebenbürger Sachsen in Rumänien – Gesetzliche Verankerung und Wirklichkeit, 1919-1933,” in *Aspekte...*, 241.

⁴⁸⁹ Günther H. Tontsch, “Legiferarea Statutară și Jurisdicția ca atribuții fundamentale ale Universității Săsești” in *Transilvania și Sașii Ardeleni in Istoriografie* (Sibiu: Editura Hora, 2001), 56.

economic basis of Saxon communities affected by the Great Depression. Amateur theater demonstrated the Saxons' organizational capacity to redress depleted finances and exert cultural influence in complex ways.

Evidence that cultural freedoms were taken for granted is found in Saxon philosophical and literary works and articles of social commentary published by Saxon intellectuals, who enjoyed the benefit of thinking freely, pursuing self-knowledge, and making spiritual affirmations. As active contributors to the literary monthly *Klingsor* (Kronstadt, Braşov, 1924-1939), they wrote on a variety of topics and interests, being unimpeded by centralizing tendencies or restrictive measures advocated by Romanian nationalists. They claimed that autonomy was an inherited right justified by the particular mission of the Saxons in the region as mediators between East and West. It was not a political claim buttressed by Saxon cultural superiority or their numbers, which were, after all much smaller than those of the Romanians and Hungarians.

Amateur theater has received no treatment in monographs about Saxon communities in Transylvania. If covered in historical surveys, Saxon cultural life deals mainly with urban developments, leaving out rural life and the local elites in villages and small towns.⁴⁹¹ Similarly, studies on Saxon literature focused on the poets, novelists, and critics considered representative for their works about the village world, and, in general, acknowledged as works of literary value. Amateurs, however, preferred works that could serve the community's social needs. Thus, the folk dramas by pastors and schoolteachers were dismissed for literary shortcomings. For the purposes of this study, the latter plays have been identified, located and examined, being necessary for understanding amateur theater events through their messages reaching playgoers.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ Paul Şeulean, *Comunitatea Germană*, 74.

⁴⁹¹ Monica Vlaicu, "Zur Geschichte des Hermannstädter Theaters" in Daniel Nazare, Ruxandra Nazare, Bogdan F. Popovici (eds.), *In Honorem Gernot Nußbächer* (Braşov: Editura Foton, 2004), 445.

⁴⁹² Karl Kurt Klein, *Literaturgeschichte des Deutschtums im Ausland, Schriftum und Geistesleben der Deutschen Volksgruppen im Ausland vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Bibliographisches Institut AG: Leipzig: 1939); Vasile

I have used in my study village monographs, ethnographic journals published by Saxon cultural societies, and literary works giving first-hand accounts of everyday life in Saxon villages.⁴⁹³

In the next section, I trace the political, cultural, and intellectual background for the emergence of the amateur theater movement, and I will examine the different social categories living in Saxon villages and towns that were actively interested in theater playing: pastors, women's societies, schoolteachers, and firefighters. I seek to show that the strength and place of religion in different localities and counties and the organizers' own agenda led to the Saxon cultural revival in the region.

Political Context and Debate

The status of ethnic groups in historical Transylvania depended on the treatment given by each government in power. Indigenous since medieval times, Saxon communities enjoyed a special position in the Habsburg Empire up until the nineteenth century. They seemed to adjust to the constant losses of status they experienced from the nineteenth century; first, they lost their autonomous institutions at the hands of the Hungarians, who, in 1876, outlawed the Nationsuniversität (Universitas Saxonum). Then, after the First World War, they also had to face the effects of the agrarian reform (1921-1923), carried out by the Romanian state which dispossessed them of their significant forest and cultivated lands.⁴⁹⁴ Being denied administrative autonomy through the local administration law, which was promulgated by the Liberal-run Romanian state in 1925 and again in 1933, the Saxon communities arguably benefitted from the temporary local decentralization introduced by the National-Peasant regime in 1929. Once in

Ciobanu, Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei Sașilor Transilvăneni, 1918-1944 (Hora: Sibiu, 2003); Carl Göllner, Joachim Wittstock (eds.), Die Literatur der Siebenbürger Sachsen in den Jahren 1849-1918: Beiträge zur Geschichte der rumäniendeutschen Dichtung (București: Kriterion, 1979).

⁴⁹³ Verein für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, Archiv des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde (Hermannstadt: Michaelis Kronstadt Verein, 1845-1944). The whole series is enormously rich in materials on Saxon culture.

⁴⁹⁴ Keith Hitchins, Rumania 1866-1947 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 355.

power from 1928 to 1933, this Party gave local administrators at the village and county levels considerable power of decision which allowed minorities ample opportunities for their own initiatives.⁴⁹⁵ The Saxons experienced further material and financial losses during the Great Depression. But, at the same time, they drew even closer to each other by organizing cultural events. Then, too, the absence of centralized bureaucratic oversight due, in large part, to underfunded institutions, diminished to a certain degree the presence of the Romanian state in the region.⁴⁹⁶ It also meant that minorities could greatly benefit from the widening gap between the letter of the law and everyday practice as long as they did not threaten national security.

The contacts between Saxon theater amateurs and the Romanian state occurred at different levels. As the 1926 Law of Theaters stipulated, amateurs needed official approval for plays performed in a language other than Romanian, the official state language. The paths followed by amateurs to obtain the required paperwork for scheduling theater events remained surprisingly the same for both interwar decades and was similarly applied to all minority groups. It even applied to Romanian groups and citizens who performed their shows in Romanian, but who could be suspected of breaking the law and disregarding Article 57, which forbade offensive content directed against other ethnic groups.

The steps to obtain a play permit were numerous and trying. Amateurs had to secure first the patronage of their own local elites, primary schoolteachers, and pastors. A petition to be forwarded eventually to the Ministry in Bucharest needed to include a note from the village officials and the county prefect stating that they approved of the amateurs' play, location, and purpose. With all these required seals, the amateurs, then, could mail their petition to the Theater Inspectorate of Klausenburg, where Emil Isac (1886-1954), the inspector in charge, with his very

⁴⁹⁵ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 31/1931, Fila 1/27 Ian. 1931.

⁴⁹⁶ Hitchins, 372.

limited personnel (one or two clerks), gave the seal of approval on the proposed play and the date of performance. Isac forwarded the petition with his recommendation to ministry officials in Bucharest, where the final decision, either approval or rejection, was made within two weeks. If approved, a copy of the petition was mailed to both Inspector Isac and the petitioner. If rejected, the copies of the resolution were mailed to the local authorities (the police, the mayor's office, and the county prefect) to prevent the performance from occurring. The state officials verified the educational content of plays and the honest intentions of the organizers. One case of rejection involved the play *Der Rote Adler* by Adolf Sommerfeld, submitted for approval by amateurs.⁴⁹⁷ As Isac argued, the play contained lengthy passages criticizing Italian rule in Tyrol, and he argued that the script could easily hint at the new Romanian regime in Transylvania. As the play contained improper material, Inspector Isac withdrew the authorization.⁴⁹⁸

More experienced and literate than other ethnic groups in Transylvania, the Saxons from various Transylvanian cities and villages perceived the context quite favorable for cultural initiatives and acted upon this opportunity by founding local groups and submitting or renewing statutes of prewar and new cultural societies in an effort to highlight their interest in organizing plays. By the end of the 1920s, in practically every village there were numerous local societies of young men and women, artisans, or peasants, older women, and firefighters, all ready to put on plays. This favorable situation is evidence of the legal cooperation between the Romanian government and minorities in cultural life, one that left room for compromise, fresh initiatives, and a successful integration in Romanian society.

⁴⁹⁷ Adolf Sommerfeld, *Der Rote Adler* (Bin Friedman: Verlag Continent, 1918).

⁴⁹⁸ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Departamentul Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 35/1931, Fila 116/21 Dec. 1931.

Cultural Context and Debate

Through their ideas and publications, intellectuals (university professors, journalists, and writers) shaped considerably the overall cultural development among the Saxons and contributed to an increase in cultural interests and idealism. In various writings they discussed the phenomenon of amateur theater, and were often critical of the plays that were put on. Although the leading voices in organizing amateur theater were the local elite, it would be hard to understand fully the local cultural life without reference to intellectuals. Similar in their overall goals of furthering cultural activities, the two groups played different roles and maintained separate paths of inquiry and action: while the leading Saxon intellectuals pondered and reflected in their writings on Saxon literature and culture, the Saxon local elite busied itself with organizing cultural life in each community by assuming concrete roles as patrons and participants.

In this section, I seek to reveal the intellectuals' contributions by way of written word to the creation of an autonomous Saxon cultural space. Their views on the theater's potential to strengthen Saxon identity and the ethnic group as a whole highlighted the role of modernist innovations and the importance of a forward-looking and secularist mentality. By looking closely at intellectual debates in the main literary reviews, it is evident that leading Saxon intellectuals enjoyed writing in the cultural environment of Greater Romania and pondering Saxon opportunities for cultural growth. In contrast, the local elites made efforts to represent on stage what culture meant for ordinary Saxons.

Intellectuals

Generally, the impact of ethnicity on theater, its audiences, and its purpose in Saxon cultural life began in the early twentieth century. Writings about Saxon ethnicity abounded in Kronstadt, where political and literary debates engaged many Saxon intellectuals. Some placed

ethnicity higher than other elements of identity, and attempted to weaken tradition, history, and religion as markers of identity. The major literary journal, *Die Karpathen*, (1907-1914), edited by Adolf Meschendorfer (1877-1963) is representative of this trend through an emphasis on exceptionalism, eccentricity, and individualism. His defense of esthetic criteria in all works of literature was coupled with his urging to all Saxon writers to abandon the traditional, historical, religious, and ethnic framework of self-understanding. He recommended that Saxons imagine themselves in the future as modern individuals, as creators upholding the same esthetic values that were being shared everywhere in Europe. Even in his own novels Meschendorfer contributed to the originality of Saxon modern literature by placing his stories in the present rather than in the past, and by making the case for artistic objectivity as indispensable for the new literary productions. He was also among the first to break with the trend of historical perspective that usually dominated literature.⁴⁹⁹ No wonder that amateur theater found closed doors at *Die Karpathen* since the journal set for itself the task of promoting esthetic education and discovering new talents anchored to the latest esthetic trends. Articles in *Die Karpathen* heavily criticized dilettantism, small-town mentalities and the ossification of traditional ways, and therefore it failed to become the catalyst for inspiring and nurturing amateur theater.

Works of lesser value, such as amateur plays, did not make it onto the pages of Meschendorfer's review, because *Die Karpathen* emboldened writers to write modern literature and abandon historical themes. No significant crop of modern writers emerged, however, but it yielded an unexpected result: the creation of a scientific, esthetic foundation for literature. The writers who did not adhere to modern esthetic motives sought instead inspiration and a source of originality in the works of historians and storytellers. Lesser known playwrights used such works for a wide range of topics and themes, and gave them an incentive to write. Historians also found

⁴⁹⁹ Göllner, Wittstock, *Die Literatur...*, 295.

appealing to venture into the literary field and write works of ethnographical and cultural history with a literary bend (Georg Adolph Schuller, Otto Fritz Jickeli).⁵⁰⁰ Literary history, as well as ethnography and history emerged in full swing by the turn of the century as fields in their own right and were both closely connected with the spiritual life of the Transylvanian Saxons.⁵⁰¹ The review's platform of ideas as well as writers not affiliated to a literary current shaped a rich Saxon cultural life before the Great War.

In Hermannstadt, pastors continued to write plays and publish them with the help of the Krafft family. As owners of a publishing house, the Kraffts had a long experience in the book business and, over the decades, it was associated with a long tradition of religious fervor. As the son-in-law of Samuel Filtsch, Johann Wilhelm Krafft (1833-1908) displayed an indefatigable energy coupled with business acumen.⁵⁰² Samuel Filtsch was the youngest son of Johann Filtsch (1783-1867), a senior pastor in Hermannstadt and a historian who published a biography of his grandfather, also a pastor. Although his grandfather Johann Filtsch (1769-1835) was also a publisher and bookstore owner in Bistrița, Samuel learned the art of publishing from Martin Hochmeister Jr. (1767-1837), whose business operated in Kronstadt. Gaining experience from working for Hochmeister, Samuel was able to open his own publishing house and bookstore in Hermannstadt in 1826.⁵⁰³ The Krafft publishing house of the family selected and approved for publication religious works and plays by, among others, Ernst Thullner (1862-1918), one of the most popular Saxon playwrights in the interwar period.

After the postwar territorial boundaries had been settled in favor of Romania, the multi-ethnic province of Transylvania witnessed a sluggish cultural and intellectual revival. Saxon intellectuals were the first to engage in a lively debate by way of journals and public lectures with

⁵⁰⁰ Göllner, Wittstock, 175-176.

⁵⁰¹ Göllner, Wittstock, 177.

⁵⁰² Die Siebenbürgen Sachsen Lexikon, 80.

issues of Saxon culture. Many ideas pitted the old generation against the young, and the views that prevailed in newspapers were those of university professors and politicians. To improve their relations with their host country, Saxon intellectuals emphasized a crucial element in their search for a place in Greater Romania: Transylvania's unique character.⁵⁰⁴ The current sense of isolation which dominated the thinking of the pre-war "little Saxon," was to be overcome by reaching out to Germany through cultural exchanges.⁵⁰⁵ At the same time, the sense of local belonging is reinforced through the creation of a Saxon domestic literature specific to Transylvania.

In defense of their intellectual autonomy, Saxons remained middle-class in views and actions. Even in their work as cultural animators, they undertook initiatives that affected only the upper levels of the educated, secular intellectuals. In their search for original literary models, they created a sense of elite cultural space within the Saxon ethnic community. One example is the playwright Hermann Klöß, an expressionist by artistic creed, who was committed to a literary space of *Dorfrealismus* (village realism) in a modern sense, that is, unrelated to village life as such, and makes the Saxon amateur theater movement were not touched by such literary currents, which shaped the horizons of urban intellectuals like Kloß. We find the reason why the two currents remained apart in Klöß's plays, which feature peasants revolting against pastors in conflicts about power, money, and greed. They reveal a context totally estranged from the Saxon rural world depicted in the plays preferred by amateurs.⁵⁰⁶ It is all the more surprising that Klöß's play, Die Braut von Urwegen, Tragödie (1918)⁵⁰⁷ had been nonetheless performed in Codlea in December 1938 by the Evangelical-Lutheran Women Society led by Magda Bell on the second

⁵⁰³ Joseph Trausch (ed.), Schriftsteller-Lexikon der Siebenbürger Deutschen Band I, 325.

⁵⁰⁴ Keith Hitchins, "Autonomies in" 18.

⁵⁰⁵ Andreas Möckel, "Kleinsächsisch oder Alldeutsch? Zum selbst verstandnis der Siebenbürger Sachsen von 1876 bis 1933", in Walter König (ed.), Siebenbürgen Zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen (Böhlau Verlag: Köln, 1994), 29.

⁵⁰⁶ Michael Markel, "Expressionismus in der Rumäniendeutschen Literatur Rezeption, Erscheinungsweise und Lokale Interferenzen" in Anton Schwob and Brigitte Tontsche (eds.), Die Siebenbürgisch-Deutsche Literatur als Beispiel Einer Regionalliteratur (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1993), 177.

day after Christmas. When Inspector Isac approved the petition, he expressed his surprise at this preference for a romantic play.⁵⁰⁸ Since amateurs put on plays that appealed to the audience attending them, one may infer that the Saxon middle class dominating the audience expressed a propensity for plays that appeared in professional repertories, and Klöß's play was certainly a well-known one.

Committed as they were to the higher issues, Saxon intellectuals were much concerned about ethnic identity, its characteristics and sources of strength. Similar thoughts and queries occurred among ordinary Saxons, too, but, not in the abstract guise of identity or ethnic concepts. Whether intellectuals influenced Saxon villagers to see ethnicity as a priority is hard to know. Intellectuals who grappled with identity perceived a deep sense of crisis affecting Saxon self-understanding, while ordinary people may have experienced it, but did not come fully to terms with it. Moreover, intellectuals did not see religion as an active force for pushing forward efforts to revive cultural initiatives and life as it used to be before the war. Rather, to them religion seemed to remain an essential, but passive element of identity and culture. On the other hand, the Saxon local elite and amateurs concerned themselves greatly with Saxon religious beliefs, upon choosing to perform a play, for they would only rarely select plays with no moral-religious elements.⁵⁰⁹

Saxon intellectuals were certain of the role theater could play in the education and cultural advancement of the Saxon people after World War I. The new conditions under which the Saxons found themselves as a minority ethnic group required new cultural approaches, which were widely debated in cultural reviews. Their suggestions of a theater movement were made initially to enlighten the masses, but they conceived of it in terms of professional theater and

⁵⁰⁷ Hermann Klöß, "Die Braut von Urwegen Tragödie," Kalendar Siebenburger Volkfreunde (49), 23, 1918, 49-60. Karl Kurt Klein, Literaturgeschichte..., 420.

⁵⁰⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 819, Dos. 3/1938 vol. II, Fila 291/ 6 Dec. 1938.

classical plays. Also, they had in mind an audience solely comprised of middle and upper-class Saxons. Hopeful and positive, Saxon intellectuals believed that a minority group could enjoy cultural, intellectual, and spiritual autonomy under the new regime in Greater Romania and were ready to embrace the idea of bringing cultures together in order to further cooperation, recognition, and mutual support. Pursuing this agenda, a Transylvanian cultural review *Cultura* (1924) in three languages announced its publication. It lasted only four issues and its mission was to bring together representatives of all ethnic groups in order to enliven professional theater as well as the humanities in general. In their call for unity published in three languages, the Saxon representatives, the literary critic Konrad Nüssbach and Richard Csaki, made a strong case in favor of the role of professional theater and private theater companies in raising the level of Saxon cultural life. They targeted especially an audience mainly composed of Saxon theater lovers from the upper-classes and asked them for material support to fund Saxon theatrical companies.⁵¹⁰

After the First World War, the emergence of a new literary review, *Klingsor* (1924-1939) in Kronstadt, introduced an extraordinary novelty by allowing for the first time that plays, theatrical scripts, and reviews of both professional and amateur theatrical performances be featured in its pages. This was a striking change in the journalistic approach to literature, since the prewar Saxon literary periodicals focused only on high quality drama representative of such major European currents as naturalism and devoted space only to reviews of professional theater premieres. But now intellectuals recognized the phenomenon of amateur theater and tried to define its characteristics and merits in the pages of *Klingsor*. The most important Saxon journal of the interwar period, *Klingsor* began publication under the leadership of leading intellectuals, the playwright, Gustav Ongyert (1897-1969) and the journalist and novelist Heinrich Zillich (1898-

⁵⁰⁹ Keith Hitchins, "Autonomies...", 14-15.

1988). The review was a powerful reflection of the opportunities for minorities of cultural and intellectual expression available in Greater Romania. *Klingsor's* originality is best highlighted if one compares it to the international review *Ostland* (1919-1921, 1926-1931) founded by Richard Csaki with the intention of creating a "spiritual network" among all Germans from Central Europe to the Baltic Sea.⁵¹¹ *Klingsor*, unlike *Ostland*, advocated the separate development of cultural life for the Transylvanian Saxons, rather than pushing like Csaki for a collective, all-German autonomous cultural life.

Klingsor's claim to be opening a new era in 1924 with its first issue is not an exaggeration, if one considers its contribution as a driving force in the development of Saxon theater life. Eighty-three plays were published in its pages, many in Saxon dialect, while those performed by amateurs, very rarely reviewed, were often reviewed critically. Typically, *Klingsor* addressed only the most representative works of both modernist and traditional orientations: expressionism and naturalism. Unlike *Karpathen*, it even inserted articles and notes about the venerable genre of calendar- almanachs describing anecdotes, jokes, short stories, fables, grotesque snippets, sketches.⁵¹² Thanks to its insightful editor, Heinrich Zillich, *Klingsor* announced a return to tradition, and, at the same time, an opening toward European literary currents in accordance with his principle that Saxon identity was shaped by a synthesis of local Saxon culture and the German cosmopolitan world in Europe.

Zillich promoted theater activities with extraordinary zeal beginning with the second issue of *Klingsor* in an article about the theater question among the Saxons of Transylvania.⁵¹³ He encouraged theater playing by giving detailed advice on purpose and mission, the persons

⁵¹⁰ Pompilia Burciă, "Romanian Language and Cultural Politics after World War I: Theatrical Aspects in the Literary Journal *Cultura*," in *Români Majoritari/Români Minoritari, Interferențe și Coabitari Lingvistice, Literare și Etnologice* (Iași: Alfa, 2008), 491.

⁵¹¹ Vasile Ciobanu, "Der Beziehungen zwischen Siebenbürger Sachsen and Deutschbalten im Ersten Jahrzehnt der Zwischenkriegszeit," in *Jahrbuch des Baltisches Deutschums, 2003* (Lüneburg: 2002), 194-204.

involved and their precise tasks, the repertory and play selection, and the timing of the event. Zillich argued that theater was indeed an art, but insisted that its main purpose was rather to illuminate what was human and restore a sense of the spiritual and an appreciation for the necessary things in life. But for an intellectual like Zillich, the major task for theater was to cure two illnesses: the farsightedness of the past and the nearsightedness of the present. He was an advocate of independent theatrical initiatives which could avoid all the trappings and malfunctions of theater societies, which had been founded in practically every town with a Saxon population.

To him, theater societies represented everything that had really failed in the Saxon theater organization and should be eliminated along with the stage director. He perceived theater as belonging to the Saxon people, and not the turf of theater professionals who saw it as a business or even private affair of entrepreneurs, touring the country from place to place without strong roots anywhere. For creating a troupe and putting on a play, Zillich argued, independent artists needed, first of all, good will, enough courage to found a theater without the help of specialists, and a willingness to learn how to organize theater events. He warned theater organizers that it would take time to learn the craft, or otherwise, they would appear like “a first-time rider who, with just a saddle and a horse, expects to become an experienced horseman”. Zillich cautioned his readers that for such an undertaking no “Sunday rider” could succeed because daily perseverance was a must. To function, theater-playing required initiative, a measure of independence from foundations or centralizing structures and even from judgments of artistic value. Its financial aspects indeed required the presence of a businessman, whose duties would be guided by the commercial code. The job of the artistic leader would be to select the cast and

⁵¹² Horst Schuller Anger, *Kontakt und Wirkung*, 102, 88.

⁵¹³ Heinrich Zillich, “Zur Deutschen Theaterfrage in Siebenbürgen,” in *Klingsor*, Jahr 1, Heft 2, Mai 1924, 59-65.

choose the repertory in cooperation with local groups. Zillich recognized that dozens of professional troupes performing in large cities put on plays selected based on audience taste, and that it was the number of sold tickets for a particular play, which decided the repertory of the respective troupe. He argued that individuals willing to put on plays locally had only a short season to schedule a play, usually around a religious holiday, a birthday, a celebration, or a commemoration, to which a particular play could be dedicated. Usually, the fame of the author and the literary standards made a play become the center of attention and a source of emotion among the public. This was theater playing with a cultural mission. Zillich went on to suggest that theater organizers could start with *Die Räuber* (1781) then continue with *Don Carlos*, (1787) two plays by Friederich Schiller, the most important German classical playwright renowned for creating the genre of melodrama and historical drama. He thought the amount of revenue should cover the honorarium for the troupe leader, while the rest could be split between the performers and the local groups.⁵¹⁴ Whether his ideas animated amateur theater as it emerged in small communities is debatable, for Zillich sought to encourage theater playing along semiprofessional lines, and theater for him was to take precedence over other goals that a community might have. His chief aim was to encourage an idealist theatrical life that would uplift art standards.

To the Saxon intellectuals who contributed to *Klingsor*, amateur theater was an occasion which could be defined, compared, and analyzed in its essence as a cultural rather than a religious phenomenon. When amateur theater in small towns and villages practically erupted into the public sphere, it revealed a major potential for self-expression and a phenomenon that needed constant encouragement and scrutiny. *Klingsor* featured articles that explored amateur theater's potential and outcomes. After a decade during which intellectuals pondered the virtues of professional theater and its merits for the cultural advancement of Saxon society, they eventually

⁵¹⁴ Zillich, "Zur Deutschen..." 61.

had to reckon with the existence of an amateur theater in Saxon communities and by 1934, *Klingsor* began to feature articles which attempted to grasp its ever growing role everywhere in German-speaking communities giving most attention, however, to the plays and accompanying events of high literary merit.

Arnold Roth's view, a poet and contributor to *Klingsor*, is quite different than the overall orientation at *Klingsor*. Roth noticed that the Saxon amateur theater movement is born from the desire to shape a living community, by bringing together performers and audience.⁵¹⁵ We discover that an amateur performance was an occasional, even an impulse-based activity rather than a regular event; putting on a play without much planning, with informal rehearsals that reinforced community ties among the local people; without the indispensable stage props and costumes; and with the amateurs' verbal and body expressions on stage that were never grandiose and polished but rather clumsy and naïve. On the other hand, amateur playing was deeply embedded in what the world was all about, life and death with all its mysteries and riddles and its relation to Divinity. If anything, amateurs hoped to bring all their spectators together by way of the sacred word and create not only a living community but a theatrical and religious community as well.

According to Roth, amateurs among the Saxons differed strikingly from the usual theater aficionados, assorted dilettantes, and even folk theater practitioners. To him, professional theater especially was morally bankrupt for being too profit-driven, for approaching human life in plays through the erotic and the psychological, and for addressing an audience composed of atomized individuals rather than a unified community. Despite striking contrasts that cast a positive light on amateur theater, the latter did not try to supplant professional theater or to cross its boundaries.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ Arnold Roth, "Theaterkrise und Laienspiele," in *Klingsor: Siebenbürgische Zeitschrift*, vol XI, nr. 12, 1934, 476.

⁵¹⁶ Roth, "Theaterkrise..." in *Klingsor*, 477.

Roth also argued that the amateurs were not dilettantes, for the latter performed the repertoires of professional theater, playing them like professional actors and borrowing costumes and stage props from theatrical institutions. They tended to go to great lengths and don elegant outfits, and they ensured high ticket sales and lots of public filling theater halls. Moreover, dilettantes received subsidies from foundations, represented philanthropic interests, and their performances were generally seen as occasions for amusement. The theater of amateurs, Roth continued, was not similar to folk theater, either, for the latter involved only the very few educated individuals living in villages.⁵¹⁷ His distinctions in *Klingsor* help us understand better the purposes and details of amateur performances in Transylvania, their particular nature and unique features that set them apart in general and in particular from the amateur movements in the German-speaking communities of other countries.

The Local Elite

Using theater for educational purposes was not a new idea; it had actually preoccupied educated individuals and cultural associations since the latter half of the nineteenth century, but the idea remained weak and never took off. Saxon bishops put on passion plays following the example of Lutheran communities in German cities and sought inspiration from professionals in Western-like urban entertainment. Local elites, schoolteachers and pastors, found theater useful, but amateur theater had no appeal among them. By the mid-1920s, therefore, it was a total surprise when theater events were initiated by villagers themselves together with the local elite under the patronage of the local church.

One may infer that barriers between cities and villages broke down after the end of war, a change that helped the movement of amateur theater take off within a few years. But unlike the

⁵¹⁷ Roth, 478.

efforts of Hungarian intellectuals to reach out to Hungarian villagers, an urban-rural dialogue was not promoted by Saxon intellectuals. Insiders like pastors and schoolteachers, with broad community visions and Western cultural horizons, were those who initiated theatrical activities. Saxon intellectuals did not systematically endorse and act upon the view that the educated had a responsibility to further Saxon cultural progress in the villages, nor did they advocate a deep involvement in village life or an eagerness to connect with peasant. As their contributions in *Klingsor* demonstrate, they concerned themselves with philosophical questions about the meaning of life, Europeanization, art and religion, and translations. In the literary review *Ostland*, for example, they wrote extensively about cultural politics, and elaborated plans to push for minority legislation.⁵¹⁸ Thus, mainly the local elite largely shaped cultural life at the grassroots level.

The local village elite integrated social, educational, and religious goals and tailored them to the needs of the respective community, so that plays could serve moral and educational needs more adequately. We find in the petitions for event approvals that they justified the events by claiming a moral-educational purpose. By charging admission, they aimed at supporting both the less advantaged individuals, notably the elderly and children, and skilled groups. In each county, there was a particular emphasis, depending on local social conditions; for example, in the county of Mieresch, women's societies tended to support children's needs.⁵¹⁹ They knew that amateur theater could provide enormous benefits as its message could educate, by way of indelible examples, a whole diversity of backgrounds, ages, characters, and social categories. Thus, through entertainment, organizers could satisfy the material needs of the respective community. They relied mainly on local people, who lacked experience in putting on or publishing plays, but were enthusiastic to become involved as organizers themselves, actors or

⁵¹⁸ Vasile Ciobanu, *Identitatea Culturală a Germanilor din România în Perioada Interbelică* (București: Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române, 2012), 146-150.

writers to produce short dialogues or sketches. In discussing cultural matters, preparing the event, rehearsing the actors, and staging their plays, they resorted to informal places, or perhaps the church hall, which had no stage or even a curtain; they used the facilities available and, sometimes, performed outside in open-air settings.

While the Saxon intellectuals who wrote for *Klingsor* saw their role in this region as representatives of Europe and of the German world,⁵²⁰ the organizers of amateur theater in villages and small towns embraced a different outlook. In the majority being educated above the average, Saxon schoolteachers and pastors established numerous contacts with the West. In doing so, this local elite revived their mission as preservers of the Western heritage. But, as my analysis will show, they understood the West through the lenses of the past, valuing dialects as they were spoken by the earliest German settlers in Transylvania and praising localism.

When choosing plays that were performed for audiences in Berlin or Munich, Transylvanian Saxon amateurs were very selective. They preferred playwrights with an interest in the dialectal diversity of the German-speaking world and in showing the beauty of local customs and traditions. In choosing so, they saw themselves as preservers of the German culture inspired from Germany and still alive in the regions on the periphery of the area inhabited by Germans, like Tyrol or Transylvania. Thus, when numerous amateur groups from Germany went on tours, like the famous Münchener Laienspiele, putting on plays as traditionalists in many cities in Central and Eastern-Europe, they sought to reach Germans everywhere. But when they reached Transylvania they found an amateur theater already in place and led by the local elite with its own vision of German tradition.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, for Malmkrog: Inv. 818, Dos. 44/1935, vol. II, Fila 9/ 30 Mar. 1935, for Regen: Dos. 21/1935, vol. II, Fila 118/2 Dec. 1935; for Birk: Inv. 819, Dos. 4/1940, fila 184/13 Mar. 1940.

⁵²⁰ Horst Schuller-Anger, Kontakt und Wirkung. Literarische Tendenzen in der Siebenbürgischen Kulturzeitschrift "Klingsor" (Bukarest: Kriterion Verlag, 1994).

⁵²¹ Nied, 14.

Lacking the sophistication of urban intellectuals, Saxon schoolteachers and pastors were nonetheless familiar with the German high culture, and many attended German-speaking European universities. In their search for answers to what makes a Saxon identity, they pondered their relation to Germany very much like the intellectuals who wrote for *Klingsor*. They tended to give religion the most important place in their thoughts, and, thus, they searched for answers in the history and experience of their own communities where religion was fundamental.

Part II

The Saxon Clergy and Amateur Theater

Saxons saw amateur theater as being reminiscent of pre-1867 German theater life perhaps going back even as far as the Reformation. Unlike Catholicism, which encouraged plays founded on a certain sophistication of language, genre, and performance, Lutheranism initially embraced theater-playing for purposes of instruction. Students were among the first amateurs, while pastors like Honterus (1498-1549), the foremost Renaissance theologian of the region, were very interested in making various religious texts suitable as play scripts and easily understood by diverse audiences.⁵²² Until the late seventeenth century, this kind of Protestant theater playing witnessed a great development, but, from then on, itinerant professional troupes slowly began to overshadow it through more attractive entertainment. Instead of professional troupes, Saxon clergy continued to encourage theater playing for and by amateurs. By the late 1920s and 1930s they became fully involved in putting on plays.

The pastors participated in theatrical events with a larger agenda and responsibilities than just supervising and endorsing events. They even wrote plays themselves and encouraged others to do so, notably *pfarrerins* – the wives of pastors - and female schoolteachers, as well as the wives of schoolteachers. Animated by a sense of mission, both the upper and lower clergy

embraced amateur theater, giving it momentum and scale. By the very nature of their spiritual role, the Saxon clergy saw religious fulfillment in bringing all community members within the Church's fold and in encouraging the feeling of belonging among parishioners, so that, in the end, Church and community were one. They chose theater as one means of helping them achieve their goal.

While the Bishop's initiatives reflected a biblical focus in the performances directly sponsored by his office, the parish clergy stressed a different sort of purpose, seeing in plays a source of enhancing belief by suffusing everyday-life concerns with idealism and morality. The parish ministers crafted petitions on behalf of play organizers to obtain official permission for their performances. They endorsed the moral values of the plays and guided the organizers and actors in associating the theatrical event with a church celebration or religious holiday. They were careful to match the cultural purpose of the event with the pastoral mission of their ministry without, however, turning theater playing into a religious undertaking.

The Bishop

From 1930s onward, each level of the church hierarchy left records of theater activities: parish churches in villages and towns, the presbyteria of cities, the church district's offices located in Hermannstadt, Mülbach, Schäßburg, Mediasch, and Kronstadt and, lastly, the archbishopric of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession (*Gesamtkirche*) led by the Bishop (*Sachsenbischof*) in Hermannstadt. These records of amateur theater reflect a vivid cultural life and the large degree of cultural freedom enjoyed at every level of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church.

⁵²² Ute Monika Schuller, *Der Coetus am Honterus-Gymnasium zu Kronstadt in Siebenbürgen, 1544-1941* (Verlegt bei Hans Meschendörfer: München, 1963).

Cultural objectives had always had a prominent place in the Statutes of Evangelical-Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession which had been approved on July 1, 1861. After the First World War, the Statutes underwent review and reshaping for the first time in 1922, the most important changes for our analysis being the provision that the Church should supervise an entire array of activities pertaining to local congregations and their cultural activities.⁵²³ As Ludwig Binder argues, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church became an active custodian of the cultural, social, and traditional life of the Saxon people.⁵²⁴ The Church expanded its autonomy at each level, that is, the parish church and the district church office could operate independently of each other, and the two also functioned separately from the *Gesamtkirche*. Only the Saxon neighborhoods in urban centers (*nachbarschaften*), the societies of young people, and the church school system were all integrated and regulated formally by the Statutes.

The renewed role of cultural activities in church life and the widespread preoccupation with theater was owed in part to the fact that they could solve many financial issues in a time like the 1920s when significant land expropriations suffered by the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Transylvania reduced drastically the church's income and made pastors increasingly dependent on parishioners and the latter's willingness to pay higher church taxes. By charging admission to their plays, the organizers were able to collect significant amounts of money. Yet, rather than seeing amateur theater as an economic and political initiative, I would rather consider it in the light of the initial call issued in *Kirchliche Blätter der Evangelische Landeskirche A.B.*, published in Hermannstadt beginning in the late nineteenth century, asking the clergy to consider culture and folk customs as strong pillars for faith.⁵²⁵ By 1920, this call had been reiterated numerous

⁵²³ Ludwig Binder, "Die Evangelische Landeskirche A.B. in Rumänien 1920-1944," in Walter König (ed.), *Siebenbürgen Zwischen den Beiden Weltkriegen* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag Köln Weimar), 239.

⁵²⁴ Binder, 240.

⁵²⁵ *Kirchliche Blätter, Evangelische Wochenschrift für die Glaubensgenossen aller Stände; Monatsschrift der evangelischen Kirche A. B. in Rumänien* (1917), 410, (1927), 354.

times and even found a concrete application in renewed urgings and practical initiatives at the parish level. Amateur theater performed by the societies of young people *nachbarshafts* and other community groups may well be regarded as the implementation of such provisions on a large scale. Going beyond providing traditional education, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church came to promote neighborliness, cultivate in those parishioners interested in plays a sense of togetherness, while enhancing the importance of attending Church services regularly. It was, in Ludwig Binder's words, a "re-situation" of the Church fully within the concept of "people's education."⁵²⁶

The Bishop and parish pastors had a strong interest in promoting amateur theater. The correspondence of Lutheran Consistory in Hermannstadt with the Ministry of Arts and Religions in Bucharest dealt mainly with issues of scheduling, as shown in a complaint sent to the Ministry in 1921, protesting an order limiting the number of theater shows allowed for minorities around the time of Orthodox Church holidays. The governmental ordinance forbade entertainment during the first three days of fasting and the sixth week before Easter, according to the Orthodox calendar. Although officials in Bucharest rescinded the order, local police was not informed and, consequently, had attempted to stop the shows.⁵²⁷ Indeed, communication was slow and ineffective, but minority requests were promptly addressed and resolved according to the law. The Ministry approved the request of the Evangelical-Lutheran Presbytery to waive this requirement for Saxon communities, based on the argument that pre-war church regulations applying in Transylvania were still valid.⁵²⁸

Part of clergy's motivation for supporting play performances in their parishes was the influence that a diverse repertory had on their pastoral work. Both bishops were aware of this situation: Friederich Teutsch (1852-1933; Bishop 1906-1932) and Viktor Glondys (? – 1949;

⁵²⁶ Binder, 243.

⁵²⁷ DANIC București, Fond Dep Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 704/1921, Fila 174/22 Feb. 1921.

⁵²⁸ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 704/1921, Fila 172/18 Mar. 1921.

Bishop 1932-1941). They hoped to revive the pastors' position in their communities which they had enjoyed before the First World War, because it provided stability and continuity in communities. It was out of concern for the well-being of the entire Evangelical-Lutheran clergy in every aspect of community life that the bishops encouraged pastors to embrace theater. Bishops also urged pastors to exercise complete freedom in organizing theatrical events, selecting the repertory, date, and location for the performance.

In 1929 and 1930, when the Evangelical-Lutheran Presbytery of Hermannstadt commemorated the 400th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, the Bishop approved several theater performances organized by his Presbytery, but only of religious plays. According to the archival records held at the Teutsch House of Hermannstadt,⁵²⁹ on three occasions, in 1888, 1929, and 1930, the Presbytery selected Otto Devrient's play *Luther, Historisches Charakterbild in 7 Abteilungen*,⁵³⁰ a play fit for celebratory events like the *Lutherfest*, widely celebrated in Europe within the Lutheran faith. In 1902, the Saxon Lutheran Women's Association of Hermannstadt performed Devrient's play again.⁵³¹ But, by no means had the Evangelical Presbytery in Hermannstadt (Sibiu) limited itself to such solemn occasions. From 1930 on, it had a rich and regular correspondence about issues of amateur theater with numerous parishes and groups who requested its patronage and authorizations.⁵³² The evidence suggests that pastors came to see theater in a positive light at the height of the Great Depression, and embraced it fully beginning in the last years of Bishop Teutsch's tenure.

⁵²⁹ Casa Teutsch, Hermannstadt, Best. 613, Musikalia & Theatralia or see DANIC, București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inventar 817, Dosar. 11/1930, no page number/no date.

⁵³⁰ Dr. Otto Devrient, *Luther Historisches Charakterbild in 7 Abteilungen*, Dargestellt von Burgern und Bürgerinnen der Lutherstadt (Worms, 1911).

⁵³¹ Casa Teutsch, Hermannstadt, Best. 613, Musikalia & Theatralia.

⁵³² DANIC, București, Fondul Dep. Arte, Inv 817, Dosar. 11/1930.

The Pastors

Generally, Saxon pastors were fully committed to the ideal of reinforcing religion as the basis of a Saxon identity. In rural parishes they worked tirelessly to bring villages closer to each other; in urban parishes they encouraged contacts and common work among co-religionists within neighborhoods and with the Saxons living in neighboring villages. Pastors could hardly be considered indigenous to the village where they preached, since most of them had studied theology and German literature and philology in European university centers and rarely ended up serving as pastors in their village of birth. But they were always looked upon as the respected elite of a village or a town parish, and took the lead in the spiritual, educational, and even legal affairs of their communities.

From the end of the First World War until 1924, evidence about amateur theater, in which pastors were involved, is scattered and scarce. When it took off in the late 1920s, amateur theater was intended to complement the ministry of the pastors and to help them convey Evangelical-Lutheran teachings in a more effective way. The pastoral purpose is visible in the goals of the theatrical events stated in petitions. Scheduled especially before or during Protestant holidays and anniversaries, amateur performances were a means of celebrating, but it was a celebration shaped by a strong educational and religious component. Being organizers, patrons, and petitioners on behalf of different groups, Saxon pastors appear to endorse for theater a central role in the cultural life of the community. In villages, clergy organized plays with the local young men and women parishioners who often were members of the church choirs. The majority of petitions that the pastors wrote to Romanian authorities for play approvals were on behalf of Evangelical-Lutheran Women's Societies, which were practically attached to the church, and were led by their wives. From time to time, Saxon clergy offered patronage to local elementary

schools and to local firefighters, one example being the firefighters of Codlea, who received the full patronage of the local Evangelical-Lutheran parish office.⁵³³ Also once in a while, the Presbyterium of Hermannstadt gave its seal of approval for plays at secondary and high schools, an example being the Saxon Commercial School of Hermannstadt and its performance on May 15, 1932 of the play *Soll und Haben* by Gustav Freytag.⁵³⁴ Initially a popular novel, this play appealed to middle-class families through its focus on valuable advice for how fathers should educate sons so that they could maintain their social position with dignity.⁵³⁵

Pastors were thus important disseminators of innovative cultural initiatives like amateur theater. By serving in different communities in remote villages, they played an active role within the region as a whole because of the practice of moving up frequently and rising in the church hierarchy. As they transferred to different villages and towns and in more important urban centers they helped spread theater playing. Often time, pastors ended up in the administration of confessional secondary schools, thereby giving greater scope to the theater movement. Ambitious pastors were willing to pass on original ideas from one community to another. The practice of changing offices was encouraged by the higher clergy of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in an attempt to shape the training of promising pastors as broadly as possible and prepare them for serving in positions of leadership. These capable pastors, together with their wives, contributed greatly to the spreading of a taste for amateur theater in isolated communities.

Playwrighting

Writing drama was a much older preoccupation among Saxon pastors, going back to the early nineteenth century when Christian Heyser (1776-1839) and Daniel Roth (1801-1859) wrote

⁵³³For firefighters in Codlea, DANIC București, Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 44/1935, Vol.II, Fila 111/4 Apr. 1935.

⁵³⁴DANIC București, Dep. Arte, Inv. 81, Dos. 12/1932, Fila 251/6 May 1932.

⁵³⁵Gustav Freytag, *Debit and Credit*, trans. Christian Charles Josias Bunsen (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1858).

plays with political themes,⁵³⁶ emulating European literary trends. Critics observed these features when they analyzed Roth's play *Der Königsrichter von Hermannstadt* (1841).⁵³⁷ Then, starting at the turn of the twentieth century, pastor-playwrights began to consider their own Evangelical-Lutheran communities as the location and subject of their plays. In general, pastors who put on plays preferred native playwrights who were pastors themselves: Ernest Thullner, Hans Lienert, and Otto Reich. Also, the wives and daughters of pastors, notably Anna Schuller-Schullerus and Grete Lienert-Zultner, schoolteachers by profession, were quite popular playwrights.

As native playwrights, they infused their works with traditionalism and religion, conjuring up images of domestic life and strong community ties. All these elements were couched in a writing style of light entertainment and informal speech, thereby, helping the plays' content of religion, local custom, and village mores reach all the more effectively a diverse village audience. Moreover, by touching upon moral sensibilities such plays could capture the imagination of religious and secular minds alike. Thus, in the county of Mieresch (Mureş), amateurs from three villages, Zendrisch (Seneruş), Maldorf (Domald), and Botsch (Batoş) who wrote petitions preferred Otto Reich in 1934, 1937 and 1940, while amateurs in Hermannstadt County preferred Hans Lienert, Schuller-Schullerus and Lienert-Zultner. All these authors were congenial to local audiences.

Ernst Thullner (1862-1918) was a writer who initially studied medicine at Graz and theology and pedagogy in Leipzig and Klausenburg (Cluj). He then served as a pastor in Agnetheln, Mülbach, and Großpold, and then as a school teacher and principal in several villages and small towns. He composed folk songs in dialect, published short stories and stories in verse about Saxon folk life and was the author of a single play *Das Wort Sie Sollen Lassn Stahn*:

⁵³⁶ Karl Kurt Klein, Literaturgeschichte des Deutschtums im Ausland, 162.

Volksstück aus der Vergangenheit der Großpolder.⁵³⁸ Although written before World War I, in 1903, for an audience conversant in the Reen dialect, the play was performed throughout the interwar period: in 1929 and 1930 in Sächsisch-Reen in Mieresch County and in 1938 in the village of Großpold in Hermannstadt County.

Hans Lienert (1885-1954) was a pastor who served in various Saxon villages until 1932, before devoting himself to playwriting. He is also known for writing a complex novel representative of the Dorfliteratur, *Im heiligen Ring* (In the Holy Sphere).⁵³⁹ Besides a few plays published in Saxon dialect with a Leipzig publisher in the 1910's, he collaborated with Transylvanian publishers and bookstores in Mediasch and Schäßburg in the 1920s and in Hermannstadt and Kronstadt in the 1930s and engaged in fervent correspondence with Transylvanian-born Austrian writers like poet Olga Hörler (1853-1929).⁵⁴⁰ The dialect he used in his play seemed to be understood by villages included in an area cutting across these counties and encompassing the areas known as Unterwald, Weinland, and Altland.

Lienert's interest in theater, and in particular, amateur performances in villages, inspired him in 1925 to compile a handbook, *Ratgeber für Unsere Dorfbühne*,⁵⁴¹ published in Schäßburg, and covering in detail the stages of putting on plays. The purpose, the audience, and the selection of plays were followed by discussions about the set and costumes as well as pieces of advice to the main people involved in it: the director and the performers. He explains the different stages of the rehearsals and the rules to be followed in order to turn the "big day" into a great success. He gives advice on how long each play should be performed, and lists the summaries of a number of

⁵³⁷ Joachim Wittstock, "Eine Widersprüchliches Erbe zur Siebenbürgischen Literatur in der Ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Bestrebungen, Leistungen, Folgen," in Anton Schwob und Brigitte Tontsch (eds.), *Die Siebenbürgisch-Deutsche Literatur als Beispiel Einer Regionalliteratur* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1993), 110.

⁵³⁸ Ernst Thullner, *Das Wort Sie Sollen Lassen Stahn: Volksstück aus der Vergangenheit der Großpolder* (Hermannstadt: Krafft, 1903).

⁵³⁹ Michael Markel (ed.), *Studien zur Deutschen Literatur aus Siebenbürgen* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Verlag, 1982), 40.

plays which might appeal to villagers. He even thought it important to give advice about copyright issues in case of a public performance and about the technical stage and prop matters.

Pastor Martin Kessler from the village of Schönberg (Dealu Frumos) was a fan of Lienert's play, *Et Kitt Him* (He came home) and organized numerous performances featuring this play. At the core of the plot are aspects of marriage (timing, the right age for marriage), which a Protestant parsonage might endorse. Two widowers, close in age and neighbors, Nit and Thumes, are willing to get married but the latter keeps thinking of a young woman, Martha, as his future wife. Thumes adopted Martha when she lost her parents, and they grew accustomed to each other, and he was worried that a young woman needed a fixed status in the community. So, he wanted to give her not only status, but stability and protection. But Martha is in love with a young man of her own age. Not only she but the whole community was shocked at Thumes's intention to marry her and disregard the difference in age.⁵⁴² Meant to shock also were the themes in other plays by Lienert, but those that exaggerated corruption of human nature or inappropriate behavior, especially among pastors, seem to have been avoided by villagers when choosing plays for their repertory. *Die Hochzeit* (The Wedding) was such an example.⁵⁴³ In this play, a pastor seeking office in a village is tempted to use the opportunity of a wedding in the family of the church curator to visit that village anonymously in order to get to know the community. The trick was revealed by the curator's daughter, who recognized him as someone she had met in Berlin during her studies.

Otto Reich (1872- ?) was another popular pastor-playwright who even owned his own publishing house, "Tartlau Pfarrer Otto Reich." He started writing plays in the early 1920s, while

⁵⁴⁰ Joachim Wittstock, "Literarische Kontakte zwischen Österreich und Siebenbürgen in der Zwischenkriegszeit," in Anton Scwob (ed.), *Beiträge zur Deutschen Literatur in Rumänien seit 1918*, Vol. 45 (München: Verlag des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerks, 1985), 162.

⁵⁴¹ Hans Lienert, *Ratgeber für unsere Dorfbühne* (Schäßburg:Verlag Friedr. J. Horeth, 1925).

in Leipzig⁵⁴⁴ during his theological studies. Upon his return home, he continued writing plays, but was still a late comer compared to Lienert. His first play, *Der Härr Lihrer kit: Lastspäll än 3 Beldern* (The Teacher Came Home: A Comedy in Three Acts),⁵⁴⁵ was published in Hermannstadt in 1929, being followed by two of his hits, *Dani Misch Wid Harresch* (Dani Misch turns into a gentleman),⁵⁴⁶ and *Wo äs de Trud?* (Where is the Ghost).⁵⁴⁷ Reich was popular in the County of Mieresch as far south as the villages of Zendrisch (Seneruş) and Maldorf (Domald) with *Der Dani Wid Harresch* and as far north as the village of (Botsch) Batoş with *Wo äs de Trud?*, an area adjoining the region in which Lienert's plays were performed.

As champions of Saxon religious identity, pastor-playwrights like Thullner, Reich, and Lienert understood the power of theatrical performances on parishioners and the beneficial effects that plays could have on villagers. They were worldly people who had lived and studied in Western Europe, were familiar with the urban life of Transylvanian cities, but chose to return to Saxon villages and small towns to preach and inspire co-religionists. The first to write plays among all three, Thullner, described the early beginnings of Saxon settlements in his *Das Wort Sie Sollen Lassen Stehen, Volksstück aus der Vergangenheit der Großpolder*. He portrayed images of the Saxon immigrants who found land and freedom of religion upon their arrival in Transylvania in the late Middle Ages. After describing how one calamity after another befell his hapless, good-hearted characters, Thullner emphasized how religion, for which their ancestors had risked their lives, families, and belongings, remained a constant source of strength and identity. Reich's play scripts, building upon Thullner's example, were modest but continued to be performed until the mid-1930s. His efforts to write gentle comedies full of common sense, faith,

⁵⁴²Hans Lienert, *Et Kitt Him, E Sachsesh Lastspäll än Drän afzäjän* (Medwesch: Gedreakt och Verlocht Bä G. S. Reissenberger, 1921).

⁵⁴³Hans Lienert, *Hochzeit, Lustspiel in 3 Aufzügen* (Mediasch: Verlag G. U. Reissenberger).

⁵⁴⁴Otto Reich, *Der Herr seines Willens Schauspiel in 5 Akten* (Dr. jur. Stein & Co: Leipzig, 1921).

⁵⁴⁵Otto Reich, *Der Härr Lihrer Kit : Lastspäll än 3 Beldern* (Hermannstadt:Honterus,1929).

and love were not left unrewarded. His plays *Dani Misch wid harresch* and *Wo äs de Trud?* were the most performed plays of the works of all three playwrights. Lastly, Lienert sought to disseminate his play scripts widely so that amateurs could have better access to them. Being the youngest of three pastor-playwrights, Lienert continued his literary career into the 1940s, but his focus was less centered on pain and sacrifice, and his focus on pastors, churches, and faith was often marked by humor, exaggeration, and comic situations. Thullner, Reich, and Lienert sought to provide their communities with Evangelical-Lutheran teachings, but they did so in conjunction with the dissemination of secular ideas and the wisdom of everyday life in order to broadly educate the masses and stimulate learning as a life-time endeavor. In this regard, theater was the ideal means of achieving both objectives.

Pfarrer-in-playwrights

Pfarrerins (pastors' wives) were as active as playwrights as the Saxon pastors who organized theatrical events and their plays were quite popular if not even more so. *Kirchenväter vun Hielt* (The Churchfather from Heltau-Cisnădie) by Anna Schuller-Schullerus was performed, at the pastor's request in 1935 in two villages of Malmkrog (Mălăncrav) and Hundorf (Viișoara), both in Mieresch County; in Halvelagen (Hoghilag),⁵⁴⁸ in the Hermannstadt County in 1940⁵⁴⁹ and in Rups (Rupea), fifty kilometers east from Halvelagen, in 1934. By tracing the communities that chose this play, one can easily see that the dissemination of plays followed the dialectal spread across a region, superseding county borders.

Unlike her popular and widely-disseminated comedies about everyday life in rural Saxon communities in the 1920s and the 1930s, the *problemstücken* (problem-plays) of Anna Schuller-

⁵⁴⁶ Otto Reich, *Dani Misch Wid Harresch* (Birthälm: 1933).

⁵⁴⁷ Otto Reich, *Wo äs Trud?* (Tartlau: 1936).

⁵⁴⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Artelor, Inv. 819, Dos.2 4/1939, Fila 251/20 Mar. 1939.

⁵⁴⁹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Artelor, Inv. 819, Dos. 4/1940, Fila 1/8 Jan. 1940.

Schullerus looked at historical moments from the past. It was, paradoxically, in the plays of a pastor's wife where the characters of pastors and their relationships with the broad society and among themselves were explored in detail. The main story in *Kirchenväter von Hielt*⁵⁵⁰ deftly explores the emotional pressures in the life of the new pastor of Hielt, Michael König, whose election brings up numerous concerns about his faith, behavior, and impact on community, that beset Saxon leaders and communities. Elected pastor by the elders of the village precisely because he was poor, but also wise and firm, Michel König (Ganjdesche Mächel) competed against his former comrade, Georg Paulini (Pals Gerch), a wealthier villager, a more conservative character and overly cautious in his decisions. Their supporters among villagers were split not only between the two candidates, but also on whether or not approve of the installation on the church roof of a copper lightning rod, "a Blitzmaschine" that would counteract the destructive effects of lightning flashes on public buildings. The contraption was brought to Transylvania by a villager returning from America. König welcomed progressive, new ideas such as the Blitzmaschine, which was the first ever known in the region according to historical documents. He showed a particular ability to understand and empathize with a broad category of individuals, living and dead, young and old. Elders saw König and his initiatives as being in line with other progressive-minded pastors, whose enduring legacy in the region was remembered for decades afterwards.

In her play, Schuller-Schullerus pays tribute to Johann Filtsch (1753-1836), a far-sighted pastor, who had served in Hielt in 1791 and who was often referenced to as well as inserted as a fully developed character in the play. His reputation reached every corner inhabited by Saxons for being an able school-builder and attracting the young people minds by embracing new ideas. In the play, he intervenes to pacify communities and restore the reputation of those wronged, like Michael König by clearing him of any wrongdoing that might disqualify him for ministry.

⁵⁵⁰ Anna Schuller-Schullerus, *Kirchenväter von Hielt* (Hermannstadt: Fritz Teutsch Verlag, 1924).

Numerous women populate her plays of diverse age and background, being popular characters of psychological depth. Many personal histories revealed in plays bring up simple controversies, human foibles, and concerns that animate the world of human beings, but also conflict. Becoming a pastor or a pastor's wife was a coveted position which attracted many locals, leading to dangerous intrigues and revengeful plans in order to yield the prestigious position to the contender whose family was the most powerful.

Upon Michael König's election as a pastor, the rumors that he had endorsed a ten-year-promisory note for his deadbeat brother-in-law, proved true and triggered introspection and conflicts that tormented not only König himself but wives and adult children whose marriage prospects depended on their parents' reputation and social status. Evidence of the misdeed came from an old woman, a veteran matchmaker, who devoted her time to find out things that could destroy her adversaries. But it is comforting to know that such characters were exceptions. Choices based on heart and conscience prevail in the end in a surprising twist of events. Positive values were embodied in the young generation. For Getz, Georg Paulini's son would not take back his word and refuse to marry the pastor's daughter Gritchen, just because the loan that her father had endorsed might land him in prison and discredit him from serving as the new pastor. As Getz argued, it was all a matter of honor for a Saxon *Bursch* (young man).⁵⁵¹ For him, notions of poverty and wealth had little to do with money. He sees wealth in a person's attachment to his native land, to the religion of forefathers, and to collective togetherness around the communion table, and in village gatherings. Without all these things, he would be judged poor. But he would be even poorer if he lost his sweetheart, the pastor's daughter, who believed like him that land, faith, and community mattered more than material wealth.⁵⁵²

⁵⁵¹ Anna Schuller-Schullerus, De Kircheväter vun Hielt, 38.

⁵⁵² Anna Schuller-Schullerus, De Kirchengväter..., 8-9

The play affords a glimpse into a pastor's household, describing how their meals were modest and infrequent; how singing and riddles often times alleviated the pangs of hunger; and how they wore their one, plain outfit for years, every single day. More important is the play's focus on the transfer of pastoral duties from the old pastor to the new one. An important responsibility was the protection of the parish community from material hardship. In the play, the pastor must keep the secret about the riches of the church treasury, which were passed onto him by the former pastor. He could allow the use of the church's wealth only in times of severe poverty. To Saxons, the material foundation of the community was intrinsically linked to its existence and continuous presence in the region since the first Saxon settlers had arrived in Transylvania; if the church's treasury were jeopardized, then the very survival of the Saxons was at risk.

Schuller-Schullerus ties the plot of the play to the local context of eighteenth-century society and the historical roots of the Saxon community in Hiel to show how the careful preservation of material wealth went hand in hand with maintaining the spiritual heritage of the their communities. The golden hen and chicks are symbols of the material wealth of the community, which was preserved in the church treasury to represent perpetual progress and a forward-looking mentality, both specific to Saxon thinking. An old pastor, Peter Gündisch, reminisced about the years of his youth in the 1790s, when law was starkly upheld by parishioners, the work of smiths and women was done only by hand and it carried the reputation of their village far and wide in the Saxon lands.

To Gündisch, it was the church's walls that kept the Saxon people and their dialect alive, because in its small room ("das klinzich Kimmerche" or "dä ålt Kirchekummer), the golden hen with chicks was held secure ("wo de gäldän Hihn sätzt"). The room was doorless, round and high, with a tall ceiling and a tiny window. This was a tradition which the old Gods asked of the

German nobility to comply with around three hundred years ago. Saved by their forefathers in order to avoid the ravages of drought or wartime shortages, the treasure of the golden hen with chicks represents a mindset of caution, thriftiness, and generosity in supporting one another. These qualities are associated with the prosperity of the Saxons over the centuries, and the high degree of economic stability in the region as a whole due partly to their presence.

Besides religious tenets, customs, and traditions, the dialect of the plays was a peculiar element in Saxon amateur theater. The plays featuring in the amateurs' repertoires employed phrases in Romanian as well as isolated Hungarian words, especially in the talk of female characters, which means that playwrights found useful to preserve the distinctiveness of their Saxon culture without embracing segregation. In *Kirchenväter vun Hielt* by Anna Schuller-Schullerus, Michael König's wife Trenj, addressed her husband's rival with the ironical comment: "Cha – cha – ta bäst nor änst der face cale fir de ändern!"⁵⁵³ (a face cale- in Romanian means "make room for").

Through a close examination of the village world in both its past and present times, Saxon women playwrights were able to write plays and short stories that captured the authentic Saxon world with its dialectal and confessional particularities. Their literary creativity reflects their advanced studies, their broad intellectual horizons and their proximity to learned men.

The Pastors and the West

The pastors' keen interest in German authors, like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) or Otto Devrient (1838-1894), is proof that they were able to understand and admire various cultural spaces unhindered. A playwright and actor who served in the administration of several theater institutions in different German cities, Devrient had his play, *Luther Historiches*

⁵⁵³ Anna Schuller-Schullerus, De Kirchenväter vun Hielt, 27.

Charakterbild in 7 Abteilungen, first performed with much success in 1883 in Jena, in Thuringia, which was well-known German center of idealistic philosophy and the place where believers could visit the bronze slab of Martin Luther's tomb. In the following years, it was performed all over Germany, and his play, was published in 1884, thus opening its way to other regions and countries. By 1888, it was being performed in Transylvania where the Saxons, always in the vanguard of European influences from the German world, were quick to become familiar with it. But it would be misleading to consider this play just a foreign importation for a local stage and thereby imply that the Saxons of Transylvania lacked a local dramatic literature. Early attempts at writing bible stories and religious dialogues which could be used for stage performances, since both were easily available in print to Saxon audiences accustomed to reading the widely-disseminated and popular folk calendars.⁵⁵⁴

A glance at Devrient's work, however, justifies the decision of the Lutheran upper-clergy of Hermannstadt to perform his play. The script had a surprisingly free format, the text consisting of seven short texts (*Schauplatz*), tracing the various stages in Luther's life in Erfurt, Wittenberg, Worms, Wartburg, Kloster, again Wittenberg, and finally, Luther's last Christmas in 1545. The text, stage directions, props, and performers' lines were left to be imagined by the amateur performers themselves. One significant detail, however, was given in the so-called "script" of the play: the setting was the comprehensive social fabric of a community encompassing all social ranks and stations, men, women, and children who could be found in Saxon communities everywhere. By performing Devrient's play, the Transylvanian Saxons could well claim that they fit into the European-wide pattern of Lutheran cultural life and German culture of the communities engaged in similar efforts of strengthening religious ties like the Transylvanian Saxons.

⁵⁵⁴ Avram Mircea, *Calendarele Sibiene în Limba Germană, Secolele 17-20* (Sibiu: Editura Biblioteca Astra, 1979).

Especially in large cities, many pastors showed their admiration for German literature of universal value. Goethe, a key figure of the German Enlightenment, was a steady preference. In March 1932, in the city of Broos (Orăștie), Hunedoara County, the pastor's petition requested approval for *Die Laune des Verliebten* (The Lover's Whim).⁵⁵⁵ Published first between 1767 and 1768, this one-act pastoral play in verse examines the feeling of love experienced by adolescents in a rural world inhabited by shepherdesses and sheperds. The characters matched the profile and lifestyle and the surroundings and activities of the audience. Language is a notable exception, however. Goethe's dialogue is sophisticated; its verse has profound wisdom and stylistic beauty, which enables him to capture the duplicity and frivolity of the love feelings of young men and women.

The play condemns human vice in contexts rich in details: the lack of self-restraint, jealousy, unrequited efforts to preserve harmony, a playful alternation between subordination and dominance, in a word, all that is inherent in the love of the flesh. Criticism aside, the playwright conveys, nevertheless, a message of affection when shepherdesses and suitors themselves explore human weakness. Goethe urges adolescents to become aware of "what wisdom bids and what duty's governance is," giving the play a strong sense of permanence appealing to local Saxon audiences.⁵⁵⁶ Goethe remained the favorite author also in the village of Metisdorf (Metiș) in Hermannstadt County where the parish pastor approved of Egmont for a performance in 1934. He endorsed the schoolteacher's initiative, and they guaranteed together the morality and educational character of the play and the performance as a whole.⁵⁵⁷ So, after Saxon pastors and schoolteachers emphasized their belonging to the German cultural space by putting ahead of Saxon traditions the aspects that bound together all Germans in Central and Eastern Europe:

⁵⁵⁵ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, fila 98/11 Mar.1932.

⁵⁵⁶ Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethe's Plays, ed. by Charles E. Passage (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1980), 21.

modern German language and German literature of universal value. The universality of German literature also stimulated Romanian Greek-Catholic priests, like Teodor Păcățian of Hermannstadt, to adapt German plays for a Romanian audience. An example is the social drama *Der Müller und sein Kind* by Ernst Raupach,⁵⁵⁸ which was very popular in South Germany and which Păcățian published it after it had been performed by Saxon artisans in the Theater of Hermannstadt in 1901.

For this category of ministers who pursued ethnic solidarity through theater, reaching a civic level in individual consciousnesses that would surpass religion, was paramount. For the ethnic solidarity with Germans everywhere would only provide a stable foundation for society. The Europeanizing pastors considered tapping into the ethnic source of solidarity through theater, while more traditional clergymen believed that religious education combined with tradition, faith, customs, history, and morality, could turn amateur theater into a useful instrument for entertaining and fundraising. Both groups intended, however, to revive Saxon cultural life and reflect Saxon identity, but they chose either a traditionalist or a westernizing orientation. These two different paths helped the clergy stimulate the parishioners' cultural and ethnic identification with other German-speaking communities in Germany and Europe. At the time, they expanded their broad views about life and the world they lived in by remaining true to tradition and their Saxon character.

Saxon Women and Amateur Theater

After the First World War, women's participation in Saxon communities conveyed a dazzling expression of freedom of action. Less interested in individualism or civic and political rights, Saxon women were intent on shaping a Saxon cultural space within the bounds of a group,

⁵⁵⁷ DANIC București, Departamentul Artelor, Inv. 818, Dos. 14/1934, Vol II, Fila 109/5 Febr.1934.

⁵⁵⁸ Telegraful Român," 1904/LIII, nr. 112, 19 Oct/1 Nov., 454.

united by religion, tradition, and language. They considered using modern means like theater, because it could overcome shortcomings that typically weakened other forms of public cultural events. They found theater more congenial than balls, dramatic readings, and singing soirées. Plays were seemingly more effective in strengthening Saxon folk consciousness and Evangelical-Lutheranism as complements to the reading of folk literature or attending the church service.

The organizing of theater performances of course required compliance with the legal procedures enforced by the Romanian state and the observance of the civil statutes endorsed by officials, all of which implied a new role for Saxon women. In the process, women's contributions reinforced a sense of cultural freedom for the Saxon minority and increased the presence of diverse Saxon institutions in the cultural life of the country. The existing gender relations among the Saxons encouraged a public role for women in sharing responsibility for the community on an equal footing with pastors and schoolteachers.

Evangelical-Lutheran Women

All Saxon women in villages were members in local Evangelical-Lutheran women's societies. The model for and the leader of Saxon women was the *pfarrerin*, the pastor's wife. This couple, the *pfarrerpaar*, was the most significant family model in a Saxon village or a urban community. They reveal the collaborative nature of relations among the leading men and women in Saxon communities and give a plausible explanation for the widespread popularity of theater events even in small villages. Working together as spouses in providing spiritual, educational, moral, and material guidance to all parishioners, the pastor and his wife were also active members in the societies that enlisted their peers and their parishioners. The *pfarrerins* served as presidents of the Evangelical-Lutheran Women's Societies were in close contact with *pfarrerins* elsewhere, especially by attending the meetings scheduled by the Association of Women of the Evangelical-

Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania (Allgemeiner Frauenverein der Evangelischen Landeskirche A.B. in Rumänien) and the gatherings organized by the Evangelical-Lutheran Women's Union for the Protection of the Sick. Both groups had branches and offices in all urban centers of the province. Auguste Priringer, the president of the District Women's Societies with its central office in Broos, carried on a rich correspondence with the presidents of local women's societies.⁵⁵⁹

The *pfarrerins'* influence in their own communities implied that they were able to secure the cooperation of other local women, the wives of prominent citizens like notaries, bankers, business owners, scribes, office clerks, as well as of other women in their families, like married daughters and other female relatives. They often enlisted the support of their husbands, in putting on plays in several neighboring villages, and for community projects. Calls to unity were regularly printed in newspapers, like the one published in 1917 and 1927 in the official weekly *Kirchliche Blätter: Evangelische Wochenschrift für die Glaubensgenossen aller Stände; Monatsschrift der evangelischen Kirche A. B. in Rumänien* (The Church newsletter: Evangelical Weekly for the Community of Faith of all Classes; Monthly of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Romania) by confessional schoolteachers, among whom many served as pastors, or used to be pastors before taking up teaching positions. These calls urged neighboring villages to form one single community across a region and to cooperate both economically and culturally by engaging in local projects.⁵⁶⁰ The pastors' wives established contacts and emulated each other in various community projects, continuing an historical tradition dating back to the eighteenth century.

Evangelical-Lutheran Women's Societies

⁵⁵⁹ ZAEKR Hermannstadt, Bestand: 400, Signatur: 351-451, Unterlagen bt. Ortsfrauenverein 1930-1949.

⁵⁶⁰ Kirchliche Blätter, Evangelische Wochenschrift für die Glaubensgenossen aller Stände; Monatsschrift der evangelischen Kirche A. B. in Rumänien (1917), 410, (1927), 354.

Evangelical-Lutheran women founded and ran many groups known officially as women's societies, homes for elderly women, and peasant women societies. Of the three, women's societies had the most powerful and pervasive impact in Saxon communities. Their religious affiliation was plainly stated in their official designation, which helped their presence in the public sphere as representatives of their faith to be fully endorsed by the Evangelical-Lutheran Presbytery of Hermannstadt. The sizable volume of petitions sent by these groups to local officials and the Ministry in Bucharest convey the fervent cultural and theatrical life promoted by Saxon women in the region.

The first societies were created in the 1910s (except in Burzenland where one was founded in 1886) and became local branches of the Allgemeine Frauenverein der Evang. Landeskirche, the oldest official structure of Saxon women founded in 1884. At its fiftieth anniversary, the Frauenverein had ten districts and 245 local branches in towns and villages⁵⁶¹ and the cultural work concentrated on fundraising and education. Their practical goals and noble aspirations were multifaceted: they founded institutions (The Deaf-Mute Institute, the Society for Children's Protection, nursing homes, and youth hostels), erected buildings (meeting halls, gymnasia, schools), and hired and paid teachers. Cultural activities included balls (Frauenvereinsball) or reading evenings and were typically held for fundraising. Bound by oath and a sense of responsibility and participation, the members of Evangelical-Lutheran women's societies (*Ortsvereins*) fulfilled duties related to administration, memorial events, social welfare, entertainment, faith, education, and even fire service support. From local to district offices, they created a very large archive of correspondence, questionnaires, and monthly and yearly reports of activity. Such a rich agenda demonstrated these women's abilities to handle very diverse domains

⁵⁶¹ ZAEKR Hermannstadt, Bestand: 536, Signatur: 229, Allg. Frauenverein der ev. Landeskirche A. B. in Siebenbürgen, jetzt Rumänien, 1884-1934.

of activity, and their experience acquired often over many decades and passed on from generation to generation.

As members of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, Saxon women were able to legally undertake such initiatives and use cultural events to attain their objectives. Being the only Saxon institution that enjoyed official autonomy recognized by the Romanian state, the church gave its patronage to all women's groups, who could thus act under its jurisdiction when pursuing their social causes. The Saxon women's involvement at all levels shows how autonomy trickled down from the highest church offices all the way to the smallest Saxon village. Cultural autonomy thus depended significantly on women's contributions to creating a cultural space within their community that was shaped on the one hand, by faith (community togetherness, a common devotion to service), and, on the other, by elements of identity (Saxon dialects, local traditions).

The reading initiatives of local women's societies led to the acquisition of books and plays. The yearly reports of local women's societies included ten general categories several of which touched on amateur theater: an emphasis on plays (Vortrag) and women's evenings (Frauenabende) within the general context of training and educational courses (Schulungen und Lehrgänge) all organized for Saxon women; the category of Theater Performances and Celebrations (Theateraufführungen, Feste, und Feiern, listing the specific theatrical events; and the category of Advancement of Church and School (Förderung von Kirche und Schule), stressing the need for an auditorium and a youth society.⁵⁶² When amateur theater became a priority on the cultural agenda of the *pfarrerpaar* (the pastor and his wife) it automatically involved all the members of the Evangelical-Lutheran Women's Society, and with them, the entire community of all ages (women, young girls, men, young men, and children) and social status (wives of pastors,

⁵⁶² ZAEKR Hermannstadt, Bestand: 400/351, Signatur: 455, Ortsverein Jahresbericht, Tätigkeitsbericht.

military officers, judges, lawyers, doctors, businessmen, artisans, and even peasant women). Through the woman-president representing their society, the members strove to obtain the proper paperwork that authorized their community to put on local entertainments. In tracing their abundant petitions that formed an archive at the Ministry of Arts and Religions, one is struck by the ease with which women took bold steps to contact state offices, mailed petitions from villages to city officials, and thus turned their cultural plans into reality. In many cases, they wrote petitions themselves or had the pastor write them on their behalf. Their perseverance in dealing with office routine that was far from smooth explains how they succeeded in obtaining all the necessary seals of approval from local authorities and were able to proceed with the play. The *pfarrerins*'s high level of literacy and public involvement contributed to institution building and civic participation.

Due to their proximity to the Presbytery in Hermannstadt, the women's groups found amateur theater appealing, as evidenced by the yearly frequency of their shows every year. Judging by the logistics of these events, these were significant occasions. Once, the Evangelical-Lutheran Women's Society in Hermannstadt preferred to use the services of the "H. Salzer," theatrical agency, which exercised a relative monopoly in Hermannstadt. Salzer organized theatrical events for various patrons including the Evangelical-Lutheran Church District. In smaller cities in the county, like Agnetheln and Mediasch, not agencies but the organizers themselves, namely the women's Society's president and the pastor, usually took care of tickets, location, advertising, and fees and taxes. When the Salzer theater agency was involved, it was able to book the Municipal Theater for its clients, a building considered by many as the most important venue for cultural events in the city. In contrast, women's societies from smaller towns used the hall of their own church for performances.

The choice of repertory also set the Evangelical-Lutheran Women's Society of Hermannstadt and the one in Mediasch apart from those in smaller urban centers and villages in the same county of Hermannstadt. In Hermannstadt, plays with music enjoyed much popularity, trending foreign playwrights and favorites like *Der Schauspiel-Direktor, ein Kommische Singspiel* (known as *The Impresario*) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) and *Eva, Operette in drei Akten* by Alfred Maria Willner (1859-1929). In another large city, Karlsburg (Alba-Iulia) Regina Galter, the president of the Evangelical-Lutheran women's society proposed to the authorities the following plays by two German playwrights, one born in Straupitz in Silesia, Ernst Benjamin Salomo Raupach (1784-1852), and another born in Oberammergau, Ludwig Thoma (1867-1921).⁵⁶³ Known for his satire of Bavarian rural and small-town society and elements of folk theater couched in a dialectal language, Ludwig Thoma attracted the Transylvanian audience through his conservatism and reservations about experimenting new genres and writing styles. His embrace of naturalism fit his own traditional views but also the values embraced by Transylvanians in general. Recently, scholars have emphasized in literary works about Thoma his strong ties to the city life, instead of analyzing the rural and peasant world in his plays which appealed so much to the Transylvanians' tastes.⁵⁶⁴ In Mediasch, Evangelical-Lutheran women decided in favor of Otto Julius's *Das Sächsisch Lied*, a musical play based on a text by Max Hallbauer. The two were renowned for working together in the writing of the Saxon anthem. Mediasch's orientation was strongly traditional, as women's societies there were very much in favor of plays by pastor-playwrights.

Plays that reinforced religion, tradition, and a sense of community seemed more popular in small towns and villages than in large cities. Close to Mediasch, Agnetheln was home to a

⁵⁶³ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 819, Dos. 28/1937, Fila 7/5 Feb. 1937.

well-known Society of Evangelical-Lutheran Women, founded in 1883. A glance at the special report celebrating fifty years since its founding and drafted by its president, Ida Barthemes, shows how for five decades it broadened its mission, from caring for the poor, orphans, and the old and sick, to building a cemetery chapel, an institute for orphans, and a gymnasium.⁵⁶⁵

In Agnetheln, the famous play by pastor Otto Reich, *Der Dani Misch wid härresch*⁵⁶⁶ provided a great opportunity to inspire in an audience, especially married women, a need for self-introspection. The play is a rich account of the women's inner world with numerous characters who felt being part of a closely-knit community. The marrying off a daughter is an easy peg on which to hang a drama for reasons that hardly need much elaboration: family and community togetherness. Dani Misch Geddert, a Saxon peasant, father of three girls, argues with his wife, Fichen Geddertin, in regard to the marriage of Liso, their oldest daughter. Fichen prefers a bourgeois son-in-law and finds for Liso a great match in Barthes, the local notary practitioner. Dani Misch prefers their neighbor, a native villager, Getz, who briefly dated Liso. But persuading mother and daughter to do otherwise was useless. They were adamant in welcoming Barthes into their family, hoping thereby to change their way of life. More troubling were the mother's efforts to imitate city trends in fashion and behavior in order to prepare herself and her daughter for a bourgeois life awaiting them after Liso's marriage.

Desperate at seeing his wife and daughter ignoring the folk costume and donning city clothes in everyday life and in the church, Dani Misch asked the village doctor for help. The two came up with the idea of perpetrating a farce on the wife and daughter, pretending that Dani Misch had lost his mind and thought of himself now as a bourgeois man. Borrowing 'bourgeois'

⁵⁶⁴ Eléonore Kauf-Nietsch, *Femme et société dans l'oeuvre de Ludwig Thoma* (Thèse de doctorat, Etud. germaniques: Paris 4: 1992); Nicole Durot, *Ludwig Thoma et Munich: Une Contribution à la vie sociale, politique et culturelle à Munich autour de 1900* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).

⁵⁶⁵ Ida Barthemes (ed.), *Der Agnethler Evangelische Frauenverein, 1883-1932. Bericht, aus Anlaß der Fünfzigjährigen Jubelfeier des Vereins* (Agnetheln: Buchdruckerei H. Maurer, 1933).

items from the doctor, he showed up in the village smoking a pipe, wearing city clothes, reading the newspaper, and hiring people to work on his farm. As soon as they returned from one of their frequent trips to the city, the two women not only disliked what they saw in Dani Misch, but started to worry about his mental health and the fate of the farm. Surprisingly, they asked the doctor for help to heal Dani Misch's mental disorder.

The farce reached an end only after the mother and daughter realized that the notary practitioner was a rogue, and they had been wrong all the way. The moral of the story is that when peasants turn into bourgeois overnight, they seem to display symptoms of an illness from which they must be cured at all costs. Villagers thus could pay a high price if they chose to change their identity. Not only did the two women lose the trust of their neighbors and their friendship and support, but they felt alienated from the church community because of changing their traditional clothes. The virtual banning they suffered was too hard to bear. In Dani Misch's view, abandoning the traditional costume was the first step in experiencing a rupture with one's faith, past, language, and community. When Liso argued that clothing should be diverse and adjusted to the respective occasion and place, Getz, her neighbor and a longtime boyfriend, gave her the example of his father, who, as the village pastor, always donned his traditional Saxon outfit, even when he was teaching classes for adults or when he received confirmation as a teacher.

When Dani Misch planned the farce with the doctor they let their neighbors know about the hoax, making a family issue the concern of the whole community. The doctor also let his wife know about their conspiracy so the two could manoeuver effectively. The final goal was to bring Liso and Getz together for reconciliation and later on, to get them married. In several scenes, the playwright Otto Reich included embarrassing moments for the mother when she mispronounced

⁵⁶⁶ Otto Reich, Der Dani-Misch wid härresch, Lastspäll ä 5 Beldern (Birthälm: Klosius, 1933).

clothing's names or could not remember fabrics used by the ladies living in cities. Evangelical-Lutheran women's societies found the play congenial because it conveyed a message of unity with the community and truthfulness with oneself and hints at the intelligentsia's involvement in village life to keep the rural world unaltered and united (the doctor versus the notary practitioner). The doctor served as the typical representative of a bourgeois lifestyle and identity, but who decided to live in the village and serve the peasants' medical needs. This character fits well the profile of Saxon educated men who as schoolteachers and pastors who chose to live in the village and who became involved in village life without fears of facing prejudices or losing social status.

The character of the notary practitioner was an opportunity for the playwright to highlight the shallowness of his pretensions. One of his favorite statements was that whoever traveled widely knew the world better, an obvious reference to at the peasantry's backwardness and lack of sophistication. The practitioner not only brought with him a whiff of arrogance toward villagers, but he also bemoaned their attachment to the past. He claimed that the present was better than the past, an idea that was supposed to run counter to the prevailing view of the villagers.

Women appear in Reich's play in a host of situations: spousal relationships, motherly duties, membership in the local women's society, neighborly relations, and matchmaking efforts. Fichen's character evolves steadily from the image of a self-sufficient and assertive wife, who shushed her husband in order to take control of all family decisions, to a submissive, modest, flexible mother and wife whose self-introspection led her to correct her views and behavior. At first, her search for a husband for her daughter and her meetings with the local Evangelical women's society took up all her time. Once she announced her interest in marrying her daughter to the notary practitioner, and embracing bourgeois manners, her neighbors suspected that she would next seek to gain the leadership of the women's society in the next election, and then,

presumably, she would put on airs and behave like a pastor's wife. The role of the play within a play was to serve as an educational means for adult schooling in the villages. The education of villagers indeed loomed large in the play. Reich, in effect, inserted a theater within a theater with the hope of holding up a mirror for people to see themselves even when they put on plays and learn from what they experience.

Traditionalism and pastoral plays also shaped the repertory of amateurs in the village of Schönberg, close to Agnetheln. Here, the women's society performed Reich's play, which, the president, Wilhelmine Kessler, mentioned in her petition that was highly popular. Hoping to secure prompt approval from the authorities, she gave the example of organizers in Hermannstadt who had also put on Reich's play in the previous weeks.⁵⁶⁷

Then two years later, her husband, Pastor Martin Kessler, petitioned the authorities on behalf of the Society to get approval for a show featuring Hans Lienert's play *Et kit him*.⁵⁶⁸ Published by G.A. Reissenberger in Mediasch, a well-known old publishing house, *Et Kitt Him*⁵⁶⁹ (He Came Home) is a folk play in three acts written in the Saxon dialect as being spoken in the villages surrounding the city of Mediasch. This modest, morally satisfying comedy is a discussion of the personal choices a widow or widower should consider in regard to re-marriage. Lienert's cast of characters is drawn from across a typical village community of the 1920s. It has at its top the judge and his wife, the notary (also the *Nachtwächter* or nightwatchman), a contingent of young men and women, and ordinary peasants just happening to seek justice at the chancellery's door. The plot was set in a period contemporary to that of the amateurs.

The play describes the doubt we all experience when contemplating the presence of the dead among the living. They come alive to provide guidance when their living relatives do not

⁵⁶⁷ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 4/1934, Fila 14, 21 Mar. 1934.

⁵⁶⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte Inv. 818, Dos. 43/1935, Vol. II, Fila 315, 28 Feb. 1935.

conform to traditions. They posthumously enjoy the respect of the living if, when alive, they were known for moral uprightness. Oftentimes, villagers obey the dead's injunctions when these are revealed in dreams, sometimes out of love for the dead or out of fear, if they do not obey them, that they might displease God. Surprisingly, the pastor is missing in the play, but religion is definitely found at the core of the plot. The themes play with perceptions and expectations of a religious nature, which ensure that the didactic content never wears thin.

There is a sad, intimate start to this play that ends on a happy note. Martha, a twenty-year old young woman in love with Hans, of her age but higher in social station, sings a mourning song about unrequited love. The audience associates it with rumors circulating in the village about the terrible fate awaiting her. Her guardian, Thumes, a widower of fifty who raised Martha since she lost her mother at a very young age, wishes to marry her. While debating their course of action, Hans and Martha think that a neighbor from across the street, a widow herself, childless but well-to-do, would make a better match for Thumes. Their view is shared by the whole community, still under shock from Thumes's marriage plans.

Lienert tends to favor sympathy over satire when it comes to delineating the causes for his characters' troubles, in particular those of Thumes. Stubborn, Thumes becomes the object of derision when Martha's friend, Rosken, disguises herself as a ghost in order to persuade him to change his mind. Supernatural signs, weird sounds at the window, things found in unexpected places, stable doors unlocked soon after the farm buildings were all closed for the night scare Thumes and trigger an agitation engulfing the entire neighborhood. Under the fear of the ghost, even the widow neighbor, Nit, knocks daily at Thumes's door seeking his protection. According to Thumes, it was his own talk to a ghost, the ghost of his deceased wife, telling him to get

⁵⁶⁹ Hans Lienert, Et Kitt Him, E Sachsesch Lastspäll än Drän afzäjén (Medwesch: Gedreakt och Verlocht Bä G. S. Reissenberger, 1921).

married, that persuaded him to seek a wife. He describes the supernatural visits of his deceased wife as regular occurrences, whenever he was alone. Both bereft of a spouse, Thumes and Nit interpreted these signs as the means by which God attempted to communicate with them and suggest a course of action.

Ready to help, the nightwatchman intervened. He also saw a white figure (Rosken in disguise) in Thumes's yard, lending even more credibility to the claims being made. His testimony stimulates further contemplation in other individuals. Resembling the figure of the Würzburger Nachtwächter from the old Frankish stories written also in dialect and centered on the past of the bishopric in Würzburg (Germany), the nightwatchman in Lienert's play also carried the traditional hallebarde and lamp while on duty.

Even more traditional in content was the religious play by Pastor Ernst Thullner, *Das Wort Sie Sollen Lassen Stehen, Volksstück aus der Vergangenheit der Grosspolder* (Let the Word Stand, A Folk Play about the Past of the Inhabitants in Großpold).⁵⁷⁰ It was certainly popular in among the peasants of Großpold (Hermannstadt County). Here, the women's society selected Thullner's play not only because it refers to their own village and its past, but also for the merits of putting on a play about themselves. In *Das Wort...*, Thullner described the embrace of the Reformation by Austrian peasants and the forceful seizure of their properties and children when their choice to relocate to Transylvania in the eighteenth century to escape Catholic pressures was made known. When played at the height of the Great Depression, in front of an impoverished audience of villagers, the script aimed at reviving a quest for spiritual values at a time when material want and misery engulfed minds and spirits. Thullner's play remained a preferred choice

⁵⁷⁰ Ernst Thullner, Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn: Volksstück aus der Vergangenheit der Großpolder (Hermannstadt: Krafft, 1903).

of the Evangelical-Lutheran Women's Society in Grosspold until 1938 when the organizers decided to use the services of a theatrical agency.

More Westernizing than their rural peers, women's societies in Mieresch County were active in Säschisch-Regen and Schäßburg and the villages in their close proximity. In Regen, their amateur theater spanned almost the entire decade from 1929 to 1939. In 1930 and 1939 they even organized two performances a year. The president, Hermine Nikolaus, wrote her petitions to the authorities directly without asking the pastor to intervene on their behalf. Born as the daughter of Carl Wilhelm Krafft⁵⁷¹ and granddaughter of Bishop Friedrich Müller, she gained experience working at her father's publishing house, the most important in South-East Europe. Hermine established literary contacts with local Saxon and German writers by managing the concert agency and the bookstore which her father's publishing house owned. But a new phase in her life began when she married the pastor of Säschisch-Regen. She now served as the president of the local Society of Evangelical-Lutheran Women (1927-1944) focusing on philanthropy work in the spirit of her grand-mothers. She devoted her time finding resources to help the orphans, sick, and needy members of their community. Her purpose for putting on plays was to collect funds for helping poor children.

The Society of Evangelical Lutheran Women of Säschisch-Regen⁵⁷² is another example of a community whose literary choices revolved around native playwrights (Ernst Thullner) and German authors. Thullner (1862-1918) obtained a prestigious education in Western Europe, and upon return, he was appointed the city pastor in Mühlbach and later he became the Dean of the Church District. His play *Das Wort Sie Sollen Lassen Stahn* with the subtitle *Volkstuck aus der Vergangenheit der Grosspolder* indicates that he drew inspiration from the life of Saxon villagers

⁵⁷¹Hans Mechendorf, Das Welagswesen der Siebenbürger Sachsen (München: Verlag des Südosdeutschen Kulturwerks, 1979), 52.

living in Grosspold, his naïve village and he was well acquainted with the peasant mentality and ways of life. One should judge Thullner's creativity not only from the content of his play, but from his use of language, in particular the Saxon dialect, which he observed first-hand.⁵⁷³

Thullner found in "the worldly but fixed folk traditions," in anecdotes, farces, and the local dialect spoken in his native county of Hermannstadt a remarkable repository of original social and moral themes, which defined over the long term his close ties to the native land in both his professional life and his literary avocation. Relying heavily on the folk understanding of Luther's ideas, Thullner gained local popularity and turned into a pastor-playwright whose work found local performers among the amateurs of the various Saxon communities.

The president of the Women's Society of Sächsisch-Regen approved Thullner's play *Das Wort Sie Sollen Lassen Stehn* in 1929 and 1930. Starting in 1933 a visible change in preferences was noticeable when this community performed Lessing's *Mina von Barnhelm*, followed in 1934 by *Einem jux will er sich machen* by another popular playwright, Johann Nestroy (1801-1862). Comedies have a weak tradition in the German lands, but Saxon women found them congenial for their events because they emphasized good-natured laughter rather than derision. *Mina Von Barnhelm* (1763), a comedy in five acts by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, was popular because of his fondness for history and his original observations of social mores captured at transitional moments.⁵⁷⁴ Didactic in his plays, Lessing used a common literary device of including a play within the play. Hermine Nikolaus and her community chose this play by a classic author in order to enhance her parishioners' interest in nineteenth century and thereby strengthen an understanding of Saxon traditionalism and a sense of community.

⁵⁷² DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930. Reuniunea Femeilor Ev. Lutherane din Reghin, no page number/ 23 Aug. 1930.

⁵⁷³ Joachim Wittstock, "Ernst Thullner" in Carl Gollner, Joachim Wittstock (eds.), Die Literatur des Siebenburger Sachsen in den Jahren 1849-1918 (București: Kriterion Verlag, 1979), 322.

Born in Vienna, Johann Nestroy gained fame with his plays in the Biedermeier (1815-1848), a period known for its tough conservatism but amazing artistic creativity. His work appealed to theatrical audiences beyond his country borders because of his skilled combination of down-to-earth realism and stylistically marvelous folk plays. Nestroy's play scripts in the Viennese dialect brought him fame, as they were admired for his expressive language and his art of using puns and allusions with great effect and beauty. His were comedies that found inspiration in the old but still popular Viennese genre of the farce, which precluded the rationalistic, North-German perspective.⁵⁷⁵

His play *Einem jux will er sich machen* (He would make himself a joke) premiered in Vienna in 1842. Two store clerks bored with their social status and full of self-pity because of their wretched life, take advantage of their boss's leave of absence and decide to pretend to be members of the upper bourgeoisie in their boss's circle of acquaintances and friends. This causes a series of family conflicts to surface which show the hypocrisy, the affected manners, and the meaningless pretensions of the urban bourgeoisie involved in commerce. Occurring in various places like their boss's mansion, his store vault, the fashion store owned by their boss's fiancée, a fancy restaurant, and the home of their boss's sister, the scenes reveal human frailties, in particular improper love matches that typically beset younger generations.

More than anything, the play seeks to show the bourgeoisie's enjoyment with pretending. ("ein Rausch im Spiel"). Making a joke of themselves, the two clerks make the bourgeois way of life an embarrassment for no other reason except curiosity to see what would happen next. As the joke of pretending expands to include more people, who are ready to join in the joke, the new characters prove in the end to be related to the already known characters. One,

⁵⁷⁴ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Minna von Barnhelm, Comedy in Five Acts*, Kenneth J. Northcott (trans.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), XII.

pretending to be someone else meets face-to-face exactly the person he claimed to be impersonating. The most intriguing part of this play pretend is the willingness of those exposed to a fake character to go ahead with the joke and play the part although they knew immediately that the clerks were not who they said they were.

Of them all, only a servant, Melchior (a Magi name), realized that all of it was just a sham and fraud. His subtle observations in regard to everyone's real intentions produced hilarious reactions couched in naïve statements and moral judgments. Humor writ large arose from his role as the *narr* (fool), although of all characters, he is the embodiment of virtue. When he was misunderstood, Melchior simply admitted guilt rather than defend himself.⁵⁷⁶ The figure of the *narr* achieved prominence between the wars, when literary critics, still grappling posthumously with Nestroy's work after his death, showed interest in the image of the fool populating his plays. The universe of the "kind souls," coined by Ovid Crohmălniceanu in his study of the Romanian drama literature between the two world wars, applies perfectly to Melchior.

Regen witnessed a rich theatrical activity. Here all four ethnic groups lived in rather even numbers. Besides 2,222 Saxons, there were 1,812 Romanians, 3,570 Hungarians and 1,556 Jews. The Saxons were Evangelical Lutherans, and the same was true for the surrounding area.⁵⁷⁷ Five miles south of Regen was the village of Petelea (965 Saxons compared with 574 Romanians, 110 Hungarians, and 281 Gypsies),⁵⁷⁸ while the twin villages Unter-Eidisch and Ober-Eidisch were located within three miles of Regen (with 952 and respectively 871 Saxons next to almost 20 Romanians, some 50 Hungarians, and 30 Gypsies)⁵⁷⁹. These three villages together formed a

⁵⁷⁵ Franz H. Mautner (ed.), Johann Nestroy Komödien, 1838-1845, Zweiter Band (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1970).

⁵⁷⁶ "Einem Jux will er sich machen, posse mit Gesang in vier Aufzügen" in Mautner, Johann Nestroy..., 435-519.

⁵⁷⁷ Ernst Wagner, Historisch-Staatistisches Ortsnamenbuch..., 207.

⁵⁷⁸ Wagner, 205.

⁵⁷⁹ Wagner, 203.

nachbarshaft. They used the same dialect which reinforced their sense of community, but the nearby urban culture was centered on modern German language and literature.

The year 1938 was very rich as amateurs put on plays by favorite playwrights like Nestroy (*Hinüber Herüber*) and Hartung (*Kleptomanie*) and two newcomers, Alexandre Berger (*Eine Vorlesung bei der Hausmeisterin*) and Ludwig Fulda (*Unter Vier Augen*). Nestroy's one-act play, *Hinüber Herüber* focused on the robbery of a tavernowner by two wayfarers who happened to overhear the transaction by which the former received cash from the sale of his tavern. The robbers bet the tavernowner 300 florins to win if he would continuously say "hinüber herüber" for fifteen minutes until the clock struck a quarter to an hour. The witnesses, among whom were the tavernowner's wife, a couple of relatives, and the waiters who were appalled by the trick but failed to persuade the owner that he was the victim of an extortion. Just like the inhabitants of Nestroy's small market town, who fell victim to strangers passing through their town, the audience in Regen found the play instructive for the lessons to be learned about trust and naiveté. Marriage was also an important theme, as the tavern owner and his wife were at odds over the proper choice of a husband for their daughter. Whereas the mother sought to encourage her to marry the town bailiff, the father had in mind an older, wealthier suitor. The play ends with the daughter holding their ground to marry her own choice, Franz the waiter. It thus promotes the idea that marriage should be for love which was a constant theme in the plays preferred by Transylvanian Saxon communities. It was a tradition that common sense and true love between those of the same social status should determine decisions about marriage. Even when seeking inspiration from German literature, women's societies in Saxon communities remained traditionalists and religious in their choices of plays and the ideas these plays imparted.

Retirement Homes for Senior Evangelical-Lutheran Women

The Retirement Homes in Hermannstadt were very active in putting on plays. Their petitioning for permission to host performances began in 1930, when the organizers presented an operetta, *Eva, das Fabrikmädel* (Eva, the Factory Girl) by Alfred Maria Willner (1859-1929). Then, in 1933, they resumed their theatrical activity with performances of fairytales like *Frau Holle: Das Märchen von Gold und Pechmarie* (Madame Holle: Fairytales from Gold and Pechmarie) by the Brothers Grimm and followed it in 1934 with *Schneewittchen und die Sieben Zwerge* (Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs), another Grimm fairytale, which they presented as a play with music and dance. After 1935 the Home shifted its theatrical tastes toward native playwrights. They showed a strong interest in Anna Schuller-Schullerus's work *Der Gänjzelroken* (The Patron Spindles), a play that was constantly performed until 1940.

A writer, playwright, schoolteacher, and a *pfarrerin*, Anna Schuller-Schullerus (1869-1951) was born into a pastor's household and lived in different villages and towns in her native Transylvania, continuing her academic training and following her husband's ministries. Her poems, stories, and plays are all inspired by life in Saxon villages described in objective representations, written in an accurate Saxon dialect, of stylistic beauty. For her literary creations she gained wide recognition from literary critics during her life and posthumously.⁵⁸⁰

Published in 1924 by the famous printing house 'Krafft & Drotleff' in Hermannstadt, Schuller-Schullerus's *Der Gänjzelroken* (The Patron Spindles) presents lively snapshots of domestic life in a Saxon family who found itself in the middle of preparations for Advent, the fourth week before the Nativity celebrations of Christmas. According to the playwright's

⁵⁸⁰ Michael Markel (ed.) *Anna Schuller-Schullerus, Ausgewählte Schriften* (Bukarest: Kriterion Verlag, 1972). Karl Kurt Klein, *Literaturgeschichte des Deutschtums im Ausland, Schrifttum und Geistesleben der*

indications, the action takes place around the 1880s and 1890s during the period of Hungarian rule. It was a time of severe magyarization of non-Hungarian ethnic minorities designed to strengthen the national unitary state of Hungary. Two men, a cantor and his helper, were debating the future of their two oldest offspring, who were dating each other. They engaged in an animated conversation, combining gossip-riddled comments with gentle criticism of their wives, all sprinkled with aphoristic and religious quotations. On one level, the plot revolves around the cantor's efforts to reassert his dominance in his household which is dominated by his wife, and on another, it focuses on his wife's avarice and the ways of getting cured with the help of her neighbors. Elements of traditionalism abound in the whole story: the Advent, women's donning of the Advent costume, men competing in breaking the spinning spindle, and lovers celebrating their engagement.

Startling are the play's references to the most current issues afflicting Saxon communities at the hands of the Hungarian state. Both men express their nostalgia for the time when the Saxons could work their own land and when harmony existed among peasants, the pastor, the choir master, and the schoolteacher. When Schuller-Schullerus wrote the play in the 1920s, she was familiar with the life of the Saxons under the new Romanian regime and found it useful to contrast it with the changes occurring in the social and cultural life of the Saxon peasantry before the turn of the century. The community church choir master, Herr Kanter (the village cantor and orchestra leader) and his assistant, Mächel-Miärten, represent typical Saxon peasants and heads of household living in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Their nostalgia for their years is evident in their warm talk about their fathers' time. Both served as clerks, and they owned their own land, which was recorded on their names. They also remarked

Deutschen Volksgruppen im Ausland vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut AG, 1939), 434.

how the courts used to be run by the upper-class landowners, not by the state as was now the case: how professions were jeopardized once the Hungarian state started to pay salaries to employees formerly remunerated by the Church or local communities; and how vibrant musical life was in villages. We also discern Schuller's regret that only men could become cantors, although they sang in mixed choirs with women from an early age.

Schuller-Schuller's writing is funny and heartfelt throughout, especially when she is describing Kanter's rehearsal of Saxon hymns and psalms to be performed during the Advent mass, or the daughter's spinning evenings with other young girls, feverishly working on their own costumes for the event. The play does justice to a very old custom, long-forgotten, the custom of *Gänzelroken* (in translation, the clothing for the patron). It was performed by the community in preparation for a young woman's wedding day with the hope that the newlyweds' home would enjoy sunshine and good luck.⁵⁸¹ But *Gänzelroken* is much more complex than that, involving as it does contingents of men of different ages. Saxon young men compete among themselves to break the thread spindles with their feet. The strongest would be designated as the leader of the group and would marry the most beautiful girl in the village. It is a significant moment of leadership assertiveness that mirrors a central social organization: the *Burschenschaft*. In this play as in others, women's major concern was marriage according to tradition. They upheld the old law, according to which the local young women were supposed to marry only fellow villagers. Once the husband, Kanter, reasserted his fatherly, incontestable position in the household, the cantor's wife renounced her idea of marrying their daughter to someone else other than the assistant's son. Marrying outside their community was again reiterated as something to be avoided at all costs.

⁵⁸¹ Anna Schuller-Schuller, "Gänzelroken" in Michael Markel (ed.) *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 244.

Another popular native playwright, Hans Lienert, fits well in Schullerus's company, as a preferred author by senior women in retirement homes. Their petitions reveal that they organized a performance of *Dra Fronjderkniecht*⁵⁸² (Three marriageable young peasants), a play expanding again on the theme of marriage outside one's community of birth. When deciding to put on a play, the organizers had in mind not only educational but pragmatic purposes as well. The homes for elderly women listed fundraising as a goal since collecting money would help their institution cover its expenses. Lienert's plays for example, were popular in the village of Jibert where the Evangelical-Lutheran women's society got involved in theatrical performances in 1937. They sought to raise funds for the village's band, but generally, like most women's societies, they had adult education in mind, especially for the cohort of young men and women who were on the verge of beginning their adult life and being integrated into the local community as adults.

Music featured prominently in most of the plays, and the old community songs were carefully passed on to the young generation because they reflected the history of the place where they were first written and sung. Singing during the church service at evening gatherings, performing solo or with an orchestra was thought to have had the power of bringing about both unity within communities and God's grace. They followed Luther's thought that music, "a noble gift of God," enriched a worshiper's religious life, and "whoever had a skill in the art of music was also of good temperament and fitted for all things."⁵⁸³

Overall, Evangelical-Lutheran women were conservative, even in urban communities, a stance that showed a strong penchant for traditionalism in amateur theater. To them, plays served as an impetus for their nostalgia for the local past and as a means to strengthen Evangelical-Lutheranism in the life of Saxon young generation.

⁵⁸² Hans Lienert, *Dra Fronjderkniecht, Lastspäll än enem Afzeag* (Medwesch: Reissenberger, 1924).

⁵⁸³ Thomas Kepler (ed.) *The Table Talk of Martin Luther* (New York: Dover, 2005), XII.

Schoolteachers

Educators at the elementary level, high school, vocational schools and adult schools actively put on plays, showing a sustained level of extracurricular activities in cultural life. They adhered to the precepts of Bishop Georg Daniel Teutsch and his son Friedrich who urged Saxons to mold their consciousness to adapt to the new times by looking to their own past and to Germany.⁵⁸⁴ All confessional schoolteachers took up the task of shaping Saxon consciousness through cultural activities in order to enhance their school work.

The schools' status was a vital topic that preoccupied Saxon representatives in the Parliament, intellectuals in cultural reviews, and local elites in small communities. Many Saxon schools seeking to teach in German switched their status from private and community-owned to state schools, hoping thereby to obtain state subsidies to fund them. The Saxons sought to keep schools under private administration after 1918, in the early 1930s during the Great Depression, and in 1939 when the Nazi threat loomed large in the life of the Transylvanian Saxons.⁵⁸⁵ A closer look at play production, repertory, dates of performances, and the organizers would reveal that, in villages, schoolteachers were in the forefront of cultivating togetherness, idealism, and an atmosphere of spirituality through amateur theater.

Elementary Schoolteachers

The Evangelical-Lutheran Church preserved its influence in all Saxon schools at every level and the teacher conferences were held regularly under the presidency of the Lutheran clergy hierarchy. These gatherings were venues for exchanging cultural ideas about education and ways of channeling the religious spirit to students through a variety of means, including plays. Like the pastors, Evangelical-Lutheran schoolteachers enjoyed spatial mobility transferring from and to

⁵⁸⁴ Paul Șeulean, Comunitatea Germană...,28.

different locations and relying on the church institution to adjust to their new communities. The schoolteachers and pastors ran confessional schools together but did not always cooperate with one another in putting on plays. Yet, for both theater meant transmitting ideas to cultivate the mind and character.

Village schools in Mieresch County were active in putting on plays in the villages of Birk (Petelea), Malmkrog (Mălâncrav), Mettersdorf (Dumitra), Urmesch (Ormeniș), Abstdorf (Apoș) Marldorf (Aldorf), and Martinsdorf (Metiș) in front of audience composed of the young people, school students, and villagers at large.⁵⁸⁶ Before performances, schoolteachers ordered numerous plays from publishers especially from Markusdruckerei of Schaßburg⁵⁸⁷ as early as 1929. All confessional in character, the theatrical events displayed a strong religious spirit, which prevailed in the entire Saxon school system and among its teachers after 1918.

Secondary Education

The principal of the Evangelical-Lutheran Teachers' Institute for Boys in Hermannstadt, E. Briebrechen, submitted two petitions for theatrical performances: in 1933, when he proposed *Meister Andrea* by Emanuel Geibels, for the evening of December 16 in the Unicum Hall,⁵⁸⁸ and in 1940, when he hired the Salzer Theatrical Agency for a performance of *Der Baumeister Gottes* by Paul Wagner in the Municipal Theater of Hermannstadt.⁵⁸⁹ These were only a few of the theatrical events the Institute presented. This interest in plays is not surprising because the education teachers were all trained in local or foreign theological seminaries, some even traveling abroad for university studies, all of which could not but influence the quality of the education

⁵⁸⁵ Vasile Ciobanu, *Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei sașilor transilvăneni, 1918-1944* (Sibiu: Hora, 2001), 279.

⁵⁸⁶ DANIC București, for Malmkrog: Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 21/1935, vol. II, fila 146/6 Dec. 1935; for Birk: Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 819, Dos. 4/1940, fila 184/13 Mar 1940; for Urmesch: Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 14/1934, vol. II, fila 40/29 Jan. 1934.

⁵⁸⁷ ZAEKR Hermannstadt, Bestand: 400/352, Signatur: 178.

⁵⁸⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, for Hermannstadt: Inv. 818, Dos. 10/1933, Fila 251/27 Nov. 1933.

⁵⁸⁹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, for Hermannstadt: Inv. 819, Dos. 29/1940, Fila 52/6 May 1940.

available to both children and adults. The Saxons were among the first to open pedagogical seminaries for female students. The Evangelical-Lutheran Teachers' Institute for Young Women eventually opened its doors once the General Assembly of the Hermannstadt Consistory decided in 1883 that the Association of Women of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession (Allgemeiner Frauenverein der Evangelischen Landeskirche A.B. in Rumänien) should be in charge of finding subsidies and students seeking training as kindergarten and elementary schoolteachers. Three Pedagogical Institutes eventually opened in three major cities: Hermannstadt, Kronstadt and Mediasch.

Upon graduation, many female schoolteachers ended up teaching in Evangelical-Lutheran elementary schools and continued to have contacts with religious circles. Oftentimes, they were daughters of pastors and married pastors. As they relocated to follow their husbands' ministries, they traveled to many Saxon urban and rural communities. Many chose to write and publish literature including plays in Saxon dialects and a few of these schoolteacher-playwrights wrote plays with considerable success, like Anna Schuller-Schullerus and Margarete Lienert-Zultner. As they moved from place to place, they spread interest in amateur theater and formed a taste for performative events in new communities.

In most counties schoolteachers organized regular theatrical events for religious holidays, being mindful of the particular themes that might appeal to villagers and might provide teachings and messages to shape their character and improve their lives. In their selection of plays they took into account the needs of young men and women by choosing plays that contained fragments from the daily lives of parishioners so that they could recognize themselves in the text. They took into consideration the children in the audience and their parents' expectations of an

uplifting experience for their offspring. They were also intent on enhancing village ties among neighbors.⁵⁹⁰

Marriage is the most common theme to be found in the majority of the plays, regardless of region, and it seems that springtime stimulated thoughts about marriage and preparations for weddings. In the county of Karlsburg, Ecaterina Wegendt with pupils and villagers in Seiden proposed the play *Einer muss heiraten*⁵⁹¹ (One must marry) by Alexander Wilhelmi (1817-1877). She chose March 1934 for the event, a date close to the Easter celebration. On the same occasion Michael Wolff, a schoolteacher in the village of Bulkesch, scheduled a performance of Otto Reich's play *Dani Misch wid Härresch* (Dani Misch turns into a Gentleman) in preparation for Easter. His audience was, in the majority, composed of local young men and women. A year later, in the village of Wallendorf (Nußdorf-Năsăud County), Johann Penteker, a schoolteacher and principal in the local Evangelical-Lutheran confessional school, also scheduled Reich's play about marriage, *Dani Misch wid härresch*.⁵⁹² The principal of the elementary confessional school in another Năsăudean village, Mätterşdraf (Dumitra), also scheduled a local performance of *Dani Misch wid Härresch*.

Playwriting by women

Of considerable interest is Anna Schuller-Schullerus's *Am zwein Kretzer* (For Two Kreuzers)⁵⁹³ because she wrote it in dialect, which, just a few decades before, had been used mainly in short literary genres and anecdotes. She herself used dialect also in other genres.⁵⁹⁴

Published in 1923 and performed on numerous occasions, notably in 1935, the play recounts the

⁵⁹⁰ DANIC Bucureşti Fond Dep. Arte, For Bulkesch: Inv. 818, dos. 27/1937, vol. I, fila 180/27 Jan. 1937, for Seiden: Inv. 818, Dos. 4/1934, Fila 229/3 Mar. 1934.

⁵⁹¹ Alexander Wilhelmi, Einer muss heiraten! William Addison Hervey (ed.) (H. Holt and Company: New York, 1905).

⁵⁹² DANIC Bucureşti, for Wallendorf: Fond Dep. Arte, Inv 818, Dos. 44/1935, Fila 175/15 May 1935.

⁵⁹³ Anna Schuller-Schullerus, Am zwein Kretzer (Druck und Verlag der Krafft & Drotlef: Hermannstadt, 1923).

⁵⁹⁴ See the variety of genres tackled by Schuller-Schullerus discussed in Michael Markel, Angewählte Schriften.

adventures of two poor apprentices who travel to another village in pursuit of a young woman Enno. Enamored of her, one of the young men, Miärten, persuaded his friend to travel with him to her village, where he intended to ask her father or guardian for her hand in marriage. His apprehensions about his marriage plans were well founded, for tradition excluded matrimonial alliances between peasants from different villages. To Miärten's chagrin, the *Olde Recht*, or the old law, was still upheld in all communities. To encourage him, his friend tells him that times have changed. Miärten wants to believe that through his faith and divine intervention he can attempt the impossible and even succeed. He had met Enno and had fallen in love with her at a fair in Fogorasch. But he possessed none of the clever and by general consent, reprehensible manners that characterized urbanites when they fell in love with a village girl. Miärten's thinking betrayed a solid anchoring in tradition and the idea of the home. His trip was to obtain first-hand proof, right in her own household, that Enno would make a good wife.

Gesch, her guardian and her brother-in-law, is another interesting character. Schuller-Schullerus devised the meeting between Miärten and Gesch along similar lines found in the plot of Johann Nestroy's *Hinüber, Herüber*. In Schuller's play, Miärten makes a bet with Gesch that if the latter can stand for fifteen minutes under a grandfather's clock and say continuously "Ha loift se hahinnen, diu loift se dihinnen" (here it goes up, here it goes down), he will win two kreuzers. If in Nestroy's play the tavern owner lost his cash and all his riches while saying "hinüber, herüber" for fifteen minutes, in Schuller's play, Miärten's proposal of a bet is meant to show that he is not a thief, even if he wins the bet. He used this device to gain entrance to Gesch's household in order to meet and observe Enno, whom, at the end of the play he will marry. In *Mätteršdraf*, the play served practical purposes: to collect donations for the support of the local kindergarten, a cause which in 1935 had got the support of the local Loan and Savings Cooperative, which thus, provided space for the performance.

In cities, pastors representing the *nachbarshafts* submitted petitions to the Ministry in Bucharest for approval of plays by another woman-playwright, Grete Lienert-Zultner(1906-1989), a schoolteacher who also wrote poetry and composed folk music, which she integrated into her plays. The *nachbarshaft* of Hermannstadt, in particular favored plays in dialect in the 1930s. The pastor there chose Lienert-Zultner's play *Beim Brunnlein* (At the Spring) (in Saxon dialect, Băm Brämehen).⁵⁹⁵ The play gives examples of social behavior meant to deter urbanized young men, when visiting or returning to villages, from looking condescendingly at peasants, or from deceiving village girls who might fall in love with them. The script fits nicely with the notion that urban dwellers should look to village life for inspiration, friendship, and life connections, as a site of human and natural beauty, and above all, of a pure Saxon character.

Pastors were aware that theater as a powerful educational opportunity could promote thoughtfulness and challenge fixed ideas among local Saxons. Performed under the patronage of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, *Băm Brämehen* therefore tries to make sense of what it means to be an Evangelical Lutheran in a city and to find ways to connect with co-religionists in the villages.⁵⁹⁶ In the play, both lovers followed religious injunctions, and observed fasting periods and holidays, although he was a seminary student in the city and she was a plain village girl. For him, travel abroad meant a dire homesickness alleviated by the healing power of the Evangelical-Lutheran faith, as the evenings in the village were occasions for religious songs and theater shows. Lienert-Zultner's use of a play within the play is more than a literary device. The evening talks about casting and stage directions were also occasions for young men and women to share their love feelings toward each other. The play, overall, highlights the importance of theater in

⁵⁹⁵ Grete Lienert-Zultner, *Băm Brämehen* (Hermannstadt, 1931).

⁵⁹⁶ DANIC București, Fond Departamentul Artelor, 1932.

Saxon cultural life and shows that Saxons generally found theater congenial in both rural and urban areas.

History was a permanent feature of the efforts at enlightenment that local elites undertook through theater. Organizers in Aposdorf (Apoşul) in Hermannstadt County engaged in a feverish amateur theater activity, animated by Erich Schneider, the principal of the Elementary Evangelical-Lutheran confessional school. He announced the performance of Anton Maly's *So Starb Stephan Ludwig Roth* (The Way Stephan Ludwig Roth Died) in the spring of 1934. As the subtitle of the play indicates *The last hours of a Martyr* (Die Letzen Stundes eines Märtyrers), it is a touching rendition of the last hours before execution of the Saxon pastor Stephan Ludwig Roth during the Revolution of 1848, when Transylvania was a province of the Habsburg Empire.⁵⁹⁷

Stephan Ludwig Roth (1796-1849) served in real life as a Lutheran pastor in Meschen (Moşna). In the play, the description of his last hours in prison sets forth an array of issues and conflicts involving his friends, supporters, and family members. They all sought to help him escape from jail and the upcoming death sentence, but Roth had his own way of dealing with the dire conditions of his imprisonment; he asked his friends to bring him books. Through reading, writing, revisiting his memories, and reflecting on historical, scientific, and religious issues, he could explore the meaning of his life and the choices he had to make.

One plan would have Roth escape prison and go into hiding abroad. In a moment of deliberation, Roth considered his character and principles to be more important than anything else. When Marie von Brennerberg, on behalf of the Saxon Women's Association proposed Roth's escape from prison by having him don a female disguise and use the help of a prison guard, Roth refused to do it. Here we have the main *raison d'être* of the play, in Roth's own words. An escape,

⁵⁹⁷ Anton Maly, *So Starb Stephan Ludwig Roth, Die Letzen Stunden eines Märtyrers*, Drei Akte (Hermannstadt: Honterus Verlag, 1932).

that is, saving his own life in this way, would make Roth feel embarrassed in front of the Saxon people. He claimed that the respect of the Saxon people toward him was more important than his own life. Moreover, he reasoned that the danger, to which both Marie and her accomplices exposed themselves meant, in essence, the risk of their execution.

He carefully considered the offer of escape but he found hard to reconcile his escape with the moral consequences it entailed. Escaping in a cowardly way, in his mind, could not square with his religious faith, because it would have meant replacing the Bible with the sword. His urging: “Wie Gott will! (It is God’s will!) is strong enough to remind us that Roth was a pastor who lived up to the Christian standards of conduct even when he was unjustly charged with a political crime. Children, property, political leadership, or life itself were not sufficient reasons to deter him from choosing the Christian way. He knew that his body did not matter, but only God’s will.⁵⁹⁸ Stephan Ludwig Roth’s attachment to Christian values secured him a special place in the memory of the ordinary Saxon people and made Maly’s play extremely popular with Saxon audience.

Leading the Association for Theater in Hermannstadt, Anton Maly was a devoted playwright. He founded a library with plays for amateurs and edited a theater review starting in 1927, *Blätter des Deutschen Theatervereins*, published in Hermannstadt. As a director, Maly was acclaimed for putting on the play *Michael Weiss* by Meschendorfer, whose historical content crackled with patriotism and exaltation of the past and traditions.⁵⁹⁹ Although his initiatives attempted to emulate professionals, Maly was in fact one of the very few local theater organizers who belonged to the group of Saxon intellectuals looking to Central Europe for inspiration in

⁵⁹⁸ Anton Maly, *So Starb...*, 40.

⁵⁹⁹ Radu Alexandru Nica, 142-143

strengthening the theatrical arts in Transylvania. He also watched helplessly the effects of the moral crisis affecting professional theater and the decrease in audience size.

Besides upholding tradition in marriage, clothing, and holiday customs, and praising historical figures whose religious beliefs were paramount values, the plays preferred by the amateurs were meant to enlighten and to remove superstition and backward thinking. For example, in the village of Veseud, the young men and women in the local Saxon community, under the guidance of the confessional schoolteacher chose to put on Otto Reich's *Wo äs de Trud?* (Who is the Ghost?).⁶⁰⁰ Rehearsals and the performance both occurred right in the church building on February 1937. Published in 1936 by the playwright's own printing house, *Wo äs de Trud?* is a superb comedy in four acts about Saxon peasant women and their beliefs in *das Trud* (troubled souls of the dead rising from the grave or living people with certain magical powers; in Romanian, *strigoi*). Their naiveté and fears that long-dead forebears might jeopardize their family's wellbeing were subject to inquiry, disapproval, and, in the end, action against them on the part of their husbands and young offspring because they could not tolerate the *Trud's* effect on women villagers. They all undertook to eradicate superstition through farces, by taking turns in playing the roles of ghosts themselves and at the end of the play, revealing themselves to show that ghosts did not exist in reality.

The didactic, enlightening purpose of this play fits in well with the decade-long efforts of intellectuals, pastors, and wealthy and literate peasants to change old-fashioned ways of thinking about life on a farm and about family and community traditions. One such wealthy individual was involved in bringing progress in the peasants' lives: Johannes Salmen, a literate, well-to-do Saxon peasant, who was astonished to see the widespread belief in magic and superstition and sacrifices to ward off evil spirits. To his further amazement, other individuals in the village thought about

putting an end to this fantasy: a widow, who hoped to marry her son to Salmen's daughter, Trenni, and a young fellow, a poor but good-hearted pretender to Trenni's hand, Kraus-Getz. The latter was intent upon proving himself worthy of Trenni in front of her parents. They all relied on various tricks that show they were conversant with superstitious signs prevailing in villages: stealing milk or leaving marks on the wall, smearing the cows with all kinds of lotions, and placing nails in unexpected places. Not only had they pretended to be ghosts (Trud) themselves, but they were the most active in declaring their intentions to catch the ghosts (Trud), making strigoi-hunting real and significant and encompassing the whole community. But at the end of it, they revealed themselves to the victim and acknowledged the trick they had performed. When smearing cows to play a farce, Trenni actually used yeast on the cow's udder in accordance with the latest advice given by the veterinary doctor working in the village. He said it was a scientific way of increasing the amount of cow milk. Nonetheless, interestingly enough, the efforts at enlightenment did not alienate members in the traditional community, but rather strengthened their sense of unity.

In *Wo äs de Trud?* religion is a constant reference in the characters' informal talks. Women artisans rely on Gypsy women to foretell the future in cards, it is a belief as intense as faith in God. Salmen's worry is that peasants will replace their own faith with credible stories provided by other fortune-tellers who were itinerant women engaged in such trades. He finds the fear of black cats utterly retrograde and began writing rhymes about the Trud, but in a sympathetic rather than an ironic tone.

The play captures the world of a Saxon community in all its beauty and complexity. Neighbors shares indispensable goods like lamp oil; they showed up at each other's doors unannounced; mothers like Gus, Salmen's wife, arranged their daughters' dates and selected

⁶⁰⁰ Otto Reich, *Wo äs de Trud? Lastspäll ä 4 Beldern* (Sälvstverl, 1936).

suitors only if they were wealthy. Reich's prose abounds in proverbs and sayings that illustrate peasant wisdom such as "speaking is silver, silence is gold" or "what God has brought together, Man shall not divide." In his play, the main obligation of Evangelical-Lutheran women was helping members of the audience identify themselves with the characters in the play by stressing the issues of child-rearing and protection as a collective duty. Female characters in the play were all members of a fictive Children's Protection Society. Such societies operated at the village level through meetings, fund-raising events, and evening gatherings where such matters as the role of old Saxon songs in the nursery were discussed. These details were similar to what village women from Veseud were doing in their own local association in real life. An Association for the Protection of Children under the Evangelical Lutheran Church's patronage opened many branches in every region inhabited by Saxons and even published their own yearly newsletter with articles about this important social mission.⁶⁰¹

Amateur theater was not limited to isolated performances in isolated villages. The villages interested in performing plays seemed to form clusters in a particular county and were obviously more or less in contact with each other due to similar professional commitments. Indeed, the president of the Evangelical-Lutheran Schoolteachers' Association, E. Ziegler, scheduled a play in order to inaugurate its conference sessions in the district of Nochrich in 1933. Serving also as the principal of the Confessional School in Marpod, Ziegler approved the play *So Starb Ludwig Stephan Roth*, in a county where records of numerous play performances dated from the 1930s and until March 1939. In Hoghilag, the principal of the local confessional school, Mihail Schasser, coached performers to put on *Im Schweiß deines Angesichts* (In a Positive Light), a comedy with song and dance in three acts by Josef Eisenburger (1864-1929). A leading

⁶⁰¹ Kalender des Hermannstadter Kinderschutzvereins (Calendarul Asociației Sibiene pentru protecția copilului) (Tiparul Tipografiei Georg Haiser, 1932). Tatigkeitsbericht des Hermannstadter Kinderschutzvereins. The other three

figure in the musical world in the county of Bistriz, Eisenburger was a schoolteacher who embraced an original approach in cultural events by combining physical education with music.⁶⁰² In *Im Schweiß deines Angesichts*, he makes a strong case in favor of a life of toil rather than one spent in luxury. The two charming characters, Hans and Grete, working as hired hands on a count's estate, found out by themselves that yearning to enjoy life without work meant, in fact, leading an empty life.

Schoolteachers were also in favor of plays by foreign playwrights, especially from Protestant countries. The map of the Hermannstadt County shows a large number of villages which were active in performing mainly plays inspired by German literature. In Martinsdorf (Metiș), the pastor, schoolteacher and local young men and women presented Goethe's *Egmont* in the spring of 1934. The play is full of the early Romantic themes such as the power of emotion and subjectivity, amply captured in the conflict between the Flemish Prince of Gaure (Count Egmont) and the Spanish Imperial General, the Duke of Alba. Siding with Egmont for his natural and honest way of being, the playwright introduces the powerful element of "all things natural," understood in religious terms. When dealing with incivilities and foolhardy acts, Egmont prefers a sound flogging and the release of the wrongdoers rather than their beheading. Overall in the play, beheading is described with horror by Dutch citizens: "I can smell an execution morning: the sun can't come out, the clouds stink!"⁶⁰³ Egmont's advice to town dwellers is consoling, in his own words, "Whatever you can do to keep peace, do it, people. Provoke the king no further; after all, the final power is in his hands!" When tax-collecting brought in little money, Egmont

branches of the Society for the Protection of Children were in Mediasch, Schaßburg, and Kronstadt, as cited in Avram Mircea, *Calendarele Sibiene in Limba Germană* (sec. 17-20) (Sibiu, 1982).

⁶⁰² Josef Eissenburger, *Im Schweiß deines Angesichts, Lustspiel mit Gesang und Tanz in zwei Aufzügen* (Bistriz: Jekeli, 1920).

⁶⁰³ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe's Plays* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1980), 340.

refused to defer alms-payments made to veterans and widows, and urged his tax-collectors to find solutions and make acceptable suggestions and to “still get the money”.

Saxon female schoolteachers must have found *Egmont* congenial as well, for it contains a fascinating account of women characters, ranging from the Duchess Margaret of Parma (1522-1586), ruling the Habsburg Netherlands after her aunt and great-aunt had served as governors, down to Egmont’s betrothed, Klara, and her mother. The first is the accomplished female politician by virtue of her willingness to understand and tolerate the Flemish people she ruled over and by virtue of her stoutheartedness and decisiveness which she shared with other female characters. Klara was a young woman in love with Egmont, who was much above her station, but whom she praises not for his rank but for his qualities as a human being, a friend as well as a beloved, so frank and open. Following her mother’s advice, she disregarded the various ways by which a woman could please or charm a man. Besides her propriety and regular church-going on every Sunday, she frequently observed and pondered social and political issues. Goethe makes clear that it was the duty of every Dutch burger to be concerned about rights and leadership. Women were no exception. As a typically Dutch bourgeois woman, Klara read newspapers, to keep herself informed about the issues of the day. Here was a figure of great appeal to educated Saxon women.

Many in the Saxon audience would recognize striking parallels between Flanders and their own “Saxon land.” They shared similar values. The most cherished aspect of politics in Flanders was tolerance, which the local population sought to defend by all means. The Dutchmen opposed the Inquisition, the foreign Catholic clergy, and Spanish despotism, and, instead, were remarkably tolerant of Calvinist preachers, whose teachings were quickly embraced by the nobles, the common folk, and the military. In the play, Soest, the merchant, recounts his meeting with such a preacher who claimed in front of thousands of people that Dutchmen ought to have more

enlightenment in their lives. According to the witness, he buttressed his ideas with proofs from the Bible. Jetter, the tailor, also invokes divinity so that “all the saints [will] strengthen Egmont.”⁶⁰⁴

Lutheran ideas abound in the play, and no wonder *Egmont* fit the tastes of an Evangelical-Lutheran audience, who claimed faith from the original Augsburg Confession. As the core conflict in Goethe’s play was between the King and his citizens, one can argue that it hints at the conflict between the public and the private, but it actually refers to the opposition between the individual and the corporation, a position on which Luther made himself clear when debating Christian ethics and politics.⁶⁰⁵ One could read in Egmont’s conduct the elements that shaped his lifestyle and decisions, which fitted with Evangelical-Lutheran teachings. Luther himself thought that in order to avoid the Devil, one should shed despondency by seeking convivial company, companionship, dining, dancing, and singing⁶⁰⁶. To the dismay of many who feared for his life, Egmont defied authority by entertaining guests and creating networks of partners and supporters at parties organized at his house and by pursuing his business in the open, having no interest in discreet maneuvering. Egmont showed his Christian values when he claimed that “present and future times will praise the ones who forgive an offense rather than deplore and disdain the wrongdoer.”⁶⁰⁷ On the other side, soldiers serving the Spanish General had a pervasive sense that only Fate decides everything. As one of them put it: “Only when the breath of Fate’s caprice touches the scale, the matter is decided,”⁶⁰⁸ a way of thinking that resonated with the “Sturm and Drang” literary spirit of the time.

⁶⁰⁴ Goethe’s Plays, 341.

⁶⁰⁵ Roland Bainton, Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press), 240.

⁶⁰⁶ Bainton, Here I Stand, 363.

⁶⁰⁷ Goethe’s Plays, 351.

⁶⁰⁸ Goethe’s Plays, 347.

Interest in Goethe's play rose even higher among the villagers of Martinsdorf (Metiș), when Egmont described his country fellows as being "men worthy of walking God's earth, each one an entity unto himself, a small-scale king, solid, agile, capable, loyal, clinging to old customs,"⁶⁰⁹ a list of attributes that fit the Transylvanian Saxons' own understanding of themselves! It was religion and old customs and probably not a civic identity that strengthened their ethnic group. When Egmont makes the point that a ruler should not alter old customs, or else he could lose legitimacy and his followers, he conveys more than a piece of advice: it is a prerequisite for peace and the cultural consolidation of ethnic minorities in keeping with traditional elements that defined their ethnic core.

In other counties like Mieresch (Mureș), plays by local playwrights alternated with works chosen from foreign literatures. Norbert Fleischert, who served as a schoolteacher in the confessional elementary school in the village of Birk (Petelea), chose Otto Reich's *Der Dani Misch wid Härresch* for Easter in 1935. The same school, led by principal G. Schuster, organized a performance of *Et Kitt Him* by Hans Lienert in October 1933. However, five years later, the school in Birk (Petelea) organized a theatrical event with *Jeppe vom Berge* by Ludwig Holberg, as a way to collect money for the army by way of cultural events.⁶¹⁰ Fritz Theil, another schoolteacher in Birk, continued the theatrical tradition in the village during the war as part of his responsibility to educate both the young and adults.

Theil brought together students and villagers to read and rehearse Holberg's play, *Jeppe vom Berge*. The father of Scandinavian drama, Ludwig Holberg (1684-1754) was educated in theology and deeply versed in literature, philosophy, and music. In 1722, he wrote *Jeppe vom Berge* and soon after, he became a history professor at the University of Copenhagen. Jeppe was a

⁶⁰⁹ Ibidem, 353.

⁶¹⁰ DANIC București, Fond Departamentul Artelor, Inv. 819, Dos. 4/1940, Fila 184/13 Mar. 1940.

fifty year old poor peasant, and a war veteran, whose wife abused him physically for not working enough and not providing more for his family. His portrait evolves out of several traumatic experiences: he returned from a long and bloody war, safe and conversant in German; his wife and co-villagers demeaned him to the lowest level in society as a husband under the lash of his wife's whip. More traumatic was the farce initiated by the baron who was curious to see whether Jeppe, if one day wakes up in a palace as a noble, would react in some fashion and change his way of thinking and living.

Religiosity and everyday ethical and moral behavior reinforced each other in Jeppe's case. Too poor and toothless, but honest, Jeppe tells the gospel truth, and refuses to believe that lawyers, even when they are defending him in court, could be motivated by Christian pity. Jeppe totally wins the hearts of his fellow characters in the audience. His sense of love even for his wife who whips him every morning, for his children and for those who condemn him to death, only to reveal that everything was a joke, is a marvelous Christian posture of obedience, kindness, and wisdom. Holberg's play is a text that captivates the minds in the audience who believe in the importance of tradition, religion, and morality.

The men and women serving as schoolteachers in Saxon communities embraced theatrical activities and made them core cultural activities in all the counties inhabited by Saxons in a way that very few other regions had. Bringing forth examples of characters that looked inwardly into their lives was important for strengthening the self-introspection of their audiences. Schoolteachers also placed a strong emphasis on history, daily life, and local customs just like the pastors and the societies of Evangelical-Lutheran women. Together they hoped to renew the ties that the Saxons had cultivated for centuries with Germany but even more tightly with the Lutheran world, so it could heighten their sense of Saxon identity.

Firefighters

As better-off members of their communities, Saxon firefighters enjoyed a certain favored social status and with it a degree of cultural superiority. As volunteers, they had to have not only a stake in protecting their belongings from fire, but also needed the time necessary to commit to the task. A need for firefighters to establish operational bases in cities began to be felt as early as the 1840s after terrible fires destroyed villages of the Bistritz County, like Oberneudorf, Heidendorf, Petersdorf, Groß-Schogen, Weißkirch, and Tschipendorf.⁶¹¹ In response to the cultural and ethnic effervescence encompassing all ethnic minorities between the wars, the firefighters came to the fore not only as protectors of their communities but as active cultural promoters.

The firefighting force in Bistritz city organized a lively cultural activity centered on amateur theater.⁶¹² A popular play was *Zwangseinquartierung* by Ernst Bach (1876-1929) the Director of the Volkstheater in Munich, who, after the war, collaborated on farce writing with Franz Arnold (1878-1960), a prolific playwright for theaters in Berlin in the 1920s. Offering a good picture of bourgeois middle-class life in a German provincial town, the farce opens in the household of a factory owner to describe the upheaval created by his adult children when they choose spouses from the same social class and education, thereby impeding their rise towards a higher social status.⁶¹³ Farces tended to blend the vernacular traditions introduced in medieval passion plays and were very popular among the Transylvanian Saxons. This was unusual. Very few comedies appeared in Saxon repertoires because the German stage, unlike the English and the French, did not enjoy a remarkable productivity in comedies from which the Saxons could draw.

In the village of Kisd, County of Mieresch, the local firefighter society performed Anton Maly's *So Starb Stephan Ludwig Roth* for Christmas 1934. In 1935, in Agnetheln, County

⁶¹¹ Otto Dahinten, *Geschichte Der Stadt Bistritz in Siebenbürgen* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1988), 142.

⁶¹² DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, Fila 53/9 Oct. 1930.

of Hermannstadt, the Voluntary Firefighters Corps performed *Der Hochtourist* (The Alpinist).⁶¹⁴ A dramatic anecdote by Curt Kraatz and Max Neal in three acts, this play narrates a bourgeois family's efforts to convey a false image of marital bliss and a proper education of their offspring in order to increase its social standing in Berlin society. The father and husband, Friedrich Wilhelm Mylius, a director of a stock company in Berlin, took literary descriptions of mountain climbing and snowy landscapes from a book on alpinism and pasted them in his weekly letters to his wife, leading her to believe that they were his writings. He even published them as his own impressions in a travelogue he authored. His deeds persuaded the public to believe that he was the embodiment of a real *hochturist* (the most prestigious title among the inveterate mountain-climbers, usually designated by the terms *Alpinist* or *Bergser*). While everyone believed that he was climbing mountains, he was, in fact, physically in Munich working as a theater director, another impersonation meant to give him a chance to have fun away from his family and regular business responsibilities. As a writer of travelogues, he thought that he could impress his wife, who admired men who were writers. Very conscious of her social class, now greatly enhanced by the recent publication of her husband's first book of essays about mountain-climbing, she crafted a plan to further even more her husband's reputation and writing skills. On his 50th birthday, she invited journalists to meet Mylius together with the farmers who were mentioned in the travelogue and who, allegedly helped with his climbing tours in the Tyrolian Alps. But it all led to the unraveling of his lies. The play thus captures the dynamic of a bourgeois household in terms of relations between spouses and between parents and children, and casts doubt on the married bliss conveys in the public sphere. Although the plays put on by Saxon firefighters in cities satirized the middle-class lifestyle, they appealed because of their cosmopolitan encounters and

⁶¹³ Franz Arnold, Ernst Bach, Zwangseinquartierung, Schwank in drei Akten (München: Ahn&Simrock Bühnen- und Musikverlag).

⁶¹⁴ Kurt Kraatz, Max Neal, Der Hochtourist (Leipzig: Reklam, 1927).

the German world they portrayed. Such plays were probably more welcome to Saxon urban audiences than villagers, but they displayed the same didactic and moral teachings as plays directed at rural people.

In Kronstadt and Bistritz, the number of firefighters who showed an interest in amateur theater was large, spreading further to Bod, Codlea, and Hălchiu, all located within a close distance in the East-South corner of the county. Most of the firefighter groups centered their theatrical activity on classics like Schiller, Lessing, and Heinrich von Kleist, and farce playwrights like E. Bach and F. Arnold. Only in Hălchiu did they show an interest in native playwrights, putting on Otto Reich and his play *Wo äs de Trud?* In Aldorf (Bistritz), for example, the firefighters led by President Michael Eisner put on *Die Räuber* by Schiller.⁶¹⁵ They secured a middle ground between westernizers and traditionalists, but with greater propensities toward German than local drama literature.

Concluding remarks

The two interwar decades stand as a distinct stage in the development of the Saxon minority, being fostered by the prevailing conditions in Greater Romania, which, although not favorable in legal terms, nonetheless had positive effects on minority life. The Romanian government saw cultural life as a means of compromise of political and legal differences between itself and minorities, and thus allowed the Saxons the exercise of cultural freedoms.

The defense of their ethnic identity through amateur theater was the paramount goal for the Saxons. Frequently invoked in public discourses, ethnicity and ethnic feeling in cultural life between the two world wars were widely regarded as secular because secularism implied a modern self-understanding and self-perception; we can thus think of the Saxons both as a minority and as citizens of Greater Romania. Studying amateur theater among minorities in the

1930s offers a unique window on the Saxon cultural-spiritual and social life at the local level, showing that actually ordinary Saxons were more concerned about their affiliation to a local community than about their collective status as a minority group in a Romanian nation-state.

An important finding of my study is that the Saxons' strong belief in their ability to revive their cultural life, aided, in a sense, by Romanian state institutions. The local elite played the most important role in this revival: schoolteachers, women's groups, and pastors all brought to their tasks a privileged perspective informed by religion, a Western education, and a deep knowledge of village communities. As traditionalists, they saw amateur theater performances as having less to do with emulating mainstream theater and more with the search for a cultural blueprint that fit Saxon identity. The "form" (comedies with songs) and the "content" (history, customs, faith) of amateur theater as well as the particularities of language in the scripts of plays that were staged expressed an attachment to the values of the "word" rather than a concern for performative elements or performance in itself. Despite their higher education and travels, they remained captivated onlookers of the village world, observing traditions, history, and holidays with understanding. Their energy in putting on plays, finding or writing scripts, and encouraging the local contingent of amateurs is a remarkable characteristic of Saxon minority cultural life that testify to their efforts of self-inquiry and determination to survive in the new circumstances by way of their specific culture.

To both intellectuals and ordinary Saxons, a closing of ranks was of utmost urgency. A thorough analysis of the plays and the socio-religious contexts of their performances offer a productive background for exploring how villagers envisaged unity among themselves in order to secure the survival of their small group. Ethnicity and ethnic identification may be best illustrated in the efforts of professional troupes to uplift the image of Saxon theater arts, while ethnic feeling

⁶¹⁵ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 819, Dos.2/1938, Vol. II, Fila 125/4 Febr. 1938.

mainly shaped the work of traditionalists who, in various locations, emphasized their own local dialect and particular historical lessons and common moral and religious teachings. While unity at the level of the entire minority group, although advocated, remained an aspiration, local solidarities and particularities remained strong within local groups, preventing the formation of a unitary ethnic cultural life. Only a resilient a pervasive Evangelical-Lutheran polity united local communities to define a unitary Saxon identity.

Chapter 4 Jewish Amateur Theater

Amateur theater organized by local Jewish communities of historical Transylvania in the decade following the end of World War I followed a much slower and uncertain path than that of other ethnic groups in the region. At first, there was no permanent professional theater in the region that was officially recognized as Jewish, but many private theater companies came from abroad or other provinces and toured historical Transylvania. Upon their arrival they were able to adapt to the artistic environment in Greater Romania, partly due to the overall high profitability of the theater business in Greater Romania and partly due to the European character of their repertoires.

In the late 1920s, there were very few signs of amateur theater events organized by ordinary Jews. Only sporadically had they selected Hungarian plays for shows, and on these occasions, there was a slim endorsement from the leading members of the community, which prevented the onset of an amateur theater movement similar to that of the Hungarians, Saxons, and Romanians. In their understanding, theater was not associated with the concept of social uplift through education, and local communities did not envisage cultural life particularly around theater events. Much less was done to ensure continuity with the Jewish theatrical traditions hailed by the Hebrew Renaissance theater of the eighteenth-century Germany and the Yiddish theater traditions of Moldavia and Bucharest in Greater Romania. In this chapter, I hope to explain the causes that determined this state of affairs by explaining the rift among Orthodox Jews, pro-assimilation Jews (civilized), and Zionist Jews. If for other ethnic minorities religion galvanized interest in theater, among the Jews, religion led to divisions that eliminated culture.

Romanian officials encouraged Jews to organize a theatrical activity distinctively Jewish, either in Yiddish or Hebrew, but this objective was constantly thwarted and eventually was not achieved. It is paradoxical that Jews, for whom social autonomy was possible and granted in the

past, and was perceived as vitally necessary, did not start overwhelmingly expressing their autonomy through cultural means like amateur theater. Autonomy was the foremost objective for the Jewish minority because Jews formed a cultural and especially civil entity having already its own religious, administrative, and charitable institutions. Being an historical group in the region, with a rather independent social body, autonomy reflected their century-old aspiration to create their own agencies of self-government and jurisdiction. Autonomy in the sense of self-government collided with the Romanian state's concern about giving minorities collective rights that would jeopardize the stability of the newly-created country. Thus, my findings demonstrate that for Jews cultural life meant to take charge of spiritual and social affairs but these affairs did excluded the medium of theater to put across Jewish teachings and moral values. I explain why theater playing failed to secure a central place within the overall cultural life with the exception of Zionists and aspirants to assimilation. Finally, this chapter explains why autonomy for Jews did not reach the full potential that other ethnic minorities enjoyed.

The Romanian state was not alone in recognizing autonomy expectations on the part of the Jews in this region. The National Union of Transylvanian Jews/ Erdélyi Zsidó Nemzeti Szövetség (EZSNSZ; UNET) also built a strong platform for Jews to appear as an ethnic force in the province. The pressing need for organizing a dynamic cultural life in local communities greatly preoccupied the UNET and Orthodox Jewish structures at local levels, but, there was no close cooperation, much less a common program to follow. Above all, Jewish cultural life was not to take the path that it took for the other historical ethnic groups. Their cultural understanding remained aloof in the region and from Jews of other provinces.

What is peculiar to this minority group as a whole is the lack of a leading periodical or a cultural society or a group that took upon itself the task of cultural revival for all Jews, and which would compare with the *Erdélyi Fiatalok* for the Hungarians, or *Klingsor* for the Saxons. While

the Romanians had the support of the state and of two church institutions, Orthodox and Greek-Catholic committed to an ethnic identification, the Jews had no significant involvement from the rabbi or a centralized institution. No Jewish cultural effervescence among writers stimulated the creation and writing of plays to be performed by amateurs on stage, the way it happened among the Saxons and Hungarians. Given such limitations for research, I hope to show the efforts of Jewish society to promote cultural development through theater, however scattered and reduced it was, and to examine whether the context of postwar Romanian rule encouraged Jewish autonomy in cultural matters. The efforts undertaken by the Romanian state to encourage Jews to appear as an ethnic collectivity did not differ much from those applied to other minorities, but, those that are peculiar to Jews are worth highlighting to conclude whether overall they were conducive to the creation of a Jewish cultural life in the province.

Driven by the opportunities of cultural autonomy granted to all ethnic minorities, Jews saw in theatrical events a way to advocate political agendas. The Zionists were among the most involved in bringing plays to local communities, but they were also the most critical of professional theater initiatives, which the Zionists rebuked for their form, content, and flimsy characters. Overall, Jews belonged to the ranks of the middle class, but, compared to other provinces they were less interested in commercial and industrial life.⁶¹⁶ Thus, economic needs figured in their planning, although ideological and religious goals fared higher. In religious terms, theater was not the preferred choice in organizing a local cultural life. The Orthodox principles were staunchly upheld by the leading men in the community who did not see amateur theater as congenial to spiritual uplifting comparable to the effect that Talmud readings had on Jews. Thus,

⁶¹⁶ Ezra Mendelsohn, The Jews of East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 180.

reviving and strengthening ethnicity through theater could not occur as in the case of other minority groups in historical Transylvania.

Language was an impediment for the Jews in historical Transylvania who used partly Yiddish, partly Hungarian, while their loyalty to Yiddish was a staunch affirmation of their traditionalism and Jewishness. Even Hebrew was learned and introduced in the region through the medium of Yiddish and not as a language surpassing Yiddish in importance and sacredness. Putting on plays presented a controversial situation: using Hungarian would have meant relinquishing entirely Yiddish with its accompanying religiosity embedded into it and which defined Jewish orthodox denomination; using exclusively Yiddish would have meant a posture too close to ultra-traditionalism, given that the Jews in this region prouded themselves of remaining moderate. The Orthodox denomination of Judaism remained crucial to Jewish self-identification in small communities in historical Transylvania. Whatever language to choose on the stage remained a strong impediment which prevented actual events to be organized, and individuals to take the lead and start an initiative. The lack of a overwhelming embrace of Hungarian on stage by small Jewish communities counteracts the idea that most Jews in the region were assimilated to Hungarian culture.

A cultural life in communities was the product of ideological and political forces rather than the efforts of Jewish individuals speaking on behalf of their communities. Instead of witnessing cultural events independently and locally organized to fulfill the lower classes' literacy needs, Jews from other places reached out to them, and the presence of outsiders triggered interest into putting on plays. One could hardly point to Jews in local communities organizing cultural activities for their own co-religionists, families, and neighbors and, if so, theater was not their first choice, but rather poetry readings and classical music concerts.

Part I

Jewish Society in the 1920s

To trace Jewish interest in amateur theater, one must attempt to understand the paradoxical situation in which Jews chose not to have an officially-declared native language, yet continue to preserve Yiddish, which defines them religiously. To Orthodox Jews, it was the religious language that brought them close to their Orthodoxy without becoming Hassidic or Neolog. Identifying the language they used in their local communities (Hungarian- and German/Yiddish- speaking Jews) and discovering whether they were religious or secular members within the UNET ranks and their local communities is a difficult task, but worth to consider when searching for causes for their lack of unity. Among the Orthodox Jews, the Yiddish speakers tended to select plays from German and Yiddish theater repertoires, which demonstrate the close attachment of this denomination to the religious status of Yiddish. On the other hand, only four counties had over 50% of the Jewish population speaking Yiddish: Gyulaféhervár, Maros, Nagyszeben, and Beszterce, following a descending cartographical line within our province from North to South-West and toward another province nearby, the Banat.⁶¹⁷ Yiddish-speaking Jews also lived in Beszterce, another county in our region which was closer culturally to the areas of Maramorosh and Szatmárnémeti, and was dominated by the Hasidic Jews who formed strong communities of Yiddish language and culture. They are not the focus of this chapter.

Three categories of Jewish groups appear active in theater events in historical Transylvania. The self-designated assimilated Jews who belonged to a local Jewish community, spoke Hungarian, lived in large cities, and tended not to be involved in amateur theater. The assimilated Jews put on plays that reflected cosmopolitan European tastes and

⁶¹⁷ Recensământul din 1930: Transilvania, Studia Censuala Transsilvanica (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2011).

business interests and were involved in supporting or attending professional, either permanent or itinerant, theaters. Second, an interest in amateur theater could be found among Orthodox Jewish women's societies and young people's groups. Orthodox Jewish men, typically in charge of the leadership of the community, did not put on plays. Their main cultural efforts revolved around strengthening Orthodoxy by reaching out to other Orthodox Jews from Central and South-Eastern Europe and by reviewing a great variety of books in religious periodicals. Third, the Jews active in the UNET opened up branches or sections in different locations and put on plays as UNET representatives. Orthodox groups found in the UNET an organization fit for promoting their cultural activities and spiritual duties in the Hungarian language. The UNET served as an all-encompassing organization, becoming the Jewish Party of Transylvania (Erdélyi Zsidó Párt) in 1930. In the 1920s it counted among its members Jews who put on plays to endorse a particular ideology, either a communist or a Zionist cause, with the main purpose of collecting funds. Theater helped increase the political visibility of the Party whose membership continued to increase significantly throughout the decade after its founding in 1930. The UNET groups pursuing a political agenda tended to be theater semiprofessionals.

Several factors explain the lack of unity among the Jewish communities in historical Transylvania. First, they remained unaffiliated until the creation of the Jewish Communities Federation (Hitközségek Szövetségeinek Föderációja - HSF) in May 1935. Soon after, an informational bulletin, *The Religious Monitor* (Hitközségi Értesítőt), was published in 1936. Even after the opening of the National Jewish Central Office of Banat and Transylvania (Az Erdély-Bánsági Országos Izraelita Iroda) in 1922, and the creation of the Jewish Orthodox Central Office of Transylvania (Erdélyi Ortodox Izraelita Központi Iroda), communities remained independent. Like their kin in East-Central Europe, Transylvanian Jews split into

numerous groups following a religious division between a reformed group, the Neolog (or Kongressz) and the status-quo groups,⁶¹⁸ on the one hand, and Orthodox, on the other hand. The Neolog Jews embraced reforms in simplifying the service and the architecture of the prayer house and enlarging women access to other services and positions within the religious community. The Status-quo Jews remained somewhat attached to tradition and partly embraced selectively a few changes proposed by the Neolog.

In works about ethnic minorities and in general surveys, historians discussed ideologies like Zionism, Nationalism and Socialism as well as assimilation and their impact on Jewish identity, especially how it influenced Reformed Judaism among the Jewry of Germany, Poland, and Hungary.⁶¹⁹ The Reformist Jews formed heterogeneous camps and developed communities mainly in cities where they enjoyed wide economic and political opportunities of public and civic involvement.⁶²⁰ The Zionist emphasis on biblical Judaism did not attract Orthodox Jews, because the biblical stories were treated as historical rather than religious works. Nonetheless, in historical Transylvania, a province dominated by Orthodox Jews, Zionism witnessed a remarkable revival.

Besides religion, division continued along ideological lines like communism and Zionism and further on along religious and (non) political Zionism. Zionist ideas in Transylvania started in 1897 among the Jews of Balázsfalva, and encouraged mass immigration to Palestine. Unlike in Hungary, where Zionist goals were met with downright

⁶¹⁸Howard Lupovitch, "Between Orthodox Judaism and Neology: The Origins of the Status Quo Movement," in Jewish Social Studies, New Series, Vol. 9 Nr. 2, Winter 2003, 123-153.

⁶¹⁹ One such work dealing with pre-1918 Hungarian Orthodox Jewry and its conflict with the Reformed Jews is Jacob Katz, A House Divided: Orthodoxy and Schism in Nineteenth-Central European Jewry (London: Brandeis University Press, 1998).

⁶²⁰ Konrád Miklós, "A neológ zsidóság útkeresése a századfordulón," Századok, 2005/6, 1335-1369.

rejection, in historical Transylvania they continued to be promoted at a constant pace.⁶²¹ The embrace of Zionism appeared to local Jewish leaders as a measure of communal and spiritual resistance against assimilation, either Romanian or Hungarian.⁶²² Zionism indeed appears to scholars to have functioned as a means of resistance against assimilation during the interwar period, but the majority of assimilated Jews, secular and religious in thinking, did not hesitate and actually went along with Hungarian language and culture after the onset of the communist regime.

Whether different Jewish camps split along age groups is another important aspect. However, it is hard to determine whether Zionism appealed more to the young than the old generation of Jews, or more to the religious or secular Jews. Interested in supporting education, the Orthodox Prime-Rabbi Akiva Glasner of Kolozsvár, son of Rabbi Moses Samuel Glasner (1856-1924) built a yeshiva in 1934 in Kolozsvár and served as founder of the main Zionist periodical *Új Kelet* of Kolozsvár. He put his beliefs into action as leader of Mizrahi educational activities⁶²³ stressing religious Zionism. In supporting Zionism, youth groups (Hanoar Hationi) stressed human virtues and values, universalism and equality, while rejecting traditionalism and Orthodoxy. Extremely resilient and pervasive, Zionism influenced the economic thinking of Jews through brochures published in Berlin and Prague and containing information about building the economic foundations of newly-created communities. These brochures circulated widely in the neighboring region of Küköllum and Banság.⁶²⁴ Religious Zionism was at odds with other Zionist orientations, such as leftist branches or secular groups. Representative of these disagreements is the case of Rabbi Glasner who could not continue his

⁶²¹Raphael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary, History, Culture, Psychology* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 445.

⁶²²Moshe Carmilly Weinberger, "Communal and Spiritual Resistance of Jews in 1933-1944," in *Studia Judaica* 2001, 22-26.

⁶²³*Pages of tradition*, 25(3), Spring 1991, 63-69.

work in Kolozsvár and had to migrate to Jerusalem where he died in 1924, leaving his son to serve as rabbi in his place.

Disagreements between the young and the elders, as well as between religious denominations and gender occurred in schools. Zionism influenced the activity of Jewish secular schools in 1920 known as the Tarbut high-schools for boys (supported by the Orthodox) and for girls (supported by the Neolog). In 1927, the emphasis on Hungarian led to the closing down of the Tarbut high-school for boys by the Romanian government, due to the increasing suspicions that irredentist goals like promoting Hungarian culture instead of Hebrew language and literature jeopardized public order and security in Greater Romania. Even the high-school review, *Ifjú Erdély*, could not escape pro-Hungarian irredentist accusations from authorities.⁶²⁵ This action is a clear example of the Romanian state's rejection of ethnic-centered expression of religiosity due to risks of instability and disorder that ethnicity can engender in multiethnic provinces like historical Transylvania.

Historical Transylvania sheltered a moderate branch of Orthodox Jews, the Western Askhenazi type of communities, who kept up with the requirements of the new times but were not quite ready to forget about or ignore tradition and old customs. They introduced the Hungarian language in the synagogue service and kept it in use even after the First World War. They differed from the Orthodox Jews of other regions like the Hassidic Jews in Bukovina who, upon their rabbi's instructions, had to comply with two conditions: to worship only in Hebrew, the sacred language (as expected, Hebrew was a language that ordinary Transylvanian Jews unfortunately did not master) and to use Yiddish on a daily basis as Yiddish yielded spiritual value in spoken idioms and tradition. In the region, Jews used not Yiddish but

⁶²⁴ János Benedek, *A Cionista...*, 79.

⁶²⁵ Zoltán Tibori Szabó, "Zsidlic- Istoria Liceului Evreiesc din Cluj (I), in *Babel*, Oct. 12, 2013.

Hungarian as a vernacular language. Hungarian was thought to enhance the quality of Jewish cultural life, being widely used in journalism, literature, and public events.

Two categories of individuals were typical of East European Jewry and shed light on the social relations within Transylvanian communities. A limited number of individuals belonged to the class of *sheinen* - in translation "the beautiful" - a name for the educated individuals experienced in reading the sacred texts, and highly influential in the decision-making process regarding the community. The majority formed the *proste* - the simple ones, who could certainly be wealthy, but due to their slim command of the Torah and basic education lacked power and social standing. Both statuses tended to be passed on from fathers to offspring.⁶²⁶ Access to the Torah appears, thus, as a means of differentiating among Jewish social classes in the first decades of the twentieth century. Despite the Judaic commandment stating that the Torah be imparted to all Jews and that all Jews should have a chance to reach the *sheinen* status through education, the social stratification among the Jews remained constant and highly polarized.

Communal elders strove to strengthen cohesion within communities, but social boundaries remained securely in place. Like all cultural events, theater offered religious and cultural content among Jews, who, typically, treated schooling and learning as a religious duty. But the community attended plays not for religious education, as such initiatives were meant to counteract the negative effects of constant mobility and demographic unbalances that dismantled communities. Cultural planning presupposed the gathering in one place of Jewish families that were scattered in villages or other small towns, in order to form an urban

⁶²⁶ Shaul Stampfer, "Heder Study, Knowledge of Torah, and the Maintenance of Social Stratification in Traditional East European Jewish Society," in Studies in Jewish Education, Vol. 3, Jerusalem, 1988, 275-276.

community.⁶²⁷ The scattering of Jews is reflected in the large number of cemeteries existing in many rural centers of historical Transylvania.⁶²⁸ Out of 675 cemeteries at the national level, 459 were located in Transylvanian counties, and more than two thirds of them were rural.⁶²⁹ Many Jews living in villages travelled to and from towns, seeking trade outlets that were locally unavailable. The scattered distribution of Jews in villages made the trend toward association in a town a necessary step to secure their belonging to a viable and stable community to which they were to pay dues and were dependent upon. From a community's perspective, a large membership was desirable for collecting more synagogue dues and other taxes, and theater revenues motivated communal leaders to put on plays. Plays could attract the rural Jews who aspired to an urban identity, sophistication, and material well-being.

The most visible elements which show that Jews had their own organizational structures in place under autonomous direction are the synagogues and the cemeteries. According to statistics, synagogues in historical Transylvania numbered twenty-five, all built before 1945, and more than half were built in the years between the two World Wars.⁶³⁰ Building a synagogue was proof of the financial stability of the community and the existence of a well-to-do constituency. Architecture varied based on the material conditions available to communities, religious creed, and the economic character of the town. When smaller budgets prevented the building of a synagogue, and divisions among the Jewish leadership of the community grew deep, the community used for worship a simple house for prayer. If a town had two or more Jewish religious establishments, it meant religious diversity among the local

⁶²⁸ Randolph L. Braham Hungarian-Jewish Studies vol. I (New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews 1966., 46. If in 1700 Jews living on the borders of the country were 90% by 1910, their numbers fell to 35,7%. 40, 46.

⁶²⁹ Mircea Moldovan, Sinagoga - arhitectură a monoteismului (Paideia: București, 2003), 198.

⁶³⁰ This estimate is based on the table provided by Streja Aristide, Lucian Schwartz, Sinagoga in România (Editura Hasefer: București, 2009), 274.

Jews, a very good financial situation and, demographically, a large Jewish population like those in large cities (Kolozsvár, Regen, and Marosvásárhelyi).

In towns, ordinary Jews took part in the life of the community which revolved around the courtyard.⁶³¹ One could get directly into the synagogue by passing through the courtyard, making this space of paramount importance, since it could serve various purposes for different communal gatherings, including entertainment like theater and official celebrations. The courtyard was surrounded by the synagogue, school, the cantor's and schoolteacher's dwellings, and the ritual bath, together forming the traditional urban configuration in Jewish Transylvanian communities. A courtyard was present even in the case when synagogues were missing, and the religious service was provided in private houses in small towns and villages.⁶³² The spatial configuration was closely intertwined with social hierarchies. Since the synagogue membership reflected the economic, social, professional, and political structures of the Jews in a particular town, the well-to-do members, also the most important financial contributors to the synagogue's finance strove to buy buildings for homes and businesses around the synagogue. Theater events could attract those local Jews who were close to these quarters, mainly the same ones who were involved and interested in their community affairs.

Periodization

Three periods framed the history of Transylvanian Jews in the region after the First World War. The first from 1919 to 1923 was marked by the Romanian administration's commitment to public debates about professional theater among the minorities. The UNET leaders sought to establish a professional theater hopefully in a permanent building, a troupe to be officially recognized as the theater company of the Jewish minority. Jewish politicians and

⁶³¹ "Courtyard" is also the name of a journal of Jewish studies published in the United States.

⁶³² Moldovan, 208.

religious leaders insisted on obtaining a fair allocation of the special state benefits to their theater, similar to those given to other minorities in the region. The number of troupes allowed for the Jewish minority was determined by the demographic percentage at the national and provincial level. If the Hungarian minority of 1,435,507 could be approved to have twelve officially-recognized theater troupes, 65,873 Jews in historical Transylvania (with only 26,187- 39% using Yiddish was their primary language, and the rest using Hungarian) could have only one troupe.⁶³³ The Romanian authorities took little action to enforce strictly the ratio of demography to numbers of troupes, and at least half of dozen Jewish theater troupes visited Transylvania yearly.

The assimilated Jews were mostly interested in professional theater. They preserved their attachment to Hungarian culture through the professional theater available in the cultural center of Kolozsvár. Jenő Janovics (1872-1945) epitomized the most successful Jewish theater entrepreneur in Transylvania, before and after the war, earning profits and cultural prestige as the director of the largest Hungarian theater of Kolozsvár.⁶³⁴ Among the members of the assimilated group, of which Janovics was representative, were the advocates of cosmopolitan liberal and bourgeois values who were very attached to the Hungarian language and literature as well as European values.

Jews used their newly-created political organization to undertake efforts to develop their own cultural life through theater. Founded by Hillel Kohn (1891-1970)⁶³⁵ in Kolozsvár in 1918, the UNET could not develop free of leftist or rightist currents. The founder intended a

⁶³³ Recensământul din 1930: Transilvania, Studia Censuala Transsilvanica (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2011). I have considered the following counties: Gyulafehérvár, Beszterce, Brassó, Kolozsvár, Haromszék, Csík, Hunyad, Maros, and Hermannstadt.

⁶³⁴ Lajos Jordáky, Jenő Janovics és Lili Poór (Kolozsvár: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 1975).

⁶³⁵ A very brief sketch about Hillel Kohn is to be found in Peter Ujvari, Magyar Zsidó Lexikon (Budapest: A Magyar Zsidó Lexikon Kiadása), 494. Before openly becoming communist in 1946 and published studies about communism and Soviet Union, Hillel Kohn published with Zsako Gyula, A Kolozsvári Hazsongardi temető sirkövei 1700-ig (The Tombstones of the Hazsongardi Cemetery of Cluj) (Kolozsvár: Styef Ny, 1911).

communist foundation for this structure, but in 1920, important members of the Union voted to have the Union join the World Zionist Organization. In 1923, its official name was changed to the National Jewish Union of Transylvania and Banat (Erdélyi Zsidó Nemzeti Szövetség; Uniunea Națională a Evreilor Transilvăneni) with Chaim Weissberg (Weiszburg), a well-known Zionist as president of the Cultural Section.⁶³⁶ This section established an active correspondence with Romanian officials in Bucharest on theater issues, obtaining from Theater Inspector Emil Isac and the Minister of Arts and Religions an exclusive yearly renewable license for only one theater troupe. As other Jewish troupes were being officially barred from Transylvania, this troupe, endorsed by both Romanian and Jewish officials, was to cover the needs of the Jewish communities not only in historical Transylvania, but in the adjoining areas as well. The UNET gradually came to serve as the official institution sponsoring the Jewish theater troupe and responsible for its compliance with rules and regulations. On the recommendation of the Jewish side, they both agreed that a Viennese Yiddish theater troupe led by Adolf Adler and Solomon Strammeck was to receive endorsement as the only local Jewish troupe authorized officially to perform in Kolozsvár and elsewhere in other cities.⁶³⁷ To the satisfaction of Romanian authorities, many foreign Jewish troupes toured the region and attracted numerous Magyarized Jews to their performances and away from Hungarian shows. Group pride among the Jews reached very high levels, when the local organizers who invited Jewish troupes from abroad to perform, considered renting the National Theater of Kolozsvár's building for a much more impressive event.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁶ Dr. Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger (ed.), Memorial volume for the Jews of Cluj-Kolozsvár (New York 1970), 89.

⁶³⁷ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 686/1921, fila 522/27 Jun.1921, 633/29 Nov. 1921, 654/ 29 Nov. 1921.

⁶³⁸ It was declined because, on National Theater stages, only performances in Romanian were legally admitted . DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 686/1921, Fila 311/25 Mai 1921, Fila 652/29 Nov. 1921.

Historians distinguish a second period (1923-1934), which starts with the UNET's transformation into the National Jewish Union of Transylvania and Banat in 1923, a year when Orthodox Jews and the status-quo and neolog branches failed to unite into a single cultural association.⁶³⁹ At the same time, the UNET affiliated a number of societies like the Association of Orphans' Protection of Transylvania (Erdélyi Zsidó Árvagondozó Egyesület, EZSAGE)⁶⁴⁰ and youth groups (ifjuság), which led to a broader cooperation.⁶⁴¹ Amateur theater events remained local affairs as the putting on of plays took place without the involvement of Jewish central authorities. The period ending in 1934 brought an important piece of legislation called the 'national work law' which required 80% of the employees in enterprises to be Romanian.⁶⁴² This law officially marked the beginning of legal restrictions for Jews in Greater Romania. Until 1934, Jews employed the available legal framework to build a cultural life of their own. Such events enabled them to exert group solidarity along similar lines with the Hungarians and Saxons,⁶⁴³ although Jewish solidarity remained parochial, being conceived along religious and community lines at the local level.

Historians argue that from the end of the war up until 1934 the Jewish question was not at the center of Romanian political life, or at least was not as problematic as the Hungarian irredentism. Thus, these years allow us to put cultural issues into a perspective clear of significant interethnic, political, and economic conflicts.⁶⁴⁴ The third period (1934-1939) from the assassination of Prime Minister I.G. Duca in December 1933 to the onset of the royal dictatorship in 1938 covered years of tense confrontations and increasing concerns about the

⁶³⁹ Attila Gidó, "Cadrele instituționale ale reprezentării intereselor politice evreiești din Transilvania interbelică" in Vasile Ciobanu, Sorin Radu (eds.), *Partide politice și minorități naționale din România în secolul XX* (Sibiu: Technomedia, 2009), 83.

⁶⁴⁰ Attila Gidó (ed.) *Úton. Erdélyi zsidó társadalom- és nemzetépítési kísérletek (1918–1940)* (Kolozsvár: Pro-Print, 2009).

⁶⁴¹ Gidó, *Úton...*, 75.

⁶⁴² Mendelsohn, 204-205.

⁶⁴³ Gidó, 22.

Jews while debates turned into bitter controversies about their minority status.⁶⁴⁵ The ethnic ratio within Romanian companies had to be enforced due to job scarcity at the height of the economic crisis, and thus Jews in excess of 20% of the total personnel had to be dismissed. In 1938, the closing down of Jewish newspapers and bookstores took effect immediately. The dictatorship excluded Jews from public life in 1940 as the Second World War got underway in Europe.⁶⁴⁶ Such measures were applied in earnest in economic and political domains especially in large cities, while in smaller communities their impact was much attenuated, with cultural and theatrical life practically being left untouched.

The Romanian state and Jewish minority theater life

Compared to the Hungarians' and Saxons' rich theatrical traditions in the region, Jewish professional theater, whether permanent, local, or itinerant, was something new. Romanian officials often expressed their surprise at hearing that a local Jewish theater began activity, because it was practically unheard of in the region. Many foreign professional troupes who toured Transylvania, such as the *Habima*⁶⁴⁷ with artists from *Roland Bühne* of Vienna⁶⁴⁸ or from Budapest⁶⁴⁹ or the small local troupes like that of Eugene Teszles conveyed to observers an inchoate Jewish theatrical life that started only after Transylvania joined Greater Romania in 1918.

After the First World War, small-town Jewish communities accepted the Romanian state's vision of emancipation: physical integration into the Romanian society not as a

⁶⁴⁴ Carol Iancu, 19.

⁶⁴⁵ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea 'Arhanghelul Mihai,' O Contribuție la Problema Fascismului Internațional* (București: Humanitas, 1999).

⁶⁴⁶ Mendelsohn, 207.

⁶⁴⁷ DANIC Fond Ministerul Artelor, Inv. 550, Dos. 550, Dos. 777/1922, Fila 185/28 Mar. 1922

⁶⁴⁸ Michaela Feurstein, Gerhard Milchram, *Jüdisches Wien: Stadtpaziergänge* (Wien: Bohlau, 2001), 129.

collective entity but as law-abiding individuals. Jewish political leaders sought civic and public rights comparable to the Jews from the Old Kingdom where, due to a different historical evolution, most Jews assimilated to Romanian culture. The trend among the secular Jews in historical Transylvania was to write and read in Hungarian, take an interest in the journals and fiction published in Budapest, put on plays by Jewish authors who lived in Transylvania but were not native of this region, and choose Budapest or elsewhere in Central Europe to start a literary career. I will call them assimilated Jews because they were eager to cross territorial borders and encounter other ideological frames of mind, but this opportunity, although allowing them to remain culturally free and comfortable, put them and their community at risk and at the mercy of centrifugal and temporary vagaries of foreign cultural influences. Of all religious camps, the Orthodox Jews bemoaned the risks of assimilation and Zionism and distanced themselves from these dangers. They used predominantly Yiddish and their cultural life was exclusively related to religion.

Bent on allowing each minority's own ethnic individualization, the Romanian government did not interfere with the Jews' interest in foreign ideas and influences. For one thing, the minorities in the region continued to have after 1918 a very sustained and vibrant press to inform, debate, and sustain a cultural, political, and social agenda. City councils remained foreign-dominated until the mid-1930s and managed the administrative issues of the urban centers, accustomed to Hungarian and German decision-making. Then, the Romanian government lacked sufficient personnel competent in Hungarian, Hebrew, and Yiddish, and familiar with the cultural and political past of the region, which could have enhanced the

⁶⁴⁹ Lisa Silverman, *Becoming Austrians: Jews and Culture between the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

state's control of the region. So, their control generally did not go beyond borders and internal security, and anti-libel protection in the public sphere.

Scholars analyzed the impact that nation-states had on Jewish minority life in prewar Hungary, which ruled historical Transylvania before 1918. In his quantitative studies about the Hungarian Jews in the nineteenth century Michael Silber found that Jewish affairs witnessed a dramatic growth in cultural life whenever nation-states encouraged their expression, but the revival was always temporary, quickly followed by years of stagnation and even regression. This unequal pace of development accounted for a shifting outlook in the cultural profile of Hungarian Jewry, a lack of uniformity in the level of literacy, and then an abrupt takeoff in the learning of basic writing and reading for women, elderly, and children. Silber argues that the high rate of reading abilities in Latin and Gothic letters for the Jews born in 1880 and later actually indicated not superior literacy but only an elementary level of acculturation. Only for the very few privileged Jews who attended secondary schools and higher institutions, were literacy achievements remarkable. Silber concluded that Jewish society in prewar Hungary “was far more polarized culturally than the rest of the population.”⁶⁵⁰

Except for the secular Jews who chose to use, speak, read only Hungarian, very little had been known about Jewish cultural life in small communities where they used predominantly Yiddish. Between 1923 and 1930, the Romanian state sought to play a very active role in the coordination and control of Jewish minority communities in this region, but the diversity of religious denominations and positions held by numerous community leaders made the task difficult. Transylvanian Jewry lacked a powerful theater spokesperson like Director Jenő Janovics who, although Jewish, was interested in theater as high culture and as a

⁶⁵⁰ Michael Silber, “Towards the Cultural Profile of Nineteenth Century Hungarian Jewry, A Quantitative Survey” Paper presented at the Conference on Social Issues of Central European Jewry, Paris, 20-22 August 1985, 11.

path to assimilation into Hungarian society. An efficient communication emerged between Romanian officials and Jewish organizers, who submitted their inquiries and requests for their theatrical projects.⁶⁵¹ As Romanian officials sought to further Jews' ethnic and linguistic distinctiveness, the Yiddish-speaking Jews in Kolozsvár grew more vocal and launched anti-Hungarian slogans "Los von die Ungarn" ("Let's be free of the Hungarians") in sign of protest against Hungarian assimilation. Such spontaneous public reactions reflect the prevailing public mood among certain Jews living in town. A small minority (5,183 out of 23,858), the Yiddish speakers had less of an impact on the city's cultural life compared to the larger number of assimilated theatergoers who frequented the venerable institution led by Janovics. Unlike other counties like Maros, Gyulafehérvár, Háromszék and Nagyszeben, where Yiddish prevailed in over 80% of Jewish homes, Kolozsvár came to be known as the main Zionist center for Jews but also a Jewish cultural center.

Under the new regime the Jews' interest in building a cultural life of their own led to enhanced public participation. Outcomes, however, revealed that Jews as a whole were only partially committed to this goal; they lacked unity and direction, which, in turn, was compounded by the disappointment which many experienced with the slow and difficult process of naturalization and which thus left many with non-citizen status. The Mârzescu Law on naturalization and disqualification for Romanian citizenship passed by the Romanian Parliament on February 24, 1924 transferred the authority of the matter from the judiciary to local councils, replacing the collective emancipation for Jews in the newly-attached territories after 1918 with the principle of individual naturalization. As the Jews' indigenous origin and local residence mattered in the naturalization process, their cultural involvement could therefore serve as a useful indication of an individual's local integration. Synagogues, kehilas

⁶⁵¹ DANIC Bucureşti, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817 and 818 in full.

(kahal), and the debates about the material conditions of schools allow us to explore the local cultural life of Jewish communities in small towns and to trace the sort of cultural work they were able to achieve under inauspicious circumstances

The new law on religions promulgated in April 1928 took into account the religious diversity of Greater Romania and recognized officially three Jewish communities: Ashkenazi (Western rite), Sephardic and Orthodox. It authorized the union of Jewish communities into distinctive federations, but this union did not materialize. The law provided a juridical and moral status, benefits like tax cuts, free stamps, and reduced-fee transportation, all granted solely to synagogues affiliated with a federation. Such benefits were specifically denied to other structures and groups that Jews created for various communitary needs. Applying an equal legal treatment to all minority religions, Romanian authorities denied official recognition of the juridical charters of the *kehila* (the elected communal Jewish structure) to serve as a body separate from the Jewish religious community.

Furthermore, in 1928, the coming to power of the National Peasant Party improved the political visibility of Transylvanian Jews, when two Jewish deputies, József Fischer and Tivadar Fischer, entered the Romanian Parliament.⁶⁵² The National Peasant Party benefitted from the Jewish votes in Transylvania, and the municipal elections in the region resulted in many Jews taking the oath of office as municipal clerks.⁶⁵³ However, deputies as well as Jewish public figures only rarely had addressed issues that were directly pertinent to the Orthodox Jews in small communities in historical Transylvania. The local prime-rabbis of the various communities emerged as vehement defenders of local interests by publishing in the

⁶⁵² Claudia Ursuțiu, *Senatori și Deputați Evrei în Parlamentul României (1919-1931)* (Cluj- Napoca: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2006).

⁶⁵³ Ioan Scurtu, Ioan Dordea (eds.), *Minoritățile Naționale din România 1925-1931, Documente* (București: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1996), 440.

Hungarian-language press articles about financial concerns and fundraising for charitable institutions.

While Neolog rabbis were open to the West, Orthodox prime-rabbis in historical Transylvania preferred a more isolated stance, and the status-quo leaders were wary of exposing their issues to a broader public. By 1934, Francisc Löwy, the status-quo prime-rabbi of Marosvásárhely, expressed dismay at the publication of articles that stressed the Hungarian character of Transylvanian Jews, arguing that, by doing so, these authors placed all Jews at odds with Romanian interests. He urged his Jewish fellows to abstain from encouraging it, as it was perceived as an unwelcome interference in their own local affairs. He was concerned with preserving schools, temples, and communities as representing the foundations for the development of their cultural life. He saw the shortage of rabbis in local communities as a bigger problem, closely linked to the unfortunate practice of sending young men abroad for education without taking steps to attract them back to their hometowns to gain practical experience and revive their ties to their native land. Cultural life, he argued, was in shambles because many communities lacked a rabbi; without a rabbi's guidance, these communities were simply ignored and isolated, very rarely attaching themselves to a nearby community that had a rabbi and rarely being visited by Jewish missionaries (tutors).⁶⁵⁴

There is an ample correspondence between Romanian authorities and Jewish leaders focusing on Sabat and budgetary payments to confessional schools of all minorities, including Jewish educational institutions. By 1933, Neolog Rabbi of Torda (Kolozsvar) Albert Wézel acknowledged the willingness of Minister of Arts and Religions, Dimitrie Gusti, to allow Jewish students in state schools to maintain the Sabbath and allow them to skip the school day

⁶⁵⁴ Ioan Scurtu, Ioan Dordea (eds.), Minoritățile Naționale din România, 1931-1938. (București: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1999), 278.

on Saturday “to help them achieve the goal of the Central Office (Központi Iroda).”⁶⁵⁵

Compared to the Orthodox leadership, the Union of Jewish Communities of Neolog Denomination proved more adamant in making the Romanian state deliver the expected payments according to the budgetary allocations, even at the height of the Great Depression.⁶⁵⁶

Around 1930 the Jewish professional theater witnessed a severe moral crisis that hit all professional theaters in the country (Romanian, Saxon, and Hungarian). The extensive coverage in the Hungarian press revealed concerning issues like the blurring line between professionals and amateurs with more amateurs taking up professional work, and a focus on idealism in arts. Desperate for work opportunities, assimilated Jewish semiprofessionals in urban centers began to join amateurs and even work on their own by forming their own private semiprofessional troupes. Newspapermen, eager to find faults with Transylvanian professional theaters, took up the idea of forming a troupe as a business opportunity. Jozsef Seress, a journalist in Kolozvár, obtained a ministerial authorization for putting on comedies with five performers. Later, he served as a intermediary for bringing Hungarian foreign troupes from Budapest to perform in Transylvania, claiming that he had found better troupes than those of the discredited Hungarian professional theater. Overall, minority individuals embraced such opportunities, being ready to express opinions and display their organizational spirit even in fields in which they had limited practical experience.

The crisis of Jewish professional theaters was recorded in numerous articles, some containing attacks against the material drive of professionals at the expense of the literary canon and people’s education. Newspapers like *Irodalom és Művészet* and *Keleti Újság* announced that professional performances were practically shunned by the audience which

⁶⁵⁵Hoemesz, Évi 1-2 sz., 1933 Szept 21, 3.

⁶⁵⁶Ioan Scurtu, Minoritățile..., 1931-1938, 271.

affected revenues.⁶⁵⁷ Difficulties soared even for well-known Hungarian Jewish theater directors, who were fleeing from creditors and theatrical agents collecting overdue royalty payments for plays performed on professional stages.⁶⁵⁸ The Pallas Company in Hungary, to whom royalties for plays were to be paid on behalf of the Hungarian Authors' Association of Budapest, was also complaining to Romanian authorities about delinquent professional and semiprofessional troupes. The crisis, however, did not mean the slowdown of theater playing. Quite active, amateurs continued to put on plays frequently, even with professional actors, and many of them, members of the Budapest Association of Actors (Budapesti Színészek Egyesület). Budapest agents came to pursue even amateurs for not paying royalties, although by Romanian law, due to the occasional character of amateur shows, they were not required to pay any sort of taxes.⁶⁵⁹ As the effects of the economic crisis began to fade after 1934, a vivid cultural life, especially in large cities, regained its strength and even surpassed the pre-crisis levels.

A constant concern for Romanian authorities pertaining to theater life was the preservation of public order. Often, shows triggered among the audience riotous reactions, making authorities fear that Jewish cultural initiatives in large cities inhabited by a majority of Romanians would lead to anti-Semitic demonstrations organized by university students. Kolozsvár city was a place where theater events ignited public outrage because, despite the low ratio of the Jewish population, it constantly hosted a large number of Jewish professional theater troupes performing in Hebrew or Romanian, most of them invited from Bucharest or from abroad by Jenő Janovics, the director of the Hungarian Theater of Kolozsvár. Since a very small number of Jewish families lived in the city or would be typical theatergoers,

⁶⁵⁷ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 76/1930, Fila 65/24 Nov. 1930

⁶⁵⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 85/1930, Fila 22/7 Jul. 1930.

⁶⁵⁹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 73/1930, fila 30/22 Mai 1930

protesters reacted to the troupes' marketing focus on other ethnic groups for an audience.

Authorities strove to prevent public outbursts and worked closely to anticipate them. However, theater managers ignored the inflammatory potential of some of their plays and the demographic ratio of Jews in various locations. Out of 100,844 inhabitants in Kolozsvár city only 13,504 were of the Jewish confession and, by law, one official Jewish troupe and a couple of itinerant troupes should have covered the needs of the relatively small Jewish population in this city.⁶⁶⁰ The authorities' report counted at least half a dozen putting on plays in town.

Yiddish plays posed significant problems to the Romanian officials in charge of monitoring Jewish theater troupes. Unable to read and censor plays in Yiddish, even after appointing a Literary Committee, Inspector Isac, claiming language incompetence, gave this responsibility to the Kolozsvár Branch of the UNET.⁶⁶¹ By doing so, Romanian officials trusted this Jewish organization to represent Jewish interests. On the other hand, Jewish leaders established effective communication channels with the Romanian authorities on behalf of their communities and were concerned lest interferences from abroad might weaken this trust. Even though the Hungarian language made it easier for Romanian authorities to monitor better Jewish professional and amateur theater, it strongly encouraged the use of Yiddish on stage, despite a scarcity of Yiddish-speaking Romanian officials.

An interesting case is the troupe led by a conservatory graduate, Eugene Teszles, who toured the Old Kingdom. He vouched for his artists that they were members of the Union of the Free Romanian Artists of Bucharest (the SADL); he even paid work insurance for his employees, knowing the Romanian institutional system. As he claimed in his correspondence with the ministerial officials in Bucharest, his theater business touring Transylvania with

⁶⁶⁰ See Isac's report on the presence of Jewish Theater Troupe of the Jignița Garden of Bucharest on tour in Kolozsvár city, DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 76/1930, Fila 4/12 Febr. 1930.

⁶⁶¹ DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Culte and Arte, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 981926, Fila 201/15 Jul. 1926.

Yiddish operettas appears to have been profitable, as he relied on a large, mainly urban, theater audience able to understand Yiddish and eager to attend plays.⁶⁶²

The Romanian state interest in Yiddish was to prevent further Hungarian assimilation of the Transylvanian Jewry. A native of the province, the Theater Inspector Emil Isac encouraged ethnic particularities and sought to reinforce them rather than promote assimilation. Whether Isac and his superiors in Bucharest ever considered the Transylvanian Jews' assimilation to Romanian culture by way of Jewish professional theaters from the Old Kingdom is not yet documented. Overall, the position of the Romanian government toward Jewish cultural life, and theater in particular, was one of relative control and freedom, based on dialogue and the relegation the power of decision to local and organizational leaders, while preserving public order and respect for the law.

Intellectual and cultural life of Jewish communities

Within this political and social framework, Jewish communities were ready to advance cultural initiatives in small towns, where a stable, relatively contained Jewish life remained traditional. Events were scheduled mainly during holidays and advertised in the local press. These were more frequent in large cities where Jewish society was quite complex, thus more religiously divisive. One source of information is the Jewish Neolog calendar (*Jüdischer Kalender–Zsidó naptár*) edited by Salvator A. Lax in Kolozsvár. It included meditations, rabbinical announcements, historical studies, biblical articles and funny materials, but very little literature.⁶⁶³ In Kolozsvár and Marosvásárhely, Jewish intellectuals of different generations gave their support to Zionist Jews to put on plays that were considered particularly

⁶⁶² DANIC București, Fond Ministerul Culte și Arte, DGA, Inv. 652, Dos. 87/1926, Fila 264/18 Sept. 1926. The operettas in Idish were: “O nunta la țară”, “Fetița Dulce”, “Fetița din Vest”, “Cepkefayer”, “Sulamit”, “Iankale”, “Barhcova”, “Baron Kimel”, and “Golem.” No Yiddish translation of these titles was found in library catalogs.

suitable for converting fellow Jews to Zionism. In the majority, the plays presupposed a certain degree of acculturation and literacy among the audience, affording to all involved an opportunity to display erudition rather than educate the masses. As education was a lower priority, debates remained local and were limited to what the educated communal leaders found necessary: pursuing activities of amateur theater and cultural objectives with the intention of delivering political messages or strengthening financially the unity of the Jewish minority around communal structures. In other large cities like Petrozséni and Brassó cultural events relied on similar social milieus for an audience, and thus, discussions remained limited to the *kahal* (Jewish communal body).

Either enticed by intellectual opportunities or by better chances of publishing their works, young Jewish intellectuals from villages moved first to small towns, then, to larger cities in a constant flow. From 1910, when 44% of Jews lived in urban centers, to the 1920s, the number of Jews living in cities increased to 56, 2%.⁶⁶⁴ This transit allowed intellectuals to settle in large urban centers, which encouraged a diversity of opinions and debates. Two distinctive camps emerged: the “young” and the “old” intellectuals. Jewish graduates and assertive intellectuals, who took up residence in cities and showed a preference for “*furcsa kétnyelvűség*” (“strange bilingualism” that is Hungarian and Romanian), formed the young camp. They revealed only a slight concern for the local Jewish communities which they left behind in their native villages or small towns, but the negative effects of migration were clear: a dwindling number of Jews in villages, and the weakening of communitary institutions. Thus, for villages, it became harder to maintain cohesion and preserve autonomy, while those who chose to stay noticed the difficulty that local Jewish leaders had in finding rabbis to serve,

⁶⁶³ Oszkár Fürst (ed.) *Zsidó családi naptár az ... évre* (Cluj: Szilágyi Adolf, 1924); *Zsidó történet, zsidó kultúra* (Truma Kiadás, 1924).

⁶⁶⁴ Ladislau Gyémánt, *The Jews of Transylvania*, 256, quoted in Attila Gidó (ed.), 31.

teachers to educate the local youth, and even committed members willing to get involved and strengthen the *kehila*.

Published in 1922, *Iffjú Kelet* was a periodical devoted to Jewish young people, serving as an informative bulletin to connect youth across secular and religious schools with the specific objective of promoting individualism, sciences, and Jewish culture. They stressed Hungarian and Jewishness in their quest for identity.⁶⁶⁵ Young educated Jews with propensities toward Romanian culture triggered prompt reactions on the part of the old Jewish intellectuals, who insisted that devotion to Hungarian culture was crucial for the Jews of Transylvania. Old-generation intellectuals also urged fellow Jews to ignore the new pressures of assimilation (learning Romanian) or ethnic individualization (learning Hebrew), which had a certain appeal through the policies of the Romanian state and links with the Zionist Jews of the Old Kingdom. In this province most of the Jews willingly accepted a full assimilation into Romanian culture.⁶⁶⁶ Such divisions along generational lines were not unique among the Jewish intellectuals. In contrast with the “old” intellectuals the young generation, who achieved public recognition only after World War I, strongly pushed for adaptation and integration of the Jews in post-Trianon Transylvania, rather than withdrawal, reticence, and revisionism.

Another element of heterogeneity within Jewish intellectual camps was the embrace of various Haskhala (Enlightenment) ideals such as reforms in the content of prayer books which were to be cleansed of any mention about *Aliyah* (return to Sion), or the bringing of prayer books from Germany.⁶⁶⁷ Moses Mendelsohn’s concept of freedom of conscience was representative of Haskhala. An Orthodox Jew, Mendelsohn remained active in his Jewish community, abiding

⁶⁶⁵ Romániai magyar irodalmi lexikon: Szépirodalom, közírás, tudományos irodalom, művelődés II. (G–Ke).

⁶⁶⁶ Rotman, 136.

⁶⁶⁷ Carmilly-Weinberger, 127.

faithfully by the Torah prescriptions in his daily life. At the basis of freedom of conscience he placed rationalism because it was independent of revelation. Interwar Jewish intellectuals in historical Transylvania found inspiration in Mendelsohn, while others looked to Kant's and Leibniz's philosophies to help them reconcile wisdom with piety. Overall, the Haskhala in the Romanian lands evolved along pragmatic lines and lacked an ideological elaboration and an autonomous literary orientation. It also failed to contribute with theoretical insights that would allow the Jews living in Romania to participate in public debates and to add to the intellectual effervescence of other European cultures.⁶⁶⁸

In the Orthodox perspective, assimilated Jews or Zionists played no role in the development of Jewish culture. One contributor to *Hoemesz* compared the work of a Jewish assimilated writer to an architect who had brilliant ideas, but the final work, in the end, was not his.⁶⁶⁹ He continues by stating that Jews believed that language, arts, and religion shape culture by leaving an imprint on all other peoples' spiritual and ethical works. From this perspective, Jewish culture influenced the language, art, and religion of all peoples. Even in communities where Zionism was strong, Jewish communities built a cultural house, which made clear the community's intentions to stay but the cultural events to be scheduled in these centers did not resemble those of Christian communities. Jews preferred to engage in Talmudic studies, read and debate ethical literature and theological collections.⁶⁷⁰ Despite the great ideological and religious variety among Jews, historical Transylvania remained overwhelmingly Orthodox and the majority of local communities belonged to the UNET. This double affiliation gave stability to communities in the region and shaped the organization of Jewish cultural life, but theater held a modest place in people's preferences.

⁶⁶⁸ Simona Fărcășan, *Între Două Lumi, Intelectuali Evrei de Expresie Română în secolul al XIX-lea* (Cluj –Napoca: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2004), 203.

⁶⁶⁹ Morija, "Zsidó Kulturprobléma Orthodox Nézőszögből" in *Hoemesz*, 1.Évi.13.sz.15 December, 1933, 3.

International Jewish agencies played no role in the shaping of the intellectual debate in the region. Well-known societies like the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris, or the Israelitische Allianz in Vienna displayed a very limited interest in historical Transylvania, and, often, foreign Jewish groups were rebuked if they sought to interfere in Orthodox affairs or represent Transylvanian Jews' interests. Typically, their mission was to provide financial means for furthering Jews' assimilation into the local culture of the host country. Thus, such undertakings had slight effects on the Jews of our region whose assimilation into the Hungarian culture was not only incomplete but rebuffed.

Originating in Budapest, Hungarian cultural trends enhanced the cultural assimilation of Jews especially in large cities, but also, surprisingly so, in small towns. It is worth noting that in the 1920s and 1930s Hungary recorded the publication of a large number of Jewish literary works devoted to religion, including many novels and poems dealing with biblical and general Jewish subjects were published. Jews living in large Transylvanian cities established connections with the Jews of Hungary. In the county of Maros, periodicals representing a progressive middle-class readership, such as *Nyugat* (Budapest) or *Erdélyi Helikon* (Kolozsvár), broadly shaped the reading choices of the readers in both large and small towns like Segesvár or Hatzeg. This cultural thrust reflected Jews' confidence, mobility, and adaptation that contributed to close cultural contacts between them and European Jewry, even though, in everyday life, they strove to preserve their distance and independence. One might argue that a relative isolation of the Transylvanian Jews existed, although intellectually they fully remained a part of the European Jewry.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁷⁰ Imre Szábo, *Erdélyi Zsidói: Talmudisták, Chaszidok, Cionisták*, vol. I (Kolozsvár, 1938.), 198.

⁶⁷¹ Andrew Handler (ed.), *Ararat. A collection of Hungarian-Jewish Short Stories* (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press), 13.

Similarly, theatrical journals published in Budapest freely penetrated small towns in historical Transylvania, where theatrical traditions, not as much among Jews as among other ethnic groups went back almost a century. In particular, the review *Színházi Élet* (Budapest, 1911-1938, editor Sándor Incze) helped ignite Jewish theatergoers' interest in a lively professional theater season and even in attempting to organize amateur shows. Also, the plays that made headlines in Budapest theaters reached many small towns in this region through Hungarian professional troupes owned by Jewish theater managers. In their petitions to the Romanian authorities asking for approval of their events, Jewish managers of touring companies requested authorization in Hungarian-speaking towns like Segesvár, Regen, and Hatzeg, a move that demonstrated that these towns actually mattered for financial reasons and were undoubtedly highly receptive to the Hungarian language.

Ideology and Theater

Starting in the mid-1920s and continuing well into the 1930s, Zionism and communism in historical Transylvania often appear connected with amateur theater. Zionists were generally critical of theater-playing that mixed song, jokes, comedy, and realism with fairy tales with a strong emphasis on profane, material things such as clothes, and travel. These play subjects and plots did not square well with the Zionists' pure idealism. They rarely accepted plays in the program of Zionist Congresses and if they approved of any, they chose biblical plays, like *Moses* by Israel Auerbach at the Congress in 1925 in Vienna.⁶⁷² Zionism emerged among secular groups to advance the concept of ethnicity, despite their strong principles of internationalism. Zionism sought to create a modern, new Yiddish culture through individuals who believed in human and social ideals. To attain such goals, proletarians in

⁶⁷² Brigitte Dalinger, *Trauerspiele mit Gesang*, 309.

particular perceived the uselessness of living life in cities and barely being able to support a large family through employment in urban industrial centers. The emerging working class perceived better than other categories the need to emigrate and use their skills to build a new, prosperous Jewish state in Palestine.⁶⁷³

The most important Zionist periodical was *Új Kelet* of Kolozsvár, edited by Érnő Márton who was also known as the deputy mayor of Kolozsvár and a member of the Hungarian Parliament before the First World War. Ferenc Jámhora followed Márton at the *Új Kelet's* helm from 1927 until 1938. Both editors gave literature a special place in the pages of the newspaper, the latter even initiating in the 1930s the literary supplement of the newspaper, *Új Kelet Szombatja Irodalmi Mellékletét*.⁶⁷⁴ The Zionist press addressed particular groups targeted for conversion. The World Organization of Zionist Jewish Women (Zsidó Nők Cionista Világszervezetének) recruited women members, while the Society of Jewish Businessowners (Zsidó Iparostársadalom) welcomed workers. A popular organizer of entertainment for young Jews in our region was a non-political Zionist youth organization “Aviva Barisia” with branches in Kolozsvár County. The president was Rező Kasztner (1906-1957) a journalist for *Új Kélet*. They provided useful information on relocation to Palestine and organized a rich activity of amateur theater for entertainment. Miklós Hirsch, the Aviva Barisia leader in the city of Dés, put on the play *Timosa* by Lajos Gellért.⁶⁷⁵ The Zionist press reflected the new orientation towards Zionist nationalism. Together with the anti-Zionist press

⁶⁷³ János Benedek, *A Cionista Munkásmozgalom, Eszmei És Történeti Fejlődése* (Kolozsvár: Kiadja A Hitachdut Barisszia – Habonim Nösziutja, 1940), 8.

⁶⁷⁴ Bianca Doris Bretan, *Istoria Presei Sioniste de Limba Română în Perioada 1897-1938* (Presa Universitară Clujeană: Cluj-Napoca, 2010) 57. I was unable to locate and consult this literary supplement of the *Új Kélet*.

⁶⁷⁵ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 10?1933, fila 826/9 Nov. 1933 Lajos Gellért, *Nyitott Szemmel* (Budapest: 1958).

(*Neue Judische Presse*, *Jesunum*, *Hoemesz*, and *Hasemes*) they convey the scale and dynamism of the golden age of Jewish press in the 1930s.⁶⁷⁶

Functioning under broad institutional designations, the Kolozsvár branch of the General Association of Railway Unions and Sections was eager to put on plays emulating professional theater troupes. Its Jewish members emphasized the use of Yiddish as in the staging of *Farn Shturm* (The Great Evening) by Leopold Kampf, in January 1930.⁶⁷⁷ It was uncertain from the petition of the organizers whether the show was for Hungarians or Romanians, but the translation of the play's title into Yiddish in the petition submitted to authorities might be proof that it had Jewish organizers behind this event who knew Yiddish.⁶⁷⁸

Transylvanian organizers selected this play from French theater' repertoires and adapted it to the multiethnic stage of this province. Kampf, a Pole from Russia, tried to have it stage in Berlin, and Hamburg, but his enthusiasm for this play was not shared by theater directors while the police forbade it on the stage. As a member of the socialist movement in his hometown, Kampf wrote about generous aspirations with sensibility. Only in Paris and New York did authorities allow this play to be presented.⁶⁷⁹

Romanian officials in charge of theater life allowed the play on stage because as a stimulus for a flourishing Zionist movement in Kolozsvár, it could help with the task of dissociating Jews from Hungarians and enabling the former to exist as an ethnic group in itself.⁶⁸⁰ Reformist rabbis were receptive to Zionist ideas. For example, Maros County, the

⁶⁷⁶ Bretan, 82.

⁶⁷⁷ L. Kampf, *Farn Shturm, drama fun der Rusisher revolutsyon in 3 Akten* (New York: 1907)

⁶⁷⁸ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, page not specified.

⁶⁷⁹ Leopold Kampf, "Le Grand Soir" in *L'Illustration Théâtrale, Journal d'actualités dramatiques*, no. 8, 8 Février 1908. 2. 25.

⁶⁸⁰ Attila Gidó, "Institutiile evreiesti interbelice din Transilvania," in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Historia*, 1-2, 2003. Livia Dandara, "Populația evreiască în contextul integrării Transilvaniei în viața economică, socială, politică" *Anale de Istorie*, 1 (1985).

status-quo prime-rabbi Ferenc Löwy (1869-1944) embraced Zionism. His literary activities included translations of plays, like Max Nordau's *Doctor Kohn*,⁶⁸¹ but their Zionism was intended to strengthen religion for a political objective, not for the sake of ethnicity.

Professional troupes supported by a devout Zionist like Neolog Rabbi Chaim Weissberg, a faithful collaborator of the president of the World Sionist Congress, Nahum Sokolow, and active president of the Cultural Section of the UNET,⁶⁸² were also not as supportive of the ethnic cause. The theater amateurs among the Askhenazi Jews appeared more interested in collecting funds or representing ideological causes on stage rather than stimulating ethnic identity in the Yiddish or Hebrew languages.

Part II ***Religion among the Jews of historical Transylvania***

Religion remained the fundamental factor for Jewish community-formation and self-understanding. Judaism in the region drew its essence from the concept of rabbinical Judaism, according to which a rabbi was indispensable in a Jewish community. Once the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskhala) triggered anti-rabbinical attitudes, mainly among the Jews of Neolog (Reformed) denomination, rabbis were required to limit their influences to the religious service or to learning/reading from the Jewish codes, while the Jewish communal elders became the real decision-makers in the community of Jews. As anti-rabbinism was on the rise among the Neolog, a requisite close relationship between rabbi and community still remained a strong characteristic of Orthodox Judaism. The Shulhan Arukh Code of Jewish Law was the major guide of Orthodox Jewish life.⁶⁸³ The fact that the much-castigated theater was still being carried out very rarely was proof of the Orthodox rabbi's embrace of

⁶⁸¹ Dávid Gyula (ed.) *Romániai magyar irodalmi lexikon: Szépirodalom, közírás, tudományos irodalom, művelődés III. (Kh–M)* (Bukarest: Kriterion, 1994).

⁶⁸² Dr. Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger (ed.) *Memorial Volume for the Jews of Cluj-Kolozsvár* (New York: 1970), 89.

modernization in historical Transylvania and the Askenazi Jewry's high degree of adjustment and adaptation to modern life, which should not be considered as evidence of liberalism and assimilation to Hungarian culture, especially because the language in use remained Yiddish.

The Orthodox Jews were able to organize and galvanize support for cultural events without the rabbi's patronage, but at the same time they managed carefully to put on plays without alienating him. On the contrary, they sought to uphold his authority. The community kept its allegiance to the most educated and powerful communal leaders in the Jewish local community in parallel to that of the rabbi. So much precedence did the secular leadership have over rabbis in administrative and even spiritual powers that they came to be perceived by the Romanian state as "officials" acting and deciding on behalf of their Jewish constituency.

Two aspects enhanced the rabbis' subordinate position vis-à-vis the power of the local Jewish community board members: when being selected as candidates for the position of rabbi, they were brought from foreign countries, especially Eastern Europe, and upon nomination, the main requirement was that they not have relatives in the respective locality. That requirement prevented rabbis from establishing a power base of their own that could overpower the community board. Rabbis who ended up working in historical Transylvania generally attended the Rabbinic Seminary of Budapest.⁶⁸⁴ Once elected to serve as local rabbi, he made decisions on controversial issues in the community in cooperation with high-ranking rabbinical authorities from other regions. A local rabbi held no official title. After election, he could increase his standing only through the community's recognition of his learning and piety.

Orthodox Jews' ancestors came from Galicia (Poland) and Moravia. Designations like the Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and Hasidic have to do mainly with geographical and cultural

⁶⁸³ Solomon Poll, "The Role of Yiddish in American Ultra-Orthodox and Hassidic Communities," in YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science, Vol XII, (New York: Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, 1965, 125-152), 127.

⁶⁸⁴ Moshe-Carmilly-Weinberger, 127.

specificity like language and synagogue forms of worship, since Reformed or Orthodox denominations could be found in each of these branches. After the incorporation of the Sephardic communities into the numerous Ashkenazi communities in 1823, the Jews in historical Transylvania, now fully Ashkenazi, followed a different path than the Orthodox Jews in the neighboring provinces like Máramaros (dominated by Hasidic communities) because of their different paths of understanding Orthodoxy. The Askenazi Jews embraced Western Orthodoxy in Judaism while the Hasidic Jews embraced an Eastern Orthodoxy in their religious beliefs.⁶⁸⁵ From a political perspective, Orthodox Jews believed in the principle of religious freedom not only in prewar Hungary, but in post-Trianon Greater Romania as well, endorsing it consistently and requiring the government of their host country to uphold it.

Denominations like the Jewish Orthodox and Neolog created a rift among Jews. They failed to reach a common ground in cultural life in 1923, as the Neolog stressing core values like equality, democracy and individualism, and thus, assimilation and progressive views. These values were amply addressed in studies by scholars of Jewish communities in Central Europe, who explored the advent of the Haskhala movement in Western Europe since the nineteenth century and the accompanying secularization and modernity.

Religious freedom emerged strongly in the debate about the status of *kehila*. Although it lacked an official status, the *kehila* practically remained the foundation of the religious, social, and cultural life of the Jews well into the final years leading up to Second World War. It was through the *kehila* that Jews sought to preserve a sense of separateness, self-organization, and cultural and religious distinctiveness for their local community.

⁶⁸⁵ Nathaniel Katzburg, "Assimilation in Hungary During the Nineteenth Century: Orthodox Positions," in Béla Vágó (ed.) Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times (Westview Press: Boulder, Colorado, 1974), 50.

In Greater Romania, the state allowed the *kehila* to function unhindered, until it was abolished in Romania in 1952 by the communist regime, whereas in many neighboring countries, it had been eliminated since the mid-nineteenth century and further attempts at reviving it remained only theoretical. However, for a long period up to World War II, it was widely acknowledged that the *kehila* served as a surrogate for statehood, unifying Jews and giving them internal discipline and hierarchy in the form of local self-government. The legal framework that made possible its existence and activity was defined by the Constitution of 1923, which reiterated the freedom of assembly and association granted by the Constitution of 1866 in the Old Kingdom.⁶⁸⁶

The *kehila* of historical Transylvania survived in its main traditional functions up to the Second World War, a fact enhancing its uniqueness and salience in Greater Romania, since in the Old Kingdom it underwent such major internal transformations that practically led to its abolition. The disappearance of cohesive communities in the Old Kingdom, historians explain, was the outcome of the Jews' mobilization to induce "an authentic explosion of Jewish schools" in response to the Law of Elementary Education in 1893, the Law of Secondary Education of 1898, and the Law of Vocational Schools of 1901, promulgated by the Romanian state. Negative in their impact by excluding a large number of Jewish children, these laws adversely affected Jewish community structures like the *kehila*, but they led to significant improvements in the Romanian school system.⁶⁸⁷

As the local elite in the region played a crucial role in organizing amateur theater, the relation between Jewish local leaders and *kehila* members determined the spirit of initiative and involvement. Typically, electing leaders in an urban *kehila* leadership was the job of the

⁶⁸⁶ Keith Hitchins, *Romania 1866-1947* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2004), 31, 417.

⁶⁸⁷ Liviu Rotman, *Școala Israelito-Română (1851-1914)* (București: Editura Hasefer, 1999) 132-133, 141.

synagogue elders, and in general, the *kehila* membership was tied to membership in a synagogue. However, the president of the community and not the rabbi had the power of decision in both religious and secular matters. The dominance of communal elders and affluent members in a *kehila* made the dissemination of socialism or Zionism among members committed to these ideological affiliations very difficult. By propagating them, their action would have meant disregard for the traditional principles embraced by the local community and its leaders. To Jewish reformists, the *kehila* was seen as a traditional institution in need of a radical reinvigoration, but adjustment to and openness to the numerous ideological affiliations were possible only when the communal leaders themselves supported them. Thus, the Jewish leadership structured deterred a level of relaxed collaboration of all strata in a community to make possible theater playing through volunteering, assistance, and involvement.

In financial matters, Transylvanian Jews enjoyed a wide autonomy within a *kehila*, collecting internal taxes, membership fees and consumption charges. In the Old Kingdom, a tax known as *gabala* was found illegal by the new standards of the Civil Code and could not be collected from the *kehila* members, a decision leading to underfunded Jewish public and private schools and health and welfare support. When the debate surrounding education shifted public attention from rescuing Jewish community structures to the more important task of salvaging Jewish schools before and after the First World War, spokespersons and community elders considered joining school committees and education societies because they considered them more important than the *kehila*. Inevitably, their actions to the *kehila*'s demise and the Jews' assimilation into Romanian society. Even the rabbis of the Old Kingdom became

modern and socially-involved endorsing a secular education,⁶⁸⁸ while Jewish businessmen in trade, industry, and finance became vociferous leaders supporting schools in tandem with Jewish international organizations.

None of these changes touched Transylvania. Here, the *kehila*, being spared the intrusions of international Jewish agencies, succeeded in preserving its preeminent status by controlling schools and making them serve the needs of community,⁶⁸⁹ while the community leadership maintained power and cohesion between members and the rabbi. The spheres of activities of the traditional *kehila* involved education, philanthropy, public health and welfare for Jews. It also subordinated all the other local communal societies of Jews to its council. That some *kehila* communities found it sometimes necessary to put on plays, despite the well-known opposition of orthodox rabbis against theater, proves that the broad array of fields in which they were involved was meant to reach as many Jews as possible through the *kehila*, not the office of the rabbi. They centralized efforts in the same way a state would draft its cultural agenda so that it benefited all citizens, but it would materialize only rarely.

If one looks at the predominant state-like duties of the *kehila* (social, political, civil, legal, and cultural), it is clear that the administrative and political needs of Jews took precedence over religion and education. Theater emerged as an arena for the display of ideological choices rather than of Jewish religiosity. Religion was not completely absent, as a closer look at the internal social dynamic within a *kehila* reveals a Jewish self-understanding that was inevitably shaped by the level of Talmudic expertise and by how much education its members had acquired. Unlike in Christian communities, the strongest religious base among

⁶⁸⁸ Rotman, 158.

⁶⁸⁹ Rotman, 122.

the Jews was the family rather than the synagogue, and religion remained an individual and private affair, while the *kehila* served as the main social structure in communities.

Orthodox Jews and Amateur Theater

Under the political context and circumstances provided by the Romanian rule, Orthodox Jews were intent on organizing a local cultural life within their communities, but theater was not thought of as a priority. The effect of a slim individual and group advocacy base for theater activity was not related to inadequate legal rights granted to the Jewish minority. Whenever addressing Romanian authorities, or organizing theater as Yiddish-speaking Romanian citizens, or sending their paperwork to ministerial offices for show permits, Jews actually used their own organizations and structures instead of Hungarian associations and the plays they specified in petitions were all translated into Romanian.⁶⁹⁰ Culturally, their religious press addressed a Jewish readership with the intention to cement collective belonging. *Hoemesz, Az Igazság* (1933–1940), the weekly periodical devoted to their Orthodox community life represents a valuable source of information about Zionism and local Jewish cultural life, with rubrics focusing on the views of the local leadership and readership.⁶⁹¹

The rare events of amateur theater appearing in *Hoemesz* and petitions for show permits came from the Agudász Jiszroel organizations of young people. The leader of a local branch, Jenő Müller of Petroszany, explained the goal of a particular event to be the rabbi's guiding his flock on the right path.⁶⁹² Whether religious fervor dominated the concerns of the Orthodox Jews is hard to find, because, generally, linking amateur theater to Judaism remained a difficult task. The weekly Orthodox periodical *Hoemesz* gave detailed information about

⁶⁹⁰ DANIC Bucuresti. Fond Ministerul Arte. Inv. 550. Dos. 794/1922, Fila 45/22 Sept. 1922.

⁶⁹¹ Hoemesz – Az Igazság, Ortodox Zsidó Hetilap, Torda.

Jews in the neighboring provinces organizing theater, hoping that other local Jews would emulate these youth groups. The Orthodox readers of *Hoemesz* found in its pages the full titles of plays, their authors, and the themes of János Arany's *Az Örök Zsidó* (The Eternal Jew), *Józsefet Eladják Testvérei* (Josef Sells His Brother) and even comedies.⁶⁹³ Among the Jews of Yugoslavia or Northern Transylvania there were no hesitations about the appeal of amateur theater. Especially at Purim, amateur theater attracted entire communities.

If Neolog communities elsewhere would mix two genres, for example *purim-shpil* and comedies, in historical Transylvania among the Orthodox Jews the two remained separate. In small communities like Torda, theater remained attached to religious purposes, even when young people, more attracted to entertainment, organized it. The Jews of Torda might be an exception since, entertainment and religious worship, in general, remained separate.

Folk theater maintained its popularity among the lower classes. Known as *purim-shpil* ('pur' means fate),⁶⁹⁴ this traditional theater based on the Book of Esther involved the whole community both as actors and audience.⁶⁹⁵ Since women as performers at a time were not associated with respectability, men in disguise played women's roles. Outside historical Transylvania, Hassidic communities saw singing and dancing as increasing spontaneity in worship, while the literary text, although in appearance religious, was also secular. Jewish literature did not differentiate between profane and sacred.⁶⁹⁶ Many urban communities since the eighteenth century in Máramaros continued to play *purim-shpil* well into the mid-twentieth century. Seen mainly as an occasion for drinking and partying due to its content

⁶⁹² Jenő Müller, "Ifjusági Szervezkedés," in *Hoemesz*, Szeptember 21, 15, 1933 .

⁶⁹³ "Jugoszláviai Hírek" in *Hoemesz*, II, Évi. 12-13.sz. 30 Március 1934, 16.

⁶⁹⁴ Károly József, *Zsidó Hitéleti Kislexikon* (A Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselete Kiádasa: Budapest, 1985), 180.

⁶⁹⁵ József Dombér, *Eszter, Tréfás színmű öt felvonásban énekel és táncsal*, quoted in David Hundert Gershon, *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, vol. II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1876.

⁶⁹⁶ S.A. Birnbaum, "The Cultural Structure of East Ashkenazic Jewry," in *Slavonic and East European Review*, 25, 1946/1947, 73.

prone to masquerading, carousing, jesting, and burlesque, the *purim-shpil* was known to unleash a strong disapproval from the Orthodox rabbis.

The staunch Hassidic rabbis from north-western Romania found the idea of intertwining *purim-shpil* with holy events unacceptable, especially during Jewish religious holidays. Their ultra-traditionalism rejected *purim* plays also when they were simultaneously celebrated with European festivities like the Mardi Gras and other atavistic traditions. According to Nahma Sandrow, theater was forbidden due to the rabbinical injunctions against it that appear in the first psalm (*moshav letsim*, “the seat of scoffers”).⁶⁹⁷ Reformed Jews found the folk traditions of *purim-shpil* outdated and hard to accept because of its vengeful and chauvinistic story, celebrating the slaying of the Persians at the hands of the Jews, according to Esther’s scroll.⁶⁹⁸ The argument against *purim-shpil* also included the way in which Jews understood the meaning of their holidays. For Jews, holidays like Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah are important not for conveying an historical event or for being linked to a particular place. Instead, these holidays are significant and matter because their meanings emerge out of individual consciences and convey an abstract message, without clear historical meanings. Thus, enacting them on stage is not only difficult, but it would make them highly contentious in a typical Jewish society already ridden with divisions. Also, the choosing of religious content for theatrical events would make things difficult.

The earliest occurrence of the *purim-shpil* showed up around 1839 in the region north of historical Transylvania in documents related to Szatmárcseke, while the most recent occurred in the interwar period, performed as late as the 1930s in Balmazújváros, both in

⁶⁹⁷ Nahma Sandrow (ed.), *God, Man, and Devil, Yiddish Plays in Translation* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 2.

⁶⁹⁸ “Should Purim be Revived?” *Education in Judaism*, vol. 12, March 1965, 3.

Marmaros and Szatmárnémeti.⁶⁹⁹ *Purim-shpil* plays were usually organized at the end of February or the beginning of March. Many petitions sent by Jews in historical Transylvania, asking to be allowed to put on plays were mailed in February, for events scheduled for March. This period of the year was preferred, for it reminded participants of the time when the *purim-shpil* marked the coming of spring, as a time of release and merrymaking after a hard winter, mixing tradition and religion in the folk imaginary.

Orthodox Jews showed interest *purim-shpil* only on holiday occasions. Playwrights, in the majority assimilated and secular, had more interest in literary masterpieces and professional theater productions, and very few engaged in writing plays of religious character. A well-known Jewish playwright, Oszkar Bárd (1893-1942) wrote *Csoda*, a play in one act entitled a mystery, but like *Silvio Lovag*, his other stage success, it appealed mainly to a Hungarian assimilated public in Kolozsvár.⁷⁰⁰ In his study on the Orthodox German Jewry, Mordechai Breuer offered interesting generalizations about the Orthodox stand on creativity in music, literature and painting, concluding that Orthodox Jews were overall more consumers than creators of art⁷⁰¹ due to the preservation of the old Jewish world view centered on either the distant past or the recent present, and due to over-idealization and over confidence about a given body of truth.

Theater was usually encountered in Jewish communities whose material possibilities and education were higher than the average,⁷⁰² but it was delivered by organizations interested in carrying out Zionist and political agendas. Rather than organizing their own amateur theater,

⁶⁹⁹ David Hundert Gershon (ed.), YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1876.

⁷⁰⁰ Edgár Balogh (ed.), Romániai magyar irodalmi lexikon : Szépirodalom, közírás, tudományos irodalom, művelődés I. (A–F) (Bukarest: Kriterion, 1981). László Murvai, Bárd Oszkár irodalmi munkássága (Cluj-Napoca: Univ, 1984).

⁷⁰¹ Mordecai Breuer, 161.

⁷⁰² Eugen Gluck, "Jewish Elementary Education in Transylvania (1848-1918), in Studia Judaica, vol. II, 1993, 110. The communities of Haromszék, Hunyad, Nagy-Küküllő, Nagyszeben, and Csík and the limited resources of their members did not afford to set up Jewish schools in and for their communities.

Jewish Orthodox communities of Transylvania attended the theater organized by centralized groups with a political or Zionist agenda. Jews were not oblivious to literary creativity, but they did not encourage it through reading groups, awards, or other means or incentives, strengthening the idea that education was not for the masses at large.

Religion, also, lacked visibility in their agenda. They left the field of homiletics in the hands of those preaching the word of God, to be handled in original ways in the synagogue in a decent, restrained manner. For social bonding, theater was not a preferred means of bringing together a community; instead, religious concepts like *mitzvot* (“between man and his fellow”) tended to foster relations among Orthodox Jews, enhancing the social aspects of piety and regulating Jewish human relationships. *Mitzvot* was crucial in the expression of piety, defined as “to love and fear God,” when introduced in the education of Jewish pupils.⁷⁰³

Amateur theater and education

Theater typically enlivened the cultural life of a community when parishes were well-established and school environments were stable. Schoolteachers could be effective theater supporters when they were fully integrated into the social fabric of the village or town and enjoyed prestige. Jewish communities in the first postwar years witnessed a very distinctive and troubling crisis in the development of Jewish education, due to intertwined cultural and religious causes as well as issues of funding, curricula, teacher availability, and student enrollment. Jewish parents could choose for their children either a traditional education (in schools called *hadarim*) or a modern training.⁷⁰⁴ They could sign up children in public Jewish schools (defined as communal structures, partly supported by the state and partly by the Jewish

⁷⁰³ Solomon Schimmel, “Ethical Dimensions of the Traditional Jewish Education” in Studies in Jewish Education, vol. I, 1983, 91-111, 92.

⁷⁰⁴ Liviu Rotman, “Tipologia Învățământului Evreiesc în a doua Jumătate a Secolului al-XIX-lea și la începutul secolului al XX-lea” in Studia et acta historiae Iudaeorum Romaniae, Vol. 5, 2000, 175-177.

community) or private Jewish schools (fully funded by private Jewish societies and groups which had a financial stake in the enterprise).⁷⁰⁵ Regardless of status or curriculum orientation, all schools with a majority of Jewish pupils and teachers were treated as “confessional schools” by the Romanian central and local authorities.⁷⁰⁶ Confessional schools formed a multi-regional network (Tórténét Erdély, Kükkölvő, Maramorosch, and Banság) and used the curriculum devised by the Tarbut high-school of Kolozsvár, which sought to enhance Hebrew learning.

Jewish elementary schools were very numerous, but encountered severe difficulties in finding teachers and textbooks. The oldest Jewish elementary schools functioned in Kolozsvár until 1944.⁷⁰⁷ A serious lack of teachers led to the closing of many schools, because graduates from pedagogical institutions nurtured high career aspirations and chose to teach in large cities or elsewhere abroad rather than in lesser-known small towns. Choosing their hometown was even more unlikely. Public Teachers’ Institutes did not train Jewish students to teach in Jewish schools. But for many Jewish students, degrees from Transylvanian schools helped them in job applications for private Jewish schools and for admission in Western European advanced institutions.⁷⁰⁸ Most likely, they fulfilled their pedagogical training in state-run schools, but took Hebrew and Jewish classes privately in order to become fully qualified for teaching in Jewish schools.

To choose plays that appealed to the local public was not a simple task. It required, first and foremost, a common ground shared equally by organizers and audience and defined

⁷⁰⁵ György Gaal, *Az erdélyi zsidóság az első világháborút követő időszakban. Beilleszkedés a két világháborút közötti romániai viszonyokba*, *Korunk*, 1991, 8-9 sz.

⁷⁰⁶ Liviu Rotman, *Școala Israelito-Română (1851-1914)* (București: Editura Hasefer, 1999), 25.

⁷⁰⁷ M. Carmilly-Weinberger, “Jewish Education in Transylvania in the Days of the Holocaust”, in Dr. Carmilly-Weinberger Mozes (ed.) *A Kolozsvári Zsidóság Emlékkönyve* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, Inc, 1988), 272. For 1919-1940, see also the useful background provided on pp. 269-273.

⁷⁰⁸ Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition, The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

by common hierarchies of values and elements of identity. Also, this body of common values about education, entertainment, identity, and the common good had to be accepted within the legal framework operating in the host country. After 1918, the state's main consideration of minorities was in ethnic terms, and not religious, but schools run by ethnic minorities were treated as in the prewar period as ethnically foreign entities. Like any foreign organization, Jewish schools felt entitled to self-administration and autonomy. In historical Transylvania, there were only two Jewish high schools operating in Kolozsvár, until 1927, when they were closed and their students and teachers had to join public state schools.

In the region, theater tended to be a common solution to widely-debated topics like adult education. In Jewish society, however, compared to issues of assimilation or Zionism, education was less a topic of debate in urban centers, attracting just a slight interest mainly in small communities. The leaders of various Jewish community boards often expressed their concerns over the loss of religiosity and the ebbing interest in a Jewish education among ordinary Jews. First of all, the most pressing task was restoring the Jewish character of educational activities by adding disciplines that were specifically Jewish (Hebrew, Judaism, biblical history and geography) while complying with the state requirements of adding Romanian language, Romanian history and geography, and arithmetics.⁷⁰⁹ Lacking Hebrew teachers and religious classes, Jewish public elementary schools dealt with lower student enrollment compared to the so-called "golden period" between 1880 and 1910, when the number of Jewish teachers increased by a phenomenal rate of 110.70% compared to 1848.⁷¹⁰ Debates within communities urged leaders to seek new means of redressing the dismal situation for religion in schools and in general. Despite the Romanian state's emphasis on

⁷⁰⁹ Rotman, "Tipologia...", 177.

⁷¹⁰ Eugen Gluck, "Jewish Elementary Education in Transylvania (1848-1918) in Studia Judaica Vol. II, 1993, 109-111.

Hebrew as a counterweight to Hungarian, attachment to the latter was strengthened in cities and remained so throughout both interwar decades. As such, the divisive issue of language and overall cultural orientation was a strong impediment to promoting plays and theater activities.

In general, language and literature matter greatly when organizing theater especially during planning and rehearsing, but, for Zionist advocates, seeking to persuade more followers to join and hoping to increase their political impact, history took precedence over literary endeavors. The play preferred by Zionist theater amateurs in Marosludas and Balázsfalva was *Béke konferenca* (unidentified author), a play which, judging by its title, refers to the Peace Conference of 1919, known for redrawing the borders in Eastern Europe to create independent states.⁷¹¹ Zionist activists preferred addressing large-city constituencies by voicing their political causes both in print and public venues.

According to newspapers and the official correspondence archived by the authorities in Bucharest, theater featured in the cultural agenda of many secular Jewish associations and societies like the local UNET branches in Györgyfalva, Érmihályfalva, Marosludas, and Maroshéviz as a tool of education. Jews tended to admire plays about mundane and bourgeois life styles and travel and involving themes of love, burlesque, and welfare. In Maroshéviz, the UNET local branch ventured to put on Oszip Dümov (Ossip, Osip, Dymov, Dymow)'s famous tragi-comedy *Szomorúságának Énekese: Tragédia* (The Singer of Sadness, a Tragedy) published in Kolozsvár in translation in 1927 (and originally published in German as *Der Sänger seiner Trauer: Tragikomödie* in the nineteenth century, and staged with great success in Berlin and Vienna in German, as well as Yiddish and Hungarian). As Brigitte Dalinger

⁷¹¹ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos 35/1931, fila 83/26 Nov. 1931 and Inv. 817, Dos. 12/1932, fila 423/24 Nov. 1932.

shows, the success of this poetical drama revolves around the story of Yoshke, who was in love with a local girl, Shaineh, but was to lose her to another man. The latter leaves her pregnant and is lucky enough at card-playing to take all the money Yoshke had won at the lottery.⁷¹² Zionists would disagree with such a play, for it did not stress enough idealism, but rather focused on mundane and bourgeois issues that diverted Jews from their real mission to pursue a national homeland in Palestine.

Zionism, like the Neolog orientation in Judaism, emerged as an expression of modernity within Jewish society. The split among the Jews of various denominations led to further division within the Jewish community, creating difficulties of participation and inclusion in a local cultural life. Openly championing the East European secular Haskhala movement in large cities like Kolozsvár, Petrozséni, and Marosvásárhely, the Jews of Western denominations were eager to propose a secular education free of rabbi tutelage. In small towns, Jews adopted a position between secular and religious with traditionalism outweighing progressivism, in the sense that they did not conceive the idea of dismantling the *kehila* as in the Old Kingdom, or, even worse, weakening the rabbi's spiritual influence and eliminating his spiritual guidance as in Hungary, Austria, and Germany. Such principles ran counter to ideas that Jews in small communities traditionally embraced. They reasoned that religious education could provide individuals with a better standing in the community and could even help a person qualify for leadership. This was a path that informed the core of the social structure of the Jewish community and from which it drew its traditional character. As many noticed, however, religious training without teaching skills that were specific to a modern curriculum left the local youth unprepared for higher school levels.

⁷¹² Brigitte Dalinger, Trauerspiele mit Gesang und Tanz. Zur Ästhetik und Dramaturgie jüdischer Theatertexte (Böhlau Verlag: Wien, 2010), 101-106.

Unlike the amateur theater of other ethnic groups in the region, it rarely originated from initiatives started by ordinary individuals, but when they did occur, they tended to address the small public of a local community. In small towns and villages, Zionism had a limited impact due to the propensities of Jewish communities to consider historical Transylvania their home and to look culturally to Hungary.

Strong traditionalism prevented amateur theater from flourishing in small communities. In its fierce struggle against traditionalism, European secularism among Jews created such a distance from tradition that the conflict lost its urgency, leaving traditionalism intact. This fact is even more pervasive in historical Transylvania, a region known for its relative isolation and ethnic diversity. In all regions to the north of the Danube River, our province included, the absence of international Jewish organizations, for whom secular education was always an important goal, meant that traditionalism and local customs about education remained in place, keeping social hierarchies intact with the local leadership catering to the needs of its humblest members and helping only bright students to succeed at higher levels.

In Jewish private schools a traditional curriculum centered on teaching religion was met with wide disapproval from parents who sought a modern education for their children. *Heder* (elementary) schools were quite numerous, but only one *yeshiva* operated in historical Transylvania. Communal study halls were even more unlikely to operate in this region. But an inside look into the typical nature of learning is useful in understanding why theater was not widely endorsed as an educational tool by Jewish schools. The education given in a *heder* (reading prayerbooks, reading the Pentateuch, teaching the Humash, and finally teaching the Torah), or in secondary schools (*yeshivas*) and communal study halls (the *beit midrash*) endowed only a small number of students with skills to read the Talmud by themselves. Thus,

parents hoped that a modern curriculum would give an equal chance to all students to enter higher institutions of learning. A modern curriculum with an everyday life application enabled students not only to become *sheinen* but to be prepared to compete for high positions of real power and prestige in the community.

The main drawback of the traditional curriculum was its catering solely to the needs of exceptional students who could read widely and learn by rote large amounts of material. Only select students could do this. For example, when students delved into a sacred text written in a foreign language, they had to master simultaneously both thought and language, an learning by rote the content, while, at the same time, practicing the skill of analyzing ideas. Analysis is important in preparing students the mastery of deliberation (the long and careful consideration of an issue), which Jewish preachers employ when conceiving a sermon, or when applying the pattern of the old *derasha* (sermon) and its chief structure and elements. In making a good sermon, one had to construct a framework that posits a conflict between the simple meaning of the biblical verse and the rabbinical comment referring to it, and then resolving it at the end. In this format, the prerequisites of conflict, contradictions, weakening or questioning the centuries-old truths became inherent. Only select students could acquire this ability during training and use it in when serving as preachers or rabbis. Such outcomes appeared to parents and students as disadvantaging those lacking these abilities.

While it helped students become acquainted with the prayer book, the synagogue service and the rituals, for the majority, the method was simply too hard, and many students failed to get a chance to further their studies. It was the tight integration of religious content with daily life and the free intermingling between adults and children when reading, learning Hebrew, memorizing injunctions, and debating the Torah, that led to the recruitment of the most capable of the younger generation for positions of leadership. Unfortunately, the system

also left out a large uneducated cohort of Jews who could not read and understand the dialectics of the Torah and who increasingly criticized the closed and secretive character of a religious education. For Orthodox Jews in historical Transylvania, making education available to the masses meant a return to the sacred injunction that the Torah had been given to all of the Jewish people. Many supposed that the *sheinen* raised on purpose the rigors of the training, lest it become too accessible and too many *proste* turn into *sheine*.⁷¹³ Local Jews openly rejected the usefulness of investing communal resources in the education of the brightest students because it did not yield great benefits for the community and synagogue, since none of the graduates would return to their native village or small town of birth to serve as a local rabbi.

In the early twentieth century, in historical Transylvania as in other areas of Eastern Europe, Jewish teachers supported the idea of including writing and secular studies in the curriculum centered on reading the sacred texts. Profane disciplines, such as literature, history, and languages became more common, a fact, which I argue, came to induce an interest in the theater organized by groups like the Zionists or communists. When modern curricula were introduced in the Old Kingdom, thanks to the lobby of prominent Jewish spokespersons, mainly businessmen, they promptly triggered the collapse of their communities' structures, because sponsors preferred joining school boards rather than serving the local *kehila*. In historical Transylvania, too an educational crisis occurred, but the *kehila* remained functional and influential, and its hierarchy legitimized itself through the knowledge of the Torah and the ability to interpret it during the service. Thus, a feature unique to our region was that the *kehila* remained attached to the synagogue.

⁷¹³ Shaul Stampfer, "Heder Study, Knowledge of Torah, and the Maintenance of Social Stratification in Traditional East European Jewish Society," in Studies in Jewish Education, vol. III (1988), 279-287

Religious education explains the popularity of *purim* plays in small communities which found such traditions to be good entertainment that brought all Jews together. *Purim-shpil* plays were expressions of amateur theater, but they had presented more religious importance than cultural. Despite this religious importance, these plays could restore a spiritual connection with the Jewish tradition, but the rabbi was not typically present at theater events. Generally, whenever music and dance ended communal events such as the celebrations for a newly erected synagogue, the dedication of a new Torah scroll, the consecration of an Orthodox hospital or a new school and the yearly celebration of the welfare organization, the rabbi refrained from attending the part dealing with entertainment.⁷¹⁴

More than the synagogue it was the family that served as the first medium of initiation for the young generation in the understanding of Jewish religious values. The heads and members of households seriously committed time and determination to promote them. Parents made large financial sacrifices in order to provide a traditional Judaic training for children. It was well known that, in the majority, students had slim chances of admission into a *yeshiva* (high school level). Once this career prospect failed, Jews returned to the traditional understanding of education through the lenses of material security and ascension on the social ladder in towns and cities. Educating children skills that enabled them to pick up a trade or continue the family business required Hungarian acculturation and Hungarian language. Both continued to be used in our region and in Western Greater Romania especially by way of economic relations. Attending plays put on by the local community in Hungarian was not necessarily a religious duty or implied a religious awareness, but provided a useful cultural background serving individual pragmatic interests.

⁷¹⁴ Mordechai Breuer, Modernity within Tradition, The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 6.

Public schools did not stress the teaching of deliberation skills, understood as the long and careful consideration of thought. Watching plays could have helped rural audiences develop an understanding of such skills, if the adequate plays were selected. Deliberation skills were particularly useful especially after 1918, when Jews had to engage in decision-making so they could administer their own communities. When children had not access to advanced Talmudic training, the teaching of deliberation came to be acquired at home.⁷¹⁵ Burton Cohen argued in his study of deliberation in Jewish schools covering the period from the early twentieth century up to the 1980s, that “less deliberation was taught to Jews, fewer and fewer would be worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit”. Also, rabbinical thought disapproved of study which did not lead to action.⁷¹⁶ The practice of deliberation was of great significance for Jews, for it referred to ethics and politics, and thus, leadership. Such was the religious nature of the Jewish community that it led to a modest embrace of amateur theater as a cultural expression of unity and education.

Jewish amateur theater case studies

Several organizers of amateur theater perceived the political content of plays to be of high stake for Jewish audiences in either large or small town: Kolozsvár in Kolozsvár County, Segesvár, the capital of Nagy-Küküllő County, Szamosújvár in Kolozsvár County, Hátszeg in Hunyad County, and Nagyenyed in Gyulafehérvár County. Before delving into each case, a few geographical and demographical data helps explain the characteristics of Jewish communities within the county and province at large. In the region, the overall demographic

⁷¹⁵ Burton Cohen, “The Teaching of Deliberation in the Jewish school” in Studies in Jewish Education , Vol. II, 1984 pp. 122-135, p.124.

⁷¹⁶ Elliott Dorff, “Study leads to Action” in Religious Education LXXV 2 (March-April 1980), 171, as cited by Burton Cohen “The Teaching . . .” in Studies in Jewish Education, 134.

data recorded a total of 81,503 Jews of which 35,038 lived in villages.⁷¹⁷ In the smaller towns listed above, the number of Jews was quite small in this period: in Nagyenyed, there were 475 Jews in a total population of 9,478; in Hátszeg, 464 Jews out of 3,383; in Segesvár, 161 Jews out of a total of 13,033.⁷¹⁸ In addition, I focus on two mid-size cities from Maros County, which had a larger Jewish constituency: Regen (1,587 Jews out of a total of 9,290) and Marosvásárhely (4,824 out of 38,517) and one large city, Kolozsvár (13,194 out of 103,840). In all these counties, Jewish communities shared the urban space mainly with Hungarians, Germans and Romanians.

Kolozsvár

This county witnessed amateur theater especially in Kolozsvár city, where organizers within political groups like UNET, communist, and Zionist branches actively sent out petitions for official approval of theatrical events. Suspected of communist leanings, many theater organizers among Jewish workers walked a fine line, forcing legal boundaries in their effort to open arts and entertainment to all social classes. A committee of thirty-seven people representing the six hundred Jewish workers in Kolozsvár selected the play and stage design with the help of theater professionals working for National Theaters. The Kolozsvár local branch of the Romanian Workers' Aid Society (Ajutorul Muncitoresc Român) also known as Red Help (Ajutorul Roșu) scheduled a few events with Maxsim Gorki's play *In the Depths* (Azilul de Noapte, Na Dnie) thinking that it taught members the distinctions between reasoning and emotion and the importance of idealism in freeing one's life from material

⁷¹⁷ Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România de la Emancipare la Marginalizare (1919-1938)* (București: Editura Hasefer, 2000), 31.

⁷¹⁸ Sabin Mănuilă, *Recensământul General al Populației României din 29 Decembrie 1930* (București: Editura Institutului Central de Statistică, 1940), 455-457.

chains.⁷¹⁹ The play by Gorki was previously presented by the National Theater of Bucharest in 1915 and at National Theater of Iași in 1904 and 1908, and it made headlines in newspapers because it divided public opinion between those who emphasized its financial success, the director's exceptional talent, and the social and psychological merits of the play, on the one hand, and the conservative and bourgeois representatives who denied the play's merits, on the other.⁷²⁰ Unlike the left-leaning idealists, the Zionists embraced a more pragmatic goal and the means they employed in theater activities were completely subordinated to their political and ideological purposes.

With Zionist headquarters located mainly in Kolozsvár, young members championed the creation of Israel as their future nation-state by advocating their Jewish ethnicity. Developed before the war in Kolozsvár and to a lesser scale in Gyulafehérvár, Zionism appealed mainly in large towns to Jewish young people, atheist and secular, free from communitary obligations. Advocates moved from city to city to help spread Zionism and enlist new members, and many of the hurdles that prevented conversions came from assimilated Jews of Hungarian culture. Local Zionist groups like the Hasomer Hatzair put on a play, in Romanian translation "Si noi am vrea sa fim regi" ("We also would like to be kings," author and original title unidentified). In our region, Jewish identity was split between the Jews who embraced Hungarian culture, on one side, and the Yiddish-speaking, Orthodox Jews on the other side, who welcomed a public political orientation toward Romanian civic life. This attitude made the chances for Zionism to succeed more difficult.

Scholars examining Jewish intellectual and political discourses in Transylvanian cities, such as Kolozsvár, argued that the burdens entailed by the "double minority" status,

⁷¹⁹ DANIC București, Fond Departamentul Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 9/1930, Vol. I, Fila 345/14 Mai 1930, Fila 572/7 Iul. 1930.

referring to the weight of their simultaneous ethnic identity, Romanian and Hungarian, worsened the status of the Jews of Transylvania in Greater Romania, while it contributed to a weak cultural life.⁷²¹ The internal opposition between religiosity and secularization wore down the vitality of small-town Jewish communities and affected its cultural presence in Greater Romania.

Several cultural activities were initiated by Neolog Jews, an example being reading circles and the publication of a bulletin between 1900 and 1906 within the Jewish Reading Society of Kolozsvár (Kolozsvári Izr. Felolvasó Egyesület).⁷²² Secondary schools (*yeshiva*) offered a strong literary background to Jewish students, some graduates among them writing on theater. Moshe Friediger (1884—1947), a future rabbi, published a doctoral dissertation on German theater, “*Das Motiv der feindlichen Brüder im deutschen Drama des 19. Jahrhunderts.*”⁷²³ Students at Zsidlic (the Jewish High School of Kolozsvár) put on plays by European authors, in their language courses, like *L’Amour Peintre* by Molière.⁷²⁴

Local groups proved active cultural organizers. In their centennial bulletin (1836-1936), the local Orthodox Hevra Kadisa in Kolozsvár placed emphasis on humanism, modernization, and institution building in Jewish neighborhoods.⁷²⁵ The language they required to be used within the society was Yiddish.⁷²⁶ In Samosújvár, The Jewish Women’s Society (Kolozsvári Zsidó Nőegylet) was among the very few such societies in the county who

⁷²⁰ Dumitru Copilu, “Semnificația unui ecou: În jurul premierei piesei lui Maxim Gorki “Azilul de Noapte” pe scena Teatrului Național din București, in 1915,” in *Revista de lingvistică și știință literară*, 220-227.

⁷²¹ Attila Gidó (ed.), *Úton Erdély Zsidó Társadalom- és Nemzetépítési Kísérletek (1918-1940)*, (Csíkszereda: ProPrint Könyvkiadó, 2009), 20.

⁷²² György Barabás, *Magyarországi Zsidó Hitközségek Egyletek Tarsulatok Éves Beszámolói (1629-2008)* (Budapest: Zsidó Tudományok Szabadegyeteme, 2009), 367.

⁷²³ Gábor Lengyel, *Moderne Rabbinausbildung in Deutschland und Ungarn, Ungarische Hörer in den deutschen Rabbinerseminaren (1854-1938)*, PhD Dissertation (University of Jewish Studies: Hanover, 2001), 222.

⁷²⁴ Thanks to Donka Farkas (Santa Cruz, CA) for inquiring about theatrical performances among the graduates of the Jewish High School of Kolozsvár (the Zsidlic), and for sharing this piece of information with me.

⁷²⁵ Elek Mózes, Imre Szabó (eds.), *Száz É a Kegyelet és Jótékonyaság Szolgálatában. A Cluji Ort. Chevra Kadisa száz éve 5597-5697* (Cluj: Fraternitas Könyv- és Lapkiadó Rt., 1936), 139, 16.

⁷²⁶ *Cluj-Kolozsvári Orthodox Izraelita Chevra –Kadisa Szentegylet Alapszabályai* (Cluj: Weinstein & Friedmann, 1923), 3.

put on plays. They chose an amateur playwright, by profession a Protestant lawyer, Károly Eötvös (1842-1916) with his play *A Nagy Per* (The Great Trial),⁷²⁷ dealing with the debate about the blood murder of Christian children by Jews.⁷²⁸ Lacking their own local playwrights interested in a first-hand exploration of Transylvanian village societies, Jews tended to transform popular novels into plays. *A Nagy Per* is one example of a novel turned into a play.

Hunyad

Women's societies and youth groups, guided by Zionist intellectuals in small towns organized amateur theater focused on biblical stories.⁷²⁹ Such religious plays were meant to bring into the Zionist fold both Jewish believers and atheists in order to enhance solidarity for the Palestinian cause, even if it entailed the weakening of local communities. Zionist organizers placed the main emphasis on ancient biblical history in order to inspire the public with Zionist ideas and thereby justify the restoration of the historical Israel in the Palestinian region.

Maros

Compared to Hungarians and Saxons involved in amateur theater events, fewer Jews wrote petitions to authorities for show approvals on behalf of their communities. One reason was that Jews were less numerous, but equally important was the lack of interest in communities for building a cultural life. A few petitions, however, offer a glimpse into the cultural life of small Jewish communities and can be compared with the majority of requests, typically sent by a branch or section of a centralized organization, either political or Zionist. In February 1932, Josif Fried sent a petition to Bucharest requesting permission to put on a play

⁷²⁷ Károly Eötvös, *A nagy per, mely ezer éve folyik s még sincs vége* (Budapest: Révai, 1904.) Also, see the movie by Erdély Miklós *Verziók* based on this novel.

⁷²⁸ DANIC București, Dep. Arte, Inv. 818, Dos. 9/1932, Fila 354/ no date.

in Hungarian, scheduled for March 6, with his fellow Jews in the small town of Segesvár. As president of the Jewish community board, Fried engaged in a broad range of interventions in order to fulfill his organizational and administrative duties when addressing the authorities. As president, Fried was responsible for cultivating a close relation between members of the community and the rabbi, and for performing the service in the synagogue as an elder, by reading paragraphs from the Torah and participating in debates regarding ethics and its implications in social life. The community board could not be declared religious in character and could not be subordinated to or considered to be part of the synagogue, because only synagogues alone had official status as religious structures for Jews. Fried's influence was therefore crucial in securing a base of support for the rabbi, and the two presumably worked in harmony for their mutual benefit.

Josif Fried chose to perform two plays: *Stradivari* by György Szántó and *Háziasszonyok Iskolája* (The Housewives' School), author unidentified.⁷³⁰ The first described the Cremona-based family dynasty of violin makers, known as the "Kings of the Violin." In both plays, the stories emphasized the need for formal instruction within the home and family environment, the proper space for consciously and effectively transmitting spiritual and ethical teachings and family memories. Theater amateurs performed in the play in 1932, but, as it was a success, Szántó turned it into a novel in 1934.⁷³¹ However, other amateurs (Jewish industrial workers) living in Regen, another small town in the county of Maros, also listed *Stradivari* in their petition, dated May 1931. They also specified that the play was serially published in *Színházi Élet*, a theater review printed in Budapest⁷³² founded and edited by Sándor Incze (1889-1966). A Jewish newspaperman born in Kolozsvár, Incze's contribution in this review was the creation of an intensive cult of the

⁷²⁹ Ioan Velica, *Pagini din Istoria Evreilor din Valea Jiului* (Petroșani: Editura Edyro Press, 2006),

⁷³⁰ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte Inv. 818, Dos. 9/1932, fila 191/Febr. 1932.

⁷³¹ György Szántó, *Stradivari*, Regeny, 2 vols. (Genius Kiadas: Budapest, 1935).

actor.⁷³³ Most likely, Szántó published excerpts of his novel as the genre of *feuilleton*, a common practice among writers, who sought to publish in theater journals broadly distributed in our region. Subscription to these journals proved that, for Jews, amateur theater was a popular pastime, encouraged partly by Jewish literacy and partly by the presence in Segesvár of a professional theater company led by Jenő Gáspár, himself owner of a newspaper *Színházi Élet*, *Gáspár Jenő társulatának lapja*. Gáspár's review published and circulated locally, was even more influential in promoting successful plays and playwrights within the county of Maros.⁷³⁴

Szántó was among the active literati interested in playing an important role in creating an original literature in Transylvania after the First World War. The transfer of Transylvania to Romania gave some writers an opportunity to claim that new beginnings required new foundations and, therefore, literature had to search out a new and separate course of its own. Others saw the new times as a continuation of the literary creativity that existed even before the war in the region. But Jewish views were somehow ambivalent. For Jews, there was no return to the village values as a way to strengthen the core of Jewishness, as happened in the case of Romanians or Hungarians.

Szántó was a consummate writer and playwright, whose literary orientations changed often from avant-garde to expressionism, and later toward traditionalism. As his writings reveal, he claimed that it was isolation from non-Jews and universalism that defined Hungarian Jewish literature. Several reasons might explain why Szántó's novel was chosen for amateurs' repertoires. With a problematic framed around mysticism and symbol but always seen in action, Szántó conceived his novel around the relation between the human spirit and things, namely in this case, the artisan-made violin and its owners. He put at the center of his story the

⁷³² DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv 818, Dos. 9/1932, fila 151/Febr. 1932.

⁷³³ Peter Újvari (ed.), Magyar Zsidó Lékikon, (Budapest: A Magyar Zsidó Lexikon Kiadása, 1929), 387.

Judaic value of seeking the path of righteousness in a type of socialization that underlined ethical relations with one's fellow men. A strong emphasis on material things which exerted a strong attraction on various individuals appears in many of Szántó's characters, who all shared an appalling fate when owning the Stradivari violin. But through their creative powers and rational abilities, they succeeded in understanding the concept of social interaction and reveal it in the novel in all its aspects, nuances, and sophistication. They had ended, however, on a pessimistic note, after all holding a dismal perception of life.

Universalism was an important vision specific to Judaism everywhere. For his novel *Stradivari*, György Szántó chose for his plots several locations all over Europe, as well as different time periods ranging from 1640 to 1985. As a former painter who lost his sight after the First World War, he emphasized the European character of works of art in his reviews of works on painting. In *Stradivari*, universalism appears to legitimize the distinctive existence of the Jewish people, in keeping with a saying by a traditionalist Orthodox rabbi, "the more a Jew is a Jew the more universalist his views and aspirations will be." Universalism found expression not only in rabbinical teachings but also in the Ashkenazi liturgy prayers, which offered certain universalist visions.⁷³⁵ The majority of Transylvanian Jewry were of Ashkenazi origins. Although a Sephardic community thrived in Transylvania from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, it was the migration of the Ashkenazi Jews from Hungary and Moravia that led to minority status for the Sephardim and the defeat of the latter's rabbi in elections. Their assimilation ensued within a short period.⁷³⁶

⁷³⁴ Dimitrie Poptamas, Julia Mozes, *Publicațiile Mureșene, 1795-1972, Bibliografie Monografică* (Târgu-Mureș: Biblioteca Județeană Mureș, 2000), 220. See Monoki, II, 167.

⁷³⁵ Nicholas de Lange, *Penguin Dictionary of Judaism* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 330.

⁷³⁶ Bernard Klein, "The Decline of a Sephardic Community in Transylvania, in Izaak A. Langnas and Barton Sholod (eds.) *Studies in Honor of M. J. Bernadette. Essays in Hispanic and Sephardic Cultures* (New York: Las Americas Publishing Co., 1965), 349-358.

Composed of a succession of short stories, *Stradivari* expressed the aspirations of a typical educated Jew. In Segesvár as well as in Hungary, the novel was well received among Jewish readers, who read it in numerous languages (Romanian, English, and German) spreading its popularity beyond Transylvania and Romanian. The novel was centered on the travel of the violin, the main literary character of the novel. It reached various sites all over Europe, and thus gave Szántó an opportunity to flesh out a series of individual human profiles and various religions.⁷³⁷ Since I could not locate the text that came to serve as the playscript, I assume it was this peculiar structure that allowed organizers of amateur theater to freely select the setting, characters and theme that fitted best their expectations. The novel also included biographical elements such as choices that the author made in his private life at an early age. Critics argue that the Judaic spiritualism that appears in the works he published in the early 1930s revealed his enthusiasm for religion, which was inspired by his pious father, a rabbi.

As the 1930s wore down, his traditionalism slowly gave way to a modernist perspective in his thinking. Responsible for this change was his time working as a contributor to radical journals, which brought about other changes in Szántó's literary engagements and principles, such as subordinating his intellectual views to the desire for satisfying the public taste.⁷³⁸ Although diverse in themes, characters, and geography, as well as widely popular, *Stradivari* could not serve particularly as a unifier of local Jewry around central tenets that they all shared. One reason is the novel's and, undoubtedly, the play's ambiguity that made it attractive to a secular-minded, educated audience, on the one hand, but, on the other, quite challenging to a religious-minded public in search of biblical truth.

⁷³⁷ László Szabó, "Stradivari - Szántó György regénye" in *Nyugat*, 1934 (Januar-Junius), Huszonhetedik. Evfolyam I Kötet (1-12 szám), 112.

Gyulafehérvár

In Nagyenyed, the wife of Fenichel Lazar enhanced her status as a respectable spouse of the community board president in a distinctive way. She petitioned the Ministry of Arts and Religions on behalf of the Society for the Protection of Jewish Orphans,⁷³⁹ hoping to get an authorization for a theater event. She introduced herself with her married name. By carrying her spouse's full name, she acted in the public sphere by complying with old Jewish social norms and consciously downplaying her public presence. As the Fenichels were board members in the Jewish community of Nagyenyed, they enjoyed a certain social standing and economic affluence. Only wives of prominent Jewish leaders could have garnered the courage to take such a step. Since no independent women's organizations were permitted under Jewish norms, women's work of charity and burial services occurred within the precincts of the synagogues.

This case study reveals the involvement of Orthodox Jewish women in the public sphere and their understanding of religion in their quality as organizers of amateur theater events. That a Jewish wife would undertake the task of addressing the authorities by petitioning for a play approval, as Josef Fried did, reveals that women saw themselves in an equal relation to men on issues concerning the cultural life of the community. Thus, by the early twentieth century the division between Jewish men and women was undergoing a different evolution, one that did not diverge from tradition, but was still changing considerably. Traditionally, men's learning emphasized reading and religion and training designed to enhance their understanding of the cultural aspects of community. For women, training implied writing and practical skills necessary for administering their households. The very step of

⁷³⁸ Miklós Szabolcsi, *A Magyar Irodalom Története 1919-től Napjainkig*. Vol. 6 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966), 954.

writing on behalf of her community to address state authorities implied the possibility of transcending the traditional roles. It is a visible change for women who before were confined to household tasks, and under the Romanian regime they felt confident to step out into the public sphere and concern themselves with the outside image of their community.

The Society helping Jewish Orphans in Nagyenyed was one of many associations functioning regularly under the control of the board, but which remained traditionally associated with the synagogue. The mission of caring for Jewish orphans had to do with the intervention of the entire Jewish community on behalf of the male adult whose death had left children and women vulnerable financially. This cooperation served to buttress Judaic principles which historically defined the Jewish understanding human behavior norms. If in Christian communities at the beginning of the nineteenth century, orphans, widows, and the sick fell under the responsibility of the Church, by the turn of the century, in most Eastern European countries, these impoverished groups had come under the care of state institutions. That the Jews of Greater Romania continued even after 1918 to provide services for their elderly, orphans, widows, sick, and deceased through the *kehila*, the synagogue, and the Hevra Kadisha, reveals the Jews' understanding of group solidarity as isolated communities, which although highly polarized socially and financially, still managed to form tight relations among generations, families, and across gender.

In her petition, Fenichel Lazar's wife proposed three plays, *Holnap Úgyis Meghalok* (And I will die tomorrow)⁷⁴⁰ by János Vaszary (1899-1963), *Után kapu bezár* (After the Door Closes), and *Békeconferencia* (The Peace Conference). Since no actual play script and author could be identified for all three titles, simple inferences judged from the title might prove

⁷³⁹ Imre Szabó, *Erdély Zsidói, Talmudisták, Chaszidok, Cionisták*, (Kolozsvár: Kadima Kiadas, 1938).

⁷⁴⁰ The play was a comedy featured on the website www.nagykar.hu/ekonyvek/6954/49479/resletek. The main role was performed by Izsak László. Further information about author, place, and year of writing is missing.

useful to understand the connections between concepts like Gates, Redemption and Judaism. The symbol of the Gate or Door symbolizes the free access of the Chosen People to God's grace, or how God uses the door to make Himself manifest and shower His blessings on Earth and its people.⁷⁴¹ It is most likely that the amateurs, enlisted as members of such a society, chose topics referring to the unfortunate conditions that Jews had to deal with and to ways of helping each other.

The petition was approved upon the condition of removing the last play because it allegedly contained offensive comments against the League of Nations.⁷⁴² The League of Nations granted in 1922 its support to Zionists for the creation of a homeland in Palestine. It would be hard to claim that the Romanian government sought to weaken the Zionist cause. The Zionist groups submitted a number of petitions for theater authorizations and the great majority of them received positive responses. Their authors even made this success a point of pride when addressing Romanian authorities about the events they were planning for. In Nagyenyed, in particular, the Jewish local amateurs' link with Zionism witnessed strong beginnings through the work of two organizers, Béla Márton and Bank Manoyer.⁷⁴³ Being given the presence of women in fulfilling the Society's mission among Orthodox Jews, the theatrical event looks like an opportunity for raising spirits rather than as pure entertainment. The local rabbi, Abraham Schonfeld, could thus be supportive of their work.

Szamosújvár

The Society of Jewish Women of Szamosújvár (Kolozsvár County) petitioned the Ministry of Arts and Religions in Bucharest for authorization to put on two plays: *Rahapatalai Maharadsa* (The Maharajah of the Patala Kingdom) and *Nagy Per* (Big Lawsuit), (authors

⁷⁴¹ Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 424.

⁷⁴² DANIC, București, Fond 9/1932, Dos. Departamentul Arte, Inv. 818, fila 239/10 Mar.1932.

cannot be unidentified),⁷⁴⁴ to contribute to the welfare of all local Jews. Judging by their involvement in upholding tradition and preserving family respectability, the place of Orthodox Jewish women was a complex one both in the family and in community roles, even venturing to employ amateur theater to fulfill their goals. Compared to the Jewish women in the Old Kingdom, who were active in the public sphere as administrators of private schools for girls as well as patrons for various dancing and performative events, in historical Transylvania they remained active within societies that functioned under the guidance of the synagogue and community.

Szamosújvár was a small town close to two important urban centers, Kolozsvár and Dézs, with a Jewish community demographically stable and rather numerous (1,012). Many of these urban Jews were the first generation of urbanized Jews or village dwellers who had recently relocated from Nagyklód (176), Órdöngösfüzes (38), and Gőc (23), which, over time, were demographically depleted. As Randolph Braham has argued for Hungary overall, only 2-3% of the current Jewish city-dwellers were a second or a third generation of the same family living in cities. The ranks of city-dwelling Jews were constantly replenished with rural population.⁷⁴⁵ As Szamosújvár had in 1919 a majority of Romanians of Greek Catholic faith (3,285) and Hungarians of Roman-Catholic faith (2,313). Thus, in this particular town Judaism coexisted in part with Roman Catholicism, and Jewish women's initiatives resembled the involvement in public and cultural activities of Catholic Marian Societies devoted to Virgin Mary. Culturally, Jews and Roman Catholics maintained a tradition of close cooperation as early as the 1700s that lasted up to the Second World War. This cultural rapprochement

⁷⁴³ Imre Szabó, *Erdélyi Zsidói* (Kolozsvár, 1938),190.

⁷⁴⁴ DANIC București, Fond Dep. Arte, Inv. 817, Dos. 11/1930, fila 33/Dec. 1930.

⁷⁴⁵ Randolph L.Braham (ed.), *Hungarian-Jewish Studies* (New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1966).

strengthened their religious cooperation, enhanced also by the advanced state of Hungarian assimilation experienced by Jews since the nineteenth century.

Signs of material prosperity for the local Jews emerged in the 1920s and were heralded for weeks in the press as the building in 1927 of a new steam bathhouse attached to the synagogue, proceeded without reliance on external subsidies or help. Documents attest that a synagogue was already in place by 1902, and served as the basis of the urban Jewish community. With the addition of a bathhouse and a slaughterhouse the community became stable. As revenues increased, the community moved on to make improvements to the existing bathhouse, to organize theater performances as a means of fundraising for various enterprises that would benefit the local community.⁷⁴⁶

The context of religion is very important in understanding the purposes of amateur theater and the particular choices of plays. Since no studies of Jewish communities in small towns exist, finding the denomination of the community must take into account external characteristics, such as the degree of urbanism and styles of architecture. In Szamosújvár, the synagogue's architectural style indeed included two small towers, typically Neolog traits, but although confusingly progressive, the two were not meant to show a modernist embrace but rather to convey slight elements of Spanish style. Its Orthodox character is visible in the two-inclined sides of the roof, forming a V placed upside down, as well as in the separate entry doors for men and women, typical of Orthodoxy.⁷⁴⁷ Being Orthodox, all Jewish associations, societies, and welfare structures were traditionally affiliated with the synagogue and the community, while the members were subordinated to a community board. This was a pattern to be widely found in all Jewish communities in historical Transylvania. Their goal was diverse:

⁷⁴⁶ Ion Câmpăan, 67.

⁷⁴⁷ Aristide Streja, Lucian Schwarz, Sinagoga în România (București: Editura Hasefer, 2009), 214-215.

to provide religious services, burial assistance, food, education, and orphanages for poor children lacking relatives. It is significant that all these structures acknowledged the centrality of the synagogue as the central structure of an Orthodox community. But if the women of Szamosújvár were still part of the community structures and were subordinated to its leadership, their choices most likely had to be met with a broad consensus of what was acceptable for a woman and what was not. We do not find this consensus in the Old Kingdom, where the public place for Jewish women was being granted and accessible to them much earlier, starting in the late 1890s. The presence of the Jewish international agencies which advocated education for girls and women in schools for adults significantly contributed to this evolution. Therefore, the wives of wealthy notables challenged traditional roles and joined school committees, engaged in fundraising, and organized amateur theater for this purpose.⁷⁴⁸ The Jewish women in the Old Kingdom experienced a much different emancipation than that of Transylvanian Jewish women, they were quite involved in welfare, education, and health, but worked within the traditional structures of the *Hevra Kadisha* (the Sacred Brotherhood), and carefully avoided stepping out in the social arena without community patronage.

An important structure was *Hevra Kadisha*, a society providing burial services to members of the Jewish community and thereby respecting a century-old Talmudic tradition. Paradoxically, however, such societies de-emphasized religion. Perusing the statutes of the *Hevra Kadisha* of the Orthodox Community of Gyulafehérvár, one of the oldest in the province, one may find that women were in charge of the preparation of the dead body for burial. It is most likely that the women involved in *Hevra Kadisha* were also members of the

⁷⁴⁸ Rotman, 164.

Society of Jewish Women attached to the synagogue.⁷⁴⁹ If in the eighteenth century the statutes of a *Hevra Kadisha* required that its members offer courses about religion and Jewish culture and strive to model an ethical-religious behavior by engaging in philanthropic objectives, one could not find such initiatives in the case of Jewish women of Szamosújvár. Their choice of theater's main justification the need of furthering goals of social welfare. They certainly sought to address social issues in association with religious commitments (they were still attached to the synagogue), but they chose a profane means like theater to reach their goals, thus, revealing a mixture of secularism and religiosity, difficult to disentangle.

Addressing social issues in an Orthodox way implied a certain quietism and historical passivity in designing what certain Jews call "initiatives." Orthodox Jews made sure to distinguish their cultural initiatives, including theater events, from the Zionist ones, the latter seeking to employ theater to put across their secular message with the political purpose of creating a Jewish state and ending the yoke of exile through human intervention and activism. The Orthodox Jews in Szamosújvár limited their initiatives to mundane plays. By engaging in caring for the poor, orphans, and the dead, as prescribed by traditional commandments, Jewish women proved that "they accepted the yoke of exile", which in religious terms, meant taking steps toward and displaying readiness to achieve salvation. Unsurprisingly, the plays proposed by the Jewish women of Szamosújvár avoided a clear religious agenda in order to keep the rabbi's support. The topics of the plays, judged by the titles (the king -Maharadja- of the Palata, meaning "underground kingdom") revealed a focus on otherworldly rulers and realms, most likely a pejorative description of burglars or unlawful individuals rather than a connection with Hindu mythology and history. The second play, A

⁷⁴⁹ Ion Câmpean, Victor Iulian Moldovan (eds.), Istorie, Cultură, și Spiritualitate în Spațiul Gherlean (Kolozsvár: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2007), 25.

Nagy Per (The Big Lawsuit), refers to the issue of ethics (lawsuits and legal issues). In Jewish tradition, ethics is entirely dependent on religion, implying that the dualism of good and evil coexisted in every person. It was a duty for Jews, then, to engage in proper ethical conduit capable of eliciting respect and admiration in the community. The norm in Orthodoxy was to carry out religious regulations in an ethical way rather than by worshipping with religious ardor. Jewish women expressed their Orthodoxy less by excessive care of ritual matters but by strictly ethical behavior in social life. Too much piety and ardor were actually regarded with suspicion and disdain.

By diverting their focus from the typical religious expression of their *Hevra Kadisha* activities, the Jewish women of Szamosújvár fitted in with the broad Jewish outlook of secular involvement in the affairs of the community, avoiding overt religious meanings but complying with centuries-old Jewish injunctions regarding law and ethics.

Hátszeg

Like the Jewish community of Nagyenyed (Gyulafehérvár) the Orthodox Jews of Hátszeg (Hunyad) lived in a small town where amateur theater was organized by local Zionist townsmen, on the initiative of Zionist members in transit. This case is interesting because it reveals how an Orthodox community, like the Hátszeg Jews, reacted to Zionist events meant to gain converts for settlement in Palestine, in terms of their religious identity. Many among the Transylvanian Jews, more isolated from such ‘deleterious’ influences than those in adjoining regions, perceived Zionist activities as “satanic acts.”

That Zionist performances of amateur theater took place in communities exclusively inhabited by Orthodox Jews is proof of remarkable tolerance compared to the outrage triggered by plays in other regions, as in Marmarosch area. Two petitions submitted to the Minister of

Arts and Religions by the local youth of Hátszeg for approval to perform plays in Hungarian show more than a passive experience for Orthodox Jews, being no strangers to the idea of stage performances, in this small town, taking the initiative. According to Ioan Velica, a Zionist supporter since his late teens, theatrical events featured biblical stories on stage. Similarly, in Nagyenyed, two religious plays were followed by a third with a clear political and contemporary Zionist agenda. The majority of plays were not organized by ordinary members of the community but by Zionists who traveled to the area to gain converts. Thus, tenets supporting faith and the commandments, the core values of traditionalism for Orthodox believers, informed most of the play choices. These choices also suggest that the inhabitants in the region were typically open-minded individuals, preserving faith and principles of conduct even when faced with an array of tempting new thoughts.

Zionist advocates persuaded the local youth to join a secular movement and also sought to penetrate local society by way of amateur theater in order to gain adherents among the older generation. Orthodox communities generally rejected upfront Zionist overtures, so Zionism appealed for support gained followers not through secular ideas but rather by using religious messages that left Orthodoxy untouched and the traditional attachment to the old religious identity unchallenged.

Zionism in small and large towns and at the county level was not an organic development from previous local efforts initiated by long-term Jewish residents of Hunyad, but rather it originated from cities in distant counties affiliated with the branches of organizations like “Barissia” and “Habonim” headquartered in Kolozsvár, which sent traveling groups to pass through various small towns. Here as well as in the larger cities and the countryside, they proved indefatigable in attracting converts. However, the movement’s greatest aspiration was to open permanent offices to have access to Jewish constituencies of large cities. This mindset,

choosing large cities as the final destination, was helped by and actually mirrored the pattern of migration and organization of Jewish families. It was well known that Jews living in the villages around towns sent their children for schooling to relatives living in small towns, from where, upon graduation, they moved to larger cities for employment. After attending schools in different regions and countries, most local Jews returned to their native county, but they gave preference to the large cities in that particular county rather than to their native villages. The youth in small towns enlisting in Zionist activities were the most likely to carry on the Zionist agenda when they moved up the social ladder in larger cities. It was the case of Ioan Velica from Hunyad County, an Orthodox Jew born in the village of his grandparents in Pădureni, from where he moved to Hatzég and then, later on, to Petrozsény. In his parents' house numerous cousins from the countryside received room and board in order to attend the Hátszeg primary school, and afterwards they received secondary education for eight more years. Despite the active Zionist propaganda among the Jews of Hátszeg, there was no immediate reaction and decision to relocate to Israel that one could possibly identify. Only at the onset of and during the Second World War and then at the time of the communist takeover and the transformation of the Romanian society along Soviet lines, did such extremely dangerous circumstances persuaded Jews decide to leave for Israel or USA (roughly from the early 1940s up to 1952 when the Soviets occupied Romania). Entire families like Velica's, including cousins, uncles, and grandparents left Romania for Israel after the war.⁷⁵⁰

Demographically, Hátszeg was inhabited by Orthodox Jews who lived there among a majority of Romanians, followed by Hungarians, and Gypsies. Hunyad County numbered a total of 4829 Jews, out of which 1,996 Jews lived in villages.⁷⁵¹ Hátszeg had 464 Jews out of

⁷⁵⁰ Ioan Velica, Pagini din Istoria Evreilor din Valea Jiului (Petroșani: Editura Edyro Press, 2006), 64, 65.

⁷⁵¹ Recensământul General al Populației României din 29 Decembrie 1930, Vol. IX, 441, 444.

a total of 3,383 inhabitants. The majority were Greek-Orthodox Romanians (1,314), followed by Greek-Catholic Romanians (796), Roman-Catholic Hungarians (406), and Hungarian Reformed (340). But Petrozsény, the largest city in Hunyad county (15,406) had a much larger Jewish population (1,071),⁷⁵² comprised mainly of successful businessmen owning the most important mining companies in the area. They did not join the Zionist camp.

The Jewish community of Hátszeg thus numbered tens of families and was formed of small artisans, merchants, intellectuals and clerks at state institutions. Jews dominated commercial activity and were the owners of two hotels with restaurants. They enjoyed plays at the only cinema hall in town, where Jewish amateurs directed and played in productions inspired by biblical stories.⁷⁵³ Notwithstanding the predilection of Orthodox Jews for quietness, inconspicuousness and modest public expression, the choice of location (the cinema hall) most likely came from the Zionist group, which had sought to enhance visibility and overall conditions for the shows.

Hátszeg had an active social and cultural life shaped by ethnic diversity and a balanced ethnic ratio in town accounting for a rich and broad-minded expression of the various religious groups. Interethnic emulation showed its effects: the Hungarians took pride in their socializing opportunities as the wealthiest member of their community, Count Kendeffy, organized numerous celebrations and cultural events at his castle for the working community on his lands. Each ethnic group kept its cultural affairs separate from others.

Amateur theater in Hátszeg was the area of encounter between Jewish religious tradition and the secularity of the Zionist idea to create a modern Jewish national state. Orthodox rabbis rejected Zionism on theological grounds, claiming that it affected the

⁷⁵² Ibidem, 450.

⁷⁵³ Velica, 67.

messianic redemption which was to be initiated not by humans but by heavenly powers. Little is known about the mindset of the newly converted Zionist youth or about the various “techniques” that the Zionists employed to persuade about their Jewishness with essential religious truths. They constantly referred to a new understanding of messianism, seen rather as a process than a concrete historical development, and always they made sure that Zionism and messianism were not parallel but overlapping phenomena. Like the Christians, the religious Orthodox Jews placed a significant emphasis on redemption, but their traditional messianism was mainly a transcendental expectation based on a miracle, not human-centered as it is for Christians. In his study on Orthodoxy and Zionism, Aviezer Ravitzky traced the debates among rabbis, theologians, and intellectuals about the various meanings of messianism in relation to Zionism, but the impact of these ideas on the broader segments of Jewish society in various communities in cities, towns and villages remains undocumented. It is my assumption that the appeals of the rabbis endorsing religious Zionism to persuade Jews of the necessity of settling in the Land of Zion did not penetrate the majority of Orthodox believers, although many conferences and gatherings took place in the close proximity of historical Transylvania, as close as Hungary, Lithuania, and Poland, and as far away as the United States.⁷⁵⁴

That the Orthodox Jews of Hátzeg would attend plays whose purpose was Zionist reveals much about the tolerant spirit of the town. Zionist thought designed to appeal to Orthodox audiences was in fact a new form of *midrash*, which was meant to strengthen Orthodoxy. *Midrash* was a familiar form, whose exposition of meanings in a text usually drawn from the Bible could be recognized from the regular religious service provided by the rabbi and the quorum of ten men in their community. The biblical stories enacted by Zionists

⁷⁵⁴ Aviezer Ravitzky, Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 42 .

and local Jews as theater plays resembled what the Jews heard regularly in their prayer house or synagogue, performed by the rabbi and all the synagogue members. They drew out all possible meanings from the sacred texts, showing that their individual choice was not bound in any way by an examination of context or authorial intentions. They thus conveyed an air of sacred authenticity, making the texts familiar and appealing. It bears noting that the new ideas of Zionism sprang from the reservoir of classical Jewish sources and concepts, grounding ideas of activism and human agency in tradition, and leading to creative and original new *midrashes*. This writing practice began in ancient times and has continued ever since. The current scholarship of literary studies analyzing Hebrew literature argues that poetry, fiction and drama retell versions of traditional Jewish narratives while taking great liberty in content and style.⁷⁵⁵

However, continuity in Jewish history is not easily traceable from century to century, because, although Jews began a process of unification and harmonization around the sixth century A.D., the process was not yet completed by the nineteenth century. Even though a Jewish historical consciousness emerged over time, a severe crisis took hold of the European Jewry. It was created by their living simultaneously in a Jewish and non-Jewish environment. The effects of this crisis, triggered by this dual existence began to be felt in historical Transylvania much later than in Central European countries. It also led to a different role and importance that history assumed as understood by the Jews of our region as compared to those of Hungary. When creating the modern *midrash*, either in the 1920s or at present, Jews redefined their link to the past which helped them cope with a double crisis, an internal one,

⁷⁵⁵ David C. Jacobson, Modern Midrash, The Retelling of Traditional Jewish Narratives by Twentieth Century Hebrew Writers (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 9.

the crisis of secularization, and an external one, relating to their contacts with a Gentile world and an assertive nation-state.

In a sense, as happened for Romanians, the transfer of Transylvania to Romanian rule was a change in regime that caused Jewish intellectuals and public figures to ponder their status as a minority in Greater Romania. Some historians argue that they began to think about themselves as an ethnic group. Whether the Jews of Transylvania experienced a double ethnic minority status, Hungarian and Jewish, or a double burden, secular and religious, is still an object of debate, but in the case of the ordinary Jews in small Transylvanian towns, the evidence inclines in favor of religion as a source of their concern. Their cultural events dealt with aspects of daily life, shaped by social interactions, generational contacts, law and learning, all understood through secularization and religious perspectives. In most small towns, the Jews' attachment to the Hungarian language and culture remained unshaken.

Concluding remarks

At the end of the First World War, religion for Jews encountered serious challenges arising from within, leading to divisions and dissent that proved much more insurmountable than those experienced by other ethnic groups. In large cities, Jewish communities still remained cohesive, in the majority embracing Reformist ideas or Zionism. Orthodoxy lost ground in everyday life and in schools, and the power of community boards was transferred to individual households. Therefore, in cities like Kolozsvár and Marosvásárhely, religiosity lost ground in favor of secularism and potential assimilation, exerting a heavy influence on cultural life. Secularism relegated cultural events to a space outside the reach of the community and synagogue, and especially in the large cities, the lucrative character of entertainment gained a remarkable momentum. These trends slowly weakened the communities' cohesiveness in small towns, but did not lead to their demise until after the Second World War. Therefore, my

focus on smaller towns sheds a rare light on the fate of Orthodox Jewish communities, whose cultural life, including amateur theater, still revolved around the community and was much less touched by secularism. Still present in our region, traces of rabbinical Judaism meant that Jews were striving to reconstitute the Temple in their own collective life by considering social encounters to be a sort of sanctified experience, thus, excluding cultural events.

The traits of rabbinical Judaism among the Orthodox stressed belief in human rationality and a general rational order of existence, the importance of reflection, study, the mastery of the law, and the salience of concrete deeds. Such characteristics could well be markers of any secular thinker, Jewish or non-Jewish. To a general reader, this is a fine line, separating the secularism of progressive Jews from the thinking of Orthodox Jews. But to Transylvanians, these Judaic traits were religious in character and accounted for the survival of their local community as a cohesive body. Expressing publicly these traits through plays and performances could have strengthened solidarity around core Judaic values. The demographic decline of the Jewish population of small towns and a lack of interest in cultural self-expression weakened the public presence of religiosity among the Jews and relocated it to the private realms.

Jews diverged from Hungarians, Saxons, and Romanians, for whom theater served educational purposes to enhance their Christian faith and moral values and oftentimes serve as an auxiliary to the church service. For Jews, theater events in Hungarian were a display of erudition for the learned Jewish upper classes. Learning broke loose from its religious sources, a perspective that had concerned leading Jewish individuals, although separating the two is difficult.

In the words of a leading Jewish politician, Adolphe Stern, the religious law of the Jews was the actual effort of learning, a tenet so highly praised in the Talmud that a learned

man took precedence over rabbis and preachers, while the ignorant man could never be called a believer. If for Christians, religion means interior life, faith and spirit, for Jews religion was intellectual thought and law. Interestingly, rabbis were absent from theatrical events, whereas in the case of the Romanian Orthodox, Hungarian Roman Catholics, Unitarians, and Reformed and the Lutherans, the clergy were not only present but were playwrights, and they even petitioned for authorizations and acted themselves as facilitators for obtaining special conditions to benefit the organizers, such as a good location, resources, and respectability and moral guarantees.

The Jewish plays performances did not require the coordinating skills or the moral pledge of a rabbi nor the premises of a synagogue as a necessary framework of activity, as in the case of Christians. I argue that by allowing amateur theater to take place in his community, the Orthodox rabbi sought to demonstrate that adherence to Jewish religious law in a modern society could be possible through modern means of communication like theater. The community itself organized amateur theater to promote a high level of education, and the play was to be performed in front of and shared by all community members. Not doing so, it meant putting at risk the main goal of Orthodoxy. It was by engaging with the new needs of a modern society that theater became a medium of general education fully compatible with Jewish learning. Whenever this learning ideal failed, religiosity lost ground. Avoiding to turn theirs into a “religion of feeling,” Jewish society risked becoming secular thoroughly. The Transylvanian Jews’ resilience in the face of this risk makes them a particular group in the region.

Overall, this chapter reveals the centrality of Judaism as each community of Orthodox Jews understood its injunctions and in accordance to the local needs of Jews living in the small towns of historical Transylvania. My examination showed that Jews remained aloof from other

ethnic groups and even from other Jewish denominations living in large cities like Kolozsvár, or in the western and northern lands bordering Hungary. Indeed, differences among Jews from the neighboring Romanian provinces were quite large. The borderland communities conveniently pursued assimilation in Hungarian society after the First World War and saw their relation to God in terms of the appreciation that non-Jews or assimilated Jews accorded them based on their successes as individuals. Unlike them, an Orthodox Jew's relation to God was a direct one.

Unlike the groups of Romanians, Saxons, and Hungarians, who organized amateur theater with the help of their own Christian clergy, Jewish communities and their rabbis only rarely concerned themselves with cultural activities, although religion was paramount to Jewish identity and remained the core of communal strength in historical Transylvania. The internal structures of their communities, as they evolved through generations, and the political background of the host country allowed Jews a freedom of conscience and a level of religious freedom to flourish, not only in legal terms but in everyday life as well. Both the rich professional theatrical life providing entertainment and the few amateurs in small communities conveyed a civic and inherently religious idea of Jewishness. They shed light on their dilemmas and conflicts of ideas that typically beset Jewish communities everywhere in the world.

Chapter 5 Women and Theater Playing in Historical Transylvania

Centred on a new public expression of spirituality, the emergence of a mass theater culture had a significant impact on Romanian and minority women in interwar historical Transylvania. Women began their incremental participation in Romanian society as organizers and spectators of theatrical events; in the process, they fashioned for themselves a distinct social identity, blending a religious status, their social involvement as educators and morality advocates, and the respectable lay conditions of wife, daughter, and widow. This social standing allowed them privileges associated with all these roles, while it released them from the constraints that these roles entailed. This chapter examines how time-honored notions of female domesticity and separate spheres stimulated women's explorations in the public life. This encouraged them to showcase traditionalism through amateur theater. By putting on plays as amateurs, women blurred boundaries between the public and the private and exerted an influence that enabled them to reveal their experiences and self-conceptions.

Women's public role is best understood at urban and rural levels when seen in contrast with men's status and other age and professional groups. The 1923 Constitution gave only to men the right to vote, but the ability of the majority of men to participate in politics remained overall limited due to lack of experience. Overall amateur theater stimulated a greater engagement among women than men. Women were key participants in the local cultural development of minority communities. They were eager to promote a local vision of identity and convey it to authorities through a two-way dialogue by way of petition-writing.

The special relationships both Romanian and minority women developed with the theater forms of communication were exclusive to the social circumstances in which they lived. Before the war there were significant restrictions for public expression for non-Hungarian groups, but, after the 1918, the post-war order opened up to new and ample forms of expression and minority

activism. Yet, women's activities outside the home were not committed to a political agenda thus, their work appeared as an extension of domestic work. The majority of Romanian and minority women involved in amateur theater in the region performed extradomestic labor for their church, which was being posited in petitions as strengthening the integrity of a community and its families.

The postwar order did not bring changes to the family structure; on the contrary, it strengthened its institution along traditional lines. The importance of the family was bolstered by the Church teachings, which stressed the women's service role within the home rather than in the workforce. Thus their public roles as theater organizers appeared as supporting their family and communities, rather than undermining their roles as wives and mothers. Theater came to play a significant role in the lives of women at this time because plays were a large reservoir of experience, morality, historical knowledge, and functional literacy. Out of the models represented in plays, they would fashion a message for themselves and others that would educate and entertain.

Despite the disparity among men and women in terms of involvement, both were able to represent themselves in the new public space mediated by the contours of the Romanian nation-state authority. Clergymen were the first to recognize amateur theater's new importance in women's lives, and the power of theater as popular media and a mass communication tool in giving rise to a local popular culture. Clergymen approved of plays with messages about women's abilities to balance responsibility of work, service to the community, and family duties. Male playwrights showed in their scripts that women's extradomestic work mainly in the church had an effect on the health and welfare of the family, maternity, and domestic industries, arguing in essence that family and service roles were to take precedence over outside employment in towns and cities. Although theater did pave the way for new ideas to reach a relatively literate

population and provide local entertainment, debates over domesticity in the plays selected by Hungarian and Saxon amateur theater troupes revolved around traditional duties endangered by urban pressures. Most debates were inflected with specific concerns of dress codes, marriage choices, wives' qualities, men's temperance efforts, and children's obedience to their parents.

Even as the interwar period is regarded as one of relatively dynamic political involvement, many women were involved not in politics but in cultural organizations at the local level. The postwar movement of amateur theater relied on the work of cultural organizations revolving around the local church. Through amateur theater, women attempted to affect real social change in their communities in multiple arenas: philanthropy, burial, schooling, church decoration, cooking for the poor and putting on plays. Only elite Saxon women belonged to a church-run central organization that governed the parish women's societies, but not the same can be said about Roman Catholic, Reformed Hungarian or Romanian Greek-Catholic, much less Romanian Orthodox women involved in theater playing. Locally, no theater organizers within women's societies held a conception of political activity and did not push for a political, irredentist action in order to help their ethnic groups. Faith had the most decisive impact on female organizational solidarity. The churches followed suit by approving their initiatives and joining them.

Wives of religious and civil officials, women founders of schools, women of religious orders, school mistresses announced play performances as the ideal training ground for literacy, domestic skills, and religious and moral training. In historical Transylvania, a large number of women were literate in villages: 29, 8% (13-19 years old) and 45, 4% (20-64 years old) and in urban centers 7, 6% (13-19 years old) and 14, 6% (20-64 years old).⁷⁵⁶ Amateur theater contributed indirectly to the spread of mass education among the minority and Romanian female

⁷⁵⁶ Sabin Mănuilă (ed.), Recensământul General al Populației României din 29 Decembrie 1930, Vol. III: Știința de Carte (București: Imprimeria Națională, 1938), XXII.

population. They welcomed everyone in the theater's arena seats to expose them to ideals in dramatic works and highlight theater's merits for the individual and society. Through theater playing, the audience could develop virtues that would make them better Christians and wives and mothers will contribute to the moral education in society and became guardians of moral tradition. Plays also stressed that women had to learn how to behave in different settings, to sew, cook, and do domestic work under parental supervision, while debating human vices and virtues.

At the same time, women and young women started being perceived as having a greater presence in the public sphere. Taking seriously their social responsibilities, they played an active role in their religious communities and contributed to the moral improvement of lay communities, without stressing excessive rule and formality, yet maintaining structure and order in their work. In private life they never appeared in a subordinated position within the family nor did their involvement in theater matters lead to their isolation. In plays, allusions to domesticity and femininity actually helped strengthen women's public presence.

In society, their work as playwrights was appreciated by ordinary individuals and even met publications standards. I argue that the absence of women playwrights and their plays from the literary canon is neither due to their writings' lack of esthetic principles or to their nonexistence. Actually, they had a great reception among the amateur public and their inclusion in anthologies occurred somewhat later, during the communist period. The particular worldviews of women playwrights could be accepted in print and on stage, demonstrating that the gender bias or socio-economic power structures that silenced women were mostly at work in politics, academic world, and professional theater. Printers like Alexandru Anca or the Kraffts treated women's work by the standards used for men, as no binary representation appeared to be at work.

Though the professional theater was still dominated by male producers, playwrights, and critics, the 1920s and 1930s amateur theater saw the emergence of a number of creative female

playwrights whose genres and styles achieved immense success. Although now much of their work is overlooked in the dramatic canon of the ethnic groups, but not completely forgotten, their traditionalist perspectives on women's roles in marriage, business, politics, and throughout society unfolded onstage for rural and urban audiences.

The Saxon women playwrights achieved the greatest success of all female authors. They enjoyed productions of nearly every plays and the script booklets were reprinted several times. To understand their rise as public writers, not so much societal factors but private aspects are useful in tracing changes that benefitted women: their personal background, their spirit of observation, and their close circles of friends. Saxon female playwrights mastered the local dialects they addressed their own audience with. Characters are similar in many respects: if young, they try to fit into their village world, if mid-age, they strive to cope with life pressures, work, and family concerns. Society's norms for accepted public behavior being never up for debate, the stage provided the ideal venue to present tradition with an entertainment twist.

Of all women involved in amateur theater, the Saxon women proved to be the most active not only as consummate playwrights and as theater organizers, but as managers of a complex and orderly structure of women's associations, and accomplished schoolteacher professionals as well. Surpassing the Saxon women in number, the Reformed women also displayed particular qualities as theater organizers, but were not playwrights with their own followers in local communities, and most likely never took up jobs in the workforce, or coordinated a regional centralized structure for their local women's societies. All women in the region who were involved in amateur theater shared one common denominator: they were all housewives but found satisfaction in their public presence as active members in their communities in various positions.

Daughters of ministers, Saxon women playwrights emulated their fathers and husbands, as many Saxon pastors wrote plays for their communities in the local dialect. Anna Schuller-

Schullerus (1869-1951) was a schoolteacher, *pfarrerin*, poet, writer of short stories and drama who lived and wrote in the village of her husband's ministry and in Sibiu. In Karl Kurt Klein's words, she was the most successful comedy writer in Saxon dialect, whose plays continued to be performed on amateur stages in Saxon communities until present. A *Heimatkunst* representative, Anna Schuller-Schullerus engaged in serious documentation for her plays and added her own experience from living in villages and cities when making plots and giving twists to her plays. Throughout her plays, she was able to capture similar traditions shared across villages and county borders, thus, making the case that there is a collective Saxon mindset and that the gap between rural and urban Saxon societies could be closed through common traditions that strengthen solidarity. If this supposition is correct, she was a perceptive observer of the existing distance among Saxon intellectuals and the local elite/parishioners.

Grete Lienert-Zultnert (1906-1989) had a similar background with her friend, Anna Schuller-Schullerus. A talented storyteller and songwriter, she wrote plays about Saxon village life hoping to educate and entertain and, at the same time, inspire faith and creativity. Like her friend, upon marrying a notary, she could not continue as a teacher, and had to live as a housewife, being active in the local women's society and giving lectures and recitals. For both writers, a domestic status only enhanced their opportunities to write and teach, as well as joining a Saxon women's elite that left behind a regional literature of considerable linguistic and historical value. These two playwrights' proximity to their subject and to other dramatists made possible their gain of valuable insights into effective staging techniques and the fitting of a play to a particular public and to the actors who would play each role. Writing for the theater implies the presence of women dramatists in numerous village contexts and situations, a rare opportunity for educated women

Among all ethnic groups in the region, it was the Reformed intellectual tradition that opened the way to the schooling of elite women. The majority of Reformed women attained

literacy sufficient for casual reading, letter-writing, and keeping household and church accounts, and quite a few were accomplished negotiators with the authorities as they engaged in a sustained correspondence with the Romanian state. In this energetic display of self-organization, Reformed women were not joined by Reformed men as the Saxon *pfarr* and *pfarrerin* pair worked together.

Women were active in quite a variety of institutional contexts and were even expected to take charge of these institutions. Saxon women were active in putting on plays in asylums being sponsored by the Evangelical-Lutheran Church. Jewish women, however, surpassed Saxon women in their charitable involvement. They supervised all benevolence efforts and the work of charitable institutions like orphanages and hospitals, mostly founded by individual philanthropists. Jewish women's involvement in local charitable associations conveyed a picture of persistent traditional values and deep-attachment to notions of women's domesticity and separate spheres. Rabbis and men and women in Jewish communities reinforced through sermons and their organizations gender norms and traditional family structures. In their isolation, local Orthodox Jews would be quick to reject liberal values, because assimilation and participation in a vibrant cultural life, specific to middle-class groups would mean a danger to their community structures. As pious family members, Jewish women were to remain the primary religious influence in the family, while men were to stay the central figures in the public life, thus, making Jewish women reluctant to play a role in the public sphere as other minority women putting on plays locally.

Romanian women of both confessions had practically a very limited presence as organizers and playwrights. One reason is the lack of interest shown by Romanian men towards playwrighting and amateur theater. This lack of emulation and urging among Romanian men and women and among clergymen and parishioners accounts for a passive attitude in regard to amateur theater. Writing plays was not seen as a dominant activity of Orthodox clergy, who preferred to leave this activity to professional writers and educated individuals living in urban

centers, such as clerks, professors or schoolteachers. The Greek Catholic prelates only rarely authored plays, one of them being Augustin Cosma, and his subjects were exclusively religious.

Greek Catholic women formed women's societies a bit more numerous than the Orthodox women, the former being quite active in fundraising. None, however, have found playwrighting appealing. Except female translators like Virginia Vlaicu, a member of her local Greek Catholic women's society, Romanian women overall did not choose to convey in plays their domestic lives and perform them for a public, but confined their presence to own household, keeping the public and the private lives separate. Their domestic roles remained bound to their duties as wives and mothers within their families and not toward their communities like the Saxon women chose to do. For the Orthodox, faith and tradition bound a community together, and not human agency.

A general passivity placed the Romanian majority in sharp contrast with the minorities whose women population displayed the most energetic interest in a burgeoning amateur theater movement. In matters of self-organization, Orthodox Romanians and to some extent Greek Catholic Romanians considered this activity to be the domain of the literate and private and state organizations rather than the realm of individual action and creativity.

Chapter 6 Final Conclusion

As the first comprehensive study of the phenomenon of amateur theater in a multiethnic province, this dissertation shows the importance of theater playing in showcasing the power of ethnic feeling. In a relentless drive to consolidate the Romanian nation-state and gain autonomy in cultural life, Romanians and minority groups organized a theater life as a sort of public contest about spiritual and cultural essences, a sort of *Kulturkampf* of peoples each led by its own clergy.

Amateur theater served as a mechanism whereby local individuals and communities expressed themselves, reflecting the existence of a participatory culture among the minorities in Greater Romania. Since the essential factor for the takeoff and development of cultural life is religion, I give ample space in my dissertation to its role in amateur theater as a catalyst for social improvement and educational programs. I consider clergymen the most devoted individuals to the cultural development in parishes, touching the lives of parishioners through religious messages in plays, and the religious occasions of performances, without actually promoting a religious theater. Religion stimulated not only the minorities' solidarity and initiative, but determined the authorities to view favorably the events submitted for approval. Moreover, since religion enjoyed the widespread support of the broad public, it contributed to the immense success of amateur theater. Exploring cultural life through religion in a group-by-group examination of the theater playing and giving space to the grassroots perspective of the organizers and participants was an approach not yet considered in Transylvanian studies. Neither was a study of cultural life conducted in an extensive range of professional, age, and gender groups with the goal of showing their self-organization and efforts to display their cultural autonomy.

Amateur theater provided ethnic groups with a framework to build their own local cultural life. The plays embodied their social thought on essential religious beliefs, serving as a medium to

impart them to the community. They enabled confessional groups in historical Transylvania to revive unwritten traditions with an energy undeterred even by the Roman Catholic Church, which, in Hungarian communities, determined for believers the orally transmitted word of God.

Examining the plays from the people's perspective, this study concludes that tradition, the second most respected source of Orthodox Christianity, gained in historical Transylvania a wide terrain especially among the Protestant groups. Rather than ethnicity, most plays highlighted the value of tradition, a perspective that fully resonated with the parishioners.

From the Romanian state's perspective, amateur theater witnessed constant growth. On account of the large number of people using state offices to secure play permits, amateur theater developed into a veritable 'institution,' which, as I have described, involved regulations that applied to the presence of minorities in public life and placed a bureaucratic control over the logistics of performances, involved a constant check on plays' messages, and vigilance about the audience' reactions to stagecraft and performance, in order to prevent potential unrest. Of the two sides of the bureaucratic machine, the public's involvement exceeded the ministerial officials' expectations of scale and diversity, requiring often more resources and control than the state structures could manage and oversee.

In most counties, amateur theater lacked a sustained emphasis on ethnicity as a matter of individual and community choice. To deal with the rare occurrences of ethnically-charged theater performances, the state strengthened its policies of public order and national security. It also established a basis of cooperation with all ethnic minorities, suggesting as a prerequisite that the proposed events can only encourage the religious expression of their respective minority group. There is strong evidence to believe that amateur theater, witnessing a thriving development because of such prerequisites, therefore, fulfilled the conditions put by negotiators at the end of the First World War, who required the Romanian government at the signing of peace treaties to

enforce rights for the ethnic minorities. Amateur theater also, one may argue, enabled the Romanian state to fulfill requirements pertaining to the Roman-Catholic minority, approved upon when signing the Concordate with the Vatican in 1927.

Part I

Local cultural initiatives came to fruition and secured state approval mainly when plays and performances enhanced spiritual feeling. Petitions for play permits were numerous especially before religious holidays, when the organizers announced their overt religious character as in the case of Roman-Catholic communities of Hungarians, or when they stressed their fundraising purposes, as in the case of the Hungarian Reformed. For Unitarians, amateur theater could fuel pride about literacy achievements within their communities and a sense of confidence in their daily activities. Common to all confessions among the Hungarians was the mentality that theater served as a platform for sharing ideas and for raising awareness of the problems they experienced under the new territorial and political conditions, enabling them to find the best solutions to their own problems.

For the Romanians, religion was not a factor in determining state approval for their events, and theater playing was not intended for fundraising on the scale that the Hungarians appeared to do. Furthermore, I argue that the lack of a religious basis for Romanian amateur theater can be explained by the predominance of cultural societies guided mainly by secularism and ethnic advocacy. Romanian Greek-Catholic priests put on plays to show not religiosity or religious tenets, unless the play is clearly devoted to a Catholic saint (very rarely), but to promote a Western orientation in public life and the superior qualities of Romanian professional theater, which was mainly oriented towards Western theatrical innovations. Even plays focusing on village life actually highlighted middle-class values for Romanian audiences, rather than the spiritual sensibilities of parishioners.

An everyday focus laced with Christian tenets appears in the few but successful theatrical initiatives of the Orthodox Romanians. For the Orthodox, change and new ideas were an intrusion in their lives, which had to be carefully examined, understood, and in most cases, eliminated as something too foreign to the needs and the old ways of doing things and leading lives. But new ideas were never shunned away or downright rejected, thus demonstrating tolerance and integration. One example is the attitude towards individuals who supported the much-disliked communist ideas, or embraced new fashion trends, and, as a consequence, they encountered their fellows' skepticism. Above all, for the Orthodox Romanians, morality always took precedence over other benefits that came with new ideas. By looking at all religious groups' involvement in amateur theater, my study reflects the force (or lack) of religion in mirroring social and cultural values that were specific to each of them.

I have shown in all the chapters that religious leaders served as trustworthy intermediaries between minority parishioners and Romanian authorities. From the case studies selected in different counties, I conclude that their allegiances stood squarely with their communities in which they maintained prestige and respect for their spiritual qualities, eloquence, and knowledge. For clergymen, theater served as the only call of community members to action. Both clergy and parishioners saw themselves as proponents of legality and social calm, using a historical and socio-cultural rather than a political rhetoric. A few, however, breached the limits of accepted speech boundaries and put ahead of their spiritual mission ethnicity raised to a political level. Such suspicious cases always triggered caution on the part of Romanian authorities, who mobilized local officials and requested additional information about these religious leaders in order to keep them in check.

Minority clergy were prompt to give support to a growing cultural life at the local level because they sought that solutions to ethnic problems need to be fashioned out of social and

cultural traditions. The clergy organizing amateur theater perceived the postwar years as a time for laying new foundations for their future in the province. First of all, they thought restoring a collective sense of identity was paramount. As my discussion of intellectual traditions in each of the chapters dealing with Christian groups has shown, the minorities played an important role in bringing religion and history into the mainstream of cultural life. The Saxon pastor Ernst Thullner or the schoolteacher Anna Schuller-Schullerus, the Hungarian clergy like the Roman-Catholic priest Vilmos Bálint, the Reformed pastor János Vásárhely, and the Unitarian cantor Gyula Péterffi, and last, Jewish elites like the community leader József Fried, all embraced amateur theater because they could highlight the importance of religion and morality as fundamental for the survival of their communities. Consequently, they made an effort to write or choose plays that subtly addressed religious messages specific to their own confession, thinking that it would help them find ways to deal with the most pressing needs of their co-religionists: literacy, behavioral models, and funds. They went beyond analyzing their myriad problems themselves and even stimulated their co-religionists to form groups and to enhance their self-organization. By consciously enlarging their religious roles as active readers and authors of plays, they shared their knowledge by making it public and accessible to all.

Although in general conservative, the organizers among the minority clergy insisted that amateur theater embrace both tradition and modernization, thereby placing themselves in a unique position as users of modern means of communication. The clergy sought to spread their ideas by using amateur theater and perform their spiritual duties at the same time. They engaged groups of women, young people, artisans, firefighters, and schoolteachers, giving as an incentive a modernist pretension to civilization, the theater stage, yet they promoted a close identification with their local communities and maintained a steadfast commitment to their faith and dialect.

The dynamic integration of women into the amateur theater enterprise documented their strengths and achievements, potentially equal to those of men. Local women found other uses for theater beyond religious duties or fundraising. They became staunch advocates of literacy and moral behavior by way of theatrical entertainment. Hungarian and Saxon women built local institutions, like philanthropies, and children protection and women's societies that strengthened community and identity. Saxon women, in particular, advocated adult education; Roman-Catholic Hungarian women developed a degree of limited autonomy within their church through their work as members of local women's societies; and the activity of Reformed Hungarian women confirmed that the gender divide in their communities was practically non-existent, as women's cultural involvement surpassed that of local men.

To gain the broad support of all community members, the local elite and amateurs selected plays that presented the realities of everyday life and outlined well-known events. They hoped to locate in the history of each ethnic group a record of community traditions and religious tenets in order to advance their assertions of ethnic autonomy. Certainly, they hoped to revive the grandeur of their own ethnic group in richly textured literary materials full of history. By harnessing traditions, they enacted in plays commonly held cultural codes in language, literature, and daily behavior. Examples are the Saxon traditions of *Gänjzelroken* on the wedding day, or *de Trud*, a ghost living in villages, which present various kinds of behavior and speech on stage, which could easily be transferred to the secular reality and fit situations in the real world.

Theater performances had a strong influence in Christian communities, given that no disagreements over language and literature surfaced among organizers, a sign that they and their audiences saw in plays a common heritage and the language used on stage, their own local dialect. Geography was not a contentious issue for either minority groups or the Romanian state. Plays could feature lands and provinces that belonged to previous empires such as the Habsburg,

but as long as the script and stagecraft did not offend the feelings of other ethnic groups, the amateurs could put on plays about foreign lands and highlight the latter's similarities with their own hometown.

One similar aspect shared by all Christian ethnic groups of the region was the striking resemblance in the way in which they strengthened ethnic cohesiveness after the First World War. They all pursued a path similar to the one advocated by the elites who had led the national movements in the nineteenth century. Back then, the need for cultural foundations in the form of literary works, dictionaries, and historical studies was to contribute to the rising of ethnic consciousness. In exploring twentieth-century amateur theater, my study finds that the narrative woven on stage reveals a sense of new beginnings for these communities, for whom, as in the past, literature, history, and religion proved fundamental in building a community of language and faith.

Amateur theater sheds light on the aspect of language for Orthodox Jews in regard to assimilation. Language proved to be a divider and inhibitor of both amateur theater and assimilation. Their divergent language choices, being deliberately made, led to the separation of secular and religious matters: Yiddish on Sabbath and Hungarian in everyday life. In Transylvania, Hungarian was used only outside the synagogue, but it did not prevail as the language of the Jewish community to supplant Yiddish.⁷⁵⁷ Cultural life, therefore, appeared hindered by the ambiguous language use, an aspect which clarifies why assimilation to Hungarian culture was thwarted. For our purposes, it explains the slow takeoff of amateur theater in Jewish communities for whom neither plays in Hungarian or Yiddish could be considered fit to cater to their needs.

⁷⁵⁷ Solomon Poll, "The Role of Yiddish...", 134.. See chart of users and attitudes toward language.

The interest in amateur theater often went beyond religion, education, literature, and language. A few organizers put on shows that stressed competing issues of ethnic rights or ethnic allegiances to foreign political entities. These events were most likely to cause conflict on all levels. It was generally understood that organizers avoid ethnicity and nationalism and, instead, emphasize the religious character of the performance, giving it a thorough spiritual and moral importance and purpose. Such a perspective could render a public event harmless and idealist. Wary of ethnically-overt theater playing, both authorities and individuals conceived of shows as expressions of the local culture, and only in a few exceptions did ethnicist overtones appear in theater shows. In general, both sides, consequently, downplayed and discouraged the ethnic facets in play scripts and stagecraft. The repertoires included historical plays that featured individual characters whose idealism and religious uprightness served to instill pride in a group's past. If a play described the characters' loyalty to an unspecified royal house, that was acceptable, but rarely did a play get an approval stamp if inferences about unflattering contrasts with the Romanian Royal House could be detected. If the local church endorsed the entire initiative and clergymen stated that the show served the community, the organizers most likely would have obtained a play permit. State officials shared with local communities the idea that a church was the heart of a community and religion was the driving force of a vibrant cultural life.

In very few cases, amateur theater in Romanian communities extolled ethnicity, which the Romanian state condoned and even encouraged in different degrees depending on the government in office and the officials in charge. Overall, however, it was the idea of ethnic freedom and feelings, rather than ethnicity in the political sense, that dominated the entire movement of amateur theater, and appeared as a general tendency constantly fostered by both citizens and the Romanian state. The Romanians' own experience and resolve to survive ethnically ever since they were ruled by the privileged ethnic groups in the Habsburg Empire constantly advocated the

need for such freedom and expression of feeling, and Romanian middle-class intellectuals worked hard to assert ethnicity in order to remove Hungarian legal hurdles.

Influences, however, were not one-sided, as minority groups also showed their contribution to the expression of cultural freedoms. Hungarians had confidence in modern political institutions in Bucharest and Cluj, and trust that they could influence decisions in cultural matters that pertained to their Hungarian-speaking communities. Although I focused on ethnic freedom in its cultural and economic aspects as it emerged out of amateur theater, as well as on ties to institutions like churches and schools, I argue that, actually, not an awareness of civil freedoms for ethnic groups, but rather the religious confessions constituted the most powerful engine of social action. They could slow down or speed up social initiatives and interactions. Being more prone active citizenship, the minorities (Catholic, Reformed, Unitarian, and Evangelical-Lutheran) showed a more positive view of wealth and public activism than the Orthodox, if we are to consider the material incentives and public expression triggered by theater playing.

Each community set its own agenda when putting on plays and defined the goals it hoped to achieve. An important issue concerned members was the condition of the local church building and the insufficient funds to cover the costs of repairs or improvements. One visible effect that came out of this solidarity was the strengthening of community cohesiveness and mutual understanding, which restored a sense of mission shared by the inhabitants. That is not to say that divisions in Hungarian society, for example, disappeared, but, at this particular juncture, through amateur theater, communities came together to discuss their future and address together their needs in the new context.

Even if confessions crossed county borders, paradoxically, theater never reflected the cultural life of the entire confessional collectivity at the regional level, much less of the entire ethnic group, but rather locally, at the most at the level of a cluster of two-three villages or a town surrounded by two villages, but only if they were within the bounds of the same confession. As the second part of each chapter shows, theater became a comprehensive event that brought together the interests within a social group and a local community, with the entire population of that particular village sharing the same faith and language dialect. Although a diversity of commitments in the community repeatedly generated theatrical events, the presence of the local church conveyed the idea that there was a unified cultural center.

The meaning of amateur theater did not change from the 1920s to the 1930s. The idealism pervading amateur theater was not a novelty of the 1930s, as key elements like philanthropy, literacy, and moral teachings had informed amateur theater events well before the onset of the Great Depression. But a slight increase in show frequency in the 1930s reflected longer hours in preparation, more experience, and numerous rehearsal sessions. Amateur theater became an ‘institution’ in itself, not just an activity administered by the state under the jurisdiction of a government ministry. Shaping a specific worldview, amateur theater unified all confessions through the common fact that, in the majority, at the grassroots level, all shows reflected the persistence of traditional values and the importance of the legacies of the past.

Part II

The minorities advanced successfully their own interests in the region through amateur theater partly because they established close contacts and collaborated efficiently with the state in obtaining play permits. By focusing on the perspective of the Romanian state, I revisited the challenges encountered by the professional theater companies of all four ethnic groups, and I showed that the contacts that professional theater companies established with the Romanian state

were generally conducive to satisfactory outcomes on both sides. The Hungarian professional companies engaged in successful lobbying for assigning the Hungarian companies the towns and districts that fit their business interests. The Saxon professional private companies, being more divided when dealing with the Romanian state, were nevertheless economically sound, and culturally bending, on the whole, toward upper-class theatrical tastes influenced by Germany and Austria. Up until 1935, Jewish theater company owners could rely on play permits for secular plays which they obtained from Budapest theater reviews or from Yiddish repertoires of itinerant troupes from Bucharest, Iași, Central Europe, or even the United States. They had a free hand in the selection of plays in Yiddish, as Romanian officials admitted that they lacked the personnel competent in reading Yiddish.

The development of amateur theater significantly increased the two-way communication between society and authorities, even though the political and administrative apparatus of the Romanian state was not fully-committed to deal with the high volume of correspondence issued by the minorities, nor had the Romanian state made ample gestures to show that it was in favor of opening communication channels. Inspector Emil Isac's office operated with only Isac himself on the payroll; the mailing of paperwork to Bucharest or Cluj often forced organizers to reschedule events; and a number of Transylvanian cities already enjoyed an administrative autonomy through minority-dominated city councils, in this way reducing or muddling the powers of Romanian authorities in certain cities.

Amateur theater promoted "democratization" in overall public debates, by allowing ethnic expression to unfold under state control. By approving public events, the state sent a clear encouragement to minority groups to develop their own autonomous cultural life. As the chapter on Romanian theater has shown, officials perceived the cultural freedoms granted to minorities, although not legally recognized as corporate entities to be a serious responsibility: they created a

proper legal framework through the Law of Theaters of 1926 and various governmental ordinances. In practice, numerous exceptions were granted to petitioners, for example, the 1926 Law required proof of citizenship for all minorities who intended to organize public events, but authorities never requested proof of citizenship for amateur organizers, only information about play titles, authors, and scripts (which often times were omitted). They withheld approval of plays which offended other ethnicities' sensibilities or religious morality, and they denied the right to put on plays to those organizers who had an irredentist past and a record of breaking the law.

Nevertheless smooth and dynamic, the state offices handling amateur theater matters remained simple and small in scale. No complex mechanisms were put in place to enable local initiatives, and yet, such initiatives were countless. Newspapers tended to inform readers about professional theater, with only local dailies mentioning in passing initiatives of amateur theater organized by cultural societies. Never being advertised in the press, the clergy's initiatives of theater playing remained confined to the narrow local realm of the respective community and stored in the archives of state offices. The weak popularization of theater shows organized by amateurs accounted for the lack of political interference in or ideological interpretations of these events. I could not distinguish a particular treatment of amateurs that revealed a political ideology at work, or measures directed at amateurs by specific governments or regimes that reflecting their political convictions, as when King Carol II ascended the throne in 1930.

Amateur theater played a role in legitimizing institution building in a developing democracy. By trusting the administrative capacity of state offices that handled amateur theater, amateurs from minority groups engaged through this activity various 'institutional' structures: the legal framework, which officials constantly updated and monitored, hoping to make the procedure of petition handling and permit granting smooth and efficient; ministerial offices, by way of correspondence when organizers planned to put on plays in compliance with the law; the central

office in Cluj, led by Emil Isac which operated as the main branch, representing the central authorities in Bucharest; and the archive, which was useful for both petitioners and officials, and included correspondence and reports, but also notes issued by numerous bureaucratic structures of the Romanian state both internally and abroad. Citizens at large contributed to the creation of amateur theater into a 'linkage institution' which allowed both the government to hear what its people wanted to accomplish on their own and the minorities to make their plans happen.

Rather than seeing a dichotomy between cultural and institutional approaches to the understanding of social transition in Transylvania from an imperial to a nation-state system, the two approaches should be seen as intertwined in a multiethnic society like that of historical Transylvania. In fact, cultural development led to institutional growth. The heightened cultural sensitivity of the many ethnic groups in our region charged the "institution" of amateur theater with the cultural values and meanings of citizens, and blended it into the ethos of the host country. After carefully examining local cultural realities that stimulated the development of amateur theater in the region, my conclusion is that the social environment triggered amateur theater and brought it to a scale that might justify its 'institutional' size and character.

The independent development of amateur theater shows that the existing cultural patterns in Transylvanian society remained in place. The Romanian state allowed traditional centers of learning and knowledge like local churches and schools to maintain control within the communities they served. In every chapter I trace the history of numerous theological schools and colleges for each ethnic group in order to assess not only their impact on their graduates' embrace of amateur theater, but also the continuation of their institutional reach as centers of learning and knowledge after the First World War, despite the loss of land and resources and the transfer of the province to the Romanian state. Local churches also continued their prewar cultural involvement, and maintained their libraries. After 1918, they used or built smaller buildings attached to

churches for cultural purposes. The involvement of a large number of local elites who knew how to organize communities helped the minorities overcome numerous obstacles; the most feared was the potential opposition of various state institutions administering cultural, religious, and health affairs, as well as providing internal security in Romanian society.

The cultural life in villages and small towns was not the outcome of state mobilization or state policies, but rather of the travails of the local elite together with farmers, firefighters, artisans and local women seeking to express their ethnic specificity. Since amateur theater encouraged cooperation among various social groups within a community, it stimulated public debate, which, in the context of Greater Romania, represents the broad society's corresponding facet of the most heated debates involving intellectuals. This debate is the marker of the interwar period Romanian society and a reference point in the originality of ideas about paths of developments that the country should take.

Through amateur theater, the Romanian state could become familiar with the actions of local elites and the pressing needs besetting local communities inhabited by minorities. Officials obtained a useful depiction of minority life within small local groups, which helped them keep in check both individuals and communities. As in the majority of cases the religious leaders were the main initiators, and religion rather than social class and education remained the central boundary defining affiliations and belonging and determining social relationships and group dynamics. It was rather a rigid boundary. The Romanian state, one can argue, encouraged not only initiatives by individuals but also by small groups, despite promoting legally systematic efforts to thwart collective expressions of solidarity among the minorities out of fear of instability and irredentism.

Minority elites took steps to de-emphasize the political facets of theater playing. Even though some petitions were rejected, the volume of play requests demonstrates that the "institution" of amateur theater involving the minorities in considerable degree cultural policy.

The overall quality of governance and the cultural landscape benefitted from diversity and a multiethnic cultural life.

The Romanian state encouraged religious communities to participate in the public sphere and express their ethnic feelings. A church or temple endorsement served as a reliable reference for the applicant's good intentions when putting on plays. The authorities trusted references given by churches and religious leaders and, if in doubt, they correlated them with references from other state offices at the local level. Discovering the past and performing it on the stage was also intended to reinforce religion. Theater shows indicated a widespread revival of historical interest, featuring in the majority nineteenth-century plays, a constant preference of both minority and Romanian audiences because they boosted ethnic feeling instead of promoting one's ethnicity at the expense of other ethnic groups. Ethnicity and, in general, events that served an agenda of ethnic solidarity which cut across social and religious lines encountered bureaucratic barriers and were highly discouraged and eventually forbidden by the Romanian state.

The role of literature, especially plays, was recognized by both nationalists and ordinary individuals as fundamental for shaping cultural change. But the citizenry at large did not embrace literature in the sense of writing or reading literary works, although both occupations remained a domain accessible to a broad audience and open to individuals of all walks of life. While for nationalist activists literature helped mobilize energies and tap ethnic sources of identification, for the broad audience it was the most useful source of new ideas and an inspiration when working on current problems. In this vein, plays came to inspire communities to start putting on shows. As for nationalist playwrights who hoped to promote their own plays among the amateurs, they had little appeal at the regional level, enjoying some success mainly with cultural societies in urban centers.

The Romanian state also took into account the field of literature as one of the many cultural fields in need of state funding, but it tended to prioritize theater by arguing the latter's

superior capacity to educate audiences and to provide effective models of moral behavior and cultural enlightenment across class, age, and ethnicity. Rather than seeing schools, churches, and cultural societies as major factors in shaping a cultural identity, the state joined the broader society in historical Transylvania in stressing amateur theater's prominent role in shaping mentalities. Institution-building was to start from the bottom up, with subsequent adjustments at the higher levels, but only after it had started from the grassroots initiatives.

The state did not prevent religious confessions from reaching at the forefront of cultural life. Officials demonstrated a marked effort to fulfill the state's legal obligations that had been assumed abroad within international forums like the Peace Conference of Paris in 1919 or the Concordat between the Holy See and Romania of 1927. Romanian officials constantly pondered the uniquely advantageous status enjoyed by minorities in amateur theater in Greater Romania, and were eager to advertise the favorable conditions existing in historical Transylvania to neighboring countries and foreign ambassadors in Bucharest and abroad. Whether European public opinion, the leaders of the great powers, and foreign agencies knew about the favorable conditions or expressed unease is beyond my concern here. One thing is certain: they played no role in the development of amateur theater led by the minorities in Greater Romania. By highlighting the perspectives of citizens and the authorities, my study reiterates the conclusion that amateur theater was the outcome of internal development in cultural life.

Part III

Amateur theater highlighted the minorities' conscious effort to become an active presence in the public life of the province despite living through a period of political changes and a downturn in their economic fortunes. The culminating years of the movement were those of the Great Depression and afterwards, a period which probed the minorities' devotion to the mission of amateur theater in all its spiritual, material, and idealist facets.

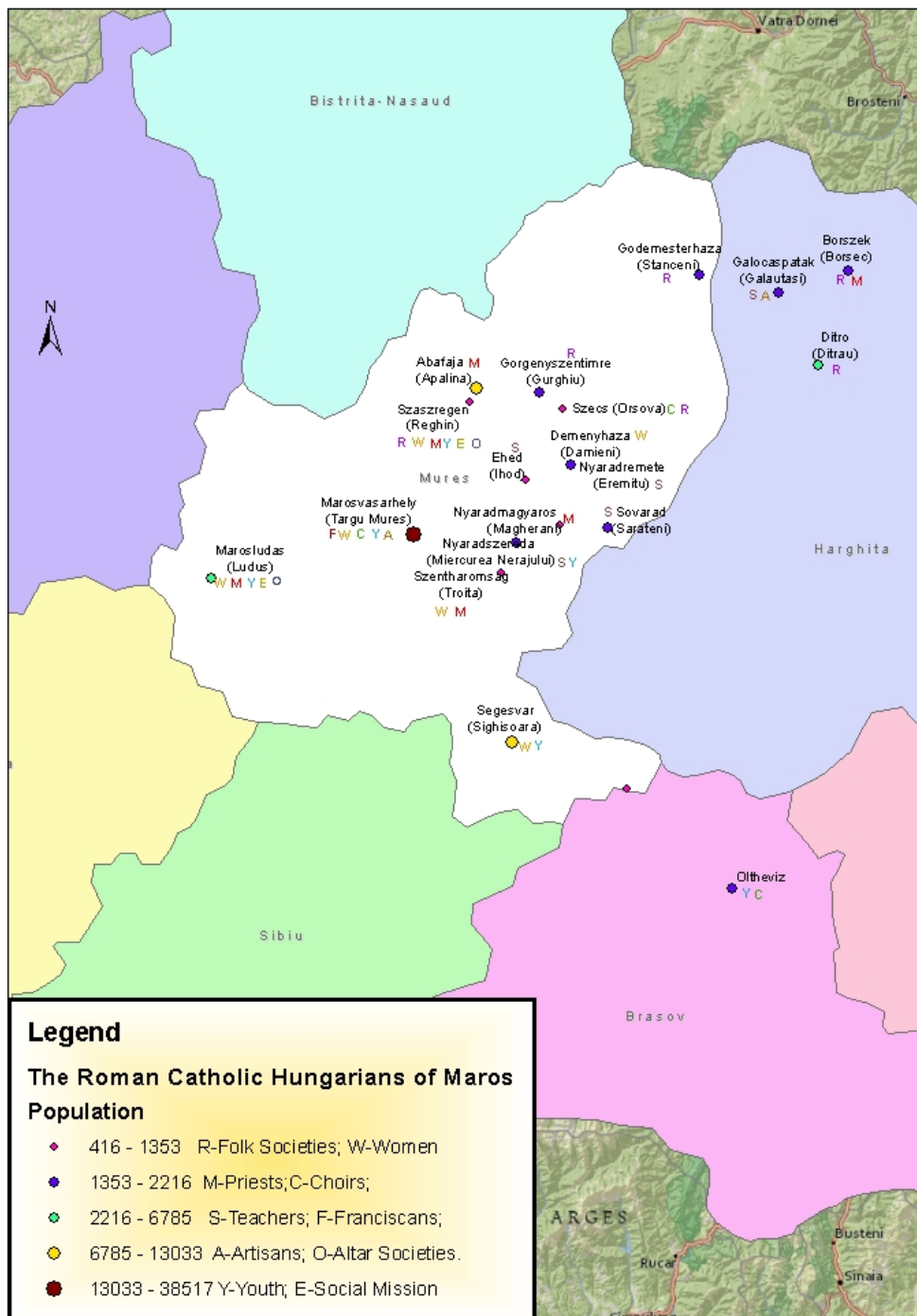
As late as 1940, amateurs continued to put on plays to address wartime needs and to take care of their church parish, orphans, sick, and elderly. Women's societies in Unitarian, Evangelical-Lutheran, Reformed, Roman-Catholic, and Greek-Catholic communities, together with priests and pastors, firefighters, and artisans scheduled shows and sustained a constant correspondence with the state authorities for play permits. Still in office, Inspector Emil Isac continued to select and eliminate questionable scripts that offended ethnic sensibilities. An important change in the region affected the Jewish amateurs, whose correspondence about play permits with the authorities stopped around 1935. Political measures and war mobilization touched amateur theater activity and local life, but it mainly targeted local youth. I conclude my study of amateur theater at the onset of the Second World War in 1939, although documents in the archives recorded Inspector Isac's impressions about cultural and theatrical life in Northern Transylvania (including most of historical Transylvania), which, with the Second Vienna Award of 1940, was transferred from Romania to Hungary at Germany's behest. With it, an historical epoch came to an end.

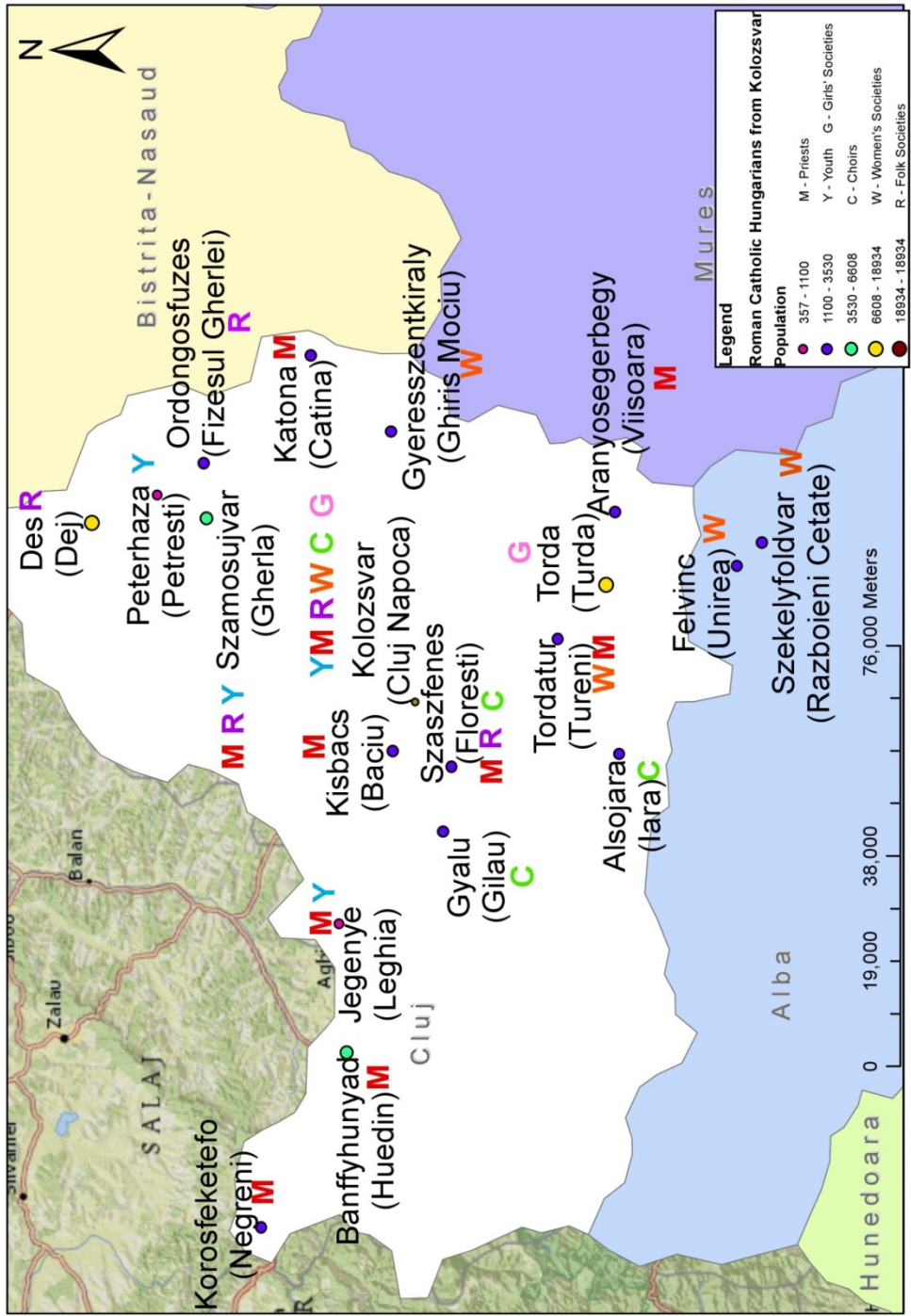
Amateur theater in historical Transylvania between the two World Wars was a unique phenomenon in the history of Romania and South-Eastern Europe. Through its objectives, amateur theater served as a barometer of society's energy levels and the minorities' power of spiritual regeneration, and owed its success largely to the indefatigable efforts of clergymen and religious leaders. The 1930s showed amateur theater arts as the main cultural occupation of Romanian citizens of all ethnicities living in historical Transylvania. By its scale and diversity of its participants, amateur theater underscores the extent of cultural change in Romanian society in a decade known for its extreme-right politics, with ethnic minorities taking a lead role in promoting such change. Through plays, amateurs from minority groups came to terms with cultural transformations by reconciling past and present, continuity and change, tradition and

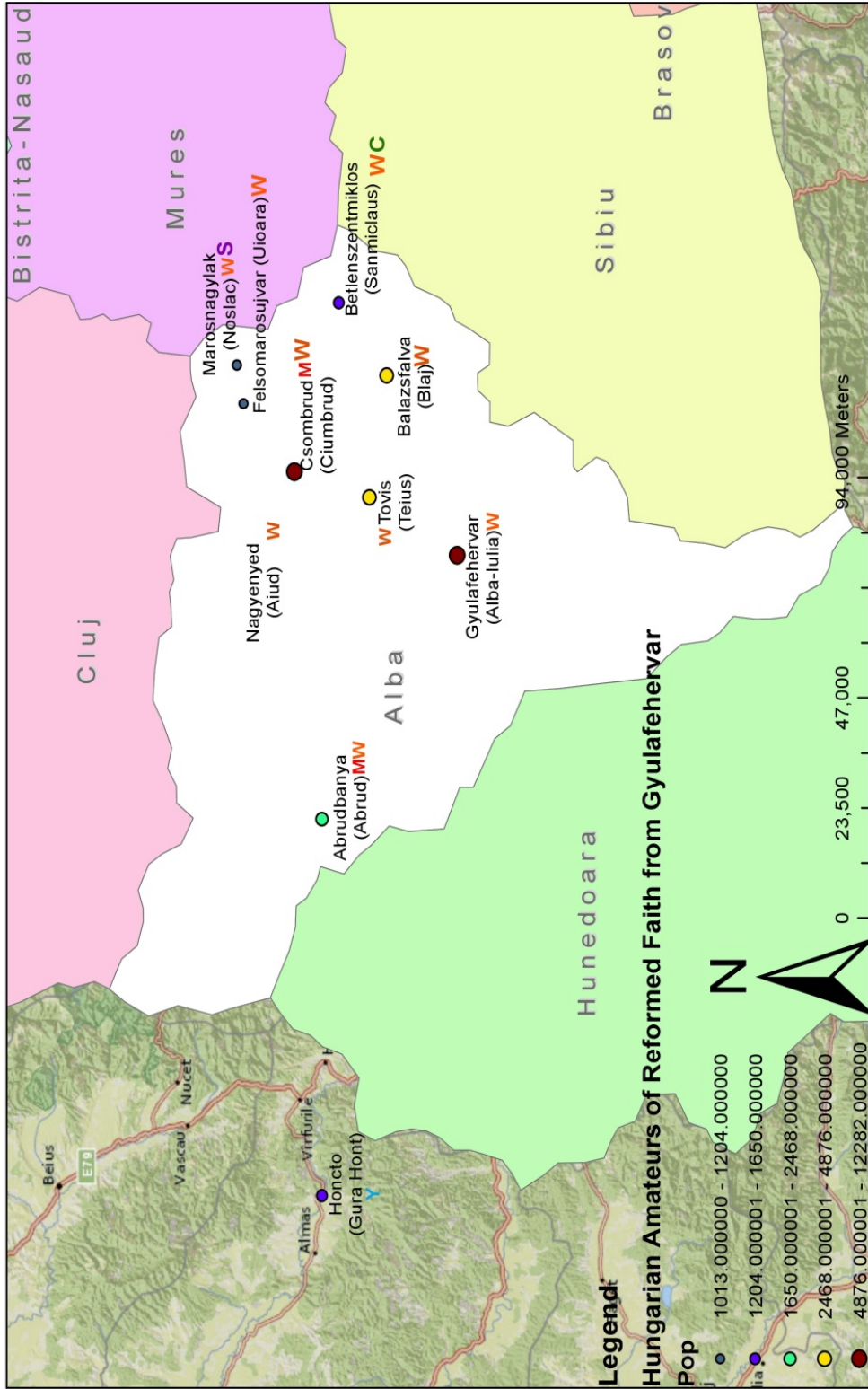
modernity, as well as historical Transylvania and the minorities' homelands: Hungary, Germany, and Israel.

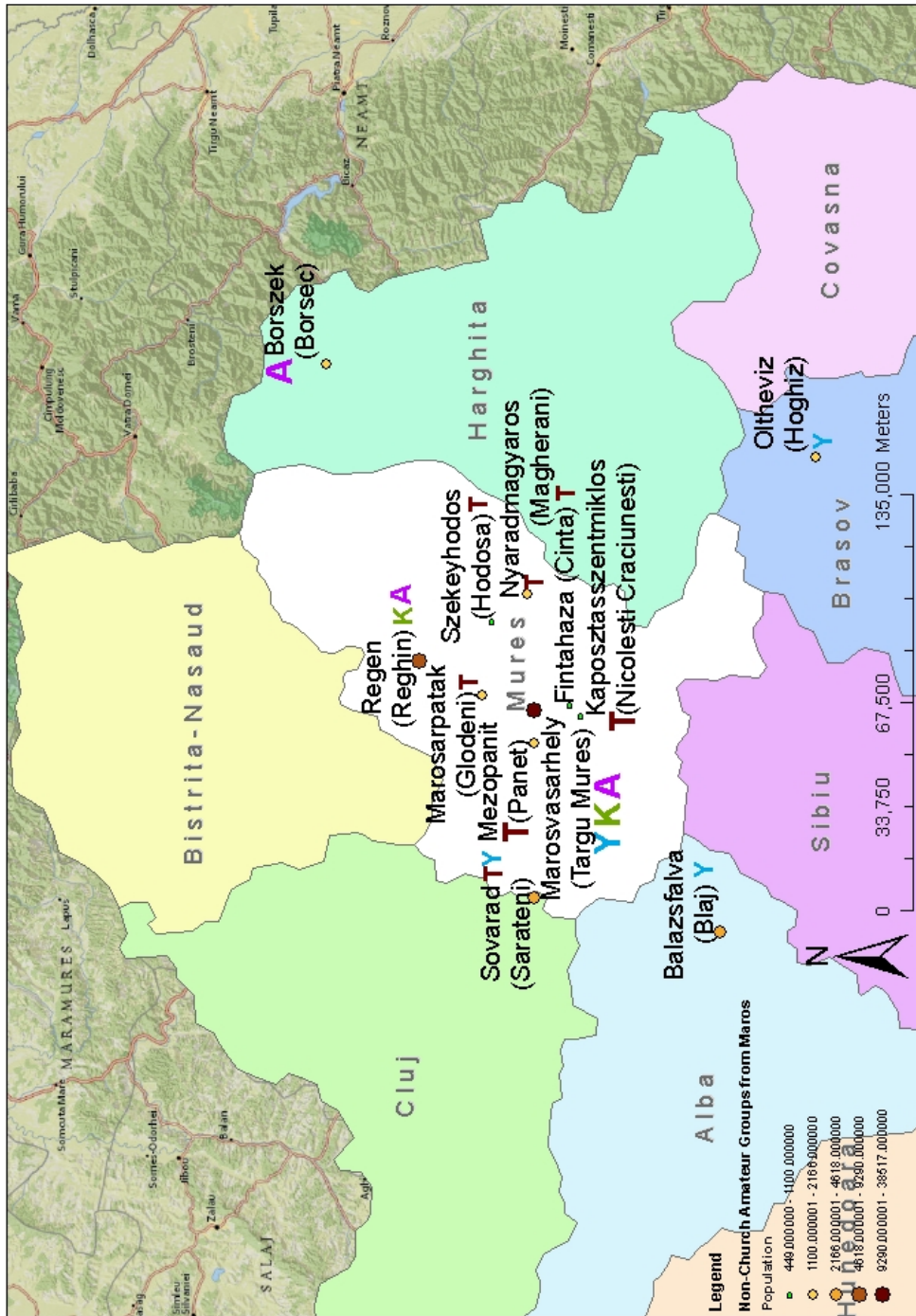
Selective Maps

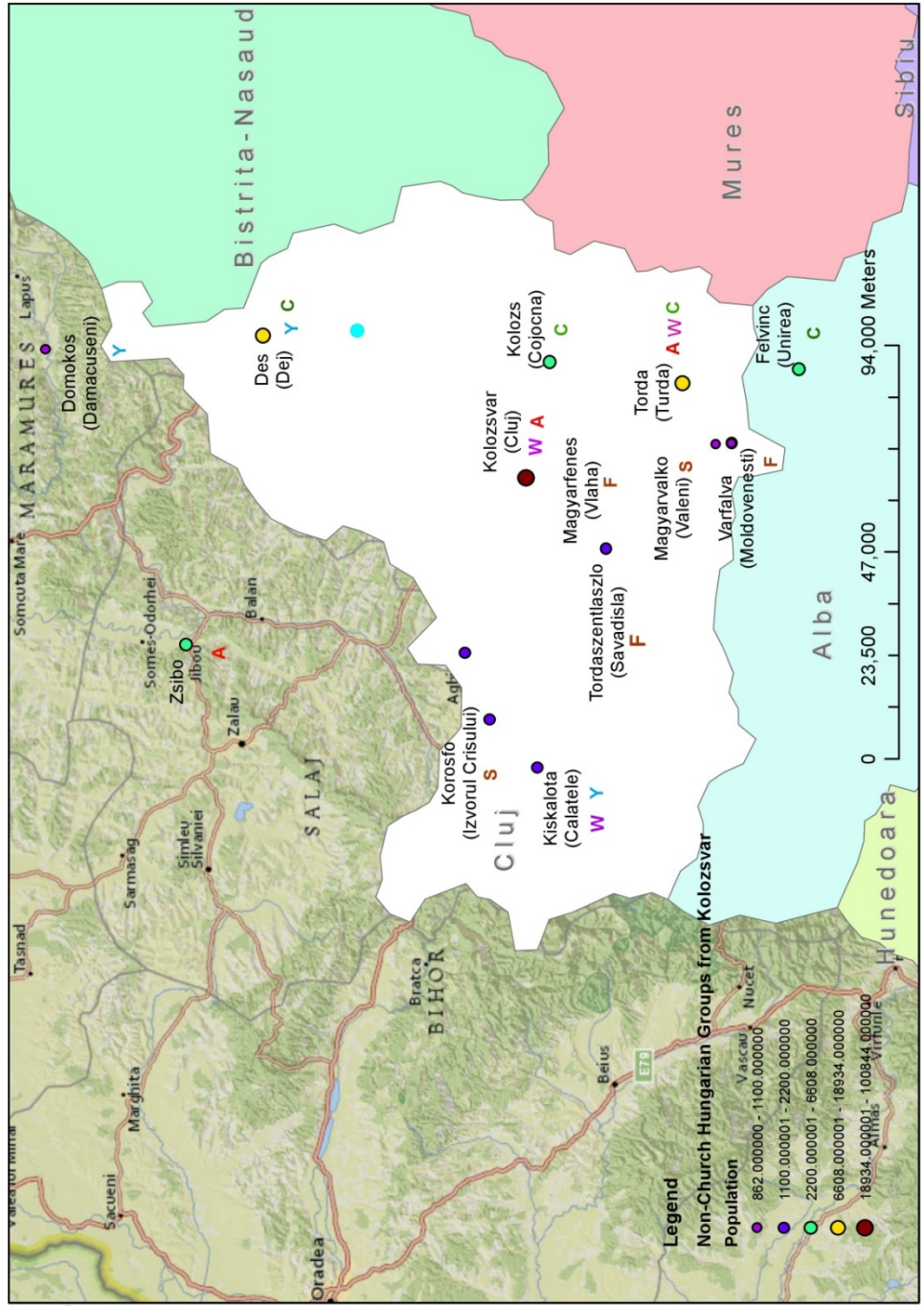


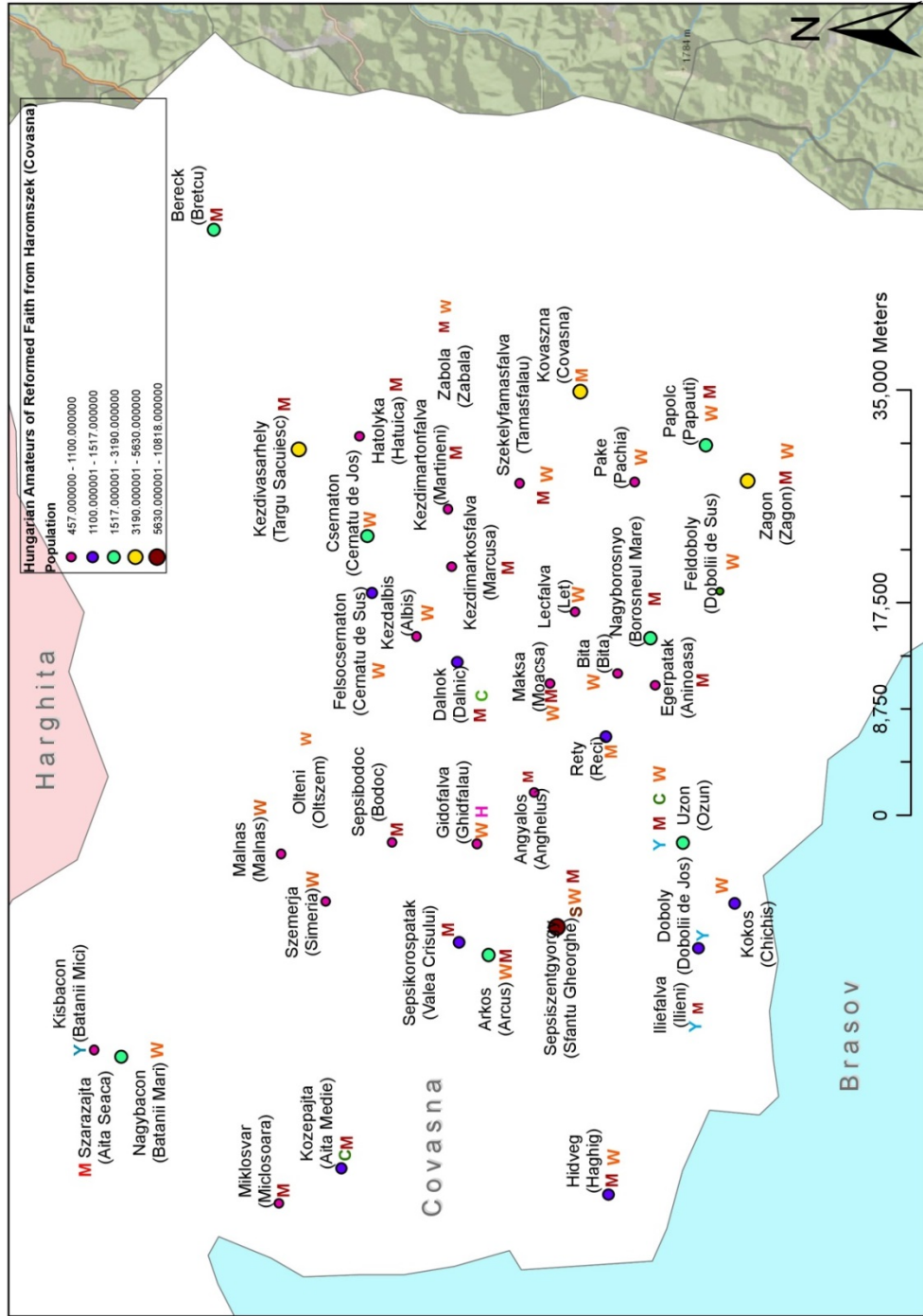


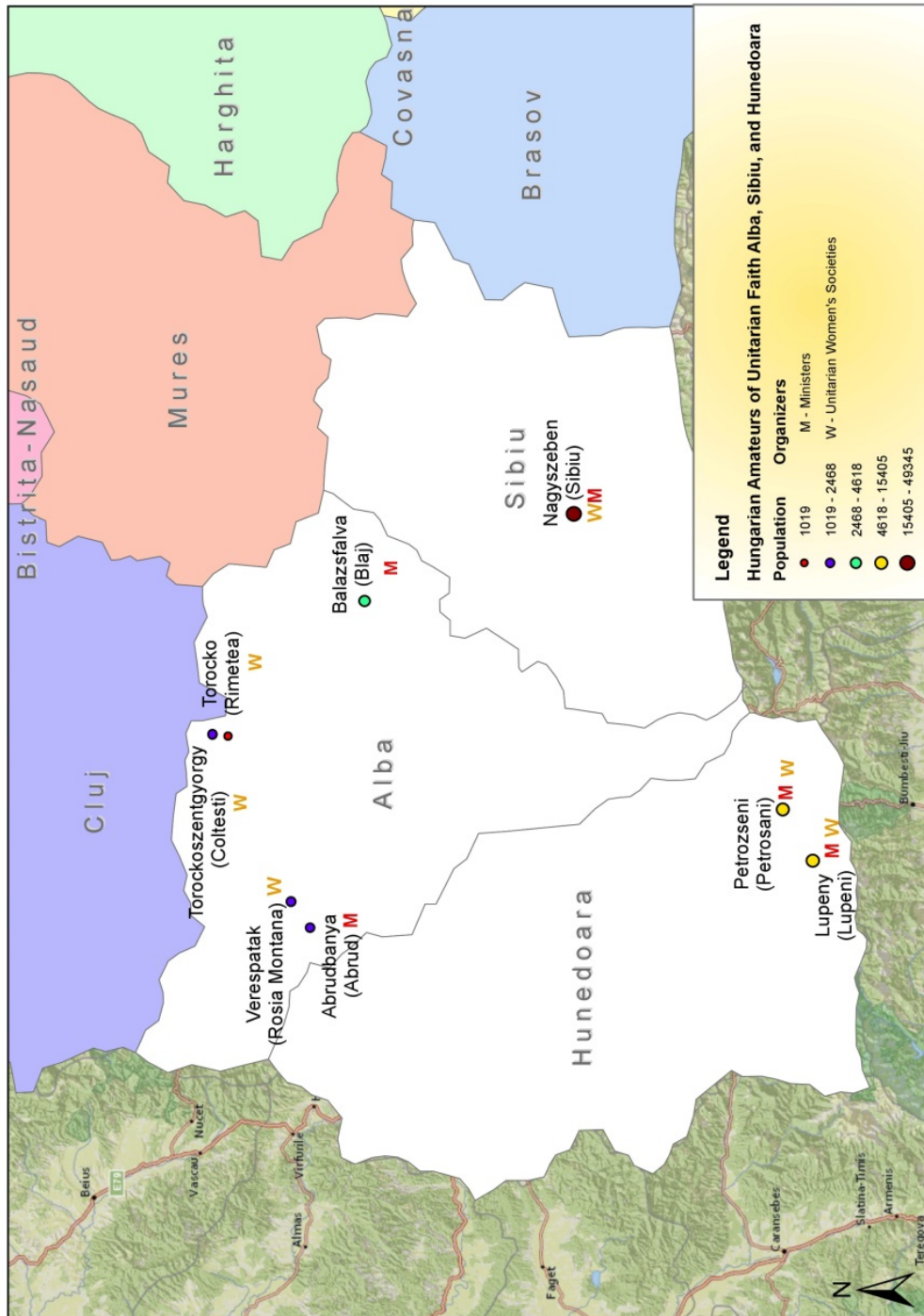


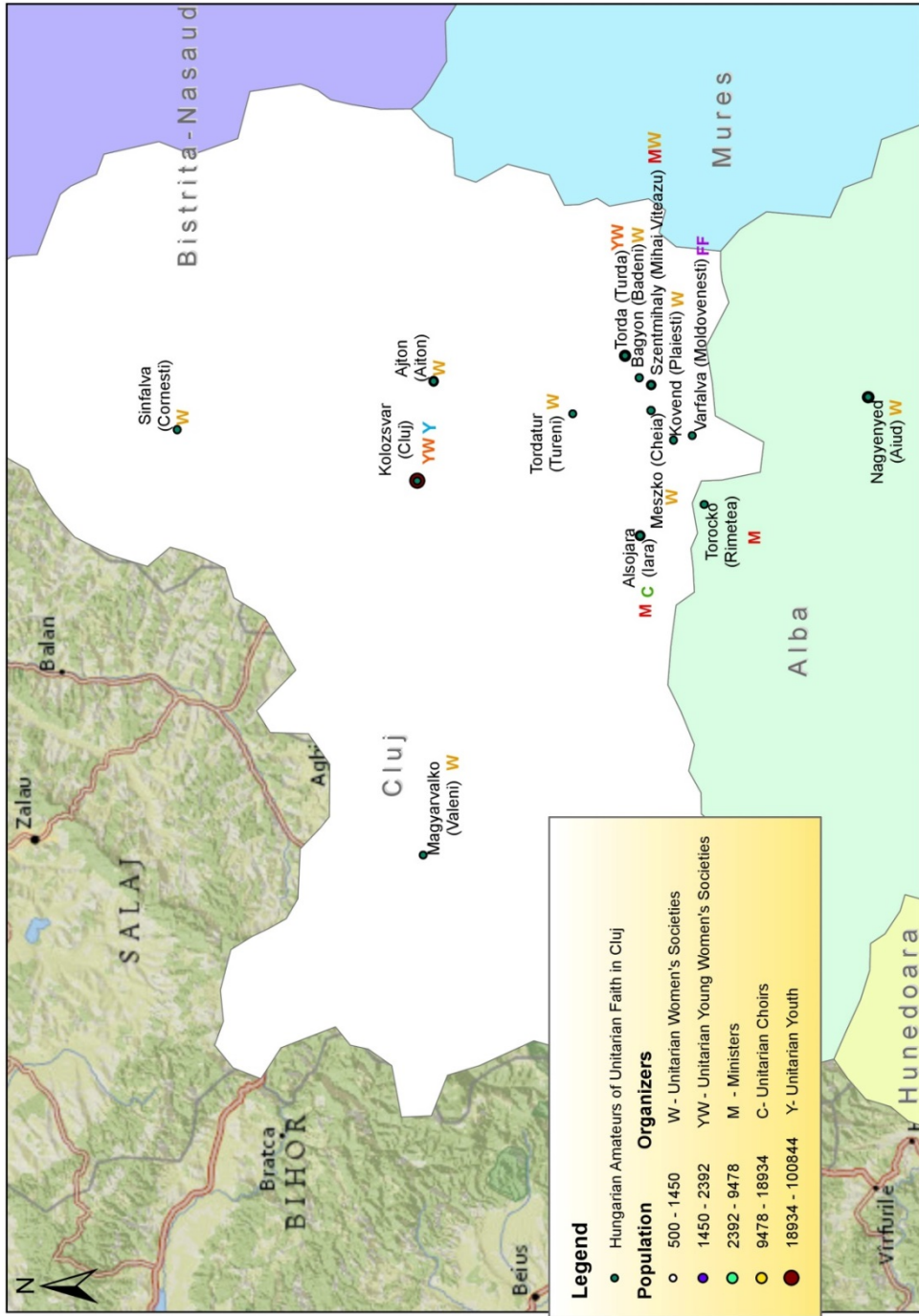


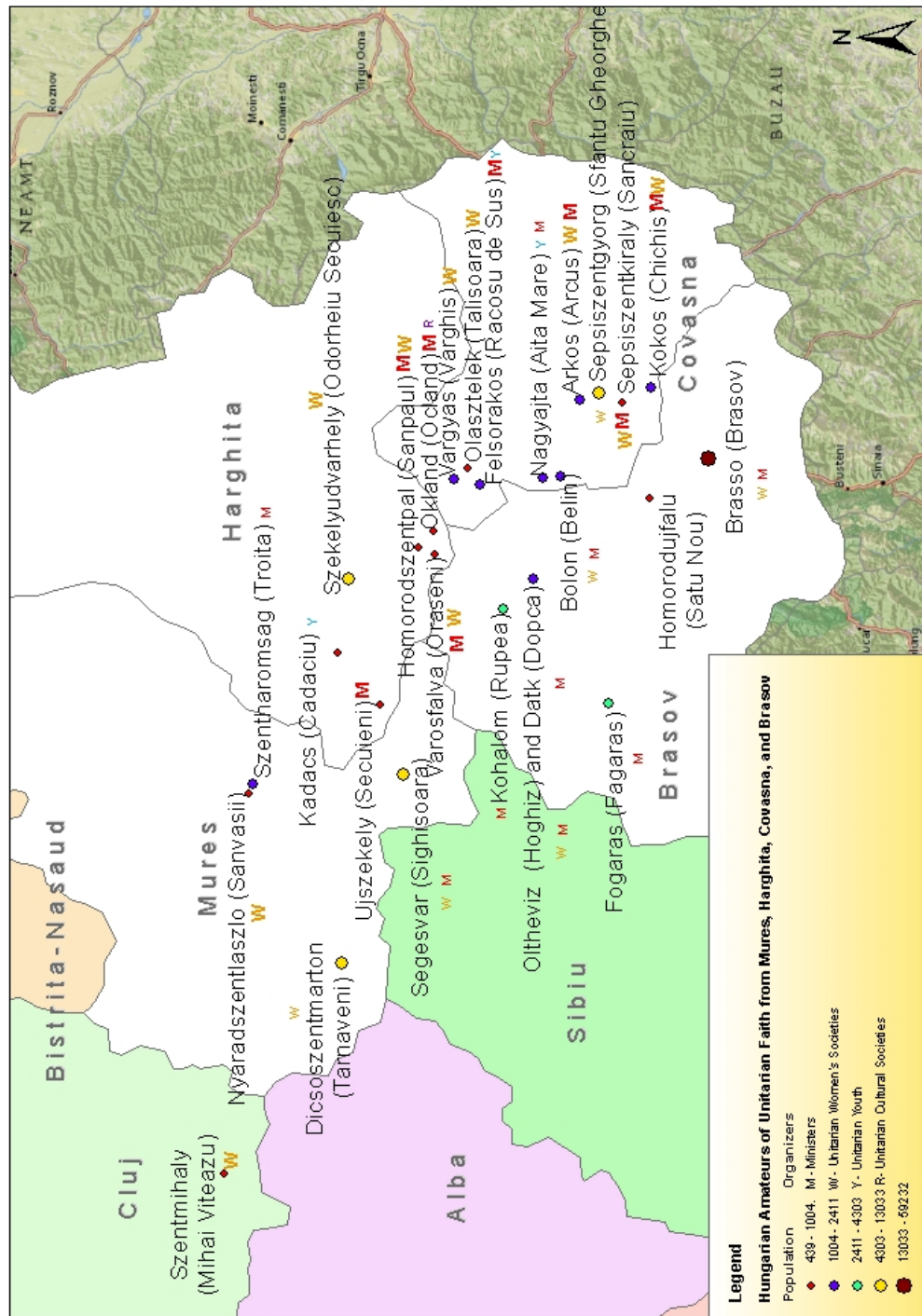












Bibliography

I. Sources

Unpublished:

Romanian National Archives in Bucharest (DANIC – Direcția Arhivelor Naționale Istorice Centrale):

- Fond Ministerul Culte și Instrucțiune, 1917-1919
- Fond Ministerul Instrucțiunii Publice, 1920-1924
- Fond Ministerul Artelor, 1903-1924
- Fond Ministerul de Interne, 1911-1920
- Fond Ministerul Artelor și Cultelor, 1921-1932
- Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, Direcția Generală a Artelor, 1920-1929
- Fond Ministerul de Război, 1900-1952
- Fond Departamentul Artelor, Direcția Educației Poporului din Ministerul Muncii, Sănătății, și Ocrotirii Sociale, 1930-1931
- Fond Ministerul Instrucțiunii, Culte, și Arte, 1931-1936.

Romanian National Archives in Cluj (ANDJ):

- Fond ASTRA, 1900-1930
- Fond Teatrul Național Cluj, 1919-1957
- Fond Teatrul Maghiar Cluj, 1802-1942.

The National Theater of Bucharest Archive (Arhiva Teatrului Național București), Inventarul Materialelor Documentare ale Teatrului Național “I.L. Caragiale,” ale Studioului din București pe anii 1857-1948.

EME of Cluj (Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület – Transylvanian Museum Society), Biblioteca de pe Str. Lăcătușului:

- Papers of Jenő Janovics
- Papers of György Bözödi.

EME of Cluj, Biblioteca Jordáky:

Papers and materials on theater collected by Lajos Jordáky (Colecția personală de materiale teatrale a lui Lajos Jordáky).

Biblioteca Centrală Universitară din Cluj-Napoca:

Colecția Fonduri Speciale

Kultur- und Begegnungszentrum "Friedrich Teutsch" der Evangelischen Kirche A.B. in
Rumanien, Zentralarchiv, Hermannstadt:

Fond Hohndorf

Fond Schonberg

Fond Nußbach

Fond Großpold

Fond Hannenheim.

Published

Ornea, Zigu. *Titu Maiorescu și Prima Generație de Maioresceni, Corespondență, Documente Literare*. București: Ed. Minerva, 1978.

Popeangă, Vasile, Lițiu, Gheorghe (eds.). *Roman R. Ciorogariu (1852-1936) Studii și Documente*. Oradea: Episcopia Ortodoxă Română Oradea, 1981.

Az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület, Közgyűlésének, Jegyzőkönyve, 1927 évi Augusztus Hó 13-15 Napjain Tartott Rendes. Kolozsvár: Minerva, 1927.

Részletezés a Közgyűlés A Mult 1898.évi közgyűlésjegyzőkönyve.

A Közgyűlés Jegyzőkönyve. A múlt 1898. Évi.

II. Journals and Periodicals

Romanian

Luceafărul, Revista pentru Propășire Culturală și Armonie Socială, Organ al Asociației Învățătorilor din Orașul Sibiu, 1934-1939, Sibiu.

Învățătorul, Organul Asociației Învățătorilor Români din Ardeal, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș (Revistă pedagogică), 1919-1936, Cluj.

Renașterea: organ național-bisericesc săptămânal: Organul Oficial al Eparhiei Ortodoxe Române a Vadului, Feleacului, Geoagiului și Clujului, 1922-1948, Cluj.

Transilvania, Revista Lunară de Cultură, 1868-1946, Cluj.

Societatea de Mâine, 1924-1945, Cluj.

Revista Generală a Invățământului, 1905-1948, București.

Revista Teologică, 1907-1947, Sibiu.

Țara Noastră, 1920-1938, Cluj.

Arieșul, Organ al Partidului Poporului, 1926-1934, Turda.

Telegraful Român.1853- Sibiu.

Hungarian

Az Erdélyi Irodalmi Szemle, 1924-1929, Kolozsvár.

Erdélyi Magyar Református Naptar, 1931, Kolozsvár.

Hítel, Nemzetpolitikai Szemle, 1935-1944, Kolozsvár.

Katolikus Világ, Keresztény Népművelő Folyóirat, 1923-1946, Kolozsvár.
Keleti Újság, 1918-1944, Kolozsvár.
Kévekötés, Unitárius Ifjúsági Folyóirat. 1929-1938, Kolozsvár.
Korunk, 1926-1940, Kolozsvár.
Művelődés, közművelődési folyóirat, 1968 - , Kolozsvár.
Nyugat. 1908-1941, Budapest.
Pásztortűz, Erdélyi Irodalmi és Művészeti Folyóirat, 1921-1944, Kolozsvár.
Református Szemle, 1906-1978, Kolozsvár.
Unitárius Közlöny, 1888-1948, Kolozsvár.
Unitárius Egyház Ifjúsági Melléklete, 1920s-1930s, Kolozsvár.
Színházi Élet, 1911-1938, Budapest.
Saxon
Klingsor: Siebenbürgische Zeitschrift, 1924-1939, Kronstadt.
Sächsischer Hausfreund. Ein Kalender für Siebenbürger zur Unterhaltung und Belehrung, 1851-1913, Kronstadt.
Verein für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, Archiv des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, 1845-1944, Hermannstadt.
Jewish
Hoemesz – Az Igazság, Ortodox Zsidó Hetilap, 1933-1940, Torda.

III. Plays

Romanian

Alecsandri, Vasile. "Arvinte și Pepelea," in *Opere Complete, Partea Înteaia, Teatru, Vol. II, Vodeviluri*. București: Editura Librăriei Socecu, 1875, 820-848.

_____. *Ovidiu*. București: Editura Librăriei Universale Leon Alcalay, 19.....

Bidnei, Ștefan. *Domnu Scriitorăș, Comedie Țărănească în Trei Acte*. Brașov: Editura Librăriei Ioan I. Ciurcu, 1914.

Bisson, Alexandre and André. *Le Contrôleur des Wagons-Lits, comédie en trois actes*. F. Rouft: Paris, 1898.

Cosma, Augustin. *Plinirea Vremii (Mesia), dramă în 6 acte și un prolog*. Tipografia și Librăria Românească: Oradea, 1928.

Cristescu, Florian. *Două Surde, comedie populară în două acte*. 2nd Edition. Editura Cartea Românească: București, 1900s.

Eftimiu, Victor. *Opere, Teatru, Comedii Provinciale, Drame Istorice*. Vol. 5. București: Editura Minerva, 1973.

_____. *Ariciul și Sobolul, fabulă modernă într-un act*. Brașov: Editura Librăriei Ioan I. Ciurcu, 1914.

Legan, M. *Sticla din urmă, comedie*. Adapted by Iuliu Putici. Orăștie: Edit. Librăriei Naționale Sebastian Bornemisa, Tipografia Nouă 'I. Moța', 1912.

Popa, Victor Ion. *Cuiul lui Pepelea, comedie într-un act*. Cartea Satului 10. București: Fundația Culturală Regală "Principele Carol", 1935.

_____. *Mușcata din Fereastră*. București: Vremea, 1929.

Țanțariu, Alexandru. *Soacra Domnului Profesor comedie într-un act*. Editura și Proprietatea Casei de Editură Alexandru Anca: Cluj, 1927.

Vlaicu, Virginia A. *Trei Doctori, comedie într-un act*. Biblioteca Teatrală a Societății pentru Crearea unui Fond de Teatru Român, 5. Brașov: Tiparul Tipografiei Ciurcu Comp, 1898.

Hungarian

Abonyi, Lajos. *A betyár kendője népszínmű dalokkal 6 felvonásban*. Kolozsvár: "Magyar Nép," 1924.

Bálint, Vilmos. *A Dúsgazdag: Bibliai Színjáték, a régi moralitást színpadra*. Kolozsvár: Minerva Ny., 1932.

_____. *A Béketűrő Jób: Bibliai Színjáték*. Kolozsvár: Minerva, 1944.

Berczik, Arpád. *A Parasztkisasszony*. Budapest: 1885.

Eötvös, Károly. *A nagy per, mely ezer éve folyik s még sincs vége*. Budapest: Révai, 1904.

Farkas, Imre. *Nótás Kapitány: operett három felvonásban*. Budapest: Klein Ny, 1929.

Gárdonyi, Géza. *A Bor: Falusi Történet 3 Felvonásban*.

Géczy, István. *Ámit az erdő mesel*. Roth Ferencz Könyvnyomdája, 1901, or Budapest: Bródy, 1923.

_____. *Gyimesi Vadvirág*. Budapest: Brody, 1887.

Harsányi, Zsolt. *A Noszty-fiu esete Tóth Marival, vígjáték 4 felvonásban*. Budapest: Singer és Wolfner Irodalmi Intézet r.-t Műkedvelők Színháza, 1920.

Móricz, Zsigmond, "Hány Óra Zsuzsi," in *Nyugat*, 19, 1922.

Péterffi, Gyula. *Piros Rózsa, Fehér Rózsa*. Turda, Fussy Ny., 1927.

Péczely, Jozsef. *Ködmönke, falusi vígjáték egy felvonásban*. Budapest: Kókai, 1930.

Szakáll, Szőke, "Kelemen Palika," *Színházi Élet* (Budapest, 1923) 30-43, 54-1.

Szigligeti, Ede. *A Cigány: színmű zenével, népdalokkal, tánczczal*. Budapest: Bródy, 1923.

Tóth, Ede. *A Falu Rossza: eredeti népszínmű dalokkal, tánczczal, 3 felvonásban*. Budapest: Kiadja Pfeifer Ferdinánd, 1875

Vadnai, László. "Az ismeretlen tettes," in *Színházi Élet, Színházi Élet különlenyomat*. Budapest, 1927, 115-148.

Vásárhelyi, János. *Hóstáti lakodalom: életkép a kolozsvári földészek esküvőjéről*. Minerva: Kolozsvár, 1933.

Vasvári, Gizella. *Jőjj és Kővess, Evangéliumi Esemény Két Képeben*. Rákospalota: Szalézi Művek, 1928.

Saxon

Arnold, Franz, Bach, Ernst. *Zwangseinquartierung, Schwank in drei Akten*. München: Ahn&Simrock Bühnen- und Musikverlag, 1920.

von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Goethe's Plays*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1980.

Devrient, Otto. *Luther Historisches Charakterbild in 7 Abteilungen, Dargestellt von Burgern und Bürgerinnen der Lutherstadt*. Worms, 1911.

Eissenburger, Josef. *Im Schweiß deines Angesichts, Lustspiel mit Gesang und Tanz in zwei Aufzügen*. Bistriz: Jekeli, 1920.

Freytag, Gustav. *Debit and Credit*. Trans. Christian Charles Josias Bunsen. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1858.

Kraatz, Kurt, Neal, Max. *Der Hochtourist*. Leipzig: Reklam, 1927.

Klöß, Hermann. "Die Braut von Urwegen Tragödie," *Kalendar Siebenburger Volkfreunde*, 49: 23, 1918.

Maly, Anton. *So Starb Stephan Ludwig Roth, Die Letzen Stunden eines Märtyrers, Drei Akte*. Hermannstadt: Honterus Verlag, 1932.

Lienert-Zultner, Grete. *Bäm Brämehen*. Hermannstadt, 1931.

Lienert, Hans. *Dra Fronjderkniecht, Lastspäll än enem Afzeag*. Medwesch: Reissenberger, 1924.

_____. *Hochzeit, Lustspiel in 3 Aufzügen*. Mediasch: Verlag G. U. Reissenberger.

_____. *Et Kitt Him, E Sachsesch Lastspäll än Drän afzäjen*. Medwesch: Gedreakt och Verlocht Bä G. S. Reissenberger, 1921.

_____. *Ratgeber für unsere Dorfbühne*. Schäßburg: Verlag Friedr. J. Horeth, 1925.

Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Minna von Barnhelm, Comedy in Five Acts*. Trans. by Kenneth J. Northcott. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972.

Nestroy, Johann. "Einem Jux will er sich machen, posse mit Gesang in vier Aufzügen," in Mautner, Franz H. (ed.). *Johann Nestroy Komödien, 1838-1845*. Vol. II. Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1970, 435-519.

Reich, Otto. *Der Dani-Misch wid härresch, Lastspäll ä 5 Beldern*. BIRTHÄLM: Klosius, 1933.

_____. *Der Herr seines Willens Schauspiel in 5 Akten*. Dr. jur. Stein & Co: Leipzig, 1921.

_____. *Der Härr Lihrer Kit: Lastspäll än 3 Beldern*. Hermannstadt: Honterus, 1929.

_____. *Wo äs de Trud? Lastspäll ä 4 Beldern*. Sälvtstverl, 1936.

Schuller-Schullerus, Anna. "Gänzelroken" in Michael Markel (ed.) *Ausgewählte Schriften* Bukarest: Kriterion Verlag, 1972, 244-298.

_____. *Kirchenväter vun Hielt*. Hermannstadt: Fritz Teutsch Verlag, 1924.

_____. *Am zwein Kretzer*. Druck und Verlag der Krafft & Drotlef: Hermannstadt, 1923.

Weißenhofer, Robert P. *Die Heilige Elisabeth von Thüringen*. Linz, 1922.

_____. *Die Heilige Elisabeth von Thüringen, Schauspiel in Prosa*. Linz: A. D., 1876.

_____. *Andras Hofer, Volkschauspiel in Acht Abteilungen*. Wien, H. Kirsch: 1893.

Thullner, Ernst. *Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn: Volksstück aus der Vergangenheit der Großpolder*. Hermannstadt: Krafft, 1903.

Sommerfeld, Adolf. *Der Rote Adler*. Bin Friedman: Verlag Continent, 1918.

Wilhelmi, Alexander, *Einer muss heiraten!* H. Holt and Company: New York, 1905.

Jewish

Goldfaden, Abraham. *Sulamith, Jeruzsálem leánya keleti operának összes énekszövegei*. Trans. by Albert Kövessy. Budapest: Löbl, 1899.

IV. Articles and Book Chapters:

Birnbaum, Solomon, A. "The Cultural Structure of East Ashkenazic Jewry" in *Slavonic and East European Review*, 25: 64, 1946, 73-92.

Katzburg, Nathaniel. "Assimilation in Hungary During the Nineteenth Century: Orthodox Positions," in Béla Vágó (ed.) *Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times*, Westview Press: Boulder, Colorado, 1974, 49-55.

Bodó, Márta. "A két világháború közti erdélyi katolikus lapok iskolai színelőadásokra vonatkozó közléseinek vizsgálata", in Botházi, Mária (ed.). *A médiakutatás módszertani követelményei: média szakos doktori hallgatók konferenciája*. Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2007 május 11.

Bindea, T.V. "Condițiile de Muncă și de Traiu ale Muncitorilor din Cluj, Studiu Social-Economic" in *Buletinul Camerei de Muncă Cluj*, 1939, 90.

Binder, Ludwig "Die Evangelische Landeskirche A.B.in Rumänien 1920-1944" in König Walter (ed.) *Siebenbürgen Zwischen den Beiden Weltkriegen*. Wien: Böhlau Verlag Köln Weimar, pp. 237-243.

Bödy, Paul. "Joseph Eötvös and the Modernization of Hungary, 1840-1870, A Study of Ideas of Individuality and Social Pluralism in Modern Politics," in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*. New Series, 62: 2, 1972, pp. 63-97.

Carmilly-Weinberger, Mozes (ed.). "Zsidók Erdely Magyar Kulturajaban," in *A Kolozsvári Zsidóság Emlékkönyve*. New York: Sepher-Hermon Press: 1988.

Ciobanu, Vasile. "Der Beziehungen zwischen Siebenbürger Sachsen and Deutschbalten im Ersten Jahrzehnt der Zwischenkriegszeit" in *Jahrbuch des Baltisches Deutschums*, Lüneburg: 2002.

Carmilly-Weinberger, Moshe. "Communal and Spiritual Resistance of Jews in 1933-1944" in *Studia Judaica*, 2001.

Ceuca, Justin. *Teatrologia Românească Interbelică*. București: Editura Minerva, 1990.

Cohen, Burton. "The Teaching of Deliberation in the Jewish school," in *Studies in Jewish Education*, Vol. II, 1984.

Copilu, Dumitru. "Semnificația unui ecou: În jurul premierei piesei lui Maxim Gorki "Azilul de Noapte" pe scena Teatrului Național din București, in 1915, in *Revista de lingvistică și știință literară*, 2:1957.

Cristescu, Florian. "Însemnări Asupra Învățământului Popular Românesc din Transilvania și Ungaria," in *Albina*, București: 1912.

Dandara, Livia. "Populația evreiască în contextul integrării Transilvaniei în viața economică, socială, politică" *Anale de Istorie*, 1, 1985.

Deline, Michel. "Un Drame Populaire du Comte Léon Tolstoi," in *Révue D'Art Dramatique*. Vol. VI, Avril-Juin 1998, Paris, 151.

Dimény, Attila. "A Kézdivásárhelyi Polgárság Egyesületi Elete a 19. Század Második Felétől a 20. Század Közepéig" in *Acta Siculica*, 2011, 516.

Dobre, Florin. "Protopop Stavrofor Dr. Sebastian Stanca – Micromonografie" in *Revista Teologică*, I, 2006, pp.1-5.

Dopp, Izidor , "Școalele și Orașele noastre sub raport cultural" in *Luceafărul, Revista pentru Propășire Culturală și Armonie Socială, Organ al Asociației Învățătorilor din Orașul Sibiu*, I:1-2-3, 1934, p. 34.

Dorff, Elliott. "Study leads to Action" in *Religious Education*, LXXV: 2 (March-April 1980), 171-192.

Dragomirescu, Mihail, "Un Minister al Culturii" in *Românimea Culturală*, I: 4, Duminică, 17/20 Mar. 1919, p.1.

Filtsch, Eugen. "Geschichte des Deutschen Theaters in Siebenbürgen" in *Archiv des Vereines für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, New Edition, Vol. 23: 2, Hermannstadt: 1891, pp.515-590.

Gaal, György, "Az erdélyi zsidóság az első világháborút követő időszakban. Beilleszkedés a két világháborút közötti romániai viszonyokba," *Korunk*, 8-9:1991.

Gidó, Attila. "Instituțiile evreiești interbelice din Transilvania," in *Studia Universitatis Babeș - Bolyai. Historia*, 1-2, 2003.

_____. "Cadrele instituționale ale reprezentării intereselor politice evreiești din Transilvania interbelică," in Vasile Ciobanu, Sorin Radu (eds.) *Partide politice și minorități naționale din România în secolul XX*, Sibiu: Technomedia, 2009.

Glück, Eugen. "Jewish Elementary Education in Transylvania (1848-1918) in *Studia Judaica* Vol. II, 1993.

Goldberg, Moses. "The Pedagogue in Eastern European Children's Theater" in *Educational Theater Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Mar. 1972.

Grancea, Mihaela. "Conturarea identității transilvane în zorii modernității. Câteva considerații pe marginea unor evenimente și fapte de cultură" in Stanciu, Laura, Roman-Negoi, Ana-Maria, Rosu, T. (eds.). *Reconstituiri Istorice, Idei, Cuvinte, Reprezentări. Omagiu Profesorului Iacob Mârza*.

Hajdu, Péter. "Noszty Feri Alakváltozásai" in Orsolya, Milián (ed.). *A Noszty Fiú Esete Tóth Marival, Tanulmányok*. Budapest-Szeged: Gondolat Kiadói Kör- Pompeji.

Hitchins, Keith. "Erdelyi Fiatalok: The Hungarian Village and Hungarian Identity in Transylvania in the 1930s" in *Hungarian Studies* 21: 1-2, 2007, 87-89.

Hitchins, Keith. "Religion and Identity in Interwar Romania: Orthodoxism" in From Identity and Destiny: Ideas and Ideology in Interwar Romania: Plural, 29/1 (2007), 25-44.

_____. "Andrieu Șaguna and the Restoration of the Rumanian Orthodox Metropolis in Transylvania, 1846-1868." *Balkan Studies*, 6, 1965, 20.

_____. A rev. of Z. Ornea's *Sămănătorismul*, in *Slavic Review*, 30: 4 (1971).

_____. "Mutual Benefit Societies in Hungary, 1830-1941," in *International Social Security Review*, vol. 46, 3/1993, 79.

_____. "The Romanian Socialists in Hungary, 1903-1918", in *Slavic Review*, Vol, 35, no. 1 (Mar. 1976), 73.

_____. "Autonomies in Interwar Romania: Hungarians, Saxons, and Jews," unpublished paper, 4.

_____. "The Challenge of Modernism in Interwar Southeastern Europe: The Orthodox Response" in Spinei, Victor, Cliveti, Gheorghe, (eds.) *Historia sub Specie Aeternitatis, In Honorem Magistri Alexandru Zub*. București - Brăila, 2009.

_____. "Orthodoxism: Polemics Over Ethnicity and Religion in Interwar Romania" in Katherine Verdery and Ivo Banac (eds.) *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe* (Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995) 141.

_____. "Gândirea: Nationalism in a Spiritual Guise in Kenneth Jowitt (ed.) *Social Change in Romania, 1860-1940, A Debate on Development in a European Nation* (Institute of International Studies: Berkeley, 1978), 149.

Hutchinson, John. "Cultural Nationalism and Moral Regeneration" in Hutchinson, John, Smith, Anthony D. (ed.). *Nationalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 123-131.

Itu, Maria, Potorac, Elena. "Momente din Istoria Școlilor de Adulte din România", în Șoitu, Laurentiu, *Educația Adulților*. București: Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, 1968, 345.

Joița, Diana, "Drepturile minorităților naționale în administrarea publică locală din România (1925-2001) *Hrisovul*, XIII, 2007, 159.

Kampf, Leopold. "Le Grand Soir" in *L'Illustration Théâtrale, Journal d'actualités dramatiques*, 8, 8 Février 1908.

Kauf-Nietsch, Eléonore. *Femme et société dans l'oeuvre de Ludwig Thoma*. Thèse de doctorat, Etud. Germaniques: Paris 4 : 1992.

Klein, Bernard. "The Decline of a Sephardic Community in Transylvania, in Langnas, Izaak A. and Sholod, Barton (eds.) *Studies in Honor of M. J. Bernadette. Essays in Hispanic and Sephardic Cultures*. New York: Las Americas Publishing Co., 1965.

Klein, Karl Kurt. *Literaturgeschichte des Deutschtums im Ausland, Schriftum und Geistesleben der Deutschen Volksgruppen im Ausland vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. Bibliographisches Institut AG: Leipzig: 1939.

Konrád, Miklós. "A neológ zsidóság útkeresése a századfordulón," *Századok* 2005/6.

von Kraus, Ernst. "Zeidner erinnert sich: Kindheits- und Jugenderinnerungen, angeregt durch das Buch von Franz Buhn Laintheater in Zeiden," in *Zeidner Gruß, Heimatblatt der Zeidner Nachbarschaft*, 2008, no. 1, 41.

Lupovitch, Howard. "Between Orthodox Judaism and Neology: The Origins of the Status Quo Movement," *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 9 Nr. 2, Winter.2003.

Maiorescu, Titu. "Against the contemporary direction in Romanian culture" (Împotriva Direcției de Astăzi în Cultura Română), in *Convorbiri Literare*, II: 19, (Dec. 1868).

Măran, Mircea. *Nicolae Țânțariu*. Panciova, 2012.

_____. *Vladimirovat, Petrovasala, Pagini de Istorie Culturală, Amatorism Cultural, Folclor Literar și Muzical*. Editura Fundației Atom: Novi Sad, 1998.

Markel, Michael. "Expressionismus in der Rumäniendeutschen Literatur Rezeption, Erscheinungsweise und Lokale Interferenzen" in Schwob, Anton and Tontsche, Brigitte (eds.) *Die Siebenbürgisch-Deutsche Literatur als Beispiel Einer Regionalliteratur*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1993, 177-.

Möckel, Andreas. "Kleinsächsisch oder Alldeutsch? Zum selbst verstandnis der Siebenbürger Sachsen von 1876 bis 1933", in König, Walter (ed.) *Siebenbürgen Zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen*. Böhlau Verlag: Köln, 1994, 29.

Motzan, Peter, "Die Szenerien des Randes: Region, Insel, Minderheit, Die Deutsche(n) Literatur(en) in Rumänien nach 1918 – ein kompilatorisches Beschreibungsmodell" in Grunewald, Eckhard, Sienerth, Stefan (eds.). *Deutsche Literatur im östlichen un südostlichen Europa, Konzepte und Methoden der Geschichtsschreibung und Lexikographie*. München: Verlag Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1997, 81.

Pavel, Tudor. "Români Transilvăneni și curentul politic social-creștin la popoarele din Centrul Europei in primul deceniu al sec. 20" in *300 de ani de la Unirea Bisericii Românești din Transilvania cu Biserica Romei. Actele Colocviului International din Nov. 23-25, 2000*. Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj, 2000, 290.

Pervain, Iosif. "Societatea Diletanților "Teatrali" din Cluj," *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai: Series Philologia*. Fasciculus 1, 1962, Cluj, 56-63.

Popkin, Henry. "Theater in Eastern Europe," *The Tulane Drama Review*, 11: 3 (Spring 1967), 40-46.

Roth, Arnold. "Theaterkrise und Laienspiele" in *Klingsor: Siebenbürgische Zeitschrift*, Vol XI, nr. 12, 1934.

Rotman, Liviu. "Tipologia Învățământului Evreiesc în a doua Jumătate a Secolului al-XIX-lea și la începutul secolului al XX-lea" in *Studia et acta historiae Iudaeorum Romaniae*, Vol. 5, 2000.

Rüdiger, Hermann. "Richard Csaki (1886-1943), Gedenkrede," in *Deutschum im Ausland (Stuttgart: Deutschen Ausland-Instituts 1944, 2.*

Schimmel, Solomon, "Ethical Dimensions of the Traditional Jewish Education" in *Studies in Jewish Education*, vol. I, 1983.

Simionescu, I. "Cultura Populară" in Nicolae Iorga (et al, eds.) *Politica Culturii, Treizeci Prelegeri Publice și Comunicări Organizate de Institutul Social Român* (Bucuresti, 1927), 387.

Stampfer, Shaul. "Heder Study, Knowledge of Torah, and the Maintenance of Social Stratification in Traditional East European Jewish Society," in *Studies in Jewish Education*, Vol. 3, Jerusalem, 1988.

Stevens, Mitchell L., "Culture and Education" in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 619, Sept. 2008, 99

Stampfer, Shaul. "Heder Study, Knowledge of Torah, and the Maintenance of Social Stratification in Traditional East European Jewish Society," in *Studies in Jewish Education*, vol. III, 1988.

Szabó, László. "Stradivari - Szántó György regénye" in *Nyugat*, 1-12:1934 (Januar-Junius), Vol.1.

Szabó, Zoltán Tibori. "Zsidlic- Istoria Liceului Evreiesc din Cluj (I), in *Babel*, Oct. 12, 2013.

Tontsch, Günther H. "Legiferarea Statutară și Jurisdicția ca atribuții fundamentale ale Universității Săsești" in *Transilvania și Sașii Ardeleni in Istoriografie*. Sibiu: Editura Hora , 2001, 56.

Varga, Éva, "A cseperkekalap' K. Pap János színművei" in *Somogyi múzeumok közleményei*, 1992. 9. évf. 233-248. old.

Varga, Marcel, "Activitatea Reprezentanților Partidelor Minorităților Etnice în Parlamentul României," in *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Contemporană*, Serie Nouă, Vol. VII, 2008.

Vlaicu, Monica. "Zur Geschichte des Hermannstädter Theaters" in Nazare, Daniel, Nazare, Ruxandra, Popovici, Bogdan F. (eds.). *In Honorem Gernot Nußbacher*. Braşov: Editura Foton, 2004), 445.

Verdery, Katherine. "The Unmaking of an Ethnic Collectivity: Transylvania's Germans" in *American Ethnologist*, 12:1, (Spring, 1985), 63.

Wittstock, Joachim. "Ernst Thullner" in Carl Gollner, Joachim Wittstock (eds.). *Die Literatur des Siebenburger Sachsen in den Jahren 1849-1918*. Bucureşti: Kriterion Verlag, 1979.

_____. "Eine Widersprüchliches Erbe zur Siebenbürgischen Literatur in der Ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Bestrebungen, Leistungen, Folgen" in Schwob, Anton, Tontsch, Brigitte (eds.) *Die Siebenbürgisch-Deutsche Literatur als Beispiel Einer Regionalliteratur*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1993.

Wolff, Stefan (ed.). *German Minorities in Europe: Ethnic Identity and Cultural Belonging*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000.

Zach, Cornelius R "Der Status der Siebenbürger Sachsen in Rumänien – Gesetzliche Verankerung und Wirklichkeit, 1919-1933," in Hösch, Edgar, Seewann, Gerhard (eds.). *Aspekte Ethnischer Identität, Ergebnisse des Forschungsprojekts "Deutsche und Magyaren als nationale Minderheiten im Donaauraum"*. München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1991, 237.

Zillich, Heinrich. "Zur Deutschen Theaterfrage in Siebenbürgen" in Klingsor, Jähr 1, Heft 2, Mai 1924.

"Should Purim be Revived?" *Education in Judaism*, vol. 12, March 1965.

V. Books:

Academia Română. *Dicţionarul General al Literaturii Române, A/B*. Bucureşti: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004.

Az Akadémiai Értesítő és a Magyar Tudomány Indexe, 1840-1940. Budapest: MTA, 1975.

Az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Cluj-Kolozsvárt 1927 Évi Augusztus Hó 13 - 15 Napjain Tartott Rendes Közgyűlésének Jegyzőkönyve. Kolozsvár: Minerva Irodalmi És Nyomdai Müintézet R.-T. Könyvsajtója, 1927.

Analele Academiei Române. Partea Administrativă și Dezbaterile. Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Göbl: București, 1901.

Alecsandri, Vasile. *Opere.* Vol. 5 Drame. Chișinău: Editura Hyperion, 1991.

Alterescu, Simion. *Istoria Teatrului în România, 1919-1944.* 3 Vols. București: Editura Academiei R.S.R, 1965-1973.

Apetroaie, Nina. *Ion Minulescu Monografie.* Galați: Editura Porto-Franco, 1996.

Bainton, Roland. *Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther.* New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950.

Balázs, Orbán. *A Székelyföld leírása történelmi, régészeti, természetrajzi s népismei szempontból.* Illyés Elemér: 1981.

Balogh, Júlia. *Az Erdélyi hatalomváltás És Magyar Közoktatás, 1918-1928.* Budapest: Püski, 1996.

Balogh, Edgár, Benkő, Samu (eds.). *Romániai magyar irodalmi lexikon: Szépirodalom, közirás, tudományos irodalom, művelődés I. (A–F).* Bukarest: Kriterion, 1981.

Barabás, György. *Magyarországi Zsidó Hitközségek Egyletek Tarsulatok Éves Beszámolói (1629-2008).* Budapest: Zsidó Tudományok Szabadegyeteme, 2009).

Boia, Lucian. *Relationships between Romanians, Czechs, and Slovaks, 1848-1914.* Bucharest: 1977.

Brockett, Oscar. *History of the Theater* Boston: Allyn and Bacon: Boston, 1968.

Bárdi, Nándor. *Otthon és haza Tanulmányok a romániai magyar kisebbség történetéről.* Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 2013.

Barthmes, Ida (ed.). *Der Agnethler Evangelische Frauenverein, 1883-1932, Bericht, aus Anlaß der Fünfzigjährigen Jubelfeier des Vereins.* Agnetheln: Buchdruckerei H. Maurer, 1933.

Bécsy, Tamás. *Magyar Drámákról 1920-as, 1930-as Évek*. Budapest: Dialóg Campus Kiadó, 2003.

Benedek, János. *A Cionista Munkásmozgalom, Eszmei És Történeti Fejlődése*. Kolozsvár: Kiadja A Hitachdut Barisszia – Habonim Nösziutja, 1940.

Bercovici, Israil. *O Sută de Ani Teatru Evreiesc în România*. București: Editura Integral, 1998.

Bodó, Márta. *Iskola és Színház, Az Iskoladráma neveléstörténeti és pedagógiai szerepe*. Kolozsvár: Verbum, 2009.

Borcsa, János (ed.). *Kézdiszentléleki Breviárum*. Kézdivásárhely: Ambrozia, 2009.

Brad, Ion. *Emil Isac, un Tribun al Ideilor Noi*. Cluj: Editura Dacia, 1972.

Braham, Randolph L. (ed.). *Hungarian-Jewish Studies*. New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1966.

Bretan, Bianca Doris. *Istoria Presei Sioniste de Limba Română în Perioada 1897-1938*. Presa Universitară Clujeană: Cluj-Napoca, 2010.

Breuer, Mordechai. *Modernity within Tradition, The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

Buteanu, Aurel. *Teatrul Românesc în Ardeal și Banat* (Cluj-Napoca, 1944).

Buzogány, Dezső. *Az Erdélyi IKE Története 1930-ig*. Kolozsvár, 2000.

Câmpean, Ion, Moldovan, V.I. (eds.). *Istorie, Cultură, și Spiritualitate în Spațiul Gherlean*. Kolozsvár: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2007.

Carmilly-Weinberger, Mozes. “Jewish Education in Transylvania in the Days of the Holocaust”, in

_____. (ed.), *A Kolozsvári Zsidóság Emlékkönyve*, New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, Inc, 1988.

_____. (ed.). *Memorial Volume for the Jews of Cluj-Kolozsvár*. New York: 1970.

Ceuca, Justin. *Teatrologia Românească Interbelică*. București: Editura Minerva, 1990.

Chevalier, Jean, Gheerbrant, Alain. *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*. London: Penguin Books, 1994.

Chirilă, Traian. *Reuniunea culturală națională a meseriașilor români din Sibiu la optzeci de ani*. Sibiu, 1946.

Ciobanu, Vasile. *Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei Șașilor Transilvăneni, 1918-1944*. Hora: Sibiu, 2003.

_____. *Identitatea Culturală a Germanilor din România în Perioada Interbelică*. București: Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române, 2012.

Ciorănescu, Al. *Teatrul Românesc în Versuri și Isvoarele lui*. București: Casa Școalelor, 1943.

Crainic, Nichifor. *Spiritualitatea Poeziei Românești*. București: Editura Muzeului Literaturii Române, 1998.

Crohmălniceanu, Ov. S. *Literatura Română între cele două războaie mondiale*. Vol. III. Dramaturgia și Critica Literară. Editura Minerva: București, 1975.

_____. *Literatura Română între Cele Două Războaie Mondiale*. Vol III. Editura Minerva: București, 1975.

Dahinten, Otto. *Geschichte Der Stadt Bistritz in Siebenbürgen*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1988.

Dalinger, Brigitte. *Trauerspiele mit Gesang und Tanz, Zur Ästhetik und Dramaturgie jüdischer Theatertexte*. Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2010.

Davies, Cecil W. *Theater for the People: the Story of the Volksbühne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).

Dénes, Némedi, *Népi szociográfia, 1930-1938*. Budapest: 1985.

Dénes, Tóth. *A Magyar Népszínmű*. Budapest, 1930.

Diós, István. *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon*. Budapest: Szt. István Társ.

Duca, Ion G. *Partidul Național-Liberal și Situațiunea Țării*. București: 1932.

Dubnow, S.M. *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, From the Earliest Times until the Present Day*. Vol. I From the Beginning Until the Death of Alexander I (1825). Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916.

Durot, Nicole. *Ludwig Thoma et Munich: Une Contribution à la vie sociale, politique et culturelle à Munich autour de 1900*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007.

Egyed, Ákos. *Falu, város, civilizáció: fejezetek Erdély gazdaság- és társadalomtörténetéből: 1848-1914*. Kriterion Könyvk, 2002.

Elek, Mózes, Szabó, Imre (eds.). *Száz É a Kegyelet és Jótékonyság Szolgálatában. A Cluji Ort. Chevra Kadisa száz éve 5597-5697*. Cluj: Fraternitas Könyv- és Lapkiadó Rt., 1936.

Ember, Ernő. *A Magyar Népszínmű Története: Tóth Ede Fellépésétől a XIX. Szazad Végéig*. Debrecen: Csáthy Ferenc R. T. Egyetemi Könyvkereskedés, 1934.

Ernő, Ligeti. "Emőd Tamás" *Ararát, Magyar Zsidó Évkönyv Az 1944 Évre*, Budapest: Országos Izr. Leányárvaház, 1944, 55-64.

Fărcășan, Simona, *Între Două Lumi, Intelectuali Evrei de Expresie Română în secolul al XIX-lea*. Cluj –Napoca: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2004.

Feurstein, Michaela, Milchram, Gerhard. *Jüdisches Wien: Stadtpaziergänge*. Wien: Bohlau, 2001.

Fundația Culturală Regală "Principele Carol," *Cartea Echipelor*. București: Fundația Culturală Regală "Principele Carol," 1937.

Fürst, Oszkár (ed.) *Zsidó családi naptár az ... évre*. Cluj: Szilágyi Adolf, 1924.
_____. *Zsidó Történet, Zsidó Kultúra*. Truma Kiadás, 1924.

Lajos Gellért. *Nyitott Szemmel*. Budapest: 1958.

Gershon, David Hundert (ed.). *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, Vol. 2. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Ghent, Ioan. *Administrația Bisericească*. Oradea Mare: Tipografia Nagyvarad, 1912.

Gidó, Attila (ed.). *Úton Erdély Zsidó Társadalom- és Nemzetépítési Kísérletek (1918-1940)*. Csíkszereda: ProPrint Könyvkiadó, 2009.

Göllner, Carl, Wittstock, Joachim (eds.). *Die Literatur der Siebenbürger Sachsen in den Jahren 1849-1918: Beiträge zur Geschichte der rumäniendeutschen Dichtung*. Bucharest: Kriterion, 1979.

Gónczi, Lajos. *Székelyudvarhelyi Református Kollegium, Értésítője, 1896/1897.* Székelyudvarhelyi, 1897.

Green, F.C. (ed.). *Molière's Comedies, Vol. 1.* London J.M. Dent & Sons, 1956.

Gyula, Dávid (ed.). *Romániai magyar irodalmi lexikon: Szépirodalom, közírás, tudományos irodalom, művelődés III.* (Kh–M). Bukarest: Kriterion, 1994.

Handler, Andrew (ed.). *Ararat, A collection of Hungarian-Jewish Short Stories.* London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Heinen, Armin. *Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail”, O Contribuție la Problema Fascismului Internațional.* București: Humanitas, 1999.

Hitchins, Keith. *The Romanians, 1774-1866.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 248.

_____. *A Nation Affirmed: the Romanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1860/1914.* Bucharest: The Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999.

_____. *România, 1866-1947.* București: Humanitas, 1994.

Iancu, Carol. *Evreii din România de la Emancipare la Marginalizare (1919-1938).* București: Editura Hasefer, 2000.

Ioachim, Lazăr. *Crișan un sat istoric din Zarand, Studiu Monografic.* Deva: Tipografia Astra, 2007.

Itu, Maria. *Forme Instituționalizate de Educație Populară în România (1859-1918).* București: Editura științifică și enciclopedică: 1981.

Jacobson, David C. *Modern Midrash, The Retelling of Traditional Jewish Narratives by Twentieth Century Hebrew Writers.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.

Jelavich, Charles. *South Slav Nationalisms: Textbooks and Yugoslav Union before 1914* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1990).

Jinga, Victor. *Germanii în Economia Transilvăneană.* (Sibiu : Tipografia “Dacia Traiană” S. A., 1942).

Jólesz, Károly. *Zsidó Hitéleti Kislexikon.* A Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képvisélete Kiádasa: Budapest, 1985.

Jordáky, Lajos. *Janovics Jenő és Poór Lili. Két színész arcképe*. București: Kriterion, 1971.

Kalender des Hermannstadter Kinderschutzvereins Tätigkeitsbericht des Hermannstadter Kinderschutzvereins. Tiparul Tipografiei Georg Haiser, 1932.

Kálmán, Osvát. *Erdélyi Lexikon*. Oradea: Szabadsajtó Könyv- és Lapkiadó Rt, 1928.

Kampf, L. *Farn Shturm, drama fun der Rusisher revolutsyon in 3 Akten*, New York: 1907.

Katz, Jacob. *A House Divided: Orthodoxy and Schism in Nineteenth-Central European Jewry*. London: Brandeis University Press, 1998.

Karl Kurt Klein, *Literaturgeschichte des Deutschums im Ausland, Schriftum und Geistesleben der Deutschen Volksgruppen im Ausland vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut AG, 1939.

Kirchliche Blätter, Evangelische Wochenschrift für die Glaubensgenossen aller Stände ; Monatsschrift der evangelischen Kirche A. B. in Rumänien, 1907-1927.

Kiss, Pál. *Marosvásárhely története*. Budapest: Petri, Egyetemi Ny, 1942.

Kispéter, András. *Gárdonyi Géza*. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1970.

Kovrig, Bennett. "Partitioned nation: Hungarian minorities in Central Europe," in Michael Mandelbaum (ed.). *The new European Diasporas: National Minorities and Conflict in Eastern Europe*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2000, 19-80.

Lengyel, Gábor, *Moderne Rabbinerausbildung in Deutschland und Ungarn, Ungarische Hörer in den deutschen Rabbinerseminaren (1854-1938)*. PhD Dissertation. University of Jewish Studies: Hanover, 2001.

de Lange, Nicholas. *Penguin Dictionary of Judaism*. London: Penguin Books, 2008.

Leppin, Volker, Wien, Ulrich A. (eds.). *Konfessionsbildung und Konfessionskultur in Siebenbürgen in der Frühen Neuzeit. Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des östlichen Europas*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005.

Lükő, Gabor. *A Moldvai Csángók*. Budapest, 2002.

Maksay, Albert. *Jézust követő asszonyok : nőszövetségi kézikönyv : ... a transzilvániai nőszövetség egyházkerületi elnöksége, a kerületi nőszövetség megalakulásának 10. évfordulója alkalmából*. Cluj: Tipografia Grafică, 1938.

Malita, Liviu. *Eu, Scriitorul: Condiția Omului de Litere din Ardeal între cele două războaie*. Cluj-Napoca: Fundația Culturală Română, 1997.

Mally, Lynn. *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917-1938*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.

Mândra, Vicu. *Victor Ion Popa*. Editura Albatros: București, 1975.

Markel, Michael (ed.). *Anna Schuller-Schullerus, Ausgewählte Schriften*. Bukarest: Kriterion Verlag, 1972.

_____. (ed.) *Studien zur Deutschen Literatur aus Siebenbürgen*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Verlag, 1982.

Marton, József, Jakabffy, Tamás. *Az Erdélyi Katolicizmus Századai, Képes Egyházmegye – Történet*, Gyulafehérvár: Gloria, 1999.

Masoff, Ioan. *Teatrul Românesc*. 5 vols. București: 1961-1974.

_____. *Teatrul Românesc, Privire Istorică, Vol. IV*. Editura Minerva: București, 1972.

Mautner, Franz H. (ed.). *Johann Nestroy Komödien, 1838-1845*. Vol. II. Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1970.

Mănuilă, Sabin. *Recensământul General al Populației României din 29 Decembrie 1930*. București: Editura Institutului Central de Statistică, 1940.

Moga, Valer. *“ASTRA” și Societatea, 1918-1930*. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003.

Mendelsohn, Ezra. *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Mechendörfer, Hans. *Das Welagswesen der Siebenbürger Sachsen*. München: Verlag des Südosdeutschen Kulturwerks, 1979.

Mircea, Avram. *Calendarele Sibieni in Limba Germană (sec. 17-20)*. Sibiu: Biblioteca Astra, 1982.

- Moga, Valer. *Astra și Societatea, 1918-1930*. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003.
- Moldovan, Mircea. *Sinagoga - arhitectură a monoteismului*. București: Paideia, 2003.
- Munteanu, Ioan. *Banatul Istoric, 1867-1918, Școala și Biserica*. Timișoara: Excelsior Art, Vol. 3, 2008.
- Murvai, László. *Bárd Oszkár irodalmi munkássága*. Cluj-Napoca: Univ, 1984.
- Musnai, László. *Aiud-Nagyenyed, és Református Egyháza*. Nagyenyed: Nyomatott Keresztes Nagy Imre Könyvnyomdájában, 1936.
- Nica, Radu-Alexandru. *Nostalgia Mitteleuropei: O Istorie a Teatrului German din Sibiu*. Eikon: Cluj-Napoca, 2013.
- Nied, Ernst Georg. *Almenrausch und Jägerblut : die Anfänge des berufsmässigen oberbayerischen Bauerntheaters vor dem ersten Weltkrieg*. München: J. Kitzinger, 1986.
- Pamfil Matei. *ASTRA, Asociațiunea Transilvană pentru Literatura Română și Cultura Poporului Român (1861-1950)*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1986.
- Patai Raphael. *The Jews of Hungary, History, Culture, Psychology*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996.
- Popescu, Ion Apostol. *Literatura Ardeleană Nouă*. București: Fundația Regele Mihai I, 1944.
- Recensământul din 1930: Transilvania, Studia Censuala Transsilvanica*. Presa Universitară Clujeană: Cluj, 2011.
- Ronai, J. *Zion und Ungarn*. Balázsfalva: Selbstverlag des Verfassers 1897.
- Nica, Radu-Alexandru. *Nostalgia Mitteleuropei, O Istorie a Teatrului German din Sibiu*. Eikon: Cluj-Napoca, 2013.
- Oniscu, Georgeta. *Ion Minulescu, Bibliografie*. București: Biblioteca Centrală "M. Eminescu," 1994.
- Ornea, Zigu. *Sămănătorismul*. Editura Minerva: București, 1971.
- Păcurariu, Mircea. *Politica Statului Ungar față de Biserica Românească din Transilvania în perioada dualismului, 1867-1918*. Sibiu, 1986.

- Palotai, Maria. *Pásztortűz, 1921-1944 – egy Erdélyi Irodalmi Folyóirat Története*. Budapest: Argumentum, 2008.
- Păcurariu, Mircea. *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*. București: Univers Enciclopedic, 2006.
- Petrescu, Camil. *Comentarii și Delimitări în Teatru*. București: Editura Eminescu, 1983.
- Petrică, Vasile. *Institutul Teologic Diecezan Ortodox Român, Caransebeș (1865-1927), Contribuții Istorice*. Caransebeș: Editura Episcopiei Caransebeșului, 2005.
- Pintér, Jenő. *Magyar Irodalomtörténete, Tudományos Rendszerezés*. Vol. 7: A Magyar Irodalom a XIX. század utolsó Harmadában. Budapest, 1934.
- Pop, Claudia. *Aspecte ale cărții și lecturii în reviste literare din Transilvania (1848-1918)*. Biblioteca București, 2010.
- Poptamas, Dimitrie, Mozes, Julia. *Publicațiile Mureșene, 1795-1972, Bibliografie Monografică*. Târgu-Mureș: Biblioteca Județeană Mureș, 2000.
- Ravitzky, Aviezer. *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Roshwald, Aviel, Stites, Richard, Winter, Jay (eds.). *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914–1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Rotman, Liviu. *Școala Israelito-Română (1851-1914)*. București: Editura Hasefer, 1999.
- Roșca, Eusebiu. *Monografia Institutului Seminarial-Teologic-Pedagogic Andreian, al Arhidiecezei Greco-Ortodoxe Române din Transilvania*. Sibiu: Tiparul Tipografiei Arhidiecezane, 1911.
- Sandrow, Nahma (ed.). *God, Man, and Devil, Yiddish Plays in Translation*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999.
- Sas, Péter. *Az Erdélyi Római-Katolikus Egyház (1900-1948)*
- Schuller, Ute Monika. *Der Coetus am Honterus-Gymnasium zu Kronstadt in Siebenbürgen, 1544-1941*. Verlegt bei Hans Meschendörfer: München, 1963.
- Schriftsteller-Lexikon der Siebenbürger Deutschen*. Böhlau Verlag: Köln, 1983, Vol. IV.

Schuller-Anger, Horst. *Kontakt und Wirkung. Literarische Tendenzen in der Siebenbürgischen Kulturzeitschrift "Klingsor."* Bukarest: Kriterion Verlag, 1994.

Schullerus, Adolf. *Siebenbürgisch-Sächsische Volkskunde im Umriss.* Editura Meronia: București, 2003.

Scridon, G., Domșa, I., Bugnariu, T. (eds.). *George Coșbuc.* București: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1965.

Scurtu, Ioan, Boar, Liviu (eds.) *Minoritățile Naționale din România: Culegere de Documente.* Vol II. București: Editura Arhivele Statului din România, 1995.

Scurtu, Ioan, Dordea, Ioan (eds.) *Minoritățile Naționale din România, 1931-1938.* București: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1999.

Sebestyén, Mihály. *A Marosvásárhelyi Ev. Református Kollégium történetéből: 1895-1944, Fejezetek, folyamatok, és értelmezések.* Marosvásárhely: Mentor Kiadó, 2006.

Senelick, Laurence. *Theater in Europe, a Documentary History, National Theater in Northern and Eastern Europe, 1746-1900.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Michael Silber. "Towards the Cultural Profile of Nineteenth Century Hungarian Jewry, A Quantitative Survey." Paper presented at the Conference on Social Issues of Central European Jewry, Paris, 20-22 August 1985.

Silverman, Lisa. *Becoming Austrians: Jews and Culture between the World Wars.* Oxford: 2012.

Simion, Eugen (ed.). *Dicționarul General al Literaturii Române, A/B.* București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2004, 68.

Smântânescu, Dan. *Mișcarea Sămănătoristă, Studiu Istoric-Literar.* Bucovina, 1933.

Streja, Aristide, Schwarz, Lucian. *Sinagoga în România.* București: Editura Hasefer, 2009.

Szabó, Imre. *Erdélyi Zsidói Talmudisták, Chaszidok, Cionisták.* Kolozsvár: Kadima Kiadas, 1938.

Szabolcsi, Miklós. *A Magyar Irodalom Története 1919-tole Napjainkig.* Vol. 6. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1966.

Szántó, György. *Stradivari, Regeny.* Genius Kiadas: Budapest, 2 Vols, 1935.

Szinnyei, József. *Magyar írók élete és munkái*. Vol XIII. Budapest: Hornyánszky. 1909

Toth, Szilárd. *Partidul Maghiar și problema minorității maghiare în Parlamentul României în perioada interbelică*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2008.

Trausch, Joseph (ed.). *Schriftsteller-Lexikon der Siebenbürger Deutschen*, Band I.

Újvari, Peter (ed.). *Magyar Zsidó Léxikon*. Budapest: A Magyar Zsidó Lexikon Kiadása, 1929.

Ursuțiu, Claudia. *Senatori și Deputați Evrei în Parlamentul României (1919-1931)*. Cluj- Napoca: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2006.

Valjean, Despina, Potopin, Ion (eds.) *I. Valjean, Generația de Sacrificiu, Teatru*. Editura Minerva: București, 1985.

Velica, Ioan. *Pagini din Istoria Evreilor din Valea Jiului*. Petroșani: Editura Edyro Press, 2006.

Vencel Biró. *A Báthory-Apor Szeminárium Értesítője, Az 1928/29 – 1934/35. Tanévekről*. Cluj: Gloria Könyvnyomda, 1935.

Venetianer, Lajos. *A Magyar Zsidóság Története A Honfoglalástól A Világháború Kotöréséig, különös Tekintettel Gazdasági és Művelődési Fejlődésére*. Budapest; Fővárosi Könyvkiadó R-T, 1922.

Wagner, Ernst. *Historisch-Staatistisches Ortsnamenbuch für Siebenburgen, Mit einer Einführung in die historische Statistik des Landes*. Bohlau Verlag: Koln, Wien, 1977.