MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI ȘI CERCETĂRII
UNIVERSITATEA DE ARTE DIN TÂRGU MUREȘ

ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ TEATRU ȘI ARTELE SPECTACOLULUI

TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT

Rezumat lb. engleză

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2025

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1. Personal motivation

In 2011, I obtained my acting degree at the University of Arts of Târgu-Mureș. Over the following eleven years, I was able to experience not only on stage but also in the everyday life of the theatrical milieu what it means to be an actress in Transylvania. Through both my own experiences and my close attention to professional discourse, it became strikingly clear to me that when the history of theatrical art in Transylvania is discussed, the mention of female creators is far rarer than that of their male counterparts. It is an everyday experience that male actors have found it easier to gain professional recognition and attain leadership positions. As an actress, I have repeatedly experienced that women's work was pushed into the background by the narrative built around male creators. This realization deepened in me the intention to examine in my research the visibility of female actors in the Transylvanian theatrical sphere, as well as to deal in my research with women's theatrical work.

In theatrical public discourse there is still the reflex that upon hearing the word "actor" we associate it with a man, while the designation "actress" marks the female creator separately. This linguistic distinction reflects deep social ingrained patterns and points to the fact that the role of female actors in collective memory is regularly secondary. The history of a theatre is generally organized around male leaders, even when the engines of everyday theatrical life were in many cases women. The names of female actors receive less attention in the press and in official works on theatre history. This is why it is important to reread theatre history from the perspective of female creators.

Katalin Czvikker's study (2016) provides a comprehensive picture of the situation of women working in the Transylvanian Hungarian theatrical sphere, within the interrelations of gender and nation as well as marginality. Relying on the research of Réka Geambașu, the author points out that due to the traditionalism of ethnic minorities, Transylvanian Hungarian women live in a double subordination: their minority status is disadvantageous not only ethnically but also in terms

of gender (Geambașu, 2024; cited by: Czvikker, 2016, p.50). Focusing on the period between 2000 and 2015, the present research examines the leadership and artistic structures of nine Transylvanian Hungarian repertory theatres. Its results show that the top management of theatres is almost exclusively in male hands: in eight out of the nine theatres the director is a man, and there is also significant male dominance among artistic directors.

As a female theatre director, only Katalin Czvikker appears at the head of the Szigligeti Theatre in Oradea, which is a rare exception (Czvikker, 2016, p.51). The artistic creative positions—such as directing, set and costume design, choreography—also remained male-centred. Female directors are almost entirely absent from the full-time staff of the repertory theatres, and only 6% of premieres were entrusted to female directors during the examined decade and a half. Similarly low is the proportion of works by female playwrights staged (Czvikker, 2016, p.52). By contrast, background positions—such as the artistic office and administrative posts—have significantly feminized: the overwhelming majority of artistic/literary secretaries are women. This professional segregation clearly shows that for women it was primarily administrative and support tasks that became accessible within theatrical structures. Based on higher education data, the proportion of women enrolling in theatre programmes has increased significantly in recent decades, particularly in theatre studies and scenography; at the same time, directing and on-stage leadership positions have continued to be typically dominated by men (Czvikker, 2016, p.52).

Overall, Czvikker concludes that a patriarchal system of values persists in the institutional structures of Transylvanian Hungarian theatres, which makes women's professional advancement more difficult. Although social and educational processes show an increase in the number of women in the field of theatre, the actual realization of equal opportunities still seems distant. According to Czvikker, independent theatrical structures and movement- and dance-theatre may offer new opportunities for female creators in the future.

The gender hierarchy of the Transylvanian Hungarian theatrical structures not only reveals current inequalities, but also connects to deeper historical patterns. The institutional invisibility of women and male-centred leadership structures can only be fully understood if we also take into account the political system that for decades has defined women's roles in Romania. The socialist

state officially proclaimed equality between the sexes, but in practice it placed women in the service of state goals: it simultaneously expected full-time employment and full-time motherhood from them. Behind socialism's image of woman, autonomy is pushed into the background; the body and work become instruments. For the interpretation of these mechanisms, feminist philosopher Mihaela Miroiu's systemic analysis provides a fundamental point of reference.

2. The question of women's theatre in Transylvania

In contemporary theatre studies, the concept of women's theatre refers to an institutionalized or creative practice in which female creators play a central role and women's experiences, themes, and life situations become the primary object of artistic expression. This does not necessarily mean the creation of formally "female" theatres—the enforcement of a female perspective can be realized in any artistic milieu if the creators sensitively and consciously reflect on women's life situations and experiences.

The theoretical and historical grounding of women's theatre is closely connected to second wave feminism and to the New Women's History and consciousness-raising movements that grew out of it. The feminist theatre of the 1970s started from the recognition that historical and artistic canons posit male experience as universal, while making women's experiences invisible. Therefore, feminist creators aimed to make women's experience visible through new storytelling methods and structural critique (Cannig, 1993, p.533). From the 1970s onward, the goal of women's theatre historiography was to bring to the surface those creators and roles that had previously remained hidden. Female theatre artists reinterpreted mythical female figures (such as Antigone or Persephone), and, building on their own community experiences, reflected on the shortcomings of patriarchal theatre history (Canning, 1993, p.533). Over time, the concept of women's theatre moved away from an essentialist understanding of a unified "female experience" toward post-structuralist theories, according to which identity and experience are not static but discursively formed and changing phenomena (Canning, 1993, p.534).

This approach also demanded new attention to the documentation of silences, absences, and fragmented female narratives. In Transylvania, during the period 1945–1989, an institutional

women's theatre in this sense could not come into being. The political and cultural frameworks of the time—the nationalization of theatres, the homogenizing impact of socialist ideology—were not conducive either to alternative artistic structures or to the conscious, thematized appearance of female viewpoints. Yet this does not mean that women's creative presence was negligible. In the theatrical operation of the period, actresses—through their individual role creations, stage work, and impact history—were essential agents and shapers of artistic directions. It is important to emphasize that the female perspective can appear not only in women's communities. Women's experiences and problems can become visible even when artists pay sensitive and conscious attention to ensuring that women's lives, feelings, and situations appear authentically in their work—even within mixed creative communities that include both men and women. Charlotte Canning's examples all show that women's theatre is not only a generic or organizational category, but also a sensibility, a method, and a viewpoint. As Linda Nochlin pointed out: the invisibility of women in art history does not stem from a lack of talent, but from structural, institutional obstacles that excluded them from training, publicity, and representation. Societies dominated by men developed rules, norms, and customs that systematically hindered women's artistic unfolding.

Overall, then, women's theatre means not only theatre created by women, but also that creative and spectatorial position capable of making women's experience visible, contextualizing it historically and socially, and at the same time questioning male-centred theatrical traditions. "The fault does not lie in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and in our education (…)." (Nochlin, 1971, pp.5–6).

3. The thesis of the dissertation

The basic thesis of my dissertation is that the female creators of Transylvanian theatres—although they more rarely attain leadership positions formally—fundamentally contribute, through their role creations, stage presence, and company-organizing abilities, to the formation of their theatres' artistic profile and communal character. The work of female actors often remains in the background in the course of official recognitions and summaries of theatre history, yet they function as a determining force: they not only raise the artistic quality of performances, but also

strongly shape the internal cohesion and communal identity of ensembles.

During the research it became clear that the impact of female actors can be assessed not only from an aesthetic point of view: their portrayals carry significant weight in social and cultural terms as well. Through their stage appearance and the sensitive mediation of women's experiences and life situations, women become hidden yet all the more important shapers of theatrical discourse. Through their work, considerations and perspectives often find a place in the theatre that would have been pushed into the background within traditional, male-dominated institutional structures.

The enforcement of a female perspective therefore does not necessarily depend on the existence of formal women's organizations or separate institutions. Rather, it depends on how actresses were able, through their artistic work, to make women's experiences visible, and how far they were able to sensitize the theatre audience and the professional community to these questions. This making-visible—which often took place in hidden or indirect form—contributed to the theatre, as an artistic and communal institution, presenting a richer, more diverse picture of social reality.

4. Scholarly background and theoretical framework

In her famous 1971 essay, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists*?, Linda Nochlin arrived at an insight that remains valid to this day: the absence in art history of "great female creators" does not stem from women being less talented than their male counterparts. The root of the problem lies much more in the structural obstacles of social institutional systems. Societies dominated by men created rules, norms, and customs that systematically hindered women's artistic unfolding. Women could not receive the same training as men, they had no access to the academies, to workshops, to exhibition opportunities, and even when they created, their work was often not taken seriously, or was simply rendered invisible to posterity.
In state-socialist Romania, although women formally—by laws, for example—obtained equal rights, everyday reality differed significantly from this. According to Mihaela Miroiu, the

recognition of equality on paper was not sufficient: the institutional frameworks of public life (politics, economy, culture) and private life (family, relationships) continued to conform to men's needs and interests. Thus women often remained on the periphery of society, and although in principle they could participate in public life, in reality they were relegated to subordinate positions. The Eastern European socialist systems created a specific paradox in this respect. According to the official ideology, women formally enjoyed the same rights as men: they could work, study, vote. However, the fundamental social structures, the distribution of power, and everyday customs did not change substantially. Women's burdens often multiplied: alongside workplace obligations they continued to be responsible for caring for the family and running the household. Thus the real situation behind "formal equality" often reflected a condition of double burdens, structural subordination, and the non-realization of genuine emancipation (Miroiu, 2004, p.73).

Nochlin and Miroiu alike emphasize that women's unfolding was limited not by a lack of talent, but by the social environment, institutional obstacles, and the society's deeply rooted, male-centred organization—and these constraints operated even where, in principle, equality had already been achieved. Charlotte Canning's feminist theatre-historical theory further nuances this problem. Canning points out that women's theatrical experiences were long missing from theatre history, and that each female generation had to reinvent itself in the theatrical world (Canning, 1993, p.529). Feminist theatre historians face a double challenge: on the one hand, how to make women's theatrical achievements visible in historical narratives; on the other, how to do this without having these achievements absorbed into the dominant, patriarchal discourse, thereby losing their resistant potential (Canning, 1993, p.529). In Canning's reading, women's experience becomes a key concept: a historical and analytical category that enables women to appear in art historiography according to their own viewpoints and life experiences. To this end, historians often have to turn to alternative sources—personal letters, marginalized notes, silenced texts—and must apply new interpretive methods. Women's theatre history is often constructed along absence, fragment, resistance, and alternative communal experiences. Women's experiences thus require not only new topics but also new historiographical methods: "Feminist theatre historians who draw upon a variety of theoretical approaches to explore women's experience in theatre often find themselves writing about things that did not happen, events that were not documented, strategic silences, and illegitimate performances." (Canning, 1993, p.536). The thoughts of Canning, Nochlin, and Miroiu

converge in that the invisibility of female creators does not stem from a lack of talent or achievement, but from the male-centred functioning of historiography and institutional structures. The creation of historical and artistic frameworks built upon women's experiences—whether in the visual arts or in theatre—not only supplements the existing canon, but brings forth radically new perspectives and questions that form the basis of feminist critique.

5. The aim and focus of the research

My research originally aimed to map the social position of Transylvanian actresses in a given historical period. My primary questions concerned women's opportunities, visibility, and professional esteem. However, as I immersed myself more and more deeply in the oeuvres of individual actresses and in the history of the theatrical milieu, it became clear to me that it was not sufficient merely to examine their social status. The focus shifted increasingly to the actresses' active, shaping role: to how they influenced theatrical practice, how they shaped their community, and what lasting mark they left on theatrical tradition.

This impact can be grasped most tangibly through the acting work in the performances.

Reconstructing individual portrayals—that is, the detailed analysis of stage productions once created—allows me not only to evaluate the actresses' achievements from an aesthetic perspective, but also to pose questions of social history. How was women's social position reflected in their stage roles? What types of female figures did they present, and what message did these performances convey to the audience about female roles? Thus the research is at once art-historical—since I examine the artistic value of the performances—, theatre-historical—because I situate these portrayals within the broader context of theatrical operation—, and social-historical—as I uncover how the actresses reflected on the social expectations of their era and how they contributed to shaping them.

6. Methodology

In my research I carry out performance reconstruction according to the Philther method, which is one of the most important theoretical approaches in contemporary theatre studies. The Philther perspective starts from the premise that a theatrical performance is not merely the staging of a text, but a complex, autonomous artistic product that arises from the integrated collaboration of various arts—acting, directing, set and costume design, composition, movement art. Therefore, the

performance must be examined in its entirety: not only what was performed, but also how, in what form, with what means, and through what mechanisms of effect. In the course of performance reconstruction.

I strive to use as many surviving sources as possible: contemporary reviews, the recollections of actors and spectators, audio recordings, photographs where they exist, and possibly contemporary promptbooks or other internal documents. Since theatrical performance is fundamentally a transient art—each performance is a unique event that cannot be repeated in its entirety—the surviving sources are always fragmentary. Therefore, the goal is not a simple copy or reproduction, but an interpreted reconstruction: understanding which aesthetic and social questions the given performance responded to, and what cultural and ideological messages it conveyed. My method thus goes beyond the mere description of events. I aim to uncover what artistic means were used to create theatrical productions in the given period; what social problems they reflected on; how the period's aesthetic tastes and systems of value, as well as ideas related to gender roles, power, and community life, were mirrored in them. In this way, performances can be interpreted not only as documents of theatre history, but also as social imprints: they hold up a sensitive mirror to the society and cultural discourses of a given era.

The subject of the research: five female actors
In my dissertation I examine the work of five outstanding female creators:

Szabó Duci (born Szabó Ida): an actress from Târgu-Mureș, founding member of the Székely Theatre, whose figure I feel particularly close to not only from a professional standpoint but also through my personal experiences. I met her before my admission to the Academy of Dramatic Arts: she listened to the repertoire I had prepared for the entrance exam, encouraged and supported me, and gave me a kind of reinforcement that accompanied me in my career for a long time. Particularly memorable to me was a large production photo I saw in Szabó Duci's apartment, which captured the actress's youthful, radiant energy. This image stood in sharp contrast to reality: she sat alone in her small studio apartment, with swollen legs that no longer allowed her to reach not only the stage but scarcely even the entrance of the apartment block. This duality—the past stage vitality and the present physical vulnerability—deeply moved me and fundamentally shaped my relation to the further examination of the actress's oeuvre. Szabó Duci's career profile is an

illustrative example of how an actor's life path can organically intertwine with the artistic development of a theatrical institution. Initially she excelled primarily in the soubrette register, but with the transformation of the Székely Theatre's repertoire—from the dominance of operetta toward psychological realism—she consciously broadened her acting toolkit. She not only adapted to changing theatrical expectations, but with her subtle, natural acting style and gradually deepening stage presence she herself contributed to the formation of the company's new artistic profile. The role of Ilma in the 1957 *Csongor and Tünde* is particularly important in Szabó Duci's career, because in this portrayal traces of the lightness of her earlier soubrette roles are still perceptible, while the psychological nuance that prepares later dramatic characters already appears. The production thus reflects not only Szabó's artistic transition, but also the Székely Theatre's shift in artistic profile, which is why I chose it as the subject of my analysis. Elekes Emma (Satu Mare): an actress from Satu Mare, founding member and defining artist of the Satu Mare theatre. Her figure is close to me not only as an object of professional interest, but also through personal attachment. Through my late dear friend, Ferenc András Kovács—of whom she was the mother—I heard about her on numerous occasions. Whether the recollections came from professionals or laypeople, everyone unanimously emphasized Elekes Emma's exceptional artistic qualities: her distinctive voice, her sensitive and authentic acting, her powerful stage presence, as well as her devoted commitment to the art of theatre. Her career is closely intertwined with the history of the Satu Mare theatre. Her title role in the 1958 production of The Diary of Anne Frank not only brought her national professional success, but also showed how a female actor can, beyond artistic achievement, become a shaping force for a company's identity and cohesion. In shaping Anne Frank, Elekes Emma not only proved her exceptional acting sensitivity, but also her rare ability to present with nuance and authenticity the maturation and development of a young girl. Her portrayal sensitively followed Anne's inner evolution from childlike naivety to the coming-of-age that becomes conscious of a tragic fate, which contributed to the production's deep emotional impact and to the Satu Mare theatre's national professional recognition. At the same time, her career profile highlights that although her talent and artistic potential were indisputable, her career could not unfold fully due to an early and undeserved retirement.

Orosz Lujza (Cluj): to understand her career profile, it is crucial to recognize that her artistic significance lies not only in the roles she played, but even more in the roles she did not. Her relation to the era's prevailing beauty ideals—which even today often remains a decisive criterion in the

evaluation and casting of female actors—resulted in Orosz Lujza being employed primarily as a bit-part or character actress. These categories, however, fell far short of the talent, artistic sensitivity, and acting depth she possessed (Krizsán, 1973, p.10.). Regardless of the size of the tasks, Orosz Lujza worked with extraordinary intensity and professional rigour. Yet roles that truly allowed her to display her full artistic splendour were rare. Hecuba in The Trojan Women is therefore particularly significant: in this portrayal there was finally space for all that emotional richness, inner strength, and acting knowledge that characterizes her entire career. In the course of my research I realized that Orosz Lujza was not only an actor with exceptional talent, but also someone who thought about theatrical art with an extremely contemporary outlook. She deeply understood the complexity of theatrical operation, the essence of artistic work, and was wholly committed to the profession—all while preserving her humanity, empathy, and communal sensitivity. Her career was cut short relatively early, since in the choice between artistic vocation and the maternal role she ultimately placed the family in the foreground. Her decision was influenced not only by personal conviction but also by the era's expectations of women's roles: social norms expected women above all to fulfil family duties, even when they showed outstanding talent in their profession. The officially proclaimed image of womanhood under state socialism—which demanded both participation in the labour market and the assumption of family roles—imposed a double burden on women, and Orosz Lujza's example also shows well what difficulties full artistic unfolding encountered for women. Her talent and professional commitment far exceeded the framework designated for her by social and institutional expectations.

Bisztrai Mária (Cluj): the first and to this day the only female director of the State Hungarian Theatre of Cluj, whose career is a rare example of a female creator attaining an institutional leadership role in Transylvanian theatre life. Her directorial activity is pioneering not only in that, as a woman, she attained a leading position in a highly hierarchical and male-centred theatrical system, but also in that she consciously strove to cultivate Hungarian-language culture and to build international cultural connections. During her tenure as director, Mária Bisztrai consistently supported the staging of works by Hungarian authors, and did so in a political environment that not only failed to encourage the survival of minority cultures, but actively sought to wither them. By building international cultural collaborations, Bisztrai created an important bridge among Hungarian theatrical communities beyond the borders, despite the political headwinds characteristic of the period. Examining Mária Bisztrai's career profile is an especially complex

task, since her artistic activity is tightly interwoven with her position of power and her family network of connections. Although she played significant roles as an actress, we cannot ignore that as a theatre director, and by virtue of her father having been a prime minister, her social position was exceptional. This double background could not but have influenced the course of her career and raises the question: to what extent did her successes stem from her own talent, and to what extent from opportunities deriving from her position or from political–public connections? Following Mária Bisztrai's appointment as director, she immediately took active steps to raise the artistic standard of the Cluj theatre. Among her first measures was to invite a guest director from Budapest, which in that political environment counted as not only a professional but also a diplomatic achievement. She did not choose just any director: she succeeded in bringing to Cluj Tamás Major, a defining figure of the National Theatre of Budapest, who directed three productions with the company. The first of these was The Winter's Tale, the realization of which is directly connected to Bisztrai's initiative and her assumption of the director's role. In The Winter's Tale production, Mária Bisztrai herself also played a key role: as the interpreter of Hermione she proved that as a leader she was defined not only by organizational strength but by acting qualities as well. Thus The Winter's Tale simultaneously represents Mária Bisztrai's artistic and institutional endeavours in the initial phase of her directorial career.

Papp Éva (Satu Mare): an actress and university lecturer entered my dissertation in an unconventional way. I had known her voice since childhood from vinyl records, and her person and story from my mother's accounts. During my university years I came to know her in person, and my admiration for her only grew. Her acting career was tragically short, yet her artistic impact far exceeded the number of her active years. Her courage, humanity, passion for theatre, and her brave stage struggle with bodily limitations set an example that demands a place in any treatment of theatre history. I feel that without her presence and work this research would not be complete. Papp Éva's career clearly shows that theatre is not a matter of conforming to bodily norms, but a space for expression and the authentic mediation of human stories. This became especially symbolic with her return in the production of The Glass Menagerie: she embodied the principle that the power of stage presence does not derive from physical perfection, but from inner intensity, sincerity, and the transmission of deep human experience. Papp Éva's case also draws attention to how theatre's traditionally normative body images—the idealization of the young, healthy, "flawless" body—can push into the background artists who do not meet this expectation, yet

convey extraordinary artistic values. It was precisely with this non-normative body, by assuming her own bodily struggles, that Papp Éva's stage presence became liberating: her art testifies that human frailty is not an obstacle, but a source of authentic theatrical utterance.

8. Structure of the thesis

The aim of my dissertation is not merely to present, in chronological order, the career profiles of the five actresses examined—Szabó Duci, Elekes Emma, Orosz Lujza, Bisztrai Mária, and Papp Éva—but, starting from these, to shed light on deeper interrelations. I do not strive merely for biographical summaries, but to reveal, through the course of individual life paths, the patterns in women's history, institutions, and aesthetics that defined the operation of Transylvanian theatre in this period. After a brief summary of biographical data, in each case I subject a highlighted production to detailed analysis. These productions—be they career peaks, turning points, or moments of risk-taking—offer an opportunity not only to examine the given actress's artistic toolkit, but also to see how individual achievement connects with shifts in collective theatrical work. In my analysis I unfold not only the aesthetic features of the portrayal, but also contextualize them: how the given production affected the company's operation, what changes it initiated, or how it reinforced existing directions.

I devote particular attention to what theatrical norms, acting modes, and ideals of style these portrayals conveyed, and how these shaped audience expectations, company dynamics, and the theatre's social position. The chosen productions thus appear not as isolated aesthetic products, but as active elements of the broader theatrical ecosystem, which act back upon institution, community, and audience reception. In this way the individual chapters go beyond the traditional biographical overview: they follow not merely the chronology of life paths, but also examine how the given actress's art reflected on the social context and in what ways it shaped it. Female actors did not merely adapt to the prevailing structures, but in many cases consciously acted as creators, innovators, and community-shapers. Their art can often be interpreted as an aesthetic and ethical stance: a response to the institutional, political, and social force fields surrounding them.

My dissertation undertakes a rereading of theatre history from a female perspective. The aim of this approach is to provide a richer, more nuanced picture of the theatre history of

Transylvania, and to bring to the surface those processes that, through female artistic presence, shaped the regional cultural field.

The exploration of women's experiences, artistic paths, and community impacts not only serves the rehabilitation of forgotten or underrepresented oeuvres, but also helps us to reread theatre history not merely as the story of events, institutions, and directors, but as a living, layered, and multi-actor space.

Summary

The aim of my dissertation was to explore the career profiles, artistic work, and community-shaping roles of five significant female creators in the theatre history of the Hungarian community in Transylvania. In the course of the research I strove not merely to present biographical data, but also to map the complex milieu in which these artists created—and which, in turn, shaped their life paths.

The careers examined—such as the story of Papp Éva as well—attest that theatre is at once personal self-expression and a communal mirror. At the same time, they show how fragile is that inner balance which makes artistic fulfilment possible. Bringing this narrative to the surface is not merely of historical significance: through it those inhibiting forces arising from female existence, deeply coded at the social level, also become visible—forces that often remain hidden in the course of theatrical creative work.

My dissertation set out to explore the career profiles and theatrical activity of five significant female creators—Szabó Duci, Elekes Emma, Orosz Lujza, Bisztrai Mária, and Papp Éva—in order to understand how these women artists shaped the face of the Transylvanian Hungarian theatrical milieu, and how, through their own life paths, they reflected the social and institutional relations of the era. Based on the results of the research, the following main interrelations emerged:

First and foremost, it became evident that female actors are not merely passive participants in theatrical life, but active shapers as well: through their portrayals, professional presence, and company-organizing work, they exert a significant influence on the artistic profile of their theatrical communities.

The example of **Szabó Duci** shows how an actress—even from a sidelined position—can, through consistent artistic work, humility, and a natural acting culture, become a defining figure of a company in the long term. Her career proves that professional dignity and a devoted attitude toward roles can often override institutional neglect.

The career of **Elekes Emma** vividly exemplifies how an acting achievement can become a performance of not only aesthetic but also communal significance. Her acting determined not only the success of the production, but also the shaping of the Satu Mare theatre's identity. Her early withdrawal, however, draws attention to that systemic fault which often closes women artists' careers arbitrarily and prematurely.

The story of **Orosz Lujza** casts an especially sharp light on the situation of female actors: the relation to aesthetic norms, the expectation of conforming to non-normative beauty ideals, represent constraints of such weight as to limit actresses' unfolding. Despite Orosz Lujza's talent and stage depth, she only rarely received roles that allowed genuine artistic unfolding. Hecuba in The Trojan Women is the rare crown of this undeserved career trajectory.

The career profile of **Bisztrai Mária** opens important questions from another perspective: in her case we can see a rare example of female theatrical leadership. Her activity as director, however, cannot be interpreted solely from artistic or professional viewpoints: her position of power, family connections, and the political milieu all play a defining role in the course of her career. The result of my research warns that, in the given historical environment, the possibility of a woman's attaining a leadership role is closely intertwined with the current political and social power relations and cannot be separated from them.

Finally, the career of **Papp Éva** stands before us as a special case: a rare example of the theatrical reception of an actor bearing bodily difference, and at the same time a painful testimony that artistic achievement in itself cannot dissolve either social prejudices or the shaking of individual self-identity. Her career change is not a conscious gesture or symbolic message, but an inner compulsion: the recognition that the theatrical milieu of the time and her own self-evaluation did not allow for the continuation of a classical acting career.

Overall, the results of my dissertation show that the work of female creators in the Transylvanian Hungarian theatrical life is an indispensable part of artistic and communal development, yet the social, institutional, and aesthetic obstacles that limit their unfolding regularly rebuild their invisibility. By mapping women's experiences, life situations, and artistic struggles, however, we can move closer to a fairer, more complex theatre-historical narrative. The

exploration of female acting careers not only enriches our knowledge of theatre history, but also bears important lessons for social and cultural history.

The five careers presented—Szabó Duci, Elekes Emma, Orosz Lujza, Bisztrai Mária, and Papp Éva—share the common denominator that each one's artistic work took shape within frameworks defined by minority existence, political constraints, social expectations, and the theatrical institutional system.

In the course of my research the recognition was strengthened that the careers of women artists cannot be interpreted solely on aesthetic grounds. Each of their life paths deeply reflects the era's social relations: the marginalization of women, the limits of artistic unfolding, as well as the constant balancing act between preserving personal integrity and the constraints of social conformity. The theatre—as a communal institution—becomes at once an opportunity and a limitation: it gives space for self-expression, yet at the same time subordinates individual life paths to the ideological, political, and aesthetic expectations of the era.

The life paths I examined also reveal that theatrical communities integrate or reject female creators not only on the basis of artistic performance, but also on bodily, social, or political grounds. The story of Papp Éva is a particularly vivid example of how bodily otherness can erect invisible walls even within a fundamentally supportive community. But the career of Orosz Lujza also shows that artistic talent is not sufficient for full unfolding if social—or indeed aesthetic—norms favour a different type of physique. The directorial activity of Mária Bisztrai, characterized equally by political navigation and cultural diplomacy, points out with particular force that even attaining a position of power does not mean full freedom for women artists. At the intersection of the political system and communal expectations, artistic autonomy is often sustainable only at the price of compromises and hidden struggles.

In the course of the research it became clear: processing the life paths of female actors not only nuances the theatre-historical narrative, but also helps to understand how— and partly how to this day—gender roles, artistic value judgements, and institutional power relations functioned in the Hungarian minority milieu. The exploration of women's experiences thus contributes to the formation of a much more complex, more sensitive theatre-historical knowledge. Overall, the career profiles of the five artists I examined do not present merely individual fates, but become

parts of a broader cultural map: they can be read as imprints of the complex network of theatre, community, gender roles, and identity. Carrying this line of research further—an even deeper exploration of women creators' life paths, a more precise reconstruction of social contexts—may open new, hitherto obscured chapters in the Hungarian theatre history of Transylvania.

One of the greatest challenges in my work was that I often had to reconstruct the career profiles of the artists examined by relying on incomplete, contingent sources. Owing to the nature of the acting profession—the momentariness of performance, the shortcomings of documentation—the reconstruction of artistic life paths always remains fragmentary. This is especially true in the case of female creators, whose work the contemporary criticism and professional memory often regard with less attention. In certain oeuvres—such as that of Papp Éva—it is particularly difficult to form a comprehensive picture, since few extant recordings, archival materials, or comprehensive career profiles are available. In many cases I could draw conclusions only from recollections, scattered reviews, or oral sources, which called for caution and sensitivity to source criticism. An additional constraint was that the political–social context—especially the censorship and cultural policy of the communist dictatorship—often determined what documents could survive and how artistic careers could be interpreted. The same is true for the contemporary press—for example, the impact of the University of Arts of Târgu-Mureș—requiring deeper exploration, with special attention to how it influenced the training, opportunities, and artistic unfolding of female actors. It is likewise an urgent task to expand the visual and oral documentation of women's theatrical experiences: through life-history interviews, oral history projects, and the creation of digital archives. These would not only serve a better understanding of theatre history, but would also contribute to ensuring that, despite the transient dimension of theatrical art, the memory of outstanding female careers endures. One of the greatest challenges of my dissertation was that I often had to reconstruct the career profiles of the artists examined by relying on incomplete, contingent sources.

Writing this dissertation was for me not only a scholarly but also a profoundly personal journey. Time and again in the course of the work I was confronted with the fact that theatre—particularly Hungarian theatre in Transylvania—is not merely a series of performances, but a living, complex, sensitive fabric in which individual life paths, communal endeavours, and historical constraints are inextricably interwoven. In analysing the directorial activity of Mária

Bisztrai, for example, it was difficult to separate how much was due to her own diplomatic sense and how much to the favourable development of political power conjunctures in her theatre's ability to preserve its artistic autonomy for a longer period.

As a further research direction, the most important task would be to explore, proceeding period by period, the careers of outstanding female creators from every significant Hungarian theatre in Transylvania. This would make it possible to obtain a much more complete, nuanced picture of the role women played in shaping Transylvanian theatrical life and how their situation changed in different political and social periods. In addition, it would be important for Hungarian theatrical education in Transylvania.

In the course of my research a consistent pattern emerged: the role of female creators—no matter how outstanding its significance—often became invisible or was excluded from the canon in the deeper layers of theatrical memory. The exploration of their work is therefore not merely a compensatory gesture, but also a scholarly and cultural responsibility: one of the most important means of setting alternative memory in motion, as well as of reinterpreting and transmitting artistic traditions. Their presence in theatre, their struggles, successes, and fragilities contribute to seeing the theatrical culture of the past more in nuance, and through this to interpreting our own cultural identity from a new perspective. The greatest lesson for me was how little of an actor's oeuvre remains for posterity. Theatre is a transient art: what happens on stage is born and passes away in that very moment. Performances and stage portrayals are often preserved only by fragmentary written traces, occasional recordings, or the memory of spectators. Thus the research was not only a work of documentation, but almost an archaeological undertaking: from tiny signs and fragmentary echoes I tried to reconstruct an artistic career. I also experienced in the course of research that written sources—reviews, recollections—always mediate events through personal filters. Theatrical criticism is never free of individual value judgements, emotions, the taste of the age, or even political considerations. Therefore, working with sources required constant vigilance: to place each claim in context, to verify it, to read it on multiple layers.

In the course of my research it became ever clearer to me that the evanescent theatrical profession scarcely offers the possibility for its creators and their works to endure in the long term. We hear names, we see a few photographs or scattered recordings—but the living theatrical

moment, the struggles of everyday creative work, the stories of fulfilment and sacrifice, rarely leave a lasting mark. Theatre—especially in a minority milieu—is, in addition to artistic activity, also survival and the preservation of identity. In light of this recognition, my research assumed a double aim: not only to explore the career profiles, but also to preserve these oeuvres consciously for theatrical memory. To document and record the work of those creators who often, invisibly, yet in defining ways, shape their community's cultural self-identity. In the words of Orosz Lujza: "The actor's work is so vivid, so alive, because the actor is both the tool and the material. And if it has passed, it has passed. If no one takes the trouble to write about it, it has disappeared without a trace." (Nászta, 1983, p.122). In this spirit, my aim is that my writing, too, preserve and make visible again these outstanding female creators, without whose oeuvres the history of Hungarian theatre in Transylvania would not be complete. The oeuvres of the artists examined are a collective cultural heritage, whose preservation and making visible for future generations is a duty as well.

My dissertation is at once an experiment and an obligation: the intention to document, so that these creators do not lose their place in memory. I trust that the career profiles explored will also arouse new questions and will contribute to ensuring that the Transylvanian Hungarian theatrical past—especially the work of female creators—gains an ever fuller, more nuanced image for future researchers.

I trust that this dissertation—if only to a modest degree—will contribute to ensuring that the artistic work and human steadfastness of these exceptional women do not sink into oblivion, but offer inspiration and example to all who, in theatre, seek not only a craft, but also a vocation, community service, and self-expression.

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