

SIR SECRETARY – SZIGLIGETI 200

– VOLUME, EXHIBITION, PUBLIC DISCUSSION –



The National Széchényi Library organized a whole series of events during 2014 in order to salute in an honorable way the famous playwright, theater director and theater organizer, Ede Szigligeti, with the occasion of his 200th birthday. Remembering the one-time director of the National Theater, we published a jubilee volume of four plays of the author in collaboration with the Szigligeti Theater from Nagyvárad (Oradea), making use of the treasures of our Theater History Collection: copies of the director and prompt-copies.

The handwritten theatre scripts of Szigligeti's plays are safe kept in the script library of the Theater History Collection (in the shelfmark of the library of the National Theater). The volume of plays was a result of a selection from here and of the collaboration with the theater that wears the name of Szigligeti, in Nagyvárad (Oradea), the birthplace of the author. Here was also

published the book in March 2014, for the bicentenary. (*The Reign of Woman* – edited and preface written by Ildikó Sirató; contributor Edit Rajnai) The festive publication contains besides the title salon comedy the popular legend treated also by János Arany, *The Gypsies of Nagyida*; the rhymed tragedy of a historical theme: *Nadányi*; and finally another comedy, *The Pentecostal Queen* – presenting also the versatility of the author. To quote from the preface: „Szigligeti's talent as a playwright, his productivity and theatrical experiences make him an outstanding representative of the 19. century playwrights. He is situated in the middle of that series which starts with the old Hungarian drama and through Károly Kisfaludy, the most illustrious theatrical representative of the Reform Era, continues with the successes of those 20. century authors who made it to the world-stage, like Ferenc Molnár, Jenő Heltai, Ferenc Herczeg and others.”

The twenty year old man, József Eduárd Szathmáry arrived to Budapest from Nagyvárad in 1834, after paying no attention to the fatherly warning and giving up on the career in law, and became an actor. In August 1834, after he had changed his name to Szigligeti, he played his first role in the Castle Theater of Buda. But his love of theater did not exhaust in acting. Seven month later, on March 24, 1835, the theater company of Buda presented Szigligeti's first tragedy. His writing career was soaring and overtook the otherwise promising acting career (including his good dancing skills), but the latter one always served him in other ways. The author Szigligeti was a born organizer, he knew the theater inside out, had a good sense of order and was able also to maintain the order. In 1840, he received the award of the Hungarian Learned Society for his historical comedy entitled *Rose*, and the society elected him as corresponding member the same year. At this time, he was only twenty-six years old. Szigligeti, who by the end of the 1840's had tried himself in almost all of the drama genres with success, created a new musical genre, the folk play (his play entitled *Fugitive Soldier* is memorable). He brought all these to fruition in a time when the political climate was not favorable at all. His career as a playwright was extremely productive. He wrote more than one hundred plays! He was quick in

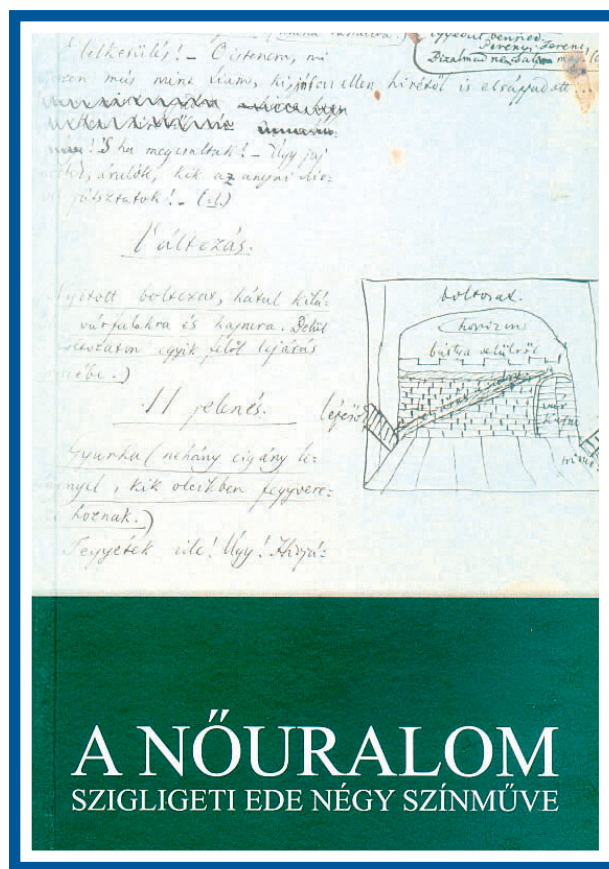


The sculpture of Ede Szigligeti in the front of the theater of Nagyvárad

creation and could change around things in time, in the case of some less successful plays and genres. If the whole oeuvre seems somewhat uneven, his play entitled *Young Lily* is rightly constantly successful since 1849. Besides playwriting, Szigligeti was good at organizing the whole process of the theatrical work. He had a good overview of the work and by the end of his life, he started to reorganize and reform, with a good sense, the whole Hungarian theater. He became the secretary, stage-manager and librarian of the National Theatre in 1845, later on became its director and five years before his death, the artistic director. The theater was his life. With his unusual creativity as a playwright, he represented permanence in the history of the Hungarian Theater from the Reform Era to the Compromise.

The theater of Nagyvárád dedicated a whole season to Szigligeti's memory in 2014. As part of the art festival entitled *After Tomorrow*, the book launch was on March 8th, (which is not only the women's international day, but Szigligeti's birthday also), so its title was a double hit. There was a public discussion also, and László Boka, director of Research and Academic Affairs discussed with Ildikó Sirató, theater-historian, editor of the volume, about Szigligeti's role, the value of the oeuvre today and, of course, about the process of selection.

The successful premier in Nagyvárád was followed by two premiers in Budapest: first at the National Theater, on March 13th, for which the theater company of Nagyvárád prepared a play written specifically for this occasion, entitled *Szigligeti*. The show was preceded by a round-table discussion and book launch, where László Boka literary historian (NSZL), Piroska Ács theater historian (Hungarian Theater Museum and Institute) and István Szabó K. art director (Szigligeti Theater) praised Szigligeti's importance, his local and international influence as well as they analyzed his somewhat fading stage-presence today. The book was launched in the NSZL also, on May 22nd and Márton Szilágyi literary historian, professor and head of department at Eötvös Lóránd University, asked Ildikó Sirató, editor and director of the Theater History Collection, about the book. This was supported by a



Cover of the book entitled *The Reign of Woman*

substantial background provided by the beautiful chamber exhibition opened in the cases of the catalog-corridor of the reading hall, in the first days of April. (*Sir Secretary* – curator Edit Rajnai).

Most of Szigligeti's works have never been published. They wait in the forms of director copies and prompt-copies for the researchers and theater historians of the future to evaluate the enormous oeuvre, and prepare for the press such a selection, what Szigligeti deserves for a long time now, since, despite his mistakes, he is one of the most important representatives of our history of theater. NSZL contributed to this also in the spring of 2014.

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