

Elvira Grözinger

## THE SOCIALIST HERO OF THE STATE THEATERS IN POLAND AND ROMANIA?

### A Chapter in the History of Yiddish Theater, in Memory of Abraham Goldfaden (1840–1908)

When visitors come today to the Jewish Theater in Warsaw, which is named after Estera Rachel and Ida Kamińska, they are not aware of the fact that this institution is actually the fruit of the efforts of one man, i.e. Abraham Goldfaden, who founded the first professional Yiddish theater in the Romanian town of Jassy in 1876. The renowned Yiddish playwright, considered to be both the “father of the Yiddish theater” and the founder of Yiddish opera, may nowadays “be the most influential Jewish artist you’ve never heard of,” as Joel Berkowitz suggests.<sup>1</sup> This Warsaw Theater, now a remnant of Polish-Jewish theatrical culture which flourished before the Shoah, was revived after the Second World War as a State Jewish Theater. Since the fall of the Communist regime it is being financed by other Polish cultural authorities. One of its partners was for many years the State Jewish Theater of Bucharest, which also tried “to spin the golden thread” of Jewish tradition, especially under its longtime literary secretary and chief dramatic advisor from 1955 to 1982, Israil Bercovici (1921–1988).<sup>2</sup> Bercovici was assisted in these efforts by his friend and colleague, the Polish stage director and painter Jakub Rotbaum (1901–1994). Both were lifelong disciples and fans of Goldfaden. He was accepted – like Sholem Aleykhem – by the Communist authorities as “politically and ideologically correct,” especially after Alexander Granovsky, with the help of Yehezkiel Dobrushin and Moshe Litvakov, staged Goldfaden’s operetta *The Sorceress* at the Moscow State Yiddish Theater (GOSET) in 1922 and therewith launched a new modernist and ideological aesthetics for the Yiddish theater.<sup>3</sup> By interpreting Goldfaden in the socialist manner, they were able to put him on stage in the rare periods of favorable conditions for Jewish culture as well as in times of political oppression.<sup>4</sup> Abraham Goldfaden died in 1908, a century ago,

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<sup>1</sup> Berkowitz 2004, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Grözinger 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning the politization of theaters in the Soviet Union, see the excellent study by Veidlinger 2000. Berkowitz (2004, 16), is right in calling it “Reinventing Goldfaden.”

<sup>4</sup> The writer Uri Finkel (1896–1957), son of the last rabbi of Rakov and member of the Belarus Institute of Culture, which was later renamed as “The Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture in the Belarus SSR,” had for instance published an article on *Sotsyale figurn in Goldfadns verk* [Social Figures in Goldfaden’s Oeuvre], in *Tsaytshrift* 1 (Minsk 1926) and in the same year edited together with Nahum Auslaender (Nokhem Oyslender) a collection of articles on the biography of Goldfaden (*A. Goldfadn: materyaln far*

and in spite of the fact that the majority of today's general Jewish audience lacks knowledge of the Yiddish which was the chosen language of Goldfaden's oeuvre, and although the glorious days of the Yiddish stage are over, his heritage is still kept alive.

### Abraham Goldfaden's life and oeuvre

Goldfaden was born as Avrom Goldenfodim (or Goldenfodem) in the Volhynian town of Starokonstantinov, at the time Russia, on July 24, 1840, the son of a watchmaker. Like all Jewish boys in the Ukraine at that time he spoke Yiddish at home and attended a Jewish religious elementary school (*kheyder*), where he also learned Hebrew. However, as his family was affected by the spirit of the Jewish Enlightenment, the *Haskalah*, he was lucky to get a private tutorship in Russian and German, too. There was no Jewish professional stage at that time; the only theatrical activities were the carnival Purim-Shpils, performed in private homes and confined circles on the yearly festival of Purim. Goldfaden's talent as a comedian manifested itself quite early in his childhood, as he is said to have often imitated the Jewish wedding entertainers (*badkhonim* or *marshaliks*) and the "Broder singers,"<sup>5</sup> i.e. the folk singers so popular among the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe. He then attended a Russian school, thus avoiding the 25-year compulsory military service in the Czarist army, and continued to study at the government-run higher rabbinical school in Żytomierz (1857–1866), from which he graduated as a teacher. He never became a rabbi, though.

This might have been due to the fact that one of his teachers at Żytomierz was Abraham Baer Gottlober, one of the foremost Neo-Hebrew poets (1811–1899) and a declared disciple of the *Haskalah*. Gottlober supported and promoted the literary talent of his student, whereas through the headmaster of the school, another *maskil* (enlightener), H.S. Slonimsky, or rather Slonimsky's wife, Goldfaden became acquainted with the Yiddish comedy *Serkele* by the Warsaw-born writer Shloyme Ettinger (approx. 1800/1803–1855/1856). In 1862 Goldfaden published his first Hebrew poems in the then leading Hebrew and Yiddish periodicals of the Russian *Haskalah*-movement, *Hamelits* and *Kol mevasser*, and in 1885 his first book of Hebrew poetry *Zizim u-Ferahim*, which indicates his knowledge of traditional Jewish literature.<sup>6</sup> Since his earliest collection of Yiddish lyrics under the title *Dos Yiddele* (The Little Jew) which was published in 1866, followed in 1869 by the book, *Di yidene* (The

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*a biografye*), cf. *The Concise Jewish Encyclopedia* (in Russian) vol. 9, 176–177. See also Berkowitz/Dauber 2006, 41 or Berkowitz 2003, 194–195.

<sup>5</sup> Berkowitz 2004, 12.

<sup>6</sup> S. *Babylonian Talmud*, Tract Sabbath, translated by Michael L. Rodkinson, Book 1 (Vols. I and II), [1903], Vol. II, Ch. XXII, p. 332: R. Joseph taught: It is written [Isaiah xxvii. 6]: "In the future shall Jacob yet take root: Israel shall bud and blossom; and shall fill the face of the world with fruit." "What is meant by "bud and blossom?" The scholars of Babylon, who wind blossoms and wreaths around the Thorah." See also Jakob Emden (1697–1776), Rabbi and Kabbalist from Hamburg–Altona and enemy of Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschuetz from Krakow (1690–1764) whom he denounced for Sabbatianism. Later in life, Emden became more liberal and corresponded with the initiator of the Jewish Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn. He published a lexicon of Kabbalist symbols, *Zizim u-Ferahim*, Altona 1768, cf. Scholem 2006, 9, note 25.

Jewess), including poetry, a sketch and a three-act comedy, *Di mume Sosye* (Aunt Sosye), he has had a reputation as a Yiddish songwriter and dramatist, the creator of the Yiddish operetta. These early lyrics “caught the popular fancy and were used by folksingers to enrich their repertoire,”<sup>7</sup> and many of them are today considered to be a part of Jewish folklore, as frequent recordings show.<sup>8</sup> This was the beginning of Goldfaden’s astounding career, ending up as an internationally famous songwriter and playwright, author of approximately 60 plays.<sup>9</sup> It was probably Gottlober, too, the author of comedies *Der dektukh* (The Bridal Canopy or Two Weddings in One Night), who taught Goldfaden how to use “satirical dialogue as a vehicle of popular enlightenment.”<sup>10</sup> This, besides his decisive encounter with the art of the “Broder Singers,”<sup>11</sup> – Velvl Zbarzher in Czernowitz, and especially Israel Grodner, a Yiddish cabaret artist, in Jassy – accounts for Goldfaden’s soon becoming a leading figure in Yiddish theater.

Before he dedicated his life to the stage, though, Goldfaden worked at first as a teacher in Simferopol (1867–1868), from where he moved to Odessa, trying unsuccessfully to make a living from commerce (with a ladies’ hat business) for several years, but he seemingly had no talent for business at all. He edited several short-lived Yiddish journals, for example in 1875 together with his friend, the writer Yitskhok Yoel Linetsky, a humorous magazine, *Der alter yisrolik*, which was banned by the Czarist authorities. This caused Goldfaden to move to Romania in 1876, originally in order to establish another Yiddish newspaper there, but instead a new era began for him and Yiddish culture when the modern Yiddish theater took shape under his guidance. In spite of three different versions concerning the birth of this institution, it is an established fact that Goldfaden did succeed in his endeavor, and dedicated the rest of his life to writing and producing Yiddish plays.<sup>12</sup>

In his life, he experienced good and bad luck which took him to many places, at first towns in his home country Russia (including the Ukraine). But he did not stay for long either in Munich or in Vienna, where he made an unsuccessful attempt to study medicine. Goldfaden was at home nowhere, but his career and fame as the founder of the modern Yiddish theater was closely tied to Romania. Compared to Czarist Russia there was more freedom and less oppression in Romania, the warm summer weather was better for open-air performances – all this suited Goldfaden at the time. Jassy (Iași), where he arrived in 1876, has since been called the “cradle of the Yiddish theater,” and jealously holds on to the title even today,<sup>13</sup> though some theater historians

<sup>7</sup> Liptzin 1963, 35.

<sup>8</sup> One of his most famous songs, the lullaby “Rozhinkes mit mandlen,” is a timeless classic.

<sup>9</sup> P. Hartnoll and P. Found, Abraham Goldfaden, in *The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, Oxford 1996, maintain that he even wrote nearly 400 of them – which is wrong, of course.

<sup>10</sup> Liptzin 1963, 35.

<sup>11</sup> They were founded by Berl Margulis, better known as Berl Broder (from the Galician town of Brody, 1815–1868). Broder’s troupe travelled from Galicia and Hungary to Romania, where it performed Yiddish folk songs – among them Goldfaden’s own poems, in the tradition of the Jewish troubadours and the *bakdhonim*. One of the most famous singers was Eliakum Zunser or Eliakim Badkhen (1836–1913), who in turn was influenced by Velvl Zbarzher, (1824–1884), born as Benjamin Wolf Ehrenkrantz. In 1876, Goldfaden wrote a two-act play for them, and its performance by the Broder Singers in the wine cellar “Pomul Verde” in Jassy was the cradle of the Yiddish theater.

<sup>12</sup> Sandrow 1977, 40.

<sup>13</sup> Nowadays an International Drama Festival, “Avram Goldfaden,” takes place there.

have contested it and preferred Warsaw as the birthplace.<sup>14</sup> Goldfaden's career was positively affected by the Crimean War (or the Russian-Turkish War 1877–1878) which led to Romania's independence and to the temporary influx of a large prospective Jewish audience. Apart from Jassy, where Goldfaden established his troupe, he stayed for a while in, among other places, Botoșani, Galați, Braïla and repeatedly Bucharest, where he became the director of the Jignița-Theater in 1892. In the meantime he began to sympathize with the ideas of the upcoming socialism and also Zionism (Hovevey Zion),<sup>15</sup> but the political and social ferments in Romania, coupled with economic crisis as well as rising anti-Semitism, caused Goldfaden in 1896 also to leave for good this country where he had spent his most creative and successful years, twenty years after he had first arrived there to make his way.

He did not stop traveling like a "wandering star," when his musical plays were later performed by a singing and acting troupe. At first it was just as a little company, playing in the style of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, with which he toured cities in Romania and Russia, until the Russian authorities banned Yiddish theater in 1883. The rise of anti-Semitism and pogroms in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, following the assassination of Czar Alexander II, led to the first big wave of emigration of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe, primarily to the United States of America. Goldfaden, too, continued to roam and wander. In his plays he often depicted the Jewish world of his time, which was familiar to his audience. His dramatic works were of a different quality, most of them not being considered as profound literature, and Goldfaden himself did not maintain this to be the case. He justified the low literary level, however, by arguing that his audience, at least in the early years, could not have absorbed by any more sophisticated material than he had given them. But the best of his plays are touching, stirring, lyrical and comical, as Nahma Sandrow stresses.<sup>16</sup> They were of different genres with a wide range of topics, starting from the classical maskilic intents, like the amusing fight against religious fanaticism and arranged marriages in *Di tsvey Kuni Lemls* (The Two Kuni-Lemls, first performed 1880), depicting Biblical figures (like in the stage hit *Sulamith*<sup>17</sup>) and historical events from Jewish history, later conveying criticism of the Haskalah after the pogroms, as in the drama about the Bar-Kokhba-revolt (1882) or in *Moshiyakhs Tsaytn* (The Messianic Times, 1887). These plays reflected Goldfaden's education in both traditional Jewish and worldly European culture, his enlightened position, and his part-time sympathies for socialist and Zionist ideas.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> e.g. Turkov-Grudberg 1956; Bercovici 1976, 27 f., quoting Shloyme Mikhoels' article in *Emes*, December 1946, who refers to an article from the *Allgemeine Preussische Staatszeitung* (No. 341, 6. Dekabr 1838), about an actual debate which then took place in Warsaw concerning the possibility of founding a stage for performing plays in Yiddish.

<sup>15</sup> See the review by Miriam Kachanski of a dissertation entitled *Khibat-Tsion and Yiddish: the Multidimensional Encounter Between Movement, Language and Culture*, in: S. Luria, H. Bar-Ytzhak (eds.), *Khulyot, Journal of Yiddish Research*, No. 8, winter 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Sandrow 1977, 45 f.

<sup>17</sup> Anonym: [Budapest; Oper "Sulamith" von Goldfaden]. – In *Die Welt*, Vol. 4 (1900) Nr 1, 23: "Die Goldfaden'sche Oper "Sulamith" erweist sich im Budapester Kisfaludy-Theater als Zug- und Cassenstück ersten Ranges. Samstag den 12. D. M. wurde sie bei total ausverkauftem Haus zum fünfzigstenmale gegeben."

<sup>18</sup> Goldfaden was also a delegate to the World Zionist Congress in London in 1900.

Goldfaden is said to have been particularly good at explaining to the actors the inner motivation of their roles, and, as the actor Kalman Juvelier from Lemberg relates, “Scenic imagination he also had in plenty, and in spite of the limited means at hand, the father of the Yiddish theater was often able to achieve remarkable effects.”<sup>19</sup> He briefly put together another unsuccessful theater company in 1886 in Warsaw, and in 1887 he went to New York for the first time. But others were settled already there – Joseph Lateiner (1853–1935), and Moishe Hurvitz (1844–1910), old acquaintances and rivals from Jassy, who had left Goldfaden’s troupe, and, being both gifted *shund* writers, kissed by the lightly draped muse, produced commercially successful rather vulgar comedy and satire. The disappointed Goldfaden, having failed in establishing a new successful troupe, left in 1889 for London and traveled again for another fifteen years from one European city to another. His plays continued to be performed in Europe and America, but his health was worsening and he had money problems. After selling all his possessions, he again left for New York in 1904.

In America, he made another short attempt at journalism as editor of the *New Yorker Yidishe Ilustrirte Tsaytung* and wrote a Hebrew-language play called *David bamlkhama* (David at War), which was performed in March 1906, the first play in this language to be performed in America, and was staged repeatedly, drawing large audiences. His last attempt, with *Ben Ami*, a play based on George Eliot’s novel *Daniel Deronda* performed at Boris Tomashevsky’s People’s Theater in New York on December 25, 1907, was finally an enormous success. But it came too late, as Goldfaden survived this triumph by a few days only. After his death on 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1908, the obituary in the *New York Times* called him “the Yiddish Shakespeare” and “both a poet and a prophet.” His funeral procession to the Washington Cemetery in Brooklyn was attended by 75,000 mourners.<sup>20</sup>

Goldfaden, even in being a showman, followed the tradition of the Haskalah and constructed his plays as didactic instruments, thus introducing his spectators both to the new genre of drama and to the ideas of the Enlightenment: “Since I have a stage at my disposal, let it be a school for you. You who had no chance to study during your youth, come to me to see the faithful pictures I will draw you of life... as in a mirror... you will take a lesson from it and improve by yourselves the errors which you make in family life, and among Jews, and between Jews and their Christian neighbors. While you are having your good laugh and are being entertained by my funny jokes, at that very moment my heart is weeping, looking at you.”<sup>21</sup> And indeed, after the play he often came out to the stage again, in order to explain the play to his spectators. Goldfaden could thus have served as an ideal figure at the time when it was necessary to transform the traditional Jew into a new human being, i.e. a socialist, in the communist societies of post-War II Eastern Europe by all means, also by means of culture.

<sup>19</sup> Rosenfeld 1977, 242.

<sup>20</sup> According to the article 75,000 at Poet’s Funeral, *New York Times*, January 11, 1908, 1, whereas Joel Berkowitz writes that “more than 100,000 people attended his funeral,” cf. Berkowitz 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Sandrow 1977, 46–48.

## Goldfaden on the Bucharest stage

No wonder that someone like Israil Bercovici (1921–1988), the Botoșani-born shtetl-Jew son of a poor tailor, who survived the Shoah as a young man and, becoming an active communist, was able to complete high school and study at the Mihai Eminescu Literature Academy,<sup>22</sup> felt a deep bond between Goldfaden's program and his own work for the Yiddish stage at the State Jewish Theater in Bucharest. Apart from the fact that Goldfaden was "the father of the Yiddish theater," as is written on his tombstone, and that he founded it in Romania, there were many other reasons for Bercovici to keep Goldfaden's legacy, and seek as well as safeguard the continuity of what he called the "spinning of the golden thread" – "der hemshekh fun goldenem fodem," which he formulated in an article in *Fraie Shtime* (undated).

Bercovici paid tribute to Goldfaden in his monumental history of the Jewish /Yiddish theater in Romania, *Hundert yor yidish teater in Rumenyne 1876–1976*, published in Yiddish by the Criterion Publishing Company in Bucharest in 1976 and followed by his Romanian translation *O sută de ani de teatru evreiesc în România* ("One hundred years of Yiddish/Jewish theater in Romania") in 1982,<sup>23</sup> but not only in these places. Also in his earlier historical essay *Akhtsik yor yidish teater in Rumenyne 1876–1956*, Bercovici's ideas about the function and purpose of theater both to educate and to entertain followed the steps of Avrom Goldfaden. Moreover, Bercovici wrote his own Yiddish-language plays, including *Der goldener fodem* ("The Golden Thread", 1963) about Goldfaden, though it was only much later performed, and in 1970 he wrote an article on "Avrom Goldfadn un zayn muzik" for the *Tsaytshrift*, the Yiddish part of the official organ of the Jewish Communities of Romania.<sup>24</sup> The Romanian translation of this article followed in the Romanian edition of the journal *Revista Cultului Mozaic din R.P.R.*

But despite the fact that Goldfaden was generally recognized as a founding pillar of the modern professional Jewish Theater, and was seen by many as a prophet, a revolutionary as well as a teacher of the masses, as Bercovici stresses in his book on the centenary of the Yiddish Theater in Romania,<sup>25</sup> his works were not frequently performed on the Bucharest stage. In Bercovici's chronicle of the plays staged there after the Second World War, i.e. from 1947/1948 to 1976, he lists merely the following few performances:

1948: *Di tsvey Kuni-Leml*, put on stage by Moshe Rubinger; Music by Khayim Shvartsman; Choreography by Kora Benador;

1951: *Di Kishef-makheren* [sic!], staged by B. Lebli and D. Kenig;

<sup>22</sup> Grözinger 2002.

<sup>23</sup> The second Romanian-language edition of this book, published in 1998 by the Editura Integral, Editurile Universala, Bucharest, was revised and enlarged by Constantin Măciucă. In this paper I quote Bercovici's first Yiddish edition of 1976 as the authentic document of his ideological and historical standing during his lifetime. Another authentic and ambitious document of I. Bercovici's view of the history of the Jewish theater in the world is his unfinished book manuscript of approximately 600 pages, where he again extensively quotes his already published chapters on the history of the Jewish theater in Romania and on Goldfaden. I therefore refer to the original edition.

<sup>24</sup> The Yiddish article appeared on July 15, 1970 and the Romanian two weeks later, on August 1.

<sup>25</sup> Bercovici (1976, 15) quotes Y. Shatzki's article on Goldfaden and His Theater, *Tsukunft* 1916 (or 1926?), 26. 32.

1953: *Dos freylekhe shusterl (Ni-be-ni-me-ni-kukurigu [sic!])*,<sup>26</sup> staged by B. Lebli;  
 1956: *A Goldfaden-Kholem* by Jakub Rotbaum after Itzik Manger, a guest performance from Poland on the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of the founding of Yiddish theater;

1957: *Di Khishefmakherin. Operete in 5 Akten (8 bilder) [sic!]*, staged by Izo Shapira;

1958: *Di komedyantn* by Sholem Aleykhem, music by A. Goldfaden and B. Segal, staged by Beno Popliker;

1959: *Di Kishefmakherin. Operete in 5 aktn fun Avrom Goldfaden*, Romanian version by I. Kara, staged by Izo Shapira. For years to follow, Goldfaden was absent from the Bucharest stage and no one made any attempt to reinterpret him in the sense of socialist realism. Only in 1976, a jubilee again, was Israil Bercovici's homage to Goldfaden, *Der goldener fodem* (The Golden Thread) staged in Bucharest.

This chronicle yields rather poor results from Goldfaden's legacy in the Bucharest Jewish State Theater. What were the reasons for this evident discrepancy between Bercovici's private admiration for Goldfaden, the Romanian-Jewish theater's claim to "hereditary" succession and the reality of the almost Goldfaden-less Bucharest repertory? We do not know. The reason could be that Goldfaden was seen by other Romanian cultural authorities with different eyes from those of Israil Bercovici, and the old pre-World War II controversy about whether his plays were a contribution to the ideals of the socialist revolution must still or again have been virulent in Bucharest, too. We should not forget that many of Goldfaden's plays were often criticized and bear in mind that some critics even called them *shund*, almost a verdict of death for a playwright, a dramatic Olympian, so to speak, whose place was, as Bercovici claimed for him, in the "temple of arts" forever.

## Goldfaden on the Polish Stage

Let us now take a parallel look at Goldfaden's adoption in post-war Poland. As I have mentioned, Jakub Rotbaum, since his youth one of the most ardent torchbearers among Goldfaden's disciples, was a friend, colleague and guest of Israil Bercovici in Bucharest. Rotbaum, born in Żelechów in the Lublin area as a son of a rabbi, attended grammar school in Warsaw. But he did not continue the family tradition, and chose the fine arts as his profession.<sup>27</sup> From 1918 to 1921 he attended the Warsaw School of Decorative Arts, and in 1922 he was a student of the School of Fine Arts there and studied at the same time at the first Polish Film Academy. In 1923 he went to Berlin to study painting and met with the Vakhtangov Theater.<sup>28</sup> In 1926 Rotbaum was back in

<sup>26</sup> Bercovici (1976, 99), writes the title of the play differently: "Ni be, ni me, ni kukuriku" or "Shuster-yung als farshtelter rebbe." In Odessa, where Goldfaden staged it in 1879, he clothed the figures which had "peyes" and "kapotes", something that was strange for the public, because they seldom saw such Jews in the streets.

<sup>27</sup> The biographical details are based on Hannowa 1995.

<sup>28</sup> This theater was named after Evgeny Bagrationovich Vakhtangov (1883–1922), a renowned Russian-Armenian director, student of the famous Constantin Stanislavski (1863–1938, actor, director and founder of the Moscow Artists Theater (MChAT). Vakhtangov was also influenced by the theatrical style of

Warsaw, where he directed his first performance of Rabindranath Tagore's *Post*, and plays in Yiddish followed. In 1927 he produced a film on Jewish folklore, and, after his examination in film-directing in 1928 he took up drama studies in Moscow under the leading figures of the Soviet theater Stanislavsky, Meyerhold and Mikhoels.<sup>29</sup> In 1930 Rotbaum became the artistic director of the famous Jewish theater modeled after Stanislavsky, "The Vilnius Troupe,"<sup>30</sup> where he staged Goldfaden's *Kishef makherin* (The Sorceress, after Itzik Manger). In 1938 he left Poland for Paris, where he directed the P.I.A.T. Avant-garde Theater, and one year later left for New York, together with the Polish poet Julian Tuwim. There he worked at the Jewish Art Theater headed by Morris Schwartz and again produced Goldfaden, apart from Shalom Asz, Sholem Aleykhem and H. Leiwick. In the years 1942–1948 he directed in New York, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, London, Paris and Israel.

Whereas Tuwim returned to Poland as early as 1946,<sup>31</sup> Rotbaum decided to follow when Ida Kamińska, the grand dame of the Polish-Jewish theater,<sup>32</sup> invited him to return in 1949. He gave up American citizenship and enthusiastically proceeded to

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Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940); he developed e.g. the so-called constructivist theater, puppet theater and physical theater, using also oriental forms. Among Vakhtangov's productions the best known are that of *Turandot* by Carlo Gozzi and *The Dybbuk* by S. An-Sky with the Habimah theater company.

<sup>29</sup> Solomon (Shloyme) Mikhoels (1890–1948), a Soviet Jewish actor and the artistic director of the Moscow State Jewish Theater. During the Second World War, Mikhoels served as the chairman of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and, like most of its members, he was murdered on the orders of Stalin.

<sup>30</sup> The Vilnius Troupe (in Yiddish: Vilner) was founded during the First World War, in the Lithuanian town of Vilna in 1916, as a Yiddish art theater. Already during its first tour of Europe at the beginning of the 1920s, starting from Warsaw, it became famous with its production of S. An-Sky's play *The Dybbuk* and belonged, like the Hebrew Theater Habimah, to the most prestigious Jewish theater ensembles in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the tour the ensemble split up in 1925, some of the members remained in Western Europe or went to the USA. The others returned to Warsaw, where they continued to work under this name until the troupe dissolved in 1934, seemingly for economic reasons as unemployment was growing in Poland at this time. Cf. M. Kanfer, *Czy Epitafium dla Trupy Wileńskiej*, *Nowy Dziennik* 1935, No. 68, 7, in: J. Michalik, E. Prokop-Janiec (eds.), *Teatr Żydowski w Krakowie. Studia i Materiały*, Kraków 1995, 193 f.

<sup>31</sup> Grözinger 2003, 583–584.

<sup>32</sup> The great Yiddish actress, Ida Kamińska (1899–1980), was born into an actors' dynasty, the daughter of Esther-Rachel Kamińska. She determined the Yiddish theater beginning in interwar Poland, where she co-founded the Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater (WIKT), and continuing during World War II in Soviet territories. After the war, she returned to Poland in 1945 and founded the State Jewish Theater with official support in Wrocław. In the epilogue to his biography of Ida Kamińska's mother, *Di mame Ester Rokhl* (The mother Esther Rachel, Farlag Yidish Bukh, Warsaw 1953, 285) Itskhok Turkov-Grundberg wrote accordingly in 1956: "The first Jewish theater building which has been erected in liberated Poland, in the old Polish city of Wrocław, which has returned to its home country, has received the name of Esther-Rachel Kamińska. Every new success of the Jewish State Theater is a further perpetuation of her name." In 1968, due to the anti-Semitic campaign, Kamińska and her (second) husband Meir Melman left Poland for Israel. Szymon Szurmiej, her successor as the director of the State Theater, criticized this step publically as a "big mistake." In Israel she did not find the success she had hoped for, and so she traveled between Israel and the US. Ida Kamińska died of heart disease in New York in 1980, two years after her husband. Henryk Grynberg, the famous Polish-born writer who survived the Holocaust, was an actor at the Jewish State Theater from 1958 to 1967. He did not return to Poland after a guest performance on Broadway and lives until today in the USA. Grynberg, whom Szurmiej's jubilee publication does not mention, calls Ida Kamińska in his memoir "Our Jewish Queen," cf. YIVO Catalogue of the exhibition "Ida Kamiński (1899–1980), di granddame funem yidishn teater." Less than a year later Ida Kamińska followed him into exile. See also Kuligowska-Korzeniowska 2006.



build up the “new Polish society in peace and socialism,” just as Bercovici did in post-war Romania. As Stalinization progressed, between 1947 and 1950, the Jewish cultural life that was being reborn was subject to communist ideology. Upon his return in 1949, Rotbaum became the artistic director of the Lower Silesian Jewish Theater in Wrocław (until 1952), headed by Ida Kamińska.<sup>33</sup> His productions there included, of course, *A Goldfaden Dream*, a play staged as soon as 1937 (under the title *The Miracle Worker*).<sup>34</sup> In 1950 this was also staged by him at the State Jewish Theater, and shown on a tour in Warsaw. It was interpreted in the Marxist sense of a “class conflict,” and therefore very positively reviewed in the newspaper *Słowo Polskie* (Polish Word):

*A Goldfaden Dream* does not idealize Hotsmakh, a small *luftmentsh*, but nevertheless this is his rehabilitation. For the first time, perhaps we look at Hotsmakh in a proper way: as a victim of the capitalist regime and of racial prejudices, a poor, overworked Jew, whose family obligations and the social conditions of that time require him to search for solutions in questionable transactions [...] [T]housands of such Hotsmakhs died in Treblinka during the [Nazi] occupation with the mark of social vampire issued by the Hitlerite fascists. And it is just for this reason that *A Goldfaden Dream* showed us the true nature of Hotsmakh and his brothers; this play should be seen by the broadest possible masses of Polish society. And above all by workers of factories and production plants in Wrocław.<sup>35</sup>

Most of the Jewish theater groups in Poland were then dissolved by the Stalinists. The other large Jewish theater in post-war Poland, in Łódź, had to merge with that of Wrocław, and so the only one to survive was the E.R. Kamińska State Jewish Theater, based in Warsaw since 1955, as the authorities probably did not dare to close this one, too. In 1952, Rotbaum became the artistic director of the Teatr Polski (Polish Theater) in Wrocław, and staged international dramatists in the repertory rather than Jewish or Yiddish ones. He was granted many awards and distinctions. In 1968, due to the anti-Semitic climate in Poland, he had to leave the theater. As for Ida Kamińska and so many other patriotic Polish Jews, this was a deep shock for him. From then onwards he never worked for any Polish theater again, and his productions in many European countries as well as in North and South America were exclusively of Jewish plays. He continued to live in Wrocław, sharing an apartment in the proximity of the old synagogue with his sister Lia. Jakub Rotbaum died in 1994.

In 1975, the Jewish State Theater, by then headed by Szymon Szurmiej, celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, and an album with essays on the history and repertory, among them by Jakub Rotbaum, was published on this occasion.<sup>36</sup> Rotbaum’s text is similar to Israil Bercovici’s in its praise of his country, applauding the good conditions under which the theater was able to work, etc. As we know, it moved from Wrocław to Warsaw in 1955. Whereas the first play to be staged in Łódź in 1946 was Jakob Gordin’s<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> In the immediate post-war years, 90,000 Jews lived in Lower Silesia, mostly in big cities. See Woźniczka 2004, 31.

<sup>34</sup> See Lifson 1965, 238 f. The Polish critics considered this production as most remarkable.

<sup>35</sup> H. Muszyńska Hoffmanowa, *Wieczory teatralne*. “Sen o Goldfadenie” w Państwowym Teatrze Żydowskim, *Słowo Polskie* 1950, No. 61 (1189), 3, quoted in Bułat 2008, 65.

<sup>36</sup> *25 lat Państwowego Teatru Żydowskiego w Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej* [25 Years of the State Jewish Theater in the People’s Republic of Poland], Warszawa 1975. As D. Ginsberg writes there (p. 8) that since 1949 money had been collected for its erection in Wrocław.

<sup>37</sup> Jakob or Yankev Gordin (1853–1909), born in the Ukraine, arrived in the USA in 1892 and is considered as the first classical playwright and a reformer of the Yiddish theater by those who name

*Kreutzer Sonata*, and not a play by Goldfaden, Rotbaum's production of *A Goldfaden Dream* in 1950 was the first production in the newly founded State Jewish Theater, but it was a tribute to Goldfaden, based on texts by Itzik Manger, Gershon Aynbinder and others, and not Goldfaden's own play. Rotbaum's *A Goldfaden Dream* was a great success and has become legendary, being a mixture of dance, humor and song. It is maintained that Rotbaum's later versions of *A Goldfaden Dream* never reached the level of the first one, but it was performed over 400 times and was a recent part of the Goldfaden Centennial repertoire in Jassy in 2008. Rotbaum, too, had meant it to be a didactic play, introducing the values of Jewish folklore to the masses. It was praised by critics as an artistic revelation, playing on the border between dream and reality, partly exotic and partly a poetically nostalgic beautiful vision of things past, of the old Jewish world now destroyed.

It was Yankev Gordin, though, who was more regularly put on the Polish-Yiddish stage (*Mirele Efros*, *The Slaughter*, *Khasye the Orphan*), while Goldfaden was only performed in 1947 with *Di Kishefmakherin* and *Two Kuni-Lemls*, the latter again only in 1958. Rotbaum himself concentrated on other Yiddish playwrights, particularly Sholem Aleykhem, whom he interpreted in a social context, and pronounced an anti-bourgeois attitude and sympathy for the poor, proletarian Jew... As time went by, non-Jewish playwrights were also staged there, among them numerous Soviet, East German or Polish representatives of socialist realism, such as *The Family* by Popov about Lenin's youth, Leon Kruczkowski's (who was minister of culture after the war) *Julius and Ethel*,<sup>38</sup> besides "acceptable" playwrights, the dramatic realists from the other side of the Iron Curtain, like Eugene O'Neil's *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1924, a drama about the discrimination of the black population), Theodore Dreiser's scenic adaptation of *An American Tragedy* (1925), and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949). A similar repertory was staged at Bucharest, incidentally. It is notable that Goldfaden ceased to be reinterpreted, and that he was rather absent from the Polish-Jewish stage in those years, especially after Rotbaum left the Jewish State Theater, whereas in Bucharest he was still staged rather more frequently. This might have also been due to the fact that in Poland the majority of the Jewish population who might have been the audience of this theater and felt at home with Yiddish folklore had left the country in waves of emigration, leaving an empty space. The new spectators had to be "educated" by other means and topics. In Romania, the Jewish spectators remained more numerous for a longer period of time. But there, too, as we have seen, Goldfaden's star was fading.

While in Poland anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli sentiments following the Six Day War in 1967 and 1968 thrived, and Poland had expelled its Jewish citizens, Romania under Nicolae Ceaușescu chose the opposite way and was the only communist country which did not break off diplomatic relations with Israel. This was positive for Israel

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Goldfaden together with Hurvitz and Lateiner. He was a modernist, his drama tends to melodrama and is naturalistic and realistic.

<sup>38</sup> About the heroes of this side of the Iron Curtain, the Jewish couple Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, American communists who were charged with passing information about the American atomic bomb to the Soviet Union and executed after having been found guilty of conspiracy to commit espionage.

Bercovici and his theater, which now went on a 42-day tour to Israel in 1968, where it was triumphantly received and attended by 35,000 spectators.<sup>39</sup>

### **Goldfaden's adoption by Israil Bercovici**

In Bercovici's above mentioned history of the centenary of Yiddish theater in Romania, the foremost place is occupied by Goldfaden, whom he calls, quoting the obituary, not without a certain amount of pathos, "Poet and prophet."<sup>40</sup> First, it is the implied biblical prophet<sup>41</sup> who, often enough, was also a poet in a sense. And in turn, many poets have written verses which could be called prophetic. This term was thus not very original, as it has been applied to poets since the Antiquity (for instance Ovid), and especially in the Romantic period.<sup>42</sup> Up to today (when it is used, for example, to depict Anna Ahmatova<sup>43</sup>) it has several implications, and it is of significance to see them in the light of Bercovici's context. The young Goldfaden did publish poems, but some unfair critics deny him the status of a poet. Of course, if one compares Goldfaden to Lord Byron or William Blake, who are considered to be "the" poets and prophets, this may be true. On the other hand he was a gifted folk poet who created popular songs, and as such he is known until today. In what sense could Goldfaden have been a prophet? For Bercovici, the fact that thousands of mourners attended Goldfaden's funeral in New York is an indication that he had prophetic qualities indeed. Considering Goldfaden's work as influenced by the European drama, one can agree that at least his operettas *Shulamis*, *Bar Kokhba* and *Ben-Ami*, with their positive traditional Jewish element or pro-Zionist character, could indeed be considered as prophetic in their tendency, reviving the spirit of Jewish nationalism. Bercovici, however, argues that instead of the hitherto bourgeois audience it was "the simple people" to whom Goldfaden's addressed his plays, and indicated primarily the anticipation of the awaking socialist movement.

But again, these were not the plays performed at the State Jewish Theater of Bucharest. The few staged there were either of the type of a light muse or made fun of the Eastern European ghetto life and praised the Enlightenment, topics which were already in fashion one hundred years earlier... We do not actually know, then, why Goldfaden was not a more frequent playwright in the Bucharest repertory as – portrayed by Bercovici – he would have suited it perfectly. From the plays we do know to have been shown on that stage, it was impossible for the audience to grasp Goldfaden's full standing within and importance for Yiddish culture. Maybe that is the reason why Israil Bercovici, who must have realized this obvious gap, wrote his own idealistic evaluation of Goldfaden instead, wanting to make some sort of amends.

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<sup>39</sup> I. Blayzor, Yiddish Theater Flourishes in Romania, in: *Hadassah Magazine*, Vol. 53, No. 1; cf. Grözinger 2002, 308.

<sup>40</sup> Bercovici 1976, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Pollard 1898, 327–332.

<sup>42</sup> e.g. Roston 1965.

<sup>43</sup> Reeder 1994.

Let us see what else Bercovici did write about Goldfaden: His introductory portrait of his hero is partially poetical, partially epic and to some extent exaggerated. In the first place, he names Goldfaden along with Itzhok Leybush Peretz and Yankev Gordin by using the traditional Jewish word for the revered Biblical ancestors, the “forefathers.” For both Peretz and Gordin, Bercovici claims, the Jewish theater was a place of continuation of the Jewish cultural tradition, and a bridge from the glorious ancient past to the present, at the same time giving an insight into the future, “by spinning the torn theater-thread,” generating from the religious and popular forms. However, Goldfaden, much more than these two “forefathers,” believed strongly that “the role which was once played by religion will now be replaced by the theater.” This was a religiously anti-orthodox position of course, as rabbis have throughout the ages since Talmudic times fiercely opposed the institution of Jewish theater. On the other hand, though, from the communist point of view it was again considered as absolutely “politically correct” and thus prophetic, being a herald of the new times to come.

Bercovici argues that by introducing Biblical heroes on the stage, transforming them into popular heroes and placing them next to simple, everyday Jewish figures, Goldfaden, who could not fall back upon a rich genuine Jewish theatrical tradition since none existed apart from the Purimshpil, drew a new line from the ancient Jewish theatrical sources (processions, holiday customs, prayer tunes and clothing) to his present. Moreover, Goldfaden “deprived the kings of their crowns and transformed the old Hassidic adepts of prayer into adepts of theater, and the visitors of synagogues into theater visitors.” But for Bercovici the difference and the step between a traditional Purimshpil and Goldfaden’s *Shulamis* or *Bar-Kokhba* as pieces of art seems to be enormous indeed, and so he declares Goldfaden a genius, comparing him even to the giant figure of Maimonides. Thus, in Bercovici’s interpretation or “reinvention,” Goldfaden is a luminous personage of our age and becomes a great epochal and pioneer intellectual figure, revolutionarily changing the traditional Jewish society from a religion-based into a theater-based one. Goldfaden, it seems, almost Moses-like, led the Jewish people out of the religious temple into the temple of arts (“kunst-templ”).<sup>44</sup>

Israil Bercovici, just like Jakob Rotbaum, believed in the communist credo that all mass media are there to teach and enlighten the masses. The “new” communist man and woman have the right to education, they are privileged and offered everything to advance their intellectual capacities (the technical term for that was “to elevate their cultural level”) for the benefit of the new socialist society.<sup>45</sup> Bercovici therefore regards his own work at the theater, newspapers and radio as a pedagogical mission, one he had to carry on also as Goldfaden’s legacy. In the second chapter of his book, Bercovici quotes from “Goldfadns groyse oytobyografye” (*Goldfadn-Bukh*, New York 1926): “Di umes ha-oylem haltn shoyt /vayt mit der efentlekher folks-shule oyf di breter.../un mir hobn nokh gornisht...”.<sup>46</sup> Therefore the Yiddish stage founded by Goldfaden should be considered as a sort of public evening school for adult education, Jewish education. In this case we can even be more precise: the school Bercovici

<sup>44</sup> Bercovici 1976, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Grözinger 2002, 281.

<sup>46</sup> Bercovici 1976, 14: “The nations in the world are already advanced having a public school on the stage..., whereas we have nothing yet...”

means is both a Jewish theater concerning the topics and a theater made by Jews. The audience, incidentally, as we saw in Bucharest or later in Warsaw, did not necessarily have to be Jewish. Cultural elevation can only be achieved if knowledge of culture is being actively handed on from one generation to the other, and such is the case of theater, a cultural event in which an audience of whatever origin can participate. For Bercovici, following Israel Zinberg in his *History of Old Literature from its Origins to the Haskalah*, the syncretistic play of dance-singing-music is the essence of theatrical culture since the most ancient times, and all these essential elements could be found in Goldfaden's plays. He thus presented Goldfaden as the "Beginning and the Continuation"<sup>47</sup> of the theatrical cultural tradition, and therefore the ideal teacher of the people – although this was not in fact really true in every aspect and did not reflect Goldfaden's complete activity.

Bercovici's often idealized portrayal of Goldfaden leaves out the above mentioned criticism with which Goldfaden's plays had to live after his successor and rival, Yankev Gordin, appeared on the Jewish dramatic firmament. Especially in socialist and communist circles, Goldfaden's works were seen as melodramatic, old-fashioned and therefore in need of rearrangement in order to meet the needs of the revolutionary theater program, as was the case with his *Sorceress (Di Kishefmakherin, 1877)* in Moscow in 1922.<sup>48</sup> This play, an operetta, the only play by Goldfaden more or less frequently staged in Bucharest, had a formative influence on the development of Yiddish theater on at least two continents – in the USA (1881) and the post-revolutionary Soviet Union (1922 at the GOSET Theater) – according to Paola Bertolone.<sup>49</sup> Although this play underwent modernization following its creation, the Bucharest theater made no such attempts in the case of other Goldfaden plays.

For Bercovici, just as for the earlier Jakub Rotbaum, Goldfaden enters the modern age, in his role as a people's teacher by means of an artistic medium. But it is not merely the function of providing aesthetic education which has been associated with theater before. It now becomes an important socio-political educatory means for changing the mentality of a minority that has so far been religious and thus considered as backward, into members of a new, secular and thus progressive socialist collective who would therefore be worthy of becoming equal citizens. This is the new and advanced "enlightenment" of the Jewish masses. According to Bercovici, Goldfaden being the "beginning" meant that his theater differed from the earlier attempts which took place in Warsaw in 1838, for instance. Warsaw, the Polish city, belonged to Russia after the partitions and its Jewish theater audience belonged to the bourgeois, not the workers' strata of the society. At that time, the Haskalah movement was beginning to gain influence in Eastern Europe, but the spirit of that age was still different. This accounted for the different approach of the early Yiddish plays in those days. Therefore Warsaw would not be the true cradle of the Jewish theater. In Romania, however, where new theaters were being founded at that time, contemporary historians began to develop a progressive theory of dramatic arts. Bercovici quotes

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<sup>47</sup> Bercovici 1976, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Veidlinger 2000, 46.

<sup>49</sup> Bertolone 2003, 79.

their evaluation of the theater as a place of mass education, which young and old, intellectuals and even illiterate people can attend. Theater offers more than a school, it is the biggest moral institution besides the church; the theater is a place where the noblest humanitarian and national feelings are aroused.<sup>50</sup> This was also Goldfaden's credo.

“Shtey oyf mayn folk/ ervakh fun dayn driml/ fun narishkayt makh an end.”<sup>51</sup> Bercovici argues, like later Mikhoels and other Communist Party cultural authorities, that Goldfaden was a folk artist who wrote plays portraying genuine shtetl life, which, when combined with the newest stage styles, produced true revolutionary theater.<sup>52</sup> But, as Jeffrey Veidlinger's description of the debates in the Soviet Union show,

over the next few years [...] like the Moscow State Yiddish Theater, Goldfaden would be seen as a revolutionary who fought against the insipid rabbinism of his era in an effort to promote secular enlightened culture among the Jewish masses. However, the sentimentality and melodrama of his plays, which were geared towards bourgeois audiences, would remain a contentious subject.<sup>53</sup>

Bercovici quotes Goldfaden calling his first audience “Di niderike shikhtn des folks” – the low layers of the population – and this type of audience needed him most. Arts which derive from popular, folkloristic sources have the biggest impact on the people. As we can see, Bercovici portrayed Goldfaden as a revolutionary from several points of view, not just intellectually or from the artistic point of view, but also in the ideological, political sense of the word. When Bercovici wrote his book, Romania under the Ceaușescu regime was still firmly confined behind the Iron Curtain. The word “Popular” was a part of the name of the Republic of Romania. It was a magic, a bolshevist, a socialist and a Stalinist word. Popular culture, having been freed by the revolution, could finally serve the purpose of the “people.” Bercovici wanted to or had to sound ideological. He traced the anti-Czarist spirit in Goldfaden's plays, especially as, at the end of his life, the first new revolutionary events since 1848 heralded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the big political changes yet to come. The fact that Goldfaden could establish a professional theater nowhere else but in Romania, a country which has always played rather a marginal role in world history and whose geographical position was on the fringes, not in the centre of Europe, is for Bercovici, a Romanian patriot, another revolutionary event.

Bercovici's theses explaining the new formative role of Romania in this decisive process in the Jewish Diaspora are also based on the sometimes slanted findings of his contemporary Romanian Marxist-Leninist historians whose conception of history idealized the development of the country. It is not known in the general history of the revolution of 1848 that Romania played any important part in this “peoples' spring,” as the communists called it, while it took hold of many countries in the realm of the Habsburg Monarchy and had notable effects on Hungary and Poland. But Israil Bercovici does not hesitate to draw a direct line from 1848, as one of the “most important historical events in Romania [...] when the writers stood up in the foremost

<sup>50</sup> Bercovici 1976, 44.

<sup>51</sup> Bercovici 1976, 99, quotation from *Ni be ni me ni kukuriku*: “Get up, my people, wake up from your dream, put an end to foolishness.”

<sup>52</sup> Veidlinger 2000, 45 f.

<sup>53</sup> Veidlinger 2000, 46, quoting Y. Dobrushin, “Dray datn,” *Di royte velt* 4 (April 1926), 91–94.

line in the struggle for the national and social right of the people,”<sup>54</sup> to Goldfaden’s time almost thirty years later. He argues that the 1848 revolution gave an impact and initiated the rapid cultural development and secularization which took place in Romania, making it a place where minorities’ and local theaters could be founded, becoming “schools of high ideas and high feelings,”<sup>55</sup> thus becoming ripe for such an institution as Goldfaden’s first Yiddish theater. This would have been impossible in another Eastern European country where, like in Russia, repression by political rulers and the church institutions still prevailed. The subsequent flowering of the Yiddish stage was due to the fact that the Jewish public allegedly loved grand public shows, and Bercovici underlines the importance of the Yiddish language for the masses of Jews for whom this, and not Romanian, was the mother tongue. And in the course of time, the Yiddish theater became an institution which played the important role of a cultural emissary not just for Jews but also for Romanians.<sup>56</sup> This was something Goldfaden certainly dreamed of.

Israil Bercovici, for whom the work at the theater was both a mission and a fulfillment of a dream, remained a lifelong disciple of Goldfaden and not of Gordin. He declared Yitzkhok Leybush Peretz as the legitimate heir to Goldfaden. It seems, though, that Bercovici, just like his Polish friend Jakub Rotbaum, belonged to the so-called “Goldfaden fraction,” and must have been put at a disadvantage in the Jewish State Theater of Bucharest, where Goldfaden did not play the main part as Bercovici might have wished. Goldfaden seems to have ceased to play the role of a socialist hero in these theaters. This might account for the visible absence of Goldfaden’s oeuvre in Bucharest. By establishing the first permanent Jewish professional repertory theater ensemble, Goldfaden’s dream had come true, but at the Jewish State Theater of Bucharest, just as at the State Jewish Theater in Warsaw, this dream had come to an end.

### **Goldfaden’s Renaissance?**

However, as mentioned above, fans keep his memory alive, long after it was necessary to reinvent him as a socialist hero. A kind of Goldfaden revival is now taking place, and at last “a theater pioneer gets his due,” as Nahma Sandrow writes: nowadays, interest in seeing his plays has increased, and when the Hebrew Actors Union decided to give out awards for excellence they named them the Goldies in honor of Avrom Goldfadn, in the form of statuettes, “silver-painted plaster renditions of the man himself, sporting a flamboyant cloak and moustache.” Sandrow also lists the documentary by Romanian filmmaker Radu Gabrea, Goldfaden’s Legacy: The Origins of Yiddish Theater, and there is the now annual International Goldfaden Festival of Jewish Theater in Jassy, Romania, co-founded by Moshe Yassur. The National Yiddish Theater Folksbiene in New York, the longest continuously running professional Yiddish theater in America and in the world, has had Goldfaden repeatedly in its

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<sup>54</sup> Bercovici 1976, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Bercovici 1976, 41, 67.

<sup>56</sup> Bercovici 1976, 108.

repertory, such as Goldfaden's burlesque comedy with songs *A Novel Romance* (Di kaprizne kalemoyd) in 2004. In the meantime, Goldfaden's operettas have become repertory staples in Montreal, Melbourne, Buenos Aires, and Tel Aviv. His plays are presented at festivals, like at KlezKamp, the weeklong program of Yiddish culture, because "The songs have melodies people love, and they tell a story. When something is a classic, it's a classic for a reason."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Sandrow 2006.