



# Literary Censorship and the Dramatic Society in Ljubljana (1891-1904)

Literarna cenzura  
in Dramatično društvo  
v Ljubljani (1891-1904)

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This article examines documentary materials of the Dramatic Society in Ljubljana from the period between 1891/92 and 1903/04 that are held in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia. The approach is informed by Ginzburg's micro-historical method, which suggests reading documents "against the grain" and underlines the importance of materials' differing provenance. Two types of documents are included in the censorship materials, which were created by individuals in subordinate roles and by those in government structures. One type is requests from the Dramatic Society to stage plays in Slovenian, and the other is grants of permission for productions from the Provincial Presidency of Carniola, which was in charge of theater censorship. An analysis reveals that at the beginning of the twentieth century the censorship apparatus's power had not yet waned, but in fact had increased, and the time of depoliticized censorship had not yet arrived.

DRAMATIC SOCIETY, PROVINCIAL  
PRESIDENCY OF CARNIOLA,  
CENSORSHIP MATERIALS, SLOVENIAN  
THEATER, IVAN TAVČAR, ANTON  
TRSTENJAK, KAREL BLEIWEIS-  
TRSTENIŠKI, FRAN MILČINSKI,  
MICRO-HISTORICAL APPROACH

Prispevek obravnava dokumentarno gradivo Dramatičnega društva v Ljubljani, ki ga hrani Arhiv Republike Slovenije in je nastalo med leti 1891/1892 in 1903/1904. Pristop se navdihuje pri Ginzburgovi mikrozgodovinski metodi, ki predlaga branje dokumentov »proti namenu« in opozarja na upoštevanje različnih provenienc gradiva. Cenzurno gradivo namreč zajema dve vrsti dokumentov, ki so jih ustvarjali posamezniki iz podrejenih plasti in iz oblastnih struktur. Eno so prošnje za podelitev koncesij za prirejanje predstav v slovenščini s strani Dramatičnega društva, drugo so dovoljenja za uprizorjanje s strani Deželnega predsedstva za Kranjsko, ki je vodilo cenzuro dramsko-gledališke dejavnosti. Analiza cenzurnih virov pokaže, da na prehodu iz 19. stoletja v 20. stoletje moč cenzurnega aparata še vedno ni slabela, ampak se je morda celo okrepila, in da čas za depolitizacijo cenzure še ni napočil.

DRAMATIČNO DRUŠTVO, DEŽELNO  
PRESEDSTVO ZA KRANJSKO,  
CENZURNI DOKUMENTI, SLOVENSKO  
GLEDALIŠČE, IVAN TAVČAR, ANTON  
TRSTENJAK, KAREL BLEIWEIS  
TRSTENIŠKI, FRAN MILČINSKI ST.,  
MIKROZGODOVINSKI PRISTOP

**1**  
See also Štih, Simoniti,  
and Vodopivec (2008).

Theater censorship—which was quite unsystematic until the mid-eighteenth century, largely having to do with only individual bans—began to be centralized under Maria Theresa and Joseph II (from 1750 to 1790), which went hand in hand with the school system reforms. This also increased control over theater performances in the Austrian lands. Because of the impact that plays had on the audience, the ruler—who acted as a sort of moral guardian (among other things, she was interested in the proper lifestyle of actors)—refused to apply the same censorship criteria to plays as for printed books. The main figure of theater reform and censorship during the Enlightenment was the university professor Joseph von Sonnenfels, who was among Maria Theresa’s main planners and advisors.<sup>1</sup> Thus in 1770, theater censorship was introduced (independently of book censorship). Franz Karl Hägelin served as the theater censor between 1770 and 1804. He decided on the suitability of plays for staging, ensuring that nothing that could offend the ruling elite appeared on the monarchy’s stages (Bachleitner 2010: 71–75; 2017: 41–93).

In the decades that followed, the status of the theater in the absolutist monarchy did not change significantly. Due to the power of the censorship apparatus, Bachleitner defines the monarchy of Francis I (1792–1835) and Ferdinand I (1835–1848) as a police state. Absolutist rule grew stronger after Napoleon’s defeat, and the “alertness” of the state apparatus in Austria was further enhanced after the French July Revolution of 1830, which led to an intensified conservative policy. Against this backdrop, censorship was politicized, increasingly turning into an instrument of oppressing undesired (political) ideas. It was discontinued for a short while in 1848, until the adoption of the *Bach Theaterordnung* ‘theater order’ in 1850 (Bachleitner 2010: 75–91; 2017: 93–146). Alongside minor amendments, this order also served as the

main basis for literary censorship in Slovenia, which directed and controlled the Slovenian theater in the pre-March period until the dissolution of the monarchy.

A pioneer achievement in research on theater censorship in Slovenia during the last decades of Austria-Hungary was Ana Ugrinović's bachelor's thesis *Cenzura in prepoved gledališča* (Censorship and the Theater Ban; AGRFT, 2001). Most interesting for this article is the third part of her thesis (46ff.), which contains a historical overview, and its subsections, 8, 9, and 10 (64ff.), which cover the pre-March period until 1900. Ugrinović made an inventory of the "evidence material" from the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia; specifically, she lists Bundles 5, 6,<sup>2</sup> 7, 8, and 9, which she believes are key to studying theater censorship in Slovenia (Ugrinović 2001: 70). She then focuses on a detailed examination of Bundle 9, which contains licensing clauses for staging plays covering the period from 1906 to 1914, and she presents in detail selected plays and their journey onto the stage (including Jurčič and Levstik's *Tugomer*). At the end of the thesis, she appends a few documents that she refers to in the main text and serve as illustrations.

This article focuses on different, somewhat earlier documentary material from the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia that to date has not been examined in detail nor analyzed using a micro-historical approach (see especially Ginzburg 2006, 2010). Through close reading of a narrowly delineated segment of historical sources, this article explores the asymmetric communication between the Dramatic Society's committee and the Provincial Presidency of Carniola (Deželno predsedstvo za Kranjsko), which carried out literary censorship of plays staged by this first Slovenian theater. The article also identifies certain less well-known aspects of the Dramatic Society's operations and sheds new light on those already known through "reading against the grain,"

**2** She states that Bundle 6 contains licenses from 1894 onward, but licenses already slightly older than that can be found in it. These are discussed in this article—that is, licenses from 1891/92 onward.

**3** Before the era of the reading societies, similar societies, which also existed in Trieste, Gorizia, Graz, Klagenfurt, and Vienna, not only promoted the reading, collection, preservation, and distribution of newspapers and books, but also cultivated dramatic and theater activities and staging performances for the purposes of the societies (Perenič 2010: 185–205; 2012: 365).

**4** For example, in 1869 the society established a drama class or school.

especially regarding information from the same segment of censorship sources that were created by the members of the Dramatic Society and, in this sense, leave a historical trace (e.g., the names of the leading figures within the society, individual pieces of information on staging plays, and data from financial reports).

The Dramatic Society was established in Ljubljana in 1867, but its foundations extend back to the mid-nineteenth century (1848–1851),<sup>3</sup> when various political and cultural societies were active (including the Slovenian Society in Ljubljana), and the 1860s, when national reading societies flourished in Slovenia. Within the context of reading societies and their evening social events as their predominant feature, drama and theater activity was becoming increasingly prominent (for more details, see Perenič 2012). The capacity of the reading societies was soon exceeded, and this stimulated amateur but ambitious drama enthusiasts to establish their own professional organization, which from 1867 to 1892 paved the way for the Ljubljana Provincial Theater (and later the National Theater, established in 1918).

Based on the findings to date about the history of the Slovenian theater and its long journey from an amateur theater (performances under the aegis of national reading societies) via a semi-professional theater (the establishment of the Dramatic Society as the first stage of the Slovenian theater’s professionalization)<sup>4</sup> to a relatively highly professionalized theater in 1892 (a special milestone was achieved when the society moved onto the stage of the Provincial Theater), and the preserved censorship documents, theater censorship—which relied on the notorious 1850 *Theaterordnung*—only began to be seriously enforced (as late as) the “watershed” year of 1892. This implies that the performances—especially those held by reading societies as part of their evening social events as well as by the later Dramatic Society,

which, for nearly a quarter of a century, staged plays in a leased reading society hall, making them semi-public—were primarily conceived as a nationally affirmative and nationally agitational activity, whereas this could hardly be considered a form of organizing a Slovenian theater.<sup>5</sup> In other words, with restored parliamentary life during the constitutional period, which was introduced by the February Patent after the October Diploma, societies (including reading societies) had to adhere to the laws governing them. These required that, when a society was established, its bylaws (only) had to be submitted to the responsible district governor’s office, which suggests that requests to stage individual plays were also sent to this office. Hence the assumption that these societies and consequently the first Slovenian theater, which used “society” in its name, were exempt from the rules and provisions of the *Theaterordnung* and theater censorship, which were only able to control the Slovenian theater from 1892 onward, when suitable (legal) bases (the Dramatic Society acquiring a permanent building and ultimately changing its name to “theater”) were created for it.

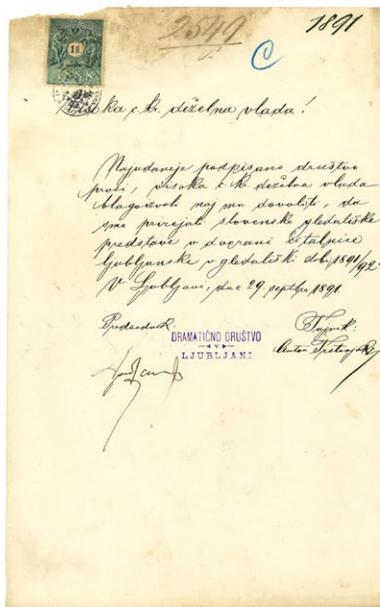
Therefore, limiting the research material to the period from 1891/92 to 1903/04 was not a coincidence. In 1892, the Dramatic Society moved its performances from the reading society’s premises onto the stage of the newly founded Provincial Theater, which also meant a more expedient organization, a permanent stage and ensemble, and so on. This further accelerated its professionalization. The year 1903 is relevant because it was then that, especially through a decree by Prime Minister Ernest von Koerber, the first measures indicating a relaxation of the still strict theater censorship were adopted.

The batch of censorship materials examined, dating to the period in which the *Theaterordnung* began to be clearly enforced, includes

**5** Filip Kalan writes along similar lines, comparing the Slovenian and Croatian theater activity in the 1860s; the latter was already considerably professionalized, whereas within the Slovenian context the professionalization process took considerably longer, also because of the marked ethnic and agitational purposes of the performances (1980: 457).

**FIG. 1 ▶**

An 1891 request from the Ljubljana Dramatic Society addressed to the Provincial Presidency of Carniola to be granted permission to stage plays in Slovenian in the Ljubljana reading society's hall at the Souvan home during the 1891/92 season.



Visoka c. kr. deželna vlada!

Najudaneje podpisano društvo prosi, visoka c. kr. deželna vlada blagoizvoli naj mu dovoliti, da sme prirejati slovenske gledališke predstave v dvorani čitalnice ljubljanske v gledališki dobi 1891/92.

V Ljubljani, dne 29. septembra 1891

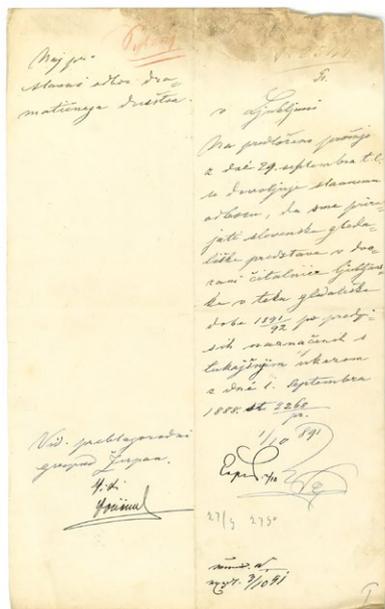
Predsednik: [Ivan Tavčar] Tajnik: [Anton Trstenjak]

6  
SI AS 16, Box 165.

7  
Censorship materials are also stored in Boxes 167, 168a, 168b, and 169. Due to their volume and different content, they must be examined separately. It should be mentioned that the scope of the research material also had to be reduced due to the epidemic, which prevented access to all the material.

requests from the Ljubljana Dramatic Society and the permissions granted for productions, together with censorship instructions, from the Provincial Presidency of Carniola (*Landespräsidium für Krain*), which are held by the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia in Boxes 165 and 166<sup>6</sup> (Bundles 5 and 6). They also contain various other documents issued by the censorship office, forms, and records on banned plays.<sup>7</sup>

The first document in the archival censorship materials analyzed is a request by the Dramatic Society to be granted permission for staging plays in Slovenian in the 1891/92 season. At that time, these plays were still performed at the seat of the Ljubljana national reading society, which from 1862 to 1892 was located in the house of the Souvan family on what was then Schellenburg Street (today's Slovenia Street,



← **FIG. 2**  
Permission from the Provincial Presidency of Carniola for staging plays from September 1891 to the end of March 1892; a copy was also sent to Ljubljana Mayor Peter Grasselli.

Slovenska cesta) in Ljubljana (Andrejka 2013), which served as an important meeting place for Slovenian cultural figures.<sup>8</sup> The request was signed by Ivan Tavčar, a lawyer in Ljubljana and the society's chair from 1886 to 1902 (Boršnik 2013), and Anton Trstenjak,<sup>9</sup> a publicist and theater historian, who served as the society's secretary from 1884 to 1886 and again from 1889 to 1893 (Koblar 2013b). Both Trstenjak and Tavčar were (co)founders, members, and supporters of several other national institutions (e.g., the Ljubljana reading society, the Sokol gymnastics society, the writers' club, and the Slovenian Society), in which representatives of "Old" and "Young Slovenians" (i.e., conservatives and liberals) were actively involved, working to develop the national culture. A great cooperative spirit born out of subordination to the

**8** Franz Xaver Souvan also converted an addition to his house into a bowling alley, cafe, and dance hall (ibid.), which means that the reading society was at the heart of social life.

**9** His main work is *Slovensko gledališče* (Slovenian Theater, 1892) published for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Dramatic Society.

**10** These were published primarily as part of the more liberal political orientation of the Young Slovenian faction, especially with regard to the development of newspapers, and voting for the December Constitution, whereas in broader national life the relations between the two camps were cooperative.

**11** It is evident from the documents that theater seasons lasted seven months, from September to the end of March.

**12** Grasselli was the first ethnically conscious Slovenian mayor; he was on the Dramatic Society's committee and also served as the society's chair and vice-chair during the first years of its operation (Uredništvo SBL 2013).

**13** SI AS 16, Box 165: permission for the 1891/92 season.

provincial government on the one hand and efforts to fulfill national interests on the other is also testified to by the censorship sources examined, which helped mitigate the (political and worldview) oppositions between the two camps.<sup>10</sup>

The subordination to the censorship office mentioned above left a strong imprint in the documents. In its requests, the society addresses the provincial presidency with expressions revealing respect, politeness, loyalty, and seemingly exaggerated, yet most likely conventional submission (e.g., “the undersigned most loyal society” and “condescend”), which, on the one hand, can be attributed to the type of document addressed to an official body, whereas, on the other hand, the carefully selected words indicate the applicants' dependence on the “generosity” of the provincial president working with the state administration. The provincial presidency approved the society's committee request of September 29th, 1891 for the running theater season, which was to last until March 31st, 1892.<sup>11</sup> It issued permission that, according to the standard procedure, was sent to the Ljubljana town hall; Peter Grasselli was the mayor at that time.<sup>12</sup>

When the above, relatively modestly formulated written permission by the provincial presidency sent to the “famous [Dramatic Society] committee, allowing it to stage Slovenian plays at the hall of the Ljubljana reading society”<sup>13</sup> is compared with later permissions, it can be determined that the later ones are much stricter in their wording, more extensive, and, first and foremost, more precise, citing, nearly in entirety, the *Theaterordnung*, censorship instructions, major orders by the provincial presidency, and relevant regulations of the state and town police. This makes the hierarchical superiority of the presidency, defined through its responsibility for theater censorship, even more evident. For example, such are the permissions for the 1892/93 and

1893/94 seasons.<sup>14</sup> The stricter legal wording can most definitely also be attributed to the fact that from then onward the Dramatic Society staged plays at the Provincial Theater, which could seat a larger audience (than the reading society's hall). This meant that this audience could no longer be as "unified" and hence, from the censors' viewpoint, it had a greater potential for dissent. Here it should be added that the representatives of the German theater also had to obtain permissions for staging German plays at the Provincial Theater in the same way. A lucky coincidence led to the discovery of two applications by German theater directors in the batch of documents examined: the first one was written in 1898 by Franz Schlesinger (director from 1897 to 1899) and the other in 1900 by Berthold Wolf (1900–1909).<sup>15</sup>

Thus, in the permissions granted to the Dramatic Society for two consecutive seasons the presidency first draws the "famous" committee's attention to (a) the provisions of the *Theaterordnung* of November 25th, 1850 and then separately to (b) the orders by the provincial presidency of October 28th, 1882.

Regarding the first point above, the two Slovenian permissions cite the decree issued by the interior ministry on November 25th and published in the official gazette of the Austrian Empire on November 30th, 1850. This decree introduced the theater regulations known as the *Theaterordnung*.<sup>16</sup> According to Norbert Bachleitner, the 1850 regulations did not differ much from those that had been in force before. In fact, most pre-1848 regulations continued to apply for all the provinces because the motives for censors' interventions practically had not changed over time. Production had to be controlled throughout and always approved in advance. The documentation shows that in fact the clerks had to first approve an individual season, and, over the course of the season, the applicants or theaters had to send the original text

**14**  
SI AS 16, Box 165:  
permissions for  
the 1892/93 and  
1893/94 seasons.

**15**  
The Provincial Theater  
used a two-tier system,  
in which the Slovenian  
and German theaters  
shared the stage until  
1911, when the German  
theater obtained its  
own building. For  
comparison and more  
on the (co)operation  
of the German and  
Slovenian theaters  
at the Provincial Theat-  
er, which from 1894  
sought to divide the  
evening performances  
between themselves  
as equally as possible,  
see Sandra Jen-  
ko (2017: 52).

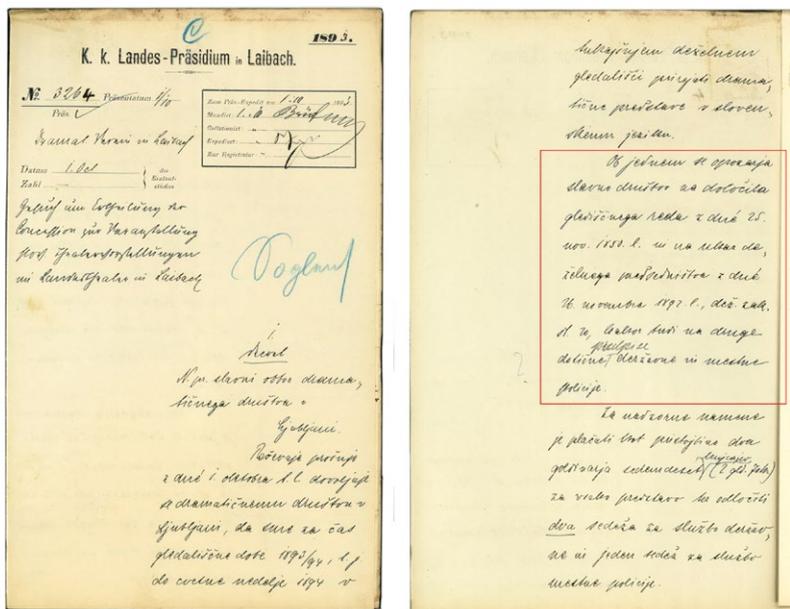
**16**  
"The order from the  
interior ministry  
of November 25th,  
1850," which set out the  
"theater regulations,"  
was published in *Dežel-  
ni zakonik in vladni list  
za kranjsko kronovino*  
(Provincial Code and  
Government Gazette  
for the Crownland  
of Carniola).



could only be staged in premises designated for this activity and with previously obtained permission; permissions for individual plays could exceptionally be granted by the district or town governor (or even the head of the police); permission applied to the specific applicant (e.g., society) only, and new permission did not have to be obtained for plays that had already been performed with prior permission in a crownland's capital (meaning that they could be performed in theaters of other towns within that same crownland). In addition, the regulations also covered the method of staging, with an emphasis on the set, props, and actors' costumes, which were not allowed to include anything that was considered publicly immoral. Special emphasis was placed on safety, which was to be provided for by special guards during the play. The *Theaterordnung*, signed by Bach in his own hand, concluded with an article setting out sanctions for violations, which included a fine (from fifty to five hundred gulden) and imprisonment (up to three months). The provisions' restrictiveness indicates a tendency to maintain control over the drama and theater culture or prevent any dissidence that might have threatened public peace and order and national security. It can be established that the *Theaterordnung* continued to govern the status and program orientation of national theater cultures as late as the end of the nineteenth century (cf. Batušić et al. 2017). As argued by Ana Ugričević, the turn of the century "unfortunately failed to constitute, in any form, a turn or break in censorship" (2001: 69), which controlled the increasingly professionalized Slovenian theater, as well as the German theater. The *Theaterordnung* continued to apply well into the twentieth century (Bachleitner 2010: 101), with certain provisions also remaining in force in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Regarding the second point above (the orders by the provincial presidency), a different type of references in the permissions granted

**FIG. 4 ▶** Permission from the provincial presidency for the 1893/94 theater season, with references to the police and fire safety regulations, and the Theaterordnung.

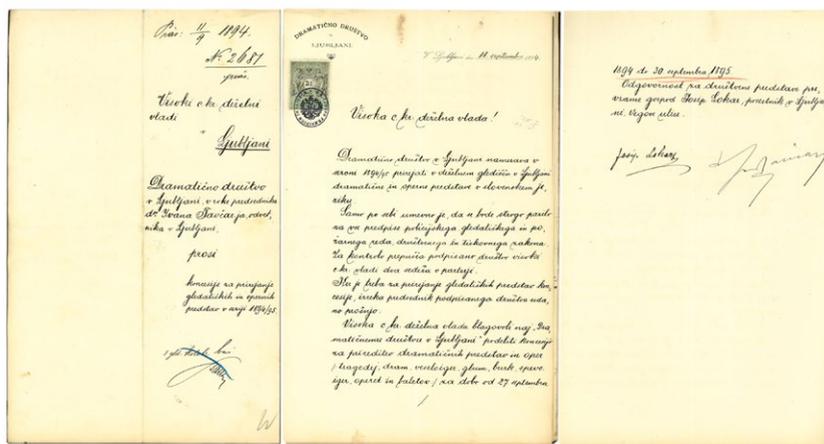


**19** Drawing attention to the fire safety regulations, which would be interesting to examine in terms of technical standards and capacities, certainly also reflects the fear and discomfort related to the experience with the fierce fire of February 1887 that destroyed the Theater of the Estates.

**20** The fee only changed after the First World War (Ugrinović 2001: 71).

to the Dramatic Society covered the 1882 orders by the presidency or, specifically, the police and fire safety regulations.<sup>19</sup> Key among the police regulations are the surveillance provisions, according to which the society had to pay two guildens and seventy kreuzers for surveillance services and reserve two seats for the state police and one seat for the town police in the theater hall. The amount of the surveillance fee remained the same over the course of the ten years covered by the research material,<sup>20</sup> which also applies to all the other provisions.

What an important limitation the censorship regulations constituted for the Society's operations can be gathered by examining further censorship materials or, specifically, the committee's request for a license in early September 1894. The applicants were aware of their



← **FIG. 5**  
Request from the Dramatic Society for the 1894/95 theater season sent to the provincial presidency by Ivan Tavčar and a landowner from Ljubljana, Josip Lokar, who thereby took responsibility for the society's performances.

position in relation to the provincial office as the center of power; hence, for example, they mention that it “goes without saying” that the police, theater, and fire safety order, and especially the laws governing societies and the press, must be adhered to, adding that they had already reserved two stall seats for the Austro-Hungarian government surveillance officers.

By inspecting this document closely, a careful reader interested in literary history can also notice an increased genre diversity in the society's repertoire. The request to obtain permission for the given season namely announced that several types of plays and operas would be staged (i.e., tragedies, dramas, comedies, farces, burlesques, musicals, operettas, and even a ballet).<sup>21</sup> In addition to Tavčar, the request was signed by the fairly or completely unknown Josip Lokar from Vega Street (Vegova ulica) in Ljubljana, who took responsibility for the Dramatic Society's performances. The 1900 census reveals that Lokar was a landowner and innkeeper born in 1851 and residing

**21**  
It is evident from the material that the presidency first approved the running theater season. One would think that it also approved the annual list of plays simultaneously submitted by the society, but that would be mere speculation because no such lists can be found. However, based on later documents (specifically, from 1903 onward) it can be presumed that the censors obtained individual texts for inspection and approval at least three days before the performance.

**22**  
SI AS 16, Box 166:  
permissions for  
the 1895/96 and  
1896/97 seasons.

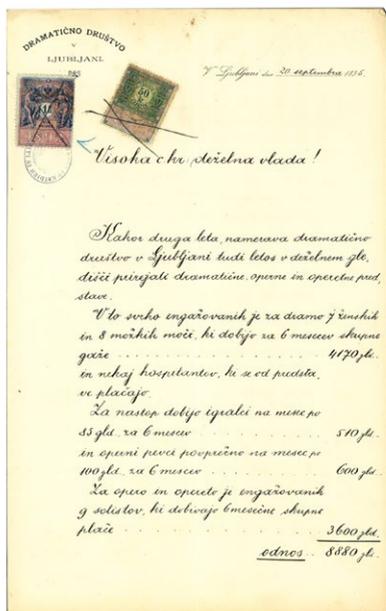
**23**  
Worthy of mention  
is *Teharski plemiči* (The  
Nobles of Teharje),  
an opera by Benjamin  
Ipavec, for which  
Funtek wrote the  
libretto based on Ferdo  
Kočever's *Mlinarjev  
Janez* (Janez from the  
Miller Farm). The  
work was published  
in 1890 as part of the  
collection *Slovenska  
Talijska* (The Slovenian  
Theater), and it pre-  
miered in 1892 at the  
Provincial Theater.

**24**  
SI AS 16, Box 166:  
permission for the  
1895/96 season.

at house no. 10 on the street. This foregrounds seemingly unimportant individuals that helped shape the Dramatic Society's history and through whom fragments of its unknown past are being revealed. Another such individual was Ivan Kavčič, who signed the request for the 1896/97 season together with Ivan Tavčar,<sup>22</sup> thereby taking responsibility for the society's performances. According to the 1900 census, Kavčič was an attendant at the town hall born in 1847 and residing at Town Square (Mestni trg) no. 27 in Ljubljana. Alongside the two, the request was signed by Anton Funtek, who helped the Dramatic Society primarily as a translator,<sup>23</sup> but later became a censor.

The two requests in this bundle are followed by permissions for the 1895/96 and 1896/97 seasons, revealing what initially seems to be a bland communication between the society and government officials (the sources examined mention a certain Wratschko), who seek to control the applicant primarily through regulations. In addition to decrees and orders from the 1850 *Theaterordnung*, the two permissions refer to the orders from the provincial presidency of November 26th, 1892 and Acts 30/3 1888 (no. 33) and 20/7 1894 (no. 168) of the provincial code (these include state and town police regulations). Added newly to all this is a provision referring to the amount of the police surveillance fee; if an event lasted for more than four hours, the fee for surveillance officers and guards was higher. These data are very informative because they reveal the emphasis placed on the information about the implementation of censorship regulations by the police authorities, which thereby enforced the state's monopoly power.

This is followed by the Dramatic Society's request to "be granted a license for staging Slovenian plays and operas at the provincial theater" dated September 20th, 1895,<sup>24</sup> which differs slightly from the others. In it, the society's chair, Ivan Tavčar, extensively informs the censorship



V to svrho angžarovanih je za dramo 7 ženskih in 8 moških moči, ki dobijo za 6 mesecev skupne gaje	4170 gld.
in nekaj hospitantov, ki se od predstave plačajo.	
Za nastop dobijo igralci na mesec po 85 gld., za 6 mesecev	510 gld.
in operni pevci povprečno na mesec po 100 gld., za 6 mesecev	600 gld.
Za opero in opereto je angžarovanih 9 solistov, ki dobivajo 6mesečne skupne plače	3600 gld.
	odnos 8880 gld.
	prenos 8880 gld.
13 moških in 11 ženskih članov zbora se skupno 6mesečno plačo	3270 gld.
1 kapelnik z letno plačo	960 gld.
Godba stane za vsako predstavo drame po 14 gld., ta operno predstavo po 30 gld., torej za 5 dram na mesec	70 gld.
in za 7 oper na mesec	210 gld.
za vsako opero 2 skušnji 15 gld. x 7 =	105 gld.
	skupaj na mesec 365 gld.
	ali za 6 mesecev 2130 gld.
Garderoobjer dobi za 6 mesecev	180 gld.
10 bilijeterjev na večer 3 gld. za mesec to je 12 x 3 = 36 gld. ali za 6 mesecev	216 gld.
Statisti in hospitante na mesec 20 gld. za 6 mesecev	120 gld.
Gledališki mojster z delavci (požarna bramba, 2 policijska nadzornika[]), tiskar gledaliških listov – za vsako predstavo povprek računamo	25 gld.
in plin za večer	20 gld.
	skupaj 43 gld.
	ali za 12 predstav v mesecu 516 gld. in
	odnos 15936 gld.
	prenos 15936 gld.
	in za 6 mesecev 3096 gld.
1 suflerza dobi za predstavo 4 gld. za 12 večerov s skušnjami 48 gld., za 6 mesecev	288 gld.
1 inspicijent za mesec 45 gld., za 6 mesecev	270 gld.
Muzikalije, honorari za pisatelje in skladatelje in za prevode ter garderca etc. znašajo za sezono gotovo	2500 gld.
Vsa potrebščina za sezono znaša torej okolo	22100 gld.

← FIG. 6  
First page of Ivan Tavčar's request for granting the Dramatic Society a license for the 1895/96 season (right, transcribed by the author).

committee of the society's financial affairs or expenses, which differs from the requests sent in other years. This information not only provides insight into the business aspects of managing the society (e.g., the amount of money spent on hiring actors and singers, the average costs of one performance, salary or remuneration by profession, role in the ensemble, and so on), but also reveal its organizational structure. Basically, the entire composition of the actors' or theater ensemble at the time can be gathered from it. It is not clear why Tavčar decided to add a financial report to the request, but it seems he wanted to indirectly inform the presidency about how the Slovenian theater was developing (and becoming professionalized) and building its own identity, which was also reflected in the structure of its ensemble.<sup>25</sup>

**25**  
The report lists the salaries of certain actors, costs of rehearsals (prompter and stage manager), and remunerations for writers, translators, and composers.

**26**

SI AS 16, Box 166: permissions for the 1897/98 and 1898/99 seasons.

**27**

SI AS 16, Box 166: permissions for the 1899/1900, 1900/01, and 1902/03 seasons.

**28**

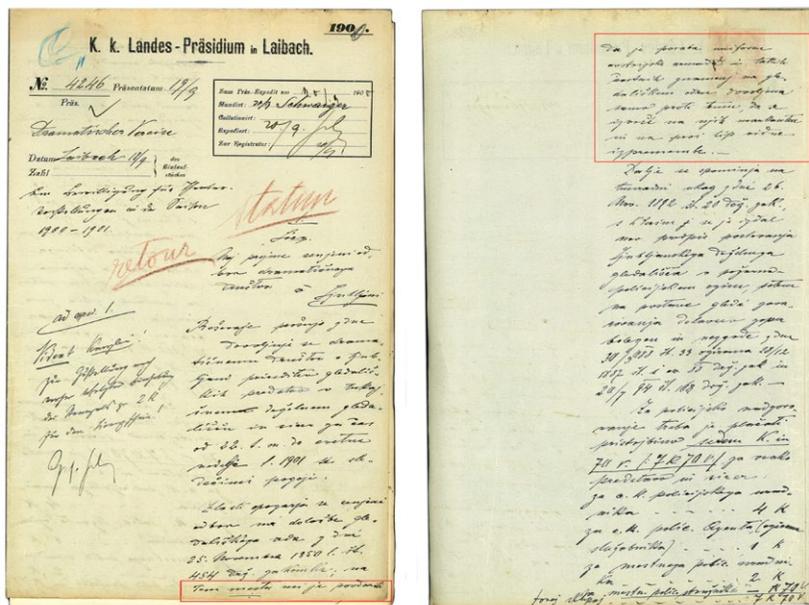
Tavčar's withdrawal could be explained by his more intense focus on his political career within the liberal National Progressive Party (he and Ivan Hribar began heading it as early as 1894). In addition, he had been the manager and editor of the newspaper *Slovenski narod* since 1887.

**29**

Thanks to Štefan Vevar for his helpful tip in decoding Bleiweis-Trsteniški's signature on the request.

Ivan Tavčar turned to the Carniolan censorship office two more times after that in his capacity as chair: in 1897 and 1898.<sup>26</sup> In his request of September 22nd, 1897, he was applying for a license for the period from October 1st, 1897 to April 1st, 1898, pledging that the society would strictly adhere to the *Theaterordnung*. The fact that the censorship office remained as strict as before is evident from its reply to the society, which, in addition to the obligatory reference to the Bach 1850 *Theaterordnung*, also cited the 1892 orders by the provincial presidency. In the permission for the 1897/98 theater season, the clerks added a new reference to the provisions of the 1880 and 1894 provincial code concerning workers' health and accident insurance; any disease or accident at work would be handled by an accident insurance company in Trieste.

Even though Tavčar officially chaired the Dramatic Society until 1902, from 1899<sup>27</sup> onward communication with the censorship office was taken over by vice-chair Karel Bleiweis-Trsteniški, who soon succeed Tavčar as chair.<sup>28</sup> Hence on September 18th, 1900, Bleiweis-Trsteniški<sup>29</sup> and Fran Milčinski Sr., who at the time was serving as the society's secretary, asked the censorship office to urgently approve their request because the first performance was already scheduled for September 22nd. Taking into account the power relations and previous requests, such "urging" on the side of the Dramatic Society was unusual; in addition, it can be noticed that the request for license is purged of (excessive) expressions of politeness and submission. This could partly be attributed to the tactlessness of both committee members and partly to the fact that from 1899 to 1901 Milčinski was the head of the Slovenian theater at the Provincial Theater (Koblar 2013a). It is evident from the permission received that the request was processed on September 19th and already dispatched the next day, September 20th, 1900. Alongside the official orders from the *Theaterordnung* and the provincial



← **FIG. 7** Permission granted by the Provincial Presidency of Carniola to the Ljubljana Dramatic Society for staging plays with a note added on using Austrian army uniforms on stage.

code (on the fire safety and police order, to which subsequently a note was added regarding the insurance of theater staff) cited in several places, the permission also includes a reference to the order regarding the use of Austrian army uniforms on stage: “[I]n this regard, I would like to stress that the use of Austrian army uniforms and similar symbols of honor on the theater stage is only allowed if no prominent changes visible at first glance are made to them.”<sup>30</sup> The delicacy of this issue can be explained with the role played by the army: it defended and represented the state’s ideology.

After that, in their permission for the 1903/04 season, the clerks added a copy of a decree issued by the Austro-Hungarian interior ministry, which included two provisions. The first one referred to the

**30** The society’s request of September 18th, 1900.

**31**  
Bleiweis-Trsteniški lodged requests for a license twice that year (in July and August). See SI AS 16, Box 166: permission for the 1902/03 season.

responsibility of the theater censorship enforcer (primarily the police commissioner), who was to ensure, in agreement with the theater director, that any parts in the “theater piece” that might prove problematic for staging be deleted or altered. The second provision concerned the deadline for submitting plays to the provincial presidency: they were to be submitted at least three days before the performance. It is difficult to explain why at the beginning of the twentieth century the censorship office felt the need to further tighten its regulations. However, based on the dates on the requests submitted by the society, it can be assumed that the applicants filed them at the last minute or right before the start of the season, thereby placing the censorship office, which sought to maintain public peace and order through theaters, under pressure. Another reason for the tightened measures, through which the censorship authorities sought to both keep the actors on stage on a short leash and maintain control over the audience, could have been the fear in view of the planned increase in theater productions after the theater moved to a permanent building. In addition, on July 21st, 1903<sup>31</sup> Karel Bleiweis-Trsteniški informed the censorship office that from then onward the society planned to stage plays three times a week alongside occasional afternoon Slovenian performances on Sundays and holidays.

One can imagine what a beneficial effect the fresh decree (*Verordnung*) by Prime Minister Koerber (cf. Bachleitner 2010: 92) of April 1903, which he sent to all provincial governors, must have had on the tight(ened) censorship conditions, at least in principle. The Dramatic Society immediately had it translated into Slovenian. Koerber was aware that an absolute abolition of censorship was impossible for the time being (even though he indicated the possibility of its abolition in his decree), but he clearly strove for its relaxation. What was key

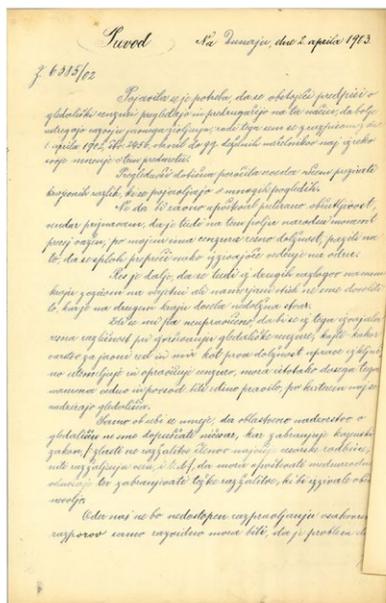
was his request for censorship committees to be established at individual provincial offices to evaluate plays and performances. They were to be composed of administrative and judicial clerks in charge of enforcing theater censorship and members educated in literature, such as playwrights and theater critics (he also mentions teachers), who had to be fluent in the language that the work was written in. This means that the provincial office was only able to adopt a final decision once it received a report from the censorship committee. If a ban was issued on a play, an appeal could be filed with the interior ministry.<sup>32</sup>

On the one hand, “pure lust” still had to be expunged from both the stage and social life, and nothing that was prohibited by the penal code was permissible (e.g., it was not allowed to offend the imperial dynasty, attack religious truths, or do anything that might provoke general displeasure). However, on the other hand, Koerber very clearly supported the view that the stage cannot be inaccessible to discussions on diverse topics. This includes social issues and issues concerning economic and cultural development. Especially the inclusion of qualified clerks and individuals educated in literature on the censorship committee was a clear attempt to gradually depoliticize censorship, whose primary tasks were to ensure, without prejudice to literature and within the laws, appropriate staging of plays, to sanction any unacceptable incidents, and to help control and maintain safety.

However, even at the beginning of the twentieth century, Koerber’s 1903 decree, which was supposed to remove political elements from censorship, and which clearly recognized both the altered living conditions and the emancipatory status of literature, seems nothing but a feint. Closer reading of censorship documents, especially the permissions issued by the provincial presidency, point more to an opposite tendency—that is, to further strengthening strict and direct

**32** The materials examined to date do not reveal whether this type of procedure was ever effectively used in Ljubljana.

**FIG. 8 ▶**  
First page of the Dramatic Society's translation of the 1903 decree<sup>33</sup> issued by Ernest von Koerber.



**33**  
SI AS 16, Box 166:  
permission for the  
1902/03 season.

ensorship in order to prevent any criticism of the government. This is, first and foremost, confirmed by the clear references to the applicable provisions on the one hand and the addition of ever new restrictions (from statutory deadlines for submitting works via changes in the police surveillance to using costumes on stage), which encroached on the operations of theater and evaluated it according to ideological and political criteria, rather than art and esthetic ones. The *Theaterordnung* continued to apply even at the beginning of the twentieth century, accompanied by strict fire safety and police regulations, and especially the provisions of the laws governing societies and the press.

Through a close inspection of censorship sources on a smaller scale, this article shows how written communication between the Dramatic

Society and the provincial presidency took place within the framework of these regulations. The expressions of politeness observed especially on the side of the Dramatic Society and the nearly express approvals on the side of the presidency might suggest that this communication was balanced and not complex. However, the communication partners were anything but equal. Even though the censorship documents follow a standard form, they reveal both the superiority of the presidency—which affably grants the applicant the permission each time, while maintaining official distance by adhering to the legal regulations and clearly pointing to them—and the subordinate status of the Dramatic Society, which pledges in writing to respect and implement these regulations, and ultimately in no way implies a dissident stance.

The members of Dramatic Society also entered certain interesting and seemingly unimportant information into the censorship documents, which leave traces of the society's history. These were not only important actors within the Dramatic Society, but also important individuals in terms of the history of the censorship institution. This information includes individual data from requests referring to staging plays (e.g., information about an increased number of visiting performances at the Provincial Theater or the expansion of the genre repertoire) or data on the society's business operations (e.g., the financial report), which provide insight into the economic and organizational aspects of the Dramatic Society's operations, and ultimately testify to the developing organizational structure, growth, and professionalization of the first Slovenian theater. ♡

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## Povzetek

Prispevek obravnava dokumentarno gradivo Dramatičnega društva v Ljubljani, ki ga hrani Arhiv Republike Slovenije. Gre za gradivo ožjega obsega, nastalo med leti 1891/1892 in 1903/1904. Način obravnavanja se navdihuje pri Ginzburgovi mikrosgodovinski metodi, kjer je pomemben predlog za branje dokumentov »proti namenu« in opozorilo o upoštevanju različnih provenienc gradiva. Cenzurno gradivo namreč zajema dve vrsti dokumentov, ki so jih ustvarjali posamezniki iz podrejenih plasti in iz oblastnih struktur. Eno so prošnje za podelitev koncesij za prirejanje predstav v slovenščini, s katerimi se Dramatično društvo obrača na c.-kr. Deželno predsedstvo za Kranjsko, drugo so dovoljenja za uprizorjanje s strani urada predsedstva, ki je vodil cenzuro dramsko-gledališke dejavnosti. Od branja proti namenu, s katerim so cenzurni dokumenti dejansko nastali in zahteva analizo navidezno malopomembnih podatkov, ki so se v dokumente vpisovali »nekontrolirano« (npr. imena glavnih akterjev v društvu, posamični podatki o prirejanju predstav, navedbe iz finančnih poročil), si obetamo sveža spoznanja o (u)pravnih, gospodarskih in organizacijskih vidikih delovanja te prve gledališke ustanove na Slovenskem. Analiza cenzurnih virov, ki natančno dokumentirajo komunikacijo med Dramatičnim društvom in deželnim predsedstvom, razkriva, da na prehodu iz 19. stoletja v 20. stoletje moč cenzurnega aparata še vedno ni slabela, ampak se je morda celo okrepila. Na to predvsem kaže ravnanje s strani predsedstva, ki svoj superiorni položaj vzdržuje s še vestnejšim oklepanjem zakonskih predpisov in jasnim kazanjem nanje. Prav tako se uradniki poslužujejo vedno novih restrikcij (npr. glede policijskih pristojnosti pri nadziranju predstav, okrog rabe gledaliških kostumov na odru), čemur je treba dodati zahtevo po strogem spoštovanju

požarnih predpisov, predpisov policijskega reda, društvenega in tiskovnega zakona. Eno redkih svetlih točk bi utegnila predstavljati *Verordnung* ministrskega predsednika Ernsta von Koerberja, ki bi zlasti z osnovanjem cenzurnega sveta, sestavljenega iz kvalificiranih uradnikov in literarno izobraženih članov, omogočala postopno iztrganje gledališča iz političnih okovov. Vendar je tudi jasno, da čas, ki bo razrahljal in slednjič odpravil cenzuro, še ni napočil.

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