

# From an Actor to an Author, from an *Amante* to an Animator

## The Role of an Individual in Shaping the Local Theatrical Repertoire

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Warsaw in the nineteenth century could not boast of an extraordinary development of the theatrical scene, yet the absence of spectacular achievements did not preclude its rich cultural life, maintained by a certain social structure that helped to build Warsaw's theatrical scene as an arena of social and emotional exchange enjoyed by local residents. To that network of professionals who actively shaped Warsaw's theatrical life at that time belonged Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski (1777–1847). Having authored over one hundred theatrical pieces, served as a director of the theatre in Warsaw and contributed to the development of theatrical life as a journalist, he seems to deserve a place in the history of nineteenth-century Polish theatre. Although his name did not fall into complete oblivion, his input and his meaning for the development of the Polish theatre, even in its local dimension, are rarely discussed, for as an author but also as an animator of the theatrical life of Warsaw, all his life he remained in the shadow of his predecessor, Wojciech Bogusławski (1757–1829), and other prominent figures of his time. Yet Dmuszewski's versatility and adaptability to current trends allowed him to have his (in fact mediocre) plays often performed in Warsaw in the early nineteenth century. On the one hand, it was his 'hands-on' experience that enabled him to occupy the position of an influential agent impacting the repertoire of the Warsaw theatres of that time, but on the other hand, it was also his social standing that helped him profit from his high position, including his close relations with Bogusławski – a doyen of theatrical Warsaw – and with other prominent actors and authors as well as locally popular composers. Therefore, Dmuszewski can serve as an excellent example of and as a reason to discuss the role of an individual in shaping the image of the theatrical repertoire in provincial towns as he endorsed certain genres and especially promoted particular authors. This paper discusses Dmuszewski as a member of the network of people who shaped the place they lived in as an extension of their own artistic vision of the city and its theatrical scene. The paper stresses the significance of Dmuszewski's connectivity to Warsaw, arguing that his impact on the place implies a deeper understanding of the logic underpinning theatrical practices of that time, especially in their local dimension. The underlying assumption of the paper concerns the impact of everyday life experience on Dmuszewski's understanding of the role of the theatre and also attempts to reveal the close relationship between Dmuszewski's professional activities and the very place he

was based in.<sup>1</sup> Suffice to mention that Warsaw in the first half of the nineteenth century was an arena of violent political upheavals, which left profound marks on theatrical productions staged there, while manifestations of patriotic spirit seemed to constitute an important aspect of how Warsaw was shaping its self-image in this moment when Poland had lost its independence as a state and its citizens were holding out hope for a quick recapture of sovereignty. In Warsaw, as in other provincial cities under foreign rule, “[t]hrough performances of spoken theatre and opera, feelings and viewpoints about social realities could be expressed, making it possible to communicate political criticism or denunciations of political situations to the public.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite Dmuszewski’s great popularity during his lifetime, his significance in the city, his prominence as an actor and author and especially as a journalist and organiser of theatre life, he still seems somewhat under-researched. Although present in various scholarly works dealing with nineteenth-century Polish theatre, he is only mentioned there briefly. There are no detailed and up-to-date studies analysing his role in the creation of the intellectual atmosphere of Warsaw under Russian occupation. As mentioned above, in the early nineteenth century Dmuszewski undoubtedly belonged to the city’s elite, which, nevertheless, still remained provincial – at least in the opinion of Russians, who, even in the early twentieth century, described the city as “Russia’s backyard”.<sup>3</sup> Rather than in quantitative measures (area, number of citizens), Warsaw’s provinciality manifested itself in “smallness [...] in the urban habitus”, that is “ways of acting, self-image, the sedimented structures of feeling, sense of place and aspiration”.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Warsaw functioned far away from the Russian capital and advanced on its own at its own pace. Its theatrical life remained dominated by a few influential residents, such as Dmuszewski, who were part of a sustainable network of individuals who fostered and supported theatrical positions. This network was based on friendships as well as family relations, shared experiences, information flows, professional collaborations and joint entrepreneurship.

<sup>1</sup> As Allen J. Scott writes, “Place and culture are persistently intertwined with one another, for place as it is understood here is always a locus of dense human interrelationships (out of which culture in part grows), and culture is a phenomenon that tends to have intensely place-specific characteristics thereby helping to differentiate places from one another.” See Allen J. Scott, *The Cultural Economy of Cities*, in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 21/2, 1997, pp. 323–339, here p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> Giulia Brunello/Annette Kappeler/Raphaël Bortolotti, Introduction, in *Feltre’s Teatro Sociale and the Role of Provincial Theatres in Italy and the Habsburg Empire during the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Giulia Brunello/Raphaël Bortolotti/Annette Kappeler, Baden-Baden 2023, pp. 19–42, here p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> “Задворки польские России”. This is how the poet Alexander Blok would describe Warsaw as late as in 1918. See Aleksander Blok, Wstęp [Foreword], in Blok, *Odwet [Revenge]*, transl. by Adam Galis, Warszawa 1980; original available at [http://az.lib.ru/b/blok\\_a\\_a/text\\_0040.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/b/blok_a_a/text_0040.shtml) (10 December 2024).

<sup>4</sup> David Bell/Mark Jayne, Conceptualizing Small Cities, in *Small Cities. Urban Experience Beyond the Metropolis*, ed. by David Bell/Mark Jayne, Abingdon 2006, pp. 1–18, here p. 5.

## As an actor

Warsaw as a theatrical city was framed by a long historic tradition, and it may be said that the city had a long history of theatrical life, with productions staged not only *in* Warsaw but also *for* Warsaw residents. The purported tendency of Warsaw residents to enjoy the theatre was deeply rooted in the city's aspirations to maintain its reputation as the capital of Poland and gain importance within the larger context (i.e. within the hierarchy of Polish cities) after the loss of political independence. Dmuszewski, who stemmed from minor nobility, was born in the small town Sokółka, located between Białystok and Grodno, but started his theatrical career in Warsaw, where he first moved in 1794.<sup>5</sup> Although he initially worked as a clerk, his good education helped him develop his multifaceted career. Due to violent political events connected with the Kościuszko Uprising,<sup>6</sup> Dmuszewski left Warsaw, only to return to it in 1799. Then, at the turn of the century, when attending a social gathering, he happened to meet Wojciech Bogusławski, who – having noticed Dmuszewski's musical talent when they were singing together – convinced him to try his hand at acting.<sup>7</sup>

It was not only Bogusławski but also other then-popular Warsaw actors such as Karol Świerżawski (1735–1806) and Jakub Hempiński (1749–1829) who most probably served as Dmuszewski's role models, possibly also as his mentors. As a young man, Dmuszewski watched many plays and probably also read books on acting.<sup>8</sup> He began his theatrical adventure at a time when many established actors, fearing political changes that were affecting the overall situation in Warsaw, decided to leave the city, heading to provincial theatres or giving up acting altogether. Hence, Dmuszewski did not start his career, as was customary at that time, by replacing another actor but was instead cast in a main role. His theatrical debut took place in 1800: he played the *amante* (lover) Karol in *Dwóch w jednym* (*Two as One*),<sup>9</sup> the Polish translation of an unidentified German comedy. Dmuszewski himself translated the work from the German. His career developed well; he performed both in Warsaw and other cities, such as during the summer

<sup>5</sup> Most details of Dmuszewski's biography are to be found in *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa ozdobiona 247 rysunkami w tekście 1821–1896*, Warszawa 1896; and in Stefan Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski*, Warszawa 1964.

<sup>6</sup> The Campaign of 1794, under the lead of Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817), was an unsuccessful uprising against Tsarist Russia and Prussia in an attempt to liberate the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth from their influence after the Second Partition of Poland (1793).

<sup>7</sup> “W Warszawie poznaje się przedewszystkiem z założycielem teatru, Wojciechem Bogusławskim. Zaproszony raz na obiad, po wesołej i obojętnej uczcie, gdy do pieśni i on głos swój przyłączył, Dmuszewski zadziwił Bogusławskiego czystością i wdziękiem tego głosu, choć jeszcze niewyrobionego. Ujęty powierzchownością młodzieńca nestor sztuki zaczął go namawiać do sceny, i Dmuszewski zachęcony, długo prosić się nie dając, wnet się zapisuje w poczet artystów, grywając odtąd role pierwszych kochanków w komediach i tenorowe w operach.” *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa*, p. 43 (all translations by the author if not otherwise stated). See also Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski*, pp. 7f.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8–11.

<sup>9</sup> *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa*, p. 43.

months when his troupe toured across the Polish territories (visiting such places as Poznań, Kalisz and Łowicz). Starting in 1804 Dmuszewski also embarked on writing short reports about these performances; these were published by the Warsaw press (e.g. the *Gazeta Warszawska*). These texts already revealed his witty style. Soon, Dmuszewski – who was constantly mastering his acting technique – was elevated to the position of leading actor (mainly playing roles of lovers). Because he had a good voice (as Bogusławski had observed), Dmuszewski managed to also establish himself as a singer, performing alongside well-known female singers such as Zofia Petrarsch and Konstancja Pięknowska. For example, in 1804 Dmuszewski was cast in *Palmira* with music by Antonio Salieri and in *Mieszkańcy wyspy Kamkatal* with music by Józef Elsner (based on the novel *Inkle i Joriko*, with the libretto abridged by Dmuszewski).

Recognised as the first *amante* of the Warsaw stage and adored in smaller theatres outside Warsaw, Dmuszewski was able to accumulate a small fortune and became materially independent, which was not common among Polish actors of that time. In 1805, he decided to marry the aforementioned Zofia Petrarsch (1785–1807). Unfortunately, his young wife died two years later at the age of only 22, having already been highly praised for her musical and theatrical talent.<sup>10</sup> In 1812, Dmuszewski remarried, again choosing an actress – Konstancja Pięknowska (1784–1854) – as his spouse. Pięknowska had already had an illegitimate son (born in 1805) from her previous relationship with Wojciech Bogusławski.<sup>11</sup> In the years to come, Dmuszewski and Bogusławski still remained on good terms, and the latter allowed Dmuszewski to supervise his theatrical troupe in case of his indisposition as well as promoted Dmuszewski to the role of a manager of the tours taking place during the summer months. It seems that Bogusławski's trust, his friendship and support from the very beginning of Dmuszewski's career helped the younger man to establish and to sustain – at least in the initial period – his high position in Warsaw.

### *As an author*

As noted above, Dmuszewski entered the world of the theatre simultaneously as an actor and as an author. His versatility and multiple talents were noticed, and he successfully continued on that dual path: his acting victories overlapped literary achievements, establishing his reputation and strengthening his position in the theatrical community. Initially, Dmuszewski was prone to some literary experimentations; for example, in 1801 he presented a comedy *Aktorowie na Elizejskich Polach* (*Actors on the Elysian Fields*), in which he attempted to encapsulate the idea

<sup>10</sup> Despite her young age, she was already recognised as one of the best opera actresses and was cast in leading roles, oftentimes together with Dmuszewski.

<sup>11</sup> Dmuszewski's only daughter Ludwika was also born before he married Pięknowska. When Ludwika Dmuszewska married Ludwik Sanvan, Dmuszewski became a grandfather to their daughter Natalia Sanvan. See *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa*, pp. 43f., 58.

of the quodlibet as a type of theatrical performance, mixing various topics and topoi.<sup>12</sup> Recognition and respect came in the times of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw (established in 1807), as Dmuszewski's works usually included allusions to political events and contained overt patriotic motifs. While never steering away from current subjects, he also authored satirical and historical plays. Although patriotic and historical themes persistently appeared in his works throughout his life and dominated his entire oeuvre, the latter can nevertheless be divided into three general phases. In the first period, until 1807, Dmuszewski privileged comedies and comedy-operas. The only drama from this early period is the 1803 *Oblężenie Odensy* (*The Siege of Odensa*), with an alternative title *Oblężenie miasta Odensy* (*The Siege of the City of Odensa*). In the second period (1807–1813), Dmuszewski became more engaged in political themes, and his works were often conceived in a patriotic spirit. Among the plays written at that time is *Pospolite ruszenie, czyli bitwa z Kozakami* (*Mass Mobilisation, or the Battle Against the Cossacks*; 1807). Given that Dmuszewski occasionally alluded to contemporary political events, some of his plays feature citizens of Warsaw as characters, such as in his comedy *Okopy na Pradze* (*Trenches on Praga*; 1809), based on the construction of entrenchments in the Praga district of Warsaw during the Polish-Austrian war.<sup>13</sup> In the third period between 1814 and 1821, from the entry of the Russian army into Warsaw until his resignation from writing, Dmuszewski dedicated more time to translating and adapting, writing only a few plays (including more dramas), but in general he became interested in other literary genres and soon started to work as an editor of a gazette. His creativity as a playwright slowly decreased, and from 1822 onwards he wrote no theatrical works. Coincidentally, in the 1820s his plays were losing their popularity, among other things because of the rising star Aleksander Fredro (1796–1876), a fellow playwright who excelled at comedies. In fact, Dmuszewski wrote his best and most popular works between 1810 and 1820. Although he authored over a hundred plays, not all of them survived; among the best-preserved autographs is his 1804 one-act comedy-opera *Siedem razy jeden* (*Seven Times One*). For Dmuszewski (both as an actor and author), it proved to be a big success, and it settled in the repertoire of Warsaw theatres for the next thirty years. The music was written by the established composer Józef Elsner (1769–1854); supposedly Elsner agreed to set Dmuszewski's text to music because of his respect for Dmuszewski's champion, Bogusławski. Elsner had befriended Bogusławski during their times together in Lvov in the 1790s, while Dmuszewski became Bogusławski's protégé in Warsaw at the turn of the nineteenth century. The play *Siedem razy jeden*, like most of Dmuszewski's works, was based on a simple scheme: it is a masquerade in which the same actor appears on stage in seven

<sup>12</sup> Jakub Chachulski, *Zły smak i gminna przesada. Kilka uwag o muzyczno-dramatycznej konstrukcji opery *Sultan Wampum* Józefa Elsnera na tle oryginalnego libretta Augusta von Kotzebue*, in *Muzyka* 4, 2019, pp. 3–36, here p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Dobrochna Ratajczakowa, *Galeria gatunków widowiskowych, teatralnych i dramatycznych*, Poznań 2015, p. 134.

different roles. While he remains unrecognised by other protagonists, the audience is fully aware of the ploy. The musical comedy was set in the general mode of eighteenth-century works and exposed individual characters by underlining the dynamics of their relations. Choruses were introduced as vehicles transporting certain moral truths and providing background for the main heroes; Carl Dahlhaus described them as an “extension of the stage décor”.<sup>14</sup>

The presence of educational elements was typical for the majority of Dmuszewski's works, although at the same time they were not devoid of a slightly satirical character. Like *Siedem razy jeden*, his plays usually promoted traditional Polish values but also underlined the local character, for they were often set in Warsaw and featured petit-bourgeois (and/or aristocratic) characters. In that respect, Dmuszewski's comedies seemed rather old-fashioned and can be classified as representative of the transitional period between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. While Dmuszewski as an author was generally praised during his lifetime, his plays were not often performed after his death, and even when staged, they failed to raise further interest (one of the most renowned Polish poets, Juliusz Słowacki, is known to have seen a play by Dmuszewski but left no commentaries on it). The popularity of Dmuszewski's works vanished, the plays seemed outdated and fell into oblivion, and Dmuszewski himself became forgotten.

### *As a journalist*

Why did Dmuszewski – still popular as an actor and as an author in the 1820s – decide to shift his interest to other realms of theatrical activities despite his obvious successes onstage? It seems that his looks changed, and accordingly he needed to adjust his employ as he was no longer apt to be cast as a passionate lover. Also, doubt began to be cast upon his acting talent: he was particularly criticised and negatively assessed in the press by the publicist Kajetan Koźmian (1771–1856), who practically campaigned against Dmuszewski's acting skills. As a consequence, Dmuszewski ceased performing but still retained his robust contact with the theatrical world. Nevertheless, he searched for alternative sources of income and turned towards journalism. He became the owner of the recently founded *Kurier Warszawski* (Warsaw Courier), which was a daily newspaper printed in Warsaw from 1821 to 1939. The man behind the paper was its creator and first editor, Bruno Kiciński (1797–1844), who nevertheless was not satisfied with the initial results and sold the title to Dmuszewski. The actor-turned-journalist became its second chief editor and managed to establish the high position of the gazette; he was predominantly responsible for endorsing its tabloid character. Dmuszewski, for example, disregarded the chronology of the news and often had trivial and important information printed alike and often next to each other. Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849), who lived at that time in Warsaw, once described Dmuszewski

<sup>14</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, transl. by J. Bradford Robinson, Los Angeles 1989, p. 66.



as “the same as ever”, that is telling lies and inventing “various queer things”.<sup>15</sup> On top of everything, Dmuszewski resorted to clever tricks to promote his newspaper (e.g. hiring students to provoke local citizens to buy the *Warsaw Courier*). One of the readers, Count Fryderyk Skarbek (1792 – 1866), a successful writer and playwright whose works Dmuszewski helped to stage in the theatre, recalled that the journal was extremely popular for it had a convenient format and was affordable for virtually everyone. Skarbek also confirmed the role of Dmuszewski in establishing the gossipy, tabloid-like character of the journal, stating:

It was not Kiciński, the first founder of the “Kurier”, but Ludwik Dmuszewski, its next editor, who gave the paper that original quality of naive simplicity that no other publications, domestic or foreign, had. Without any pretensions to scholarship or wit, with a clear disregard for the conditions required of the editors of public periodicals, and with no concern for the correctness of style or a thorough knowledge of the things he was writing about, the editor of the “Kurier Warszawski” was able to occupy the public of his day with everything and anything, to such an extent that it became some kind of daily indispensable mental food. It was trusted, even though it often told the untruth, it was forgiven, even though it printed falsehoods, and finally it was subscribed and read, even though it was the object of constant jokes.<sup>16</sup>

As an editor, Dmuszewski became legendary already during his lifetime, and he was known to have worked very hard and for long hours; for example, he even personally supervised the process of printing. Surprisingly, his gazette was not concerned with theatrical news, but when some materials about Warsaw theatrical life were featured, Dmuszewski took care that such texts were informative in nature, presented as announcements or reports<sup>17</sup> devoid of judgmental and/or critical elements. Dmuszewski was prone to present anything connected with the theatre in a positive light. At the same time, his own knowledge about theatre was manifested in several para-scholarly texts that he published, including “Krótka kronika teatru polskiego 1764–1808” (Short Chronicle of the Polish Theatre 1764–1808), appearing between 1814 and 1817 in the *Rocznik Teatru Narodowego Warszawskiego* (*Yearbook of the Warsaw National Theatre*), among others.

<sup>15</sup> *Chopin's Letters*, ed. and transl. by Ethel Lilian Voynich/Henryk Opieński, New York 1931, p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> “Pismo to znalazło od razu łatwe i wielkie wzięcie. Drukowane na jednej tylko ćwiartce małego formatu, było tanie i pożądane przez wszystkich, nawet słabo czytać umiejących, skutkiem czego stało się poniekąd duchową potrzebą całego miasta. Ale to nie Kiciński, pierwszy założyciel tego ‘Kuriera’, lecz następny jego redaktor Ludwik Dmuszewski, nadał dopiero pismu temu tę oryginalną cechę naiwnej prostoty, jakiej żadne tak krajowe jako i zagraniczne nie miało, i potrafił z wydawnictwa tego osiągnąć zyski takie, do jakich żadne inne dowcipne lub poważne dojść nie mogło. Bez żadnej pretensji do uczoności i dowcipu, z wyraźnym nawet lekceważeniem warunków od redakcji pism publicznych wymaganych, nie troszcząc się bynajmniej o poprawność stylu ani o dokładną znajomość rzeczy, o jakich pisał, umiał redaktor ‘Kuriera Warszawskiego’ wszystkim a niczym tak mocno zajmować ówczesną publiczność, że się stał codzienną a niezbędną strawą umysłową. Że mu wierzone, chociaż się często z prawdą mijał, że mu przebaczano, choć i fałszy drukował, wreszcie że go prenumerowano i czytano, chociaż ciągle żartów był przedmiotem.” Fryderyk Skarbek, *Pamiętniki*, ed. by Piotr Mysłakowski, Warszawa 2009, p. 163. (Originally printed in: Fryderyk Skarbek, *Pamiętniki*, Poznań 1878).

<sup>17</sup> For example, Chopin wrote in one of his letters in the early months of the year 1830 that “the Courier announces Fräulein Sontag”, suggesting it was a reliable source of that type of information. See *Chopin's Letters*, p. 84.

Together with Alojzy Żółkowski he worked on the *Dykcjonarzyk teatralny* (*Theatrical Dictionaries*, 1808).<sup>18</sup> Dmuszewski also authored the “Spis wszystkich oper granych w polskim języku na teatrach warszawskich” (List of all Operas Performed in Polish at Warsaw Theatres), published in 1820 in *Tygodnik Muzyczny*. He can be credited as one of the first historians of Polish theatre, although he wrote quite selectively, for example only mentioning some operatic performances of foreign troupes in Warsaw, skipping operas during Władysław IV’s reign, briefly mentioning Italian operas staged during the reign of August III, only vaguely referring to performances of Italian ensembles during the reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski, etc.<sup>19</sup>

### *As a theatre manager*

In the 1820s Dmuszewski not only became a full-fledged editor but also started to engage in the organisation of Warsaw theatrical life, sometimes – especially in the beginning – working without remuneration, such as from 1 July 1826 to 15 June 1827, when he served as an unpaid member of the economic committee of the theatre.<sup>20</sup> In 1827, Dmuszewski became one of the directors of the National Theatre in Warsaw and held this position until his death in 1847. Before that, for two years he had already collaborated with its director Ludwik Osiński (1775–1838), who stepped down from the post in 1833 and was replaced (for the next three years) by Boris Halpert (1805–1861), then by Ignacy Koss (1800–1848), who quickly overshadowed Dmuszewski. However, Dmuszewski was also active in other theatrical domains: in 1825 he joined as an assessor the Government Directorate of Theatre and Performing Arts, established in 1820 as a body controlling and censoring theatrical life in the Russian-occupied parts of Poland.<sup>21</sup> Also, from 1836 onwards, Dmuszewski lectured at the School of Drama, educating aspiring actors willing to perform in the National Theatre.

Dmuszewski’s career as one of the directors of the National Theatre developed in the shadow of the November Uprising (1830/31),<sup>22</sup> which broke out soon after he was appointed to supervise the theatre. At that point, the management of the National Theatre (then called the Great Theatre) was of two minds concerning the politics of the repertoire to be adopted: on the one hand, the necessity of political involvement was felt as the theatre was supposed to play a special role during the upheaval, but on the other hand, the Committee also believed that direct political

<sup>18</sup> See Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski*, pp. 97f.

<sup>19</sup> See Grzegorz Markiewicz, *Opera w Polsce w latach 1635–1795*, Łódź 2019, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa*, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> See Encyklopedia Teatru Polskiego, *Ludwik Osiński*, online, n.d., <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/osoby/79489/ludwik-osinski> (11 December 2024).

<sup>22</sup> The Polish–Russian War 1830/31, known as the November Uprising, was an armed revolt that started on the night of 29 November 1830 in Warsaw when young Polish cadets led by Lieutenant Piotr Wysocki (1797–1875) rebelled against the Russian Empire occupying partitioned Poland.



immersion should be avoided. It is rather difficult to determine Dmusczewski's own political stances: obviously he was interested in Polish history and generally in Polish matters, yet he seemed to support pro-Russian policy, serving on Russian-orchestrated and Russian-supervised official committees. Like many other Poles, Dmusczewski had hoped that Napoleon Bonaparte could restore Polish independence, but he revised his views after Napoleon's defeat. Dmusczewski initially assessed the Tsar of Russia, Alexander I, in a more favourable light; alas with time he became disappointed in and disillusioned with his politics towards Poles.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the audience as well as the press, especially right after the November Uprising, demanded a pro-Polish repertoire, and Dmusczewski rather hastily suggested a range of plays to be performed in this situation. On 5 December 1830, a production of Bogusławski's *Krakowiacy i Górale* (*Cracovians and Highlanders*) was performed on the stage of the Great Theatre; even today, the play is considered a milestone in the history of Polish theatre and perceived as an allusion to the Kościuszko insurrection. Its staging under the particular, extraordinary conditions after the defeat of the November Uprising was read as a response to the current political situation.<sup>24</sup> Classified sometimes as a *Dialogoper*,<sup>25</sup> with music by Jan Stefani (1746–1829), *Krakowiacy i Górale* invariably captivated the audience with its powerful national message. Furthermore, the play seemed to be easily adaptable to the new political circumstances and was subjected to changes reflecting on the dynamically changing situation, thus addressing the expectations of the society.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the staging of *Krakowiacy i Górale* was not only conditioned by the political situation and allusions it could propose, but also by its generic potential, since it clearly followed the typical structural model of the late eighteenth-century opera buffa (two acts with a climax in the finale of the first),<sup>27</sup> which was still very popular in Warsaw in the early nineteenth century. At the same time, the play conveyed some French charm combined with features borrowed from Italian opera buffa as well as German singspiel.<sup>28</sup> On top of that, as suggested by Jakub Chachulski, this particular play seemed to smuggle in a few Viennese traits, for example in the form of more or less obvious *alla turca* motifs heard in the rhythmic layer and its instrumentation; it also followed the late eighteenth-century Viennese convention of opera semiseria.<sup>29</sup> It can be suspected that the staging of *Krakowiacy i Górale* in the initial phase of Dmusczewski's

<sup>23</sup> Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmusczewski*, pp. 90–93.

<sup>24</sup> See Jakub Chachulski, Genologia i polityka. Swoistość *Cudu*, czyli *Krakowiaków i Górali* w horyzoncie gatunków operowych końca XVIII stulecia, in *Muzyka* 66/3, 2021, pp. 117–147, <https://doi.org/10.36744/m.976>, here p. 134.

<sup>25</sup> See Thomas Betzwieser, *Sprechen und Singen. Ästhetik und Erscheinungsformen der Dialogoper*, Stuttgart 2002. See also Thomas Betzwieser, Verisimilitude, in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. by Helen M. Greenwald, Oxford 2014, pp. 297–317.

<sup>26</sup> Zbigniew Krawczykowski, *Wojciech Bogusławski. Ojciec sceny narodowej. Kronika życia i działalności Wojciecha Bogusławskiego*, Warszawa 1954, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Chachulski, *Zły smak i gminna przesada*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Chachulski, *Genologia i polityka*, p. 118.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133; Chachulski, *Zły smak i gminna przesada*, p. 19.

directorship clearly signalled his sensitivity to the needs of the public, and his openness to political allusions while proving his awareness of the importance of genres chosen to be performed in the theatre.

### *Creating the repertoire policy*

As a pupil of Bogusławski, Dmuszewski saw the role of the theatre as a vehicle for commenting on current public affairs, even “serving as a sort of social thermometer”.<sup>30</sup> Hence, when choosing plays that addressed important social issues, Dmuszewski seemed somehow naturally to continue the line started by Bogusławski. This view became particularly evident when Dmuszewski shared the directorship with Osiński, who wanted to steer away from political involvement in his theatre. Dmuszewski and Osiński showed distinctive approaches to both the theatre and life; in fact, the differences in their mentalities translated into mutual animosities. To a certain degree, however, when it came to managing the theatre, they complemented each other quite well.<sup>31</sup> Osiński, for example, was rather reserved, more calculative, “cunning, greedy for profit” but at the same time “undoubtedly superior to his colleague in terms of education and literary talent” (he, for example, translated Pierre Corneille’s *Le Cid* and seemed more knowledgeable about the theory of theatre).<sup>32</sup> Unlike Dmuszewski, who was always supportive of actors and aspiring authors, Osiński was more prone to scrutinise them and generally had more enemies than Dmuszewski, who was very popular in the theatrical circles. Furthermore, Osiński was more in favour of classical repertoire, especially tragedies, while Dmuszewski insisted on performing plays, possibly even of lower standard, which could nevertheless ensure popularity among viewers and thus generate generous profit for the theatre. As could be expected, the repertoire that the theatre eventually proposed included comedies, comedy-operas, light musical comedies with songs, while dramas, tragedies and operas were staged less frequently.<sup>33</sup>

As an experienced actor and especially as a successful editor who understood and closely monitored the needs of the public, Dmuszewski was well aware of the expectations of Warsaw theatregoers. The audience was still in a transitional phase: the middle classes and petite bourgeoisie were slowly finding their place and cementing their status, and they treated theatre attendance as an integral part of cultural life. Their tastes had to be catered to, and Dmuszewski – with his literary and translativ skills, his first-hand experience of theatrical life and his sharp

<sup>30</sup> Brunello/Kappeler/Bortolotti, Introduction, p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> Mieczysław Rulikowski, *Teatr warszawski od czasów Osińskiego, 1825–1915*, Lwów 1938, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> “przebiegły, na zysk łapczywy”; “niewątpliwie przewyższający swego kolegę wykształceniem i talentem literackim.” Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Mieczysław Inglot, Repertuar teatrów warszawskich w świetle raportu carskiej cenzury z 1843 roku, in *Pamiętnik Literacki. Czasopismo kwartalne poświęcone historii i krytyce literatury polskiej* 71/3, 1980, pp. 219–251, here p. 221.

journalistic eye for a good story – seemed to understand that and tried to provide the audience with the repertoire that would not be too demanding for them yet satisfying at the same time. Thus, Dmuszewski was not very picky when it came to the choice of the plays and was quite ready to accept translations (often his own) as well as adaptations of trivial comedies, preferably those by August von Kotzebue (1761–1819). Although many plays staged in Warsaw were of foreign origin, Russian works were quite strikingly absent, and the preferred ones were translations and adaptations of French, German and Italian authors. Left aside, however, were works by, for example, Alfred de Musset (1810–1857), Alfred de Vigny (1797–1863) and even Friedrich Schiller (1802–1759).

Dmuszewski preferred lighter plays that were not, however, completely devoid of satirical commentaries on political events. After the November Uprising, the theatre resigned from staging many plays that had been performed before (i.e. in the years 1810–1820), for most likely they were no longer found appropriate and/or up-to-date by the post-November-Uprising society and were perhaps even considered as quite obsolete and old-fashioned.<sup>34</sup> While the repertoire was supposed to satisfy the needs of the emerging petit-bourgeois public, it still included pre-Romantic dramas and plays in the style of the grand spectacle.<sup>35</sup> Following the politics of escapism, Dmuszewski – who was always very practical – did not try to overwhelm the audience with plays that could prove to be rather problematic for staging or those which were banned by the censorship. The Russians prohibited staging several works containing elements of social and political criticism, and the censors were reluctant to mount romantic dramas raising ethical questions.<sup>36</sup> Mieczysław Ingłot argues that the delicate relation with the censorship was a very important factor impacting the repertoire of the National Theatre. Accordingly, the Imperial Censorship Report of 1843 produced by the Central Censorship Board at the Ministry of National Enlightenment headed by Sergey Uvarov (1786–1855) reveals that the majority of the works staged in Warsaw in the years 1832–1843 were actually in line with the censorship guidelines (these were, of course, conceived in the spirit of the politics endorsed by Tsar Nicholas I).<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, in order to avoid any controversies, dramas authored by playwrights denounced by the Russian censorship were not staged, such as works by the Polish emigrant Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849), the liberal Victor Hugo (1802–1885) and William Shakespeare (1564–1616), the plots of whose tragedies might have contained too many conspiracies and crimes committed against the powers that be.<sup>38</sup>

The most popular authors who were staged in Warsaw under Dmuszewski's directorship were local Poles: Fryderyk Skarbek and Jan Tomasz Seweryn Jasiński (1806–1879), who was himself an actor – often cast as an *amante* – but

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>35</sup> Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski*, pp. 100–102.

<sup>36</sup> Ingłot, *Repertuar teatrów warszawskich*, p. 221.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

also a gifted adaptor, translator and author of dramas and comedies. The plays of Dmuszewski that were included in the repertoire were mostly those dealing with historical topics, such as the 1818 opera with music by Józef Elsner titled *Król Łokietek, czyli Wiśliczanki* (*King Ladislaus the Elbow-High, or The Peasant Girls of Wiślica*), being Dmuszewski's own answer to Bogusławski's masterpiece *Krakowiacy i Górale* and functioning as a counterpoint to the latter's popularity. Dmuszewski also had many plays in his own translation staged: his translation of Gaspard Spontini's *La Vestale* (*Westalka*) proved to be very successful, while his translation of Giacomo Meyerbeer's grand opera *Robert le diable* (the first three acts) was performed in Warsaw under the Polish title of *Robert Diabeł* until the end of the nineteenth century. Also, the above-mentioned authors Skarbek and Jasiński often translated plays performed in Warsaw. In the Great Theatre there was a long tradition of performing plays translated from other languages along with so-called 'original operas' (i.e. written in Polish). The description 'Polish', 'German', 'French' or 'Italian' appearing in the playbills was immediately linked to the language in which they were originally written rather than with their generic features.<sup>39</sup> This association was reinforced by the theatrical practice of linking a work – play, musical comedy, even opera – with the author of the text or libretto rather than the composer; consequently, the language of the original libretto mattered most even if the play was translated and presented in Polish.<sup>40</sup>

Observing what kind of repertoire was endorsed under Dmuszewski's directorship, it is easy to notice that his own experience as well as the pressure from the censors and the public seemed to be the decisive factors. Additionally, his individual preferences and – above all – societal connections were extremely crucial. His circle of collaborators was rather limited and well connected. It is well to remember that Osiński's wife was the daughter of Wojciech Bogusławski, while Dmuszewski's second wife was the mother of Bogusławski's illegitimate son. One should not forget either that Dmuszewski preferred his own works and those of his collaborators, including Jasiński, who was also responsible for the group of actors in the theatre from 1842 on. Dmuszewski was open towards young, aspiring authors and was willing to have their works performed. Around 1843, Aleksander Niewiarowski, under the pseudonym Aleksander Półkozic (1824–1892), together with Michał Morzkowski (1816?–1868) authored a short comedy, *Dwie szkatułki* (*Two Caskets*); it was praised by experts and recommended by Morzkowski's friends to Dmuszewski. Much to the surprise of the authors themselves, who considered the work as half-improvised and trivial, Dmuszewski had it performed in the theatre and arranged payment for the young writers.<sup>41</sup> Dmuszewski displayed a similarly patronising attitude toward the young Chopin, whom he informed, in April 1830 about his generous 'offer' to publish a sonnet dedicated

<sup>39</sup> Markiewicz, *Opera w Polsce*, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Kurjer Warszawski. *Książka jubileuszowa*, p. 51.

to the composer in one of the issues of the *Warsaw Courier*. In his style, Chopin commented upon the whole situation:

“For the Lord’s sake,” said I – “don’t do such silly things.” – “It’s already in print,” said he, with the smile of one doing a kindness, apparently supposing that I ought to be glad to have met with such an honour. A poor sort of kindness!<sup>42</sup>

### *Dmuszewski in the collective memory*

Dmuszewski’s repertoire policy was an extension of Bogusławski’s postulates and his artistic vision. Yet Dmuszewski became well-known as a prominent figure on his own and was remembered as a very eccentric and popular persona of early nineteenth-century Warsaw. He was accordingly portrayed in the book celebrating the 75-year anniversary of the *Kurier Warszawski* printed in 1896. Although the text in this special publication was clearly meant to glorify Dmuszewski as one of its chief editors, one can easily read between the lines and see that Dmuszewski was genuinely respected and liked. Predominantly appreciated as an editor of the successful daily newspaper, he was also remembered as a person involved in several initiatives outside the theatrical world. For example, Dmuszewski was committed to charity,<sup>43</sup> supported young authors, belonged to the Polish Freemasonry<sup>44</sup> and lectured at the drama school, teaching several subjects, including pronunciation, declamation, music and dance as well as languages and general history. When he died, the Warsaw press wrote about his funeral, which was attended by local notables and the local theatre community alike. On the day of the funeral, all theatres in Warsaw were closed.

Dmuszewski today may be predominantly perceived as a figure whose versatility was a phenomenon typical of leading figures in Warsaw’s social and cultural life of the early nineteenth century: born of a politically turbulent time, he found himself in an artistically flourishing environment that provided an opportunity for the realisation of many of his talents. It was, after all, not that unusual that an actor who understood the requirements of the stage and knew the audiences – their tastes and habits – began in the later stages of his life writing plays and successfully joined both careers, namely as a performer and as an author. It was also not that uncommon for an actor to become a theatre manager. Yet Dmuszewski proved the impact of an individual with a strong personality on the development of the local theatrical scene and showed how personal experiences and views (he was known for the motto ‘primum non nocere’) may affect institutional policies.

<sup>42</sup> “Na miłość Boską prosiłem, żeby głupstwa nie robił. ‘Już wydrukowany’, odpowiedział z uśmiechem przysługującym się, myśląc, żem się pewnie radować powinien z zaszczytu, jaki mię spotkał. O, źle zrozumiane przysługi!” Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, *Listy Chopina. Do Tytusa Woyciechowskiego w Poturzynie*, online, n.d., <https://chopin.nifc.pl/pl/chopin/list/670>, English translation after *Chopin’s Letters*, p. 84.

<sup>43</sup> *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa*, pp. 47f.

<sup>44</sup> Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski*, pp. 93f.

What distinguished Dmuszewski from others was his unique position in the city as he built up his career and became a press tycoon who could easily influence the public opinion. Well established in the intellectual and artistic circles of the city as an editor of the daily journal, he also understood the needs and expectations of the city's inhabitants. Thus, he tried to cater for them, not only in his journal but also in the theatre, where he was responsible, among other things, for co-creating the repertoire policy and always strove to provide Warsaw residents with the best amusement, alas not devoid at the same time of some dose of sensation, and some – more vague and less obvious – political innuendos.

In the context of today's theatrical scene, Dmuszewski's works may seem out-dated, and while they answered the artistic cravings of a nineteenth-century audience, they may lack that appeal today. Likewise, what twenty-first-century audiences enjoy may have been received with little or no interest – and possibly even indifference – in the early nineteenth century in a city like Warsaw.<sup>45</sup> One also cannot forget that an individual like Dmuszewski, responsible for the shaping of the theatrical repertoire, was a member of the local establishment, that is an informal network of people that exercised an impact on the entire infrastructure of Warsaw's theatrical scene. Arguably that network played a central role exerting influence over the local acting school, running the newspapers, etc., which, in return, played a key part in supporting the status quo of Warsaw theatrical life. While the network provided Dmuszewski with recognisable support,<sup>46</sup> he was also quick enough to seize various opportunities on his own, notwithstanding constraints caused by the overall political and economic situation of the city. As a very active and eventually prominent member of the network, Dmuszewski facilitated the diffusion of conventions (defined here as customary agreements<sup>47</sup>) in artistic productions proposed in Warsaw. While adhering to them, he reinforced the routinisation of the local theatrical life and indirectly defined the resources used in theatrical endeavours. Worth underlining is the fact that Dmuszewski himself vigorously contributed to the Warsaw scene by writing his own plays and working on translations while constantly searching for potential authors (often in the close circle of his friends and acquaintances). Effectively, Dmuszewski provided the Warsaw public with the repertoire that was generally accepted and enjoyed, proving thus his excellent ability to decipher and understand the needs of the local audience.

<sup>45</sup> See Alfred Einstein, *Muzyka w epoce romantyzmu*, transl. by M. i S. Jarocińscy, Warszawa 1965, p. 275.

<sup>46</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, Cambridge 1993, p. 64.

<sup>47</sup> See Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1982, p. 29.



Places of Cohesion and Debate  
Socio-Political Roles of Provincial Theatres  
during the Nineteenth Century

edited by

Giulia Brunello and Annette Kappeler

With editorial assistance from  
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Hochschule der Künste Bern,  
Institut Interpretation

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ERGON VERLAG

Published with the support of the  
Swiss National Science Foundation SNSF.

Cover picture:

Playbill of *I misteri della polizia austriaca* in Feltre, 1866,  
Polo Bibliotecario Feltrino “Panfilo Castaldi”, *Fondo Storico*.

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the  
Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data  
are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

© The Authors

Published by

Ergon – ein Verlag in der Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden 2025  
Overall responsibility for manufacturing (printing and production) lies with  
Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG.

Printed on age-resistant paper.

Typesetting: Thomas Breier

Cover design: Jan von Hugo

[www.ergon-verlag.de](http://www.ergon-verlag.de)

ISBN 978-3-98740-239-5 (Print)

ISBN 978-3-98740-240-1 (ePDF)

DOI: 10.5771/9783987402401



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PARODOI

Interdisziplinäre Studien  
zur historischen Theaterkultur

herausgegeben von | edited by

Beate Hochholdinger-Reiterer, Annette Kappeler,  
Helena Langewitz, Jan Lazardzig, Stephanie Schroedter  
und Holger Schumacher

Band 3 | Volume 3

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