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A HUNDRED YEARS OF RESEARCH ON THE 18TH-CENTURY THEATRE IN POLAND AND FRANCE

Abstract

Among the modern researchers conducting studies on the 18th century, there is a widespread belief that research on Polish theatre of that era did not develop until the turn of the 1950s and 1960s. It is only part of the truth. The apogee of theatrical research coincided with those years, resulting from the 200th anniversary of the National Theatre, which was widely promoted by the authorities. However, the first diagnoses of Polish theatre scientists dealing with the 18th century are much earlier. Suffice it to recall Ludwik Bernacki's monumental work, "Theatre, Drama and Music under Stanislaw August", which the researcher published in Lviv in 1925. Bernacki's research was closely related to the work of French theatre scientists, who conducted research on the scene and drama of the 18th century before the First World War. This article analyses and chronologically presents the last century of theatrical research and its methodological changes on the example of Polish and French history of 18th-century theatre.

Keywords: theater, 18th century, theater research, Poland, France.

Historians studying the 18th century hold a relatively common opinion that the research on the Polish theatre of this period began only in the first half of the 20th century. That is not wholly true. The peak of theatre studies on the Enlightenment took place in the 1950s and 60s, which was related to the wide-ranging 200th anniversary of the National Theatre in Warsaw (founded in 1765), widely popularised by the authorities of the time. However, the first explorations by Polish theatrologists dealing with the 18th century are much earlier. We only must recall the extensive work titled "Dzieje nowożytnej tragedii polskiej" (History of Modern Polish Tragedy) by Marian Szykowski and the monumental work "Teatr, dramat i muzyka za Stanisława Augusta" (Theatre, Drama and Music in Times of Stanislaw II August) by Ludwik Bernacki which the researcher published in Lviv in 1925 and which is still being used

today. These studies, especially Bernacki's scientific explorations, remained strictly tied to the works of French teatrologists whose pre-First World War research on the 18th-century stage and drama was much more substantial than in Poland.

There are several reasons to begin this work by emphasising the early scientific ties between France and Poland in the area of 18th-century theatre. The most important one — and obvious — is the historical, literary heritage, i.e., the influences of French playwrights in Poland beginning in the second half of the 17th century with Corneille, Racine and Molière, and later in the 18th century with Marivaux, Destouches, Voltaire, and numerous other authors, now forgotten, whose plays constituted the cornerstone of repertoires of school, court and public theatres throughout the 18th century. The artistic and organisational functioning of private and public Polish theatres of the time was also based on the French model. This area, analysed by Ludwik Bernacki in his theatre history investigations of the interwar period, had been previously completely untouched in Poland.

Beginning in the 1920s, the functioning of the 18th-century theatre in France was the subject of research conducted by the founder of the "Société d'Histoire du Théâtre", Max Fuchs (1876–1949), considered the father of modern French theatre studies because he determined the general modes of functioning of old theatrical institutions, and above all because — and this is of crucial importance to people studying the 18th century — he convincingly explained that a fundamental change had taken place in the 18th-century theatre, the consequences of which we have continued to experience to this day. As briefly as possible, according to Fuchs: the 18th-century theatre in Europe is not a simple continuation of previous theatrical achievements because of an economic factor permeating it to a large degree, whose previous relevance was negligible.

Only in the 18th century a theatre operating in a public building becomes a trading company, an enterprise managed by an entrepreneur. The appearance of this profession in the early 18th century and the word "entrepreneur" referring to theatre managers clearly show that things have changed.¹ Events that have transformed the stage play into a product dependent on the demand of the audience paying for the theatre ticket, which is a type of a bilateral miniature Purchase and Sale Agreement. An agreement whose value can be questioned even during its execution by an audience member using whistling and mockery, should the theatrical play be unappealing. The economic factor studied by the French scientist is convincing, especially since he took numerous

¹ Cf. M. Fuchs, *La vie théâtrale en province au XVIIIème siècle*, Paris, 1933 Librairie Droz, p. 7.

provincial enterprises in Nancy, Bordeaux, and Lyon into consideration. Fuchs worked with Ludwik Bernacki and even mentioned "Teatr, dramat i muzyka za Stanisława Augusta" from 1925 in the bibliography of works he consulted in the 1930s while writing his most famous book, "La vie théâtrale en province au XVIIIe siècle" (Paris, 1933). Fuchs also defined "theatrical life" (*la vie théâtrale*), a significant concept in theatre studies, in its modern sense and scope used to refer to a wide variety of social, economic and artistic phenomena connected with the functioning of theatre.

Perhaps the first use of the concept of "theatrical life" in a manner like that of Fuchs can be found in the title of Karyna Wierzbicka Michalska's 1949 work, "Życie teatralne Warszawy za Stanisława Augusta" (Theatrical Life of Warsaw in the Times of Stanisław II August).²

Studies on theatrical staging in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were another pioneering achievement of French teatrologists before the Second World War. The first such work, titled "La mise en scène en France dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle" written by Marie A. Allévy-Viala and published in 1938, was a novel theatrical book due to its subject of research, but mostly because of the method that consistently avoided dramatical literature and focused solely on the visual side of play execution. After the war, it attracted the attention of Polish theatre historians. It was published in 1958, translated by Wojciech Natanson as "Inscenizacja romantyczna we Francji" with a fascinating foreword written by Zbigniew Raszewski.

As mentioned before, the 200th anniversary of the National Theatre in 1965 unleashed great scientific energy fuelled not only by substantive reasons. The Polish People's Republic government, searching for intellectual tradition in remote eras, focused its ideological tools on the Enlightenment. The "Age of Lights" was presented as the "beginning of this red thread that runs throughout the 19th century up to our times".³ That is why, from today's perspective, knowing well the propagandistic references of the time, we can say that the permanent scientific value of these studies on the Enlightenment theatre is also proven by the ability to discern the difference between the authentic role of politics in the Polish 18th-century culture and the tendency to politicise the Enlightenment by the People's Government unilaterally.

² In her book, *Teatr w Polsce w XVIII wieku* [Polish Theatre of the 18th Century] (Warsaw, 1977), K. Wierzbicka Michalska extensively uses the methodology devised as early as in 1949.

³ T. Kostkiewiczowa, *Oświecenia w pracach Instytutu Badań Literackich*, in: "Wiek Oświecenia", No. 12, 1996, p. 135.

A persuasive example of understanding this subtlety can be seen in the 1950s and 60s in the two monographical editions of “Pamiętnik Teatralny” (Theatre Journal) about the Polish 18th-century stage, as well as in numerous publications authored by such renowned theatre historians as Karyna Wierzbicka, Barbara Król, Zbigniew Raszewski, and Jacek Lipiński, next to the older generation of such researchers as Bohdan Korzeniewski, Tadeusz Mikulski, Eugeniusz Szwankowski, and Stanisław Dąbrowski. This team of teatrologists set the later tone of the entire discipline of Enlightenment studies.

Around the anniversary, Polish theatre studies also received a second set — after Ludwik Bernacki’s monumental work — of the most important documents about theatrical life in the 18th century: *Teatr Narodowy 1765–1794* (National Theatre 1765–1794), edited by Jan Kott,⁴ and *Początki teatru stanisławowskiego* (Origins of the Stanisław II August Theatre) by Mieczysław Klimowicz.⁵ Let us emphasise that most documents collected and discussed in both publications were originally written in French.

The breadth of these works was summarised at the scientific session organised in November 1965 by the Department of History and Theory of Theatre at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences. When recapitulating the theses and conclusions of the three key speeches given by J. Kott, M. Klimowicz and Z. Raszewski, T. Sivert emphasised that they have essentially determined the role of politics in the Stanisław II August-era theatre, especially on the stage of the National Theatre, and the key role of the king, Stanisław II Augustus.⁶

Research from the late 60s and early 70s, among which two works should be mentioned: “Bogusławski”, a biography by Z. Raszewski,⁷ and Jerzy Got’s “Na wyspie Guaxary” (On the Island of Guaxara)⁸, confirms the generalising findings of the preceding years. Indeed, Got’s book about Bogusławski’s Lviv Theatre introduces an entirely new element to the research, which could be called, using a currently fashionable term, the regionalisation of culture, i.e., its distinctness in comparison with the dominant culture of the capital.

Also, later publications on the Enlightenment theatre, even those that do not fully subscribe to individual “political” hypotheses, do not question the basic findings of the 1950s and 60s. In the most important

⁴ J. Kott, introduction and editing, Warsaw, 1967.

⁵ M. Klimowicz, Warsaw, 1965.

⁶ *Teatr Narodowy w dobie Oświecenia* [National Theatre in the Enlightenment], ed. E. Heise, K. Wierzbicka-Michalska, Warsaw, 1967

⁷ Warsaw, 1972.

⁸ Kraków, 1971.

work to date on this topic, "Teatr w Polsce w XVIII wieku" (1977), its author, Karyna Wierzbicka-Michalska, states in her conclusion: "The permanent existence of a public theatre in Warsaw [...] produced affection toward theatrical entertainment among a wide variety of the capital's residents and visiting nobility. It provided the national stage with great possibilities of propagandistic impact."⁹

Studies on the dramatic literature of the Stanisław II August period developed — quite understandably — in a strict relationship with the progress of works on the institution of theatre. Let us return here to the research on the 18th-century drama in France and recall a pioneering work in this area, the 600-page book written by Félix Gaiffe in 1910 and titled "Le drame en France au XVIII^{ème} siècle". Although Gaiffe's starting point was the presentation of texts now classified as bourgeois tragedy, which — per his words — "was created in opposition to the classic genres of tragedy and comedy,"¹⁰ the author takes the position of a modern theatrologist more than a traditional literary critic because he begins his studies — let me quote again — "by discussing literary and social sources of the genre, determining its basic properties and boundaries, only to move to the environment in which it was created and where it evolved."¹¹ Thus, Gaiffe is interested in those spheres of the theatre that involve politics, sociology and economy. Let us add here that his book remains one of the most valuable sources in the study of 18th-century French playwriting.

Studies on the Polish Enlightenment drama do carry traces of Félix Gaiffe's methodology, particularly in the aspect concerning stage texts remaining in opposition to the classic court genres of tragedy and comedy. We should draw attention here to the role of Jan Kott as the initiator and editor of the multi-volume edition "Teatr polskiego oświecenia" (Polish Enlightenment Theatre). Thanks to this series, for nearly 20 years, readers have been receiving perfect issues of comedies by, among others, Bohomolec (ed. J. Kott), Krasicki (ed. M. Klimowicz), collection "Komedia obyczajowa warszawska" (Warsaw Comedy of Manners, ed. Z. Wołoszyńska), "Utwory dramatyczne Jana Baudouin" (Dramas of Jan Baudouin, ed. Z. Raszewski), collection "Drama mieszczańska" (Bourgeois Drama, ed. J. Pawłowiczowa). Among other later issues of theatre plays that were important in the Enlightenment, we should mention "Polska tragedia neoklasyczna" (Polish Neoclassical Tragedy) by D. Ratajczakowa and a kind of conclusion to the works about the best playwrights of the Enlighten-

⁹ K. Wierzbicka-Michalska, op. cit., pp. 298–299.

¹⁰ F. Gaiffe, *Le drame...* "avant-propos", p. 1.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 1.

ment, i.e., the five-volume “Teatr Franciszka Zabłockiego” (Theatre of Franciszek Zabłocki) by J. Pawłowiczowa.

Let me indulge here in an important reflection on the question the organisers from the Faculty of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw used to name our conference: “How to study the Enlightenment?” Regarding theatre studies, the question of how to study the 18th-century (or the Enlightenment) theatre has been the source of disputes in our community for many years. The cultivation of various specialities caused these disputes — topics passed from masters to their student-heirs — methods and research tools that needed naming and which have owed their permanence on the scientific market to many factors. In 1999, the Jagiellonian University centre for theatre studies in Kraków organised the national conference titled “Teatr — teatrologia w Polsce u schyłku XX wieku” (Theatre: teatrology in Poland in the late 20th century), during which, briefly speaking, we primarily tackled the past tense of Polish theatre studies. Technical and methodological issues were rarely raised, typically in lobby discussions and not in the conference room. After the publication of the conference materials and discussions in the teatrological circle, we could sense something that one would like to call, in some instances, a desire to search for a more modern research technique and goal, while in other cases, it could be called an uncertainty with respect to these matters. From the perspective of a dozen or so years, this anxiety could be sensed primarily by reading two articles: “Dawne i nowe” (Old and New) by Dobrochna Ratajczakowa and “O możliwościach zastosowania w nauce o teatrze pewnych nowych metod badawczych (Perspektywy i ograniczenia)” (On the possibilities of using specific new research methods in theatre studies: Perspectives and limitations) by Sławomir Świątek,¹² because their authors — researchers of theatre commanding great authority in our community — critiqued traditional methods of classical historiography, used by Polish teatrologists due to inertia, proposing better and more modern ones instead. Despite several reservations, the arguments made by Ratajczakowa and Świątek got to the heart of the concerns of numerous theatre historians and, in some ways, called for an in-depth methodological reflection.

Going further, in the Autumn of 2002, a methodological conference was organized entitled “Jak badać teatr” (How to study theatre?). Its structure was atypical. It was a panel discussion of around a dozen specialists who, before participating in the debate on methods used in theatre studies, learned about the positions of their colleagues by reading

¹² Both articles were published in the post-conference volume *Teatr — teatrologia w Polsce u schyłku XX wieku*, Kraków, 2001.

the texts written by everyone.¹³ The central axis of the dispute between historians and theoreticians was the persistence of the cardinal rule of the “classical” method of theatre history research and historical research in general: respect for facts, i.e. that which can be expressed in units of theatre inauguration dates, show titles and dates, names of actors, salary amounts. For several decades, beginning in the 1950s, Polish research centres produced documentary works to collect such facts precisely as possible. We are still using these materials, and we know that there will not be any new ones soon. Who and when began to suspect that this methodologically indisputable respect for facts in our research sometimes leads to an impasse? Naturally, it is not possible to point at someone directly. It occurred along with the time necessary to understand that bare facts by themselves do not contain the truth about theatre. When referring to, for example, the works of Polish teatrologists collected by the Wrocław scientist Janusz Degler in his multi-volume publication titled “Wprowadzenie do nauki o teatrze” (Introduction to Theatre Studies), we can notice that in the 1970s, an increasingly large group of theatre researchers disavowed segregation and periodisation of documents. At the same time, in drama studies, they rejected philological analysis and entered the areas reserved by sociology, art history, philosophy, literary criticism, and linguistics. Although this did not lead to creating a new methodology, it did prepare the field for creating original and scientifically fertile concepts integrating various elements constituting our discipline. I think here of semiological propositions (e.g., T. Kowzan’s sign in the theatre), particularly of the utilisation of the category of space, used in humanities, which is a convenient tool of analysis concerning the stage and dramatic text in both historical and theoretical aspects. The second proposition was — as we may recall — very popular from the 80s until recent years¹⁴.

Zbigniew Raszewski, a distinguished theatre researcher, died in the early 90s. I present this fact¹⁵ because the influence of Raszewski, who had every feature of a master, was great in our community. Several generations of theatre historians, primarily researchers of the 18th century, shaped their teatrological techniques to what he did and how he did it. Raszewski’s methodology was, in the most general terms, a method

¹³ *Jak badać teatr? Materiały z konferencji metodologicznej poświęconej badaniom historycznoteatralnym* [How to Study Theatre? Materials from the Methodological Conference Devoted to Theatre History Research], ed. M. Dębowski, Kraków, 2003.

¹⁴ See D. Ratajczakowa, *Przestrzeń w dramacie i dramat w przestrzeni teatru* [Space in Drama and Drama in Theatre Space], Poznań, 1985

¹⁵ I quote the following sentences from my speech at the 2002 conference, found in the book *Jak badać teatr?* p. 51.

of classical historiography, in the best sense of this term. There was, however, a very significant exception. In his books, Raszewski combined the respect for facts with a personal narration, which is a thing rejected by traditional historians. That is because personal narration rules out impartiality.

On the other hand, Raszewski wrote the history of the Polish theatre like a scientist fervently asked by someone who knows much less: "Professor, please tell me the story of Bogusławski." And he answered their questions. This aspect of writing resulted in the fact that we still perceive His studies as modern, even in the light of the newest narrative theories utilised by non-classical historiography. A researcher's personal telling of history (which is a bit like the narrative in *roman-fleuves*), in my opinion, works best in biographies of great figures of the theatre.

Professor Raszewski tended to be mistrustful of applying "theory" in theatre history research. He believed in the subordination of observation and experience to an ahistorical system — a kind of "super science" — as more detrimental than beneficial to the theatre. He passed on this attitude to many students, even though he was not free from interpretation in the name of a "higher idea." I think here primarily of his belief that theatre history should be made — please forgive my simplification — "for strengthening of hearts," that in a given political situation in communist Poland, a theatre historian should follow the thought of J. J. Rousseau: "You cannot possibly keep them from swallowing you, but they shall not be able to digest you"¹⁶, which is a thought that Professor Raszewski implemented in his works and his talks with students.

Returning to the French methodologies of the last decades of the 20th century and the early 21st century, we should emphasise that since the 1950s, the research and teaching in the area of theatre have been led by the Sorbonne's Institut d'Etudes Théâtrales, founded by Jaques Scherer, a researcher of classical dramatic literature, well known by all Romanists. Scherer purchased for the Sorbonne a magnificent library of the distinguished director Gaston Baty, who died in 1952 and was one of the founders of the so-called "Group of Four," an informal and very influential pre-Second World War association of four Parisian theatre directors.

As Jaques Scherer's student, professor Martine de Rougemont, told me, it was the Gaston Baty's library where the later team of teatrologists gathered and set the tone of French theatre studies to this day. Scientists with a sociological bent have played a significant role since the beginning. We only need to list the theatrical critic Jean Duvignaud,

¹⁶ As cited in Z. Raszewski, *Teatr Narodowy w latach 1779–1789* [National Theatre in 1779–1789] in: "Teatr Narodowy w dobie oświecenia," op. cit., p. 79

author of, among other things, “Sociologie du théâtre” (Sociology of Theatre), Paris, PUF, 1965, translated into many languages, or Bernard Dort, founder of the magazine “Travail théâtral”, and most of all, since 1967, Martine de Rougemont, who contributed more to the 18th-century theatre research than anyone else. Briefly speaking, this group decided in the early 60s that, despite prior multidirectional studies, the basic material to create a solid history of the French theatre had not yet been collected. Thus they first needed to study the actual conditions of the theatre at the time. They began with the collection of facts. This respect for facts, like in Poland, became a persistent research trend for at least three decades, which — although it may seem slightly anachronistic today — led to a change in the outlook on certain important phenomena. We should recall one of the most impressive achievements of the group of researchers of the 18th century who conducted studies under the direction of Martine de Rougemont in the 70s. It concerned the situation of tragedy — the highest genre in the classical French literary hierarchy — and specifically, the French’s adoration of the tragedy repertoire in the 18th century. It was a research topic that has always bothered, to a greater or lesser degree, historians of ideas, sociologists of culture, and teatrologists. That is because, at a glance, particularly in combination with irregular genres such as domestic drama or opera buffa, it seemed paradoxical. Like hardly any other period, the Enlightenment, at least until the Revolution in 1789, makes the impression that it is oblivious to tragedy, fate, transcendence, suffering, and death. The best and still played works of the Enlightenment theatre entertain, sometimes teach, but primarily constitute leisure time. They make us laugh, potentially think and reflect, like Marivaux’s works, or give us courage and energy, like the works of Beaumarchais. They are refreshing and, most of all, positive. In essence, the 18th-century theatre is overflowing with the instinct of life, both in playwriting and in the accompanying visual arts and music. Despite occasional notes of melancholy here and there, it is entirely anti-tragic. That is wholly confirmed by the research of Félix Gaiffe, mentioned in the beginning.

However, if we investigate the details of the current activity of great French stages, including the most important, the Comédie-Française, we will notice that tragedy has been the most played genre. Meticulous statistical studies conducted by teatrologists from the Institut d’Etudes Théâtrales demonstrate that throughout the 18th century, audiences buying tragedy tickets were much bigger than those buying comedy tickets. For example: in 1715–1750, the average number of people attending comedies was 319, while 545 people saw tragedies on average. In the 60s and 70s, the average figures were 485 for comedies and 754 for

tragedies, and the popularity of tragedies was maintained until the important year 1789. Digits do not lie. The audience indeed had been buying tragedy tickets, and accusations directed at theatre directors that they played something people had not liked — because of conservative tastes or a desire to pay tribute to the great tragedies of Corneille and Racine — have no basis in reality.¹⁷ Why? Here we are assisted by the careful studies about the 18th-century audience and acting. As it turns out, the audience had been attending tragedies because it was fascinated by roles played by great female actors such as Dumesnil or Clairon, and by great male tragedy actors such as Lekain (Voltaire's favourite actor) or Larive, and slightly later, by the idol of the crowds, Talma. These acting stars with exceptional declamation skills overshadowed the 18th-century comedy acting that existed in the Italian theatre since 1762 with the opera buffo and turned into acting techniques that combined singing with declamation, sophisticated stage movements and dance (this theatre, moreover, dominated the entertainment arts for the following two centuries).

The pinnacle of the 18th-century theatre research with a sociological bent was the 1988 French publication of the book titled “*La vie théâtrale en France au XVIIIe siècle*”. Its author, who died prematurely in 2015, Sorbonne Professor and director of the Institut d’Etudes Théâtrales, Martine de Rougemont, on the one hand, adopted certain methodological aspects of Max Fuchs¹⁸ but, on the other hand, enriched them considerably with new propositions. The point of view adopted by the scientist in the 1980s is not surprising considering still expanding research specialities, to which we have added semiotics, comparative literature, drama studies, and theatrical iconology. In the 90s, we can see a certain decline in studies on the sociology of theatre and a clear move in emphasis toward its aesthetics. Remaining with Martine de Rougemont, we can see that her interests in the 2000s were increasingly often focused on the visual aspects of theatrical plays. The study from 2005 titled “*Situation de l’iconographie théâtrale*” is clear proof of this change. The switch of emphasis from sociology to aesthetics in studies on the 18th-century theatre in France concerns, at the turn of the 21st century, a much larger group of teatrologists, from which I will only list one name: Pierre Franz, author of the book “*L’esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*”, published in 1999.

Issues of the aesthetics of play in the Polish 18th-century theatre remain at the periphery of the primary trend of researchers’ interests. At the earliest, separate studies on this topic covered Enlightenment

¹⁷ M. de Rougemont, *La vie théâtrale en France au XVIII^e ème siècle*, Paris, 1988, p.33.

¹⁸ M. de Rougemont writes about this in “note limitaire,” *ibid.*, p. 9

acting and, to be exact, views on acting. Here, we must yield the palm to Bohdan Korzeniewski. The interest in 18th-century acting can also be found in many post-war publications. Still, we should recall that we somewhat owe more concrete studies on the Enlightenment acting to a lucky accident. It is about discovering one of the parts of Wojciech Bogusławski's "Dramaturgia" (Dramaturgy), which had been lost during the war. This part, titled "Mimika" (Facial Expression), was edited by Jacek Lipiński. Lipiński continued his works on old Polish acting, which resulted in — in addition to several articles — 1974's "Sztuka aktorska w Polsce 1500–1633" (The Art of Acting in Poland, 1500–1633), which its author envisaged as the first volume of a work devoted to the history of aesthetics of the Polish stage play. Unfortunately, this intent has not yet been carried out. Still, thanks to the studies undertaken by a team of employees of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, portraits of four actors of the turn of the 19th century have been written and published in a popular series titled "Monografie czołowych artystów sceny polskiej" (Monographs of the Leading Artists of the Polish Stage).

The Enlightenment acting needed around a dozen years to find a new researcher, which is also, in a sense, thanks to the accidental discovery of the 1810 manuscript "Des acteurs et du jeu théâtral" by Emanuel Murray.¹⁹ My printed publication of this first manual for actors in Poland, strictly tied to the National Theatre, enabled us to continue the studies initiated by Lipiński and make hypotheses on acting style. Although we will have to wait for an in-depth exploration of this topic, we can now say that the model of French acting, otherwise applicable on most European stages, had been transformed on the Warsaw stage rather quickly. We can already identify national features in our pre-eminent dramatic artists' acting in the first years of the 19th century.

At the same time, we should note the studies of B. Król, St. Mrozińska and I. Turska, which, in the 1950s and 60s, were already devoted to stage aesthetics, completely leaving aside the sociologising and political directives applicable at the time. The research subject, ballet, decorations, painting, and theatrical costumes facilitated this epistemic disinterestedness; however, it is also true that later studies on these essential parts of a show have not developed sufficiently. On the other hand, the knowledge of theatrical aesthetics, which was not as in-depth as it should be, solidified the conviction about the simple copying of French and West European models.

¹⁹ Published from the manuscript in French and in Polish (*O aktorach i grze teatralnej* [On Actors and Theatrical Acting]), translated and edited by M. Dębowski, Kraków, 1992.

Ballet is a constant and vital phenomenon in the Polish Enlightenment theatre. Bogusławski writes about it multiple times in “Dzieje Teatru Narodowego” (History of the National Theatre).²⁰ It is not the place for longer contemplations on this topic. Still, we can conclude Bogusławski’s remarks on the art of ballet that, for him, it was the perfect school for organising theatrical space and the visual side of stage movement. We certainly cannot speak about the Warsaw stage ballet of the time in categories of imitation or dependence on the West European stage. For example, Noverre’s most famous ballet, *Medea and Jason*, staged in Warsaw by Vestris in 1767, had its Parisian première only in 1770, a cut-down version.

When moving to works on scenography and costume studies, we should primarily emphasise that we owe most of them to the diligence of a single person, Barbara Król Kaczorowska (who died in 2011). Her studies on the two leading decorators of the Enlightenment, Jan Bogumił Plersch and Antoni Smuglewicz, remain irreplaceable. Thanks to them, we can determine whether our decorations had to be seen as old-fashioned and provincial compared to the decorative fashions of Paris or London. We can formulate a similar opinion about costumes, which already had some realistic features by the end of the 18th century, particularly plays, even historical ones. We can see this in meagre iconographic documents and works on this topic, which unfortunately number in single digits.

Is research on the eighteenth-century Polish theatre continued today, in the twenty-first century’s second decade? Yes. The foundations on which the new scientific structures can be built are solid. Among the specialised researchers, we can already notice a kind of “changing of the guard”. The younger generation of Polish theatre researchers uses the new methods to conduct a scientific reconnaissance, which often leads them to interesting synthetic research results. This new and — I do not hesitate — modern generation will soon raise the question of how much is still ahead of us.

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²⁰ W. Bogusławski, *Dzieje teatru Narodowego na trzy części podzielone oraz Wiadomość o życiu sławnych artystów* [History of the National Theatre Divided into Three Parts and Information about Lives of Famous Artists], Warsaw, 1820.

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