

‘Photography is something that has no end’, these words by Wojciech Plewiński<sup>1</sup>, the master of theatre photography, come back to me when I think about the beginnings. We know from history that, although 1839 is considered the year of the official public announcement of the invention of photography, its origins are much older. In Polish theatre photography, we can also name a date (which we will also mention here) when the first stage photograph was taken, but the essence of the beginnings does not lie in dates. Theatre as a visual art has always been about creating images. The images were accompanied by emotions, expressed differently depending on the era or genre—with facial expressions, gestures, words, singing, dancing, staging... Images that were retained under the eyelids were remembered and taken away by the audience as they left the theatre. Images that came to life in conversations, returned in dreams, remained in memory. They were told, described, remembered, and constantly processed. In the early nineteenth century, with the invention of lithography, the first drawings of actors and actresses in roles, in make-up and costume, captured on stage, began to appear. Editions of popular dramas, such as the series published by Teatry Warszawskie [Warsaw Theatres] company (1834–1840), included portraits of actors in their roles with a transcribed excerpt from the play. They recalled important situations in the play in black and white and in colour. The photographs of actors and their private portraits, published separately, enhanced the prestige of the theatre people, travelled with them when they went on tour and increased their popularity.

One lithograph shows an actor uttering, ‘God, I have regained my sight!’ It is a dynamic image; the actor stands with his legs spread, his arms in the air, and the black ribbon that had covered his eyes falls to the ground, caught in a picturesque, blurred wave in mid-air. We can only imagine that this scene was a significant, if not the climactic, moment of the performance. Many years would pass before this single moment on stage, in motion and colour, would be captured by a camera. Theatre photography evolved with the technical changes of the 1839 invention. The stage in the theatre was its greatest technical challenge. By looking at Polish theatre photography up to 1918, I would like to capture its origins, the changes that took place at the turn of the twentieth century, and the variety of subjects that

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<sup>1</sup> See: *Wojciech Plewiński – Dobry obraz* [Wojciech Plewiński – A good image], a film (directed and edited by Bianka Kurylczyk, Tomek Schaefer, 2022) on display at the exhibition held at the Museum of the Sary Theatre in Kraków (MICET) 1.07–31.07.2022. [“Wojciech Plewiński - Dobry obraz” / wystawa w Muzeum Starego Teatru \(MICET\) - YouTube](#)

continue to be pursued. Joel Anderson's book *Theatre & Photography* opens with a quote from a letter written by Denis Diderot in 1758 to Madame Riccoboni, a French actress and writer: 'Theatre is an image, but it is a moving image, the details of which we have no time to analyse'<sup>2</sup>. In tracing the multiplicity of subjects, I am particularly interested in capturing the movement, the freeze-frame that creates the image. How and what did theatre photography try to remember in the first decades of its existence? The need to make a curatorial selection led me to concentrate on dramatic theatre, while other genres—dance, opera, operetta—were only marginally represented, which reveals the wealth of possibilities to be pursued in the future. For the same reason, I decided to concentrate on the three major theatre and photographic centres of the time—Warsaw, Lviv, and Kraków, with a single example from Vilnius. The collection of Polish theatre photography up to 1918 is scattered in many museums, libraries and archives and is still waiting to be catalogued, compiled and described - there are not many publications on the subject<sup>3</sup>. Step by step, I follow a selection of photographs, often published for the first time. This is only the first step in the future history of theatre photography.

<sup>2</sup> Denis Diderot, *Letter to Madame Riccoboni*, 1758, cited after: Joel Anderson *Theatre & Photography*, London 2015, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> On 14–16 September 1959, an exhibition entitled „Polish Theatre Photography 1840–1959 was held at the conference hall of the State Institute of Art in Warsaw as part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Council of the International Federation of the Association of Librarians (Section of Theatre Librarians and Archivists). Three hundred and fifty images were exhibited. This event and the articles written about the event (Jerzy Got, „Fotograficzna dokumentacja teatru w Polsce” [The Photographic Documentation of Theatre in Poland] *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 1960, volume 1, pp. 71–94 and Ewa Makomaska, „Wystawa fotografii teatralnej w Warszawie” [An Exhibition of Theatre Photography in Warsaw] *Fotografia* 1960, no. 1, pp. 7–11) are the only existing texts about the issue. It is worth mentioning the following publications on selected themes of early theatre photography: Ignacy Płazewski, *Dzieje polskiej fotografii 1839–1939* [On Polish Photography] Warsaw 2003, *inter alia* pp. 93–95; Wanda Mossakowska, *Walery Rzewuski (1837–1888) fotograf. Studium warsztatu i twórczości* [Walery Rzewuski (1837–1999). A Photographer. A Study of his Work and Oeuvre], Warsaw–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1981, pp. 161–173 and *Nieznany wizerunek Leontyny Halpertowej* [The Unknown Image of Leontyna Halpertowa], *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 2003, issue 3–4, pp. 337–340; Krystyna Lejko, *Kalendarze fotograficzne z zakładu Konrada Brandla. Obraz Warszawy w latach 60. XIX wieku* [Photographic Calendars from the Workshop of Konrad Brandel. Warsaw in Pictures in the 1860s], Warsaw 2009, pp. 55–57; Marta Ziętkiewicz, *Michał Chomiński i Jan Królikowski w obiektywie Konrada Brandla. Spojrzenie na polską fotografię teatralną 2. połowy XIX wieku* [Michał Chomiński and Jan Królikowski as Pictured by Konrad Brandel. A Look at Polish Theatre Photography of the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century], *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 2016, issue 1–2, pp. 139–172; Marta Ziętkiewicz, *W służbie nowoczesności. Fotografia w Warszawie w latach 1864–1883* [In the Service of Modernity. Photography in Warsaw between 1864 and 1883], Warsaw 2024, pp. 98–103. The following monographies penned by Danuta Jackiewicz feature highly valuable information about the subject: *Karol Beyer 1818–1877*, Warsaw 2012; *Maksymilian Fajans 1825–1890*, Warsaw 2014; *Konrad Brandel 1838–1920*, Warsaw 2015. Of the works by theatre scholars of significance is the two-volume work by Alicja Kędziora *Ikonaografia teatralna „Tygodnika Ilustrowanego” (1859–1939)* [Theatre Iconography of *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* (1859–1939)] Kraków 2018 and her numerous publications regarding the iconography of Helena Modrzejewska, including *Szekspir Modrzejewskiej* [Modrzejewska's Shakespeare] Kraków 2015; *Kleopatra Modrzejewskiej w fotografii* [Modrzejewska's Cleopatra in Pictures] [in:] *Helena Modrzejewska. Addenda do badań nad życiem i twórczością* [Helena Modrzejewska. Addenda to the Study of Life and Oeuvre] ed. Alicja Kędziora, Emil Orzechowski, Kraków 2021, pp. 273–189. Worth noting are also the following works: Anna Litak, *Fotografie Modrzejewskiej* [Modrzejewska's Photographs] *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 2009, issue 3/4; Agnieszka Wanicka: *Fotografia i teatr. Pierwsze spotkanie* [Photography and Theatre. The First Encounter] [in:] *Miejsce fotografii w badaniach humanistycznych* [The Position of Photography in Humanities Research] ed. Marta Ziętkiewicz and Małgorzata Biernacka, Warsaw 2015, pp. 59–74; and “Kołysałem się tą myślą. Historia niezrealizowanego projektu fotograficznego Michała Chomińskiego” [‘I Was Swayed by This Thought’: The Story of a Photography Project by Michał Chomiński That Never Came to Be] *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 2021, issue 1, pp. 37–72, <https://czasopisma.ispan.pl/index.php/pt/article/view/718/870>.

## The birth of theatre photography

It is not without reason that when we look at the biographies of actors and actresses in their roles, including the booklets with printed plays published in the *Teatry Warszawskie* series, the most frequent image we come across is that of Leona Halpertowa, née Żuczkowska. She was the first star of the Polish theatre, the first actress to be showered with flowers on stage, and the first to fascinate audiences with her acting and personality<sup>4</sup>. There are many private portraits of her—miniatures and etchings, including a lithograph dated 1830 taken by Antoni Laube during her guest performances in Lviv, with the inscription ‘Artist of the National Theatre in Warsaw’.

The beginnings of theatre photography were rich in portraits, including images of theatre people in private, as well as of actors and actresses in their roles. The only two daguerreotypes<sup>5</sup> in the archives of Polish theatre photography are the portraits of Leontyna Halpertowa. Both were made by Karol Beyer in his studio on Senatorska Street in Warsaw, near the building of the Wielki Theatre on Theatre Square. The first daguerreotype in the collection of the Theatre Museum in Warsaw has a fascinating history. It turned out to be a reproduction of a watercolour painting by Stanisław Marszałkiewicz depicting the actress in the title role of a French melodrama called Rita ‘The Spanish Girl’. Halpertowa was first cast as the passionate Rita in January 1840 and was so successful that the play remained in the repertoire until 1846. The watercolour is dated 1840, and the daguerreotype was produced in 1846. We know of another colour lithograph showing the actress in this particular role, made in 1840 in the Warsaw theatre series. Beyer was also commissioned to make reproductions of paintings and miniatures by Polish artists, including Marszałkiewicz. The other daguerreotype is a private portrait of the actress (from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw) taken in the autumn or winter of late 1849 or early 1850. A year later, at 48, Halpertowa left the theatre and gave a legendary farewell performance<sup>6</sup>. The end of her career was her own choice: the actress was suffering from an illness that caused her head to shake. The crooked

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<sup>4</sup> A beautiful portrait of the actress was written by Halina Waszkiel in the book *Trudne lata. Teatr warszawski 1815–1868* [The Hard Years. Theatre in Warsaw in the years 1815–1868], Warsaw 2015, pp. 125–128, 240–246, 327–334.

<sup>5</sup> Daguerrotype – one of the first forms of photography invented by Louis Jacques Daguerre in 1839. The image captured on a metal plate covered with iodised silver emulsion is unique, characterised by sharpness and rich detail. The daguerreotype technique prevailed until the 1850s.

<sup>6</sup> As her farewell performance held on 26 February 1851, Halpertowa chose the play *Adrianna Lecouvreur* by Eugène Scribe and Ernest Legouvé, where she played the titular role and which she chose and translated into Polish herself. The final words of the protagonist, Adrianna, who was an actress, became Halpertowa’s parting words with the stage. More in Halina Waszkiel, op. cit., pp. 331–334.

pose in the photograph, in which she supports her head with her hand, was probably forced by her worsening condition.

Among the oldest images of theatre personalities is a talbotype<sup>7</sup> from the beginning of 1846, which was photographed again in the 1860s. The talbotype of unknown authorship depicts the Kraków actor Ignacy Chomiński, who died in tragic circumstances on 1 December 1846 at 27. Just as his career was gaining momentum and he was about to become a highly respected actor on the stages of Warsaw's theatres, he was arrested for his political activities in March 1846. As a citizen of the Russian partition, he was handed over to the Russian authorities, spent nine months in the Citadel prison, and was sentenced to twelve years' deportation to the Caucasus. On the way, near Siedlce, he tried to escape. Captured and beaten, he went mad and died in a hospital in Siedlce. The talbotype photograph was commissioned by his younger brother, Michał Chomiński, also an actor, and taken by Warsaw photographer Walerian Twardzicki. The original has not survived, so verifying whether it was technically a talbotype is difficult. The characteristic sharpness of the portrait suggests a daguerreotype. Throughout his life, Michał Chomiński cultivated the memory of his deceased brother. The memory of the actor was perpetuated by the talbotype (or daguerreotype) photograph and its numerous reproductions. We know that in 1847, Chomiński began to collect daguerreotypes of actors and actresses, and since the 1860s, his passion as a collector led him to plan a photographic project, namely a gallery of artists and women of the theatre, which unfortunately was never completed.

The beginnings of the Polish theatre can be studied from the perspective of processed images—the miniature daguerreotype and the talbotype (or daguerreotype) photograph—by analysing them to identify visual and theatrical contexts on the one hand and memory on the other. The reason for the creation of both reproductions was to preserve the memory of both the author of the reproduction and the actor portrayed. In Aleksander Maciesza's book *Historii fotografii polskiej w latach 1839–1889* [The History of Polish Photography in 1839–1889] I found a fragment that moved me. It talks about the connection between the rise of photography in the early 1860s, when the so-called carte de visite (small format photographs in the size of 6 by 9 cm, available in Beyer's studio since 1859 roku) appeared, and the January Uprising. In 1863 and 1864, the number of clients of the increasingly popular photographic studios soared, as soldiers who were to take part in the uprising wanted to leave

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<sup>7</sup> We are talking about a positive print on salt paper from a talbotype. The technique of making a photograph was recognised by Jerzy Got, see Jerzy Got, *op. cit.* p. 72. Talbotype (also called calotype) – one of the first forms of photography, invented by William Fox Talbot, patented in 1841. The image is fixed on light-sensitive paper and developed as a negative. The talbotype is then used to create a positive print on salt paper. The talbotype technique was used in the 1840s and 1850s.

their portraits to their loved ones as souvenirs. The photographs of the men who died in the armed conflict were treated by their families as relics, reminding them of their love for their homeland and contributing to the strengthening of national identity during the partitions. Maciesza believes that the specificity of Polish photography, compared to other countries, was that it was a factor in creating the memory of the homeland<sup>8</sup>. Photography and theatre crossed paths at a time when Poland was being erased from the world map, and when researching the history of theatre photography before 1918, one must bear this fact in mind.

The theatre, which preserved the Polish language and supported the development of Polish drama, had an enormous social impact. Theatre photography in Poland developed in parallel with world photography and used the exact mechanisms; it was used for advertising purposes and thus contributed to the growing popularity of celebrities. However, there was another aspect to the popularity and importance of Polish theatre. Therefore, before 1919, theatre photography was used to preserve memories and promote Polish culture. As Ignacy Płażewski writes, photography ‘played a social role’<sup>9</sup>.

Among the oldest portraits of theatre people, I would like to mention the photograph of Adelaide Ristori, an excellent star of the Italian theatre, who came to Warsaw for a guest performance in 1856. We know from a press report that on 13 November, she visited Karol Beyer’s studio, where ‘the great artist’ was ‘captured on paper’<sup>10</sup>. The Warsaw photographer moved his studio to Warecka Street in 1850 and introduced a new technique of taking photographs on glass plates covered with wet collodion emulsion, which enabled him to make glass negatives and then print them on photosensitive paper, while his studio changed its name to ‘Zakład Fotograficzny Karola Beyer w Warszawie’ [Karol Beyer's Photographic Workshop in Warsaw]. Photographs of the actress could be bought in the studio and a stationery shop. Ristori’s portrait is a prelude to the rising star era, also known as ‘actor mania’, an increasing popularity of actors and actresses in the second half of the nineteenth century.

### **“Photography of Theatres”**

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<sup>8</sup> See: Aleksander Maciesza, *Historii fotografii polskiej w latach 1839–1889* [The History of Polish Photography 1839–1889], Płock 1972, pp. 56–57.

<sup>9</sup> Ignacy Płażewski, *Dzieje polskiej fotografii...* [The History of Polish Photography...], *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>10</sup> *Kurier Warszawski* 1856, no. 300 (14.11), p. 1544.

I was wondering when the profession of theatre photographer was officially created, and I discovered that in February 1877, the official trade name of 'Photography of the Theatres in Warsaw' (sometimes also called 'Photography of the Government Theatres in Warsaw') was established by Aleksander Karoli and Maurycy Pusch. This is confirmed by a short article in the press: 'The Director of the Warsaw Theatres appointed Messrs Karoli and Pusch as permanent photographers of these theatres. As a result of this appointment, Messrs Karoli and Pusch will be allowed to photograph the artists of the Warsaw Theatres in their costume roles'<sup>11</sup>. The exclusivity mentioned in the story was only wishful thinking. The archives of Polish theatre photography show that actors and actresses of the time were photographed in various studios. However, some studios were preferred by theatre artists. It turns out that some photographers had a very close relationship with the theatre milieu.

Throughout the nineteenth century, professional and private photographs of actors and actresses were taken in studios in daylight, sometimes with additional light provided by mirrors positioned at specific angles. During the sessions, the models posed in costume and make-up, recreating scenes from performances. The earliest photographs of actors 'in roles' come from the studio of Karol Beyer, whose nickname 'the forefather of Polish photography' should actually read 'the forefather of Polish theatre photography'. Among his photographs are those of Ludwik Panczykowski in the title role of *Janek from Ojcowo* by Jan Kante Gregorowicz from 1860. It is worth noting that in 1859, Beyer began his collaboration with the weekly *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, where he published photographs, including theatre photographs, in the form of wood engravings. One of Beyer's pupils was Konrad Brandel, who opened his own photographic studio in 1865. The photographer's parents were friends of the actor Michał Chomiński. To advertise the new studio, Brandel used his family's connection with the actor and photographed his best friend, the famous tragedy actor Jan Królikowski and Chomiński himself, who usually played supporting and walk-on roles in comedies. Both actors were photographed in a dozen roles, and the shoots took place in February (Królikowski) and April 1866 (Chomiński), and they brought the expected results, namely publicity but no profit. Brandel's business partner, Marcin Olszyński, was the artistic director of the magazine *Kłosy*, which featured Królikowski's portrait (in the form of a wood engraving) as Franz Moore from Schiller's *Die Räuber* on the cover of the April 1866 issue (no. 40). Other actors who were photographed at Brandel's studio included the tragic actor

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<sup>11</sup> *Echo* 1877, no. 45 (26.02), p. 4.

Boleslaw Leszczyński (as Othello) and Józef Damse, who primarily played walk-on roles (e.g. the gravedigger in *Hamlet*).

Jan Mieczkowski's first major award was a distinction he received at the Great Exhibition in London in 1862. It is known that he sent there, among other things, a collection, among which are our artists and ballet dancers in leading roles and national costumes, in which the Krakowiak dance was also represented<sup>12</sup>. These are the oldest photographs of dancers known to us. I have to admit that they fascinate me with their desire to capture movement, i.e. the blurriness of a skirt in a dancer's sweeping gesture, the detail of a protruding frame trying to hold the dancer in pose. In April 1870, Mieczkowski was commissioned by the weekly *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* to photograph a scene from a performance of Victorien Sardou's *Les Ganaches*<sup>13</sup>. The studio was set up with three armchairs, a table with two candles in candlesticks and playing cards. The actors—Alojzy Żółkowski (Margrave de Rochepeans), Adolf Ostrowski (Fromental) and Wincenty Rapacki (Leonidas Vauclin) in costume and make-up—reenacted the sixth scene of the first act, when the three play a game of whist. It turned out that the photograph, in the form of an engraved woodcut, had also appeared in the rival magazine *Kłosy*<sup>14</sup>. The photographs raise questions about memory. Group scenes (with more than two people) were rare in photography before the 1890s. In the second half of the nineteenth century, theatres were full of plays with all-star casts, but only this one was captured on camera. This image has gone down in theatre history as an example of an outstanding trio of actors. Mieczkowski likely took seven photographs of the three men, including two from different scenes. It turns out that some actors, including Rapacki and Damse (as Bourgoigne), were photographed separately, the former even visiting two different studios. The pictures and engravings of the actors were very popular. It is known that they were exhibited in a new and unexpected way in October: 'I was walking down Senatorska Street the other day. I noticed a large teacup in one of the shop windows. On the teacup, there was a reproduction of a photograph of the *Les Ganaches* trio: Żółkowski, Rapacki and Ostrowski, a smaller version of an engraving we published a few months ago in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*'<sup>15</sup>. Perhaps at the same time, in the window of Mieczkowski's studio at the corner of Senatorska and Miodowa Streets, there was a larger photograph of the three actors? In 1876, his passion for the theatre and his entrepreneurial spirit led to the publication

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<sup>12</sup> *Kurier Warszawski* 1862, no. 66 (21.04), p. 382.

<sup>13</sup> The shoot was held on or around 16 April 1870 (based on an announcement in *Kurier Warszawski* 1870 no. 84, p. 3), and the play premiered at the Wielki Theatre on 30 March 1870.

<sup>14</sup> See: *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1870, no. 123 (7.05), p. 221 and *Kłosy* 1870, no. 253 (5.05), p. 269. For more see: Alicja Kędziora, *Ikonoografia teatralna...*, *op. cit.*, Volume 1, pp. 133–134.

<sup>15</sup> *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1870, no. 148 (29.10), p. 206.

of a 'theatre newspaper' called *Antrakt*, which was regularly published under the name of *Kurier Poranny* and *Antrakt*. In 1877, one of the incentives offered to subscribers was a premium gift in the form of a tableau with photographs of members of the acting ensemble from Teatry Warszawskie<sup>16</sup> and a photograph of a scene from *Les Ganaches*. We know from an inscription that one of the copies of the tableaux was presented to the director of the Krakowski Theatre, Stanisław Koźmian, as a gift to mark his jubilee. When the National Theatre decided to stage *Les Ganaches* in 1926, the inspiration not only for the costumes and make-up but also for the stage setting for the three actors who were cast in the leading roles (Ludwik Solski, Kazimierz Kamiński and Józef Chmieliński), was the scene depicted in the 1870 photograph. It was taken by Jan Malarski and published in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*<sup>17</sup>. It is the only place where the photograph can be seen today.

Mieczkowski's was the most prominent and trendiest photo studio of the Star Era. It was here that Helena Modrzejewska most often had her photographs taken. Mieczkowski was a master of light; he took care of the right pose and retouching; he created in the style of realist idealism, in which beautiful lines dominated. It is enough to look at two photographs of the opera star Bronisława Dowiakowska and the theatre star Helena Modrzejewska. The picture of Dowiakowska in the role of Violetta in Verdi's *La Traviata* also suggests the theme of photographs of opera singers and singers. The series of photos of Modrzejewska in these roles is striking not only for the beauty of the poses and gestures recreated for the camera, for which the actress was famous on stage but also for the attempt to capture movement<sup>18</sup>. After Halpertowa's career ended, Modrzejewska took her place as the leading star of the Warsaw stage, and she was also the first Polish actress to use photography in her theatrical career consciously. A rare example of a large format colour photograph (54.8 by 41.5 cm) is her portrait by Maksymilian Fajans.

The first photographs of the actress in roles were taken between 1865 and 1869 by the Kraków photographer Walery Rzewuski. Fifty-five of Rzewuski's glass negatives are kept in the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków. This is the only collection of nineteenth-century photographic film in the archives of Polish theatre photography. In 2024, the negatives were

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<sup>16</sup> See: *Kurier Poranny i Antrakt* 1877, no. 3 (31.03), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1926, No. 28/29, 17.07, p. 11, <https://polona.pl/item-view/996169cf-3b6b-4b33-aab2-9101750510e4?page=6>.

<sup>18</sup> For more see: Alicja Kędziora, *Kleopatra Modrzejewskiej...*, op. cit and Agnieszka Wanicka, „Pożerali ją oczyma”. Kilka uwag o warszawskim doświadczeniu w życiu i twórczości Heleny Modrzejewskiej, [“They were devouring her with their eyes”. Some remarks on the Warsaw experience in the life and work of Helena Modrzejewska], *Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna*. English Issue 2022, pp. 229–256, ‘They were devouring her with their eyes’ | English Issue 2022 | [Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna](https://www.didaskalia.pl/)



digitised at the Museum of Photography in Kraków<sup>19</sup>, which allowed us to see the excellent effect of the joint efforts of the actress and the photographer, namely Modrzejewska's emotions, her acting, still 'fresh' rather than realistic, which she showed during her time in Warsaw. Rzewuski was fascinated by emotions and movement and tried to reproduce them in his studio. As a young man, Rzewuski was an amateur actor and a frequent visitor to the theatre (now the Helena Modrzejewska Stary Theatre), where he always sat in the same balcony seat. It should be remembered that the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre was founded on his initiative and partly thanks to a donation from his photography studio's proceeds. Apart from Modrzejewska, he photographed many actors and actresses from Kraków, including Antonina Hoffmann, Wincenty Rapacki, and Bolesław Ładnowski. He also collected photographs to publish them in photo albums. Only one of these books has survived to the present day: *Album sceniczne A. Hoffmann, Artystki Teatru Krakowskiego* [Stage Album A. Hoffmann, Artists of the Kraków Theatre] from 1868, which contains twenty-eight printed photographs taken in the studio, depicting 12 roles of the actress in costume. Under each picture, there is an inscription featuring the play's title, the playwright's name, the number of acts, and a quotation from the role. It is impossible not to notice the similarity of this arrangement to the lithographs discussed above. The album of photographs by Antonina Hoffman can be considered the first book of theatre photography<sup>20</sup>. Rzewuski, like many other photographers of the time, photographed 'living pictures', i.e. a quasi-theatrical performance consisting of the reconstruction of an image or scene from literature by people in make-up and costume, using props. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the 'living pictures' (e.g. from Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Ogniem i mieczem* [With Fire and Sword], 1884), which were particularly popular in the aristocratic milieu, were given a new lease of life in the photographic studio. This thread points to the themes of quasi-theatrical shows, amateur theatres, and all kinds of performances and happenings that theatre photography is interested in.

In 1909, at the 'Kordyan' studio in Lviv, an interesting photograph of 'living pictures' was created. A group of women reproduced painted portraits, including the famous picture of Sara Siddons by Thomas Gainsborough. The representative of theatre photography in Lviv was Teodozy Bahrynówicz, who earned the status of 'Photographer of the Lviv Municipal

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<sup>19</sup> The digitalisation process was conducted as part of the MiniGRANTY POB Heritage project (special edition: Digital Humanities) *Kolekcja fotograficzna krakowskich ról Heleny Modrzejewskiej. Digitalizacja szklanych negatywów z lat 1865–1869* [Collection of photographs of the Kraków roles of Helena Modrzejewska. Digitalisation of glass negatives from the years 1865–1869] headed by Agnieszka Wanicka at the Polish Studies Department at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

<sup>20</sup> See also: Aleksandra Federowicz-Jackowska, *Nieuznana rewolucja? Polskie książki i fotografia (1856–1883)* [An Unrecognised Revolution? Polish Books and Photography (1856–1883)], Warsaw 2023, p. 254–256.

Theatre'<sup>21</sup>. Many actors and actresses of the theatre ensemble led by Tadeusz Pawlikowski in 1900–1906 were photographed in Bahryniewicz's studio. The selection of Bahryniewicz's works presents not only the stars of Pawlikowski's theatre but is also, I sincerely hope, an attempt to capture the changes in the art of acting at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the intensification of realism in acting, the depiction of anxious moods and melancholy, which were characteristic of the modernist theatre reportage. The photographer used a different technique. From the 1880s, dry film was used, which was easier to handle and more sensitive.

When discussing the links between photographers and the theatre world, we should also mention Aleksander Karoli, the co-founder of the 'theatre photography' brand, who worked as a lighting master in the Warsaw theatres. This kind of theatre work enabled the duo of Karoli and Pusch to acquire the official title of theatre photographers, which they used on the back of their photographs. At a time when competition in the photographic market was fierce, a stamp with the words 'Theatre Photographer' served as a promotional tool, adding prestige to the reputation of the Teatry Warszawskie company. The two photographers worked together until 1892 when they symbolically split their trademark. In 1892–1902, the trademark was used by Maurycy Pusch, and in 1892–1893 by Karoli and Edward Troczewski, who from 1894 used it on his own, adding to the photographs the information that he also reproduced works of art: 'Edward Troczewski Theatre Photography and the Zachęta Association of Fine Arts in Warsaw'. Around 1898, Troczewski's studio and brand name were taken over by photographer Jadwiga Golcz, who ran the business until 1910. She was a very active member of the industry and an inspiration to the photographers' circle<sup>22</sup>, while her studio, located in the Bristol Hotel, was one of the trendiest places for people in the cultural sector. The photographers Malarski and Tavrell (Jan Malarski and Karol Tavrell), who worked as a duo and ran a studio on Nowy Świat street, dominated the field of theatre photography in the early twentieth century by printing postcards. One of Troczewski's photographs shows a large sign for his studio on a tenement building on Krakowskie Przedmieście street, where the Bristol Hotel now stands. Advertising the brand on the city

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<sup>21</sup> Cited after: *Dawna fotografia lwowska 1839-1939* [Lviv Photography of the Past 1939–1939], ed. Aleksander Żakowicz, Lviv 2004, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> See: Katarzyna Gębarowska, *Jadwiga Golcz (1866–1936): zapomniana popularyzatorka i krytyczka fotografii przełomu XIX i XX wieku* [Jadwiga Golcz (1866–1936). The Forgotten Photography Promoter and Critic at the Turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries] [in:] *Krytyka artystyczna kobiet: sztuka w perspektywie kobiecego doświadczenia XIX–XXI wieku* [Art Criticism of Women. Art in the Perspective of the Female Experience of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries], ed. Beata Łazarz, Joanna M. Sosnowska, Warsaw 2019, p. 92–114.

streets was a great introduction and symbol of the popularity of theatre photography, which contributed to the success of the Star Era.

## The Star Era

It is challenging for modern audiences to imagine a world without photography. In those days, the theatre was a mystery. You never knew the private faces of the actors and actresses; you only met them between curtain calls. When you looked at the stage, illuminated by the light of oil lamps, you saw a character in costume with a face covered in a thick layer of make-up. Lithography was the first to popularise the actor's likeness, and photography revolutionised it. In a way, the theatre was taken out into the street; theatre people had to go to the studio and there, in costume and make-up, recreate the situation in daylight. The developed prints were shown in exhibitions, bought, collected, sent, and seen in magazines... As we know from the example of *Les Ganaches*, they even appeared on teacups. Pictures of theatre people took on an advertising function; they advertised the studio, the show, and the theatre, as well as cigarettes, chocolates, sweets, etc. Postcards became popular at the beginning of the twentieth century when photographic printing went into mass production.

Starting with the photograph of the entrance to the Wielki Theatre, where we can see a decorative window with photographs of actors and actresses, I would like to tell you about a few objects with photographs of the theatre building or people from the theatre. For example, there is a plate with a coloured picture of Theatre Square and the building of the Wielki Theatre, a perfume bottle with a picture of an actress identified as Konstancja Bednarzewska, and a pocket mirror with a photograph of an actor, which was a gift from colleagues on the occasion of a work jubilee. An interesting example of such artefacts is a black wooden box with silver fittings, dated 1900–1906 and inscribed with the initials TP, used to store large-format group photographs by Bahryniewicz of all the staff of the Lviv Municipal Theatre. It was a gift from the team to the theatre's director, Tadeusz Pawlikowski, at the end of his term of office. I combined the gift with a postcard showing a group of people in front of the theatre building during a joint strike on 28 November 1905. Pawlikowski decided to present the strikers with a performance of Wyspiański's *The Wedding* on that day<sup>23</sup>. This decision, and many similar gestures made by the director to the theatre's technical staff, were seen as an expression of a civic, engaged theatre involved in important political events. Complementing

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<sup>23</sup> See: Franciszek Pajączkowski, *Teatr lwowski pod dyktando Tadeusza Pawlikowskiego 1900–1906* [The Lviv Theatre under the Leadership of Tadeusz Pawlikowski 1900–1906], Kraków 1961, p. 347.

the Lviv thread, we have the fan with photographs of the company produced to commemorate the opening of the Lviv Municipal Theatre building in 1900. We know of a similar fan with photographs of actors and actresses from the Teatry Warszawskie company, made a decade earlier by Maurycy Pusch. An interesting example of a photoprint is the cover of the magazine *Goniec Teatralny* from 1877—the photograph of the actress Romana Popiel, taken in the studio ‘J. Kostka i Mulert’ studio, was printed in the lithographic printshop run by Meletius Dutkiewicz and Karol Beyer. The photo print was pasted onto the front page of the magazine. The presentation concludes with a selection of postcards, some in colour, featuring stars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including dancers and singers of the operetta, which was becoming increasingly popular at the time.

### **Changes and the birth of stage photography**

The postcards are a good reflection of the changing themes and perceptions of the photographic and theatre audiences. The year 1901 was a milestone in the history of the Polish theatre. Two important premieres took place on the stage of the Municipal Theatre in Kraków, namely the premiere of Stanisław Wyspiański’s *The Wedding* in March and Adam Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers’ Eve*, staged by Wyspiański, in October. Electric light was also used in the productions, its varying intensity creating a mood and helping the audience to focus on the image on stage. A series of postcards was issued to commemorate the two premieres. Scenes were also reproduced in the photographic workshop, in Wilhelm Kleinberg’s ‘Zofia’ studio<sup>24</sup>, and in the studio of Józef Sebal, who took over Rzewuski’s former workshop. In selecting photographs and printed postcards, the horizontal photographs of group scenes from *Forefathers’ Eve* are the most remarkable. More and more of the photographs and the postcards they printed had a horizontal composition, as did the stage pictures. The postcards of the performances do not include the names of the actors or actresses. They are, of course, still well known and popular with the public, and that will not change today, but the postcards advertised the performance rather than the individual performers. The audience would buy a postcard because it showed, for example, Helena Sulima (who played Rachel) and, above all, because it was a scene from Wyspiański’s *The Wedding*. Technical improvements in the age of photography—lighter, smaller equipment, dry glass plates of ever-increasing sensitivity—allowed photographers to move out of the

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<sup>24</sup> Cited after: Agnieszka Janczyk, Marek Janczyk, *Krakowski fotograf Wilhelm Kleinberg (1865–1942). Życie i działalność* [The Kraków Photographer Wilhelm Kleinberg (1865–1942)] *Rocznik Krakowski* 2017, vol. LXXXIII, pp. 163–182.

studio and shoot elsewhere. A revolution occurred in theatres at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when electric light replaced gas light. It was during this period that photographers began to take pictures during performances. In 1899, Jozef Sebald photographed a group scene from Juliusz Słowacki's *Kordian*, which was later published as a postcard, and in 1900, a scene from Aniela Bogusławska's 'stage trifle' *Butterfly Love*, which we know from a large-format print with a dedication from Michał Tarasiewicz, who starred in the play. The actor also had himself photographed in Sebald's studio, posing as Kordian and the Butterfly. These two roles illustrate well how many actors went beyond their typical roles at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Tarasiewicz was often cast as a love interest, but he also sought tragic roles and appeared in a diverse repertoire, from classical plays to modernist dramas.

The authors of the first photographs of theatre interiors were Karoli and Pusch, who photographed the Wielki Theatre before its renovation, on 26 May 1890, and on the day of its reopening after the renovation, on 11 September 1891. The first photograph of a performance, taken on stage during a performance, was published on the cover of *Echo Muzyczne, Teatralne i Artystyczne*. Unfortunately, the original print has not survived. The picture was taken on Saturday, 11 February 1893, immediately after the performance of *Fredzio* [Little Fred], a comedy by Stanisław Grajbner, on the stage of the Rozmaitości Theatre, after the audience had left the room. The team posed for Karoli and Troczewski by recreating a 'situationally strong' scene at the end of the third act. The photographs were taken using 'explosive magnesium powder'. 'The exposure time was 1/20 second, and the photographs owe their accuracy to this incredible speed'<sup>25</sup>, the photographers wrote.

The oldest stage photograph is believed to be a postcard print by Maurycy Pusch of the Brandon Thomas farce *Charley's Aunt*. The play premiered on 14 May 1894 at the Nowy Theatre, a branch of the Warsaw Theatre opened in an old theatre building on Królewska Street. Three days after the premiere, Pusch took 'several dozen photographs of individual and group scenes'<sup>26</sup>. Looking at the only copy that has survived to this day, questions and doubts arose that could not be answered. Compared to other stage photographs taken at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this one is too sharp and bright. It was challenging to achieve such results even in a very well-lit theatre building. It turned out that the picture had been taken 'in the garden of the Nowy Theatre', where a temporary stage had

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<sup>25</sup> *Echo Muzyczne, Teatralne i Artystyczne*, 1893, no. 490 (18.02), p. 2. A photograph of a different frame of the scene, in a smaller format was also published in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* weekly, 1893 no. 164 (18.02), p. 101.

<sup>26</sup> *Kurier Warszawski* 1894, no. 135 (18.05), p. 1.

been set up, and the set of *Charley's Aunt*<sup>27</sup> had been moved. As such, it was indeed a 'stage photograph', but one taken in May daylight on a stage set up outside the building. The picture was taken in a middle ground, no longer in the studio but not inside the theatre building. It shows the cast of Gabriela Zapolska's *Malka Szwarcenkopf*, performed at the Municipal Theatre in Kraków on 16 October 1897. This small print, measuring 7 by 14 centimetres, is dark and blurred and was taken by an anonymous photographer. Another early photograph of Jadwiga Golcz, taken at an unidentified performance between 1901 and 1910, is larger and brighter. The print is from the National Museum in Warsaw collection and is a rare example of a surviving positive print of an early twentieth-century stage photograph. Such photographs were mainly made for the press and were published in the periodicals *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, *Scena i Sztuka* and *Świat*. They usually illustrated reviews of the plays or articles about other theatrical events. Reproductions published in the press mostly showed 'frozen' group scenes in a general plan and brightly lit. They aimed to document the performance and record the set, props, costumes, and scenery.

The beginnings of stage photography could be summed up with the presentation of a valuable collection of photographs from Vilnius, which I would like to discuss to draw your attention to the artistic milieu of Vilnius. The Polish Theatre in Vilnius, closed in 1864, was revived in 1906. We know it from photographs taken by Aleksander Strauss, a photographer with a painting and stage design background<sup>28</sup>. In 1909, the theatre hosted the premiere of *Lila Weneda* by Juliusz Słowacki, adapted for the stage by Ferdynand Ruszczyc. The collection of surviving photographs and postcards includes pictures of actors and actresses in costume and make-up posing for the photographer in his studio and photographs taken in the theatre.

Wacław Szymborski (1866–1932), who may be unknown to historians of Polish photography, deserves special mention. He was an actor, singer and amateur photographer. In 1906, he joined the Municipal Theatre in Kraków, where he worked until the end of his life. 'Around 1910, he began taking photographs as an amateur and over the years perfected his skills to a professional level'<sup>29</sup>. He worked mainly during the interwar period, but in his early works from 1910 to 1920, there are interesting and original shots, most likely due to his blossoming passion for photography and his involvement in everyday theatre life. Of course,

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<sup>27</sup> *Kurier Poranny* 1894, no. 136 (18.05), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> See: Magdalena Skrejko, *Strauss Aleksander Władysław*, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, t. XLIX [Strauss Aleksander Władysław, Polish Biographic Dictionary, vol. XLIX], Warsaw–Kraków 2013–2014, pp. 274–275.

<sup>29</sup> Diana Poskuta-Włodek, *Szymborski Wacław*, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, t. L/1, [Szymborski Wacław. Polish Biographical Dictionary, vol. L/1] Warsaw–Kraków 2014, p. 220.

he took many typical stage photographs from the perspective of the audience, in a general plan, showing the entire stage box with the prompter's booth in view, such as the pictures of *The Legion* by Stanisław Wyspiański, staged in 1911. The actors Ludwik Solski and Józef Węgrzyn, the great stars of the theatre, are barely visible in the photographs, but the primary purpose of the work was to present the staging of the play; it was a stage picture. Szymborski paid attention to the set design and photographed empty sets, for example, in Aleksander Frfedro's *Maiden Vows* in 1916. As an actor, Szymborski could move around the stage much more quickly than other photographers. Three photographs from 1913 show how interestingly he managed to capture movement, dynamics, and the climactic moment of the performance; he took these three images on stage, close to the actors. His work also includes portraits of actors, most likely taken in the theatre, close to the stage, in a similar light, which made them more expressive. An example of such a portrait is that of Ada Kosmowska, which I have paired with a stage photograph from the 1913 play *Judas of Kerioth* by Karol Hubert Rostworowski, in which Kosmowska played Salome.

Technical changes and the development of amateur photography led to the emergence of a specific type of private portraits of theatre people in the field of theatre photography. These portraits were taken, for example, in their homes, during outings in the woods or by the sea (Antonina Hoffmann, known from Rzewuski's photographs, is pictured sitting in a wicker beach chair!) The last photograph I selected is a portrait of Irena Solska and her daughter Anna, taken by Witkacy around 1909. The women are photographed in close-up, in daylight, with no retouching. It is also an example of photography's adaptation to the new style of acting represented by Solska, based on creative individuality and self-expression.

The turning point in theatre photography at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the technical change that made it possible to photograph the stage image inside the theatre, with the photographer standing directly on the stage. The possibility of entering the theatre also opened up a vast new subject: backstage photography. Among others, the first pictures of this kind are known from the reportage "Behind the Scenes of the Rozmaitości Theatre", which appeared in the magazine *Świat* in 1906.

Photographs from a 1927 reportage celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the work of actor and photographer Waław Szymborski also give us a glimpse behind the scenes of the theatre photographer's profession. One of the photographs shows the essential elements of his equipment: a spotlight to illuminate the stage and a camera on a tripod. A new chapter in the development of stage photography had begun, with the ever-distant dream of capturing the stage image in movement and colour.