Center Stage

Ther, Philipp, Hughes-Kreutzmüller, Charlotte

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Part Three

The Polish Theater in Lemberg
CHAPTER FOUR

Social Foundations

The Tradition and Rise of Aristocratic Theater in Central Europe

Aristocratic theaters, after royal theaters, were among the first institutions to stage opera in Central Europe. They were a prominent feature of the Habsburg Empire, Poland, Venice, and other countries with powerful aristocracies. In the rare instances when the term “aristocratic theater” is used in German or English language literature, it usually denotes theaters within mansions or castles. Many of these existed in the Habsburg Empire, Prussia, and Russia. Similarly to the royal theaters of the eighteenth century, they were run as venues for private entertainment and attended by selected invited guests. Some of the wealthiest aristocratic families even maintained permanent orchestras for performing operas. Patronage by the nobility was vital, as the example of Joseph Haydn shows. It was thanks to his permanent position in the Esterházy residence that he was able to devote himself mostly to composing music. The central European nobility also took an active role in founding music societies and conservatories. This involvement in music was partly motivated by political considerations: a lively music scene was a marker of prestige to the outside world and provided a counterbalance to the cultural hegemony of the royal courts. In the age of absolutism, when political and cultural centralism prevailed, this was of crucial importance.

In the light of Polish research and the history of Bohemia, this book broadens the definition of the term “aristocratic theater” to include public theaters founded and run by individual members of the nobility as well as theaters controlled by groups of aristocrats. Another factor by which theaters are defined here is their public. In Bohemia, where only 1 percent of the population belonged to the aristocracy, it was an insignificant force among audiences, while in Poland and Hungary, where the aristocracy constituted around 7.5 and 5 percent of the population respectively, it predominated in theater for many years. It should be
noted, however, that in these two countries, and especially in Galicia, nobility did not necessarily equal wealth, and many rural noblemen lacked the means to attend the theater. Lastly, the aristocratic theater can be defined by its repertoire. Besides questions of aesthetic orientation and day-to-day management, repertoire choices were the most hotly contended issues of the day in theater circles. Hence, one of the questions this case study of Lemberg asks is: how did contemporary observers view the aristocratic theater?

Several famous aristocratic theaters had existed in Central Europe long before the nineteenth century, such as Count Sporck’s Theater in Prague. The first aristocratic theater to become a permanent institution, however, was the Count Nostitz National Theater (*Gräflich Nostitzches Nationaltheater*), named after its founder, the royal governor of Bohemia. Similarly to Count Skarbek’s theater in Lemberg, this establishment, later to become the Estates Theater, was privately run. When it opened in 1783, it was as expansive and impressively decorated as the best-known royal theaters in Europe.

But matching royalty in terms of architectural grandeur was not Count Nostitz’s only concern. Naming his enterprise a “national theater,” he signaled his progressive, patriotic aims, which he sought to achieve by staging lyrical and historical dramas. Like most of his rank, he objected to Viennese centralism under Emperor Josef II and intended his theater to directly compete with Vienna’s Court and National Theater, investing huge sums to this end. Its renown spread—not least owing to the legendary world premiere of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*—far beyond the borders of Bohemia. From a political point of view, the second Mozart world premiere in Prague, *La Clemenza di Tito*, in 1791—was even more remarkable. The Bohemian estates commissioned this opera, portraying the rule of a just monarch, to mark the coronation of Josef’s successor Leopold II as King of Bohemia and voice their expectations of the new sovereign. A hundred years later, the opera had apparently lost none of its explosive potential as the censors vetoed a centenary performance that was planned by the Czech National Theater. Leopold, for his part, accepted the Bohemian crown and bowed to the political and cultural will of the Bohemian estates, which had been a driving force behind Mozart’s penultimate opera.

The pursuit of political emancipation also shaped the history of the Lemberg Theater. Set up at the command of Emperor Josef II, the town’s first theater was run by Galician governor Joseph Bulla (who actually hailed from Bohemia) from 1784. Sidestepping the long tradition of Polish drama, it initially staged mostly German pieces. This changed, however, when Wojciech Bogusławski, former director of the Warsaw National Theater, came to Lemberg in 1795 after being forced into exile in the wake of the Kościuszko Uprising. Taking up the post of director of the Polish ensemble, Bogusławski persuaded Josef Elsner, principal conductor of the German ensemble, to set Polish lyrical dramas to mu-
sic. Bogusławski also translated several Italian operas and sang *buffo* bass in a number of performances. Not content with that, he even took over the faltering German ensemble (known as the “German theater”) two years later. In this way, Bogusławski achieved in the cultural sphere what the Galician nobility aimed for in politics.\(^5\) His return to Warsaw in 1799 caused a temporary lapse in Lemberg’s Polish theater activities. But ten years later, when Austria was at its nadir, another nobleman—Jan Nepomucen Kamiński—founded a permanent Polish theater. Kamiński resumed Bogusławski’s practice of translating imported operas, allowing the Polish theater to refer directly to the English or French originals without the diversion of German. Meanwhile, the Polish repertoire was also growing steadily. Since Austria, like Prussia, had justified Poland’s partition by claiming that the Polish were uncultured and backward,\(^6\) this independent cultural activity indirectly challenged Vienna’s political hegemony.

Without the involvement of Czech aristocrats in culture and politics, the Prague Theater may not have overcome a crisis which struck in 1798. When the heirs of Count Nostitz were unable to provide the necessary funds and bankruptcy loomed, six prominent aristocratic families decided to buy the theater and run it as a corporate institution. Shareholders purchased “hereditary boxes” for 10,000 guilders each and the Bohemian estates—the highest political institution of the country—assumed legal responsibility for the theater.\(^7\)

In 1821, the nobility in Lemberg showed a similar level of commitment to its theater. The Galician estates agreed on a subsidy to maintain the “beneficial influence which a well equipped national theater has on literature, the purity of the language, morals, the education of the young, and the diffusion of light to the more mature parts of the nation.”\(^8\) Polish creativity flourished again during this phase in which the dramas and comedies of Fredro and Korzeniowski were written. Nevertheless, the German ensemble continued to dominate the modestly sized theater, with capacity for around 600.

Being subsidized by the estates, the aristocratic theaters in Lemberg, Prague and, from 1838, Budapest were also subject to public control. The estates set up theater commissions to ensure that the playhouses were fulfilling their artistic task, that the finances were in order, and that an annual report was submitted. The theaters were leased to private manager-directors, who ran them at their own risk, without the security of a royal treasury to fall back on. Unlike the royal theaters in Vienna, Berlin, and Dresden, then, these theaters had to cater to their publics’ tastes in order to secure their economic survival. Balancing fulfillment of their educational task and the public’s desire for entertainment was no mean feat, and aristocratic theaters suffered frequent repertoire and financial crises. The bilingual arrangement at the theaters in Lemberg and Prague was an additional source of friction as Polish and Czech theater activists competed with German drama and opera departments for equal status and use of the stage.
In 1830, a group of mostly prominent noblemen set up a “private association of executives for the Polish Theater in Lemberg” (Prywatne Towarzystwo Przedsiębiorców Teatru Polskiego we Lwowie) in order to provide additional support for the Polish ensemble. Consisting of 60 almost exclusively aristocratic members, this society was reminiscent of the alliance of six Bohemian aristocratic families that took over the Estates Theater in 1798, the most significant difference being that the Galician corporation had ten times as many members but only a fraction of the means. The 3,800 guilders start capital was already expended by 1831 when a cholera epidemic prevented audiences from attending but personnel costs continued to accrue.9

Figure 7. Count Skarbek, founder of the Skarbek Theater.
It was then that Count Stanislaw Skarbek (1780–1848) stepped in. Owner of three towns and 37 villages, Skarbek was tremendously wealthy. While proud of his native Polish culture, he was also loyal to the Habsburgs. The emperor granted him the exclusive right, for the duration of fifty years, to build and run the only public theater in Lemberg. In return for this privilege he was required to guarantee provision of a Polish and German ensemble and productions for this entire period. A controversial figure among his fellow noblemen, Skarbek had made his fortune from property speculation, distilling and selling brandy, and trading the cattle, which he drove across the length and breadth of Austria. His business acumen was legendary; one anecdote describes how he responded to a price increase by the Viennese butchers’ guild by buying a slaughterhouse and marketing his own beef. Begun in 1836, the Count’s imposing new theater in Lemberg was completed in 1842. With a seating capacity of 1,800, it was the third largest theater in Central Europe after Munich and Dresden. It gave Vienna cause to fear for her cultural supremacy and demands for a new theater in the capital to outshine the provinces were voiced.

Similarly to the Estates Theater in Prague, the Skarbek Theater served as a focus of local pride as well as a symbol of prestige to the outside world. It was built in the style of Viennese Classicism, with an auditorium containing 69 visitors’ boxes in three circles and the parterre. As in Prague, Budapest, and Venice, then, the target audience was visibly the high nobility. The emperor’s place was merely a generously sized box on one side, symbolically reducing him to a *primum inter pares*, in accord with the traditions of the Polish Commonwealth and
the political aims of the Galician nobility. In court theaters, by contrast, the royal box always occupied a central position. The members of the audience who could not afford boxes, on the other hand, were marginalized in Lemberg too. Seating for the general public was only available in the last balcony and in the orchestra level. The predominance of boxes in the theater clearly reflected the distribution of power in Polish society in the prerevolution period.

![Auditorium of the Skarbek Theater.](image)

While no precise record of audience composition in Lemberg exists, there is much to suggest that the landowning nobility made up the majority until the later nineteenth century. The theater achieved best attendances at the time of the Carnival holiday and the annual land and property trade fair, Kontrakty, when many rural landowners came to Lemberg. Conversely, the theater struggled when the aristocrats stayed away. This was the case following the Galician Peasants’ Uprising of 1846, which claimed the lives of over 1,000 landowners and stewards. The surviving noblemen were afraid to leave their estates for months after this bloody revolt.13

As in Dresden and Prague, many of the playwrights, composers, singers, and actors involved in the theater also came from aristocratic backgrounds. Since commercial activities were frowned upon, male aristocrats tended to choose between careers in the military, state administration, or estate management. Breaking into the arts was a way to escape convention. Although technically a theater
director was just as much an entrepreneur as the manager of a department store, and a singer equally an employee, the glamour and prestige of involvement in the arts glossed over this. For aristocratic women, working in theater was a way to circumvent the need for marriage, which high dowry expectations and a lack of suitable candidates could render problematic. Moreover, aristocratic children traditionally received musical training. So, although the impoverished Galician low nobility (the szlachta), who often lived like peasants, was not especially qualified for a life in opera, members of propertied aristocratic families were. A scion of one of these was to become the leading Polish opera composer of the post-Moniuszko generation: Władysław Żeleński.

The first weeks after Skarbek opened his theater must have seemed like the apogee of his career. Performances were sold out well in advance despite distinctly higher ticket prices for the first nights. Aristocrats from all over Galicia thronged to the capital, Lemberg, to attend the many supporting events as well as the evenings’ performances. The Galician public was delighted both by the German ensemble, which launched the theater with Grillparzer’s Der Traum, ein Leben, and the Polish ensemble performing Śluby Panieńskie by Aleksander Fredro. The new set designs garnered much admiration and it was agreed they could match any of the royal theaters’. On the opening night, stage designer Pohlmann, who was also responsible for the interior design of the theater, was singled out for applause after every act of Grillparzer’s play. The local press fêted him as a “truly poetic designer” and declared his portrayal of a giant, convulsing snake to be “the most striking deception and greatest possible illusion.”

Records show that in the years that followed, audiences continued to favor light entertainment over heavy intellectual drama. One anonymous commentator made the following observation on the Lemberg public’s taste: “You can be sure that if a play by Corneille, Voltaire, Schiller, or Iffland is showing, the number of audience members can be counted on one hand. If, however, there is a large notice announcing the Syren of the Dniestr, stay at home, or you will be crushed in the theater.” Indeed, in 1844 a farce about “the wicked women of the Seraglio” (Die schlimmen Frauen im Serail) was the sensation of the season, enticing audiences with the promise of “well-exercised ladies.”

Tailoring the repertoire to suit the public resulted in a predominance of farces and comedies. But rather than attacking the public’s tastes, critics tended to accuse theater directors of too much compromise. Even Skarbek, despite his Enlightenment goals, received mostly bad press for his allegedly unpatriotic stance. This was symptomatic of the inherently divergent perspectives held by Lemberg’s different social strata. While the wealthy Galician (and Bohemian) nobility had a more cosmopolitan way of life, the local critics generally belonged to the intelligentsia, who could not afford to travel abroad and hence focused with more intensity on home.
One of the high nobility’s most vocal critics at this time was Jan Dobrzyński, publisher of the newspaper *Gazeta Narodowa*, who became known as an opponent of aristocratic theater in the 1860s. His protests that Count Skarbek was not serving the nation were justified in so far as Skarbek’s primary motivation was indeed cultural emulation. Skarbek wanted to establish Lemberg as an *European* center for the arts and improve the standing of his Galician homeland. Creating a national repertoire and promoting Polish artists were not at the top of his agenda.

Skrbek and his theater colleagues regularly traveled across Europe to acquire new plays for their repertoire. In the decade before the revolution, Paris exerted a magnetic appeal far greater than that of Metternich-ruled Vienna. In Paris, Skarbek sought the material to keep his turnover of new productions high. He could not have achieved the 172 premieres staged in his seven years as director of the Polish theater relying only on native works.

German opera, on the other hand, was neglected during the Skarbek era. In 1844, the correspondent writing for the *Wiener Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* noted that “the preference for Italian music, despite the tireless efforts of a few individual Teutomaniacs, generally prevails.” One of the few exceptions to this rule was a performance of *Fidelio* in August 1843. According to the newspaper *Gazeta Lwowska*, “the entire hall seemed as if filled with electric sparks.” The review went on to eulogize Beethoven, who was deemed a suitable substitute for Polish composers “when the native gods remain silent.” As well as Beethoven’s hymnal music, the central theme of liberty captivated the hearts of the audience, reflecting, as it seemed, the contemporary political goals of the Polish elites. In *Fidelio*, an innocent prisoner is saved from execution by his wife, who offers herself in sacrifice, disguised as a man. Evil is personified by a scheming henchman of the regime, who ultimately faces his just deserts. Was not Mother Poland, embodied by her chivalric nobility, fighting reactionary powers? The public’s response to this—and all patriotically tinged operas in the late nineteenth century—was particularly emotional.

Before the revolution of 1848, the Lemberg Theater’s singers preferred performing Italian operas in order to shine in the well-known arias. Demonstrations of virtuosity often took precedence over faithfulness to the composers’ intentions—something which Wagner railed against in Dresden—and soloists shortened or extended vocal parts to suit their tastes and abilities. In 1843, for example, the finale from Bellini’s *La Straniera* (*The Stranger Woman*) was performed at the end of Donizetti’s *Lucrezia Borgia* and a production of Rossini’s *Barber of Seville* featured an aria from Bellini’s *Bianca e Fernando*. Repeating arias was common practice—in Polish the word *bisowanie* (from the term *bis* for twice) was coined—and opera involved far more improvisation than it did at the end of the century.

As in Dresden, opera gradually became more popular than spoken drama. Although this trend could be observed all over Europe, it was far from self-evident in
Lemberg, which had a long tradition of drama and celebrated native playwrights such as Aleksander Fredro. Drama provided, moreover, a vehicle for cultivating the mother tongue. Ultimately, however, music theater had more appeal, not least to Skarbek himself, and the Count frequently secured productions by personally paying for stage sets and costumes.

Yet all his commitment could not allay one of the theater’s fundamental problems: the new premises of 1842 were simply too large for the town. Before the revolution, Lemberg did not even count 50,000 inhabitants. Excluding the children, laborers, and others who could not attend the theater, there was an estimated potential audience of roughly 5,000. In order to fill the 1,460 seats, each of them would have had to attend every third evening. That was too much to ask even of the most devoted opera lover, and too costly for teachers, journalists, and other members of the intelligentsia. As a result, not even premieres were consistently sold out. Spoken drama suffered especially from the lack of public interest and the actors’ motivation waned. “Disheartened by playing to empty houses,” Stanisław Peplowski writes, “they performed their tasks as if doing labor service for a feudal lord.” The mood in the theater was so dejected, and attendance so low, that just one year after its launch a popular saying advised: “If you seek rest from struggle and feud, go to the theater—and find solitude.” Even opera’s appeal was no longer reliable and Skarbek was compelled to inject more of his own money into his theater.

Economic insecurity prevented Skarbek from realizing his original plan of setting up a charitable foundation to benefit from his patronage of the arts. The Count had presumed the theater would yield a profit, together with proceeds from leasing the in-house restaurant, confectioner’s shop, and café. Skarbek had intended to channel these profits, as well as those from his estates, into setting up an orphanage for 600 children and a home for the elderly in the village of Drohowyże. He appointed the husband of his niece, Prince Karol Jabłonowski, executor and trustee of his foundation. However, both the foundation’s statutes and Skarbek’s last will failed to provide for the eventuality of the theater making a loss. Hence, there was nothing to prevent the endowment fund being used to make up the theater’s deficit.

The “theater privilege” that the emperor had granted Skarbek ultimately proved a heavy burden. It demanded provision of a German theater until 1892, regardless of the diminishing public demand in Lemberg, and conceded considerable rights of intervention to the governor. The government and the police were authorized to approve the repertoire, casts, the director, and even the price of tickets. The town council was permitted to lease the theater to a third party if necessary. In this way, the Austrian authorities were able to gain control over the theater by a number of means.

During Skarbek’s term as director, these regulations were irrelevant. But he passed away in the revolution year, and Lemberg was one of the major trouble
spots in the Habsburg Empire. There was armed insurrection in November 1848; the town was bombarded and fires raged for days. As in Dresden, the old theater was destroyed in the flames. The new theater, built from 1836 to 1842, faced vacant seats and increasing losses. After the troubles had died down, censorship was tightened, especially of Polish drama. In spring 1850, the governors dismissed Skarbek’s replacement and trustee, Prince Karol Jabłonowski—a loyal supporter of the Habsburgs like his father-in-law before him—and assumed control of the theater.26 The bureaucrats’ management of the theater resulted in further high losses and frequent changes to the ensemble throughout the 1850s. Despite the disastrous state of affairs at the theater, the authorities believed that it could be used to Germanize society’s elite, and the number of Polish-language performances was reduced from three to two per week.27 Such neo-absolutist attempts to turn the clock back only served to strengthen public resistance to German culture. The German theater in Lemberg was increasingly regarded as a symbol of foreign rule and oppression.

The situation improved after Austria’s political liberalization in 1860–61, when the Skarbek foundation regained its former independence and was able to appoint the director of the Polish and German ensembles. But the theater’s social and political context had changed. Neo-absolutism had undermined the nobility’s cultural and social hegemony, and a new social class, the intelligentsia, had evolved. Now a generation of lawyers, administrators, and professors working in Lemberg also wanted to have a say in the theater. When Jabłonowski appointed the actor and theater manager Adam Miłaszewski as the new theater director, the flourishing press, led by Jan Dobrzański’s Gazeta Narodowa, ensured that a critical eye was kept on the theater’s activities. As Miłaszewski’s career reflects all the major developments in Polish theater history of the 1850s and 1860s, it deserves to be examined more closely here.

Miłaszewski first became known to the Lemberg public as an actor in 1849. He had a strong singing voice and sometimes performed cabaret songs and musical interludes. He left the Skarbek Theater in 1853 in order to direct the Polish Theater in Krakow, but resigned soon after, confounded by neo-absolutist chicanery. He went on to work in the capital of the Russian province of Volhynia, Żytomierz, and Kiev.28 These places had also once belonged to Poland and, despite Russian rule, were still very much under the influence of the Polish nobility. The Polish elites’ aspirations to share in Europe’s cultural life and achievements, especially in theater, prompted them to invest considerable sums in constructing and equipping theaters and establishing orchestras in various cities.29 Although Żytomierz had a population of only 40,000, a new theater was opened there in 1855, financed by public donations. Miłaszewski was appointed director and quite successfully satisfied the demands of the aristocratic audiences. In 1863, he was given a six-year contract in Lemberg on the strength of his achievements in Volhynia.30
Outwardly, Miłaszewski’s first season seemed to herald a reversal of fortune for Lemberg’s aristocratic theater, with improved sets and a greater number of premieres. But Miłaszewski lacked an objective for the theater. He was an entrepreneur without missionary zeal. In his first report to the Galician diet’s theater committee in 1864, he set out his definition of a good theater as one which “is accountable to the public” and that respects the public’s verdict. Ultimately, he obeyed the demands of the market and not any enlightened or nationalist ideals.31

His initially mixed program of light entertainment with some Polish dramas gradually came to be dominated by French comedies and operettas. Lemberg may have had little in common with Paris—it was not connected to the railroad until 1861 and its population did not exceed 100,000 until after 1870—but the French capital, symbolizing urbanity, progress, and liberal sexuality, exerted an undeniable allure on it. At this time, Paris was “the capital of Europe,” as Walter Benjamin put it.32 Miłaszewski was handsomely rewarded for his repertoire of light entertainment. The boxes, especially, were usually sold out and yielded an annual profit which went directly to Miłaszewski, as personally liable manager.33 The German theater, meanwhile, was ruined. A succession of directors went bankrupt and the Poles of Galicia became the indisputable masters of the theater in their regional capital Lwów.

**Theater Wars**

Despite having successfully marginalized German theater, in 1865 Miłaszewski came under attack from the respected newspaper *Dziennik Literacki* for neglecting classical and Polish authors and replacing drama with operettas: “So, first short skirts, then even shorter, then none at all. A man’s suit, a leotard; at least one ‘Can Can.’ Tastes are offended at a fatal speed and with deadly consistency, faster and more certainly than aesthetic improvements [are made].”34 Backed by the conservative and powerful Jablonowski, however, Miłaszewski could safely ignore this criticism. Two years later, the aristocratic theater was under fire again, this time from the defenders of patriotic interests. A critic writing for the journal *Nowiny* called for an Enlightenment theater to promote Poland’s restoration: “For us, who are robbed of so many things, theater is in the broadest sense of the word an academy, a spiritual treasure trove, in which the jewels of the past are kept; a platform, a national pulpit—a temple.”35 The press called for the closure of the under-attended German theater in Lemberg, which was only kept alive by society events, rental payments from the Polish ensemble and above all subsidies from the Skarbek foundation. Devouring an astronomical 255,998 guilders between 1850 and 1864,36 it was the main reason why the orphanage in Drohowyże could not be built, and made a mockery of Skarbek’s theater “privilege.”
In spring 1869, the Association of Friends of the National Theater (Towarzystwo przyjaciół sceny narodowej) was founded in Lemberg with the chief aims of dissolving the German ensemble and establishing a highbrow and national repertoire for the Polish ensemble. In 1870, newspaper publisher Jan Dobrzyński was able to gain a foothold in the association and set about pursuing his ultimate goals of breaking the conservative high nobility’s cultural and political hegemony over theater and politics. The battle between Dobrzyński and Miłaszewski—known in Lemberg as the “theater war” (wojna teatralna)—had begun, and was to last nearly 15 years.

The two adversaries fought each other with different weapons. Dobrzyński used his newspaper, with the highest circulation in Galicia, as a mouthpiece for rallying the public to his cause. Miłaszewski, on the other hand, controlled the theater and had powerful allies. But Dobrzyński held the ideological advantage, supporting an enlightenment concept of theater, like German or Czech intellectuals. He called for a repertoire focusing on classical dramas and comedies, and Polish authors to be given precedence to advance national awareness and Polish culture. Miłaszewski could only counter these principles with his record of economic success. The argument that the international operas and Parisian operettas he staged—by popular demand—had deflated the German competition cut no ice. Aware that operetta, especially, lacked the ideological validation sought in the prevailing mood of nationalism, Miłaszewski and his aristocratic backers could offer no resistance to Dobrzyński’s mounting attacks in Gazeta Narodowa. Moreover, as high-ranking noblemen, they would not stoop to justifying themselves to a petty aristocratic publisher or the intelligentsia.

The German theater eventually became a secondary, but decisive, theater of war. In 1870, its last independent director, a former actress of Vienna’s Burg Theater, Anna Löwe, organized a gala performance to mark the Prussian victory over the French near Sedan. The auditorium was decorated with Prussian flags and Wacht am Rhein (“Guard over the Rhine”) was sung. Lemberg’s Polish population responded with spontaneous shows of support for the French. These protests soon escalated into the town’s first public demonstration against the German theater. As a consequence, Löwe was dismissed and a new director was sought for the German ensemble. Jabłonowski convinced Miłaszewski to stand. He agreed and assumed the post of director of the German ensemble. It seemed the zenith of his career.

However, Miłaszewski’s dual role as director of both the Polish and German ensembles made him more vulnerable to opposition. Dobrzyński stepped up his attacks in Gazeta Narodowa, portraying Miłaszewski as a pro-German traitor to the national cause, while also campaigning against the aristocracy’s control of the theater and Jabłonowski’s influence. The mere toleration of a German theater bordered on treachery in the eyes of the nationalist intelligentsia. Criticisms began
to be voiced by the theater committee, set up in 1871 by the Galician diet (the Landtag) to safeguard the appropriate use of state subsidies and ensure that standards were maintained. By 1872 Dobrzański’s campaign had prevailed. The German ensemble was finally dissolved, leaving the Polish ensemble with a monopoly. Miłaszewski was forced to resign and Jablonowski, who had supported him to the last, was politically tarnished. The Association of Friends of the National Theater—now a shareholding corporation—took over the running of the theater.40

Dobrzański, the newspaper publisher who had managed to become the de facto director of the Lemberg theater, was an intriguing figure. He came from a petty aristocratic family from the village Dobra on the left bank of the San.41 His impoverished father had been forced to work in the service of a wealthy landowner. Although he had benefited from aristocratic patronage, enabling him to complete his education, he remained an advocate of the revolutionary ideals of 1848 and peppered his newspaper with anti-aristocratic allusions. He neither used his family coat of arms on his correspondence nor requested recognition of his nobility from the Austrian regime. Moreover, he remained a Greek Catholic in the Ruthenian tradition, which Miłaszewski mocked by using the Ukrainian version of his name, Dobrianski. The bitterness of their dispute was exacerbated by the lack of communication between the prosperous high nobility and the impecunious intelligentsia. The high aristocracy inhabited a world of magnificent residences while the intelligentsia, who often had szlachta roots,42 moved in other, much more modest circles. Even at the theater the two classes did not mix as the Lemberg house, unlike many theaters, did not have a large foyer where social mingling could take place.

In spring 1873, it emerged that Dobrzański’s was a Pyrrhic victory. The Association of Friends of the National Theater was set up on the basis that 250 shareholders each contributed 200 guilders to raise capital of 50,000 guilders. The relatively low price and broad range of dispersion of the shares reflected the corporation’s democratic vision for the theater, analogous to the Young Czechs’ ideas in Prague. This was explicitly set out in a statement by the corporation, declaring: “For the first time, the Lemberg Theater has ceased to be the venture of an individual person or society and become, in a sense, common property or the property of all theater-goers. The small shares make it easier for all classes to participate in the public ownership of the local theater.”43

But the corporation was not able to sell the targeted number of shares and its registration had to be postponed. In summer 1872, Dobrzański won a major victory over his aristocratic adversaries by enticing the leading actors away from the Krakow Theater and its director, influential conservative politician Stanisław Kożmian.44 But since the aristocracy was boycotting the Lemberg Theater, Dobrzański found himself struggling to pay the higher fees they demanded. The aristocracy-controlled Galician diet placed him under further pressure by threat-
ening to stop the theater’s subsidies.\textsuperscript{45} To avoid impending bankruptcy, the theater’s shareholders finally toppled Dobrzański in a \textit{coup de théâtre}. His attempt to build the theater on a broad social foundation had failed.

A period of confusion and turmoil followed Dobrzański’s ouster.\textsuperscript{46} The Galician theater world, like Prague’s, was small and close-knit. Disputes often took on a personal dimension and ended in public humiliation. In 1873, two counts tried their hands at running the Polish theater but, both failing, a successor was sought again in 1874. As none could be found within aristocratic circles, three ensemble members took over the theater. Lacking both capital and entrepreneurial skills, they too went bankrupt in spring 1875. By now the only appropriate candidate remaining was Dobrzański.

With his son Stanisław, a well-known actor and playwright, as Artistic Director, Dobrzański steered the theater out of its crisis. The chorus, orchestra and ensemble were extended so that lavish operas such as \textit{Aida} and \textit{Lohengrin} could be performed. An ensemble of soloists who could all sing in Polish was set up, breathing new life into Polish opera, and in early 1877, Moniuszko’s \textit{Straszny Dwór (The Haunted Castle)} was premiered. Significant premieres of more recent Polish operas and dramas were also staged, and the number of operettas was reduced. The years after 1875 saw the Polish Theater in Lemberg thrive. In a cultural sense, the town became Polish \textit{Lwów} again.

But the Dobrzański’s good fortune came to an abrupt end on the very evening that Emperor Franz Josef visited the theater. Dobrzański junior suffered a heart attack during the performance and died hours later. To make matters worse, the emperor took exception to the nationalist, emancipatory content of the program. The only Austrian element of the evening was the imperial anthem at the beginning. This was followed by scenes from \textit{Straszny Dwór} and a number of national dances, then a four-verse song in which the Poles assured the emperor of their loyalty if he would only extend them his hand. The conditionality of the message was certainly not lost on the emperor. When this was followed by more national dances—traditional dances of the Huzul ethnic group, performed by the \textit{kolo huzulskie}—Franz Josef, not a keen theater-goer in any circumstances, had seen enough Polish patriotism. After just a little more than an hour, he left the theater.\textsuperscript{47} Dobrzański’s old opponents took this incident as an opportunity to renew their attacks on his directing. Miłaszewski soon reappeared on the scene and curried favor with the most powerful families in the land, sensing an opportunity to resume control of the theater.\textsuperscript{48} Shaken by the death of his son and artistic director, Dobrzański decided not to stand for another term as director.

Miłaszewski’s return marked one last reprise for the aristocratic theater in Lemberg, although he now demonstrated greater detachment from his supporters. The opening performance of the 1881 season featured a short piece by Kraszewski parodying the antagonism between the social factions and their conflicting de-
mands. In it, the intelligentsia was represented by a vain, progress-obsessed, ultranationalist character while the nobility was personified by a bored and sybaritic baron. But this initial ironic commentary—which seemed to come with a promise of mediation—was followed by an increasing number of operettas and farces and the complete neglect of Polish opera. In spite of the season tickets sold to a number of aristocratic families, Miłaszewski began making a loss. In fall 1882, a petition was started in protest against his direction and reliance on light entertainment. A total of 665 signatures were quickly collected. Confronted with this “petition by the citizens of Lemberg,” financial losses which he was personally obliged to cover, and the censure of the theater’s executive committee, Miłaszewski decided to resign, announcing his departure for March 1883. The aristocratic theater in Lemberg had run its course, both artistically and financially.

Not only social but also cultural changes were the cause of this. An increasing number of small theaters, open air stages, and circus troupes regularly passed through Lemberg, offering light entertainment and an alternative to the Polish Theater. While the aristocracy had stagnated in numbers, the intelligentsia had grown, altering the profile of the Lemberg audience. The Jabłonowski, Potocki, Badenis, and other prominent aristocratic families who had previously held sway over the theater spent more time in the imperial capital Vienna, where they attended more cosmopolitan venues.

Following Miłaszewski’s resignation, the Executive Committee of the Galician diet, now in charge of appointing a theater director, was only too glad of aging ex-director Jan Dobrzyński’s offer to resume his former post. Dobrzyński’s second term as director, from 1883, saw a renewed emphasis on music theater and some spectacular world premieres. Konrad Wallenrod by Władysław Żeleński was performed in February 1885 and followed a year later by Jadwiga, the first major opera by principal conductor Henryk Jarecki. The sets for this work alone cost over 10,000 guilders—half of the committee’s annual subsidy for the opera. Dobrzyński sold shares in his publishing house to finance these native grand operas and send out the signal that the Polish Theater did not intend to fall behind the recently opened Czech National Theater in Prague or Royal Opera in Budapest. But when Jan Dobrzyński died in 1886, of heart failure like his son, a new era dawned for the theater, with its fate in the hands of the intelligentsia and the Galician diet.

A Middle-Class Finale

One of the distinguishing features of the Polish intelligentsia was that although its members were educated and therefore possessed cultural capital, in material terms they were not wealthy. In Lemberg, then, the educated classes which saw themselves as the natural guardians of the theater lacked the resources to run it. Following Dobrzyński’s death, no theater director in Lemberg was able to fill his
shoes for longer than two or three years, each losing the battle to reconcile the ideal of Enlightenment theater with the need to accommodate public tastes. The frequent disruptions at the theater damaged Lemberg’s status as a city of culture in Poland and the Habsburg Empire. The theater in Krakow, where the nobility continued to predominate in cultural politics, soon superseded Lemberg as the leading venue for spoken drama in Galicia. Meanwhile, in Lemberg, none of the instruments, costumes, or stage sets were renewed or replaced, and if the theater invested in any new productions, it could not afford experienced singers to perform reprises. For this reason, operas often ran for only one season, which in turn meant that it was not worth investing in new stage sets. As a consequence, from 1866, opera was reduced to a short annual stagione, for which singers were engaged from Italy. These temporary soloists were, however, costly, and sometimes even failed to appear.

Eventually, the permanent crisis at the Lemberg Theater—and the imminent RSHQLQJRIDPDJQL¿FHQWQHZPXQLFLSDOWKHDWHULQ.UDNRZ 52—roused the educated elite of the town to take action. In 1892, the Skarbek foundation’s 50-year “theater privilege” expired and the question of an administrative successor arose. The Galician diet was reluctant to run the theater as a Polish National Theater, as some members proposed, in view of its high losses and frequent bankruptcies. After long negotiations, the city council announced it would run a new, municipal theater on the proviso that the Galician diet provided at least 400,000 guilders to cover the cost of construction plus an annual subsidy of 24,000 guilders.53 A competition was held for the design of the building which, surprisingly, was not won by the distinguished Viennese architects Fellner & Helmer, who had already constructed dozens of playhouses in the Habsburg Empire. Their style was deemed too eclectic and international. The judges in Galicia preferred the entry by lesser known Polish architect Zygmunt Gorgolewski.54 Construction began in 1896 in close proximity to the old theater, while an almost exact duplicate of the Fellner & Helmer design for Lemberg was built in Zurich.

The new building transformed the character of the city. In order to be able to construct it on the chosen site, the Pełtew River was diverted underground and canalized along the entire length of today’s Prospekt Svobody, Lemberg’s equivalent to Wenceslas Square in Prague. This connected the old town and the palatial quarter around the Ossolineum with the Galician parliament building and gave Lemberg a grand boulevard suited to a European metropolis. Furthermore, the Teatr Polski served as a symbol of the Poles’ supposed cultural superiority over the Ukrainians,55 who made up an annually growing proportion of the population in Lemberg, and later raised funds to build their own Ruthenian National Theater. But the theater came at a cost of 2.5 million crowns (the equivalent of 1.25 million guilders before the currency conversion in 1900), which was not only roughly 50 percent more than originally estimated but also
two-and-a-half times the annual budget of Lemberg University, and nearly as much as the government’s entire expenditure on high school education in Galicia in 1900.\textsuperscript{56}

Figure 10. The new Lemberg Theater, opened in 1900.

An upturn for Lemberg’s Polish theater appeared even before the new premises were opened in the shape of Ludwik Heller, its first long-serving nonaristocratic director. A former railroad employee, he had been introduced to the world of theater by his wife, a well-known opera singer. Heller was the first director since Dobrzyński to have an understanding of the economics of theater. He immediately invested in new musical instruments and extended the chorus and orchestra so that even large-scale operas could be performed without the assistance of the military band. Preferring Czech and German to Italian and French works, Heller staged Smetana’s \textit{Bartered Bride} and \textit{Dalibor} soon after taking up his post in 1896 and, in 1897, presented \textit{Lohengrin} in Polish. World premieres of new pieces by Jarecki and Żeleński confirmed the renaissance of Polish opera. Once again, all the soloists in the ensemble could sing in Polish, enabling a hodgepodge of languages to be avoided.

Heller made maximum use of the orchestra, choruses, and soloists, playing not only in Lemberg but also touring to Krakow and the spa town Krynica in the summer and to Warsaw from mid-May to mid-September in 1898. The Warsaw public came in droves to this first Polish \textit{stagione}, and Heller returned to Lemberg with a profit of 65,000 rubles.\textsuperscript{57} Now the entrepreneurial director could also afford
to produce less popular, modern dramas. Among the premieres in the period 1897–1899 were four plays by Gerhard Hauptmann, two by Ibsen and one by Tolstoy.

In view of his success, Heller assumed that the post of director of the new Lemberg Theater would be his. But the high nobility had already singled out Tadeusz Pawlikowski, charismatic director of the new municipal theater in Krakow. He came from a wealthy landowning family and had an elegant aristocratic air, in contrast to Heller’s much less refined, petit bourgeois manner. Pawlikowski spoke fluent French, used an ebony cane and spoke with “noble distinction,” as even the leftist newspaper Kurjer Lwowski noted admiringly.58

The contest between Heller and Pawlikowski—the third Lemberg “theater war”—in many ways resembled a modern election campaign. The two rivals’ followers canvassed support in the press, with leaflets and handbills, and in the coffee houses. Pawlikowski seemed to have the greater advantage, being politically better connected and in a position to offer the town council a higher rent.59 Indeed, shortly before the day of the vote, the councilors involved in the decision making gathered at a private reception held by Marshal Count Badeni.60 Pawlikowski could moreover count on the support of a large part of the intelligentsia, impressed by his distinguished, cosmopolitan ways. Meanwhile, Heller rallied Lemberg’s bourgeoisie and the National Democrats around him. After a long and heated debate, Pawlikowski won the town council’s ballot by 55 votes to 33.61

The new director established a repertoire that is generally considered definitive for Polish theater. French ensembles were frequently invited to give guest performances, nourishing Lemberg’s aspirations to be a European cultural metropolis. Improved directing prepared the actors and singers better for their performances and encouraged them to use the stage more effectively. Financially, however, Pawlikowski’s tenure was a disaster. The theater had already accrued a huge loss of over 100,000 crowns at the end of his first season, and it continued to grow throughout the second season. By 1903 the deficit had doubled, and the town council agreed to write off a large portion of the rent owed. Despite this concession, the theater’s finances still continued to deteriorate. In 1906, the press reported debts of 400,000 crowns. Even with his considerable private fortune, Pawlikowski could not meet such a substantial sum. Performance quality, especially of operas, began to suffer because of the theater’s financial plight, and in April 1905, the Executive Committee threatened to hold back the opera subsidy.62 Ludwik Heller must have observed all this with quiet satisfaction. He had stayed in Lemberg and turned his attentions to converting the old Skarbek Theater into premises for his newly founded Lemberg Philharmonic Orchestra. As in Prague, then, conflicts surrounding the theater gave rise to an independent orchestra and the pluralization of the music scene. Heller soon managed to secure guest appearances by such distinguished conductors as Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, and Ruggero Leoncavallo, performing with Lemberg’s new orchestra.
In 1906, the theater director was due for reelection and a campaign was anticipated. But Pawlikowski, worn down by financial difficulties and increasing criticisms in the press, simply gave up. Heller was able to take over without a fight and promptly shifted the repertoire’s focus back to music theater. Krakow theater critic Karol Estreicher remarked, “Heller has no lovers because he loves his wife, but he has a favorite, and that is opera or operetta. For this favorite he has abandoned young talents in comedy and drama.”63 Indeed, Heller, who lacked Pawlikowski’s sense of mission with respect to modern theater, seemed to have no appreciation of spoken drama. But to avoid accusations that he relied too much on light entertainment, he nevertheless produced plays by modern authors almost as often as his predecessor had.64

This former railroad employee also staged Poland’s first Ring of the Nibelung and Rosenkavalier in Lemberg. His love of music drama inspired him to produce Mefistofele by Arrigo Boito, Italy’s leading Wagnerian, Puccini’s Madame Butterfly, and Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin and Pique Dame (The Queen of Spades). Like Dresden, then, Lemberg gained a European repertoire that rivaled the major theaters of Central Europe. When the curtain fell on Austrian Lemberg and its theater at the beginning of World War I, it marked the end of a truly middle-class finale.

Notes

1. See Staud, Adelstheater in Ungarn; Frenzel, Brandenburg-Preussische Schloßtheater, 158–64 and 170–84.
2. On the nobility’s role in Prague, Lemberg, Vienna, and Germany see Bužga, Deutsche Opern, 270; Mazepa, Towarzystwo; Mikoletzky, Bürgerliche Schillerrezeption, 170; Reif, Westfälischer Adel, 411.
3. These figures are taken from Rostworowski, Ilu było, 8.
4. See NA, fond ND, sign. D. 50, Minutes of the administrative board (hereafter Mab) of Sept. 3, 1891.
5. See Mazepa, Teatr Lwowski, 77–78.
6. For more on Kamiński, see Lasocka, Teatr Lwowski, 55, 100. On Prussia’s justification of Poland’s partition, see Hackmann, Ostpreußen, 58. On Austria’s attitude towards Galicia, see Wolff, Inventing Galicia.
7. On the Bohemian nobility’s aims in the late eighteenth century, see Hroch, Na prahu, 18–22.
8. See the petition of 1821 in Tsentralnyi derzhavnyi istorychnyi archiv Ukrayiny u Lvovi (Central State Archive of the Ukraine in Lemberg) (hereafter TsDIAU), 165/5/8, 1–3.
9. See Barbara Lasocka, Teatr Lwowski, 77–79.
10. For more on Skarbek see Polski Słownik Biograficzny, vol. 38, 23–25; Lasocka, Teatr Stanisława.
11. Theaters in western Europe rarely seated more. The Salle Le Peletier in Paris, opened in 1821, seated 2,000 (see Gerhard, Die Verstädtung, 31); including standing room, Milan had capacity for up to 4,000. The figures vary, however, from source to source.
12. Lytiński presumes there were 62 boxes on three balconies and 14 parterre boxes. See Lytiński, Gmach, 55.


14. On the early days of the Skarbek Theater see Got, Das österreichische Theater, vol. 1, 353.

15. Quoted in Got, Das österreichische Theater, vol. 1, 356.


17. See Got, Das österreichische Theater, vol. 1, 396.


20. These and further details of theater life in Lemberg are described by Jerzy Got. See Got, Das österreichische Theater, vol. 1, 363, 376.

21. See the review in Gazeta Lwowska, no. 91, Aug. 5, 1843, 601–602. A detailed description of the performance can be found in Got, Das österreichische Theater, vol. 1, 442.

22. Quoted in Pepłowski, Teatr Polski, 206.


24. More details on his career can be found in a report in TsDIAU, 165/5/12, 40–41.

25. Theater life in the southeasterly regions of old Poland is discussed in Komorowski, Polskie Życie Teatralne.

26. See TsDIAU, 165/5/12, 40. The Polish ensemble now played alternate Mondays, Fridays, and Sundays and in the weeks in between, Wednesdays and Fridays. See the relevant contract in TsDIAU, 165/5/12, 50–57.

27. See Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. V/1, 45.

28. The Polish Theater was making an average annual profit of 4,000 guilders at this time. See Marszałek, Przedsiębiorstwa, 30.


30. For an example of criticism of the aristocracy and its cultural tastes, see “Kronika Lwowska,” Gazeta Narodowa, March 17, 1872, 1.

31. On these losses and cross-subsidies, see Agnieszka Marszałek, Lwowskie przedsiębiorstwa, 30; also Got, Das österreichische Theater, vol. 2, 732, 530.

32. Gazeta Narodowa, June 10, 1869, 3, Kronika. On this society see also Sprawozdanie z czynności wydziału towarzystwa przyjaciół sceny narodowej za rok 1869–70 t.j. od Maja 1869 do końca Maja 1870.


34. For an example of criticism of the aristocracy and its cultural tastes, see “Kronika Lwowska,” Gazeta Narodowa, March 17, 1872, 1.

35. The statutes for this corporation, as well as numerous other documents, are facsimiled in Marszałek, Lwowskie Przedsiębiorstwa, 237–43.

36. More information on the social structure of the village Dobra can be found in Ślusarek, Drobná Szlachta, 86, 99–101, 161. For a biography of Dobrzański, see Poklewska, Jan Dobrzański; Lechicki, Najpopularniejszy dziennikarz.
42. The origin of the *inteligencja* has been the subject of much debate among Polish academics. The conflicting views are set out in Chalasiński, *Społeczna genealogia*; also Czepulis Rastnis, *Wzór osobowy*, 159–78. On the architecture of these residences and the many new constructions of the first half of the nineteenth century, see Zhuk, *The Architecture*, 115–16.
44. On the history of the theater in Kraków, see Michalik, *Dzieje teatru*.
45. On this resolution, see TsDIAU, 165/5/14, 20, and for a report on the debate in the Galician diet, see *Sprawozdanie sejmowe XXII posiedzenie d. 6. grudnia 1872 r.* in *Gazeta Narodowa*, Dec. 8, 1872, 3.
46. This period is examined in depth in Marszalek, *Lwowskie Przedsiebiorstwa*, 39–122.
47. A detailed report is contained in Stanisław Pepłowski, *Teatr polski w Lwowie (1780–1881)*, 407–409. My thanks go to Daniel Unowsky for pointing out that the emperor on the whole took a skeptical view of theater.
49. On the performance of this piece, see Pepłowski, *Teatr Polski we Lwowie (1881–1890)*, 5–16.
50. The forms with the names of petitioners can be found in TsDIAU 165/5/21, 34–54.
51. On the positive evaluation of the opera repertoire by the Theater Committee, see TsDIAU 165/5/23, 1–5.
52. On the financing and architecture of this theater, see Purchla, *Teatr i jego architekt*.
53. See *Dziennik Polski*, no. 100, April 4, 1891, 3, *Rada Miasta Lwowa*.
54. The construction and various technical and financial problems surrounding this project are described in detail in Grankin, Sobolevskij, *L'vivskij opernij teatr*. See also Szuliński, *Teatr Miejski*.
55. This is evidenced in the artwork adorning the theater’s interior, portraying Polish culture as a central component of European civilization, and the Ukrainians, or Ruthenians, as quaint peasant folk. The iconography of the new theater is analyzed by Lane, *The Polish Theatre*, 157–60.
56. See Szuliński, *Teatr Miejski*, 28–53; Dybiec, *Finansowanie*, 203. The figures are taken from the state budget appropriation for 1900. The cost of construction is relativized, however, when one considers that between 1900 and the outbreak of the First World War state expenditure for education in Galicia increased six-fold.
57. Besides some popular operettas, the most successful piece of the Warsaw season was *Dalibor*, which was performed ten times. See the report in *EMTA*, Sept 19, 1898, 475–76.
58. For more on Pawlikowski’s career, see Michalik, *Legenda i prawda*. The author shows that Pawlikowski’s own accounts of his life, work, and experience abroad were often embellished and exaggerated.
59. On the decade-long conflict between Heller, Pawlikowski and each side’s supporters, see Krasinski, *Heller czy Pawlikowski*.
60. See Webersfeld, *Teatr miejski*, 45.
61. See the report in *Dziennik Polski*, April 11, 1900, 2.
62. See TsDIAU, 165/5/630, 27.
64. Nevertheless, criticism of Heller’s lack of education, profiteering and artistic ineptitude persisted. See *Krytyka* 8 (1906), bk. 12, 471–77, *O teatrze lwowskim*.