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# From theatre and music<sup>1</sup>. *Functions and Tasks of Opera Criticism in Selected Warsaw Periodicals of the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

**ABSTRACT:** The article analyses the emergence and development of press opera criticism in Warsaw in the second half of the nineteenth century, viewing it as a phenomenon situated at the intersection of theatrical and musical criticism. It begins by pointing to underdeveloped research tradition in the field of opera criticism and the lack of established terminology, which complicate scholarly description of this area. The aim of the article is to present press opera criticism as an important supplement to the history of the Polish operatic stage. As a reflection of audience tastes, this form of criticism simultaneously helped to shape them, exerting influence through specific writing and rhetorical strategies. The analysis focuses on selected periodicals, primarily *Bluszcz* and *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, with references to *Kurier Warszawski* and *Kurier Codzienny*. A comparison of various forms of journalistic expression (brief notices, notes, reviews, and surveys) makes it possible to capture the tension between reportorial criticism, governed by the logic of the chronicle, and „reasoned” criticism, grounded in specialist knowledge and educational ambitions. The article demonstrates that, despite the dispersed nature of the material, opera criticism from the years 1865–1914 constitutes a significant—though still insufficiently examined—component of nineteenth-century musical and theatrical culture.

**KEYWORDS:** opera criticism, nineteenth century, *Bluszcz*, *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, music criticism, theatre criticism, Warsaw periodicals, opera reception

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<sup>1</sup>This is the title of a regular column in *Kurier Warszawski*, which served as a review of Warsaw theatres.

Theatrical criticism is a tedious and extremely difficult, thankless task, requiring great tact and the highest education; it is arbitrary yet slippery, a guiding factor nearly all too often anarchic. The purpose of theatrical criticism is to cast a thoughtful word amidst passions, to curb overly inflated vanities, to elevate and appraise true value, to judge, in a word, justly—and yet it is a field for abuse, for personal vengeance, for all petty and base passions. Nothing in the world is more exposed to human malice than the theatre. It is a shield at which everyone may safely and fearlessly shoot; the theatre cannot and should not shoot back (Kozmian, 1883, p. 6)

Theatre criticism is a tedious business, often learned in fragments – according to random or more specific interests – claiming to be a fundamental opinion-forming institution on which the fate of authors, actors, and directors depends. It is extremely rich and at the same time poor and, after all, clumsy, if compared to the literary-critical powers of the Parisian press (*Polish theatre criticism in the 19th century*, 1994, p. 5). Music criticism, meanwhile, is a phenomenon that became particularly prominent at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, coinciding with the golden age of opera, concert performance, and “celebrity cults.” According to Magdalena Dziadek:

The genuine fashion for music led to an extraordinary boom in music criticism, the abundance of which cannot be compared to any earlier or later period. At the turn of the century (the peak of this boom), every daily newspaper and almost every magazine, including scientific and political periodicals and women’s magazines, published regular music reviews (Dziadek, 2002, p. 30).

Critical writing at the turn of the century, identified by the researcher as the period 1890–1914 (Dziadek 2002, p. 33), was shaped by the circumstances of the authors, the development of periodicals, as well as historical conditions, and evolved at a characteristic pace. Dziadek distinguishes three phases in the development of the Polish press during this period, placing them in the broader context of the history of music criticism. She identifies, in the following order: the years of growth (1887–1897), characterized by increased interest in new foreign trends; the years of prosperity (1897–1907), which saw the publication of ideological and artistic programmes; and the period of decline (1907–1914), directly linked to political and social processes (Dziadek, 2002, pp. 33–34). In this article this interpretation is taken as a point of reference, with the themes identified there providing a context for the issue at hand: a description of the diverse perceptions of opera in the second half of the 19th century, as reflected in the press of the time. However, addressing this topic involves significant difficulties, which result primarily from the lack of a national research tradition in the field of opera criticism. These difficulties include, among other things, lack of fully developed professional terminology. Additional challenges are posed by both the breadth and the heterogeneity of the source material.

The insufficiently explored field of opera criticism reflects both the actual and potential opinions of an audience absorbed in theatre mania. *Gazeta Teatralna* explained its popularizing motivation in its programme article: “We do not claim to be an *Areopagus*, or even a *court of the lowest instance*, but in matters concerning the judgment of works of art, we recognize only one instance, and that is the audience” (*Gazeta Teatralna*, 1843, p. 16). The specificity of opera criticism in the period in question is based on its dependence on theatre criticism (related

to dramatic theatre) and music criticism, for which there is only a very modest bibliography<sup>2</sup>; it might even be said that to date it has not been described at all. To paraphrase Winton Basil Dean, work on a synthetic overview of the history of opera criticism has rarely been undertaken and has not yet been completed (Dean, 1980). In the context of this article, identifying when and under what socio-artistic conditions opera acquired autonomous status seems more important than the reasons why it happened.

Undoubtedly, the reason for this state of affairs can be found in the history of the 19th-century Warsaw opera scene, which at that time was part of the Grand Theatre. Together with the Theatre on the Island, the Theatre in the Orangery, and the Summer Theatre (from 1870), it constituted an artistic conglomerate of WTR<sup>3</sup>. As Anna Wypych-Gawrońska, a monographer of the Warsaw opera scene, correctly noted:

The history of Warsaw opera in the years 1832–1880 is evidence of the formation of a new musical theatre in Poland, moving away from the close connection with dramatic theatre characteristic of the 18th century and tending towards a clear separation from its dramatic counterpart, linked to the emergence of new conventions in stage production and staging (Wypych-Gawrońska, 2011, p. 9).

It should be added that Wypych-Gawrońska considers 1880 to be a clear dividing line due to the establishment of a separate operetta scene at that time. The process of independent development of musical theatre, separate from dramatic theatre, began in the 1830. It should be noted that an important element in this cycle were performances presented by foreign ensembles – most often Italian (to a lesser extent French) – which introduced both new repertoire and new (sometimes rather derivative) performances and staging. An example of this is the premiere of *Lombardi alla prima crociata* in 1848, which began the history of Giuseppe Verdi's operas being staged in Poland<sup>4</sup>. Until the establishment of the opera stage in Lviv in 1872, the Warsaw opera was the only permanent musical theatre in Poland. For this reason, it is the basic point of reference for the process of institutionalizing opera criticism, the beginnings of which can be found precisely in its activities.

This line of thought prompts us to adopt a different time frame than the one suggested earlier in Dziadek's work. The years 1865 and 1914 should be taken as the boundaries of our considerations. During this period, in addition to the aforementioned autonomization of the Warsaw opera scene and, consequently, of opera criticism, new press titles began to appear, focusing their attention to

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<sup>2</sup>The literature on 19th-century theatre criticism is very rich; see the bibliography.

<sup>3</sup>The repertoire of the WTR opera stage, which was subordinate to the Administrative Council of the Directorate of Theatres and Dramatic and Musical Performances in the Kingdom of Poland, depended on the current political course of the tsarist authorities. Of course, the basic tool of control was censorship, introduced in 1819; for fear of possibility of the presence of codes in the notes, censorship of sheet music was also introduced in 1851 (Borkowska-Rychlewska, Nowicka, 2016, p. 7).

<sup>4</sup>The history of the 19th-century reception of Verdi's works on Polish stages is presented in detail in the book *Opery Verdiego w polskich XIX-wiecznych przekładach* [Verdi's Operas in 19th-Century Polish Translations], edited by A. Borkowska-Rychlewska and E. Nowicka.

a greater or lesser extent on verbal and musical works<sup>5</sup>. The symbolic starting date of this new period, inspired by an excerpt from Narcyza Żmichowska's *Letters to Family and Friends*, can be taken as 1865. In a letter to Henryk Wohl dated August 14, 1865, the novelist presented the titles of newly created or planned magazines:

I must also inform you that a lot of new magazines have started to appear. [...] The new *Dziennik mÓd, Rodzina, Kłosy* – it's hard to remember them all – I only know that Mrs. Ilnicka is going to publish *Bluszcz*. The names of other editors are heard for the first time (Żmichowska, 1995, p. 57).

Along with the development of periodicals, it is worth noting that the January Uprising in the Kingdom of Poland (1863–1864) coincided with a three-year hiatus in the publication of new press titles, which significantly influenced the formation of critical space. An example of this process is the suspension of the publication of *Ruch Muzyczny* in 1862. It was at this time that opera criticism began to emerge in the press, and many newspapers of the time introduced various forms of information about musical theatre into their pages. According to Dziadek's interpretation, the year 1914 is "the undisputed end of an era, due to the fact that the musical institutions whose repertoire was the subject of criticism closed down at that time, and the composers fell silent" (Dziadek, 2002, p. 32). This thesis can be successfully transferred to the field of opera criticism, which became institutionalized in the years 1865–1914, finding its final framework in the context of social and cultural changes at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Following this line of thought and taking into account the dependencies and comments made at the beginning of this essay, the following thesis can be formulated, which will serve as a point of reference for further considerations: press criticism is a valuable addition to the picture of the history of the Polish opera scene in the second half of the 19th century. It gives expression to the opinions of a diverse audience obsessed with theatre, and at the same time shapes its attitude towards opera through specific writing and rhetorical strategies. Therefore, the circumstances of the authors will reflect those of the audience in the theatre hall, which vary depending on the place occupied in the theatre: in chairs and in the stalls, in boxes and the dress circle, and in the gallery (Udalska, 1994, p. 13); for: "theatre criticism [more precisely: opera criticism – N.K.] is primarily addressed to the readers of the magazine, shaping their tastes, or more precisely: expressing those tastes" (Udalska, 1994, p. 5). This issue can be examined using the example of *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, for which the news provided by *Kurier Codzienny* and *Kurier Warszawski* will serve as context (a kind of *basso continuo*); and *Bluszcz*, which will be the starting point for further considerations.

<sup>5</sup>The history of the Polish music press dates back to the beginning of the century, as exemplified by the music criticism of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, Karol Kurpiński, and Maurycy Mochnacki, as well as *Tygodnik Muzyczny* [Music Weekly] – the first Polish music magazine published in Warsaw from May to October 1820 and from January to June 1821; its editor, publisher, and main contributor was Kurpiński, and *Biblioteka Warszawska* [Warsaw Library]. However, I have chosen 1865 as the starting point for my reflections, as the above texts mostly concern musical art (concert performances, e.g. by Fryderyk Chopin) rather than opera.

The focus will be on selected journalistic genres preferred in the music press: mentions, notes, and informational articles; reports and reviews, which, when read in conjunction with the magazine, will allow us to reconstruct the strategies and conventions of writing about musical theatre.

It should be emphasized that the present discussion does not aim to provide a comprehensive account of operatic criticism in Warsaw periodicals of the second half of the nineteenth century. The selection of *Bluszcz* and *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna* is deliberate and serves to illustrate two distinct models of critical discourse: on the one hand, a non-specialist periodical addressed primarily to a female readership, and on the other, a weekly journal with professional ambitions, directed towards a musically informed audience. The juxtaposition of these two titles makes it possible to identify differences in the functioning of operatic criticism as conditioned by a periodical's profile, its intellectual and professional resources, and its implied readership, rather than to formulate generalizations applicable to the entirety of the Warsaw press of the period.

### 1. *Bluszcz*

The relationship between life and art<sup>6</sup> – its importance was constantly reiterated by reviewers of the leading Warsaw women's magazine of the 1990s, *Bluszcz*, to their readers, women mostly from wealthy landowning families: “It is important to consider what directly affects us, what is happening in our country in terms of music, whether in performance or publications, for public fame or home enjoyment, in scientific and artistic terms” (Sikorski 1865, p. 4). This phrase encompassed efforts to raise the cultural and intellectual level of its readers. It is worth noting that the music criticism section (*Ruch Muzyczny*) – actually opera criticism – of the weekly was run by authors who enjoyed great authority in the music community (including Jan Kleczyński, a talented pianist and one of the outstanding music critics in Poland in the years 1868–1895; he wrote for *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, *Kurier Warszawski*, and *Tygodnik Powszechny*, among other publications); and occasionally Maria Ilnicka, the magazine's editor at the time (Dziadek, 2002, p. 45).

The critical stance adopted in *Bluszcz* is best illustrated by this statement of Józef Sikorski:

Rightly or wrongly, but very often one can hear or read the accusation made to readers that they desire novelty too much, that they are unable to persistently cultivate a single thought, even if it is useful, even if convinced of the need to cultivate it – and thus also a written organ whose task is to sustain, disseminate, and develop a certain idea [...] If this is true, then the editors of this magazine have indeed erred in calling for the collaboration of a man who may already have become unpopular with readers [...] May the readers forgive him in the name of the music he is to talk about, which is almost as old as the human race, and yet always as new and fresh as nature reborn with each spring; in the name of this immortal truth, which shines its rays of light on all branches of human knowledge, and which he wishes to grasp and express in the name of

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<sup>6</sup> For example: “In today's state of civilization, music is a social necessity” (Sikorski, 1865, p. 3).

the simplicity with which he approaches the fulfillment of his duty, believing that in this way he will do justice to the subject itself and to the reader (Sikorski, 1865, p. 3).

In his “preface,” the reviewer sets a clear programmatic direction for the music section of the magazine, emphasizing his theoretical ambitions and strong cognitive preferences; he does not intend to reduce the role of criticism to a chronicle of performances that are valuable only in the opinion of the average audience. Addressing *Ruch Muzyczny* to a single circle of recipients – and, in fact, female recipients – he does not plan to take their tastes into account, but adopts an educational attitude towards them, since periodicals, being an integral part of the process of shaping public opinion at that time, are a living part of opera culture. Due to the limited space allocated to him in the magazine, he decides to focus on what is current for musical theatre. Sikorski’s perspective in this case is very broad, and this is linked to the breadth of music itself:

Our subject – music – is immeasurable! It fills the lives of so many people devoted exclusively to it, occupies so many of the most beautiful hours of the lives of people engaged in other specialties – it accompanies people from the cradle almost to the grave! So it is right and proper to treat it with nothing but reverence and seriousness, even when dealing with its lighter fruits (Sikorski, 1865, p. 3).

The critic gives his pronouncements a journalistic and programmatic character, constructing an internally coherent argument and using numerous stylistic devices, such as hyperbole, metaphors, and periphrases, in order to convey the content more fully and to make the text more ornate and, above all, more vivid. All the components of Sikorski’s programmatic reflection became an important factor shaping the language and manner of writing about opera culture in the pages of *Bluszcz*. These texts are clearly guided by the model of criticism of *Ruch Muzyczny*: popularization is subordinated to a subjective description of facts. The reviewer, treating opera with the utmost care and attaching particular importance to the issues of theatre, presents his readers with extensive, critically annotated information and systematically organized material. An example of this model of criticism can be found in the second part of Sikorski’s aforementioned argument, which begins with a report on Warsaw theatres. The critic records only two new plays, “mainly music-oriented” (Sikorski, 1865, p. 4). *Lara* – an opera by Louis-Aimé Maillart and the operetta *Ten Daughters* with music by Franz von Suppé, to which he devotes more words:

...the operetta mentioned here is a real farce, as one can guess from the title alone. The comedy in it is crude, often illogical, and yet it delights the audience; the music is neat and appropriate to the subject matter, and yet it goes almost unnoticed; the young artists even play well, the experienced ones so excellently that it is a pity to waste them on something like this! Well, there are enough reasons for this trifle to remain in the repertoire for a long time. And yet we cannot curse it, nor even its aging colleague in our service called *Orpheus in Hell*, nor... But why mention trifles and torment them, when they pave the way for more important productions! (Sikorski, 1865, p. 4).

Given the enormous influence of theatre on society, the reviewer warns: “Probably, our future visits to this publication will give us the opportunity to

talk about something closer to our hearts than the operetta mentioned here.” (Sikorski, 1865, p. 4) He thus appeals to his readers to be aware of the dubious quality of the “Offenbach-style” plays, which absorbed the attention of the theatre audiences of the time. He reinforces his lesson by using evaluative vocabulary such as “farce”, “trifle”, and “trivia”. With clear disapproval, he laments the fate of actors wasting their talent by performing in French plays; he denigrates the value of the effects and directs the audience towards the proper reception of such plays – this is the reviewer using his powers of persuasion. Readers of the *Bluszcz* magazine and potential audience members could thus arrive at an evaluation of the operetta in question in accordance with the critic’s assumptions. The note on *Ten Daughters* is not just a review of the performance, but a tool for shaping the tastes of the audience.

A different review of this performance was presented in *Kurier Codzienny*:

Once upon a time, the Grand Theatre staged the operetta *Ten Daughters*, which always draws large audiences. This time, the daughters performed without governesses, taking responsibility for the entire musical, recitative, and choreographic performance, which greatly enhanced the opera’s elegance and charm (Kurier Codzienny, 1865, p. 5).

The reviewer’s voice becomes the voice of a passive audience with a taste for French art; it is a voice without much cognitive or inspirational ambition. For the sake of clarity, it should be added that most of the musical reviews in *Kurier Codzienny* (as well as in *Kurier Warszawski*) remain anonymous, which gives them a specific form – the authors are bound by stylistic and structural templates, such as cursory and vague statements. This type of “critical” commentary – for that is how it should be described – on performances contained many similar or related topics: an explanation of the plot of the play, a discussion of the roles of the performers, and the audience’s reception<sup>7</sup>. This criticism renounced its aim of educating the audience, of shaping how and whether the performance should influence the culture of reception. Thus, two orientations of opera criticism clashed: the orientation of criticism according to the tastes of the audience, which formulated the criteria for evaluation, and the orientation of criticism with clear moral and intellectual criteria, represented in *Bluszcz* – a non-specialist periodical<sup>8</sup> – by Sikorski, whose aforementioned argument does not end with a report on Warsaw’s opera stages.

In addition to the above, the editor mentions more high-profile concerts, such as *Phantoms* with music by Stanisław Moniuszko and *Konrad Wallenrod* by Ignacy Feliks Dobrzyński, as well as new releases on the publishing market:

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the rest of the above review: “Six of them, dressed as Amazons, skilfully danced a pas, choreographed by Mr. Mennier, depicting the battle of the Amazons. The precocious Miss Grabska, in the place of the ditty ‘the cat climbed in’, recited just as well a skilful poem by Mr. Szober, a student of the Drama School, performing at the Variety Theatre as a novice artist” (*Kurier Codzienny*, 1865, p. 5).

<sup>8</sup> It should be emphasized that professional criticism was identified with writing in specialist periodicals, while amateur criticism was associated with daily newspapers and weeklies such as *Bluszcz* or *Dziennik Mód Paryskich* (Dziadek, 2002, p. 47).

In terms of publishing, this year has been quite a busy one for us. Moniuszko's *Phantoms*, published by Gebethner and Wolf, the fifth volume of the complete works of Chopin, which is also being published by the same company, is nearing completion, and Moniuszko's opera *Haunted Manor*, which the same company is preparing to launch worldwide as soon as takes to the stage, are excellent undertakings for a single publishing house in our town (Sikorski, 1865, p. 4).

He also announces the topics that will be discussed in the next issue<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*

In music writing, things that were unheard of in the past are beginning to happen here. In every daily newspaper, in every weekly magazine that has not refrained from venturing into the artistic field, music is covered in a separate section. [...] Only Biblioteka Warszawska, respecting its serious and mainly scientific character, has for years cultivated our musical affairs with a certain completeness, without even fearing technology. It ceased, slowly, and so did the special magazine (*Ruch Muzyczny*). [...] Finally, music itself ceased to exist. A strange and instructive phenomenon!<sup>10</sup>.

The special publication, turned out to be *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, a weekly magazine published from October 1865, edited by the son of a well-known publicist, Tomasz Le Brun, a contributor to *Kurier Codzienny* and author of *Komedia prozą i wierszem* [Comedy in Prose and Verse] (1868). In *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, he was the author of *Przeglądy tygodniowe* [Weekly Reviews] – reviews and notes related to the musical and theatrical life of Warsaw. The editorial staff of the music and theatre weekly included such figures as Adolf Bogucki, August Jeske, Kazimierz Łada, Ignacy Krzyżanowski (pianist, composer, and friend of Fryderyk Chopin, who published his articles on music in *Ruch Muzyczny* and *Echo Muzyczne i Teatralne*, among others, and was also a reporter for *Bluszcz*), Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki (co-founder and later editor-in-chief of *Biblioteka Warszawska*) and Waclaw Szymanowski. The magazine's regular columns included the aforementioned *Przegląd tygodniowy* [Weekly Review] by Le Brun, the anonymous *Nowiny ze świata muzycznego* [News from the World of Music], and *Repertuar sceny warszawskiej* [The Warsaw Stage Reporter]. Occasionally, thematic sections appeared, such as *Rozmaitości* [Miscellany], which featured short anecdotes and stories from the lives of musicians, *Korespondencje z Pragi, Lwowa i Mediolanu* [Correspondence from Prague, Lviv, and Milan],

<sup>9</sup> Detailed issues concerning the reception of operetta in *Bluszcz*, including analyses of Zehn Mädchen und kein Mann by Franz von Suppé, are addressed in a separate study and fall outside the scope of the present discussion.

<sup>10</sup> Further: "None of the fine arts spoke so loudly before this sudden silence, none knew how to squeeze into narrow alleys like it did, none developed such a wide crown as music. And again, none declined so much, none withered so much in times unfortunate for the arts and all peaceful matters as it did. After several years of fasting and inactivity, music has been taken up again in our country" (Sikorski, 1865, p. 19); An example is *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, which began its life after the January Uprising.

*Przegląd literatury muzycznej* [Review of Music Literature], and *Wiadomości księgarskie* [Book News] (Zakrzewska-Nikiporczyk, 2000).

Writing about *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, Sikorski emphasized the importance of “specialization”: extensive scientific and aesthetic knowledge and excellent expertise in the subject matter:

The specialization of a publication such as *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna* can be highlighted by scientific and historical dissertations and, above all, by criticism that readily embraces technique. [...] In the three issues of *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna* published so far, this core specialization is not yet present [...] But a promising direction can already be seen, as well as in the selection of contributors. More qualities will surely emerge later, mainly this specialization (Sikorski, 1865, p. 20).

For the editor, “specialization” is a matter of primary importance, a kind of *leitmotif*, as it counterbalances the versatility, i.e., dilettantism, typical of the press titles of the time. Sikorski links this issue with scientific and historical dissertations, but above all with criticism: “This is a section that one cannot hope to find in a versatile publication” (Sikorski, 1865, p. 20). He sees the beginnings of specialization in *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*. These remarks are also echoed in the editor’s subsequent report on the Warsaw theatre scene.

It is worth noting that the specialization and aspiration to objectivity articulated in the pages of *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna* operated within a specific institutional framework. As a periodical published in the conditions of the nineteenth-century press, the journal was subject to various forms of oversight, which encouraged caution in the choice of language and interpretative strategies. At the same time, the editors and contributing critics sought to maintain an appearance of impartiality in their assessments of works by Polish composers, balancing professional critical standards with the expectations of their readership. This ambivalence forms an important backdrop to the critical judgments articulated in the journal, including those concerning the reception of *The Haunted Manor*:

We have nothing new to say about the Warsaw opera today, as we are unable to adequately present the opera *The Haunted Manor*, as required by the noble work of both authors, Chęciński and Moniuszko. An opera is a solid drama, not a collection of individual passages; having discussed them, nothing has yet been done about what is most important, and what can only be understood by listening carefully to something that is already almost well known (Sikorski, 1865, p. 20).

Le Brun shared similar observations in *Przegląd tygodniowy*, the column opening the first issue of *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*:

Moniuszko wrote and staged his new opera: *The Haunted Manor* to lyrics by Chęciński; the first performance took place on the 28th of this month. This is not the place for a serious analysis of this work in a brief report, as in order to judge it, one must first get to know it thoroughly. The first performance of an unknown composition should rather be considered [by N.K.] as a dress rehearsal, and any flaws in the execution and stage movement should be judged with indulgence; one can only refrain from judgment based on personal impressions, which, depending on one’s momentary mood, cannot be considered valid criticism; Therefore, we will only say that the opera *The Haunted Manor* was written by Moniuszko in 1861, and that it was only in preparation for six months (Lr Brun, 1865, p. 1).

These are important voices, not only because of the reception of *The Haunted Manor*<sup>11</sup>. It is noteworthy how both editors understood the reviewing and reporting duties of opera criticism; their ideas about its method, function, and subject matter. Modern critics should take care to express well-motivated, factual judgments based on deep reflection, or put down their pens so as not to write nonsense. This principle was espoused by, among others, Józef Kenig, editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Warszawska*, who, according to Marek Piekut, distinguished between two types of reviews: “ad hoc [...] reports” and “reasoned criticism” (quoted in: Piekut, 1994, p. 115):

Ad hoc reports published the day after the premiere may be necessary, but according to J. Kenig, the performances deserve to be treated with dignity. True criticism should be “thorough, strictly reasoned,” and at the same time, “boring pedantry should be avoided like the plague” (Quoted from: Piekut, 1994, p. 115).

An interesting commentary on the above-mentioned opinion, as well as on the statements by Sikorski and Le Brun, is the “critical” commentary/anonymous review of *The Haunted Manor* published in *Kurier Warszawski* the day after its premiere:

Yesterday saw the premiere of Mr. Moniuszko’s new opera, with a Polish libretto by Mr. Chęciński, *The Haunted Manor*. The audience, full of respect for the achievements and admiration for the talent of the creator of *Halka*, received his new work with lively sympathy. After the first performance, it is difficult to convey the variety of emotions that moved the audience. Moniuszko’s compositions have their own distinct character, their music full of charming new melodies, as fresh as the flowers of our fields [...] Our artists took the success of their beloved Master’s work to heart and, without exception, all performed their roles excellently [...] After the opera ended, all the artists, the composer, and the author of the libretto were called out and given well-deserved applause (*Kurier Warszawski*, 1865, p. 2).

Such criticism – reportage criticism – perpetuated the three-part scheme (similar to the review of *Ten Daughters* published in *Kurier Codzienny*) of a review subordinated to the poetics of chronicling events. The editor’s primary goal was to familiarize a wider readership with the performance, i.e., to explain the plot of the play, evaluate the performances of the actors, and describe the audience’s reaction to the above, elevating the applause to the highest rank. The author notes the “excellence” and “diligence” (this term appears sev-

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<sup>11</sup> The project of *The Haunted Manor* was conceived in 1861, and its realization fell in the period following the outbreak of the January Uprising. Despite the tense political situation, Moniuszko remained a salaried member of the staff of the Grand Theatre, and in the years 1863–1864 other works by the composer were staged on the Warsaw stage (*Halka*, *Hrabina*, *Verbum nobile*, *Flis*). The opera’s premiere in 1865 took place in an atmosphere of social tension; however, the circumstances surrounding its rapid removal from the repertoire were complex and cannot be reduced to direct censorship alone. They included, among other factors, competition from the intensively promoted performances of Bartolomeo Merelli’s Italian troupe and productions featuring Adelaide Ristori. *The Haunted Manor* was revived only in 1877, after the composer’s death (cf. Kamiński 2015, p. 979; findings of M. Dziadek).

eral times) of the performances of all the artists<sup>12</sup>. Adopting the criteria of the audience's "liking" of the plays (applause for the performances), he excessively compliments the performers. He also notes the "excellent" staging of the opera: "two new sets in Act 1, a forest painted by Mr. Malinowski, in Act 3 a chamber painted by Mr. Groński, rich and tasteful costumes, which serve as proof of the care taken by the management" (*Kurier Warszawski*, 1865, p. 2). The reviewer takes on the role of the audience gathered at the performance. This can be explained by the fact that *Kurier Warszawski*, as a daily newspaper, published reports on performances "fresh" – the day after the premiere (often linguistically and stylistically unpolished). The articles, written in a hurry at night, provoked criticism: "An article about a given play and the acting in it had to be printed the day after its first performance [...] this rush was reflected in the articles and gave them an increasingly journalistic character" (quoted in: Piekut, 1994, p. 115).

Unlike *Kurier Warszawski*, the review of *The Haunted Manor* appeared in *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*<sup>13</sup> several weeks after the premiere. The critic, signed with the pseudonym "...ski," begins his argument by referring to the observations presented in the previous issue:

If we were to write a review of *The Haunted Manor* after hearing it only once, we would find ourselves in considerable difficulty; [...] it is extremely difficult to pass an impartial judgment on Moniuszko's operas after hearing them only once, or even twice; if someone wants to express their opinion immediately, it must be insufficient for the reasons stated above, so that the same reviewers who, after their first impression of the opera, write about its merits [...] Many who wrote reports at that time wanted to guide public opinion and turn it towards their own way of thinking, but these unwary manipulators, instead of turning the tide of opinion towards themselves, were themselves carried away by it (*Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna* 1865, p. 3).

It seems that the position of the editor, represented by Sikorski, Le Brun, and other authors publishing in *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, could be reduced to the belief in the important social function of opera criticism, which should be interested in the universal values of art and whether and how a performance influences the culture of reception. Its secondary purpose would be to inform the audience about the reception of the performers on a given evening. The quoted passage indicates that, for the editor of *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, the hallmark of a good review is a thorough knowledge of its subject, which cannot be acquired "after hearing it once" (*Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna* 1865, p. 3). In order to create an accurate critical statement, it is not enough to be guided by the opinion of the general public; it is necessary to become familiar with the opera in question in order to be able to make an impartial judgment about it. In-depth study is the shortest description of the tasks that a critic sets for himself.

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<sup>12</sup> For example: "Ms. Majeranowska studied the role of Cześnikowa very carefully and sang it with the precision and grace she brings to each of her creations. Mr. Koehler was excellent in the role of the old servant Maciej, and Mr. Dobrski, with the sensitivity that enlivens every role, brought forth youthful sounds from his chest that electrified the entire hall. The choirs, carefully trained by Mr. Meller, performed their often difficult task perfectly" (*Kurier Warszawski*, 1865, p. 2).

<sup>13</sup> It also results, though not exclusively, from the fact that *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna* was a weekly periodical.

The review in *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna* shows signs of deep reflection on both music criticism and theatre/stage criticism, concerning each of the four acts of the work. Referring to reports from *The Haunted Manor* in the style of *Kurier Warszawski*, the author draws attention to the feeling of familiarity<sup>14</sup>; a feeling of inner satisfaction and bliss, as: “This is how music presents itself to us when we evaluate it with our hearts; if we are to judge it with our minds, we must admit that it is recommended for its wealth of ideas, multitude of fresh melodies, and masterful instrumentation” (*Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, 1865, p. 3). Writing about selected passages from Moniuszko’s opera, the author demonstrates his excellent knowledge of the principles of music, musical form theory, aesthetics, as well as the basics of harmony and counterpoint, using an example:

Yawning is perfectly rendered here in song, first with a chromatic scale from top to bottom, and then jumping an octave from *G* to *G*, up and back again; while the orchestra’s accompaniment, flowing smoothly and evenly like water, enters for a moment when the singing stops, as if in dissonance, but immediately dissolves into a very gentle ending (*Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, 1865, p. 4).

The reviewer approaches his tasks professionally; he has the literary skills to formulate his thoughts correctly, i.e., he has a specialist vocabulary at his disposal. Rejecting common theatrical tastes, he defends, among other things, the finale of the play:

Unfortunately, the finale of the second act has many detractors; they accuse it of being too long and too heavily cast. In fact, it features as many as 10 solo voices and choirs, because that is how the play requires it to be; the composer therefore had to use these enormous forces for his finale, which, unsurprisingly, seems noisy. Here, the quarrel of the hunters is rendered, clearly audible among so many other voices, yet it does not drown out the rest, but creates a harmonious whole (*Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, 1865, p. 4).

The conclusion of the review deserves special attention:

In conclusion, we would like to share a short anecdote with our readers: One of the reviewers, writing about *The Haunted Manor*, lists the instruments that are part of the chime in the third act; among others, he heard or saw *zèle* there! Anyone who is familiar with the piercing sound of cymbals and knows that they are used together with the timpani only in ensemble passages to increase the noise will easily understand that it would be nonsense for the composer to use them for the quiet and gentle singing of the chimes. We did not expect such a mistake in recognizing instruments from the reviewer; for if someone makes such mistakes, what value can his praise or criticism have? (*Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, 1865, p. 4).

The author once again takes on the role of an opinion leader; his statement is not so much an individual judgment as the voice of a certain community – the musical community. The mistake in question is not the result of illwill on the part of “one of the reporters,” but of a lack of specialist musical knowledge. By recounting this anecdote, the editor of *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna* makes

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<sup>14</sup> In his review of *The Haunted Manor*, the critic from *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, similarly to the reporter from *Kurier Warszawski*, praised the singing and acting of the performers.

it clear – and at the same time warns – how important it is to have excellent knowledge of the subject in order to present a reliable analysis of the merits and shortcomings of the reviewed work. Thus, conscientious criticism is a virtue pointed out by Sikorski, Le Brun, and “...ski.”

To conclude this section, it is worth adding that *Gazeta Teatralna i Muzyczna* survived for only six months (until the end of March 1866), contrary to the appeal of the editor of *Bluszcz*: “May it last longer than all its predecessors combined! Music and theatre are the necessities of civilized life, factors of civilization, one of the voices of humanity!” (Sikorski, 1865, p. 20). It published a total of 26 issues and left behind valuable musical analyses of works such as the above, as well as Franz Liszt’s oratorio *Saint Elizabeth* and Adam Münchheimer’s *Otto the Armorer*, and a series of articles by Łada *Materials for the History of Music in Poland*, which is a continuation of the texts published by Sikorski in *Ruch Muzyczny*.

The second half of the 19th century was a time of extremely dynamic and successful development for Polish opera criticism, largely due to the institutionalization of the Warsaw opera scene and, more broadly, the sphere of universal reception of verbal and musical works. This article does not explore all the issues related to the “life” of opera criticism but, rather, tests analytical tools in an attempt to understand this scattered– and often forgotten– body of work. Generally speaking, reflections on opera criticism confirm the validity of its dependence on theatre and music criticism, of which it is a derivative, and from whose perspective it should be analyzed (while also treating it as a phenomenon in its own right). Functioning at the intersection of different aesthetic and institutional frameworks, it co-shaped the image of opera as both an artistic and a social phenomenon, actively participating in the formation of tastes and models of reception.

The analysis of selected critical statements reveals a persistent tension between reportorial criticism, subordinated to the logic of the chronicle and current information, and “reasoned” criticism, grounded in specialist knowledge and educational ambitions. It was within this tension that the fundamental functions and tasks of opera criticism took shape. Its role was not limited to recording stage events but also encompassed the interpretation of works, the evaluation of performance practices, and the formulation of aesthetic norms. A comparison of materials from *Bluszcz* and *Gazeta Muzyczna i Teatralna*, supplemented by references to the daily press, makes it possible to observe that opera criticism was, to a considerable extent, dependent on the profile of the periodical, its frequency of publication, and its imagined readership. It therefore did not function independently of the realities of nineteenth-century periodical publishing, but constituted an integral component shaped by media-related, social, and institutional mechanisms.

From this perspective, opera criticism emerges as a valuable source for research into the history of the Polish operatic stage, enabling the reconstruction not only of repertoire and performance practice but also of modes of interpretation and social circulation. Despite the dispersed and fragmentary nature of the material, its analysis allows a better understanding of the process of the institutionalization of opera and the place it occupied within nineteenth-century musical

and theatrical culture. A comprehensive account of the history of opera criticism remains an open task, requiring further systematic research; nevertheless, even at this stage it may be regarded as an essential and indispensable element of reflection on nineteenth-century operatic culture.

Translated by Grzegorz Kołodziej

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