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**JANINA LUDAWSKA *IN MEMORIAM***  
**(1921–2019)**



Janina Ludawska, fot. z archiwum rodzinnego, Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN

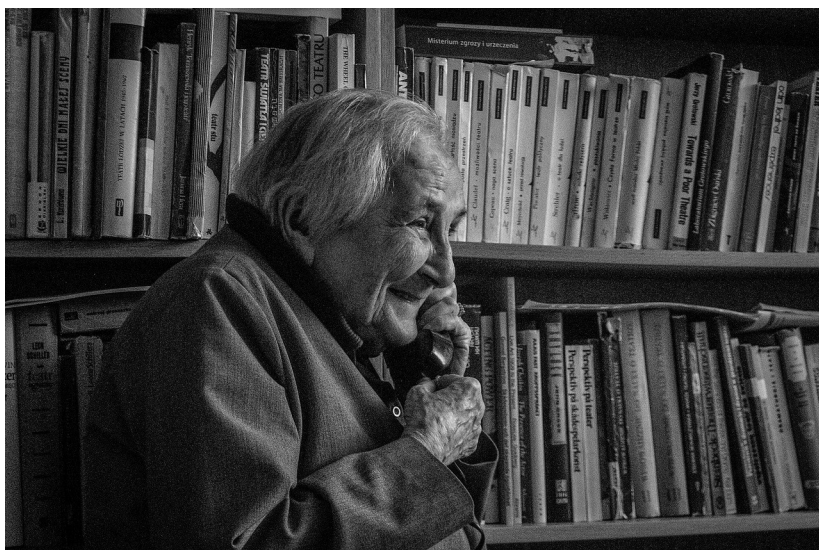
Theatre scholar Janina Ludawska passed away at the beginning of December 2019, just a few weeks before her 98<sup>th</sup> birthday. She had no family to mourn for her, but many friends, in Sweden and in Poland.

When Janina Ludawska came to Sweden in 1968, she had fled from Poland a second time. When she was a 17-year-old schoolgirl, she received a grant to study Swedish and she arrived in Sweden in August 1939, some weeks before the German attack on Poland. She came to spend six years in Sweden, supporting herself as a maid and governess while she studied chemistry, as her father had advised her. In 1942, she received the last letters from her parents and from her beloved brother. When she returned to Warsaw after the war, her entire family had been murdered in the Holocaust, and her home lay in ruins. The only item left was a golden ring with a green emerald that her father had made for her as an ultimate insurance before leaving Poland. She kept it dearly all her life.

In the beginning of the 1950s, Janina moved to Moscow to attend Stanislavsky's theatre school GITIS. She often spoke of her experiences in the Soviet Union, including about the atmosphere after the death of Stalin in 1953. Back in Poland, she devoted her energy to the establishment of a new Polish theatre that was heavily indebted to the country's traditions of Romantic drama, a theme that she carried with her all her life. Adam Mickiewicz, Stanisław Wyspiański, Juliusz Słowacki, Zygmunt Krasiński as well as their interpreters such as Leon Schiller, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, Józef Wittlin and many others were always on her mind when she lectured about Polish drama. But her enthusiasm for these dramatists, directors, and scenographers could not protect her from the course of history.

In 1968, anti-Semitic demonstrations in Poland caused the emigration of the few remaining Jews in the country. Janina Ludawska, together with her son Tomasz, happened to be invited to visit an old friend in Paris at the time. After her stay in France, she chose not to return to Poland but preferred to return to Sweden, the country she knew from her war-time exile.

She found a new home for herself and her son in the suburbs of Stockholm and in 1970 she was employed by the Department of Theatre Studies at Stockholm University. Her primary task there was to establish a selection of slides that could be used by the teachers of the department to illustrate their lectures on various aspects of theatre, from theatre history to the most recent productions. Her thorough knowledge of the history of performing arts, art history and cultural history



Janina Ludawska. Fot. © Alexander Perski

exceeded the immediate demands of illustrations by far. Her expanding collection of slides became a source of inspiration for teachers, students and researchers. Janina Ludawska's view of theatre as a source of democratic foundation included the international aesthetics of theatre, its history, and its positions and functions in various societies. In the department, she contributed actively to the vision of theatre as a central phenomenon in the contemporary cultural foundation of society. At the time of her retirement in 1986, her collection numbered about 12 000 slides. Those who had the fortune to teach and research during those years were privileged to be inspired by her work and by all the conversations we were welcome to have with her in her small office at the department. Her own theatrical experiences stretched over a vast area of Polish theatre, from Ida Kamińska's Yiddish performances to Tadeusz Kantor's avant-garde experiments.

Along with this important foundational work with the slides, supported by the photographer Hans Hasselgren, she also pursued her scholarly work. Her love of Polish Romanticism resulted in the book, written in Swedish, called *Poetic Political Theatre: About Polish Romantic Drama and Its Scenic Traditions*.<sup>1</sup> Published in 1980, it was illustrated with a map of Poland and its various political spheres in

<sup>1</sup> *Poetisk politisk teater: om det polska romantiska dramat och dess sceniska traditioner*, red., övers. J. Ludawska, Stockholm 1980. Reviewed in „Pamiętnik Teatralny” by Zenon Ciesieleski (1981 z. 1–2).

the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, concretizing the landscape of Polish Romanticism. Throughout the book, the connection between this early period of Polish drama and its significance for today's Polish theatre was underlined in order to explicate the tight bonds between historical and contemporary Polish cultural life.

Towards the end of her scholarly life, Janina Ludawska also managed to complete her doctoral dissertation. Originally, she had intended to write about Polish drama in Sweden, but this proved to be too broad a topic. She reduced her scope to the dramas of Witold Gombrowicz, which she loved so much. In the end, she limited her research to the three Swedish productions of Gombrowicz' *The Marriage* since 1948. These three productions of 1966, 1968 and 1969 proved to contain so many variations that they more than exhausted the format of the doctoral dissertation she defended in 1991.<sup>2</sup> Although she had retired from her work at the department at the time, her academic achievement was highly praised and much appreciated in all circles of theatre studies, as well as in Polish studies.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, Janina Ludawska had suffered from a terrible personal loss. Her son Tomasz was one of the first victims of the AIDS epidemic. He had studied at Cornell University in the US and came back to Sweden, at only 29 years of age, to die in the arms of his mother. But Janina Ludawska would never give up. Soon after her son's death, she joined the AIDS supporting agency Noah's Ark, learned everything about the disease and started to travel to Poland. There she instructed Polish nurses and doctors on how to treat and comfort those who suffered from AIDS. She continued to travel back and forth from Sweden to Poland as long as she was physically able to do so. She received prizes and medals for her never-ending efforts to teach and encourage healthcare personal to take care of those who, like her son, were about to die, long before any treatments were available.

If I may be allowed to conclude this brief retrospective of Janina Ludawska's life on a personal note, I very much feel privileged to have known her since I was a Master's student. She always encouraged me as well as my colleagues with an open and positive mind. Even through the years after her son's death, she would inspire others to pursue their own ambitions and aims. Just a few weeks before her death I visited her, and she still inquired about former colleagues, friends and acquaintances. She had been reading the Polish *Dialog* magazine during all those years, but now she almost apologized: at the age of 97, she was only reading novels and stories. Of course, she had read Olga Tokarczuk long before she received

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<sup>2</sup> J. Ludawska, „*Emellan oss*”: *om de svenska uppsättningarna av Witold Gombrowicz Vigseln*, Stockholm 1991. She wrote about Gombrowicz in Polish for „Pamiętnik Teatralny”: eadem, *O recepcji twórczości Gombrowicza w Szwecji*, „Pamiętnik Teatralny” 1990 z. 3–4. „Pamiętnik” was also where her first paper was published: eadem, *O tradycjach Teatru im. Wachtangowa*, „Pamiętnik Teatralny” 1954 z. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Teaterbilder: en vänbok till Janina Ludawska*, red. W. Sauter, Stockholm 1987.

the Nobel Prize – in Polish obviously – and she advised me what I could read as an introduction to this fabulous storyteller. Before I managed to tell her how much I appreciated her recommendation, her physical condition put a stop to this beautiful mind. We all miss her a lot.