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Interethnic Migration in Polish Theatre in Galicia

The Case of Andrzej Mielewski

Abstract

The article presents the profile of Andrzej Mielewski (b. 1866 or 1867, d. 1916), actor and theatre director. It focuses on his ethnic origins, using them as a point of departure to discuss their influence on his career, repertoire, and his relations with other theatre workers. The author is not interested in Mielewski's ethnicity in political terms, as a clue that would allow to determine the actor's national affiliation; instead, she analyses his case from the perspective of migration, of moving between different complementary or conflicting ways of defining one's identity and belonging somewhere through language, faith, and memory. The article also draws on classic historical research about Galicia and its ethnic relations, and on social anthropology studying societies with a hybrid cultural structure.

Keywords

Andrzej Mielewski, ethnicity, Ruthenian/Ukrainian identity, theatre in Kraków, modernist acting, Galician culture in the 19th century

Abstrakt

Migracje międzyetniczne w polskim teatrze w Galicji: Przypadek Andrzeja Mielewskiego

Artykuł poświęcony jest postaci aktora i dyrektora teatrów Andrzeja Mielewskiego (1866 lub 1867–1916). Wydobywa i czyni punktem wyjścia etniczne pochodzenie artysty oraz jego wpływ na karierę, repertuar, wreszcie – relacje z innymi pracownikami sceny. Etniczność Mielewskiego nie interesuje autorki w wymiarze politycznym, jako trop prowadzący do jednoznacznego rozstrzygnięcia narodowych związków aktora. Jego przypadek analizuje raczej z perspektywy migracji, krążenia między różnymi, komplementarnymi lub spornymi, sposobami definiowania własnej tożsamości i przynależności poprzez język, wyznanie, pamięć. Odwołuje się zarazem do klasycznych badań historycznych na temat Galicji i jej stosunków ludnościowych, jak i do antropologii społecznej zajmującej się społeczeństwami o hybrydycznej strukturze kulturowej.

Słowa kluczowe

Andrzej Mielewski, etniczność, tożsamość rusińska/ukraińska, teatr krakowski, aktorstwo modernistyczne, kultura Galicji w XIX wieku

For some time now, I have been preoccupied with a largely forgotten figure in the history of Polish theatre at the turn of the twentieth century: Andrzej Mielewski (1866 or 1867–1916). My interest began with a question about the man who succeeded in persuading Stanisław Wyspiański—renowned for his uncompromising literary decisions—to insert several dozen additional lines into the already printed text of *Cyd* shortly before its premiere in October 1907. A few years earlier, Mielewski had performed the leading roles in Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* (1901) and Wyspiański's *Liberation* (1903), and in the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War he co-organized a theatre for working-class audiences in Łódź. Yet across these stages of his acting and directing career, the fact that Andrzej Mielewski originated from an ethnic group other than Polish remained obscured and, in effect, largely unrecognized in scholarly research.

This is hardly surprising given the realities of Austrian Galicia at the end of the 19th century. The province was home to an ethnically and nationally diverse population,¹ and marriages between people of different religions²—and sometimes, different national affiliations—were common. At the same time, it was precisely in this period that ethnic origin ceased to be a neutral or secondary characteristic and could be mobilized or instrumentalized politically at any moment, amid the intensifying dynamics of national liberation movements and nation-building efforts.³

However, I am not interested in Mielewski's ethnicity as a political category or as a means of definitively determining his national affiliation. His case becomes more revealing—and more intelligible, without sacrificing its complexity—when approached experimentally from the perspective of migration: that is, of circulation between different, sometimes complementary and sometimes conflicting ways of defining one's identity and sense of belonging. This condition shaped the lives of many, if not most, actors working in Polish theatre under the partitions.

Illustrations 1, 5 and 7 come from the collections of the Museum of Krakow, ref. nos. mhk-Fs6g-v1, mhk-Fs510-v1-2g, mhk-Fs2960/v1.

¹ Regular censuses did not include a separate ethnic category, relying instead on religious affiliation, which was generally treated as a proxy for ethnicity. In the decade in which Mielewski was born, the religious composition of the province was as follows (according to the 1869 census): Roman Catholics—2,509,015; Uniates—2,317,884 (including 2,102 Armenian Catholics); Orthodox Christians—1,495 (including 126 Armenian Monophysites); Evangelicals—39,746; Jews—575,918; and adherents of other religions and non-believers—631. Krzysztof Zamorski, *Informator statystyczny do dziejów społeczno-gospodarczych Galicji: Ludność Galicji w latach 1857–1910* (Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1989), 70, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/153100/edition/144907/informator-statystyczny-do-dziejow-spoeczno-gospodarczych-galicji-ludnosc-galicji-w-latach-1857-1910-zamorski-krzysztof-1952>.

² Marriages were also concluded within one religion (e.g. Catholicism), but between different rites, using different calendars and linguistic traditions (Armenian, Greek and Roman rites).

³ See Henryk Wereszycki, *Pod berłem Habsburgów: Zagadnienia narodowościowe* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986).

Officially, they were subjects of the Russian, Prussian, or—like Mielewski—Austrian empires, yet in practice they navigated a range of overlapping labels tied to citizenship; nationality (not identical with citizenship); ethnicity (not identical with nationality); religious affiliation and rite (often linked to ethnicity, though not always synonymous); and, finally, social origin and gender. Through their education, these individuals learned to adapt to such circumstances, including the multilingualism their situation required. In their professional careers, they at times made deliberate, pragmatic, or politically motivated choices among several languages, or acquired new linguistic competencies. Their position was further complicated when they came from dual-rite families (for example, Latin–Uniate), were of Jewish origin, or were raised in culturally mixed environments—such as Polish-German households—and thus moved continually between different social and cultural groups.

I seek to reconcile two research approaches: the classical social and political history of Central Europe and social anthropology concerned with societies characterized by hybrid cultural structures. The former, drawing on source materials (legal documents, parliamentary proceedings, the press, and memoirs) highlights the political complexities of that corner of the Austro-Hungarian Empire known as Galicia. It makes us aware of the ways in which the region's history has been mythologized and ideologized to serve the national aspirations of specific communities, often retrospectively.⁴ For this reason, it is important not to adopt a twentieth-century perspective on this region (a tendency visible in most studies, which treat Galicia as a prelude to the events of the following century while simultaneously severing it from earlier periods), nor to accept the onomastic play with “Galicianness” promoted by the Austrian authorities, which effaced both the history of ancient Galician Rus’ and that of Poland. A second postulate of this approach is the careful nuancing of terminology in accordance with how it developed in the period under study. Accordingly, I will generally employ two sets of terms: Ruthenian (Rusyn) to denote ethnic consciousness—this designation being commonly used in the source materials—and Ukrainian to denote national consciousness as proclaimed by the Ukrainian national movement. This distinction is crucial, since not all Ruthenians declared Ukrainian nationality, and linguistic or confessional distinctiveness alone did

⁴ For an overview of positions and methods of historiography in Galicia, see Andrzej A. Zięba, “Kultura Galicji,” in Elżbieta Orman and Grzegorz Nieć, eds., *Spółeczeństwo, kultura, inteligencja: Studia historyczne ofiarowane Profesorowi Irenie Homoli-Skapskiej* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2009).

not constitute a national community; rather, it required conscious political use, definition, and acceptance.⁵

In the research of social anthropologists, particular interest lies in the fragile and unstable stage of ethnicity before it becomes shaped or instrumentalized by political processes. They propose examining this cultural and social phenomenon both dynamically and from the perspective of those directly involved.⁶ Ethnicity, in this view, is more a matter of self-perception than a statement of objective facts defining political communities. From an anthropological perspective, two points are emphasized. First, ethnic differences are highlighted—and in some cases even created—through contact with others, making them relational and bilateral in nature. Second, any given social or cultural characteristic that is significant at a particular moment and forms the basis of ethnic distinction may later be re-evaluated, lose its importance, or even disappear. Eriksen frequently revisits the question: When does ethnicity matter? The answer differs depending on the viewpoint: it may vary when considered on behalf of the whole group—often articulated by representatives seeking its emancipation or the creation of a unified national entity—versus the perspective of the individual.

The point here is that ethnicity can be a fluid and ambiguous aspect of social life, and can, to a considerable degree, be manipulated by the agents themselves. Of course, ethnic identities cannot be manipulated indefinitely, and one cannot ascribe any identity to somebody by claiming, say, that an Irish person is “really” a Jamaican. Ethnicity can be of varying importance in social situations, and it is often up to the agents themselves to decide upon its significance.⁷

What was the significance of Andrzej Mielewski's ethnicity? When did it matter, and in what contexts? Did it surface in the roles he played, or in his other professional activities? Mielewski's figure is especially thought-provoking because, paradoxically, historical theatre studies have rendered him uniform and transparent.

⁵ One example of the entanglement of religion with political and national affairs is the so-called Russophile movement among the Ruthenians, which tied the future of the Ukrainian nation to Russia. As a result, by the 1880s, Greek Catholics in certain towns of eastern Galicia had converted to Orthodoxy.

⁶ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Third Edition, Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 2010). Although the book primarily addresses contemporary issues (twentieth and twenty-first centuries), it also takes a historical perspective, and it is precisely for this reason that it can shed light on social relations at the turn of the 20th century. Eriksen argues that the emergence of awareness of ethnic issues is linked to processes of modernization and dates to the 19th century, coinciding with the development of capitalism, intensified migration, and social tensions between classes.

⁷ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 38.

Andrzej Mielewski,

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JULIUSZ MEN, 1894



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I aim to explore the actor's stage biography, focusing on his ethnic background and the professional and artistic decisions he undertook.

What Is Known Officially

Andrzej Mielewski, born in 1866 or 1867 (the exact date remains uncertain, as will be discussed later), began his career in 1886 in Rzeszów with the Barbara and Adolf Linkowski troupe, performing under the stage name "Milewski." He worked briefly in Lviv and in other provincial theatres, including the Stanisławów theatre. From 1893 to 1905, and again from 1906 to 1908, he was associated with the Kraków theatre. In addition, he ran his own travelling theatre companies and, together with Aleksander Zelwerowicz from 1908 to 1910—and later independently—directed the Workers' Theatre (Teatr Popularny) in Łódź. His activities in Łódź have been



Andrzej Mielewski as Jasiek
in Stanisław Wyspiański's
The Wedding

POSTCARD, KRAKOW, 1908

the subject of a dedicated monograph.⁸ In 1910, Mielewski married the actress Alina Gryficz in Łódź. In 1913, he returned to Kraków at the invitation of Tadeusz Pawlikowski to assume the position of actor and director. During the height of wartime turmoil, when theatre institutions were largely suspended, he directed a group of actors working under a “departmental” system (at the Nowości Theatre). Mielewski died on 11 April 1916 and was buried in the Rakowicki Cemetery.

Mielewski was one of the actors most devoted to Wyspiański's work, regularly performing in his plays: Jasiek in *The Wedding*,⁹ Konrad in *Liberation*, the

⁸ Maria Kaczorowska-Herman, *Andrzeja Mielewskiego Teatr Popularny w Łodzi, 1910–1913* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1970).

⁹ He also devised and organized combined performances: lectures and recitations devoted to *The Wedding*, to which he invited Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki. See Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, *Na orbicie Melpomeny* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1966), 128. It is difficult to say to what extent it was an attempt to popularize, and to what extent to commercialize the success of *The Wedding*.

Andrzej Mielewski as Gustaw in
Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*

POSTCARD, KRAKÓW, 1902



Rhapsodist in *Bolesław Śmiały* (Bolesław the Bold), the Singer Aojdes in *Protesilas and Laodamia*, and Don Rodryg in *Cyd*. After the playwright's death, he added further roles to this repertoire, including Bolesław Śmiały, Chłopicki in *Warszawianka* (The Varsovian), Meleager (Kraków premiere, 1908), the Priest in *Kłątwa* (The Curse, Łódź premiere, 1909), and the Rhapsodist in *Legion* (The Legion). Mielewski's special connection with Wyspiański's work not only shaped his own career but also influenced the reception of the playwright's oeuvre. Alongside Irena and Ludwik Solski, he was one of the most ardent advocates for staging Wyspiański's plays, ensuring their presence on the Polish stage.

From the perspective of the actor's legacy, perhaps the most striking fact is that, since the premiere of *Forefathers' Eve* in Kraków in 1901, Gustaw-Konrad in Adam Mickiewicz's play bore the face, stature, and voice of Andrzej Mielewski. In him, the theatrical existence of this character was fully realized. Particularly suited to performing poetic and romantic repertoire, and capable of combining

realism with idealism in a manner often compared to Helena Modrzejewska, Mielewski specialized in portraying complex, not always wholly admirable “Polish heroes.” These included Norwid’s Krakus and Juliusz Słowacki’s Zawisza Czarny and Horsztyński; the Stranger in *Kordian* and Kossakowski in *Ksiądz Marek* (Priest Marek) by Słowacki; Pułaski in Mickiewicz’s *Konfederaci barscy* (The Bar Confederates); Leonard in *The Undivine Comedy* and Heliogabal in *Irydion* by Zygmunt Krasiński; Sułkowski in the drama by Stefan Żeromski; and, finally, a series of roles in *Kościuszkę pod Racławicami* (Kościuszkę at Racławice) by Władysław Ludwik Anczyc (including the Commander), which endeared him to the audience.¹⁰

He was also involved in managing theatre companies and in directing—understood in the acting sense, as stagecraft—and in this field he showed a particular interest in challenging texts. In Kraków, he directed new plays, such as Frank Wedekind’s *Demon of the Earth* in 1904, drawing eagerly on his knowledge of modern German theatre and its innovations, especially experiments with the chamber stage. In Łódź, he prepared his own staging of *Forefathers’ Eve*. From 1913 onward, he directed regularly in Kraków, staging works by George Bernard Shaw (almost all of which were performed there), Knut Hamsun, John Millington Synge, Tadeusz Rittner, Aleksander Ostrowski, and Romain Rolland—demonstrating his sensitivity to contemporary modernist drama.

All of this justifies the tone of the obituary that appeared after his death in *Nowości Ilustrowane* newspaper: “With the passing of Mielewski, Polish theatre loses a highly talented and exceptional artist, who earned his place among the foremost actors, renowned for his heroic and dramatic roles.”¹¹

What Is Omitted

The future portrayer of romantic heroes came from a family with Ruthenian roots—a fact largely absent from his biographies. In the obituary, *Czas* merely noted that he was born in 1867 in Lviv and that, at a relatively young age, he embarked on a theatrical career “out of passion,” a phrase that may suggest both an

¹⁰ A Kraków theatregoer, writing with admiration for Mielewski’s portrayal of Kościuszkę, commented on his appearance: “He looked the way Kościuszkę probably never did, even when he was trying to win over Miss Sosnowska,” Elżbieta Kietlińska, *Wrażenia i wspomnienia młodej teatromanki* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2012), 143.

¹¹ Anon., “Zgon wybitnego artysty,” *Nowości Ilustrowane*, no. 17 (1916): 9, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication/112429/edition/105188/content>.

autonomous choice and a decision made against social expectations.¹² Among the managers of provincial theatres who supported him were, in addition to the previously mentioned Linkowski family, Antoni Kattner and Emilian Baczyński. The latter is particularly noteworthy, as he worked simultaneously in Polish and Ukrainian theatre. *Słownik biograficzny teatru polskiego* (The Biographical Dictionary of Polish Theatre) states that the artist was born in Tołuszczów (or Tołszczów) near Lviv under the name Andrzej Sydor (or Sidor), yet provides no information regarding his family background or ethnicity.¹³ Some of these details were later revised by Maria Kaczorowska-Herman in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (The Polish Biographical Dictionary): according to her findings, Mielewski was born in 1866, and his parents were Tomasz Sidor and Agnieszka Kaliniak, *secundo voto* Kłoczek. Crucially, the researcher identified him as being “of Ukrainian origin,”¹⁴ although this aspect had not been foregrounded in her earlier monograph on the artist.

According to statistical data from 1870, Tołuszczów was a village within the Lviv starosty, inhabited by 634 residents and served by two parishes: Latin and Greek (i.e. Uniate).¹⁵ Parish registers from the Uniate community record numerous individuals bearing the surname Sydor. For instance, in 1865 the baptism of Jakub, son of Laurent Sydor and Maria Weklak, *agricolae tołszczowienses* (peasants from Tołszczów), is documented. In the Roman Catholic records of the same village, an entry from 1868 notes the baptism of Maria, daughter of Andriej Sydor and his wife Wiktoria Husarowa.¹⁶ As Husarowa was a Latin Catholic, their child was baptized according to her rite, hence the appearance of the record in the Latin parish register.¹⁷ It is possible that these families were related to the parents of the future actor. However, no birth certificate corresponding to him has yet been identified in these or other preserved records, nor has it been possible to establish conclusively whether both of his parents belonged to the Uniate parish. If the

¹² Anon., “Nekrologia. Śp. Andrzej Mielewski,” *Czas*, no. 185 (1916): 3, <http://old.mbc.malopolska.pl/dlibra/publication/48319?tab=1>. According to Kaczorowska-Herman, Mielewski “ran away from home as a teenager due to disagreements with his stepfather,” Maria Kaczorowska-Herman, “Mielewski, właściwe nazwisko Sidor (Sydor) Andrzej,” in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* 20, no. 6 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1977), 770.

¹³ Zbigniew Raszewski, Zbigniew Wilski, Maria Wosiek, Krystyna Zawadzka, and Hanna Garlińska-Zembrzuska, eds., *Słownik biograficzny teatru polskiego 1765–1965* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1973), 439.

¹⁴ Kaczorowska-Herman, “Mielewski,” 770.

¹⁵ Konrad Oksza Orzechowski, *Przewodnik statystyczno-topograficzny i skorowidz* (Kraków, 1872), 84.

¹⁶ Central State Archive of Ukraine in Lviv, fond 618, inventory 2, file 2156; fond 201, inventory 4a, file 7655.

¹⁷ In the ecclesiastical jurisdiction concerning mixed marriages, the principle was generally followed that a son would be baptized according to the father’s rite, and a daughter according to the mother’s. The Sydor family were Uniates, and Andrzej Mielewski also adhered to this faith, following his father. Very little is known, however, about the Kaliniak family, who do not appear in the local records.

Sydors recorded in Tolszczów were indeed part of his extended family—a hypothesis that remains uncertain—this would point to his Ruthenian peasant origins.

The circumstances surrounding the change of name are in themselves revealing, particularly when viewed against comparable cases. It may be assumed that Mielewski—or those who supported him at the outset of his career, such as the Linkowski family—sought to obscure his modest, rural origins. At the time, questions of ethnicity were inseparable from considerations of social class.¹⁸ Several performers who later achieved prominence chose not to use their family names at the beginning of their careers, though for quite different reasons: these were “heraldic” surnames, and their parents objected either to their children’s choice of profession or to the public display of a noble name on theatre posters. Thus, Roman Żelazowski debuted simply as Roman; Leon Stępowski adopted the pseudonyms Leonowicz and Warski; and Ludwik Sosnowski became Ludwik Solski. Mielewski’s future wife came from the Jaxa-Dębicki family and, after breaking with her relatives, performed under the stage name “Gryfcz.” Andrzej Mielewski, however, followed the opposite strategy: he adopted a more socially resonant pseudonym—initially Milewski—which he later modified following objections from a Polish landowning family bearing that name. For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that the surname Sydor was not unknown in Kraków. Andrzej Sydor was a respected craftsman, a carpenter who collaborated with Stanisław Wyspiański on the design of furniture for the Żeleński couple.

The change of surname, together with the obfuscation of details concerning his place of birth, suggests an attempt to conceal Mielewski’s origins—whether at his own initiative or at the insistence of his family. Yet this interpretation cannot be stated with certainty. Among the staff of the Kraków theatre, his background appears to have been common knowledge. As Lucyna Kotarbińska noted: “Mielewski was a Rusyn. A Rusyn patriot. Stubborn, reserved. But noble and very warm to me.”¹⁹ The phrase “Rusyn patriot” remains ambiguous. It may indicate a Rusyn with patriotic—thus Ukrainian nationalist—convictions, or, alternatively, a Rusyn who identified as a Polish patriot, a stance that was by no means uncommon (*gente*

¹⁸ There are ambiguous suggestions from Mielewski’s contemporaries that, because of his social background (and not only his ethnicity), certain negative traits were attributed to him. According to actor and director Józef Kotarbiński, after an unfavorable review of *Balladyna* by Kirkor, the hot-tempered actor publicly attacked the critic of *Czas*, *Listy Józefa i Lucyny Kotarbińskich*, ed. Zofia Jasińska (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1978), 50. Actress and writer Gabriela Zapolska wrote in a letter to Stanisław Janowski in November 1899: “As for Miel[ewski]’s scene, etc.—it was a very fine quarrel, truly worthy of Miel. Do you remember how he threatened Ronikier with his fist at my place, shouting, ‘I will strike? He is, after all, a common peasant,” Gabriela Zapolska, *Listy*, ed. Stefania Linowska, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1970), 734. At the same time, Mielewski must also have been sociable and well liked within his professional milieu, since Zapolska herself mentions him multiple times as a participant in actors’ supper gatherings and Christmas Eve celebrations.

¹⁹ Lucyna Kotarbińska, *Wokoło teatru: Moje wspomnienia* (Warszawa: Księgarnia F. Hoesicka, 1930), 129.

rutheni, natione poloni). What can be stated with confidence is that Mielewski was not the only artist of Ruthenian origin in the Kraków ensemble. Another Ruthenian, Grzegorz Senowski, spent his entire career on this stage as both actor and musician—working as a conductor and performing music onstage and behind the scenes. The icon painter Osyp Kuryłas was involved in the preparation of the stage design for *Sen srebrny Salomei* (Salomea's Silver Dream) at the Kraków theatre in 1900.²⁰ Around the same time, the Lviv Russian National Theatre, operating under the auspices of the Ruska Biesiada Society, performed on the municipal stage in Kraków and was received with considerable interest.²¹ Mielewski himself was said to have supported the ensemble and assisted its members upon their arrival.²² His ethnicity, therefore, appears to have been neither a source of stigma nor a matter concealed behind the scenes. What, then, did it consist of—apart from “stubbornness” and “reserve,” which are psychological rather than sociological categories?²³ Anthropologists suggest that ethnicity is based on identifying a culturally significant difference at a given moment. Put simply, beyond a belief in shared origin and past, there must exist a distinguishing feature—or constellation of features—that enables an ethnic group to separate itself, or to be separated, within society. This is always a dual process, involving both external classification and internal identification. The markers of difference may vary: for some groups, language is decisive; for others, religion, cultural practices, or phenotype. Over time, the basis of ethnic distinctiveness may shift. However, even very clear differences—such as linguistic ones—may not pose a problem, as group members do not regard themselves as ethnically distinct on that basis and readily adopt the language of the majority.

When Mielewski arrived in Kraków from eastern Galicia in 1893, both behind the scenes and in the audience, his characteristic, unfortunate “harsh” pronunciation was noticed, despite his otherwise pleasant voice.²⁴ This description suggests

²⁰ The playbill advertised “new scenery in second act, painted by Mr. S. Jasiński. In acts 3, 4, and 7, scenery by J. Spitziar and Korylas [Osyp Kuryłas] and Przybyłowski.” Reprint of the playbill: Józef Kotarbiński, *W służbie sztuki i poezji* (Warszawa: Księgarnia F. Hoesicka, 1929), 27.

²¹ See anon., “Kronika: Teatr ruski,” *Nowa Reforma*, no. 99 (1900): 2.

²² Anon., “Śmierć artysty,” *Ukrajins'ke Słowo*, no. 96 (1916): 3, <https://dlibra.kul.pl/dlibra/publication/68948/edition/60661/content>.

²³ Mielewski had, behind the scenes, the reputation of a misanthrope: a reserved man who withdrew to the sidelines, but also someone violent, ambitious, hot-tempered, and, finally, a wounded misogynist. The last characterization reflects the mythologizing of his persona, as he was said to have suffered a romantic disappointment that supposedly influenced his solitary way of life.

²⁴ Kotarbińska, *Zza kulis teatru*, 234. As fellow actors and spectators noted—for example, Kietlińska, who was infatuated with him—Mielewski had to overcome many obstacles of a physical nature, including a visual defect (crossed eyes). His greatest difficulty, however, was his “stiff” diction, which he struggled for many years.” Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, *Tadeusz Pawlikowski i jego krakowscy aktorzy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1971), 303.

that he may have retained traces of his native accent in certain sounds and syllables. I use the subjunctive here because, although many sources comment on the peculiarities of his diction, none explicitly link it to the Ukrainian language. It is equally possible that this “harsh” speech simply reflected the inexperience of an actor from the provinces who, despite more than seven years on stage, had yet to fully master the flexibility, modulation, and intonation necessary to individualize his characters. In his early career, Mielewski’s voice may have been undeveloped, resulting in a lack of projection during powerful scenes, uneven delivery, or a tendency to speak too slowly—despite his otherwise dynamic stage personality and temperament—as if he were concentrating on avoiding mistakes. Alternatively, he may simply have been performing roles that were ill-suited to him. Yet it was precisely his language, or more specifically its phonetic qualities, that made him seem distinct. Even if this distinction was not ethnically marked, it positioned Mielewski as someone who spoke differently, who was in some sense “the other.” The feature most apparent to those around him—and one that could have categorized him outside the Polish-speaking group—was his accent and his phonetic character.²⁵ Interestingly, this very trait, which initially marked him as different, later became the basis for a particular type of role and eventually disappeared from his performance altogether.²⁶

In 1898, Mielewski was entrusted with the dramatic and demonic role of Don Salluste in Victor Hugo’s *Ruy Blas*. Director Pawlikowski justified this as follows:

Whoever I cast in this role . . . will be a theatrical villain, and I am looking for a figure who would not reveal the darkness of his soul; I have a feeling that Mielewski will bring this out. . . . The fact that Mielewski *stumbles over his words* will work very well in this role; he will *speak even more slowly than he does in real life, always as if*

²⁵ It is worth emphasizing that disputes over language—in the broad sense of the term, encompassing the origins and development of speech rather than merely differences in pronunciation—served, from the early nineteenth century onward, as a key platform for the crystallization of Ukrainian identity. Representatives of the radical wing of the Ukrainian movement associated the Polish language with cultural expansion and argued that it blurred their own national identity. Consequently, in the search for ways to codify the spoken Ukrainian language—the language of the people—there were even protests against the use of the Latin alphabet, which was perceived as excessively Polish. At the same time, some activists within the Ukrainian national movement maintained that the Ukrainian vernacular lacked sufficient literary refinement and flexibility to serve as the foundation of an emancipating nation’s language, and therefore advocated the use of German instead. See Jan Kozik, *Ukraiński ruch narodowy w Galicji w latach 1830–1848* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1973); Jarosław Moklak, *W walce o tożsamość Ukraińców: Zagadnienie języka wykładowego w szkołach ludowych i średnich w pracach galicyjskiego Sejmu Krajowego 1866–1892* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze “Historia Iagellonica,” 2004).

²⁶ Although the characteristics of the native language—particularly syntax—can be discerned in written texts, such as Mielewski’s letter to Marian Gawalewicz (Łódź, after 22 March 1909), Jagiellonian Library, B J Rkp. 1720.111.

with premeditated words, and this will give the right tone to a character who must watch over every word he utters, so that not even half a word betrays his secret.²⁷

Tadeusz Pawlikowski, who discovered Mielewski among provincial actors, originally hired him in Kraków to play lovers, folk characters, and soldiers.²⁸ Between 1893 and 1901, Mielewski performed a wide range of roles, from serious and lyrical parts to stock suburban characters, farce types, Shakespearean lovers, and even silent salon figures. In some seasons he took on as many as fifty new roles, although the average was closer to twenty-five to thirty.²⁹ At one point, the theatre director made a bold casting decision by entrusting him with a villain role. While this may not have entailed significant risk for the theatre—given the constantly changing repertoire and the short lifespan of productions—it opened the way for Mielewski to a markedly different repertoire. It would be naïve to assume that the role of Don Salluste alone proved decisive; rather, its story encapsulates a long and elusive process of adaptation, acculturation, and, ultimately, artistic maturation.

Initially, Mielewski seemed among the least likely candidates to succeed as a leading Kraków actor in the poetic dramas of Romanticism and Young Poland. To achieve his later virtuosity in this field, he had to devote several years to intensive vocal training and to the practical mastery of his bilingualism, ensuring that it no longer interfered with or disrupted his stage presence. I would also argue that he needed a rival—an actor of comparable qualities and ambition, competing for the same roles. In this respect, his rivalry with Michał Tarasiewicz significantly accelerated Mielewski's professional development. By the end of 1901, following his performance as Konrad, he was already being praised for a level of vocal finesse that few of his colleagues could match. Feliks Koneczny wrote about the pleasure of “listening to his acting,” while Elżbieta Kietlińska remarked on his vocal mastery:

²⁷ Grzymała-Siedlecki, *Tadeusz Pawlikowski*, 304 (emphasis D.J.-W.).

²⁸ Memoirs repeatedly note that Pawlikowski did not appreciate Mielewski. Grzymała-Siedlecki writes explicitly that the director “did not recognize the extraordinary talent” of the actor, Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, *Świat aktorski moich czasów*, (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1973), 148. Kietlińska makes a similar observation: “It’s strange: Pawlikowski—such a talent scout—failed to recognize his ability and tried to cast him in bland romantic roles, for which Mielewski was completely unsuited. Therefore, he only made a name for himself under the next director,” Kietlińska, *Wrażenia i wspomnienia*, 59. Michalik’s account further confirms this assessment: “The director [Pawlikowski] was probably not satisfied with Mielewski’s progress, as his salary remained unchanged from his first to his last performance (140 + 4), while Solski reached 280 crowns + 8 feu,” Jan Michalik, *Dzieje teatru w Krakowie*, vol. 5, pt. 1, *Dzieje teatru w Krakowie w latach 1893–1915: Teatr Miejski* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1985), 360.

²⁹ Michalik, *Dzieje teatru w Krakowie*, 350.

Such simplicity and poetry radiated from his stage presence at the priest's house, and his small, unassuming, and not particularly resonant voice was employed with such mastery that even the quietest words were perfectly intelligible. He never faltered in moments of tension or exclamation. This very simplicity forms the foundation, strength, and charm of Mielewski's acting . . . At the same time, the physical demands of the role were immense.³⁰

The difference marked by the phonetic qualities of his speech, which had alienated Mielewski from the other performers, gradually disappeared. This, however, did not diminish the significance of his otherness; rather, it manifested in a different form.

Cossack Roles

Almost from the very beginning of his work on the Kraków stage, Mielewski's repertoire included roles classified as "romantic-Ukrainian," connected with the borderlands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 17th century and deeply mythologized in Polish literature.³¹ In these roles, "Cossackness" was linked to the ideals of freedom and melancholy, derived from the vast, untamed expanses of the "wild fields." Pride and an inner yearning for liberty ennobled the Cossack in the eyes of Polish poets, even when expressed in extreme forms—rebellion, betrayal, or brutality:

The Romantics were far less interested in the common people, perceiving the peasantry as prone to savagery and cruelty, as evidenced by their involvement in uprisings such as the Koliivshchyna. The Cossacks also participated in this carnage, but they were not subjected to such harsh condemnation; their cruelty seemed, in fact, to carry a sanctifying dimension of freedom.³²

As Witkowska observes, Cossackdom was depicted as a warlike "culture of solitary men," familiar with death and emptiness, at home in a world of violence and horror, and much less often as inhabitants of a gentle, sentimental land of poetry—a vision primarily represented by Bohdan Zaleski. By Mielewski's time,

³⁰ Kietlińska, *Wrażenia i wspomnienia*, 133–134.

³¹ See Alina Witkowska, "Dziko – pięknie – groźnie, czyli Ukraina romantyków," *Teksty Drugie*, no. 2 (1995): 20–30.

³² Witkowska, "Dziko – pięknie – groźnie," 23.



Andrzej Mielewski

(p. "Mazepa")

Kazimierz Kamiński

© JÓZEF KOTARBINSKI, W SŁUŻBIE SZTUKI I POEZJI..., 1929

Andrzej Mielewski as Mazepa and Kazimierz Kamiński as Jan Kazimierz in *Mazepa* by Juliusz Słowacki

the stereotype of romantic Ukraine had become so firmly entrenched in the collective imagination that it risked trivialization. Alongside the memorable line from Antoni Malczewski's poem *Maria*—"A steppe—a horse—a Cossack—. . . a single wild soul,"³³ one might add a humorous nod from *The Wedding*: "You are such a little Cossack; / when you dismount from your horse, you get sad."³⁴

Cossack roles became Mielewski's specialty—not because of their quantity, but because of their distinctive color and exoticism, anticipated by the audience, and the authenticity he brought to them, a quality emanating from within, inaccessible

³³ Antoni Malczewski, *Maria*, quoted in Witkowska, 22.

³⁴ Stanisław Wyspiański, "Wesele," in *Dzieła zebrane*, ed. Leon Płoszewski, vol. 4 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1958), 9.

to outsiders, and surprising to those around him. As early as his performances in Stanisławów, Mielewski was said to have delighted audiences in the role of Ivan Gonta, the Cossack leader of the Koliivshchyna, in Włodzimierz Lewicki's *Wernyhora* (an adaptation of Michał Czajkowski's novel).³⁵ Kraków audiences first saw him as the title character in Słowacki's *Mazepa* on 12 December 1894. An early reviewer in *Przegląd Polski* lamented that, rather than displaying the boldness and imagination of a man, Mielewski seemed to possess too much of a delicate, page-like quality. Yet the same critic praised his performance in the walled-up scene as "perfect," noting the poignancy of his delivery.³⁶ This assessment is supported by Kietlińska, who, years later, recalled Mielewski's "captivating, simple, masculine, and chivalrous magnetism and fire."³⁷

He radiated a broad, golden poetry—poignancy piercing through the page's exuberance—and the role's climax arrived with the words: "How could I leave? That woman would never have been believed again . . ." It was as if being walled up alive for the honor of a beloved were the simplest thing in the world.³⁸

As can be seen, in the eyes of the audience, the defining feature of Mielewski's *Mazepa* was his sense of poetry—the romantic, almost fairy-tale freedom with which he could carry the hero through extreme registers of passion, fantasy, and tenderness, while simultaneously conveying simplicity and strength. *Mazepa* represented a borderland-Ukrainian type, a symbolic embodiment of Ukrainianness wrapped in a Cossack–noble–romantic aura, as remembered by viewers. Yet the audience did not agree on every detail. Amusingly, the reviewer for *Przegląd Polski* even had a stereotypical idea of *Mazepa*'s appearance: "But there are reservations. Fair hair?" he asked. "Ukrainians are usually dark-haired."³⁹

At the beginning of Kotarbiński's directorship, on 24 March 1900, Mielewski took on another, even more expressive Cossack role: Semenko in *Sen srebrny Salomei*. "Semenko will not be forgotten. Talented actors become excellent actors through their roles," wrote Feliks Koneczny, adding, "It was in this role that *Sen srebrny* had its greatest momentum; the Ukrainian element shone through

³⁵ Anon., "Śmierć artysta," 3.

³⁶ J.F., "Teatr krakowski," *Przegląd Polski* 115, no. 343 (1895): 197.

³⁷ Kietlińska, *Wrażenia i wspomnienia*, 59.

³⁸ Kietlińska, 226.

³⁹ J.F., "Teatr krakowski," 197.

Andrzej Mielewski as Semenko
in Juliusz Słowacki's *Sen srebrny
Salomei*

POSTCARD, KRAKOW, 1900



Semenko so strongly that the character often eclipsed everything else.”⁴⁰ In this performance, the Cossack hero was characterized by dark violence. Much has been written about Mielewski’s portrayal of Semenko in various memoirs, which in itself makes the role exceptional. Several of these accounts, written either shortly after the premiere or many years later, are worth quoting. Kietlińska valued Mielewski’s performance even more because she disliked his rival, Michał Tarasiewicz, who played Sawa; in her opinion:

He was all the more glaring next to Mielewski’s captivating Semenko, who exuded the fire of a Cossack—the pain, humiliation, pride, and crime. It is no coincidence that he was a Rusyn; he knew how to embody all kinds of Cossacks and bandits.

⁴⁰ Feliks Koneczny, *Teatr krakowski: Sprawozdania 1896–1905*, ed. Kazimierz Gajda (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe WSP, 1994), 165.

Yet it was difficult to split the slender Mielewski in two, so that he could play both Semenکو and Sawa. I would rather forgo the butcher and give him the role of Sawa.⁴¹

Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki also recalled a lasting impression of witnessing primal energy embodied in a single character, who, though brutal and deceitful, appeared simultaneously sublime:

Semenکو, with all his steppe romanticism, was the flesh and blood of the truest son of the people—wonderfully primitive in every utterance, yet, in that very primitiveness, possessing a heroism and strength as solid as granite. . . . The captivating Mielewski was at once genuine and poetic . . . at the Polish premiere of *Sen srebrny* in Kraków.⁴²

The nerve of the role, as Lucyna Kotarbińska recalled, lay in a cumulative, fierce, and profound hatred, expressed uniquely in the word “rizat” (slay):

This role suited his psyche perfectly. In Scene VI, as the leader of the rebellion, one of the peasants asks him, “And what will happen to the nobility?” “Rizat,” replies Semenکو. To this day, I can still hear that word—the sheer hatred, irrevocable vengeance, and determination it contained.⁴³

In the same season, Mielewski portrayed a character in Leonard Sowiński’s *Na Ukrainie* (In Ukraine), who was the antithesis of Semenکو, though equally tragic: Maksym Hrynio, the son of a priest, who dreamed of a Polish-Ukrainian rapprochement yet was forced to stand against his own father. To the “romantic-Ukrainian” roles we can also add Bohun in *W czartowym jarze* (In the Devil’s Ravine, an adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Ogniem i mieczem* / With Fire and Sword), as well as mythical characters such as Rapsod in Wyspiański’s *Bolesław Śmiały* and Wid in Słowacki’s *Zawisza Czarny*—bards, prophets, and heroes of the Slavic imagination.

The simplest conclusion might be that the evocative appeal of these self-referential roles reflected a kind of colonising tendency.⁴⁴ The Rusyn actor

⁴¹ Kietlińska, *Wrażenia i wspomnienia*, 119.

⁴² Grzymała-Siedlecki, *Świat aktorski*, 144.

⁴³ Kotarbińska, *Wokoło teatru*, 129.

⁴⁴ Alina Witkowska points out the features of such appropriation and simplification in the portrayal of Romantic Ukraine when she compares its elements to motifs from the American Western. What is surprising, however, is that after the actor’s death in 1916, a Ukrainian publication took as proof of his ethnic identity precisely his association with these Cossack roles—ignoring his other, later achievements, b.a., “Śmierć artysty,” 3.

subordinated himself to the way Polish theatre wanted to perceive heroes from his cultural milieu and to how they were portrayed by the authors, most of whom were Romantics or Neo-Romantics. Polish literary, mental, and cultural assumptions produced the aura of the Cossack as a poetic, mythologized figure prone to extremes. But such a conclusion is too simple and one-sided. An intelligent, independent artist like Andrzej Mielewski—soon to become a director and manager—cannot be denied the right to artistic expression, for which he was responsible and to which he devoted himself. Moreover, in light of the theory of ethnicity as fluidity outlined in the beginning, it is difficult to accept that the dynamic interplay of ethnicity in theatre—between actor, role, partners, and audience—could vanish entirely, leaving only a static creation with rigid boundaries and fixed characteristics.

It is not at all essential whether Mielewski could or wanted to play these characters differently than expected—subversively, grotesquely, or otherwise—but that he played them with profound commitment. I will venture a hypothesis—though it is difficult to verify due to the lack of personal documents, letters, or memoirs—that it was precisely these roles that allowed him to express a poetics of confession in theatrical form: a negotiation of his existence as a human being, situated between Polishness and Ruthenianness, and between Ukrainianness as a field of reflection and a site for transcending differences. Through these roles—within the constraints of the available repertoire and acting conventions—Mielewski was able to reveal aspects of his partially hidden identity and ethnic heritage. He portrayed characters from a world to which he had access on different terms than most Polish audiences, yet this did not result in a one-dimensional, mythologized image of a haidamaka (Cossack rebel). Rather, he negotiated and “discussed” the role with both himself and the audience in a reciprocal gaze, forcing the spectators to hear something unexpected in the very utterance of the word “rizat.” While Koneczny and Kietlińska, in the *Cossack/Other*, discovered an important component of Polish identity and cultural memory, Mielewski examined Polishness from an ethnically non-Polish perspective. A similar dynamic occurred in ultra “Polish” roles, such as Mickiewicz’s Gustaw-Konrad, which may have succeeded precisely because he treated them as simultaneously intimate and foreign, familiar yet observed from a cultural distance.

This process is well captured by Bakhtin’s notion of “non-co-presence,” or being “always situated outside” the object of study—a concept recently revisited by Ryszard Nycz:

It leads the scholar to reject the idea of the individual, as well as national culture, as a kind of closed container (a notion inherited from the Romantics, including

Schelling and Herder, who conceived of culture as a bounded sphere or island). As for the subject, Bakhtin argues that “To be means to be for another, and through the other for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he *looks into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another*.” The same applies to culture: “We should not . . . imagine the field of culture as a certain spatial entity with boundaries, but also possessing its internal territory. The field of culture does not have an internal territory: it is entirely located on the boundaries. They run everywhere, intersect at its every point.”⁴⁵

Contact with the wider society is fundamental to the articulation of ethnic difference. “For ethnicity to come about, the groups must have a minimum of contact with each other,”⁴⁶ and such contact necessarily entails the exchange of information about mutual perceptions. It is precisely this exchange—cooperation and communication with other groups—that can lead both to assimilation and integration, as well as to the sharpening of differences and the intensification of conflict. The relational mode of existence of ethnicity, or more accurately the process through which ethnoses emerge as autonomous and undergo transformation, is therefore a particularly compelling phenomenon. Ethnicity cannot be defined without an external perspective, without submission to—or resistance against—this process.⁴⁷ Mielewski’s Cossack roles may be read as a theatrical enactment of this dynamic: an attempt to establish on stage what, in the perception of a Polish audience—and of the semi-Ukrainian actor himself (as representatives of the national movement would likely have described him)—was becoming Ukrainian or Polish, or Ukrainian through Polish mediation and Polish through Ukrainian influence. It is worth emphasizing that this process unfolded on the Polish stage, in the Polish language, and thus within Polish culture, where these two voices encountered one another. This may have been because Polish culture was dominant, because it was already on the verge of losing that dominance, or perhaps precisely because, in the course of its transformation into a modern society, it required interethnic perspectives and forms of non-co-presence. We will probably never know exactly how this process unfolded, yet it may well have been a decisive factor in Mielewski’s enduring fascination with Polish Romantic

⁴⁵ Ryszard Nycz, “Inny jak ja (Trzy i pół głosy do aktualnego teoretycznie i praktycznie problemu),” *Teksty Drugie*, no. 6 (2015): 12 (emphasis of the original).

⁴⁶ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 16.

⁴⁷ This is also acknowledged by historians of the Ukrainian national movement, who point out the significant influence that patterns drawn from Polish literature and Polish clandestine organizations had on its development.

drama and its “Polish heroes.” Faithful to this tradition throughout his life, he nevertheless remained actively engaged in Ukrainian affairs. On 5 November 1898, Leonid Mańko’s play *Nieszczęśliwa miłość* (Unhappy Love), translated by Mielewski, was staged in Kraków—“a drama in five scenes against the backdrop of the life of the Ruthenian people in Ukraine.”⁴⁸ The play, rich in songs and idyllic motifs, told the story of a seduced girl and was set in Russia. There was likely no more suitable translator for this work within the Kraków troupe than Mielewski himself. His roots in the Ruthenian world were recognized by the director Kotarbiński, who, after one of the performances of *Sen srebrny Salomei*, presented him with a wreath adorned with ribbons “in Ruthenian colours” (their exact colours remain unknown) and bearing the inscription: “To the excellent Semenکو.”⁴⁹ Finally, Mielewski’s funeral in Kraków in 1916 was conducted according to the Greek Catholic rites at St Norbert’s Church, with the participation of clergy of both Latin and Greek Catholic traditions, and was attended by large crowds of fans as well as city delegations.⁵⁰

Mielewski was active during a period of intensified Ukrainian nationalist mobilization, which openly and forcefully advocated the creation of a separate state and independence from Poland, and at times exhibited a hysterical Polonophobia (while simultaneously displaying pronounced Austrophilia).⁵¹ Only a few months after Mielewski’s death, on 22 November 1916, Ukrainian national democrats—protesting against attempts to revive the Polish state—issued a document that reduced seven centuries of the Ruthenian lands within the Kingdom of Poland to a national occupation. This was therefore a moment in the divided Galician society when ethnicity became a central stake in political struggle and was inevitably instrumentalized and ideologized. A significant aspect of Mielewski’s biography is that he appears to have adopted a strategy different from that of, for example, Salomea Kruszelnicka, who, by emphasizing her Italian and Polish identity, most consistently and effectively cultivated ties

⁴⁸ Maria Zacińska, *Repertuar Teatru Miejskiego w Krakowie 1893–1899* (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 1977), 210. In the Lviv Theatre Library, a copy from 1901 has been preserved, Silesian Library, file no. 8TLW 3221, <https://sbc.org.pl/dlibra/publication//283728/edition/268476>.

⁴⁹ This provides a clue as to how the term “Ruthenian patriot” should be understood—not as an expression of nationalist separatism.

⁵⁰ Anon., “Pogrzeb ś.p. Andrzeja Mielewskiego,” *Czas*, no. 190 (1916): 1.

⁵¹ The growing anti-Polish sentiment, especially in response to the increasing political and cultural dominance of Poles during the so-called Galician autonomy, can be seen, among other sources, in theatrical censorship records. According to Austrian regulations, censors were required to remove expressions inciting aggression against other national and ethnic groups, including calls for a “slaughter of the Lachs” [Poles]. See Mariola Szydłowska, *Cenzura teatralna w Galicji w dobie autonomicznej 1860–1918* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych “Universitas,” 1995), 123–124.

with the Ukrainian national movement, eventually becoming one of its patrons. I have found no evidence to suggest that Mielewski sought to assert his national distinctiveness by performing exclusively for Ukrainian audiences or by exploiting accumulated antagonisms between Poles and Ruthenians, or between the nobility and the peasantry. One press report suggests that he would have been welcomed in such a role; however, if the same source is to be believed, the actor denied this rumor in a letter:

Theatre News. In response to reports published in several national newspapers claiming that Kraków stage actor Andrzej Mielewski is leaving the local theatre to assume the position of director of the Ruthenian theatre in Lviv, the artist has written to the editorial office to deny these claims. Mielewski explains that his departure from the Kraków stage is involuntary, resulting from the theatre management's decision to break off negotiations with him, despite his acceptance of all proposed terms. He further emphasizes that reports alleging he is to take over the management of the Ruthenian theatre in Lviv are entirely unfounded.⁵²

The allusive wording of this correspondence suggests the existence of a conflict between Mielewski and the newly appointed director of the Kraków theatre, Ludwik Solski, possibly concerning ambition or financial terms (the honorarium). In any case, the company's decision not to engage him compelled Mielewski to seek alternative professional opportunities, including guest appearances and work with touring troupes.⁵³ Why the actor so emphatically distanced himself from rumors of taking over the Ruthenian stage and, at a critical moment—even if motivated by resentment towards Polish theatre—did not express solidarity with the Ukrainian national movement, remains an open question that can only be addressed through further examination of personal documents, correspondence, and notes. Perhaps he preferred not to choose between the sharply delineated camps of politicized national communities. Rather than reinforcing difference and separation, he may have sought points of connection⁵⁴ among the groups that co-created Galician culture, favoring a model of interethnic interaction over one of division.

⁵² Anon., *Nowa Reforma*, no. 179 (1905): 2.

⁵³ He left Kraków after Solski assumed the directorship (in August 1905) and returned in June 1906. Two years later, in the autumn of 1908, he again departed from the Kraków stage. This was a period of gradual disintegration of the Kraków company and of its members moving to other theatres that offered better financial conditions. See Raszewski et al., *Słownik biograficzny teatru polskiego*, 439; Michalik, *Dzieje teatru w Krakowie*, 331.

⁵⁴ He would agree with a philosopher who wrote that "one looked for opposites where there were transitions," Friedrich Nietzsche, *Wędrowiec i jego cień*, trans. Konrad Drzewiecki (Kraków: Zielona Sowa, 2003), 373.

A “Modern” Man

Among Mielewski's finest roles were portrayals of the rebel, the gloomy hypersensitive soul, the decadent, and finally the derailed figure—cast out of society, at odds with both the social and cosmic order, and violently afflicted by problems arising from his own maladjustment. These types were defined not by social class but by inner dissonance. Many such characters—castaways of life—were drawn from Russian literature: Nekhlyudov in Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, Vasya Pepel in Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, and Raskolnikov in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (a role from his time in Łódź). When Mielewski departed for provincial “exile” in the 1905/06 season, Kietlińska lamented in Kraków: “Mielewski is gone! What will our ‘great’ repertoire look like without him? Who will play the various misfits, madmen, and poets for us?”⁵⁵

The artist appears to have been drawn to characters in decline or transition, as well as to apostles of modernity—figures consumed by their own ideas and passions. He appeared as Hartwig in Hermann Sudermann's *Fires of St. John*, a role combining erotic and dramatic elements. He achieved great success as Bogdański in Gabriela Zapolska's *Tamten* (That One, 1898), played Gregor Werle in Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* (1899), and Serba in Jan August Kisielewski's *W sieci* (In the Web, 1899). The fact that he performed these figures of the new generation successfully and with clear enjoyment is not, in itself, unusual. What is noteworthy, however, is that he also reshaped the canonical figure of Konrad—both in Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* and Wyspiański's *Liberation*—subjecting it on stage to a modernist revision. In the former role, according to Kietlińska, his performance exerted a powerful sensual effect on the audience, blurring the boundaries between actor, role, and authorial creation.

Gustaw-Konrad reigns supreme over the entire performance. For example, the *Improvisation*. No—the world is ending, I have no words! . . . It has already reached its highest peak, where you completely forget that you are watching an actor and see only Mickiewicz.⁵⁶

Mielewski's success in the role of Gustaw-Konrad was not determined solely by his ability to speak and recite—though this, too, played a part—nor by the

⁵⁵ Kietlińska, *Wrażenia i wspomnienia*, 229.

⁵⁶ Kietlińska, 133, 137.



Jadwiga Mrozowska and Andrzej Mielewski as Klara and Albin in *Śluby panieńskie* by Aleksander Fredro

DRAWING BY WITOLD WOJTKIEWICZ

fact that a Ruthenian⁵⁷ was playing a Pole. What proved decisive was the compelling superimposition of a contemporary sensibility onto Mickiewicz's hero. Mielewski worked on the role over a long period, transforming not only his vocal technique but also drawing on the experience he had gained in the most recent repertoire, which offered no ready-made aesthetic models and demanded flexibility and intelligence. He was an actor of the new school: modern, intent

⁵⁷ As is well known, Wyspiański drastically trimmed the Great Improvisation. "The most problematic were two lines: 'Now I am made one with my homeland; / With my body I have swallowed its soul' (Part III, lines 258–259). Ultimately, for the performance, only the first line was retained, and in print Wyspiański omitted both," wrote Maria Prussak, "Dziady bez mesjanizmu," in *Brzmienia Wyspiańskiego* (Kraków: żywoślowie.wydawnictwo, 2023), 261. Wyspiański argued that the weight of these words made them credible only in Mickiewicz's own mouth; in anyone else's, they would be an usurpation. An actor playing Konrad would have to be a genius on Mickiewicz's level for the audience to forgive his audacity. Awareness of Mielewski's background further complicates the matter.

Andrzej Mielewski

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JÓZEF KUCZYŃSKI,

POSTCARD, KRAKOW, CA. 1915



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on performing through concentrated energy and inner vibration. Kazimierz Ehrenberg wrote of him:

He was a thoroughly modern actor; the impression he makes is due neither to the sound of his voice, nor to the artistry of his diction, nor to heroic posture. He is so anxious that he has given several creations from modernist literature a distinctly hysterical undertone. He plays with his nerves and plays on the nerves of the audience; among Polish artists, he is closest to the German Kainz.⁵⁸

This style of acting—modernizing historical Romantic types and bringing their dilemmas closer to the audience—may well have been shocking to purists. But

⁵⁸ K. E., "O grze artystów krakowskich w *Dziadach* Mickiewicza," *Nasz Głos*, no. 42 (1901): 5, <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/en/dlibra/publication/926534>.

he won over audiences, especially young ones. I suspect that one of the qualities that attracted Wyspiański to Mielewski as an artist was his sense of contemporary issues and current human dilemmas, as well as the fact that he had more than one face, migrating between ethnic and linguistic worlds and identities.

Returning to the question of the significance of ethnicity in Mielewski's biography, it can be argued that it emerges at the intersection of two anthropological discourses. The dominant discourse "tends to equate ethnicity . . . with community and culture."⁵⁹ It was this perspective that—perhaps with Mielewski's own consent—constructed him as an outstanding actor of Polish theatre, while effacing other traits, affiliations, and differences. This view should be complemented by the demotic discourse, "more flexible and complex," which "recognizes the situational and multifaceted character of individual identification"⁶⁰ and, at times, even blurs clear ethnic boundaries. Accessing this mode of self-definition is considerably more difficult, since it likely unfolded outside the realm of writing—in the sphere of direct interpersonal relations—and only its faint traces entered the recorded memories about the artist.

Andrzej Mielewski appears as a profoundly dualistic figure: extremely discreet and reserved, yet also someone who, when opportunities arose, actively chose his nationality and identity. Without travelling far—his career developed within a triangle formed by Kraków, Warsaw, and Łódź—he moved between two ethnic worlds, deploying the communicative codes of distinct cultural circuits while simultaneously absorbing the influence of Polish culture. I do not think that for him this situation was tragic or inherently burdensome, nor should it be dramatized. "Before assuming that ethnic anomalies are by default unhappy, we ought to look into their actual lives."⁶¹ This observation may serve as a fitting conclusion to these reflections, while also encouraging further inquiry into the elusive traces of the actor's "actual life."

Translated by Katarzyna Szuster-Tardi



⁵⁹ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 183.

⁶⁰ Eriksen.

⁶¹ Eriksen, 78.

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