

Agata Łuksza

University of Warsaw (PL)

ORCID: 0000-0001-7459-0187

“Warsaw Has Gone Berserk with Those Italians”

Fan Cultures in Late 19th and Early 20th -Century Warsaw from the Perspective of Theatre Migration History

Abstract

The author examines nineteenth-century Warsaw theatre through the lens of migration and fan-celebrity relations, focusing on fan practices and parasocial bonds established by the local audiences with the nomadic star performers. Both perspectives—the fan-based and the migratory—enable a reconsideration of the mechanisms of desire and gratification that underpin theatrical production, as well as of the economic dimension of theatre, which remains contingent upon transfer, translation, mobility, and ultimately, access to the

metropolitan center. They allow for a revaluation and reconceptualization of the history of the nineteenth-century Polish theatre, revealing phenomena that were by no means marginal in nature but have been marginalized at various stages of history production.

Keywords

Anselmi, Bellincioni, home, fans, migration, opera, theatre

Abstrakt

“Warszawa ogłupiała naprawdę z tą włoszczyzną”: Kultury fanowskie w Warszawie przełomu XIX i XX wieku w perspektywie historii migracji teatralnych

Autorka analizuje warszawską scenę teatralną XIX wieku z perspektywy migracji oraz relacji fanowsko-celebryckiej, koncentrując się na praktykach fanowskich i paraspółecznych więziach, jakie lokalna publiczność nawiązywała z nomadycznymi gwiazdami sztuk scenicznych. Obie te perspektywy – fanowska i migracyjna – otwierają możliwość, by upomnieć się o warunkujące teatr mechanizmy pożądania i gratyfikacji oraz o wymiar ekonomiczny teatru, który pozostaje uzależniony od transferu, translacji, ruchu, wreszcie – dostępu do metropolitarne centrum. Pozwalają przewartościować i przemyśleć na nowo historię teatru polskiego w XIX wieku, dostrzec zjawiska, które wcale nie miały charakteru marginalnego, ale zostały zmarginalizowane na różnych poziomach wytwarzania historii.

Słowa kluczowe

Anselmi, Bellincioni, dom, fani, migracja, opera, teatr

In her chronicle *Dawna Warszawa* (Old Warsaw), Jadwiga Waydel-Dmochowska, describing the city at the beginning of the 20th century, notes the popularity of the so-called "postcard mania." Residents of the capital—both men and women—eagerly collected postcards depicting works of art, natural landscapes, city scenes, and "ethnographic types," particularly from foreign or "exotic" regions, as well as images of renowned stage artists.¹ The craze for sending and collecting postcards thus intersected with pre-existing practices among theatre enthusiasts, who, long before the invention of postcards, had collected visiting cards and studio photographs of their idols. Moreover, the term—*mania* derived from the Greek for "frenzy" or "madness"—was, in the Warsaw context, most closely associated with "theatre mania" and "actor mania,"² phenomena for which the capital's audiences had been renowned since at least the late 1860s.³ Nineteenth-century "theatre mania" and "actor mania" are nothing other than historical terms for theatre fandom and early celebrity culture.

At the end of the 19th century, the future author of *Dawna Warszawa*, as a young member of the capital's intelligentsia, also had a "collection of postcards," including numerous postcards with images of stage stars—such as Lucyna Messal, the prima donna of the Warsaw operetta, or an entire collection of professional beauties, including La Belle Otero, Cléo de Mérode, and Lina Cavalieri. However, Waydel-Dmochowska highlights two Italian opera artists in particular: "I had dozens of photos of my beloved singer and great actress (such a rare combination) Gemma Bellincioni and the phenomenally gorgeous Giuseppe Anselmi [!]. Both of them performed at the Warsaw Opera for several consecutive years."⁴ Waydel-Dmochowska's recollections point to the intertwining of the capital's postcard craze with a local fashion for "Italianism"—an adoration for Italian opera celebrities who regularly performed on the Warsaw stage in the early 20th century: soprano Gemma Bellincioni, tenor Giuseppe Anselmi, and baritone Mattia Battistini, who is not mentioned by the author. In the case of both stage

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¹ Jadwiga Waydel-Dmochowska, *Dawna Warszawa* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1959).

² For the first time, the word *mania*, borrowed from the medical register, was used in reference to fan practices by Heinrich Heine. In 1844, he coined the term *Lisztomania* to describe what he considered the pathological behavior, mental state, and temperament of female admirers of Franz Liszt. See Dana Golley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 203–204.

³ See Jerzy Got, "Gwiazdorstwo i aktoromania w teatrze polskim w XIX wieku," *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 19, no. 3 (1970): 294–310.

⁴ Waydel-Dmochowska, *Dawna Warszawa*, 271.

celebrities and postcards, the categories of transfer, travel, and exchange are at the very heart of both phenomena, allowing us to approach the history of Polish theatre at the turn of the twentieth century as a transnational history. Both postcards and performers crossed borders, serving as media of movement and nodes of contact.

Building on Waydel-Dmochowska's recollections, I would like to propose a fragmentary account of the Warsaw stage, written from the dual perspectives of migration and of fan-celebrity culture, focusing on fan practices and parasocial relationships that the local audience established with itinerant stars. I approach this audience in a specific way: in the spirit of British cultural studies, informed by research conducted at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, and by the fan studies that emerged from it, also referred to in Polish literature as *fantropology*.⁵ Both perspectives—the fan-based and the migratory—enable a reconsideration of the mechanisms of desire and gratification that underpin theatrical production, as well as of the economic dimension of theatre, which remains contingent upon transfer, translation, mobility, and ultimately, access to the metropolitan center. They allow for a reassessment and reconceptualization of the history of nineteenth-century Polish theatre, revealing phenomena that were not inherently marginal, but were rendered marginal at various levels of history production.⁶

Transnational History of Theatre

Metropolitan centers, especially the capitals of empires, functioned as hubs through which the main theatrical circuits ran, along which people, works, capital, goods and ideas moved. As Christopher Balme and Nic Leonhardt note in the opening article of the inaugural issue of the aptly titled *Journal of Global Theatre History*:

This period saw a huge outflow of theatrical productions from metropolitan centres that brought the full gamut of performance genres from vaudeville acts to high opera to numerous towns and cities around the globe. In this economy of desire and gratification theatre was predicated on mobility and transience for

⁵ *Fanthropology*—a distinct field of study within media and cultural studies, a term coined by Aldona Kobus, *Fandom: Fanowskie modele odbioru* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2018), 20.

⁶ See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015).

its economic survival, and promised palpable connection with the metropolitan centres and ways of life. Theatre was thus a part of circulating consumer products, which need to be considered within a research paradigm that balances economic with ideological and aesthetic imperatives.⁷

From both the fan and migration perspectives, the history of Polish theatre inevitably emerges as a transnational history, breaking free from the constraints of "methodological nationalism," which had obscured the global flows, interconnections, and structural conditions of the early modern and modern worlds.⁸ The key links in this understanding of theatre history are mobile phenomena—these may be traveling performances, in particular musical productions, or people involved in various ways in the creation of stage performances. In this spirit, Len Platt describes how Anglo-Saxon musical comedies and modernized continental operettas circulated through metropolitan theaters, contributing to the emergence of a "common metropolitan culture" at the turn of the 20th century.⁹ Laurence Senelick, in turn, examines the staging of Offenbach's works in Rio de Janeiro (engulfed in "operetta fever" at the time), Cairo, and Yokohama, identifying musical theatre as a paradigmatic case of translocation—primarily due to its musical and visual dimensions, which easily lend themselves to universalization.¹⁰ In his analysis, Senelick employs the concept of "omni-localism," which Emily Greenwood introduced in relation to classical Greek and Roman literary works conceived as "cultural palimpsests." Omni-localism allows us to recognize both the local historical roots of these works, which are partially untranslatable, and their high potential for virtual "intercultural adaptation," which is defined only in the process of reception.¹¹ For this reason, the term "omni-local" can be understood as synonymous with "glocal." According to Senelick, different theatrical omni-local genres require various degrees of adaptation to local contexts: for example, performances of *commedia dell'arte* were subject to more extensive modification than opera performances, in which only the libretto underwent changes.

⁷ Christopher Balme and Nic Leonhardt, "Introduction: Theatrical Trade Routes," *Journal of Global Theatre History* 1, no. 1 (2016): 4, <https://doi.org/10.5282/gthj/5020>.

⁸ See Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and Social Sciences," *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 301–334, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00043>.

⁹ Len Platt, "Berlin/London: London/Berlin—an Outline of Cultural Transfer 1890–1914," in *Popular Musical Theatre in London and Berlin 1890–1914*, ed. Len Platt et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 25–43.

¹⁰ Laurence Senelick, "Musical Theatre as a Paradigm of Translocation," *Journal of Global Theatre History* 2, no. 1 (2017): 22–36, <https://doi.org/10.5282/gthj/5065>.

¹¹ Emily Greenwood, "Reception studies: The cultural mobility of classics," *Dædalus* 145, no. 2 (2016): 43–44, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24711574>.

Alternatively, the transnational history of theatre may focus not so much on the translocation of forms and genre titles, as in Platt or Senelick, but on the migrations of people, including performers, who literally embody theatrical mobility and, moving from place to place, spin a web of connections and dependencies. Many of them operated as centers of cultural transfer, functioning as human transmitters who facilitated the circulation of cultural fashions and the reshaping of social norms. As agents of cultural exchange, they frequently subverted prevailing paradigms of behavior and appearance—Sarah Bernhardt, the foremost star of French theatre, is a notable example—thereby stimulating experiments in identity. The reception of Bernhardt in Warsaw shows that already in the 19th century, the body and persona of a celebrity became “the site of intense work on the meaning of both individuality and collective identity.”¹²

Viewed through the prism of fan cultures and the celebrity culture intertwined with them –both a product of modern transformations and a driving force behind the modernization process¹³ –the history of theatre reveals an obvious yet understudied fact: stage artists were in constant motion. Their mobility was so extensive that it is often impossible to determine where “home” was, or whether it functioned merely as a symbolic point of reference.¹⁴ Opera performers traveled not only across Europe, Russia, the British Isles and North America, but also ventured frequently to South America. Among dramatic actors, only the aforementioned Sarah Bernhardt matched this scope of travel: she toured not only Europe, the United States and Canada, but also the Caribbean, South America and even Australia. Just as musical genres are more “mobile” than dramatic forms, singers also make up a particularly mobile and numerous groups among itinerant performers.

The Fan Perspective, the Migration Perspective

In December 1897, the weekly *Echo Muzyczne, Teatralne i Artystyczne* (EMT*iA*) released a note that illustrates the frequent and continuous migration of tenors, while also indicating the active, engaged, and predominantly female fan base in Warsaw.

¹² P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 241. For the reception of Bernhardt during her first guest performances in Warsaw, see Agata Łuksza, “Sarabernardyzacja, kwestia żydowska i upadek moralny: O warszawskich fankach Sary Bernhardt,” *Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna*, no. 159 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.34762/dv75-mgo6>.

¹³ Simon Morgan, “Celebrity,” *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 1 (2011): 96.

¹⁴ Not all artists led an itinerant lifestyle; a good counterexample is the greatest Warsaw comic of the 19th century, Alojzy Gonzaga Żółkowski, who never performed outside his native stage and generally never left Warsaw.

Tenors—such is a nation enjoying a special kind of patronage: that of female readers. We are inundated with letters requesting the addresses of these favorites of the theatrical world. Therefore, we reply here to all our kind correspondents: Jan Reszke will be performing in January with a German troupe in St Petersburg; [Władysław] Floriański has been engaged in Lviv; [Aleksander] Bandrowski has left Frankfurt for Italy, from where he will probably return to Berlin. [Aleksander] Myszuga will spend the entire year in Warsaw (Senatorska 22); [Ignacy] Warmuth is singing in Germany; [Marian] Alma is in Berlin; [Julian] Zakrzewski has abandoned his stage career and now lives in Kazań.¹⁵

This short text is an invaluable source for research on historical theatre fans. It can be inferred from it that opera lovers were keenly interested in obtaining information about the professional engagements of their favorite tenors, and thus in determining where they would be able to see them. Moreover, if fans had no way of “following” their idol, and the overwhelming majority of them were unable to travel freely for various reasons, they could at least learn where to send their letters. The fact that *EMTIA* published the exact address of Aleksander Myszuga, who was contracted as Warsaw’s leading tenor for the 1897/98 season after his spectacularly successful guest appearances in late spring 1897, is telling: it reveals that the social and physical distance separating nineteenth-century theatre stars from their fans was far smaller than it is today. The Warsaw audience adored Aleksander Myszuga primarily for his show-stopping roles in Stanisław Moniuszko’s most famous Polish operas: Jontek in *Halka* and Stefan in *Straszny dwór* (The Haunted Manor), as well as for his renditions of popular Polish sentimental songs. Although Myszuga came from a poor Ukrainian family, he nonetheless achieved remarkable success in the “Polish” repertoire; the late 1890s marked the height of his triumphs on the Warsaw stage.

The note published in *EMTIA* is no less revealing when considered in the context of theatrical migration. In the 1897/98 season, Jan Reszke performed not only in St Petersburg, but also in Paris and, of course, in London, where he sang regularly at the Royal Opera House during the summer months. Of the six singers mentioned—Polish, or at least identifying themselves as Polish to some degree—only two spent that season in “Polish” centers; and even then, Floriański, engaged in Lviv, was returning to his hometown after a decade in Prague, while Myszuga arrived in Warsaw from Kiev. In these relocations, none of them crossed a state border, yet the local context of their daily experience,

¹⁵ *Echo Muzyczne, Artystyczne i Teatralne*, no. 50 (1897): 597. Contrary to the claim made by *EMTIA*, Zakrzewski did not leave the stage and continued performing in various Russian cities until 1907.

professional work, and interaction with audiences changed dramatically. Not every tenor led an incessantly nomadic life, and not every season was spent on the move; the scale and duration of migrations varied. Nevertheless, the examples above demonstrate that the profession of an opera singer was, for the most part, inseparable from the need to navigate unfamiliar spaces, endure prolonged stays in new locales, and undertake extensive travel—an activity which, under unfavorable circumstances, could easily acquire the character of vagrancy.

A cursory analysis of the places of birth and death of the artists mentioned in the *EMTIA* article leads to similar conclusions—at least on average. Two singers were born and died in the same city, returning there after years of artistic migration and presumably regarding it as their “home”: Floriański in Lviv and Warmuth in Kraków. Bandrowski was born in Lubaczów in the Podkarpacie region, near the present-day Ukrainian border, and died 260 kilometers away in Kraków (thus remaining within the same political entity, the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and is buried in the Rakowicki Cemetery. Zakrzewski’s birthplace remains unknown, though he is believed to have come from a Ukrainian family in Galicia; he died in poverty in Kazań, a city with a relatively large Polish community (although Poles never exceeded 1.5% of its population). Alma was born in Zaleszczyki in Podolia, pursued much of his career on the German stage and died in Berlin, where he spent a substantial part of his life. Jan Reszke, a native of Warsaw, worked for many years with the Metropolitan Opera in New York and, in the 1890s, purchased an estate in Szydłów near Częstochowa, which served as his Polish “home.” He spent his final years in Nice, where he founded a singing school, and is buried in the Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris. Finally, Myszuga, born in the village of Wiktów Nowy near Bełż, spent the end of his life in Stockholm and died in a sanatorium near Freiburg im Breisgau.

A seemingly trivial note in one of the Warsaw weeklies of the late 19th century, a minor historical detail, almost a “curiosity,” gains significance from both a fan and a migration perspective, becoming a signpost in the theatre archive.

Theatre Migrants Against the Backdrop of the Era

I regard artistic peregrinations as emblematic of the unprecedented scale of migration in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Migration became a widespread phenomenon during this period—initially among Western European and German populations, and, from the 1880s onward, increasingly among Slavic and southern European communities. As Eric Hobsbawm observes:

The middle of the nineteenth century marks the beginning of the greatest migrations of peoples in history. Its exact details can hardly be measured, for the official statistics, such as they were then, fail to capture all the movements of men and women within countries or even between states: the rural exodus towards the cities, the migration between regions and from town to town, the crossing of oceans and the penetration of frontier zones, the flux of men and women moving back and forth in ways even more difficult to specify.¹⁶

Opera artists participated in this migratory "wave," crossing continents and oceans in search of fame, a breakthrough in their careers, better pay or new professional opportunities. Their "journeys" were unique in that singers at the turn of the 20th century worked in an environment with a centuries-old tradition of migration—they functioned in the "omni-local" (glocal) medium of opera. It can therefore be said that they were driven to migrate not only by the fever of the era, but also by the specific characteristics of their profession.

Contrary to the long-standing image of the nineteenth-century migrant as an uprooted and alienated "fugitive," lost in the modern urban crowd—a figure that also appears in Hobsbawm's reflections—subsequent research has highlighted the central role of family and friendship networks in historical migration, particularly among the working classes. A. Gordon Darroch argues that migrants' routes were often shaped by the presence of relatives and acquaintances at their destination, whose support facilitated their "domestication" and entry into the labor market.¹⁷ Professional migration, by contrast, typically involved individuals from the upper classes who moved in response to pre-arranged job offers; yet even in these cases, such offers frequently stemmed from pre-existing familial or social connections. However, I have no reason to assume that the first performances in Warsaw of Waydel-Dmochowska's favorite Italian singers—Gemma Bellincioni and Giuseppe Anselmi—occurred under such circumstances. It is more likely that Warsaw, then part of the Russian Empire, entered their itineraries for purely professional reasons, serving as a convenient stop "on the way" to Russian cities popular among Western opera artists, above all St Petersburg. Their subsequent visits—both singers returned regularly during the first decade of the twentieth century—may have contributed to their gradual sense of being more "settled" in the area and at the Grand Theatre, helping them develop new social and personal connections with local residents.

¹⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875* (London: Abacus, 1995), 228.

¹⁷ A. Gordon Darroch, "Migrants in the Nineteenth Century: Fugitives or Families in Motion," *Journal of Family History* 6, no. 3 (1981): 257–277.

Gemma Bellincioni and Giuseppe Anselmi

Gemma Bellincioni, known as the “opera Duse,” made her first appearance in Warsaw on December 20, 1901 during a symphony concert at the Philharmonic on Moniuszki Street, where she performed, among other works, an aria from *Tosca*—a number she was asked to repeat at the audience’s insistence. “At last, we have heard the voice of the world-famous Gemma Bellincioni,” wrote a critic for *Kurier Poranny*. “It is a pity that we hear her a dozen years too late, for I can easily imagine what kind of artist she once was, since even today, with only the remnants of her voice, she makes such an impression on listeners.”¹⁸ She did not appear in the opera repertoire of the Grand Theatre until the following year, on November 3, 1902, thereby beginning a long series of performances that continued for nearly a decade. Giuseppe Anselmi, on the other hand, made his debut in Warsaw on October 2, 1902 and signed subsequent contracts with the Grand Theatre for the winter seasons of 1903/04 and 1904/05, as well as for short performances in December 1906. He sang for the Warsaw audience for the last time at a concert on May 4, 1909. Waydel-Dmochowska most likely remembered most vividly the seasons in which both artists were in Warsaw simultaneously—namely the winters of 1902/03, 1903/04, and 1904/05.

Bellincioni was born in 1864 in Monza, Lombardy, and made her debut in 1880 at the Teatro della Societa Filarmonica in Naples. Opera was quite literally in her blood as she was the daughter of a pair of singers—bass Cesare Bellincioni and contralto Carlotta Savoldini. Waydel-Dmochowska’s “beloved” singer performed mainly in Europe (especially in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany, Portugal, and Italy), but she also enjoyed great success in Argentina.¹⁹ It was in 1886, during her first trip to that country, at the age of twenty-two, on a ship to Buenos Aires, suffering from seasickness, that she met the love of her life, the forty-six-year-old Sicilian tenor Roberto Stagno. They came ashore as a couple, triggering a media sensation, since Stagno—like many leading singers of the period—was widely viewed as a transnational idol and global celebrity.²⁰

The turning point in Bellincioni’s artistic biography is considered to be her performance in the premiere of Pietro Mascagni’s opera *Cavalleria Rusticana* at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome on May 17, 1890, where she played Santuzza

¹⁸ *Kurier Poranny*, no. 353 (1901): 3.

¹⁹ For more on Italian immigration to Buenos Aires and its influence on the local opera scene, see John Rosselli, “The Opera Business and the Italian Immigrant Community in Latin America 1820–1930: The Example of Buenos Aires,” *Past & Present* 127 (May 1990): 155–182.

²⁰ The love story of Bellincioni and Stagno, based on the singer’s memoirs: Gemma Bellincioni, *Io e il palcoscenico: Trenta e un anno di vita artistica* (Milan: Società Anonima Editoriale Dott. R. Quintieri, 1920).

alongside Stagno as Turiddu. From then on, Bellincioni consistently performed in the new Italian repertoire as the star of Umberto Giordano's *Fedora* and *Mala vita* and Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca*, becoming one of the leading figures of verismo, which seemed to best correspond to her stage temperament, acting skills, and vocal character. Yet she also excelled in roles of a different kind, such as Violetta in Verdi's *La Traviata* and the title role in Bizet's *Carmen*. Her last major creation was Salome: following the Italian premiere of Richard Strauss's opera in Turin in 1900, she performed the role more than a hundred times, and it was as Salome that she "said goodbye" to the audience, retiring in 1911.²¹ Although she officially concluded her stage career at that point, she continued to make occasional appearances on European stages in the following years—for example, in Warsaw in 1912. She died in 1950 in Naples, where she had been teaching singing at the Conservatorio di Musica San Pietro a Majella since the early 1930s.

Giuseppe Anselmi was born in 1876 in Nicolosi, near Catania in Sicily, and began his musical career as a violinist at the age of thirteen. He made his operatic debut in 1896 in the Greek city of Patras, singing the role of Turiddu in *Cavalleria Rusticana*—a part first created by Roberto Stagno. In this way, Anselmi embarked on his operatic career at a moment when Bellincioni had already reached the height of hers. His acclaimed performances at London's Covent Garden in 1901 brought him international renown. Like Bellincioni, he also travelled to Buenos Aires with great success, though his most enthusiastic receptions came in Spain and the Russian Empire. He retired in 1918 and died in 1929 in Zoagli, near Rapallo in Liguria. His final public appearance, fittingly, was as a violinist in Rapallo in 1926.²²

The Anselmists and Battistinists

Anselmi was particularly favored by the Warsaw public, especially the Warsaw women. His female admirers, among them Waydel-Dmochowska, were known as "the Anselmists" and were frequently contrasted with "the Battistinists," the female fans of Mattia Battistini. In the press, these two fandoms were portrayed as antagonistic camps waging a kind of war for the primacy of "their" idol, despite the fact that Battistini—born in 1856—was twenty years Anselmi's senior and a baritone. Theaters' repertoire policies may have contributed to this

²¹ See Nicolas Stonimski and Laura Kuhn, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, vol. 1 (New York: Schirmer Books, 2001), 280.

²² Stonimski and Kuhn, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 93.

rivalry, since both singers appeared on the Warsaw stage in the same romantic role: Werther in Massenet's wildly popular opera. Local journalists, critics, and satirists mercilessly teased both groups of admirers. A satirical weekly, *Mucha*, for instance, proposed an "educational game" *Anselmi or Battistini: Pieces to be Assembled into a Whole and Kissed*. Meanwhile, in another magazine, *Kolce*, in October 1903, as Anselmi's second Warsaw season was beginning—extended by nearly a month and lasting until December 20—a short poem appeared that clearly relegated his admirers to the realm of illness, madness, and pathology:

—Why is everyone so cheerful today?
I cannot grasp it—go on, blow me away!
—Oh, naïve soul, have you not read
That Anselmi himself has come ahead?
He'll gather rubles and laurel once more,
As he has done so often before,
And Tworki will grow, as the tale persists,
By three new Anselmist ladies in its lists!²³

Apparently, dying for the love of Anselmi seemed almost befitting, and the female audience literally showered the singer with flowers. This applied both to the wealthier spectators and to the general crowd, whose enthusiasm was regularly hushed during his performances.

It was not only the satirical press that criticized the behavior of Anselmists—rebuks came from multiple quarters. An article published in the daily *Kurier Codzienny* in January 1904, shortly after Anselmi's departure from the city, sheds light on which practices of the Warsaw Anselmists and Battistinists were considered particularly unacceptable:

The raging enthusiasm of the Anselmists and Battistinists, which knew no bounds, found its outlet in expressions of outrage in our serious press. In *Biesiada Literacka*, Sęp added his fair and forceful voice to those condemning such unhealthy and undesirable behavior among us. When Marysia, in the village, throws herself at Bartek and waits for him outside the tavern—just as ladies once lingered outside theaters for singers to come out—he responds by spitting on the ground. The singers, though more polite, must have harbored similar disdain for these women, who had clearly forgotten their dignity. When one particularly daring enthusiast,

²³ Anon., *Kolce*, no. 40 (1903): 2. "Tworki" refers to a town near Warsaw, known for the psychiatric hospital established there in 1891.

unable to act boldly before an audience, exclaimed, "I would swallow you whole," the singer replied with an indulgent smile: "And what would you do with Marcus Aurelius if he dismounted to approach you?" . . . This lamentable tableau—a kind of moral decay that permits such foolish antics among female admirers of Italian singers—reveals that a lack of proper upbringing and dignity is becoming increasingly common.²⁴

The key word, repeated twice, is therefore "dignity"—the practices of Italian singers' fans, such as waiting for the artist in front of the theatre, openly expressing admiration, including erotic fascination, and public excitement, were recognized as "undignified," and thus violating the social norms of emotional restraint and control imposed on women, especially in their relationships with men. The column in *Kolce* clearly pathologized Anselmi's admirers:

Do you see those crowds gathered at the theatre gates, squeezed in among carriages and carts? Do you see how they wait restlessly, whispering, ready at any moment to burst into shrieks? . . . And suddenly a mighty uproar erupts. Is it joy, or is it despair? . . . "Anselmi! Anselmi!" The theatre moths cry out: "Anselmi! Anselmi!" The women's eyes bulge like owls, their hair flushes red, and they start wailing: "Oh, Anselmi! Oh, Anselmi! Ooooooh, Anselmi!"²⁵

However, it ended with a striking postscript: "Truth be told, why should we be angry with women for what men are forgiven for?"²⁶ Importantly, if the press of the time is to be believed, Anselmi's fandom was formed almost immediately during his first stay in Warsaw. The artist instantly became "the darling of the Warsaw audience," charming his listeners, "especially the ladies, whose hearts he made beat faster."²⁷ During his farewell performance in 1902—naturally in the role of Werther—he was engulfed by "a literal flood of flowers," while the ovation swelled into "prolonged applause" and countless curtain calls.²⁸ In this atmosphere, Anselmi left Warsaw on December 11, 1902, after more than two months of continuous success, which started with his debut on October 2 in *Rigoletto*, and set off to perform in Odessa.

²⁴ Anon., *Kurier Codzienny*, no. 12 (1904): 2.

²⁵ Hen-Ryk, "Felieton Kolców: Nie-ludzka komedia," *Kolce*, no. 49 (1903): 9.

²⁶ Hen-Ryk, "Felieton Kolców," 9.

²⁷ Anon., *Kurier Poranny*, no. 305 (1902): 2.

²⁸ Anon., *Kurier Poranny*, no. 343 (1902): 3.

The Season for Italian Opera

After a successful concert at the Philharmonic in 1902, Bellincioni returned to Warsaw, this time on a contract with the Grand Theatre, where she performed for two whole months, beginning and ending with Verdi's *La Traviata* (on November 3 and December 2, respectively).²⁹ She therefore chose a low-risk and well-known repertoire for her first performance; the audience had to wait another two weeks for Santuzza, and more than a year for Tosca. Over the next decade, Warsaw audiences could also see Bellincioni in works such as Ruggero Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* and *Zazà*, Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and *La Bohème* (all of them her signature roles), in the new French opera *La Pastorale des chèvres* by Gabriel Dupont, and in *Manuel Mendez* by Lorenzo Filiasi, as well as in Francesco Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*, Gaetano Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Jules Massenet's *Manon*, the less characteristic for the artist *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette* by Charles Gounod, and finally in the entirely separate *Salome* by Richard Strauss.

As a journalist from *Kurier Poranny* reported after the first *Traviata*: "The fame of Gemma Bellincioni . . . filled the hall to the brim,"³⁰ and during her stay in the city, the box office was reportedly not opened at all, as all seats were always sold out. Bellincioni quickly "sang her way into the hearts of Warsaw residents," enchanting the local audience, who showered her with exceptional adoration. "It had been a long time since the Grand Theatre had seen such enthusiastic, such rapturous, such boundless exaltation. . . . The entire performance yesterday was one big and well-deserved ovation," wrote a *Kurier Poranny* critic about the singer's farewell performance in early December 1902. "After the third act, amid a storm of applause, Ms. Bellincioni was presented with three magnificent baskets of flowers and several beautiful bouquets on the open stage. After the opera ended, the artist was called back eighteen times."³¹

When Anselmi and Bellincioni met in Warsaw in the autumn of 1902, captivating both audiences and critics—especially in their joint performances of *La Traviata* and *Cavalleria rusticana*—they stood at very different points in their international careers. This invites reflection on when and under what circumstances foreign artists came to Warsaw. When Anselmi first appeared on the

²⁹ It is difficult to explain why Bellincioni did not perform in Warsaw earlier. In 1894, before the groundbreaking premiere of *Cavalleria rusticana*, she gave concerts with Stagno in Kraków and Lviv, and in 1896 she appeared in Lviv again. Her late arrival on the Warsaw stage was most likely due to the immense popularity of this pair of singers among the Viennese audience.

³⁰ Anon., *Kurier Poranny*, no. 305 (1902): 2.

³¹ Anon., *Kurier Poranny*, no. 335 (1902): 2.

stage of the Grand Theatre in October 1902, his career was only just beginning to gather momentum. Meanwhile, Bellincioni, twelve years his senior, had already reached megastar status, attained the height of her fame, and was slowly starting to ease her pace. In fact, as early as 1902 the Warsaw press was hinting that Bellincioni's best years were behind her and that her voice was "ruined." To be fair, she was celebrated less for the quality of her voice than for her dramatic interpretation and acting talent—qualities that suited the spirit of the age perfectly. A critic for *Kurier Warszawski* noted that the audience "appreciated the high artistry of Ms. Bellincioni's interpretation in every role, even though the vocal aspect did not always go hand in hand with the spiritual qualities of her performance and the profound attributes of her stage acting."³²

Bellincioni and Anselmi repeated their 1902 success in the next two autumn seasons. Anselmi, now hailed as "one of the world's greatest singers," returned to Warsaw on October 1, and Bellincioni joined him on November 3, appearing with him in *La Traviata* and achieving "spectacular triumphs." Together they introduced *Tosca* to the Warsaw stage, where it enjoyed "complete and unwavering success." As a result, both artists extended their stay and did not leave Warsaw until December 20. After their departure, silence settled over the Grand Theatre: "the storms of applause have temporarily subsided, the morbid, almost hysterical outbursts of delight have died down."³³

Bellincioni's next season in Warsaw began on November 10, 1904; Anselmi's two weeks later. Once again, both artists were met with an excellent—and at times almost "morbidly" enthusiastic—reception, though they appeared together less frequently than before. Rumors circulated that the two were competing for the favor of the Warsaw audience:

A truly southern temperature prevails here at the performances of the Italian opera... It is intensified by the hot blood of the two singers currently visiting the Grand Theater: Bellincioni and Anselmi. . . . It is a matter of little importance: merely settling the doubt as to who enjoys greater success in Warsaw.³⁴

According to a reviewer for *Kurier Warszawski*, the two artists kept a close eye on the attendance at their performances, and the laurels of victory ultimately went to Bellincioni. As a farewell gesture, she received truly regal gifts from members

³² Anon., *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 334 (1902): 1–2.

³³ Anon., *Goniec Poranny*, no. 12 (1904): 2.

³⁴ Anon., *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 352 (1904): 2.

of the Polish aristocracy: from Margravine Zygmuntowa Wielopolska, “a gold chain ending in a large diamond bow, from which hung beautiful large turquoise pendants engraved with gold hieroglyphs,” and from Countess Natalia Potocka, “a gold *porte-bonheur* set with a large turquoise surrounded by diamonds.”³⁵ At the turn of 1905, the joint performances of Bellincioni and Anselmi in Warsaw, which had left such a deep impression on Waydel-Dmochowska, came to an irrevocable end.

Anselmi appeared in the opera repertoire only once more, stopping in Warsaw for several performances in December 1906 on his way to St Petersburg, and he likely made his final appearance before the capital's audience on May 4, 1909 at a concert. Bellincioni, on the other hand, returned to Warsaw after a long break to sing at a symphony concert on April 5, 1907, while traveling from St Petersburg to Rome, and two days later performed in *Tosca*—a production hastily arranged at the special request of the audience. She visited Warsaw twice in 1908: in May for several performances, including the premiere of *Salome*, and again for the entire month of December, when she sang in *Madama Butterfly*. She returned once more in November 1909, coming directly from Vienna to give eight performances, including her first Warsaw appearance in *Zazà*. Felicjan Szopski wrote about her reception in *Gazeta Warszawska*:

This adoration of Bellincioni, adoration not by individuals but by the entire audience, is currently a rather strange phenomenon, because it somewhat contradicts the fact that it is mainly the technical virtuosity of singers that generally impresses our listeners. It is truly unusual for the atmosphere in the hall to be so heated, for there to be such overwhelming absorption with a singer.³⁶

Bellincioni's final performance in the capital took place on April 20, 1912, after she had officially retired from her stage career.

During the joint Warsaw seasons of Bellincioni and Anselmi, there was usually at least one other artist of Italian origin, which led Warsaw critics to refer—somewhat sarcastically—to the months of their presence as the “Italian craze.” The schedule announced in the press for the autumn of 1902 was as follows: beginning in October, Anselmi and the baritone Antonio Magini-Coletti, who was already nearing the end of his career, were to appear in Warsaw; in November they were joined by Bellincioni and the baritone Mario Ancona,

³⁵ Anon., *Kurier Poranny*, no. 354 (1904): 3.

³⁶ Felicjan Szopski, “Z ruchu muzycznego,” *Gazeta Warszawska* no. 336 (1909): 2.

particularly popular with American audiences; and finally, in December, Battistini and Regina Pinkertówna, a local artist associated with the Italian stage, were scheduled to perform. It is worth noting that Bellincioni and Anselmi sang both older operas and the latest works, but their repertoire remained exclusively Italian or French.

In December 1903, when Warsaw was in a frenzy over *Tosca*, Władysław Rabski, known for his critical stance toward all cultural fads, mocked the situation in *Kurier Warszawski*:

Warsaw has gone berserk with those Italians. We rave about Anselmi, we are in love with Bellincioni, we long for Battistini, we fight over tickets to Italian operas, in the salons we speak only Italian, and soon—just wait!—we shall be eating nothing but pasta. Oh! Our little “Warszawka” is so very silly, so very silly indeed!³⁷

A year earlier, on the occasion of the anniversary of Bolesław Leszczyński, one of the most popular and highly regarded dramatic artists of the Warsaw stage in the 19th century, the newspaper *Goniec Polski* wrote:

The Grand Theatre was filled to capacity—not, to be sure, with the audience that regularly attends performances by Bellincioni, Anselmi, et consortes, but with people who loved art for art’s sake and genuinely adored, even worshiped, its performers, as evidenced by the cascade of ovations prepared for our veteran of the stage.³⁸

On the one hand, critics praised the performances of Italian artists and rhapsodized about the “artistry” of their singing, yet on the other hand, they regarded the artists’ admirers—especially female admirers—with dislike, even outright hostility, as shown by the satirical pieces targeting the fans of Anselmists and Battistinists. I believe that one reason for this critical stance and for the media portrayal of female fans of Italian opera singers was the foreignness of these performers—their status as “non-native.”³⁹ Female admirers of Myszuga, who was indeed a “Ruthenian but excelled in the repertoire of Moniuszko and Bandrowski, were viewed more favorably because their devotion could be framed in

³⁷ Kaprys [Władysław Rabski], “O czym mówią,” *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 335 (1903): 7.

³⁸ Anon., *Goniec Polski*, nr 170 (1902): 4.

³⁹ For more on the Warsaw critics’ unfavorable attitude toward “excessive” displays of adoration for foreign—or for Polish—artists who nevertheless kept distance from patriotic themes, see Agata Łuksza, *Tort Marcella: Kultury fanowskie w teatrze XIX wieku* (Kraków: Universitas, 2023).

patriotic terms. In the case of Anselmi and Battistini, no such cultural or social “legitimization” of fandom was possible.

For Bellincioni and Anselmi, Warsaw must have seemed a peripheral city with an odd dichotomy, where generally favorable critique was tinged with the frequently lamented pervasive “Italian craze.” These complaints were, of course, shaped by political and historical circumstances—primarily the period of repression following the January Uprising, when the Russian administration deliberately engaged only Italian artists during the prime months to undermine Polish opera. Bellincioni and Anselmi, however, were not necessarily aware of this context.

Feels Like Home?

While it is possible to trace, to some extent, the routes that brought Italian artists to Warsaw, these reconstructions do not clarify whether there were locations along these routes that Anselmi or Bellincioni could genuinely consider as “home.” We cannot say with confidence that they arrived in Warsaw “from home,” nor that they were returning “home” when they left. Warsaw, by virtue of its location, was always “on the way”: in 1902, Bellincioni traveled on to Lviv after her performances, while Anselmi continued to Odessa. One might also ask whether Warsaw could have become a kind of “home” during a longer stay, even if only for two months, as in Anselmi’s autumn 1903 season. Tamara Nahrub notes that the phrase “feel at home” denotes “the highest degree of familiarity and closeness,”⁴⁰ and that settling into a new place requires time.⁴¹ Yet how can we measure—or compare—the way a nomadic opera artist experiences time with that of someone who travels rarely or not at all, such as Alojzy Żółkowski? Is a two-month stay sufficient for such an artist to truly “feel at home”? To what extent does professional status—perhaps even that of an international celebrity—shape the process of settling into new places? These questions comprise the broader challenge of understanding “home” for a person who lives in near-constant motion, for whom every stop is temporary, even in a place officially regarded as “home,” or, more broadly, as homeland.

⁴⁰ Tamara Nahrub, “Współczesne formy wyobcowania: Tożsamość w ruchu: migrant i nomada,” *Etyka* 58, no. 1 (2019): 104.

⁴¹ Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller, “Introduction: Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration,” in *Uprootings/Regroundings Questions of Home and Migration*, ed. Sara Ahmed et al. (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), 9.

Recalling the 1904–05 season—when the premiere of *The Goatherd*, in which she sang the lead role, created a sensation on European opera stages—Bellincioni later admitted that by the end of the tour she was utterly exhausted and distraught. The burdens, sacrifices, and hardships of life as a “famous artist,” constantly touring, perpetually in the spotlight, and performing day after day for an ever-present audience, had worn her down. She longed instead for “a quiet, peaceful home” where she could “live in [her] own way” (*la pace tranquillo di una casa dove poter vivere a modo mio!*).⁴² Here, “home” can be understood as a refuge—an intimate, protected space shielded from the demands of the outside world (fans included), a place where one could breathe, and where the public persona of the celebrity, though never fully absent, need not be incessantly performed. In other words, “home” would be a Goffmanian backstage. The rented apartments in Milan or Paris, where Bellincioni was based during her engagements, evidently could not fulfill this need for “domestication.” It is plausible, however, that this role was played by the magnificent Tuscan Villa Morazzana—a twenty-room estate in the hills of Livorno near Monterotondo—which Bellincioni and her husband purchased in the 1890s.⁴³ There, she would withdraw for several months each year after a demanding season, resting and studying new roles and operas. Ultimately, both she and Stagno were buried in the Montenero cemetery in Livorno, despite dying in different cities (she in Naples, he in Genoa).

The Tuscan Villa Morazzana also figures in Bellincioni’s biography as a home in the most traditional sense of the word, a home that is “rooted,” constructed “in relation to a specific geographical space,”⁴⁴ as Nahrub writes, in this case her native country. Villa Morazzana was a home of choice, established jointly by Bellincioni and Stagno, and which also became the family home of their daughter, Bianca (who was, however, born in Budapest). Situated within the boundaries of their homeland in the most literal sense, it was anchored in the place of origin to which both singers felt a strong emotional attachment. Bellincioni returned there regularly, yet she never spent the greater part of her life at the villa. During her active career, she was on tour for most of the year, and after retiring, she did not settle in Livorno but instead taught singing in various European cities—Berlin, Vienna, and finally Naples. It is as if she were never quite able to anchor in her own “home.”

⁴² Bellincioni, *Io e il palcoscenico*, 129–130.

⁴³ The residence, built around 1765, currently belongs to the municipality of Livorno and has been closed since 2012. Previously, it served, among other purposes, as a shelter, an exhibition space, and—perhaps most strikingly in the context of reflections on migration and home—a center for refugees.

⁴⁴ Nahrub, “Współczesne formy wyobcowania,” 105.

A Nomadic Home

Bellincioni's memoirs also suggest the possibility of establishing a sense of home in a new environment—one not tied to the absolutist notion of a birth-place or “roots.” She referred to Warsaw as her “second adopted homeland,” *mia seconda patria di adozione*, describing her bond with its audiences in the context of that harrowing year of 1905, when she was suffering from professional burnout:

Warsaw was waiting for me in the autumn. . . how could I turn back? . . . Dear Warsaw! . . . my second adopted homeland, where I experienced the greatest joys of my artistic life. In Warsaw, the audience loved me. . . I was *l'enfant gâté*; for to love an artist is more than simply to admire them. I felt this warm affection flowing toward me from the audience every time I stepped onto the stage. . . and it strengthened my resolve, driving me to give my very best in every performance, with a burning desire to be loved even more.⁴⁵

However, the notion of home rooted in the absolutist paradigm ultimately prevailed over the sense of home that emerged within the nomadic one. Although Bellincioni initially postponed her Warsaw performances planned for the autumn of 1905 to the spring of 1906, she did not, in fact, return to her “second homeland” for any extended period until 1908. When interpreting her memoirs, the phrase “second homeland” may therefore appear to be little more than a rhetorical flourish—especially since Warsaw is mentioned only once in the entire book. It is worth remembering, however, that Bellincioni's memoirs do not constitute a comprehensive artistic autobiography. She devotes very little space to *Tosca* and omits *Madama Butterfly* altogether, despite the enormous significance of both operas for her reception in Warsaw. It seems that Bellincioni intended her autobiography to shape and reinforce the memory of herself as a great opera artist primarily by highlighting her professional and personal bond with Roberto Stagno. The events after Stagno's death in 1897—including her Warsaw engagements—are compressed into a single chapter, the tenth and final one, even though she continued to perform intensively for nearly fifteen more years, a period that constituted almost half of her “artistic life.” Thus, the limited presence of Warsaw in her memoirs does not diminish the significance the city held in her personal experience.

⁴⁵ Bellincioni, *Io e il palcoscenico*, 130.

We can quote an excerpt from *Goniec Poranny* from 1904, which vividly echoes Bellincioni's words:

Cara Polonia, how I love you! I assure you that nowhere else do I sing with such satisfaction and joy as in Warsaw. What a refined, intelligent audience! Of course, it is pleasant to be applauded in any country, but where art is felt and understood so deeply and so earnestly—that is where an artist most gladly sings. And that is why I think of my performances in Warsaw with such delight.⁴⁶

This is what Bellincioni reportedly told one of the Warsaw correspondents—a declaration that greatly pleased the columnist, Kazimierz Bartoszewicz, until he browsed the foreign press. There he discovered that she was equally effusive about audiences in other countries. Emphasizing the uniqueness of the local audience and the special bond between it and the celebrity was, in fact, a common promotional strategy for transnational opera stars and a form of publicity. *Cara Polonia*, *Cara Germania*, *Cara Spagna*. . . the same mantra, the same rhetoric, the same role, the same flattery for everyone. Its purpose was to reassure each audience of its primacy in the artist's professional and emotional life. The difference between the text in *Goniec Poranny* and the passage in Bellincioni's memoirs, however, lies in the contexts in which these similar phrases were used. In 1904, Bellincioni needed to cultivate her public image and court audiences so that theaters would continue to offer her engagements and pay her appropriately high fees. In 1920, when she published her autobiography, she was already retired from the stage, and her statements were far less shaped by immediate professional necessity. Notably, in her memoirs she refers to no other place where she performed as her "second homeland," even though she acknowledges the admiration she enjoyed in Vienna and Buenos Aires. I am therefore inclined to think that there was a kernel of sincerity in her words about Warsaw, and that they point to the existence of an alternative understanding of "home" in the life of an artistic migrant—a form of "nomadic" home grounded in a relativistic approach to space. As Tamara Nahrub writes:

According to this concept, home is not a fixed location, but a particular set of relationships that can be reproduced. . . . Unlike a rooted home, a nomadic home is neither stable nor unambiguous; it cannot serve as a permanent point of reference

⁴⁶ Kazimierz Bartoszewicz, "Postscriptum," *Goniec Poranny*, nr 325 (1904): 2.

or a foundation of identity. Such a home can be recreated repeatedly throughout life by “domesticating” different spaces.⁴⁷

Home is therefore understood as a virtual entity—a set of conditions, properties, and expectations that must be met for it to be constituted in different geographical locations, including those that are spatially and culturally distant from a home defined in the absolutist sense, rooted in the place of origin. The potential for home travels with the artist, yet it is seldom fully activated, allowing only a partial sense of being “at home.” I wonder whether the primary condition for the constitution of home, in the case of a transnational celebrity, might be the relationship they establish with the audience—the local affective economy, the flow of emotions between stage and spectators. Bellincioni, in distinguishing between “admiration” and “love,” suggested that it is love that opens the possibility of truly settling down. I would argue that this distinction also delineates the boundary of fandom: transcending mere admiration and entering the realm of love—manifested as a parasocial relationship—may be the defining feature of fandom from this perspective.

I am not familiar with Anselmi’s analogous notes, but the singer reportedly instructed that, after his death, his heart be placed in a crystal casket and sent to the Teatro Real in Madrid, where he had achieved his greatest triumphs and shared his most intimate connection with the audience. In 1925, when the Museo del Teatro Real collection was being established, Anselmi wrote:

In response to the kind request to send a memento of my humble self to the Museo del Teatro Real, I must answer very simply: I am still alive. My chest still holds that muscular and impulsive dynamo we call the heart, upon which are engraved the words: “Spain, faith, gratitude, love.” . . . Therefore, I dictate my will that it be placed next to the bust of the divine Gayarre.⁴⁸

Anselmi made his debut in Madrid on January 27, 1907, immediately securing a high fee of 3,000 lire per performance, and despite the passage of time, he remained a favorite of the Madrid audience.⁴⁹ Undoubtedly, his success in the Spanish capital shaped his subsequent European tours—he never returned to

⁴⁷ Nahrub, “Współczesne formy wyobcowania,” 106.

⁴⁸ Cited in Begoña Torres Gallardo and Chloe Sharpe, “La laringe de Julián Gayarre (1844–1890): El símbolo de la voz de un genio,” *Revista de Investigaciones en Técnica Vocal* 4, no. 2 (2017): 18, <https://revistas.unlp.edu.ar/r1teV/article/view/3854>. The Spanish tenor Julián Gayarre is considered one of the greatest opera singers of all time.

⁴⁹ Joaquín Turina Gómez, *Historia del Teatro Real* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1997), 227.

Warsaw. The love of the Madrid audience allowed the singer to “domesticate” a new space, where he had initially been a stranger. The decision to separate his heart from the body buried in the cathedral in Catania—a home understood in absolutist terms—and transfer it to Madrid is perhaps even more telling than Bellincioni’s self-narrative. It serves as a historical trace of the existence of nomadic homes for migrant artists: with homes that could be created anywhere, a unique parasocial relationship formed between a celebrity and their audience.

However, considering that both Bellincioni and Anselmi were born, died and were buried within a single nation state to which they constantly returned, the nomadic home, understood as a virtual concept, as a portable potential for settling down, does not necessarily exclude the existence of a “rooted” home. It seems that in the case of migrant artists, both experiences of home coexisted (or could coexist), travel and the accompanying domestication of a place that was originally foreign did not negate the affective power of “roots,” just as the possession of an absolutist “homeland,” small or large, did not preclude the chance to feel at home somewhere else.

In the figure of the nomadic artist—part vagabond, part cosmopolitan—not only do two opposing models of home meet, but different patterns and modes of migration, as well as various types of wanderers of the modern and postmodern eras, converge. Writing in the context of today’s consumer society, in which time and space have contracted while attitudes toward them remain both diverse and hierarchical, Zygmunt Bauman distinguished between the paradigms of those “high up” (tourists) and those “low down” (vagabonds). The former is a thrill-seeker chasing after new desires, a wanderer by choice, for whom constant travel constitutes the optimal life strategy. The latter is constrained by local ties; if on the move, it is not by choice, nor necessarily toward places they would like to head:

The tourists have a horror of the vagabonds for much the same reason that the vagabonds look up to the tourists as their gurus and idols: in the society of travelers, in the travelling society, tourism and vagrancy are two faces of the same coin. The vagabond, let us repeat, is the alter ego of the tourist. The line which divides them is tenuous and not always clearly drawn.⁵⁰

Bauman’s diagnosis, grounded in processes dating back to the second half of the 19th century, speaks to the historical underside of European cosmopolitanism intertwined with the idea of cultural openness, that is to xenophobia, colonialism,

⁵⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 96.

racism, and, ultimately, to the “forced mobility for those who do not belong, those who are expelled, and those who are not let in.”⁵¹ An examination of the biographies of stage artists at the turn of the 20th century, including opera singers, reveals the closeness of the two statuses—tourist and vagabond—their permeability and interdependence. To what extent did a member of a touring company move from city to city out of excitement for constant travel, and to what extent because they were compelled to, unable to sign a permanent contract? To what extent was the professional burnout Bellincioni experienced in 1905 a consequence of the relentless necessity to travel from one metropolis to another, which had seemed so alluring from afar? Half tourists, half vagabonds, nomadic artists embodied both the opportunities and the perils of modern mobility.

Contact Zones

I believe that both Bellincioni and Anselmi were able to feel at home in the foreign places their artistic careers took them—Anselmi “domesticated” Madrid, and Bellincioni, at least temporarily (for a nomadic home is, by its very nature, unstable and fleeting), Warsaw. Yet neither of them ever fully severed their ties to their homeland, to their “rooted” home, which ultimately became both their final resting place, their beginning and their end. As Italian opera singers, they carried a “piece” of that home with them wherever they went. Whether performing in Buenos Aires, Milan, or London, they primarily sang Italian librettos set to music by Italian composers, resorting to French only when necessary. As Italians, they occupied a privileged position in the global operatic world, a status derived from their belonging to Italian culture and its centuries-old operatic tradition. Their experience of migration thus differed significantly from that of, for example, Polish or Ukrainian nomadic artists.

During the heyday of Bellincioni and Anselmi, Italian opera remained influential, even as its period of absolute dominance was waning, particularly due to the rise of Wagner and German-language musical theatre more broadly. Its female face was consciously and deliberately—but also out of personal preference—Bellincioni, who promoted the “new opera” and worked closely with its leading composers. Notably, the composers of verismo, such as Ruggero Leoncavallo and especially Pietro Mascagni, also enjoyed star status. Bellincioni recalls one evening when she and Stagno attended a performance of *Werther* at

⁵¹ Mimi Scheller, “Cosmopolitanism and Mobilities,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Maria Rovisco and Magdalena Nowicka (Farnham: Ashgate 2011), 349.

the Vienna Opera. During the second act, Mascagni, then reveling in the success of *Cavalleria rusticana*, entered the theatre. All eyes immediately turned to the "Maestro's box," and as soon as he left, a "literal boxing match" broke out among the audience for his autograph. Apparently, if someone could not find a piece of paper, they were just as happy to obtain the Maestro's signature on a shirt cuff.⁵² Bellincioni also notes that there was a genuine "mania" (*una vera mania*) for collecting autographs from artists, and she herself often spent long hours at a table signing the albums, postcards, and portraits that arrived at the hotel in what she describes as an avalanche.⁵³

Anselmi, although essentially representing a somewhat outdated operatic style, also maintained connections to verismo in various ways, particularly in the eyes of the Polish audience. While he excelled in romantic opera, for instance in *Werther*, he was the first to play Turiddu flirting with Santuzza, performed by Bellincioni, on the Warsaw Opera stage in November 1902 and his performances helped pave the way for verismo in the city. Thanks to both performers, another verismo masterpiece, *Tosca*, was staged for the first time in Warsaw on November 7, 1903, to the delight of critics and audiences alike. For the Warsaw audience, *Tosca*, like Santuzza and Nedda from Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, bore Bellincioni's face. Even during her final performances in Warsaw in 1912, after her retirement from an active stage career, she led the local premiere of another Leoncavallo's opera, *Zazà*. Through these works and the presence of Italian performers, Warsaw became part of the global fascination with verismo. Moreover, Bellincioni became the first *Madama Butterfly* on the Warsaw stage, with the premiere taking place on December 2, 1908. Puccini's celebrated opera, a key element of the wave of Japanomania that swept across Europe and the United States from the late 1860s onward, brought not only theatre-goers but also Warsaw residents who did not attend the opera into global cultural trends. From this perspective, the opera stage functioned as a true "contact zone"—a cultural hub where "tradition and modernization as well as different regimes (scopic, economic, social, aesthetic)"⁵⁴ converged. It served as a center for the dissemination of artistic and cultural trends, propelled and popularized by theatre and opera celebrities.

An analysis of events at the intersection of migration and fan culture opens a discussion of specific historical figures in terms of media circulation from

⁵² Bellincioni, *Io e il palcoscenico*, 109–110.

⁵³ Bellincioni.

⁵⁴ Balme and Leonhardt, "Introduction: Theatrical Trade Routes," 7.

one center to another and the globalization of particular cultural phenomena. The individual and their biography, however spectacular, serve less as a pretext for reconstructing exceptional lives or immortalizing the “great artist” than for reflecting on the conditions that allow the “us–them” dichotomy to be transcended and on the relationship between celebrity culture and the dissemination of transnational cultural trends in the modern era.

Translated by Katarzyna Szuster-Tardi



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AGATA ŁUKSZA

Cultural studies scholar, assistant professor at the Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw. Her research interests include 19th-century culture, the history of women in theatre, the history of audiences and popular culture, as well as the theory and history of colonialism. She is currently conducting research entitled *Polish Colonial Histories*.