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Creating Spaces for Wonder: Dramaturgies of Revelation in Early Modern Jesuit Theatre

**Przemiany przestrzenne a dramaturgia
ośnienia w nowożytnym teatrze jezuickim**

Abstract

The article examines early modern Jesuit theatre as a dynamic practice of spatial and symbolic transformation extending beyond the physical stage, rather than as dramatic representation confined to it. Its aim is to demonstrate how Jesuit performances in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth created spaces of wonder and revelation through the continual reshaping of bodies, objects, architecture, landscapes, and systems of signs. The study argues that transformation constituted a fundamental principle of Jesuit dramaturgy: concealment generated uncertainty, transformation produced wonder, wonder led to recognition, and recognition opened the possibility of moral and spiritual understanding. The analysis draws primarily on selected Jesuit playbills, production accounts, college chronicles, and related theatrical documents from the Jesuit provinces of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These sources are examined alongside theoretical approaches to early modern theatricality, especially Henry S. Turner’s concept of the “New Theatricality,” Tiffany Stern’s understanding of theatre as an ecology of performance materials, and studies of Jesuit visual and

ceremonial culture. The article also draws upon Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski's treatise *De acuto et arguto* (c. 1619) as an important intellectual framework for understanding Jesuit aesthetics of surprise, paradox, and revelation. Methodologically, the article employs emblematic sampling to identify broader patterns of transformation within selected theatrical episodes. The case studies examine different modes through which Jesuit theatre produced and transformed space: the reconfiguration of the performing body through costume and music in *Władysław Jagiełło król Polski* (1663); triumphal arches as ceremonial and civic spatial devices in *Brama Grzymała Pandana* (1696); the mapping of classical narratives onto the cultural landscape of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in *Exul vates* (1715); the sudden transformation of the stage into an eschatological space in which mortality is made visible in *Orgia Bacchi* (1738); and the sea voyage as a mutable moral landscape of instability, temptation, and salvation in *Regni fames non regia* (1714). The article concludes that Jesuit theatre did not use spectacle merely for visual pleasure. Theatrical transformation functioned as a pedagogical and spiritual instrument through which spectators were invited to reconsider their faith as well as their perceptions of history and the Christian world.

Keywords: Jesuit theatre, emblem, Sarbiewski, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, rhetoric, playbill.

Abstrakt

Artykuł omawia teatr jezuicki w kategoriach przemian przestrzennych i symbolicznych wykraczających poza formę dramatyczną, traktując element przemiany jako jeden z podstawowych zasad dramaturgii jezuickiej wywodzącej się z estetyki barokowej, w której zaskoczenie i zdumienie były główną metodą dotarcia do głębszej prawdy. Ukrycie określonych treści budziło niepewność i ciekawość odbiorcy, nagła przemiana, niespodziewany zwrot akcji lub olśnienie wywoływały w odbiorcy głęboki zachwyt i zdumienie (*admiratio*), zaskoczenie burzyło dotychczasowy porządek i pozwalało dostrzec ukryty sensy rzeczy, a poprzez estetyczny szok odbiorca osiągał wyższy poziom dojrzałości moralnej i religijnej. Metodologicznie artykuł wykorzystuje analizę wybranych studiów przypadku (*emblematic sampling*) w celu ukazania szerszych mechanizmów obecnych w teatrze jezuickim. Analiza opiera się przede wszystkim na wybranych programach teatralnych, opisach przedstawień, kronikach kolegów oraz innych związanych z teatrem dokumentach pochodzących z jezuickich prowincji Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów i datowanych na XVII i XVIII wiek. Źródła te są analizowane w zestawieniu z ujęciami teoretycznymi dotyczącymi wczesnonowożytnej teatralności, w szczególności z koncepcją „nowej teatralności” (*New Theatricality*) Henry’ego S. Turnera, rozumieniem teatru jako ekologii materiałów performatywnych w ujęciu Tiffany Stern

oraz badaniami nad jezuicką kulturą wizualną i ceremonialną. Artykuł odwołuje się również do traktatu Macieja Kazimierza Sarbiewskiego *De acuto et arguto* (ok. 1619) jako istotnego tekstu dla analizy barokowego konceptyzmu. Artykuł jest próbą interpretacji zjawisk historycznych oraz próbą ich rekonstrukcji ze śladów, które po nich pozostały. Omawiane przykłady programów teatralnych ukazują różne sposoby wytwarzania i przekształcania przestrzeni teatralnej: przemianę aktora poprzez kostium we *Władysławie Jagielle królu Polski* (1663); wykorzystanie łuków triumfalnych jako ceremonialnych urządzeń przestrzennych w *Brama Grzymała Pandana* (1696); wpisanie narracji klasycznych w krajobraz kulturowy Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w *Exul vates* (1715); nagłą przemianę sceny w przestrzeń eschatologiczną w *Orgia Bacchi* (1738) oraz ukazanie podróży morskiej jako krajobrazu moralnego znamionującego pokusę i zbawienie w *Regni fames non regia* (1714). Artykuł dowodzi, że teatr jezuicki nie wykorzystywał spektaklu jedynie dla efektu wizualnego. Przemiany sceniczne służyły religijnej perswazji, prowadząc widzów ku dojrzałości moralnej i religijnej oraz dając im nowe spojrzenie na dzieje wspólnoty politycznej i świata chrześcijańskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: teatr jezuicki, emblemat, Sarbiewski, Rzeczypospolita Obojga Narodów, retoryka, program teatralny.

Introduction

Early modern Jesuit theatre was a theatre of transformation. Rather than treating space as a static setting for dramatic action, Jesuit playwrights continually reshaped bodies, objects, architecture, landscapes, and systems of signs in order to generate wonder and guide their audiences towards acts of moral and spiritual recognition. Costumes became political statements, ephemeral architecture reshaped civic space, inscriptions (occasionally presented through hieroglyphic dances), changed their meaning before the spectators' eyes, paintings turned into prophetic visions, and darkness itself became a theatrical medium through which invisible realities were made perceptible.

Transformation was not simply a dramatic motif but a fundamental principle of Jesuit theatrical practice, and could thus be linked with what John O'Malley saw more broadly as a rhetorical organization of the Jesuit world, one that privileged persuasion, adaptation, and the capacity to reshape character and conduct.¹ Early Jesuit school theatre reflected

¹ John O'Malley, S.I., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). See also: Stephen Schloesser, S.I., "Accommodation as a Rhetorical Principle: Twenty

Baroque aesthetics which emphasized illusion, contrast, spectacle, and emotional engagement. Through successive acts of concealment, revelation, and reinterpretation, Jesuit performances generated new ways of seeing and knowing the self and the Christian world. By examining selected elements of Jesuit theatre preserved in playbills, playtexts, and production notes, I propose that Jesuit performance operates through a sequence of transformation: concealment created uncertainty; transformation generated wonder; wonder led spectators to recognition; and recognition opened the path to moral understanding, and, at times, even spiritual conversion.² By making this proposition, I approach Jesuit theatre through the concept of the New Theatricality developed by Henry S. Turner who argues that theatricality should not be understood merely as a property of dramatic representation or performance but as a broader cultural operation that produces new relationships between material objects, bodies, institutions, and systems of knowledge.³ Rather than reflecting an external reality, theatrical events actively reorganise perception and create new forms of social and intellectual experience. Such an approach is particularly fruitful for the study of Jesuit theatre, whose educational and pastoral ambitions extended well beyond the stage itself. The performances recorded in seventeenth and eighteenth-century playbills reveal theatrical events in which scenography, music, costume,

years after John O'Malley's *The First Jesuits* (1993)," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 1/3 (2014): 347–372; Jaska Kainulainen, *Early Jesuits and the Rhetorical Tradition, 1540–1650* (Oxford: Routledge, 2024).

- 2 The desire to produce wonder that would yield spiritual fruits of conversion is evident in a 1592 annual report sent to Rome from the Jesuit College of Kalisz (est. 1583) in the Polish Jesuit Province. Describing the inauguration of the new academic year (*Renovatio Studiorum*), the report celebrates a public performance of Edmund Campion's play *Ambrosiana*, staged by students with such magnificence and order that it "drew the eyes and attention of all who watched" (*ut omnium spectantium in se oculos et ora converterint*), *Annuae Litterae provinciae Poloniae*, 1592, Collegium Callisiense, A. S. J. Pol. 50, fol. 98v; Latin transcription by Katarzyna Gara. The Latin verb *convertere* is significant: it describes the spectators' physical turning toward the performance, and also echoes the language of spiritual conversion – a transformation of vision that could lead from wonder to moral and religious understanding. More on Campion's real and symbolic presence in the schools and colleges of Central Europe in Clarinda Calma "Edmund Campion's Prague Homilies: *The Concionale ex concionibus a R.P. Edmundo Campiano*," in *Jesuit Intellectual and Physical Exchange between England and Mainland Europe, c. 1580–1789. "The World is our House"?* eds. James E. Kelly and Hannah Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 43–66.
- 3 See: Henry S. Turner, "Generalization," *Early Modern Theatricality* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 3. This essay opens a collection of twenty-nine essays that offer new insights into early modern drama and theatre studies, bringing together innovative approaches to the study of performance, materiality, space, and cultural exchange.

architecture, allegory, emblematic imagery, and ritual action worked together to generate spaces of moral reflection and spiritual discovery.⁴

Following Tiffany Stern's argument that early modern drama cannot be understood through the modern category of the autonomous dramatic text alone, this article approaches theatrical materials as a broader ecology of performance documents.⁵ Early modern theatrical practice was recorded and transmitted not only through dramatic texts but also through playbooks, playbills, college chronicles, production notes, and other practical documents that preserved traces of performance processes. These materials do not simply supplement the dramatic text; they reveal the collaborative, material, and transformative nature of theatre itself. In the case of Jesuit theatre, such documents allow us to reconstruct not only what was performed, but how meanings were produced through staging, objects, movement, and visual effects. It is therefore in light of the above that the surviving playbills of the Jesuit provinces of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth constitute the principal source material for this investigation. Although they preserve only condensed summaries of performances rather than complete dramatic texts, they offer remarkably rich evidence of scenography, stage machinery, music, allegory, visual effects, and ceremonial processions, all of which invite interpretation. Throughout these performances, transformation rarely occurs in isolation. Objects disappear and unexpectedly return in altered forms. Bodies become historical rulers, saints, virtues, or personifications. Genres themselves proved remarkably fluid, as tragedy, school drama, civic ceremony, devotional meditation, court spectacle, and carnival entertainment continually intersected. Conventional distinctions dissolve into hybrid dramatic forms. Words detach themselves from their original contexts, inscriptions reveal hidden meanings, images become prophecies, while emblems unfold into dramatic action. Paradoxically, this fluidity of signs directs spectators towards acts of recognition, inviting them to discern moral, political, and spiritual truths concealed beneath changing appearances.

I would also like to argue, adopting a method of 'emblematic sampling' (Henry S. Turner), that Jesuit theatre did not merely represent

4 My recent study, *Watching the Virtues: Playbills, Drama and the Teaching of Civic Virtue in the Jesuit Theatre of Poland–Lithuania* (Leiden: Brill, 2025), offers a systematic overview of Jesuit theatre in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, using playbills as a primary source for understanding its repertory, performance contexts, and theatrical practices.

5 Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009).

cultural landscapes but actively produced them. Like the early modern emblem itself – a form that brings together image, text, and interpretation – the article examines selected representative theatrical moments to identify broader transformative principles of Jesuit dramaturgy. The case studies are therefore not presented as isolated curiosities but as examples of larger patterns of theatrical transformation. Each example signals a particular technique through which theatre reshapes cultural space. Transformation operated simultaneously on several levels: material objects (books, costumes, insignia, weapons, sacred vessels, paintings) acquired new meanings through performance; bodies assumed historical, allegorical, or sacred identities; architectural forms organized political and devotional space; texts and inscriptions changed their semantic value as the action unfolded, and spectators themselves were invited to undergo cognitive, emotional, and spiritual reorientation. Theatre thus became an instrument of revelation that produced and consolidated knowledge not only through verbal instruction but also through carefully orchestrated sensory experience.

Wonder, Revelation, and the Production of Space

Transformation occupied a privileged position in early modern theatrical culture.⁶ Across Europe, the stage and public spaces increasingly functioned not simply as a site for representing actions but as an apparatus for producing wonder through movement, revelation, illusion, and material change. Curtains opened unexpectedly, machines descended from above, architectural settings dissolved into landscapes, clouds carried saints heavenwards, while kings, martyrs, and allegorical figures appeared and disappeared through ingenious mechanical devices.⁷ Such

6 See Rosa De Marco, *Le langage des fêtes jésuites dans l'Assistance de France (1588–1645)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2025), on the centrality of transformation in Jesuit festive culture, where changes of space, image, and ritual served as instruments of persuasion and wonder.

7 One of the earliest documented uses of flying machines in Polish–Lithuanian theatre appears in Act 1 sc. 6 of a Jesuit playbill for a performance staged at the Kalisz College in 1623 to celebrate Sigismund III Vasa (1566–1632) during his royal progress. The Latin version of the playbill: *Sigismundus I Rex Poloniae* (Kalisz: Albertus Gedelius, 1623), Ossolineum Library XVII.1970.II, the Polish version (lost): *Zygmunt I król Polski*, known from a reprint in Edward Raczyński, *Wspomnienia Wielkopolski to jest województw poznańskiego, kaliskiego i gnieźnieńskiego* (Poznań: W drukarni Orędownika, 1843), vol. 2, xxviii–xxxv. The earliest use of trap doors is attested in a playbill of *Akt tryumfalny* (Kalisz, 1640), and in Jan Okoń, *Dramat i teatr szkolny. Sceny jezuickie XVI–II wieku* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1970), 244.

effects did more than display technical virtuosity. They reorganised perception by confronting spectators with phenomena that appeared simultaneously natural and impossible. Theatre thus became a laboratory of transformation.⁸ Such an understanding is especially productive for Jesuit theatre, whose educational programme sought to transform both intellectual formation and spiritual disposition through sensory experience. The temporary theatre erected in a college hall, refectory, courtyard, or civic square became a dynamic environment in which political identities, sacred histories, and moral lessons could be experienced.⁹ Transformation therefore operated simultaneously as a dramaturgical principle and as a means of producing cultural space.

8 On *apariencia* as a theatrical practice of unveiling and revelation in Spanish Golden Age theatre, see: Héctor Ruiz Soto, *Apariencia ou l'instant du dévoilement: Théâtre, images et rituels dans l'Espagne du Siècle d'or* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2024). The Author demonstrates how the act of disclosure transformed concealment into knowledge, making revelation itself a central theatrical event.

9 This is the case of Campion's *Ambrosiana*, staged twice in Prague in 1578 (fourteen years before the Kalisz production), by students of the newly founded Jesuit College Klementinum under Campion's supervision as professor of rhetoric. Reportedly, the play was performed once in the College and once in the courtyard of the Prague Castle opposite St Vitus cathedral, with the Empress, Mary of Austria (1528–1603), mother of Rudolf II and her daughter, Elizabeth of Austria (1554–1592), Queen of France in attendance, Joannes Schmidl, *Historia Societatis Jesu Provinciae Bohemiae*, Prague, 1747, vol. 1, fol. 419. See: Gerard Kilroy, *Edmund Campion: A Scholarly Life* (London: Routledge, 2015), 118–119; Alison Shell, "We Are Made a Spectacle: Campion's Dramas," in *The Reckoned Expense: Edmund Campion and the Early English Jesuits*, eds. Thomas McCoog et al. (Rome: IHSI, 2007), 125.

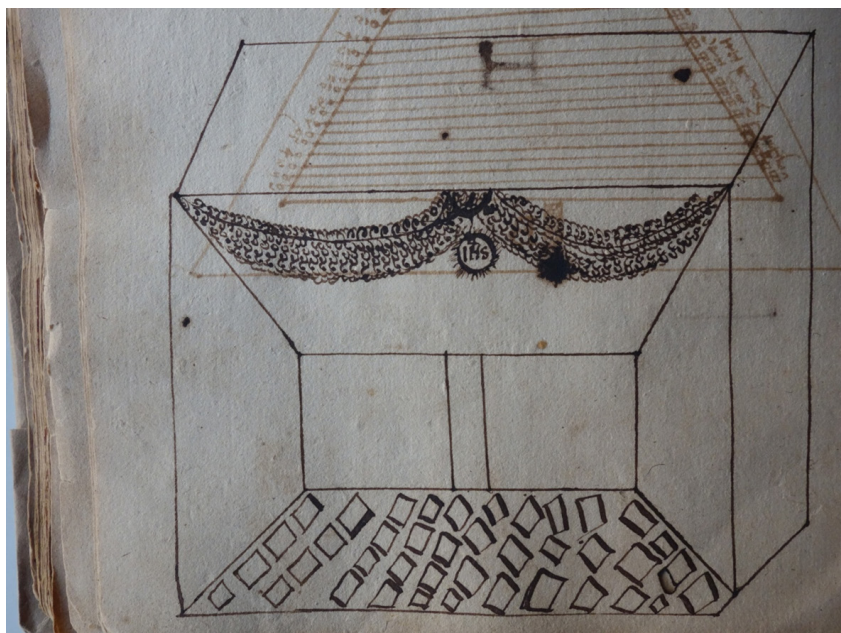


Figure 1. Jesuit monogram as theatrical decoration above the stage and spatial markers with designated areas indicating actors' positions on the stage below. A drawing from Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski's student lecture notes on poetics, 17th c., MNK Princes Czartoryski Library, Ms. 1858.

The capacity of theatrical transformation to generate knowledge was already articulated within Jesuit literary theory itself. In his influential poetics *De acuto et arguto*, Jesuit Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius) (1595–1640), defines wit (*argutum*) as the surprising conjunction of apparent opposites, producing delight through unexpected recognition (*acutum*).¹⁰ Wonder arises precisely because something appears at once identical and different, familiar and unfamiliar,

10 Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, "De acuto et arguto [...] sive Seneca et Martialis," in M. K. Sarbiewski *Praefecta poetica*, trans and ed. Stanisław Skimina (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1958), on *acutum* definition see Chapter 2, "Verisimilior de natura acuti sententia," 11; for *argutum*, Sarbiewski develops the distinction between *argutia* and *acumen* especially in Chapter 6, "Discrimen inter argutias et acuminia insinuatur." Sarbiewski's theory of *acutum*, as discussed by Elwira Buszewicz, locates the power of the concept not in verbal ornament alone but in an intellectual act of discovery: the sudden perception of a hidden relation. See Elwira Buszewicz, "Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski: 'De acuto et arguto' / O poincie i dowcipie," in *Retoryka a tekst literacki*, eds. Michał Hanczakowski and Jakub Niedźwiedź (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2003), 23–52.

natural and contrary to expectation. The spectator experiences pleasure not through deception alone but through the sudden perception of hidden relationships. Surprise becomes a cognitive event.

Sarbiewski, the celebrated neo-Latin poet and Jesuit professor of poetics, rhetoric, philosophy, and theology, taught at Jesuit colleges in Vilnius, Połock (Bel. Polatsk), and Kroże (Lit. Kražiai). Having studied at the Jesuit College of Braniewo (1614–1617) and later at the Collegium Romanum (1622–1623), he became one of the most influential literary figures of the seventeenth-century Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

In his Roman days, Sarbiewski was mentored by Alessandro Donati (1584–1640), a distinguished Jesuit poet and antiquary, who introduced him not only to literary theory but also to the elements of theatrical production that Sarbiewski was able to discuss in his lectures in Poland–Lithuania. In particular, Donati involved Jesuit students in the preparation of theatrical performances, including productions staged for the celebrations of the canonisation of Francis Xavier on 3 December 1622, thus exposing Sarbiewski to the practical dimensions of Jesuit theatre.¹¹ Praised by his contemporaries as *Horatianis par* (Horace's peer), *Horatius Sarmaticus* (the Sarmatian Horace), and *Horatius Christianus* (the Christian Horace), Sarbiewski shaped the theoretical framework within which Jesuit drama was conceived and taught. His lectures on poetry, preserved and transmitted in manuscript form, informed generations of Jesuit students.¹² Yet he was not only a theatre theoretician, but also a participant in the theatrical culture of Jesuit education, where poetry, rhetoric, and performance were closely linked together. While Sarbiewski's poetics provides an illuminating framework for understanding Jesuit dramaturgy based on paradox, transformation, and reinterpretation, the surviving playbills also attest to the transformative element: a festive banquet becomes a meditation on mortality; triumphal architecture becomes an allegory of civic virtue; military costume transforms schoolboys into national heroes; a classical landscape is relocated into

11 Irena Kadulska, "Koncepcja komedii w poetykach szkół jezuickich," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 80/2 (1989): 177–178, 180.

12 Sarbiewski's poetics: *Poetica practica Anno Domini 1648*. Żałoski Library, Warsaw, Ms. Lat. Qu. XIV. 229 (lost); Volodymyr I. Rezanov (ed.), *K istorii russkoj dramy. Ekspurs v oblast' teatra iezuitov* (Nežin: Tipografija naslednikov V.K. Melenevskiego, 1910), 303–375; 'Precepta Poetica Manu ex arata unius ex discipuli Clarissimi Poetae Mathiae Sarbiewski'. Czartoryski Library Ms. 1446 I; *De perfecta poesi*. Czartoryski Library Ms. 1858 (contains sketches of set design). Modern editions of the two Czartoryski Library MSS in: *O poezji doskonałej czyli Wergiliusz i Homer (De perfecta poesi sive Vergilius et Homerus)*, trans. Marian Plezia, ed. Stanisław Skimina (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1954).

the political geography of the Commonwealth; playful inscriptions unexpectedly reveal messages concerning death; and darkness itself materializes. These transformations enabled Jesuit audiences to see the world as simultaneously historical and allegorical, political and theological, temporal and eternal.



Figure 2. Design of a theatrical sound effects machine. A drawing from Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski's student lecture notes on poetics, 17th c. MNK Princes Czartoryski Library Ms. 1858.

This logic of transformation was further enhanced by the seasonality of Jesuit performances. As Erika T. Lin has shown for early modern English theatre, theatrical performances were inseparable from the evolving festive calendars that structured communal life.¹³ Before they became “vendible commodities,” plays were embedded in the cyclical rhythms of religious observance, civic celebration, and seasonal festivities that organized collective experience. Performances acquired meaning through their placement within cycles of religious feasts, civic ceremonies, royal celebrations, Carnival, or Shrovetide. Time, like space, was actively produced through theatrical practice.¹⁴ This temporal dimension

13 Erika T. Lin, “Festivity,” *Early Modern Theatricality* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 212–229.

14 It required the pioneering research of Eamon Duffy to recover the temporal dimension of pre-Reformation religious culture and to demonstrate the extent to which the English Reformation disrupted its performative rhythms. Rather than viewing the Reformation as a welcome liberation from medieval ritual, Duffy has argued that it

is especially significant for the Jesuit plays. Dozens of plays were written specifically for Shrovetide, the liminal period immediately preceding Lent, when carnival excess was expected to culminate in moral reflection and penitential preparation. Their repeated emphasis on *memento mori*, the instability of worldly fortune, and the certainty of death derives much of its force from this liturgical context. Spectators encountered images of dancing skeletons, collapsing kingdoms, deceptive pleasures, and allegorical death not as isolated theatrical motifs but as part of a collectively experienced transition from festivity to repentance.

Such instability should not be mistaken for semantic indeterminacy. Jesuit theatre did not celebrate ambiguity for its own sake. On the contrary, the continual movement of signs adjusted to the liturgical calendar served a profoundly didactic purpose. Objects disappeared only to reveal hidden realities. Visual spectacles culminated in moral recognition. Architectural transformations disclosed political ideals. Apparent disorder ultimately resolved into theological order. Transformation functioned as a pedagogical method that led spectators from sensory astonishment towards intellectual and spiritual understanding.

Embodying History: Costume, Music, and Material Performance

One of the most striking characteristics of Jesuit theatre is that spatial transformation frequently begins not with scenery but with bodies. Before architecture changes, before curtains reveal new landscapes, and before stage machinery produces visual marvels, actors themselves become the primary medium through which new spaces emerge. Costume, gesture, military equipment, music, and ceremonial movement transform the performers into living components of a historical landscape. Space is therefore generated not by scenic illusion alone but by the material presence of bodies that carry history onto the stage.

This performative production of historical space is particularly evident in the playbill of a play *Władysław Jagiełło król Polski*, performed in 1663 at the Jesuit college in Pińsk (Bel. Pinsk), a town at the confluence of the Pina and Pripyat River in the former Lithuanian Jesuit Province.

constituted a violent rupture that dismantled a vibrant, communal, and deeply theatrical religious world. The destruction of this performative calendar transformed not only religious practice but also the temporal organization of everyday life. See: Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

The play celebrated King Władysław II Jagiełło (Lit. Jogaila), who, as King of Poland, served as the supreme commander of the allied Polish-Lithuanian forces at the Battle of Grunwald (Tannenberg) in 1410, one of the most decisive victories over the Teutonic Knights in medieval Europe. Although the dramatic text has not survived, an accompanying account in the college chronicle records an exceptional feature of the production: the costumes and military equipment were borrowed from a local cavalry unit:

Gdy stała chorągiew husarska hetmańska, od której zbroje, proporce i muzyka była, suknie i inszy wojskowy aparat.

(When the cavalry unit of the hetman was stationed [in the area, we obtained from them] the armour, banners, musical instruments, clothing and other military equipment).¹⁵

The presence of authentic armour, banners, military instruments, and other equipment has usually been interpreted as a practical solution made possible by the availability of nearby troops.¹⁶ Such an explanation is undoubtedly correct, yet it captures only part of the theatrical significance of these objects. Once incorporated into the performance, military artefacts ceased to function merely as props. They became active agents in the production of historical meaning. Instead of relying exclusively upon verbal narration to evoke this foundational event, the production materialised history through the very objects that had participated in contemporary military culture. Seen from this perspective, costume becomes a spatial rather than merely decorative practical element. Once dressed in armour, the student actor no longer occupies the space of the school theatre alone but simultaneously inhabits the imagined battlefield of Grunwald. His body becomes the point at which contemporary civic life intersects with national memory. The theatrical event thus bridges the chronological distance, allowing spectators to experience history as unfolding in the present. The effectiveness of this transformation depended upon the collective cultural memory shared by performers and spectators alike.

This process illustrates yet another broader principle governing Jesuit performance. Material objects acquired agency not because they possessed intrinsic symbolic meaning but because theatrical practice activated them within a system of visual, rhetorical and ritual relations.

15 Rezanov, *K istorii russkoj dramy*, 419.

16 See: Okoń, *Dramat i teatr szkolny*, 128.

Armour functioned together with banners, music, ceremonial movement, and spoken dialogue to produce what may be described as an immersive historical environment. Spectators were not asked simply to imagine the Battle of Grunwald; they entered, however briefly, a space organised according to its symbolic logic.

This transformation illuminates an important feature of Jesuit pedagogy. School theatre educated not only through texts but through participation. Students learned history by performing it, while audiences encountered political ideals through shared sensory experience. The boundary separating education, civic ceremony, and theatrical spectacle became remarkably porous. Historical knowledge was no longer confined to the classroom or chronicle but acquired bodily, visual, and emotional form.

The example of *Władysław Jagiełło król Polski* therefore demonstrates that the production of theatrical space begins with the transformation of the performer. Costume, music, and military material culture convert individual bodies into carriers of collective memory and transform the college stage into a historical landscape. Long before elaborate scenographic machinery reshaped theatrical environments, Jesuit dramaturgy had already discovered that the most powerful instrument of spatial transformation was the performing body itself.

Ephemeral Architecture and the Production of Civic Space

If bodies constituted the first medium through which Jesuit theatre produced historical space, ephemeral architecture provided the second. Jesuit theatrical culture did not treat space as a neutral container in which historical narratives unfolded; rather, it understood space itself as an active instrument of persuasion, memory, and transformation. Through temporary structures – arches, gates, portals, columns, obelisks, pyramids, galleries, fountains, and other modular architectural forms – the Jesuits transformed ordinary environments into symbolic landscapes in which political, religious, and historical meanings could become visible.



Figure 3. Design for rotating columns enabling sudden scene changes. A drawing from Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski's student lecture notes on poetics, 17th c. MNK Princes Czartoryski Library Ms. 1858.

As Rosa de Marco has recently shown, building on earlier research of Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco and Silvia Carandini, the practice of the Baroque Jesuit theatre drew heavily on the Roman tradition of the triumphal way, in which ceremonial movement culminated in passage through arches marking victory, authority, and renewal.¹⁷ In Jesuit productions, however, these arches were not merely decorative references to antiquity. They functioned as spatial devices that altered perception, elevated spectators into participants, and created what early modern observers often described as a sense of wonder (*admiratio*) capable of leaving a lasting impression on the soul. The triumphal arch became a threshold between ordinary and extraordinary space: a point at which the present could be connected to a larger historical and providential order.

Moreover, meaning emerged not only from what these arches, gates, obelisks represented but from how bodies moved through them and around them. This relationship between architecture and movement reflected the Jesuit understanding of theatre as a technology of memory.

17 De Marco, *Le langage des fêtes jésuites*, especially pp. 213–233. See also: Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco and Silvia Carandini, *Leffimero barocco. Strutture della festa nella Roma del '600* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1977); Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, *La festa barocca* (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1997).

Historical knowledge was not simply communicated through words or images; it was embedded within physical experience. To pass beneath an arch decorated with scenes of triumph, sacrifice, or divine intervention was to enter into a relationship with the past.

This transformation of space was particularly powerful because it enabled Jesuit theatre combine local identities, stories of their patrons and benefactors with universal narratives. Temporary monuments could place local rulers, patrons, saints, civic institutions, and communities within larger frameworks of Catholic renewal, practice of justice, and historical continuity. A particularly revealing example is the summary of the production *Brama Grzymała Pandana* (1696) in the Collegium Gostomianum, a Jesuit College in the city of Sandomierz, former Polish Jesuit Province, which demonstrates how ephemeral architecture could transform theatre into a civic ritual of political memory.¹⁸ The performance celebrated the political culture of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and the newly appointed officials of the Sandomierz district court. It reflected the strong interest of Jesuit theatre in the legal and constitutional traditions of the Polish–Lithuanian nobility (Pol. *szlachta*), especially the ideals associated with the *ius Polonicum* – the body of law governing not only the nobility but also other social groups and estates within the Commonwealth.

The play constructed its entire spatial logic around five triumphal arches, each corresponding to one act of the performance: the Arch of Freedom (*Pandana*), the Arch of the Rivers (*Flumentana*), the Triumphal Arch, the Arch of Honour (*Collina*), and the Palestinian Arch. These structures were not simply a visual backdrop but a framework through which the political meaning of the performance unfolded. The five acts moved through five symbolic spaces, transforming the stage into an allegorical civic landscape.

The occasion itself was deeply connected to local political culture. The performance honoured the Sandomierz palatinate, its ten districts, and its officials, including Józef Karol Lubomirski (1638–1702), Court

18 *Brama Grzymała Pandana albo Wolności: jaśnie oświeconemu, jaśnie wielmożnemu, województwu sandomirskiemu, jako pierwszemu wolności polskiej asylo. Flumentana: I.O.I. MP Józefowi Karolowi comiti in Wiśnicz, Jarosław et Tarnów Lubomirskiemu, S.R.I. principi marszałkowi nadwornemu kronnemu, Sędomirskiemu, Zatorskiemu, Lubaczowskiemu, Lubomleńskiemu, Ryckiemu etc starości. Tryumfalna: porucznikowi znaku I.O. principis S.R.I. marszałka nadw. Collina albo Honoru: cześnikowi wieluńskiemu. Palestyńska: podstarościemu na ten czas Sędomirskiemu, przy solennej inauguracji na ten grodzki urząd, od szlachetnej młodzi szkół. Devinctissimi Collegii Gostomiani S.I., otworzona i poświęcona. Roku Pańskiego 1696. W styczniu* (Warszawa: Coll. Schol. Piarum, 1696), USTC 1772572.

Marshal of the Crown and Starost of Sandomierz, and Kasper Teodor Siemianowski (d. 1704), a district judge. The names of newly appointed officials were solemnly inscribed into district books on stage, turning theatrical representation into a performative act of civic recognition. The theatre did not merely depict political authority; it participated in its public creation.

The allegorical programme of the performance connected the city Sandomierz at the Vistula river with the classical tradition of republican virtue and the Roman ideal of civic law. Law itself appeared in the figure of the Polish Themis (*Themis polska*), who explained to Astrea, the goddess of justice, the parallels between Sandomierz and Rome as centres of legal order. Themis inscribed the names of the newly elected officials with a sword symbolizing judicial authority and a quill representing administrative power. Through this combination of allegory, ceremony, and historical reference, the play may be interpreted as representing district officials as *custodes libertatis* – guardians of liberty.

Interestingly, the historical narrative in the play extended back to the medieval foundations of Polish law, particularly the parliamentary assembly at Wiślica under King Casimir the Great in 1347, presented in the play as the moment when Polish liberty was born and when local representatives emerged as protectors of civic freedom. By invoking historian Marcin Kromer's (1512–1589) description of Sandomierz as the “centre of Poland” (*meditullum Poloniae*), the performance transformed local space into a symbolic centre of the Commonwealth itself.¹⁹ Virtue and liberty were imagined as residing *in medio*, in the geographical and moral centre of the political body.

The five arches thus functioned as more than ceremonial ornaments. They can be interpreted as articulating a spatial argument: Sandomierz was not simply a provincial district but a privileged site within the historical geography of Polish liberty. The temporary architecture transformed the theatre into a civic space in which historical continuity, political legitimacy, and communal identity could be performed.

19 Marcin Kromer, *De origine et rebus gestis Polonorum libri XXX* (Basileae: per Ioannem Oporinum, 1555), vol. 1, fol 79. USTC 675237.

Mapping Antiquity: Cultural Landscapes and Classical Memory

Having examined two forms of theatrical transformation – the transformation of bodies through costume and the transformation of civic environments through ephemeral architecture – I now turn to a third process: the transformation of space through cultural mapping. Jesuit theatre did not merely reproduce historical places; it reorganized geographical imagination by creating connections between distant worlds, linking classical antiquity, sacred history, and local political identities. Antiquity was not presented as a distant archive of names and events but as a cultural landscape that could be reconstructed, inhabited, and reinterpreted through performance.

This spatialization of antiquity reflected a broader early modern practice of mapping classical memory. Humanist education had trained Jesuit students and audiences to associate places with exemplary narratives. Geography and history were inseparable disciplines, since knowledge of a civilization required knowledge of the spaces in which its virtues, conflicts, and transformations had unfolded. Theatre extended this pedagogical principle by giving those spaces dramatic form.

Yet Jesuit theatre did not simply reconstruct ancient landscapes; it actively transformed them. The classical world became a flexible symbolic geography that could be relocated, adapted, and integrated into contemporary political and cultural frameworks. Ancient places were not only represented – they were reinterpreted through the concerns of early modern Catholic identity, local myths and traditions. To Polish-Lithuanian Jesuit playwrights and their audiences, Rome signified republican spirit, martyrdom, and the triumph of Christianity over pagan power. A particularly revealing example of this cultural mapping is Vilnius end-of-year playbill *Exul vates* (1715).²⁰ Rather than simply presenting classical antiquity as a distant historical world, the performance relocated it into the cultural landscape of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Its protagonist, Jan Zamoyski (1542–1605), Grand Chancellor and Grand Hetman of the Crown, was celebrated not only as a political leader but also as a humanist patron and founder of the Zamoyski Academy. The

20 *Exul vates et pro domo orator semel mortui, bis sepulti nempe in tumulo, et hominem oblivione, per literatissimos Sarmatas, Ovidianum mausolaeum eruderantes, Ciceronis[ue] pro republica reperientes volumina, ad vitam famae revocati, demum ab illustrissima, perillustri, magnifica, ac praenobili iuventute Academiae Vilnensis S.I. sub sextile Musarum exilium erudito orbi reproducti anno exulis in patria Dei-hominis 1715. Kalendis Augusti.* (Np., n.p., 1715), Jagiellonian Library, Kraków, 33690.III.

play presented Poland–Lithuania as a space capable of receiving, preserving, and continuing the legacy of classical civilization.

This process of translation was dramatized in the play through two extraordinary discoveries. First, as has been summarized in the playbill, Zamoyski's secretary encounters a copy of Cicero's *De Republica* in Poland, suggesting that classical wisdom had found a home in the Commonwealth. Later, Zamoyski himself discovers a mysterious tombstone beneath an overgrown laurel tree which he identifies as the lost tomb of Ovid. Through this theatrical fiction, the play drew upon a long-standing legend, popular in Polish and Lithuanian cultural memory, that the Roman poet had been exiled not to the distant margins of the empire but to lands inhabited by the ancestors of the Sarmatians – Poles and Lithuanians.

The significance of this scene lies not in its historical accuracy but in its imaginative geography. The stage became a meeting place of multiple cultural traditions: Roman literature, Sarmatian identity, Lithuanian and Polish local memory, humanist scholarship, and the republican ideals associated with civic virtue and political liberty. Classical antiquity was no longer located exclusively in Rome; it was mapped onto the landscape of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where its legacy could be claimed as part of a living political tradition.

The Sea as Mutable Space: Voyage, Fortune, and Moral Transformation

As has been shown above, the theatrical landscape of antiquity was neither a simple imitation of the ancient world nor an escape into historical fantasy. It was carefully constructed cultural geography in which memory, theology, politics, and identity intersected. The past became a place that spectators could enter – and, by entering it, a place through which they could understand their own historical moment. The material realization of these imagined landscapes depended upon an extraordinary investment in theatrical technology and visual invention. The stage machinery produced by students of Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski in the mid-seventeenth century offers a glimpse into the ambition behind Jesuit scenography and its desire to create spaces of wonder and revelation. The Jesuit monogram and cornucopia, for example, transformed the theatre itself into a celebratory space under the symbolic authority of the Society of Jesus. Revolving columns enabled rapid changes of scenery, allowing one historical environment to dissolve into another.

The possibilities of Jesuit scenography extended beyond the reconstruction of cities, sacred sites, and classical landscapes. One of the most dynamic theatrical spaces was the sea, a mutable environment that allowed for constant transformation and offered a particularly powerful vocabulary for representing instability, temptation, and spiritual journey. The stage machinery preserved in the student notes associated with Sarbiewski's poetics reveals the technical ambition behind such scenes: waves, moving elements, and mechanisms for changing scenery enabled Jesuit theatre to create maritime worlds in which geographical movement became a visual metaphor for moral and spiritual change.

A particularly rich example is the Shrovetide playbill of a play *Regni fames non regia* (1714), performed in Nowogródek (Bel. Navahrudak) in the former Lithuanian Jesuit Province.²¹

21 *Regni fames non regia, fraterno Georgii Clarentiae ducis fato, ad minime secundas mensas Eduardo bis secundo rege Angliae exsatiata, inter hilares vero carnisprivii ferias, eventu tragico ab illustrissima, perillustri, magnifica ac prae nobili studiosa iuventute Collegii Palatino-Novogrod. Soc. Iesu adumbrata. Anno Dei-hominis, exsatiandae mortalium fami, cibi facti 1681* [n.p., n.p.], Jagiellonian Library, Kraków, 33567.III, USTC 269433.

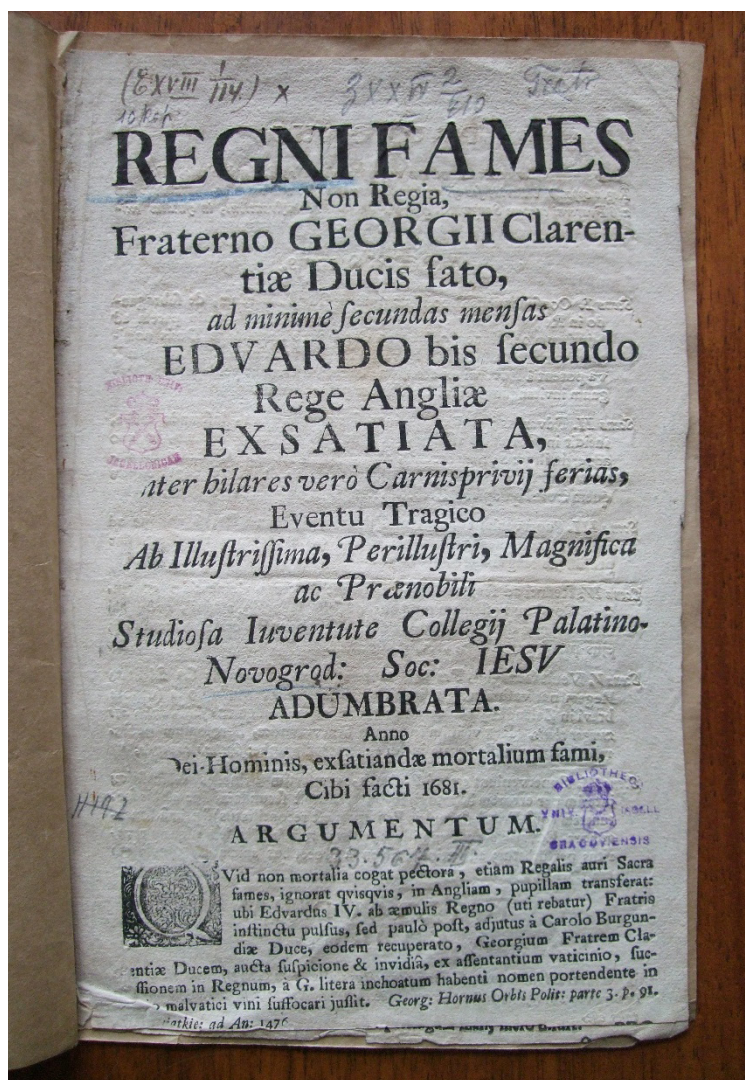


Figure 4. [Title page]: *Regni fames non regia, fraterno Georgii Clarentiae ducis fato, ad minime secundas mensas Eduardo bis secundo rege Angliae exsatiata, inter hilares vero carnisprivii ferias, eventum tragico ab illustrissima, perillustri, magnifica ac praenobili studiosa iuventute Collegii Palatino-Novogrod. Soc. Iesu adumbrata. Anno Dei-hominis, exsatiandae mortalium fami, cibi facti 1681* [n.p., n.p.], Jagiellonian Library 33567.III.

A densely plotted drama of political ambition, deception, violence, and religious allegory, the play demonstrates how the sea could function as a theatrical landscape of uncertainty and transformation. Based on

historical materials including the Baronius–Kwiatkiewicz compilation and Georg Horn's *Orbis politicus imperiorum, regnorum, principatum, rerum publicarum* (1668), the play dramatically expands its sparse sources through elaborate scenes of royal spectacle, court intrigue, prophecy, and maritime allegory.

The plot centres on the first Yorkist King of England, Edward IV (1442–1483), whose return from exile in Flanders initiates a chain of events driven by ambition, suspicion, and misinterpretation. A prophecy warning the king about the number seven (*Septima cavenda, dulce ne fatum ferat*) is mistakenly interpreted by his magician Gofredus as referring to the letter G, the seventh letter in Latin alphabet, leading Edward to suspect George, Duke of Clarence, rather than Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who will ultimately become the true threat. The play culminates in the symbolic drowning of Clarence, whom Edward has accused of conspiracy and condemns to death at seven o'clock in malmsey wine (*vino malvatico*).

The central theme of the play is already announced in its title: *regni fames*, the hunger for power. Edward's political appetite is presented as spiritual excess, an insatiable desire that can never be satisfied by worldly possessions. The title page and prologue develop a complex play on the meaning of hunger and satisfaction, contrasting the king's endless desire for domination with the only true satisfaction offered through Christ and the Eucharist.

The play's sea voyage scenes extend this moral allegory into spatial form. The two choruses transform the stage into maritime landscapes in which human existence itself becomes a voyage through uncertainty. The first chorus presents the life journey of Edward's Genius, accompanied by Fortune and singing sea nymphs. The second depicts the voyage of Clarence's Genius, who attempts to escape danger by sailing toward "happier islands" but instead encounters deceptive sirens representing Fortune's abandonment. The sea thus becomes a space of illusion and instability: a landscape where appearances deceive and where worldly aspirations lead protagonists away from spiritual security.



Figure 5. Indications of stage marks for actors' positions (E) and a design for waves used to create theatrical effects (I). A drawing from Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski's student lecture notes on poetics, 17th c. MNK Princes Czartoryski Library Ms. 1858.

This maritime imagery also reinforces the play's distinction between different forms of violence and desire. Clarence, although responsible for the murder of Dolinus after witnessing his blasphemous mockery of the Virgin Mary, remains a morally sympathetic figure because his action is framed as a defence of religious truth rather than political ambition. His encounter with Dolinus occurs before his sea journey, when he seeks counsel from a hermit near a chapel dedicated to Our Lady, *Stella Maris* (Star of the Sea). The juxtaposition is significant: the sacred maritime symbol of Mary as a guiding star contrasts with the deceptive waters of Fortune, sirens, and worldly temptation in Clarence's sea voyage.

The sea therefore may be interpreted as a moral landscape, a space where characters move between danger and revelation, temptation and transformation. Performed "in the merry holiday of Carnival" (*inter hilares vero Carnisprivii ferias*), the play embraces the paradoxes of carnival culture: excess reveals restraint, pleasure reveals danger, and spectacle reveals moral truth. Royal ceremonies, banquets, and sea voyages create a world of abundance and movement, yet all ultimately point toward the same conclusion. Human beings remain trapped within cycles of desire unless worldly pleasures are transformed by spiritual discipline.

Sudden Spatial Transformations: The Stage as Eschatological Space

The mutability of Jesuit theatrical space reached its most powerful expression in moments of sudden transformation, when the stage itself became an instrument of revelation. Whereas the reconstruction of cities, civic monuments, classical landscapes, and maritime worlds created environments in which history could be entered and explored, sudden changes of scenery produced a different kind of historical experience: one based on rupture, revelation, and the unexpected appearance of hidden truths. Through sudden alterations of light, colour, movement, and scenery, Jesuit theatre could make visible the forces that arguably shaped human destiny but remained normally concealed – death, providence, divine judgment, and the fragility of worldly power.

A striking example is the playbill of a play from Braniewo entitled *Orgia Bacchi* (1738), which transforms the theatrical space of royal celebration into a landscape of mortality.²² The play's Scottish plot draws upon Hector Boece's *Scotorum historiae* (1527) and George Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum historia* (1582). Boece's account, which also indirectly contributed to the Macbeth tradition through later historical compilations, recounts a mysterious episode from the reign of Alexander III, King of Scots (1241–1286).

22 *Orgia Ba[c]chi, tragico Libithinae saltu olim in Alexandro III Scotorum rege terminate, nunc demum, anticineralibus feriis, in cautelam male bachantibus lupercis lupercalibusque; choragis scenic apparatus reproducta ab oratoria facultate Hosiano-Cardinalitii Athenaei S.J. anno 1738 die 15 Februarii* (Braniewo: Coll. I.S., 1738), Vilnius University Library IV 32016.



Figure 6. The coronation of Alexander, King of Scots, on Moot Hill, Scone. The king is being greeted by the royal poet of Scotland who recites Alexander's genealogy. Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon* (Volume 2), c. 1400–1499, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Ms. 171B, f. 206r. © The Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

During the king's second wedding celebrations, while dancing with his bride Yolande de Dreux, Alexander suddenly saw a skeleton appearing at the end of a long procession of dancers. The courtiers who witnessed the apparition interpreted it as a bad omen. The Jesuit play combines this episode with Buchanan's account of Alexander's later accidental death after falling from a horse and breaking his neck, creating a dramatic structure in which prophecy and fulfilment become inseparably linked.

The play's central argument is expressed in its dramatic premise: royal magnificence cannot protect human beings from mortality. The opening silent allegorical scene presents Death dancing with Alexander's Genius, a visual summary of the entire drama. Accompanied by a *memento mori* line from Sarbiewski, which appears on the printed playbill, the scene immediately establishes the play's moral universe.²³ The king's status,

23 The playbill's title page has a line from Sarbiewski's Epigram 119: "De nobili adolescente in feriis bacchanalium miserabiliter extincto" (About a noble youth miserably slain during the festivities of the Bacchanalia). See: Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski,

wealth, and authority are shown to be powerless before death. The image recalls the medieval tradition of the *danse macabre*, a powerful motif that persisted in early modern Europe and found particularly strong visual manifestations in Polish artistic culture, including examples preserved in Jesuit student notebooks.²⁴

The transformation of festive space into a space of death structures the entire performance. After a triumphant royal entry symbolizing peace and unity, Alexander and his court prepare a magnificent feast. Before the banquet begins, the king and his nobles examine a series of images intended for entertainment. The first depicts Death with discarded insignia of power, with the Latin biblical inscription *Omnes traditi sunt in mortem* ("All were delivered unto death").²⁵ The second image represents dancing figures, including giants (*Gigantes*) and dwarfs (*Pygmei*), accompanied by another Latin inscription with an unusual word order *Movebit Omnibus Risum Saltus* ("The dance will make everyone laugh").²⁶ The court initially responds to the second image with laughter, believing it to be merely comic entertainment. Yet the visual and verbal world of the theatre suddenly shifts. The initials of the inscription's words spell M.O.R.S. – death – and the apparently amusing image transforms into a representation of a dance of death later on in the play: the giants become figures performing the *mortis saltatio* (dance of death). Through this carefully staged revelation, comedy itself becomes a vehicle for mortality.

Epigrammatum Liber/Księga epigramatów, ed. and trans. Magdalena Piskała and Dorota Sutkowska (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 2003), 120–121.

- 24 Krzysztof Kurek, Wiesław Wydra, „Taniec śmierci na scenie kolegium jezuickiego w Kaliszu?,” *Poznańskie Studia Filozoficzne. Seria Literacka* 22 (2013): 315–339. The authors argue for a possible staging of a *dance of death* at the Kalisz Jesuit College around 1712, based on a copy of the vanitative poem accompanying the *dance of death* painting in the Franciscan monastery in Kraków. The verses were copied into a newly discovered notebook of a Kalisz Jesuit College student Franciszek Marszałkiewicz, now held in the Cathedral Library in Gniezno (MS 1144). See: Jadwiga Rył (ed.), „Katalog rękopisów Biblioteki Katedralnej w Gnieźnie,” *Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne* 46 (1983): 53–54. See also a broader study of dance motives in Polish-Lithuanian Jesuit theatre in: Anna Reglińska-Jemioł, *Formy taneczne w polskim teatrze jezuickim XVIII wieku* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2012).
- 25 “quia omnes traditi sunt in mortem ad terram ultimam, in medio filiorum hominum, ad eos qui descendunt in lacum.” (for they are all delivered unto death to the lowest parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with them that go down into the pit.) Book of Ezekiel 31:14 (Douai-Rheims Bible).
- 26 The underlying concept of this scene is to convey the universality of laughter. Its comic effect arises from the contrast between exceptionally tall figures dancing alongside people of very short stature. The term *pygmei*, used to describe a race of diminutive people, was already employed by ancient authors (Aristotle, Pliny, Hesiod, Ovid), and their fight with cranes is described by Homer, *Iliad* 3, 1–7.

The court's laughter is interrupted by the discovery that death had been present within the spectacle from the beginning.



Figure 7. Dance of Death. Unknown artist. Late 17th c. Church of St. Bernardine of Siena, Krakow. The chapel of St Anne. Photo by Maciej Gas. © Friars Minor, Krakow.

The most dramatic transformation occurs later in the play, when Alexander, overwhelmed by the accumulation of omens, seeks refuge in sleep. As he falls asleep in the sixth scene, the stage undergoes a complete metamorphosis – the entire hall turns black – *tota aula nigrescens*. Darkness covers the space, and images of skeletons and death begin to appear, accompanied by the inscription *Finit illorum mors est* (Their end is death). The transformation turns the theatrical environment itself into a *memento mori*. The audience does not merely hear about death; it experiences a moment in which the visible world disappears and the hidden reality behind worldly celebration is revealed.

This scene exemplifies the distinctive power of Jesuit scenography. The change of the stage does not function simply as a spectacular effect. It creates an epistemological transformation: spectators are forced to reinterpret everything they have previously seen. The royal feast, the images, the laughter, and the celebrations acquire a new meaning once death becomes visible. The theatre performs the act of revelation itself.

The irony of this episode reveals the central moral logic of the play: human beings cannot escape the realities they attempt to avoid. The stage transformations of *Orgia Bacchi* therefore externalize an early modern understanding of history as governed not only by political events but by providential and eschatological forces. Through sudden changes of scenery, Jesuit theatre made invisible truths perceptible. Space itself became a medium of revelation.

Taken together, the examples of costume, ephemeral architecture, cultural landscapes, maritime scenery, and sudden stage transformations demonstrate the extraordinary flexibility of Jesuit theatrical space. Whether through the body of the actor, the civic environment of the city, the imagined geography of antiquity, the unstable movement of the sea, or the abrupt appearance of death itself, Jesuit theatre created worlds in which history became visible, inhabitable, and emotionally compelling.

Conclusion: The Uses of Transformation

Jesuit theatre often works in unexpected ways, and we are still learning how to fully understand it. These were performances shaped by flexibility and surprise, creating a sense of wonder and delight. Like the “two hours’ traffic of our stage” described in the Prologue to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, these performances created temporary worlds in motion – worlds shaped by spectacle, surprise, and revelation. The ultimate force of Jesuit theatre lay in its capacity to create spaces of wonder in which revelation

could emerge. Through acts of concealment, revelation, and reinterpretation, performance altered the relationship between seeing and knowing, inviting spectators to encounter the world anew. Spectacle was not an end in itself but a means of discovery: wonder prepared the spectator for understanding, and astonishment opened the way to moral and spiritual insight. By reshaping what could be seen, entered, and experienced, Jesuit theatre transformed space into an instrument of intellectual and spiritual formation, demonstrating that theatrical space was never merely where history was represented – it was one of the principal means through which history, identity, and meaning were made visible.

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- Exul vates et pro domo orator semel mortui, bis sepulti nempe in tumulo, et hominem oblivione, per literatissimos Sarmatas, Ovidianum mausolaeum eruderantes, Ciceronisq[ue] pro republica reperientes volumina, ad vitam famae revocati, demum ab illustrissima, perillustri, magnifica, ac prae nobili iuventute Academiae Vilnensis S.I. sub sextile Musarum exilium erudito orbi reproducti anno exulis in patria Dei-hominis 1715. Kalendis Augusti.* (Np., n.p., 1715), Jagiellonian Library, Kraków, 33690.III.
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Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon* (Volume 2), c. 1400-1499, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Ms. 171B, f. 206r. © The Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

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