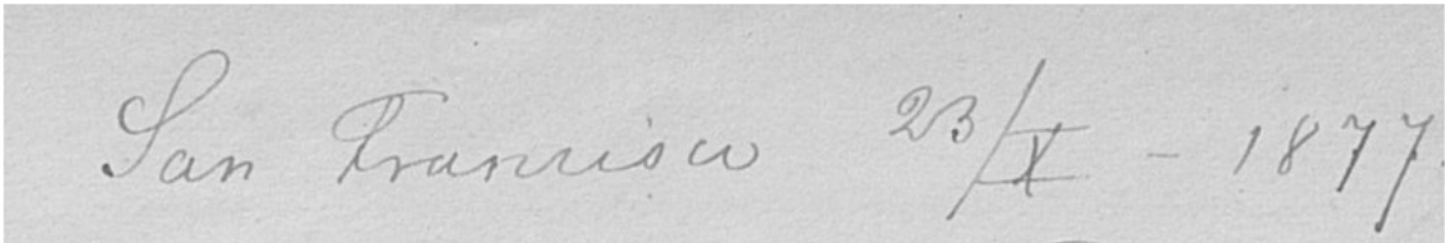


ALEKSANDER BEDNAWSKI¹ TO HELENA MODRZEJEWSKA²



San Francisco
23 October 1877

Dear and Respected Madame,

It was just in the past few days that I picked up a package of letters from Lwów, among which I found N[umbers] 119-120 of the *Polish Daily* [*Dziennik Polski*], into which were mixed segments of my latest correspondence, so I'm sending enclosures for Your Respected Ladyship to be so kind as to look at them – I don't know how much [illegible words] [news ?] [came to the attention of ?] Your Respected Ladyship – though according to what's written me from there – it made quite a stir in all spheres of Lwów society.³

Be that as it may, I wrote what I could, mostly "under the influence of first impressions, which were difficult to resist." When taking into account all of the circumstances, then essentially it seems to me that my only calling, my only purpose in California, was to await Your Ladyship's arrival in San Francisco from Warsaw, only for the purpose of writing back home about Your success, and thereby adding at least a particle to the monument of your glory in this hemisphere – it's hard for me not to admit I feel proud that it's almost as if Providence had chosen me in particular for this – there really is in all of this something greater than my own will, but what's hard for me to even grasp – I must confess that some kind of blind force is always spurring me, and almost insisting – as you see, I am, so

CALIFORNIA THEATER.
JOHN McOULLOUGH.....Proprietor and Manager
BARTON HILL.....Acting Manager

Monday and Tuesday Evenings,
August 20th and 21st,
First appearance on the American stage of the
Celebrated Polish Artist,
HELENA MODJEWSKA
(COUNTESS BOZENTA),
From the Imperial Theater at Warsaw, in her
Renowned Impersonation of
ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR,
Newly translated from the French expressly for
the occasion.

Wednesday and Thursday, August 22d and
23d—**ROMEO AND JULIET**, Helena Modjeska
as Juliet.
Friday Evening, August 24th—Benefit of
Helena Modjeska, on which occasion John Mc-
Oullough will appear as Hamlet; Helena
Modjeska as Ophelia.
Saturday Evening—**FAREWELL BENEFIT**
OF JOHN McOULLOUGH.
Monday, August 27th—First appearance this
season of the popular actress, **ROSE EYTINGER**,
and first production in this city of the new play,
MISS MUTTON.

San Francisco Chronicle 19 August 1877

¹ Aleksander Bednawski; see: <http://www.polishclubsf.org/Bednawski%20addresses.pdf>

² See: <http://culture.pl/en/artist/helena-modrzejewska-modjeska>

³ Bednawski submitted articles to Polish and American newspapers.

to speak, an instrument in the hands of this unseen force. [B]ut when I am guilty of being obedient, you must forgive me for that!



Lake Temescal, Oakland, California

Last Saturday we made a date with the Bielawskis⁴ to join them for a little excursion to Oakland on Sunday. Apparently all the previous night it poured rain, the following day it was gorgeous, all of nature, having been thirsty for so long, revived itself anew – which suited us just fine, so we set ourselves out on the road, and *Basta* [Enough] !!!

As usual, starting out, we were driven – after a while we sailed on a ship⁵ – then again we boarded a train – and at the end we went on foot – finally, after a brisk walk, we found ourselves in a beautiful garden set in a place called "Temescal," at the very end of Oakland – there in a lovely arbor we sat down at a table set with such delicacies as may be obtained only by those who own a garden.

Oh! how sweetly moving it was, when I was told that several months ago, You had been seated in this same place, and likewise it was at the beginning of this year, when You made that excursion in the company of the Bielawskis [and] [redacted] [Horain? Sienkiewicz?], and here I sighed deeply, when I recalled that soon You won't be with us – that You've abandoned us – and God knows when we may see each other again, but... ("Everything in this poor world is strangely woven";⁶ "Here today, gone tomorrow, such has been our fate"!). I was more than a little moved in the moment when [illegible] [wine? vodka?] was brought to the table – but Mrs. Bielawska, out of well-meaning **enthusiasm** [?] and with the liveliest affection, called out: "Well, let us drink [to the] health of... someone – meanwhile I propose the health of Mrs. Helena!" and we carried out her wish, [drinking] to your health, with the greatest pleasure.

You may now be convinced, whether you're conscious of it or not, that you are firmly established in the hearts of all who have met you – everyone remembers you with unceasing gratitude – everyone loves you sincerely, and what more could be required? When you have happily returned, you must thank, you must *personally* thank, Mrs. Bielawska.

Be kind also to your friends. Don't forget about them, in happiness or unhappiness – don't let anything in the world lead you away from them – since God would be angry with you for that. – Oh! *ma chere la penchant de votre noble coeur et estime et aimee votre Michonnet*.⁷

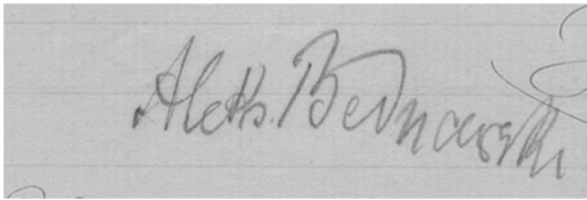
⁴ See: <http://www.polishclubsf.org/Bielawski.pdf>

⁵ The ferry, from San Francisco to Oakland

⁶ Allusion to poet Jan Kochanowski; see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Kochanowski

⁷ My dear, the inclination of your noble heart and esteem and affection [of] your Michonnet [Michonnet is a character in the play "Adrienne Lecouvreur" -- a play in which Modjeska played Adrienne in 1877 in San Francisco]

Aleks Bednawski



76500 Bednawski, Alexander. 60 Poland. Surveyor 1573 Folsom. 11 June 5, 1858, Ohio, Com. Pls. Oct 31, 1877
Aleksander Bednawski in San Francisco, 1877, on 1573 Folsom Street (from Ancestry.com, California Great Register of Voters)

National Theater.

The acting of Madam Modjeska last night at National Guard Hall was not like anything ever seen before in Virginia City. It was the perfect realization of something which we fancy is dreamed of by us all, but which we all have waited and waited for through the years until deep down in our hearts we had concluded it was something too rare for any earthly one to give materialization to—that it was but a longing of the divine within us which only in some other state less sordid, dull and cold, than this, could find full expression. But last night the dream was made real, and more than once did the audience rub their eyes and look up with that questioning gaze which men put on when startled suddenly from a broken sleep and trying to gather together their confused senses. There was no ranting, no apparent struggle for effect, but simply the portrayal of a human life as it might exist through a brief period of joy, a season of unparalleled sorrow, then a renewal of measureless happiness for a moment—the lightning before death—and then the close, curtained around with such suffering and despair that the tones still ring in one's ears and the scene still flashes with ghastly vision before one's eyes. It was art reduced to an exact science, and so masterful was the delineation that the audience were spell bound. They gave no sign that they were thrilled, because they were so terribly thrilled that they could no more respond than can the bird fly away when once it is lured by the serpent's eye. The sorcery of a genius superb in power and marvelous in grace was upon them. They listened as to an incantation, and went away believers in enchantment. We cannot, in a brief and hurried notice, give any idea of the acting of Madam Modjeska. She is a lady of wonderful mind, and that mind has been trained in the severe discipline of the European schools, until art has become so perfect that it seems like nature. And beyond the acting and the art, there is apparent a womanhood which is nobler than all else. Of the other performers, J. H. Vinson deserves especial mention. The part of Mons. Michounet reveals him in a character which exactly portrays the best attributes of Mr. Vinson, and he performed the part as though, instead of a first performance, he had been playing it nightly for months. Miss Jennie Reiffarth as Princess de Bouillon, in her performance last night, would have divided the honors with any other Adrienne Lecouvreur, save Helena Modjeska. Miss R. is always capable, always conscientious, and always seems to perfectly understand her part, and renders it faithfully. Ward, as Prince de Bouillon, was good, as he always is. The other performers did well for a first performance, and will doubtless do better, as the play "Adrienne Lecouvreur" is repeated to-night.

P.S. I read with great pleasure a brief reference in the local papers about your success in the Hinterlands. God bless you!

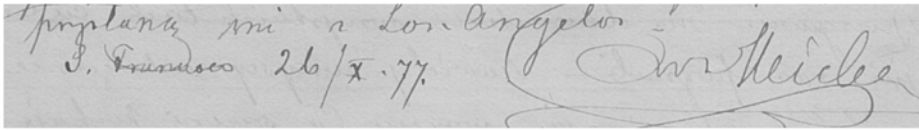
Tuesday, October 23, 1877
Paper: Territorial Enterprise (Virginia City, Nevada)

St. California Theatre w San Francisco, gdzie wystąpiła po raz pierwszy na scenie amerykańskiej 20 sierpnia 1877 Helena Modrzejewska



But! Mrs. Bielawska is very troubled, and nothing will comfort her – her favorite doggie "Toby" died – he no longer lives, and he gave up the ghost on the same day as our excursion to Oakland – after returning, she found him in the little garden, already expired – it appears he died of desperation.

I am also enclosing this photograph,⁸ sent to me from Los Angeles.



S. Francisco

26 October 1877

Bednawski

SOURCE:

Letter number 26 (Modrzejewska correspondence), generously provided by **Professors Emil Orzechowski** and **Alicja Kędziora**, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland.

Translated from a Polish transcription (A. Kędziora) by **Bob Lamming**, with **Elżbieta Kieszczyńska** (Clifton, New Jersey), and from the original Polish by **Consul Ignacy Żarski** (Los Angeles) and **Anna Usowicz, MD** (San Francisco), and edited by **Maureen Mroczek Morris** (San Francisco) with **Roman Włodek** (Kraków) and **Lynn Ludlow** (San Francisco). We are grateful to Rita Moran (San Francisco) for translating the French phrase. Translation commissioned by Maureen Mroczek Morris.

⁸ Unidentified photograph