

= Stańczyk ( painting ) =

Stańczyk ( Polish : Stańczyk w czasie balu na dworze królowej Bony wobec straconego Smoleńska , English : Stańczyk during a ball at the court of Queen Bona in the face of the loss of Smolensk ) is a painting by Jan Matejko finished in 1862 . This painting was acquired by the Warsaw National Museum in 1924 . During World War II it was looted by the Nazis and subsequently seized by the Soviet Union , returned to Poland around 1956 .

It is one of Matejko 's most famous works and the one that launched him to fame . It has been described as one of the most recognizable paintings in the Warsaw National Museum , and is a flagship painting for the " Collection of Polish paintings prior to 1914 " . Its primary composition is the contrast between the solemn jester ( the titular Stańczyk ) and the lively ball going on in the background . The painting has created an image of Stańczyk that has become iconic , and widely recognized in Poland .

= = Stańczyk = =

Stańczyk , the male figure depicted in the painting , was the court jester when Poland was at the height of its political , economic and cultural power during the era of the Renaissance in Poland , during the reign of King Sigismund I the Old ( reigned 1506 ? 1548 ) . He was a popular figure ; besides his fame as a jester he has been described as an eloquent , witty , and intelligent man , using satire to comment on the nation 's past , present , and future . Unlike jesters of other European courts , Stańczyk has always been considered as much more than a mere entertainer . Stańczyk 's fame and legend were strong in his own time and enjoyed a resurgence in the 19th century , and he remains well @-@ known to this day .

Scarcity of sources gave rise to four distinct hypotheses about Stańczyk in the 19th century : that he was entirely invented by Jan Kochanowski and his colleagues , that he was " perhaps a typical jester dressed by his contemporaries in an Aesopian attire , perhaps a Shakespearean vision of 19th century writers , or perhaps indeed a grey eminence of the societatis ioculatorum " . In any measure , consensus among modern scholars is that such a person indeed existed and even if he did not , the figure had a tremendous importance to Polish culture of later centuries , appearing in works of many artists of the 19th and 20th centuries . He appears in a work of , among others , Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz ( in Jan z Tęczy . Powieść historyczna , 1825 ) and several works by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski ( 1839 , 1841 ) .

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The full title of the painting is Stańczyk w czasie balu na dworze królowej Bony wobec straconego Smoleńska ( Stańczyk during a ball at the court of Queen Bona in the face of the loss of Smolensk ) . a

The primary composition of the painting is in the contrast between the solemn jester ( Stańczyk ) ? obviously the focus of the painting ? and the lively ball going on in the background . Stańczyk is shown sitting alone in a dark room , while a ball , hosted by the royal family , is in full swing in the neighbouring hall . His appearance is unlike that one would expect in a jester ? gloomy , deep in thought . His seriousness is reinforced by his accessories : his marotte lies discarded on the floor , whereas a holy medallion of the Black Madonna of Cz?stochowa can be seen on his torso . On the table lies a letter with the year 1514 and the name Smolensk , likely announcing that Poland has lost Smolensk ( now in Russia ) to the Grand Duchy of Muscovy , causing Stańczyk 's sorrow and reflection on his fatherland 's fate . The letter seems to have been discarded by some official , and only the jester realizes its significance ? while the rulers are partying , celebrating the recent victory at the battle of Orsha , disregarding the bad news about Smolensk . Another symbol , a lute , symbol of glory , is being carried by a midget , stereotyped as a person of low stature and morale in Matejko 's time ; this suggests a decline of the Jagiellon dynasty 's fortunes . Through an open window , a comet is seen ? a portent sign of ill fortune .

= = History , significance and historiography = =

Matejko was fascinated by Stańczyk from the times of his youth , and portrayed him in several of his works ( most notably , besides the painting discussed here , in Consecration of King Sigismund 's Bell , 1874 and Prussian Homage , 1882 ) . Working on this painting , Matejko was also inspired by the book *Król zamczyska* by Seweryn Goszczyński , whose main character ? a loner , living in the castle 's ruins , trying to reconcile past and present , and himself inspired by Stańczyk ? likely influenced this painting . Completed in 1862 , when Matejko was twenty four years old , it is one of his most famous works and the one that launched him to fame . It is seen as a key painting for the understanding of Matejko 's style and intentions in his art . Matejko used his own face for Stańczyk , and with this work , began a series of paintings analyzing and interpreting the history of Poland through the figure of Stańczyk .

The painting is also seen as highly significant for the culture of Poland in general . It has been described as one of the most recognizable paintings in the Warsaw National Museum , and is a flagship painting for the " Collection of Polish paintings prior to 1914 " . The painting has created an image of Stańczyk that has become iconic , and has been repeated in other works such as the play *Wesele* ( 1901 ) of Stanisław Wyspiański . Matejko 's most famous paintings are usually large , group scenes ; individual scenes are less common in his work .

Upon its creation , the painting did not gather much attention , and was acquired by the Kraków Society of Friends of Fine Arts for a purpose of a gift lottery . It was subsequently won by a certain individual , Korytko , in whose possession it was slightly damaged . Upon Matejko 's raise to fame , the painting was rediscovered and applauded as a masterpiece , and acquired by the Warsaw National Museum in 1924 . During World War II it was looted by the Nazis . It was subsequently seized by the Soviet Union and returned to Poland around 1956 .