Politics and the Reception of Irish Drama in Poland since the War

Abstract

This article surveys the critical and popular reception of Irish playwrights in Poland after the second world war. Concentrating on Behan, Beckett, Shaw and O’Casey, it examines the extent to which politics and censorship influenced their reception. The Polish careers of each playwright are studied, with special attention being given to the issue of censorship and to the rise (or decline) in fortunes of individual writers after the overthrow of communism in 1989.

Although it is difficult to separate political factors from others in assessing the reception of literature some patterns can be seen very clearly, allowing conclusions to be drawn. For example, the great popularity enjoyed by Shaw throughout the history of communist Poland (and also before the war) collapsed dramatically in 1989. Brendan Behan’s reception in Poland suffered from censorship but it can also be argued that O’Casey – a playwright who, from the point of view of the authorities, was politically correct – was tainted by association with communism. Samuel Beckett was not unaffected by censorship but his popularity endured communism and survives into modern day Poland, perhaps because of the apparently apolitical nature of his theatre.

The article will also examine the way in which critics’ statements sometimes need to be decoded due to the politics of the time.