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## Politics and the Reception of Irish Drama in Post-War Poland

*Oak Leaves and Lavender* is one of Sean O'Casey's less acclaimed plays. Like *The Star Turns Red*, it is marred by pro-communist propaganda. This might seem to make it an ideal candidate for the post-war Polish stage, especially during the years 1949 to 1955 when the doctrine of socialist realism in the arts held sway. How could the commissars and the censors fault a play that sings the praises of communism? And yet the play remained untranslated, unpublished, unperformed. For what, in fact, might the censor have made of the following lines from the play? They are spoken by Drishogue O'Morrigan, a young communist, in rebuttal of the red-baiting Hitler sympathiser Deeda Tutting.

Others with eyes as clear as yours, lady, have seen brighter and manlier things there [i.e. in the Soviet Union]. The fear you say you saw may have been the deep, dark fire of courage; the chiselled lines in pallid faces, the insignia of resolution; the ragged garments, the hurried shelter worn by sturdy hope striding down the street. If you want, woman, to see fear in th' eye, the pinched and pallid face, the shrunken figure, the tattered garment, ribbed to welcome every gusty wintry wind, look here at home – you'll find them plentiful in every town and city!<sup>1</sup>

We can only speculate but it seems likely that the trained censor would have seen in this passage a fine example of Aesopian language, a none-too veiled attack on the Soviet Union, especially since Drishogue is revealed to be something of a racist himself. Even the censor who interpreted this as no more than glorification of communism would have been inclined to

1 Sean O'Casey, *Collected Plays*, vol. 4 (London: Macmillan, 1951), pp. 1–116, pp. 47–8.

assume that the Polish reader would not. And as for a theatre audience, told to 'look here, at home ...?' These were audiences that in 1968 took to the streets when a nineteenth-century play was taken off stage for allegedly being anti-Soviet.

In a study such as this it is natural to concentrate on the plays that were published and performed but in a country like Poland this is to ignore a large part of the picture, cut out by censors, who did not necessarily leave written records that would be helpful to modern day studies of the period. The example of *Oak Leaves and Lavender*, then, remains a hypothetical one. It is rather unlikely that the play was killed by the censor's office, but it illustrates the complexity of the situation in Communist Poland.<sup>2</sup> It was not necessarily the 'politically correct' – i.e. socialist – writers that had the smoothest path, though if *Oak Leaves and Lavender* was indeed withheld from the Polish public by political considerations it probably did O'Casey's career in Poland no harm at all. Other writers probably suffered in the long run by being favoured by the authorities.

This article will examine the reception of Irish drama in post-war Poland, and its relationship with politics and censorship. It will concentrate on Sean O'Casey, Brendan Behan, Samuel Beckett and George Bernard Shaw, each of whom in his own way illustrates something of the times. It is difficult to tease out political factors from all the other factors – such as the quality of translations and the success of individual productions – that can affect the reception of a given playwright or play but a study of the performance statistics and the behind the scenes machinations of the censor allows some conclusions to be drawn.

That politics had a role to play in Polish theatrical life is not in any doubt. Theatres in Poland were nationalised after the Second World War and were answerable to the Ministry of Culture. Kazimierz Braun emphasises the extent of party infiltration<sup>3</sup> and describes the personnel changes

2 An anonymous review of an English production of the play acknowledges its weakness in 1947. This was before socialist realist art became the official dogma. Anon, 'Liście dębu i lawenda', *Teatr*, 9 (1947), p. 52.

3 Kazimierz Braun, *A History of Polish Theater, 1939–1989: Spheres of Captivity and Freedom* (Westport: Greenwood, 1996), p. 124.

in theatres after 1947 that left loyal party men in control. Further evidence of state interference is the closure in 1949 of seven theatre periodicals.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Poland seems to have been a good deal more liberal than most other Eastern Bloc countries and, as will be seen, the political climate changed over the years.<sup>5</sup>

### Sean O'Casey

It cannot be said that O'Casey made a great impression on the Polish public. *Shadow of a Gunman* was translated, published and performed in 1955. It ran for seventy-eight nights in Warsaw's Teatr Współczesny, directed by the translator, Zygmunt Hübner (who was later to direct *Cock-a-Doodle- Dandy* and an adaptation of Joyce's *Ulysses*). Seventy-eight showings is a respectable enough run but in 1951 in the same theatre Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* ran for 242 nights.<sup>6</sup> Also, where *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was to return repeatedly, there was to be only the one production of *Shadow of a Gunman*. In 1960 Grzegorz Sinko, in a joint review of *Cock-a-Doodle- Dandy* and *You Never Can Tell*, wrote that O'Casey was almost completely unknown in Poland.<sup>7</sup>

One might speculate that the public was discouraged from going to see *Cock-a-Doodle-Dandy* by the headline – if not the content – of a somewhat earlier article on O'Casey in the same publication: 'Sean O'Casey

4 Braun, *A History of Polish Theater*, pp. 43–4.

5 See, for example, Tomas Venclova, 'Translations of Word Literature and Political Censorship in Contemporary Lithuania', *Lituanus*, 2 (1979), (<[http://www.lituanus.org/1979/79\\_2\\_01.htm](http://www.lituanus.org/1979/79_2_01.htm)>, accessed 15 September 2008).

6 'Aneks. Sztuki irlandzkie na scenach polskich (1945–1974)', *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, 3–4 (1975), p. 8. For statistics see also: Jan Michalik and Stanisław Hałabuda (eds), *Dramat obcy w Polsce 1765–1965. Premiery, druki, egzemplarze*, 2 vols (Cracow: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2001).

7 Grzegorz Sinko, 'Kłopoty i niespodzianki', *Nowa Kultura*, 46 (1960), p. 3.

– a fighting dramatist’. This is a glowing tribute to the author, as well as to Brecht and Shaw. Although the tone does not smack overpoweringly of newspeak, the headline is a giveaway: ‘fighting’ (*walczący*), like ‘progressive’, would have been instantly identifiable as a badge of communist sympathy.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, a brief note in the daily newspaper *Życie Warszawy* refers to O’Casey as a ‘... writer fighting to liberate man from the terror of fanaticism and dogmatism.’<sup>9</sup> *Trybuna Ludu*, Poland’s official party organ, also carried a review of *Cock-a-Doodle-Andy*, by Roman Szydłowski. Here O’Casey suffers doubly. Szydłowski writes that he is a good communist, calling for the staging of, among others, *The Star Turns Red*, which is an ‘ideologically exceptionally valuable work.’<sup>10</sup> For many, such a recommendation would have had the opposite of the intended effect. For those who in 1960 still believed in communism Szydłowski does not have much to offer either, pronouncing the production unsuccessful.

Szydłowski also reviewed the earlier *Shadow of a Gunman* for *Trybuna Ludu*. This was before the watershed year of 1956. Propaganda was more pervasive, politics and ideology more overt in public discourse, less dissent was permitted. The general climate was more oppressive, although by 1955 a thaw was starting to set in. In his review, Szydłowski expresses surprise that O’Casey is debuting in Poland so late (in his 1960 review he returns to this theme, mentioning a ‘conspiracy of silence’ around O’Casey<sup>11</sup>). As a communist, well-known and highly regarded in the USSR, O’Casey should be close to Poles both artistically and ideologically. The review is positive but Szydłowski notes that since writing *Shadow of a Gunman*, O’Casey has made much progress: ‘... he clearly sees the goal of this struggle and sees its true heroes in the communists’. Although he avoids directly praising the propagandist *The Star Turns Red*, it is clear that O’Casey’s

8 Annette T. Rubinstein, ‘Sean O’Casey – dramaturg walczący’, *Nowa Kultura*, 31 (1960), p. 8.

9 Anon, ‘Kogut zawinił ... Premiera w Teatrze Kameralnym’, *Życie Warszawy*, 256 (1960), p. 6.

10 Roman Szydłowski, ‘Kogut z podciętymi skrzydłami’, *Trybuna Ludu*, 300 (1960), p. 6.

11 Szydłowski, ‘Kogut z podciętymi skrzydłami’, p. 6.

‘progress’ means progress to this kind of play. Szydłowski’s interpretation of *Shadow of a Gunman* also seems affected by ideology: he speaks of pseudo-heroes writing verses while others die fighting. O’Casey’s target is the ‘cowardly bourgeoisie’, which may seem something of a simplification of the play, which is a good deal more critical of the gunmen of the title than Szydłowski allows.<sup>12</sup>

Andrzej Wirth reviewed the same play in *Po Prostu*. At the start of 1955, it was the official organ of the Polish Youth Union (ZMP), the youth wing of the party in Poland, and by issue 39, in which Wirth’s review appears, it is flagged ‘the weekly paper of students and the young intelligentsia’. Wirth complains that the production of *Shadow of a Gunman* betrayed the author’s intentions by pseudo-romanticising and making a hero of Davoren.<sup>13</sup> Criticism was supposed to be a form of control but in practice critics often ignored Marxist-Leninist issues and Wirth, too, like many critics concentrates on aesthetics, devoting half of his review to questions of directing in general.<sup>14</sup>

Czesław Miłosz writes of the period from 1949 to 1955 that in the theatre it was marked by a turn to ‘... a photographic naturalism in settings, costumes and acting, as well as an influx of hastily concocted “realistic” plays with a political message.’<sup>15</sup> This is reflected in the choice of O’Casey’s plays: the early, more naturalist *Shadow of a Gunman* in 1955, with the more exuberant *Purple Dust* waiting until the 1960s, a period of ‘intensive experimentation’ in Polish theatre.<sup>16</sup>

12 Roman Szydłowski, ‘Bohaterowie i tchórze’, *Trybuna Ludu*, 269 (1955), p. 4. The play’s title was translated as ‘Shadow of a Hero’. See Robert Looby, ‘Looking for the Censor in the Works of Sean O’Casey (and Others) in Polish Translation’, *Translation and Literature*, 1 (2008), pp. 47–64 for a discussion of the translation of the play.

13 Andrzej Wirth, ‘Warsztat reżyserski młodych’, *Po Prostu*, 39 (1955), p. 4.

14 Andrzej Krajewski, *Między współpracą a oporem. Twórcy kultury wobec systemu politycznego PRL (1975–1980)* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2004), pp. 61–2.

15 Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, 2nd edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 511.

16 Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, p. 534.

Politics come up in Jabłonkówna's review of the next O'Casey outing on the Polish stage, *Red Roses For Me*, which in 1964 had a fifty-one-night run, playing to nearly 30,000 viewers. This would place it some distance from the top thirty foreign plays of the season, the most popular of which, *Anne of Green Gables*, attracted over half a million viewers.<sup>17</sup> Jabłonkówna writes that in the clash of social classes in acts one and two there is no easy simplification: Brennan o' the Moor makes for a strange kind of capitalist.<sup>18</sup> This might be read as a coded reassurance that we are not dealing with propaganda. Zofia Jasińska's review mentions that O'Casey '... does not avoid declarations', which in turn might be read as a hint that we are dealing with propaganda.<sup>19</sup> In both cases, though, there is a hint at what lies behind much of the reception of O'Casey – he was a communist. According to Poland's authoritative *Periodicals Bibliography*, 1964, the year of O'Casey's death, brought just six articles (including the two reviews mentioned above) in the Polish press and periodicals about him, while in

17 Figures from *Almanach Sceny Polskiej*, various editors, Warsaw. Published annually from 1959/1960 on. Seasonal statistical breakdowns of the type I will refer to here were published from 1960–61 to the 1987–88 yearbook (published 1994). Publication of the almanac became more and more erratic in the 1980s, with delays of many years. Such yearbooks were naturally subject to censorship, in particular of information concerning Poles living and writing abroad, but the kind of wholesale falsification of statistics known from the USSR does not seem to have been a feature here. It should also be borne in mind that post 1965 attendance figures can be inflated by compulsory attendance, especially of school children and communist youth organisations (see Braun, *A History of Polish Theater*, pp. 125–6), though this is not a phenomenon unique to totalitarian states. The figures should be treated with caution (they can be skewed by a runaway success) but they at least give an indication of trends. See Jadwiga Czachowska, 'Zmagania z cenzurą słowników i bibliografii literackich w PRL', in Janusz Kostecki, Alina Brodzka, eds, *Piśmiennictwo – systemy kontroli – obieg alternatywny*, vol. 2 (Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1992), pp. 214–36 and Krystyna Tokarzówna, 'Cenzura w *Polskiej Bibliografii Literackiej*', in the same volume, pp. 237–50.

18 Leonia Jabłonkówna, 'Czerwone róże dla mnie', *Teatr*, 17 (1964), pp. 5–7, p. 6.

19 Zofia Jasińska, 'Szekspir, Mann, Plato, Sean O'Casey', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 24 (1964), p. 4.

1965 there was just one.<sup>20</sup> According to the same source, 1968s production of *Purple Dust* brought just two reviews, an unfavourable one by Elżbieta Morawiec, and a favourable one by Maria Czanerle, which concentrated mostly on the stage setting but does mention that O'Casey is suspected of communism.<sup>21</sup> The 1975 production of the same play, apart from one brief mention, yielded just one review, again unfavourable. In it, Marek Jodłowski accuses the play of tendentiousness, criticism tempered by the reassurance that O'Casey can rise above 'narrow doctrinairism', for example in *Red Roses for Me*. Nonetheless, O'Casey's communist sympathies are once again aired and the bad example of *The Star Turns Red* is again given an outing.<sup>22</sup>

Lengthier, more scholarly pieces on O'Casey are, as might be expected, more nuanced than newspaper reviews, but also cannot avoid the subject of his communism, which Bolesław Taborski describes as 'highly individual'.<sup>23</sup> Sinko refers to the '... non-heroic look at heroic struggles for independence ...' of *Shadow of a Gunman* and *Juno and the Paycock*, while Wanda Krajewska's straightforward scholarly study 'Sean O'Casey i ekspresjonizm' also mentions the anti-romanticism of the Dublin trilogy, quoting the line from *Shadow of a Gunman* 'No man, Minnie, willingly dies for anything'.<sup>24</sup> She criticises the melodramatic tendencies of *The Star Turns Red* and the naivety of the credo 'So Red Jim says, so Red Jim orders', a naivety which stems from the lack of the earlier plays' 'derision'.<sup>25</sup>

20 *Bibliografia Zawartości Czasopism*, various editors, Warsaw. Published annually from 1947 on. Mentions in the subject index include reviews. Much the same provisos apply to this source as to the *Almanach Sceny Polskiej*.

21 Elżbieta Morawiec, 'Naiwność i wyrafinowanie', *Życie Literackie*, 42 (1968), p. 12 and Maria Czanerle, 'Świetna zabawa Szajny', *Teatr*, 21 (1968), pp. 3–5.

22 Marek Jodłowski, 'Pył w oku widza', *Odra*, 6 (1975), pp. 109–10, p. 109.

23 Bolesław Taborski, 'Jeszcze o Seanie O'Casey', *Dialog*, 1 (1962), pp. 100–7, p. 106. Taborski also devotes a chapter to O'Casey in his *Nowy Teatr Elżbietański* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1967).

24 Grzegorz Sinko, 'Irlandia – daleka i bliska', *Dialog*, 10 (1961), pp. 106–17, p. 109. Wanda Krajewska, 'Sean O'Casey i ekspresjonizm', *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny*, 4 (1965), pp. 363–79, p. 367.

25 Krajewska, 'Sean O'Casey i ekspresjonizm', p. 373.

The scholarly reception does not differ so greatly from that in the west. There is the same recognition that O'Casey was at times guilty of sloganeering but that his better plays are more subtle and humanist and display a gift for language, which, Taborski writes, he did not lose '... whatever one may think of his later plays.'<sup>26</sup>

Despite his communism – or because of his 'individual' communism – O'Casey was not excessively praised, even in handbooks of literature. In the *Concise Dictionary of English [sic] and American Writers* of 1971 three columns are devoted to him (one to Behan, six to Shaw, two and a half to Synge, three and a half each to Swift and Wilde, and none to Beckett, often considered a French writer). In his later plays, we read there, the '... Marxist theory of class struggle finds ever fuller expression ...'<sup>27</sup> Another example would be the modest half a page devoted to him in the *History of European Literatures* of 1982, where his humble origins are stressed, as is his belief in the ineffectiveness of an Irish national liberation movement divorced from working-class struggle.<sup>28</sup> In this book Shaw, Wilde, Beckett and Swift are given more space, while Synge is given about the same. Behan does not figure.

It could be argued, then, that O'Casey was too communist for the general public but not communist enough for the authorities. If his career on Communist Poland's stages seems less than dazzling, it might be worth bearing in mind the words of Janina Szymańska in her review of the television production of *Juno and the Paycock*: 'the English also have problems with O'Casey, thinking him a genius but rarely actually staging his plays.'<sup>29</sup>

Up until 2002 O'Casey had one play produced in the Third Republic of Poland. Perhaps in reaction to the years of association with ideology, it

26 Taborski, 'Jeszcze o Seanie O'Casey', p. 105.

27 *Mały słownik pisarzy angielskich i amerykańskich*, ed. Elżbieta Piotrowska (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1971), p. 316.

28 *Dzieje literatur europejskich*, vol. 1, ed., Władysław Floryan (Warsaw: PWN, 1982), pp. 601–2.

29 Janina Szymańska, 'Irlandzka ballada', *Ekran*, 1 (1977), p. 10. Szymańska was not the only Polish commentator to call attention to this.

was a farce entitled *The End of the Beginning*, and received good notices.<sup>30</sup> One critic wrote in a review of it and a play by Molière '... they fight for nothing and attack nothing; they are all about and only about entertaining the viewer' and predicted a run of several seasons.<sup>31</sup> It had been over twenty years since an O'Casey play was performed in Poland and another critic suggested that the success of this one might prompt theatres to go back to this 'somewhat forgotten' writer.<sup>32</sup>

## George Bernard Shaw

Shaw has the advantage over O'Casey that although he was a good – though as a Fabian, not perfect – ideological fit with Communist Poland he had also been very popular in the country before the war. Thus, Stanisław Kumor writes in 1971: 'The Polish history of Bernard Shaw is much longer than it is generally admitted by his biographers', which might reasonably be interpreted as a signal that although the stages of the People's Republic of Poland are constantly showing his plays – don't worry, he is a worthwhile playwright, having been popular in the Second Republic.<sup>33</sup> In fact, Shaw was even popular in partitioned Poland, before the First World War: *The Devil's Disciple* was performed in Lviv in 1903, where its farcical elements were downplayed

30 Kulczycka suggests it was chosen to accommodate the skills of one of the actors. Olga Kulczycka, 'Godzina śmiechu', *Wiadomości Kulturalne*, 51 (1996), p. 17.

31 Joanna Godlewska, 'Śmiech w jesiennej szarości', *Przegląd Powszechny*, 1 (1997), pp. 101–3, p. 101. Her prediction proved correct.

32 Aleksandra Rembowska, 'Na dobry początek', *Teatr*, 1 (1997), pp. 29–30, p. 30. Seeing as this is an article about politics it might be worth pointing out that all three reviews that I have been able to find of this light comedy were written by women. The other, more serious plays were dealt with by women too, but men also found them worthy of their attention.

33 Stanisław Kumor, *Polskie debiuty Bernarda Shaw* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo UW, 1972), p. 269.

in favour of highlighting the theme of the struggle for independence, showing once again the role of politics in the reception of literature.<sup>34</sup> Before the Second World War Shaw was for a time the most popular English-language playwright, along with Shakespeare, in Poland and in Communist Poland he enjoyed immense popularity, even rivalling Shakespeare and Molière, the two most consistently popular foreign playwrights in the country. From 1945 to 1989 *Arms and the Man* had twenty-five productions, *Widowers' Houses* nineteen, *Pygmalion* twenty-seven, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* twenty-nine and *Candida* fourteen. In the period from 1944 to 1963, Shakespeare, Molière and Shaw, in that order, were the most staged foreign playwrights. The fourth most popular, Goldoni, was produced just over half as often (sixty-six times) as Shaw (124 times; Molière and Shakespeare were played 159 times and 169 times, respectively). In the 1971–1972 season Shaw overtook Shakespeare to assume the position of most-performed foreign author, with 735 performances to the latter's 450.<sup>35</sup>

The figures can be erratic, with, for example, Oscar Wilde making sudden appearances in the top twenty only to drop out again next season, but it is worth noting that Shaw was in the top twenty most frequently played foreign authors in every season in the 1960s except the last. In the 1970s Shaw makes the top twenty six times, with his star fading in the late 1970s and the 1980s. Nor did he play to empty houses. *You Never Can Tell*, the ninth most attended foreign play in the 1960–1961 season, attracted nearly 75,000 viewers. For comparison, the number one play, Regner's *Les Petits Têtes*, was seen by 192,849 people. In the 1971–1972 season (a particularly good year for the Irish, with Beckett, Wilde, Shaw, Behan and James Joyce all on Polish stages) *Arms and the Man* had just over 120,000 viewers, and was second only to L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, with 157,736. In the late 1960s *Pygmalion* regularly played to 30,000 people a season.

34 Wanda Krajewska, *Recepcja literatury angielskiej [sic] w Polsce w okresie modernizmu (1887–1918)*. Informacje. Sądy. Przekłady (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1972), p. 194.

35 Figures from *Almanach Sceny Polskiej*. Neither Behan nor O'Casey ever make the top twenty foreign authors.

Along with public interest in his plays went more or less scholarly interest in the shape of articles and monographs. 1957 saw the publication of the first Polish book devoted to Shaw.<sup>36</sup> In 1952 Alick West's *A Good Man Fallen Among the Fabians* had been translated. In 1975 a collection of Shaw's aphorisms was published and in 1981 his letters to Ellen Terry. About Shaw's works themselves, Kumor writes in 1971 that they, like 'all the English classics were sold at very low prices and are now available even from minor libraries.'<sup>37</sup>

An indicator of the official approval of Shaw would be the reprinting of a short article on him by Anatol Lunacharsky, the Soviet education commissar, in the late 1940s.<sup>38</sup> Another sign of approval would be the inclusion in an English reader for eleventh class schoolchildren of an extract from *The Man of Destiny* and an account of an interview with the writer (although a biographical note describes him as '... fundamentally a bourgeois thinker and writer').<sup>39</sup> The reader is divided into five themed sections. The first is 'Socialism, utopian and scientific', the fourth 'Imperialism, the last stage of Capitalism' and the fifth 'The USA, the camp of the reactionary forces'. As well as Shaw, there are pieces by Marx, Engels and Lenin (and Lincoln, Dickens and Tennyson). In the reprint of the interview, in which the aging Shaw praises Stalin, Słonimski writes 'And this I shall never forget how his voice vibrated then [when speaking about peace and socialism] with youthful enthusiasm.'<sup>40</sup> Shaw is devoted a good deal of space in Sinko and Grzebieniowski's 1954 *Theatre of Western Europe*, in which they conclude that Shaw's 'art for life's sake' is superior to the 'art for art's sake' of Oscar Wilde, whose chief value lies in clearing the way for Shaw.<sup>41</sup>

36 Bronisława Bałutowa, *Dramat Bernarda Shaw* (Łódź: Ossolineum, 1957).

37 Kumor, *Polskie debiuty*, p. 273.

38 'Anatoli Lunaczarskij o Bernardzie Shaw', *Łódź Teatralna*, 7 (1946/47) [sic], p. 13.

39 Stanisław Helsztyński, *Antologia tekstów do nauki języka angielskiego dla klasy XI* (Warsaw: Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, 1950), p. 227.

40 Helsztyński, *Antologia tekstów*, p. 265.

41 Grzegorz Sinko and Tadeusz Grzebieniowski, *Teatr krajów zachodniej Europy XIX i początku XX wieku. Część I, Kraje anglosaskie* (Warsaw: PWN, 1954), pp. 89, 110. The book was aimed at college students.

All this is not to say that Shaw was embraced solely for his politics or that he could not be criticised. Sinko accuses him of repeating himself after 1923.<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere there are broad hints that Shaw – as a playwright at least – is not just a useful idiot. Chwalewik writes that Shaw's comments on his works are vigorous but misleading: as a playwright he is more subtle and less of a propagandist.<sup>43</sup> Helsztyński assures readers that Shaw is not simple and easy, for which one could substitute Stalinist and doctrinaire.<sup>44</sup> Reviews of his plays were not necessarily overflowing with unwarranted praise on account of his politics either. A recurring theme in some reviews is the question of whether the plays had dated or not and even on the pages of *Trybuna Ludu* it was permissible to say that some of the master's works had not lasted as well as they might.<sup>45</sup> There were occasional references to Shaw's political correctness, as when Wróblewski writes that thanks to the change in social relationships (for which one is to understand the coming of communism to Poland) some of his plays now seemed dated, i.e. that Poland caught up with Shaw only after the war, but, perhaps curiously, there was not the constant referring to politics visible in the critical reception of O'Casey.<sup>46</sup> A review of the 1967 Polish translation of selections from Shaw's *Our Theatres in the Nineties* does not have a trace of politics, treating him solely as a playwright and critic.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, Shaw's fortunes waned with those of the communist regime in Poland, though one critic attributes his decline to a change in theatrical fashion – away from literary theatre and towards '... theatre of the depths, psychoanalysis, ritualistic theatre, theatre of political and cul-

42 Grzegorz Sinko, 'Stara i młoda Anglia', *Dialog*, 4 (1961), pp. 89–102, p. 89.

43 Witold Chwalewik, 'Shaw in Poland: An Outline', *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, 1961, pp. 47–58, p. 48.

44 Stanisław Helsztyński, 'O Bernardzie Shaw w Polsce uwagi luźne', introduction to Kumor, *Polskie debiuty*, pp. i–xi, p. i.

45 Jaszcz, 'Młódziej jest zwykle inna', *Trybuna Ludu*, 176 (1968), p. 6. Jaszcz gives *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* as an example of a play that did not stand the test of time.

46 Andrzej Wróblewski, 'Secesja z morałem', *Teatr*, 18 (1968), pp. 3–5.

47 Henryk Szletyński, 'G.B.S. jako krytyk teatralny', *Nowe Książki*, 12 (1968), pp. 800–2.

tural contestation ...'<sup>48</sup> Ironically, Shaw may also have suffered from the tendency, noted by Kazimierz Braun, to favour 'safe, censor-friendly' plays under the re-doubled constraints of Poland under martial law.<sup>49</sup> As a rough indicator of Shaw's decline in popularity, the number of references to him in the subject index of the *Periodicals Bibliography* falls in every decade, until in the 1980s there are only ten in all (from over 100 mentions in the 1950s). In the 1990s one finds only one reference to Shaw in the same source and this lack of interest is mirrored in the theatres.<sup>50</sup> From 1990 to 2002 *Androcles and the Lion* and *Arms and the Man* were each produced once, while *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was produced twice, giving just four productions in a dozen years, with virtually no attention paid to them in either the major print media or scholarly journals.

In short, Shaw started a career in partitioned Poland, established an enviable position in inter-war and post-war Poland, started declining in the seventies and collapsed in the post-1989 republic.

## Brendan Behan

With his modest output and just three Polish productions of his plays, Behan is unsuited to the statistical treatment used above in the case of Shaw. However, his reception in Communist Poland was even more dramatically affected by politics, though contemporary audiences and readers would

48 Ewa Baniewicz, 'Remake', *Twórczość*, 2 (2000), pp. 134–7, p. 136. This is a review of a 1999 production of *Androcles and the Lion*, in which both Shaw and the production come out very favourably.

49 Braun, *A History of Polish Theater*, p. 117. Braun puts the words quoted above in inverted commas.

50 *Bibliografia Zawartości Czasopism*. The full list of periodicals included in the bibliography is too long to give here but in the 1990s it includes, for example, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*, two leading daily quality newspapers, as well as numerous university publications and cultural journals.

have been hard put to notice this. *The Hostage* received its Polish premiere in Warsaw in December 1971. It was reasonably successful, with thirty-seven performances and nearly 16,000 viewers, giving an average house of 430 in a theatre that could seat 650. For comparison, Peter Ustinov's *Photo Finish* in the same theatre during the same season was shown nineteen times to 8,235 people.<sup>51</sup> Three months later, in March 1972 another production was put on in Sopot (Gdańsk). In his review of the latter Michał Misiorny – taking his cue from a Soviet critic – stressed that this was not political theatre. The correct critical category for the play was ‘of the people’ (*ludowość*) and any political elements were just background for the Leslie–Teresa story.<sup>52</sup> Some years earlier, Marta Piwińska had also played down the political import of Behan's plays, writing that the reality of his dramas ‘means only what it means’ (*znaczy tylko to, co znaczy*). Behan, she continued, did not write ‘dramas “with a thesis”’.<sup>53</sup> This unwillingness to acknowledge the politics in *The Hostage* seems all the stranger considering the readiness with which reviewers compared Behan to that most political of playwrights, Brecht. The songs and the small, grey characters lead Kosińska to the Brecht comparison in her review of the Warsaw production.<sup>54</sup> In a review in *Trybuna Ludu*, however, the reviewer does find politics. The director, he writes, makes the play less specific to Ireland, meaning a loss in allusiveness but a gain in terms of political drama.<sup>55</sup> In a laudatory article on the occasion of Behan's death Piotrowski writes that O'Casey was correct to say that Behan was not a revolutionary writer. Rather, Behan was a ‘people's writer in the best sense of the word’ (the word, *ludowy*, having acquired markedly ideological overtones). And yet, having played down Behan's politics, while mentioning his ‘anarchistic’ tendencies, Piotrowski goes on to quote Behan stating his desire for a thirty-two-county socialist republic of Ireland, and

51 *Almanach Sceny Polskiej 1971–72*.

52 Michał Misiorny, ‘Ballada ludowa’, *Teatr*, 8 (1972), p. 8.

53 Marta Piwińska, ‘Ultima Thule Brendana Behana’, *Dialog*, 8 (1964), pp. 95–100, p. 96, 97.

54 Maria Kosińska, ‘Zakładnik z opóźnieniem’, *Życie Warszawy*, 6 (1972), p. 5.

55 Jaszcz, ‘Z kraju dalekiego’, *Trybuna Ludu*, 13 (1972), p. 6. Jaszcz also mentions the similarity to Brecht.

reports that Behan was a member of the Communist Party.<sup>56</sup> One gets the impression that Piotrowski wishes to assure, on the one hand, communists, that Behan's politics were sound, and, on the other hand, non-communists, that the plays are not political and might, therefore, be worth watching.

That Behan in general and *The Hostage* in particular are not essentially political can be defended and it is not my intention to prove Polish critics wrong. Grzegorz Drymer detects a slight similarity between Behan and Beckett in that they show life as a ‘haphazard succession of unpredictable events (Behan) or a pointless advance through time (Beckett)’, which seems a reasonable interpretation given that the hostage dies in a farcical accident.<sup>57</sup> However, the story of Behan has a curious twist. Kosińska's 1972 review starts with a description of current events in Northern Ireland, namely the resurgence of the IRA. It would seem, then, that the play was particularly topical and yet her review is entitled ‘*The Hostage* delayed’ and in it she complains that although the play may be interesting, the delay means it has lost something of its ‘sharp significance’.<sup>58</sup> The delay that Kosińska writes of is mentioned circumspectly by Stanisław Marczak-Oborski in his 1968 book on theatrical life. Chapter three deals with the years 1956 to 1964 and tells of a revolution on the Polish stage, with hundreds of new titles from outstanding authors of all continents and countries.<sup>59</sup> This is a not so oblique reference to the influence of the thaw on Polish cultural life in the late 1950s. The nationality-based quotas that had been applied to theatrical productions were loosened. Accounts of the quota vary but by way of illustration in 1954, fifty-three Russian and Soviet plays were staged; in 1957 only ten were, which was cause for concern for the

56 K. Piotrowski, ‘Autor Zakładnika nie żyje’, *Teatr*, 9 (1964), pp. 12–13, p. 13.

57 Grzegorz Drymer, ‘Brendan Behan's Dramaturgy’, *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Bydgoszczy. Studia Filologiczne; Filologia Angielska*, 13 (1981), pp. 49–80, p. 76.

58 Kosińska, ‘Zakładnik z opóźnieniem’, p. 5.

59 Stanisław Marczak-Oborski, *Życie teatralne w latach 1944–1964. Kierunki rozwojowe* (Warsaw: PWN, 1968), p. 129.



authorities.<sup>60</sup> Marczak-Oborski continues ‘True, certain gaps remained: missing from theatre posters was the classic Claudel and the controversial Irishman Behan; but this was of value in its own way – it reminded one that the arsenal of literature was inexhaustible, which is one of its main charms.’<sup>61</sup> If it seems as if there is more to this than meets the eye, it is because there almost certainly is. Marczak-Oborski was part of the management of Warsaw’s Teatr Dramatyczny and must surely have known what Marta Fik was to reveal much later, in London: *The Hostage* was to have been staged in the Teatr Dramatyczny in the 1959–1960 season but was withheld from performance by the Ministry for Culture and Art ‘on account of its debatable ideological character.’<sup>62</sup> Napiontkowa, also writing without the confines of censorship (in 1990), states that Gombrowicz’s *Ślub* (*The Wedding*) and Kafka’s *The Trial* and *The Castle* were also withheld from public view ‘on account of their debatable ideological character’, giving as her source an unpublished report prepared for the Cultural Committee of the Central Committee of Poland’s Communist Party by J. Pastuszka.<sup>63</sup> In fact, *The Hostage* was perceived as political – or political enough to be banned at any rate.

The ban did not last too long. An excerpt appeared in a *Nowa Kultura* in 1960 and the full play later the same year in *Dialog*.<sup>64</sup> Considering it appeared only months after production was halted, the translation of this politically sensitive play is surprisingly free of the censor’s interference. The Russian spoken by the Polish character is replaced by English but this may have been the translators ‘correcting’ Behan, who it seems either thought ‘da’ was Polish or wanted to make a point about Poland’s domination by Russia. A reference to the Red Countess is dropped, either because of censorship

60 Maria Napiontkowa, ‘“Odwilż” w Warszawie’, in Lidia Kuchtówna, ed., *Warszawa teatralna* (Warsaw: PAN, 1990), pp. 220–34, p. 224.

61 Marczak-Oborski, *Życie teatralne*, p. 129.

62 Marta Fik, *Kultura polska po Jalcie. Kronika lat 1944–1981* (London: Polonia, 1989), p. 325.

63 Napiontkowa, ‘“Odwilż” w Warszawie’, p. 233.

64 Brendan Behan, *Zakładnik*, trans. Maria Skroczyńska and Juliusz Żuławski, *Dialog*, 12 (1960), pp. 49–89.

or because it would have been lost on Polish audiences unfamiliar with Constance Markievicz. Meg’s insulting reference to a ‘half-red footman’ is changed, avoiding any mention of colour. Polish censors found it unnecessary to change Dulles to Khrushchev, which is what appears in the *Complete Plays* (1978), but not in the first edition. The translation (to be precise, the version of the translation used in the production) attracted some criticism for its ‘schoolboyishness’ and general strangeness in one review.<sup>65</sup>

*The Quare Fellow* ran for twelve nights in 1967 and was reviewed twice. Grodzicki’s mentioning that it was a significantly weaker play than *The Hostage* (which had been published but not yet performed) might have intrigued some readers but beyond this it is hard to detect any politics in his not very favourable review. He complains that nothing ‘happens’ in the play, despite the trail blazed in this respect by Beckett and, in Poland, Różewicz.<sup>66</sup> Kłossowicz’s review in *Polityka* is mixed to say the least. Behan is referred to as English (it was and to a somewhat lesser extent remains common practice in Poland to conflate the two) but a few lines later is acknowledged as Irish. There is much reference to swinging London, ‘big beat’ music (i.e. rock and roll) and to Shakespeare (*The Quare Fellow* is Shakespearian but Behan is no Shakespeare) and to Dostoevsky: in the play (which is not, though it might seem so, anti death penalty) there is punishment but no crime. At times very boring, there is however, a rare ‘true theatrical passion, an engagement in human affairs.’<sup>67</sup> The most political note struck is the statement that as a genuinely working class man, Behan’s social and personal protest is more authentic than that of the bourgeois Osborne. (The review’s title is ‘First of the Angry Young Men.’) Sieradzka-Grymińska also draws a parallel with the Angry Young Men but in her more scholarly piece, as in Grzegorz Drymer’s study, it is difficult to discern any strong ideological shading.<sup>68</sup>

65 Bohdan Drozdowski, ‘*Salto mortale*’, *Teatr*, 4 (1972), p. 9.

66 August Grodzicki, ‘*W cieni śmierci*’, *Życie Warszawy*, 67 (1967), p. 10.

67 Jan Kłossowicz, ‘*Pieruszy z “gniewnych”*’, *Polityka*, 18 (1967), p. 12.

68 Teresa Sieradzka-Grymińska, ‘Brendan Behan’s *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* – A Sample of Anglo-Irish Novelised Autobiography’, *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich*, Łódź, 1 (1974), pp. 49–64, p. 58.

To what precise extent politics, and to be more precise, censorship, influenced the reception of Behan is debatable but that there was an influence is certain. *Borstal Boy* and *The Scarperer* were both translated into Polish, receiving good (though few) reviews, but the damage had been done: Behan was not revived between 1990 to 2002 and remains largely unknown in Poland.

### Samuel Beckett

Beckett also fell foul of the censor. Permission was not given for the publication of *Waiting for Godot* in full in 1956.<sup>69</sup> A few months later, however, *Teatr Współczesny* was permitted to stage the play, which it did in January 1957. This was just after the events of October 1956, when Gomułka was, to great acclaim, made first secretary of the Party, calling for the democratisation of life in Poland amid a wave of enthusiasm for the thaw. *Tygodnik Powszechny* remarked at the time 'And so the funeral of literary socialist realism took place modestly and without honours – there was not even a wake.'<sup>70</sup> However, as seen above, this opening up of Polish society was not to last. Napiontkowa writes that in 1959 press attacks on 'so-called dark, defeatist western drama' like Pinter and Beckett started appearing.<sup>71</sup> In fact, even earlier, Barnaś, himself the author of socialist realist plays, writes that Polish criticism had identified the distinctness ('inność') of *Waiting for Godot's* formal means with its ideological foreignness ('obcość ideologiczna').<sup>72</sup> It is said that Gombrowicz, whose *Ślub* was withheld for the same reason as Behan's *The Hostage*, was really censored because Gomułka thought there

69 Antoni Libera, personal communication.

70 JBS, 'Zjazd literatów', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 1 (1956), p. 7.

71 Napiontkowa, "'Odwilż" w Warszawie', p. 225.

72 Kazimierz Barnaś, 'Spotkanie z "Godotem" ...', *Życie Literackie*, 51 (1956), p. 10.

was no place in socialist realist theatre for plays 'about nothing'.<sup>73</sup> If so this was clearly bad news for *Waiting for Godot*, whose most famous review is that is a play where nothing happens, twice.<sup>74</sup> Patrick Murray notes that Beckett's fiction was ill received by Marxist commentators for its failure to tackle political or social issues.<sup>75</sup>

At any rate Beckett got off to a slow start on the Polish stage, though he did attract a lot of comment, rivalling Shaw for press and periodical notices in the late 1950s. *Waiting for Godot* had been produced twice by 1965, as were *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, with *Krapp's Last Tape* produced once. In 1966 *Film* won an award at a Cracow film festival.<sup>76</sup> Audiences were not large and one production of *Waiting for Godot* appears to have flopped, with just two showings and 165 viewers.<sup>77</sup> In these early years Beckett also made his presence felt in more indirect ways. For example, in Tadeusz Różewicz's *Kartoteka* (*Card Index*), the Chorus of Old Men tells the inactive hero to do something – even in a Beckett play, they say, the hero does things. Różewicz has said that his aim was to create a dramatic character even more passive than Beckett's.<sup>78</sup> The fascination of Beckett's characters with the movements of their hands and feet is also to be seen in this play.<sup>79</sup> *Kartoteka* debuted in 1960 and it, rather than *Waiting for Godot*, is credited by Napiontkowa with shaking up the formal aspects of

73 Napiontkowa, "'Odwilż" w Warszawie', p. 230.

74 Vivian Mercier, cited in Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (London: Picador, 1980), p. 329.

75 Patrick Murray, *The Tragic Comedian: A Study of Samuel Beckett* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1970), pp. 90–1.

76 Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 492.

77 *Almanach Sceny Polskiej 1961–62*.

78 This is not to suggest that Różewicz followed Beckett. Stanisław Gębała points out that his *Przyrost naturalny* predates *The Lost Ones*. See his *Teatr Różewicza* (Ossolineum, Wrocław, 1978), p. 120. Różewicz later commented that although the Irish directors he met in Dublin did not talk to him about Beckett, in Warsaw he was known as 'the Beckett from Wrocław' ('Spotkania', an interview with Tadeusz Różewicz, *Teatr*, 3 (1993), pp. 4–13, p. 9).

79 Murray, *The Tragic Comedian*, p. 35, after Kennan.

Polish theatre.<sup>80</sup> By the early 1970s Beckett was a regular feature on Polish stages, with three productions in the 1970–1971 season and five each in the next two seasons. *Waiting for Godot* attracted 25,302 viewers in 1973–1974, when he scraped into the top twenty most staged foreign playwrights at number twenty.<sup>81</sup>

In 1975 a large part of one issue of the periodical *Literatura na Świecie* (*World Literature*) was given over to Beckett, concentrating mostly on his prose. In it the editors wrote that he was not well enough known in Poland to warrant the production of something of the *Beckett at Sixty* type, which had appeared in 1966.<sup>82</sup> In Antoni Libera's contribution to this special edition we learn that Beckett is known largely through the translations that appeared in *Dialog* – which also published O'Casey and Behan. Libera also discusses the problem of translation. Beckett, despite his recurring linguistic motifs and refrains, had numerous Polish translators, each of whom approached the job in his or her own way, without necessarily referring to other translators.<sup>83</sup> This may be contrasted with the case of Shaw, consistently translated by Florian Sobieniowski<sup>84</sup> Also, where Shaw, as we have seen, was made widely available to the public, Libera states that just three items by Beckett, not very carefully selected, had been published by 1975.<sup>85</sup>

In some reviews of Beckett productions one is struck by the critics' unwillingness to grapple with the question of what the plays are all about. In one inconclusive review of *Waiting for Godot*, the critic finishes by saying Beckett demands lengthy deliberations, and promising a return to the play.<sup>86</sup> In the follow-up article a fortnight later, the author, Dolecki, refers to the difficulty critics are having with Beckett. For some of those critics the

80 Napiontkowa, "‘Odwilż’ w Warszawie", p. 225.

81 *Almanach Sceny Polskiej 1973–74*.

82 Editors' note, *Literatura na Świecie*, 5 (1975), p. 4.

83 Antoni Libera, 'Beckett w Polsce', *Literatura na Świecie*, 5 (1975), pp. 246–51, p. 249.

84 Jaszcz, 'Młodość jest zwykle inna', p. 6.

85 Libera, 'Beckett w Polsce', p. 248.

86 Zygmunt Wążyński, 'Czekając na ...', *Kierunki*, 6 (1957), p. 12.

verdict on the playwright is: "you wanted the West – well now you have it!"<sup>87</sup> Wisława Szymborska, in a 1957 review of an amateur production of Beckett's work, compared his severe criticism of people to medieval literature. In this review, as in others by Grodzicki, Natanson and Dąbrowski, care is taken to describe what happened on stage. Grodzicki mentions that in the production of *Happy Days* under review the theatre kept very close to the stage directions; Szymborska writes that liberties were taken with the text; Dąbrowski worries that the *Waiting for Godot* he saw took liberties with the text because the director thought the truths revealed by Beckett were not revelatory enough or might sound banal. The question of banality also worried Grodzicki, who concluded, however, that the novel presentation of old truths in *Happy Days* was enough of a saving grace. In these generally favourable reviews it is difficult to detect the influence of politics and one gets the impression that the reviewers concentrated on technical details (was the play faithful to the text?) from a feeling of helplessness in the face of Beckett.<sup>88</sup>

Perhaps because of his general avoidance of politics, Beckett's reputation continued to grow as Shaw's slowly declined, with press and periodicals mentions drawing slightly ahead in the 1970s, to thoroughly outdistance Shaw in the 1980s. In the 1982–1983 season Beckett was the tenth most staged foreign playwright; Shaw, with eighteen performances of *Pygmalion*, does not make the top thirty. In the 1985–1986 season Beckett was number five, with Shaw outside the top thirty. In the 1983–1984 season Shaw, at number nineteen, outdid Beckett, so it cannot be said their careers were mirror images of each other but the figures are at least suggestive. When Beckett did get political, the censor was on hand: the censor cut *Catastrophe's* dedication to Vaclav Havel.<sup>89</sup>

87 Zbigniew Dolecki, 'Godot czeka najdłużej', *Kierunki*, 8 (1957), p. 5.

88 Wisława Szymborska, 'Teatr 38 i koniec świata', *Życie Literackie*, 47 (1957), p. 10; August Grodzicki, 'Smutek radosnych dni', *Życie Warszawy*, 23 (1967), p. 4; Andrzej Józef Dąbrowski, 'W tarnowskim teatrze', *Teatr*, 13 (1975), pp. 14–16; Wojciech Natanson, 'Sztuka o czekaniu', *Życie Warszawy*, 104 (1982), p. 7.

89 Antoni Libera, personal communication.

In comparing Beckett's and Shaw's Polish fortunes the most striking feature is their post-1989 careers. *Waiting for Godot* had sixteen productions up till 1989. From 1990 to 2002 there were a further twelve. The corresponding figures for *Endgame* are twelve and ten. *Krapp's Last Tape* had four productions before 1989 and five from 1990 to 2002; *Happy Days* had seven before and six after. As can be seen, Beckett continued to thrive, while Shaw was sidetracked. The period 1990 to 2002 sees three mentions of Shaw in the subject index of the *Periodicals Bibliography*; Beckett is the subject of nearly a hundred articles.

## Others

Like Shaw, Oscar Wilde's career in Poland reaches back to before the origin of the People's Republic of Poland. Most of his works had been translated by the First World War.<sup>90</sup> Unlike Shaw, he did not fit the bill of socialist literature. From the Second World War until 1957, when *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* came out, only his fairy tales were published. *The Importance of Being Earnest* was produced in 1948 and 1949 but Wilde was absent in the darkest days of socialist realism. With the thaw in 1956, the number of productions of the play increased dramatically: one in 1956 (December) and three each in 1957 and 1958. In all, there were twenty-nine productions from 1945 to 1989, with another two from 1990 to 2002, making it by far his most popular play, although his *The Star-Child* attracted good numbers in the early 1970s, and again in the early 1980s, when Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* also enjoyed a measure of popularity, some of it in puppet theatres. The critical reception of Wilde was occasionally quite cool: art for art's sake seems to have appealed neither to communist thinking nor to serious-minded critics. Brończyk describes the entrance of *The Importance of Being Earnest* to theatre repertoires as a step too far 'in the direction of

90 Krajewska, *Recepcja literatury angielskiej*, p. 102.

idea-free art.<sup>91</sup> Later, Mroczkowski was to be more sympathetic. He reads *Lady Windermere's Fan* as a criticism of hastening to cast the first stone and draws attention to Wilde's concern with social ills and his 'partially socialist' utterances.<sup>92</sup> As can be seen, these are defences against particularly communist attacks on Wilde.

Some interesting political differences in the reception of Irish playwrights come up in a cross-newspaper exchange in 1956–1957 concerning productions of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Fanny's First Play* and Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*. The exchange is started by Zygmunt Greń, who writes that Shaw has dated, with only *Pygmalion*, *Saint Joan*, *The Man of Destiny* and a handful of other plays standing the test of time. *Fanny's First Play* is not one of the handful and Greń asks rhetorically: why put on boring plays just because they happen to have been written by Shaw? The subtext here is that they are put on because Shaw was a socialist – just as some books were censored because of their author's (not necessarily the books') politics. Perhaps to avoid being accused of this subtext, Greń suggests that Shaw's plays are always performed because Warsaw was once granted a world premiere of a Shaw play.<sup>93</sup> To add to Shaw's woe, Greń concludes that the cheerful scepticism of *The Importance of Being Earnest* ages better than Shaw's gloomy, serious scepticism.<sup>94</sup> On the pages of *Trybuna Ludu* Jaszcz and Szydłowski reply sarcastically, if not very convincingly, that Shaw's datedness doubtlessly explains why he is played more and more often. They stress the bourgeois nature of the Wilde play and say that its occasional wit would be Shavian (clearly meant as a good thing) if it went 'beyond art for art's sake, jokes for jokes' sake, beyond a museum of delightful mementos.<sup>95</sup> In this they are following Sinko and

91 Kazimierz Brończyk, 'Oscar Wilde w teatrze krakowskim', *Kierunki*, 2 (1957), p. 12.

92 Przemysław Mroczkowski, *Historia literatury angielskiej. Zarys* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1986) (first published in 1981), pp. 524, 484.

93 Zygmunt Greń, 'Inwazja z wysp brytyjskich', *Życie Literackie*, 52–53 (1956), pp. 10–11, p. 10.

94 Greń, 'Inwazja z wysp brytyjskich', p. 11.

95 Jaszcz and Roman Szydłowski, 'Drogi i bezdroża teatrów krakowskich', *Trybuna Ludu*, 10 (1957), p. 6.

Grzebieniowski, who stress that *The Importance of Being Earnest* is purely for laughs.<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, Jaszcz and Szydłowski's praise for *Fanny's First Play* is by no means fulsome and they do at least credit this production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* with being funny.

Both articles refer also to the 1956 *Teatr Ludowy (Nowa Huta)* production of *The Playboy of the Western World*, translated into Polish as 'Bohater naszego świata' (A hero of our world). This production (directed by Jerzy Zegalski) lifted the play out of its setting in turn-of-the-century rural Ireland. The programme notes stated the director's desire not to produce just another critique of capitalism: the cult of the false hero was visible in contemporary Poland, as it is in this play, and it is this cult that is the production's target.<sup>97</sup> Whether or not the play is just another critique of capitalism, there seems no doubt that this version was adapted to Polish reality of the 1950s. Tekla Brzezicka, in her review, writes that in the light of recent times, this production 'gains a bitter political irony.' The play often refers to the contemporary audience's experience: 'the compromised hero, as he leaves Mayo, speaks in the manner of speakers from the period of "newspeak"' (*drętwą mową*).<sup>98</sup> Although she is careful to add that the play presents a world with no reference to any environment we know (the production appears to have used grotesque techniques, for which the set designer, Józef Szajna, was noted), it must be said that in 1956 'newspeak' did not belong to the distant past.

Where Greń takes issue with the translation of 'playboy' as 'hero,' Jaszcz and Szydłowski object to the dropping of 'Western' from the Polish version. It is nonsense, they say, to stage the play as an attack on the cult of the individual in *our* world (their emphasis). This was some months after Khrushchev's attack on the cult of the individual, i.e. Stalin, at the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the USSR. The play refers, the two critics say, to the western world for a reason: even when it was written the cult of the gangster was spreading far and wide. In this respect, Brecht's

96 Sinko and Grzebieniowski, *Teatr krajów zachodniej Europy*, p. 89.

97 Jaszcz and Szydłowski, 'Drogi i bezdroża', p. 6.

98 Tekla Brzezicka, 'Bohater i cyrk', *Kierunki*, 7 (1957), p. 5.

Berliner Ensemble interpretation from the year before brought out the play's full, current meaning; that is, it came out against the glorification of 'power and crime in the world of "American culture"'. The only other valid interpretation in today's Poland, they argue, is as a satire of 'our hooligans, flash Harrys and other roughnecks' so beloved of some sections of society ('na naszych chuliganów, bikiniarzy i innych łobuzów': a classic example of newspeak invective). But both possibilities, they claim, involve a criticism of capitalism.

Underlying the discussion of all three plays is the question of the plays' applicability to modern Poland. Greń notes that *Fanny's First Play* attacks the moral hypocrisy of England in 1911 and wonders if this production is aimed at Poland's moral hypocrisy. At the same time he cautions against reading Wilde or this production of him in this way. For all Greń's criticism of Shaw and how he has dated it is hard not to see in the following lines – ostensibly about Shaw – a comment on contemporary Poland. Here Greń applies a favourite technique of propagandists: using the other side's heroes to support one's own cause.<sup>99</sup>

The conflict between the individual and the environment was not unknown [to English literature], thanks first and foremost to Shaw's work. It was a rebellion of the young against moral hypocrisy, against social falsehoods. Because a boring and content society can live and keep going thanks only to lies, concealment and evasions. And young people want to know and say everything. Their disagreement with a world bound by a thousand conventions is the healthy reflex of rationalists. 'Prison is for everyone,' Margaret says in *Fanny's First Play* when her parents react with outrage to the news that she has got mixed up in a fight with the police and sent to prison for it.<sup>100</sup>

99 In post-war Germany the US authorities pressed works by Shaw, Gorky and for a time even American Communist Party member Howard Fast into anti-communist service. Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999), pp. 21–2. See also the inclusion of Abraham Lincoln in a pro-Communist school book, above.

100 Greń, 'Inwazja z wysp brytyjskich', p. 10.

Within the year *Po Prostu*, magazine of the young intelligentsia, was to be closed down for its outspokenness. In Greń we have young people irked by hypocrisy, falsehood and social conventions; in Jaszcz and Grodzicki we have 'bikiniarze' and 'lobuzy'.

Other Synge productions (four in all under Communism) excited less, and less heated, comment. *The Well of the Saints* ran for twenty-two nights in a provincial theatre in the 1961–1962 season, drawing just one review in the national press. A 1960 production of *The Shadow of the Glen* in Katowice did not warrant any mentions in the national press.<sup>101</sup> It is of interest, perhaps, that the published translation of *Riders to the Sea* is prefaced with a quotation from Gorky about how *The Playboy of the Western World* switches naturally from the comic to the gruesome and back again. *Riders to the Sea* was not performed in Poland.<sup>102</sup>

Although sympathetic to Synge, Sinko and Grzebieniowski complain that, as in Conrad, among others, in *Riders to the Sea* the struggle between man and the elements crowds out everything else, like relations between people. There is no room for social problems, as is characteristic of 'bourgeois literature of the imperialist epoch.'<sup>103</sup>

*Ulysses* was translated into Polish in 1969 and with it came adaptations for the stage. (*Exiles* had six runs in Communist Poland, most of them after the translation of *Ulysses*.) Zygmunt Hübner's production was interfered with by the censor but this was because of sex rather than politics.<sup>104</sup> An indication of social mores of the time can be got from Władysław Huzik's review of Behan's *The Scarperer*: he starts by attributing Joyce's success to being a dead foreign pervert. *Ulysses* had a print run of 40,000; *The Scarperer* a print run of 30,000.<sup>105</sup> In more sympathetic tones, Janusz

101 *Bibliografia Zawartości Czasopism*.

102 Synge, John Millington, *Jeźdźcy do morza*, trans. Monika Misińska, *Dialog*, 3 (1957), pp. 69–75, p. 69.

103 Sinko and Grzebieniowski, *Teatr krajów zachodniej Europy*, p. 140.

104 Marta Fik, 'Cenzor jako współautor', in Bożena Wojnowska, ed., *Literatura i władza* (Warsaw: IBL, 1996), pp. 131–47, p. 139.

105 Władysław Huzik, 'Jak zarobić uczciwie trochę pieniędzy?' *Kultura*, 47 (1970), p. 9.

Głowacki also referred to the snob value of possessing – not necessarily reading – Joyce's novel.<sup>106</sup>

In a 1993 review of *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Jacek Wakar writes that Brian Friel is unknown in Poland and despite several production in the intervening years this verdict is repeated in 1999 by Jacek Sieradzki, who describes him as direct descendent of Chekhov.<sup>107</sup> Most of the Polish productions of Friel's plays date from the post-89 period, when politics may be expected to have had less influence on reception. *Translations* and *The Freedom of the City* were published before 1989 but only the latter was produced in Communist Poland. It ran for thirty-five nights and apparently did not make a great impression, with few reviews and half-full houses.

Younger Irish playwrights such as Martin McDonagh, Conor McPherson and Mark O'Rowe have enjoyed considerable success in Poland, starting in the late 1990s. Plays like *Howie the Rookie*, *The Weir*, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* have enjoyed long runs and critical acclaim, and while turnouts have not been as high, this may be a reflection of changing public tastes and the dominance of television. It is difficult to discern any political bias in reviews. In the early years of this century Ireland was often held up as a model of European Union success for Poland to follow (Poland voted to join the EU in 2003) but, as might be expected in a free country, there are no attempts by reviewers to deny the reality of the depressing, provincial ugliness, emigration and boredom often shown in these plays. One critic remarks that the tinned peas in the stage set of *The Cripple of Inishmaan* bring to mind Polish shops in the 1980s when there was nothing on the shelves apart from vinegar and methylated spirits but this seems more a fair comment than a politicisation of McDonagh's play.<sup>108</sup>

106 Janusz Głowacki, 'Erotyzm ciemny i jasny', in *Jak być kochany* (Warsaw: Świat książki, 2005), pp. 36–40. Głowacki also comments that Słomczyński's adaptation of *Ulysses* is good but that Tadeusz Różewicz could have done it without Joyce's help (p. 39).

107 Jacek Wakar, 'Taniec jest życiem', *Teatr*, 7/8 (1993), p. 29; Jacek Sieradzki, 'McCzechow', *Polityka*, 11 (1999), p. 51.

108 Magda Hasiuk, 'Szansa jedna na milion', *Opcje*, 4 (2000), pp. 81–2, p. 82.

Głowacki writes that under censorship careful reading between the lines resulted in ‘... readers and viewers [...] exceptionally good at detecting allusions, even where there were none.’<sup>109</sup> The same applies to studying the literature and criticism written under censorship. Was Kosińska trying to send a signal by entitling her review ‘*The Hostage* delayed’? Were the editors of *Dialog* trying to curry favour by dragging Gorky into a translation of Synge? Was Greń really complaining that Shaw was always being played because of his politics? When Kelera wrote approvingly of Wilde’s line about how most of modern culture depends on what one ought not to read was this, coupled with his mention of ‘difficult areas of our life’, a reference to censorship?<sup>110</sup>

The vast majority of the Polish reviews and articles about the Irish playwrights above are straightforward pieces of work, in no way deformed by censorship, ideology or politics. Or so it seems. Perhaps, after all, Shaw is dated, Beckett fashionable (the most written-about playwright, and not just in Poland),<sup>111</sup> Behan too local, Wilde too frivolous and O’Casey not the kind of writer to catch the Polish imagination. Translators, directors, actors, reviewers and professors all have their part to play in the reception of drama but so too do politicians and censors: Beckett, O’Casey, Behan and Shaw all had works that were at one time or another banned in twentieth-century Ireland.

109 Janusz Głowacki, *Z głowy*, 2nd edition (Warsaw: Świat książki, 2004), p. 12.

110 Józef Kelera, ‘*W polowie czerwca*’, *Nowe Sygnały*, 26 (1957), p. 6.

111 The IASIL Bibliography Bulletin for 2005 records six entries on Sean O’Casey, one on Brendan Behan, thirteen on Shaw and six *columns* (approximately sixty-five entries) on Beckett. *Irish University Review*, 2 (2006), pp. 403–50.

JOANNA ROSTEK

## From a Polish in Dublin to Polish Dublin: Retracing Changing Migratory Patterns in Two Recent ‘Dublin Novels’ by Polish Migrants

### I. From Poland to Ireland

In an article published in the year 2000 and entitled ‘The Right to the City: Re-presentations of Dublin in Contemporary Irish Fiction’ Gerry Smyth makes the following observation:

As many contemporary novelists and journalists attest, Dublin is now a large, brash, dangerous city. [...] ‘Dublin’ is, nevertheless, increasingly the arena in which the paradoxes, ironies and complexities of a modern Irish identity are played out.<sup>1</sup>

What I wish to suggest in this chapter is that within a few years after the publication of Smyth’s essay, Dublin has also become an arena in which the paradoxes, ironies and complexities of a modern Polish identity are played out; an identity that is largely affected by the relatively new phenomenon of Polish migration to Ireland. By comparing two recent Dublin novels written by Polish authors living in Ireland, I will seek to illustrate how the sudden and unprecedented growth of a Polish community there has changed the self-perception of Polish migrants to Ireland and the way in which they perceive the country they have moved to. The two texts under discussion

1 Gerry Smyth, ‘The Right to the City. Re-presentations of Dublin in Contemporary Irish Fiction’, in Liam Harte and Michael Parker (eds), *Contemporary Irish Fiction. Themes, Tropes, Theories* (Basingstoke/New York: Macmillan – St Martin’s Press, 2000), pp. 13–24.