

Introduction

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The Poles as the Irish of the East.
F. Jameson, "A Businessman in Love" (2006)

The concept of 'identity' and its cultural, political, sociological, artistic and literary corollaries has become essential for a deeper understanding of "minor" cultures (or those considered as such).

In this sense *Irishness* and *Polishness* (*polskość*) are terms with very similar connotations and to some extent they are even interchangeable: Poland can be considered to be a kind of island positioned between the two great Russian and German 'oceans', because often in its history it has suffered 'floods' and 'storms' from both sides. One of the most remarkable differences is that Poland has proudly kept its linguistic identity throughout the ages, whereas Irish culture has been forced to find its expression almost exclusively in the language of the Other. There is no doubt, however, that the Irish linguistic situation, together with its 'dark sides' (of which Brian Friel's *Translations* is a dramatic and powerful manifestation), has produced unpredictable and remarkable outcomes. As a consequence, whereas some of the most outstanding 'English' writers of the last two centuries are in fact 'Irish', even as migrants 'Polish' writers have been able to break down the 'wall' which divided them from their Western counterparts only by accepting the challenge of translation and/or self-translation, or even changing their language (but not their cultural identity), as in the case of Joseph Conrad. Indeed, internal and international migrations are features that the two literary and artistic cultures share.

One of the clear signs of this complex phenomenon is the translation proposed by two great poets and great friends, Stanisław Barańczak and Seamus Heaney, of Jan Kochanowski's *Treny* (*Laments*, 1994), the absolute masterpiece of Renaissance Polish poetry, that the Nobel Laureate Czesław Miłosz (whose role in this tradition of exchanges and literary affinities is pivotal) paradoxically defines as "Bringing a great poet back to life" (Miłosz 1996). Furthermore in his *History of Polish Literature* (1983 [1969]), which was written for an American audience when Miłosz taught Slavic Literatures at Berkeley, the poet-professor, missed no opportunity to highlight analogies

and concordances between Polish and Irish literature, as in the case of the Enlightenment writer Ignacy Krasicki – who is the author of the very first Polish, and Slavonic *tout court*, romance, *Mikotaja Doświadczyńskiego przypadki* (1776, *The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom*; cf. Bartoszyńska 2013), whose debt to Jonathan Swift Miłosz deems indisputable. And to the author of *Gulliver's Travels*, the forerunner of all twentieth-century utopias and dystopias, Miłosz would dedicate his poetical letter “Do Jonathana Swifta” (To Jonathan Swift), with which his 1953 collection *Światło dzienne* (Daylight) opens. In this poem the author draws a parallel between his own condition as wandering exile in hostile lands and that of Gulliver himself: “Zwiedziłem ziemie Brobdingnagu / I nie minąłem wysp Laputy. / Poznałem także plemię Jahu, / Co wielbi własne ekskrementy, / Żyjący w niewolniczym strachu / Donosielski ród wyklęty.” (I visited the land of Brobdingnag / and have not missed the Laputa islands. / I also met the Yahoo tribe / crazy about its own excrements / people enslaved by terror, / the cursed race of spies).

In Miłosz's *History of Polish Literature*, Ireland comes to the fore again when he discusses Bolesław Leśmian, one of the greatest poets of the early twentieth century, whose role of creator of myths can be compared to that of William Butler Yeats (349); Miłosz affirms that the two poets, William Butler Yeats and Leśmian, who were born around the same time, coped with the same problem of agnosticism, a subject which could be explored in the future (350). Miłosz also comments on the importance of the first translations from Joyce by Józef Czechowicz, the late-avantgard young poet of the 1930s, along with his translations from Mandel'stam and T.S. Eliot. Clearly, when considering these four authors, we might recall that the influence of Dante can be traced in the works of all of them, and that Dante is a strong presence in both Irish and Polish poetical traditions, especially in the twentieth century: in particular we might reflect on Seamus Heaney's Dantism, absorbed through the peculiar *lecturae Dantis* of Mandel'stam and Miłosz.

Moreover, Czesław Miłosz would devote a whole chapter of his *Ogród nauk* (1979; *Garden of Knowledge*) to Yeats, trying his hand at translating “The Tower”. With reference to the complex issues of identity, affinities and differences between the two literary traditions, Miłosz writes:

Yeats was the poet of that strongly poetical country, Ireland, which is a bit like my Lithuania in this perspective. And Yeats was Irish like Swift and Berkeley the philosopher, like Edmund Burke the well-known patron of the conservatives, like Oscar Wilde and many others: he wrote in English, and even lacked a connection with Celtic culture so drenched in Irish Catholicism, because his family was Protestant and his ancestors were Protestant too. Nevertheless the Irish independentist movement recognized him as its own poetical voice. Analogies end here, because none of us of Lithuanian origin but writing in Polish, will ever be considered a Lithuanian writer. (201)

The political theme of independence is obviously central to the debate about the affinities and reciprocal historical sympathies between the Poles and the Irish. We will recall, on the one hand, Marx and Engels's deep interest in the 'Irish question' and in the 'Polish question' (cf. Franzinetti 2007); on the other hand, it is worth noting that over the last 25 years in both countries a post-colonial approach towards the interpretation of the political and cultural history of the two countries has flourished. Aleksander Fiut, one of the most outstanding Polish scholars who have taken up the cause of post-colonialism, is also the author of a seminal essay on Miłosz, in which he draws a parallel between the life and works of the Polish Nobel Laureate and Swift's Gulliver (Fiut 2014, 17-28).

The contributions collected in this monographic section of *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* intend to develop this analysis of consonances and affinities. This is only the start of a more extended study that will be published in future issues, but it already serves to highlight the fertility of the cultural relationship between Ireland and Poland.

Magdalena Kay's and Tomasz Bilczewski's contributions focus on Seamus Heaney's relationship with contemporary Polish poetry. Kay's essay considers the unusual position of Irish and Polish cultures and how this situation relates to the construction of lyric subjects that appear unassimilable to dominant postcolonial literary-critical paradigms. Her analysis of the Eastern European influences informing Seamus Heaney's volume *The Haw Lantern* (1987) reveals the cultural pressures brought to bear upon a well-known poet whose work challenges dominant assumptions about the proper idiom of the Anglo-American lyric. Bilczewski's contribution delves into Heaney's intellectual and artistic dialogue with Czesław Miłosz and Polish poetry, situating Heaney's poetics of the everyday in relation to the work of Miłosz. Although Heaney expressed the view that Polish poetry provided a lesson in the poet's ethical responsibility, he also found in it, and precisely in Miłosz's example, a testimony to the amazement experienced at the sight of seemingly insignificant objects and trivial phenomena.

Katarzyna Bartoszyńska offers a comparative reading of the early novel – and the ways in which it has been described – in Polish and Irish literature. Arguing that both traditions 'fail' to develop realism because they cleave uncritically to romance, she examines the generic hybridity of Lady Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1809) and Maria Wirtemberska's *Malwina, czyli domyślność serca* (1816; *Malvina, or the Heart's Intuition*). Reading Polish and Irish literature alongside each other allows us to see that neither is the anomaly it is often taken to be in literary criticism. This approach also invites reflection on the issue of how we make sense of the relationship between literary works and the socio-political contexts they emerge from.

Two contributions explore the topic of the ways in which Ireland's multicultural phenomenon has deeply influenced the country's literary scene.

Roddy Doyle comes to the fore among contemporary Irish writers dealing with these issues. Doyle has published short stories about race in *Metro Éireann*, an online multicultural weekly newspaper. Burcu Gülüm Tekin's essay examines Doyle's story "The Pram" (from *The Deportees and Other Stories*, 2007), which is set in the context of multicultural twenty-first century Dublin, and which investigates the negative attitude towards migrants in Ireland. The story contains various references to Celtic and Polish mythological female figures (in particular, the Old Hag of Beara and Boginka), and draws parallels between them and the protagonist Alina, a Polish migrant; so depicting both the obstacles that a female outsider may experience in Ireland and the subsequent transformation she undergoes as a result of the racism she encounters there.

The interviews with practitioners of Polish-Irish intercultural relations conducted by Joanna Kosmalska and Joanna Rostek, give voice to two Ireland-based Poles and two Irishmen who, in different ways, have reacted to and represented the new Polish presence in Ireland: Chris Binchy and Piotr Czerwiński have focused on the experiences of Polish labour migrants in Dublin in their respective novels *Open-handed* (2008) and *Przebiegum życia* (2009); Dermot Bolger has explored, *inter alia*, the historical parallels between Polish and Irish histories of migration in his play *The Townlands of Brazil* (2006); Anna Wolf recounts her experiences as the artistic director and producer of the Dublin-based Polish Theatre Ireland (PTI).

In his essay, Barry Keane discusses the work of Tadeusz Pawlikowski, arguably Poland's greatest theatre director of the *fin de siècle*, who brought many western plays to partitioned Poland; he assesses both Tadeusz Pawlikowski's contribution to Irish theatre and the reception and legacy of his productions of plays by Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw and John Millington Synge, which were staged in Cracow and Lwów. By means of a detailed analysis of contemporary reviews and reports, Keane shows how there was a growing conviction amongst Polish critics that Irish dramatists would soon make an impressive impact on the culture of the age.

Danielle McCormack's essay reflects on the significance of Irish language teaching outside of Ireland and the challenges which Irish teachers face abroad. With a focus on the significance of Irish teaching in Poland, she opens up debate about the proper contextualization of Irish language programmes within Irish Studies courses, making recommendations about future directions for Irish language teaching outside Ireland and suggesting that a professional network is established for Irish teachers.

Our journey across/from the 'frontiers of writings' concludes with the reprint of an interesting account of the meeting between Jan Parandowski and James Joyce that took place in Paris in 1937. The importance of Parandowski's recollections lie in the subject of their conversation: the structure of the *Odyssey* and its complex relationship with *Ulysses*. The final part is most-

ly about the *Work in Progress* Joyce was trying to complete at the time, and shows that Joyce feared “a catastrophe”, a failure of all his efforts “to liberate” all languages from their “servile, contemptible role”; Parandowski shared Joyce’s doubts, and considered *Work in Progress* only “a genial caprice” (141).

We cannot but agree with Magdalena Kay when she remarks on the “necessity of comparatism across the margins of Europe [which] remains powerful and potentially inspirational” (62). The eight contributions included in this collection make a strong case for this viewpoint; they also suggest that margins can be disrupted and become a new throbbing inclusive ‘centre’, opening new perspectives and posing new questions.

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