

zmieniającej sposób widzenia ciągłości procesu historycznoliterackiego. Cenne też byłyby w opracowaniu autorów koncepcje antropologicznych struktur wyobraźni G. Duranda i R. Derche'a, ściśle związane nie tylko z antropologią kultury, ale przede wszystkim z porównawczą analizą tekstów i rewizją kategorii symbolu. Zatem nie chodziłoby o zasadnicze naruszenie przyjętych zasad selekcji materiału, ale o rozwinięcie podjętych już tematów w kierunkach potencjalnie interesujących dla studentów. Pozostając jednak przy opracowaniu *Literatury. Teorii. Metodologii* jako całości, której recenzja dotyczy, należy raz jeszcze podkreślić jej pragmatyczny i aksjologiczny sens, zbudowany na idei dialogowości w poznawaniu i nauczaniu.

Joanna Ślósarska

MARTA WISZNIOWSKA,
*BY ACTION DIGNIFIED BRITISH
 THEATRE 1968-1995: TEXT AND
 CONTEXT*, Uniwersytet M. Kopernika,
 Toruń 1997, p. 419

Embarking on her monographic study, Marta Wiszniewska starts with caution, stating that drama remains the most transient, controversial, subversive and fragile of all arts (p. 9). But she proves soon in the course of her critical investigations which have an ambition to be 'a chronicle and an interpretation' (p. 17), that the handicap of transience and fragility can be cognitively overcome when one has an exemplary command of the material at hand. Time-wise Marta Wiszniewska sets off where Peter Anson's classic early study, *Disrupting the Spectacle*, had to stop. Anson analysed only five years of experimental and fringe theatre in Britain, from 1968

to 1973. Wiszniewska offers to the reader a very solid study, probably the most complete analysis of British theatre between 1968 and 1995. Almost thirty years of theatrical experiments mean that the scope of the phenomena which the analyst covers is enormous and this necessitated a system, an organising principle. The 'Preface' presents the author's reasons both for compartmentalising theatre history into convenient decades as well as a wish to avoid strict compartmentalisation. This might have proved, of course, an exercise in impossibility and the author is well aware of it. It seems, however, that Marta Wiszniewska delights in the area of the provocative when she defines her study's prime aim in poetic phrases which in themselves constitute an aesthetic manifesto. The critical promise given in the 'Preface' is:

...to concentrate on the new, the outrageous and the contradictory, on the variety of theatrical experience, the freedom and delight in anarchy, in abolishing prevailing conventions of performance structure, acceptable language, propriety, morals and manners, the thematic range; in other words, on how theatre keeps stimulating or frustrating the spectators' horizon of expectations (p. 17).

If acts of stimulating or frustrating the spectators' horizon of expectations are seen as the central selective principle, then the choice of the year 1968, ('the watershed', 'the mythical '68') as a starting point is far from accidental. The author sees it not as the year of political protests in Europe but as the year of radical changes in the theatre. In Britain, Wiszniewska claims, 1968 revolution occurred in the theatres, not in the streets. The year when theatre censorship was lifted saw additionally pop-culture in full swing, topped with the birth of anti-culture(s), alternative

theatre and fringe companies. Moreover, late sixties coincided with the emergence of the self-avowed affluent society and the self-avowed welfare society. In the shadows of these changes the power of Conservative Party was steadily (even if not very ostentatiously) growing and so was the intellectual opposition against some its major political premises.

Chapter 1, 'The Legacy of the Sixties - the Prospects for the Seventies' and Chapter 2, 'The Eighties - New Developments' form jointly the background for the analyses. Both chapters characterise and systematise those elements of political, social and cultural reality that were shaping the various faces of the British theatre. The author does not present the changes chronologically, rather her method is spiral and the comparison of the seventies and the eighties is concentrated on their crucial respective similarities and differences. The primary focus is set on the kaleidoscope of diversified theatrical enterprises, frequently grouped under the umbrella terms of 'left wing political drama' and/or 'alternative theatre'. Marta Wiszniowska's theoretical considerations are supported by illustrative analyses of a variety of 'alternative classics'. She interprets representative works of the British fringe (e.g. John McGrath's play *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black Black Oil*), major accomplishments of professional regional theatres labelled as 'community theatre' (e.g. a section devoted to Peter Cheeseman and the performance of *Fight for Shelton Bar*), the beginnings and the development of British feminist theatre which is briefly compared to American feminist theatre of the same period. The author examines the results of the identification of the theatre with politics - so popular in the seventies - the theatre having largely functioned as a political and propagandist tool in educating the masses. Although the excesses of simplistic

ideology were revised in the eighties, the direction offered by the main exponents of theatrical politics did not at all become clear except for the fact that alternative theatre stopped being alternative. In fact, it stopped being an alternative. Wiszniowska demonstrates the reasons for this form's consecutive crisis and sees those reasons in the ideological crisis, the demise of the avant-garde and the gradual introduction of changes in the functioning and financing of the majority of theatres. The lamentable end of the avant-garde is a particularly important phenomenon and the author discusses it convincingly. She also explores the complex sociological problematics of the successive commercialisation of theatrical life: the reversal to new technological possibilities and their promise, and finally she demonstrates how new ideological potentialities offered, at least apparently, by postmodernism led to a radical remodelling of the theatre.

For many British playwrights of the post-1968 era, the historical and political experience of Britain during the last two centuries provided no substantial stimulus that could be used to articulate an illuminating perspective on the current conjuncture. But Elizabethan Britain, instead, remained a source of dramatic treasures which were waiting to be given a treatment with contemporaneous, radical ideologies. Chapter 3 of the study, 'Adapting Elizabethans for the Modern Stage: Shakespeare and Marlowe versus Marowitz, Bond, Stoppard, Thacker and Jarman' deals with manifold aspects of the literary rediscoveries. Wiszniowska presents a consistent and well argued critical reading of the hosts of adaptations and manipulations undertaken both by directors (e.g. Charles Marowitz's *A Macbeth*, Derek Jarman's *Edward II*, David Thacker's *Julius Caesar*) and established playwrights (Edward Bond's *Lear*, Tom Stoppard's *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*, Arnold Wesker's *Lady Othello*).

The author offers significant conclusions concerning the new theatrical tactics of adaptations. Firstly, directing Shakespeare always means adapting Shakespeare. Secondly, adaptations turn mostly into political plays - voices in the ongoing debates on colonialism, society and politics in accordance with the readings of New Historicists. Thirdly, Shakespeare's (and Marlowe's) plays are decontextualised in the process and start functioning as myths (e.g. Promethean or Oedipal). Wiszniewska's tentative conclusion need not be tentative at all: 'one may state that adaptations have become a most sensitive litmus test to denote the transition from modernism to post-modernism, from frenzied pursuits after originality at all costs to re-creating the meanings, evolved from originals but existing independently of them' (p. 163).

At the end of the nineteen seventies Britain was nicknamed 'the sick man of Europe' (p. 69) and throughout the eighties the feeling of 'diseased history' comes to the fore. Chapter 4: 'The Idea of Native Tradition - the Dispute with Native Tradition. Drama and History' concerns theatrical versions of history, the topic which Marta Wiszniewska pursued also in her recent paper, 'Shock, Disease, Madness - A Hundred Years of British Historical Theatre'. In both analyses the author finds the point of departure, very appropriately, in the context of last century's fin de siècle, with its own distinctive sense of the ending, its conviction of 'rotteness' and the role of the theatre entangled in a complex social situation. The approaching end of the millennium sees British theatre in a state of complex entanglement yet again, although - as the author argues - today's situation results from different disorders and a different form of rotteness: a sense of loss of values, an absence of past glory replaced with its ugly aftermath (p. 212). What particularly interests

the author in the new situation is the debate over national history, examination of repossessions of history in British drama. Wiszniewska's discussion of the resulting problematics is illuminating. She chooses and analyses those attempts at radical rewritings of British legendary and royal history which share the delight in belittling the once-admired protagonists. The 'sacrilegious' texts under scrutiny include: David Storey's *Cromwell*, John Arden's *The Island of the Mighty* and Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain*. The same problematisation refers to the moments of history which have already shifted into the domain of mythology, as well as cross-roads between history and contemporaneity. Here Wiszniewska interprets Roger Howard's play *The Siege*, David Hare's *Licking Hitler* and *Plenty*, Trevor Griffith's *Country. A Tory Story* and David Edgar's *Maydays*. The analyses of texts laden with various interpretational possibilities introduce a fresh and an interesting dimension, offering a thought-provoking perspective. For instance, while interpreting Alan Bennett's *The Madness of King George* Marta Wiszniewska demonstrates convincingly that a) in contemporary British theatre, as aberrations of history tend to replace history itself, history stamped with illness and disease becomes a dramatic plot invariant, b) drama - no longer sworn to historical accuracy - becomes an intertextual mixing and matching of genres, and c) historical figures are superseded with figures on loan, exploring new formal and ideological tactics. In *The Madness of King George* monarchy itself becomes a condition of lunacy.

I have stated above that for numerous playwrights of the post-1968 era, the historical and political experience of Britain during the last two centuries provided no substantial stimulus that

could be used to articulate an illuminating perspective on the current issues. That is not to say that Britain's corridors of power are not depicted in dramas. Indeed, David Hare's trilogy (*Racing Demon*, *Plenty*, *The Secret Rapture*) and other plays which are analysed in Chapter 5 of the monograph ('At the Cross-roads of the Historical and Contemporary - Political Theatre') investigate 'the state of the nation' (p. 246). The author analyses recent political plays by Trevor Griffiths, Howard Brenton, Edward Bond and Harold Pinter. Yet, the really interesting development of political theatre was its thematic move beyond Britain, towards the continent and further. East Europe and Asia in particular seemed to fulfil the searched-for objective, and as a result these areas tended to constitute a setting in which the action of determining events in numerous British plays was situated. Going East meant that the plays labelled somewhat loosely as 'overtly political' (p. 218), e.g. Tom Stoppard's *Professional Foul*, Roger Howard's *The Tragedy of Mao in the Lin Piao Period*, *White Sea*, *A Break in Berlin*, David Hare's *Fanshen*, *Saigon: Year of the Cat* were all built - directly or indirectly - on a dialogue between the (capitalist) West and the (communist or spiritual) East with an aim to examine ideological trappings of both battlegrounds of influences. The ideological and historical interrelationships and exchanges between East and West and the resulting power exercised respectively upon each other are the basis of most of these achievements. Theatrical journeys into the mentalities of revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries, revolutionary passages and revolutionaries' passages from blind faith and an early commitment to a critical understanding of totalitarianism becomes perceptible. When, eventually, Marxist understanding of history and politics, as

well as of the individual, becomes the target of criticism, political plays are accused of having silenced the individual consciousness. Therefore, especially as communism crumbles in Eastern Europe, new political directions emerge: In Tom Stoppard's *Squaring the Circle*. *Poland 1980-1981*, Ronald Harwood's *The Deliberate Death of a Polish Priest*, David Edgar's *The Shape of the Table*, Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest. A Play from Romania* and Howard Brenton's *Berlin Bertie* the dramatists investigate the following relevant points: the consequences of the end of the grand narrative of the socialist revolution, the possibilities of building a liberating politics without recourse to a discourse of truth and the growing and decisive importance of the struggle of the individual against forms of subjection enforced by communist or capitalist ideology besides the forms of social and economic exploitation and domination. These new developments seem to confirm and strengthen the opinion of theatre's growing acceptance of the fact that even if some immediate political mission is there, it cannot be realised by propagandist means.

Women's social move towards political and economic independence as well as social authority was paralleled in theatrical life by the emergence and development of feminist drama. The beginnings of this movement and the basis of its discourse were already described in Chapter 1 and 2, now, in a separate chapter (Chapter 6: 'Women and the Theatre. *Herstory* and *His Story of Her*') the author reflects upon the more mature manifestations of the movement and its particular theatrical practices. The image of the woman in transition from the social and cultural inheritance of repression and denial to independence is seen in the analyses of plays by women writing for the stage. Pam Gem's

early and still docile play, *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* and *Steaming* by Nell Dunn, are appended by the presentation of main issues in more recent and more militant plays by Caryl Churchill (*Cloud Nine, Top Girls, Skriker*), Elizabeth Bond (*Love and Dissent*) and Elaine Feinstein (*Le-ar's Daughters*). But feminist theatre does not equal feminist movement, argues Marta Wiszniowska (p. 322) and feminist topics were taken up by male playwrights. The author demonstrates how the host of 'male-written' plays articulate feminist concerns, e.g. David Hare's *Slang* and *Plenty*, Willy Russell's *Educating Rita*, Jim Cartwright's *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*, Howard Barker's *The Castle* and *Scenes from an Execution*. Male playwrights consciously and conspicuously abstain from the androcentric viewpoint and suggest more or less directly the idea of female empowerment. That in itself is ironic and goes slightly against feminist ideas of self-definition in which the ready-made formula would have it that dramatisation of women's struggle for autonomy against a male oriented system of relations would not allow men to define what female empowerment stands for. One has a feeling that for Marta Wiszniowska the triumph of feminist ideology is debatable. In the conclusions to the chapter she emphasises that emotional and ideological obligations facing women writing for the stage often proved to be too cumbersome. '[M]ale authored female protagonists seem to have taken over, outnumbering those of active women playwrights'. And, even more strikingly: 'Male authors have produced more complex characters than [...] their female counterparts' (p. 323).

While reading the beginning of Chapter 7 ('Postmodern Theatre in Postmodern Society'), one senses the author's conviction that the role of contemporary theatre is informed by the somewhat

miserable state of the humanities in general. Debates rage over classical heritage, (non)representation of reality, liberal tradition of the sixties, the relation with the audience, the writer's commitment and (un)limited permissiveness. These debates constitute part of a more general, hectic debate over the humanities. 'Theatre thrives on *Wellschmerz*', the author of the monograph noted elsewhere, and now diagnosing the condition of recent British drama Marta Wiszniowska sees the theatre of the close of the century entangled between alternative and mainstream, radical left and conservative right. It is to be regretted, however, that despite the many fascinating ideas that postmodernity offers (be it positively or negatively) the diverse plays selected for analysis are chosen somewhat defensively as those that 'place themselves outside the categories proposed so far' (p. 327) and their common denominator is found in an endeavour to retell and revise familiar topics by recasting them into theatrically inventive plays. The modifications of the prevailing tradition and freedom in mixing techniques do not yet provide a satisfying, legitimate identification of 'postmodernity'. The author groups together and discusses such varied phenomena as a broad legacy of the absurd, theatre of provinciality, comedy, well-made-play convention and revolutionary versions of domestic drama, including Tom Stoppard's *Dirty Linen* and *Arcadia*, thrillers (as exemplified by Anthony Shaffer's *Sleuth*) and Alan Ayckbourn's commercial plays. Even granting that the concept of postmodernity is notoriously liberal, Marta Wiszniowska applies it rather too liberally. What this chapter testifies to is not so much the condition of postmodernity, as the fact that by the nineteen eighties the situation of British drama is that of Baroque richness, which can be grasped

under no single umbrella term, even if this term is conveniently elastic. This very richness is probably the clue to an explanation why there are so few attempts at a global interpretation and an analysis of British theatre of the last decades. That in itself provides yet another reason why Marta Wiszniowska's valuable study should be welcomed by those interested in the history of drama. The study fills the flagrant gap which not many critics would dare bridge.

In sum, the book conceived as a chronicle and interpretation is written in a highly competent manner, and what is more, it succeeds in illuminating the mutual interaction of compartmentalised categories. The bibliography of playtexts and criticism, although labelled as 'selected' is imposing and gives the reader a rich source of information for further critical and textual research. Thanks to meticulous analyses, the clarity of style and significant cognitive values the book may be enjoyed by specialists in the field, students of English philologies and all those who are interested in contemporary drama. The study should, as soon as possible, appear in the Polish translation. How long can our Polish market be satisfied with the translation of Peter Ansoerg's *Disrupting the Spetacle: Five Years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain*, which in itself is almost twenty five years old?

Zbigniew Białas

IZABELLA MALEJ,
*IMPRESJONIZM W LITERATURZE
ROSYJSKIEJ NA PRZEŁOMIE
XIX i XX WIEKU. WYBRANE
ZAGADNIENIA.* Wydawnictwo
Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław
1997, s. 141.

Książka jest próbą rewizji stanu badań na temat kształtu i znaczenia impresjonizmu literackiego w Rosji na przełomie XIX i XX wieku. Rozważania autorki rozpoczynają się od wskazania trudności związanych z analizą i pracami nad pełnym opisem tego zjawiska, szczególnie w obrębie działalności pisarskiej. Podkreśla ona jego złożoność i niedookreśloność wśród wielu splatających się często ze sobą nurtów artystycznych przełomu wieków. Charakterystyczna dla tego okresu korespondencja sztuk, ścieranie się, ale i symbioza rozmaitych kierunków, prądów i doktryn nie pozwoliła na pełne usamodzielnienie się impresjonizmu w kulturze rosyjskiej (podobnie jak i w Europie Zachodniej, skąd wywodzą się jego podstawowe idee).

Malej traktuje impresjonizm nie tylko jako styl w plastyce, ale definiuje go jako „metodę postępowania artystycznego, określony sposób percepcji i zobrazowania rzeczywistości w dziele literackim” (s. 7). Próbuje więc w swej książce prześledzić i zilustrować jego ślady w dziełach pisarzy rosyjskich.

We „Wstępie” poświęca wiele uwagi rosyjskiej refleksji literaturoznawczej. Krytyczny przegląd rozpoczyna od omówienia *Encyklopedii literackiej* z lat trzydziestych, gdzie impresjonizm został scharakteryzowany jako styl tworzący „zwyrodniałą” sztukę dekadencją. Malej prezentuje też sposób traktowania nurtu w obszernych syntezach i pracach poświęconych poszczególnym twórcom zwłaszcza A. Czechowowi. Osobno wyróżnia