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Modernisations of Polish identities in contemporary Polish plays:

The right to individuality

1.1 Introduction

With the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, Polish playwrights were released from the stranglehold of communist censorship, becoming free to do and say whatever they liked in whatever ways they chose, no longer bound within the confines of allegorical stage languages when addressing political issues. While clandestine, politicised performances did take place under communism, the content of mainstream theatre was officially controlled by the censor. After 1989 there was an initial brief wave of restagings of classics, Western European plays, and psychological dramas. There then came a surge of contemporary Polish new playwriting which once again engaged with politics, but now the writers had freedom of speech and freedom of artistic expression. Marginalised characters were placed in the spotlight, demanding to be heard. They frequently did so in ‘real’, though not realistic, language, often full of obscenities. Since Poland’s accession to the European Union in 2004, contemporary Polish playwrights have continued to engage with the ongoing processes of reshaping Polish identities and tackling national stereotypes. This paper focuses on a selection of plays written after that important moment in Poland’s cultural history.

As Elwira M. Grossman has stated, ‘the process of redefining Polishness is a complex task’,¹ because during communism ‘an artificial, monolithic vision of “Polishness”’ was promoted² in which Poles are seen as uniquely white, Catholic and heterosexual. ‘Bóg, honor i ojczyzna’³ have long been the supposed pillars of contemporary Polish society. Versions of history have been imposed and memorialisation of the past has been institutionalised.

¹ Grossman, Elwira M. ‘Introduction’ in *Studies in Language, Literature, and Cultural Mythology in Poland: Investigating ‘The Other’*, ed. Elwira M. Grossman (USA: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 4

² Grossman, *The Other*, 7

³ God, honour and the motherland.

Sameness continues to be valued over difference, and although contemporary Polish playwrights have artistic freedom, this is still within the framework of a society riddled with taboos, social stereotypes and national myths. There is a strong and clear trend for contemporary playwrights to engage with socio-political discourse around such taboos, and to advocate for changes and freedoms which are still emerging, even now.

A multitude of issues which reflect contemporary social realities are addressed by several playwrights and there is not room here to discuss them all. However, in this paper there will be examples of several characters that either demand or express the freedom to be an individual and to redefine what it is to be a Pole. This is manifested specifically in ways that include (a) the freedom to put down the metaphorical baggage of World War Two and communism, and within that to face difficult truths about the past and to reject imposed rituals of commemoration; (b) the freedom to be openly homosexual without persecution; (c) the freedom not to follow the Polish Catholic church without criticism. I will give illustrations to support these assertions from selected plays by Paweł Demirski, Dorota Masłowska, Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk and Przemysław Wojcieszek.

While there is not room here to discuss dramatic technique in detail, it is possible to summarise by saying that although the four playwrights in focus approach traditional dramatic structures differently, each of them rejects the classical rules of drama to a greater or lesser extent. They do not write mimetic, naturalistic, Stanislavskian plays. Instead, these are dramas of free speech and free expression, in which dominant structures are challenged: those relating to dramatic form, linguistic form, genre, the relationship with the audience, social hierarchies and inherited modes of thinking. In the majority of the plays in hand, social reality is approached through entirely non-realistic dramatic techniques, and while the plays are too text-based to be labelled postdramatic in Hans-Thies Lehmann's definition,⁴ they

⁴ Lehmann, Hans. *Postdramatic Theatre*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), Kindle edition

share some characteristics with the broad notion of the postdramatic, more so than with realism or naturalism.

1.2 Down with the war!

In *Był sobie Polak, Polak, Polak i diabeł*⁵ (*There was a Pole, a Pole, a Pole and the Devil*), Demirski brings together an unlikely combination of characters who are all dead, awaiting transportation from limbo. A young actress character, Gwiazdka,⁶ a committed capitalist who takes her visa card everywhere, even to the grave, sees Poland's history as being utterly irrelevant to her. She asks 'do czego mi jest ta wasza historia...a do czego mi jest ta wasza narodowa tożsamość?'⁷ In the same play, the young boy, Chłopiec, wants to identify with contemporary Europe rather than with historical Poland: 'nie chcę być dzieckiem powstańca, korowiec, stoczniońca ani komucha', and instead 'chcę być dzieckiem zawodnika Realu Madryt'.⁸

In Sikorska-Miszczuk's *Burmistrz cz. II*⁹ (*The Mayor II*) the play's abstract action is set in contemporary Jedwabne, the small town that was the site of a 1941 massacre in which at least 340 Polish Jews were killed by their non-Jewish neighbours, but culpability was assigned to the Nazis. The truth has only been publicly acknowledged in recent years,¹⁰ and it is still a controversial issue for those who do not wish to accept Polish responsibility. There are three members of the young generation, Młode Pokolenie¹¹ I, II and III, who are tired of being defined by their town's difficult past and by World War Two in general. Młode Pokolenie III says 'urodziliśmy się pięćdziesiąt lat po wojnie. Jasne? Mamy w dupie tę

⁵ Demirski, Paweł. *Był sobie Polak, Polak, Polak i diabeł*. Unpublished. Manuscript copy emailed to Natasha Oxley 24 July 2012.

⁶ Starlet.

⁷ Demirski, *Był sobie Polak*, 46, 'what good to me is this history of yours?...and what good to me is this national identity of yours?', trans. Natasha Oxley, unpublished.

⁸ Demirski, *Był sobie Polak*, 37, 'I don't want to be the child of an insurgent, or of someone from the Workers' Defence Committee, or of a shipbuilder or a commie, I want to be the child of a Real Madrid player', trans. Natasha Oxley, unpublished.

⁹ Sikorska-Miszczuk, Małgorzata. 'Burmistrz cz. II', *Dialog* 12/2011 (2011): 182-195

¹⁰ The publication of Jan T. Gross's book *Sąsiedzi* (2000) was a catalyst for this cultural process.

¹¹ Young Generation.

wojnę. Całą wielką drugą wojnę światową mamy w dupie'.¹² He or she continues: 'Mam dość tej afery z Żydami'.¹³ Sikorska-Miszczuk encapsulates the idea that the young generation are in tension with national mythology and at odds with inherited versions of Polishness. She has them sing the national anthem with altered lyrics:

Marsz marsz Dąbrowski –
 Chcemy iPhone'y!
 [...]
 Precz z stodołą!
 [...]
 Marsz marsz Dąbrowski –
 Żydów zabił Voldemort!
 (wszyscy razem) Żydów zabił Voldemort!
 [...]
 Precz z historią!
 [...]
 Precz z pamięcią!
 [...]
 Chcemy żyć!
 Chcemy żyć!¹⁴

Sikorska-Miszczuk emphasises the connection the Młode Pokolenie has to modern technology (iPhones) and to contemporary foreign literature – the Voldemort accused here of killing the Jews being a character from J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books. The young generation here are firmly located in a modern, capitalist international context. They see no connection with the war or Jedwabne and refuse to inherit any associated postmemory in Marianne Hirsch's definition.¹⁵ This version of the song conveys the idea that the young generation represented here, presumably young teenagers, want to 'live' beyond their cultural context. By singing the national anthem in this way, they are rejecting and reshaping a ritual

¹² Sikorska-Miszczuk, *Burmistrz cz. II*, 192. 'We were born 50 years after the war. Got that? We don't give a shit about the war. We don't give a shit about World War II', Sikorska-Miszczuk, *The Mayor II*, trans. Artur Zapalowski, in *(A)Pollonia: Twenty-First-Century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage*, ed. by Carol Martin (Calcutta : Seagull, 2014), 191.

¹³ Sikorska-Miszczuk, *Burmistrz cz. II*, 192. 'Yes, it was me who burned those Jews in the barn. | Is that what you wanted to hear? | [...] I'm sick of this business with the Jews' (Sikorska-Miszczuk, *The Mayor II*, 114).

¹⁴ Sikorska-Miszczuk, *Burmistrz cz. II*, 194. 'March, march Dąbrowski | We want iPhones! [...] | Down with the barn! [...] | March, march Dąbrowski | The Jews were killed by Voldemort! [...] | Down with history! | [...] Down with memory! [...] | We want to live! | [...] We want to live!' (Sikorska-Miszczuk, *The Mayor II*, 115).

¹⁵ Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of postmemory: writing and visual culture after the Holocaust* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2002), ebook

that reinforces national narratives. This notion of wanting to live, that is to have the freedom to live according to their own desires, is reiterated by several young characters in many plays.

While Sikorska-Miszczuk's *Młode Pokolenie* are trying to get rid of the history they have inherited, in Masłowska's *Między nami dobrze jest*¹⁶ (*Things are Good Between Us*)¹⁷ the Mała Metalowa Dziewczynka¹⁸ is unaware of having received any such memories. This is encapsulated in the exchange in which her grandmother, the Staruszka,¹⁹ says 'Ja pamiętam dzień w którym wybuchła wojna'²⁰, and she replies: 'Wojna cenowa?'.²¹ Here Masłowska conveys the idea that the Mała Metalowa Dziewczynka doesn't even know what the war is, and that she is so entirely immersed in capitalism that the concept of a price war is more familiar to her than the concept of the Second World War. Similarly, the grandmother and granddaughter have completely different impressions of Germans. Staruszka remembers 'Aż do Warszawy wkroczyli Niemcy', to which the girl replies 'Niemcy, Niemcy, coś słyszałam o jakichś Niemcach...O Jezu, wiem, to ci, co tak jodlują!'.²² The girl's stereotyped image of the Germans has nothing to do with her grandmother's experiences. Within the context of the play it would have been impossible for the grandmother to pass on memories to the granddaughter because neither of them actually exists, the grandmother having been killed during the war as a young woman, before having any children, but Masłowska highlights generational differences through their contrasting attitudes. While the grandmother hears

¹⁶ Masłowska, Dorota. *Między nami dobrze jest* (Warsaw: Lampa i Iskra Boża, 2008).

¹⁷ Translated by Artur Zapałowski as 'No Matter How Hard We Tried: Or We Exist on the Best Terms We Can', in. *(A)pollonia : Twenty-first-century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage*, ed. by Duniec, Klass and Krakowska (London, New York, Calcutta : Seagull Books), 419-463

¹⁸ Small Metal Girl (a young girl who likes metal music).

¹⁹ Old Woman.

²⁰ Masłowska, *Między nami*, 11, 'I remember the day when the war broke out', trans. Natasha Oxley.

²¹ Masłowska, *Między nami*, 75. 'A price war?', trans. Natasha Oxley, unpublished.

²² Masłowska, *Między nami*, 11 'Germans, Germans, I've heard something about some Germans...Oh Jesus, I know, they're the ones who yodel!', trans. Natasha Oxley.

sounds of bombs going off, the granddaughter interprets them as bikes burning.²³ While the grandmother describes air raids, the granddaughter imagines toy planes.²⁴

In Sikorska-Miszczuk's *Walizka*,²⁵ Fransua visits the Holocaust museum in Paris. The *Przewodniczka*²⁶ is being driven insane by her daily dealings with the museum's artefacts. She argues in favour of destroying everything in the museum, saying:

Przestańmy pamiętać!
Bo nic to nikomu nie daje
Nie ma żadnego efektu
Poza tym, że ja
Przewodniczka w muzeum zagłady
Jestem wrakiem człowieka'.²⁷

However, her spirits are lifted when Fransua finds a suitcase that turns out to belong to his father, whom he never met and about whom his mother refuses to talk, because he was killed in Auschwitz. When Fransua opens the suitcase, he imagines meeting his father. Fransua tells him not to breathe in the gas around him, imploring him to hold his breath, demonstrating how to do so himself. The father, *Pantofelnik*, tells the son

...Oddychaj
Synku
Oddychaj
Nie możesz tak żyć²⁸

In saying this, the imagined *Pantofelnik* symbolically gives Fransua and the generation he represents the permission to let go of their parents' past. Fransua's held breath and the tense state it causes symbolises the internalisation of his father's painful history, which *Pantofelnik* says is not necessary. Having opened his father's suitcase and faced the truth, Fransua

²³ Masłowska, *Między nami*, 80.

²⁴ Masłowska, *Między nami*, 78.

²⁵ Sikorska-Miszczuk, Małgorzata. 'Walizka', in *Dialog*, 9/2008, 5-21

²⁶ Tour Guide.

²⁷ Sikorska-Miszczuk, *Walizka*, 12, 'Let's stop remembering! | Because it doesn't give anyone anything. | It has no effect | Apart from that I, | The Guide in the holocaust museum | Am a wreck of a person', trans. Natasha Oxley, unpublished.

²⁸ Sikorska-Miszczuk, *Walizka*, 12, 'Breathe out | Son | Breathe out | You can't live like that', trans. Natasha Oxley.

receives reassurance that he does not need to carry his father's story as his own, which allows a healing process to take place.

1.3 Rejecting rituals of commemoration

In *Niech żyje wojna!*²⁹, Paweł Demirski tackles head on the issue of imposed rituals of commemoration. Szarik, a veteran who has been transformed into a man-dog by his experiences of war, barks orders at the younger generation to observe a minute's silence to commemorate the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. The younger characters attempt to comply, but in the production directed by Monika Strzępka which premiered in 2009, they cannot keep still or stop laughing, and they eventually speak out against Szarik's attempt to impose the ritual. Gustlik says 'ja nie mam żadnej takiej minuty w głowie'³⁰. Lidka also expresses the fact that she has personal feelings about the war and the country's past but that she doesn't want to be dictated to about how she should respond to those feelings: 'Ja mam takie emocje | ale mnie że on o nich mówi wkurwia'³¹. Throughout the scene, Szarik makes repeated attempts to get the younger characters to observe a minute's silence, shouting 'ani kroku w tył'³² each time somebody moves or talks. In Strzępka's production, the scene is both amusing and poignant, and it perfectly encapsulates Demirski's point that commemorative practices should be individualised, and that it is meaningless to thoughtlessly participate in collective rituals. Gustlik says he is able to remember the people who died in the Warsaw uprising but feels it is unnecessary for Szarik to tell him who, what, or how to remember:

ja mogę
 Ja te dwieście tysięcy osób pamiętać mogę
 ale czemu on ma mówić co ja mam pamiętać? Właściwie?³³

²⁹ Demirski, Paweł. '*Niech żyje wojna!*' in *Parafrazy*, by Paweł Demirski (Warsaw : Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2011), 339-394

³⁰ ³⁰ Demirski, '*Niech żyje wojna!*', 389, 'I haven't got a minute like this in my head', trans. Natasha Oxley, unpublished.

³¹ Demirski, '*Niech żyje wojna!*', 389, 'I have these emotions | but the fact that he's talking about them pisses me off', trans. Natasha Oxley.

³² Demirski, '*Niech żyje wojna!*', 390, 'not one step back', trans. Natasha Oxley.

³³ Demirski, '*Niech żyje wojna!*', 391, 'I can | I can remember these two hundred thousand people | but why does he have to tell me what I have to remember? | Really?', trans. Natasha Oxley.

Czereśniak not only wishes to find his own way to express his emotions about the past, but also wants to include within his retrospection a protest against the authorities who gave the command to begin the Warsaw Uprising:

ja mam takie emocje różne
 ale sam je sobie wolę mieć
 niż z wami
 minutę mogę stać
 ale moja minuta jest przeciwko władzy
 która wydała rozkaz żeby rozpocząć powstanie
 a potem każe nam ten rozkaz świętować
 stoję przeciwko takim świętom.³⁴

In the Polish social context it is controversial to challenge the Warsaw Uprising in this way, but the point is succinctly made and communicated in performance with a conviction that makes it seem very reasonable. It is part of the dismantling of a framework of generalised attitudes in favour of personally thought through and freely expressed opinion.

In the same play, Szarik wants to set up a new monument, which Gustlik opposes and urinates on. This is clearly a symbolic act expressing disregard and disrespect for the proposed monument and what it represents, exemplifying generational differences in attitudes to remembering. Gustlik argues that the place in which Szarik wishes to make his monument holds different meanings to different people, and that the location has been witness to various events in the recent past, none of which should take precedence. Although the character is ostensibly male, in the *Strzępka* production the actor is female and uses feminine verb endings, saying:

W tym miejscu w roku takim tam a takim – o godzinie 13.45 [...]
 Zginęły trzy sanitariuszki państwa podziemnego
 [...]
 w tym miejscu zachorowałam na grypę jak się całowałam z chłopakiem pierwszy raz
 Potem w tym miejscu mnie rzucił
 [...]

³⁴ Demirski, '*Niech żyje wojna!*', 391, 'I have these various emotions | but I prefer to have them alone | than with you | I can stand for a minute | but my minute is against the authorities | who gave the order to start the uprising | and then tells us to celebrate the order | I stand against these commemorations', trans. Natasha Oxley.

potem zdarzyło się całe mnóstwo rzeczy
[...]
gdzie jest w sercu tego miasta moja tabliczka?³⁵

In Wojcieszek's *Cokolwiek się zdarzy, Kocham cię*³⁶ the female character Sugar's girlfriend Magda articulates her disdain for monuments that represent national heroic narratives and prejudicial attitudes by writing in a poem:

jesteśmy kochankami / zrób to na grobach królów naczelników powstań przegranych
w dniu ich rozpoczęcia / zrób to na pomnikach patriotycznej młodzieży.³⁷

This leads on to the next section which focuses on characters expressing their right to be openly homosexual without fear of persecution.

1.4 Open the closet!

While 'the homosexual taboo is fading'³⁸ in Polish society, prejudice against non-heterosexual people of all kinds remains a particular problem in contemporary Poland, and 'constructing the homosexual as nationally-alienated derives from the fantasy of a real, unchangeable core of national identity' (Warkocki : 2013, 132, referring to Czaplński : 2009). By writing homosexual and transsexual protagonists whom they support, contemporary Polish playwrights contribute their voices to activism against homophobia and anti-gay prejudice, engaging with the ongoing socio-political discourse seeking to assert the acceptability of being Polish and being gay.

In *Między nami dobrze jest*, Masłowska writes a minor 'Fryzjer-gej' character who is 'nietolerowany'. It is an example of her biting irony when a nostalgic speech on the radio

³⁵ Demirski, 'Niech żyje wojna!', 394, 'In this place in such and such a year at 1.45pm [...] Three nurses of the Polish underground state were killed [...] | In this place I got the flu after I kissed a boy | for the first time | then in this place he dumped me | [...] Then loads of things happened | Where in the heart of this town is my plaque?', trans. Natasha Oxley.

³⁶ Wojcieszek Przemysław, 'Cokolwiek się zdarzy, Kocham cię' in Agnieszka Tuszyńska (ed.). *TR/PL: Bajer, Kochan, Masłowska, Sala, Wojcieszek : antologia nowego dramatu polskiego: nowa dramaturgia 05*, Warsaw : TR, 2006), 233-288.

³⁷ Wojcieszek, *Cokolwiek*, page 'we are lovers | let's do it on the tombs of kings, of commanders of uprisings lost the day they began | let's do it on monuments to patriotic youth', trans. Artur Zapalowski, *I Love You No Matter What*, in *(A)pollonia: Twenty-first-century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage* (London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books), 587

³⁸ Warkocki, Błażej. 'Homobiographies and Gay Empancipation', in *Polish Literature in Transformation*, ed. Ursula Phillips with the assistance of Knut Andreas Grimstad and Kris Van Heuckelom (Berlin: Lit Verlag) 125

describes how Poland used to be an ‘oazą tolerancji i multikulturowości’.³⁹ In *Cokolwiek się zdarzy, Kocham cię*, Wojcieszek’s young nationalist soldier character Piotr, unlike many of his contemporaries in the plays in hand, proudly carries the history of World War Two as part of his own autobiography, in contrast with his sister Sugar and her girlfriend Magda who reject it entirely. He compares himself to his grandfather and argues that Sugar’s lesbianism is preventing him from following in his grandfather’s footsteps, saying ‘Siostra dziadka nie był lesbą, kiedy on umierał pod Monte Cassino! [...] Mogłem zginąć, a ty...Jesteś taka na złość mnie!’.⁴⁰ Sugar and Piotr’s mother, Teresa, supports her daughter’s right to sexual freedom over her son’s nationalist tendencies. Sugar says ‘Stworzymy małą lesbijską rodzinę. Małeńką wywrotową komórkę, która wysadzi w powietrze to popieprzone społeczeństwo’.⁴¹ Teresa tells Piotr ‘Twoja siostra ma takie jak ty prawo mieszkać tu, z kim chce! To duży dom, pomieścimy się wszyscy’.⁴²

In *Tęczowa Trybuna 2012*⁴³ (*Rainbow Stand 2012*), Demirski’s protagonists are a group of gay football fans protesting for their own stand in the stadium for the 2012 European Cup final held in Poland and Ukraine, to protect them from violence. In the production of this play directed by Strzępka, premiered in 2011, characters approach the audience, asking them if they will sign a petition in favour of the stand for the gay fans, putting them on the spot with regard to this controversial initiative. This play drew a lot of attention, not least because Demirski pretended that it was based on a real group of fans, but in fact he and his colleagues had set up the *Tęczowa Trybuna* group, which was reported as real in the international press.

³⁹ Masłowska, *Między nami*, 80, ‘an oasis of tolerance and multiculturalism’, trans. Natasha Oxley.

⁴⁰ Wojcieszek, *Cokolwiek*, 270, ‘Grandfather’s sister wasn’t no lesbian when he laid down his life at Monte Cassino! [...] I could have been killed, and you...you’re doing this to spite me!’, trans. Artur Zapałowski, *I Love You*, 566.

⁴¹ Wojcieszek, *Cokolwiek*, 258, ‘We’ll start a little lesbian family. A tiny, subversive cell that will blow this fucked-up society to smithereens.’, trans. Artur Zapałowski, *I Love You*, 553.

⁴² Wojcieszek, *Cokolwiek*, 269, **translation**

⁴³ Demirski, *Paweł Tęczowa Trybuna 2012*, unpublished, 2011, received by email from the playwright’s assistant in 2013.

In this play, a gay teacher who fears violent attacks wonders ‘co wynika z mojego karate które ćwiczyłem przez dwa lata jak teraz się boję wyjść na ulicę’.⁴⁴ Later he declares: ‘ja już dłużej nie będę sobie na to pozwalał | bo właśnie przyszedł czas żeby nie wstydzić się wychodzić na ulicę’.⁴⁵ Here, Demirski is clearly supporting and giving a voice to this character and the people he represents. In the same play, Demirski presents what is one of the most controversial and complicated characters possible in a Polish context: a transsexual priest who used to be a nun. In the *Strzępka* production this character is played by a female actor dressed in a priest’s outfit. The example of this provocative character leads us on to the final section on the church.

1.5 Down with the church!

Another clear commonality in plays by several playwrights is the presence of characters who do not feel connected to the Polish Catholic church. Given the dominance of the Catholic church in Polish society, the inclusion of such characters represents another aspect of engagement with contemporary socio-cultural discourse. In Sikorska-Miszczuk’s *Popieluszko*,⁴⁶ the protagonist is an Antypolak⁴⁷ who articulates the problem of the Polak-katolik myth, saying:

Mój Kościół postawił mnie przed wyborem. Przed wyborem narodowym. Jeśli jestem Polakiem, to muszę wierzyć w Kościół katolicki. Jeśli nie będę wierzył w Kościół katolicki, nie będę Polakiem. Bo wtedy za karę pozbawi mnie obywatelstwa.⁴⁸

He goes on to assert his right to choose his religion and how he practices it. He addresses the audience with the unambiguous lines:

⁴⁴ Demirski, *Tęczowa*, 6, ‘where did two years of karate classes get me since I’m scared to go outside’, trans. Artur Zapałowski, *Rainbow Stand 2012*, 2011, unpublished, received by email from Demirski’s assistant, 7.

⁴⁵ Demirski, *Tęczowa*, 34, ‘...I won’t stand for it any longer | because the time has come to stop being ashamed of going out in the street’, trans. Artur Zapałowski, 40.

⁴⁶ Sikorska-Miszczuk, Małgorzata. ‘*Popieluszko*’, in 2013. *Transformacja. Dramat Polski po 1989 roku. Tom II. Antologia*, ed. Jacek Kopciński (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2013), 718-779.

⁴⁷ Anti-Pole.

⁴⁸ Sikorska-Miszczuk, *Popieluszko*, 721, ‘My church presents me with a choice. A choice about nation. If I’m a Pole, I must believe in the Catholic church. If I’m not going to believe in the Catholic church, I’m not going to be a Pole. Because then as a punishment it will deprive me of my citizenship’, trans. Natasha Oxley unpublished.

To, co mogę zrobić, to wstać z kolan. I wzywam wszystkich: wstańcie z kolan. Tak. Bo ja wstaję z kolan. I mówię: Nie potrzebuję Kościoła, żeby wierzyć. Jestem Polakiem. Wolnym człowiekiem.⁴⁹

In Masłowska's *Dwoje biednych Rumunów mówiących po polsku*⁵⁰ (Masłowska : 2006), protagonist Parcha is an actor who plays a priest in *Plebania*, a television series that was shown in Poland between 2000 and 2012. Despite this role, he explains that he fears he will not receive eternal salvation and complains: 'Kościół katolicki się przypierdoli ze swoimi dogmatami, spowiedziami, postami i udupią mnie. Mnie. Księdza Grzegorza udupią'. In Wojcieszek's *Made in Poland*⁵¹, the central character, Boguś, has lost faith in the church, telling the priest Edmund: 'Mam dosyć tych kłamstw, nie widzisz?',⁵² and 'Nie wierzę w życie wieczne, nie wierzę w Nowy Testament, nie wierzę w objawienie Proroków.'⁵³

In Demirski's *Był sobie Polak, Polak, Polak i diabeł*, the Gwiazdka again expresses herself bluntly, asking 'a do czego mi jest kurwa mać ta cała wasza religia...[...]...a do czego mi jest ta wasza narodowa tożsamość'.⁵⁴ The **Pole-Catholic** myth is no longer sacred for these characters or their playwrights. In presenting such characters, the playwrights are supporting open debate around religion, advocating freedom of choice when it comes to religion and how it is practised.

1.6 Conclusions

The playwrights discussed here clearly engage in contemporary Polish public debate and social discourse, particularly in relation to history, sexuality and religion, and they all

⁴⁹ Sikorska-Miszczuk, *Popieluszko*, 723, 'What I can do is get up off my knees. And I urge you all: get up off your knees. Yes. Because I'm getting up off my knees. And I'm saying: I don't need the church to believe. I am a Pole. A free man', trans. Natasha Oxley.

⁵⁰ Masłowska, Dorota. 'Dwoje biednych Rumunów mówiących po polsku', in *TR/PL : Bajer, Kochan, Masłowska, Sala, Wojcieszek: antologia nowego dramatu polskiego: nowa dramaturgia 05*, ed. Agnieszka Tuszyńska (Warsaw: TR, 2006), 96-140.

⁵¹ Wojcieszek, Przemysław. 'Made in Poland', in *Made in Poland. Dziewięć sztuk teatralnych z Polski*, eds Roman Pawłowski and Henryk Sulek (Kraków: Ha!art and Horyzont, 2006), 404-463.

⁵² Wojcieszek, *Made in Poland*, 407, 'I've had enough of these lies, don't you see?', trans. Dominika Laster, in *Loose Screws: Nine New Plays from Poland*, ed. Dominika Laster (Calcutta: Seagull), 303).

⁵³ Wojcieszek, *Made in Poland*, 408, 'I don't believe in eternal life, I don't believe in the New Testament, I don't believe in the revelations of the prophets', trans. Dominika Laster, 303.

⁵⁴ Demirski, *Był sobie Polak*, 47, 'what fucking good to me is your whole religion? [...] and what good to me is this national identity or yours?', trans. Natasha Oxley.

challenge oppressive myths of homogeneity. These writers advocate the democratisation of memory and the freedom for postwar generations to sever the continuation of the passing down of postmemories of the war. The plays discussed here give the clear message that it is, or should be, acceptable for postwar generations not to be nationalistic and not to internalise the history of World War Two. The plays also demonstrate a challenge to prejudice against homosexual and transsexual people, emphasising the point that being Polish does not have to mean being heterosexual. Neither does being Polish equate to being Catholic, according to these plays, which voice the conviction that it is acceptable for Poles not to believe in God, or to have a religious faith without subscribing to the Polish Catholic church. These plays are vibrant, cacophonous reactions against existing structures, both social and theatrical. Collectively they emphasise the importance of individual expression, conveying a sense of anger at certain aspects of the status quo but at the same time projecting a sense of optimism about the future for individual Poles.

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