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Shakespearean criticism in Poland in the inter-war period (1918–1939)

English literature and culture were not taught at the university as they were not generally known until the end of the nineteenth century. Sometimes specialists in other fields presented lectures or a series of lectures on some elements of English literature. Wilhelm Creizenach (1851–1919), a professor of German literature at the Jagiellonian University, included English literature as a subject of his research. He had lectures and seminars on Shakespeare and other literary figures and works of English literature long before the first English Department was established. He also published a history of European drama (*Geschichte des neuen Dramas*), which contained a large amount of information about English drama, being one of the first such resources in Poland. Since 1909 the Lvov University students also had access to lectures and seminars on English literature delivered in Polish by a poet Jan Kasprowicz (1860–1926), for whom the Chair in the Comparative Literature Studies was established (Starnawski 1997).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the growing interest in learning the language and increasing demand for English literature created conditions for setting up a Polish university institution which would provide the needed specialists. The first Chair of English Language and Literature was established in Cracow in 1908 and Roman Dyboski was the first scholar in the field in Poland. The first doctoral dissertation in English philology at the Jagiellonian University was written under the supervision of Creizenach by Andrzej Tretiak and defended in 1909. Another student who completed his Ph.D. in the field of

English Studies was Władysław Tarnawski, who was working under Dyboski. In 1913 Cracow University awarded its second Ph.D. degree in English to Tarnawski, on the basis of his dissertation on the Polish translations of Shakespeare's dramas, published in 1914.

After World War I, in the re-born Poland, Cracow and Lvov universities remained operating, while the other two universities, Warsaw and Vilnius re-opened and a new university opened in Poznań, based on the German Academy, which had existed there before the war. Only Cracow had a chair in English Studies before the war and Dyboski was the only professor in Poland who was a specialist in that field. Four other universities wanted to open English departments and were looking for scholars who could be their chairs. Some years later, Warsaw and Lvov managed to establish permanent chairs when Tarnawski and Tretiak, both specialists in literature and culture, created the new academic discipline. Only in Poznań, did the newly opened university create an English Department with Wilfrid Arbuthnot Massey and Zygfryd Maria Arend¹, who concentrated on linguistics rather than literature (Fisiak 1983).

In the inter-war period the departments of English Studies in Poland were small in the number of students – about thirty students per department, so about 120 for the whole country. There was no English language exam required on admission for students, so some students started their studies with no knowledge of English language at all. Usually they had two hours of practical English, in a group of 100 students. They could take their exams at the time convenient for them during the four-year studies. The curriculum consisted of lectures and seminars delivered in English which reflected the academic interests of professors (Starnawski 1997).

The first professor of English who, at the same time, was the most eminent scholar in the field and the founder of English Studies in Poland was Roman Dyboski (1883–1945). He was born and raised in Cieszyn, situated on the Polish-Czech border at that time, a part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, where three languages: Polish, Czech and German were spoken by the inhabitants. Dyboski knew all three languages and, after finishing a Polish primary school, attended a German secondary one. Then, he continued his education at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. He studied there in 1901–1902, where one of his mentors, whose lectures had the strongest influence on Dyboski, was Wilhelm Creizenach. This relationship had an impact on Dyboski's academic career and he began to show an interest in English Studies. Following Professor Creizenach's advice, after one year in Cracow, Dyboski continued his studies in

¹ Massey (1884–1969), British scholar, linguist, in 1921 appointed professor of the University of Poznań, Arend, author of books on English pronunciation and co-editor (with Dyboski) of a Middle English text. He was executed by the Nazis in 1944.

Vienna, where he took his Ph.D. degree in 1905. His dissertation *Tennysons Sprache und Stil* was published in Vienna in 1907. Later, still working in Vienna, Dyboski was sent on a one year scholarship to the United Kingdom and did his research at the universities of London, Oxford and Cambridge. On his return to Vienna, at the age of twenty five, he completed his post-doctoral studies in 1908. His book *Songs, Carols and Other Miscellaneous Poems*, published in London in 1908, was recognized as his dissertation.

In 1908 Dyboski returned to Cracow and was appointed to the first Jagiellonian University Chair of English Studies. He began lecturing as an assistant professor in the Philosophical Faculty. In 1911 he was promoted to the rank of professor extraordinarius. He chaired the Department until the First World War. In 1914 he was called to active service in the Austrian Army and fought on the eastern front until 1917. In the years 1918–1919 he was a prisoner of war in Russia. There he founded the German-Hungarian University and served as its rector. During this time he gave a course of English literature which was attended by many prisoners.

When Dyboski returned to Poland in 1922, he took up his post at the Jagiellonian University. He resumed his lectures on English literature and continued his studies. That same year he was appointed full professor (ordinarius). He was the Chair of the English Department from 1922 to 1939. In the years 1927–29 he lectured on Polish history and literature in London in the School of Slavonic Studies. All his lectures were later published in a well-known periodical *The Slavonic Review* and in book-form. In 1928 he was invited by Kościuszko Foundation and Chicago Society, an organisation of Americans of Polish origin, to give lectures on Polish culture at the University of Chicago. They were so well received that Dyboski had a lecturing tour from autumn 1928 till spring 1929 during which he visited 25 universities and gave hundreds of lectures and speeches.

Dyboski was a prolific writer and speaker. Throughout his professional career his articles on literature and culture appeared in hundreds of newspapers and magazines in Poland and abroad. Some of his articles, on culture and literature of English speaking countries, were then collected and published in 1920s and 1930s as books. He also wrote and lectured on education in Poland, his native Silesia or Polish aspirations after independence. He lectured in Polish as well as foreign institutions in England, Austria, Czechoslovakia, the United States, Switzerland and Russia.

He spent World War II in Cracow. Absent from Cracow on 6 November 1939, he luckily escaped the Nazi persecution, when many professors and lecturers were arrested and sent to concentration camps. During the years of the Nazi occupation he continued writing about English and American literature and history and prepared six monographs. After the war, in March 1945 Dyboski

resumed his work at the University and continued it until he died of a heart attack on 1 June 1945, at the age of sixty two.²

Between 1911 and 1913 he published all of Shakespeare's works in *Dzieła Dramatyczne Shakespeare'a* [Shakespeare's Dramatic Works]. A prominent feature of this work was his extensive introduction which included background information with detailed discussion of sources and dates of the dramatic works. Each play was additionally prefaced with a critical introduction. His knowledge of the history of Elizabethan literature, culture and theatre made the edition an outstanding achievement. However, it was published in the wake of World War I, when Poland did not exist as a state and Dyboski's work did not receive sufficient recognition. It was not re-printed after the war.

In 1914 Dyboski published his essay *O sonetach i poematach Szekspira* [On Poems and Sonnets of Shakespeare], another important contribution in Shakespearean studies. He discussed sources and traditions behind the sonnets and poems and introduced them as integral elements of Shakespeare's whole work. Typical for critics at that time Dyboski showed sonnets and poems against Shakespeare's life and his dramatic output. He discussed their content and language and analyzed them in the context of Shakespeare's later works.

In 1917, while a prisoner in Russia, he published another work on Shakespeare – *Rytmika wysiłku i znużenia w twórczości Szekspira* [Rise and Fall in Shakespeare's Dramatic Art]. It appeared in Moscow, but six years later he presented the work in English before the members of the Shakespeare Association in Britain and it was republished in 1923 by the Oxford University Press. In the work Dyboski described the dramatist's literary career as a rising and falling wave, which allowed him to explain Shakespeare's weaker artistic dimension. The examination and evaluation of the dramatist's rhythm of energy and fatigue covered both the aspects of form and contents.

After his return to Cracow Dyboski continued his studies and published another work – *Shakespeare* in 1927. In addition to a detailed study of the dramas, their sources, characters and language, his work gave a broad picture of the political and literary situation of Tudor England, described the theatre and analyzed the literary output of all the other important dramatists. Gibińska

² Dyboski began informing Polish society about English literature in 1909, when he published his first book *Milton i jego wiek* [Milton and his Age]. His important publication was the textbook outlining the language and literature of medieval England: *Literatura i język średniowiecznej Anglii* [Literature and Language of Medieval England], which was a guidebook of medieval literature for students of Polish universities. His next publication, *Alfred Tennyson: jego życie i dzieła* [Alfred Tennyson: his Life and Works], which appeared in 1912, for the first time introduced the famous poet to the Polish reader. In his research Dyboski focused primarily on the medieval period, Victorian epoch and on Shakespeare.

considers the first three chapters of the book as “one of the best expositions of Renaissance in Europe and England” (1998: 53). Dyboski touched all important facts, ideas and “names and paints a master landscape against which he then discusses Shakespeare’s work” (Gibińska 1998: 53).

Dyboski also wrote about Shakespeare and his works in many articles. He made the dramatist more accessible to all kinds of readers and initiated Polish research in Shakespeare studies. Though his critical approach reflected the state of knowledge of his times and moral reception of literature, his learning and judgement place him among the first-class scholars of Europe.

Another important specialist in the field of English studies whose research also concentrated on Shakespeare, was Władysław Tarnawski (1885–1951), born and raised in Przemyśl (in Eastern Poland). His parents were well known activists, who did much social work in the region. Przemyśl, also a part of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, with German as its official language, was inhabited by two nations: Poles and Ukrainians. The secondary school, which Tarnawski attended, was divided into two sections: Polish and Ukrainian. Tarnawski attended the Polish one, but participated in some activities organized by his Ukrainian school friends.

Tarnawski began his studies in 1903 at the Lvov University. He studied Polish and classical philology. It is not known whether he was acquainted with English literature at that time, but he may have attended Kasprovicz’s lectures on English poetry. After a break caused by his health problems, he continued his education at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. At the end of his studies Dr Dyboski was one of his lecturers of English literature. Tarnawski’s doctoral dissertation, *O polskich przekładach dramatów Szekspira*, [On Polish Translations of Shakespeare’s Dramas] written under Professor Dyboski’s supervision, was completed in 1913. As it was the first work which offered a comprehensive study of translations of Shakespeare’s plays which appeared in Poland, it was highly praised by scholars and was published in 1914.

When Tarnawski graduated from the university, he returned to Przemyśl and started working at school. At that time English was not a school subject, so he taught Polish and history. As his work on Polish translations of Shakespeare’s plays became quite popular, he was often invited to write articles on English literature for Cracow, Warsaw and Lvov periodicals. During the years he spent as a secondary school teacher (1914–1924) he continued his research in English literature. When in 1916, the publishing house “Biblioteka Narodowa” opened a section on English literature, Tarnawski was one of the key players. In 1920s Tarnawski translated Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet*, which were published with prefaces he authored and contained his detailed analyses.

The University of Lvov wanted to open an English Department in 1919. Jan Kasprowicz, during the Philosophical Faculty meeting, recommended Tarnawski as its chair. It encouraged Tarnawski to continue his studies to be able to apply for the position of professor. In 1922 he received a degree of habilitated Ph.D. at the University of Lvov. His monograph *Krzysztof Marlowe, jego życie, dzieła i znaczenie w literaturze angielskiej* [Christopher Marlowe, his Life, Works and Significance to English literature] was recognized as his dissertation. In 1923, recommended by professor Dyboski, he was appointed to the first Chair of English Studies at the University in Lvov. He was promoted to the rank of professor (extraordinarius) in 1924. His work as a Chair of the English Department was interrupted, when in 1934 the department was closed. At that time many university professors lost their jobs for political reasons, Tarnawski among them. He was forced to retire in September 1934 and in 1934–1937 English studies did not exist as a university discipline. He returned to the Chair in December 1937.³

In 1931 he wrote a monograph *Szekspir. Książka dla młodzieży i dorosłych* [Shakespeare. A Book for Youth and Adults], in which he gave information about Shakespeare's life and works as well as the history of English literature from Celtic times. To encourage readers and make his work accessible to an average Pole, he gave background information on all the names he mentioned in the text together with their phonetic transcription and explained literary terms.

After the outbreak of World War II, Tarnawski stayed in Lvov and continued his work as a university professor until 1941. That year he came to Cracow and started giving lectures and seminars on English language and literature at the Underground University. During the years of the Nazi occupation he translated some Shakespeare's works. In 1945, after Dyboski's death, he was offered the Chair of the English department and in 1946 appointed full professor (ordinarius). During the post war period he was involved in the work of Komitet Ziemi Wschodnich [Committee for Eastern Lands]. In December 1946 he was arrested, as the Polish government considered the work of this organization illegal, against the Communist regime doctrine. In 1947 he was put to trial, accused of being one of the leaders and sentenced to a ten-year imprisonment.

³ While working in Lvov Tarnawski published two important synthetic works on English literature: *Historia literatury angielskiej od czasów najdawniejszych do Milтона i Drydena* [History of English Literature since the Oldest Times to Milton and Dryden] published in 1926, which contained a large section devoted to Shakespeare, and *Historia literatury angielskiej od Swifta do Burke'a i Burnsa* [History of English Literature from Swift to Burke and Burns] in 1930. These were the first textbooks on English literature in Polish. He also wrote reviews of Polish translations of English poetry and prose, numerous articles about different English authors, as well as reviews of critical works published in England. However, in his research he focuses on Elizabethan literature and Shakespeare.

In March 1948 he got permission to continue his research in prison. He spent the years of imprisonment doing research on Shakespeare's dramas. He died in April 1951, having spent three years in prison. After his death his translations of some plays were published: *Hamlet* in 1953, *King Lear* and *Richard II* in 1957, *The Tempest* in 1958, *Sonnets* in 1964 and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1970.

During his years in prison he wrote some works, which were not published. Among them there are some devoted to Shakespeare, like *Składniki twórczości Szekspira* (*Elements of Shakespeare's Creative Activity*), written in 1951, *Varietas delecta*, a work in English, about Shakespearean drama, *Szkic krytyczny o pismach niedramatycznych Shakespeare'a*, [A Critical Sketch of Shakespeare's Non-dramatic Works], prefaces to Shakespeare's dramas, *The Shakespearean Tragedy* and the unfinished *Shakespeare na tle epoki* [Shakespeare and his Epoch].⁴

Andrzej Tretiak (1886–1944), born in Lvov, was a son of Józef Tretiak, a well-known historian of Polish literature. When Andrzej was still a baby, the family moved to Cracow where he graduated from secondary school. Tretiak entered university in 1904. He studied two subjects: Polish and German philology at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. As he became interested in the field with no scholarly traditions in Poland, English philology, he moved to Vienna to continue his studies. In 1907, as a young man of 21, he published his first essay, *Marlowe i Mickiewicz* [Marlowe and Mickiewicz] which was soon followed by other studies. In 1909 he received the title of Doctor of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University for his work about *Hapax legomena* in Shakespeare's works.

Tretiak remained in the field of English Studies two years after his doctoral dissertation. Then, unwilling to work as a secondary school teacher, he entered the Agricultural Academy in Wrocław, and after his graduation in 1912, settled down in the countryside as an agricultural administrator. In his free time he continued his research, which concentrated on Shakespeare. He wrote prefaces and analyses of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1921), *Macbeth* (1922), *Hamlet* (1922) and *King Lear* (1923). They were published by "Biblioteka Narodowa". The last two were published together with his own translations of the plays. His translations were considered exact philological renderings, but, as critics claimed, lacked imaginative poetic beauty (Borowy 1938–45: 263). When the re-opened Warsaw University wanted to start an English department, Tretiak was invited to chair it. He gave up his work in agriculture, took the position and continued his research in English Studies. In 1923 he was

⁴ Information about Tarnawski's unpublished works, which are in possession of his daughter Joanna Tarnawska, see Rożnowska-Szymczykowa 1993/1994.

appointed professor (*extraordinarius*) and in 1936 he was promoted to the rank of professor (*ordinarius*). For the academic year 1939–40 he was elected Dean of the Faculty of Humanities. He held this post during the years of World War II and actively worked in the underground Warsaw University. He was also a member of the clandestine society giving assistance to war prisoners who had escaped from the camps. In 1942, when the Germans became aware of its activities he had to go into hiding and went to live in the country. In 1944, during one of his brief arrivals in Warsaw, he was arrested, under the assumed name of Trzeciński, and imprisoned in the Pawiak, the most severe Nazi persecution centre in Warsaw during World War II. Luckily, he was freed, as the Germans did not discover his true identity. However, two months later, in the first days of the Warsaw Uprising, he was taken as a “hostage,” together with other inhabitants of the Professor’s house in Nowy Żajazd. He was never seen again. Probably he was shot the same day. 3 August 1944 is believed to be the date of his death.

Tretiak concentrated on certain areas of English literature. The first one, begun in his young years and continued throughout his life, was Shakespeare. His study *Środki artystyczne sceny szekspirowskiej* [The Artistic Devices of Shakespearean Stage] (1925) analyzed the types of theatres existing in Shakespearean times and the dramas performed during that period. Also his many articles dealt with Elizabethan stage and theatrical productions, like *Scena Szekspirowska* [Shakespearean Stage] in 1925 or *Inszenizacja ‘Juliusza Cezara’ na scenie szekspirowskiej* [Production of *Julius Caesar* on the Shakespearean Stage] in 1925. He wrote some very original studies like *The Merchant of Venice and the Alien Question* (1929) and *Kompozycja Antoniusza i Kleopatry Shakespeare’a* [Construction of Shakespeare’s Anthony and Cleopatra] (1937), in which he developed his theory of the structure of a literary work. For “Biblioteka Narodowa” he wrote prefaces to Shakespeare’s plays: *The Tempest* (1921), *King Lear* (1923), *Othello* and *Macbeth* (1927). He analyzed the language, structure of the plays, Shakespeare’s relation to sources, main characters and problems. Writing about *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* he attempted to show their influence on Polish poets and dramatists.

Another specialist in English literature who started his professional career in the twenties but only after the World War II became an important Shakespearean scholar was Stanisław Helsztyński (1891–1986). He studied English philology in Münster and, when Poland regained independence, in Poznań. After graduation in 1921 Helsztyński started working as a secondary school teacher, at the same time doing research on English literature. In 1926 he took his doctor’s degree and was employed as a junior staff member at the Warsaw University. Until the outbreak of the Second World War he edited Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*,

Macbeth (1929) and *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1931), which were published with his introductions. In the years 1928–1938 Helsztyński cooperated with a periodical *Wiadomości Literackie* in which he published three critical articles on Shakespeare's dramas: *Stratford i "Sen nocy letniej"* [Stratford and *Midsummer Night's Dream*] (1926), *Krzywda Lady Macbeth* [Lady Macbeth's Harm] (1927), *Hamlet islandzki i Hamlet szekspirowski* [Islandian Hamlet and Shakespearean Hamlet] (1930). In 1939 the articles appeared in one volume containing a collection of Helsztyński's writings – *Od Chaucera do Joyce'a* [From Chaucer to Joyce].

There were a few scholars, who contributed to the English Studies and Shakespearean criticism from outside English departments. Leon Piniński (1859–1938), professor of law at the University of Lvov, was an outstanding expert on Shakespeare. In 1924 he published a collection of essays on Shakespeare – *William Shakespeare. Wrażenia i szkice z twórczości poety* [William Shakespeare. Studies and Impressions], which are still valid and considered as original (Fisiak 1983). Other scholars who shared a fascination with Shakespeare and his work were professors of Polish literature – Waław Borowy (1890–1950) and Marian Szykowski (1883–1952), who published articles on Shakespeare, usually with reference to Polish literature. Not only did they critically analyze Shakespeare's output, but they also traced the dramatist's influence on Polish authors.

All the scholars followed the pattern of the nineteenth century interpretation – biographical criticism. Studying Shakespearean characters, they were trying to discover the truth about Shakespeare's life and creation through his works. Although they knew and used the critical output of all foreign specialists in Shakespearean studies, in their work they presented the results of their own research, encouraging a greater understanding of the English dramatist. All their works were important contribution to Shakespearean criticism not only in Poland.

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