

## Grotowski in Opole. A Case Study

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Jerzy Grotowski's theatre, especially in the period of his work in Opole (1959–1964), has most often been interpreted through the prism of aesthetics, actor training, and the evolution of the so-called 'poor theatre'. Much less attention has been paid to its political dimension, frequently obscured both by contemporaneous critical discourse and by deliberate strategies of camouflage employed by Grotowski and his collaborators. This article argues that *Studium o Hamlecie* (1964; *The Hamlet Study*) constitutes Grotowski's most explicit and radical political intervention, in which theatrical form became a vehicle for diagnosing the deepest tensions within Polish society under state socialism. The performance not only reflected but also critically reworked the ideological conflicts, social divisions, and latent violence characteristic of the Polish People's Republic in the early 1960s.

KEYWORDS: Grotowski, archive, politics, linguistic analyses, censorship, Opole, PRL

To understand the political dimension of Grotowski's theatre, it is necessary to situate it within the broader framework of post-war Polish history, particularly the transformations following October 1956. The events of October 1956 – often referred to as the 'Polish October' – marked a turning point in the history of the Polish People's Republic. Following a period of Stalinist repression, a wave of social unrest and political negotiation led to the rise of Władysław Gomułka and a temporary liberalisation of the regime. Although this 'thaw' raised hopes for systemic reform, it soon became clear that the changes were limited and that the fundamental structures of authoritarian control remained intact. For Grotowski's generation, October 1956 was a formative experience: it revealed both the possibility of political transformation and its ultimate impossibility. This tension between hope and disillusionment would later manifest itself in the structure and themes of his performances.

The Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR) functioned as the ruling communist party in Poland from 1948 to 1989. Although formally monolithic, it was in fact internally divided into competing factions, representing different ideological and strategic orientations. These internal divisions played a crucial role in shaping the political climate of the 1960s. Ranging from reformists to hardline dogmatists, the factions within the PZPR often differed more in tactics than in doctrine, yet their conflicts had palpable consequences for cultural policy and artistic freedom.

As Małgorzata Dziewulska wrote, ‘the starting point for Jerzy Grotowski’s projects was the tragic side of fundamental pessimism. The intensity of his action was the result of the tension between this tragic conviction and the constraints of rationalism and criticism of dialectics imposed upon it.’<sup>1</sup> Ludwik Flaszen repeatedly mentioned Grotowski’s apocalyptic consciousness, which stemmed from his experience of life under totalitarian regime and the fact that he had been rubbing shoulders with death ever since childhood, but which, nevertheless, did not lead to catastrophic conclusions.

After all, one may also talk about a joyful Apocalypse. There is a very specific type of black humour in Poland that features mockery, irony and self-irony. A characteristic trait of Polish people is the ability to take important matters seriously while at the same time mocking them. Messianism is an important topic for Poles, which is why the dialectic of mockery and apotheosis appears in *Dziady* and *Kordian*.<sup>2</sup>

These works also featured a ‘messianic sensibility’. Such a dialectic was, however, absent from the last performance in Opole, based on Wyspiański’s *Hamlet Study*.

The relationship between the individual and the collective, shown as a conflict impossible to resolve was important in Grotowski’s theatre from the beginning. The vision of history in Grotowski’s performances based on Romantic dramas was radically revised.

It is interesting that Grotowski does not touch *The Undivine Comedy*, or that from the third part of *Dziady*, which is of key importance in the series, as it talks about the suppression of the patriotic movement of Polish university students by the tsarist police, he takes only one monologue addressed to God and against God [...]. He consciously sets aside the political issues of Romanticism, but also his interest in history and his acute poetic observation of the present.<sup>3</sup>

Konstanty Puzyna’s above-mentioned comment on the apolitical nature of Grotowski’s performances is surprising: perhaps it was a form of self-censorship to protect Grotowski and his ensemble. From *Cain*, through *Mistero Buffo*, *Dziady*, *Kordian*, *Acropolis*, to *The Hamlet Study*, Grotowski implemented what he had set out to do at the very beginning when he took over the management of the theatre in Opole: he created performances about the most important aspects of modern social life. From *Dziady* onwards, the focus was on a character who wanted to save the nation, humanity, or himself. This is a significant motif in Poland, which stems from the Romantic tradition but at the same time constitutes a sociological phenomenon of a kind. It applies mainly to the intelligentsia, whose members are supposed to sacrifice themselves. It is considered their duty, especially in countries with a tragic past. In subsequent performances, the relationship between the individual and the collective started to be even more clearly portrayed through the lens of an unresolvable conflict.

Setting political issues aside was a deliberate and ironic move, since both Grotowski and Flaszen were representatives of the generation who knew from their experience

1 Dziewulska 2005: 49.

2 Author’s notes from a meeting with Ludwik Flaszen at the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław.

3 Puzyna 1982: 136.

of October 1956 that revolution had no chance of succeeding. They raised important contemporary issues in such a way as to effectively divert the attention of the authorities from them. Hence the metaphorical nature of the performances, the ‘profusion of oddities and allegories incomprehensible to the regular viewer’ (as the censor noted), the emphasis on the new, emerging style of acting in the programmes and press, as well as Jerzy Grotowski’s experiments with the stage space. The meaning of the performances was unclear not only to the censors, but also to the ordinary and even quite well-educated viewer. Grotowski’s productions were a camouflaged criticism of the Poland of Gomułka’s era and a vivisection of the darkest instincts of collective life in the country.

The interpretation was further complicated by Ludwik Flaszen, who, in the bold exegeses included in the performance programmes, did everything to obscure their meaning and protect the ensemble from potential political consequences. An example is the programme for *Dziady*, in which he wrote: ‘It would come as a surprise to many that the play is completely devoid of the motif of the fight against Tsardom, often considered as the key one in *Dziady*. This can be explained by the fact that there is no such thing as Tsardom.’ An involvement in the events of October ‘56 was a painful experience not just for Grotowski. Flaszen’s book *Głowa i mur* (The Head and the Wall) was confiscated by censors in 1957 and the entire print run was destroyed. Understandable caution deprived neither of them of their determination to continue a camouflaged game with the authorities, as exemplified by *The Hamlet Study*, a play about a meeting between Polish peasants, workers and a Polish intellectual of Jewish origin.

Grotowski did not stage *The Undivine Comedy*, a drama about revolution, but the repertory in 1964 featured *The Hamlet Study*, albeit only for three weeks. This, in a way, complements the story of the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows (13 Rzędów) as an institution. As presented in the performance, the vision of the history of a nation makes it possible to understand why Grotowski withdrew even further into the laboratory. Zygmunt Molik, in a conversation with Teresa Wilniewicz, attributes a political significance to *The Hamlet Study*. ‘Hamlet was a Jew, while the royal court was presented with clear allusions to the current authorities. Such a clear interpretation could in no way be defended against censorship and the authorities. Other circumstances also came into play and eventually we stopped staging it.’<sup>4</sup>

Eugenio Barba mentions the play in a similar vein:

*The Hamlet Study* with its daring acting and direction, breathing existential and political rebellion [...]. But in March 1964, their outburst became a slap in the face to everyone: friends and enemies alike; it eluded the understanding and sensitivity of the supporters of the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows, shaking up the criteria and norms of Polish socialism. [...] Understandably, it provoked the irritation of the Polish authorities.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Wilniewicz 2001: 115.

<sup>5</sup> Barba 2001: 107.

The censors, however, found that ‘in general, the performance, undoubtedly of interest to the connoisseurs, was characterised by even greater obscurity than all the previous ones.’<sup>6</sup>

Press reviews from those times are quite scarce; critics did not have the opportunity to see the performance. What is interesting is the title of Józef Kellera’s review – ‘And Thus Hamlet Became a Jew’. Wilhelm Mach, in turn, saw in the play ‘a disturbing, disputable but rich in conceptual ideas, formally innovative philosophical and moral treatise on Shakespearean themes. It is an unusual work, very contemporary, and very Polish.’<sup>7</sup> Thirty years later, Elżbieta Morawiec saw in the play ‘a drama of contemporary society hidden under the costume of a great classic. Dangerously explicit one, which is why it was soon diverted from that path.’<sup>8</sup> She was undeniably right. She was one of the first among scholars of Grotowski’s theatre to address the question of its political character. What is more, she believed that the performance contained ‘an almost exact prefiguration of March 1968!’<sup>9</sup> The dynamics analysed in Grotowski’s performance would culminate a few years later in the crisis of March 1968, when student protests were violently suppressed and accompanied by a state-sponsored anti-Semitic campaign. Thousands of Polish citizens of Jewish origin were forced to emigrate, and the cultural field underwent further ideological tightening. As later commentators observed, *The Hamlet Study* can be read as an almost prophetic diagnosis of these developments: it exposes the mechanisms of exclusion, the hostility toward intellectuals, and the latent anti-Semitism embedded in social structures.

Directed by Jerzy Grotowski, or, as he wished, directed jointly by him and his team, *The Hamlet Study* was created in an extraordinary social atmosphere. On 14 March 1964, ‘List 34’ [Letter of 34] was published as an expression of the mood of the Polish intelligentsia, ‘the first organised act of protest by creative circles against the cultural policy of the state.’<sup>10</sup> In March 1964, a group of prominent Polish intellectuals signed the so-called ‘Letter of 34’, a protest against increasing censorship and restrictions on cultural production addressed to the prime minister. This document is widely regarded as the first organised act of collective resistance by the intelligentsia against the cultural policy of the communist state after 1956. The publication of the ‘Letter’ coincided almost exactly with the premiere of *The Hamlet Study*. This temporal proximity was not accidental: both events reflect a growing tension between intellectual circles and the authorities, as well as a deepening awareness of the limits of artistic and political freedom.

6 Wójtowicz 2004: 159.

7 Mach 28–29.06.1964.

8 Morawiec 1991: 210.

9 Ibid: 211.

10 Fik 1989: 359.

*The Hamlet Study* premiered three days later. On 5 April, the Presiding Board of the Provincial National Council in Opole received a telegram from the Ministry of Culture and the Arts requesting that the Dworcowy Hotel be booked for the following day for a commission to visit the Theatre of 13 Rows.<sup>11</sup> The theatre was notified at the last minute that the commission would be coming to see *The Hamlet Study*.<sup>12</sup>

On that day in Warsaw, several dozen copies of an illegal pamphlet, a proclamation of the so-called ‘Chinese faction’ in the Polish United Workers’ Party (Mijal’s faction), reflecting the anti-Semitic views of the communist dogmatists, were found at the home of Michał Krajewski, a former bricklayers’ foreman and later a prominent party activist.<sup>13</sup>

Grotowski’s *Hamlet* brought these moods together, offering a portrait of Polish society and advancing a diagnosis that was far from optimistic. Inscribed within *The Hamlet Study* was the ‘divide between the intelligentsia and the people’.<sup>14</sup> The commoners (peasants), led by the King (more a leader than a sovereign), were set in opposition to Hamlet, ‘an intellectual speaking Polish with a Jewish accent’.<sup>15</sup> Flaszen’s text in the programme undoubtedly constitutes a masterful example of the camouflage of politically dangerous content.

*The Hamlet Study* was born out of a meeting between Jerzy Grotowski and Józef Śnieciński, one of the leading representatives of Mijal’s faction. It was he who passed anti-Semitic leaflets distributed by the activists of the Chinese faction on to the director. Grzegorz Sołtysiak, in his text *Soldiers of the Party*:

[Mijal’s faction] was the largest and least known opposition group of the 1960s. [...] They were named after a member of the Central Committee in the 1950s – Kazimierz Mijal. Their most spectacular feat was the publication of an illegal pamphlet in 1963 with a circulation of 10,000. When, in 1964 they were exposed, the Security Service arrested around 100 people, while 1000 were expelled from the Polish United Workers’ Party [*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR*].

Mijal was their patron, while the leaders were the journalist Józef Śnieciński and the economist Kazimierz Jarzębowski. [...] As the historian Jerzy Eisler observes, PZPR was never a monolith, although the coteries and factions that emerged within it (the Pulawians, the Natolinists, the Partisans, the Liberals, the Conservatives, the Reformists, the Nationalists, the Dogmatists, the Revisionists) were generally fluid and had no formalised structures. The differences were often more tactical than doctrinal, sometimes even personal. In 1956, Mijal was linked to the conservative Natolin faction. He drew on the tradition of the Communist Party of Poland in its most ‘sectarian’ form.

11 State Archive in Opole, Presiding Board of the Provincial National Council, ref. 2504, k. 72.

12 Ibid: 72.

13 ‘Polish worker! Wake up, the revolution is calling you! Remember that [...] until you drive the Polish and Jewish bourgeoisie out of the country, until you keep [...] the false intelligentsia [...] on a short leash [...], no one will respect you’ (Fik 1989: 360).

14 Flaszen 2014: 170.

15 Barba 2001: 109–110.

The views of the Mijał's faction were typical of communist activists with a 'dogmatic' orientation, although they took an extreme, if not downright caricatured form, characterised, above all, by authoritarianism – the belief in the power of orders and prohibitions, the cult of discipline, the need for authority and hierarchy. Hidden behind it were also deeply nationalist and anti-Semitic attitudes.<sup>16</sup>

Jerzy's name appears in this article in one sentence. A statement by a witness, an artist from Grotowski's ensemble who was running a theatre in Opole at the time, is preserved in the case documentation:

I used to receive Chinese materials from him (Śnieciński – G.S.), as well as the reproduced text *W walce...* I have already cut off that relationship. [...] Śnieciński gave the impression of an individual with a kind of aberration, characterised by a strong party patriotism combined with Stalinist era resentments and even a kind of crypto-antisemitism.<sup>17</sup>

Following his involvement in the events of October 1956, Jerzy Grotowski remained under constant surveillance by the Security Services until at least 1969. The creation of *The Hamlet Study* was an act of courage. The performance was born out of an insightful analysis of the political situation, impressions of the meeting with the activists from Mijał's faction, and the content of anti-Semitic leaflets. The director always had great ideas where to set the action of his performances. For example, *Kordian* is set in a lunatic asylum, *Dziady* at a party, *Acropolis* in a concentration camp, while *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* at the Last Supper. The suburban pub in *The Hamlet Study* is an extremely painful image of the contemporary reality, a vivisection of the Polish soul, bringing the darkest social instincts – hatred and anti-Semitism – to light. The leaflet addressed to Polish workers that Grotowski received could, in fact, be used as a ready-made script:<sup>18</sup>

Parszywieńki ten nasz socjalizm	Our wretched socialism
Spachciał w rękach żydowskich frajerów,	Decayed in Jewish hands,
Ni robotnik w nim szczęścia nie znalazł,	Brought no happiness to workers,
Ani chłop w nim nie zrobił karjery.	Nor to ordinary men.
Siwe mgły po zagonach się toczą.	Grey mists rolling over the fields.
Dymy tkają mozaikę brzydoty,	Ugly mosaics weaved of smoke,
Po dawnemu chłop mało ochoczy,	Indolent farmers, drunk workers,
A robociarz chła wódę w soboty.	Everything the same as before.
Tak jak dawniej dobrodziej z ambony,	Jewish politruks are preaching,
Dziś poucza żydowski politruk:	Like priests used to do before
Módl się chamie a będziesz zbawiony,	'Pray, commoners, and you will be saved,
Pracuj więcej, gdy zreć chcesz do syta.	Work hard if you want more'.
Słońce wschodzi i znowu zagasa,	The sun goes up and down again,

<sup>16</sup> Sołtysiak 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See the description of the performance *The Hamlet Study* in: Wójtowicz 2004: 116–142.

Żarnem Ziemi w kosmosie obraca,  
 Powstań ludu roboczy z suteren.  
 Cóż ci słońce – dla ciebie jest praca.  
 Czeka dniówki wieczysty różaniec  
 Niekończąca się trudu udręka.  
 Miękki żarcia obłędny kaganiec  
 I na cmentarz twa droga nie lekka.  
 Może znowu za lat sto albo dwieście  
 Ktoś się nad tym głęboko zaduma,  
 W jakimś kraju w nieznanym dziś mieście  
 Znowu słowo wymyśli komunizm.  
 Znowu rzesze powstaną szalone  
 Krwi czerwonej popłyną znów strugi,  
 Będą wiewać sztandary czerwone,  
 Potem przyjdzie – powszedni dzień długi.  
 Ach. Nie nam śpiewać *powstań wyklęty*,  
 Ni sztandarem pod niebo powiewać.  
 Świat jak dawniej, nie dla nas się kręci –  
 Chamy, sza. Jutro trzeba pracować

Spinning the Earth's quern stone.  
 But there is no sun for ordinary men,  
 Only days of hard work.  
 A never-ending cycle of labour  
 Endless toil and gloom.  
 A life spent on staving off hunger,  
 All the way to the tomb.  
 Perhaps in a hundred years or so,  
 Someone will reflect on this.  
 An in a country far away from here  
 Will reinvent the word *communism*.  
 Crowds will rise again in frenzy,  
 And blood will flow again,  
 Red banners will flap in the wind,  
 Then will come the long working day.  
 Songs and banners are not for us.  
 The world revolves around someone else.  
 Shh, be quiet,  
 commoners! Tomorrow's another working day.<sup>19</sup>

The leaflets distributed by Mijał's faction contained everything Grotowski hated. The meetings with Śnieciński and the analysis of the proclamations of the Chinese faction became an impetus for one of the most painful and mysterious of his performances. In March 1964, just before the premiere of *The Hamlet Study*, an interview with Jerzy Grotowski, conducted by Jerzy Wróblewski and Stanisław Nyczaj, was published in the Opole Higher School of Education's journal *Nasze Sprawy* [Our Matters]. In this relatively unknown text, Grotowski makes it quite clear what the play is about:

*The Hamlet Study* is a play about impossibility. The very word 'hamletism' has taken on exactly this kind of meaning. At the same time, the drama challenges the theatre to confront it. It is so heterogeneous, multilayered, and full of internal contradictions that, with good reason, it has been claimed by many, including Wyspiański, that no one has yet played *Hamlet* in a fully satisfactory manner. At the same time, it is a fascinating work. We decided to confront the hydra in its very lair. Not to hide, but to bring out the impossibility of playing *Hamlet*. Not to try to avoid but, on the contrary, to showcase moments of impossibility, specifically in relations to the Polish reality, where it took on a specific form.

How should one interpret impossibility? Sometimes it simply means a contradiction between one's own strength and intentions. At other times, it takes on a more dangerous form and it is the latter that drew our attention to it. We focus on the impossibility of people understanding and accepting each other, caused by superstitions and the darkness within them. This latter is the overarching theme of our performance, which attempts to penetrate the secrets, the recesses

19 AIPN 01255/124, vol. 10, k. 264 (Józef Śnieciński's files).

of the collective soul. It is an attempt to confront anew the myths and taboos that shape the human personality in our civilisation and culture. It can be viewed as a première of a new play based on excerpts from Shakespeare and Wyspiański. *Hamlet* is too captivating a work to be adapted. It has to be played faithfully or used as an inspiration to create a completely new work of art. [...]

We have the main character of Hamlet, played by Zygmunt Molik, but the other characters also show the features of hamletism. Hamlet and the rest represent two kinds of hamletism, mutually hostile and full of hatred. It is as though a cloud of hamletism hovers over the entire play. We incorporated elements of folk song, carols, and national songs. Our aim was to create a typically Polish atmosphere of the performance. For this reason, it might be difficult to interpret for someone familiar with the Shakespearean work but unfamiliar with the affairs of our country. It is a play about Polish hamletism. A distorted mirror of the interpersonal superstitions that have formed here.<sup>20</sup>

Materials of the Security Service on Józef Śnieciński were assembled in thirteen volumes, each of about 900 pages (Mijał's faction had been watched over for a long time). Grotowski's name does not appear in these files, but there is a brief reference in the record of the interrogation of Śnieciński's brother, Dariusz:

Józef Śnieciński was sometimes visited by a director from Opole or Kraków. He was a tall, sturdy man with an oval face and a large nose. I am not sure whether he was from Opole or from Kraków.<sup>21</sup>

The Security Service immediately established that the person who met with the arrested Śnieciński in Opole and in Warsaw was Jerzy Grotowski. At the order of the authorities of the Security Service, he had to provide a lengthy explanation, which was used as evidence in the trial of Józef Śnieciński.

#### Declaration

At the request of the Security Service regarding my acquaintance with Józef Śnieciński, Warsaw,

I hereby explain that:

I do know Citizen Śnieciński from my studies in Moscow (although I am not exactly sure), or perhaps from a preparatory course for studies in Moscow. He later came to the Theatre for a performance of *Dziady* (in 1960 or 1961), introducing himself as the Deputy Director of the National Investment Bank. He said that he had come for accreditation of the current Director of the local Bank (who was accompanied him to the performance). Since that time, he came to Opole every couple of months (sometimes once a year only). He would either call the Theatre asking me to join him for coffee, or accost me in the café. As for our conversations, I had the impression that he was interested in conversations with an artist. I was amused to be acquainted with a dignitary with all the positive and negative qualities of the characters in Mayakovsky's dramas. He would invite me to visit him in Warsaw, but since I did not travel there frequently and had a lot of work anyway, it was not easy, so he would

<sup>20</sup> Wróblewski, Nyczaj 1964.

<sup>21</sup> AIPN 01255/124, vol. 10, k. 264.

often act offended, claiming I simply did not want to. When I did manage to visit him once, he was very welcoming and hospitable. In general, he gave the impression of a kind-hearted man towards a 'poor fellow artist' (he mentioned that he could arrange medical treatment for me in the South).

Since the Security Authorities asked me to describe the social content of our conversations, I would like to explain that: Citizen Śnieciński gave the impression of an individual with a kind of aberration, characterised by a strong party patriotism combined with Stalinist era resentments and even a kind of crypto-antisemitism ('Jewish nationalists' as the interviewee's mental motif), but this was neither open nor agitational.

Since, on the occasion of several of our conversations, Citizen Sniecinski, using the prerogatives of an 'insider' as a high-level dignitary from the administration, presented to me several times (2-3 times) prints of pro-Chinese materials (something about Yugoslavia in Russian, written in very bad language). When I received a certain number of Chinese pamphlets by post (I gave them to Comrade [Augustyn] Wajda of the Municipal Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party), I was wondering whether it was not him who had sent them. But I decided I had no proof to think so. I visited China, the Embassy could have sent them. When he was in Opole a few months later, I asked him if he had sent something to me, but he denied. I stress that the allusion was purely [illegible text]. When talking about such texts, Citizen Śnieciński tried to be impartial (it was not yet common knowledge at the time that there was such a discussion in the labour movement), without any agitation, or at least not with words. You rather had the intangible impression, almost as a reflex of sympathy or antipathy for the topic in question, that he was almost a religious believer in Stalinism and that was his tragedy. As a man of art, this was very interesting to me.

With regard to the request to clarify the last visit to Opole of Citizen Śnieciński and the matter of a document in his possession with a (apparently?) pre-convention content, I would like to explain that: Citizen Śnieciński met me in 'Europe' where I was having lunch (February? 1-15 March?) and sat down at my table with a lady, his business secretary (as he introduced her), or something like that. The conversation was rather general, about nothing in particular. When it was time for me to go (to work? for a rehearsal?), Śnieciński, making a gesture like a pornographic photo dealer, handed me an envelope, saying: 'this is interesting', 'I'll be here for lunch tomorrow'.

I didn't have time to read it, but from the look of it, it was clear that it was some kind of a memorandum for the Party Congress, very primitive in linguistic terms and rather unreadable. I found two things striking: (1) a constantly repeated phrase: 'in the city and in the countryside', (2) accusations of the leadership (or part of it?) of succumbing to Jewish nationalists. The text was simply ludicrous and farcical. Returning it to Ścieciński, I asked where he had got it from and whether he did not find it ridiculous.

He replied that he was temporarily keeping it as part of his administrative duties (he did not say it explicitly) and it was a document from some Workers' basic party unit, prepared for a pre-convention discussion, but that it probably originated from somewhere higher up and had likely been prepared by revisionists. Although he agreed that it was not a serious document, I would say that it somehow was not in line with his normal mental attitude: something did not seem right to me. However, I thought that since he was not agitating me, but – on

the contrary – showing it to me as some kind of phenomenon, and since he was holding a high position in the Party and had access to such ‘insider’ things, I guess my suspicions were wrong. What were those suspicions? Not concerning any menacing, but pure insanity. There was something about it that brought to mind [illegible text]. There was something about it reminiscent of the tragical and grotesque study of the ‘man of the past’.

Interesting yet repugnant. I thanked him for his company and left. He has not shown up ever since.

#### References

The text was a copy of a typescript (10–15 sheets of paper of the size of a box of cigarettes). It gave the impression of an amateur photocopy, very unclear and, at times, at least for me, illegible (perhaps also due to lack of time). From a cursory perusal, I guessed that it was a kind of ‘criticism’ of the post-October leadership (I noticed repeated references to Comrade Cyrankiewicz), but probably quite .....

I did not get the impression that this kind of movement could be taken seriously at the Congress, if only for stylistic reasons and grotesque content. However, Śnieciński said that it was a document that had long been known to the Party leadership (I presumed that he kept it as part of his higher-level administrative duties and was surprised that they were actually dealing with such frivolous matters there).

Jerzy Grotowski

Opole

Pasieczna 11/1<sup>22</sup>

The staging of *The Hamlet Study*, Grotowski’s acquaintance with Józef Śnieciński, and his involvement in the issue of Mijał’s faction had very serious consequences for the theatre. As a result, the theatre was denied the promised subsidy and was left without funding. In the spring of 1964, Grotowski could not extend the actors’ contracts. He did not even know whether he would be able to stay in Opole. Józef Kelera and other supporters of the ensemble did everything they could to help Grotowski move to Wrocław. The fact that the ministerial commission came to Opole right at that time was due to information reaching the authorities about Grotowski’s contacts with the Chinese faction.

Immediately after the premiere, Grotowski was to leave for France. He only managed to do so after providing an extensive explanation to the Security Service. Before he left, he handed management of the theatre over to Ryszard Cieślak. I received a handwritten letter from Kazimierz Kowalski, a member of the artistic council of the Theatre of 13 Rows, written by Grotowski. It was a request to assist Cieślak in case of his prolonged absence.<sup>23</sup> It seems like he reckoned that things might take a wrong turn and he would not be able to return to Poland, after all. At the time, Eugenio Barba was interrogated by the Security Service for an alleged

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, vol. 13, k. 212–214.

<sup>23</sup> From the author’s archive.

illegal sale of a scooter and postage stamps, listed as *persona non grata*, and expelled from Poland. The visit of a ministerial commission, the refusal to grant a subsidy, the interrogation by the Security Service, and Barba's expulsion – all this forms a logical sequence of events.

Staging *The Hamlet Study* was undeniably an act of courage. It was Grotowski's most 'political' performance in which he intensely and painfully – as Puzyna described it – 'hit some kind of living nerve of the reality of the time'<sup>24</sup>. Grotowski and Flaszen brilliantly portrayed the anti-Semitic and anti-intellectual sentiment prevailing in Polish society, which fully exploded in 1968. Due to the investigation by the Security Service (mentioned by Barba and Raszewski) and in order to protect the theatre, the performance was quickly removed from the repertory and kept hidden deep in the historical archives of the Theatre of 13 Rows.

Going back to the ministerial commission which came to Opole in order to assess the activities of the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows, it was comprised by Jerzy Jasiński, head of the team for theatre affairs, Jerzy Sokołowski, department head, critics Konstanty Puzyna and Jan Paweł Gawlik, theatre studies specialist Józef Szczublewski and stage designer Zenobiusz Strzelecki. The local authorities were represented by Comrade Stanisław Kaźmierczak from the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party and Edward Pochroń from the Creative Association. The two-day meeting was also attended by 'those invited by the Theatre as observers and consultants, including: Bohdan Korzeniewski, Zbigniew Raszewski, Andrzej Wirth, Tadeusz Byrski, Jerzy Timoszewicz'.<sup>25</sup> Years later, Korzeniewski described it as follows:

The authorities tried to get rid of Grotowski, I am not sure whether only from Opole or in general. In any case, he contacted the editorial team of 'Pamiętnik Teatralny', where he had gained recognition earlier [...]. He made a call to say that a ministerial commission was coming to Opole and that he expected the worst. We had problems with delegations, so I took Raszewski, Timoszewicz, Wyśniński and we made it in time for that hearing. [...] Grotowski's defence was awkward, making things worse for himself. I asked for a break and sought out a representative of the provincial party authorities. I told him that what was happening there was extremely important. In times of German occupation, Opole was a deep province on the border of the state, a place without its own culture. Now Opole had its own theatre, which was gaining recognition abroad. It would be a serious political mistake to squander this opportunity – this place of Polonisation attracting attention of

<sup>24</sup> Puzyna 1971: 58.

<sup>25</sup> This is how Eugenio Barba describes the event: 'In 1994, Grotowski told me what Puzyna's strategy was about. He asked a number of prominent figures from the theatre community to speak ill of the Theatre. This is the reason why they were elected members of the commission, and naturally, after visiting the Theatre, they concluded that it was an extraordinary phenomenon that should be given maximum support' (Barba 2001: 169).

the rest of the world. In any case, Grotowski gained some time,<sup>26</sup> and then the sensible and independent mayor of Wrocław, Professor [Bolesław] Iwazkiewicz,<sup>27</sup> invited him with his entire ensemble.<sup>28</sup>

Jerzy Timoszewicz, in a conversation with the author of this paper, confirmed Professor Korzeniewski's version – they were convinced that this was the end of the theatre in Opole.

The People's Republic of Poland was a time of compromises and this is what Grotowski learnt from the events of October 1956 – he was a politician and a strategist and this is the only reason why he stayed in Opole for so long. After the relocation to Wrocław in 1965, Grotowski and his ensemble started touring the West. What played an important role in this regard was the fact that in December 1964 Grotowski's good friend from his time at the Union of Polish Youth, Lucjan Motyka, became Minister of Culture.<sup>29</sup> The latter was replaced in the 1970s by Józef Tejchma, who saw Grotowski as 'the best cultural product for export'.

Received 24 March 2026

Accepted 13 May 2026

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26 'Despite the positive assessment (a proof of which was a subsidy granted by the Ministry of Culture in the amount of PLN 350,000), there is still a conviction that Opole is not a suitable environment for such shocking explorations, and supporters of the Theatre are increasingly advocating the relocation of the Theatre of 13 Rows to Wrocław' (Mykita-Glensk 1964: 132).

27 It may be a coincidence, but the theatre's chief accountant was Waclaw Iwazkiewicz, a relative of the president of Wrocław.

28 Korzeniewski 1989: 201–202.

29 'They had met [Grotowski and Motyka] many years earlier, when Grotowski was organising political protests among students and workers in 1956–1957' (Barba 2001: 180).

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## Jerzy'is Grotowski Opolėje. Atvejo tyrimas

### Santrauka

Šio straipsnio tikslas – aptarti aplinkybes, lėmusias J. Grotowskio įsitraukimą į komunistinės Lenkijos politiką ir politinę sistemą. Siekdama apibūdinti „13 eilių teatro“ kaip institucijos veiklą autorė analizuoja informatorių pranešimus, oficialius dokumentus ir antisemitines skrajutes. Ji sutelkia dėmesį į profesines ir asmenines rizikas bei grėsmes, su kuriomis susidūrė J. Grotowski, ir su jomis susijusį Lenkijos saugumo tarnybos ir komunistų partijos vaidmenį. Apie J. Grotowskio teatrą paskelbta nemažai mokslinių straipsnių, tačiau nė viename iš jų teatras nėra nagrinėjamas kaip institucija. Tyrimo metu autorė aptiko retos ir vertingos medžiagos: Opolės srities spaudos kontrolės biuro archyvinius dokumentus ir keletą įdomių Saugumo tarnybos bylų, rastų Lenkijos Tautos atminties muziejuje. Šie faktai ir dokumentai suteikia galimybę naujai pažvelgti į tam tikrus aspektus, taip pat peržiūrėti kai kuriuos stereotipus ir mitus apie „13 eilių teatrą“ jo veiklos Opolėje laikotarpiu. Straipsnis grindžiamas autorės monografija „Grotowski polityczny“ („Politinis Grotovskis“) (Zbigniewo Raszewskio teatro institutas, Varšuva, 2023), kurioje pateikiama išsamesnė J. Grotowskio politinio konteksto analizė.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Grotowski, archyvas, politika, lingvistinė analizė, cenzūra, Opolė, Lenkijos Liaudies Respublika