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INVISIBLE  
COUNTRY

Four Polish Plays



TERESA MURJAS

# Invisible Country





# Invisible Country

## Four Polish Plays

Edited & Translated by Teresa Murjas



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*For Mike Stevenson*

*With special thanks to Simon Bedford-Roberts  
Irena, Jola and Mała Murjas  
Doug Pye*





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# Introduction

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### ***Polish Naturalism: A duel with the self***

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This introduction to *Invisible Country: Four Polish Plays* is presented in five short sections. In *Section A: The Translation Project*, I explain the rationale for creating the collection and outline the research methodologies employed. *Section B: Partitioned Poland* provides an overview of the Polish historical contexts within which these plays can be read and understood, indicating further research routes for the reader. *Section C: Play Synopses* contains plot summaries of all four texts, on account of the plays' relative obscurity, and is provided in order to ground *Section D: Polish Naturalism*, which in turn offers analyses of the playwrights' various approaches to questions of theatrical form. *Section E: Biographies* contains more specific information about each playwright, and this can most usefully be read in light of preceding sections. The second part of the book contains my four play translations. These are organized in the order in which they were translated, rather than chronologically, as the plays were originally written. The rationale for this choice rests in the fact that the first play text in the collection, *Ashanti*, incorporates additional material that has evolved as a result of my practice-led research methodology, which is outlined in *Section A: The Translation Project*. My work on *Ashanti* subsequently informed my decisions about which of a broad selection of un-translated fin-de-siècle naturalistic Polish plays to include in the book. Accordingly, the book's structure reflects the evolution of that decision-making process.

### **Section A: The translation project**

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*Invisible Country* is the latest book to emerge as part of a long-term practice-led translation project focusing on late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century Polish naturalistic drama. The book builds on two existent volumes, *The Morality of Mrs. Dulka* (Bristol/Chicago: Intellect, 2006) and *Zapolska's Women* (Bristol/Chicago: Intellect, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

As editor of these two volumes, I developed and drew together new English translations of four plays by Gabriela Zapolska, who was a contemporary of Stanisław Przybyszewski, Tadeusz Rittner, Włodzimierz Perzyński and Leopold Staff. Three of the four plays had not previously existed in published translated form. Similarly, the plays I have included in *Invisible Country* do not have Anglophone translation histories. *Śnieg* (*Snow*, 1902) was translated for an early twentieth-century American audience and is printed on demand by

BiblioLife (2011) as a pre-1923 historical reproduction.<sup>2</sup> However, *W małym domku* (*In a Small House*, 1903),<sup>3</sup> *Aszantka* (*Ashanti*, 1906)<sup>4</sup> and *To Samo* (*All the Same*, 1912)<sup>5</sup> have no prior published English versions. This situation remains entirely characteristic of Polish dramatic writing of this period, largely irrespective of whether the playwrights are regarded as canonical in their original national context.

The starting point for this particular collection was a research performance that was staged using my draft translation of Perzyński's *Ashanti*, which I directed and designed in 2009–10. I was motivated to realize this work theatrically by my growing curiosity about how, comparatively, Zapolska's professional peers approached naturalism as a theatrical form and how their plays relate to arguably more familiar European counterparts, created by Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov. In terms of my research methodology, both the rehearsal process and performances facilitated the development of the text of *Ashanti* included in this volume, in which both that process and those performances have inevitably been encrypted. Additionally, the research questions raised through the production have informed subsequent choices about which plays to group together in this book. Essentially, I have arranged the four texts around a series of congruent themes and corresponding formal approaches.

Evidently, theatre research is based on the analysis of live performance and its histories, as well as written texts. Some aspects of theatre research are most effectively undertaken through practice. For a theatre translator, conceptualizing research within a practical framework that enables live theatrical embodiment can be an extremely useful, investigative strategy. As an empirical research method, it allows for the gathering of experiences, corporeal reflection and embodied knowledge. However, within an academic context, it can impose its own particular demands in relation to time and resources and, in my own case, needs to be used selectively. In terms of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which is relevant specifically to lecturers and postgraduate students working in the arts and humanities in a UK academic context, practice as research is defined as a versatile methodology that can lead to stand-alone, performance-based research outputs (for example, a film, a performance, an exhibition), as long as their theoretical and critical parameters are carefully and systematically defined. Practice-as-research outputs can also be supported by – or indeed support – other kinds of outputs (for example, journal articles, books etc.). In these terms, and within the framework of my longer-term project exploring Polish Naturalism, translation can therefore productively be framed as constituting both a research outcome – or series of related outcomes (e.g. a book and/or performance) – and a research methodology (that is, an intercultural and dynamic scholarly practice). As such, it must also be inextricably combined with methodologies of textual and performance analysis, historical analysis and archival research, all of which are necessary for both the enhancement of my own understanding of relevant translational and historical contexts (particularly complex given Poland's fin-de-siècle political circumstances) and for the effective critical framing of the published texts as they are introduced to an Anglophone reader. Extensive archival research into

fin-de-siècle Polish theatre – particularly with regards to performance – can be a problematic task, especially in relation to these playwrights. Materials have been destroyed and given Poland's complex and often violent history, coherent archives do not exist in each case. The notion of documenting performance has not in any case always framed the collection of material that is in existence. Importantly, it is not the purpose of this book to explore in great depth and detail a Polish performance history of the plays translated here; this would entail a lengthy, involved process for which I would require significant additional time and resources. This approach has featured more extensively in my books on Zapolska's work. Nevertheless, an *overview* of some aspects of performance history has been possible within the parameters of *Invisible Country*.

Since 2002, the practice-as-research strand of my wider research, which incorporates both translation and performance, has focused on critically analysing the under-investigated area of naturalism as a theatrical form in Polish theatre, during a period when Poland did not exist on the map of Europe: before the First World War it remained partitioned for 123 years by Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungary. My research in this area has been driven by a number of related objectives: to formulate key research questions about performance history and context in relation to such a complex national and geographical status quo; to engage with concepts of 'liveness' in relation to theories of translation and interculturalism; to make the work of key European playwrights 'visible' in Anglophone contexts and, finally, to develop translations as scripts, for publication and, potentially, for further use.

My practical emphasis in this specific area of my work (which more broadly takes as its subject East Central European theatre and film, including Holocaust representation)<sup>6</sup> has been on producing and contextualizing ten new translations; nine of which have now been published, and six of which I have directed. As already mentioned, realistically, it is not always possible, given constraints on time and resources, to combine translation and performance in application to every chosen play text intended for publication. However, my documentation of the performance practice where it does occur remains integral to the critical writing that finally accompanies the published material in book form. For example, in this particular book, my reflective writing about the research production of *Ashanti* interleaves my translation of that play, and this is also complemented by illustrative images from the performances, which I have selected for their particular critical bearing on my analysis of the original Polish text. These interleaving images and words form an archive of the performance. By including them, I aim to expose some of the aesthetic and practical choices that informed the evolution of the translation, and consequently, the evolution of the collection, as well as the development of a tone, idiom and register, in which ultimately, the plays as a group have been situated. The purpose of the practice is therefore not to engage with methodologies of reconstruction; my aim is not to re-enact an 'original' performance. Rather, my research performances have a dramaturgical function; the choices I make as a director, as they develop, involve ideological, conceptual and practical negotiations, which aid the materialization of the text within a new linguistic, cultural and historical context.

Typically, the re-drafting of the translation continues prior to rehearsals, during rehearsals and long after the performances have taken place.

I have not yet staged *Snow*, *In a Small House* or *All the Same*. These translations came about in what might be regarded as a more conventional way, sometimes informed by group readings at various stages in the drafting process but – largely – achieved through focused solitary endeavour. This contrasted with my spatially dynamic, relational, collectively embodied engagement with an ensemble of actors and theatre technicians when working on the development of my English language version of *Ashanti*.<sup>7</sup> As a translator, these contrasting approaches have in some ways rendered the process of producing *Invisible Country* more problematic. I believe that my own perception of how the un-staged translations might function theatrically – particularly how theatrical space might be conceptualized in response to the Polish source texts – remains far less clearly defined. This is especially the case since only one translation of one of these plays exists. I regard this perception, gained empirically in the case of *Ashanti*, as significant because it can directly affect my own linguistic and stylistic choices in the target language. My attitude towards those translations that were produced without live performance having acted as a ‘mediating lens’ is that they have a different status to *Ashanti* – I regard them as less developed ‘drafts’. This does not mean that I consider my translation of *Ashanti* to be definitive and complete. Indeed, the process of theatrical translation has a tendency to encapsulate notions of incompleteness at every level – dissatisfaction, perhaps – and discourses informing it as a cultural practice ought arguably to remain strongly focused on questions of choice, ideology and on enhancing the translator’s visibility. This notion becomes particularly significant when one is involved in culturally reframing texts that were written over a century ago so that they can potentially interlock with the conditions for liveness produced and re-produced within one’s own very specific socio-historical contexts. Any closure – if that is what one seeks – implied by the publication process is, for these reasons, specifically chimerical in relation to theatrical translation. As part of my subjective experience of translation, the conviction persists that the texts I produce are less stable, in an ethical sense, than the texts that they aim to encapsulate. Their semantic slipperiness appears so strong because I remember the choices I have had to make in the lead up to a publication deadline that is largely defined by the constraints of my professional working context. I have within my repertoire of translational ‘attitudes’ one that involves a somewhat reverential engagement with the source texts. This is tempered by another that is founded on the understanding that they too inevitably underwent a series of sometimes haphazard developmental theatrical and publication processes, particularly if the playwrights who created them wrote in more than one language and were translators themselves. Nevertheless, the fact that the texts have reached me with some form of intactness, especially their materiality as books, inspires me to perform linguistic and semantic mediations, which connect overtly to my own relationship with Polish histories and cultures. In short, in each case, the translation process reflects a deeply personal, politically motivated attempt to ‘reach back in time’ and engage with notions of origin. However chimerical and mutable these turn out to be, I feel that this process sometimes

requires source material around which to temporarily 'coalesce'. As the bilingual daughter of post-war refugee immigrants to the UK, it constitutes for me one dynamic strand of an attempt to dialectically reinvigorate and deconstruct my sense – and understanding – of my political identity. I work imaginatively through a prism of family trauma, which has defined my personal orientation – and my family's linguistic reorientation – within a specific ('new') cultural context. In this sense, theatre's liveness offers endless regenerative possibilities. Through efforts of will and speech acts, these can perpetually replay the conceptual and literal tensions between ephemerality and embodiment, mutable and concrete material heritage. However, the pleasures of translation can sometimes, for me, be difficult to access.

Significantly, practice-as-research is an inherently phenomenological activity and provides a framework for foregrounding the pathic aspects of research – those that are situated, relational, embodied and enactive. In a project such as this, it can thus facilitate critical and experiential investigation into concepts of national culture and ethnic identity, heritage and immigration, bilingualism and self-identification, ethno-national and translational discourses, historiography, community spaces and their politics. All my research performances have taken place in Reading, where I work as a lecturer, and at the Polish Cultural Centre (POSK) in Hammersmith, London. Since 1974, this has been one centre for the UK diasporic Polish community, of which I am a member, and houses a purpose-built theatre, which operates as a charging venue and hosts a programme of local and visiting artists. Through these performances, non-academic/diasporic communities have become both the subject of my research, and one of its intended audiences.

Over the past ten years, the hoped-for effect of my research has been to enrich and engage reciprocally with this established and – post-1989 – growing UK community group, many of whose cultural and educational activities are centred on this specific London-based venue. I believe I have contributed innovatively to its cultural programme, changing behaviours in intercultural terms, by making new translations and producing performances. I have aimed to develop the community's representation in a variety of performance-based forums and in the media by, for example, publishing material about its cultural practices. I have brought the community into contact with a series of academic and student audiences, facilitating clearly definable, ongoing relationships and increasing educational opportunities for all parties. As such, for me, this practice-led translation project constitutes a direct engagement in the politics of UK multiculturalism. My understanding is that its cumulative effect has led to an enrichment of diasporic community and cultural resources/self-representation – including my own, as a member of that community. My hope is that it has resulted – through live performance and publication – in the increased visibility of a highly significant and, in certain contexts, previously inaccessible area of Polish and European cultural history, to a wider audience of both specialists and non-specialists. Importantly, late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century Polish Naturalism is a relatively unknown quantity in Anglophone translational, scholarly and theatrical contexts. Nor has it been a prime focus for theatre scholarship in Poland.



## Section B: Partitioned Poland

*When I lived at home, in our country, this girl fell in love with me. Know what she did, when I left? Go on, guess ... poisoned herself. Honestly.*<sup>8</sup>

Why might someone choose to commit suicide? There are many possibilities, as evidenced by methodologically diverse research, ranging from the psychopathic to the political.<sup>9</sup> In addition to being shaped by the fact that they share certain formal characteristics, this collection of dramatic texts has also been established around the theme of suicide. The four plays included here are essentially naturalistic and their narrative structures involve engagement with the causes and, to a lesser extent, the effects of suicidal acts. Each playwright deploys and experiments with theatrical form in contrasting ways. However, ideologically, they all emphasize psychological and socio-political viewpoints, highlighting, in a manner characteristic of naturalistic drama of this period, intersections between heredity and environment as determinants of motivation. Indeed, it is precisely the theme of suicide that allows the playwrights to engage dialectically with these concepts. The plays share a narrative focus on gender and family relationships, played out primarily in a variety of domestic – or pseudo-domestic – settings. Also, they explore a variety of possible scenarios leading to a suicide, and express their relationship to the aforementioned contexts as integral. In each play, the domestic, private sphere is presented as a ‘highly charged’ and politicized environment, shaped by a variety of constraints. These constraints gradually create a pressure-cooker effect, in which personal boundaries and privacy become difficult to maintain, protect and re-establish. In addition, the precise methods of suicide that are chosen by individual characters (shooting, drowning or self-defenestration) further a debate about the politics of the act, even if that act – in terms of plotting – can be framed in performance as unexpected or even anti-climactic.

Consequently, the plays may be read historically in relation to a range of influential European predecessors of the same dramatic form, and with shared thematic preoccupations, which include the practical and philosophical problems of suicide: for example, plays by Ibsen (*The Wild Duck*, 1884; *Rosmersholm*, 1886; *Hedda Gabler*, 1890), Strindberg (*Miss Julie*, 1888) and Chekhov (*The Seagull*, 1896). Additionally, however, their naturalistic approach to representation invariably roots them firmly within a related series of Polish socio-historical contexts and environments that need to be taken into account. Within the Polish-language literary and dramatic tradition their position, as naturalistic works, has been somewhat decentred, particularly by retrospective scholarship, which has largely tended to concentrate on the analysis of theatrical symbolism and early expressionism. Indeed, these forms were frequently utilized by those Polish fin-de-siècle writers who had an interest in positivism and nationalism, and were favoured as vehicles for state-of-the-nation plays that, ideologically, both evaded and challenged state censorship – for example, Stanisław Wyspiański’s *Wesele* (*The Wedding*, 1901).

*Ashanti, Snow, In a Small House* and *All the Same* were created by men with divergent political interests, who were highly significant and prominent literary figures. All four earned their living fully or partly through writing – predominantly in Polish and German – though none of them wrote exclusively for the theatre. The playwrights’ lives – which are explored later in this introduction – and their dramatic writing engaged with the complex political circumstances that Poles experienced in the decades leading up to the Second World War (1939–1945): the final years of over a century’s partition by Russia, Austria and Prussia (1795–1918); the Great War (1914–1918); the Polish-Soviet War (1919–1921); and a period of politically fraught inter-war national independence (1918–1939).

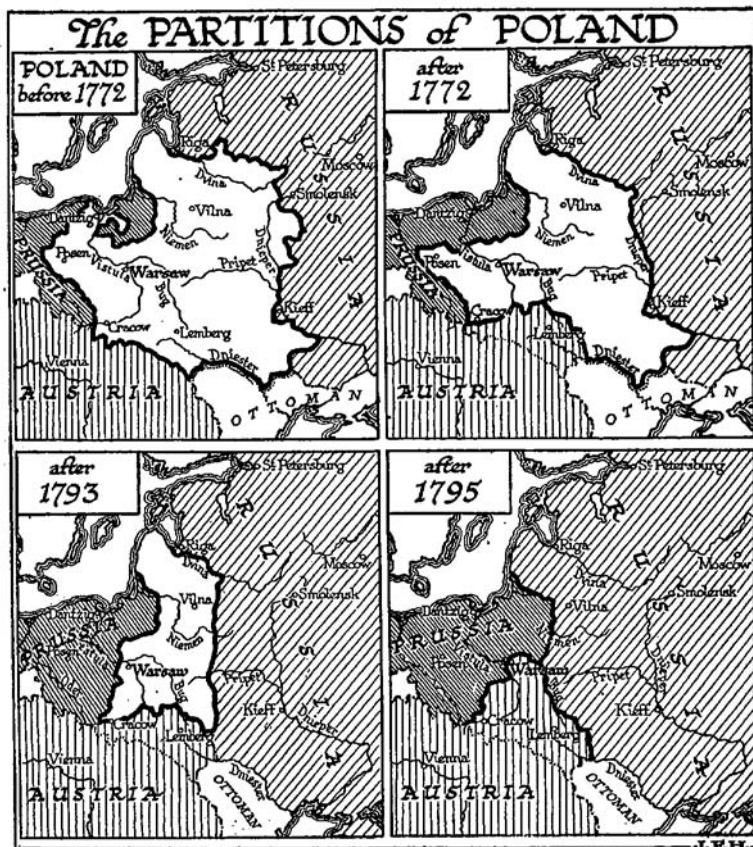


Figure 1: A map showing the partitioning of Poland between 1772 and 1795. The map shows Poland before 1772, and the three territorial annexations by Prussia, Russia, and Austria in 1772, 1793, and 1795. Source: <http://outline-of-history.mindvessel.net/350-princes-parliaments-and-powers/357-crowned-republic-of-poland-and-its-fate.html>.

The period encompassed by both the creation of these plays and their setting is 1902 and 1912. During this time, Poland remained uneasily divided among the empires into three separate geographically defined governmental, legislative and administrative systems. This affected the material conditions and the ways in which theatre and other forms of representation were – and could be – practised, as well as the subject matter chosen by writers and artists. This was a period of political unrest, cultural repression, mass emigration, large-scale industrialization and modernization. Poland did not exist on the map of Europe. However, as a former ‘place’ and nation state, with associated languages, cultural practices, evolving discourses of nationhood and organized modes of political resistance, it was indeed an ‘invisible country’.

In his comparative regional history of East Central Europe, Piotr S. Wandycz underlines the challenges of writing about partitioned Poland, in a section dedicated to discussing how the Industrial Revolution functioned in different geographical contexts:

For what was Poland in the nineteenth century? It was not an economic reality, its lands being part of the partitioning powers’ economies. There was no Polish market, and the adjoining parts of the former Commonwealth were separated by customs barriers. The Congress Kingdom [in the Russian partition] had to import coal from the Donets basin rather than from the neighboring Silesia. The Poles themselves could be said to be a governing nation (to some extent) only in the autonomous Galicia. After 1864 the Kingdom was reduced to the status of an occupied province. Hence their ability to shape economic developments was severely restricted.

In a commentary that is equally applicable to the analysis of the early years of the twentieth century, Wandycz also underlines how pronounced the cultural and material differences were between the three regions. He asserts that:

Galicia was clearly a neglected and underdeveloped province, little affected by industrialization ... The building of strategic railroads by Austria stimulated the province’s economy to some extent as did subsidies for agriculture and the creation of the first provincial credit bank.

However, it should be noted that any investment in infrastructure could not adequately respond to rapid demographic growth – 85 per cent in the second half of the nineteenth century – and Galician oil production ‘brought profits mostly to foreign capitalists.’<sup>10</sup> *In a Small House* and *All the Same* reflect these conditions, both in their evocation of geographical location, and provincial and urban Galician social conventions. For example, Rittner’s evocation of the Doctor’s small house as situated close to the railway, at the start of the play, and his wife’s constant reference to the possibilities of going on a lengthy journey or greeting new visitors compound the atmosphere of isolation and stagnation.

The role of the railroads in Polish developments was distorted by the fact of the Partitions. The railroads were built to connect Prussian Poland to Prussia and Germany, the Congress Kingdom to Russia, and Galicia, except for the strategic east-west line, to Austria. In that sense they promoted the integration of the economy of the individual Polish lands into the economic fabric of the partitioning powers. The density of the inter-Polish network was low [and] adjacent regions were frequently unconnected by rail.<sup>11</sup>

Focusing on the Russian partition, and restricting his analysis to the former Congress Kingdom (which, following the January Uprising of 1864, was renamed Vistula Land), Wandycz identifies this as 'the only area of the old Commonwealth that experienced the Industrial Revolution',<sup>12</sup> with textile production at the forefront, followed by coal. In the early 1850s the technical revolution had begun and the customs barrier with Russia was abolished, resulting in a higher demand for products and materials. This in turn impacted on the scale of investment in steam transport infrastructure, as well as the scale of the urban population, which doubled between 1879 and 1910. Consequently, the growth of factories also increased (particularly in Łódź, often referred to as the Polish Manchester), as did the size of the labour force. These conditions are reflected and critiqued in *Ashanti*, which is partly set in Warsaw. Industrial development combined with political disempowerment is shown by Perzyński as producing a profoundly socially and psychologically destabilizing effect, realigning class hierarchies and exacerbating poverty.

In the Prussian partition, often referred to as taking a more Westernized developmental route, the technical modernization of agriculture and light industries was most in evidence and was reliant on 'local credit, cooperatives and self-aid associations'.<sup>13</sup> Poles had to compete with local Germans, whose capital was greater and who were backed by the state. As a result of these factors, this area of the former Commonwealth saw the largest growth of a Polish middle class. None of the plays in this collection is set definitively within the Prussian partition. Przybyszewski's *Snow* has not yet been mentioned in this section and this is partly because the fact of its indefinite setting – compounded by the blizzard of the title – is essential to the play's thematic and narrative structures; the notions of invisibility and obfuscation are central. However, a reading of this play as dealing overtly with the notion of a defunct, politically disempowered and dysfunctional Polish aristocracy, vampiric and torn ideologically between dreams of revolution and imperialist conquest, is entirely possible.

A key date in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Polish history is 1863 – the date of the failed January Uprising, which began a period of increased repression by the partitioning powers. In addition, the so-called Polish Question, relating to national independence, gradually faded from political discourses at the international level. The result was an 'internal' ideological crisis concerning the possibility of revolution, a crisis that bore within it political viewpoints espousing compromise with the partitioning powers, expressed particularly in ostensibly conservative Galicia. In reading the plays in this collection, it is crucial to bear in mind the extent of the frequently violent repressive measures

exercised by the occupying powers on a mass scale, particularly in Russian and Prussian Poland, which aimed at no less than the Russification and Germanization of the Polish population, including the elimination of the Polish language. In addition, the Polish gentry, for example, were prevented from following career paths in politics or administration, which further problematized the prospect of national self-determination. Broadly speaking, these repressive measures might now be regarded as unsuccessful, in that they came to contribute directly to the development of political and national movements that enabled the breakdown of the partition-based stranglehold. Indeed, the first decade of the twentieth century – which the plays included in this collection encompass – was one of radical political mobilization and consciousness raising in East Central Europe, and it saw the demise of 123 years of that particular form of imperialist domination. It was a period when social and national change appeared increasingly possible to those both on the socialist left and on the national democratic right, and the concept of a border-defying, unified Polish culture strengthened following the 1905 Revolution in the Russian Empire. This idea of a unified Polish culture was ideologically appropriated in different forms, some of which – like right-wing Roman Dmowski's – were exclusive and tended to define 'otherness' along ethnic lines, espousing opposition against non-Polish nationalities, with a strongly anti-Semitic inflection. Along with other political ideologues – including Józef Piłsudski and Rosa Luxemburg on the left – Dmowski was preoccupied with the question of what shape his currently invisible country would take, once partition borders were dissolved.

Although the partition borders had deepened division among Poles and even affected their mentality, Polish culture continued to be the surest and strongest national link.<sup>14</sup>

As a medium for cultural expression, theatre became an important centre for engaging debates around the themes of national identity and sociopolitical change. In his book on the history of Polish theatre, Kazimierz Braun traces the influence of the fin-de-siècle Great Reform of Theatre on dramatic and theatrical practice, as directors, playwrights and actors in all the major cities – in Galicia initially, where there were greater freedoms of expression, and then in Russian Poland – responded to the ideas of Edward Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia, André Antoine, Max Reinhardt and Konstantin Stanislavsky.<sup>15</sup> The playwrights whose work features in *Invisible Country* might all be considered responsive to the Reform. Any analysis of Polish theatre practice of this period, however, must also take into account questions of censorship and how this operated within each partition – particularly given the fact that in the Russian partition, for example, the theatre was for a significant period of time the only forum where the Polish language could be publicly spoken. Much work remains to be done by contemporary scholars of this period on the operation of theatre censorship in partitioned Poland – it is no easy task to gather relevant material together and the scope of the project is great. Braun devotes much of his section on early twentieth-century theatre to the work of Stanisław Wyspiański, the highly significant, groundbreaking Galician writer and artist, who practised predominantly in Kraków.<sup>16</sup> However, there is still little focused



scholarship on how censorship functioned in relation to naturalism specifically – indeed, this situation is in itself partly a legacy of the complexities (often highly bureaucratic and operating at the level of written text, rehearsal and live performance) of evolving and often highly repressive systems of censorship put in place by the partitioning powers.

### Section C: Play synopses

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#### ***Śnieg (Snow, 1902) by Stanisław Przybyszewski***

A sensitive young woman, married to a landowner who once had military aspirations, struggles to understand the origins of her fear of abandonment. This has been triggered by her wealthy husband's obsession with their extremely rich female friend, whom she also desires. In the depths of a blinding winter blizzard, on a country estate, their triangular relationship is complicated by the presence of her husband's brother, whose love for her is entirely dependent on her lack of reciprocity. As these relationships evolve, the young woman is compelled to bravely confront her early traumatic experiences. She gradually becomes fully conscious of the fact that, during their childhood, her sister drowned herself on a seemingly ordinary day in their father's mere. This process of remembering is facilitated by the arrival of the young woman's aged former nursemaid, who brought her up. As her confused, over-powered husband and vampiric former school friend draw closer together, she orders that the mere on her country estate be cleared of snow and ice-holes be cut for carp fishing. She then proposes a double suicide by drowning, to her compliant brother-in-law, who cheerfully accepts her offer.

#### ***W Małym Domku (In a Small House, 1903) by Tadeusz Rittner***

An aspiring young doctor studying in Kraków gets his landlady's daughter pregnant. They marry – reportedly, this is not regarded as the essential outcome for a man in his predicament – and he sets up a private practice in a small provincial town to run alongside his surgical work at the local hospital. The town is located very close to a railway line, which is visible from his house. There, to his extreme, poorly concealed delight – as expressed by his perceptive sister, also his ward – he becomes mayor. Shortly after his victory, his neglected wife betrays him with an apparently experienced cad – an engineer overseeing a local bridge-building project – to whom the doctor has offered to rent a room. This dashing 'European' pays her far more attention – and compliments – than her husband. Following a disastrous soirée at which local luminaries – including a judge and his wife – are present, the doctor shoots his wife dead. To the surprise of the politically idealistic local schoolteacher, who is in love with the doctor's sister, he is subsequently acquitted by the local court. Upon returning from a prolonged trip, he fails to re-integrate into the local community and blows his brains



Figure 2: Celina Niedźwiecka as Bronka in a scene from a production of *Snow* by Stanisław Przybyszewski. This was staged in December 1927 at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków. Copyright: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe.



**Figure 3:** A scene from the March 1938 production of Tadeusz Rittner's *In a Small House*, staged at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków. From the left, seated: Zygmunt Modzelewski as the Engineer; Romana Pawłowska as Maria, the Doctor's Wife; Janina Wernicz as the Judge's Wife; Kazimierz Szubert as the Pharmacist's Assistant; Józef Karbowski as the Doctor; Maria Bednarska as Wanda. Copyright: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe.

out, potentially dashing any hope that his two children, his sister and the enamoured schoolteacher have for a 'happy life'.

### ***Aszantka (Ashanti, 1906) by Włodzimierz Perzyński***

A rich young landowner 'keeps' a poor young woman in Warsaw, 'procured' for him by his closest friend, an older man who knows the city and its underbelly very well. The 'couple' moves to Florence in order to avoid offending the landowner's disapproving family, including his rather moralistic and pompous – though ultimately practically minded – uncle. There, the woman betrays him with a well-travelled hotel waiter, who has fled Poland in order to avoid conscription and will never be able to return to his country. When the landowner learns of the affair, he takes out his gun and shoots in the woman's direction. Luckily for her,



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