

# Taking Liberties

*Gender, Transgressive Patriotism,  
and Polish Drama,  
1786–1989*

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OHIO UNIVERSITY PRESS

ATHENS

# Compass Points

## *A Prologue*

We live so fully enclosed in the circle of nationalism  
that we can hardly see beyond it.

—John H. Schaar, *Legitimacy in the Modern State*

IF WORDS ARE ALSO DEEDS, as Ludwig Wittgenstein's aphorism reminds us, it is appropriate (and necessary) to give an account not merely of what plays are saying but of what they are doing in propounding their arguments.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, one way to approach plays is to consider them as rhetorical performances in which stances are tried out for reasons that cannot be taken for granted at the outset. The challenge of such analysis and interpretation is compounded, on the one hand, by the Derridean interrogation of the transparency of language and, on the other, by the many forms of censorship that act on playwrights. With these points in mind, I propose to examine a rich array of plays by many authors, from Franciszek Dionizy Kniaźnin's *The Spartan Mother* (*Matka Spartanka*), staged by Izabela Czartoryska in 1786, to Anna Bojarska's *The Polish Lesson* (*Lekcja polskiego*), directed by Andrzej Wajda in 1988.

It may be helpful to know that *The Spartan Mother* features in Margaret R. Hunt's magisterial monograph, *Women in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, as one of the "heavily politicized cultural interventions" into the central debates of its time and place.<sup>2</sup> It may be intriguing to discover that Władysław Ludwik Anczyc's *Kościuszko at Raclawice* (*Kościuszko pod Raclawicami*, 1880), a source of frustration to modern critics, has made it to a list of the fifteen best plays ever written in the Polish language.<sup>3</sup> And it may be gratifying to find that my selection also includes a classic of Polish political satire: *The Return of the Deputy* (*Powrót posła*, 1791) by Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, one of the most conspicuous stars of the Warsaw literary scene in the early 1790s. With this play, he made a major contribution

to a vigorous exchange of rhetorical fire during what his contemporaries called the Polish Revolution of 1788–92.<sup>4</sup> The completion of *The Return of the Deputy* in November 1790 coincided with the publication in London, also in November 1790, of Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Mary Wollstonecraft’s rebuttal to Burke, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. While Burke denounced the upheavals taking place in France and depicted revolutionists as violators of royalty and womanhood, Niemcewicz, like Wollstonecraft, declared sympathy for the French Revolution. Performed with deliberate polemical intent at the Warsaw National Theatre in January 1791, *The Return of the Deputy* proved to be a bombshell with immediate and far-reaching political repercussions. Because its inflammatory content attracted massive attention, ranging from over-the-top enthusiasm to outrage and indignation, it would not be extravagant to say that few plays and theatrical performances anywhere and at any time had more direct or suggestive impact on their original audiences than the 1791 production of Niemcewicz’s drama. However, much of the textual territory I want to explore remains uncharted in scholarship, even though many of the plays I propose to discuss, and not just *The Spartan Mother* or *The Return of the Deputy*, were successful at claiming a prominent place in public life in the past.

In Benjamin Bennett’s pivotal phrase, the dramatic genre is “the memory and the conscience of literature.”<sup>5</sup> I take this phrase to mean that one of the most significant achievements of dramatic writing is its ability to make plausible and convincing a broad range of conflicting conceptions and beliefs. To gain a fuller view of Polish drama and its engagement with political disagreement and conflict, I set out to recover a wide variety of plays, including those that have been sidelined or neglected in scholarly commentary. I began with the mid-eighteenth century when a demand for plays in print rose sharply in Poland, partly because of a rapid growth of the reading public, partly because of changes in reading habits, and partly because Enlightenment pedagogues and politicians enlisted drama as a forum for public debate. It also helps to recognize that residents of large areas of the country had only sporadic access to theatrical performance. It should not be particularly surprising, then, that plays were predominantly part of a burgeoning print culture. While some playwrights wrote explicitly for the stage, many others took advantage of the explosion of print culture and wrote with a readership in mind. Booksellers’ advertisements, lending

library records, inventories of private collections, and other sources of evidence, however fragmentary and frustrating, permit us to track in bold outlines the reading public's fascination with drama, which at times surpassed interest in the novel.<sup>6</sup> The surging demand for plays made dramatic literature a lucrative business for printers and booksellers. For example, Pierre Dufour, one of the largest printer-booksellers in Enlightenment Poland, brought out more than thirty plays between 1775 and 1779. His drama-publishing project was so successful that he launched a series entitled *The Polish Theatre* (*Teatr Polski*) in 1779. Over the next fifteen years, he published fifty-six volumes of *The Polish Theatre*, each volume consisting of up to five plays.<sup>7</sup>

Enjoying a large readership, the dramatic genre became a major venue through which the public was socialized into certain modes of belief and certain value orientations. This historical phenomenon, however, has eluded sustained investigation in Polish studies. To be sure, the work of leading playwrights and theatre practitioners has been extensively discussed, and the existing secondary literature contains a great deal of valuable scholarship on their achievements. But despite strong interest in Polish theatre and drama, a substantial body of material has yet to be fully acknowledged, examined, and documented.

Admittedly, it is almost impossible to resist the temptation to consider only those authors who for various reasons have entered the canon of academic culture and to leave out of consideration those who have failed to establish enduring reputations even though they developed a high profile in their own time as writers and public intellectuals. Although such oversights may be innocent, the almost exclusive focus on more familiar texts in the usual channels of scholarly commentary and curricular inclusion has had the effect of de-emphasizing the diversity of cultural practice in the past as well as generating some misleading epistemological assumptions. For example, it has nearly become an article of faith that a distinctively modern Polish culture emerged only in the Romantic era or that Poland's paradigmatic National Symbolic was forged single-handedly by Romantic poets such as Adam Mickiewicz.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, a Polish version of the myth of maternal virtue, known as the myth of the Polish mother, is presumed to have originated during Romanticism, in reaction to Poland's loss of independence in 1795 and necessarily via the cult of the Virgin Mary.<sup>9</sup> Such misapprehensions, sanctified by an earlier generation of commentators, have had remarkable staying power.

In response to these challenges, I turn to an archive of dramatic writing that has rarely been studied. I would like to retrieve this archive not only in the sense of dusty manuscripts and crumbling volumes that for the most part sleep undisturbed in libraries but also in the sense invoked by Michel Foucault when he sought to direct historical inquiry away from individual works to the discursive structures that support them.<sup>10</sup> I share Arlette Farge's sense that "the archives are always explosive."<sup>11</sup> They offer alternatives to generally accepted views and interpretations, complicating attempts at theorizing solely on the basis of established classics and other well-known materials. My purpose here is to make a case for the need to reevaluate the contribution made to Poland's cultural history by what might be called the other traditions of Polish drama and theatre—a plethora of material that, regardless of the "popular" or "elite" status of individual works, falls outside the purview of dominant critical paradigms and thus remains poorly understood. I have been inspired in part by John Ashbery's efforts to recover the less familiar traditions of American and English poetry. In one of his Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, presented at Harvard University in 1989–90, Ashbery said: "I myself value Schubert more than Pound or Eliot."<sup>12</sup> He meant David Schubert, not Franz Schubert, and one can imagine some members of his audience gasping.

Taking account of an overlooked or undervalued archive of dramatic writing, along with its vision of the thoughtways, interests, and desires of the public, has considerable implications for the widely accepted claim that the role of drama and theatre in the civic life of Polish society has been both vigorous and important. In Poland, according to this claim, plays and performances have repeatedly opened up possibilities of resistance and redress, thus confirming that drama and theatre can constitute a platform of activist and interventionist engagement, inspired by movements for political and social change. To put this another way, had the political role of drama and theatre been negligible in Poland, the level of concern it created among the authorities would be impossible to explain satisfactorily. I do not contest that the twists and turns of modern Polish history have strengthened the traditional significance of the stage as a magnification mirror for the circumstances that lie outside or that theatre and drama have enjoyed remarkable cultural authority in Polish society. But I argue that the engagement of Polish drama and theatre with politics cannot be explained solely through celebrated masterworks and canonized aesthetics. To allow a more complex

picture, it is necessary to find room for the ignored spinster aunts and odd bachelor uncles of the nuclear family. They, too, participated in the broader dialogue on the social and political commitments of theatre and drama and had a hand in the shaping of idea(l)s and beliefs—sometimes even more insistently or subversively than their more acclaimed and more richly furnished relatives.

Given the sheer volume of plays that make up the other traditions, it is impossible to imagine any attempt to convey a sense of their range and depth without sacrificing one to the other. Rather than provide a general overview, then, I want to concentrate on a few topics only, chief among them an idea/phenomenon whose meaning is in dispute: patriotism.

For some users of the term, patriotism is synonymous with communitarian solidarity and a concern for the public good; for others, it is interchangeable with oppressive collectivism, crusading chauvinism, blindness to the darker aspects of the national past, sensitivity to slights to the national honor, and belligerent huffing by wavers of the national flag. Those for whom human life is communal to its roots might admire patriotism because it can lift individuals out of their narrow preoccupations and selfish interests; others will regard it with fear and loathing as “a cloak of deceit” and “an armor of righteousness” put on by cynical politicians intent on securing their goals.<sup>13</sup> While one person might say that patriotism is one of the important associative relationships that people develop and as such supplies the “strong common identification” that is necessary for a democratic political community to function, another will dismiss patriotism as nationalism’s “bloody brother,” each “characterized by exaggerated love for one’s own collectivity combined with more or less contempt and hostility toward outsiders.”<sup>14</sup> The conflict of opinion about patriotism has been best summarized by Alasdair MacIntyre: “At one end is the view, taken for granted by almost everyone in the nineteenth century, . . . that ‘patriotism’ names a virtue. At the other end is the contrasting view, expressed with sometimes shocking clarity in the nineteen sixties, that ‘patriotism’ names a vice.”<sup>15</sup>

Although *patriotism* is a relatively new term that came into general use for the first time in the eighteenth century, the conception of allegiance to *patria* dates back to Greek and Roman antiquity.<sup>16</sup> Despite its long history, however, patriotism has rarely been the object of in-depth exploration in scholarship. In particular, only a handful of studies has considered it in relation to the circumstances of a specific time and place.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, although

gender norms, or prescriptive standards of masculinity and femininity, have shaped assumptions about patriotic responsibilities, the interaction between patriotism and gender has scarcely been touched upon in existing scholarly accounts.<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, gender sometimes seems to be erased or invisible in patriotic discourse; on other occasions, however, it can be hypervisible as when the skills and qualities of women are celebrated over those of men (or vice versa). But invisible or hypervisible, gender can offer a lens through which to read how concepts of patriotism are constructed.

In the past, commentators tended to treat the concept of patriotism as timeless, monolithic, and self-evident. As Dustin Griffin points out, even those scholars who gave extensive attention to the subject of patriotism “largely . . . regarded it in unproblematic terms, as a ‘universal’ emotion,” constant across time and space.<sup>19</sup> Given this general consensus, it would be reasonable to suppose that patriotism comes in a single, unambiguous form: love of *patria*. But to accept this assumption is to overlook the fact that while the term *patria* has outlived the old, classical world, its meaning has been far from stable.<sup>20</sup> Any attempt to understand patriotism inevitably and inescapably leads to the questions: What exactly is the *patria* that patriots claim to love? Are they lovers of *patria* in the sense of a geographic area, a polity, or a set of values and ideals? Is the object of their loyalty and devotion a community of their fellow citizens or (to invoke the ancient Stoics’ understanding of *patria*) “the universal society to which all humans belong”?<sup>21</sup> And if *patria* refers to the patriots’ native country, do they love their homeland “as it is, as it once was, or as it might be”?<sup>22</sup>

To compound the problem, the equation of the patriot with the dutiful son (or daughter) and patriotic obligations with the bonds of filial affection has become so ubiquitous that it seems almost indelicate to invoke John Adams who, in a series of essays published in the *Boston Gazette* in 1765, argued that those who seek separation from the mother country are not necessarily unpatriotic.<sup>23</sup> To compound the problem even further, Richard Price, who worked with a political club called the London Revolution Society, the revolution being that of 1688, made a historic case for a patriotism that contains strong universalist, even cosmopolitan strains. Price’s “A Discourse on the Love of Our Country” (1789), best remembered today as the burning speech that provoked Burke’s wrath in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, begins with three crucial caveats. First, “our country” should not be understood in a purely geographical sense, but should be regarded as a

corporate “community” of persons “bound together by the same civil polity” and “protected by the same laws.” Second, “the love of our country” does not imply “any conviction of the superior value of it to other countries, or any particular preference of its laws and constitution of government.” Third, “the love of our country” should not be confused with “that spirit of rivalry and ambition which has been common among nations.” Patriots should love their country “ardently but not exclusively”; while performing the duty they owe to their country, they should also accept wider responsibilities as “citizens of the world” and in so doing “take care to maintain a just regard to the rights of other countries.”<sup>24</sup> Price’s idea of patriotism, in other words, rejects compatriot partiality or the widely and deeply held belief that we are permitted to show greater concern for compatriots than for strangers. In Price’s view, being a patriot entails a moral obligation to, and solidarity with, all other human beings, who should be viewed as fellow citizens.

In recent scholarly literature, patriotism finds little favor.<sup>25</sup> Its critics consider the whole idea/phenomenon of patriotism as tired and passé. An odd relic of a bygone epoch, a stiffly unattractive, embarrassing, even offensive anachronism, it has nothing to offer to a much needed ethic for global citizenship. Or to be more precise, the era of globalization in which we are living, and particularly the erosion of national barriers through the rapid expansion of new communication technologies and transnational cultural networks, makes the notion of patriotic allegiance and obligation untenable. Yet there are also those commentators who recognize, on the contrary, that patriotism is far from becoming a useless fossil of a lost world. To them, the continuing appeal of patriotism is a cause for concern. The reasons for this concern are not hard to identify. While the emotional pull of patriotism in the sense of attachment to one’s homeland, its people, and its cultural heritage (to mention only the most obvious forms) remains strong in the age of globalization and the attendant logic of placelessness, it is not unusual to see patriotic affection appropriated for the promotion of the “our country, right or wrong” idea, absorbed into chauvinist enthusiasms and exhortations, exploited for the veneration of the nation, or engaged to pay dividends for the politics of nationalism.<sup>26</sup> Terminologically, the slide of patriotism into nationalism is facilitated by a consistent tendency in the anglophone world “to sentimentalize the state by calling it *the nation*.”<sup>27</sup> As the term *patriotism* is reconceptualized as “a mild, euphemistic alternative to ‘nationalism,’ ‘national pride’ or ‘national loyalty,’” and the exclusionist

rhetoric of the nation is dressed up as patriotic conviction, those who oppose chauvinist fervor and xenophobic bigotry are stigmatized as unparadonably disloyal.<sup>28</sup>

Considering that patriotism has often carried with it both racism and xenophobia, that patriotic sentiments are routinely co-opted for chauvinism and jingoism, and that the terms *patriotism* and *nationalism* are used interchangeably, it is hardly surprising that many commentators respond to patriotism “at best with embarrassment and at worst with downright hostility.”<sup>29</sup> In 1946, Merle Curti defined patriotism as “love of country, pride in it, and readiness to make sacrifices for what is considered its best interest”; as such, he noted briefly, it “is related to nationalism.”<sup>30</sup> Fifty years later, George Kateb identified patriotism as a dangerous, potentially lethal form of group membership and allegiance, driven by narcissistic commitment emanating from love of one’s country:

How can one love such a mottled or hybrid entity as a country, particularly when, as in a democracy, the country’s people are (always by imputation and sometimes in fact) directly and indirectly responsible for the country’s wicked policies? . . . One does and sometimes should love persons “beyond good and evil,” so to speak; but to love a country, an abstract entity capable of so much harm, especially to those outside, to those who are not fellow-patriots, but rather patriots of their own, if they are patriots at all—that is an unacceptable idea. . . . The evil done in the world by nationalism and patriotism, commonly abetted by racism or ethnocentrism, and often by religion as well, is immense.<sup>31</sup>

Kateb conceded that “patriotism may be mobilized for a good cause,” but he darkly warned that “much more easily, it may be mobilized for an unjust one.”<sup>32</sup>

The fact that a 2001 law, which gives the US government wide new powers to bypass fundamental civil liberties such as due process of law and protection from unwarranted searches and seizures, is named the Patriot Act has not boosted the reputation of patriotism. And the reputation of literature on patriotic themes has for decades been quite low because this body of writing is typically (and not unjustifiably) associated with stirring exhortations and panegyric effusions. That said, I was intrigued to find, for instance, that *The Patriot’s Calendar*, published in London in the 1790s, contained both the Magna Carta and the “Marseillaise.”<sup>33</sup> Studies such as

Albert Goodwin's *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* reminded me that the eighteenth-century roots of the term *patriotism* were in the defense of citizens' rights, the struggle against outrages of centralized power, and the fight against corruption in government. Accordingly, radical reformers in Britain between 1790 and 1850 "viewed themselves, initially at least, not as Chartists or Dissenters, socialists or trade-unionists, but as 'patriots' defending a familiar set of patriot concerns—liberty, property, and constitutional rights."<sup>34</sup> Focused on the "opposition to the increasingly centralized state and the growing capitalist economic order," their "patriot cause" was "*internationalist* in its leanings."<sup>35</sup> Thus, the patriot of *The Patriot's Calendar* stood for political equality, popular sovereignty, and social justice, rather than simply a romantic attachment to country.

Publications such as *The Patriot's Calendar* inspired my decision to revisit the concept of patriotism and to explore its equivocal and, at times, ambiguous meanings. Clearly, the perplexities and paradoxes that inhere in the question of patriotic beliefs, idea(l)s, allegiances, motives, intentions, aspirations, and commitments invite closer scrutiny. To be sure, there is no lack of commentaries arguing that patriotism welds together a strong sense of national identity with identification around a sense of the common good. But is this the only possible way to understand patriotism? Aren't a sense of national identity and a sense of the common good distinct and even in tension for some patriots? And isn't it reductive to link the exercise of patriotism to prideful admiration for the greatness of one's country rather than to the acknowledgment of its weaknesses?

To say that patriotism is a highly contentious yet oddly slippery category would be an understatement. This book begins with the recognition that patriotism is a notoriously promiscuous concept that seems to depend on a timeless conjunction of love and duty but carries multivalent meanings that have seldom been the object of a sustained analysis. Combining archival research with historical contextualization and critical theory, *Taking Liberties* is an attempt to elaborate a fresh approach to a complicated, contradictory, and often confusing idea/phenomenon known as patriotism. The core of my argument is that the porousness or elasticity of the concept of patriotism allows it to connect, converge, and cross-pollinate with other discourses and practices in unpredictable, even heretical ways. Through a series of engagements with the work of writers

such as *Kniaźnin* and *Bojarska*, this study tracks some of the unorthodox interactions, exemplified here by the interplay between patriotism and transgression of social or customary norms, and it examines how and to what ends playwrights have grappled, either directly or obliquely, with a puzzling, seemingly absurd nexus between patriotic commitment and transgressive nonconformity. Although my project is situated in a particular historical context and steeped in local knowledge, its reach extends beyond its immediate subject and scholarly discipline. I hope to show that battles waged over the meaning and practice of patriotism; clashes between competing views of patriotic idea(l)s, principles, and concerns; controversies over “proper” and “improper” forms of rebellious insubordination; and attempts to distinguish the “true” patriot from the “false” not only illuminate the strong dependence of patriotism on local time and circumstance but also constitute rich terrain for investigating some of the broader issues—such as cultural memory and authority—that are at the center of debates in the humanities.<sup>36</sup>

This project began as an exploration of a vast trove of material bequeathed by those prolific generations between the mid-eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, contracted to focus on the 1880s and 1890s, and, finally, expanded to encompass the period between the mid-1780s and the late 1980s. I start, unconventionally, with *Kniaźnin*'s *The Spartan Mother*, staged as a lavish private theatrical at an aristocratic court in June 1786, and end with Lech Wałęsa's public extravaganza-cum-masquerade, performed *al fresco*, on the site of an eighteenth-century battle, in May 1989. I made the decision to devote more chapters to the eighteenth century after I realized that the efforts in scholarship to locate the foundations of modern Polish culture in the Romantic period and to use Romanticism as a grid for conceptualizing the engagement of Polish literature with politics have been so successful that, paradoxically, they have diminished an entire era: the Enlightenment. The paradox (or the irony) here is that, for generation after generation, Polish political commentators have drawn their fundamental concepts and analogies from the tumultuous history of Enlightenment Poland and taught their lessons by referring to it.<sup>37</sup> Clearly, Poland's long eighteenth century has had an even longer afterlife, even though the hermetic view of the Polish Romantic age, of which Maria Janion has been the leading magus for many years, encourages us to believe that there was an irrevocable break between the Enlightenment and Romanticism in Poland. At a time when the

Enlightenment continues to be “one of the most debated themes of contemporary intellectual discourse,”<sup>38</sup> a reductive and misleading dichotomy—a conventional opposition of an Enlightenment of unoriginality, rationality, emotional restraint, and decorum versus a Romanticism of aesthetic daring, sublime emotionality, heroic individualism, and edgy, threshold-crossing subjects—dominates the thinking about Polish culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nowadays the meaning of the Polish Enlightenment has shrunk and narrowed so much that its cultural history appears uncontroversial, unproblematic, even boring. It is not particularly surprising, then, that the Enlightenment has become one of the most neglected periods in the poststructuralist discourse of Polish literary and cultural studies.<sup>39</sup> This neglect is unfortunate. For example, the fixation on the rationality of the Enlightenment misrepresents trends in eighteenth-century moral philosophy that resorted to the sway of the passions, the language of sentiment and feelings, and the heightened appreciation of sensibility. Moreover, although masculinity and femininity were key categories of Enlightenment thought, we know surprisingly little about the Polish Enlightenment’s debate about gender.

I had planned to conclude this book with the last theatre season before World War I, but I decided to include more twentieth-century plays after I discovered, on one of my (all too) many furloughs from work on my project, Stefan Otwinowski’s *Easter* (*Wielkanoc*). Drafted in 1943 and published by the Central Commission of Polish Jews in 1946, *Easter* is the earliest attempt in any language to depict the 1943 uprising in the Warsaw ghetto through the medium of drama. A wealth of scholarship has expanded our knowledge of literary and theatrical representations of the Holocaust, but when I set out to do research on *Easter*, I found that it had received scant critical attention. In the play, historical figures find modern counterparts, and events both past and present jostle one another. This in itself is not exceptional, but what still stands out is a puzzling conflation of the Jewish uprising of 1943 and the Polish insurrection of 1794. This conflation startled me, first by its seeming absurdity, then by its possible implications. I could not proceed with my project until I was clear in my mind about what the 1794 insurgency was doing in a play about the resistance of the Warsaw ghetto. *Easter* was an invitation to search for missing pieces of the puzzle, hidden in libraries. I found myself dealing with gaps, omissions, tense silences, censored traumas, buried anxieties, haunting “shadow” themes, thickening

layers of significance, endlessly multiplying connotations, and no clear sense of closure. Madness may lie in that direction, but so too might a richer sense of Polish cultural history.

In a book that enables the other traditions of Polish drama and theatre to emerge from the shadows of condescension and neglect so that complications and contradictions of patriotic discourse can be examined, it is impossible to avoid the question: Why take up this topic *now*?

One reason is that in the age of boundless opportunities for global connectivity, transnational cultural traffic, and intensified hybridization it is still axiomatic that patriotism and allegiance to one's nation go together and that patriots should look to the well-being of their own nation and defend its core interests.<sup>40</sup> As the magic of national "we-identities" continues to hold sway in the ostensibly globalized postmodern culture, patriotic commitments are typically explained within a nationalist paradigm, and concepts such as cosmopolitan patriotism are viewed as a contradiction in terms.<sup>41</sup>

Another reason is that the problem of patriotism in Poland's "imagined community" (to use Benedict Anderson's indispensable phrase) has remained largely unexplored in scholarship.<sup>42</sup> That patriotism has been a dominant concept in "the cultural liturgy" of Polish society; that its persistent themes have been freedom and independence; and that its language has been one of moral absolutes, of self-sacrifice against self-interest—on these points there exists a strong consensus.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, it has become standard practice to attribute "a high voltage patriotism" to Poles and to invoke a parallel between the supreme sacrifice of Christ and the bloody ordeals endured by the martyred Poland.<sup>44</sup> It is hard to avoid the suspicion that such impassioned claims are sheer fustian that has more to do with rhetorical impact than with cool analysis. This kind of rhetoric has indeed caught the public attention, obscuring the fact that the semantic range of the term *patriotism* has encompassed, for example, defense of the rights and status of parliament, insistence on the contractual basis of government, concerns about the expansion of executive power, criticism of those who support a government without checks or oversight, demands for government accountability, struggles for the extension of human rights and civil liberties, and claims to equal educational opportunities. At a time when a narrow, nationalist motivation of patriotic allegiance is taken for granted, and patriotism is invoked to justify everything from flag-waving triumphalism and a celebratory nationalist historiography to arrant chauvinism and

xenophobic bigotry, the nonnationalist or transnational conceptions of patriotism have vanished from the culture's radar. It seems that the time has come to bring them into view.

There is also a third reason for taking up the problem of patriotism now. Patriotism has become arguably the most polarizing term of public debate in postcommunist Poland, especially with regard to the memory of the Holocaust and the legacy of the communist period, but also with regard to the liberal tradition.<sup>45</sup> Many participants in the debate are either openly skeptical or unremittingly critical of what they construe as the liberal tradition's atomistic approach to society. They contend that it overestimates the individual as the bearer of value at the expense of values inherent in a community, and thereby it fails to inspire strong identification with, and enduring commitment to, the common good; instead, it encourages a clinical, amoral instrumentality in social relations. Convinced that it is imperative to assure the transmission and conservation of collectively held values, critics of the liberal tradition tout patriotic affection as the indispensable "glue" that can bind Poles together as a community, fostering both a shared sense of Polishness and an ethos of mutual indebtedness and mutual concern among individuals who are otherwise strangers to each other.<sup>46</sup> Just what this construction called Polishness means, what its role in the public sphere should be, and whether or not it stokes the fires of the national ego are questions that are hotly debated, but there is widespread agreement that Polishness has been shaped around the collective memory of a long history of foreign oppression and national resistance. Consequently, the most common understanding of patriotism has crystallized around a cluster of just a few associations: freedom fighting, battlefield heroism, honor (in particular, a rather kamikaze sense of honor), bloody glamor.<sup>47</sup> New parties that emerged after the collapse of communism in 1989 have become adept at using this abridged vocabulary in an attempt to broaden their electoral appeal and particularly to secure the support of voters who are alarmed over the growth of a liberal culture and concerned about the hollowness and corrosiveness allegedly inherent in individual liberalism. Some parties have gone so far as to insist that there should be a place for proper patriotic idea(l)s and traditions in school curricula, that the teaching of history in particular should impart "true" patriotism, and that more difficult and problematic aspects of the Polish past should be downplayed to facilitate a celebratory sense of Polish identity in the present.<sup>48</sup>

In theory, patriotism, at the very least, is capable of blurring the edges of party rivalry or animosity; in reality, its usefulness as the hard currency of party rhetoric and a tool of legitimation and persuasion has triggered new skirmishes in the unending combat between “true” and “false” patriotism. These skirmishes have escalated into a rancorous public controversy over whether the patriotic credentials of President Lech Kaczyński, who died in a plane crash in 2010, entitled him to be interred in Poland’s most hallowed burial place, the Wawel Cathedral in Kraków, next to monarchs and national heroes. The polemics over President Kaczyński’s enshrinement at Wawel have rekindled a bipolar commonplace that, on the one hand, self-proclaimed patriots are right-wing bigots prone to hysterical displays of nationalist sentiments and that, on the other, critics of patriotism are renegades guilty of a wanton abrogation of an intimate bond or an act of unpardonable disloyalty. In the rush of postcommunist Polish history, it is almost unavoidable to rehearse such overheated platitudes or to forget that patriotism has not been a monolithic and static concept, that patriotic commitments have not been the exclusive property of the political right, and that adherents of patriotism have not always been interested in the same political and social outcomes. At a time when patriotism is increasingly perceived in Poland (and elsewhere) as a sentiment associated with men and women who salute the flag, attend church, and become defensive when their country is criticized abroad, it is vital to supplement critiques of reductive presuppositions about patriotic allegiance and devotion with an investigation of a more complex, often paradoxical discourse of patriotism.

In the course of my research, I have acquired a richer appreciation of “raffish” writing, dramaturgical “bad” manners, rhetorical “ungrammaticalities,” textual “oddities” and “aberrations,” “preposterous” asynchronic quirks and singularities, “anomalous” effulgences, and many other ways in which the other traditions of Polish drama and theatre encourage us to stand back from some of the current assumptions and habits of thought about Polish cultural history and perhaps even to reconsider them. I hope to shed new light on a few old questions about cultural practice in the past, but this project might also help us better understand some of the dilemmas and disputes of our own time. Given that the term *patriotism* has become a handy label whose application reassures its users, turning questions into answers before they have even been asked, this is a timely moment to restore to view the complications and contradictions of the conceptual terrain of patriotism.

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