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“That’s Something for the Vice-Minister, No Less”

A Korean Fairytale in the State Puppet Theatre in Gdańsk

Abstract

This article discusses the circumstances of the staging of the play *Arirang* in a Polish puppet theatre. This dramatised Korean fairy tale was based on short stories by Dr Tonchu Ru, a Korean living in the Polish People’s Republic, whose biography constitutes a separate important thread of the story. The play premiered on 31st October 1953, four months later than originally planned; this was due to the hostilities on the Korean Peninsula, which forced the producers to get involved in ministry-level exchanges and special diplomacy. Affected by the pressure of a centrally controlled message about the war, the staging was part of the Polish ‘engaged’ artists response to the armed conflict in a ‘brotherly’ country. In the face of this conflict, the Polish-Korean ‘parallels’ identified for decades gained a new context, and with it a socialist realist costume.

Keywords

Arirang, Koreans in Poland, Tadeusz Tonchu Ru, Natalia Bojarska, Ali Bunsch, State Puppet Theatre in Gdańsk, socialist realism in puppet theatre

Abstrakt

„Niżej viceministra takich spraw się nie rusza”: Koreańska bajka w Państwowym Teatrze Lalek w Gdańsku

Artykuł przybliży okoliczności wystawienia na polskiej scenie lalkowej sztuki *Arirang*. Udramatyzowana baśń koreańska powstała na kanwie opowiadań osiadłego w Polsce Koreańczyka – doktora Tonchu Ru, którego losy stanowią osobny i ważny wątek historii. Premiera odbyła się 31 października 1953, z czteromiesięcznym opóźnieniem wobec zaplanowanej daty. Jego powodem były działania wojenne na Półwyspie Koreańskim, które zmusiły realizatorów do szczególnej dyplomacji i kontaktów na szczeblu ministerialnym. Inscenizacja, powstająca pod naporem odgórnie sterowanego przekazu o wojnie, była częścią rezonansu, jaki konflikt zbrojny w „bratnim” kraju wzbudził wśród polskich artystów „zaangażowanych.” W obliczu tego konfliktu diagnozowane od dekad „polsko-koreańskie paralele” zyskały nowy kontekst, a razem z nim socrealistyczny kostium.

Słowa kluczowe

Arirang, Koreańczycy w Polsce, Tadeusz Tonchu Ru, Natalia Bojarska, Ali Bunsch, Państwowy Teatr Lalek w Gdańsku, socrealizm w teatrze lalkowym

On October 31, 1953, the State Puppet Theatre in Gdańsk staged an unusual performance. Titled *Arirang*, it was a Korean fairy tale adapted for the stage by Natalia Bojarska in collaboration with doctor Tadeusz Tonchu Ru,¹ a dentist of Korean descent who had settled in Warsaw. The play was directed by Natalia Gołębska, the soundtrack was created by Jerzy Dobrzański, the stage design and costumes were by Ali Bunsch, the then artistic director of the Gdańsk theatre. The peculiar political and social background of the event—the Korean War (1950–1953), the bloodiest armed conflict of the Cold War era, which had ended just three months earlier—made the preparations for the premiere an exhausting undertaking, requiring ministerial consultations and diplomatic maneuverings. Reconstructing the course of events that thoroughly engrossed the small Gdańsk stage seventy years ago is hampered by a number of factors—from large-scale politics to small disagreements. However, it is worth making the attempt, as it allows us to tell another story of the kind that Estera Choj (Choi Sung Eun) wrote about as “growing out of the historical dualisms of foreignness and familiarity, East and West.”²

“Life is good here and life is good there.” A Korean in Warsaw

Bojarska’s foreword to the play’s program read:

For many years there has lived in Warsaw a guest from afar, Doctor Tonchu-Ru from Korea. It so happened that his countryman and colleague Hung-Soo-Hang came to visit the Doctor. While reminiscing about their homeland, the friends came up with the idea of jotting down tales and folk stories they remembered from their childhood. It then happened that I met Dr Tonchu-Ru. And this is how the friends’ notes came into my hands. These notes comprise a collection of 14 lovely Korean tales and legends, which will soon be published in a book edition. I adapted one of the tales for the stage: this is *Arirang*.³

¹ His name appears in various forms, such as Tonhuru, Tonchu Ru (Tonchu-Ru), Tong-chu Ru, Touchu Ryu, Ru Tong-chu, Ru Tondziu, Rutondzin, Yu Dong-ju, and Yoo Dongju. Throughout this text, including quotations, I uniformly use the form Tonchu Ru, which he himself used in official correspondence and files, e.g. passport applications (although when signing the documents he used the form “Tonchuru”). See the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, passport files, file no. IPN BU 1005/63463.

² Estera Czoj (Choi Sung Eun), “Korea – Polska Wschodu: Koreańsko-polskie paralele historyczne i literackie jako kluczowe hasło w nauczaniu literatury polskiej w Korei,” in: *Polonistyka bez granic*, 1: *Wiedza o literaturze i kulturze*, ed. Ryszard Nycz, Władysław Miodunka, and Tomasz Kunz (Kraków: Universitas, 2010), 139 (all passages from Polish-language sources have been translated for the purpose of the present article).

³ The State Archive in Gdańsk (Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, henceforward: APG), sign. 10/1623/75, Natalia Bojarska, “Słowo od autora,” in *Arirang* performance program (Gdańsk: Państwowy Teatr Lalek w Gdańsku, 1953), 3.

A draft held at the State Archive in Gdańsk shows that she also planned for this text to include the following acknowledgment:

First of all, I must confess that the East has always held a great charm to me. It seemed to me to be shrouded in a curious enchantment of strangeness and mystery; from its fairy tales through its ancient cultures, incomparably older than Europe's, to its customs and mores, to its people, so different from us. Thus, when fate brought me into contact with the most authentic man of the East, with whom it was easy to communicate in my mother tongue, which he had mastered perfectly, and what is more, when I was presented with fairy tales and entrusted with the voluntarily accepted duty of producing their literary elaboration, my joy was truly great.⁴

It can be assumed that Bojarska met “the most authentic man of the East” at one of his Warsaw dental practices. This may have happened just before the war, when she herself—then still under her maiden name Halina Marczakówna—was preparing for medical studies, while the young Dr Tonchu Ru, barely in his thirties and a fresh graduate,⁵ opened a practice in a luxurious modernist townhouse at 24 Puławska street.⁶ This building, which also housed the doctor's private flat, miraculously survived the wartime destruction of Warsaw and in 1945 members of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers took up residence there. At this point Dr Tonchu Ru moved his practice to premises at 31 Chocimska street, as was reported by the daily newspaper *Życie Warszawy*.⁷ There, too, he could have been regularly visited by Bojarska, who soon discovered that reworking a Korean fairy tale into drama was a much more ambitious task than she had anticipated:

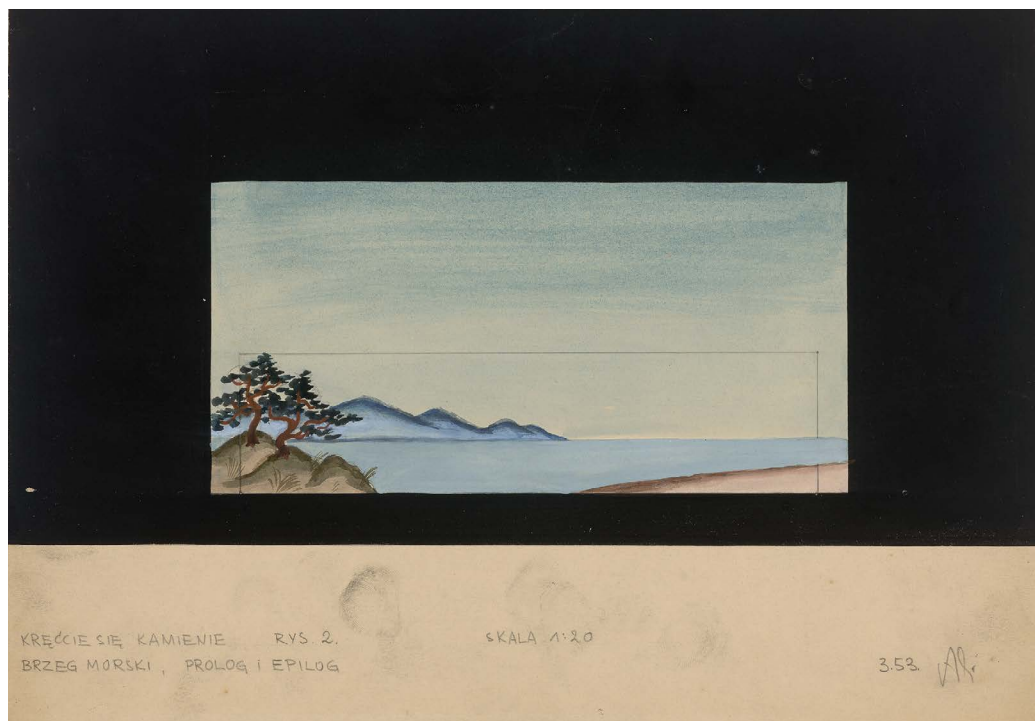
In the course of the work it turned out what a difficult thing it was. How can one write down original fairy tales with less than scanty knowledge of the country and

⁴ APG, sign. 10/1623/1, Bojarska, “Słowo od autora,” fol. 1 (443).

⁵ His file could not be located in the archives of the Warsaw Medical University. However, an interesting trace of the activity of “student of the Academy of Dentistry Tadeusz Tonchu Ru” can be found in a pre-war academic dentistry journal article: Kiuwa Bunan, “Infekcje poekstrakcyjne,” *Dwumiesięcznik Stomatologiczny*, no. 3 (1935): 165–168.

⁶ Dr Tonchu Ru must have already been receiving patients at some other Warsaw address before that date. His move to premises at 24 Puławska St. is reported in *Dobry Wieczór! Kurier Czerwony*, no. 224 (1938): 2. His private apartment was in the same building. His wife, Janina Andrea Tonchu Ru née Otto, provided the address (24/1 Puławska St.) in her application to the Warsaw School of Economics. In the application, she requested that her thesis be considered and that she be awarded a Master's degree in economics and commercial sciences. See the archives of the Warsaw School of Economics, file no. 7698: Otto Janina, 16. She received her master's degree through the School's Senate's decree dated September 30, 1938. Her engaging master's thesis, “Japan in the 20th Century,” is still held by the Warsaw School of Economics Library.

⁷ *Życie Warszawy*, no. 290 (1945): 4.



The seashore, set design for the prologue and epilogue of *Arirang*

DESIGNED BY ALI BUNSCH, STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

the people? The doctor turned out to be a veritable encyclopedia of knowledge about his homeland. Plagued with the most bizarre questions, not for a moment did he lose patience. He listened sympathetically to questions, corrected misconceptions and erroneous assumptions, answered and narrated, trying to cover as much ground as possible. But this was not enough. Painsstaking research and inquiry began, and the material was still lacking. Thanks to the Doctor, I was able to read a manuscript of a work on Korean history by a Korean author. I also managed to get a text on Korean customs and mores. I picked up every printed word about the country in all the languages available to me. After all, it was necessary for me to learn about everything: the landscape, nature, history, architecture, and only within this framework to seek and to find a living human being whom his heroic fight for freedom and the right to live made so close to us.⁸

⁸ APG, sign. 10/1623/75, Natalia Bojarska, "Słowo od autora," 3.

Doctor Tonchu Ru is an enigmatic figure,⁹ and his diverse and sometimes surprising activities at the edge of Polish art and culture deserve a separate study. In 1933, he appeared in the cast of the film *Prokurator Alicja Horn*, where, in a white smock and round black glasses, he played the role of the taciturn assistant to the demonic experimenter, Professor Brunicki.¹⁰ Two years later, he became one of the protagonists in a short reportage from the newspaper series *Egzotyczna Warszawa* (Exotic Warsaw), in which he was presented as an enterprising dental student “leading a very busy life” in the Polish capital.¹¹ The viewers were told that “apart from his studies, he plays almost all sports, but he is especially passionate about popularizing jiu-jitsu, which was previously unknown in Poland.”¹² He ran courses at sports associations, among youngsters and university students, in the army and in the police; he also intended to train instructors.¹³ He lived with his father, a doctor and promoter of natural medicine—a “kind old gentleman” named Yoo Gyeongip.¹⁴ The text indicated that the reporter from the *ABC Daily Newspaper* searching for Warsaw’s “exoticism” came to visit the father, not the son. In a living room at Nowy Świat street,¹⁵ he found what he was looking for, because “leaning out of the picture frames” there were “smiling, slant-eyed geishas in colorful kimonos,” while “the painted eyes of snake charmers shrouded in white Eastern robes” mesmerized the viewer. “Bizarre, symbolic paintings, carved horns of Japanese water cows, masterpieces by famous Japanese and Chinese painters adorn the walls of an otherwise banal living room, giving it an exotic feel.” The kind old gentleman, however, turned out to be embarrassed by the journalist’s visit and by his own severely limited command of the Polish language. “From the torrent of words with which I accost him at the outset, he clearly understands nothing and I, in turn, conclude with despair that we are not going to get along at all,” reported

⁹ I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Tomasz Guja for his assistance in helping me find information and access the valuable collections of the Polish Jiu-jitsu Organization.

¹⁰ *Prokurator Alicja Horn* (Prosecutor Alicja Horn), Polish feature film, directed by Michał Waszyński and Marta Flantz, 1933, based on a novel by Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz under the same title.

¹¹ “W’granatowym’ kraju: Japoński entuzjizm dla polskiej pracy,” *ABC: Nowiny Codzienne*, no. 100 (1935): 7.

¹² “W’granatowym’ kraju.”

¹³ Cf. “Japończyk Tonchu-Ru wyszkoli w dżiu-dżitsu 40 polskich policjantów,” *Dobry Wieczór! Kurier Czerwony*, no. 224 (1935): 2. The first record of jiu-jitsu classes conducted by “Ru Tondziu, a Japanese” appears in *Kurier Polski*, no. 50 (1932): 6. The next record, mentioning “the Japanese Rutondzin,” is found in *Kurier Poranny*, no. 97 (1932): 6.

¹⁴ Polish transcription of his name is Ju-Czo-Sy. Another form of the name’s spelling is found in the marriage certificate recording the marriage of Tadeusz Tonchu Ru with Janina Magdalena Andrea Otto (born Nov. 29, 1910, died Apr. 7, 1953). The wedding took place on March 29, 1937 in the parish church of St. Michael in Warsaw, where the marriage certificate is still held. The name of Tonchu Ru’s father is given there as “Aleksander Liou Sosi.”

¹⁵ Kyunam Kim, “Stosunki Polski z państwami Półwyspu Koreańskiego w latach 1948–2013” (Poland’s Relations with the Countries of the Korean Peninsula, 1948–2013), (PhD diss., University of Warsaw, 2015), 29, <https://repozytorium.uw.edu.pl/entities/publication/5cc4fd50-80a0-4c6a-9102-d66681547bcf>.

the journalist. That was when the “lively, nimble, constantly smiling” future doctor Tonchu Ru came to the rescue, “eager to tell his and his father’s story.”¹⁶

What exactly did he say? Surely, he was answering the question of “wherefrom did they come to Poland?” and the answer he gave allowed the reporter to sum up the matter as briefly as misleadingly: “Quite simply. They come from Tokyo.” He also talked about his father’s extensive medical practice based on the use of ginseng, which he had supposedly carried out for many years in Russia. It was there that, according to his son’s account, Yoo Gyeongjip remarried, this time not to a Japanese woman, but to a Polish one, which was why he settled down in the reborn Poland.¹⁷ Tonchu Ru himself, meanwhile, remained in Tokyo, finishing high school and dreaming of Europe and travel. Finally, he decided to follow in his father’s footsteps and go to Poland, the “dark-blue country,”¹⁸ whose history was apparently familiar to every Japanese student, at least in an outline. “Poland’s popularity, especially in the last few years, has been very great,” said Tonchu Ru with conviction, undoubtedly pleasing the journalist very much; “the Japanese people are impressed by Poland’s enormous development in all spheres of life, by an energy an equal of which no other country created after the war can boast.” Thus, Tonchu Ru came to Poland, chasing his dreams, and the only thing he feared was the language barrier, which could effectively prevent him from swiftly making his plans a reality. “However, I got down to work with energy, studied diligently from dawn to dusk, and as a result, after just one year I was able to enroll to study dentistry,” he recalled, and then added:

My studies are going quite well, and I intend to specialize in surgery and do my training practice in Warsaw. In a few years’ time I may return to Japan, although I have to admit that I am in a real dilemma. I have become so close to my colleagues, both men and women, I have so many friends and acquaintances here that it will be difficult for me to part with them; on the other hand, I would like to see my homeland again. Life is good in Poland and life is good in Japan—it is really hard to choose.¹⁹

Only a part of the above information is confirmed by surviving documents; the rest is untrue or inaccurate. There are many reasons for these inaccuracies, and

¹⁶ “W’granatowym’ kraju.”

¹⁷ According to the report, this happened “16 years ago,” i.e. in 1919; see “W’granatowym’ kraju.”

¹⁸ “The Japanese call Poland the dark-blue country because the Polish railway staff, policemen and pupils at schools all wear dark-blue uniforms; the prevalence of dark-blue colors has struck many Japanese travelling through the country and the name has caught in Japan,” explained Tonchu Ru to the Polish reporter, “W’granatowym’ kraju.”

¹⁹ “W’granatowym’ kraju.”

they have to be sought in the historical circumstances, which were dramatic on the scale of the entire Korean nation, and remarkably unusual in the case of this particular family that strayed to Poland. Until 1945, when the Japanese occupation of Korea ended, Tonchu Ru remained essentially a Japanese citizen. As soon as the political situation changed, he would start emphasizing his Korean nationality with pride. Before the war, he undoubtedly studied at the Academy of Dentistry and certainly devoted himself to “the greatest—it seems—passion of his life, i.e. jiu-jitsu.”²⁰ There is also no doubt that the “slant-eyed little mister Tonchu-Ru”²¹ had many acquaintances and friends in Warsaw, he “paid visits” and was a familiar face, and his head was sculpted by Magdalena Gross.²² Two years after his conversation with the reporter exploring the “exotic” salons of Warsaw, he resolved his dilemmas by making a final choice between Poland and Japan. On Easter Monday 1937, at the church of St Michael in Warsaw, he married a Polish woman, the beautiful Andrea Otto, a student at the Warsaw School of Economics. The marriage certificate, which is held in the parish, provides a wealth of interesting information which can supplement or correct the fragmentary and unclear picture of the father and son’s fortunes. It gives us, among others, the bridegroom’s true place of birth, his address at the time of marriage, and the name and surname of his mother.²³ Still unanswered, however, are key questions, such as the true reason for the Korean family’s arrival and settlement in Poland.

It is only a doctoral dissertation entitled “Poland’s relations with the countries of the Korean Peninsula, 1948–2013,” defended a few years ago at the University of Warsaw, that proves helpful in this respect.²⁴ In the margins of his considerations, its author Kyunam Kim briefly mentions the fate of two Korean refugees, under whose surnames, misleading because they were Latinized according to two different patterns, Yoo Gyeongjip and Tonchu Ru are recognizable. The passage reads:

One particular figure was a Korean exile, Yoo Gyeongjip, who emigrated to Poland in 1920. His son had collaborated with An Junggeun, who assassinated the Japanese governor Ito Hirobumi in Harbin in 1909. Yoo Gyeongjip left Korea with his family, fleeing the repressions of the Japanese occupiers. His son was arrested by

²⁰ “W ‘granatowym’ kraju.”

²¹ “Japończyk Tonchu-Ru wyszkolił w dżiu-dżitsu 40 polskich policjantów.”

²² Mieczysław Wallis, *Magdalena Gross* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sztuka, 1957), fig. 2.

²³ Cf. note 14.

²⁴ Kim, “Stosunki Polski z państwami Półwyspu Koreańskiego.”

the Japanese police and sentenced to death. Yoo came to Warsaw via Russia. He lived at Nowy Świat Street in Warsaw and returned to Korea in 1936. His third son Yoo Dongju [i.e. Tonchu Ru], in turn, studied dentistry at the Medical Academy in Warsaw and received a diploma from this institution. He married a Polish woman who had saved him during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. He was a lecturer in Korean at the University of Warsaw from 1948. Having Polish citizenship, he helped Korean orphans from the DPRK residing in Poland during the Korean War (1950–1953). He visited Seoul during the 1988 Olympic Games and died in Warsaw in the same year.²⁵

This handful of condensed information comes from Tonchu Ru's own memoirs, published shortly after his death, in the crucial year of 1989, the time when the Cold War walls came down, borders opened up, and archives—and the resources of memory—became accessible.

The above version of events should be considered valid. The “lively, nimble, constantly smiling” dental student and promoter of eastern martial arts would therefore be a political refugee who was destined to spend his entire adult life in a country with a geo-strategic position as troublesome as Korea's. The “Korean-Polish parallels,”²⁶ discernible both at the level of historical fact and in the way of understanding the history of one's own nation, have been the object of scholarly reflection on more than one occasion. Reflections on historical and meta-historical affinities have also given rise to analogous images of the disastrous trap in which the Korean “shrimp” is caught between two “whales,” China and Japan, and of the way Poland is locked, just as unhappily, between two “mill wheels,” Russia and Germany.²⁷

This coincidence of location was something that Tonchu Ru had the opportunity to explore in the later years of his life, when his belief that “life is good here and life is good there” was repeatedly tested. Not long after he managed to open a private practice in Warsaw, another specter of war hung over Poland. At the beginning of April 1939, his name appeared again on the pages of the Polish capital's press, this time in an announcement reflecting the horror of those days: he is listed among the donors giving money “to strengthen Poland's defense.” The announcement reads: “Dr. Tonchu-Ru pledges 200 Polish zloty for the Air Force Loan.” The same amount was donated by the Photogravure Company Lux, and

²⁵ Kim, 29–30.

²⁶ Czój, “Korea – Polska Wschodu,” 129–139.

²⁷ Józef Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, and Marcei Burdelski, “Słowo wstępne,” in *Korea w oczach Polaków: Państwo – Społeczeństwo – Kultura*, ed. Józef Włodarski et al. (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2012), 9.

a half of this sum by an unnamed resident of Warsaw. The most moving, however, are the other two declarations: "Leszek Królewski, a pupil of class 1b of the public school no. 98 donates all his savings, 5 zloty 50 groszy, to the anti-aircraft defense fund," and "Krysia Orlińska, a six-year-old artist at the Ortyma Children's Theatre, donates her three years' wages at the theater, 100 zloty, to buy planes."²⁸ A few months later, the small and large donors, and with them Dr. Tonchu Ru, would share the terrifying fate of other inhabitants of German-bombarded Warsaw.

With the end of the II World War, another dramatic chapter began in the history of both Poland and "Poland of the East."²⁹ The People's Republic of Poland found itself behind the Iron Curtain, and Korea, which from 1910 to 1945 had been an integral part of the Japanese empire, fell victim to a new balance of power. As a result, it was divided, along the 38th parallel, into two spheres of influence: the Soviet and the American, reflecting "two political lines in relation to the colonial nations."³⁰ In 1948, while the mono-party model mandatory in the Eastern Bloc was being introduced in Poland, two separate, externally-controlled state organisms emerged on the Korean peninsula: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea. Two years later, the Korean Civil War broke out, while the deep darkness of Stalinism engulfed the People's Republic of Poland. Under the cover of this darkness, Communist propaganda carefully modulated the message concerning the bloody, fratricidal conflict. At the end of May 1951, on the eve of International Children's Day, the daily newspaper *Trybuna Ludu* reprinted an emotional proclamation by the DPRK Minister of Culture and Propaganda, Ho Chon-suk appealing for the rescue of Korean children. Among the drastic images of the crimes committed by "Truman's sadistic mercenaries" was the following message:

The war goes on. And each day of it means new thousands of murdered children. Korean mothers look at their little martyrs with eyes full of suffering and pain. Thousands and thousands of children have already died. And as long as our land is trodden by intervening strangers, a terrible threat of annihilation hangs over all children. This fact fills the hearts of all honest people on earth with outrage. Let the appeal of Korean mothers reach everywhere and echo loudly: Save our children, put an end to the invasion of the interveners, demand that the American child-killers be held accountable!³¹

²⁸ "Dla wzmocnienia obrony Polski," *Dobry wieczór! Kurier Czerwony*, no. 96 (1939): 4.

²⁹ Cf. Czoj, "Korea – Polska Wschodu."

³⁰ Quoted after Adam Leszczyński, "Wojna koreańska w propagandzie polskiej od czerwca do grudnia 1950 roku," *Przegląd Historyczny* 86, no. 1 (1995), 48.

³¹ Cho Chon-suk (Ho Chon-suk), "Ocalcie nasze dzieci!," *Trybuna Ludu*, no. 149 (1951): 3.

Dramatic appeals were successful and soon groups of orphaned Korean children numbering between one hundred and two hundred began to arrive, hungry and sick, in the brotherly countries of the socialist camp. The first group to reach Poland was directed to Gołotczyzna, a village near Ciechanów, from where it was soon transferred to Świder near Warsaw. The largest group, consisting of 1,270 children, arrived in the Lower Silesian village of Plakowice after hostilities in Korea had already ended.³² A large number of students came to Poland as well; they were given the opportunity to obtain diplomas at Polish universities. At the same time, a group of students began to study Korean as a second language at the already existing Department of Sinology at the University of Warsaw's Institute of Oriental Studies. Initially, their teacher was none other than Tadeusz Tonchu Ru, whose classes were attended by, among others, Halina Ogarek-Czój, the future "mother of Polish Korean studies."³³ In the autumn of 1953, he was replaced by a professional teacher sent from Pyongyang,³⁴ and Tonchu Ru was able to devote himself to the consultations required for the staging of the Korean fairy tales he had written down.

From the Adaptation to the Preview: Between Fairy Tale, Artistic Rendition, and Propagandistic Subtext

1. Art and Propaganda

Ho Chon-suk's string of gruesome descriptions of the actions of the "American interveners" opens with the following image:

On the road, a young mother lies on her back, her face bloody, mutilated. On her chest, an eight-month-old infant is lifting himself on his arms. He gazes at the beloved body, now almost cold, astonishment painted in his black eyes. He is not crying simply because he does not yet understand what death is... This photograph has appeared in the pages of many magazines. We would like to print it in millions of copies and distribute it throughout America: let American mothers see what atrocities their sons are committing in Korea!³⁵

³² This subject has been thoroughly investigated by Jolanta Kryszowata, a reporter, author of radio broadcasts and film documentaries. Her journalistic investigation is also described in a book, see Jolanta Kryszowata, *Skrzydło anioła: Historia tajnego ośrodka dla koreańskich sierot* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2013). See also Kryszowata, "Sieroty koreańskie," *Karta: Kwartalnik historyczny*, no. 42 (2004): 98–121, <https://www.publio.pl/karta.p495412.html>.

³³ "Matka polskiej koreanistyki: Halina Ogarek-Czój," Muzeum Historii sztuki, <https://muzeumhistoriisztuki.org/portfolio/matka-polskiej-koreanistyki-halina-ogarek-czój/>, accessed April 17, 2025.

³⁴ Cf. Halina Ogarek-Czój, "Studia koreanistyczne w Polsce," *Przegląd Orientalistyczny*, no. 3–4 (1998): 239–243.

³⁵ Cho, "Ocalcie nasze dzieci!"

To reinforce the message, the same issue of *Trybuna Ludu* published a report from a conference organized by the Commission of the Women's International Democratic Federation to investigate the crimes committed by the American and British interveners in Korea. Representatives of seventeen countries announced in it that "members of the Commission will tell the simple people of the whole world what they saw in Korea." The report, again saturated with anti-American rhetoric, ended with an emotional proclamation by the delegate from France. "Let French mothers and the mothers of other countries," she said, "know the truth about the terrible war in Korea, where people are killed by bombs, where soldiers of foreign countries kill children sleeping in their cradles."³⁶

The top-down controlled message about the Korean War, in which the figure of the mother took centre stage, found an echo in one of the canonical paintings of the era of Socialist Realism in Poland. Wojciech Fangor's *Korean Mother* (1951).³⁷ This painterly vision, a witness to a period when "a distant, unknown, culturally alien country suddenly—overnight—became a close 'comrade in battle,'"³⁸ seems born out of a reading of Ho Chon-suk's proclamation. Also the ten-minute films of the Polish Film Chronicle, screened in cinemas before each feature,³⁹ proved equally useful in this struggle, which was officially a struggle for peace and freedom. Short forms with telling titles (such as *Shame on American Génocidaires!*, *Shame on Murderers!* or *Children of Heroic Korea*) became a chronicle of "imperialist" crimes, and thus an excellent tool for the propaganda assault, all of which was accurately summarized by Adam Leszczyński:

Korea featured in almost every speech at the Committee for the Defence of Peace meetings, in every article or lecture on the world political situation. There were exhibitions, demonstrations and rallies in support of the Korean people, as well as demonstrations and rallies in protest against American aggression. Analytical articles, reports and denunciations appeared in the press (in *Trybuna Ludu* from June to December 1950—almost daily); a portrait of Kim Ir Sen was put up in many workplaces. Poems and songs were written, money and clothing for the Koreans were collected, resolutions condemning the aggression were passed by all officially

³⁶ "Niech matki na całym świecie poznają prawdę o wojnie w Korei gdzie najeźdźcy zabijają dzieci w kołyskach. Wypowiedzi członkini Komisji ŚDFK o zbrodniach interwencji amerykańsko-brytyjskich w Korei," *Trybuna Ludu*, no. 149 (1951): 2.

³⁷ Wojciech Fangor, *Korean Mother*, 1951, oil on canvas, National Museum in Warsaw, MPW 1777 MNW, <https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/pl/zbiory/449051>.

³⁸ Leszczyński, "Wojna koreańska," 48.

³⁹ Marta Maria Matusik, "Jesteśmy z wami, ludzie walczącej Korei: Obraz Korei Północnej w Polskiej Kronice Filmowej 1947–1984," *Ogrody Nauk i Sztuk* 5, no. 5 (2015): 56, <https://doi.org/10.15503/onis2015.562.570>.

organised social groups—from trade unions, scouts and the Association of War Invalids of the Republic of Poland to patriotic priests.⁴⁰

Intellectuals gave lectures, the working class increased its productive capacity for Korea, and “committed artists” protested in word and image. In his poem *Trzydziesty ósmy równoleżnik* (The 38th Parallel), Tadeusz Różewicz panted a poetic image of mothers burying their children “in shallow pits dug with their fingers,”⁴¹ while Adam Ważyk contrasted the thoughtless and cruel consumers of Coca-Cola with those who “drink the water of hope.”⁴² The future Nobel Prize winner Wisława Szymborska wrote: “The boy’s eyes were gouged out. The eyes were gouged out. Because those eyes were angry and slanted.”⁴³ For obvious reasons, the subject that resonated the most strongly on the scale of the entire society was that of maltreated children, and not only poems but also books were devoted to it. One of them was *Dom odzyskanego dzieciństwa* (The House of Regained Childhood, 1953) by Marian Brandys, a fictionalized account of the first group of Korean orphans who came to Poland.⁴⁴ In 1956, Kim Il-sung himself visited these children in Poland, and their presence was exploited for political purposes in propaganda. This was also experienced by the Gdańsk theatre crew, who willy-nilly fell into the orbit of these complex tensions. Today, the “theatre of regained childhood”⁴⁵ which they attempted to create for orphans from the fraternal country reveals the astonishing fabric of induced Korean hysteria, in which propagandistic slogans were combined with true outbursts of the heart, and short-term political goals with sincere human empathy.

2. Fairy Tale and Art

The play, originally titled *Kręćcie się kamienie, sypcie białą sól* (Turn, Stones, Sprinkle the White Salt), was based on a Korean folktale that explains why the water in the sea is salty. In a letter addressed to “Comrades, Theatre Managers, Directors, and Reviewers,” Natalia Bojarska explained the circumstances of taking up this theme, writing:

⁴⁰ Leszczyński, “Wojna koreańska,” 48.

⁴¹ Quoted after Estera Czoj (Choi Sung Eun), “Koreańska wojna domowa w polskich socrealistycznych utworach literackich,” in *Korea w oczach Polaków*, 549.

⁴² Czoj, “Koreańska wojna domowa,” 550.

⁴³ Czoj, 548.

⁴⁴ Marian Brandys, *Dom odzyskanego dzieciństwa* (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1953).

⁴⁵ This is my paraphrase of the title of the Brandys’s book.

Similar themes are, after all, also found in the Polish fairy tale about the three brothers and the salt grinder. The reasons that prompted me to work on a Korean fairy tale are doubtlessly quite clear—the torment of the Korean people is reason enough for everyone who can, in the form available to them, to try to do something for these people, even if only in the most modest way. I had the good fortune to come into contact with the Koreans and through them, with the stories of the life, customs and legends of the Korean folk. So, I decided to adapt one of the Korean fairy tales for the stage, in order to show this beautiful, distant country onstage and thus bring it close to the Polish audience. Hence, the play is, perhaps, somewhat overloaded with references to customs and with digressions having relatively little to do with the narrative of the fairy tale, but intended to give the audience as much insight into the life of the Korean people as possible.⁴⁶

The aforementioned “overload” is certainly discernible in the text of the play, whose heavily marked typescripts, fortunately extant, record the struggle for the “effective duration of the play.”⁴⁷ The program indicates that the narrative was eventually divided into eight scenes, a prologue and an epilogue.⁴⁸ According to Bojarska’s original idea, however, the construction of the play was slightly different.⁴⁹ At the beginning, the announcer was to appear in front of the curtain, equipped with a large salt shaker. His task was to welcome the young audience and gently introduce them to the unfamiliar subject of the lack of salt mines in the “far, far away Korea, called by its inhabitants the land of Joseon.” As the lights faded out, the announcer began to tell the story of a small and poor fishing village where two neighbors lived. Bok-Tong was “hardworking, good and gentle, respectful of grey hair, favorably disposed towards people and animals.” Lu-San-Ok, on the other hand, was “lazy and sluggish, his heart was full of anger and envy, he loved no one and dreamt of a lucky stroke of fate that would elevate him above others by endowing him with wealth and good fortune.”⁵⁰

The actual narrative of the play began with the two fishermen going to the town to buy salt. In the town square, everyone waits impatiently for the salt merchants to arrive. The merchants finally show up and set a price for their merchandise

⁴⁶ APG, sign. 10/1623/51, Natalia Bojarska, *Autora słów i objaśnień kilkoro* (A few words and explanations from the author), fol. 1(2).

⁴⁷ According to the meeting protocol, on November 10, the special commission consisting of art director Ali Bunsch, director Natalia Gołębska, local communist party cell secretary Zofia Kowalewska, local council chairman Czesław Mitkowski, dramaturge Lech Bądkowski, and director Szczepan Paluszkiwicz “determined the performance *Arirang* by N. Bojarska would be 2 hours and 4 minutes long.” See APG, sign. 10/1623/631, Protokół, fol. 387.

⁴⁸ APG, sign. 10/1623/75, *Arirang* performance program, 7.

⁴⁹ APG, sign. 10/1623/51, Natalia Bojarska, *Kręćcie się kamienie, sypcie białą sól*, fol. 4(5)–72(73).

⁵⁰ Bojarska, *Kręćcie się kamienie*, fol. 6(7).



Bok-Tong, O-Men-Chi, and Pak, puppet design for *Arirang*

DESIGNED BY ALI BUNSCH, STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

appropriate to the huge demand they have found on the spot. The kind Bok-Tong cannot afford to buy salt, so he tries to sell his festive clothes first and when that fails, he asks his neighbor for a loan. The wicked Lu-San-Ok refuses. In the second scene, the two protagonists find themselves in the gloomy chamber of an inn house, where they have come to spend the night before the return journey.

The fishermen and villagers who have dragged themselves into town for the market, and who have been detained here by night, sit at tiny tables, on mats stretched directly on the floor. The illumination of the chamber is provided by oil lamps hanging on the walls. The seated people talk in low voices, calmly. They take their time sipping a drink made of rice.⁵¹

While they are discussing “the plight of the people in the beautiful land of Joseon,” someone brings up the story of the poor Lu-En-Ru, who, having gone

⁵¹ Bojarska, fol. 15(16).



Lu-San-Ok and fishermen, puppet design for *Arirang*

DESIGNED BY ALI BUNSCH, STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

into debt to a certain rich man, lost his land and cottage to him. Having “too proud a heart . . . to endure the humiliation and the hard life of a tenant farmer,” Lu-En-Ru packed his meagre possessions in a bundle and left the village. He decided to go to the other side of the Arirang mountain and thus to cross the border of the beautiful land of Joseon. At this point, there is a distinct stir: “Sympathetic nodding of heads, sighs. Those present become silent, thoughtful.” In the midst of the “painful reverie,” someone intones *Arirang*, “an ancient song of those disinherited and wronged for centuries.”⁵²

⁵² Bojarska, fol. 16(17). Bojarska explained the social background to the play in her foreword to the program: “I tried to incorporate as many authentic motifs and images related to customs as possible into the plot of the play, which is why I included the song *Arirang*. To understand its significance, we must go back to feudal times. Back then, a smallholder—a Korean peasant—was completely dependent on the forces of nature. If the harvest failed for several consecutive years, he would inevitably fall into debt. This debt would result in the loss of his small field, his home, and all his possessions. He could lease his former property from the creditor, who was usually a landowner or kulak, but this made him and his children dependent and reduced them to poverty. The lease terms stipulated that out of every ten parts of the harvest, seven had to be given to the lord, and only three could be kept. Another way out of this situation was to leave everything behind and set out into the world. Most emigrated to Manchuria or the steppes of Mongolia, which borders Korea to the north. The road along the mountainous northern border led through a peak called Arirang. The pauper who went into exile inevitably



The inn, set design for Scene Three of *Arirang*

DESIGNED BY ALI BUNSCH, STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

In the next scene, Bok-Tong and Lu-San-Ok are walking back to their village. By the forest path they have taken, a little hare runs away from a fox. The frightened animal jumps onto the path and seeing Bok-Tong in front of him, leaps straight into his embrace. Bok-Tong chases the fox away and then lets the hare go, which angers Lu-San-Ok, who would have liked to sell the animal's skin. At this, the hare speaks in a human voice, "seriously and with dignity," and declares that although he is still young, he knows how to distinguish good from evil. "You are good! I know for sure that a reward awaits you for this!"⁵³ he says to an astonished Bok-Tong. Hearing this strange prediction, Lu-San-Ok begins to clumsily court his neighbor. At that moment, the Old Woman appears on the path, dragging a heavy sack. Seeing her weariness, Bok-Tong shares a rice cake and "a drop of wine" with her and then, heedless of Lu-San-Ok's protests, offers to help her carry the sack. "Livid and fuming," Lu-San-Ok leaves and soon disappears in the forest. Bok-Tong and the Old Woman continue along the mountain path. At the top of the mountain, she

perished. They were killed by poverty and yearning for their homeland. In Korean, "crossing the Arirang" means making a hopeless and irreversible decision. *Arirang*, the song of voluntary exiles, is as old as the suffering of the Korean people." See APG, sign. 10/1623/75, Bojarska, "Stowo od autora," 5.

⁵³ APG, sign. 10/1623/51, Bojarska, *Kręćcie się kamienie*, fol. 26(27).



Fox, Old Woman, and Hare, puppet design for *Arirang*

DESIGNED BY ALI BUNSCH, STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

orders Bok-Tong to open the sack. It turns out to contain two millstones, which the Old Woman gives to Bok-Tong as a gift. She instructs him to put the stones in a boat, sail out to sea, and utter the incantation, “Turn, stones, sprinkle the white salt.” While a stunned Bok-Tong wonders aloud if he is dreaming awake, there comes a violent gust of wind, which snatches the Old Woman and carries her away. Amidst the gale, her words can be heard: “For what I have done wrong in my life. . . A long life. . . A wasted one. . . You will make amends. . . You will give back to the people what was given to the people.”⁵⁴

In the fourth scene, Bok-Tong goes out to sea and tries out the spell. It works: the stones begin to turn and salt is sprinkled all around. Upon returning to the village, Bok-Tong announces that no one will ever run out of salt again. Having realised his mistake, Lu-San-Ok offers his services as an intermediary for the sale of the precious commodity, promising himself to make a lot of money in the process. But Bok-Tong declares: “Salt is not for sale! I will not trade in what

⁵⁴ Bojarska, fol. 32(33).



KRĘCIE SIĘ KAMIEŃ RYS. 7.
ZAGRODA BOK-TONGA SCENA 6.

SKALA 1:20

3.53. 198.

Bok-Tong's homestead, set design for Scene Six of *Arirang*

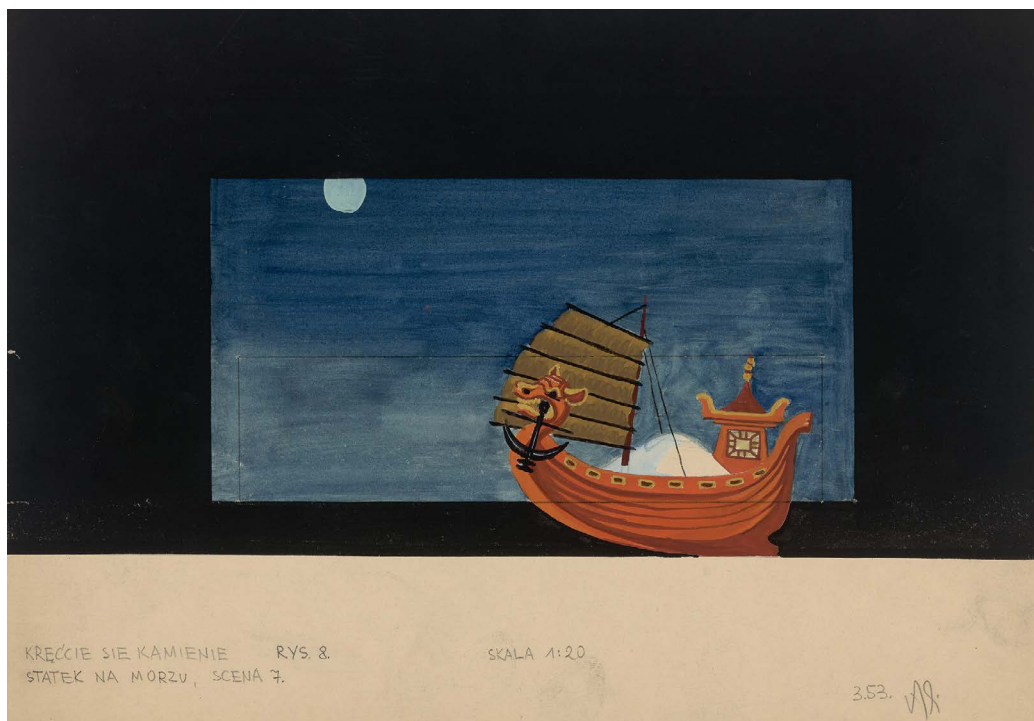
DESIGNED BY ALI BUNSCH, STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

is essential to life! You will not turn me into a salt merchant! Let them come whoever wishes and let them take as much salt as they want.”⁵⁵

In the fifth scene, Bok-Tong persuades his wife that the salt should be distributed so that “those nasty traders” cease to come to the land of Joseon and so that no one has to leave the market empty-handed. “A happy fortune can only be earned by one’s own work and merit,” he explains to the bewildered O-Men-Chi, and when the latter tries to resist by saying that the Old Woman gave the stones specifically to him, he replies: “She gave them to me, but not for me.”⁵⁶ Bok-Tong gathers the whole village together to discuss how to use the precious gift in a worthy manner. After long and heated deliberations, Bok-Tong welcomes the input offered by the Old Man: “We give salt, we give our labour on the land, and for this, let everyone who comes to take it bring us the harvest of their toil. The farmer will give us a bit of rice, or a piece of cloth, the craftsman

⁵⁵ Bojarska, fol. 37(38).

⁵⁶ Bojarska, fol. 38(39).



The ship at sea, set design for Scene Seven of *Airang*

DESIGNED BY ALI BUNSCH, STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

will sew a shoe, the potter will bring a pot. Whatever they can afford, they will share with us for our toil....”⁵⁷ With this resolution, the curtain falls.

The sixth scene opens with a view of two homesteads by the sea shore, one neat and the other neglected. In the neat one lives Bok-Tong with O-Men-Chi and their son Pak. The neglected one once belonged to Lu-San-Ok, who, to the astonishment of his neighbours, sold it and bought a ship. As night falls and the whole village sleeps, Lu-San-Ok “creeps towards Bok-Tong’s hut like a rat.”⁵⁸ He carries a sack with the stones out of it and runs to the shore. In the next scene, Lu-San-Ok is busy on the deck of his ship under the cover of a moonlit night. He drops anchor and utters the incantation he had overheard. The stones begin to turn and grind salt, and Lu-San-Ok is triumphant. However, it soon becomes apparent that he does not know the second

⁵⁷ Bojarska, fol. 45(46).

⁵⁸ Bojarska, fol. 52(53).

Peasants and carts of salt traders, puppet and prop design for *Airirang*

DESIGNED BY ALI BUNSCH, STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

part of the spell, the one that stops the stones. The heap of salt is steadily growing. The ship slowly begins to sink and finally goes to the bottom, taking Lu-San-Ok and the enchanted stones with it. The action of the eighth scene takes place at the bottom of the sea. On the sand, there are shells and “slowly strolling starfish.” The “Great Fish sits carelessly, yawning again and again,” on a mossy stone, talking to a crab.⁵⁹ The sea creatures watch the sinking ship and the stones falling down to the bottom of the sea. Behind them, “as they grind without a moment’s break, a trickle of salt spreads in the water like a veil.”⁶⁰ The sea creatures perceive with horror that the water is changing its taste. Amid pained exclamations: “It’s salty!” the curtain falls.

In the original version of the play, the image of the seabed is followed by the ninth scene, the action of which takes place in the central square of the village. Fisherwomen sit on benches under the trees mending nets, while visitors from

⁵⁹ Bojarska, fol. 57(58).

⁶⁰ Bojarska, fol. 60(61).

far away who have come to collect salt, walk to and fro beside them. There is a conversation about Lu-San-Ok, who died “because he was as wicked as he was stupid.” The newcomers complain that they would go home empty-handed, and the women lament that “poverty and sorrow will return, the abominable traders will return, the merchants and lords will get more potent.” At this, the Old Man speaks up, indicating that all is not lost, for the village people have discovered the power of unity, and “it is not in the power of one man, or even of many men, to change what the working people have learnt.”⁶¹ At this point, Bok-Tong rushes into the square with a cauldron filled with water and declares that the water in the sea has turned salty. Nobody believes him, so he tells the people to light a fire under the cauldron and cook a handful of rice in it. The water boils, but O-Men-Chi has forgotten to throw in the rice. While the assembled people frantically discuss how to get the salt out of the sea, the water boils away, leaving, to everyone’s astonishment, a fine salt deposit. The happy people ponder how to use the discovery on a larger scale without wasting fuel. While the adults are futilely deliberating, there come the children with another extraordinary piece of news: the little boy Pak has found salt on shells and roots drying in the sun. The villagers quickly grasp the significance of this discovery and decide to build vats so that the water collected in them would leave a salt deposit as it dries in the sun. While the gathering discusses technical improvements to this solution, darkness falls and the children demand a bedtime story. “The whole length and breadth of the land of Joseon, old grannies always tell children a story,” argues Pak. An old lady is finally persuaded and begins her tale of how “a long time ago, or maybe not so long ago, in the beautiful land of Joseon, in a small, small village on the shores of the great sea, there lived two fishermen.”⁶² With this structural bracket and an effective *da capo al fine* signal, the curtain slowly falls.

3. Adaptations and Negotiations

In the letter quoted above, Bojarska made it very clear that the play as she proposed it was, theatrically, a raw material. Thus, while the full text could be performed in live-actor theatres, in puppet theatres it could be freely abridged. She stated that “the play is written with some room to spare and whole parts of it are destined to be cut, depending on where it is staged.”⁶³ She also left clear instructions as to the locations

⁶¹ Bojarska, fol. 64(65).

⁶² Bojarska, fol. 72(73).

⁶³ APG, sign. 10/1623/51, Bojarska, *Autora słów i objaśnień kilkoro*, fol. 2(3).

Boys, Grandmother, and Girl, puppet design for *Arirang*

DESIGNED BY ALI BUNSCH, STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

and sizes of any cutting. In her view, Scene One was indisputably necessary as an introduction to the environment and as an elucidation of “the ground on which all further conflict grows, namely the lack of salt mines on Korea.” Scene Two, on the other hand, could be “removed in its entirety, as it does not fundamentally bring anything new to the plot, but rather paints certain social issues and complaints.” Bojarska noted that it may be reasonable to play that scene “in mining centers, as the issues it deals with are close to miners working in whatever mines (salt, coal, ore) there might be.” This classification seems all the more interesting since *Arirang*, the “song of the displaced,” which ultimately gave the Gdańsk production its title, appeared precisely in the second scene. According to Bojarska, the third scene, where the plot is set in motion, and the fourth, in which “the tale happens,” were irremovable. The fifth scene, in turn, in which the kind Bok-Tong explained to his practical wife how it was decent to act, could be replaced by several utterances in the adjacent scenes. “It makes sense to play it in agricultural centers, as it draws all too many comparisons and analogies with the class struggle in the countryside;

it was, in fact, written in this thought in mind,” Bojarska noted. Scenes sixth and seventh were necessary, according to her, although they could undergo certain corrections. The eighth and ninth were interlinked: according to Bojarska, the eighth scene could be the point at which “the play may end, unless there is enough room to play the last part, because this is where the fairy tale is concluded.” It could also be completely deleted, as long as the ninth scene was retained, which, “again, can either not be played at all as it goes beyond the framework of the fairy tale by telling what happened next, or it can be played to explain to the audience the meaning of the fairy tale and its practical application, so to speak.”⁶⁴

Having thus explained the possible ways in which such flexible theatrical raw material could be used, Bojarska remarked:

Obviously, the author humbly asks you not to make changes and shifts behind her back, but solely in gracious agreement with her. Since, as I indicated earlier, I am anxious for the play to bring the spectator closer to the country in which the narrative takes place, I ask you to seek my advice, and perhaps even, through me, the advice of Dr. Tonchu-Ru, a Korean, to whom I owe most of my knowledge of Korea, as well as my knowledge of its fairy tales, in matters of all background elements, i.e. decoration, costumes, etc. The few issues I have raised above certainly do not exhaust all possible doubts or queries. In any case, however, I am at your service for personal clarification.⁶⁵

Bojarska's declared readiness to collaborate with stage practitioners was soon put to a heavy test. When the State Puppet Theatre in Gdańsk became interested in the play, both she and Dr. Tonchu Ru were pulled into an unexpectedly intensive process of consulting and revising the fairy tale about the beautiful land of Joseon. The first phase of the struggle involved adapting the text to the requirements of the puppet stage. This work was supervised by Aleksandra Grzyska, who in the 1952/1953 season was employed at the Gdańsk theatre as director.⁶⁶ The effect of her efforts to “make it possible to stage this play for

⁶⁴ Bojarska, *Autora słów*.

⁶⁵ Bojarska, fol. 2(3).

⁶⁶ According to the original plan, it was Grzyska who was to direct the play. Gołębska replaced her because Grzyska decided to leave the Gdańsk theatre as she was to be employed as the art director of the Guliwer Theatre in Warsaw on March 15, 1953, cf. Marek Waszkiel, *Dzieje teatru lalek w Polsce 1944–2000* (Warszawa: Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza, 2012), 304. On January 31, 1953, the members of the art council of the Gdańsk theater met to consider the matter. The protocol from that meeting read: “In his opening remarks, Administrator Bunsch stated that Grzyska's departure from the theater complicates the execution of the plan. Ms. Gołębska may fill the position of chief director with a quota of three plays. The fourth play may be directed by someone from outside the theater as a commissioned work. Ms. [Juliana] Catkowska is also

children and in a puppet theatre” can be seen thanks to documents that have fortunately survived, held at the Museum—Tarnowski Castle in Tarnobrzeg. The main desiderata of the “literary reworking” are summarized there as follows:

Above all, enliven the plot, then bring it closer to the child by involving children in the action. The dialogues should definitely be shortened and their language simplified to make them comprehensible to children; the whole play should be made more lively and cheerful. Clearly separate the fairy tale from reality. Give the play more fairy-tale elements. Convey socio-political issues simply and intelligibly to a child, based on the schools’ methodological experience in this area.⁶⁷

Following this introduction, Grzyska made a number of specific comments relating to particular sections of Bojarska’s play. At the beginning, she suggested adding an image of children playing. The children are flying kites. Their game is interrupted by their grandmother, as it is time for them to go to bed. Before bedtime, “as is the custom in Korea, the grandmother tells her grandchildren a story.” In the second scene the children, falling into sleep, see the beginning of the fairy-tale plot, i.e. the scene of the neighbors’ departure to the market. According to Grzyska’s idea, Bok-Tong is accompanied by his young son Pak. On the way, they meet the displaced people singing *Arirang*. The scene in the inn chamber, about whose necessity the author herself had doubts, is thus deleted. In the third scene, the characters are already at the fair. Bok-Tong fails to sell his clothes and has no money to buy salt. In the version amended by Grzyska, the father is helped by his son. The little Pak tries unsuccessfully to sell the kites that he has been making with his mother. In the fourth scene, Bok-Tong and Pak return home empty-handed. They are accompanied by Lu-San-Ok, who carries a sack of salt. The scene of the fox chasing the hare is repeated, the only correction being that it is Pak who rescues the animal. The hare thanks the child for help and foretells good fortune for him. The Old Woman arrives. Lu-San-Ok

being considered for the position. Whether or not to recommend the fourth play to Director Gołębska is open to discussion. Director Grzyska declares that she wants to leave for Warsaw before March 1st. She agrees to prepare the documentation for the Korean fairy tale for Director Gołębska. She even suggests commuting from Warsaw for several rehearsals, if necessary. Director Gołębska agrees without reservation. Director Paluszkiewicz suggests continuing work with only Gołębska and her assistants.” However, Paluszkiewicz then shares his concerns about Gołębska’s health, stating that he sees “a certain danger in Gołębska’s illness continuing to affect her work, even if only her assistant were to conduct the rehearsals.” Grzyska then reported on the state of her preparatory work for the play *Kręćcie się kamienie*, reading from a prepared outline. The discussion focused on whether the play should incorporate a fairy-tale element or be staged in a realistic manner. Director Bunsch concluded the discussion by proposing that, due to the importance of the setting, all of Ms. Grzyska’s material should be rewritten and presented to the entire artistic council. See APG, sign. 10/1623/1, Protocol from the theatre art council meeting, Jan. 31, 1953, fol. 75.

⁶⁷ The Tarnowski Family Castle in Tarnobrzeg (henceforward: МЗТТ), sign. МНМТ/4722, Propozycje przeróbki literackiej *Baśni koreańskiej* N. Bojarskiej wg Aleksandry Grzyskiej [Proposals for a literary reworking of the *Korean Fairy Tale* by N. Bojarska according to Aleksandra Grzyska], Gdańsk, Feb. 10, 1952, fol. 1(9)–2(10).

scoffs at Bok-Tong's kindness and leaves. The Old Woman presents Bok-Tong with a precious gift. In the fifth scene, Pak goes to sea with his father and reminds him of what the spell is. When the salt appears, Bok-Tong declares that he intends to give it to the villagers. The joyful news spreads owing to the children. There is a village council. In the sixth scene, a delegation from another village arrives, asking for salt, "they come in a cart, unload packs and sacks; the children help with the work." A jealous Lu-San-Ok steals the enchanted stones from Bok-Tong's hut. In the next scene, he sails out to sea and sinks with his ship and the stones. Grzyska recommended softening the horror of this scene so as "not to frighten or depress the children too much." She also modified the tone of the eighth scene, pointing out that it might as well be deleted. The underwater scene, if it were to be played, would be playful and grotesque. When the sea creatures perceive that the water in the sea is getting salty, "a sea elder or some such character typical of Korea's tales appears and tells the fish how much fun it will be for them to live in the salty sea." In the ninth scene, the sorrows of the dejected villagers are dispelled by the appearance of children with "salty" seashells. Having grasped the significance of this discovery, "the villagers decide to form a cooperative" and the children, pleased with themselves, ask their grandmother for a story.⁶⁸

Several typescripts of Bojarska's play have survived in the State Archive in Gdańsk. With or without a prologue, in eight scenes or nine, with or without an epilogue, and in many plot variants; dozens of pages document months of struggling with the text. The exhaustive process of correcting the story following other people's recommendations was also reported by Bojarska herself in an interesting letter to Ali Bunsch. In its opening, explaining her prolonged lack of input, she admitted that she was dissatisfied with the first version of the corrections and had to postpone the work. The letter indicates that it was written to accompany the next, revised version, which Bojarska considered final. "The play in the current version seems to me to be completely acceptable and sufficient. I wouldn't want to change anything anymore, because I think it all holds together," she wrote. Then, with slight irony and palpable impatience, she addressed the various revisions and interventions one by one. First, she settled the contentious issue of the play's beginning:

In the prologue we explain, sufficiently, I think, everything that needs to be explained in terms of economy, as well as point out clearly that what follows is a fairy tale and only a fairy tale. It is your task, Ali-Sir, to clearly demarcate the prologue from the rest of the story with the help of art; then the issue will become completely

⁶⁸ Propozycje przeróbki, fol. 1(9)–2(10).

Market at the city gate, Scene Two of *Arirang*

STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

clear and legible and no one will accuse us of fooling the “little ones” by filling their heads with fairy tales. What follows is also abridged and condensed. If Basia still deletes this or that point she finds unwieldy, this will not cause a catastrophe.⁶⁹

The diminutive “Basia” refers to Natalia Gołębska, the director of the play, who was “called Barbara in everyday life,”⁷⁰ with whom too Bojarska had to debate each successive scene. It transpires from the letter that it was the resolution of the final scene that caused the producers the most trouble. Bojarska herself summed up the discussion as follows:

In the end, I decided that all epilogues were garbage and a fib. The ending must be the scene at the bottom of the sea and this will be perfectly fine. In the present prologue, the issue is presented in such a way that we have no reason to go through the whole thing again in the epilogue, which is an artificial and artistically abortive extension.⁷¹

In the subsequent sentences, she also referred to the idea of including a ballet scene in the finale, which Gołębska advocated and perhaps invented. Bojarska was against it, and argued:

⁶⁹ МЗТТ, sign. МНМТ/4722, Natalia Bojarska's letter to Ali Bunsch, April–July 1953, fol. 11.

⁷⁰ Cf. „Natalia Gołębska: Rozmowę przeprowadziła Eugenia Kochanowska,” *Dziennik Bałtycki: Gdynia*, no. 73 (1956), <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/232107/natalia-golebska>.

⁷¹ Bojarska's letter, fol. 12.

In wanting to close the show with the sea bottom, we cannot limit ourselves to ballet only, as it was intended. If it were a live ballet, then we could still be tempted to have this ending, but ballet is in its essence a symbolic and conventional thing, a puppet is also a conventional object, so if we accumulate these conventionalities, we will close the play with a great misunderstanding and a completely illegible solution. In addition, what kind of technique is required to move the puppets so as to clearly and unambiguously convey the meaning and content of the fish scene using only music and gesture, even limiting it to the essential point, i.e. the stones that grind the salt getting to the bottom of the sea...? Do you imagine, Ali-Sir, that this would work? I, being somewhat aware of our capabilities, claim that it would not. Maybe Obraztsov, who rehearses one piece for 1 to 1.5 years, could try it. Not we, who have 4 months or less.⁷²

Bojarska's critical remarks on the trap of piling up conventional elements and the limitations of the modest Polish stage make it clear that there were tensions and misunderstandings between her and the director:

If this is the final scene, it cannot be devoid of text. This is where Basia will jump up about a foot and a half because she "does not appreciate" the text for some reason. But I don't think she's right. She shouldn't be so picky, and may God grant that she never has to deal with weaker verses in theater. I've read it myself a couple of times and given it to a few people to read, yet nobody sees anything "scandalous" that Basia found there. . . . Ali-Sir, please, convince Basia somehow. Let her approve of this scene; otherwise, we'll have to find a different solution. Those epilogues and similar nonsense make the whole thing totally "non-artistic," isn't this obvious? Do you have the text for the fish? If not, write to me, and I will send it to you. As for the complaint that fish talk—this is just a fairy tale, after all!⁷³

4. Consultation, Diplomacy, Implementation

The following phases of work on the staging proved even more arduous and absorbing, and what was supposed to be "just a fairy tale" turned out to be an undertaking that required some diplomatic maneuverings.⁷⁴ The subsequent

⁷² Bojarska's letter, fol. 12.

⁷³ Bojarska's letter, fol. 12–13.

⁷⁴ These problems are best evidenced by the fact that the premiere was delayed by a few months in relation to the originally planned date, i.e. June 30, 1953. Cf. АРГ, sign. 10/1623/1, the repertoire plan sent to the Program Department of the Central Administration of Theaters at the Ministry of Art and Culture on December 31, 1952, fol. 105.

part of Bojarska's letter to Bunsch contain echoes of those struggles. It reads: 'The next matter is the children—we have a permit to see them on the 22nd and 23rd, that is Friday and Saturday next week. Have Basia be here on Friday, okay? That is what we agreed on with Dobrzański.'⁷⁵ The children in question were Korean orphans from the educational centre in Świder, whom the production team visited during the preparations for the premiere. The minutes of the meeting of the Art Council of the Gdańsk theatre on 15 June 1953 contain information on this subject. The relevant section reads:

Citizen Gołębska requests that the following persons go to Świder for consultation with Korean children: Snarska Monika, Grzesik Józef, Zarzecki Michał, Gosk Jan. Director Paluszkiwicz raises no objections to this and indicates the need to see the Korean Army Song and Dance Ensemble while in Warsaw.⁷⁶

These visits, aimed at obtaining a multi-level consultation of the fairy-tale matter, were also mentioned by Bojarska in the play's program, where in one breath she listed all those involved in the process: "We plagued the indefatigable Doctor Tonchu-Ru with requests for consultations, we gave the Embassy employees no peace, we pestered the instructors of the Korean children at Świder, Han Sin-Won and Czan."⁷⁷ The latter, "Professor Czan," is also found in the list of guests invited to the play's premiere⁷⁸ and in the important report by Jerzy Dobrzański.⁷⁹ The composer wrote:

I received help from a fellow musician from Korea, Czan, a tutor to the Korean children at Świder. He explained to me, to a large extent, the emotional and performative qualities of Korean music and provided me with rich material in the form of songs performed by the choir of his tutees.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Bojarska's letter, fol. 13.

⁷⁶ APG, sign. 10/1623/1, Protocol from the theatre art council meeting, June 15, 1953, fol. 72. "Citizen" (Polish: *obywatel/obywatelka*) was an official form of address in the period.

⁷⁷ Bojarska, "Słowo od autora," 3.

⁷⁸ APG, sign. 10/1623/631, Zaproszenia, fol. 390.

⁷⁹ The composer's interesting text about how the soundtrack to the play was created had been intended for the theatre program. However, the Central Theatre Management at the Ministry of Art and Culture failed to endorse Dobrzański's article and the text was withdrawn from print at the last minute. Director Jerzy Pański's justification for the decision reads: "The article is of a theoretical nature and thus its usefulness is limited to audiences with some musical training and culture. We consider it unproductive to include such an article in a program that is intended to make the issues touched upon in the play more accessible and clearer for young people and the average adult audience." See APG, sign. 10/1623/631, a letter from the Central Theater Administration of the Ministry of Art and Culture, fol. 386.

⁸⁰ APG, sign. 10/1623/631, Jerzy Dobrzański, *Słowo od kompozytora*, fol. 1(383)–2(384).

In order for these instructive meetings to take place, the play's producers had to make various arrangements, taking into account the complicated diplomatic protocol. Bojarska, who after the end of the war had decided to pursue a career as a civil servant, personally blazed the trail on the ministerial level.⁸¹ It soon became apparent that among all the people involved, it was she, with her knowledge of the realities, who was the most adept at navigating the intersection of politics and bureaucracy. The rest of the team had some spectacular stumbles in this area, as is more than evident from one of Bojarska's letters to Bunsch:

What a mess you have made with going through government officials! For crying out loud! Did I not tell you, such matters are never brought up at below a deputy minister. I was traipsing from office to office for a week. If we had tried to deal with the Embassy in the same way, we wouldn't be there yet!⁸²

In the end, despite some tactical errors, contacts were successfully set in motion, bringing heaps of valuable data regarding the land of Joseon. The play's producers later emphasized that the information material was obtained through "live reports" from the Koreans themselves. This was made clear in the play's program: "Live people were actually the only source of our facts on Korea," Bojarska assured the readers in the author's note,⁸³ while in his text entitled "Miejsce spotkania" (A Meeting Place), Bunsch wrote: "We obtained documentary material almost exclusively 'live,' from the stories told by the Koreans themselves, from the performances of the People's Army ensemble, from the common-room activities at the Korean children's camp. Almost nothing else besides that."⁸⁴ The reasons why the producers of *Arirang* relied solely on oral accounts were explained to the readers by Bojarska:

In our search, we discovered a terrible thing, one that cannot be believed until actually encountered. The Korean culture, which is a few thousand years old, has been destroyed, first by the Japanese occupiers and then by American vandals who tried to finish the job. We wanted to look at Korean books, illustrations, reproductions of paintings, sculptures, architecture, and we received the invariable answer: there is none, it does not exist.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Beata Kotasiak-Wójcik, "'Bajki koreańskie' Natalii Marczak-Bojarskiej", *Dzikoviana: Rocznik Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Tarnobrzega* 2 (2016): 202–203.

⁸² Bojarska's letter, fol. 13.

⁸³ Bojarska, "Słowo od autora," 3.

⁸⁴ АРГ, sign. 10/1623/75, Ali Bunsch, "Miejsce spotkania," in *Arirang* performance program, 8.

⁸⁵ Bojarska, "Słowo od autora," 4.

In order to move the reader and spectator even more strongly, she referred to the native cultural heritage:

Imagine that the Wawel Castle, Matejko's paintings, Kochanowski's and Mickiewicz's poems have ceased to exist, and more, that there are no Polish books, no photographs, that everything up to the last copy has been meticulously sought and destroyed, all that is left are references in the histories of neighboring countries and what living people have been able to store in their memories.⁸⁶

Both Bojarska and Bunsch saw their work on *Arirang* in terms of a mission to safeguard the remains of the vanishing beauty of the Land of Morning Freshness. Bunsch diagnosed the existing situation as follows:

We know very little about Korea. Our contacts with it date back only a few years, but they are very special. After all, Korean children, victims of the dirty war, are being brought up in our country. Cadres of Korean technical intelligentsia are developing here to return home and, in the days of peace, build their young country. The old one, including a few thousand years of national culture, was meticulously destroyed during the many years of occupation by Japanese imperialism, and the American aggressor tried to complete this work of destruction.⁸⁷

The action of rescuing Korean orphans—commendable, although politically conditioned and embedded in the wider context of wartime propaganda—led to a narrowly focused but multi-level rapprochement between the two distant peoples. It facilitated the revival of old intuitions and recognitions about historical parallels between Poland and Korea, which in the new reality blended seamlessly into the official narrative of the bloody war in the “fraternal country.” It was in the area of these amalgamated meanings that the *Arirang* artists operated, making key artistic decisions in this particular socio-political context. Bunsch talked about this in detail in the play's program:

Korea: a country about whose history we in Poland know almost nothing. Yet its fate is as clear to us as that of our own country. A nation shedding blood in defense

⁸⁶ Bojarska. The tone of this paragraph was originally intended to be much harsher, as evidenced by the surviving draft of the text which reads: “It doesn't exist. It was burned on pyres in Nuremberg and Auschwitz. All that remains are mentions in neighboring countries' histories and what people have managed to preserve in their memories. Our cultural heritage would probably be like this today had our liberation depended on the Western Allies. It is worth thinking about,” APG, sign. 10/1623/1, Natalia Bojarska, *Słowo od autora*, fol. 3(445)–4(446).

⁸⁷ Bunsch, “Miejsce spotkania,” 8.



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of its elementary rights. A nation that is close to us because of all that it experienced and is still experiencing; even though it is located so far away from us. In the face of that, was I allowed to seek only exoticism in the alien folklore and to let my imagination run wild on the subject of the Far East, taking advantage of the license that a fairy tale and an indefinite historical timeframe seem to give, and on top of that, to justify myself with a lack of documentary material? Absolutely not! It was a joyful experience to go against the Europeans' habit of inventing the strangeness of the Far East. Amidst the simplicity and restraint typical of the Korean costume, dance, musical instruments, I noticed the noble beauty of the Korean face.⁸⁸

Bunsch's "joyful experience" deserves a closer look because of what is noticeable at first glance in his statement, namely, his courage in going beyond the mental and artistic stereotype. Doubts about the legitimacy of the "exotic" costume, the readiness to oppose "the Europeans' habit of inventing the strangeness of the Far East," as well as the urgent recommendation "to find in the face of the Koreans, which

⁸⁸ Bunsch, 8–9.

is unusual to us, a human being who feels and lives like we do”; all of this seems to be a clear sign of a conscious struggle with the patterns of Orientalism and its underlying binary opposition of “us” versus “them.” An awareness of the shoals of stereotyping is also revealed in another passage in the text. “In the past, bourgeois science and art portrayed people of the Far East as supposedly culturally inferior to white people,”⁸⁹ Bunsch instructed, announcing a new *modus operandi*. A careful reading of his text, however, makes us pause at an important question he posed to himself. When he wondered whether “in the face of that” he was “allowed to seek only exoticism in the alien folklore,” he emphasized the special circumstances that compelled him to engage in such a calibrated reflection. The question to ask is, of course, “in the face” of what situation exactly Bunsch posed such questions to himself. What particular circumstances shaped his approach in this case? The answer is, quite obviously, the shared experience of two distant yet “fraternal” nations, which was identified earlier but highlighted during the Korean War in order to address a political need. From this perspective, it became clear that the “other” was not the other at all because “they” were actually “us.” This characteristic distribution of accents can also be observed in subsequent parts of Bunsch’s text:

Not to get lost in decorative effects! This was outlined as a starting thesis. Treat the salt fairy tale as a secondary theme! In the foreground, *Arirang*⁹⁰—the mountain—a symbol, *Arirang*—a song, almost an anthem. A sad song about the misery of the dispossessed peasant. The paths of the destitute people banished from their ancestral land, the paths into the unknown steppes of Manchuria where they would be rootless wanderers, led through the slopes of the *Arirang* mountain. This song would not be sung by mannequins in “fantastically-Oriental” costumes. They have to be living people, experiencing drama and enjoying life.⁹¹

The curious remark about “living people” needed to tell onstage what the play’s producers had learnt from accounts of the people they had met sounds particularly puzzling considering that it related to puppet theatre.⁹² This thought is expanded further on: “If the protagonists onstage do not imitate people or live some ‘integral life of a puppet’ but are living characters and have a heart in

⁸⁹ Bunsch, g.

⁹⁰ This new emphasis on the mountain motif and the song *Arirang* must have emerged at the end of rehearsals. As late as August 31, 1953, when the local Office of Press, Publication, and Performance Control approved the program, the play was still operating under its original title. APG, sign. 10/1623/50, Natalia Bojarska, *Kręćcie się kamienie sypcie białą sól*, fol. 1(2).

⁹¹ Bunsch, “Miejsce spotkania,” g.

⁹² Bunsch, 8.



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addition to their faces, they owe this to the talent of the actor hidden behind a screen, working under the rigors of strict, demanding direction.”⁹³

These observations should be considered in the broader context of Bunsch’s beliefs at the time, which were expressed, in a propaganda text entitled *O aktualny teatr polityczny* (For Contemporary Political Theater). Published in *Teatr Lalek* (Puppet Theatre) journal in 1950, this article condemns “formalistic theories about some kind of puppet’s own life” and false notions that reduce the puppet’s stage abilities “to trivial tasks, to pranks, to fun, at best to satire.” Bunsch himself envisaged much more serious tasks for the puppet, in the face of which, as he wrote, “there emerges the necessity to remove the excess of the fantastic and the spectacular, the need to focus on dramatic content, on human affairs.” In his view, these tasks were part of the “six-year plan to build the foundations of

⁹³ Bunsch, g.

socialism in Poland,” which placed on the artists “an obligation to make puppet theatre an instrument of class struggle and socialist construction.”⁹⁴

The staging of *Arirang* seems to have more than fulfilled the ambitions of the artistic director of the Gdańsk puppet stage. This is clearly evidenced by the fiery coda completing his text “Miejsce spotkania”:

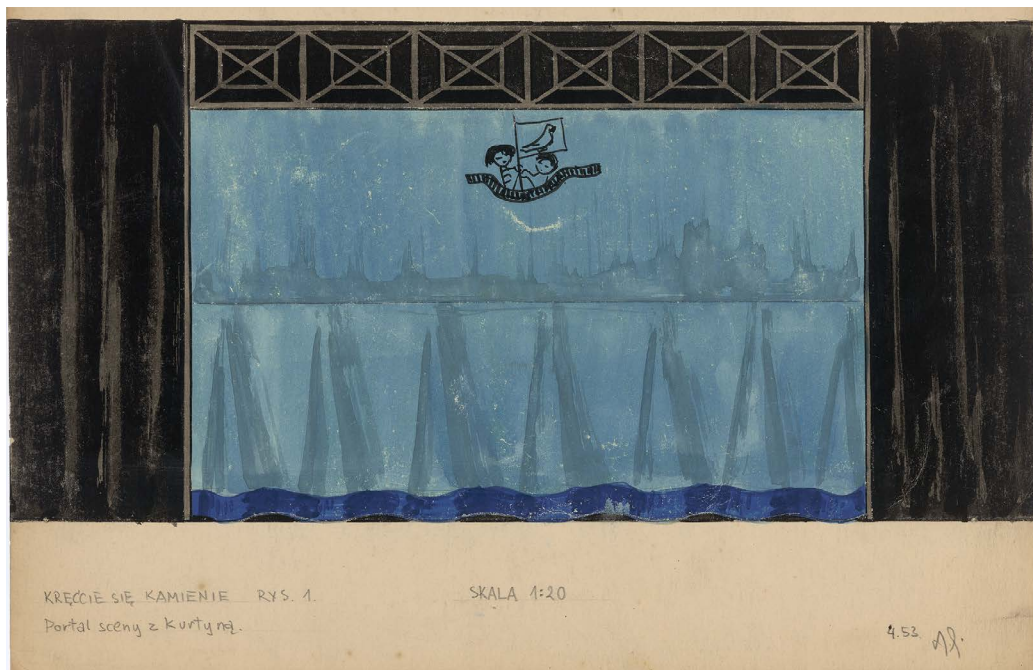
To know and understand what is different and seemingly strange through what we share. This is how we understood, and this is how we fulfilled, the rallying cry given by Mao-Tse-Tung [Mao Zedong—JSP] to Chinese volunteers: “Korea’s cause is our cause.” Through our concern for peace, for a better life, through the song *Arirang*, we wished to move forward to meet Korea, which is close to us, and to offer our work as a heartfelt gift to the Korean children we are hosting.⁹⁵

These words seem to correspond interestingly with the message conveyed by the emblem of the Gdańsk Puppet Theatre designed by Bunsch. The distinctive logotype depicts a boat with a white sail bearing a simplified drawing of a dove. Underneath this easily intelligible sign, artistically exploited already by Picasso, sail two black-haired hand puppets with dark, slightly slanted eyes. It was during the preparations for the premiere of *Arirang* that Bunsch was working on the final shape of the emblem. A copy of the program has survived in the Gdańsk archive, on which small but significant corrections were made, written in red crayon on the logotype.⁹⁶ The slope of the boat’s hull was corrected so that in the new version the boat moves more sharply into the wind. In the final version of the emblem, the name of the theatre, present in the original design and inscribed tightly in the

⁹⁴ Ali Bunsch, “O aktualny teatr polityczny,” *Teatr Lalek*, no. 2/3 (1950): 4–6. Bunsch’s political involvement stemmed from a genuine belief in socialism, which, over time, turned into great disappointment. Henryk Jurkowski, an official at the Ministry of Art and Culture, who closely observed Bunsch’s rapid ideological transformation, wrote about it in his memoir: “Like many puppeteers and intellectuals of the time, Bunsch sided with the new political order. On this occasion, his radicalism became apparent. When he decided to join the party, he simultaneously sent a letter to the bishop’s curia informing them of his departure from the Catholic Church. With the zeal of a neophyte, he demanded party instructions and guidelines for his artistic work. He committed to improving his work and assimilated the new language, which, in 1950, still held considerable power. . . . Bunsch was not the only artist to adopt ideological language and thinking. However, while it would be possible to quote many cynics and conformists, there are not many who undertook the work of socialism in puppet theater with such naive honesty as Bunsch. . . . Political events, such as the crackdown on workers in Poznań and “Polish October”—forced Bunsch to reevaluate his ideological position. His analysis of the situation was unfavorable to the ruling party, so he send back his party membership card with a big bang, as usual,” Henryk Jurkowski, *Moje pokolenie: Twórcy polskiego teatru lalek drugiej połowy xx wieku* (Łódź: Polunima, 2006), 100–102.

⁹⁵ Bunsch, “Miejsce spotkania”; g. Bojarska’s foreword to the *Arirang* program was also originally supposed to end with an innocent reference to the current political situation. In the draft, she wrote: “In the Land of Joseon, you will find Bok-Tongs and a few Liu San Oks or Li Syng Mans. They exist because they must, but they do not have power over life, and ultimate victory does not lie in their hands!” APG, sign. 10/1623/1, Bojarska, “Słowo od autora,” fol. 9(451).

⁹⁶ *Arirang* performance program.



COLLECTION OF THE SILESIAN MUSEUM IN KATOWICE

The stage portal and curtain with the theatre's logo, design for *Arirang*

DESIGNED BY ALI BUNSCH, STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

outline of the hull, was also dropped. This nautical symbol, particularly apt in relation to a theatre located in a city on the seashore, proved capacious in its meaning and quickly became associated with the image of the Gdańsk puppet theatre. It is possible, however, that the image of little sailors arriving with a peaceful message, born in Bunsch's imagination in special circumstances of both history and repertoire, was an offshoot of his meetings with the heroes of the fairy tale about the origin of sea salt and with the children into whose hands this "heartfelt gift" was conveyed.

5. The Premiere and the Debate that Followed

"We arrived from all sides, from all disciplines that constitute theatre, to meet in this work. Our *Arirang* is a meeting place," Bunsch declared in the play's program.⁹⁷ How many issues and people came together in this broadly defined "place" is best

⁹⁷ Bunsch, "Miejsce spotkania," 9.

evidenced by the surviving documents. The list of invited guests indicates that the premiere itself may have been attended by representatives of theatres and cultural centers, employees of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Embassy, members of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries and staff of the educational centre in Świder, secretaries of the provincial committees of the Polish United Workers' Party, the management of the Gdańsk Shipyard, reporters from the Polish Radio and the Polish Film Chronicle.⁹⁸

On the eve of the opening night, on 30 October 1953, an equally broad and interesting group met for a preview during the play's final rehearsal and following that, an assessment debate. The session was chaired by the theatre's literary manager, Lech Bądkowski, and speakers included the editors of *Dziennik Bałtycki* newspaper, the artistic manager of the State Puppet Theatre in Warsaw, Jan Wilkowski, the set designer Adam Kilian, as well as Bunsch, Bojarska, actors from the Gdańsk theatre, and Koreans recorded as Czaj-Kwang-Guk and Ri-San-Ir. There were many words of praise, even awe, and just as many reservations.

The decorations, which were said to be more beautiful than anything Jan Wilkowski had ever seen in a theatre, were considered a delight. Those gathered were also unanimous in their praise for the music and direction, as well as the "acting material" of the Gdańsk stage. Suggestions were made as to possible cuts in the text, improvements in the decoration changes, and reduction in the number of intervals. There were also comments on the construction of the puppets, which some felt were too stiff, had too large heads, too long torsos or too substantial hairpins. It was also pointed out that it had been an error to have male roles played by women. Yet the most interesting contribution to the discussion seems to have been made by the Korean invitees. While "citizen Ri-San-Ir" expressed "great satisfaction," "citizen Chai-Kwang-Guk" shared some factual comments:

The puppet representing the grandmother is too tall in relation to other puppets. Children spoke in adult voices, adults in childish voices. Lack of cordiality in the greeting between the wife and the husband. Adults in Korea do not wear bright colors. Also, sitting directly on the ground is not practiced in Korea. Class struggle was not shown sharply enough. . . . Some authorial omissions can be felt. E.g. it is not clear what happened to Bok Tong when his stones were stolen.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ APG, sign. 10/1623/631, invitations, fol. 388–392.

⁹⁹ APG, sign. 10/1623/1, Protocol of the discussion held after the final rehearsal of Bojarska's play *Arirang* on October 30, 1953, fol. 2(187).



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Bunsch also spoke in the discussion, thanking the audience for their appreciation and criticism and then stating “that he will try to remove some of the faults as much as possible.” The last to speak was Bojarska, whose statement indicated “that it is adults, not children, that should attend puppet theatre.” After these words, the discussion flared up again, but it was no longer recorded in the minutes.¹⁰⁰

Later, in a letter to the Gdansk theatre company, Bojarska referred to the points raised during the discussion in more detail. She wrote:

In any native production we would be picked at by native critics, here the natives are silent because they don't have a clue, whereas we must expect blows from the Koreans. To the accusation that it is not known what fate awaits the good Bok-Tong no answer can be given. We deleted the scene in the village when the children

¹⁰⁰ Protocol of the discussion held after the final rehearsal of Bojarska's play *Arirang*, fol. 1(186)–3(188).

find the salt and we must leave the issue to the perspicacity of the spectators, who should have been enlightened by the prologue. Unfortunately, they don't know enough of the language to understand all the issues.¹⁰¹

She decided to swiftly remedy the latter problem herself, as staff from the DPRK Embassy were about to visit Gdańsk. For the occasion, Bojarska undertook to prepare "a detailed outline of the performance with which they will make themselves familiar before their arrival and thus will be able to watch what unfolds before them on the stage with full understanding." She also issued meticulous instructions:

So ultimately the Embassy wants to come. However, the matter must be dealt with officially through the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries. So, you should immediately consider and think about which day would be the most convenient for you to give a performance for the Embassy and send an official letter to the Committee with their invitation for the Embassy. You need to write in it that your theatre is performing such and such a play based on a Korean fairy tale, and since the efforts of the producers and the author were dedicated to the Koreans staying in Poland, the theatre would like to cordially invite official representatives to come on such and such a day, at such and such an hour. It seems to me that it would be good to arrange an evening performance and bring in an audience of adult spectators, students of the Technical University, for example, from those faculties where Koreans are present; it should be possible to organize this nicely through the Polish Youth Association, right? . . . Of course, you have to set the date of their arrival so that it is given to them about 10 days in advance, so e.g. the last days of November or the first days of December. For my part, I suggest December 4th, Basia's name day!¹⁰²

In the following passages of her letter, Bojarska referred to the rest of the concerns raised in the discussion. "What is the situation about the intermission issues? Are they shorter and filled with music, as we planned? Has Liu-San-Ok's kaftan been changed to a darker one? Are the Koreans sitting on the ground?" she asked worriedly. She had already clarified this last point with Dr. Tonchu Ru, who explained to her that "people in the inn should sit on cushions, not mats, because such mats as he saw in the photograph are used as doormats, not for

¹⁰¹ МЗТТ, sign. МММТ/4722, Natalia Bojarska's letter to the staff of the State Puppet Theatre in Gdynia, Falenica, November 14, 1953, fol. 2.

¹⁰² Bojarska's letter to the staff, fol. 1.



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The inn, Scene Three of *Arirang*

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sitting.”¹⁰³ This passage clearly indicates that the doctor had not been present at the premiere and had not yet seen the play by November 14th, when Bojarska wrote it. Her letter did, however, contain information about a *faux pas* that had occurred, of which the doctor was by then already fully aware:

It is bad that you failed put a subtitle on the poster “following *Opowieści z Krainy Dżosen* Bojarska. Tonchu-Ru. Hang-Suo-Han” [here, again, a different version of the name is given; in *Słowo wstępne*, her foreword to the programme, Bojarska mentioned a certain Hung-Soo-Hang—JSP], as I asked, but only “according to a Korean folk tale.” I had a very unpleasant conversation because of that, but what is done is done, it cannot be remedied.¹⁰⁴

A careful reading of the surviving documents seems to indicate that this *faux pas* was the result of negligence rather than deliberate intervention. Archival materials clearly show that the producers made an effort to commemorate “the

¹⁰³ Bojarska.¹⁰⁴ Bojarska, fol. 4.

most authentic man of the East” and his contribution to art, namely, one version of the typescript contains a small but significant correction: Bok-Tong’s son is renamed from Pak to Ton-Chu.¹⁰⁵ This change was retained in the final version of the program and the young protagonist was henceforth named after the son of a Korean exile.¹⁰⁶ Whether this correction was made at the suggestion, or at least with the consent, of Dr. Tonchu Ru is unknown. What is known, however, is that the doctor asked for a set of photographs from the premiere and relevant press cuttings. This was reported by the vigilant Bojarska, together with a reminder: “Do you remember that a photo album will have to be made for the Embassy? Perhaps it would be possible to take photos of the ensemble with the puppets? And with gesture, with facial expressions, live?”¹⁰⁷ For herself, she negotiated with theatre director Szczepan Paluszkiwicz and technical manager Roman Krupowicz to be given the “Bok-Tong” and “Ton-Chu” puppets. She reminded Ali Bunsch of this promise by letter, complaining that she was still looking forward to a “long, heavy package from the State Puppet Theatre in Gdańsk.”¹⁰⁸

In one of her letters, Bojarska also referred to the voices of “native” critics that resounded during the discussion in the theatrical milieu. She put it this way:

Adam Kilian fussed, but this is a competition issue and his fussing cannot be taken entirely seriously. Nor should one fret over Jaś Wilkowski’s charge that actresses cannot be given male roles. On his part it was a very skillful jab and a desire to make a bit of confusion, and as to this performance we can say that Koreans, on average, speak in such high voices that even a whole performance done by female voices would not be a mistake.¹⁰⁹

To balance this “fussing,” Bojarska cited the opinion of Jan Kosiński, an eminent stage designer at dramatic theatres, whom she had shown photos from the premiere and recounted the performance. “We agreed that this Bunsch was a ‘furiously talented beast,’ he said you were clever to have got involved in puppetry, and in general he liked it very much,” she reported.¹¹⁰ She herself was also planning to “get involved in puppetry” to a larger extent and on this occasion promised the Gdańsk stage “priority for the premiere” of her next play, *Leśne*

¹⁰⁵ APG, sign. 10/1623/50, Natalia Bojarska, *Arirang / Kręćcie się kamienie*, 1954, fol. 1(5)—31(39).

¹⁰⁶ *Arirang* performance program, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Bojarska’s letter to the staff, fol. 2.

¹⁰⁸ MZTT, sign. МНМТ/4722, Natalia Bojarska’s letter to Ali Bunsch, Mądralin, March, 14, 1955, fol. 25.

¹⁰⁹ Bojarska’s letter to the staff, fol. 2.

¹¹⁰ Bojarska, fol. 2.



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The theatre's team; seated at the far left in the first row is Natalia Gołębska, with Ali Bunsch standing behind her

STATE PUPPET THEATRE IN GDAŃSK, 1953

sprawy (Forest Doings).¹¹¹ A year and a half later, sending the finished text to Bunsch and trying to convince him to resume their collaboration, referring to a preliminary agreement with Dobrzański. However, the *Forest Doings* play was ultimately never staged, even though Bojarska used many convincing arguments and in addition solemnly assured Bunsch that they “would not need to go to Embassies in connection with that play.”¹¹²

Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz

¹¹¹ The title of Bojarska's new play is mentioned in her letter to the Puppet Theater Department of the General Management of Theaters, Operas, and Philharmonic Halls, МЗТТ, sign. МНМТ/4722, Natalia Bojarska's letter, Mądralin, March, 14, 1955, fol. 26.

¹¹² Bojarska's letter to Bunsch, fol. 25.

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