

Some Issues Concerning Fabià Puigserver's Relationship with Poland

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English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

When speaking of Fabià Puigserver's life and artistic career, we inevitably refer to his experience and training as a set designer in Poland, where he lived and studied between 1951 and 1959. According to his biographies, he did not return until 1966; from that year, he maintained regular professional and personal contact with his adoptive country. However, despite the importance that all academics and acquaintances of Puigserver attach to the early Polish period, the published information is still quite general. The objective of this article is to provide more data about the 1951-1959 period based on the documentation found in archives and interviews with those who knew him, as well as to clarify certain issues concerning Poland and Puigserver after his return to Catalonia between 1959 and 1966.

Keywords: Fabià Puigserver, Polish theatre, Catalan set design, Polish set design, Leokadia Bielska-Tworkowska, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Fira de Barcelona

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Introduction

One of the many facets of Fabià Puigserver that, in order to understand his artistic personality and original approach to theatre, needs to be related to others (such as ideological commitment and political militancy) is his link with Poland (Graells, 2012: 21). As Anna Sawicka notes, “the Polish references appear systematically in the reviews of the evolution of the great Catalan artist, particularly the analysis of his set designs” (Sawicka, 2007: 158). Moreover, those who met him, particularly in the first years after his return from Poland, when referring to his art and his contribution to theatre and set design, usually mention, on the one hand, his extraordinary talent, which enabled him to face all kinds of set and costume design challenges, and, on the other, the training and artistic education he received in Poland. One account, for instance, comes from Manolo Núñez Yanowsky, with whom Puigserver attended the Escola d'Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual (EADAG) from 1961, and who, in an interview I conducted with him, told me:

At that time Fabià was already a renowned theatre figure who spoke peer-to-peer to the Catalan professors and their guests such as Espriu, Brossa, Obiols, Moisès Villèlia and Subirachs, and who knew how to describe his theatre experience in a socialist country (Poland) in, for me, unexpected ways.

Also illustrative are the following words by Carlota Soldevila, who in the documentary “Fabià Puigserver, ànima de teatre” in the TV3 programme *Noms* (2006), puts personal talent and Polish training at the same level: “He had gold, privileged, hands... I don't know how he could do anything... I guess that in Poland, when they teach set design, they teach you thousands of crafts.”

In fact, Puigserver himself emphasised the importance of the Polish influence while noting that in the period he lived in his adoptive country, between 1951 and 1959, he undertook artistic and intellectual training that in no

way he would have been able to do in the Barcelona of that time (Roig, 1978; Febrés, 1990: 44). If we bring together Puigserver's disperse statements, we could say that this education was "solid" and it gave him for his entire life "the conceptual and formal foundations underpinning the nature of a set designer and how to approach the process of designing a set" (Bravo, 1996: 30); that it provided him with a conception of a concise set design and stylisation, while that of the Spain of the period was realist (Roig, 1993: 266), and imbued him with the principle that any artwork, any set design, always had to be based on a real, lived, experience rather than the imitation of another artwork (Bravo, 1996: 41). He added that, from Polish set design, "what I did take away was the concept according to which a play must not be dressed up; it has to be told. If necessary, disregard the stage directions of the playwright — although, for example, the classic playwrights did not give any — and emphasise the meaning of the play while giving it a visual parallel. Yes, that's it, visually translate the backbone of a play" (Benet i Jornet, 1971: 52).

Moreover, Puigserver also acknowledged that living in a socialist country like Poland, with serious economic problems, determined his characteristic austere "anti-paraphernalia" style (Gabancho, 1988: 159; Sagarra, 1993: 28).

The significance, therefore, of Puigserver's Polishness has drawn the attention of some scholars of his work (Guillem Jordi Graells, Antoni Bueso, Isidre Bravo, Joan Abellán, Josep M. de Sagarra, Anna Sawicka), who have tried to understand the influence of the Polish experience from diverse perspectives, providing, for instance, biographical and documentary data (Sagarra, 1993; Graells; Bueso, 1996: 13, 15, 78-79, 90-99; Sawicka, 2007) or framing it within the Polish theatre and set design tradition (Abellán, 1993: 223; Bravo, 1996: 25-29).¹ However, as Sawicka argues, it is still possible to explore the issue in more depth (Sawicka, 2007: 157-158, 163), which I endeavour to do with this article. The results I present here come from the research carried out for several years in Warsaw and Barcelona.

Initially, when I started the research, the aim was to reconstruct Puigserver's theatre and intellectual training in Warsaw with the help of those who knew him. I spoke to relatives, friends and acquaintances in his Catalan environment (Lola and Enric Puigserver, Manolo Núñez, Lluís Pasqual, Guillem-Jordi Graells, Francesc Nel·lo, Maite Lorés, Ernest Serrahima, Pilar Aymerich, Santos Hernández, Josep M. Benet i Jornet, Jordi Humbert, Montserrat Ramos, Enric Bastardes, Antoni Codina) and the Polish environment (Carlos Marrodan, Xymena Zaniewska) but the information they gave me about his training was less specific than I expected. This is why I finally

1. It is worth mentioning, as a counterpoint, Ricard Salvat's views on this issue, who points out that when Puigserver entered the EADAG he had little background as a set and costume designer, and questions the comments of some of these scholars: "I visited Warsaw in 1962, invited by the World Peace Council. I dropped by the school, where Puigserver had studied, met his teachers and they talked to me about him. Nothing that professor Bravo explains corresponds to the strict truth, at least the way it was told to me in Warsaw" (Salvat, 1994: 100). However, it should be taken into account that Salvat's views are expressed in an article that is an angry reaction to the publication in Spanish of a conversation between Puigserver and Núñez Yanowsky in Graells and Hormigón's book (1993). It is not my intention to enter this controversy but, nevertheless, I find it interesting to reproduce the comment that Núñez made to me, according to which at the EADAG, "although Ricard was a walking theatre encyclopaedia, Fabià was the practical theatre encyclopaedia in all its aspects. The two young men (there was very little age difference) observed each other closely."

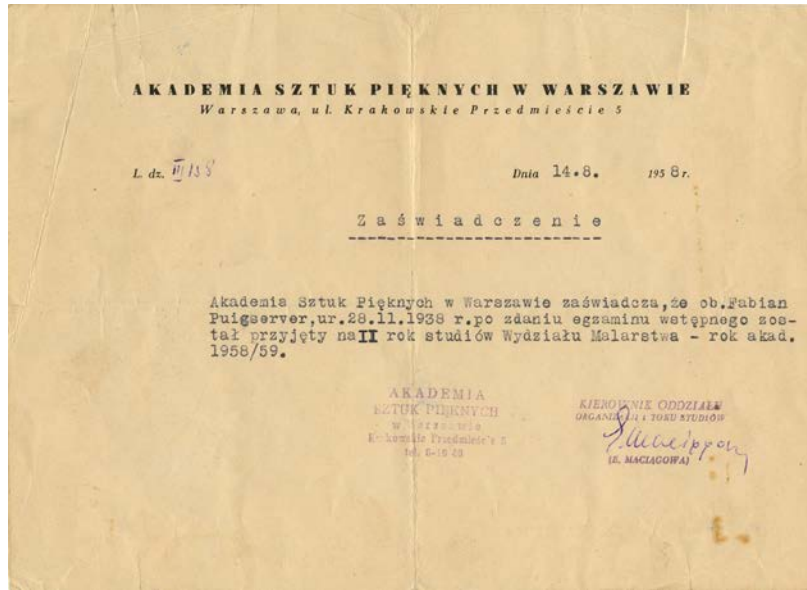
focused my research on the Warsaw and Barcelona archives. The result, despite not being as exhaustive as I initially sought, provides some documentary information (and some accounts) that complete, broaden or specify certain biographical issues concerning the period of his life between 1951 and 1966. The chronological framework chosen, therefore, encompasses the years of the Puigserver family's exile in Warsaw and the return to Barcelona until 1966, when, according to the biographers, he resumed the direct relationship with Poland.

Academic Training

At the end of the Spanish Civil War, Fabià Puigserver i Plana (1938-1991) went into exile along with his family, first to France and, later, in 1951, to Poland. In Warsaw in 1953, against his father's will, who wanted him to study industrial design, Puigserver, aged 15, enrolled in the Visual Arts Public School (Państwowe Liceum Sztuk Plastycznych), where he studied until 1957 (Febrés, 1990: 43-44). The School had been founded in 1945 and, although it initially offered professional training of two years, from 1948 it began offering regular secondary education for five years where, apart from the general subjects, there were also artistic courses. As Puigserver explains: "School begins at the age of 7, and until 13 pupils receive primary education. From 13 to 18, secondary school comprises general and fine arts courses" (Bonet, 1963: 7).² Puigserver's school (currently known as Zespół Państwowych Szkół Plastycznych im. Wojciecha Gersona w Warszawie) holds in its archive the academic record with his grades, which can help us clarify the education he received there a little more. Apart from the science courses (mathematics, geography, physics, chemistry, biology) and humanities (history, history of culture, and art history) he studied Polish, Russian and French (the subject in which he always got the highest grade). The artistic courses included drawing, painting, sculpture, composition, typography and technical drawing. Apart from military training, there was also physical education, a subject which he usually did not attend, claiming, as we can see from the records, health problems. From this period at the school several paintings and drawings survive that are reproduced in the book by Graells and Bueso (1996: 92-95), alongside set design, costume and preparatory sketches, some of which are held at the Centre de Documentació i Museu de les Arts Escèniques (MAE).³ During the fourth academic year, 1956-1957, he did an internship in set design at the Teatr Dramatyczny and contributed to Andrzej Sadowski's set design project for *The Diary of Anne Frank*, directed by Jan Świdorski and premiered at the Teatr Domu Wojska Polskiego on 8 March 1957 (Graells; Bueso, 1996: 96).

2. In this article, Puigserver uses the term "Escuela Superior de Bellas artes de Varsovia" to refer to the School. In other interviews, such as the one with Montserrat Roig on television (1978), he used a similar name ("Escola de Belles Arts"), which may cause some confusion, because it is not clear whether he is referring to the School, the Fine Arts Academy, or both at the same time.

3. The costume and set designs of *Balladyna* (1956), *Joan of Arc* and *A Midnight Summer's Dream* (the latter two also from 1956) are held (Fabià Puigserver collection Call number P 82). Also, with the same call name, under the title "Projecte d'escola", MAE holds studies of historical costumes, costume sketches and portraits. It is difficult to discern if they were made there, or later, in the Fine Arts Academy.



Entrance certificate for the Fine Arts Academy. © MAE. Institut del Teatre.



Sworn translation into French of the entrance certificate for the Fine Arts Academy. © MAE. Institut del Teatre.

Although his name does not appear in the play's programme, Puigserver recalled it as his first set design (Sagarra, 1993: 27; Bonet, 1963:7).⁴ In July that same year he completed his studies at the school and, without being clear about the theatre discipline he wanted to work in, he joined a theatre group as an actor. Finally, he decided to study set design and enrolled at the Fine Arts Academy in July 1958, for the speciality of painting. As he himself used to explain, he did it without an entrance exam and went directly into the second year (Febrés, 1990: 44); this is confirmed by a certificate in Polish from the Academy and its sworn translation into French held at MAE, although they do not specify if he sat for the exam. In contrast, according to the information held at the archive of the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw, he entered the first year after having passed the exam.

Apart from this information, the archive holds other documents that he probably submitted as merits for being accepted in the Academy: the School grades for the academic year 1955-1956 (which records that he got an A in drawing, painting and French) and the catalogue of an exhibition of his paintings made between 1956 and 1958, organised by the Klub Przyjaciół Kultury Iberyjskiej (Association of Friends of Iberian Culture) at the headquarters of the Klub Międzynarodowej Prasy i Książki Warszawy in March 1958. The Academy has no more information, but MAE holds some costume sketch projects made during that academic year (*Summer at Nohan*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Danton's Death*).⁵ Some of these works bear the pseudonym of Slèvia, which he would later use in Barcelona in his early years as a set designer, and that he chose because, as he used to say, for Poles "my surname was difficult" (Bonet, 1963: 7). It is likely that during this period he did set design projects for the Klub Przyjaciół Kultury Iberyjskiej and participated as an actor in *Los pobrecitos habladores* (Graells; Bueso, 1996: 96). Everything seems to indicate, however, that he was not able to finish training at the Fine Arts Academy, because he does not appear in the list of graduates from the centre (Włodarczyk, 2008: 20-30); which, moreover, is not surprising bearing in mind that the studies lasted for five years and that he returned to Barcelona with his parents in 1959 taking advantage of an amnesty (Febrés, 1990: 19).

In terms of the teaching staff at the School and the Academy, I have been unable to find specific documents from the period, but Puigserver mentioned as teachers, apart from Sadowski, the set designers Zenobiusz Strzelecki, who in 1963 published one of the most comprehensive studies on Polish set design, *Polska plastyka teatralna*, and Teresa Roszkowska (Bravo, 1996: 26).⁶

4. A set design sketch is held at MAE, which bears the signature "Slèvia" (Fabià Puigserver collection Call number P 82).

5. Held at MAE, Fabià Puigserver collection, Call number P 82, and reproduced in Graells; Bueso, 1996: 90, 97-99.

6. I have been unable to find out what Strzelecki's influence over Puigserver involved or if he really was his teacher at the School or at the Academy. We should take into account that apparently Strzelecki taught mainly in Łódź, in the higher schools of theatre and fine arts, Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Teatralna (1948-1950) and Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Plastyczna (1949-1951), and later, between 1954 and 1955, at the Warsaw Theatre Academy. Only from 1972 did he begin working at the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw. I spoke to Strzelecki's wife, the set designer Krystyna Mazur, and she could not provide any information about Puigserver. In any case, this does not rule out them having some sort of relationship.



Fabià Puigserver performing at the Klub Przyjaciół Kultury Iberyjskiej. © MAE. Institut del Teatre. Unknown photographer.

The Tworkowski Family

Apart from the academic studies, the contact he established with the Warsaw *intelligentsia* was key to Puigserver's training as an artist and intellectual. As he himself notes, "I practically moved to live for a time in the house of the daughter of a very famous painter, in the city centre, connected to all the intellectuals in the country," and it was there where he became familiar with the works of Sartre and other French writers that were difficult to find in Barcelona at that time (Febrés, 1990: 44). The painter in question was Leokadia Bielska-Tworkowska (1901-1973), and he met her through his friendship at the School with her elder daughter Maria, "Isia". In some interviews from 1966, Puigserver calls Leokadia his teacher along with Strzelecki (Manzano, 1966; A. del C., 1966).

Before the war, Bielska-Tworkowska, who also worked in graphic design, had formed part of the Warsaw School (Szkoła Warszawska), a group of painters that had emerged in the 1930s within the Fine Arts Academy around Tadeusz Pruszkowski, highly influenced by French post-impressionism. Bielska-Tworkowska exhibited in Geneva, Amsterdam, Stockholm, London and Brussels, and was awarded several prizes and distinctions. She worked as a critic in magazines and newspapers from before and after the war. One of her most renowned works is the portrait of the writer Adam Ważyk, from 1932, on display at the National Museum of Poland (Serafińska, 1972: 39-40). Her ironic and somewhat impressionist style might have influenced the young Puigserver in the 1950s; at least, we can see some stylistic similarities in his pictorial works, particularly in some of the portraits reproduced in Graells; Bueso, 1996: 92.

Leokadia, alongside her daughters and her husband, Stefan Tworkowski (1907-1995), architect and professor at the Fine Arts Academy, lived at the Market Square in the Old City of Warsaw, a very significant place for the citizens of the city, because all of the old district, which had been destroyed by the Nazis like most of the capital, was faithfully rebuilt during the early post-war years on the initiative of the people themselves. Specifically, the Tworkowskis lived at number 1 (35) of the square, known as Kamienica Walbachowska (Gizińska), which dated from the late 15th century. After the war only the basement and the ground floor walls were left and it was rebuilt between 1951 and 1953. The young Puigserver, who came from a humble family and lived in a working class district, was greatly impressed by that house and by that family of artists and intellectuals who lived there, as Helena, the young daughter of the Tworkowskis, confirmed.



Fabià Puigserver holding the weathervane on Tworkowski's house. © MAE. Institut del Teatre. Unknown photographer.

I was able to talk to Helena Tworkowska-Cegieła, painter and illustrator, in one of Puigserver's favourite cafés in the centre of Warsaw, the Telimena. Like most of the people who knew him, Helena talked about him with a mixture of veneration and enthusiasm. Helena showed me some objects she had affectionately kept as a memento: photos, two books that he had given her for her birthday (one of Mickiewicz's poetry and another on Wyspiański's painting) and two portraits he did of her in 1956 and that, according to Helena, showed Puigserver's sensitivity and pictorial potential. Of the family photographs she talked about, she showed me two with Puigserver at Tworkowski's house, which I reproduce in this article.

According to Helena, the School gave Puigserver his fundamental training, by providing a real grounding in art, with very passionate and demanding professors, who turned the courses into an experience that decisively marked



Puigserver at Bielska-Tworkowska's studio. Helena Tworkowska believes that her mother painted the portrait he is posing in front of, although the enlargement of the photograph seems to indicate that it is his. According to Helena, the painting of the young woman with a ponytail is her, also by Bielska-Tworkowska. © MAE. Institut del Teatre. Unknown photographer.

all those who completed them (Helena recalled one of Puigserver's fellow students, the filmmaker Antoni Krauze). This educational experience must also have marked him as a future teacher, because the accounts from students who studied set design with him at the Institut del Teatre remember him among other things precisely for his love for what he did and his demanding character (Bravo, 1996: 45, 48). At the School, according to Helena, there were often regular art outings (some paintings done by Puigserver in Kazimierz Dolny and Sandomierz in 1956, for instance, are held at MAE) and visits to museums. Among other questions, Helena considered that the influence of Maria Dołębina, a Polish language teacher, was decisive. Maria was enthusiastic and demanding and fostered love for theatre and organised theatre performances at the school. And Helena added that the literary training at the School was very important; she particularly noted the young Fabià's interest in the literature of Polish Romanticism, while venturing that perhaps he saw a parallelism between the identity values of this movement and those of pro-Catalan nationalism. In fact, in Puigserver's personal library, held at the Teatre Lliure, notable among the books in Polish are the volumes of the complete works of Adam Mickiewicz, the "Goethe" of the Polish literary tradition, who, in terms of theatre, proposed a type of dramaturgy and staging that influenced and determined 20th century Polish theatre and set design. Moreover, Helena recalled Fabià's passion for theatre because he tried not to miss anything on at the theatre in Warsaw. Helena believes that Puigserver had seen everything that was on show during those years, and mentioned that on one occasion he recommended a play that he had seen as many to five times.

To conclude this section on academic training, following the last reflection by Tworkowska-Cegieła, perhaps it is worth pointing out that, beyond what he learnt studying at the School and the Academy or seeing his mother cutting and sewing clothes (Roig, 1978), the frequent attendance at the Warsaw theatres of the time, with productions so different and advanced compared to those he would find in 1960s Barcelona, was, in fact, his first great theatre school, as Lluís Pasqual told me in an interview.

The Article on Grotowski

As mentioned, Puigserver arrived in Catalonia in 1959 and, according to Graells and Bueso's chronology, he did not return to Poland until 1966 (Graells; Bueso, 1996: 79). However, during those years, when he did military service, he worked in Barcelona-based set design workshops and for the Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona (ADB) and the Escola d'Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual (EADAG), he did not miss his ties with Poland, as I have been able to verify through different sources. As Núñez Yanowsky told me, he used to write letters to his Polish acquaintances which, as they would not have gone through Franco's censorship, he "sent through his sister Lola who lived in France." When Núñez and Puigserver met at the Barcelona port by a boat coming from Poland, in 1959, Puigserver not only went there to speak in Polish with the sailors (Febrés, 1990: 21) but also because "he wanted to try sending letters through that ship." It seems that he stayed in Poland between 1963 and 1964, as Núñez, Tworkowska-Cegieła and Joan-Lluís Marfany told me.⁷

A good example of his ties with Poland is the article on Grotowski that he published in October 1962. The article, entitled "Un teatre laboratori a Opole (Polònia)" and published in *Serra d'Or* (Puigserver, 1962: 47-48), was the first news in Spain about the Polish director (Yaycio, 1995: 20; Kacprak, 2000: 88; Aszyk, 2009a: 120; 2009b: 124). It appeared in a new section of the magazine, "Els escenaris de fora", which only survived two more issues, until April 1963.⁸

7. It is likely that the stay coincided with the hiatus in his professional activity in 1964, pointed out in the chronology (Graells; Bueso, 1996: 80).

8. On the theatre section and its operation, Joan-Lluís Marfany, who was its secretary, told me: "*Serra d'Or* was a work of craftsmanship. There was an editorial board, with editors of the diverse sections (economics, literature, town planning, cinema, etc.). The editor of the theatre section was Jordi Carbonell, I guess because, at first, there was no other clear candidate. It was necessary, however, to fill the pages of the magazine somehow. What Carbonell did then was to bring together at his home, in the evening after having dinner, with relative regularity — once a month or maybe every fifteen days, I don't remember anymore — a group of people more or less related to theatre. [...] In these meetings, apart from chatting, we decided what we would talk about in the following issue or, rather, we tried to find things to fill the two or three pages that could be assigned to us. If in some theatre there was something in Catalan, someone offered to do the review. The same if something had been published: Carbonell mentioned it and asked if someone wanted to take charge of it. If there were no performances or books to review, we had to think of something else, and then everything depended on the pure chance of someone having an idea. This was how, without doubt, Fabià's article was published, who, indeed, some years before had arrived from Poland and, in fact, still professionally called himself Fabià Slèvia. The group was very fluid. Only Carbonell, Maria Aurèlia Capmany and I attended regularly. [...] And Maria Aurèlia tried to introduce young people from the EADAG: one day she brought Montanyès, who I think never returned, another day Adrià Gual, who was a schoolmate and friend of mine and who came a little less regularly, later Pepe Ruiz Lifante. This is how on one occasion she brought Fabià, an occasion that I think was not repeated. I don't have any specific memory, but given the characteristics of these meetings, probably what happened is that we asked, as usual, what we have for the next issue, it turned out that there was not much, or Fabià said that he could write this article, or, more likely, Maria Aurèlia said that Fabià could do something on theatre in Poland and Fabià agreed and, as he was a serious man, he did it."

Puigserver's article arrived very early if we take into account that Grotowski really became popular in Europe from 1963 thanks to the articles in French by Raymonde Temkine (Osiński, 1980: 105, 110). Before this date some brief reports had appeared in Hungary, Romania, Switzerland, Finland, Denmark and Norway (Osiński, 1997: 96-97), including the *Serra d'Or* piece. All of them, including Puigserver's, were the result of the efforts and "evangelising campaign" of Eugenio Barba.

Jerzy Grotowski and Ludwig Flaszen's Theatre of the 13 Rows was founded in September 1959. In 1962 Eugenio Barba, who was in Poland on a scholarship, discovered Grotowskian theatre and became its main promoter, both abroad and among the Warsaw intellectuals (such as the aforementioned Strzelecki and Mazur), who had barely known it before (Barba, 2000: 71-72). Given that the authorities of Opole were against the group continuing, Barba and Grotowski had planned a strategy to ensure its survival:

With my Italian passport I was able to enter and leave Poland whenever I liked. I took advantage of this to make trips abroad, all very short. They had the dual objective of disseminating the New Testament of the Theatre and giving the impression to the critics and the hostile Polish authorities that Grotowski was known. In my room or in the station restaurant, Grotowski and I planned the itinerary. It involved placing my articles about the Teatr 13 Rzędów in magazines and newspapers, visiting political parties, theatre figures, artistic environments and promoting the theatre of Opole, leaving materials, articles, photos, drawings. This is how I started to write. I did so in French because it was an international language, easier to understand than mine, Italian (Barba, 2000: 72).

So the first articles that appeared in the European press were by Barba, sometimes under his own name or pseudonyms. Most were extracts from a thirty-page book, *Expériences du théâtre-laboratoire 13 Rzędów* (1962), printed thanks to the intercession of one of the censors of Opole, who admired Grotowski's theatre (Barba, 2000: 70).⁹ In the case of the article in *Serra d'Or*, Puigserver also started from the same book: he made a selection of it and translated fragments (Garcia, 2012: 179). The information chosen referred to the laboratory nature of the group, which sought, first, to break the separation between actors and audience, transforming the whole room into a stage and making the actor interact directly with the audience, turning the show into psychomagic between actor and audience, in a kind of secular ritual. Secondly, he referred to the physical and vocal work of the actors, their training to achieve mastery of the body, and the free use of the dramatic text, which was not used to create characters but to explore their sound possibilities. In contrast, there was no mention of specific shows of the group or Polish playwrights such as Witkacy or Mickiewicz, cited by Barba in his article, probably because they would have been too remote for the Catalan

9. Although I have not been able to read all of these articles, I think that most are based on the aforementioned work. The fragments of the texts included in a later publication by Barba that I had access to make me think so: Barba, 1964: 16-48.

reader. Puigserver also did not cite other issues that were largely dealt with in Barba's text, such as the relationship of theatre with archetypes and the subconscious and the link of the ritual with mystery and religious theatre. However, he also avoided including one of the central questions of the aesthetics of Grotowski's poor theatre: the renunciation of decor, music and light effects, with which he probably felt no affinity. It can be said, then, that Puigserver read Barba's text and selected fragments from his perspective as a set designer. That is also why, of all the graphic and photographic material in the article, he chose one of the drawings by Jerzy Gurawski for the set design for *Kordian*, which probably seemed interesting to him because of the spatial concept: the audience was distributed throughout the room around structures in the form of bunks, where the actors performed (Barba, 1962: 18). As Antoni Bueso says, with the *Serra d'Or* article, we can see how far Puigserver "focused the staging on establishing a proper relationship between actor and spectator, between stage and public" (Bueso, 1996: 51).

I have not discovered how the book about Grotowski came to Puigserver. Maybe through correspondence or from someone who brought it from Poland through France. But the important thing is to verify that Puigserver was familiar with Barba's strategy (to publish on Grotowski abroad and make this known in Poland so that the authorities did not close the theatre) because, after a few months after the article appeared in *Serra d'Or*, they had already learned about its publication in Opole. The programme of *Doctor Faustus*, a play premiered by Grotowski in May 1963, includes a fragment in French written by Puigserver. It is logical to think, then, that it was he who sent to Poland a copy of his article because he had fully understood what role it had to play in the Grotowski group's survival strategy. Eugenio Barba told me about it: "I remember the article by Puigserver very well, but I don't remember how I received it and how he learned about Grotowski. Until 1975, when Franco died, I didn't travel to Spain and afterwards I didn't have the opportunity to meet him."

In any case, I think that this episode shows that Puigserver, after his return, had some contact with Poland and its culture. But I cannot confirm a hypothetical direct relationship with Grotowski and his theatre in those years. It seems that Puigserver met him personally a little later, as Francesc Nel·lo told me. In the late 1960s Puigserver, Carlota Soldevila and Nel·lo went to Aix-en-Provence to see the performance of *Akropolis*. When they arrived, the auditorium was full and there was no more room; but thanks to Puigserver's conversation in Polish with Grotowski, they were able to attend the show with no problems.

The Barcelona Fair

From 1966 Puigserver would often travel to Poland and carry out numerous projects thanks to his friendship with Xymena Zaniewska-Chwedczuk. As explained by this set designer, she met him at the Barcelona Fair in the early 1960s and managed the visa for Puigserver to visit her country (Sagarra 1993: 27; Zaniewska 1997: 30). At the Exhibition Fair, since Puigserver had

come out of exile, every June he worked as a Polish interpreter. It was a job that provided a stopgap for a few years as he became involved in the Barcelona theatre world. Despite being known, there is little information about this facet. On the one hand, because it was a secondary professional activity and, on the other, due to the usual difficulty of providing proof of the activity of any interpreter.¹⁰ In our case, the proof available was a photograph of Puigserver working as interpreter at the fair, held at MAE and published in the monograph by Guillem-Jordi Graells and Antoni Bueso (Graells; Bueso, 1996: 80), and Zaniewska's account. However, in the Fira de Barcelona archive there are documents that, together with Manolo Núñez's account, allow us to expand the existing information on this issue.

After the Second World War there was a breakdown in diplomatic and economic relations between Spain and Poland.¹¹ On the one hand, Spain was one of the few countries that did not recognise the new government of



Puigserver acting as interpreter at the Fira de Barcelona. © MAE. Institut del Teatre. Photographer unknown.

Communist Poland and continued to host the diplomatic representation of the Polish Government in exile (Eiroa, 2001: 121-125; Podolska, n.d.). On the other, in April 1946 Poland, instigated by the USSR, denounced the Franco regime before the UN Security Council as a threat to world peace. The

10. The history of interpretation, despite the importance it has had over time, is the story of invisibility. This invisibility is the result of the particularities of interpreting itself: the volatility of oral support, the dispersion of primary sources and the subjectivity and veracity of some sources (Cronin, 2002: 47-49; Bowen, 1995: 247; Alonso, 2008: 430-434). For this reason, the historiography that attempts to reconstruct the activity of a given interpreter must work with very different sources (personal and autobiographical texts, sound files, proceedings of international meetings, articles, archival documents, etc.) that, often, only illuminate the object of study indirectly (Bowen, 1995: 247; Alonso, 2008: 436).

11. On the diplomatic relations between Poland and Spain during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, see Eiroa 2001: 21-22, 45-48.

denunciation started the process of diplomatic sanctions that the UN embarked on against Spain and that led the country to diplomatic ostracism and economic isolation (Eiroa, 2001: 70-71; Cavalieri, 2014: 35).

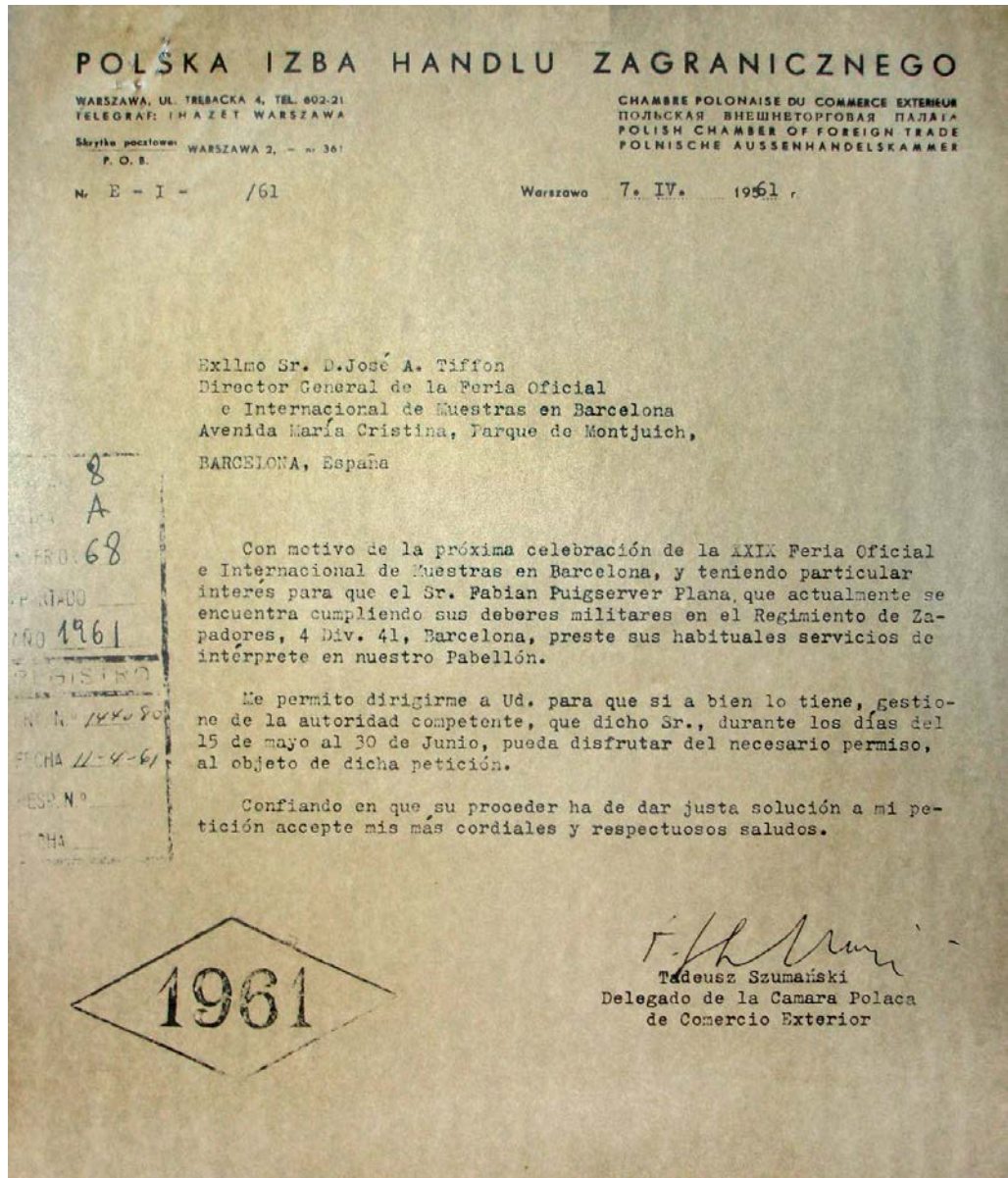
The economic relations between the two countries were resumed after 1954, although the first contacts had already begun in 1948 (Eiroa, 2001: 126; Miró, 2007: 85). In spite of all the reluctance, Spain was interested in establishing these trade relations for three reasons: 1) to pressure the western powers, demonstrating that, in order to come out of isolation, it was able to ally economically with the countries behind the Iron Curtain; 2) due to the serious economic situation, which did not allow it to disregard the good conditions that some of these countries offered for certain products; 3) from 1957, due to the problems that could arise from the creation of the EEC (Miró, 2007: 83-84).

In autumn 1957, the Polish Central Bank and the Instituto Español de Moneda Extranjera (IEME) signed in Paris a Payment Covenant that allowed the regulation of payments derived from trade between the two countries. Thanks to this agreement, Spain began importing from Poland coal, steel and chemical products, machinery and industrial material, and in the mid-1960s, meat and cement; and exporting citrus fruits and iron, among other products (Miró, 2007: 92-93, 105-108), in addition to allowing Spanish and Polish ships to call at the ports of both countries (Anonymous, 1957c: 38). That same year, Poland began to participate in the Fira de Mostres. The *Diario de la Feria* of that time announced the innovation by saying that “the economic ends of humanity surpass other circumstances, because it is impossible to close off the essential trading channels from human needs” (Anonymous, 1957a: 11).

Poland, with seven exhibitors, organised by the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade, presented at the Fair thirteen companies of animal and chemical products, leather, rubber, textiles, mining machinery, electronic and scientific devices, agricultural machinery and products, compensation, reciprocity and re-export transactions in worker cooperatives, and export and commercial import operations (Anonymous 1957b: 15; Anonymous 1957a: 11). In 1958, Czechoslovakia and Hungary also participated in addition to Poland.

There is no document indicating which year Puigserver started work, since the fair archive basically keeps copies of the *Diario de la Feria*, lists with the names of the members of the foreign delegations and some letters with technical information. Even so, Puigserver's name appears documented in 1961, when the set designer was doing military service. The delegate of the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade, Tadeusz Szumański, wrote in March of that year a letter to the General Manager of the Fair, José A. Tiffon, to request that Puigserver, who at that time was in the 4th Regiment of Sappers, could provide “his usual services as interpreter” in the Polish Pavilion, and for that reason he asked that he be given a permit from 15 May to 30 June. Tiffon wrote a few letters about the matter to the Field Marshall of Catalonia, Lieutenant General Pablo Martín Alonso, and in one of them, on 25 May, a few days before the start of the Fair, he asked that the issue be urgently

resolved, since “none of the members of the Polish Delegation can understand the Spanish staff who have to set up their stand, as they do not speak the language.” Finally, on May 29 Martín granted permission to Puigserver from 1 to 20 June.



Szumański's letter requesting a permit for Fabià Puigserver. Fira de Barcelona archive.

Puigserver no longer appears in any other document of the Fair, except on a 1962 list of the members of the Polish delegation as an interpreter. However, these lists of delegations, usually sent by the Polish Chamber of Commerce to apply for visas, allow us to determine the year in which Xymena Zaniewska arrived in Barcelona for the first time: 1966. Zaniewska appears as the pavilion designer.¹² In that year, in which a whole day was devoted to

12. However, it should be borne in mind that the list of the members of the 1964 Polish delegation has not survived.

the country, the Polish stand's surface area multiplied by five compared to the previous years (1,100 m² covered and 500 m² in the open air) and all kinds of informative and cultural activities were provided for the public (Anonymous, 1966a: 4; Anonymous, 1966b: 18).

POLSKA IZBA HANDLU ZAGRANICZNEGO
 POLISH CHAMBER OF FOREIGN TRADE • ПОЛЬСКАЯ ВНЕШНЕТОРГОВАЯ ПАЛАТА
 CHAMBRE POLONAISE DU COMMERCE EXTERIEUR • POLNISCHE AUSSENHANDELSKAMMER
 CAMARA POLACA DE COMERCIO EXTERIOR

WARSAWA 1, SKRYTKA NR 361

José A. Tiffon, Esq.
 General Manager
 International Fair
 in Barcelona

B A R C E L O N A
 Avenida Maria Cristina

Warszawa, 18.III.1966
 Trebacka 4

Dear Mr. Tiffon:

Herewith we request you to help us by obtaining visas to come and stay in Spain for the first group of our representatives who will attend the next Fair in Barcelona:

- 1/ Manager of our Pavilion
 Mr. Zdzisław Geppert
 born in Lwów on January 13th, 1928
 Passport No FA0009079
 Validity of visa: May 5th-June 30th, 1966
- 2/ Designer of our Pavilion
 Mrs. Xymena Zaniewska
 born in Poznań on June 4th, 1927
 Validity of visa: May 10th-June 5th, 1966

Commercial delegates

- 3/ Mrs. Lucyna Górewicz
 born at Ujazd on December 1st, 1923
 Passport No FA0002702
 Validity of visa: May 15th-July 15th, 1966
- 4/ Mr. Jerzy Rutowicz
 born at Wieluń on January 19th, 1926
 Passport No FA0014175
 Validity of visa: May 15th-July 15th, 1966
- 5/ Mrs. Alina Zielińska
 born in Łódź on February 20th, 1921
 Passport No FA0014691
 Validity of visa: May 15th-June 30th, 1966

./.

966

TELEFONO: 81 631. POLCHAMBER WA
 TELEGR.: POLCHAMBER WARSAWA, Tel.: 26-02-21

CARPETA 62
 LETRA _____
 INTERIOR _____
 APARTADO _____
 AÑO 1966
 REGISTRO
 N.º 129498
 FECHA 21.3.66
 RESP. N.º _____
 FIRMA _____

List of Polish delegates at the Fira de Barcelona in 1966. They include Xymena Zaniewska. Fira de Barcelona archive.



Polish stand at the Fair in 1966. Fira de Barcelona archive.

Apart from the archive documentation, Núñez Yanowsky's account reveals something about Puigserver's activity at the Fair:

Every June, if I'm not mistaken, Barcelona hosted the exhibition fair in Montjuïc. In 62 I went to see Fabià in the fair, he introduced Poles to me, mainly people from industry and trade. I know that Fabià was serious in his professional relations with these people. At that time in Barcelona there was a Polish consulate that had nothing to do with socialist Poland, it was a consulate of the Polish government in exile. A lady of the Polish nobility was the consul general.¹³ She loved Fabià a lot, sometimes she invited us to take tea at the consulate. They spoke a lot in Polish, it was important for him to keep his academic language alive. The representatives of Polish industry and trade that Fabià knew in the framework of his work at the fair ended up drinking tea at the Polish consulate in exile. Fabià was not only an interpreter but also an important public relations officer between the two Polands. Since the Polish representation was the only official "socialist" presence at the Fira de Barcelona under Franco, the annual Polish stand soon became a meeting place for left-wing Catalan friends who came to see Fabià, but they actually came to talk to the Poles to get news and information about the socialist world on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

13. Núñez refers to Wanda Morbitzer Tozer (Febrés, 1990: 21). On her work at the Honorary Polish Consulate in Barcelona before and after the Second World War, and especially on the affair of the Polish refugee children in Spain, see Calvet, 2009; Morbitzer, 2009 and Podolska, n.d.

From 1966

A few months after meeting Zaniewska at the Fair, and thanks to her intervention, Puigserver was in Poland and did set designs for the television shows: *Antygone*, *Nauczyciela tanca* and *Żołnierz królowej Madagaskaru* (Graells; Bueso, 1996: 132-133, 135).

From then on it can be said that a new, very prolific, period began in Puigserver's relations with Poland. It is not the objective of this article to discuss this, since it would deserve a thorough and detailed analysis, but I find it interesting to briefly point out just a few facts that allow us to gauge the importance of the new period.

On the one hand, from 1966 to the end of his life, Puigserver often travelled to his adoptive country and maintained a fluid relationship with its theatre, so that we can talk of a clear interaction and exchange between Polish and Puigserver's set design. A small but illustrative example was given by Guillem-Jordi Graells in a lecture about Puigserver in the framework of the exhibition *Pawel Rouba. El gest que perdura*, held on 22 March 2010. Graells explained that the idea of the famous grass meadow in *Leonci i Lena* (1977) was later used by Xymena Zaniewska in one of her sets in Warsaw.

On the other, it must be remembered that Puigserver, from 1966, also intensified his role as a link between Polish and Catalan culture. He was responsible for the arrival at the Institut del Teatre of Polish mime and dance professors (Vilà, 2009-2010; Graells, 1990: 144-145; Ciurans, 2009: 13-14) and also, thanks to his mediation, Catalan artists such as Lluís Llach, Maria del Mar Bonet, Manuel Esteban and Lluís Pasqual visited Poland in the 1970s; even the Polish and Spanish television networks established contacts to create a cooperation agreement (Sagarra, 1993: 27). He also had links with events on Polish culture. For example, MAE holds a photo with Puigserver attending the opening of an exhibition on Polish poster art held in 1973.¹⁴

By way of conclusion

As has been seen from the information provided, Puigserver's relationship with Polish culture and theatre was close both during his family exile and after his return to Barcelona. At the Fine Arts School he received his main academic training and began to make his first approaches to painting and set and costume design. He did not finish training at the Academy of Fine Arts but the knowledge he had acquired as a Polish theatre goer gave him a much better grasp than he could have in Barcelona. In addition, the relationship with the painter Bielska-Tworkowska opened the world of Polish intellectuality to him and completed his pictorial and personal training. When he returned to Barcelona, despite the difficulties, he was able to maintain his link with Poland, as his article on Grotowski shows. We can say that from 1966, although I have not examined it in this article, everything seems to indicate (both the bibliography on Puigserver and MAE's materials) that a

14. Call number F 545-22.

firm interactive relationship was strengthened between Puigserver and Polish set design. He worked for television, collaborated with Zaniewska and other Polish set designers, brought Polish professors to the IT and helped disseminate Polish culture in Catalonia. It is not surprising, then, that after his death, Xymena Zaniewska, in a fragment of an interview not included in the television programme *Noms*, when explaining Puigserver's art, she concluded by saying that "he contributed something incredible to European culture, — how can I put it? — of the Polish spirit... Somehow, based on a kind of Polish thinking, he showed the world what was incredible about his Catalan and Spanish culture. As if, by talking in Polish, he could explain his country" (Farré-Escofet; Garcia, 2006).



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