

The Stifling of Edna O'Brien in the People's Republic of Poland

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Abstract Edna O'Brien's career in Ireland has been controversial and stormy, while she remains largely unknown in Poland, despite two novels and a collection of short stories being translated and running to several editions. This article compares *The Country Girls*, *The Girl With Green Eyes* and *A Scandalous Woman* with their Polish translations to see what influence the censor and the translator had on the course of O'Brien's career in Poland. The nature of the changes that her books underwent on their passage from English to Polish is examined and conclusions drawn about the social mores of Poland at that time and the chilling effects of censorship. The article raises questions about the operation of censorship, self-censorship and strong domesticating tendencies visible in the translation strategy.

1 Introduction

Edna O'Brien's debut novel, *The Country Girls* (1960), was banned in Ireland and became an instant success, "skyrocketing"—in the words of one critic—its author to international fame (Pearce 2006: 270). The editors of the collection *Edna O'Brien: New Critical Perspectives* note that it has become traditional to start discussions of O'Brien with a "lament" about the paucity of critical material on her (Laing et al. 2006a, b: 2). Perhaps so, but O'Brien's books were reviewed in, among others, the *New York Review of Books*, *Time*, *America*, and the *New York Times*, and there were scholarly articles too. By contrast, she is virtually unknown in Poland.

The Country Girls was published in Maria Zborowska's translation in 1974 with the title *Czekając na miłość* ('Waiting for Love'), a year after 1962's *Girl With Green Eyes* (also known as *The Lonely Girl*) was published in Polish (*Dziewczyna o zielonych oczach*, also translated by Maria Zborowska). The first

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ran to at least two editions and the second to at least three, so they were by no means commercial flops: the second edition of *The Country Girls* had a print run of 50,000, and its success presumably prompted the 1979 translation of O'Brien's short story collection *A Scandalous Woman*, with the title *Grzesznica* ('A Sinful Woman'). But O'Brien attracted much less interest and scandal in Poland and her career was much shorter. Apart from the vagaries of taste, a number of reasons for this failure on the part of Poles to be roused and/or outraged by *The Country Girls* can be suggested. Firstly, Ireland was a small country far away from Poland. Secondly, in the fourteen years intervening between publication in English and publication in Polish, social mores had changed and readers were less likely to be shocked by the sexual references in *The Country Girls*. One might also speculate that serious-minded Polish critics paid less (even less) attention to the kind of mass fiction represented by O'Brien than western critics: Lech Borski's review of *Girl With Green Eyes*, though favourable, is entitled "Powieść rzemieślnicza," which might be translated as 'A Craftsman-like Novel' (Borski 1973). However, there is no doubt that one reason Poles were less shocked by O'Brien was that the translations are much less frank about sex and violence. One reviewer of *A Scandalous Woman* locates O'Brien among the "angry young men," such as Alan Sillitoe and David Storey, remarking that the emotional situation of the women in the stories is one-dimensional, revolving around a longing for men. If she was outraged by the graphic depictions of sex, she does not mention it (Rola 1980). This is at least partly because somewhere along the line the censor stepped in, either in the form of self-censorship or external censorship.

2 The Country Girls

An early casualty of censorship is the following passage from Chapter One of *Country Girls*: "Baba and I sat there and shared secrets, and once we took off our knickers in there and tickled one another. The greatest secret of all" (O'Brien 1963: 10–11). This becomes "Tu siadywałyśmy z Babą opowiadając sobie nasze sekrety. Nie miałam przed nią żadnych tajemnic" (O'Brien 1978a: 8; 'Baba and I used to sit there telling each other our secrets. I had no secrets from her'). The content of the infamous note that Baba and Caithleen write in order to get expelled from school is only hinted at in the translation: the words "'Imagine,' said Baba, 'she read out, "Father Tom stuck his long thing," and [...]" (O'Brien 1963: 114) are missing entirely, the translation referring only to the nun realising what the note was about.

In places the description of Caithleen's relationship with Mr. Gentleman is also censored in Polish: in English she feels "as if someone were tickling [her] stomach from the inside" when he shakes her hand (O'Brien 1963: 16). This is missing from the Polish version. Mr. Gentleman's eyes "met mine for as long as I wanted" in English (O'Brien 1963: 64). This too is missing from Polish, making Caithleen (who is about fourteen years of age at this point in the novel) sound a little less in control. A few lines further on it is Mr. Gentleman's turn to be made sound less

controlling when his words “‘I prefer you without it [lipstick]’” (O'Brien 1963: 64) are changed to a more impersonal “— Wyglądasz dużo lepiej bez szminki” (O'Brien 1978a: 57; ‘You look much better without lipstick’). In another place, Caitheleen looks forward to having a lace frill hang down “temptingly” over her wrist (O'Brien 1963: 150). In Polish the word is “filuternie” (O'Brien 1978a: 139; ‘playfully, skittishly’), a more innocent word (though by now Caitheleen is no longer a schoolgirl, having left home and gone to work in Dublin). She is also made to seem less predatory in the statement “‘But we want young men. Romance. Love and things’” (O'Brien 1963: 154), which in translation is “— Ale my przecież chcemy przebywać w towarzystwie ludzi młodych. Szukamy romantyzmu, miłości i tak dalej” (O'Brien 1978a: 143; ‘But we want to spend time in the company of young people. We're looking for romanticism, love and so on’). O'Brien has drawn criticism for presenting women as passive love objects but here the translator goes further, eliminating the suggestion that the girls are on the hunt for men in favour of a more decorous desire to spend time with their peers. As well as this, there is the title of the book to consider, though it need not have been chosen by the translator. The Polish title plays up the passivity of women (“waiting for love”), whereas—say what you will about the girls’ attitude to men and women’s liberation—they do not in fact just wait around for love or a husband. The change of title attracted the attention of one Polish critic, who wondered why it had been changed to something so sentimental (Rola 1980: 11). There are other fairly minor changes but in Chap. 17 some crucial parts are missing. It begins with the sexual suggestiveness in the following exchange:

“‘I feel hungry,’ he said.

‘I feel hungry,’ I said. Little did he know that I had eaten two shop buns on my way to meet him. I loved shop buns, especially iced ones.

‘For all sorts of things,’ he said, as he scooped some melon with a spoon” (O'Brien 1963: 172).

In Polish this becomes:

“— Jeść mi się chce — rzekł.

— Mnie też. — Nie powiedziałam mu, że po drodze zdążyłam zjeść dwa ciastka. Bardzo lubiłam ciastka, zwłaszcza te z lukrem. Ale w końcu przyznałam się.

— Ależ ty masz gust — rzekł, jedząc kawałek melona” (O'Brien 1978a: 161; “‘I'm hungry,’ he said. “‘Me too.’” I didn't tell him I had managed to eat two cakes on the way. I loved cake, especially the ones with icing. But in the end I admitted it. “‘The things you like!’” he said, eating a piece of melon’).

The double meaning in the original, emphasised by the simultaneous scooping out of a melon, is absent from the Polish version, which does not leave the level of banalities about sticky buns. Finally, in the Polish version there is no reference to Caitheleen touching Mr. Gentleman's “orchid.” Even this obliqueness was too direct for the Polish version.

Although the Polish version maintains the original's jaundiced view of the Catholic religion and convent school life, the criticism is a little less biting in translation. In the original, Caitheleen describes Mr. Gentleman as her “new god”

(O'Brien 1963: 65); in translation he is a "nowe bożyszczce" (O'Brien 1978a: 58; 'a new idol/pagan god'). In the original "Martha always sneered at religion, and praying and craw thumpers" (O'Brien 1963: 127). This is rendered as: "Marta zawsze drwiła z religii, nabożeństw i księży" (O'Brien 1978a: 117; 'Marta always sneered at religion, religious services and priests'). In this case the attempt to soften the blow backfires. Replacing the derogatory "craw thumper" with the neutral "priest" has the effect of making Martha's former sneering seem even more thoroughgoing: in English she criticises only craw thumpers; in Polish she criticises *all* priests. Martha had previously said that religion was "dope for fools" (O'Brien 1963: 127); in Polish it is "po to, by ogłupiać ludzi" (O'Brien 1978a: 117; '[designed] to turn people silly'). It would seem that the translator (or editor, or possibly even censor) did not wish to equate religious people with fools. Or perhaps the reference to "dope," i.e. drugs, was uncomfortably close to "opium of the people." "Dope for fools" might seem just right for the Polish climate but a translator or editor might have feared alienating Polish readers with references, however passing, to communism.

While some of these changes are significant enough—in particular the excising of the orchid and the tickling—it should be noted here that the translation does not balk at the great age difference between the married Mr. Gentleman and Caithleen, who is fourteen when they start seeing each other in both the Polish and the English versions. Nor does the Polish version shy away from the hint of lesbianism with Cynthia, whom Caithleen kisses every night in the convent school.

Other changes in the Polish translation seem unlikely to have been the result of any institutional censorship. The first change is a tendency for the Polish version to explicate, as can be seen in the following example: "'If I had a penny for every pound he owes me,' Hickey said, shaking his head fondly. We owed Hickey a lot of money [...]" (O'Brien 1963: 34–35). This is translated as "— Gdybym to ja mógł dostać tylko po pensie za każdego funta, który mi jest winien — rzekł Hickey, kiwając ze smutkiem głową. Nie przesadzał. Byliśmy winni Hickeyowi dużo pieniędzy [...]" (O'Brien 1978a: 30; "'If I had a penny for every pound he owes me,' Hickey said, shaking his head sadly. He was not exaggerating. We owed Hickey a lot of money...'). The seemingly illogical "fondly" has been changed for "sadly" in the translation, and a linking phrase ("he was not exaggerating") has been added. The addition of linking and explanatory words and phrases is very common in the translation, meaning that the sometimes abrupt shifts of the original are lost and the translation reads more smoothly, not to say flatly. The Polish version gives us a more polished narrative, unlike the original, whose style reviewers and critics usually described with words like "fresh," "charming," "honest," "lyrical," and "uncluttered" (Pelan, quoted in Greenwood 2003: 23). Edna O'Brien claimed she wrote the book in three weeks (Eckley 1974: 26). If this really is the case (her husband claimed *he* wrote it (Woods 2006: 55)), one might compare the Polish translation to a second draft.

Another example is "[...] finally he came out and pushed the curtain back with his hands. The crowd cheered" (O'Brien 1963: 45), which becomes "W końcu jednak dał za wygraną, pokazał się publiczności i rozsunał kurtynę rękami. W

nagrode otrzymał duże brawa” (O'Brien 1978a: 39; 'In the end he gave up, showed himself to the audience and pushed back the curtain with his hands. He was rewarded with a big cheer'). The translation makes it perfectly clear that we are dealing with cause and effect here.

Finally, the translation often avoids statements of fact, preferring instead to use phrases like "it seemed." This often, but not always, concerns things a non-omniscient first person narrator (which Caithleen is) could not know, as in the following example: "'I'm going to blow up this town,' she said, and she meant it, that first night in Dublin" (O'Brien 1963: 142). "— Zobaczysz, że wysadzę to miasto w powietrze—powiedziała. Wydaje mi się, że tej pierwszej nocy w Dublinie rzeczywiście tak myślała" (O'Brien 1978a: 131; "'You'll see: I'm going to blow up this town,' she said. I think she really meant it that first night in Dublin').

3 Girl with Green Eyes

Zborowska is more adventurous in her translation of *Girl with Green Eyes*, perhaps because the main characters are no longer girls, but grown women. Most ticklish references to sex are unflinchingly translated, as in the following examples: "'Distract him. Get him interested in your bust or the sunset or something'" (O'Brien 1964: 9); "'Balls'" (O'Brien 1964: 22); "he had kissed my frightened nipples and they had sprouted like seed potatoes—before I got the fit of shivering" (O'Brien 1964: 66). All this is in sharp contrast to the bashfulness of the translation of *Country Girls*, where, as seen, the details of Mr. Gentleman's anatomy are carefully skirted. This is not the case in *Dziewczyna o zielonych oczach*, (i.e. *Girl with Green Eyes*) where Caithleen's first sexual encounter is accurately translated.

And yet there are times when Zborowska's nerve fails her. The vulgar remarks made to Caithleen by the poet, Simon, are mostly translated—including "'Did you measure it?'," a reference to Eugene's "'you-know what'" (O'Brien 1964: 166)—but one of them is missing: "'How do you feel about breasts?'" (O'Brien 1964: 170). Baba's worry that she might "'puke all over the damn ship'" (O'Brien 1964: 211) is less colourful in Polish: she simply worries that they might be struck by seasickness (O'Brien 1978b: 201). Zborowska also seems at times to be a little shy in physiological matters: "Mrs. Burns asked me if it was my bad time [i.e. her period]" (O'Brien 1964: 34) becomes "pani Burns zapytała, czy to nie jest mój pechowy dzień" (O'Brien 1978b: 31; 'Mrs. Burns asked me if it was my unlucky day'), though this may have been a misunderstanding on the translator's part. When it comes to bodily functions and sex, then, Zborowska is franker in *Girl with Green Eyes* than in *Country Girls*, though she is inconsistent, apparently finding some passages from the original too vulgar or forthright to translate.

On matters religious, Zborowska again does not always follow the original. An example of the translator's unwillingness to accommodate Caithleen's idolatry is in the words "[...] he [Eugene] lay there, like a Christ, sipping tea [...]" (O'Brien

1964: 137). In Polish there is no attempt to draw a parallel between Eugene and Christ (or “a” Christ): Eugene simply lies comfortably (O’Brien 1978b: 130). When Caithleen and Baba go into a church “for three wishes” (O’Brien 1964: 68) this is changed to “na chwilę” (O’Brien 1978b: 64; ‘for a moment’). The girls’ treatment of religion in this way is omitted in translation. (Their visit to a fortune-teller, however, is left in, though the authorities did not take kindly to this kind of superstition. References to fortune telling are also left intact in the short story “A Scandalous Woman”). A key example of Polish censorship in religious matters is the sentence “‘If God is good, he [*sic*] won’t burn me,’ I said to Father Hagerty [...]” (O’Brien 1964: 101), which in translation is “— Jeśli Bóg jest dobry, to nie pozwoli mnie skrzywdzić — powiedziałam ojcu Hagerty [...]” (O’Brien 1978b: 96; “‘If God is good he won’t let me come to harm,’ I said to Father Hagerty’). The translator carefully avoids saying that God is to blame for hell. Also on the subject of eternal damnation, hell is Caithleen’s “‘second greatest fear’” (O’Brien 1964: 125) in English but in Polish it is her greatest fear (O’Brien 1978b: 119).

As in the case of *The Country Girls*, the translation of *Girl With Green Eyes* is more “polished.” Again, some of the directness (or, if you prefer, naivety) of the original is lost, though in some cases it could be argued that the translator has improved on the original: “‘They’re empty,’ I said. They were empty” (O’Brien 1964: 76) becomes “— To puste opakowania—powiedziałam. Były naprawdę puste” (O’Brien 1978b: 72; “‘the packets are empty,’ I said. They really were empty’). Similarly, “‘No.’ I knew it well” (O’Brien 1964: 105) is given a connecting word: “— Nie—powiedziałam, chociaż domyślałam się” (O’Brien 1978b: 100; “‘No,’ I said, although I guessed [the answer]’).

Zborowska also, as seen before, sometimes “corrects” incidences where Caithleen knows things only an omniscient narrator could know for certain: “They were mostly local people and they all stared at us. It was because we weren’t married” (O’Brien 1964: 173) becomes “Publiczność składała się przeważnie z miejscowej ludności i wszyscy na nas patrzyli. Chyba dlatego, że nie byliśmy małżeństwem” (O’Brien 1978b: 165; ‘The audience were mostly local people and they all stared at us. Probably because we weren’t married’). Also, “[...] my rubber boots made them think we were very eccentric” (O’Brien 1964: 17) is translated “[...] widok moich botów gumowych skłaniał ich zapewne do przypuszczenie, że jesteśmy bardzo ekscentryczne” (O’Brien 1978b: 14; ‘no doubt the sight of my rubber boots made them think we were very eccentric’). In this example, the people in question are waiters and it is highly unlikely that Caithleen actually knows what they are thinking. The addition of “zapewne” (‘no doubt’) changes the original statement of fact into a supposition.

4 A Scandalous Woman

From the point of view of institutional, state censorship, *A Scandalous Woman* presents an interesting test case: the story “A Journey” deals with a British trade union organiser. It is a casual, throwaway remark that shows the difference

between English and Polish most sharply. While addressing a meeting the union organiser jokes about his faulty loudspeaker, referring to it as “Big Brother” (O'Brien 1976: 110). In the Polish translation it is “starszy brat” (‘older brother’) (O'Brien 1979: 136). We may assume this change was made either by the censor or by the translator/editor in anticipation of what the censor would say. It is also (faintly) possible that the translator was not aware of the phrase “wielki brat” (i.e. ‘big brother’) but if so, this can also be laid at the door of censorship. There are three other changes in the story, though, that might point to the translator's antipathy towards socialism — that is, not the censor's antipathy to capitalism.

The Polish version presents the workers at the meetings as “tamer,” more bourgeois. For example, in the original the workers are “proud to contribute” (O'Brien 1976: 112) to the cause. In Polish they are not proud to contribute, but rather “[...] dumni z tego, iż stać ich na większe datki” (O'Brien 1979: 138; ‘proud they could afford larger contributions’). In other words, they are proud that they are rich. They are transformed in this way into individualists, with little of the working class solidarity of the original. Also, in the original, the narrator notes their “curious kind of bantering anger” (O'Brien 1976: 112), while in Polish their anger is gone, replaced by “gorzki humor” (O'Brien 1979: 139; ‘bitter humour’). The thought that workers in a capitalist country might feel class anger is not readily countenanced by the Polish translator. It seems unlikely these last two changes were made by the censor. More likely the translator made them — perhaps unconsciously, as they are, after all, rather subtle changes, too subtle for a censor unfamiliar with the original to catch. The third change comes in the sentence “[...] to deliver a lecture to some students and later to men, fellow unionists who worked on the shipyards” (O'Brien 1976: 103). In Polish the last part reads “przemawiać do towarzyszy związkowców zatrudnionych w jakiejś stoczni” (O'Brien O'Brien and 1979: 128; ‘deliver a lecture to trade union comrades employed in some shipyard’). The addition of the word “comrade” may have had the effect — and been intended to have the effect—on Polish readers, tired of years of propaganda and tired of the comrades running their country, of turning them off the union organiser (a philanderer in any case) and his cause.

Returning to social mores, there is a very noticeable tendency to tone down references to sex, bodily functions and, in particular, violence in *A Scandalous Woman*. In this collection of stories, O'Brien is more daring than before and references to tickling seem innocent by comparison with what we meet in, for example, “The House of my Dreams.” (It might be said of O'Brien that she kept upping the ante in a game with the Irish censor aimed at guaranteeing notoriety (Adams 1968: 252)). The translator frequently cuts the “dirty bits” out of *A Scandalous Woman*. The narrator's description of her affair with a boorish man in “The House of my Dreams,” complete with four-letter words and explicit descriptions of sex, is bowdlerised. For example, the translation reads “Czuła, że odżywa w jego obecności” (O'Brien 1979: 186; ‘She felt herself come to life in his presence’) in place of the original's description of her orgasm. The Polish version has “się przespać” (O'Brien 1979: 186–187; ‘to sleep with’) in place of “fuck” (O'Brien 1976: 148). The Polish reader also finds “[...] że musi ją zbadać”

(O'Brien 1979: 187; 'that he must examine her') in place of the original's more detailed description of what exactly was to be examined. The narrator's reminiscences of how she seduced another woman are essentially complete — Zborowska does not shy away from the lesbianism — but they are less explicit: "They were both wet" (O'Brien 1976: 152) is excised and "po ciele tej kobiety" (O'Brien 1979: 191; 'over the body of the woman') is not where the fingers were in the original.

In other of the collection's stories too the translator avoids the explicitness of the original: the already quite circumspect "tried to saw off part of the bank clerk's anatomy" (O'Brien 1976: 30) in "A Scandalous Woman" becomes "pobił [...] urzędnika bankowego" (O'Brien 1979: 33; 'beat up the bank clerk'). In "Over" Harry's stories always have "a lot of blood" (O'Brien 1976: 54). These stories in the translation are "z mrożącymi krew w żyłach detalami" (O'Brien 1979: 66; 'with blood-chilling details'), while one story of a Spanish virgin's "beauty and her moisture, etc." (O'Brien 1976: 54), in Polish, is about her "ognisty temperament" (O'Brien 1979: 66; 'fiery temperament'). In "The House of my Dreams" the narrator fears someone might "[...] treat the floor as a lavatory [...]" (O'Brien 1976: 138) while in Polish the danger is someone might "zrobić coś nieprzyzwoitego" (O'Brien 1979: 173; 'do something indecent'). Again, Zborowska avoids the subject of periods: "The girl got spoiled, stayed in bed three or four certain days of each month [...]" (O'Brien 1976: 150) is rendered "Całymi dniami wylegiwała się w łóżku [...]" (O'Brien 1979: 188; 'lay in bed for entire days').

The translation plays down the original's scenes of violence and in particular domestic violence directed by men at women and children. In "A Scandalous Woman" Eily is being beaten up by her parents for getting pregnant before marriage: "[...] I listened at the door, and ran off only when there was a scream or a blow or a thud" (O'Brien 1976: 28). This violence is cut out of the translation, which reads: "gdy ktoś krzyknął albo uderzył pięścią w stół" (O'Brien 1979: 31; 'when someone cried out or hit the table with a fist'). Arguably, the translator has merely forced Polish readers to accept her own, valid interpretation of the original, which does not explicitly say that the blow was aimed at a person (or at a table, for that matter). It is harder still to make this argument in the next example: in the same context we read in English "But that incurred some sort of a belt from her father, because I heard my mother say that there was no need to resort to savagery" (O'Brien 1976: 29). This in Polish is "Te słowa rozwścieczyły jej ojca, bo po chwili słyszałam, jak mama próbowała go uspokoić" (O'Brien 1979: 32; 'These words angered my father because after a moment I heard my mother trying to calm him down'). An exception (not all reference to violence are cut or toned down) comes in the same story, when the pregnant girl's father strikes the bank clerk who got her pregnant. It would seem that manly, man on man violence was not thought too much for Polish readers to take. Also, though, a reference in "The Favourite" to a girl's father kicking her in the backside (O'Brien 1976: 74) is translated, as "sprął ją po tyłku" (O'Brien 1979: 92; 'thrashed her on the backside'). Again, "The House of my Dreams" provides a lurid example: "[...] her father threatened her with the slash hook [...]" (O'Brien 1976: 147) is translated by (a disbelieving?) Zborowska

as “[...] zagroził jej, że ją zbije paskiem [...]” (O'Brien 1979: 185; 'threatened to give her the strap').

In *A Scandalous Woman* as a whole, we again observe a strong tendency to “improve” on the original by, for example, changing omniscient statements of fact into suppositions, explicating unclear passages in the original, and adding connecting words like “because” and “of course.” This process might better be described as “naturalisation” of the text to Polish norms of correctness. In “[...] trotting up the fields in his oatmeal-coloured socks—he'd lost his shoes” (O'Brien 1976: 33) the Polish version adds the word “because” after “socks” (O'Brien 1979: 36). In “And you told me about [...] being scolded by your mother. She was ashamed” (O'Brien 1976: 65) the Polish version explains why the mother scolded her by adding the word “because” (O'Brien 1979: 80). In “At any rate he hadn't changed his mind yet. He was a great vacillator” (O'Brien 1976: 104) Polish begins the second sentence with the word “unfortunately” (O'Brien 1979: 128).

One passage in the original describes the bad relations between a man and his daughter's boyfriend. We then read “As time went by, her father was asking the young man for tips for the horses [...]” (O'Brien 1976: 75). It seems strange that their poor relationship should include such friendliness and doubtless this is why the translation adds the words “udobruchał się” (O'Brien 1979: 92; 'he softened') after “as time went by.” The translator also intervenes to prevent a misunderstanding in the following passage: “All dogs, and they were all mongrels, were called Biddy regardless of their sex, and invariably died, of the same thing which was a distemper. There were never less than six or seven at table [...]” (O'Brien 1976: 79). Zborowska makes it clear that the creatures at the table are human beings (O'Brien 1979: 98).

The narrator's omniscience is corrected, perhaps overzealously, in the following examples: “Then he let out a couple of whistles to let her know how welcome she was” (O'Brien 1976: 16). In Polish the phrase “jakby chciał dać do zrozumienia” ('as if he wanted her to understand') is inserted (O'Brien 1979: 14). In the English we read: “A small man, her husband, excused himself [...]” (O'Brien 1976: 23). In Polish he is “zapewne” ('no doubt') her husband (O'Brien 1979: 24). Where the original has “I [...] used to stay in his room, standing by the little window in order to smell him [...]” (O'Brien 1976: 131), the Polish version, instead of “in order to,” has “tak jakbym chciała” ('as if I wanted to') (O'Brien 1979: 164), which seems a step too far. A first person narrator has a right to know the purpose of her actions.

5 Conclusion

It is difficult to detect the direct influence of ideological, communist censorship in the Polish translations of Edna O'Brien. In the only one of her translated works that deals in some way with politics we find the small but significant change of “Big Brother” into “older brother.” This change—almost certainly induced by the political climate, if not by the censor's office itself—is accompanied by small

shifts away from working-class solidarity. Apart from the censorship of “unorthodox” religious views, mostly what we find is a suppression of sex and violence. This is what might be expected from the authorities—the People’s Republic of Poland had a reputation for prudery—but so far I have been unable to find any mention of the censorship of O’Brien in the archives of the censor’s office. It seems likely that the changes detailed above represent some form of internal censorship: that is, no state censor told Zborowska to avoid blaming God for hell, for example. It is even less likely that the censor’s office lies behind the numerous alterations of O’Brien’s style—the tidying up of loose ends, the explication, and the elimination of logical errors. On the whole, one may prefer to speak of the polonisation of Edna O’Brien rather than her censorship but it is a fairly ruthless polonisation: the books in translation are less graphic, less shocking, less Edna O’Brien. The outright banning of *The Country Girls* in her home country ensured her a notoriety that can only have helped her career. The more insidious death by a thousand cuts in Poland led to relative obscurity.

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