This article focuses on the reception of Synge’s and O’Casey’s plays on the Viennese stages from 1914 to 1969. Although the Vienna productions of *The Playboy of the Western World* (1917 and 1968), *Juno and the Paycock* (1934), *The Silver Tassie* (1954), and *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1969) coincide with important political upheavals in modern world history, mainstream critics tended to de-contextualize these theatrical performances from events such as the Russian Revolution, the Austrian Civil War, the Cold War, the Prague Spring Rising and Western counterculture. Rather than noticing the parallel situation of Ireland paralyzed by the father figure of the British king and Austria ruled by a past-ridden autocratic establishment in times of global change, the critical response to these productions emphasized the allegedly strange Irishness of Synge’s and O’Casey’s plays as a distancing device. Hence modern Irish drama was perceived as the timeless exotic ‘other’ rather than applied to the political analysis of the Austrian here and now. Whereas the Irish patriot Synge was seen in a rather positive albeit exotic light, the decidedly pro-socialist O’Casey became increasingly stigmatized as a ‘red’ alien by the bourgeois Austrian mainstream audience.

This essay deals with the reception of Synge’s and O’Casey’s modernist Irish drama in Vienna from 1914 to 1969. Whereas four of O’Casey’s works were performed in Vienna in the time span under consideration, only one play by Synge made it to the Viennese playhouses: *The Playboy of the Western World*. In its debate of traditional patriarchal rule, this highly subversive text shows thematic parallels with O’Casey’s equally discomforting *The Shadow of a Gunman*. *The Playboy of the Western World* challenges the patriarchal concept of the family triad by a son’s Oedipal rebellion against his father. *The Shadow of a Gunman* features the Irish revolutionary fight against the collective father figure of the English King. Whereas Synge’s filial main character succeeds in his struggle for self-liberation after a series of drawbacks, O’Casey’s pseudo-masculine freedom fighters are satirized as a pack of lazy cowards: braggart soldiers, whose verbose lethargy is contrasted with the civic courage of the young woman Minnie Powell: the only heroic, and thus ‘masculine’ character of *The Shadow of a Gunman*. The other plays by O’Casey performed in Vienna between 1914 and 1969 are *Juno and the Paycock*, *Bedtime Story*, and *The Silver Tassie*.

The present study is subdivided into two main sections. The first part focuses on the reception of John Millington Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* on the Viennese stages. This play was first performed during the Great War on 13 April 1917: ten years after its first night in Dublin, the *The*
Playboy of the Western World’s Vienna debut was hosted by the ‘Neue Wiener Bühne in der Wasagasse’ – a ‘fringe’-like avant-garde playhouse focusing on experimental literary drama. Apparently a play which caused the notorious ‘Playboy Riots’ when it was first produced at the Dublin Abbey Theatre in 1907, was considered too provocative to be staged by one of the established theatres frequented by the conservative Viennese mainstream audience.

This production was preceded by the play’s Austrian premiere at the Salzburg Stadttheater on 13 February 1914 – i.e. approximately five months before the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914. This first Austrian production is included in the present analysis in order to show how the Great War affected the reception of the Vienna 1917 production. As the Austrian National Library has just published a digital corpus of the imperial media coverage from 1914-18, the present analysis profits from newly accessible source material on the early Austrian production history of The Playboy of the Western World. From 1917 onwards, Synge’s play was not performed by an important Vienna theatre for more than fifty years. It re-opened at the leftist fringe playhouse of the Theater der Courage in 1968 – i.e. in the time-span when Western counterculture reached its revolutionary climax in the ‘Cultural Revolution’ of 1968 and 1969.

The second part of this article focuses on Seán O’Casey. It begins with a brief discussion of – and an afterthought on – Margarete Rubik’s (2012) article on the Viennese staging of O’Casey’s plays from 1970 until 2000. This initial section is followed by a detailed analysis of the early reception history of O’Casey’s works in Vienna from its beginnings in the early 1930s until 1969.

O’Casey was introduced to Vienna when ‘The English Players’ company performed Juno and the Paycock at the Raimund Theater on 16 April 1930. Owing to the success of this English language production, the then very elitist and literary Raimund stage produced the first German translation of this play: Juno und der Käpt’n on 17 February 1934. Thus the performance of O’Casey’s drama from the Irish Civil War coincides with the Austrian Civil War from 12 to 15 February 1934.

After the totalitarian years of the ‘Ständestaat’, Hitler’s ‘Anschluss’ and the Second World War, O’Casey’s Bedtime Story was produced by the Theater der Courage on 16 October 1953 – a rather farcical and conventional one-act play. On 29 January 1954 the Volkstheater produced O’Casey’s anti-war play The Silver Tassie translated as Der Preis pokal – a performance which results in a debate on the topicality of this Great War-centred text in the context of the Cold War.

1 Cf. ANNO – AustriaN Newspapers Online. The corpus was published on 28 May 2014.