

# Włodzimierz Bolecki

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Zdzisław Łapiński, Kraków 1984 :  
[recenzja]

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nian period, collected photographs and details about his successive places of residence, as well as miscellaneous materials concerning Gombrowicz and his ties with Argentina.

As a result we obtained a fascinating document not only on Gombrowicz's stay in Argentina but also one which supplies a new and important commentary on his literary works. On the one hand, we get acquainted with Gombrowicz's friends who speak about the Polish writer, and on the other, we learn a lot about different passages from his *Diary* from what they have to say. But Kalicki's book is not scholarly in its intent. It is something like an attempt to make the personality of an unusual man and writer more familiar to his readers by showing his ties with others and their mutual fascination.

Another motif in the book concerns the ties of Gombrowicz the writer with cultural life in Argentina. Those ties were accidental but relations on Gombrowicz's views concerning the place of the writer and of art in society provide new insights into Gombrowicz's philosophy of culture. Kalicki's book also provides numerous previously unknown documents on his early writings—above all on his novel *Ferdynand*, which Gombrowicz himself recommended for translation into Spanish during his stay in Argentina. The importance of Kalicki's book follows from the fact that it covers that period in his life in which he wrote his top works, namely *The Wedding*, the *Diary*, *Pornography*, *Operetta* and the first version of his *Cosmos*.

Włodzimierz Bolecki

Transl. by Zygmunt Nierada

**Gombrowicz i krytycy (Gombrowicz and the Critics).** Selected and ed. by Zdzisław Łapiński, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1984, 847 pp. The series: *Pisarz i Krytycy*, ed. Jan Błoński.

This is an anthology of most important texts on Gombrowicz's works. The first texts refer to Gombrowicz's debut as a writer, that is, his *Diary of Pubescence* (1933), the last ones to a conference the Literary Research Institute of Warsaw organized in April 1975. Some of those texts, says Łapiński,

are now no more than documents of their times, others lay foundations for a future synthesis, while still others have survived as self-contained artistic works. But some of these texts are perhaps the best introduction we now have into Gombrowicz's work (p. 22).

The content of this bulky volume cannot possibly be discussed at length. Let us therefore mention the authors of the texts and the particular topics of their interest.

The anthology opens with most typical remarks concerning Gombrowicz's first books, by T. Breza (1933), J. Kaden Bandrowski (1933), T. Dołęga-Mostowicz (1937), I. Fik (1938), S. Kisielewski (1938), B. Schulz (1938), L. Fryde (1939) and A. Sandauer (1939). Those comments produce a picture of the reception of Gombrowicz's works before World War II. His originality was noticed immediately, but critics found it very difficult to interpret his works.

Next come texts written after the war. The first, by J. Wittlin, was written in 1951 in an attempt to defend Gombrowicz against critics castigating him for the novel *Trans-Atlantic*. Wittlin's apology soon became unnecessary because Gombrowicz's artistic originality was acknowledged more and more widely. So, texts written later refer to particular aspects of works by Gombrowicz who by then had become a recognized and appreciated author.

The first postwar texts in Łapiński's anthology betoken the triumphant return of *Ferdydurke*. Ludwik Flaszen (1956) and Jan Józef Lipski (1957) point at the original character of that novel against the backdrop of inter-war literature as well as at its up-to-date character, its topicality and innovative style. Artur Sandauer (1965) tries his hand at a recapitulating study of Gombrowicz's work presenting his main ideas and philosophical antinomies such as superiority vs. inferiority, primacy vs. secondarity, maturity vs. immaturity, age vs. youth and so on. Sandauer draws a clear distinction between Gombrowicz's early works and the novel *Pornography*, which he describes as "a tasteless piece of literary trash in which two gentlemen give free rein to their perverse likings under a sky shrouded in smoke rising from crematoria" (p. 125). Sandauer used a key of psychological and biographical details in his analysis. A much more interesting study was written by F. Bondy (1963), who studied the motif of duel in Gombrowicz's work to

discover many philosophical meanings in it. L. Goldman (1967), in turn, discovered in *The Wedding* a grotesque allegory based on a true story which occurred in Central Europe in mid-20th century. *The Wedding*, incidentally, is the subject of two more texts in Łapiński's anthology. In one, M. Głowiński discusses that play's Shakespearean roots and the mechanisms of parody and game, while stage director K. Zaleski discusses problems this play creates for producers wanting to show it on stage. K. Puzyna (1969) also writes about Gombrowicz's plays for the stage pointing out that Gombrowicz's plays are in fact more topical than all theatrical productions in socialist Poland. In the same year, W. Karpiński wrote that "Gombrowicz's work is a reaction to the crisis of European culture" (p. 173) which began with "the ascent of all-out scepticism in it" (p. 183). C. Miłosz (1970), in turn, remarks that Gombrowicz touched upon the most inexplicable problems of the 20th century, above all the "madness which took possession of both masses and individuals" (p. 190). A study by J. Błoński (1970) provides a general summary of the entire body of Gombrowicz's work, including a penetrating analysis of the writer's intellectual attitude along with its deep immersion in Poland's cultural heritage.

Studies of individual works claim a lot of space in Łapiński's anthology. Z. Malić (1970), for example, studies the novel *Trans-Atlantic* uncovering its artistic nooks and corners and casting that work against the entire backdrop of Gombrowicz's work: Says Malić,

In its development from the *Diary of Pubescence* through to the *Trans-Atlantic* Gombrowicz's work is marked by a significant change in the vantage-point of action in his individual works. Whereas in the short stories of the *Diary* events are presented from a psychological vantage-point, in *Ferdydurke* the vantage-point switches over to the sociological angle, and in *The Wedding* and in *Trans-Atlantic* national mythology provides the vantage-point (pp. 255–256).

Three studies are devoted to the play *Operetta*. J. Błoński (1971) studies the philosophy of history implicit in that work and underlines its ambiguity. Says Błoński,

As Goethe did in his *Faust*, Gombrowicz supplied his *Operetta* with a dual conclusion. Human race, all your history is a fraud, says one of the faces of Janus; human race, you are eternal, says the other (s. 282).

K. S. Jeleński (1975) recounts the order in which that play's

parts were written, displaying the differences which exist between the *History* (in the first draft) and the published text of the *Operetta*. The different versions of that work are used by the critic to scrutinize Gombrowicz's philosophy of history. D. Danek, in turn, uses the example of *Operetta* (as well as other plays such as *Iwona Duchess of Bourgogne* and *The Wedding*) to study the motif of death in Gombrowicz's work. Three studies are also devoted to the novel *Cosmos*. A. Libera, K. Bartoszyński and A. Okopień-Sławińska come forward with different interpretations of that work as well as with different ways of analyzing Gombrowicz's work. *Pornography*, too, is accorded separate space in Łapiński's anthology. M. Głowiński (1973) analyzes the mechanism of Gombrowicz's parody on the example of this novel, whereas M. Janion gives an interpretation of the novel *The Possessed*. Of studies devoted to more general topics, let me mention those by J. Jarzębski (on "game" and "form"), by M. Szpakowska (1972), and by W. Włodarczyk and H. Babiński who analyze Gombrowicz's theory of art, especially of painting. A. Falkiewicz, in turn, studies the motif of perpetrator vs. sleuth, while J. Pawłowski analyzes the "erotic language" which is part of all works of Gombrowicz's.

Łapiński's anthology is an unusual book as it not only presents the history of critical interpretation of Gombrowicz's work but also provides some very important findings which cannot be omitted in any study of Gombrowicz's work.

The anthology is supplied with an Introduction written by the editor himself, in which Łapiński penetratingly describes the leading modes of "the art of interpreting" Gombrowicz. Łapiński also points out that some previous interpretations are debatable because critics were too conciliatory towards Gombrowicz's own comments on his works.

Another major advantage of Łapiński's anthology is the excellent complete bibliography of works by and about Gombrowicz (till 1980) compiled by Z. Biłek-Dąbrowska.

Łapiński's anthology is an invaluable book as a first-rate encyclopaedia of facts about Gombrowicz. A vivid, colorful, fascinating and occasionally flabbergasting book, it has the discouraging appear-

ance of a bulky volume, but once you have started reading it you are bound to get entranced in that subtle dance of ideas in which following Gombrowicz himself and his works, all authors are engaged.

Włodzimierz Bolecki

Transl. by Zygmunt Nierada

Zdzisław Łapiński, **Ja, Ferdynurke. Gombrowicza świat interakcji (Me, Ferdynurke. Gombrowicz's World of Interaction)**, Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, Lublin 1985, 108 pp.

It is nearly 20 years ago that Zdzisław Łapiński published his article called "Wedding in a Human Church. On Interacting Categories in Gombrowicz's Works" (*Twórczość*, 1966, no. 9), which marked a turning-point in studies of Gombrowicz. Łapiński established an entirely new perspective of approaching Gombrowicz's works, invoking up-to-date categories from psychology and social communication theory. Łapiński's article was for many years to come one of the standard studies to quote from by students of Gombrowicz's work.

The book Łapiński has now published consistently unfolds the ideas contained in that old study.

In the opening chapter called "Introduction to Method: Lawyer Kraykowski's Dancer," Łapiński briefly outlines the early period of Gombrowicz's work, to proceed to analyzing the short story called "Lawyer Kraykowski's Dancer," which for the sake of interpretation, Łapiński presents as "a kind of report, an account on a definite segment of real social life" (p. 11). Łapiński uses E. Goffman's analytical categories (from *Relations in Public*, 1971) to reconstruct that segment of reality. Łapiński says Gombrowicz's short story takes place "in that segment of reality which, following Erving Goffman, we can call 'social order'" (p. 15). The title "dancer" is presented by Łapiński as a witness to events which put him into relationships with many characters from the social order. It turns out that the chief figure of the story, the "dancer", abuses "commonly approved ways of communication" (p. 16). As the hero of the story acting amidst other characters, the "dancer"