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"Ja, Ferdydurke. Gombrowicza świat interakcji", Zdzisław Łapiński, Lublin 1985 : [recenzja]

Literary Studies in Poland 17, 137-140

1987

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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"

employs nonverbal means of expression. As a story-teller, though, he is extremely eloquent. Still, in either of these two roles he behaves improperly, for he challenges established forms of social communication. Łapiński goes on to say that Gombrowicz's short story revives the ground rule of heroic comism, for the main character is talking of trivial matters as though they were of paramount importance while behaving in a manner which suggests that insignificant things are first-rate matters. Obviously, Gombrowicz is resorting to well-known literary stereotypes, "not to ridicule them, but only because they had been ridiculed enough before" (p. 19). The point is, he uses those stereotypes to express what are really serious matters. However, as he uses worn-out literary models to present riddles of the human soul, Gombrowicz actually criticizes all conventions of his contemporary literature. The short stories in the volume called *Diary of Pubescence* are all cases of parodied literary techniques. But, as Łapiński points out, the "Dancer" remains the most interesting story of all, from the standpoint of his later writings, for in that story Gombrowicz illustrated the phenomenon of social interpretation (of different people on each other). Social interaction will become the main topic of his subsequent works.

In chapter two ("Action and Interaction") Łapiński points out that things Gombrowicz's characters regard as important always emerge in interpersonal relations. An individual's consciousness organizes itself in relationship with the consciousness of another individual. Łapiński therefore analyzes the forms of communication Gombrowicz's characters use in contacts with one another, namely words, gestures, mimicry, touch. This kind of communication is a combined outcome of biological impulses (coming from the body) and social conventions (as well as institutions)—school, family, church, office, political organization, ideology etc. As is known, the order of social custom is preserved when definite conventional behavior models are emulated. But Gombrowicz's hero "behaves in a fashion which implies that each individual act of everyday life presents a problem" (p. 35). Gombrowicz's heroes feel that social institutions are infected with internal decay, but they do not want to restore the previous social order (along with all its rituals, symbols, myths, power systems etc.). They are simply on the watchout for interpersonal tensions amidst which absolute human values can

be released (p. 40). In other words, Gombrowicz's hero is actually always groping for meaning, be it in social life, in communication, in nature, or in the universe.

The third chapter of Łapiński's book ("Face to Face with Readers") is devoted to explaining the author's own presence in his works. Gombrowicz is constantly trying to stir his readers' interest and often resorts to tricks typical of popular literature. Says Łapiński,

Gombrowicz sought to eschew stereotypes to indulge in others, which he knew were the most artificial of all. They were artificial as products, falsifying the reality they were supposed to depict, but absorbed particularly eagerly in the depths of the human soul—also by elitistic souls.

So, Gombrowicz dreamt of a literature which would immerse itself in what he thought was the spirituality of the masses,

a literature which would stupefy people with its own depravation while at the same time (but how?) elevating itself from its own fall by creating hitherto imponderable values. Gombrowicz probably found himself facing an unmanageable problem (p. 18).

The novel *The Possessed* he wrote under a pseudonym is perhaps the first example of that. It was a pastiche of popular detective stories. But in his subsequent works (as in the *Diary of Pubescence*), Gombrowicz switches over from pastiche to parody. As parody implied a loosening of the link to the real world (the link between words and the reality they describe), he had to find something which could restore literature's connection with real life. He found that in the idea of self-commentary, occasionally in autobiographical remarks. From the very beginning of his career as writer, Gombrowicz tried hard to make readers feel the strength of the bond between the author's own self and his work. This is why in each of his works Gombrowicz indulges in commenting on his own self. This is what he does in *Ferdydurke*, *Trans-Atlantic*, *Pornography*, but above all in his *Diary*. Next to this particularity, Gombrowicz has another somewhat similar fondness, namely to comment on the meanings of his own works—a net in which he entangles the unwitting reader. This way, Gombrowicz produces a new kind of novel, one which can be called "awareness of one's self." This is often a tragical awareness which is expressed in scurrilous langua-

ge. Łapiński calls it tragicomedy. "One writer to read simultaneously with Gombrowicz is Blaise Pascal," says Łapiński quoting Czesław Miłosz.

The concluding chapter of Łapiński's book is devoted to the *Diary* ("Final Word on Method: The Other Me, or the *Diary*"). Łapiński outlines the successive stages of producing that book to proceed to a succinct description of its genre. Łapiński believes Gombrowicz refutes the concept of diary as a "chronicle of current events," or as a "conversation with oneself," or as a "collection of thoughts." But although he refutes or, more precisely, parodies the narrative convention of diaries, Gombrowicz avails himself of the opportunity to write his own spiritual autobiography in the *Diary*. Says Łapiński,

This is not a portrait but a series of mutually parodying portraits; it is not a biography but a series of brief biographical presentations which often clash with one another (p. 88).

However, the true protagonist of the *Diary* is not Witold Gombrowicz as a person but as "the author of the Witold Gombrowicz of the *Diary* and the author of many other characters, events and situations—an author of authors" (p. 103).

Łapiński's book is undoubtedly the best ever study of Gombrowicz. Its succinct and lucid style is reminiscent of Gombrowicz's own, as it is in its consistency of analysis and his logic of arguments. With Cartesian clarity it illuminates the darkness of Gombrowicz's universe.

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Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Horyzonty wyobraźni. O języku poezji oświecenia (Les Horizons de l'imagination. Sur la langue de la poésie du Siècle des Lumières), Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1984.

Le titre du présent ouvrage comporte deux notions fondamentales pour toute réflexion sur la poésie, sa spécificité, ses transformations et son importance. L'imagination et la langue — ces points de référen-