

## References

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*TDR: The Drama Review* 54:1 (T205) Spring 2010.

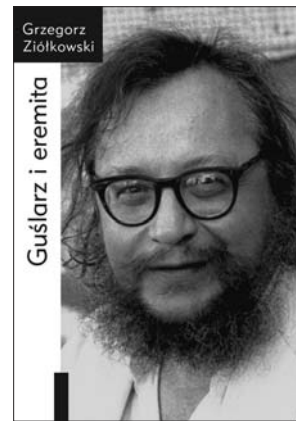
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### ***Guślarz i eremita* [The Guslar and the Hermit].**

By Grzegorz Ziółkowski. Wrocław: Instytut Grotowskiego [The Grotowski Institute], 2007; 475 pp. €10.00.

Much has been written and many brilliant (and not so brilliant) things have been said about Jerzy Grotowski since the 1960s, however, a decade after his death, theatre scholarship has yet to account for the full impact of his legacy. While "poor theatre," "holy actor," and "total act" made it into the theatre's vernacular, few can recognize much less relate notions such as "theatre of sources," "objective drama," or "art as vehicle" to contemporary practice, or understand Grotowski's post-presentational work (1969–1999) as nascent stages of ongoing research in and through performance. Charmed or puzzled, the generation directly influenced by Grotowski often proved unable to get past the power of his myth or apprehend his uncompromising and tireless investigation. Therefore, paradoxically, understanding Grotowski's project as a whole may become a task passed on to those who have not seen the work, or at any rate to those able to demythologize Grotowski without degrading him. Grotowski himself would respect a thought that embraces his vocabulary without being crippled by it, one capable of "a high-level betrayal" towards him.<sup>1</sup>

Among the recent wave of "kiss-and-tell" testimonials published on Grotowski in Poland by some of those formerly close to him,<sup>2</sup> *Guślarz i eremita* by Grzegorz Ziółkowski seems at first an exception. The author belongs to a younger generation of Polish scholars and artists who, despite never having worked with Grotowski or met him personally, publicly position themselves as bearers of his legacy, and consequently disseminate their own expropriation of the man and his project. "Can this man be someone close to us? To those who never saw him and never



1. "A true disciple betrays his master on a high level. [...] A low betrayal is spitting at someone with whom we were close. [...] But there exists a high betrayal [...] when it emerges from faithfulness to one's own path" (Grotowski 2008:38–39).
2. To give just a couple of examples: "[Grotowski] was a narcissist, with a huge desire for recognition, admiration, and fame, a narcissist hungry for ruling the souls" (Dobrowolski 2005); "The great lesson that Grotowski taught me in his last period of life was that views and ideals have no meaning in the relationships with people, and that what counts are sympathies, antipathies, and business coming from them. I needed many years to begin to finally understand it" (Osiński 2008).

received his charm? Who never worshipped him like a god? Who never were nor are his pupils?” asks Ziółkowski in the introduction by quoting Grotowski’s remarks on behalf of his own adopted artistic father, Juliusz Osterwa (9). Grotowski’s answer was affirmative both in verbal declaration and in his work, which, like Osterwa’s, functioned as a laboratory. Therefore the question is not “if” Grotowski can be close to us, but rather, “how”? What does it mean for us today to be close to Grotowski? What can we learn about him from the work continued at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards?

Ziółkowski wrote and published *Guślarz i eremita* during his tenure as the director of the Grotowski Institute (2005–2009).<sup>3</sup> One of the pivotal publications foregrounding the UNESCO Year of Grotowski in Poland, *Guślarz i eremita* deals with Grotowski’s last project based in Poland, Theatre of Sources, and the Objective Drama and Art as vehicle projects based in Irvine, California, and in Pontedera, Italy, respectively. Lacking direct experience with Grotowski, Ziółkowski reaches out to a vast assortment of Polish and international material, from well-known to obscure, with a particular focus on two pivotal lecture series given by Grotowski: at La Sapienza, the University of Rome (1982) and at the Collège de France (1997–1998), of which the former remains published only in fragments in Italian, and the latter exclusively as an audio recording in French (per Grotowski’s wish). Due to limited access to these and other sources, and more importantly, due to the fact that the period in focus is among the least known, *Guślarz i eremita* has the potential to have a formidable influence on Grotowski scholarship in Poland, and thus requires careful analysis.

Impressive archival research and laboriously collected references make *Guślarz i eremita* one of the most complete scholarly resources on Grotowski. But, as much as one can admire the scope of the research, one can become disappointed by an often meager and sometimes questionable outcome. Close comparative reading of the source materials in search of clues leads Ziółkowski to trace changes in phraseology in Grotowski’s consecutive edits of his texts only to contemplate, for example, the replacement of the phrase “my job” with “my obligation” (186). Similarly, Ziółkowski might go after a historical claim, arguing for several pages over a date, as he does regarding the actual beginning of Theatre of Sources (50–55). However, even if he does split hairs on some topics, Ziółkowski’s pedantry pays off particularly well in the more than 100-page appendix, which contains a detailed calendar of Grotowski’s activities (1982–1999) and a thorough bibliography of “published authorized and unauthorized materials of Jerzy Grotowski,” in English, French, Italian, and Polish. Nevertheless this investment in detail distracts the author from forming a larger independent argument—assuming that getting close to Grotowski can be accomplished with the magnifying lens of a philologist. Even if Ziółkowski does explain the etymology and provenance of Grotowski’s terminology and the reader becomes more equipped in pondering about “Art as vehicle” or “verticality,” the majority of the scholarly effort in the book goes into diminutive arguments rather than a dialogue with Grotowski from the independent perspective of a contemporary theatre scholar. Repeating Grotowski’s terms in the context of historical polemics, Ziółkowski fails to bring Grotowski closer to those who never “received his charm.” In a few occasions where Ziółkowski seems to promise a deeper perspective, he puts it in the language of an affected mystic rather than a diligent scholar:

I perceive the lifework of Jerzy Grotowski in its nascent stages [...] as an attempt to turn into action the nostalgia for the luminous purity to which, after birth (read: embodiment), we no longer have access, because we are separated from it by the veil of illusion and forgetting. (23)

Passages of personal musings may perhaps be acceptable in a book that aims to collect and order historical, biographical, and bibliographical material in a scholarly, objective fashion—which I

3. Formerly known as the Centre of Studies on Jerzy Grotowski’s Work and of the Cultural and Theatrical Research, the organization eventually inherited the Laboratory Theatre’s venue in Wrocław after Grotowski’s departure in 1982. There is no institutional continuity between the Laboratory Theatre and the Centre/Institute.

wish were the case, because as such it would be worthy of translation. However, in the introduction, Ziółkowski also proclaims: “Through my work on this book I tried to understand the nature of the experience that came upon me during the presentation of *Action* by the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards on February 18, 1997” (24). If this indeed was his goal, then Ziółkowski-the-scholar in the end did not enlighten Ziółkowski-the-charmed-witness. In the book’s five-page epilogue, Ziółkowski finally lays his cards on the table and reveals his criticism of the current work of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards with the transparent narcissism found in the Grotowski “kiss-and-tell” genre. Judgmental rather than analytical, Ziółkowski attempts to delegitimize the work of Richards and Mario Biagini,<sup>4</sup> accusing them of lacking artistic courage and failing to take on mature challenges, insisting that Grotowski made a mistake choosing his heirs (353). This highly subjective and unsupported criticism comes as a surprise ending to the book that devotes most of its pages to painstaking debates about far less important subjects than Grotowski’s legacy as ongoing research. Instead, Ziółkowski makes an effort to put closure to Grotowski’s project—something perhaps wished for by many Grotowskians. Transparent and unfortunate, the epilogue provides an explanation for the book’s otherwise cryptic (and anonymous) opening citation: “Are we dogs to be licking the leftovers thrown away by others?” (9). And with that thought, this laborious but rather low-altitude scholarly effort lands hard in the mud, yet another “low betrayal” Grotowski would pass over in silence.

—Kris Salata

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*TDR: The Drama Review* 54:1 (T205) Spring 2010.

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***Jerzy Grotowski.*** By James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta. London: Routledge, 2007; 208 pp. \$28.95 paper, \$90.00 cloth.

James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta’s *Jerzy Grotowski* is an introductory guide to the work of the Polish director. Intended for readers with little or no previous knowledge of Grotowski’s career, it places in a single slender volume a concise overview of Grotowski’s personal and professional biography, key texts, and approach to directing; and an introduction to practical approaches to that work as interpreted by Slowiak and Cuesta (artistic directors of New World Performance Laboratory). Slowiak and Cuesta’s decision to include their own acting exercises (developed from principles derived from years of tutelage under Grotowski) is at once the most controversial and refreshing aspect of the book.



4. Mario Biagini is the associate director of the Workcenter led by Richards.

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