

gized. Only then can the aesthetic merit of these and other important works such as Mickiewicz's *Konrad Wallenrod*, Krasiński's *Iridion*, and Słowacki's *Kordian* be evaluated and the matter of the three writers qua writers be explored.

By making the works of this celebrated group more accessible, Professor Segel's anthology will hopefully elicit such a salutary critical response. Two of the dramas in the collection, *Forefathers' Eve*, part 3, and *The Un-Divine Comedy*, are archetypal. The third, *Fantasy*, a comedy which appears for the first time in English translation, parodies the ethos of the other two. Count and Countess Respekt know Major Vladimir Gavrilovich because of time spent in Siberia as exiles. The Russian officer, an ex-Decembrist, is a good man. He shoots himself to help fellow good man Jan. *Fantasy* and *Idalia* have grown weary of Romanticism. Self-mockery has become their specialty. We may object to the play's mechanical love intrigue, but this too is a parody of vapid eighteenth-century comedy.

In his fifty-page introduction, Segel places both writers and dramas in historical context. *Forefathers' Eve*, part 3, he tells us, "has to be read as a personal apologia" (p. 39) since in it Mickiewicz tries to assume simultaneously the incongruous roles of Vergil and Aeneas. Segel's analysis of *The Un-Divine Comedy*, the Polish Romantic drama best known outside Poland, is succinct. *Fantasy*, however, because it is less familiar, should have been given additional commentary. Jan and the major pale as representatives of Romantic virtue, while *Fantasy's* and *Idalia's* verbal cavorting is more spoof than sham. The eight pages devoted to the stage history of these and other Polish Romantic plays are very much in order. Since these dramas were written primarily to be read, directors who stage them enjoy maximal flexibility. Consequently, their productions frequently have been striking.

Segel's textual work is admirable. His version of *The Un-Divine Comedy* is a great improvement on the 1927 British translation with its many errors and distortions. It is no small accomplishment to render the long self-parodying speeches in *Fantasy*. The updated English of *Forefathers' Eve*, part 3, makes the play's brilliant but hard to translate poetry less quaint. All three works, however, suffer from a shortage of notes. Only trained Polonists will be able to catch many of the references. Good notes could elucidate the complexity and profundity of these plays which have been selected for serious perusal.

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TWENTIETH-CENTURY POLISH AVANT-GARDE DRAMA: PLAYS, SCENARIOS, CRITICAL DOCUMENTS. Edited and with an introduction by *Daniel Gerould*. Translated by *Daniel Gerould* in collaboration with *Eleanor Gerould*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977. 287 pp. Illus. \$15.00.

Professor Gerould's book deserves close scrutiny and the greatest interest, particularly because of its revelatory character. Equipped with knowledge based on many years of concentrated study, a deeply sympathetic insight, and an excellent historical orientation, Gerould has revealed to American literary scholarship an original and sharply outlined phenomenon—the contemporary experimental drama of Poland. This field has been rather unfortunate up to now, as far as foreign reception is concerned. For a variety of reasons, modern Polish drama missed recognition at least twice. Neither Romantic drama (one of the peaks of Polish literature) nor Symbolist drama was introduced to the general, non-Polish public immediately. This came later and is currently being done in a far from satisfactory way. The situation is much more normal with regard to twentieth-century avant-garde drama. It is closely watched and intelligently interpreted

on the stage *hic et nunc*, thanks, largely, to the efforts of Gerould, its translator, explicator, and propagandist.

More than ten years ago, Gerould started with Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, generally and for the sake of convenience known as "Witkacy" (an abbreviation invented by Witkiewicz himself). The young historian of drama was captivated by the rare case of this playwright and creative personality, who aimed far into the future, above the heads of his contemporaries, and was therefore misunderstood in his own time. Gerould's fascination with the Polish protoplast of the theater of the absurd resulted in the publication of two volumes of Witkacy's works, "*The Madman and the Nun*" and *Other Plays* (1968) and "*Tropical Madness*," *Four Plays* (1972), which raised the number of translated items to ten (now brought up to eleven through one more newly translated play in the book under review). It made Gerould the uncontested promoter of Witkacy in the English-speaking world and a counterpart of Alain van Cruyghen, the editor of the six-volume edition of French translations of Witkacy's work. But Gerould did not stop at this point. Having mastered the problem in all its aspects (Gerould's first volume contained valuable commentaries, the second supplied Witkacy's literary biography), he enlarged the scope of his own interest; he began to observe the sequel to Witkacy's exhumation and to trace his posthumous life.

An excellent comparatist in drama, Gerould also embarked on an exploration in the opposite direction: on the reconstruction of Witkacy's antecedents, his genealogy, his spiritual homeland in Polish Romantic and Symbolist drama. Gerould's proposal, that Polish avant-garde drama be viewed as a continuous dialectical process with its own dynamics and evolutionary logic, is perfectly convincing; it enriches the comparative perspective. And this is his greatest achievement.

Twentieth-Century Polish Avant-Garde Drama is well conceived and thoughtfully structured. It is an anthology of six selected playwrights: Witkacy, Andrzej Trzebiński, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, Jerzy Afanasjew, Sławomir Mrożek and Tadeusz Różewicz, who are represented by some creative works and some theoretical pronouncements and personal confessions. The anthology is preceded by an introduction, which is an outline of a monograph of avant-garde drama and takes up one-third of the book. A bibliography of the topic, containing more than one hundred items, concludes the book. The whole is perfectly balanced, as comprehensive as such a pioneering attempt can be; it is highly informative, stimulating, and a pleasure to read.

Of course, as with every anthology, the choice of items is debatable. Mrożek is represented by a small cabaret stunt, Gombrowicz is completely left out, which can be explained by the fact that the works of both dramatists have already been translated and are available in English. Różewicz is not represented by his best work. Afanasjew, the initiator of the student theater movement, seems to be overestimated, not in his very important social and political role, but in his literary aspect.

But these objections are completely negated by the presentation of Trzebiński and his only drama, *To Pick up the Rose*. Trzebiński—a student of the clandestine university and soldier of the underground army, who was shot to death by the Nazis at the age of twenty—was one of Witkacy's earliest followers. He wrote *To Pick up the Rose*, a play about revolution, during the dark years of World War II. This play is a stunning example of precocity and artistic awareness. It would be most rewarding if one of the talented university companies in the United States were to stage this unique work of their Polish colleague. It would be a well-deserved recompense, the greatest practical praise of Gerould's sustained efforts.

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