Polish Theater Comes Alive in Bloomington

In February, Indiana University Bloomington's Polish Studies Center sponsored two cultural events centered on the performances of *Ferdydurke*, a dramatic adaptation of the 1937 satirical novel by one of Poland’s best known writers, Witold Gombrowicz. On February 15, a conference, *The Other in Polish Theatre and Drama*, featured a major lecture by Allen Kuharski (Swarthmore College), translator of the stage version of *Ferdydurke*, who spoke on “The Virtual Theatre of Witold Gombrowicz.” Other conference speakers and topics included Kathleen Cioffi, “Provisorium/Kompania and Their Roots in the Other Polish Theatre”; Halina Filipowicz (University of Wisconsin–Madison), “Poland Unmanned? Post-Partition Trauma, Gender Trouble, and Feminine Excess (1786–1826)”; David Goldfarb (Barnard College), “Witkacy and the Primitive: Self as Other”; Beth Holmgen (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), “The Polish Actress Elsewhere: Cross-Cultural Legends of Modrzejewska/Modjeska”; Tamara Trojanowska (University of Toronto), “How to Do Things with Buzz-Words: Otherness in Polish Drama of the early 1990s”; and Timothy Wiles (English, IUB), “Mrożek’s Plays and the Everyday Absurd in Cold War Poland.”

On February 15 and 16, three performances of *Ferdydurke* were held at the University Theatre, two in English and one in Polish. The play, which has only four actors, has been described by the *New York Times* as a “tumultuous evening of physical theater using brutal wit and outrageous sexual commentary to ridicule authority and class distinctions.”

Based loosely on a Faustian theme, the play is a repressed writer’s journey back to his childhood, “a microworldic historical tour of European philosophical pitfalls, pitting the realm of pristine, unrealizable ideals against stark realities of low appetites and bodily squalor, exemplified in his oafish schoolmates” (*Los Angeles Times*). The controversial play was once banned in Gombrowicz’ home country but has received critical acclaim worldwide. It won a prestigious Fringe First Award last year at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

*Ferdydurke* was performed by members of the Polish theatre groups Teatr Provisorium and Kompania Teatr. The IUB performances attracted dedicated and enthusiastic audiences, as did another performance at the American Cabaret Theatre in Indianapolis. In between performances, the actors also held two workshops for IUB’s theatre students, much to their delight. Leon Brauner, chair of the Department of Theatre and Drama, hosted a special reception at the newly opened Theatre and Drama Center, where guests were able to take a tour of the new facility.

The joint events were sponsored by the Polish Studies Center; Russian and East European Institute; Office of International Programs; Arts and Humanities Initiative; Office of the Chancellor; Dean of Faculties; and the Departments of Theatre and Drama, Comparative Literature, and Slavic Languages and Literatures.

—Polish Studies Center, IUB