

of the Roman Catholic Church (canonized by John Paul II) and a hero of Auschwitz, Fr. Maksymilian Kolbe, coeditor of a prewar religious newspaper for the less-educated segment of the population. It is said that this daily published anti-Semitic lies on its title page in virtually every issue (75). I doubt that Szer's editors have bothered to read this publication, yet they allowed these allegations to stand. Their lack of familiarity with the subject shows in their confusing the alleged sequel to this daily (*Nasz Dziennik*) with a Polish liberal paper published in New York (*Nowy Dziennik*), not to mention neglecting the fact that the accused priest (Fr. Rydzyk) has founded a chapel in Toruń dedicated to Poles who lost their lives helping Jews survive during the German Holocaust. Jonny Daniels ("From the Depths") is one of the promoters of this chapel.

Such persistent attempts to present Poles as anti-Semites detract from the value of this book, which is written in a level-headed and calm tone by a person who knows how to make fine distinctions. Without these distinctions the horror of what the Soviets and the Nazis did in Central and Eastern Europe remains incomprehensible and unredeemable. It was "the milk of human kindness," so hard to come by in hard times, that allowed some members of the Szer family to live and survive. Throwing accusations at the minor players (and victims) of the two totalitarian states is not a good way to deal with memory. Δ

## Grotowski's Bridge Made of Memory

### Embodied Memory, Witnessing and Transmission in the Grotowski Work

By **Dominika Laster**. Calcutta-London-New York: Seagull Books, 2015. xviii + 163 pages. Index, bibliography. ISBN 978-0857423177.

### Virginie Magnat

This book will be of particular interest to performance scholars and practitioners already familiar with Jerzy Grotowski's

theatrical and posttheatrical research. Dominika Laster makes clear from the outset that her objective is to analyze as precisely as possible the complex nature of Grotowski's work through an examination of his own perspective and that of his closest collaborators, especially Thomas Richards whom Grotowski designated as his heir. The challenge in doing so lies in the necessity of quoting these artists at length so as to avoid taking shortcuts by means of inevitably reductive paraphrasing. Consequently the reader is required to patiently and attentively follow the author-guide as she skilfully navigates the idiosyncratic terminology rooted in the practical investigation of performance. To some extent, then, the necessity to stay focused and remain vigilant, to take on the roles of witness and co-participant, and to be open to the unknown through a letting-go of habitual discursive reflexes that inhibit experiential inquiry, in order to approach the practice this book seeks to explore.

Aware of the limitations of preestablished theoretical frameworks when attempting to grasp the subtleties, tensions, and contradictions that sustain this ever-evolving praxis, Laster boldly asserts the importance of becoming immersed in the creative depths and multiple layers of Grotowski's approach if one is to credibly assess its artistic value and historical significance. She proposes investigating embodied memory, which she argues connects all the phases of Grotowski's research and that she links to body-memory, body-life, organicity, impulses, and associations, key terms that recur throughout his work. Grotowski asserts that "body-life goes beyond memory" and encompasses potentialities because it is linked to "an important experience, that occurred or that *should* take place" (25). Richards suggests that "the body *is* memory [since] all of our experiences have been lived by our body" (26). Laster specifies that they both consider body-memory to be connected to "the totality of life experiences that are encoded in the body" and seek to rediscover a territory that precedes social forms of conditioning by creating "the conditions in which a *deconditioning*" can occur (27–28).

The posttheatrical period is marked by Grotowski's shift to the transgenerational

transmission of collective memory, as exemplified by the research he conducted for the “Theatre of Sources” in Poland and abroad, as well as for the “Objective Drama Project” developed at the University of California, Irvine. During this transitional time, Grotowski focused on ritual performance and began to explore the vibratory qualities of songs linked to the Haitian tradition. This was an area of inquiry that became central to the final phase of his research known as “Art as vehicle” that he carried out at his Italian Workcenter with Richards, whom he encouraged to reconnect with his Afro-Caribbean ancestry through the practical investigation of these songs. Laster explains this shift by stating that for Grotowski what is encoded in the body is “not limited to the cultural conditionings of one lifetime but extends back through one’s imagined ancestral line,” and can be experienced as “a deep connection that finds its expression in extremely precise performative actions” with the song functioning as a means of remembering (45). Significantly, the realization of one’s potential hinges on the ability to rediscover this connection in the here and now: “Organicity, aliveness, being in the moment, and remembering are all inextricably interwoven” (45).

Vigilance is another recurring theme that Laster envisions as being pivotal to the periods of theater productions, participatory paratheatrical experiments, and ritual arts: “Vigilance is proposed as an alternative mode of being within an action in which an expanded receptivity may replace the conventional understanding of both the spectator as passive receptor and the performer as the active agent of action” (88). Becoming vigilant is about acquiring a heightened awareness, defined by Grotowski as “the consciousness which is not linked to language (the machine for thinking), but Presence” (96). Laster suggests that perhaps due to his longstanding interest in Eastern philosophies and the early Christian Gnostic tradition, Grotowski conceived of expanded receptivity as a form of relationality that binds vigilance, awareness, and presence, and that transcends the boundaries between subject and object, Self and Other (115).

It might have been productive to consider the extent to which Grotowski’s understanding of the Haitian tradition also informs this conception of relationality given that Vodou ritual processes are experienced by practitioners as an embodied connection to their African ancestors, a phenomenon described by Western anthropologists as spirit possession. Indeed, as noted by Laster, Grotowski sought to explore this tradition through visits to Haiti, meetings with Vodou practitioners, and collaborations with Haitian artists. In the final chapter of her book, which is the most provocative, she scrutinizes various sources pointing to Grotowski’s conviction that he was related to a Polish Legionnaire employed by Napoleon Bonaparte for his colonial military campaign in Haiti and who chose instead to support the slave uprising that led to independence. She goes on to observe that beyond his connection to Haiti, “whether through real lineage or affective kinship,” Grotowski envisioned ancestry in a very broad sense that “encompassed ancestors to whom he could not draw any blood ties,” including playwrights such as Juliusz Słowacki and, Pedro Calderon de la Barca, with whom he entered in dialogue through his theatre productions (132). She argues that Grotowski’s unorthodox conception of transmission through an imagined ancestral lineage “destabilizes romanticized notions of ‘authentic’ oral transmission” (141), as evidenced by Richards’s acknowledgment that he found a means of reconnecting to his “so-called African line of tradition from a Polish man with a white beard, in California and Italy, [who had] worked in depth with practitioners from many cultures” (142).

Laster infers from her analysis that “while the coming into (one’s own) being through the other” is pivotal to the embodied research that characterizes Grotowski’s praxis, this work on oneself is actualized through “numerous and complex lines of transmission conceived as a multidirectional process of relationality with the (imagined) ancestor” (149). Having cogently demonstrated the interconnectedness of memory, vigilance, witnessing, and transmission within Grotowski’s “complex understanding of self-development” (149), Laster concludes her study

by emphasizing that the embodied knowledge gained thereby is “rooted in practice [that] grew intuitively and organically,” an experiential mode of cognition whose validity is “impossible to either ‘prove’ or ‘disprove’ on a theoretical level” (150). Yet she asserts that Grotowski’s practice-based research nevertheless articulates a radical conception of the self that constitutes a “deliberate and literal unsettling of the boundaries between self and other” whose social, political and theoretical implications deserve to be further explored.

Throughout her compelling argument about the significance of embodied memory in Grotowski’s contested legacy, Laster addresses issues of tradition, identity, transmission, and creativity that are critical to understanding his work but have eluded conventional scholarship that privileges theory over practice. She thereby opens up promising possibilities for future investigations of Grotowski’s groundbreaking yet largely underestimated contribution to embodied practice as a way of knowing within the field of performance studies. Δ

## MORE BOOKS

*Real Heroes: Inspiring True Stories of Courage, Character, and Conviction*, by **Lawrence W. Reed**. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books ([www.isibooks.org](http://www.isibooks.org)), 2016. xii + 279 pages. Drawings of book subjects. ISBN 978-1-61017142-7. Paper. \$12.00 plus postage from the publisher.

This is not an academic book, yet academics can benefit from reading it. It consists of the life stories of forty remarkable individuals, from antiquity to the present day, whose lives spelled “achievement” in diverse areas, from spirituality to economics, from physical to moral courage, persistence, love of liberty—in short, all the features that human beings admire and consider heroic when served in large doses. The book opens with Cicero and Cato the Younger, and ends with a person totally unknown: one Larry Cooper who spent twenty-eight years in jail for aggravated assault and other trespasses. Some Nobel Prize winners are included in the book, but not many—in particular, no writers who won

the Nobel Prize. There are economists like Ludwig Erhardt and masters of spirituality like St. Augustine. Three Polish persons are noted: Marie Curie, Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, and Capt. Witold Pilecki. One suspects the latter’s story of “bravery beyond measure” would not have made its way into this book, were it not for Terry Tegnazian and her Aquila Polonica Publishing House.

*O jedność Europy: Antologia polskiej XX-wiecznej myśli europejskiej* (For the sake of Europe’s unity: An Anthology of Polish writings on European unity), **edited by Sławomir Łukasiewicz. Introduction by Łukasz Machaj and Marek Maciejewski**. Warsaw: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015. 290 pages, photographs, index of names. ISBN 978-83-63743-38-3. Hardcover. In Polish.

Printed on expensive paper and lavishly bound, this volume consists of eighteen essays written by Polish diplomats, politicians, historians, literary scholars, and assorted activists of the twentieth century. In addition to the predictable “Poland and Europe” type of essay, the collection contains some worthwhile analyses of the political situation in Europe before and after World War II. Altogether, it seems more appropriate for freshmen and high school students rather than as a voice in international debates. The reason is obvious: none of the authors has wielded enough political power to be noticed by anyone outside his country. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs seems to specialize in this sort of book—addressed to no one in particular, whose usefulness in education remains uncontested but whose role as an international voice is dubious.

*Citizens and Statesmen: An Annual Review of Political Theory and Public Life*, vol. IX, **edited by Bradley C. S. Watson** ([brad.watson@email.stvincent.edu](mailto:brad.watson@email.stvincent.edu)). Latrobe, Pennsylvania: Center for Polish and Economic Thought at Saint Vincent College, 2016. 200 pages. ISBN 978-0967371771.

A political and philosophical journal published by a small college. Would that every college in this country and in Poland embarked on a similar enterprise. Vol. IX contains articles on the place of religion in