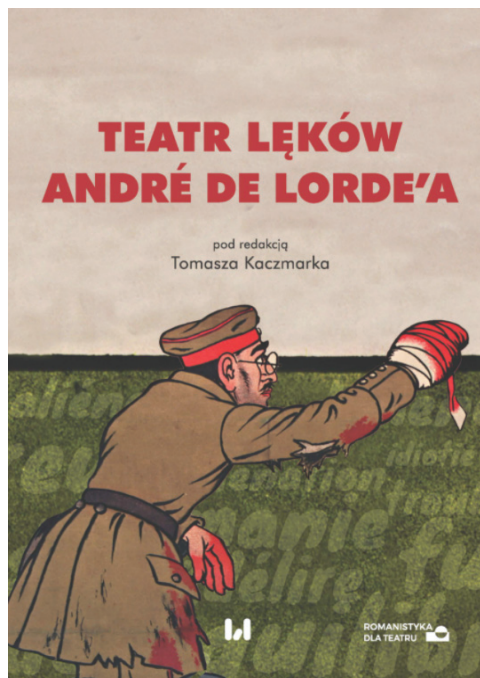


The French Theatre of Fear – André de Lorde

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Insanity, obsession, infanticide, war, rape, torture and many other cruel manifestations of human behaviour are what the Grand-Guignol Theatre scriptwriters were haunting their spectators with. Thanks to the new anthology of de Lorde's plays *Teatr lęków André de Lorde'a*, his horror travels to the Polish readers from Parisian

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theatre scenes for the first time. The volume's editor, Tomasz Kaczmarek, a connoisseur of French dramatic art of the turn of the 19th and 20th century, decided to expand knowledge about the great French creator of the horrors, hitherto unknown in Poland. Kaczmarek has already published on de Lorde's texts in French, including a critical edition of his works *André de Lorde et Son Théâtre de la Peur* (Kaczmarek 2019). The newest volume presents five horror texts, translated by University of Lodz's scholars, which are preceded by a comprehensive introduction to the artistic output of de Lorde and its distinguishing features. On the basis of various motifs visible in his plays, we may absolutely call him a promoter of future slashers and thrillers.

André de Lorde recognises mechanisms of the human mind, or – as the volume's editor suggests – the “anatomy of fear” which enables him to play with spectators' feelings. As we learn from the book's opening, the French artist was suffering from anxiety disorder, and his fears made him create a lot of texts which referred to the darkest parts of the human mind. His pieces differed from the other Grand-Guignol spectacles by building suspense – Kaczmarek compares this style to Alfred Hitchcock's movies. De Lorde attempts to raise existential fear in his readers – instead of providing hideous scenes which could respond immediately to their lowest instincts, he builds tension. As the plot progresses, the audience becomes more apprehensive about the finale of the story and its nervousness is rising.

It should be borne in mind that it is a human being, and not, for instance, ghosts from an imaginary world, that is an embodiment of sinister forces in de Lorde's works. It is precisely human nature's unpredictability which terrifies the most – in the texts it is expressed through a very well developed

psychological insight into protagonists' feelings. The protagonist, despite his attempts at resistance, cannot escape from committing murder. On the one hand, de Lorde tries to understand human subconsciousness and soul, but on the other hand he makes his plays in such a way as to strike fear in members of the audience and not to suggest any solution for their problems. What is more, he sadistically shows the agony of a murderer-protagonist who is reliving his own heinous deeds in his memory constantly, over and over again. The motif of prolonged agony is common in the Grand-Guignol theatre – this treatment is aimed at affecting the recipient. In this way, the spectator could believe that even deep inside the motif of prolonged agony there could be hidden evil forces, which could push them to commit a crime. Therefore, the situation of a human being in de Lorde's theatre may be called hopeless – the protagonists do not make decisions about their own actions.

The volume represents a wide range of de Lorde's works, selected in order to expose his writing proficiency and variety of topics and inspirations. The first play we find in the volume is *System doktora Smoly i profesora Pierza* (*The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Feather*) translated by Katarzyna Kowalik. It is not a coincidence that the title of the piece calls to mind Edgar Allan Poe's short story of the same title – the plots of both texts are similar, apart from the presence of some characters and the way they end. The action takes place in an old castle adapted to a psychiatric hospital – a motif often recalled also in horror movie productions, such as, for example, *House on Haunted Hill* (1959). The second play, *Obsesja* (*Obsession*), translated by Anita Staroń, first time performed on stage in 1905, also begins in a psychiatric office, this time situated in a regular house of a regular doctor. The co-author of this piece is Alfred Binet,

a French psychologist who wrote with de Lorde more texts related to mental illnesses. The other plays we can find in the volume are: *Mala Roque* (*Little Roque*) translated by Sebastian Zacharow, written by de Lorde in collaboration with Pierre Chain on the basis of Guy de Maupassant's novel of the same name; *Ostatnia Tortura* (*The Ultimate Torture*) translated by Joanna Ciesielka, written with Eugène Morel, and *Telefon* (*The Telephone*) translated by Tomasz Kaczmarek – Charles Foley's novel adaptation.

The workshop of the authors of the anthology is worth appreciating: apart from translating the texts from French into Polish, they also deal with the adaptation of the plays for the Polish theatre scene. From Kaczmarek's introduction we may learn that de Lorde himself would read aloud the lines he wrote to hear the way they would sound on stage. When reading the Polish version of his texts, one gets the impression that the translators not only remained faithful to their meaning, but, just like the French artist, paid attention to sound – an important factor for stage adaptation. They also did not forget about the topicality of language so that it could be understood by contemporary theatre audiences. Thanks to all this work put not only into translation but also into adapting the theatre pieces and placing emphasis on the phonic aspect, the authors managed to give them a chance to appear not only on paper but also on the Polish stage.

The authors of the anthology also conducted research in the field of comparative literary studies – they analysed those of de Lorde's texts which are inspired by prose works in confrontation with the original. Each Polish version from the anthology is annotated with valuable critical comments, such as those dedicated to the translation decisions or historical information. Thanks to the footnotes we may learn also that de

Lorde provided detailed instructions for actors on how to play some of the scenes – those descriptions have contributed to expanding the knowledge about Grand-Guignol theatre techniques which later inspired creators of horror and splatter movies. Furthermore, the authors deliver a possible key to the interpretation of the stage directions; they show, for example, that there are links between the scenery and the character's features. The translators also point to realistic threads in de Lorde's works which are apparently not connected with the horror scenes that are to come – that is done to create an appropriate context of a peaceful everyday life in which there will appear increasingly worrying signs of tragic events.

The ability to translate such complex texts is a true art. The scholars who had taken up the challenge of interpreting de Lorde's pieces made it in a very professional way – with a dash of required sensitivity and with the mental toughness needed to finalize this complex task. The excellent translation is an objectively strong feature of this publication. Moreover, as it may be observed in each piece, the interpreters provide great academic research with annotations in footnotes in which one may find comments, additional explanations and interesting facts about stories related to the translated texts. Together with the reliable introduction by Tomasz Kaczmarek, the contributions of the scholars construct a great critical apparatus which makes it possible to present de Lorde's work at its finest.

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