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PIOTR ŚWIERCZ

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6290-879X>
Akademia Ignatianum w Krakowie
Wydział Pedagogiczny
Instytut Nauk o Polityce i Administracji
swierczu12@wp.pl

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The Marriage¹ from the Perspective of Political Philosophy

Abstract

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The aim of this article is an analysis of Witold Gombrowicz's play *The Marriage* from the perspective of political philosophy.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The main problem undertaken in the article is an analysis of the play *Marriage* within the context of the main themes present in Witold Gombrowicz's work, i.e. the problem of "pure form," the relationship between the Fatherland and the Sonland, and the Inter-human Church. The article is based on an analysis of Gombrowicz source texts (*The Marriage*, *A Guide to Philosophy*, *Diaries*), conducted within the context of the abovementioned themes in his thought.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The text begins with a justification of the author's attempt at analyzing *The Marriage* from the perspective of political philosophy. Achieving this goal requires a synthetic grasp of the problems of political philosophy, culminating in a working definition of the latter. Next, the main themes in W. Gombrowicz's work are subjected to a synthetic and concise analysis. Finally, it is within this context that the main goal of the

1 For the purposes of this article I have left the accepted title, *The Marriage*, though I personally feel that *The Wedding* would be a translation of the original "Ślub." Names will be left in the original Polish: Henryk is Henry, Władzio – Johnny, Mańska – Molly. I also leave Ojczyzna (Fatherland) and Synczyzna (Sonland) in the original Polish. Quotes are taken from Louis Iribarne's translation (Gombrowicz, 1998). I have made several changes to quotes from the translation that I did not consider properly translated; all these changes are underlines in the text, like so. My analyses are based on the Polish original: Gombrowicz, 1988.

article is undertaken – an analysis of the play *The Marriage* from the perspective of political philosophy.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The main result of the scientific analysis conducted in the article is the formulation of a consistent interpretation of W. Gombrowicz's play *The Marriage* from the perspective of political philosophy. Three out of four of the main themes in Gombrowicz's work are considered in this interpretation. The theme of the "facilitated life" was purposely left out of the analysis. The entire analysis is presented against the backdrop of the Cartesian notion of *Cogito*, which also serves as the background for all of Gombrowicz's work.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: in his conclusions, the author indicates various interpretive possibilities for the key issues undertaken in the article (the relationship between Fatherland and Sonland, among others), thus creating a starting point for further research into both political (or meta-political) issues and the question of Gombrowicz's position in reference to the archetype of Polish political culture.

KEYWORDS:

Witold Gombrowicz, *Cogito*, political philosophy, the play
The Marriage, political power

„ŚLUB” Z PERSPEKTYWY FILOZOΦII POLITYCZNEJ

Streszczenie

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem artykułu jest analiza dramatu Witolda Gombrowicza *Ślub* z perspektywy filozofii polityki.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Głównym problemem podjętym w artykule jest analiza dramatu *Ślub* w kontekście najważniejszych tematów twórczości Witolda Gombrowicza, czyli problematyki „czystej formy”, relacji między Ojczyzną i Synczyzną oraz Kościoła Międzyludzkiego. Artykuł opiera się na analizie tekstów źródłowych Gombrowicza (*Ślub, A Guide to Philosophy, Dziennik*) dokonanej w kontekście wspomnianych powyżej głównych tematów jego refleksji.

PROCES WYWODU: Tekst rozpoczyna się od uzasadnienia podjęcia przez autora próby analizy *Ślubu* z perspektywy filozofii polityki. Realizacja tego celu wymagała syntetycznego ujęcia zagadnienia filozofii polityki, zwieńczonego roboczą definicją tejże. Następnie, również w sposób bardzo syntetyczny i zwięzły, analizie poddane są główne tematy twórczości W. Gombrowicza. W tym kontekście podjęty jest wreszcie główny cel artykułu – analiza dramatu *Ślub* z perspektywy filozofii polityki.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Głównym wynikiem analizy naukowej prowadzonej w niniejszym artykule jest sformułowanie spójnej interpretacji dramatu W. Gombrowicza *Ślub* z perspektywy filozofii polityki. W interpretacji tej zostały uwzględnione trzy spośród czterech wskazanych głównych tematów dzieł Gombrowicza. W sposób zamierzony poza analizą pozostawiony został wątek „życia ułatwionego”. Całość analiz została ukazana na tle Kartezjańskiej koncepcji *Cogito*, stanowiącej tło całej twórczości autora *Ferdydurke*.

WNIOSKI, INNOWACJE, REKOMENDACJE: We wnioskach autor wskazuje na różne możliwości interpretacji głównych zagadnień podjętych w artykule (m.in. relacji między Ojczyną i Synczyzną), tworząc w ten sposób punkt wyjścia do dalszych badań dotyczących zarówno problematyki politycznej (bądź metapolitycznej), jak i problematyki stanowiska Gombrowicza odnośnie do zagadnienia archetypu polskiej kultury politycznej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

Witold Gombrowicz, *Cogito*, filozofia polityczna, dramat *Ślub*, władza polityczna

The fact that I am undertaking an analysis of Witold Gombrowicz's play from the perspective of political philosophy is sure to give rise to doubts in the Reader, as the author of *Ferdydurke* is not someone whose writings are typically associated with political reflection. Thus, I feel it necessary to justify my undertaking before beginning my analysis of *The Marriage*.

It is my belief that the key issue here is the notion of political philosophy itself. I would like to present my views on the concept of political philosophy, its object and methods.

Let me begin with a methodological remark. Simplifying somewhat, when we build a definition of a concept that already functions in language, we have two options: either we build an analytic definition, or a synthetic definition. In the case of the concept of "philosophy," which has been in use in European culture for over two thousand years, it would seem that an analytic definition is most justified. The problem is that over the centuries, so many different meanings have been ascribed to the term "philosophy" that a true analytic definition would either be impossible to formulate or it would be so broad that it would add nothing to our understanding of philosophy. Therefore, I propose that we build a synthetic definition rooted in the Greek original.

The goal here is, on the one hand, to achieve clarity and precision, and on the other, to distinguish philosophy from such fields and social phenomena as religion, ideology, theology, and the like.

In the first place, I must mention a certain significant distinction made by Parmenides of Elea in his poem *Peri Phyeos*. in it, he indicates two ways of cognition: the way of truth, connected with being, and the way of opinions, connected with non-being. Here, being and non-being have veritative, not existential connotations. Simply speaking, the way of truth is philosophy, while the way of opinions is the way of probable reflection.

When specifying his understanding of “first philosophy,” Aristotle indicates two fields of inquiry it encompasses: being qua being, and the first causes and principles. I believe that applying such an understanding of philosophy to political philosophy turns out to be the most fruitful. It resembles the mathematical substitution of data for unknown variables. However, we must determine how “philosophy” so understood interacts with the “political.” Again, my proposal is a calque on the Stagirite’s reflection. “Political philosophy” is reflection on the political as the political, as well as on its first causes and principles.² I purposely use “its” ambiguously, without specifying whether I mean “the political” or “reflection on the political,” as this is a complicated issue in itself. I will come back to it later. Now, I will briefly describe how I understand the concept of “the political” as such.

This issue is quite complicated. Due to space constraints, I cannot conduct an in-depth analysis here. Certain clarifications will appear later on in my interpretation of Gombrowicz’s text. For now, very briefly: “the political” refers to the nature of collective human life organized under and according to some sort of *władztwo*. By *władztwo* I do not mean any particular form of ruling power or even rule (Pol. *władza*) as such. Both rule and the particular forms it takes are merely consequences of *władztwo*. What, then, is *władztwo*? It is the principle or idea of a “central point of reference” inherent in man, either in his biological nature (“instinct”) or intellectual nature (“thought”).

2 For different definitions of political philosophy see e.g.: Bird, 2006, pp. 3-4; Brennan, 2016, pp. 1-6; Cohen, 2001, pp. 1-3; Harman, 2003, pp. 415-425; Knowles, 2001, pp. 14-21; Larmore, 2013, pp. 276-306; Miller, 2003, pp. 1-18; *New Waves in Political Philosophy*, 2009, pp. VII-XIV; Warren, 1989, pp. 606-612.

A few more remarks on the problem mentioned above concerning the relationship between “the political” and “reflection on the political” in the context of first causes and principles. It remains an open question whether Greek ontology, which provides the basis for my analyses here, is existential or veritative in nature. Personally, I am inclined to the second interpretation. In light of the veritative interpretation, we would be dealing with the study of the first causes and principles of “reflection on the political” rather than of “the political” itself. Though I will not delve deeper into this issue here, it is worth noting that the veritative-epistemological perspective seems to dominate the existential perspective in Gombrowicz’s thought.

Taking the above into account, this paper is meant as an analysis of Gombrowicz’s play from the perspective of a search for an understanding and justification of *władztwo*. I take “analysis” literally here, as a step-by-step analysis of the source text. Of course, space constraints do not allow not only for an exhaustive analysis (which may not even be possible), but also for a satisfactory analysis, which in itself would require a monograph. My goal in this paper is simply to outline an interpretative proposal or possibly to delineate the main ideas for a research project.

I am aware of the fact that Gombrowicz’s works are exceptionally multi-thematic and that there is a wide pool of secondary literature dedicated to these works. I do not claim that the method I use exhausts the interpretative possibilities of Gombrowicz’s play. If I leave aside various aspects, interpretative possibilities, or a majority of the secondary literature, it is not because I do not view it as valuable; rather, it is because in conducting a very specific interpretation, I find it necessary to present my analyses in their “pure,” homogeneous form for clarity and precision. I am not claiming to present an authoritative interpretation of Gombrowicz’s play; rather, I treat these reflections merely as a voice in the debate, as one possible way of reading the play.

Gombrowicz himself invites us to apply the methods of political philosophy to *The Marriage* in remarks he makes in his *Diary*. I am referring to the passage concerning prof. Lucien Goldmann’s interpretation of *The Marriage*. Gombrowicz writes:

It began promisingly. *The Marriage*, in his opinion, is closely bound to the historical cataclysms of our times, it is a “chronicle of history

gone crazy,” the action of *The Marriage* is a grotesque parody of real events. But then? Goldmann makes the Drunkard into the rebellious masses, Henry’s fiancée into the nation, the King into the government, and me into a “Polish squire” who contained the historical drama in these symbols. I timidly protested, yes, I do not deny that *The Marriage* is a wild version of a crazy history; in the dreamy or drunken becoming of this action is mirrored the fantasticality of the historical process, but to make Molly the nation and Father the state...? (Gombrowicz, 2012, p. 670).

The idea that *The Marriage* is an interpretation, or meta-interpretation, of the most recent chapter in the history of civilization, especially from a socio-political perspective, does not seem to raise any objections from Gombrowicz. The problem is that such an interpretation requires tools much more subtle than those offered by Marxist ideology.³ The following outline is thus an attempt at implementing the above idea of reading *The Marriage* as “a wild version of a crazy history,” albeit with the use of more subtle tools (Cf. Kulas, 2012; Szymankiewicz, n.d.).

Gombrowicz was an extraordinary thinker. The scope of problems he discusses, the number of ideas and suggestions, is overwhelming. Nevertheless, we can indicate a few of the most important ideas contained within his works. In my opinion, the four main ideas that constitute something of a leitmotif of Gombrowicz’s thought are: 1) “pure form,” 2) the Interhuman Church, 3) the problem of the relationship between Ojczyzna and Synczyzna, and 4) the notion of the facilitated life.⁴ It should be added that the backdrop for all of Gombrowicz’s reflections on the four ideas mentioned is the Cartesian *cogito*.⁵ The four ideas appear with varying frequency and in varying degrees in most of Gombrowicz’s writings. However, in my opinion, *The Marriage* constitutes a synthesis of the relationships between these ideas and of the consequences flowing from these relationships, all presented within the context of *cogito*.

3 As Gombrowicz said: “Goldmann, professor, critic, broad-shouldered Marxist, decreed that I did not know, that he knew better! Rabid Marxist imperialism! They use that doctrine to invade people!” (Gombrowicz, 2012, p. 670).

4 In this article, I will leave the problem of the facilitated life aside.

5 For more analyses about *Cogito* as a context of Gombrowicz’s works, see: Margański, 2001.

The Cartesian context, as Gombrowicz understood it, is best characterized by the brief remarks Gombrowicz made in his *A Guide to Philosophy*. In characterizing Descartes Gombrowicz writes as follows:

I am certain that this is in my consciousness but does not correspond to reality. For example, the centaur. Systematic doubt. Puts the world in doubt, in parentheses: 1. the object. 2. everything involving the object. The only certainty is that they exist *in my consciousness*. (...) the sciences which relate to reality (supposedly objective): sociology, psychology, except for the abstract sciences; mathematics and logic, because they do not concern the outside world, but are laws for my own consciousness (Gombrowicz, 2004, p. 2).

The Cartesian *dubito* closes *Cogito* in the impenetrable world of *Cogito*'s own consciousness. This is a double impenetrability: on the one hand, *Cogito* is not able to go beyond itself; on the other, nothing external to *Cogito* is able to enter into *Cogito*, into its world. In consequence, *Cogito* is a completely closed off, inaccessible world in itself and for itself. Everything seemingly distinct from *Cogito* is in fact only a product of the latter, of the same type and to the same degree that the dream world is a creation of *Cogito*.

The *Cogito* theme, or better yet: the *Cogito* context in *The Marriage*, is not just an alleged theme visible when other works of Gombrowicz are taken into consideration. It is revealed *expressis verbis* many times in statements made by Henryk. Like Meister Eckhart's lonely god prior to creation, in the first lines of Act 1 Henryk declares:

A void. A desert. Nothing, I am alone here
Alone
Alone (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 87)

Cogito, though fixed within itself, is still accompanied by the anxiety that "perhaps something" (p. 87). It is of this anxiety that Władzio, Henryk's pragmatic alter ego, is born. Władzio, Henryk's dream-nondream (we could use the phrase "dreamingly-created alter ego"), yells "Hola!" (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 89).⁶ Henryk simultaneously does and does not want to yell. He shushes Władzio and at the

6 Louis Iribarne translates "hola" as "hallo." I find this translation inadequate for reasons outlined below, and will thus use the original "hola" when referring to the passages of the play in which the word appears.

same time yells “Hola” himself; and this yell, like “yehi’or,” creates. It creates a social context. The theme of creating a cultural-social-political context by means of speech will appear again numerous times throughout the course of the play. I will come back to this problem, as well as to the meaning of “hola” and the interpretative possibilities it presents, later on.

The theme of dreaming as a way of explaining away things seemingly distinct from *Cogito* is another recurring theme. In essence, the entire play is Henryk’s dream. He emphatically declares:

All right, all right, they have gone crazy. But they couldn’t have gone crazy, because they don’t exist and I’m only dreaming... and the surest sign they don’t exist is that I’m able to say they don’t exist right in front of them. They only exist in my head. Oh, my head! I’ve been talking to myself the whole time! (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 97).⁷

Throughout the play, Henryk seems to be aware of the “dream-like” nature of the world he inhabits.⁸ He seems to be aware of the Cogito, divine, creative, and destructive role he plays.⁹ If so, then why does he initiate a game with his own dream? First of all, as I mentioned earlier, he does so due to the anxiety that “perhaps something.” Second, the whole play is an attempt by *Cogito* to grasp and understand itself, and this game with the dream world is just such a way of reaching itself.

The creation of the parents-innkeepers and servant-fiancée Mańska, though certainly moving for Henryk, does not take away his ability to distance himself from the world he has created. The breakthrough moment when Henryk is almost completely drawn into the “dream game” and “game of dreams” comes with the appearance of the Drunkard (and drunkards) in the inn. Their violent intrusion into Henryk’s world upsets his already weakened attitude of maintaining his

7 Similarly a bit earlier: “I am alone here, all alone, since you are not here. / No! There’s no one else here! I am alone / All alone, completely alone... Oh, weep! Yes, shed / Tears for me, because I am alone, alone!” (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 92).

8 A possible alternative to dreaming that Henryk takes into account is that he has gone mad (Gombrowicz, 1998, pp. 131-132).

9 “Be careful, I’m warning you... Don’t tire me, / or I shall wake up... and you will all disappear...” (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 131).

distance. Their appearance elicits an immediate protest from him. Surprised by his reaction, he begins an internal battle from which a new form-nonform is to arise as a way of overcoming form. Let us take a closer look at his monologue (Gombrowicz, 1998, pp. 125-126).

From the start, Henryk opposes naturalness and artificiality. He wants to be natural, not artificial and ceremonious. The problem is that each reaction of his, each speech, and even each silence becomes artificial and ceremonious. What is more, even “the artlessness of these gestures is artificial” (p. 110).¹⁰ Initially, he tries to downplay the situation, but the speech he makes:

What business is it of mine whether they
beat up my father or rape my ex-fiancée?... What's the sense
of blowing everything out of proportion?
Let's not exaggerate! (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 110).

also sounds ceremonious and artificial. The lack of a reaction in the situation at hand would clearly be unnatural. Henryk identifies the cause of his speech's artificiality. It is... *Cogito* and the fact that he is alone. For he is alone, and since he is speaking, his speech becomes a declaration; the fact that he is speaking despite being alone makes the whole situation artificial. Ultimately, he kneels before his father. This gesture becomes the next stage of creation – it calls power, structure, and political order into being. The father is universally recognized as king, with only Henryk viewing the new situation as a masquerade and rubbish.¹¹

Let us briefly summarize what we have established up to this point. *Cogito*'s founding act (act of creation) is a three-step process. First, the pragmatic alter ego is created. Its source is *Cogito*'s uncertainty as to its own “aloneness” (“perhaps something”). This uncertainty seems to be a necessary consequence of the *dubito* – for it was from doubt that the certainty as to *Cogito's esse*¹² was born, but

10 In the Polish original, Gombrowicz uses the word *naturalność*, which is closer to the English “naturalness” than to “artlessness.”

11 “What kind of masquerade is this?”, “What kind of rubbish is this?”, “This is getting sillier by the minute!” (Gombrowicz, 1998, pp. 112-113).

12 Due to space constraints, I will leave out an analysis of the exceptionally complicated problem that is the relationship between *dubito* and *Cogito*. At the same time, I feel it is necessary to indicate this problem. Simplifying greatly:

no certainty followed as to *Cogito*'s absolute "aloneness." It is the alter ego, running out in front of the *dubito* with his pragmatism, who tries to convince *Cogito* of the reality of the external world. A consequence of this is the creation of society ("Hola!" – the second stage of the act of creation), and finally of power and the political structure (kneeling – the third stage), which complete the act of creation. It is time to take a closer look at the cry of "Hola!"

In Polish, "hola" is not a typical call like "hey!" A better translation in English would be, "Attention!" "Hola" is most often used in situations where we are attempting to prevent someone from doing something or informing them that we oppose their plans, actions, or intentions. Moreover, this opposition is not only mental, but implies a readiness to counteract the opposed behavior. Thus, "hola" as a call is aggressive and confrontational. It should be considered a rather belligerent and unceremonious form. The father's reaction to Henryk and Władzio's calls is significant: he considers them disrespectful, inconsiderate, tactless, and impolite. This is not due to how loudly they were calling out; it is not their yelling that is in question here. The father's reaction would likely have been very different had they yelled "Peace be with you" or something similar equally loudly. The aggression of "hola" seems proper both to the nature of *Cogito* and to that of its pragmatic alter ego. *Cogito*'s unceremonious attitude is only natural – it is the creator of all things! And the alter ego? Its pragmatic nature certainly allows for a softening of unceremoniousness, but this softening is just that – pragmatic, not fundamental.

In this way, in creating a society and simultaneously joining it, *Cogito* reveals its unceremoniousness: "Attention! I am here, drop what you are doing now and come to me!"

Is the act of creation completed with the calling into being of power of any benefit to *Cogito*, or was the creative act simply done

the essence of the problem boils down to the question of whether they are identical or distinct, and if they are distinct, which of them comes first. Another problem is connected with this issue, as well – the problem of the status of *Cogito*'s self-awareness (self-consciousness). Is this self-awareness, which is an awareness of its distinguished existential status, a necessary condition of *Cogito*? in other words, can we only speak of *Cogito* after it has become aware of its special status? As I mentioned above, I am only pointing out these questions here and leave them open to discussion.

on a whim? It is difficult to find a straightforward response on the basis of Gombrowicz's text. It would seem that *Cogito* does indeed act on a whim, though a possible benefit is soon revealed. It is the recovery of Mańka as an unblemished love and a fiancée, from the perspective of a "respectable marriage," as "has always been the custom in our family" (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 116). Such an arrangement is proposed to Henryk by his father in exchange for a vow of loyalty. Henryk agrees.

It is at this moment that the Old Order is ultimately reestablished. This is expressed emblematically in a speech by the father-King:

That I restore her former dignity
And command that she be honoured
As though she were myself or the Most Holy
Virgin in her untouchable honour, in the name
Of the Father and of the Son! (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 116).

The symbolism of the Father, Son, and Immaculate Virgin seems to legitimize the Ancien Régime remarkably clearly. The problem is that in the given circumstances, a reconstruction of the Old Order is no longer possible. Opposition and treason appear among the royal dignitaries. For until recently, the King was an innkeeper, and the unblemished fiancée merely a servant. The dignitaries consider the wedding a farce. Another breakthrough moment arrives.

At the news of the Drunkard's escape, the father-King gives the order to close the gate. The dignitaries-traitors then set a trap:

Forgive me, Your Majesty, forgive me, Your
Majesty, but His Majesty can't just close his gates to any old
drunk who happens to come along, since that would mean His
Majesty is afraid of any old drunk and that would be unthinkable
because that would constitute an affront to His Majesty, and His
Majesty cannot commit an affront to the majesty of
His Majesty... (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 122).

The deception is both clear and effective. For Form is more important than content, even when we suspect that holding onto Form will lead to the destruction of both Form and content! But what else can be done? A departure from Form signals the end of Form. And without Form or with a different Form, content becomes non-content

(a lack of content) or different content. Regardless of whether our goal is to defend Form or content, we must first of all defend Form. The father-King calls on Henryk for help. The latter is constrained by Form the entire time, but nevertheless stands in defense of it, supported by his pragmatic alter ego.¹³ Though unwilling, he agrees to help his father-King by giving a speech.

The father-King, the symbol of the Old Order, indicates the framework, the necessary characteristics of the speech:

Henree, say something, but for the Love of God, say something wise...
say something wise!

Shuut up, pigs! Now you're going to see how my son can talk...he'll put you in your places, he'll teach you a thing or two. Come on, Henree, say something, but something wise, say something wise, because if you don't then...we will make a fool of ourselves (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 124).

It is in this moment that a complete mix-up of discourses and paradigms is born. For how can anything be wise or foolish in the world of Pure Form? The world of Pure Form is a post-wise and post-foolish world simultaneously. Henryk is aware of this difficulty. He is torn and filled with discomfort at the task assigned to him by his father-King. What should he do? What should he say? How should he say it? Then, the idea of the Interhuman Church enters the scene. I will permit myself to cite longer passages here, as their significance cannot be overestimated:

Honestly

I don't know what to say, but I shall soon find out

What I will have said (...)

I am foolish

And yet I am to speak wisely... (...)

Again do my words

Acquire extraordinary power, while I stand here by myself

And speak to you alone. But what should I say?

(To himself) If I say something wise, it will sound foolish,

Because I am foolish. And if I say something foolish.... (...)

13 "Of course it doesn't matter / The main thing is you're going to marry her,"
"Naturally / It's better to amuse yourself / Than to be bored....," (Gombrowicz, 1998, pp. 123-124).

(*to himself*) If I'm unable to uphold the grandeur of this Majesty, this majesty will sink to the level of my buffoonery. I can't think of anything wise to say – just the same old empty thoughts and words... Wait a minute! I know what I will say.
(*To everyone*) My words are vapid
But they reverberate off you
And become magnified by your majesty –
Not by the majesty of the one who speaks
But by the majesty of the one who listens. (...)
I am talking nonsense
But you are listening wisely to me, and hence
I am becoming wise (Gombrowicz, 1998, pp. 125-126).

The listeners are enthralled and very impressed. The father-King immediately tries to take advantage of the situation and integrate Henryk's speech into his own order, treating it as a justification for the Ancien Régime.¹⁴ However, the Drunkard enters the scene once more. And he also exploits the Interhuman Church to strengthen his position in the battle for power:

They're gawping at my finger as if it were somehow extraordinary! And the more they look, the more extraordinary it becomes, and the more extraordinary it becomes, the more they look and the more they look, the more extraordinary it becomes, and the more extraordinary it becomes, the more they look, and the more they look, the more Extraordinary it becomes...
This is an extraordinary finger!
This is a powerful Finger!
Oh, how they've pumped up my finger!
And if I decided to...to toushhh someone with this finger... (...)

14 “Open the gates and bring in / the bride and His Holiness the Bishop, and let the trumpets / trumpet with all their might into the very heart of nature; let the / trumpets trumpet, I say, so as to terrify and terrorize any pig / who's piggish enough to pig up the works, because there's no dearth of these dirty pigs and...aaah, the pigggs, the pigggs, / the piggggggs... (...) in our family it has always been the custom to / have a respectable marriage. Don't cry mother. (...) We are about to embark upon the most holy / act of matrimony, in the name of the Father and of the Son... (...) And now let the Priest / bind their hands with the holy sash as proof of this / Crushing, shattering, / Omnipotent act performed / in the presence of our majesty! Sound the trumpets! / Hand us the holy sash! Down on your knees! / Oh, Lord! Help! My good people! / So be it! And so it shall be! Such is my decree! / Such is my will!” (Gombrowicz, 1998, pp. 126-127).

...even though that person is untouchable... (...)
*(brutally) And once I toussh, I get cocky!" (Gombrowicz, 1998,
pp. 129-130).*

The father-King is alarmed and, with the Court and Council, calls on Henryk for help. The latter again stands in defense of his father-King. What is more, to strengthen his position in his face-off with the Drunkard, Henryk refers to ideas strikingly similar to those connected with the Ancien Régime: to virtue, dignity, and wisdom.¹⁵ He gains an advantage and orders the Drunkard be thrown out. However, the Drunkard suddenly undergoes a metamorphosis – he becomes wise and offers to speak with Henryk like “one wise man to another” (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 134). The atmosphere changes completely – FIVE O’CLOCK!

The Drunkard’s conversation with Henryk occurs in the midst of a pleasant party with tea and biscuits. The Drunkard strikes a blow at the foundation of the Ancien Régime: faith in God. Since we live in the age after the Death of God, everything grounded in God loses all meaning and sense. The king is not a king, the bishop is not a bishop, and so on. Thus, a wedding also makes no sense! Henryk tries to defend himself by invoking Kantian ideas (Moral Law and the Dignity of Man), but the Drunkard, who soon turns out to be a foreign ambassador, is not fazed by Henryk’s arguments: everything is of human creation, so there is no reason to solemnly celebrate anything. Henryk shamefully admits to himself that everything he allegedly believed in and everything he knelt before is essentially a farce, and that in reality, he never really believed in them and never knelt before them. However, he still is not sure whether to unambiguously reject all of them. He considers them a sort of personal *sacrum*. In consequence, Henryk declares himself a priest. in reply, not only does the Drunkard also name himself a priest, he also describes the essence of his church and his religion with exceptional precision:

Now I shall tell you something and wisely, too
About that religion whose priests we both are.
Between ourselves

15 For the moment, I will leave aside Henryk’s longer monologue (pp. 149-150). I will return to it in my summarizing remarks.

And through ourselves is our God born
And not to heaven, but to earth does our church
Belong
We create God and we alone, whence does arise
That dark and terrestrial, ignorant and bestial
Intimate and inferior, humanly human mass
Whose priest I am! (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 137).

Unexpectedly, it turned out that the two adversaries belong to the same religion, to the same church. This fact creates good conditions for the Drunkard to try to pull Henryk into a conspiracy plot against his father-King. The Drunkard does this diplomatically, attempting to be elegant, but the message was unambiguous:

Prince, your father is undoubtedly, I would say, almost a great monarch...
but it is not at all inconceivable, I am afraid, that his concept of power is not altogether consistent with the spirit of modern times. (...)
Many people here believe you are the one who ought to be in power....(...)
And then His Highness could grant himself a marriage...or even do without a marriage altogether, ha, ha, ha – instead of submitting to these old-fashioned ceremonies! (Gombrowicz, 1998, pp. 140-141).

Though Henryk is beginning to agree with the Drunkard, he resists treason, but then becomes What? Manipulated? Misunderstood? It makes no difference. in the world of the Interhuman Church it does not matter what intentions motivate an individual. What matters is how the individual is understood. What matters is that Henryk, in shouting “incessant treason” (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 145) gives the conspirators the signal to overthrow his father-King. But the main role in the overthrow is played by Henryk himself.

The decisive clash between the father-King and son-Prince is a clash between two forces: Ojczyzna and Syncyzna. This is a rather peculiar clash, however. Let us take a look at the sequence of events.

Henryk, accompanied by the Drunkard and the other conspirators, approaches his father-King, introducing the Drunkard as an ambassador. A short exchange ensues between the King and the ambassador, when the latter whispers to Henryk to overthrow his father. Henryk

then begins a monologue, which captures the essence of the idea of Syncyzna. Let us take a look at passages from this monologue:

I'm only joking, of course...But what if...To overthrow
this father and seize power! To take control of the situation! To
take control! (...)

Oh, God! If only I could take control!

Oh, God! What God? Oh, Father! What father? It was I who
made them what they are. By virtue of my bounty! By virtue of
my will! Why should I kneel down before them? Why not
kneel down before myself, myself, myself, the sole source of
my law? (...)

It is I who create kings!

It is I who should be King!

I am supreme! There is nothing higher than me!

I am God! (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 147).

Despite the fact that the oration is so shattering to Ojczyna, Henryk backs out at what seems like the last second. He does not want to betray his father-King. And who knows how things would have played out had the father-King – alarmed by the commotion – not revealed the essence of Ojczyna:

Hank, why should I be afraid of you?... Oh, perhaps
Just a little bit, just a tiny bit, maybe just a teeny-weeny bit –
you know, just in case... But I am the King, Henry, so I think
you'd better leave me now, because even though it's small,
being royal it might grow... it might become gigantic... and
then one day it might explode! And the King and me might get
carried away! (...)

because

the King is carrying me away! And if the King trembles, I cannot
stop him from trembling! And if the King shouts, I cannot make
him lower his voice! And the King, the King, the King is shout-
ing: Traitor! Traitor! Traitor! (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 149).

This decides his fate. Henryk touches him with his finger and orders him arrested. When the delighted Drunkard wants to throw himself at the dethroned father-ex-King, Henryk orders Władzio to arrest the Drunkard as well. in this way, Henryk becomes the sole ruler and immediately sentences the Drunkard to death. However, in spite of everything, it turns out that Henryk is not an absolute ruler. For the

Drunkard, in a last plea before his execution, begs Henryk to allow him to look at Mańka with flowers over her head held by Władzio. Henryk considers this wish ridiculous, but must behave in accordance with Form – if he denied the Drunkard his wish, people would think it was out of fear. It turns out that the Drunkard's wish was a ruse: he was able to connect Mańka and Władzio; to connect them, as Henryk states, by a “dreadful and inferior bond” (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 154). Though the terrible consequences of this act are not fully visible at the moment, it soon turns out that this “pig-priestly” sacrament of marriage planted the seeds of Henryk's later demise: jealousy, a seemingly absurd feeling from the perspective of *Cogito*, but one that is in fact inherent in its narcissistic nature. For the moment, however, it seems that the new son-King has everything under control. He has taken control in a singularly brutal and complete way. The beginning of Act III brings us, in the words of the Chancellor, a perfect description of a world fully controlled by an unconstrained *Cogito* (what could constrain it?), in which, in addition, seeds of jealousy are beginning to sprout:

There is peace. All the rebellious elements are
Under arrest. Assembly has also been taken into custody along
With military and civilian circles, vast segments of the population,
the High Court, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Boards and Departments, all
public and private authorities, the press, Hospitals and orphanages.
All the Ministries have been placed Under arrest, and everything else
besides; in short, Your Majesty – everything. The police have likewise
been imprisoned.

There is peace. Quiet. It's humid (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 155).

In the world of *Cogito* there is no place, or at least – no freedom, for non-*Cogito*. *Cogito* is the limitless God-Creator, able to destroy everything with just as seemingly (why seemingly? I will discuss this later) banal an act as waking up from a dream. His sole instrument of power is *za mordę* (“by the snout”) and *po mordzie* (“in the snout”).¹⁶ As Henryk notes, and this gradation should be considered immanent

16 “Has the Chief of Police / arrived with his henchmen? Show them in. (...) Just what I needed! Look at these snouts! Ho, ho, these / snouts will take them by the snouts! Yes! If anybody gets / out of line or in any way tries to interfere or cause trouble, take / the lout by the snout and punch him

to *Cogito*, justice is not enough – you have to be brutal.¹⁷ Brutality belongs to the same category as justice – both are instruments of implementing order. From the perspective of *Cogito*, the weakness of justice lies in the fact that its promulgation makes it a known rule of socio-political order. This in itself limits the omnipotence of power, as Henryk has made clear what he is trying to achieve:

Holiness, majesty, power, law, morality, love, ridiculousness, Stupidity, wisdom – all these come from people in the same way That alcohol comes from potatoes. Like alcohol, understand? I have the Situation well in hand and I shall force these apes to produce everything my heart desires; and when they pump me up with enough power and majesty, I'll give myself a marriage. And if that is ridiculous, I'll take that ridiculousness by the snout too! And if that is foolish, I'll take that foolishness by the snout too! And I'll take wisdom by the snout too! And if God, old antediluvian God, has anything against it, I'll take him by the snout too!..." (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 157).

In the world of *Cogito*, everything must be special, unique, original, unclassifiable; in a word, it must be COGITAL. For *Cogito* is, to paraphrase Protagoras of Abdera, the sole criterion and measure of all things – of beings, how they are, and of non-beings, how they are not. Brutality is better than justice not just for its own sake, though that is also important, but above all due to its unpredictability – whoever would be able to force others to live in permanent fear, such fear in which no clear rules of behavior could be found; who could make our fear groundless, and in whom could be found even the smallest oasis of fearlessness, could gain absolute power over everyone.¹⁸

in the snout in front of everybody / ...for all to see..." (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 156).

17 When Henryk hits the Chief of Police instead of the Chancellor, the former asks why Henryk hit him. Henryk replies: "Just to keep everyone guessing! At the moment/ I am in need of a little brutality – and I'm/ searching for it/ in your face! If I'd struck the Chancellor, I would have been/ acting only justly. But I want to be brutal! I'm going to establish order here!" (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 162).

18 This is not the first time that the problem of fear in the context of power appears in *The Marriage*. The father-King referred to it earlier, when he yelled during a confrontation with the Drunkard: "I'm bursting out in such horrifying,/ Terrifying anger, that... oh... oh... oh... fright, fear!" (Gombrowicz,

However, Henryk is already “infected” with jealousy after witnessing the “pig priest’s” “dreadful marriage.” in addition, his imprisoned parents further encourage such feelings in him as a way of exacting revenge. It is in these circumstances that a tremendous conflict is born, a conflict between two fundamental ideas – between *Cogito* and the Interhuman Church:

Perhaps this is something which has been imposed on me from without; perhaps deep down inside I don’t feel that way at all, but merely feel obliged to behave as though in fact I did. (...)

With his finger... with his finger... he has fashioned an idol
Out of you... before which I must kneel and offer sacrifice as
In a dream.

The hell I will!

I am still the King! It is I who rule!

I shall rule! Oh, Henry, Henry, Henry! I alone!

I shall confer this marriage myself! Henry!

Don’t let yourself be ruled! You be the one who rules!

Henry, cast down these gods, destroy these spells

And your own throne ascend! (Gombrowicz, 1998, pp. 172-173).

And indeed, Henryk finds a way to cast off the shackles of the “dreadful bond.” This way is... Władzio’s suicide. After a lengthy discussion Henryk is able to convince Władzio of his plan. Both the method of convincing Władzio and the latter’s agreement are staged by Henryk as if they were part of a theatrical performance. For, as Henryk emphasizes, all of this is un-wise, terribly artificial, and not serious. But if everything goes ahead as planned, including Władzio’s suicide, then the wedding Henryk is to give himself will be accepted, and will therefore become legitimate – and then his rule will be complete and grounded both in *Cogito*, and in the Interhuman Church.

During the wedding ceremony the Drunkard tries to discredit Henryk using the “dreadful bond” he has created. Pointing with his finger, the Drunkard calls out: “The King is a cuckold” (Gombrowicz,

1998, p. 130). The difference seems to lie in the fact that in the Old Order, fear was one of two possible methods of legitimization – the other was acceptance, represented in Henryk’s attitude towards his father-King. On the other hand, in the world of *Cogito* there is only room for fear. On the role of fear as a principle-criterion of political legitimacy in a wider context, see: Świercz, 2011.

1998, p. 196). But it is too late, everything is over. Władzio is dead – he killed himself with a knife per Henryk's plea-command. However, Henryk's plans are irreversibly disrupted. He cancels the wedding – the time for the funeral comes and Henryk reflects on what has happened. After all, Władzio committed suicide on his orders. Is the King then responsible for his death? Henryk leaves us no room for doubt not only regarding his responsibility for Władzio's death, but also in regards to responsibility as such:

I am innocent.
I declare that I am as innocent as a child, that I have done
Nothing, that I am ignorant of everything...
No one is responsible for anything here!
There is no such thing as responsibility! (...)
No, there is no responsibility
Still, there are formalities
To be attended to... (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 199).

Though Henryk declares himself innocent, he nonetheless orders four guards to imprison him, and four others to raise up his deed – Władzio's corpse. On the orders of Henryk, the King-Who-Is-No-Longer-King, the funeral march begins.

Let us try to summarize, which will simultaneously be an attempt at interpretation. As I mentioned earlier, I read *The Marriage* from the perspective of a synthesis of the main ideas contained in the works of Gombrowicz. Not downplaying the significance of other themes, I think that the main problem in the foreground of *The Marriage* is that of Pure Form and the Interhuman Church in the context of *Cogito*. The fundamental question is: how is it possible to speak about the Interhuman Church in the world of *Cogito* at all? Is there no contradiction in that? If the world of *Cogito* is only its own (*Cogito's*) dream, what is the Interhuman Church? A community made up of *Cogito* and the products of its dream? I mentioned above that the act of creation is rooted in *dubito* and pragmatism. This explains why creation occurred, but it does not explain the difficulties *Cogito* encounters in attempting to control the world it has created; it does not explain the genesis of the Interhuman Church. It seems to me that what connects *Cogito* and the Interhuman Church is the problem of Pure Form.

In the analyzed paradigm, content is always secondary to Form, it is a product of Form. *Cogito* in itself is devoid of all content, it can only create Forms. The thing is that due to the *dubito* inherent in *Cogito*, the latter creates a pragmatic alter ego and, in consequence, a community and power. The creation of an alter ego puts *Cogito* in a situation requiring communication, and communication requires Form. In this way, Form, which is the initial environment of *Cogito* prior to creation, also becomes the foundation of the Interhuman Church. Form is the plane that connects the two seemingly mutually-exclusive ideas. Civilization is built by Form, which in turn is shaped within the framework of the Interhuman Church created by *Cogito*:

Words evoke certain psychic states in us... they create worlds of reality between us... If you said something similar to that... something strange... then I could say something even stranger and then, by mutually assisting one another, we could go on and on (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 178).

However, the tragic nature of the situation described by Gombrowicz in *The Marriage* is exceptionally deep. The dominance of Form becomes so overwhelming that it is no longer possible to find any content outside of it. First of all, it is obvious that *Cogito* can neither know whether anything external to it really exists, nor – in the context of its communication with the reality it has created – can it ever be sure what hides behind the Form used in communication; it can only speculate.¹⁹ However, what is most crushing is the awareness that not only does it not know itself – that this is the greatest, but simultaneously most difficult wisdom to achieve was already indicated by Greek philosophy – but also that there may not even be anything to come to know:

I move my fingers in the silence, and my being
Expands itself to become itself

¹⁹ “Who knows what this man might be / Thinking / in private, up there (...) He’s a numskull, one of / those shady types. But who knows? Perhaps / He’s imagining something. Perhaps in his mind / He’s connecting... / He’s connecting the two of them there... / Perhaps he’s making fun of me in private” (Gombrowicz, 1998, p. 160).

The seed of a seed. I, I, I! I alone!
And yet if I, I, I alone am, why then
(Let's try that for effect) am I not?
What does it matter (I ask) that I, I am in the very middle,
the very centre of everything, if I, I can never be
Myself?
I alone.
I alone.
Now that you're alone, completely alone, you might at least
stop this incessant recitation
This fabrication of words
This production of gestures
But you, even when you're alone, pretend that you're alone
And you go on (...)
Pretending to be yourself
Even to your very self. (...)
Such are the
Attitudes I might adopt... in your presence
And for your benefit! But not for my own! I'm not
in need
Of ant attitude! I don't feel
Other people's pain! I only recite
My humanity! No, I do not exist
I haven't any "I," alas, I forge myself
Outside myself" (Gombrowicz, 1998, pp. 180-181).

We can understand this to mean that *Cogito* is pure potentiality, essentially empty and shapeless. It is the Interhuman Church that gives it Form, without which there is also no content. If this is the case, then there is no way to reach *Cogito* itself, to reach the *ego* – it is empty, i.e., it is not there at all!

However, there is something of *Cogito*'s "own," something we can consider immanent in its nature. That something is narcissism, of which the jealousy mentioned earlier is a symptom. Yet narcissism, to become active, requires an "other." Thus, we come to the next stage in the tragedy. The Interhuman Church, though it is the only one in which humans can and do function, is simultaneously a driving force of the narcissism that gives rise to the greatest crimes and madness²⁰:

20 Let us risk the hypothesis that the Drunkard is a personification of this side of the Interhuman Church in the play. He represents the New Order that opposes the rule of the father-King.

Friends, companions, brothers –
So much
Health
And such sick behavior? So much sanity
And yet so much madness? So much humanity
And yet so much inhumanity? And what does it matter if taken
Separately each of us is lucid, sensible, balanced, when alto-
gether we are nothing but gigantic madman who furiously
Writhes about, screams, bellows and blindly
Rushes forward, overstepping his own bounds
Ripping himself out of himself... Our madness
Is outside ourselves, out there... There, there, out
there.
Where I myself end, there begins
My wantonness... And even though I live in peace
Within myself, still do I wander outside myself
And in dark, wild spaces and nocturnal places
Surrender myself to some unbounded chaos! (Gombrowicz, 1998,
pp. 132-133).

In my opinion, it is in this context that the clash between Syncyzna and Ojczyszna should be viewed. Generally speaking, the Syncyzna's project is an attempt at regaining innocence, harmony, and peace.²¹ For Henryk, who is returning from war, all aspects of reality have lost these qualities. The fault for this lies with the Old Order, the Ojczyszna. Regaining innocence thus requires the destruction of the status quo. in a sense, Henryk succeeds in this, as he does take power (and absolute power at that). Why does the Syncyzna's project not fulfill the hopes placed in it? Is it really the Syncyzna in that case? The impression we get from *The Marriage* is that Henryk builds a Syncyzna that disappoints because it turns out to be a utopia. But if we take into account the entirety of Gombrowicz's reflection concerning Syncyzna, things take on a different perspective. Writing about Poland in his *Diary*, and Poland is without a doubt the inspiration for Syncyzna, Gombrowicz states:

I, who am terribly Polish and terribly rebellious against Poland, have always been irritated by that little, childish, secondary, ordered, and

21 It should be added that an argument for the superiority of Syncyzna is that in a social context (as opposed to a biological one), it is the children that legitimize the parents, not the other way around.

religious world that is Poland. I attributed Poland's historical lack of dynamism as well as Poland's cultural impotence to these characteristics because God led us around by our little hand. I compared this well-behaved Polish childhood to the adult independence of other cultures. This nation without a philosophy, without a conscious history, intellectually soft and spiritually timid, a nation that produced only a "kindly" and "noble-minded" art, a languid people of lyrical scribblers of poetry, folklorists, pianists, actors, in which even Jews dissolved and lost their venom... My literary works guided by the desire to extricate the Pole from all secondary realities and to put him in direct confrontation with the universe. Let him fend for himself as best as he can. I desire to ruin his childhood. But now in this pursuant din, in the face of my own helplessness, in this inability to straighten things out, it occurs to me that I have just contradicted myself. Ruin a childhood? in the name of what? in the name of a maturity that I myself can neither bear nor accept? It is the Polish God, after all (in contrast to Weil's God), who is that splendid system that has maintained man in a sphere of indirect being, who is that veering away from the ultimate that is demanded by my insufficiency. How can I desire that they not be children if I myself, *per fas et nefas*, want to be a child? A child, yes, but one that has come to know and has exhausted all the possibilities of adult seriousness. This is the big difference. First, push away all the things that make everything easier, find yourself in a cosmos that is as bottomless as you can stand, in a cosmos at the limits of your consciousness, and experience a condition where you are left to your own loneliness and your own strength, only then, when the abyss which you have not managed to tame throws you from the saddle, sit down on the earth and discover the sand and grass anew. For childhood to be allowed, one must have driven maturity to bankruptcy. I am not bluffing: when I pronounce the word "childhood," I have the feeling that I am expressing the deepest but not yet roused contents of the people who gave me birth. This is not the childhood of a child, but the difficult childhood of an adult (Gombrowicz, 2012, pp. 218-219).

In this context, the project from *The Marriage* appears in a different light. I will indicate two possible interpretations.

First, we can interpret Henryk's power as the road leading up to the complete bankruptcy of maturity-Ojczyzna. All forms of the Old Order are led to their final consequences. Ultimately, their "weight" leads to the collapse of the entire system. This is the deed of Henryk that is carried in the closing funeral march.

Second, we can interpret Henryk's power the opposite way: as an attempt at bringing about Syncyzna without leading to the

bankruptcy of Ojczyszna. Henryk lacks a mature advisor who could show him the way to “the childhood of an adult.” His father cannot be such an advisor: Syncyzna is directed against everything that he represents. The Drunkard cannot be such an advisor either, as he has his own end he is working towards: gaining power to build a New Order which, though in conflict with the Old Order, is essentially a modern version of the latter. Władzio likewise cannot be Henryk’s advisor, as he is only Henryk’s pragmatic alter ego: as such, Władzio must lose the clash with *Cogito*’s narcissism.

Gombrowicz reveals to us the absurdity and downright criminality of all Forms of order, both those that refer to a transcendent Absolute (the Old Order) and those that refer to an immanent one (the New Order). What do we receive in exchange? What would constitute the essence of Syncyzna? Maybe it would be order-non-order, form-non-form, childhood-non-childhood, maturity-non-maturity. Maybe it would be the fully actualized “innermost content” of Polishness – a synthesis of freedom and community consciously deprived of Form.

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