

CREATIVITY AND CONTROL:
TOWARDS A MODEL OF AUTHORSHIP IN WITOLD GOMBROWICZ

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Tul'si Kamila Bhambry, hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere for any award. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that these are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tul'si Bhambry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping flourish at the end of the name.

Tul'si Bhambry
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ABSTRACT

My thesis explores concepts of authorship in the work of the Polish novelist, diarist, playwright and essayist Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969). I argue that implicit or subtextual allegories of authorship pervade his novels and diary, thus complementing the explicit discussions of literature and writing across his works. My close readings of perplexing passages and themes in Gombrowicz's major works, presented in the context of contemporary debates on authorship and of his output as a whole, allow me to reveal his model of authorship as a paradoxical reconciliation of spontaneous creativity and disciplined control.

Each chapter analyses a central paradox in one of Gombrowicz's major works. Chapter 1 examines authorship as a controlled surrender in a short travel journal in Gombrowicz's literary diary (*Dziennik*). The following chapters and the Postscript focus on his novels in chronological order. I discuss the notion of the work as the author's ghostly double in *Ferdydurke*, Gombrowicz's fascination with silence as both a threat and a prerequisite for literary creativity in *Trans-Atlantyk*, and the interweaving of eroticism and literature in *Pornografia*. The Postscript experiments with alternative formats of engaging with the work of a highly original and provocative writer who insists on the personal dimension of literary criticism: rather than presenting a traditional scholarly analysis of his final novel *Kosmos*, I enter into an imaginary dialogue with Gombrowicz, at once heeding and subverting his directives.

My study, which engages with Gombrowicz scholarship in Polish, English, French, and German, enhances our understanding of one of the foremost figures of twentieth-century literature. What is more, I contribute to current debates on artistic explorations of creativity, literary self-reflexivity, and twentieth-century writers'

responses to cultural and theoretical representations of authorship. Thus my thesis illuminates the dilemmas surrounding questions of language, art, and individual autonomy that preoccupy a generation of artists and theorists alike.

In memory of my mother, Ewa Bychawska-Bhambry

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Gombrowicz's Works in the Polish Original

- B *Bakakaj*: Witold Gombrowicz, *Pisma zebrane*, ed. by Włodzimierz Bolecki, Jerzy Jarzębski, and Zdzisław Łapiński (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002–), I, ed. by Zdzisław Łapiński
- F *Ferdydurke*: *Pisma zebrane* II, ed. by Włodzimierz Bolecki (2007)
- TA *Trans-Atlantyk*: Witold Gombrowicz, *Dzieła*, ed. by Jan Błoński and Jerzy Jarzębski, 15 vols (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986-1997), III, ed. by Jan Błoński (1986)
- P *Pornografia*: *Dzieła* IV: *Pornografia*, ed. by Jan Błoński (1986)
- K *Kosmos*: *Dzieła* V: *Kosmos*, ed. by Jan Błoński (1986)
- D1 *Dziennik 1953-1956*: *Dzieła* VII, ed. by Jan Błoński (1986)
- D2 *Dziennik 1957-1961*: *Dzieła* VIII, ed. by Jan Błoński (1986)
- D3 *Dziennik 1961-1966*: *Dzieła* IX, ed. by Jan Błoński (1986)
- D4 *Dziennik 1967-1969*: *Dzieła* X, ed. by Jan Błoński and Jerzy Jarzębski (1992) [1993]
- W *Wspomnienia polskie; Wędrówki po Argentynie*: *Dzieła* XV, ed. by Jan Błoński and Jerzy Jarzębski (1996)
- T **Typescript** of diary fragments to appear in *Kultura* in 1956. Section N.12, chapter XX. *Kultura* archives, Maisons-Laffitte, France
- L *Jerzy Giedroyc, Witold Gombrowicz: Listy 1950-1969*, ed. by Andrzej Kowalczyk, *Archiwum Kultury* 9 (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 2006)

Gombrowicz's Works in English Translation

- BE *Bacacay*, trans. from Polish by Bill Johnston (New York: Archipelago Books, 2004)
- FE *Ferdydurke*, trans. from Polish by Danuta Borchartd (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000)
- TE *Trans-Atlantyk*, trans. from Polish by Carolyn French and Nina Karsov, introduction by Stanislaw Baranczak (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994)
- PE *Pornografia*, trans. from Polish by Danuta Borchartd, foreword by Sam Lipsyte (New York: Grove Press, 2009)
- C *Cosmos*, trans. from Polish by Danuta Borchartd, foreword by Sam Lipsyte (New York: Grove Press, 2009)
- DE *Diary*, trans. from Polish by Lillian Vallee, ed. by Jan Kott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012)
- KT *A Kind of Testament*, trans. from French by Alistair Hamilton (London: Calder and Boyars, 1973)
- PM *Polish Memories*, trans. from Polish by Bill Johnston (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004)

Note on Translations and References

In this thesis quotations from Gombrowicz's works are cited in the original Polish. Symbols in superscript indicate English translations at the bottom of each page. I present published translations where possible; where no reference is given, English translations are mine. The same holds for original works of imaginative literature in Polish. Polish secondary sources are quoted directly in my own English translation, while quotations from primary and secondary sources in German and French are left untranslated.

Ancillary information and references are placed in the endnotes indicated by Arabic numerals in superscript.

INTRODUCTION: GOMBROWICZ THE ‘DISCIPLINED ANARCHIST’

‘Nie napisałem jednego słowa w innych celach, jak najściślej egoistyczne,’ the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz declared in 1968. ‘Ale zawsze utwór mnie zdradzał i odrywał się ode mnie’ (D4 42)*. This statement encapsulates Gombrowicz’s idea of a conflict between on the one hand himself as a writer who needs to assert his will, and on the other hand the power of the emergent work that refuses to submit to the author’s design and instead creates itself according to its own dynamics. The notion of authorship as a reconciliation of creativity and control preoccupied Gombrowicz throughout his career and represents one of the main problems he tackled in his life as a writer. In 1960 he expressed his paradoxical and agonistic concept of authorship in a nutshell, announcing that he would conquer Paris, the centre of the Western literary world, as an ‘anarchista zdyscyplinowany’ (D3 197) – ‘a disciplined anarchist’ (DE 672).

Born in 1904, Gombrowicz made his debut in the early 1930s with a collection of grotesque and subversive short stories, and soon thereafter he established himself as one of Poland’s eminent avant-garde writers. World War II interrupted his promising writing career. At the outbreak of the war he found himself in Argentina, and he remained in Buenos Aires for the next 24 years. He briefly lived in West Berlin and Paris in 1963-64, and finally settled in the South of France, where he died in 1969. Gombrowicz’s exile shaped his work in profound ways, providing themes for his fiction and autobiographical writings, but also confronting him with a wholly different experience of authorship than what he had known as a rising star in

* ‘I have not written a single word other than for an egoistic purpose; but, each time, the work betrayed me and broke away from me.’ KT 51, translation modified.

antebellum Warsaw: given that his works were suppressed in the People's Republic of Poland, and he was on unfriendly terms with the conservative mainstream of the Polish diaspora, Gombrowicz had little choice but to embrace an authorial identity that was founded on fierce independence.

Until his rise to international acclaim in the 1960s, Gombrowicz lived in considerable poverty and isolation from the literary establishment. Then, in 1967, his novel *Kosmos* won the prestigious Formentor International Prize for literature, and in 1968 he was shortlisted for the Nobel Prize. Today he is recognized as one of the foremost figures of twentieth-century Polish and European literature. In his home country, where his works had been blacklisted almost uninterruptedly from 1939 until the late 1980s, he has now attained the singular status of a canonical writer who is also considered a cult figure. The centenary of his birth in 2004, officially celebrated by the Polish Ministry of Culture as 'The Year of Gombrowicz,' was marked by a wealth of cultural events as well as academic conferences and publications. Reverberations of this unprecedented boom in scholarly activity continue to this day.¹

Gombrowicz is probably the most widely read and studied Polish writer outside Poland today. Internationally, he is most broadly known for his plays, described as absurdist *avant la lettre*,² as well as his fiction, which is more difficult to define. Sartre dubbed Gombrowicz's novels 'faux romans,'³ and indeed there is something deliberately inauthentic about their propensity for parody, self-irony, and stylized self-consciousness. Gombrowicz's insistence on the charming simplicity and readability of his works is equally deceptive: each of his novels presents a distinct style and storyline, and each calls for a reader willing to tackle the recognizably Gombrowiczian blend of satire, grotesqueness, linguistic experimentation, anti-

patriotism, existentialism, as well as intertextuality, autofictionality and textual self-reflexivity.

Until recently the reception of Gombrowicz's novels in the English-speaking world was marred by the fact that they were only available in second-hand translations from French and German. Since the turn of the millennium, however, new direct translations of nearly all his major works into English have renewed both general and critical interest in his oeuvre in Anglo-American circles.⁴ Currently an increasing proportion of international Gombrowicz scholarship emerges in English: besides an impressive number of articles and book chapters, five extensive studies in English have appeared in the last fifteen years⁵ (compared to four in German⁶ and three in French,⁷ in addition to two volumes of biographical material compiled in French by the writer's widow, Rita Gombrowicz⁸). One of the contributions of my study is to bring this significant body of international criticism – English, German, and French – into dialogue with academic debates on Gombrowicz's life and work published in Poland.

Besides Gombrowicz's drama and fiction (a short story collection and five novels, one of which was originally published under a pseudonym), an important strand of his literary output consists of various forms of autobiographical writings. In the late 1950s he composed a series of radio feuilletons that were posthumously published as his memoir, *Wspomnienia polskie; Wędrówki po Argentynie* (Paris, 1977).⁹ In 1968, prompted by the French journalist and literary critic Dominique de Roux, Gombrowicz discussed his life and work in a series of pseudo-interviews that later became known as his *Testament*.¹⁰ His most important autobiographical work, however, is his overtly fictionalized diary, which was originally serialized in the

prestigious Paris-based Polish émigré journal *Kultura* between 1953 and 1969. While Gombrowicz was exiled and his work suppressed in Poland, this literary journal allowed him to reach his dispersed readership. He engaged readers and critics in polemical discussions about literature, philosophy and politics, and openly constructed his identity as a writer through public self-mythologization. This diary, which Rita Gombrowicz characterizes as ‘a pre-Internet “blog”,’¹¹ appeared in book form in three volumes during Gombrowicz’s lifetime; a fourth volume was added posthumously.

Gombrowicz’s combined autobiographical works – the *Diary*, memoirs and *Testament* – provide a detailed and multifaceted representation of his experience of authorship. He frequently discusses practical aspects of his work, such as his daily routine, his interaction with other authors, and his struggle for recognition; other topics include literary and philosophical influences and polemics on the role and nature of literature in the modern world. He also provides extensive commentaries on his literary oeuvre, discussing the genesis and underlying formal arrangement of his works, explaining their main themes, and positioning them in relation to important strands of contemporary thought, such as Marxism, Existentialism or Structuralism. His partiality for autocommentary also spills over into programmatic texts that betray his impulse to control his reception: out of the fifteen volumes of his collected works (*Dzieła*), three are taken up by authorial prefaces and introductions, literary manifestos, interviews, polemical open letters to editors of various journals, and similar texts.¹² In *Testament* Gombrowicz admits that ‘literatura i piskorz póty żyją, póki się wymykają (D4 111)*’; in other words, he is aware of the pitfalls of auto-interpretation. ‘Wiem,’ he concedes at the end of his memoir cum autocommentary

* ‘literature and the eel live as long as they succeed in wriggling away’. KT 114.

Testament, ‘nic niebezpieczniejszego niż takie oprowadzanie po własnych utworach. Sztuka jest zawsze *czymś więcej* i właśnie w tym, co przekracza interpretację, jest najbardziej sobą’ (D4 149)*. Gombrowicz, as we shall see below, was far from condoning an intentionalist attitude towards literature; at least in theory he wanted his readers to participate in creating the meaning of his works. But at the same time, he was appalled, again and again, at the gross misreadings of his works at the hands of both his detractors and his supporters. Consequently, he chose to present neat accounts of his literary output, preferring overdetermination to misinterpretation. It is hardly surprising, in the light of this vast body of metaliterary and metacritical writing, that scholars have expressed a certain anxiety about how much of their work is already anticipated by their object of study.¹³

The conceptual framework that Gombrowicz proposes as a key to his work is commonly referred to as his ‘theory of Form’. In one of his programmatic texts, an interview with himself written in French and titled ‘J’étais structuraliste avant tout le monde,’ Gombrowicz declares: ‘toute mon œuvre est enracinée, depuis ses origines, dans ce drame de la forme. Le conflit de l’homme avec sa forme, voilà mon thème fondamental.’¹⁴ ‘Form’ is a shorthand for Gombrowicz’s concept of the social and psychological dynamics that in his view condition human behaviour, language and feeling: determined by a logic of consistency or completion, our words, actions, and emotions can never be authentic. On the social level, ‘Form’ means that human identity is shaped in response to the social environment, both on a macro level (such as social class, gender and status), and on a micro level (every interaction with another person is ruled by a certain logic from which there is no escape). On the

* ‘I know, nothing is more dangerous than to guide people through one’s own work. Art is always something more and it is precisely in that that it escapes from the interpretation which approaches it most closely.’ KT 153.

psychological level, 'Form' obliges us to comply with whatever reasoning or behaviour first pressed itself upon us. And yet, Gombrowicz insists that we must resist Form as best we can, striving to assert our identity, both on the intra- and the intersubjective level, even though authenticity will always remain out of reach: 'choć wiem że nie ma nic bardziej zwodniczego niż to "ja" nieosiągalne, wiem też, że cały honor i wartość życia polega na nieustannej za nim pogoni, nieustannej jego obronie.'^{*}

Another aspect of Gombrowicz's theory of Form is that the logic of completion that underlies human identity formation eventually leads to maturity or closed perfection, which connotes the end of creativity and foreshadows death. He emphasizes the dilemma of the human condition, according to which we are torn between an urge to achieve the zenith of our development, and a contradictory urge to resist or defer this inevitable maturity. The result of this antithetical process is a constant struggle between the perfection of accomplished Form, and a fascination with imperfection, immaturity, youth, lowbrow art and all that still has the potential to evolve. As Gombrowicz puts it in his mock interview:

Nous aspirons à la maturité, la force, la sagesse le l'âge mûr, en même temps nous avons un penchant irrésistible vers la jeunesse. Mais la jeunesse est infériorité. [...] En un sens, l'homme se veut parfait; il se veut Dieu. En l'autre, il se veut jeune, il se veut imparfait. L'homme adulte est donc entre Dieu et le Jeune.¹⁵

Gombrowicz's insistence on the dialectics of Form has long been criticized for hampering the development of original approaches to his works, and recent commentators have adopted a variety of theoretical and critical frameworks that he had not programmed or foreseen.¹⁶ Readings informed by various Poststructuralist,

* 'Even though I know that there is nothing more misleading than that inaccessible "I," I know, too, that all the honor and value of life depend on the relentless pursuit of and the relentless defense of the "I".' DE 239.

Cultural and Queer Theories have offered insight into his views on language, writing, performance, and the body,¹⁷ while literary critical analyses have illuminated his notions of language and literature in a literary historical context.¹⁸ And yet, no systematic attempt has been made to theorize Gombrowicz's representations of authorship. My analysis of his underlying model of literary creativity thus fills a major gap in Gombrowicz scholarship: setting his theory of Form side by side with other binary structures in his work, I neither privilege nor repudiate it. Instead, I develop an interpretive strategy that integrates close readings of his literary works with an attentiveness to his programmatic writings, self-representations, engagement with other writers and thinkers, and most importantly, his implicit intuitions about the nature of literary creativity. This holistic approach to Gombrowicz's major works in the context of his non-literary production allows me to (re)construct his model of writing, thus enhancing our understanding of the works of one of the foremost figures of twentieth-century literature, both European and South-American.¹⁹

Gombrowicz's fiction is overtly self-conscious. All four of the novels that he published under his name present first-person narrators who are his obvious alter egos. The narrators of the first three of these novels are portrayed as writers, and they openly discuss various aspects of their experience of authorship; the narrator of Gombrowicz's last novel, *Kosmos*, is presented as a student obsessed with interpretation. The intradiegetic pronouncements on writing and reading in Gombrowicz's novels can be revealing and thought-provoking, but when it comes to the task of piecing together Gombrowicz's model of authorship, these explicit discussions are only of limited interest. His most original reflections on writing, I argue, are conveyed between the lines of his texts. To explore such elusive or ineffable aspects of authorship as the trauma of inspiration, the role of silence in the

creative process, the eroticism of writing, or the limits of authorial authority, Gombrowicz does not present metaliterary discourses but implicitly self-reflexive allegorical scenes, passages, characters or character constellations. These ‘subtextual allegories of authorship,’ which, from a stylistic point of view, often represent the most experimental passages in Gombrowicz’s works, tend to transgress genre norms; they also stand out from their contexts through puzzles and paradoxes that pose serious interpretive challenges. Focussing on these allegorical passages in Gombrowicz’s fiction and travel writing, I render explicit his implicit search for a model of authorship, thus accounting for themes and passages that previous scholars have overlooked or dismissed as meaningless.

It would seem that the binary structure of ‘creativity and control,’ which I posit as the most significant pair of opposites in Gombrowicz’s model of authorship, could easily be mapped onto his favourite dialectics of Form: just as the individual, in Gombrowicz’s view, must reconcile the contradictory urges of maturity and immaturity, or intersubjective identity formation and the will to authenticity, so the writer must achieve a paradoxical union of spontaneous inspiration and authorial discipline, allowing the emergent work to ‘create itself’ to some extent, but also forcing it to remain faithful to the author’s intentions. But this overlap between the dialectics of Form and of authorship is deceptively simple. The most obvious difference is that Gombrowicz persistently reiterates his theory of language and human behaviour in an effort to present as straightforward an account of Form as possible. What is more, his theory of Form is relatively static. Although Gombrowicz stressed certain aspects over others at different stages in his career, he emphatically stood by his earliest declarations regarding the dynamics of Form. In the last years of his life, when he addressed an international audience through interviews and

prefaces, he recapitulated his theory of Form in a manner that inspired his editor Jerzy Jarzębski to describe Gombrowicz's late autocommentaries as tending towards 'autoparaphrase'.²⁰

In contrast to his concept of Form, Gombrowicz's views on writing do not amount to a coherent theory. Reflections on authorship, though abundant, appear in a relatively unsystematic manner; they are scattered across works of various genres, and are veiled in metaphors of paternity and sexual betrayal that are in themselves revealing of Gombrowicz's anxieties about writing. His most powerful expressions of the experience of literary composition are conveyed by subtextual allegories that disrupt the binary structures of Form. What is more, his views on authorship change over the course of his career, as he redefines the role of creativity and control in response to the historical context, to his experience of writing in exile, and to his experience of his aging body. Gombrowicz's theory of Form, therefore, cannot account for his dynamic model of literary composition; it can only provide a touchstone or standard against which his explorations of authorship as a reconciliation of creativity and control can be compared.

My concept of a 'subtextual allegory of authorship' represents an original contribution to Gombrowicz scholarship as well as to our broader understanding of self-reflexive allegories in twentieth-century narrative literature. Linda Hutcheon, in her study *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1984), distinguishes between 'overt' and 'covert' metafictionality in contemporary fiction. Overtly self-reflexive texts, she argues, 'reveal their self-awareness in explicit thematizations or allegorizations of their diegetic or linguistic fictional identity,' while in the covertly metafictional mode 'this process is internalized, actualized'.²¹ Hutcheon defines her concept of 'metafictional allegory,' which she classifies under the category of 'overt'

metafictionality, as a ‘*mise en abyme* [...] extended *in size*’ (p. 56). She finds such allegories in John Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968) and John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969), where the reader’s position is allegorically inscribed into the text.

While most of Gombrowicz’s novels present narrators who *occasionally* mirror the role of the reader by playing detective and searching for meaning in their surroundings, Gombrowicz’s last work of fiction, the pseudo-detective novel *Kosmos* (1965), can be regarded as a paradigmatic example of a ‘metafictional allegory’ in Hutcheon’s sense: the plot revolves around the narrator’s attempt to decipher the signs he finds in the fictional world around him.²² *Kosmos*, like the works cited by Hutcheon, contains a metafictional allegory that is readable in separation from the author’s remaining output. Gombrowicz already begins to explore this model of overt metafictional allegoricity in his penultimate novel, *Pornografia* (1960), where the narrator tries to decode the ‘meaning’ of the character constellation of which he is part, but the model of the subtextual allegory still dominates in this work. The two earlier novels *Ferdydurke* (1937) and *Trans-Atlantyk* (1953) present a subtextual allegoricity that is fully ‘internalized, actualized,’ and too subtle to be labelled ‘overt’. I discuss the brief appearance of the narrator’s ghostly younger doppelgänger at the beginning of *Ferdydurke*, suggesting that it represents an embodiment of this writer-narrator’s first work; in my reading of *Trans-Atlantyk* I focus on the hitherto unexplained fact that one of the major characters does not speak – a phenomenon that I present in terms of the author’s confrontation with silence in the process of literary composition. None of the subtextual allegories that I hypothesize in Gombrowicz’s work concern the reader or the act of reading. His subtextual allegories are allegories of *writing*, not of reading, and they only emerge when works

from across his complete oeuvre are allowed to set off and inform one another. In this sense I depart from Hutcheon's model of the metafictional allegory.

* * *

Intuitions about authorship as a dialectic reconciliation of creativity and control figure in all of Gombrowicz's major novels. The structure of this study and the choice of the key texts reflect the development of his model of authorship throughout his career. Before I address his fictional works, however, I will present a short travel journal from 1954, in which Gombrowicz develops a paradigmatic subtextual allegory of writing. This fragment of the *Diary* allows to establish, in Chapter 1, the basic terms for a discussion of Gombrowicz's representations of authorship as a reconciliation of creativity and control. In Chapters 2 to 4 I attend to his novels in chronological order, showing how Gombrowicz expanded the scope of his dialectic model and created intersections with other aspects of authorship, such as exile, desire, or the representation of reality, in *Ferdydurke* (1937), *Trans-Atlantyk* (1953) and *Pornografia* (1960). Each of the four chapters in this thesis discusses Gombrowicz's model of authorship from a different angle, presenting theoretical approaches appropriate to each individual work. This procedure sheds light on his main works in their literary historical and/or biographical context, and also accounts for his artistic and intellectual trajectory. The pseudonymous pastiche-gothic-crime-romance *Opętani* [*Possessed; or, The Secret of Myslotch*] of 1939, whose authorship Gombrowicz did not acknowledge until shortly before his death in 1969, contains few self-referential elements, and therefore does not form part of my main corpus.

Gombrowicz's plays pose an entirely different set of problems in relation to the question of authorship. Rather than presenting subtextual allegories of literary

composition, his dramatic oeuvre problematizes questions of authorship, creativity and control in relation to collaboration. Gombrowicz authored three plays: *Iwona, księżniczka Burgunda* [*Iwona, Princess of Burgundia*] in 1938, *Ślub* [*The Marriage*] in 1948 and *Operetka* [*Operetta*] in 1966. The play *Historia* [*History (An Operetta)*] presents a special case in terms of authorship, since it was posthumously compiled from manuscript notes for *Operetka* by Gombrowicz's friend, the critic Konstanty Jeleński. The three plays written and published by Gombrowicz pertain to his theory of authorship in that the characters perform the intrasubjective dynamics of Form, and highlight their relationship to language. The protagonist of the play *Ślub*, for instance, observes that 'to nie my mówimy słowa, lecz słowa nas mówią'.²³ This pronouncement echoes Gombrowicz's remarks on his method as a playwright: 'Mes pièces de théâtre, à l'instar d'ailleurs de mes autres ouvrages, se "choisissent" d'elles-mêmes leur propre voix. Quand je commence à écrire une pièce, je n'ai pas la moindre idée où elle va m'entraîner.'²⁴ In the same interview – the last he gave in the summer of 1969 – Gombrowicz stresses that he never attends performances or rehearsals of his plays, that he does not choose the directors or interfere with their or the actors' work. He admits that in his view the staging (light, sound, set) is of crucial importance, and he voices strong opinions about contemporary trends in *mise en scène*: 'J'abhorre le style "moderne" qui est toujours le même.' But then he adds: 'Au demeurant, je ne me mêle pas de ces choses-là, je donne carte blanche au metteur en scène. Bref, je deviens un "croyant par paresse," je m'en remets à la grâce le la Providence.'²⁵ A study of Gombrowicz's concept of dramatic authorship would have to assess the factuality of his proclaimed laissez-faire attitude by examining his

* 'it is not we who speak the words; the words speak us.' Witold Gombrowicz, *The Marriage*, trans. from Polish by Louis Iribane (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970), p. 87.

published and unpublished letters.²⁶ There are reasons to doubt his air of nonchalance. In 1967, for instance, he wrote to Konstanty Jeleński, who at that time was translating *Operetka* into French, about his plans to have the play staged by Jorge Lavelli. In the same letter he stresses the importance of finding the right composer for the score. Ideally, Gombrowicz would like personally to prepare the musician for the task at hand:

Najważniejsze to muzyka. Dobrze byłoby, żeby muzyk mógł przyjechać tu do Vence, na kilka dni co najmniej, zamieszka u nas. Ale trzeba by go dobrze wybrać: to musi być ktoś inteligentny, z wyczuciem sztuki, z inwencją melodyjną, zdolny dać temu oprawę melodyjną, dynamiczną, dramatyczną, z rytmem, z wdziękiem etc. Żadnych ‘nowoczesności’ (uff!), ale to musi być dobre.*²⁷

The binary of creativity and control takes on an entirely new dimension when it comes to Gombrowicz’s dramatic output. Given that the present study focuses on subtextual allegories of authorship in his narrative prose and autobiographical works, however, his plays, like his pseudonymous novel, will only be discussed in as far as they resonate with relevant themes in those texts.

* * *

Chapter 1 examines the subtextual allegory of authorship in the ‘Rio Paraná Diary,’ a short travel journal of 1954 in which Gombrowicz describes a boat trip up the River Paraná in Argentina. I present a close reading of this text alongside its original typescript, tracing the way Gombrowicz developed an allegorical quest for the sources of inspiration. Focusing on oxymoronic motifs of ‘active passivity’ I suggest

* ‘The most important thing is the music. It would be good if the musician could come here to Vence, at least for a few days, he can move in with us. But he must be well chosen: we need someone intelligent, with a feeling for art, with melodic invention, able to give this a melodic, dynamic, dramatic structure, with rhythm, with charm, etc. None of that new stuff (umpf!), but it has to be good.’

that Gombrowicz portrays literary creativity as a paradoxical and destabilizing phenomenon that the author's consciousness cannot control. I then juxtapose this travel diary with Gombrowicz's later account of the same journey in the autobiographical radio feuilletons, *Wędrówki po Argentynie* [Peregrinations in Argentina], showing how these two texts illuminate one another. In order to demonstrate the significance that the 'Rio Paraná Diary' had for Gombrowicz, I present letters, testimonies, and published biographical material. Throughout this chapter, I position Gombrowicz's travel journal within its literary historical and intellectual context, revealing the ways in which he built on topoi of the voyage as a journey of the imagination. I discuss intertextual references to works by Arthur Rimbaud, Adam Mickiewicz, Homer, Joseph Conrad, and Anton Chekhov, as well as Modernist tropes of artistic creativity that involve images of gender destabilization and homoerotic desire. Other theoretical frameworks to Gombrowicz's theory of authorship – ones that he might not have anticipated – include Maurice Blanchot's reflections on inspiration in *L'espace littéraire* as well as a Queer reading of the theme of ineffability. Having demonstrated the ways in which writing, for Gombrowicz, involves a state of controlled abandonment, I then move on to examine this notion with respect to his novels.

Chapter 2 addresses representations of authorship in *Ferdydurke*, drawing attention to the subtextual allegoricity of a ghostly doppelganger scene at the beginning of the novel. Besides the first edition of 1937 and the revised edition of 1957, I draw on a short sketch titled 'Ferdydurke,' published in 1935. This corpus allows me to demonstrate how Gombrowicz developed the idea of the ghostly or haunting nature of the text. Drawing on his autobiographical writings – *Dziennik* [Diary], *Wspomnienia polskie* [Polish Memories] and *Testament* – I discuss the ways

in which Gombrowicz represents himself, both explicitly and implicitly, as the double of his fictional characters and even of his work. I go on to argue that the ghostly younger double who appears to the writer-narrator at the beginning of *Ferdydurke* embodies his memory of his first work – a haunting memory that he must exorcise before he can begin to write again. In this chapter I also address Gombrowicz's notion of literary creativity 'happening' to the writer, whose task it is to control the alien force of the emergent text. Authorship, I suggest further, acquires for Gombrowicz the aura of an erotic encounter that connotes both desire and violence. In the course of my argument I reveal some hitherto overlooked resonances between Gombrowicz's works and those of Goethe, Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann, and André Breton. These resonances illuminate Gombrowicz's development of the doppelganger motif, as well as his representations of his concept of automatic writing. Finally, this chapter enters into dialogue with various theories of the doppelganger, in particular Freud's, as well as with Jacques Derrida's concept of the ghostliness of authorship.

In the third chapter I examine Gombrowicz's model of exilic authorship as presented in *Trans-Atlantyk*, his first work of fiction written in Argentina.²⁸ In this novel, I argue, Gombrowicz develops an allegorical character constellation that mirrors his binary model of authorship as a reconciliation of creativity and control, but he also destabilizes this neat structure through the presence of a silent character at the heart of the plot. Reading this allegorical character constellation alongside Maurice Blanchot's reflections on the role of silence in the writing process, I suggest that for Gombrowicz the writer, besides negotiating the opposing demands of creativity and control, must also confront silence. I discuss how the notions of silence, discipline and self-control resonate with Gombrowicz's polemical

discussions of exile literature in the 1950s. Concerning the development of Gombrowicz's model of authorship after World War II, in this chapter I demonstrate a transformation in his view of the reader: rather than recommending that the author embrace the reader's influence, Gombrowicz, in response to Polish neo-Romantic discourses on the patriotic duty of the exile writer, now valorizes the idea of artistic independence.

Chapter 4 concerns the apparently realistic novel *Pornografia* (1960). My focus is on Gombrowicz's use of eroticism in his search for a way of representing reality with 'extreme' faithfulness. Here, too, the character constellation appears as a self-reflexive allegory, as the four protagonists embody aspects of Gombrowicz's model of authorship. On the level of the plot, the narrator strives to bring about the erotic union of youth and age – a pair of opposites that he describes in terms of 'thoughtlessness' and 'consciousness'. I discuss how on a subtextual allegorical level, this binary, analogous to the binary of creativity and control, allows Gombrowicz to conceptualize his encounter with the playfully transgressive modern text. Focusing on an apocalyptic passage (the narrator has a vision in which a young boy replaces God) that transgresses the limits of conventional realism, I examine the way Gombrowicz replaces the traditional 'phallic' realist narrative, allegorically represented by God, by a modern *écriture* that is embodied in the erotic physicality of youth. The narrator's resistance towards the boy whom he desires indicates Gombrowicz's ambivalent relationship to contemporary avant-garde writing. In *Pornografia*, I argue moreover, the element of control takes on a new function: rather than taming the never-ending flow of writing, control and cunning are needed to approach the forbidden erotic source of creativity. I also highlight an important transformation in Gombrowicz's exploration of authorship in *Pornografia*: he

supplements the subtextual allegory of writing with an explicit allegory of reading, as the writer-narrator now attempts to decipher the meaning of the character constellation of which he is part. This development anticipates the overt metanarrative allegory of Gombrowicz's last novel, *Kosmos* (1965), a work that is openly concerned with reading and interpretation, as the plot consists of the narrator's explicit attempts to make sense of the signs he believes to perceive around him.

Given that in *Kosmos* Gombrowicz abandons the model of subtextual allegory of writing in favour of an explicit metanarrative allegory of reading as theorized by Hutcheon, I do not address it in the same way as the other novels. Rather than interpreting the self-conscious interpretations and meta-interpretations of a narrator who thematizes the impossibility of objective knowledge, I take Gombrowicz's last novel as a starting point to explore his concepts of reading and writing, creativity and control. The Postscript of this thesis opens with a fictitious letter to Gombrowicz in which I ask him to grant me an interview. There follows an imaginary conversation in which I extract quotations from *Kosmos* and other mostly autobiographical writings from their original contexts and insert them into an explicitly metaliterary discussion. My use of a textual collage technique responds to Gombrowicz's misgivings about traditional academic literary scholarship. In his *Diary* of 1954, for instance, he reproduces his letter to the members of the Discussion Club in Los Angeles, where he warns them about the consequences of adopting a rational, scientific posture:

Wiedźcie, że o mnie nie wolno mówić w sposób nudny, zwykły, pospolity. Zabraniam tego stanowczo. Domagam się – o sobie – słowa odświętnego. Tych, którzy pozwalają sobie mówić o mnie nudno i rozsądnie, karzę

okrutnie: umieram im w ustach i oni mają w swoim otworze gębowym pełno mego trupa. (D1 116)*

Resurrecting the author from his grave by making him engage in a dialogue with me some 44 years after his death, I am able to address how scholarship has changed since 1969. I counter Barthes' strategic proclamation of *la mort de l'auteur*,²⁹ hoping, at the same time, to avoid the fate of the members of the LA Discussion Club.

By challenging the boundary between critical and creative writing I explore the spectrum of possible scholarly responses to a highly original and provocative writer who, despite his frequent assertions that a stable identity can never be attained, insists on the *personal* dimension of literary criticism. This is the advice he gives to critics in his *Diary* of 1959:

Gdy [...] poza książkami odkryjecie osoby, [...] gdy styl stanie się czyimś stylem osobistym, gdy formę zwiążecie z czyimś przeżyciem, wówczas ustąpi sporo mgły osiadającej nam teraz na oczach. [...] jestem jak najdalszy od przyznawania twórcy wyłączności w tym względzie, ale [...] musimy dojrzeć poza dziełem człowieka, twórcę, przynajmniej jako tzw. punkt odniesienia. Nie – na Boga! – żeby pytać ‘co chciał powiedzieć?’ (to by znowu sprowadziło krytykę do badania intelektualnych, czyli abstrakcyjnych, zamierzeń autora i zresztą takie pytanie jest niedorzeczne na terenie sztuki). Ale aby książka wyrastała nam z jakiejś – z czyjejs – rzeczywistości, z czyjegoś przeżycia. (D2 178)[†]

* ‘Be informed that you must not speak about me in a boring, simple, ordinary way. I staunchly forbid this. I demand a festive word for myself. I cruelly punish those who allow themselves to speak about me boringly and rationally: I die in their mouths and they end up with their gob full of my cadaver.’ DE 89, translation modified.

[†] ‘When you discover the persons behind the books, [...] when style becomes someone's personal style, when you link form to someone's experience, then much of the fog now blanketing our eyes will lift. [...] I am very far from granting the creator exclusivity, but if modern criticism is to regain strength, sociability, efficacy within the pale of the human world, we must look beyond the work to the man, to the creator, at least as a point of reference. Not – for heaven's sake – in order to ask “What was he trying to say?” (this would again reduce criticism to the examination of the intellectual, that is, abstract, intentions of the author and, anyway, this kind of questioning is irrelevant in art). But in order for a book to

The format of an imaginary dialogue allows me to take on an agonistic role and reciprocate two of Gombrowicz's metaliterary strategies. First, my interview challenges his inscription of the reader into the fictional universe of *Kosmos*: I turn the tables on the author by inscribing *his text* into *my reading*. Second, my fictitious dialogue responds to his tendency to publish fabricated interviews with himself, such as *Testament* or 'J'étais structuraliste avant tout le monde' – a short text in which the imaginary interviewer's role is reduced to monosyllabic interjections. In the dialogue at the end of this study, Gombrowicz, for once, does not get to engineer the entire exchange. Finally, the framework of an interview enables me to thematize my personal experience of this interpretative project. While on the surface this self-conscious intrusion of the critic's 'I' still complies with Gombrowicz's directives, I also venture to question and disrupt some of the underlying power structures in his discourse.³⁰ In a way my critical stance mirrors Gombrowicz's dialectic concept of authorship as a reconciliation of creativity and control: interpretation, in this study, becomes a negotiation of compliance and resistance.

The key contribution of my work is that it provides a renewed understanding of Gombrowicz's work in relation to the (literary) historical context in which it developed, as well as in the context of his lived experience of authorship. Building on international Gombrowicz scholarship, my analyses of his subtextual allegories account for some of the most puzzling themes and passages across his major works, while also illuminating the way his preoccupation with authorship developed over the three and a half decades of his literary career. My reading of Gombrowicz's 'subtextual allegories of authorship' not only represents an original approach to the literary output of this important writer, but also contributes to our broader

grow out of some sort of – out of someone's – reality, out of someone's experience.' DE 425, translation modified.

understanding of metafictional allegory. What is more, my study enters into a range of current debates on such themes as artistic engagements with creativity, literary self-reflexivity, and twentieth-century writers' responses to cultural and/or theoretical representations of authorship. Finally, by exploring the intersection of creative and critical writing, I contribute an experimental intervention to the ongoing search for new forms of literary (and other) scholarship.

¹ No fewer than six original book-length studies devoted to Gombrowicz were published in 2004, in addition to several Polish translations of international Gombrowicz scholarship as well as a volume of Gombrowicz's letters to his family. Since then at least fourteen monographs and edited volumes have appeared in Poland, among them Klementyna Suchanow's groundbreaking biography of Gombrowicz's life in Argentina (*Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza*, 2005), as well as Jerzy Jarzębski's 860-page edited volume *Witold Gombrowicz: nasz współczesny* (2010), presenting the proceedings of a conference held at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow in 2004. See Bibliography for details.

² According to Martin Esslin, Gombrowicz 'must be regarded as a precursor and at the same time as a mature master of the Theatre of the Absurd'. See *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Vintage, 2004), p. 393. Artur Grabowski refers to Gombrowicz's 'metatheatrical dramaturgy' in his essay 'Polish Theatre', in *Western Drama Through the Ages: A Student Reference Guide*, ed. by Kimball King (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), pp. 209-38 (p. 230). Gombrowicz resisted being associated with the Theatre of the Absurd, and insisted instead on his absolute originality. See for instance his blurb, written in partially versified form, on the back cover of the 1965 French edition of his first two plays:

[Mon théâtre] n'est pas un théâtre de l'Absurde,
 mais un théâtre d'idées,
 avec ses propres moyens,
 ses buts propres,
 son climat particulier,
 un monde qui m'est personnel.
 En faisant de ces deux auteurs célèbres [Beckett, Ionesco] – et je les salue! –
 une seule machine, on leur rend un bien mauvais service.

Cela ne me regarde pas? Mais si. Et je crie quand la machine me happe.
(Witold Gombrowicz, *Théâtre*, trans. from Polish by Constantin Jelenski and Geneviève Serreau (Paris: Julliard, 1965)).

- ³ Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Sartre par Sartre', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 272 (27 January 1970), pp. 40-50 (p. 45).
- ⁴ Gombrowicz's short stories appeared under the title *Bacacay* in 2004; the novels *Trans-Atlantyk*, *Ferdydurke*, *Cosmos* and *Pornografia* were published in 1994, 2000, 2005, and 2009 respectively, but the pseudonymous novel *Possessed; or, The Secret of Myslotch* [*Opętani*] is only available in a second-hand translation of 1980. As for Gombrowicz's non-fictional writings, the first half of his memoirs appeared as *Polish Memories* in 2004; *A Guide to Philosophy in Six Hours and Fifteen Minutes* was published in 2007, and a complete edition of the *Diary* in 2012 (based on a first edition that appeared in three volumes between 1988 and 1993). Direct English translations of his plays have been available since the 1970s. See Bibliography for details.
- ⁵ Hanjo Berressem, *Lines of Desire: Reading Gombrowicz's Fiction with Lacan* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998); George Z. Gasyna, *Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise: Exilic Discourse in Joseph Conrad and Witold Gombrowicz* (London: Continuum, 2011); Michael Goddard, *Gombrowicz, Polish Modernism, and the Subversion of Form* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2010); Michal Oklot, *Phantasms of Matter in Gogol (and Gombrowicz)* (Champaign and London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009); Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, ed., *Gombrowicz's Grimaces: Modernism, Gender, Nationality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).
- ⁶ Alfred Gall, *Performativer Humanismus: Die Auseinandersetzung mit Philosophie in der literarischen Praxis von Witold Gombrowicz*, Series Mundus Polonicus 1 (Dresden: Thelem, 2007); Birgit Harreß, *Die Dialektik der Form: Das mimetische Prinzip Witold Gombrowiczs* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2001); Olaf Kühl, *Stilistik einer Verdrängung: Zur Prosa von Witold Gombrowicz* (Berlin: Freie Universität, 1995); Andreas Lawaty and Marek Zybura, eds, *Gombrowicz in Europa: deutsch-polnische Versuche einer kulturellen Verortung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

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- ⁷ Małgorzata Smorań-Goldberg, ed., *Gombrowicz, une gueule de classique?* (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 2007); Jean-Pierre Salgas, *Gombrowicz: un structuraliste de la rue*, Collection "philosophie imaginaire" (Paris: Éditions de l'éclat, 2011); Marek Tomaszewski, ed., *Witold Gombrowicz entre l'Europe et l'Amérique* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2007).
- ⁸ Rita Gombrowicz, ed., *Gombrowicz en Argentine: témoignages et documents 1939-1963*, revised and expanded edition (Montricher: Noir sur Blanc, 2004), and Rita Gombrowicz, ed., *Gombrowicz en Europe: témoignages et documents 1963-1969*, (Paris: Denoël, 1988).
- ⁹ Bill Johnston translated the first part, *Wspomnienia polskie*, as *Polish Memories* in 2004; Danuta Borchardt translated a few fragments of *Wędrowki po Argentynie* as 'Peregrinations in Argentina'; these are available in the March 2005 issue of *Words Without Borders* at <<http://wordswithoutborders.org/article/from-peregrinations-in-argentina>> [accessed 28 January 2013].
- ¹⁰ De Roux proposed to record a series of interviews in French, but Gombrowicz insisted he would write the entire text, including the questions, in Polish. These 'interviews' were published as part of Gombrowicz's *Kultura* diary, and now form part of his *Dziennik 1967-1969* – the fourth volume of his diary in the Polish edition. In English they are available in Alistair Hamilton's translation from the French, *A Kind of Testament* (1973). The word 'Testament' in this title is a posthumous paratextual addition that first appeared in this English translation, but it has since been taken up in subsequent editions in various languages. See for instance the recent Polish edition, Witold Gombrowicz, *Testament: rozmowy z Dominique de Roux* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1996). On the publication history of this work see Jerzy Jarzębski, 'Dziwna historia Testamentu', in *Podglądanie Gombrowicza* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000), pp. 213-20.
- ¹¹ Rita Gombrowicz, 'Foreword', in Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary*, trans. from Polish by Lillian Vallee, ed. by Jan Kott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. vii-x (p. ix).
- ¹² Marian Bielecki devotes a book-length study to Gombrowicz's autocommentaries and critical writings. Besides reconstructing his views on literature and criticism through an analysis of his explicit metaliterary statements, Bielecki also positions

them on the Modernism-Postmodernism spectrum. Outlining Gombrowicz's polemical engagement with contemporary theorists such as Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, Bielecki illuminates, in particular, the disjunction between Gombrowicz's view of authorship and Barthes's concept the work/text opposition in *S/Z* (1970). See *Literatura i lektura: o metaliterackich i metatekstowych poglądach Witolda Gombrowicza* (Cracow: Universitas, 2004), pp. 333-51 and pp. 371-80. My objective is to analyse Gombrowicz's *implicit* rather than *explicit* model of authorship as presented in his narrative prose, but I will refer to Bielecki's valuable discussions of Gombrowicz's paratextual and programmatic texts.

¹³ Bielecki discusses this anxiety in *Literatura i lektura*, pp. 7-22.

¹⁴ Witold Gombrowicz, 'J'étais structuraliste avant tout le monde', *La Quinzaine littéraire*, 5 (1967), 228-32 (p. 229).

¹⁵ Gombrowicz, 'J'étais structuraliste avant tout le monde', p. 232. More extensive discussions of Form can be found in Gombrowicz's diary (*passim*) and *Testament* (D4 64-76; KT 69-81). Key critical works on the topic include Jerzy Jarzębski, 'Pojęcie "formy" u Gombrowicza', *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 4 (1971), 69-96, and *Gra w Gombrowicza*; Zdzisław Łapiński, *Ja, Ferdynand* (1985) (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997); Jan IJ. van der Meer, *Form vs. Anti-Form: das semantische Universum von Witold Gombrowicz* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992); and Harreß's *Die Dialektik der Form*.

¹⁶ In 1976 Janusz Sławiński devoted a polemical discussion to the impasse of scholarship founded on the theoretical structures provided by Gombrowicz himself. See 'Sprawa Gombrowicza', in *Teksty i teksty* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Polska Encyklopedia Niezależna PEN, 1990), pp. 160-65 (p. 164). Michał Paweł Markowski performs his break with traditional Polish Gombrowicz scholarship by not allowing the word 'Form' to appear even once in his monograph, *Czarny nurt: Gombrowicz, świat, literatura* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004).

¹⁷ See in particular Berressem's *Lines of Desire*; Goddard reads Gombrowicz alongside the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Gombrowicz, Polish Modernism, and the Subversion of Form*; the volume *Gombrowicz's Grimaces* edited by Ewa Płonowska Ziarek assembles a variety of Poststructuralist readings of Gombrowicz's fiction, drama, and autobiography; Knut Andreas Grimstad

presents Queer angles on Gombrowicz's work (collected edition in preparation; see Bibliography for details on individual articles).

- ¹⁸ Besides Marian Bielecki's above-mentioned *Literatura i lektura*, his second monograph on Gombrowicz integrates categories of gender, sexuality and the body into discussions of Gombrowicz's theories of interpretation. See *Interpretacja i płęć: szkice o twórczości Gombrowicza* (Wałbrzych: Wydawnictwo Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Angelusa Silesiusa, 2005). On Gombrowicz's relationships to Polish and European Modernism see Włodzimierz Bolecki, *Poetycki model prozy w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym: Witkacy, Gombrowicz, Schulz i inni: Studium z poetyki historycznej*, 2nd edn (Cracow: Universitas, 1996) and Michał Legierski, *Modernizm Witolda Gombrowicza* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich, 1999).
- ¹⁹ Ricardo Piglia is frequently quoted saying that 'el mejor escritor argentino del siglo XX es Witold Gombrowicz' ['the best Argentine writer of the twentieth century is Witold Gombrowicz']. See for instance Carlos Huerga, 'Witold Gombrowicz: un polaco en la literatura argentina', *Espéculo. Revista de estudios literarios*, 2010
< <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero44/witoldgo.html> > [accessed 18/03/2013]. Bradley Ebbs's entry on Gombrowicz in the *Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, ed. by David William Foster (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 174-78, begins by admitting that 'Gombrowicz was, strictly speaking, neither Latin American nor gay' (p. 174). The fact that he should be included in this sourcebook, however, is revealing of his stature in South American literature.
- ²⁰ Jerzy Jarzębski, 'Sława i cierpienie: dialogi ostatnie', in Witold Gombrowicz, *Dziela*, ed. by Jan Błoński and Jerzy Jarzębski, 15 vols (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986-97), XIV: *Publicystyka, wywiady, teksty różne 1963-1969*, ed. by Jan Błoński and Jerzy Jarzębski (1997), pp. 5-9 (p. 6).
- ²¹ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 7.
- ²² Other obvious allegories – though not necessarily metafictional ones – include the two philosophical tales incorporated into *Ferdydurke*. For an attempt to read the

tale 'Filibert dzieckiem podszyty' ['The Child Runs Deep in Filibert'] as a condensed version of the novel see Jan Błoński, *Forma, śmiech i rzeczy ostateczne: studia o Gombrowiczu*, 2nd edn (Cracow: Univeristas, 2003), pp. 87-88. For a brief discussion of Błoński's argument see Chapter 2, n. 6.

²³ Witold Gombrowicz, *Dzieła*, VI: *Dramaty*, ed. by Jan Błoński (1986), p. 163.

²⁴ Witold Gombrowicz, 'L'ultime interview', in *Varia: textes variés*, ed. and trans. from Polish and English by Allan Kosko (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1973), pp. 209-13 (p. 211). Gombrowicz was interviewed by Bettina Knapp, who sent her questions in English; he dictated his answers to his wife Rita in French. See editor's note in *Dzieła* XIV, p. 542.

²⁵ Gombrowicz, 'L'ultime interview,' pp. 212-13.

²⁶ In 2004 a special issue of the quarterly *Pamiętnik teatralny* was devoted to Gombrowicz's drama. This volume of over 800 pages contains, among other materials, Gombrowicz's correspondence with Jorge Lavelli, who staged *Ślub* (1963-64) and *Iwona* (1965 and 1968) during the author's lifetime, as well as with Alf Sjöberg, who directed *Ślub* in 1966. See 'Korespondencja Witolda Gombrowicza i Jorge Lavellego (1963-1969)', ed. by Marzena Kuraś and Grzegorz Janikowski, trans. from Spanish and French by Jan Krzyżanowski, *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, 53 (2004), pp. 160-97; 'Korespondencja Witolda Gombrowicza z Alfem Sjöbergiem (1967-1968)', [no editor] trans. from French by Maria Olga Bieńka, *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, 53 (2004), pp. 305-308. The Beinecke Library at Yale University holds Gombrowicz's correspondence the Polish director Tadeusz Kantor.

²⁷ Letter to Jeleński written in early January 1967, in *Witold Gombrowicz: Walka o sławę: korespondencja*, ed. and introduction by Jerzy Jarzębski, 2 vols (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1996-98): II, p. 136. Gombrowicz did not live to see Lavelli's production of the play in Bochum, Germany, in 1971.

²⁸ To my knowledge no drafts or manuscripts of *Trans-Atlantyk*, *Pornografia* or *Kosmos* have survived.

²⁹ Roland Barthes, 'La mort de l'auteur', in *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), pp. 63-69 (p. 69).

³⁰ In particular, I engage with the fact that Gombrowicz's work is provocatively misogynistic and at the same time rife with emancipatory potential. While the premises of this project do not allow for a direct discussion of this problem, in the Postscript I thematize Gombrowicz's exclusion of the female critic from his fantasies of the ideal reader. His representations of women and have elicited a rich scholarly debate: Monika Bolach presents Gombrowicz's self-conscious performance of gender roles in relation to Judith Butler's concept of gender performance in *Płeć jako agrafka: o twórczości Witolda Gombrowicza* (Toruń: Europejskie Centrum Edukacyjne, 2009). Bielecki discusses Gombrowicz's 'feminist' deconstruction of gender in *Interpretacja i płeć*, pp. 49-152. He focuses on a collection of essays originally published in the Argentinean press and then translated into Polish: Witold Gombrowicz, *Nasz dramat erotyczny*, trans. by Ireneusz Kania, preface by Rita Gombrowicz (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003), as well as on the *Diary*. See also Tomislav Longinović, 'Witold Gombrowicz: Modernity, Gender, and Identity in *Ferdydurke*', in *Borderline Cultures* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), pp. 75-107 (pp. 96-101), and Ewa Thompson, 'Women and Other Trivia', in *Witold Gombrowicz* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), pp. 118-21. Agnieszka Sołtysik discusses Gombrowicz's critique of 'feminized' – that is to say sentimental, hypocritical and prudish – literary criticism in the context of male Anglo-American Modernists, who, unlike Gombrowicz, do not address or theorize their misogyny. See 'Witold Gombrowicz's Struggle with Heterosexual Form: From a National to a Performative Self', in *Gombrowicz's Grimaces*, ed. by Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, pp. 245-66 (p. 254).

CHAPTER ONE

‘A CRY THAT WAS NOT’: TRAVEL WRITING AS AN
EXPLORATION OF LITERARY CREATIVITY

Spróbujcie ująć mnie najgłębiej.
Słowo honoru, ja temu sprostam!

Gombrowicz, 1966 (D3 221)*

Gombrowicz never presented himself as an enthusiastic traveller. ‘Należę do ludzi nie lubiących się ruszać, podróże mnie nie podniecają’ (W 161)[†]. Writing about celebrated cultural monuments he maintained a tone of emphatic irreverence: ‘Zwiedzać Paryż? Było mi nieznośne to stawanie przed kościołami z zadartą głową, pielgrzymowanie do muzeów’ (W 58)[‡]. His remarks on landscapes are no less iconoclastic: ‘Do Diabła pejzaże! Pejzaże są szalenie głupie!’ (D3 100)[§]. We are to understand that famous travel destinations bored him, as did conventional descriptions of such places. In 1957 he criticizes Polish writers for their indulgent landscape portrayals:

Tyle już tych zachodów namalowano w literaturze, zwłaszcza naszej. [...] czuję, że jestem w tej naturze cudzoziemcem, ja w mojej skórze ludzkiej...

* ‘Try to grasp me as profoundly as possible. I give you my word, I am up to it!’ DE 689.

[†] ‘I’m one of these people who like to stay in one place; traveling doesn’t excite me.’ PM 165.

[‡] ‘Visit Paris? I couldn’t face all that standing about in front of churches with head tipped back, all those pilgrimages to museums.’ PM 56.

[§] ‘To hell with landscapes! Landscapes are outrageously stupid!’ DE 594, translation modified.

obcy. [...] opisy natury [...] nie mogą mi się przydać na nic w tej nagłej opozycji pomiędzy moim człowieczeństwem a naturą. Opozycji domagającej się rozwiązania. Polskie opisy natury. Ileż kunsztu w to włożono a jaki beznadziejny rezultat. (D2 36)*

Gombrowicz's demand that 'serious' travel writers should explore conceptual challenges such as the abyss between nature and humanity is consistent with his understanding of artistic merit in literature: 'literatura poważna nie jest po to, żeby ułatwiać życie, tylko żeby je utrudniać' (D2 12)†. This chapter deals with Gombrowicz's own travel writing. In particular, I examine how he used the genre to explore the nature of literary creativity in an allegorical travel journal – a project that I count among his most original achievements.

Writing and travelling are intimately connected in Gombrowicz's life and imagination. He did get around, reluctantly, and wrote about various expeditions, real or imagined, throughout his career. The overlap between his life as a writer and his life as a traveller seems almost uncanny: in July 1939 his reputation as a man of letters earned him an invitation to report on the maiden voyage of the liner *Bolesław Chrobry*. This was a fateful trip for Gombrowicz, as the war broke out shortly after his departure and he found himself stranded in Argentina for 24 years. A curious coincidence: six years before this voyage on the *Chrobry* Gombrowicz had published a fantastical short story presenting a first-person narrator spontaneously boarding a ship whose crew then mutinies and steers away from its course, towards Argentina.¹

Another curious coincidence: Gombrowicz's free cruise in 1939 was arranged by Jerzy Giedroyc, an employee of the Polish Ministry of Industry and Trade. Giedroyc,

* 'I don't really want to write about this; after all, so many sunsets have been described in literature, and especially ours. [...] I feel that I am a foreigner in all of this nature, I, in my human skin... a stranger. [...] descriptions of nature [...] are worthless to me in this sudden opposition between nature and my humanity. An opposition clamouring for a resolution. Polish descriptions of nature. So much art has been invested in them with what hopeless results.' DE 309.

† 'Serious literature does not exist to make life easy but to complicate it.' DE 291.

who founded the exile journal *Kultura* in 1947, became Gombrowicz's editor in the 1950s.² Thus the same man who put the young writer on a ship to South America a few weeks before Hitler's invasion would play a key role in promoting his work at a time when it was banned in the People's Republic of Poland, and when Gombrowicz's financial situation was desperate.³ Giedroyc also influenced the creation of the *Dziennik* in its unusual format: he encouraged Gombrowicz to write regular diary fragments for *Kultura*.⁴

Whatever Gombrowicz's opinion on travel writing might have been, it is a fact that he did not disdain the genre when it presented itself as a source of income. Living on the edge of poverty he simply could not afford to. There were times when he would write about places that he had not visited, or report on the same journey more than once. The question remains, however, how he employed the genre in his endeavour to create 'literatura poważna' or 'serious literature'.

Given the striking connection between geographical displacement and literary creativity in Gombrowicz's life, his strong feelings about travel literature are almost to be expected. Perhaps his disdain for naive or conventional travel writing was due to his fascination with the possibilities of the genre. His views were certainly formulated in response to the emergence of travel writing as an autonomous literary genre. For Michel Butor the essential bond between writing and travelling originates in sixteenth-century writers like François Rabelais and Michel de Montaigne, but it is Romantics like Chateaubriand who set the theme for future travel writers like himself:

Tous les voyages romantiques sont livresques. [...] Dans tous les cas il y a des livres à l'origine du voyage, livres lus [...], livres projetés [...], [...]
Ils voyagent pour écrire, et voyagent en écrivant, mais c'est parce que pour eux le voyage est écriture.⁵

Helen Carr accounts for the development of travel writing in the late Modernists:

[Travel writing became] a more subjective form, more memoir than manual, and often an alternative form of writing for novelists. [...] There was a move – as in imaginative literature – from the detailed, realist text, often with an overtly didactic or at any rate moral purpose, to a more impressionistic style with the interest focused as much on the travellers' responses or consciousness as their travels.⁶

Besides the possibilities that travel writing offered in terms of self-exploration, it also fed into Modernist writers' stylistic experiments. David G. Farley describes the reciprocity between travel literature and imaginative writing in the twentieth century:

Travel and travel writing transformed literary modernism as surely as they were transformed by it. The fragmented forms, montage techniques, and streams of consciousness that are the salient and distinguishing features of modernist style and experimentation owe much to the foreign scenes, exotic locales, wrenching perspectives, and uncanny displacements that were the result of a generation unmoored from convention and enlivened by foreign travel.⁷

Although Butor, Carr and Farley focus on Anglophone and Francophone writers, their accounts are applicable to a variety of European Modernists. There is, however, an important difference between Gombrowicz's travel writing and that of his Western colleagues: he did not write for a readership 'back home'. Even though copies of *Kultura* were smuggled into Poland, most of its readers belonged to the Polish diaspora. Using his journeys as a pretext to focus on the self, Gombrowicz arguably gave his travel writing a twist appropriate to his circumstances; he spared his émigré readers descriptions of more foreign places than they might possibly care to know about, and tapped, instead, into broader, more philosophical concerns. As we shall see below, he only produced a more fact-based account of his journeys in Argentina when he was invited specifically to address a Polish audience in Poland.

As he experimented with the possibilities of travel writing, Gombrowicz continuously tried to control the reception of his texts. In 1956 he urges his readers not to look for literal truth in his travel writing, but to read it as a *paysage de l'âme*, an exploration of the author's subjectivity:

Cóż byście powiedzieli, gdybym, przebywając w Buenos Aires, przysyłał wam korespondencje na przykład z Pekinu? Powiedzielibyście, że to nabieranie gości. Więc – najmocniej przepraszam – mieszkam w sobie i tylko stąd, z siebie, mogę do was się odzywać.^{*8}

He reiterates the ultra-subjective nature of his travel writing a decade later, while introducing his diary to an Argentinian audience in 1967. Here he explicitly cautions his readers:

Nie znajdziecie tutaj opisu Argentyny. Może nawet nie rozpoznacie jej krajobrazów; krajobraz jest tutaj pewnym ‘stanem ducha’. Wbrew pozorom ten dziennik istnieje na prawach wiersza.^{†9}

Gombrowicz repeatedly stresses his interest in images that communicate his state of mind in a deliberately cryptic and evocative manner. By placing his own subjectivity squarely at the centre of his work he emphasizes his artistic ambition not to simplify his readers’ task but to complicate the interpretive process. Inviting readers to treat his travel writing as if it were poetry – the oldest and arguably the most ‘literary’ form of creative writing – he not only suggests that the outside world is described from a subjective point of view, but he relegates reality to the position of a mere pretext or metaphor for his inner life. Travel writing, for Gombrowicz, has nothing to do with the real world. It represents, above all, an allegorical journey into the self.

* * *

* ‘What would you say if, staying in Buenos Aires, I were sending you correspondence from Beijing, for example? You’d say that this is monkey business. So – my sincere apologies – I live within myself and it is only from here, from within myself, that I can address you’.

† ‘You won’t find here a portrait of Argentina. Perhaps you won’t even recognize her landscapes; here, the landscape is a certain “state of mind”. Despite appearances this diary exists on the same rights as a poem.’

In this chapter I examine how Gombrowicz uses travel writing to explore the nature of literary creativity. I focus on the ‘Rio Paraná Diary,’ a short travel journal written in 1954, which now forms part of the *Dziennik* of 1956. On the surface of the text, Gombrowicz describes a boat trip up the Rio Paraná, South America’s second longest river. Implicitly, however, he presents an allegorical quest for inspiration. (Re)constructing the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ as an allegory of authorship, I will present a close reading that responds to the cues in the text while also following traces that Gombrowicz consciously erased: the text’s development becomes apparent when the final version is read alongside the draft in the typescript, which presents a palimpsest of earlier versions. Some of the gaps that Gombrowicz placed so carefully in the text can also be filled by evoking the context of Gombrowicz’s life and work, as well as through close attention to intertextual references and theoretical discourses, such as anthropological accounts of magical languages and, most importantly, writers’ accounts of inspiration.

Previous attempts to elucidate the significance of Gombrowicz’s travel writing in general and of the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ in particular have been variously successful. Alex Kurczaba presents the journey as a ‘metaphor or setting for spiritual or psychological experience’ in Gombrowicz’s work, and argues convincingly that ‘the “boat” is a favorite choreographic and metaphoric device with Gombrowicz’.¹⁰ However, he pays no attention to the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’. The omission of this passage is even more surprising in Janusz Margański’s book-length study on representations of North and South in Gombrowicz’s work.¹¹ It is Michał Paweł Markowski who takes us closest to the subtext of authorship in the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’. For him, this text, filled with cosmic metaphors, manifests Gombrowicz’s post-lapsarian and uncanny world, and brings to mind ‘pisarskie doświadczenie’ [the

writerly experience].¹² The ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ represents for Markowski ‘a perfect introduction to Gombrowicz’s world taken over by the Uncanny’ (p. 74), and he invites us ‘to treat the river and life as a place where the Uncanny manifests itself’ (p. 77). Focussing on the Freudian ‘uncanny’ and Kierkegaard’s ‘daemonic,’ however, Markowski does not elaborate on the question of ‘writerly experience’. In my opinion there is much more to say about this text’s ‘uncanny’ self-reflexivity.

It is documented that in mid-March 1954 Gombrowicz took three months of unpaid holiday from his office job at the Banco Polaco, and left Buenos Aires to stay with friends in the Argentinian countryside.¹³ Spending some time away from the city would do him good: he was going to be fed and looked after, and the fresh air and country walks should alleviate his asthma. Above all he was going to be able to concentrate on his writing instead of wasting his time at the bank. Perhaps, as he embarked on a steamboat in Buenos Aires, Gombrowicz sensed that he was about to enter into a period of intense literary productivity. At any rate, his journey up the Paraná River would have an extraordinary effect on him, and he would write about it not just once but twice.

Gombrowicz’s first account of his trip, the experimental ‘Rio Paraná Diary’, consists of a mere ten diary entries covering about five or six pages (D1 312-18; DE 245-50). ‘Ten Diariusz Rio Parana, natężający się z niczego i w niczym,’ Gombrowicz wrote to his editor Giedroyc, ‘to artystycznie perełka’*.¹⁴ By calling his text a ‘perełka’ – a pearl or, in this context, a gem – Gombrowicz not only foregrounds its artistic quality, but also implies its exceptional place in his oeuvre. He also valorized texts such as the ‘Rio Paraná Diary,’ which may seem loose or unstructured but were in fact written with meticulous attention to detail, by insisting

* ‘this Rio Paraná Diary, straining out of nothingness and in nothingness, artistically it’s a gem.’

that they be printed *exactly* as presented in the typescripts. Sending another one of his travel diaries to Giedroyc, he appended the following request:

Proszę to wydrukować w tym układzie, tzn. z podtytułami. Wygląda nieporządnie, ale wszystko jest przepatrzone i skontrolowane. To ma być pewna osobna całość, dziennik z podróży zaczynający się fantastycznie. Teraz piszę dalszy ciąg, wprowadzając dość istotne i ważne problemy.*¹⁵

Giedroyc received the ‘Diariusz Rio Parana’ in 1954, but omitted to insert it into *Kultura* for logistical reasons that Gombrowicz found unacceptable. A row ensued, and Gombrowicz, despite his financial dependence on *Kultura*, suspended his collaboration. His diary instalments did not appear between October 1956 and February 1957.¹⁶ Eventually it was agreed that the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ would be inserted into the book version of the *Dziennik*; it would not appear in *Kultura*, and Gombrowicz would not be paid for it.¹⁷ To mark the end of their quarrel, Gombrowicz proposed with mock-solemnity that he and Giedroyc should address each other informally: ‘Jeśli wszakże Redaktor uczyni mi ten zaszczyt, to proszę pisać “Witoldzie” przez “ł,” gdyż tak zowie się dla mych przyjaciół’ (ibid.)[†]. The text was finally published, in 1957, as part of *Dziennik 1953-1956*. Inserted into chapter XX of the diary of 1956 it conforms down to the smallest detail with Gombrowicz’s typescript.¹⁸

Thanks to its separate title and italic typeface (which I maintain in the quotations presented here) the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ stands out visually from the surrounding entries. Stylistically, too, there are noticeable variations: the fragmented,

* ‘Please print this in this layout, i.e. with the subtitles. It looks messy, but everything is reviewed and controlled. It’s supposed to be a certain separate whole, a travel journal that begins in a fantastic manner. Now I am writing the sequel, leading to quite fundamental and important problems.’

† ‘But if you will do me this honour, dear sir, please write “Witold” with “ł,” since this is what my friends are wont to call me.’

repetitious, and enigmatic language renders this text more oneiric than the surrounding passages. But this is not to say that the journal is detached from its context or inserted at random. It resonates especially with the meditations on authorship in the preceding entries.

The ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ follows a section titled ‘La Cabania,’ which contains all entries of chapter XIX and those entries of chapter XX that precede the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’. Set on the *estancia* or country estate belonging to Gombrowicz’s friend Władysław (short ‘Duś’) Jankowski and his family, on the Atlantic coast, some 500 km south of Buenos Aires, the ‘La Cabania’ section forms a travel journal in its own right. Philosophical and political subjects predominate in the 19 separate entries covering over 40 pages, but several passages explicitly address the problem of authorship. In chapter XIX, the narrator (whom I call Gombrowicz even though he does not accurately represent the historical figure of the author) reflects on dreaming and art; in chapter XX he expresses his anxiety about his aptitude as a writer. These two passages anticipate the ‘Rio Paraná Diary,’ as they prepare the reader for an oneiric text about the experience of writing.

The entry about dreams and art in chapter XIX begins conventionally with an association of dreaming and creativity.¹⁹ As Gombrowicz continues to think about the logic of dreams, where everything is meaningful and where fragments of waking life become rearranged in ‘arbitrary’ ways, he alludes to Freud’s account of literary creativity as resulting from (day)dreams:²⁰ ‘Doskonałość artystyczna snu! Ileż nauk daje ten nocny arcymistrz nam, dziennym fabrykantom marzenia, artystom’ (D1 287-88)*.²¹ Psychoanalytic notions of dreaming also suffuse the following statement: ‘ten

* ‘The artistic perfection of dreams! How many lessons this nocturnal archmaster gives to us, the daily fabricators of dreams, the artists!’ DE 225.

bezsens jest właśnie najgłębszym sensem' (D1 288)*. This formulation brings to mind Freud's statement, 'der Traum [ist] oft am tiefsinnigsten, wo er am tollsten erscheint'.²² While *Traumarbeit* or dream work obscures everyday meaning in the production of the dream's latent content, for the psychoanalyst the dream itself is far from nonsensical: 'Ich habe also das Problem der Absurdität des Traumes dahin aufgelöst, daß die Traumgedanken niemals absurd sind.'²³ Despite these parallels with Freud, Gombrowicz seems less confident about his ability to find meaning in the dream's apparent absurdity: 'pytamy w imię czego zniszczono nam zwykły sens, wpatrzeni w absurd, jak w hieroglif, usiłujemy odczytać jego rację, o której wiemy, że jest, że istnieje...' (D1 288)†. Turning to the parallels between dreaming and art, Gombrowicz proposes that both subvert conventional notions of reality and signification:

Sztuka więc także może i powinna burzyć rzeczywistość [...] naruszenie sensu ma swój sens, szaleństwo niszcząc nam sens zewnętrzny, wprowadza nas w nasz sens wewnętrzny. I sen ujawnia cały idiotyzm owego żądania, stawianego sztuce przez niektóre nazbyt klasycyzujące umysły, że ona powinna być 'jasna'. Jasność? Jej jasność jest *jasnością nocy, nie dnia*. [...] [Sztuka] powinna być [...] o twarzy zasłoniętej welonem, nie dopowiedziana, *mieniąca się wielością sensów i obszerniejsza od sensu*. (Ibid., emphasis added)‡

Gombrowicz's artistic vision privileges the 'brightness of night,' and puts the logic of ambiguity and paradox above the logic of 'those classical minds' advocating the

* 'It is exactly this lack of sense that has the profoundest meaning for us.' Ibid.

† 'why, in the name of what, is our ordinary sense destroyed. Gazing at the absurd as at a hieroglyph, we try to decipher its reason for being, of which we know that it is, that it exists...' Ibid.

‡ 'Art [...] also can and should upset reality [...] disturbing sense [makes sense], so that the madness that destroys our external sense leads us into our internal sense. Dreams reveal the abysmal idiocy of the task set for art by those classical minds that prescribe that art ought to be "clear". Clarity? Its clarity is the clarity of night, not day. [...] [Art] should be [...] veiled, not quite spelled out, shimmering with a multiplicity of meanings [*sensów*] and broader than precision [*sensu*].' Ibid., translation modified.

brightness of day. A close reading of the recurring words ‘sens’ [sense, meaning] and ‘jasność,’ which means both ‘clarity’ and ‘brightness,’ reveals the sophisticated stylistic devices he employed in the defence of his experimental writing. Through the repetition of ‘sensów/ sensu’ in the last line, Gombrowicz juxtaposes *sens* as a playful multiplicity of meanings with a concept of *sens* that is clearly spelled out but narrow. The precision of the brightness of day, which can only convey a singular *sens*, is displaced by the clarity of night, shimmering with a multiplicity of *sensów* in the plural. This is a particularly complex instance of antanaclasis – the repetition of one word in its different senses. As the word being repeated here is the word ‘sense’ itself, we are talking about competing senses of sense.

In this dreamlike passage Gombrowicz foregrounds the role of paradox and obscurity through stylistic devices such as polysemy (‘jasność’) and antanaclasis (‘sensów/ sensu’). Enacting ‘the abysmal idiocy’ of any claim for an art of rationality and precision, he valorizes modern forms of art, which explore truths that seem intuitively clear without being easily put into words.

At the beginning of chapter XX Gombrowicz tackles the question of authorship from a different perspective. He mentions that he has composed about one hundred pages of his novel *Pornografia*, but remains unsure of their artistic value: ‘Boże! A jeśli straciłem “talent” I już w ogóle nigdy nic... nic, przynajmniej na poziomie poprzednich moich rzeczy?’ (D1 298)*. Referring to Anatole France and André Gide’s definitions of talent as ‘patience’ and ‘fear of failure,’ he concludes that he does not lack talent. And yet, for the rest of his stay at the *estancia* he will continue to reflect critically on his role as a writer.

* ‘My God! And what if I have lost my “talent” and will never..., nothing, at least on the level of my former works?’ DE 233, translation modified.

The last entry before the ‘Rio Paraná Diary,’ allegedly written on the train back to the capital, regroups several themes related to authorship.²⁴ Gombrowicz describes his leave-taking from the eucalyptus alley at ‘La Cabania’ the previous day:

Geografia.
Gdzie jestem? (D1 311) *

He recounts laconically how on his last day at the *estancia* the world around him failed to form a coherent whole, appearing instead as an array of isolated objects: ‘drzewa, listek, grudka, patyk, kora’ (D1 312)[†]. He felt isolated and unable to tell his position in relation to China or Alaska, north or south; it seemed as if the earth had collapsed under his feet, as if he were walking ‘już nie drogą, tylko w kosmosie’ (D1 312)[‡]. This passage foreshadows Gombrowicz’s last novel, *Kosmos* (1965). Not only do the words ‘w kosmosie’ [in the cosmos] anticipate the title of the later work, which is overtly concerned with problems of reading and interpretation; the opening of *Kosmos* presents a strikingly similar inventory of fragments: ‘ziemia, koleiny, gruda, błyski ze szklistych kamyczków, [...] domki, płoty, pola, lasy’ (K 5)[§].²⁵ By foregrounding a sense of fragmentation and uprootedness – both in his diary of 1956 and in the novel of 1965 – Gombrowicz creates a mood or mode of introspection and literary self-reflexivity.

The ending of the ‘La Cabania’ section shifts the focus from the sense of isolation and fragmentation during the previous day’s visit to the eucalyptus alley,

* ‘Geography.
Where am I?’ DE 244.

† ‘tree, leaf, clod, stick, bark’. Ibid.

‡ ‘not on the road anymore but in the cosmos’. DE 245.

§ ‘ruts, clods of dirt, glassy pebbles flashing, [...] cottages, fences, fields, woods’. C 1.

towards the present moment. In the last few lines Gombrowicz's self-analysis unexpectedly turns in a confession of terror:

Wszystkie sprzeczności dają sobie we mnie *rendez-vous* – spokój i szal, trzeźwość i pijaństwo, prawda i błaga, wielkość i małość – ale czuję że znów na szyi kładzie mi się dłoń żelazna, która powoli, tak, bardzo nieznacznie... ale się zaciska. (D1 312)*

These lines introduce themes that will reappear – though only implicitly – in the 'Rio Paraná Diary': strategies of writing the self, the anxiety of authorship, and the combination of opposites in the creative mind.

At the end of the 'La Cabania' section Gombrowicz indicates that readers should expect sobriety behind apparently mad writing, facetiousness behind what is presented as truth. This kind of advice is not unfamiliar. Similar admonitions accompanied early instalments of his anti-confessional diary. In 1953 he wrote:

Chciałbym w tym dzienniczku jawnie przystąpić do konstruowania sobie talentu [...]. Dlaczego – jawnie? Gdyż pragnę, ujawniając siebie, przestać być dla was zbyt łatwą zagadką. Wprowadzając was za kulisy mojej istoty, zmuszam siebie do wycofania się w jeszcze dalszą głąb. (D1 58)†

Throughout his diary Gombrowicz acknowledges that he uses his readers' interest in his person as an incentive to explore his own complexities and contradictions. The diary passage from 1953 resonates with the opening of the 'La Cabania' section of 1956 in that both thematize the author's anxiety about his 'talent'. The closing of the

* 'All contradictions hold their rendezvous in me: calmness and fury, sobriety and intoxication, truth and claptrap, greatness and smallness – but again I feel an iron hand touching my throat, which slowly, yes, very imperceptibly... but it tightens.' Ibid., translation modified.

† 'In this little diary I would like to set out to openly construct a talent for myself [...]. Why openly? Because I desire to reveal myself, to stop being too easy a riddle for you to solve. By taking you to the backstage of my being, I force myself to retreat to an even more remote depth.' DE 43. The translation misses the echoing of 'jawnie' and 'ujawniając' ('openly' and 'reveal'), thus weakening the link between literary creativity and the intersubjective creation of the self.

‘La Cabania’ section, picturing an ‘iron hand’ that gradually tightens around the writer’s throat, implies the same fear.

This enigmatic image at the end of the section opens up a series of questions: does the iron hand constrict the narrator’s breathing? Does it block his vocal chords? Can he shake it off before it silences him? The ‘La Cabania’ section provides no answers. It only shows Gombrowicz bidding farewell to the eucalyptus alley on the *estancia*, feeling disoriented and anguished. Similar sensations will mark his journey up the Paraná River, described in the following section.

* * *

The ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ begins with Gombrowicz’s embarkation on a northbound steamboat on a Tuesday. Standing on deck, and assuming that his ship is still moored, he watches other vessels move in the port until suddenly he remarks that ‘*wszystko zaczęło się usuwać, jak osadzone na osi, w lewo, i Buenos Aires usunęło się*’ (D1 312)*. Right at the outset of his journey Gombrowicz misconstrues the relations of stability and movement between himself and his surroundings. ‘*Phyniemy*’ – ‘*we sail*’ – comes as a realization after the fact and throws him off balance.

The typescript (see Appendix) indicates how painstakingly Gombrowicz developed the effect of disorientation and directionlessness in the text. While the first draft still contains some details about the ship’s progress and destination, no such information is to be found in the printed *Diary*: ‘*Płynęliśmy z szybkością może 7*

* ‘*everything began to move, as if on an axle, to my left, and Buenos Aires moved*’. DE 245.

wezłow’ (T 3)^{*} is reduced to the simple statement ‘Płynęliśmy’ (D1 313); the sentence ‘Płyniemy, a za nami Rosario, płyniemy Parana, która tworzy tutaj cały system rzeczny na szerokość kilkudziesięciu kilometrów’ (T 3)[†] is erased entirely. Even vague indications of a direction are eliminated: ‘Płyniemy ku czemuś – ku jakiemus rozwiązaniu’ (T 7)[‡] becomes an aposiopetic ‘Płyniemy ku... zmierzamy do...’ (D1 317)[§]. Three lines below on the typescript the narrator tries to express how his fellow travellers’ faces, conversations, and movements appear to him congealed ‘w nieublaganym doprowadzaniu czegoś do ostatecznego konca’ (T 7)^{**}. First the word ‘ostatecznego’ [ultimate] is manually erased, and then the entire paragraph is crossed out and retyped. The printed *Diary*, which corresponds to this retyped version, contains no references to any goal whatsoever. The vague and incomplete remark ‘[z]astygłe w nieublaganym doprowadzaniu czegoś do...’ (D1 317)^{††} refers at once to the passengers’ faces, conversations, and movements, as well as to the ship’s apparent lack of direction. These progressive modifications indicate Gombrowicz’s intention to render his account less specific and more suggestive, thereby inviting the reader’s participation in the creative act.

Gombrowicz’s use of geographical information – especially the way he withholds information about the endpoint of his journey – solicits an allegorical reading of the travel journal. In some entries he refers to the landmarks and cities that he passes on his way (San Lorenzo, Santa Fe, the town Paraná, all at some 300 km

* ‘We sailed with a speed of some 7 knots.’

† ‘We sail, and behind us Rosario, we sail on the Paraná, which forms here an entire system of rivers, of a breadth of tens of kilometres.’

‡ ‘We sail toward something – toward some solution.’

§ ‘*We sail on toward... we head for...*’ DE 249.

** ‘in the pitiless striving of something to its ultimate end.’

†† ‘*congealed in a pitiless striving of something to...*’ DE 249, translation modified.

northwest of Buenos Aires), but never mentions the ship's destination. In the first entry after the 'Rio Paraná Diary' he claims that he sailed back south again to the town of Goya (some 350 km north of the places mentioned above), but he does not say how far north he ventured before turning back. Thus he heightens the aura of mystery surrounding his expedition, and also invites us to imagine a destination that may not exist on any geographical map at all.

The allegorical layer of the 'Rio Paraná Diary' is anchored in the paradoxical image of an uncontrolled movement towards a specific place: even though the ship must have a destination (namely the city of Corrientes on the shore of the Paraná River, about 1000 km from Buenos Aires), Gombrowicz experiences the sailing as an aimless drifting towards some unknown place. The process of writing similarly does have a specific goal (the finished book), but what it will be like the writer cannot know; his consciousness cannot control the movement of creativity. Writing, like sailing, is about letting oneself be swept along.

At the beginning of his journey Gombrowicz dwells on the impression that the ship is taking control of his body. During his first night on board it occurs to him that his ignorance about the ship has something to do with his ignorance about himself:

*Pojąłem że nie wiem, co się dzieje ze statkiem i to było jakbym nie wiedział, co się dzieje ze mną. (D1 313)**

The words 'ze mną' [to me] are manually added to the typescript (T 3), which indicates Gombrowicz's particular attention to the journey's effect on the subjectivity of his narrating persona. On the following pages what was commonplace becomes uncanny, remarkable and abstract:

* 'I understood that I didn't know what was happening to the ship and it was as if I didn't know what was happening to me.' DE 246.

*Wskutek wszechobejmującej nocy płynięcie nasze stało się, wraz z deszczem, jedyną najwyższą ideą, zenitem wszechrzeczy. (D1 313)**

From now on the ship's inexorable progress becomes Gombrowicz's obsession, even though he appears bored out of his wits. In the entries on the following pages references to sailing occur in almost every paragraph. The word *płyniemy* – *we sail* – appears about 40 times throughout the 'Rio Paraná Diary,' forming something like a permanent bassline in the text, and emphasizing the monotony of the journey.

The theme of the drifting boat in the 'Rio Paraná Diary' echoes canonical works of Polish and European literature. Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899) comes to mind, as it, too, presents a writer-narrator travelling on a steamship up a river in the tropics. I will discuss the resonance between Conrad's texts and Gombrowicz's in more detail below, turning first to two poetic predecessors of the 'Rio Paraná Diary'.

Arthur Rimbaud's poem *Le bateau ivre* (1871), with its extraordinary allegorical density, anticipates several aspects of Gombrowicz's account of his journey. Rimbaud narrates the trajectory of a boat, at first employed in commerce, then freed of its servitude and ecstatically roaming the oceans, and finally weary of its journey and longing to sink to the bottom of the sea or to return to its safe harbour. Given that the symbolism of the boat allows for a number of interpretations, the poem has been read as an allegory of human life (representing the progression from childhood to the freedom of adulthood, then to exhaustion and disillusionment); as an allegory of the poet's transition from a conventional life to a life of artistic experimentation and then to disenchantment with art; as a premonition of Rimbaud's

* 'as a result of the all-encompassing night, our sailing became, along with the rain, the only, the highest idea, the zenith of all things'. Ibid. Vallee's translation retains the solemn connotations of the prefix 'wszech-' [omni-], but it loses the performative quality of the Polish, where the narrator's obsession is also conveyed by the repetition of 'wszech-'.

life, and even as a self-referential reflection describing the poem's creation.²⁶ Like Rimbaud, Gombrowicz describes the bliss of abandonment and portrays his journey in symbolic terms. Rimbaud describes a sunset as 'taché d'horreurs mystiques';²⁷ Gombrowicz similarly goes into '*mystical raptures*' (DE 248) at the sight of the vast river. But unlike Rimbaud's 'drunken' boat, Gombrowicz's ship does not drift wherever the currents take it; though he has no control over its movement, he is sailing upstream, towards a specific goal. His passivity is doubled with purpose.

The recurring *plyniemy* in Gombrowicz's 'Rio Paraná Diary' also resonates with the Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz's lyric poem 'Nad wodą wielką i czystą' ['Over the vast and pure water']. Written in Lausanne in 1839 or 1840 and published as part of the cycle *Liryki lozańskie*, this poem forms a piece of travel writing not only because it was composed during the poet's stay in Switzerland, but also because it makes use of the tropes of travel. The poetic 'I' is presented to be sailing, presumably on a mountain lake, while a storm erupts:

Nad wodą wielką i czystą
Błysnęło wzdłuż i grom ryknął,
I woda tonią przejrzystą
Odbiła światło, głos zniknął.*²⁸

The poetic 'I' claims faithfully to reflect everything ['wszystko wiernie odbijam', l. 16] like the water that reflects the light [odbiła]. But he admits to leaving out [pomijam, l. 18] certain elements – just as the water cannot reflect the thunder. The poem concludes with the poetic 'I' acknowledging that he is destined to keep sailing:

Mnie [trzeba] płynąć, płynąć i płynąć – (l. 20)[†]

* 'Over the vast and pure water
A flash lit up and thunder roared,
And the water's transparent depths
Reflected the light, the voice vanished.'

† 'I [must] sail, sail, and sail –'.

Mickiewicz's poem, which portrays sailing or travelling as the poet's destiny, also contains a reflection on his capacity to represent the world: perched on a moving ship, his point of view is unstable; his account is selective and, as the final m-dash suggests, incomplete. Nevertheless, he must carry on his task of sailing and reflecting – of writing from his limited, subjective perspective. Gombrowicz's '*plyniemy, plyniemy*' echoes Mickiewicz's 'płynąć, płynąć i płynąć,' and at the same time engages with the poet's self-reflexive message.

Gombrowicz's insistence on '*plyniemy*' attracted the attention of several critics. In 1957, immediately after the publication of the first volume of Gombrowicz's *Dziennik*, Konstanty Jeleński praised the 'Rio Paraná Diary' as a meditation on 'the *alienation* of human existence'.²⁹ Despite his intuitive receptiveness to the poetic qualities of Gombrowicz's text, Jeleński does not address its contradictions, deceptions and provocations, and by representing it as a spontaneous translation of the author's 'sensitivity' he eschews the central problems of agency and control. Janusz Pawłowski devoted an article to the 'Rio Paraná Diary' in 1977, but besides repeating many of Jeleński's observations, he only proposes vague and unfounded interpretations. *Plyniemy*, for instance, is presented as an indication of madness and schizophrenia. He also mentions intertextual references to unspecified works by Kafka, the Symbolists and literary Naturalism.³⁰ More recently, Małgorzata Czermińska and Silvana Mandolessi have discussed the symbolic aspects of Gombrowicz's travel writing, but they both struggle to see any sense in the 'Rio Paraná Diary'. According to Czermińska the text harbours an existential metaphor that has 'autonomous meaning and its own dynamics'.³¹ Even so, 'the increasingly frequent insertion of "we sail, we sail" [...] gradually begins to lose meaning, the expression becomes an empty sign' (p. 141). Mandolessi is even

more dismissive, arguing that the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ is ‘reduced to the obsessive repetition of the word “we sail”. The sensuality of the landscape does not communicate anything intelligible.’ For Mandolessi, the text’s only message lies in the inexpressibility of the narrator’s experience.³²

But the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ is anything but devoid of meaning. It is, rather, the overflow of signification that poses a challenge to the reader. For instance, on the second day, a Wednesday, Gombrowicz opens up another semantic field of religious or spiritual vocabulary by associating the ship’s climb upstream with an ascension into heaven. He describes the horizon as ‘*brama wiodąca w zaświaty*’ (D1 313-14)*, then presents the expanse of the water as ‘*w niebo wstępujący*’ (D1 314)†, and finally claims that the archipelagos in the river ‘*dostąpiły wniebowzięcia*’ (ibid.)‡. Given that Gombrowicz was generally rather reserved on matters of religious spirituality I do not read this passage as a reference to the celestial afterlife. However, the language of devotion and ritual appears elsewhere in his attacks on idealizing attitudes towards art.³³ In this sense the images of an ascension into heaven on the Paraná River could have more to do with the light of inspiration and the bliss of creativity than with Christian dogma. Possibly the emphatic, almost overstated character of this passage was intended to caricature indulgent accounts of inspiration, but I would hesitate to commit entirely to such a reading. Rather, I would suggest that the meaning of this passage is purposely left unresolved, prompting us to explore

* ‘*a gate leading to worlds beyond*’. Ibid.

† ‘*it was entering the sky*’. Ibid. In Polish, ‘*niebo*’ means both sky and heaven; the latter would be more appropriate here, as ‘*sky*’ is inconsistent with the theme of ascension.

‡ ‘*ascended*’. DE 247. Here again, I would suggest a stronger emphasis on the Christian motif: ‘*ascended to heaven*’.

interpretations that bypass the alternatives of Christian imagery or naive inspirationist discourses as presented above.

Gombrowicz concludes the entry by citing his very short dialogue with a fellow traveller, who happens to be a priest:

*Płyniemy – rzekłem. Odrzekł:
Płyniemy. (Ibid.)**

The repetition of '*płyniemy*' becomes an incantation, an almost hypnotic rhythm, both in the dialogue and throughout the journal, precisely because it hardly communicates anything. A social anthropological account of magical languages can illuminate the function of this apparently meaningless repetition: according to Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, magical languages violate the primary function of communication, and can be exclusive to the point of needing to be interpreted by specialized practitioners.³⁴ The fact that Gombrowicz's interlocutor is a priest contributes to the sense that this exchange may operate above the level of the profane. The self-consciously clumsy spiritual aspect of the 'Rio Paraná Diary' also brings to mind Timothy Clark's observation that in Western theories of inspiration 'ideas that sound a little like accounts of aporias in deconstructive thinking merge in bizarre ways with notions that rest on a religious or magical world view'. This, Clark continues, is due to the fact that the concept of inspiration 'affirms a logocentric conception of a language of self-evident authority. Yet it also represents an automatization of the signifier, a speaking without thought or intention.'³⁵ Perhaps the narrator's magical usage of '*płyniemy*' is supposed to relieve his anxiety about not being able to control the ship's movement: in as far as he believes in the magical power of words to influence reality, it is the spell '*płyniemy*' that makes the ship

* '*We sail, I said. He replied:
We sail.*' Ibid., translation modified.

move, and he is in control of it. The autosuggestive incantation '*plyniemy, plyniemy*' brings about a certain state of mind – a paradoxically active passivity, a controlled abandonment.

Just as the spell '*plyniemy, plyniemy*' suspends the logic of cause and effect and retrospectively takes control of the sailing, on a self-reflexive allegorical level it allows writing to flow by suggesting that it has been flowing all the while. This notion brings to mind Maurice Blanchot's concept of writing:

L'on n'écrit que si l'on atteint cet instant vers lequel l'on ne peut toutefois se porter que dans l'espace ouvert par le mouvement d'écrire. Pour écrire, il faut déjà écrire. Dans cette contrariété se situent aussi l'essence de l'écriture, la difficulté de l'expérience et le saut de l'inspiration.³⁶

For Gombrowicz, as for Blanchot, the idea of authorship is marked by a sense of paradox and impossibility: writing cannot happen unless it is already happening. It cannot have a beginning. To reach the moment of realization that the writing is already happening, the writer must transport himself into a space where time and rational logic are (provisionally) suspended. Gombrowicz's journey up the Paraná River represents precisely such a journey into the magical space of composition.

The 'Rio Paraná Diary' continues with an entry titled 'Nazajutrz rano' ['The next morning']. After two nights on the ship the narrator seems to have lost track of the days of the week and stops using them as headings for the separate entries. The metaphysical or esoteric connotations of the sailing become more and more explicit. On the mysterious river, '*dziwn[e], tajn[e] rozgałęzie[nia] [...] wiodły w niewiadomy ukos*' (D1 315)*; the landscape ceases to be a vista and becomes the narrator's gateway into a higher state of being. Gombrowicz describes with intense precision how a chain of lakes ahead of the boat announces his elevation: '*wpłynęliśmy w zespół siedmiu lustrzanych jezior, będących siedmioma przęsłami mistycznych*

* '*strange secret branchings [...] led into an unknown incline*'. DE 248.

uniesień, każde na innej wysokości a wszystkie zawieszane w podniebnych rejonach' (ibid.)^{*}. The pseudo-numerological, pseudo-revelatory mysticism of his experience reaches its peak and almost topples over into bathos or parody. The sublime effect finally dissolves and the entry ends on *'płyniemy, płyniemy...'* (ibid.).

The constant sailing and the monotony of life on board create an increasingly tense atmosphere, as well as a sense of expectation. The breakthrough and the critical moment of the 'Rio Paraná Diary' finally occurs in the next entry, titled 'Następnego dnia rano' ['Morning of the following day']: *'W nocy coś się zdarzyło – albo, ściślej wyrażając się, coś pękło – lub może coś przelamało się...'* (D1 316)[†]. Gombrowicz reports the previous night, that shortly after falling asleep the night before, he awoke with the feeling that something was happening, something he could not control.

Having run out on deck in a panic, he witnessed a mysterious escalation:

I naraz [...] coś przelamało się i pękła pieczęć milczenia, a krzyk... krzyk jednorazowy, rozgłośny... rozległ się... Krzyk, którego nie było! Wiedziałem z całą pewnością, że nikt nie krzyknął, a jednocześnie wiedziałem że krzyk był... (D1 316)[‡]

Unable to rationalize his sensory experience of hearing a (human) voice that cannot exist, the narrator struggles to articulate his trauma: the oxymoron of the mute cry indicates his wrestling with the ineffable. Manipulations of the word *krzyk* in the typescript show how Gombrowicz developed the themes of speechlessness and

^{*} *'we sailed into a group of seven mirrored lakes, being the seven spokes of mystical raptures, each at a different height but all suspended in the subcelestial regions'*. Ibid.

[†] *'At night something happened – or, to put it more precisely, something cracked open – or maybe something broke through...'* Ibid., translation modified.

[‡] *'And suddenly [...] something broke through and the seal of speechlessness cracked open and a cry... a cry, unique, resounding... rang out... A cry that was not! I knew with absolute certainty that no one had cried out, and at the same time, I knew that the cry had been there...'* DE 249, translation modified to accommodate the defamiliarizing effect of Gombrowicz's fragmented language and unusual punctuation. I substitute 'cry' for Vallee's 'shout'.

unspeakability: *krzyk* is not allowed to appear in any random context: a remark about ‘krzyk filuternych, fioletowych fircyków’ (T 6)^{*} is manually changed to ‘*harce* [...] *fircyków*’ (D1 316)[†]. Adjectives qualifying *krzyk* are carefully selected: ‘krzyk okropny’ (T 6)[‡] becomes ‘*krzyk jednorazowy, rozgłośny*’ (D1 316)[§]. Finally, a passage concerned with the problem of speech(lessness) is made poignant through an unexpected reference to *krzyk*: the idiom ‘cisza przed burza’ (T 7)^{**} is changed into ‘cisza przed krzykiem’ (D1 317)^{††}.³⁷

Like the recurring *plyniemy*, the *krzyk* in the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ builds on intertextual references. The tension between abandonment and control, as well as the fact that the narrator’s limit-experience, the disturbing cry, takes place while he stands on the deck of a ship, can be read as a response to the passage in Homer’s *Odyssey* where the hero voluntarily exposes himself to the irresistible but deadly voices of the Sirens. Having ordered his crew to tie him to the mast of the ship Odysseus is able to enjoy the Sirens’ singing but cannot give in to their seduction: as long as they are within earshot of the Sirens’ voices, his companions, who have their ears plugged, are not allowed to heed their captain’s pleas and untie him.³⁸ Just as Odysseus rationally carves out a safe space for abandonment and irrationality, Gombrowicz’s boat journey involves a quest for the right balance between abandonment and control.

^{*} ‘the cries of playful violet dandies’.

[†] ‘*the frolicking* [...] *of dandies*’. DE 248.

[‡] ‘a terrible cry’.

[§] ‘*a cry, unique, resounding...*’ (Vallee proposes: ‘a shout... one resounding cry...’ DE 249).

^{**} ‘calm before a storm’.

^{††} ‘*calm before a cry*’. (Vallee’s version: ‘the silence before a shout’ DE 249).

Another significant literary inspiration for the episode of the ‘cry that *was not*’ in the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ is Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness*.³⁹ The basic facts of the story are strikingly similar: Conrad’s narrator Marlow, a writer, is travelling up a tropical river on a steamboat. Close textual similarities between Conrad’s story and Gombrowicz’s travel diary are particularly suggestive in a passage where Marlow hears an enigmatic cry one morning when the fog on the Congo River is ‘more blinding than the night’:

The living trees, lashed together by the creepers and every living bush of the undergrowth, might have been changed into stone [...]. It was not sleep – it seemed unnatural, like a state of trance. Not the faintest sound of any kind could be heard. [...] a cry, a very loud cry, as of infinite desolation, soared slowly in the opaque air. It ceased. A complaining clamour, modulated in savage discords, filled our ears. The sheer unexpectedness of it made my hair stir under my cap. I don’t know how it struck the others: to me it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed, so suddenly, and apparently from all sides at once, did this tumultuous and mournful uproar arise. It culminated in a hurried outbreak of almost intolerably excessive shrieking, which stopped short, leaving us stiffened in a variety of silly attitudes, and obstinately listening to the nearly as appalling and excessive silence.⁴⁰

Later, it turns out that the cry came from the ‘savages’ in the surrounding jungle:

But what made the idea of attack inconceivable to me was the nature of the noise – of the cries we had heard. They had not the fierce character boding of immediate hostile intention. Unexpected, wild, and violent as they had been, they had given me an irresistible impression of sorrow. The glimpse of the steamboat had for some reason filled those savages with unrestrained grief. The danger, if any, I expounded, was from our proximity to a great human passion let loose. (p. 61)

Conrad’s ‘cry,’ although there is no doubt about its human origin, is no less haunting than Gombrowicz’s *krzyk*. These parallels with *Heart of Darkness* – like the allusions to classical epic poetry or nineteenth-century French and Polish poetry discussed above – serve as a reminder that the reference point for Gombrowicz’s travel writing was not objective reality but literary landmarks.

Like the incantatory ‘*plyniemy*,’ the ‘cry that *was not*’ calls for an allegorical reading. The narrator claims that the night before the cry he forced himself to sleep:

‘*usiłowałem zasnąć*’ (D1 316)*. Gombrowicz’s explicit association of dreaming and creativity in the ‘La Cabania’ section suggests that the narrator’s purposeful abandonment to sleep contains a metaliterary layer: as he enters into the realm of dreams, he assumes the precarious position of a creative writer. Exposing himself to ‘the cry that *was not*’ he faces, perhaps, the terrible moment of inspiration. The overwhelming, involuntary, and ineffable nature of the *krzyk* evokes the aporia and paradoxes that permeate a number of accounts of inspiration proposed in Western traditions. As Timothy Clark argues, the process of composition has gradually been extended from the archaic notion of ‘dictation by another’ to Poststructuralist representations of writing as a limit-experience and affirmation of the writer’s powerlessness. All these accounts, however, have something in common:

The term [inspiration] seems always to occupy a crucial, liminal, uncomfortable and often exasperatingly mobile place in conceptions of the process of the composition: it names a space in which distinctions of self and other, agency and passivity, inner and outer, the psychic and the technical become deeply problematic.⁴¹

Gombrowicz represents the ‘cry that *was not*’ as suspended between existence and non-existence: the *krzyk* is uncertain, disorienting, impossible, and it cannot be attributed to any source. What is more, the fact that hearing rather than seeing is at the heart of the experience contributes to the sense of disempowerment, since Western ocularcentric discourses privilege visual perception in the processes of cognition, and, especially in the twentieth century, associate seeing rather than hearing with knowing and power. While visual evidence (as *seen* by the *eyewitness*) represents a source of authority, Gombrowicz imagines himself as groping in the dark and *hearing* the disturbing cry.⁴² The fact that the cry is *not* there suggests,

* Lillian Vallee’s translation, ‘I tried to sleep’ (DE 248), does not render the connotation of force [*siła*] in *usiłowałem*. An alternative version would be ‘I made an effort to sleep’.

moreover, that inspiration may be absent, that the writer only wishes to hear the call of the Muse. The *krzyk* episode, like the rest of the in the ‘Rio Paraná Diary,’ is rife with tensions between inside and outside, between control and abandonment. In this sense the oxymoron of ‘the cry that *was not*’ parallels Blanchot’s paradoxical definition of inspiration as ‘manque d’inspiration, force créatrice et aridité intimentement confondues’.⁴³

Reverberations of the *krzyk* continue to haunt the narrator of the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’. At first, he decides that there was nobody there who could have cried out, and so he dismisses his fright as ‘*niebyłe*’ – non-existing – and returns to his cabin. But the statement ‘*uznałem przerażenie moje za niebyłe*’ (D1 316)^{*} negates an emotional response that was real, no matter if the stimulus behind it actually existed or not. ‘The cry that was not’ and ‘the fright that was not’ both imply an internal conflict. (The English translation attenuates this conflict, since the echoing between *nie było* [was not] and *niebyłe* [non-existing] cannot be reproduced.) Awakening to the ship’s effortless progress on the next morning, the narrator vacillates between nonchalance and genuine concern with the meaning of the previous night’s incident:

Właściwie nie wiem co się stało, a nawet, prawdę powiedziawszy, nic się nie stało – ale to właśnie, że ‘nic się nie stało’ jest ważniejsze i bodaj okropniejsze niż gdyby stało się coś. (D1 316)[†]

Cóż się więc stało? W tym cały sekret że nie stało się nic. I nadal nic się nie dzieje. (D1 317)[‡]

^{*} ‘I recognized my fright as nonexistent.’ DE 249.

[†] ‘Actually, I don’t know what happened and really, to tell the truth, nothing happened – but the very fact that “nothing happened” is more important and probably more horrid than if something had happened.’ DE 248, translation modified.

[‡] ‘What, therefore, had happened? The whole secret is that nothing happened. And nothing continues to happen.’ DE 249, translation modified.

The question, ‘what happened?’ mirrors the reader’s puzzlement about the significance of the *krzyk* and the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ as a whole. What is more, Gombrowicz teases the reader, claiming that ‘*najdoskonalszy detektyw nie znalazłby żadnej poszlaki, nic do czego można by się przyczepić*’ (ibid.)^{*}. This ‘detective’ denotes the reader more than Gombrowicz’s own alter ego, the narrator, who already begins to turn his attention to the food, conversations, and pastimes on board.

Gombrowicz never explains what really happened that night – neither in the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ nor in other writings. I suggest that the monotony of life on the ship turns his (or his narrator’s) gaze inward, intensifying the introspective moment until his subjectivity is brought to a crisis. At the same time, this inward gaze brings him into the space of composition, so that the culmination of this crisis, the cry that *was not*, comes to embody the trauma of inspiration. The subtextual allegory of the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ presents a confrontation with some enigmatic aspects of authorship: the paradox of sensing something that is not there, or of having an emotion that one can then declare not to have felt, is comparable to the experience of literary creativity, which involves creating something out of nothing, and expressing sensations and emotions that one might never have experienced for real. Authorship is for Gombrowicz as destabilizing and as impossible as hearing a mute cry. And yet – it happens.

Following the *krzyk* episode Gombrowicz harnesses images of gender and sexuality into his attempt to articulate his experience of artistic inspiration. First he destabilizes traditional masculinity in a description of nightfall:

^{*} ‘*the best detective in the world would find no clue, nothing to latch onto*’. DE 249.

*Płyniemy. Płyniemy po wodzie, jak z innej planety, a noc zaczyna zewsząd parować, zacieśnia się krąg widzenia – my w nim. Ale płyniemy i bez przerwy rośnie w nas... co?... Co?... Co?... Płyniemy. (D1 318)**

Lillian Vallee's translation of 'krąg widzenia' as 'field of vision' does not render the image of a tightening circle – an image that presents a fantasy of gestation, as the narrator asserts that something is 'growing' within him. In metaphorical terms this image presents a reflection on authorship: as darkness falls around the writer-narrator and his gaze is forced to turn inward, he becomes aware of the literary work taking shape within him. His fantasy of androgyny is heightened through his feverish, quasi-magical, quasi-prophetic language – a destabilization of authoritative masculinity that resonates with male Modernist writers' accounts of inspiration. As Helen Sword argues, an 'inspired' Modernist writer must relinquish his or her own authority in order to receive the power of speech from the Other. Coded as 'feminine' such an openness or passivity leads many male Modernists to imagine their creativity as an act of embracing their 'inner female self'.⁴⁴ 'Even when spoken by a man,' Sword continues, 'prophetic discourse raises the specter of a feminized, "hysterical" male' (p. 7).

But this metaphorical equation between literary creativity and childbirth, which according to Nina Auerbach is common enough in discourses on artistic creation to qualify as 'timeless,'⁴⁵ fits uncomfortably with Gombrowicz. His momentary self-feminization is anguishing; he experiences the unknown thing that grows within him as disturbing, and even feels as if trapped within a tightening circle. The image of gestation does not seem liberating; it provides neither resolution nor an adequate discourse to convey his thoughts. On the next day he expresses his

* 'We sail on. We sail on the water, as if from another planet and night begins to steam in from all sides, the circle of vision tightens – we're in it. But we sail on and all the while there grows in us. . . what? . . . what? . . . We sail on.' DE 250, translation modified.

frustration with language: *'my zaś płyniemy, zagłębiając się coraz bardziej w... docierając do... Na nic nie zdadzą się słowa, bo, gdy to mówię, płyniemy!'* (Ibid.)^{*}. Having articulated the failure of language to name the ship's destination, that 'something' that grows within the narrator, as well as the self's deepest resources, Gombrowicz turns to Modernist tropes of homoerotic desire to explore themes of unspeakability.⁴⁶

Throughout the journey, newly-weds and other married couples on the ship create an oppressive atmosphere of compulsory heterosexuality that contrasts with the undercurrent of frustrated homoerotic desire, expressed in looks and unspoken words, between Gombrowicz and two other passengers. As one man makes a banal remark about the weather, the narrator cannot help thinking that it must conceal another layer of meaning: *'znów zadziwaczało mi to jakby nie to... jakby właściwie o coś innego, tak, coś innego chciał...'* (D1 315)[†]. Another passenger's macho talk about the local women strikes him as an unconvincing masquerade: *'Mówił. Ale mówił po to właśnie (ta myśl mnie prześladowe) żeby nie powiedzieć... tak, żeby nie powiedzieć tego co naprawdę miał do powiedzenia. Spojrzałem na niego, ale nic'* (ibid.)[‡]. The narrator never gives a name to his obsession. Although in the typescript he exclaims, *'o, natrętna myśli!'* (T 5)[§], the final version is free of any self-conscious engagement with his suspicion. And yet it appears that the divide between what is said and what is left unsaid runs along the fault line of speakable and unspeakable

^{*} *'we sail on, sinking deeper, ever deeper into . . . reaching. . . . Words are no help because while I am saying this, we sail on!'* Ibid., translation modified.

[†] *'yet it didn't sound right, as if he had wanted to say something else, yes, something else...'* DE 247.

[‡] *'He talked. But he talked precisely so as not to say anything (this thought haunts me), in such a way as not to say what he really had to say. I looked at him but nothing.'* Ibid.

[§] *'oh, obsessive thought!'*

desire. The *‘krzyk, którego nie było’* is echoed in the narrator’s exchange with the man from Asunción, which strikes him as *‘cisza przed krzykiem’* (D1 317)*.

Gombrowicz had already developed the theme of homoerotic tension between men on a ship in his early fiction. The short story *‘Zdarzenia na brygu Banbury’* [*‘The Events on the Banbury’*], mentioned briefly in the opening of this chapter, establishes his grappling with the ineffability of homoerotic desire. Knut Andreas Grimstad argues that the speech act in this short story *‘is ritualized as a means of expressing erotic gestures. Language is indeed erotic, but through the act of speech, rather than its content.’*⁴⁷ The brig itself, he adds, *‘becomes a metaphor for sexual “becoming” ’* (p. 69). Gudrun Langer proposes in the same vein that the language of the short story imitates the repressive conditioning that also affected Gombrowicz as an author. She adds that the aposiopeses and ellipses in the text have a deictic function: *‘das Nicht-gesagte erregt Aufmerksamkeit’*.⁴⁸

A Queer reading of the *‘Rio Paraná Diary’* reveals the intersection between the unspeakability of homoerotic desire and the unspeakability of inspiration. Rather than competing for attention, however, these two motifs work hand in hand. I concur with Agnieszka Sołtysik, who argues that Gombrowicz destabilizes discourses of masculinity because the problematics of gender are *‘fundamental to his task and efficacy as a writer’*:

What escaping masculinity would entail is the ability to say much more about *‘inexpressible things’*. But the problem is not merely of freedom of expression or shame; it is the ability to discursively figure the world in a different and more *‘accurate’* way than permitted within the discursive system delimited by heterosexual binarism, and he diagnoses an urgent need to find a language for what he calls the most mystified and clouded topic of all (i.e., gender and sexuality, especially homosexual attraction).⁴⁹

* *‘a silence before a cry’* (DE 249, translation modified).

The way in which Gombrowicz establishes a correlation between eroticism and authorship will be discussed in Chapter 4. For now, let us turn to Gombrowicz's experience of unspeakability.

In 1979 the Argentinian writer Ernesto Sábato recollected a conversation he had with Gombrowicz in 1967. To a question about what he was most anxious to accomplish the already ailing writer answered: 'Ernesto, ce que je pourrais faire de plus important, et que je ne ferai jamais – il est trop tard – ce serait le récit de mon expérience poétique durant mes premières années à Buenos Aires.' Sábato continues his narration:

Son ton, sa pudeur, m'ont fait penser qu'il se référerait à son expérience homosexuelle. Avec toute la force de mon admiration, je l'ai engagé à l'écrire, à laisser tout le reste pour rendre compte de cette expérience qui certainement pouvait être une des meilleures choses qu'il laisserait dans sa vie. Mais il m'écoutait avec une expression de tristesse sans cesser de faire non de la tête. J'ai compris que mes arguments ne changeraient rien à sa décision et que l'être sentimental, l'être d'une pudeur extrême qu'était Witold Gombrowicz ne dirait jamais ce qu'il y avait peut-être eu de plus mystérieux et de plus profond dans son existence.⁵⁰

Sábato's testimony is poignant because it suggests that some of Gombrowicz's most important works remained unwritten. The image of the author silently shaking his head suggests how hard it would have been for him to break the 'seal of speechlessness' on the question of his 'poetic' homoeroticism. Perhaps, had he lived longer, the poeticism of his erotic adventures in Buenos Aires, about which he wrote obliquely in his diary,⁵¹ would not have remained 'a cry that *was not*'. What this private conversation shows more clearly than the 'Rio Paraná Diary' is that in Gombrowicz's view, in order to reimagine his work, he would have to do so in Queer terms. What is significant for us today is the fact that Gombrowicz's previously 'unreadable' explorations have been rendered resonant and meaningful in the light of the changing intellectual dynamics that have recently placed

homoeroticism of critical investigations of cultural and artistic production of meaning.

* * *

As I mentioned above, Gombrowicz wrote about his journey up the Paraná River not just once but twice. In the late 1950s Radio Free Europe commissioned him to write a series of short autobiographical talks. He decided to devote about half of the pieces to descriptions of his life in Argentina, and in this context he produced another account of his boat trip. While his writings, published in Paris, were not readily accessible in the People's Republic of Poland, the radio sketches were to be broadcast to a popular audience at home.⁵² It seems understandable that in this new context Gombrowicz should draw on the same material that he had already exploited in his literary diary. Compared to the 'Rio Paraná Diary,' the radio sketches about his journey up the Paraná River, written some four years later, appear straightforward, entertaining and factual.

Gombrowicz's report is remarkably detailed. The sketches 'W drodze do Iguasu' ['On the Way to Iguazu'] and 'Przygody na Górnej Paranie' ['Adventures on the Upper Paraná'] describe his journey on the ship *Guarani* from Buenos Aires to the town of Corrientes, some 1000 km upstream. After four days of travelling through the Argentinian savannah, passengers going further north change onto a smaller vessel and sail through the subtropical forests of the Upper Paraná until they finally reach the majestic Iguazu Falls. The following section, 'Wodospad' ['The Waterfall'] presents a riveting description of the waterfalls, which Gombrowicz had most likely never seen.

In the early 1980s it emerged that these reports were not entirely fact-based: Gombrowicz's friend Mariano Betelú testifies that in April 1958, as the next sketch for RFE was due shortly, Gombrowicz decided to concoct a tale about a trip up the Rio Paraná to the famous Iguacu (or Iguazu) Falls. He asked Betelú and his friends to supply him with geography textbooks on which he could base his travel accounts. 'Nobody will guess that I never even set foot there,' Betelú quotes Gombrowicz saying.⁵³ While it is beyond reasonable doubt that Gombrowicz sailed up the Paraná River, there is also evidence to support Betelú's statement that he never went as far as Iguacu. Piotr Millati, for instance, points out discrepancies between Gombrowicz's description of the landscape along the Paraná River and its actual appearance; he also cites the author's letter to his brother where he mentions that a planned trip to Iguacu has been cancelled.⁵⁴

Despite a revival in biographical research it remains difficult to ascertain to what extent Gombrowicz's autobiographical writings are historically accurate. As far as my argument is concerned, the factual details are of limited importance. I work on the assumption that Gombrowicz's deliberate use of imagination, as well as his taste for mischief and deception, play a key role in all of his self-representations. His deviousness, I suggest, provokes us to investigate with a heightened attentiveness the place from where he was *really* writing. Gombrowicz's declaration, 'mieszkam w sobie i tylko stąd, z siebie, mogę do was się odzywać,'*⁵⁵ suggests that his voyages can be mapped onto the 'space of composition'.⁵⁶ More than any other genre, travel writing represents for Gombrowicz an opportunity to describe a journey of the imagination – a quest for the sources of literary creativity.

* 'I live within myself and it is only from here, from within myself, that I can address you.'

Gombrowicz's description of his boat trip up the Paraná River in the RFE sketches suggests an exploration of authorship not only because it contains a strong element of invention, but also because the text returns almost involuntarily to the mysterious tensions that previously marked the 'Rio Paraná Diary'. The travel report opens with the statement that the earlier account in the *Dziennik* 'jest na wpół fantastyczny' (W 238)*. And yet, even though the radio sketches seemingly focus on real events, they are also haunted by a sense of a grave, ineffable mystery undermining the possibility of purely factual writing:

Ogarnia przede wszystkim głębokie zdziwienie, że ten ogrom wód się nie zmniejsza, że, przeciwnie, coraz ogromniejszy ten zalew, ten rozlew, o brzegach uciekających gdzieś na 10 kilometrów... [...] Trudno o coś bardziej 'egzystencjalnego', ściślej związanego z samą esencją życia jak ta żegluga tajemnicza, i dlatego to tak przykuwające. (W 239-40)†

While the RFE sketches and the 'Rio Paraná Diary' can be read independently, they also complement one another. Thus the experimental diary illuminates some of the esoteric meditations in the radio sketches; for instance, the above quotation may seem puzzling on its own, given that a river should be narrowing down, and not broadening, in the course of an upstream journey. It is true that the Paraná River is expansive, but Gombrowicz's sense of loss of direction takes a metaphysical dimension that only begins to make sense when read alongside the 'Rio Paraná Diary'.

While the radio feuilletons benefit from being read alongside the 'Rio Paraná Diary,' they can also illuminate the earlier text by filling in some of its factual gaps.

* 'is semi-fantastic'.

† 'Above all, it is astonishing that this mass of water is not diminishing, that, on the contrary, it grows ever more vast, this inundation, this overflow, with its embankments receding somewhere, at a distance of ten kilometres... [...] It would be hard to find anything more "existential", more closely connected to the very essence of life than that mysterious sailing, and this is why it is so captivating.'

Most importantly, the RFE sketches describe an event that could have inspired the enigmatic ‘cry that was not’ of the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’. The ship is stuck in the river’s shallow bed; black clouds gather, the air is calm. Then the wind suddenly hits the wall of trees on the shore:

Naprzód doszedł nas huk nieokreślony puszczy, coś jak rejwach, popłoch, trzaskanie a po chwili buchnął szum, jęk, wycie, ściana zielona na brzegu wykonała dworski pokłon, drzewa wystrzeliły liśćmi, gałęziami, począł się wokół nas jak gdyby ogólny *krzyk*, a statek jął drżeć i wibrować w wirze, który, zdawało się, wcale się nie ruszał, był jak ręka targająca *struny harfy*. (W 242-43, my emphasis)*

The ship receives a jerk and finally regains its freedom. But the style in this passage departs from a straightforward portrayal of a natural phenomenon to the point of repeating the word ‘krzyk’ [cry, shout, shouting] from the ‘Rio Paraná Diary,’ as well as the word ‘struna’ [(vocal) chord or string], which here carries the unambiguous meaning of a harp’s strings, but in the previous text was left enigmatically unclear. It is possible that the *krzyk* episode in the experimental diary was inspired by a storm, that Gombrowicz removed its natural cause only to reintroduce it in his more factual account for RFE.

The reference to ‘struny’ [strings] in the above-quoted passage from the radio feuilletons sheds light on the use of the same word in the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’. A few days after the incident of the *krzyk* the narrator again anticipates some sort of eruption: ‘*póki pod ciśnieniem już niezmożonym nie pęknie struna, struna, struna!* ...’ (D1 317)†. It is unclear what the ‘struna’ in this passage may refer to. The

* ‘First the indefinable thunder of the jungle reached us, something like an uproar, a turmoil, a whacking, and a moment later the roar burst forth, wailing, howling, the green wall on the bank performed a courtly bow, the trees fired their leaves, their branches, into the air, around us something like a general *cry* arose, and the ship began to tremble and to vibrate in the whirl, which, it seemed, didn’t move at all; it was like a hand tearing at *the strings of a harp*.’ My emphasis.

† ‘*as long as the line, the line, the line does not snap under the unceasing pressure!*’ DE 249.

enigmatic sound of a string snapping under tension recalls the two instances in Anton Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), where the characters hear the sound of a breaking string. The stage directions in Act Two read:

[Silence, except for FIRS, muttering. A sound as if from the sky, far off, like a string snapping... a sad sound, which dies away.]⁵⁷

The characters wonder about the provenance of the sound. It could be the sound of a bucket falling down a well or 'some bird... like a heron'. They muse about the fact that before the 'misfortune,' that is to say the emancipation of the serfs, a similar unnerving noise had been heard. However, the off-stage sound remains unexplained. It occurs again just before the cherry trees in the eponymous orchard are chopped down at the very end of the play:

[There is a distant sound, as though from the sky, like the sound of a breaking string, dying away with a melancholy sound. Silence. The sound of an axe striking a tree, far off in the cherry orchard.] (p. 63)

Gombrowicz's use of the sound echoes the sense of foreboding in Chekhov's play: the sound of the snapping string, though unexplained, is associated with imminent change. If we read it as the string of a harp, however – and this association supported by the use of the same word in Gombrowicz's radio sketch – there comes to mind the image of an Orphean lyre, the instrument of poetic inspiration. Following the same chain of associations, Gombrowicz's journey comes to evoke a descent into the underworld: 'ciemność [statku] wdrażała się w ciemność, ale te dwie ciemności nie łączyły się z sobą' (D1 313)*. There is no resolution to this quest, but 'the cry that was not' does bring to mind Eurydice, trapped in the underworld, unable to follow Orpheus into the world of the living, crying perhaps, even though her cry cannot *be...*

* '[the ship's] darkness bored into the darkness, but these two darknesses did not join'. DE 246.

In the diary the snapping of the chord – ‘*pęknie struna, struna, struna*’ – occurs a few pages after the breaking that precedes ‘the cry that was not’: ‘*pękła pieczęć milczenia, a krzyk... krzyk jednorazowy, rozgłośny... rozległ się... Krzyk, którego nie było!*’ (D1 316)*. This echoing between *pęknie* and *pękła* is even more pronounced in the draft version of the text. In the typescript, it is not a string or chord that snaps, but another ‘pieczęć’ or seal: in the place of ‘*nie pęknie struna, struna, struna*’ the first version has ‘*nie pęknie pieczęć jaka mamy na ustach*’ (T 7)† – a formulation that is nearly identical to the preceding ‘*pękła pieczęć milczenia*’ just before the cry that was not. There is no release of the growing tension in the ‘Rio Paraná Diary,’ but by juxtaposing the text with its typescript and the RFE feuilletons we can reveal layers of signification that would otherwise be difficult to name.

As the language of Gombrowicz’s travel writings – not only his ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ but also the supposedly straightforward radio sketches – becomes figurative and contrived, there comes to mind Kurczaba’s observation that Gombrowicz’s metafictionality emerges from a ‘fundamental awareness that everything couched in words tends to become fictive; that, in other words, language inevitably effects fiction’.⁵⁸ After his visit to the Iguazu Falls, the narrator of the RFE feuilletons blames the dramatic nature of the landscape for this slipping away into fictionality: ‘*trudno by mi było powiedzieć o ile bliskość tak potężnego zjawiska nie zarażała nam wyobraźni*’ (W 245)‡. Ironically, this sketch about the Iguazu Falls is entirely fictional. His imagination infected itself.

* ‘*the seal of speechlessness cracked open and a cry... a cry, unique, resounding... rang out... A cry that was not!*’ DE 249, translation modified.

† ‘the seal that we have on our lips won’t break!’

‡ ‘I would find it hard to tell if the proximity to such a mighty phenomenon didn’t infect our imagination’.

This discussion shows that to judge Gombrowicz's travel writing in terms of its historical accuracy would be misguided. Although he wrote for Radio Free Europe, we should bear in mind that he explicitly urged his readers not to expect truthful accounts from his travel writing. Thus he breaches neither journalistic codes of good practice nor what Philippe Lejeune defines as the 'pacte référentiel' of autobiographical writing.⁵⁹ An awareness of the role of confabulation in Gombrowicz's travel writing, I suggest, is most valuable in that it allows us to appreciate how he used the genre to challenge the boundaries between fact, fiction, and philosophy.

* * *

The 'Rio Paraná Diary,' for whose publication Gombrowicz all but risked his livelihood, presents both a dense network of intertextual references and a highly original exploration of the limits of language and the origin of inspiration. Travel writing represented for Gombrowicz an ideal pretext to write about his most vital and intimate preoccupations. In the 'Rio Paraná Diary' he not only proposes a journey into the self; this short travel journal offers a pithy, complex, and imaginative statement on the process of literary composition, and a paradigm of allegorical self-reflexivity. While its loose, oneiric form suggests that it was written in a bout of spontaneous inspiration, the typescript and Gombrowicz's correspondence with his editor indicate that he had a clear vision of the text and crafted it with extreme attention to detail. Within the narration, the monotonous insistence on sailing and the (anti)climactic 'cry that *was not*' hinge on paradoxes such as controlled abandonment, as well as liminal experiences that leave the self in crisis. Read

allegorically, these conflicts present a model of authorship that annihilates the writer as a confident and dependable creator.

In the development of my argument I have drawn together scholarly discussions, archival material, biographies, letters, and testimonies, as well as intertextual references. I will conclude with a reflection on Gombrowicz's model of interpretation as presented to readers of the first volume of his *Diary* in 1966:

Gdybym miał w tej chwili udzielić moim współ-twórcom, to jest moim czytelnikom (bo czytać to nie mniej twórcze, niż pisać) jakiejś najważniejszej rady, powiedziałbym: nie ułatwiajcie sobie zadania tym, że 'on to tak dla paradoksu', albo 'z przekory,' albo 'żeby się drażnić'. [...] Spróbujcie mi uwierzyć, a zobaczycie, jak te moje dziwactwa i gierki zaczną się wam łączyć w całość organiczną i zdolną do życia. We mnie sztuczność jest tym co ułatwia szczerłość, żart wiedzie do powagi, przekora do prawdy. Spróbujcie ująć mnie najgłębiej. Słowo honoru, ja temu sprostam! (D3 220-21)*

My interpretation of the 'Rio Paraná Diary' responds to Gombrowicz's call for a diligent 'co-creator' [współ-twórca] who would 'try to grasp [him] as profoundly as possible'. I have shown not only the 'organic whole' [całość organiczna] that the little travel journal forms in relation to his oeuvre, but I have also presented the ways in which his 'oddities and games' [dziwactwa i gierki] can conceal and convey a serious reflection on the experience of authorship. But even while I found meanings in the text that the author might not have predicted or intended, my reading paradoxically conformed to his directives: Gombrowicz, who published countless commentaries to direct his readers towards the 'correct' reception of his works, also knew that in order for these works to come alive and to survive in the long run he

* 'If I were to give my co-creators, that is, my readers (because reading is no less creative than writing) some really important advice, it would be this: do not simplify your task by saying "he is doing this to be paradoxical" or "to go against the grain" or "to irritate." [...] Try to believe me and you will see how all my oddities and games begin to join in an organic whole capable of living. In me, artificiality is what enables me to be honest, jokes lead to seriousness, obstreperousness to truth. Try to grasp me as profoundly as possible. I give you my word, I am up to it!' DE 689, translation modified.

had to relinquish control over their signification. The problem of finding the right balance between creativity and control, which distinguishes his model of authorship, also lies at the heart of his model of interpretation, to which I will return in the Postscript.

¹ ‘Przygody na Brygu Banbury’ appeared in Gombrowicz’s short story collection *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* (Warsaw: Rój, 1933), later renamed *Bakakaj* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1957). Bill Johnston translates the story as ‘The Events on the Banbury’ in *Bacacay*.

² Giedroyc’s influential position as both a civil servant and editor of the journal *Polityka* allowed him to arrange a free ticket for young Gombrowicz. See Giedroyc’s foreword to his correspondence with Gombrowicz, L 23-24 (p. 23).

³ Andrzej Kowalczyk writes in his introduction to the correspondence between Gombrowicz and Giedroyc: ‘Giedroyc, editor and publisher, was the only person in emigration who could help Gombrowicz get out of this hell of anonymity and create an audience for him, in one word – make him a writer again’. See L V-XIV, (pp. v-vi). For the history of *Kultura* and the Instytut Literacki see Ulrich Schmid, ‘Eine intellektuelle Chronik Polens: Entstehung, Bedeutung und Ende der polnischen Exilzeitschrift *Kultura*’, *Osteuropa* 1 (2001), 46-57.

⁴ To a mention by Gombrowicz that he had begun to write something like a diary, Giedroyc replies on 11 September 1952: ‘The idea of a Diary is v. good. It is a form made for you’ (L 59-60).

⁵ Michel Butor, ‘Le voyage et l’écriture’, *Romantisme*, 2 (1972), 4-19 (p. 4 and p. 17)

⁶ Helen Carr, ‘Modernism and travel (1880-1940)’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 70-86 (p. 74).

⁷ David G. Farley, *Modernist Travel Writing: Intellectuals Abroad* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2010), p. 1.

⁸ Witold Gombrowicz, ‘Fragmenty z dziennika’, in *Dzieła*, ed. by Jan Błoński and Jerzy Jarzębski, 15 vols (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986-97), XIII:

Publicystyka, wywiady, teksty różne 1939-1963, p. 23. This fragment was intended for publication in *Kultura*, but it was omitted by what Gombrowicz called a mistake on his editor's part. See the editors' note, 'Nota Wydawcy' (p. 491). See also the animated correspondence between Gombrowicz and Giedroyc from March/April 1957.

- ⁹ This quotation is taken from Gombrowicz's preface to the *Diario Argentino*, an extract of his *Dziennik* published in Spanish translation. See 'Przedmowa [do *Diario Argentino*]', transl. from Spanish by Ireniusz Kania, in *Dzieła XIV: Publicystyka, wywiady, teksty różne 1963-1969*, p. 38.
- ¹⁰ Alex Kurczaba, *Gombrowicz and Frisch: Aspects of the Literary Diary* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1980), p. 39 and p. 58.
- ¹¹ Janusz Margański, *Geografia pragnień: opowieść o Gombrowiczu* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005).
- ¹² Michał Paweł Markowski, *Czarny nurt: Gombrowicz, świat, literatura* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004), p. 77.
- ¹³ According to Klementyna Suchanow, Gombrowicz first stayed with the Lipkowski family in Vertientes near Córdoba in the Argentinian hinterland and then with the Rússovich family in Goya, a town on the river Paraná. See *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005), p. 264. It is also documented that Gombrowicz travelled up the Rio Paraná again in 1955.
- ¹⁴ Letter dated 12 October 1954 (L 177).
- ¹⁵ Letter dated 28 December 1955 (L 209).
- ¹⁶ Letter dated 23 September 1956 (L 256).
- ¹⁷ Letter dated 28 January 1957 (L 293).
- ¹⁸ The only discrepancy between the typescript and the published version is the use of diacritics, which Gombrowicz's typewriter did not have. He manually added some but not all of the diacritics. I reproduce the typescript with the diacritics he added.
- ¹⁹ For a history of the association of dreaming and creativity in the Western tradition see Timothy Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of*

Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 24 and p. 36 n. 30.

- ²⁰ See Sigmund Freud, 'Der Dichter und das Phantasieren', in *Studienausgabe*, ed. by Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards, and James Strachey, 8th edn, 11 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1989), x: *Bildende Kunst und Literatur*, pp. 169-79.
- ²¹ Lillian Vallee only translates this part (DE 225), omitting to acknowledge the elision of two poems by Duś, one by Witkacy (the pen name of the Polish Modernist Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, 1885-1939), as well as Gombrowicz's interspersed comments.
- ²² Freud, 'Traumarbeit', in *Studienausgabe*, II: *Die Traumdeutung*, pp. 280-487 (p. 429).
- ²³ Freud, 'Traumarbeit', in *Studienausgabe*, II: *Die Traumdeutung*, p. 429. For Freud, absurdity arises from *Traumarbeit* or 'dream work,' that is from the mechanisms involved in the production of the dream's latent content. Having analysed a number of apparently random dream images, Freud concludes: 'Ich habe also das Problem der Absurdität des Traumes dahin aufgelöst, daß die Traumgedanken niemals absurd sind [...] und daß die Traumarbeit absurde Träume und Träume mit einzelnen absurden Elementen produziert, wenn ihr in den Traumgedanken Kritik, Spott und Hohn zur Darstellung in ihrer Ausdrucksform vorliegt' (p. 429)
- ²⁴ In the diary Gombrowicz conveys the impression that he set off for Goya immediately after his holiday in Necochea: 'Jutro,' he writes from 'La Cabania,' 'wyjazd do Buenos Aires. Muszę spakować manatki. Po czym długa podróż statkiem po rzece Parana, na północ' (D1 311) ['Tomorrow I leave for Buenos Aires. I have to pack my things. There will be a long journey by boat northward, along the River Paraná.' DE 244]. In fact, the trip to Goya took place in 1954 and the holiday at the Jankowskis' *estancia* in 1955. Before going to Goya, moreover, Gombrowicz visited friends in Vertientes near Córdoba – a destination he could not have reached by boat alone. Thus the *Dziennik* presents a conflation of various trips.

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- ²⁵ Another striking resemblance can be seen between *Kosmos* and the ‘Diariusz wiejski,’ a travel journal inserted into the *Dziennik* of 1954, which according to Markowski prefigures Gombrowicz’s last novel; see *Czarny nurt*, p. 74.
- ²⁶ Graham Robb summarizes these interpretations in *Rimbaud* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000), p. 104.
- ²⁷ Arthur Rimbaud, ‘Le bateau ivre’, in *Rimbaud: Œuvres complètes*, ed. by André Guyaux and Aurélia Cervoni (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2009), pp. 162-64 (l. 33).
- ²⁸ Adam Mickiewicz, *Liryki lozańskie Adama Mickiewicza*, ed. by Marian Stala (Cracow, 1998), p. 31, ll. 9-12. I thank Włodzimierz Bolecki for alerting me to this intertextual reference.
- ²⁹ Konstanty Jeleński, ‘Bohaterskie Niebohaterstwo Gombrowicza’, in *Gombrowicz filozof*, ed. by Francesco M. Cataluccio and Jerzy Illg (Cracow: Znak, 1991), pp. 155-67 (p. 163).
- ³⁰ Janusz Pawłowski, ‘Gombrowicz i lęk: uwagi o “Diariuszu Rio Parana”’, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 4 (1977), 151-64 (pp. 158 and 161-63). It is unclear if Pawłowski was familiar with Jeleński’s article.
- ³¹ Małgorzata Czerwińska, ‘Do kawiarni i za ocean: Paradoxy Gombrowiczowskiej filozofii podróży’, in *Gombrowicze*, ed. by Bernadetta Żynis (Słupsk: Pomorska Akademia Pedagogiczna w Słupsku, 2006), pp. 131-48 (p. 142). Czerwińska does not engage with Kurczaba’s study.
- ³² Silvana Mandolessi, ‘“Travelling is being and seeing”: National identity and visual strategies in Witold Gombrowicz and Jose Ortega y Gasset’, in *Witold Gombrowicz*, ed. by Arent van Nieukerken (= *RL*, 62-64 (2007)), pp. 453-68 (pp. 460-61).
- ³³ One of the narrators of Gombrowicz’s novel *Ferdydurke* (1937) ridicules the feigned rapture of classical concert goers by comparing it to a religious ritual:

Lecz także jest pewne, że uczestnicząc w owym koncercie, wypełniamy coś w rodzaju aktu religijnego (zupełnie jakbyśmy asystowali Mszy świętej), pobożnie klęcząc przed Bóstwem sztuki; w tym wypadku przeto nasz podziw byłby tylko aktem hołdu i wypełnieniem obrządku. Któż jednak

mógłby powiedzieć, ile w tej Piękności jest prawdziwego piękna, a ile historyczno-socjologicznych procesów? (F 73)

[‘It’s also true that by participating in the concert we fulfil something of a religious act (just as if we were assisting at the Holy Mass), kneeling devoutly before the Godhead of artistry; in this case our admiration is merely an act of homage and the fulfilling of a rite. Who can tell, however, how much real beauty there is in Beauty, and how much of it is a sociohistorical process?’ (FE 79)].

- ³⁴ Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, ‘The Magical Power of Words’, *Man*, n.s., 3 (1968), 175-208 (pp. 178-79).
- ³⁵ Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration*, p. 4.
- ³⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *L’espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 232.
- ³⁷ Given that the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ was published during the political upheavals of the Polish October, it would make sense to read the image of a ‘seal of speechlessness’ as an allusion to state censorship. I have found no evidence of the author’s intention to signify free speech by the enigmatic cracking open of a seal of speechlessness, nor any evidence of any such interpretations among contemporary readers. And yet, the passage provokes questions: does the ‘unique, resounding cry’ that cannot be attributed to any source represent the voice of an underground writer? And will this voice be heard? Below I will argue that the narrator’s preoccupation with unspeakability is related to homoerotic desire, not to political restrictions on free speech. And yet, these two kinds of censorship may go hand in hand. On the subject of homosexuality, literature and art in the Polish People’s Republic, see Wojciech Śmieja, *Literatura, której nie ma: Szkice o polskiej ‘literaturze homoseksualnej’* (Cracow: Universitas, 2010), as well as Krzysztof Tomasiak, *Gejery: Mniejszości seksualne w PRL-u* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2012).
- ³⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by E. V. Rieu, revised by D. C. H. Rieu, introduction by Peter Jones (London: Penguin Books, 2003).
- ³⁹ It is not unlikely that Gombrowicz had access to Aniela Zagórska’s translation of Conrad’s novella (in *Młodość. Jądro ciemności*, trans. by Aniela Zagórska (Warsaw: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1930), but he could also have read the French or Spanish translations. (Gombrowicz reviewed Conrad’s *The Mirror of the Sea* for the *Kurier Poranny*, no. 333 (1935), reprinted in *Dzieła XII: Varia: Proza*,

reportaże, krytyka, 1933-1939, ed. by Jan Błoński and Jerzy Jarzębski (1995), pp. 193-97.) I am aware of three studies on Gombrowicz and Conrad, but none of them discuss the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’: Aniela Kowalska’s *Conrad i Gombrowicz w walce o swoją wybitność* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1986); Alex Kurczaba’s ‘Gombrowicz and Conrad: The Question of Autobiography’, in *Contexts for Conrad*, ed. by Owen Knowles Carabine and Wiesław Krajka (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1993), pp. 73-86; and George Z. Gasyna’s *Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise: Exilic Discourse in Joseph Conrad and Witold Gombrowicz* (London: Continuum, 2011). Grimstad points to the themes of sexual ambivalence that link *Heart of Darkness* and Gombrowicz’s early short story, ‘Zdarzenia na brygu Banbury’ in ‘Co zdarzyło się na brygu Banbury? Gombrowicz, erotyka i prowokacja kultury’, *Teksty Drugie*, 75 (2002), 57-69 (p. 62).

⁴⁰ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), pp. 56-57.

⁴¹ Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration*, p. 283.

⁴² Cf. Mandolessi’s comparison of visual strategies in Argentinian travel writing by Gombrowicz and Ortega y Gasset, ‘Travelling is being and seeing’, p. 459. Also, Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁴³ Blanchot, *L’espace littéraire*, p. 233.

⁴⁴ Helen Sword, *Engendering Inspiration: Visionary Strategies in Rilke, Lawrence and H.D.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 1-3.

⁴⁵ Nina Auerbach, review of Gilbert & Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, in *Victorian Studies*, 23 (1980), 505-06 (p. 506).

⁴⁶ As we will see in the next chapter, Gombrowicz uses metaphors of childbearing frequently but only in a cursory manner, elaborating instead on the concept of paternity, rather than maternity, as a metaphor for authorship. His momentary self-feminization follows a logic of attraction and repulsion vis-à-vis the model of androgynous creativity. Diane Long Hoeveler discusses the dynamics of the fantasy of androgyny in the works of the English Romantic poets, who self-consciously used the feminine as ‘Other’ in order to achieve a fictional completion of their own

psyches. The ideology of androgyny, Hoeveler argues, not only subjugates real women. Even while the Romantics ‘cannibalistically consumed’ their female ideal alter egos, in most cases they destroyed them by the conclusion of the poem. ‘That cycle,’ Hoeveler argues, ‘idealization of women followed by fear, loathing, and destruction – corresponds also to the poets’ growing realization that androgyny was only an alluring siren song of escape from the body’. See *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), p. 9.

- ⁴⁷ Knut Andreas Grimstad, ‘Co zdarzyło się na brygu Banbury?’, p. 66, n. 39.
- ⁴⁸ Gudrun Langer, ‘Witold Gombrowicz’s Erzählung “Zdarzenia na brygu Banbury” als homoerotischer Maskentext’, *Zeitschrift für Slavistik*, 42 (1997), 290-99 (p. 297).
- ⁴⁹ Agnieszka Sołtysik, ‘Witold Gombrowicz’s Struggle with Heterosexual Form: From a National to a Performative Self’, in *Gombrowicz’s Grimaces: Modernism, Gender, Nationality*, ed. by Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 245-66 (pp. 257-58).
- ⁵⁰ Ernesto Sábato’s written testimony, Buenos Aires, 30 March 1979; trans. from Spanish by Michel Bibard, in Rita Gombrowicz, ed., *Gombrowicz en Argentine: témoignages et documents 1939-1963* (Montricher: Noir sur Blanc, 2004), p. 236.
- ⁵¹ Marian Bielecki discusses the ‘homoerotic discourse’ of Gombrowicz’s *Diary* in *Interpretacja i pleć: szkice o twórczości Gombrowicza* (Wałbrzych: Wydawnictwo Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Angelusa Silesiusa, 2005), pp. 115-52.
- ⁵² Jerzy Jarzębski reports that these texts were not preserved in the radio’s archives, and that nobody in the broadcasting station was able to testify if they had ever been on air. See the editor’s note in W 311-15 (p. 311). According to Czermińska, a letter by Gombrowicz to the Polish critic Artur Sandauer suggests that at least some of the sketches must have been broadcast. See ‘Do kawiarni’, p. 138, n. 8. Gombrowicz’s sketches saw their first (posthumous) publication as *Wspomnienia polskie; Wędrowki po Argentynie* with the Instytut Literacki in Paris in 1977. Bill Johnston translated the first part, *Wspomnienia polskie*, as *Polish Memories* in

2004; Danuta Borchardt translated a few fragments of *Wędrowki po Argentynie* as ‘Peregrinations in Argentina’; these are available in the March 2005 issue of *Words Without Borders* at <<http://wordswithoutborders.org/article/from-peregrinations-in-argentina>> [accessed 28 January 2013].

⁵³ See Mario Betelú, ‘Lokator’, in *Tango Gombrowicz*, ed. by Rajmund Kalicki (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), pp. 205-08 (p. 207).

⁵⁴ Piotr Millati, ‘Tropiki Gombrowicza’, Paper given during the Conference ‘Gombrowicz Dzieckiem Podszyty’ in Cracow, 8-10 May 2009; script e-mailed to me informally. Gombrowicz wrote to his brother Janusz on 14 May 1957: ‘Do Iguazu nie pojadę. Nie udało się, może i lepiej, bo nie będę tracił czasu.’ See *Witold Gombrowicz: Listy do rodziny*, ed. by Janusz Margański (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004), p. 100 [‘I won’t go to Iguazu. It didn’t work out, and perhaps it’s better this way, as I won’t be wasting time.’].

⁵⁵ See above at n. 8.

⁵⁶ I borrow this term from Clark’s *The Theory of Inspiration*.

⁵⁷ Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, version by Pam Gems, from a translation from Russian Tania Alexander (London: Oberon, 2007), p. 36.

⁵⁸ Kurczaba, *Gombrowicz and Frisch*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ For Philippe Lejeune, the *pacte référentiel* includes ‘une définition du champ du réel visé et un énoncé des modalités et du degré de ressemblance auxquels le texte prétend.’ See *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 36.

CHAPTER TWO

HAUNTING DOUBLES: REPRESENTATIONS OF AUTHORSHIP IN *FERDYDURKE*

We can read a beginning as the point at which [...] the writer departs from all other works; a beginning immediately establishes relationships with works already existing, relationships of either continuity or antagonism or some mixture of both.

Edward Said¹

The image of the double plays a key role in Gombrowicz's works. Alter egos, doppelgangers, foils and visions of his younger selves haunt him throughout his career. His texts respond to representations of the double in canonical works of literature, such as Goethe's or Dostoevsky's, as well as to Freud's account of the 'uncanny' doppelganger. Gombrowicz's contribution to his forerunners' models of the double lies in his use of the trope as a vehicle for literary self-reflexivity: most of his encounters with his doubles are either explicitly or implicitly linked to his concern with authorship. The present discussion addresses the way Gombrowicz positions himself in the role of a double mirroring his narrators, his readers, and finally, his work. In particular, I will address a doppelganger scene at the beginning of *Ferdydurke* (1937), Gombrowicz's first novel but his second publication after a short story collection of 1933. In the passage in question the narrator's ghostly younger self makes a brief and unexplained appearance. Contextualizing this scene with metanarrative passages throughout the novel, as well as with Gombrowicz's autobiographical works from the 1950s and 60s, I argue that the narrator's exorcism

of this spectre rehearses the author's need to overcome the memory of his previous work and to make a new beginning.

One of Gombrowicz's likely models in his representations of the doppelgänger is a section of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's autobiography, *Dichtung und Wahrheit (Poetry and Truth)*, written in 1813. Goethe's encounter with his double occurred in 1771, just after he ended his relationship with Friederike Brion:

Als ich ihr die Hand noch vom Pferde reichte, standen ihr die Tränen in den Augen, und mir war sehr übel zu Mute. Nun ritt ich auf dem Fußpfade gegen Drusenheim, und da überfiel mich eine der sonderbarsten Ahnungen. Ich sah nämlich, nicht mit den Augen des Leibes, sondern des Geistes, mich mir selbst, denselben Weg, zu Pferde wieder entgegen kommen, und zwar in einem Kleide, wie ich es nie getragen: es war hechtgrau mit etwas Gold. Sobald ich mich aus diesem Traum aufschüttelte, war die Gestalt ganz hinweg. Sonderbar ist es jedoch, daß ich nach acht Jahren, in dem Kleide, das mir geträumt hatte, und das ich nicht aus Wahl, sondern aus Zufall gerade trug, mich auf demselben Wege fand, um Friederiken noch einmal zu besuchen. Es mag sich übrigens mit diesen Dingen wie es will verhalten, das wunderliche Trugbild gab mir in jenen Augenblicken des Scheidens einige Beruhigung. Der Schmerz, das herrliche Elsaß, mit allem, was ich darin erworben, auf immer zu verlassen, war gemildert, und ich fand mich, dem Taumel des Lebewohls endlich entflohn, auf einer friedlichen und erheiternden Reise so ziemlich wieder.²

The complexity of Goethe's doppelgänger story resides in his claim that the vision foreshadowed his actual return, eight years later, on the same path and wearing the same clothes as his doppelgänger. Thus the real Goethe becomes a repetition of his own imaginary vision. The effect of this realization, as described by the mature poet, is a sense of peace after his somewhat ungentlemanly breakup with his sweetheart. Josef Rattner reads Goethe's vision as a fantasy of compensation in which the ambitious young writer, feeling guilty about forsaking Friederike, reassures himself both of the necessity of guarding his independence, and of his return to her.³

In 1963 Gombrowicz produces a doppelganger story that echoes Goethe's in that the writer and his double move on the same trajectory but in opposite directions. Gombrowicz, in this story, is returning to Europe after two and a half decades of exile in Argentina. Thanks to a scholarship from the Ford Foundation he is leaving behind his life of hardship and obscurity; the liner *Federico Costa* is carrying him toward international recognition. Mid-way across the Atlantic his ship crosses paths with the *Boleslaw Chrobry*, on which the 35-year-old Gombrowicz had travelled to Argentina in 1939. Now the mature writer feels accountable to his younger self, the promising avant-gardist whose destiny was uncertain, and to whom, consequently, all possibilities were open:

Tak, wiedziałem, że spotkać się muszę z owym Gombrowiczem, płynącym do Ameryki, ja, Gombrowicz, dziś odpływający z Ameryki. Jakaż ciekawość żarła mnie wtedy, potworna, odnośnie do losu mojego, czułem się wtedy w losie moim jak w ciemnym pokoju, gdzie pojęcia nie masz o co nos rozbijesz, ileż bym dał za najniklejszy promyk rozświetlający zarysy przyszłości – i oto dzisiaj ja nadpływam tamtemu Gombrowiczowi, jak rozwiązanie i wyjaśnienie, jestem odpowiedzią. Czy jednak, jako odpowiedź, będę na wysokości zadania? Czy zdołam w ogóle coś powiedzieć tamtemu, gdy 'Federico' wynurzy mu się na mglistym obszarze wód z żółtym, potężnym kominem swoim, czy nie będę musiał przemilczeć?...

To byłoby przykre. Jeśli on mnie zapyta ciekawie: – Z czym wracasz? Kim teraz jesteś?... a ja mu odpowiem zakłopotanym gestem rąk pustych, wzruszeniem ramion... i może czymś w rodzaju ziewnięcia 'aaach, nie wiem, daj mi spokój!' [...]. Czyż nie zdobędę się na inną odpowiedź? (D3 93-94)*

* 'Yes, I knew I would have to confront the Gombrowicz sailing to America, I, the Gombrowicz sailing away from America. What a monstrous curiosity about my destiny gnawed at me, I felt my fate like a dark room, where you have no idea what you'll break your neck on, how much I would give for the slightest ray to illuminate the contours of the future and so today I am approaching that other Gombrowicz, as solution and explanation, I am the answer. Will I, as an answer, be up to the task? Will I be able to say anything at all to that other one when the *Federico* appears to him on the foggy expanse of waters with its powerful yellow chimney, won't I have to *keep silent*? ...

That would be painful. If he asks me, curious: – What are you returning with? Who are you now? ... I will answer him with the troubled gesture of empty hands,

Gombrowicz's encounter, like Goethe's, involves a suspension of chronological time: Goethe does not know that his double incarnates his future self until eight years later, when he suddenly finds himself in the exact position of his double. In Gombrowicz's story the mature writer initially crosses his self from the past, but then their meeting seems to take place simultaneously in the present *and* in the past, so that the past self also encounters an embodied premonition of its future self. Like Goethe's 'fantasy of compensation,' moreover, Gombrowicz's doppelgänger vision evokes unfulfilled possibilities: the younger self is the question to which the older self is the answer.

Freud's account of the double in his essay 'Das Unheimliche' ['The Uncanny'] of 1919 is also relevant in this context. Besides presenting the doppelgänger as a hidden or repressed aspect of the protagonist's personality, Freud argues that it can equally well embody the subject's unexploited potential:

Aber nicht nur dieser der Ich-Kritik anstößige Inhalt kann dem Doppelgänger einverleibt werden, sondern ebenso alle unterbliebenen Möglichkeiten der Geschicksgestaltung, an denen die Phantasie noch festhalten will, und alle Ich-Strebungen, die sich infolge äußerer Ungunst nicht durchsetzen konnten, sowie alle die unterdrückten Willensentscheidungen, die die Illusion des freien Willens ergeben haben.⁴

Gombrowicz's fantasy of crossing paths with his doppelgänger is no vision of a 'better self' like Goethe's, but his younger double presents itself as a standard against which the older Gombrowicz's literary and personal achievements must be measured. This dynamic corresponds again to Freud's concept of the doppelgänger motif:

Im Ich bildet sich langsam eine besondere Instanz heraus, welche sich dem übrigen Ich entgegenstellen kann, die der

a shrug of the shoulders... and perhaps something like a yawn, "Aaahh, I don't know, leave me alone!" [...] Will I not muster a different answer?' DE 589-90.

Selbstbeobachtung und Selbstkritik dient, die Arbeit der psychischen Zensur leistet und unserem Bewußtsein als 'Gewissen' bekannt wird. (Ibid.)

Instead of appeasing his conscience, as seems to be the case for Goethe, Gombrowicz's doppelganger embodies the inner voice before whom Gombrowicz must justify himself (though not necessarily in a moral sense).

Gombrowicz's attitude towards his younger self as a writer is complex.

Besides the urge to prove his worthiness to the promising young writer that he was, he also imagines that the earlier self would have benefited from the mature self's wisdom and self-assurance. In another diary passage, dated 1954, he muses about the socially awkward youth who had just begun publishing his short stories in the early 1930s:

Jeżeli on – ja – był w takich razach bezsilny, to wcale nie dlatego, aby to go przerastało. Wręcz przeciwnie. Te sytuacje były nie do odparcia ponieważ były niegodne odparcia – ponieważ były zbyt głupie i śmieszne aby można było wziąć na serio cierpienie, które zadawały. Więc cierpiałeś a jednocześnie wstydzileś się swego cierpienia i ty, który już wówczas wcale nieźle dawałeś sobie radę z demonami o wiele groźniejszymi, tu załamywałeś się okropnie; dyskwalifikowany własnym bólem swoim. Biedny, biedny chłopcze! Dlaczego mnie wtedy nie było przy tobie, dlaczego nie mogłem wejść wtedy do tego salonu i stanąć tuż za tobą abyś poczuł się uzupełniony późniejszym sensem twego życia. Lecz ja – twoje urzeczywistnienie – byłem – jestem – o tysiące mil, o wiele lat, od ciebie i siedziałem – siedzę – tutaj, na amerykańskim brzegu tak gorzko spóźniony... i tak [...] wypełniony odległością wiatru pędzącego ze strefy polarnej. (D1 120-21)*

* 'If he – I – was helpless in situations like this, then it was not at all because he was not up to them. On the contrary. These situations were irrefutable because they were unworthy of being refuted – they were too silly and frivolous to take the suffering that they caused seriously. You suffered and, at the same time, were ashamed of your suffering so that you, who at that time could easily handle far more menacing demons, broke down at this juncture, disqualified by your own pain. You poor, poor boy! Why hadn't I been at your side then, why couldn't I have walked into that drawing room and stood right behind you, so that you could have been fortified with the later sense of your life. But I – your fulfillment – I was – I am – a thousand miles and many years away from you and I sat – I sit – here, on the

Writing of himself in the first, second, and third person, Gombrowicz conjures up his present self as a double standing behind and reassuring his past self. The mature writer's compassion and benevolence towards the young writer, though somewhat condescending (he calls his younger self a 'protoplast'), are quite at odds with Gombrowicz's encounter with his younger double from 1963. What these two doppelganger passages have in common is a fascination with the image of the budding writer.⁵ In both passages Gombrowicz imagines his present self appearing to his past self, but at the same time images of himself as a debutant haunt the mature author as he writes these diary passages.

* * *

The ghostly incarnations of Gombrowicz's past self that allow him to confront his development as a writer in *Dziennik* have an antecedent in his first novel, *Ferdydurke*. Published in 1937, this work introduces Gombrowicz's life-long preoccupation with the themes of authorship, (im)maturity and doubling: it contains prominent metafictional elements; the plot revolves around the transformation of the narrator-protagonist Józio into his younger self; and Józio, who is presented as Gombrowicz's alter ego, encounters two ghostly doubles before another character, the clownish boy Miętus ('Kneadus' in Danuta Borchartt's English translation), attaches himself to him and becomes his embarrassing foil.

The narrative structure highlights the self-reflexivity of *Ferdydurke* (see Table 1). The main Józio plot consists of three parts separated by two philosophical tales (chapters five and twelve), each of which is prefaced by a pseudo-theoretical

American shore, so bitterly overdue... and thus [...] filled with the distance of the wind speeding from the polar region.' DE 93.

treatise on authorship (chapters four and eleven). The philosophical tales resemble one another in their emphasis on a logic of symmetry, but are otherwise entirely independent.⁶ The two metafictional prefaces, however, resonate with Józio's reflections on his writing in chapter one. On the last page of *Ferdydurke* Józio deserts the book, fleeing into the hands of his readers. A humorously self-reflexive poem signed 'W.G.' concludes this metafictional novel.

Narrative level	Chapter number											[end]
Main plot (Józio)	1	2	3		6	7	8	9	10		13	14
Metanarrative preface	1		4								11	14 couplet
Philosophical tale				5							12	
Autobiographical reference	1 (<i>Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania</i>)											'W.G.'

Table 1: Narrative levels represented in chapters of *Ferdydurke*.⁷

The main plot's metanarrative layer is introduced in the opening scenes of *Ferdydurke*. Józio Kowalski awakens after a bad dream in which he was a young boy. Józio – a childish nickname for Józef – is a thirty-year-old writer. He thinks about his recently published debut work, *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* ('Memoirs from the Time of Immaturity'⁸). The critical reception of this frank portrayal of a time of transition was poor: instead of saluting Józio's courage, commentators declared him immature. Józio's book, like his name and his nightmare, is symptomatic of his uncomfortable position between immaturity and maturity. The opening scene also announces the proliferation of doubles throughout the novel. First it signals Józio's status as the author's alter ego: Józio lives in Warsaw, as Gombrowicz did until 1939, and his age corresponds roughly to Gombrowicz's at the time. Most importantly, the unfortunate *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* represents a

mise en abyme: it duplicates the title of Gombrowicz's short-story collection of 1933.⁹

A different kind of doubling occurs a few pages later, when Józio becomes aware of a ghostly presence in his bedroom. The apparition, an awkward teenage incarnation of the narrator, is a 'real' presence, not just a dream. Józio examines his double and then chases him away with a slap in the face. Tired of his haunting immaturity he decides to establish his authority through another literary work that would be truly identical with himself. He sets out to write immediately, but just then his old teacher Pimko appears and treats him with such patronizing condescension that Józio turns into a schoolboy; Pimko takes him to school and makes him lodge with a liberal-minded family. Finally Józio finds himself, with his foil Miętus, on his aunt and uncle's traditional country manor – the ultimate locus of infantilization.

There is no agreement among commentators on the significance of the doppelganger scene at the beginning of *Ferdydurke*. Maria Janion (1975) presents it in the context of Polish Romanticism as an 'experiment [...] loose and grotesque'.¹⁰ For Agnieszka Kowalczyk (2004) the scene is somehow related to Gombrowicz's problematic relationship with his mother.¹¹ Hanjo Berressem (1998) reads the ghostly double as a Lacanian mirror embodying 'the violent intervention of the cultural, symbolic order (the ego-ideal) into the unified body-image (the ideal-ego)';¹² he also views Józio's split in terms of Freudian neurosis and perversion (even though for Freud psychic conflict can only result in either neurosis or perversion): 'in Gombrowicz's work, neurotic and perverse structures are superimposed because it is a neurosis that lies at the origin of the fictional, perverse scenarios, a neurosis that is itself a reversal of the perversion and a defense against regression' (p. 48).¹³ Janusz Margański (2002) suggests that Józio's doppelganger

embodies the immaturity enforced on the narrator by the ‘Other,’ that is to say society, powerful institutions such as the school or the literary establishment, and the family,¹⁴ but Michał Paweł Markowski (2004) polemicizes with Magański, and declares that by chasing his double the narrator enters not only the world of literature, but the world *tout court*.¹⁵ I suggest that besides these Romantic and psychoanalytic frameworks, this scene can productively be read in the context of Gombrowicz’s representations of the double across his works – a context that reveals the subtextually allegorical significance of the ghostly doppelganger in *Ferdydurke*.

Gombrowicz authored several versions of the text (see Table 2). An early draft, a sketch of some 30 pages titled ‘Ferdydurke,’ appeared in the literary monthly *Skamander* in July 1935 as part of a work in progress.¹⁶ This text, which contains a first version of the doppelganger scene (A), corresponds to the first chapter of the novel *Ferdydurke*, whose first complete text was published by Rój in Warsaw in 1937 (publication postdated 1938). The doppelganger scene underwent major changes between 1935 (A) and 1937 (B). The second Polish version of the novel, partially rewritten by Gombrowicz, appeared in 1957 (predated 1956) with the Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy in Warsaw. In this version the doppelganger scene is identical to the version of 1937 (B), but I will refer to variations in chapter four of these two Polish editions. For reasons unknown, Gombrowicz’s authorized translations into Spanish (produced with a group of friends in Buenos Aires in 1945-47) and French (co-translated with Roland Martin in 1956) omit the doppelganger scene. They will not be part of my discussion. Unless indicated otherwise, I quote the revised text of 1957 as presented in the critical edition of *Ferdydurke* (2007). This edition also includes earlier variations.

Title	Date	Genre	Language	Doppelganger
‘Ferdydurke’	1935	Short sketch	Polish	Yes (A)
<i>Ferdydurke</i>	1937	Novel, 1 st edition	Polish	Yes (B)
<i>Ferdydurke</i>	1947	Novel	Spanish	No
<i>Ferdydurke</i>	1957	Novel, 2 nd edition	Polish	Yes (B)
<i>Ferdydurke</i>	1958	Novel	French	No

Table 2: Drafts, versions, and translations of *Ferdydurke* authored by Gombrowicz.

The doppelganger scene at the beginning of *Ferdydurke* takes up no more than two pages out of ca. 230. Józio, who just had a nightmare about his younger self, is predisposed to think about his past and to question his maturity, while his frustration with the critics who misunderstood his first publication puts him in the mood to examine his role as an author. He wonders whether in his next book he should assume a posture of maturity, or continue to thematize his immaturity. When his ghostly adolescent double appears in his bedroom Józio does not suspect that the awkward, pimply doppelganger might have anything to do with his profession as a writer. Scrutinizing his younger self, however, he begins to doubt his identity, and describes the double’s face as ‘twarz, która była moją i nie moją’ (F 15)*. The vision makes him think of ‘znaki i symptomy dwojakich wpływów, twarz, którą dwie siły, zewnętrzna i wewnętrzna, utarły pomiędzy sobą’ (ibid.)†. He even associates the double with his home: ‘Oto nos mój... oto moje usta... oto uszy moje, dom mój. Witajcie, znajome kąty!’ (Ibid.)‡. With the light of dawn, the ghost’s grotesque body

* ‘a face that was mine and yet it wasn’t mine.’ FE 12.

† ‘all the signs and symptoms of a twofold impact, a face that two forces, an outer and an inner, had ground between them.’ Ibid.

‡ ‘Here were my lips... my ears... my nose, they were my home. Hail familiar nooks and crannies!’ Ibid.

parts appear clearly, rendering the vision disturbingly precise. But the narrator cannot stop staring:

Nie mogłem nie patrzeć. A więc taki byłem. [...] I szczegóły uwydatniały się coraz lepiej, coraz straszniej, zewsząd wylażyły mu części ciała, pojedyncze części, a te części były dokładnie określone, skonkretyzowane... do granic haniebnej wyrazistości... do granic hańby... (ibid.)*

Mesmerized by his double's fragmented body Józio approaches him and, unable to hold back his outstretched arm, he slaps him in the face. He is indignant about the blurring of identities between him and his younger self:

Nie, to wcale nie ja! To coś przypadkowego, coś obcego, narzuconego, jakiś kompromis pomiędzy światem zewnętrznym a wewnętrznym, to wcale nie *moje* ciało! [...] Ja właściwie jestem inny! (F 16)†

The apparition vanishes, and now Józio has only one desire: 'Ach, stworzyć formę własną! Przerzucić się na zewnątrz! Wyrazić się!' (Ibid.)‡. He sets out at once to produce an uncompromising expression of his identity – a new book. But at this moment professor Pimko appears, and puts an end to Józio's maturity and writing.

* 'Yet I could not refrain from looking. Because that's the way I am. [...] The details emerged more and more clearly, more and more horribly, body parts creeping out of him everywhere, one by one, clearly defined and real... to the limits of their disgraceful clarity... to the limits of disgrace...' FE 13.

† 'this is not me at all! This is something randomly thrust upon me, something alien, an intrusion, a compromise between the inner and the outer world, it's not *my* body at all! [...] In reality I was quite different!' FE 13-14.

A certain ambivalence is conveyed by the word 'wcale', which has a double meaning, depending on whether it is used with or without the negation 'nie'. 'Wcale nie' means 'not at all.' But in colloquial Polish, 'wcale,' used without the negation, can also mean 'quite.' Moreover, the etymology of 'wcale' suggests an ambivalence through the connotation with 'cały' – 'whole.' An alternative translation, suggested to me by Dan Kupfert Heller, would be: 'this is entirely not my body!' The assonance between 'wcale' and 'ciało' [body], however, remains untranslatable.

‡ 'Oh, to create my own form! To turn outward! To express myself!' FE 14.

The doppelganger scene has a singular status within the novel. On the one hand it seems disconnected from the rest of the story, as the ghost becomes visible and disappears before the main plot even begins; what is more, the fantastic apparition clashes with the rest of the narrative in terms of genre conventions.¹⁷ But on the other hand the scene is placed between two passages concerned with authorship: the doppelganger appears while Józio is brooding over the failure of his first book, *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania*; as soon as he disappears the narrator begins to write his second work. Thus the doppelganger scene, although it is not explicitly self-reflexive, occupies a privileged position with respect to the novel's metafictionality. This position indicates that the ghostly double may represent an allegory of authorship. What is more, Gombrowicz's later representations of his younger doubles – such as in the diary passages discussed at the beginning of this chapter – suggest that this doppelganger might also have served him to explore his development as a writer. Responding to the scene's ambivalent status within the novel I will also tackle some of the questions raised by the gaps in the text: why is the narrator embarrassed on behalf of his double, whom he perceives as 'same, but different'? What are the 'inner' and 'outer' forces that shape the double's face? Why does Józio associate the double's face with his home? And finally, why is Józio violent towards the double?

Józio's encounter with his doppelganger introduces *Ferdydurke's* intertextual relationship with Dostoevsky's novella, *The Double*, published in 1846.¹⁸ Dostoevsky's protagonist Golyadkin encounters his phantasmagorical doppelganger in the form of a physically identical person who shares his name, works in the same office, frequents his social circle, and gradually brings about his ruin. The protagonist loses his ability to distinguish himself from his double, and begins to

doubt which of them is the real Golyadkin. Gombrowicz's Józio echoes his Russian model's near-automatic behaviour. What is more, *The Double* and *Ferdydurke* share similar beginnings and endings: both open with the protagonist waking up in his apartment, and end with the protagonist holding his head in his hands.¹⁹ But while Golyadkin's doppelganger finally leads to his demise, in *Ferdydurke* the double also presents a source of inspiration, both for the narrator Józio, who sets out to write his book immediately after he exorcises the ghost, and for Gombrowicz, who returns to the image of the doppelganger throughout his career.

Another intertext of Gombrowicz's doppelganger scene is Freud's above-mentioned essay, 'Das Unheimliche,' which singles out the figure of the doppelganger as a key trope of the uncanny. Freud suggests that as a return of the repressed (e.g. an adult's repressed narcissism) the doppelganger can embody a primitive or infantile state. This idea clearly resonates with Gombrowicz's image of the doppelganger as an immature self. Although no published Polish translation of Freud's essay existed at the time when Gombrowicz wrote this scene, a French translation had appeared in 1933.²⁰ It is unclear if Gombrowicz was familiar with Freud's notion of the uncanny, but it is certain that in 1935 he published a polemical essay on psychoanalytic interpretations of contemporary literature – an essay that begins as a review of the Polish translation of Freud's *Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*.²¹ Concerning his use of psychoanalytic motifs in *Ferdydurke*, Gombrowicz insisted that he did not draw on Freud's ideas: 'w *Ferdydurke* jawi się pewien świat niższy, wstydlivy, z trudnością dający się wyznać i sformułować, nie będący wszakże światem instynktu i podświadomości w sensie freudowskim' (D3

57)*.²² Nonetheless, Józio's encounter with his double shows certain similarities with Freud's essay. The narrator's perception of the doppelganger's face as both strange and familiar – 'twarz, która była moją i nie moją' (F 15)[†] and 'kompromis pomiędzy światem zewnętrznym a wewnętrznym' (F 16)[‡] – brings to mind Freud's formulation, 'das Unheimliche ist also [...] das ehemals Heimische, Altvertraute'.²³ At the same time, Józio's protestations, 'Nie, to wcale nie ja!' (F 16) ['this is not me at all!' (FE 13)] and 'to wcale nie *moje* ciało!' (F 16) ['it's not *my* body at all!' (FE 14)] recall Freud's insistence on repression (p. 267). Józio also exclaims, 'oto nos mój... oto moje usta... oto uszy moje, dom mój. Witajcie, znajome kąty!' (F 15)[§]. This fragment seems almost to mimic Freud's etymological analysis of the words *heimlich* and *unheimlich*: while *heimlich* signifies 'belonging to the house; friendly; familiar,' as well as 'concealed, secret, private,' the word's meaning hinges on a question of perspective, since that which is homely and familiar to one person will be concealed from another. '*Unheimlich*' connotes for Freud something that is hidden not only from others, but also from the self: 'Unheimlich ist irgendwie eine Art von heimlich' (p. 250).

The early version of the doppelganger scene, published in 1935 as part of Gombrowicz's work in progress, contains none of the above-mentioned parallels with Freud's essay. The narrator, unnamed in this text, experiences intense aversion and desire for his double, but none of the subtler feelings of ambivalence. He falls to his knees before his younger self, addressing him as 'O, ty, kochanko, ojczyzno, ty

* 'in *Ferdydurke* a shameful inner world is revealed which can only be confessed to and formulated with the greatest difficulty. Yet this world is not the Freudian world of instinct and the subconscious.' KT 65.

† 'a face that was mine and yet it wasn't mine.' FE 12.

‡ 'a compromise between the inner and the outer world'. FE 13.

§ 'Here were my lips... my ears... my nose, they were my home. Hail familiar nooks and crannies!' FE 12.

fakcie!’ (F 282)*. Then he mixes patriotic discourses into his expressions of gender-confused romantic ardour: ‘Właściwie głupio było wyciągać ręce do mężczyzny, zwłaszcza gdy ten mężczyzna był mną. [...] Czemuż nie byłem ułanem, któremu ukazała się dziewczyna albo ojczyzna, niestety – ja sam się sobie ukazałem’ (ibid.)†. The mishmash of idioms in this passage references Modernist tropes of unspeakable homoerotic desire, as well as medical and psychological discourses on homosexuality:

Nie umiałem znaleźć słów, gotowych słów na ten rodzaj miłości – nie było, nie było też uznanego rytuału gestów. Natomiast w głowie huczało mi od nieprzyjemnych medyczno-psychologicznych terminów, jakimi redaktorzy gazet straszą abonentów w artykułach wstępnych, a mianowicie – płaski egoizm, zgniły egocentryzm, dekadenski egotyzm i brudny narcyzm. (Ibid.)‡

Paradoxically, the allusion to established tropes of unspeakability is conveyed by the narrator’s complaint about the lack of conventions of writing about illicit desire. According to German Ritz, Gombrowicz’s relation with Polish Modernism resides in ‘his concept of that which is unspeakable – the language of homosexual desire’.²⁴ In the novel *Pornografia* of 1960, Ritz argues, ‘the unspeakable itself becomes a figure of speech’ (p. 208); Gombrowicz also transcends Polish Modernist conventions of doubling as ‘an encrypted sign for the lacking or muted identification of the I as homosexual’ (p. 204). According to Ritz, Gombrowicz’s engagement with these tropes and conventions found its full expression in his mature years. The early

* ‘Oh, you, my mistress, my fatherland, you fact!’

† ‘Why, it was stupid to hold out one’s arms to a man, especially if that man was me. [...] Why was I not an Uhlman to whom a girl or the fatherland had appeared, alas – I had appeared to myself.’

‡ ‘I could not find words, ready words for this kind of love – there were none, nor was there an established ritual of gestures. At the same time my head was buzzing with unpleasant medico-psychological terms such as newspaper men use in their editorials to frighten their subscribers – namely shallow egoism, rotten egocentrism, decadent egotism, and dirty narcissism.’

experiment of ‘Ferdydurke,’ however, shows that Gombrowicz already grappled with the legacy of Polish Modernist representations of homoerotic desire as early as the mid-1930s.

The Modernists’ use of doubling as a signifier for illicit desire responds to representations of homosexuality in early psychoanalysis. According to Andrew J. Webber, doppelgänger texts are particularly well suited to convey same-sex desire understood as ‘an intrinsically narcissistic “condition”’.²⁵ While Webber’s analysis concerns German literature, Ritz identifies the same trope in the Polish Modernists Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Tadeusz Breza, and Wilhelm Mach. Gombrowicz takes a self-conscious stance towards this association between same-sex desire and the doppelgänger motif: drawing on the trope of doubling in the sketch ‘Ferdydurke’ of 1935, he parodies jargonistic debates on psycho-sexual disorders. The confrontation between the narrator and his double is presented in more violent terms in this early text. Rather than slapping his younger self, as Józio does in the 1937 version, the early narrator spits in his face. This gesture, which arguably engages with the concept of ‘homosexual panic’,²⁶ lacks the lighthearted parodic tone and structural games of the later version. Rewriting the scene for the 1937 book publication, Gombrowicz toned down the narrator’s obsession with psychological debates, and enhanced Józio’s ambivalence towards his doppelgänger. Though he is still torn between fascination and shame, desire and aversion, Józio slaps his double in the face as the result of an automatic gesture rather than passionate hatred. This automatism foreshadows his subsequent involuntary actions, while the slap itself reverberates throughout the novel’s subsequent chapters, where face-slapping becomes a key motif. Above all, the fact that Gombrowicz relinquishes his early parodies on discourses on homosexuality yields a set of *abstract* conflicts and

reactions that invite a broader, more theoretical reading of the doppelganger scene in its final version.

Another element that Gombrowicz eliminated from the beginning of *Ferdydurke* between 1935 and 1937 is an intertextual reference to Dante's *Inferno*: just as Dante encounters three wild beasts before he meets Virgil, Gombrowicz's narrator, in the early version of 1935, confronts three characters (his doppelganger, his maid, and his school friend Piekosiński) before Pimko arrives on the scene (F 283-85). This structural parallel between the beginnings of *Inferno* and of 'Ferdydurke,' which has not been described so far, sheds light on Gombrowicz's problematic relationship with *il Poeta*.²⁷ It also suggests that the doppelganger scene in *Ferdydurke* is rooted in the writer's confrontation with a mighty forebear, Dante, who had to come to terms with the legacy of Virgil. Scaling down the variety of discourses and allusions in the 1937 book version of *Ferdydurke*, Gombrowicz obscured the intertextual reference to Dante's *Inferno*. However, he decided to portray the narrator as a writer, and to identify him as his alter ego through the reference to his *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania*. These modifications highlight the metafictionality of *Ferdydurke* in a way that the 1935 version did not anticipate.

* * *

Gombrowicz's imaginary doppelgangers appear in various guises throughout his literary career. He first identifies one of his fictional characters as his alter-ego in the 1937 version of *Ferdydurke*, but his subsequent novels intensify and dramatize this form of doubling: the narrator-protagonists of *Trans-Atlantyk* (1953), *Pornografia* (1960), and *Kosmos* (*Cosmos*; 1965) are named 'Gombrowicz,' 'Witold

Gombrowicz,' and 'Witold' respectively.²⁸ What is more, these doubles all have their own fictional doppelganger. Gombrowicz places himself at the centre of multiple reflections that seemingly affirm his primacy; he is the original after which the doubles and doubles' doubles are modelled. But his fictional alter-egos also undermine his status as a unique and coherent individual; they threaten his self-sufficiency and subvert his authority by telling their versions of the stories.

It would seem that this kind of blurring of identities can only take place in works of fiction, where the narrator is understood to be distinct from the author. And yet, Gombrowicz's autobiographical and programmatic works, where the author's voice is supposed to coincide more or less with the narrative 'I,' present an even more unsettling form of doubling. Instead of maintaining and reaffirming the position of the original after which his fictional creations are modelled, Gombrowicz, in his autobiographical writings, fashions himself as the double of his fictional narrators. In this way he not only undermines his superior position as a model for the fictitious doubles that populate his oeuvre, but also subverts the very notion of a hierarchy between original and copy.

This doubling between Gombrowicz the author and his fictional narrators affects in particular his relationship with two narrators from *Ferdydurke* and one from an early short story ('Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego' / 'The Memoirs of Stefan Czarniecki'). A particularly forceful instance where Gombrowicz destabilizes his authorial identity occurs in *Testament* (1968), when he discusses his choice of the nonsensical title *Ferdydurke*. Emphasizing that at the time of writing he was torn between maturity and immaturity, he presents an image of a split self:

Przypadek? Nie tak bardzo. Ten tytuł nie był przypadkowy. Nie było przypadkiem, że moje ja, niezgrabne, kompromitujące, dopadło w ostatnim momencie błyskotliwego tomiku, by wycisnąć na nim swoje piętno. W ten sposób mój tomik został

*wzbogacony i pogłębiany... tym właśnie ‘ja,’ które miało pozostać w ukryciu. (D4 41)**

Suggesting that the title ‘Ferdynand’ was forcefully imposed by an awkward, immature ‘I’ – an authorial double that was nevertheless beneficial to the work – Gombrowicz subverts assumptions about authorial identity and autonomy: the conscious and mature ‘I’ is never entirely in charge of the work; it must accommodate the element of immaturity, that Other which represents the locus of inspiration. This reasoning echoes the metafictional narrator of the first preface of *Ferdynand* (chapter four). Here the element of uncontrolled inspiration is also embodied in an inferior creature that pounces on the mature author and drags his writing down into the realm of immaturity:

Ściąga [duszę autora], zwięża, ugniata łapami i obejmując ją, wchłaniając, wsysając, odmładza ją swą młodością, zaprawia swą niedojrzałością i przyrządza ją sobie na swą modłę, sprowadzając na poziom swój – ach, w swoje ramiona! (F 76)†

Here, too, the author must admit that the inferior creature, though shameful and violent, is a source of vitality for the work:

Czyż ten gwałt bolesny, dokonany na naszej osobie przez półciemną niższość, nie jest najpłodniejszym z gwałtów? (Ibid.)‡

* ‘Chance? Not really. This title was not due to chance. It was not by chance that my awkward, compromising self seized that glittering little volume in the last moment and made its mark on it. This is how my little book was *enriched and deepened...* by that ‘I’ that had to remain secret.’ KT 50.

† ‘drags [the author’s soul] down, constricts it, kneads it with his paws, yet at the same time, by embracing this soul, by soaking it up, sucking it in, he rejuvenates it with his youth, seasons it with his immaturity, and prepares it to his own liking, then brings it down to his own level – and oh, into his arms!’ FE 82.

‡ ‘isn’t this painful violence that’s being committed on our person by some half-enlightened, inferior being the most fruitful of all violence?’ FE 83, translation modified, as Borchartd renders ‘najpłodniejszym’ as ‘most seminal;’ *plód*, however, refers not to semen but to the embryo or foetus.

Another overlap occurs when Gombrowicz echoes the same metafictional narrator's claim that writing is a non-linear back-and-forth movement in which the different parts of the emergent text shape one another: 'początek zakłada koniec, a koniec – początek, środek zaś stwarza się między początkiem a końcem' (F 67)*. Gombrowicz duplicates this assertion in 1968, when he discusses the genesis of *Ferdydurke*:

Na tych pierwszych stronach *Ferdydurke* moje ambicje nie sięgały poza dowcipną satyrę [...]. Ale wkrótce utwór tak gwałtownie mi się roztańczył, tak zaczął ponosić w stronę najbardziej zwariowanej groteski, że musiałem przerobić cały początek nadając mu to samo groteskowe nasilenie. (D4 42)†

As we have seen above, the beginning of *Ferdydurke* does indeed exist in two versions. But Gombrowicz could not have had in mind the text 'Ferdydurke' of 1935, since, contrary to his statement above, that text is decidedly more grotesque than the condensed and simplified final version in the novel. Unless there existed yet another draft, now lost, we must conclude that in 1968 Gombrowicz portrayed the genesis of *Ferdydurke* in a way that would be consistent with his fictional narrator's argument.

Gombrowicz also mimics the main narrator Józio on several occasions. In 1955 he admits that when he wrote *Ferdydurke* he was not entirely certain of his aims:

Sam w sercu swoim nie wiedziałem na pewno czy [*Ferdydurke*] chce być 'młoda' czy dojrzała? Czy jest kompromitującym wyrazem mego wieczystego urzeczenia młoda, więc czarująca,

* 'the beginning sets up the end, and the end – the beginning, while the middle evolves between the beginning and the end.' FE 72.

† 'when I started *Ferdydurke*, I wanted to write no more than a biting satire [...]. But my words were soon whirled away in a violent dance, they took the bit between their teeth and galloped towards a grotesque lunacy with such speed that I had to rewrite the first part of the book in order to give it the same grotesque intensity.' KT 50.

niższością, czy też dążeniem do dumnej, ale tragicznej i niepociągającej, dojrzałej wyższości? (D1 204)*

This passage brings to mind Józio's split between maturity and immaturity:

Chodziłem po kawiarniach i po barach, spotykałem się z ludźmi [...], ale sytuacja była niewyjaśniona i sam nie wiedziałem, czym człowiek, czym chłystek; i tak na przełomie lat nie byłem ani tym, ani owym – byłem niczym (F 6-7)†

Józio is undecided if in his next book he should 'skonsolidować się twardo na gruncie dorosłym' (F 14)‡, or if he should better embrace his attachment to everything that is immature: 'kocham, kocham te pączki, te kielki, te krzaczki zielone, o!' (Ibid.)§. Gombrowicz echoes Józio in another diary entry on the process of writing *Ferdydurke*. Here he asserts that writing his first novel he merely imitated mature writers:

Nie mogłem znaleźć formy na wypowiedzenie mej rzeczywistości. Nie mogłem w ogóle określić tej rzeczywistości, znaleźć swego miejsca. W tych warunkach mogłem tylko – i tak napisałem w *Ferdydurke* – udawać pisarza (wzorem innych kolegów). (D1 262)**

The interjection 'i tak napisałem w *Ferdydurke*' ['and this is what I wrote in *Ferdydurke*'] explicitly recalls the fictional narrator's discourse. In fact, Gombrowicz's statement is partially identical with Józio's question, 'udawać pisarza

* 'in my heart of hearts I didn't know myself if [*Ferdydurke*] had wanted to be "young" or mature, I really did not know. Had it been a compromising expression of my eternal enchantment with young, therefore charming, inferiority, or a striving toward a proud but tragic and unprepossessing mature superiority?' DE 159, translation modified.

† 'I frequented bars and cafés where I met up with people [...], but my status was not at all clear, and I myself did not know whether I was a mature man or a green youth; at this turning point of my life I was neither this nor that – I was nothing'. FE 3, translation modified.

‡ 'settle myself squarely on mature turf'. FE 11.

§ 'I love them, I love the little buds and sprouts, the little sprigs of green, oh!' Ibid.

** 'I could not find a form to express my reality. I could not, in general, describe this reality, find my place. In these conditions I could only – and this is what I wrote in *Ferdydurke* – pretend to be a writer (modelled on other colleagues).' DE 206.

i literata, parodiować styl literacki i dojrzałe, wyszukane zwroty?’ (F 12)*. The repetition of ‘udawać pisarza’ – to pretend to be an author – suggests that there can be no stable authorial identity: Gombrowicz imitates his literary colleagues; Józio is a mirror image of Gombrowicz; Gombrowicz repeats Józio’s words, and Józio has qualms about imitating other writers.²⁹ Authorship, for Gombrowicz, is inherently inauthentic.

Gombrowicz’s attempts to blur the boundaries between himself and his work pervade his autobiographical texts and mark his choices for the titles of some of his publications. In *Dziennik* he refers to himself as ‘ja, Ferdurke’ (‘I, Ferdurke’) on two occasions (D1 209; DE 163 and D3 163; DE 644). In *Testament* he speaks of Józio in the first person (D4 41-42; KT 50). He also returns to Józio’s dilemmas in his recollections of his literary debut. As we have seen above, Józio bemoans the choice of a title that exposes his immaturity: ‘Dlaczego jednak pióro mnie zdradziło? [...] Dlaczego, jak gdyby na przekór własnym zamierzeniom, książce dałem tytuł *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania?*’ (F 8)†. In *Testament* Gombrowicz asserts – like Józio – that the title of his short story collection was ‘ill-chosen’ and caused misunderstandings among his critics (D4 34; KT 43-44). Logically, if he was so discontented with the book’s titular immaturity, he should have titled his first novel in a way that should establish his maturity, but instead, he gave it the meaningless title ‘Ferdurke’.³⁰ Similarly, Gombrowicz could have opted for a mature title when he republished the short story collection with the Wydawnictwo Literackie in Cracow in 1957. And yet, he substituted the original title *Pamiętnik z okresu*

* ‘To pretend you’re a writer, a man of letters, to parody literary style and mature, fanciful phrases?’ FE 9.

† ‘So why did my pen betray me? [...] Why did I, as if thwarting my own purpose, entitle my book *Memoirs from the Time of Immaturity?*’ FE 4.

dojrzewania with the nonsensical *Bakakaj*. This title not only sounds like babytalk in Polish; it has also been suggested that in Spanish it is homophonous with ‘Bah, caca hay’ [‘Bah, poo there is’].³¹ Whether or not a scatological pun was intended, Gombrowicz re-enacts Józio’s dilemma, as if he wanted to ask himself, ‘why did I, as if thwarting my own purpose, entitle my book *Bacacay?*’.

* * *

The notion of the author thwarting his own purpose, or of the text running away with itself, is key to Gombrowicz’s understanding of authorship. His most extensive discussion of literary composition as a negotiation of creativity and control can be found in his diary of 1954, where he gives a detailed account of his writing technique under the guise of a ‘formula’ [recepta] for aspiring authors. At first he invites the apprentice writer to indulge in a bout of automatic writing:

Wejdź w sferę snu.

Po czym zacznij pisać pierwszą lepszą historię, jaka ci przyjdzie do głowy i napisz ze 20 stron. Potem przeczytaj. (D1 125)*

Gombrowicz seems to acknowledge, implicitly, the Surrealists’ influence on his writing technique: the above-quoted beginning of his ‘formula,’ written in the imperative mode, echoes André Breton’s manual of automatic writing as presented in the first Surrealist Manifesto. This section, titled ‘Secrets de l’art magique surréaliste,’ presents the following advice:

Placez-vous dans l’état le plus passif, ou réceptif, que vous pourrez. Faites abstraction de votre génie, de vos talents et de

* ‘Enter the realm of dreams.

After which begin writing the first story that comes to mind and write about twenty pages. Then read it.’ DE 96.

ceux de tous les autres. [...] Écrivez vite sans sujet préconçu, assez vite pour ne pas retenir et ne pas être tenté de vous relire. La première phrase viendra toute seule, tant il est vrai qu'à chaque seconde il est une phrase étrangère à notre pensée consciente qui ne demande qu'à s'extérioriser. [...] Continuez autant qu'il vous plaira. Fiez-vous au caractère inépuisable du murmure. Si le silence menace de s'établir pour peu que vous ayez commis une faute [...] rompez sans hésiter avec une ligne trop claire.³²

While Breton advises writers to continue in the automatic mode for as long as they wish, Gombrowicz asserts that the self-born [samorodne] text must be forced to satisfy the author's intention. After about 20 pages the writer should stop and return to the beginning. In the next phase of writing – a phase of rereading that has no place in Breton's prescription for unrestrained creativity – Gombrowicz recommends that the writer should select themes or metaphors that seem promising, and rewrite the text with a conscious focus on chosen images. The text should satisfy the author's imagination. Thus a code [szyfr] will emerge, and the writing will come along almost automatically: 'to, co już stworzyłeś, podyktuje ci resztę' (ibid.)^{*}. Despite this element of automatic dictation, however, it is the author's responsibility to resolve all ethical, stylistic and structural problems: 'Jednakże cała rzecz w tym, abyś, poddając się w ten sposób biernie dziełu, pozwalając aby stwarzało się samo, nie przestał ani na chwilę nad nim panować' (ibid.)[†]. For Breton any moment of 'silence' in the writing process indicates a 'mistake' [faute] on the writer's part. Gombrowicz, by contrast, proposes a model of authorship that integrates the opposing forces of creativity and control, and posits silence as a constitutive part of literary creativity. (I will return to this topic in the following chapter, which focuses on Gombrowicz's fascination with silence in the 1950s.)

^{*} 'that which you have already created will dictate the rest to you.' DE 97.

[†] 'The whole trick, though, is that while surrendering yourself passively to the work and letting it create itself, you do not, even for a moment, stop controlling it.' Ibid.

Continuing his discussion of literary composition, Gombrowicz draws on a metaphor of parenthood: out of the ‘battle’ between creativity and control is ‘born’ a ‘third thing,’ a ‘bastard’ whose paternity is unclear:

Z walki pomiędzy wewnętrzną logiką dzieła, a moją osobą (gdyż nie wiadomo: czy dzieło jest tylko pretekstem abym ja się wypowiedział, czy też ja jestem pretekstem dla dzieła), z tego zmagania rodzi się coś trzeciego, coś pośredniego, coś jakby nie przeze mnie napisanego, a jednak mojego – nie będącego ani czystą formą, ani bezpośrednio moją wypowiedzią, lecz deformacją zrodzoną w sferze ‘między’: między mną a formą, między mną a czytelnikiem, między mną a światem. Ten twór dziwny, tego bastarda, wsadzam w kopertę i posyłam wydawcy. (D1 125-26)*

The work threatens the hierarchy of cause and effect, as the author begins to doubt whether the work justifies him, or he the work.³³ The ‘third thing’ – the child/text born of the struggle – is and at the same time is not an expression of the author’s intention. Gombrowicz refers to it as ‘this bastard’ [tego bastarda], but he sends it off to the publisher nonetheless, apparently feeling neither pride nor joy, but impatient resignation. It seems that the work is at best a compromise, but it is all that the author can do.

Gombrowicz’s reference to the work as a ‘bastard’ born of the battle between the author and the force of the emergent writing in the above-quoted passage is one among a plethora of comments on writing in which he employs images of childbearing and parenthood. He uses conventional metaphors of ‘giving birth’ to a work across his oeuvre, and often exaggerates standard clichés. In *Testament*, for

* ‘out of the struggle between the inner logic of the work and my person (for it is not yet clear: is the work a mere pretext for expressing myself or am I a pretext for the work), out of this wrestling is born a third thing, something indirect, something that seems not to have been written by me, yet it is mine, something that is neither pure form nor my direct expression, but a deformation born in an intermediary sphere; between me and form, between me and the reader, between me and the world. This strange creation, this bastard, I put in an envelope and mail to a publisher.’ Ibid., translation modified: the fragment ‘between me and form, between me and the reader’ is missing in Lillian Vallee’s translation.

instance, he writes about the genesis of *Ferdydurke*: ‘Urodzenie książki nigdy nie jest przyjemne, ale ten poród ze wszystkich moich był najgorszy’ (D4 53)*. Here it is the process of writing that is described in terms of childbirth; elsewhere Gombrowicz uses labour as a metaphor for a work’s coming into the world, that is its reception: anticipating that *Trans-Atlantyk* would not go down easily with its readers, for instance, he asked the respected émigré writer Józef Wittlin to write an introduction, and in the diary of 1957 he describes Wittlin’s role as ‘akusze[r] trudnego porodu’ (D2 19)†.

An image of troubled paternity in relation to authorship also occurs in *Ferdydurke*, where the metafictional narrator of chapter four (in both Polish editions of the book) describes his encounter with the automatic force of the text. Like in the diary passage where Gombrowicz describes his work as a ‘bastard,’ here, too, the author is left uncertain about his work’s legitimacy:

Cóż tedy począc mamy z taką częścią, która się urodziła
niepodobna do nas, jakby tysiąc jurnych, ognistych ogierów
nawiedziło łożę matki naszego dziecięcia – ha, jedynie chyba dla
uratowania pozorów ojcostwa musimy z całą potęgą moralną
upodobnić się do naszego dzieła, gdy ono nie chce być do nas
podobne. (F 67)‡

The identity of the author’s female partner remains unclear, and we are not told whether the lustful, fiery stallions rape her, or whether they are incubi that she desires. In either case, the author is not involved in the act of creation; he can merely pretend, for the sake of appearances, to have fathered the work that is in fact the

* ‘Giving birth to a book is never enjoyable, but this birth was the most agonizing of all.’ KT 61, translation modified.

† ‘the midwife for this difficult birth.’ DE 296.

‡ ‘What are we then to do with such a part that has turned up and is not in our likeness, as if a thousand lustful, fiery stallions had visited the bed of our child’s mother – and hey! If only to save some semblance of paternity we must, with all the moral power at our disposal, try to resemble our work, [since] it would not resemble us.’ FE 72-73, translation modified.

offspring of an unidentified woman's intercourse with animalistic forces. The three elements concerned by this creation – the woman, the stallions, and the author – can be seen as representing three moments of authorship: the women and the stallions, which parody traditional concepts of sexual reproduction between the passive female and the active male, stand for the mind's receptivity and creative genius. The third element, that is to say the author, does not directly participate in the creative act. His role is to lend his name to the work and to assume public responsibility for it.

The 'lustful fiery stallions' in *Ferdydurke* highlight images of authorship that connote violence and desire in Gombrowicz's first novel as well as throughout his writing. Besides the force of the emerging text (embodied in the image of the stallions), the Other of authorship also includes the image of the reader. In the above-quoted diary passage of 1954, Gombrowicz suggests that the work is born 'między mną a czytelnikiem' ['between me and the reader']. This concept of the reader's participation in the creative act is also a key concern in *Ferdydurke*, where two of the narrators thematize the role of the reader in their experience of authorship.

The writer-narrator Józio is painfully aware of the internalized reader's influence. He asserts that the development of the work depends on what kind of audience it is written for:

Czy [...] pisząc ma na myśli, bierze pod uwagę jedynie ludzi dorosłych, [...] czy też nieustannie prześladowa go wizja gminu, niedojrzałości, uczniów, pensjonarek, obywateli ziemskich i wiejskich, ciotek kulturalnych, publicystów i felietonistów. (F 11)*

Józio suffers from an obsession with the least mature and least competent among potential future readers. This is why his works are doomed to remain immature:

* 'whether one directs oneself solely toward those who are mature [...], or whether one lets oneself be constantly plagued by a vision of the rabble, of immaturity, of schoolboys and schoolgirls, of gentry and peasantry, of cultural aunts, of journalists and columnists.' FE 8, translation modified.

Ani na chwilę nie mogłem zapomnieć o niedoświatku ludzi niedoludzkich [...] nie umiałem [...] się oderwać, byłem zafascynowany [...]. Jakby demon jakiś kusił mię do niedojrzałości! Jakbym w kontrnaturze sprzyjał niższej sferze i kochał – za to, że przytrzymuje mnie u siebie chłystkiem. (F 11)*

This passage foregrounds two key motifs of Gombrowicz's discourse on writing: the 'demonic' alterity that influences his work from its very conception, and his quasi-amorous fascination with this alterity. The neologisms '*niedoświatku*' [*not-quite-world*] and '*niedoludzkich*' [*not-quite-human*] highlight Józio's fascination with *niedojrzałość* [immaturity]. Having internalized his immature readers, he produces work that is immature. This in turn provokes mature readers to label him 'immature'. Finally, Józio assimilates that opinion and actually becomes as immature as he is perceived to be. As a result of this vicious circle he remains barred from authentic self-expression:

Nie mogłem ani przez jedną sekundę mówić mądrze, chociażby na tyle, na ile zdobyć się potrafię, ponieważ wiedziałem, że gdzieś tam na prowincji pewien lekarz ma mnie za głupiego i oczekuje ode mnie jeno głupstwa. (Ibid.)†

Józio summarizes his predicament in the following passage:

W świecie ducha odbywa się gwałt permanentny, nie jesteśmy samoistni, jesteśmy tylko funkcją innych ludzi, musimy być takimi, jakimi nas widzą, a już moją osobistą klęską było, że z jakąś niezdrową rozkoszą uzależniałem się najchętniej od niedorostków, wyrostków, podlotków oraz ciotek kulturalnych. A, ciągle, ciągle mieć na karku ciotkę – być naiwnym dlatego, iż ktoś naiwny sądzi, że jesteś naiwny – być głupim dlatego, że głupi ma cię za głupiego – być zielonym dlatego, że ktoś

* 'Not for one moment could I forget the little not-quite-world of the not-quite-human [...], I could not tear myself away from it [...]. As if some demon were tempting me with immaturity! As if I were favouring, against my very nature, the lower class and loving it – because it held me captive as a juvenile.' Ibid.

† 'I would not have been able even for a moment to speak with intelligence, not even that little bit which I could afford, because I knew that somewhere in the provinces a doctor would think that I was silly anyway, and would expect nothing of me but silliness.' Ibid.

niedojrzały zanurza cię i kąpie we własnej zieleni – a, toż można by oszaleć. (F 11-12)*

The surprising element in this confession is that Józio admits not only to his weakness for ‘niedorostk[i], wyrostk[i], podlotk[i]’ (F 11) [‘green youths, juveniles, teenage girls’ (FE 9)], but also for the ‘cultural aunts,’ the condescending and old-fashioned pedants whom he identifies as the most damaging of all readers.³⁴

In the 1937 edition of *Ferdydurke* Gombrowicz does not return to this image of the ‘cultural aunt’ on the writer’s back, but in the second edition of 1957 the metafictional narrator of chapter four takes up Józio’s idea of an incompetent reader clinging to the back of the author. Taking the Polish idiom *siedzieć komuś na karku* [to be a bother to somebody] literally, he visualizes an incompetent reader actually sitting on the writer’s back:

Wyobraźcie sobie, że bard dorosły i dojrzały, pochylony nad papierem, tworzy... lecz na karku umieścił mu się młodzieniec lub jakiś półinteligent półoswiecony, albo dziewczę młode, lub jakaś osoba o przeciętnie nijakiej i rozlazłej duszy, lub jakakolwiek istota młodsza, niższa lub ciemniejsza – i oto istota owa, ten młodzieniec, dziewczę czy półinteligent, czy wreszcie inny jakiś mętny syn ciemnej ćwierćkultury, rzuca się na [...] duszę [autora] i ściąga ją, zwęża, ugniata łapami i obejmując ją, wchłaniając, wsysając, odmładza ją swą młodością, zaprawia swą niedojrzałością i przyrządza ją sobie na swą modłę, sprowadzając na poziom swój – ach, w swoje ramiona! (F 76)†

* ‘in the world of the spirit, *rape* is the order of the day, we are forced to be as others see us, and to manifest ourselves through them, we are not autonomous, and what’s more – my personal calamity came from an unhealthy delight in actually making myself dependent on green youths, juveniles, teenage girls, and cultural aunts. Ah, to have that cultural aunt forever on your back – to be naïve because someone who is naïve thinks you are naïve – to be silly because some silly person thinks you are silly – to be green because someone who is immature dunks and bathes you in greenness of his own – indeed, that could drive you crazy.’ FE 8-9, translation modified, emphasis added. Borchardt conveys the idiomatic character of ‘*siedzieć komuś na karku*’ (‘to be a bother to somebody,’ or ‘to be a pain in the neck;’ literally ‘to sit on the back of someone’s neck’) by drawing on the English idiom ‘to have a monkey on one’s back’.

† ‘Imagine that the adult and mature bard, leaning over a piece of paper, is in the process of creating... but on his back a youth has squarely settled himself, or some

Józio in chapter one sees the ineluctable presence of the incompetent reader as his personal calamity (F 11; FE 8). In chapter four, by contrast, the intrusive reader also rejuvenates the work; he is the *genius* – the embodied creative spirit – that inspires the author's work. The metafictional narrator's attitude towards this inferior creature recalls his presentation of writing as inspired by lustful, fiery stallions: both creatures are wild and brutal. And yet, both are indispensable to the writer.

There is a significant similarity between this passage from chapter four and the earlier passage about the woman and the stallions: both portray authorship in terms of a co-existence of erotic desire and sexual violence. Just as the image of the woman and the stallions presents their encounter as ambivalently suspended between rape and fulfilment, in the later passage it is not quite clear if the writer is raped by the reader or if he desires this rough encounter: although the reader's presence connotes sexual violence [*gwałt*],³⁵ the narrator's sigh, 'ach, w swoje ramiona' ['oh, into his arms'], expresses yearning. He also suggests that since the reader's assault is inevitable, the author had better embrace it: 'Lecz twórca, zamiast zmierzyć się z najeźdźcą, udaje, że go nie dostrzega, i – cóż za szaleństwo! – sądzi, że uniknie gwałtu robiąc minę, jakby nie był przez nikogo gwałcony' (F 76)*. The image of rape is juxtaposed and subverted with decidedly positive connotations:

semi-enlightened fellow from the semi-intelligentsia, or a young maiden, or some nondescript slouch of a soul, or some kind of juvenile, lowbrow, ignorant creature, and then – this creature, this youth, this maiden, or lowbrow fellow, or for that matter any muddle-headed son of the unenlightened quarter-culture – suddenly pounces on [the author's] soul and drags it down, constricts it, kneads it with his paws, yet at the same time, by embracing this soul, by soaking it up, sucking it in, he rejuvenates it with his youth, seasons it with his immaturity, and prepares it to his own liking, then brings it down to his own level – and oh, into his arms!' FE 82.

* 'But this author, instead of pitting himself against his assailant, pretends that he does not see him and – what idiocy! – he thinks he'll avoid being violated by putting on a face as if he were not being violated.' FE 82-83, translation modified.

Czyż nie musimy w każdej chwili ubiegać się o łaskę istot niższych, dostrajać się do nich, poddawać się bądź to ich przemocy, bądź czarowi – i czyż ten gwałt bolesny, dokonany na naszej osobie przez półciemną niższość, nie jest najplodniejszym z gwałtów? (Ibid.)*

In *Ferdydurke* the reader appears as the author's double, as literary creativity is portrayed as a paradoxically pleasurable act of violence that the reader, a brutish *genius*, performs upon the author. Baudelaire's apostrophe, 'Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère'³⁶ comes to mind. But while Baudelaire and his reader are united by their shared sense of *ennui*, Gombrowicz's lowly and violent reader, positioned at the heart of the creative process, represents an active and fecund source of inspiration. As far as the haunting doubles of authorship are concerned, Gombrowicz presents the internalized image of the reader as an ambivalent, elusive, and yet creative alterity behind the force of writing.

Images of violence and desire, paternity and authorship, exerted a lasting fascination on Gombrowicz, and he seems to have taken pleasure in constructing complex and rather disturbing images interweaving these themes. The opening sentence of his short story 'Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego' ('The Memoirs of Stefan Czarniecki') reads: 'Urodziłem się i wychowałem w domu pełnym zacności' (B 24)[†]. The story's tragically naive narrator-protagonist Stefan is the son of an impoverished Polish aristocrat and a mother who converted from Judaism to Catholicism. The father feels aversion to his wife as a racial Other, and so Stefan wonders how he could have been conceived. He concludes that his parents' union must have taken place through violence, when his father, in the name of marital duty,

* 'Are we not obliged then, at every moment, to ingratiate ourselves with beings who are below us, to tune in with them, to surrender, be it to their power or to their charms – and isn't this painful violence that's being committed on our person by some half-enlightened, inferior being the most fruitful of all violence?' FE 83, translation modified.

† 'I was born and raised in a most respectable home.' BE 17.

overcame his repugnance and with clenched teeth impregnated his wife, Stefan's mother (B 24; BE 18). Filled with all kinds of bigotry and strife, Stefan's parental home strikes the reader as anything but 'respectable'; the beginning of the story is starkly ironic. It is remarkable, therefore, that some 25 years later Gombrowicz quotes this beginning, verbatim, in the opening of his own memoirs, *Wspomnienia polskie* (*Polish Memories*) (W 7; PM 3), thus doubling himself with his troubled fictional hero.³⁷ This doubling resonates with Gombrowicz's above-mentioned strategies of upsetting the logic of primacy according to which he should stand as a model to his fictional creations, his copies. What is more, the quotation, although short, links the author with Stefan's origins, and the image of the parents whose union happens 'wbrew naturalnym odruchom' ['in contravention of natural impulses'] comes to colour Gombrowicz's descriptions of his mother and father, Catholic Poles of the entrepreneurial landed gentry, on the following pages of his memoir.

Gombrowicz portrays his parents on two occasions in his autobiographical writings, and both times he presents them as diametrically different from one another. First, in the above-mentioned *Wspomnienia polskie* (*Polish Memories*), written in the late 1950s, he gives the following account:

Ojciec – piękny mężczyzna, elegancki [...] miał opinię człowieka poważnego, odpowiedzialnego i uczciwego. [...] Doskonały wygląd w połączeniu z umysłem ani specjalnie głębokim, ani o zbyt rozległych zainteresowaniach, ale sprawnie działającym, zapewniały ojcu te stanowiska raczej reprezentacyjne w rozmaitych radach [...].

Moja matka natomiast, odznaczała się niezwykle żywym usposobieniem i bujną wyobraźnią. Nerwowa. Egzaltowana. Niekonsekwentna. Nie umiejąca się kontrolować. (W 9)*

* 'My father, a handsome, dapper man [...] was considered serious, responsible, and honest. [...] His impeccable appearance, in combination with a mind that was neither particularly profound nor had especially wide horizons, yet which worked

In 1968 Gombrowicz returns to the image of his mother and father as embodiments of two antithetical forces. This time he defines how they marked him and his literature:

Mój ojciec? [...] okazały, a też poprawny, punktualny, obowiązkowy, systematyczny, o [...] niewielkiej wrażliwości w rzeczach sztuki [...] A moja matka była żywa, wrażliwa, obdarzona dużą wyobraźnią, leniwa, niezaradna, nerwowa (i bardzo), pełna urazów, fobii, iluzji. [...] Ja jestem artystą po matce, a po ojcu jestem trzeźwy, spokojny, opanowany. (D4 18-19)*

Gombrowicz's representations of his whimsical, uncontrolled mother and his controlled, respectable father echo established narratives of the formation of the artist. Thomas Mann, for instance, attributes an inheritance of contradictory traits to the writers Tonio Kröger in the eponymous novella of 1903, and Gustav Aschenbach in *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912). Both characters reconcile in themselves the opposing impulses of an artistic mother and a solid, business-minded father. This is how Mann describes Aschenbach's origins:

Seine Vorfahren waren Offiziere, Richter, Verwaltungsfunktionäre gewesen, Männer, die im Dienste des Königs, des Staates ihr straffes, anständig karges Leben geführt hatten. [...] rascheres, sinnlicheres Blut war der Familie in der vorigen Generation durch die Mutter des Dichters, Tochter eines böhmischen Kapellmeisters, zugekommen. [...] Die Vermählung dienstlich nüchterner Gewissenhaftigkeit mit dunkleren, feurigeren Impulsen ließ einen Künstler und diesen besonderen Künstler erstehen.³⁸

efficiently, secured for my father those mostly symbolic positions on various committees [...].

My mother, on the other hand, was distinguished by an uncommonly lively nature and a fertile imagination. She was nervous, extravagant, inconsistent; she had no self-control.' PM 5-6.

* 'My father ? [...] distinguished, very proper, punctual, methodical, not very [...] artistic [...]. My mother, on the other hand, was extremely vivacious, sensitive, imaginative, lazy, indolent, nervous, almost too nervous, riddled with complexes, phobias, illusions. [...] I am an artist because of my mother. I inherited my father's lucidity, his level-headedness, and his sense of discipline.' FE 28-29.

Gombrowicz draws on this Mannian notion of the artist as originating from an impulsive and imaginative mother and a proper, disciplined father, in his recollections of his own family background.³⁹ His account of his parents is self-consciously literary, as evidenced by the opening crypto-quotation from his early short story 'Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego' at the beginning of *Wspomnienia polskie*. Even as Gombrowicz establishes a link between his parental home and his literary oeuvre, however, it is not certain to what extent he was aware of the subtextual resonances in his portrayals of his parents.

In his discussion of *Testament*, Tomislav Z. Longinović reads Gombrowicz's binary representation of his parents in the context of Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject.⁴⁰ I would add that the division of gender roles in this later autobiographical passage provides an important contrast to the image of the woman and the stallions in *Ferdydurke*, where the female element is cast in a passive role, while the male element engenders or inspires the work. In *Testament* Gombrowicz explicitly emphasizes the mother's role in his development as an artist:

To ona pchnęła mnie w absurd, który stał się później jednym z najważniejszych elementów mojej sztuki. [...] O, formo! Przerażające idiotyzmy mojej sztuki, które nigdy nie przestaną mnie zachwycać, ta jej zdolność splatania głupstw w łańcuch nieubłagalnej logiki, stąd biorą w dużej mierze swój impuls. (D4 20-21)*

Identifying the feminine element as the carrier of the artistic impulse, Gombrowicz subverts the traditional division of roles according to which the masculine element is foregrounded as vital to the creative process. In this passage he does not, however, appropriate femininity in an image of his own creative androgyny; unlike in the

* 'It was she who pushed me into pure nonsensicality, into the absurd, which was later to become one of the most important elements of my art. [...] Ah, Form! The amazing idiocies of my art, which never cease to amaze me, its capacity to combine stupidity with the most rigorous logic, all originated in these discussions.' KT 29-31, translation modified.

image of gestation that I discussed in the previous chapter (and unlike in the exaggerated clichés of writing-as-childbirth that pervade his works), in this account the author presents his literary creativity as due to a real woman – Antonina Marcelina z Kotkowskich Gombrowiczowa (1872-1959).⁴¹ This portrayal of his mother, however contrived and however acerbic, also represents an homage to her as the origin of his artistic power.⁴²

Gombrowicz's representations of his parents in *Wspomnienia polskie* and *Testament* contain another significant element of subtextual self-reflexivity, which will lead us from the various forms of doubling across his work back into the beginning of his first novel. Gombrowicz's insistence on the antithetical dynamics between his mother and father suggests that in his view, his own genealogy is structurally analogous to his model of authorship: both he and his work are born of a sexualized dialectic reconciling, on the one hand, (female) spontaneity, imagination and creativity, and on the other hand, (male) organization, discipline and control. Products of identical dialectic processes, Gombrowicz and his work are each other's structural twins or doubles. The question of which is the model and which the copy is moot, since their origins are too deeply entwined to be distinguishable from one another. The question remains, however, how Gombrowicz represents his encounter with his double, that is to say – his work.

* * *

In the light of this doubling between Gombrowicz and his work, Józio's ghostly doppelganger in the first chapter of *Ferdydurke* takes on a powerful allegorical character. This haunting younger self coherently embodies Gombrowicz's *Pamiętnik*

z okresu dojrzewania, his first published work, which was on Gombrowicz's/Józio's mind when the spectral double materialized behind the stove. Józio's embarrassment about the gawky doppelgänger's flaws, and his violent rejection of the apparition, are reminiscent of the ambivalence a writer might feel about an early work.

Gombrowicz's portrayals of authorship as a reconciliation of the work's spontaneous (inner) force and the author's (outer) control come to mind when Józio describes the double's face as a combination of 'inner' and 'outer' forces. Józio's perception of his younger double as a *kompromis*, moreover, foreshadows Gombrowicz's later accounts of his work as 'deformacja zrodzoną w sferze "między" '; 'twór dziwny'; 'coś trzeciego, coś pośredniego, coś jakby nie przeze mnie napisanego, a jednak mojego' (D1 125)*. Finally, Józio associates the double with his childhood home, which resonates with Gombrowicz's portrayals of his own origins as a writer, beginning with his parents embodying spontaneity (mother) and discipline (father), and himself as a dialectic reconciliation of their extremes.

What ultimately determines this scene's significance for Gombrowicz's vision authorship is the fact that as soon as the double vanishes Józio begins to write his second book:

Zaczynam pisać pierwsze stronicie dzieła mojego własnego, takiego jak ja, identycznego ze mną, wynikającego wprost ze mnie, dzieła suwerennie przeprowadzającego własną rację moją przeciw wszystkiemu i wszystkim. (F 16)†

By driving off the embarrassing apparition Józio performs a rite of passage in two ways: before he can start writing his mature work he must overcome his inner

* 'a deformation born in an intermediary sphere'; 'this strange creation'; 'a third thing, something indirect, something that seems not to have been written by me, yet it is mine'. DE 97.

† 'I begin [...] to write the first pages of my very own *oeuvre*, which will be just like me, identical with me, the sum total of me, an *oeuvre* in which I will be free to expound my own views against everything and everyone'. FE 14.

immaturity, as previous commentators have suggested. However, in as far as the double embodies not only his *memories* but also his *memoirs* (from the time of immaturity), Józio must exorcize the ghost of his first work, the one that readers have perceived as ‘immature’. To overcome his ghostly double, therefore, also poses the problem of coming to terms with the haunting memory of his debut. Józio – like Gombrowicz – must establish an authorial identity that incorporates the fact of having produced one work in order to be able to begin afresh and compose another. This implies reconciling himself to the first work’s reception – as Margański implies in his discussion of Gombrowicz’s *ressentiment*⁴³ – but also continuing to explore the origins, structures and goals of his creativity. In this dual instance of haunting, that is the writers’ visitation by what is at once his younger self and his first book, Gombrowicz explores his own past *as a writer*.

The main plot of Józio’s adventures begins after he banishes his younger doppelganger with a slap in the face, but another double appears in chapter ten, about two-thirds into the novel. This double, too, is obliquely associated with the metafictional layer of *Ferdydurke*. As Józio escapes the modern family he encounters his perfectly identical double ‘na setny ułamek sekundy’ (F 167)*:

Zdawało mi się, że nie sam idę, ale z sobą – tuż przy mnie, a może we mnie, lub naokoło mnie szedł ktoś identyczny i tożsamy, mój – we mnie, mój – ze mną i nie było między nami miłości, nienawiści, żądz, wstrętu, brzydoty, piękna, śmiechu, części ciała, żadnego uczucia ani żadnego mechanizmu, nic, nic, nic... (Ibid.)[†]

* ‘for one hundredth of a second’. FE 191.

[†] ‘it seemed to me that I was going not alone but with myself – and right next to me, or maybe within me or around me, walked someone identical and cognate, mine – within me, mine – with me, and there was no love between us, no hate, no lust, no revulsion, no ugliness, no beauty, no laughter, no body parts, no feeling nor anything mechanical, nothing, nothing, nothing...’ FE 190-91.

According to Łukasz Garbal, Józio momentarily regains his identity, after having been ‘deformed’ by Pimko, the school, and the modern family.⁴⁴ But this passage resonates with metanarrative images across *Ferdydurke*. In chapter one, after chasing his ghostly doppelgänger, Józio begins to compose the work that is ‘moj[e] własn[e], taki[e] jak ja, identyczn[e] ze mną’ [‘my very own [...] just like me, identical with me’]). In chapter ten Józio presents a near-identical description of his second double: ‘identyczny i tożsamy, mój – we mnie, mój – ze mną’ [‘someone identical and cognate, mine – within me, mine – with me’]. This echoing brings the second double into the context of Józio’s experience of literary creativity. What is more, the identical oeuvre and the identical double are both ephemeral: while in chapter one Józio’s writing is interrupted by Pimko, in chapter ten Józio’s double vanishes after a split-second, and instead his foil, the delinquent Miętus (Kneadus) joins him in his escape. Józio must interact with others; his self-sufficiency, his sensation of being ‘neither mature nor immature’ but ‘quiet and pure,’ can never be sustained.

* * *

Associating the ghostly double with the experience of authorship, Gombrowicz conjures up the notion of writing as an automatic process. In *Ferdydurke* he frequently describes the author’s loss of control over the text. For instance, the metafictional narrator of chapter four claims that ‘to, co napisałeś, dyktuje ci sens dalszy, dzieło rodzi się nie z ciebie, chciałeś napisać to, a napisało ci się coś zupełnie odmiennego’ (F 66-67)*. Gombrowicz’s representations of writing as involuntary to

* ‘Whatever you put down on paper dictates what comes next, because the work is not born of you – you want to write one thing, yet something entirely different comes out.’ FE 72.

the point of resembling a ‘dictation’ betray his interest in popular spiritism. According to Helen Sword, ‘modernist writers discovered in mediumistic discourse fruitful ways of conceptualizing and representing literary production [...] and the stubborn materiality of language’.⁴⁵ Gombrowicz’s participation in spiritistic seances has not been documented to my knowledge, and *Ferdydurke* does not overtly portray ‘ghosts’ as agents of authorship. The uncanny nature of literary production only becomes plain to see in Gombrowicz’s following work, the pseudo-gothic novel *Opętani* [*Possessed; or, The Secret of Myslotch*], published pseudonymously in 1939: here an actual ‘ghost’ communicates messages via a talking board.

Gombrowicz’s interest in the notion of writing as dictation brings to mind Jacques Derrida’s concept of a ‘ghostliness’ of writing: ‘un chef-d’œuvre toujours se meut, par définition, à la manière d’un fantôme.’⁴⁶ For Derrida the ghostly power or ‘génie’ of the text may or may not be malign, but it characterizes ‘une œuvre de génie, [une] chose de l’esprit qui semble justement s’ingénier’. Derrida identifies the text’s haunting quality in its reception, in the way it is read and translated, and above all, in its tendency to spirit up or engineer itself [*s’ingénier*]. By highlighting the work’s spontaneous self-creation, both Derrida and Gombrowicz foreground the aspect of writing that is independent of the author’s intention. For Gombrowicz, as we have seen, this *genie* takes on a series of avatars, as the author’s creative power is doubled with the force of the emergent text, with the reader’s anticipated reception, with haunting fictional alter egos of his own creation, and, finally, with the memory of his previous achievements, which need to be overcome.

Derrida describes the text’s automatic power in favourable terms. In his discussion of the ghostliness of writing he refers to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, assigning it the privileged status of a ‘work of genius’. His unperturbed outlook on the work’s

ghostliness signals a contrast with Gombrowicz's ambivalence about the inexorable force of writing: Gombrowicz insists, as we saw in the passage from his 1954 diary, that as an author he must resist the work's self-creation and try to communicate his intentions. The text's automatic force is for him a manifestation of 'Form' – his shorthand for the coercive dynamics, interhuman as well as intrasubjective, which motivate human creativity but also impede individual expression. The writer must embrace the alterity of Form, but he must also strive to resist its compelling logic in order to express *himself*. The narrator of chapter four in *Ferdydurke* frames the problem as a rhetorical question; incidentally he, too, makes a reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

Czyż wszelka forma nie polega na eliminacji, konstrukcja nie jest uszczupleniem, czy wyraz może oddać co innego jak tylko część rzeczywistości? *Reszta jest milczeniem*. Czy wreszcie my stwarzamy formę, czy ona nas stwarza? (F 66, emphasis added)*⁴⁷

Gombrowicz developed the concept of Form (he uses capital and small initials interchangeably) to account for his writing practice as well as the dynamics of human relations. Form stands for the suggestive powers of language and logic, but it also comprises internalized social forces, such as the anticipated reaction of the work's future readers. In as far as the spontaneous powers of literary creativity represent the power of Form, Gombrowicz's view of the 'ghostliness' of writing remains more ambivalent than Derrida's idea of the operating *génie* or *fantôme*.

* 'Doesn't all form rely on the process of exclusion, isn't all construction a process of whittling down, can a word express anything but a part of reality? *The rest is silence*. And finally, do we create form or does form create us?' Ibid., emphasis added.

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- ¹ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, introduction by Michael Wood (London: Granta Books, 1997), p. 3.
- ² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, in *Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*, 14 vols (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1981), IX: *Autobiographische Schriften I*, ed. by Lieselotte Blumenthal, commentary by Erich Trunz, p. 500. On the history of Goethe's autobiography see Erich Trunz, 'Die Entstehung von Dichtung und Wahrheit', pp. 607-11 in the same volume.
- ³ Josef Rattner, *Goethe: Leben, Werk und Wirkung in tiefenpsychologischer Sicht* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999), pp. 32-33.
- ⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Das Unheimliche' in *Studienausgabe*, ed. by Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards, and James Strachey, 8th edn, 11 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1989), IV: *Psychologische Schriften*, pp. 241-74 (p. 259).
- ⁵ I discuss Gombrowicz's accounts of his debuts in my article, 'Revelation and Disguise: Witold Gombrowicz's Narrative Strategies of Authenticity and Authorship', in *Gombrowicz-Blätter*, 1 (2013), 45-53.
- ⁶ Jan Błoński reads the second philosophical tale, 'Filibert dzieckiem podszyty' ['The Child Runs Deep in Filibert'] as 'a microcosm of *Ferdydurke*, a model deprived of everything descriptive, scenic, inessential'. See *Forma, śmiech i rzeczy ostateczne: studia o Gombrowiczu*, 2nd edn (Cracow: Univeristas, 2003), p. 87. Although he highlights the parallels between the main plot and the philosophical tale, Błoński does not take into account the novel's genesis. He mentions that the tale had been published as a separate short story as early as 1935, then titled 'Mechanizm życia' ['The Mechanism of Life'], in *Prosto z mostu*, 1 (1935), but he ignores the question whether Gombrowicz should have consciously based *Ferdydurke* on the minimalist model of his short story, or if the novel spontaneously emerged as an expanded version of 'Mechanizm życia'. Either claim would be difficult to substantiate, and yet Błoński presents the tale as an expression of Gombrowicz's *conscious intentions*, arguing that 'it leads the reader to the only path that Gombrowicz considers valid. Easier to swallow than the novel as a whole, it seems indeed to tolerate only one interpretation – or none' (p. 87). According to Błoński, the only correct approach to *Ferdydurke* is to read it as a philosophical tale.

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- ⁷ This table builds on charts proposed by Błoński in *Forma, śmiech i rzeczy ostateczne*, p. 16, and Roman Sabo in *Slavic Metafiction: Witold Gombrowicz's 'Ferdydurke', Mikhail Bulgakov's 'Master i Margarita', and Václav Řežáč's 'Rozhraní'* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1994) (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International), p. 93.
- ⁸ The book's title is usually rendered as 'Memoirs from the Time of Immaturity,' but Katarzyna Jerzak suggests a more accurate translation: 'Memoir from the Time of Adolescence'. See 'Defamation in Exile: Witold Gombrowicz and E. M. Cioran', in *Gombrowicz's Grimaces: Modernism, Gender, Nationality*, ed. by Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 177-209 (p. 182). 'A Memoir from Puberty' would be another alternative, since 'okres dojrzewania' in Polish means puberty, and Gombrowicz opted for *okres* rather than *czas* [time].
- ⁹ Gombrowicz was 28 years old when *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* appeared in May 1933, and 33 years old when *Ferdydurke* went on sale in October 1937 (publication postdated 1938).
- ¹⁰ Maria Janion, 'Forma gotycka Gombrowicza', in *Gorączka romantyczna* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1975), pp. 169-243 (p. 183).
- ¹¹ Agnieszka Kowalczyk, 'Rodzina jako źródło cierpień: o motywie rodziny w twórczości Witolda Gombrowicza', *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 4 (2004), 75-92; and Agnieszka Kowalczyk, *Rodzina jako źródło cierpień w twórczości Witolda Gombrowicza* (Cracow: Universitas, 2006).
- ¹² Hanjo Berressem, *Lines of Desire: Reading Gombrowicz's Fiction with Lacan* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 47.
- ¹³ Berressem uses Eric Mosbacher's English translation of *Ferdydurke* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1961). Since George Sédin's French translation of *Ferdydurke* only appeared in 1973, Mosbacher must have based his English translation on the rather free first French translation by 'Brone' – a pseudonym that stands for Gombrowicz and Roland Martin, a French journalist (Paris: Julliard, 1958). This version, based on the original 1937 Polish edition of *Ferdydurke*, omits the doppelganger scene, and consequently this part is also missing from Mosbacher's second-hand translation. Berressem refers to Walter Tiel's German translation

(1960) of the doppelganger scene, explaining that Mosbacher's English version, 'perhaps because it refers to the later, revised [Polish] edition of *Ferdydurke*, is missing nearly three pages. In fact, the whole confrontation between [Józio] and his alter ego is left out' (p. 298, n. 23). This remark is doubly misleading: first, Mosbacher's translation is not based on the revised Polish edition of *Ferdydurke* (1956 [1957]), but on the French translation cited above. Second, Gombrowicz omitted the doppelganger scene from his French translation, but not from the novel's second Polish edition.

¹⁴ Janusz Margański, 'Józio w piekle literatury', *Teksty Drugie*, 75 (2002), 7-21 (pp. 10-11 and *passim*).

¹⁵ Michał Paweł Markowski, *Czarny Nurt: Gombrowicz, świat, literatura* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004), p. 247.

¹⁶ Witold Gombrowicz, 'Ferdydurke', *Skamander*, no 7 (60), July 1935. Reprinted in F 277-306.

¹⁷ The scene follows the conventions Tzvetan Todorov describes as '*le fantastique-merveilleux*,' where the character and the reader initially try to find rational explanations (such as dreaming, madness, or intoxication) for supernatural occurrences, before they accept them as truly paranormal. See *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 57. In *Ferdydurke* Józio has a moment of uncertainty, but then accepts the apparition as *real*: 'Tym razem nie był to sen – naprawdę pod piecem stał sobowtór' (F 14) ['And this time it was not a dream – it really was my double standing by the stove.' FE 12.].

¹⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Double: A St Petersburg Poem*, translated by Hugh Aplin, foreword by Jeremy Dyson (London: Hesperus Classics, 2004).

¹⁹ I am unaware of any scholarship on these parallels. On Gombrowicz and Dostoevsky, see Michał Legierski, *Modernizm Witolda Gombrowicza* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich, 1999), pp. 90-91, p. 121 (here Legierski compares Golyadkin's double to Fryderyk from Gombrowicz's novel *Pornografia*), and p. 243. See also Ewa Thompson, *Witold Gombrowicz* (Boston: Twayne, 1979), pp. 131-37; Jerzy Jarzębski, *Gra w Gombrowicza* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982), pp. 162-76 and pp. 394-404; Bronisław Świdorski,

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- ‘Dostojewski Gombrowicza’, *Teksty Drugie*, 45 (1997), 61-71; and Janusz Margański, *Gombrowicz – wieczny debiutant* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001), *passim*. Gombrowicz frequently discusses Dostoevsky’s work in his diary, but never mentions *The Double*.
- ²⁰ Sigmund Freud, ‘L’inquiétante étrangeté’, trans. by Marie Bonaparte and Mme E. Marty (Paris: Gallimard, 1933).
- ²¹ Witold Gombrowicz, ‘Nauka ściga się o prawdę psychologiczną z literaturą: o brudach i urokach’, first published in *Kurier poranny*, no. 263 (1935), reprinted in *Dzieła XII: Varia: Proza, reportaże, krytyka, 1933-1939*, ed. by Jan Błoński and Jerzy Jarzębski (1995), pp. 179-82. Gombrowicz refers to Zygmunt Freud, *Wstęp do psychoanalizy*, trans. from German by S. Kempnerówna, W Zaniewicki, and Gustaw Bychowski (Warsaw: Przeworski, 1935). On the reception of psychoanalytic theory in Poland before 1939 see Paweł Dybel, *Urwane ścieszki: Przybyszewski – Freud – Lacan* (Cracow: Universitas, 2000), pp. 19-44.
- ²² Gombrowicz also claimed that he had not read Freud at the time of writing *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* (1933): ‘O Freudzie wiedziałem coś nie coś, niewiele. Jeśli coś załapałem z tych natchnień to tyle tylko, o ile one były w powietrzu, w rozmowach, w dowcipach. Aparat formalny, który uruchomiłem, był więc w dużej mierze moim wynalazkiem.’ D4 32-33 [‘I knew a bit about Freud, not much. If I managed to catch some of those inspirations, it was only in as far as they were in the air, in conversations, in jokes. The formal apparatus which I put into motion was mainly of my own invention.’ KT 42, translation modified.].
- ²³ Freud, ‘Das Unheimliche’, p. 267.
- ²⁴ German Ritz, ‘Język pożądania u Witolda Gombrowicza’, in *Niś w labiryncie pożądania: gender i pleć w literaturze polskiej od romantyzmu do postmodernizmu* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna, 2002), pp. 196-216 (p. 203).
- ²⁵ Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 49-50. In this context Webber cites Otto Rank’s ‘Ein Beitrag zum Narzissismus’, in *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen*, 3 (1911), 401-26.

²⁶ The first account of this phenomenon was made by the clinical psychiatrist Edward J. Kempf in 1920. See 'Homosexual Panic', in *The Encyclopedia of Mental Health*, 3rd ed. (New York: Facts on File, 2008), ed. by A. P. Kahn and J. Fawcett, p. 231.

²⁷ Gombrowicz argues with Dante throughout his career, and in his diary of 1966 he even rewrites parts of *Inferno* (D3 227-40; DE 694-706). On his relationship with Dante see Jan Błoński, 'O Gombrowiczu', in *Gombrowicz i krytycy*, ed. by Zdzisław Łapiński (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), pp. 201-33; and Michał Głowiński in 'Gombrowicz poprawia Dantego', *Teksty Drugie*, 64 (2000), 58-67. Crypto-quotes from the *Divine Comedy* in *Ferdydurke* have been discussed since before the war. See for instance Artur Sandauer, 'Ferdydurke po raz pierwszy' [1938], in *Zebrane pisma krytyczne*, 3 vols (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981), III: p. 308; Maria Jarczyńska, 'Problematyka i metoda twórcza w *Ferdydurke*', *Twórczość*, 5 (1945), 126-30; Zdravko Malić, 'Ferdydurke', trans. by J. Łatuszyńska, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 2 (1968), 107-54 (p. 115); Włodzimierz Bolecki, *Poetycki model prozy w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym: Witkacy, Gombrowicz, Schulz i inni. Studium z poetyki historycznej*, 2nd edn (Cracow: Universitas, 1996), p. 134; Hanjo Berressem, *Lines of Desire*, pp. 40-41 and pp. 98-99. For detailed discussions of the *Divine Comedy* as an intertext of *Ferdydurke* see Hanjo Berressem and Ulrich Prill in '...die entbrannten Degenspitzen / Von mächt'gen Gegnern... Witold Gombrowicz' *Lectura Dantis*', *Arcadia*, 1 (1993), 47-64, as well as Margański, 'Józio w piekle literatury' (2002). The beginning of *Ferdydurke* has been excluded from this debate, since in the book version of 1937 Gombrowicz curtailed the proliferation of characters and themes in the doppelganger scene, reducing the three intruders to one – the ghostly double. The only parallel between the beginning of *Ferdydurke* in the 1937 version and Dante's epic poem lies in Józio being an alter ego of Gombrowicz, just as Dante's narrator represents the poet.

²⁸ For obvious reasons the narrator of the pseudonymous novel *Opętani* [*Possessed; or, The Secret of Myslotch*] of 1939 is not associated with Gombrowicz's identity.

²⁹ This insistence on authorship and imitation also appears in Gombrowicz's discussion of Czesław Miłosz's *Captive Mind*: 'Duch rodzi się z imitacji ducha i

pisarz musi udawać pisarza, aby w końcu stać się pisarzem' (D1 21) ['Spirit is born of the imitation of spirit, and a writer must pretend to be a writer in order finally to become a writer.' (DE 13)].

³⁰ Gombrowicz proposed various contradictory legends about the etymology of the novel's title. Włodzimierz Bolecki discusses the origin of the title 'Ferdydurke' in detail in his editorial appendix to the novel's critical edition of 2007 (see F 402-08). It appears that Gombrowicz told acquaintances in 1938 that 'Ferdydurke' derives from the French expression *faire d'hideur [que]* (Jerzy Pomianowski communicated this recollection to Bolecki in 2004; see F 405). In 1962, Gombrowicz falsely claimed that 'Ferdydurke' is the name of a street in his hometown (see 'W Buenos Aires mieszka renomowany polski pisarz', interview with Jorge Calvetti, first published in Spanish in "La Prensa" (Buenos Aires) on 20 July 1962, reprinted in F 664). The origin of the title remained obscure until 1984, when Bogdan Baran associated it with a character named 'Freddy Durkee' in Sinclair Lewis's novel *Babbitt* (1922): Zofia Popławska's Polish translation of *Babbitt* (1927) changes 'Freddy' to 'Ferdy' (for Baran's article see 'Ferdy Durke', *Znak* 4/5 (1984), 744-76; for Bolecki's summary see 402-04). This claim is further corroborated by the rediscovery, in 2004, of Gombrowicz's short story 'Uszy' ('Ears') of 1935, which contains a character named Ferdy Durkee (originally published in *Problemy: Dwutygodnik Polityczno-Literacki*, 1935, no 7, reprinted in F 263-65). Baran's discovery adds little to our understanding of the novel, but it strongly suggests that the etymology of 'Ferdydurke' is less significant than Gombrowicz's untiring construction of legends around the novel.

³¹ Ricardo Nirenberg, 'Gombrowicz, or the Sadness of Form', *Offcourse: A Literary Journal*, 2 (1998) < <http://www.albany.edu/offcourse> >, accessed 1/10/2010. 'Bacacay' (commemorating the Battle of Bacacay) is the name of a street in Buenos Aires where Gombrowicz lived briefly in 1939.

³² André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 41-42.

³³ Gombrowicz claims that it is uncertain whether the work is a pretext for expressing himself or he a pretext for the work. I will discuss this notion of a pretext in the following chapter.

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- ³⁴ Margański suggests that Gombrowicz derived his protagonist's name and the image of the 'ciotka [kulturalna]' from Tadeusz Boy Țeleński's poem 'O bardzo niegrzecznej literaturze polskiej i jej strapionej ciotce' ['On Polish Literature, Which Is Very Wicked, and Its Disheartened Aunt'] (1907). See 'Józio w piekle literatury', p. 16.
- ³⁵ The Polish noun *gwałt* means both 'violence' and 'rape'. Borchardt's choice of 'rape' in her translation is consistent with Gombrowicz's use of *gwałt*: throughout this novel, he coalesces sexual violence with linguistic and cultural practices. In chapter one Józio describes his inner conflicts in terms of rape: 'wszystkie te części [mojego ciała] gwałciły się dziko w atmosferze wszechobejmującego i przejmującego panszyderstwa' (F 6) ['all my [body] parts were wildly raping each other in an all-encompassing and piercing state of pan-mockery.' FE 2.]. In chapter three, the schoolboys 'rape' a classmate 'through the ears' by forcefully telling him about the facts of life (F 49; FE 51).
- ³⁶ Charles Baudelaire, 'Au lecteur', in *Les Fleurs du mal*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1975), II, pp. 5-6 (p. 6)
- ³⁷ The memoirs were conceived in the late 1950s as a series of autobiographical sketches for Radio Free Europe. It is unlikely that Gombrowicz would have expected his audience to pick up on this repetition, given that the sketches were not intended to be disseminated in print but broadcast to a listening audience.
- ³⁸ Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig und andere Erzählungen* (Frankfurt a.M: Fischer, 1984), p. 14.
- ³⁹ Gombrowicz discusses his relationship to Mann, and especially Mann's portrayal of the artist, in a diary entry of 1959. This entry is printed in italics, and Gombrowicz writes of himself in the third person, as he often does when dealing with particularly difficult or personal matters:

Wielki artysta w odtworzeniu mannowskim jest wstrętny i śmieszny, ale też wspaniały i pociągający... jak kochanek. Ta 'sprawiedliwość' mannowska w rozłożeniu światła i cienia [...] nad wyraz podobiała się Gombrowiczowi i często zwykł on w rozmowach powoływać się na tego autora i na jego prześlizgnięcia w rysunku opowiadanie Tonio Kröger, w którym on, Gombrowicz, wcześniej odczytał swój los i powołanie. (D2 152)

The great artist in Mann's rendition is repulsive and ridiculous, but also marvellous and attractive... like a lover. This 'justice' of Mann's in arranging light and shadow [...] appealed to Gombrowicz more than he could say and in conversations he would often refer to Mann and to the very lovely contours of the story 'Tonio Kröger,' in which he, Gombrowicz, quickly recognized his fate and vocation. (DE 404)

Gombrowicz, always uncomfortable about his forerunners' influence, decides to 'conquer' [przezwyciężyć] Mann, 'stać się nowym Mannem [...] Nowocześniejszym o jedno pokolenie' (D2 153) ['to become a new Mann, a more advanced Mann [...] more modern by one generation' (ibid.)]. To achieve this he would put to use his 'now[a] szczerłość' ['new honesty'] and 'nowy bezwstyd' (D2 153) ['new shamelessness' (DE 405)], as well as his 'filozofi[a] formy' ['philosophy of form'] and his notions of human nature as essentially inauthentic; these innovations, Gombrowicz proclaims with self-ironic conceit, should 'ensure him a fairly original place in the history of twentieth-century culture' (ibid.) ['zapewniłoby mu dość oryginalne miejsce w historii kultury XX stulecia' (D2 154)].

⁴⁰ Tomislav Z. Longinović, 'I, Witold Gombrowicz: Formal Abjection and the Power of Writing in *A Kind of Testament*', in *Gombrowicz's Grimaces*, ed. by Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, pp. 33-50 (pp. 38-39).

⁴¹ Gombrowicz also acknowledges his mother's existential inauthenticity as the source of his theory of Form in a letter dated 3 December 1962 to his brother Janusz and his wife Stanisława:

Krępowwała mnie i paraliżowała męcząca sztuczność naszego obcowania, która powstała na drodze reakcji przeciw fatalnej formie matki, niezdolnej zobaczyć siebie w prawdziwej swojej postaci i z rozpaczliwą naiwnością przybierającej osobowość akurat przeciwną. Matka, snobizmy ziemiańsko-szlacheckie, nieśmiałość i źle rozwiązana 'pańskość' (to, co Hegel nazywa 'złą świadomością') – to były główne elementy tego spaczenia, na które ja zanadto nie mogę się skarżyć, gdyż ono to zapewne dało mi wrażliwość na formę. (p. 311)

I was embarrassed and paralyzed by our relationship's tiresome artificiality, which arose from a reaction against mother's awful form, as she was unable to see herself in her true character and with pathetic naiveté put on a personality that was exactly the opposite. Mother, the snobbism of the landed gentry and nobility, my shyness and my poorly resolved 'masterdom' (that which Hegel calls 'bad faith') – these would be the main elements of this distortion, against which I shouldn't complain too much, since surely that was what gave me my sensitivity to form.

⁴² Antonina Gombrowiczowa's death in 1959 may explain why Gombrowicz, always reserved on emotional matters, pays tribute to her formative influence on him in *Testament*, and not in *Wspomnienie polskie*. On Gombrowicz's relationship with his parents and his representations of these relationships Agnieszka Stawiarska, *Gombrowicz w przedwojennej Polsce* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001), 17-39 and *passim*, as well as Agnieszka Kowalczyk, *Rodzina jako źródło cierpień w twórczości Witolda Gombrowicza* (Cracow: Universitas, 2006), pp. 60-73, pp. 151-77, and *passim*.

⁴³ Margański, 'Józio w piekle literatury', pp. 10-11.

⁴⁴ Łukasz Garbal, *Ferdydurke: biografia powieści* (Cracow: Universitas, 2010), p. 170.

⁴⁵ Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 162.

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p. 42.

⁴⁷ Cf. Hamlet: 'The rest is silence.' *Hamlet*, V. 2. 310. William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, et al., with introductions by Stanley Wells (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 774.

CHAPTER THREE

‘THE QUIETER THE LOUDER INDEED’:

SILENCE AND THE SPACE OF LITERATURE IN *TRANS-ATLANTYK*

Nie miałem nic do stracenia. Mogłem wypisywać,
co mi się zachciało [...]. Byłem niczym,
więc mogłem sobie pozwolić na wszystko.

Gombrowicz, *Testament*, 1968 (D4 112-13)*

‘*Wyjątkowa sposobność! Wymarzona chwila!*’ (D1 66)[†]. This is how Gombrowicz characterizes the condition of the writer in emigration in 1952.¹ His attitude towards exile literature is decidedly positive: deprived of the security of the homeland, but also freed of its restrictions, the writer experiences the thrill of unlimited freedom: ‘*Pękają wszystkie więzy. Można być bardziej sobą. [...] można w sposób bardziej bezwzględny dążyć do przyszłości*’ (ibid.)[‡]. The liberation of exile should result in a burst of creativity; it should bring about the beginning of a new literature. And yet, Gombrowicz continues, this expected renewal has failed to occur in Polish literature after World War II. Even the most remarkable writers, those who ought to ‘*zaryczeć*

* ‘I had nothing to lose. I could write whatever passed through my head [...]. I was nothing, so I could do anything.’ KT 116.

[†] ‘*An exceptional opportunity! The moment everyone has dreamed of!*’ DE 50.

[‡] ‘*All bonds burst. One can be more of oneself. [...] one can move toward the future in a more ruthless way.*’ (Ibid.).

jak lwy,’* have hardly made themselves heard in exile. ‘*Dlaczego nie ryczą?*’† he asks. ‘*Dlaczego głos tych ludzi osłabł za granicą?*’‡. Answering his own question, Gombrowicz establishes the crucial paradox in his view of exile writing: ‘*Nie ryczą, bo... bo, przede wszystkim, są zanadto wolni. Sztuka wymaga stylu, porządku, dyscypliny*’ (D1 66)§.

These reflections on exile literature form part of a polemic, published in *Kultura* in 1952, with the Romanian exile writer E. M. Cioran, to which I will return later in this chapter. By the time he wrote these comments on exile, Gombrowicz had lived in Argentina for about a dozen years. Since leaving Poland in 1939 he had composed the play *Ślub* and the novel *Trans-Atlantyk*, two highly original works that were about to be published with the *Instytut Literacki* in Paris. Parts of the novel appeared in *Kultura* in 1951, provoking a literary scandal. Gombrowicz had also begun to write feuilletons and polemical texts for *Kultura*, such as his response to Cioran’s article on exile writing. Arguably, in 1952 Gombrowicz was beginning to ‘roar like a lion,’ to establish his voice as an exile author. But his trajectory as an émigré writer involved a confrontation with a whole range of perils, among which he systematically foregrounded the twin dangers of silence and excessive freedom.

Exile writers, Gombrowicz asserts, ‘do not roar because, first of all, they are too free’. In as far as ‘roaring’ represents the opposite of silence, while excessive freedom results in unrestrained creativity, the opposite of discipline or control, Gombrowicz introduces the notions of silence and sound or noise into his model of authorship as a negotiation of creativity and control. His early post-war works, in

* ‘roar like lions’ (Ibid.).

† ‘Why don’t they?’ DE 50.

‡ ‘Why has the voice of these people faded abroad?’ (Ibid.).

§ ‘They do not roar because, first of all, they are too free. Art demands style, order, discipline.’ (Ibid.).

particular *Trans-Atlantyka* show an intense preoccupation with the paradoxical role that silence plays in the writing process. In this chapter I examine the model of exile authorship Gombrowicz develops in response to the calamity of World War II, as well as in reaction to other writers' representations of literature in emigration – in particular in his polemic with Cioran and through his contestation of Polish Romantic and neo-Romantic representations of the émigré writer. Historical and biographical material plays a prominent role in this discussion, as Gombrowicz's lived experience in the decade after 1939 represents the immediate cause for his re-examination of authorship. His recent adventures are, moreover, incorporated into the plot of *Trans-Atlantyka*, where a narrator named Witold Gombrowicz tells the story of his struggles as a Polish exile writer in Argentina during World War II.

Gombrowicz's emigration, as we saw in Chapter 1, was the result of a lucky coincidence, as he was invited to report on the maiden voyage of a Polish ocean liner that left for South America just before the outbreak of the war. Tadeusz Kępiński, Gombrowicz's friend during his Warsaw years, gives an account of their last weeks together, in the summer of 1939. Nobody in their circle of friends believed there would be a war, and Gombrowicz hesitated whether to accept the invitation for a transatlantic journey.² He was going through a fallow period and was not convinced that a trip to Argentina would do anything to tear him out of his lethargy. While Gombrowicz's friends were doing their best to persuade him to go, Kępiński recalls, 'he sat rocking in an armchair, puffing out his cheeks'. 'What for,' he asked. 'Everywhere is essentially the same.'³ Finally Gombrowicz decided to take advantage of the free transatlantic cruise, promising himself and his family that after his return to Warsaw he would lead a more well-regulated life. There is nothing to

indicate that he was planning to leave Poland permanently when he embarked on the *Bolesław Chrobry* on 29 July 1939.

In his diary of 1955 Gombrowicz writes about his state of mind during the ocean crossing:

Gdy płynąłem z Polski do Argentyny, byłem doszczętnie zdemoralizowany – nigdy (pomijając może okres spędzony w Paryżu na wiele lat przedtem) nie znajdowałem się w stanie takiego rozprężenia. Literatura? Nic mnie nie obchodziła, po wydaniu *Ferdydurke* postanowiłem odpocząć. [...] A gdy na ‘Chrobrym’ mijałem brzegi niemieckie, francuskie, angielskie, wszystkie te ziemie Europy zastygłe w lęku nie urodzonej jeszcze zbrodni, w klimacie duszącym oczekiwania, zdawały się krzyczyć: bądź lekkomyślny, nic nie znaczysz, nic nie zdziałasz, jedyne co ci pozostało to pijaństwo! Upijałem się przeto na swój sposób, to jest niekoniecznie alkoholem – ale płynąłem pijany, doszczętnie prawie zamroczony... (D1 204)*

This confession of despondency contains a certain element of self-mythologization.

Gombrowicz may have felt uninspired, but it is hard to believe that he had lost interest in literature. After *Ferdydurke* he had published the play *Iwona, księżniczka Burgunda* (1938), the pseudonymous popular novel *Opętani* [*Possessed; or, The Secret of Myslotch*] (1939) whose authorship he would only acknowledge in 1969, as well as a great number of literary polemics in the press. He participated in intellectual debates, was on friendly terms with leading Polish writers, and was counted among the country’s eminent Modernists. He was not ‘resting’ after *Ferdydurke*, but establishing himself as a prominent figure in Warsaw’s literary circles. His retrospective diary account of his voyage to Argentina, emphasizing

* ‘When I sailed from Poland to Argentina, I was utterly demoralized. Never (with the exception, perhaps, of the time spent in Paris many years earlier) did I find myself in such a state of disarray. Literature? I wasn’t at all interested in it. After the publication of *Ferdydurke*, I decided to rest. [...] When on the deck of the *Chrobry*, I passed German, French, and English shores, all those lands of Europe, frozen in the fear of the crime yet unborn, in a climate of stifling expectation, seemed to shout: be reckless, you are nothing you will do nothing, the only thing left to you is drunkenness! I did get drunk in my fashion, that is, not necessarily on alcohol – but I sailed drunk in an almost complete stupor...’ DE 159, translation modified.

premonitions of intoxicating recklessness in the face of calamity, relates not as much to Gombrowicz's experience just before the war as to his representations of authorship in exile after 1939.

Gombrowicz landed in Buenos Aires on 20 August 1939. Three days later telegrams reported the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, the treaty of non-aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union that represented an imminent threat for Poland. When the *Chrobry* returned to Europe on 25 August, Gombrowicz decided to stay in Argentina and wait out the political tension. Following the Nazi invasion of Poland on 1 September he reported to the recruiting board at the Polish legation in Buenos Aires but was excused from military service on grounds of ill health. At this point his exile became open-ended.

In occupied Poland, meanwhile, the world of letters underwent a radical transformation, as all presses and publishing enterprises were declared illegal and writers and intellectuals were systematically killed or deported.⁴ Five years later, at the end of the Nazi occupation, the new Soviet-imposed Communist government assumed a monopoly on publishing and distribution. In 1949 the Union of Polish Writers (*Związek Zawodowy Literatów Polskich*) proclaimed Socialist Realism the only admissible movement in literature; by Party decree, works that deviated from the line were banned from publication.⁵ Gombrowicz was censored wholesale, so that neither reprints of his pre-war publications nor any of his post-war works were marketable in Poland. While the censors intermittently tolerated performances of his plays, the ban on printing his works was not lifted – barring the reprieve of the Gomułka thaw in 1956-57 – until the 1980s.

Gombrowicz felt ambivalent about the idea of remaining in Argentina, where he saw no way out of his financial hardship. He considered various alternatives, such

as moving to another country in South America, emigrating to France, or even returning to Warsaw after all.⁶ But he realized that as long as he wanted to publish his works rather than *pisać do szuflady* – write into the drawer, as the Polish idiom has it – he had to remain in exile. To describe him, as Maria Delaperrière does, as ‘un exemple presque unique d’émigré à “l’état pur,” car aucune pression idéologique, politique ou socio-économique ne l’a amené à rester en Argentine,’⁷ is to ignore the fact that he could not have worked as a writer in Poland. On 26 June 1956

Gombrowicz wrote to Giedroyc:

Moim obowiązkiem moralnym, jako pisarza, jest pisać dla Polaków. Jeżeli pozostałem na emigracji, to właśnie dlatego, że w Kraju tego robić nie mogłem. Jestem na emigracji, ponieważ stąd, jako pisarz, chcę oddziaływać na Kraj. Jeżeli mam pisać tutaj, a moje rzeczy mają pozostać nieznanymi większości Polaków, to, pytam, po co w ogóle jestem na emigracji? I po co piszę? (L 234)*

This letter was intended to convince Giedroyc that it was unreasonable to refuse to publish Polish exile writers’ works in Poland at a time when the censorship was somewhat relaxed.⁸ Some of Gombrowicz’s books did eventually appear in Poland during the thaw; they were bought up immediately. But this moment of relative intellectual liberty was short-lived, and Gombrowicz only left Buenos Aires for West Berlin in 1963. He finally settled in France, and never set foot in Poland again after 1939.

On his arrival in Buenos Aires Gombrowicz found himself a destitute émigré. To the local Polish community, which had established itself in the late nineteenth century and rapidly grew through the 1930s, Gombrowicz was unknown as a writer; he had no connections and did not speak Spanish. There followed a period of poverty

* My moral obligation, as a writer, is to write for the Polish people. If I remained in emigration, it is precisely because back home I couldn’t do this. I am in emigration because from here, as a writer, I want to exert an influence on Poland. If I am to write here, but my works should remain unknown to most Poles, then, I ask, what is the point of me being in emigration? And what’s the point of writing?

and isolation, but according to his later accounts, these early years of his exile were also marked by a sense of independence and a taste for experimentation. Cut off from his family and social position in Poland he felt rejuvenated and free to construct a new identity. His erotic adventures in the early 1940s would have a profound impact on his later work.⁹ In *Testament* (1968) he explains that although he hardly wrote at all during the war, the intensity of his experience would nourish his artistic pursuits:

Niepodobieństwem było pisać nie wiedząc z czego będę żył za miesiąc. Dorywczo, w krótkich okresach względnej stabilizacji, szkicowałem dramat *Ślub*, ale dopiero po wojnie go wykończyłem.

Jeśli bieda, upokorzenie, wojna, klęska, samotność, niepewność, buty dziurawe, zimno, pluskwy, tysiące przykrości i nędznych kłopotów, jeśli to wszystko stało się wprost niczym, to ponieważ nigdy nie czułem się bliższy piękności, pewnej szczególnej piękności – i wtedy oddawałem się szalonej nadziei, że tę piękność będę mógł sobie przyswoić, że ona stanie się moja... (D4 90-91)*

Gombrowicz's challenge was to find an outlet for his experience. This meant finding a style appropriate both to his new circumstances and to the radically different historical moment. It also meant finding a new audience.

Given that his work was suppressed in Poland, Gombrowicz was left with the choice of addressing either the Polish diaspora or a broader international readership in French or Spanish. In the early years of his exile he tested these two options with varying degrees of success. Just a year after his arrival in Buenos Aires he made an attempt to enter the local literary scene by giving a lecture in halting Spanish at the Teatro del Pueblo. This talk concerned the influence of extreme ideologies on the psyche of Eastern European nations. It was intended to address the Argentinian

* 'It was impossible to write because I didn't know where my next penny was coming from. From time to time, in short periods of remission, I planned my play [*Ślub – The Wedding*], but I didn't finish it until after the war.

[...] If poverty, humiliation, war, defeat, loneliness, insecurity, shoes full of holes, cold, fleas, a thousand pains and worries, if all this is reduced to almost nothing, it is because I had never felt so close to beauty, to a certain unique beauty – and I then abandoned myself to this mad hope that I could appropriate this beauty, that this beauty would be mine.' KT 93-95.

intelligentsia, but the event had been announced in the Polish-language press and was attended by a large number of fiercely patriotic Polish immigrants who perceived the talk as an insult against their homeland.¹⁰ Gombrowicz was pilloried in Polish émigré newspapers; after the storm (in a teacup) subsided, his name was not mentioned for over a decade.¹¹ Ironically, it seems that Spanish-language newspapers took no notice of the scandal whatsoever.

Having become a persona non grata among the conservative Argentinian *Polonia*, Gombrowicz decided to focus on a Spanish-speaking audience. In the 1940s he contributed articles to mainstream newspapers in Buenos Aires,¹² and in 1944-45 he published a series of pseudonymous essays in the popular health journal *Viva cien años*.¹³ A collaborative translation of *Ferdynand* into Spanish occupied him in 1946, but its publication the following year did nothing to improve his standing with the local literati. The same year he also produced *Aurora*, a single-issue literary review satirizing prominent members of the *Sur* group, such as Jorge Luis Borges and Victoria Ocampo.¹⁴ By then the haut monde of letters in Buenos Aires had proven to be closed to him and he had nothing to lose.¹⁵

In 1946, Gombrowicz also completed the play *Ślub*, which he had begun during the war. As his first literary work composed in emigration, this play represents a turning point in his career, but it is set in Poland and does not deal with problems of authorship or exile. Gombrowicz did what he could to bring *Ślub* to an international audience.¹⁶ He never found a publisher for his French translation, produced with the help of a few acquaintances in 1947-49.¹⁷ A wealthy friend sponsored the publication of a Spanish translation (*El Casamiento*) by Gombrowicz and Alejandro Rúsovich in 1948,¹⁸ but again, the critics remained indifferent. Gombrowicz gave up writing in Spanish around this time. It was inconvenient

anyway; he relied on friends to proofread his work and never mastered either Spanish or French sufficiently to consider them a viable substitute for his virtuosic Polish.¹⁹

His widow Rita describes his relationship to the French language, which he had learned as a child:

Le français était une langue dans laquelle il se sentait à l'étroit, comme dans un corset. [...] Il s'emportait de ne pouvoir retrouver en français (quand il écrivait des textes) 'le jus, la saveur, le concret, la brutalité et l'infinie douceur' du polonais de même qu'il souffrait de cette impossibilité de jouer aussi librement avec les mots.²⁰

By the end of his first decade in Argentina Gombrowicz realized that if he wanted to produce literature he had to write in Polish and hope that his books would somehow find their way to their readers.

Gombrowicz's situation changed drastically in late 1947, when he obtained a clerk's position at the Banco Polaco in Buenos Aires. Although the job greatly restricted his freedom, he enjoyed the financial security and was glad to use the bank's library, medical insurance and holiday home.²¹ What is more, the bank's director Juliusz Nowiński tolerated his second secretary's sneaky literary activities during working hours, and in 1949-50 Gombrowicz wrote *Trans-Atlantyk*, his first confrontation with the problems of authorship in emigration, at his office desk.

Trans-Atlantyk, Gombrowicz's most conspicuously autobiographical work of fiction, is a retrospective narration told by the author's alter ego, Witold Gombrowicz.²² It presents an exaggerated and chronologically condensed account of the author's first few years in Buenos Aires – his alienation from the Polish community, his employment as a clerk in an absurd establishment, his encounter with the gay subculture, and his frustrated attempts at asserting himself as an author. Witold's lengthy digressions and his constantly shifting allegiances disturb the linear

narrative. Stylistically, moreover, *Trans-Atlantyk* pastiches the *gawęda*, an oral genre of the Polish Baroque that I will discuss in more detail below. Autofictional references are dense and stand in a complex relationship to historical truth. Witold finds employment as a clerk, not for a Polish bank, but for a ludicrous trio of Polish businessmen – Baron, Pyckal, and Ciumkała. In contrast to Gombrowicz, who was declared unfit for military service when he presented himself at the Polish legation in 1939, Witold is portrayed as a deserter. His tragicomic monologue as he abandons his ship, and his satirical descriptions of the local *Polonia* set the tone for the iconoclastic treatment of national history and culture throughout *Trans-Atlantyk*.

The novel's preoccupation with the role of the Polish exile writer becomes apparent when the Polish legation offers Witold financial aid in return for his services as a 'national genius,' whose job it is to impress the local intelligentsia with the culture and heroic spirit of the Polish nation. His first assignment is to represent the Polish community at a literary soiree, but during a duel of wits with the Argentinian *Gran Escritor* Witold is defeated by the maestro's eloquence and originality. Having disappointed his compatriots he begins to pace back and forth through the salon, and his walking soon becomes automatic and involuntary. What is more, the *puto* Gonzalo, 'perchance Mestizo, Portuguese, of a Persian-Turkish mother in Libya born' (TE 37) joins him in his walking. Gonzalo is a hybrid figure in every sense: as a flamboyant homosexual millionaire, he poses as his own lackey or 'transforms himself' into a woman at night. The narrator often contemptuously refers to him as a cow [krowa], mare [kobyła], or even 'Gonzala,'²³ and yet the *puto* becomes his only friend. Like all doubles in Gombrowicz's post-war fiction Gonzalo subsequently attempts to manipulate the other characters and to mastermind the plot.

Michał Głowiński associates *Trans-Atlantyk* with the picaresque genre: ‘The story consists of a sequence of various adventures that do not necessarily evolve from one another; it suffices that they are presented in chronological order.’²⁴ After Witold’s defeat by the *Gran Escriitor* the plot becomes dizzyingly episodic. Gonzalo and Witold catch sight of the Polish youth Ignacy and his father, a retired major and old-fashioned patriot, enjoying themselves on the eve of Ignacy’s conscription. Gonzalo, erotically obsessed with Ignacy, begs Witold to facilitate their acquaintance, but Witold warns the old major, Tomasz Kobrzycki, about Gonzalo’s sexual interest in his son. A brawl ensues, and Major Kobrzycki challenges the *puto* to a duel. By forcing him to engage in a ‘manly’ act, the indignant father intends to ‘correct’ Gonzalo’s effeminate nature and save Ignacy’s reputation. But Gonzalo only ridicules the notion of ‘patria’ [ojczyzna] and proposes instead his idea of ‘filistria’ [synczyzna – a neologism coined by Gombrowicz], which privileges free creativity and progress instead of obedience and tradition. Swayed by Gonzalo, Witold promises to avert the senseless bloodshed of the duel by leaving the pistols unloaded. But later he regrets his treacherous scheming with the *puto*, and plans to arrange with Baron, Pyckal, and Ciumkała that the weapons would be armed after all. In the ensuing confusion nobody knows anymore whether or not their behaviour is honourable, and, if there is an intrigue, against whom it is directed – Major Kobrzycki or Gonzalo. Meanwhile, as Poland’s defeat in the war seems inevitable, the minister at the legation decides to exhibit the Poles’ sense of honour to foreign dignitaries by arranging a spurious hunt to take place near the duel.

Walking the streets of Buenos Aires at night Witold finds himself involuntarily drawn towards Ignacy’s bedroom. As he gazes at the sleeper’s naked body his thoughts at first conform to traditional patriotic schemata: he would force

Ignacy to work and to pray, lest the boy grow slothful; he would take a stick to teach him virtue. Soon, however, Witold finds himself echoing Gonzalo's tirade against paternal authority, and in the end he passionately believes that the son ought to be free of any constraints. Consequently, at the duel he slips the bullets into his sleeve, failing to foresee that the shooting must now continue endlessly, since with no bullets in the pistols neither of the contestants will ever be hit. The situation is resolved unexpectedly when the minister's cavalcade appears with a pack of hunting dogs that attack Ignacy. The boy is heroically rescued by the *puto*.

Major Kобрzycki is now obliged to accept Gonzalo's invitation to his *estancia*, which turns out to be a place of extravagant decadence and subversiveness. Expensive artefacts are purposefully reduced, by their sheer profusion, to kitschy bric-a-brac; the dogs are crossbred with other animals, and young boys are employed to do nothing in particular. Gonzalo exasperates his guests by appearing in drag – supposedly his national dress – and deliberately assigns Ignacy a bedroom in a separate wing. Disgusted, Witold confesses to Major Kобрzycki that the duel was a sham. The old man vows to restore his honour by killing his own son, but Gonzalo declares that he would instead entice Ignacy to kill his father, and shouts 'Synczyzna, Synczyzna!' until Witold helplessly resumes his compulsive walking. At night Witold accidentally spits at a boy sleeping on the floor, but the boy only stares back in silence. Terrified by this erotic tension Witold flees, only to find himself, once again, in Ignacy's bedroom.

While Gonzalo proceeds with his insidious seduction of Ignacy, Witold is abducted by Baron, Pyckal, and Ciumkała. The Accomptant (accountant), an office colleague, initiates him into the Order of the Chevaliers of the Spur [Związek Kawalerów Ostrogi]: each member is obliged to thrust his spurs into any fellow

chevalier who shows the faintest sign of disobedience to their leader. This perfect system of mutual surveillance prevents anyone from simply leaving through the open door. The Accomptant's absurd scheme is to 'rape' [zgwalić] Nature, Fate, and God Himself in order to reverse the destiny of the Polish nation. As the cellar fills up with members of the city's Polish community, Witold decides to escape by outdoing the Accomptant's pointless brutality: he proposes to make a sacrificial killing of the innocent Ignacy.

At Gonzalo's palace, Major Kobrzycki still plots to murder his son, while Gonzalo orchestrates Ignacy's patricide: he instructs the young servant Horacjo to 'echo' Ignacy's every movement, until Ignacy would in turn mimic Horacjo; then Horacjo, 'the catalyst between Ignacy and Gonzalo,'²⁵ would strike the major, and Ignacy would be compelled to do the same, thus killing his father. Witold, torn between filicide and patricide, enters the room of the sleeping Ignacy for the third time. Enchanted by his beauty he decides that the son must no longer be subjugated to his father.

The novel ends with a lavish ball at Gonzalo's palace. The Polish minister arrives with his foreign guests, hoping to cover up Poland's debacle. Then the Chevaliers intrude, stabbing one another in order to outdo the horrible fate of their nation. During the dance, while Major Kobrzycki gets ready to stab Ignacy, Horacjo leaps at him; Ignacy prepares also to leap at his father, but in the last moment he jumps over him and erupts in laughter rather than violence. The whole congregation laughs ecstatically, and the novel ends in chaotic dissolution.

Gombrowicz's interest in exile and authorship is clearly implied in this plot development: his fictional alter ego tells the story of his struggle for recognition as an independent artist among the conservative Polish community of Buenos Aires. He

must prove his relevance and originality in circumstances that are entirely unfamiliar and unpredictable – just like Gombrowicz the author. Though it is far from realistic, *Trans-Atlantyk* presents, for the first time in Gombrowicz's fiction, a narrator who carries his name. The autobiographical dimension is further intensified through references to real-life literary figures, Gombrowicz's friends and acquaintances, who present models of exile and authorship that contrast with Witold's. At the beginning of the novel, for instance, the Polish writer Czesław Straszewicz (1904-1963) appears as Witold's fellow traveller. Straszewicz arrived in Argentina on the *Chrobry* with Gombrowicz, but he returned to fight for Poland when the war broke out.²⁶ As a dutiful patriot he functions as a foil to Witold, who refuses to identify with the national collective.

Other allusions to real-life writers in *Trans-Atlantyk* are more cryptic. The model of Witold's rival, the *Gran Escritor*, has not been conclusively identified. Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), with whom Gombrowicz had a notoriously problematic relationship,²⁷ is often said to have inspired this figure, but there is no evidence for this speculation. The Argentinian writer and critic Ricardo Piglia has proposed several alternatives, but his article, in Spanish, is not known widely among Gombrowicz scholars. According to Piglia the *Gran Escritor* could parody Eduardo Maella (1903-1982), longtime editor of the literary supplement of *La Nación* and 'Argentinian novelist par excellence in those years,' or the novelist and critic Manuel Mujica Láinez (1910-1984); he may also have been fashioned as an imitation of the fictional poet Carlos Argentino Daneri from Borges's short story *The Aleph* of 1945.²⁸ Be that as it may, the confrontation between Witold and the *Gran Escritor* in *Trans-Atlantyk* problematizes the exile writer's interaction with the cultural elite of the host country. It shows Witold in the position of a newcomer – insecure, ignorant

of the etiquette, and desperate to impress. The *Gran Escritor*, meanwhile, is confident of his ability and status. He does not conceal his disdain toward the unknown writer from a minor nation and nonchalantly humiliates him (TA 37-38; TE 33).

Another fictional character who was reputedly inspired by a real person is the queer Gonzalo. According to Gombrowicz's friend Alejandro Rúsovich he was modelled on the Cuban writer Virgilio Piñera (1912-1979), who was close to Gombrowicz during his exile in Buenos Aires in 1946-58, as well as a group of gay Cuban dancers, Piñera's friends.²⁹ Although Gonzalo is portrayed as a millionaire and not a writer, his manipulations of other characters make him a sort of stage director – a de facto double of the author.

Besides Gombrowicz's acquaintance with Piñera, the scene of Witold's first meeting with the *puto* (TA 41-42; TE 35-36) may have another autobiographical source. At the end of Gombrowicz's ill-fated lecture at the Teatro del Pueblo in 1940, a member of the audience, later described in the press as belonging to one of Poland's ethnic minorities, began to abuse 'everything Polish' (more specific information is not available). This man might have intended to support Gombrowicz, but his diatribe against Poland only amplified the scandal.³⁰ In *Trans-Atlantyk* Gonzalo exacerbates Witold's shame after his defeat by the *Gran Escritor* when he joins him in his 'walking'. (At this moment he also becomes Witold's literal *Doppelgänger*.) While Piñera, 'the epitome of the literary queen, a Cuban Cocteau known not for his plays but for his playmates'³¹ and his friends may have inspired Gonzalo's campness, the unidentified émigré from an ethnic minority in Poland who compromised Gombrowicz in front of his already hostile audience on 28 August

1940 could have inspired Gonzalo's multicultural, multiethnic heritage as well as his subversion of Polish patriotism.

Unlike the conservative Poles who restrict each other's freedom of expression, Gonzalo uses his otherness as a convenient excuse for his eccentricities. Presenting himself in drag, for instance, he claims that in his native country it is common for men to wear skirts, 'a tak nic w tym złego ni dziwnego nie ma [...]. Co kraj to obyczaj!' (TA 84)^{*}. It is his essential homelessness, for Gonzalo has no one place to look back to, that allows him to propose his utopian model of 'synczyzna' or 'filistria':

A po co tobie Polakiem być?! [...] Takież to rozkoszny był dotąd los Polaków? Nie obrzydłaż tobie polskość twoja? Nie dość tobie Męki? Nie dość odwiecznego Umęczenia, Udręczenia? A toż dzisiaj znowuż wam skórę łoją! Tak to przy skórze swojej się upierasz? Nie chcesz czym Innym, czym Nowym stać się [...] Do diabła z Ojcem i Ojczyzną! Syn, syn, to mi dopiero, to rozumiem! A po co tobie Ojczyzna? Nie lepsza Synczyzna? Synczyzną ty Ojczyznę zastąp, a zobaczysz! (TA 60-61)[†]

In Gonzalo's view patriotism should be overcome first because it subjugates the individual to the group, which is especially absurd in the case of Poland, and second because it lets desirable youth be controlled by undesirable age. Thus Gonzalo's role as Witold's double is to challenge the expatriate Poles' obsession with their homeland and to provide an alternative mode of being an outsider.

* * *

^{*} 'so there is nothing wrong or strange in this [...]. A Country – a Custom!' TE 83.

[†] 'But wherefore need you be a Pole? [...] Has the lot of the Poles up to now been so delightful? Has not your Polishness become loathsome to you? Have you not had your fill of Sorrow? Your fill of Soreness, Sadness? And today they are flaying your skins again! And you insist so on staying in that skin of yours? Would you not become something Else, something New? [...] To the Devil with Pater and Patria! The Son, the son's the thing, oh indeed! But wherefore need you Patria? Is not Filistria better? You exchange Patria for Filistia and then you'll see!' TE 57.

Writing for a Polish audience in the late 1940s Gombrowicz could not ignore the effect that recent history had had on readers' expectations. Before the war a generation of Polish literati had prided itself on its cosmopolitan outlook and openness to vanguardist experimentation, but the Nazi and Soviet campaigns against Polish culture brought about a profound transformation in the role and perception of national heritage. There arose a cult of the Romantic poets of the Great Emigration of 1831-70, and readers hungered for a renewed vision of the Polish nation united, led, and inspired by a national bard. As a result patriotic poetry modelled on the works of the 'trójca wieszczów narodowych' [the three national bards] experienced a surge in popularity.³² A key role in the moral sustenance of the nation fell to exile literature, which, as Janusz Kryszak explains, was expected above all to provide models of resistance – just as it had during Poland's partitions in the nineteenth century:

The emigration was – or was supposed to be – the carrier and guardian of the nation's cultural authority, since in Poland that culture was subjected to repression. Needless to say, we are talking about an expectation [...] that was not always confirmed. And yet, the division [between literature written in Poland and abroad] brought about by political circumstances no doubt encouraged viewing the emigration as a depository of values in a country that was under the threat of destruction. The emigration itself, moreover, took on that role – a fact that, in the nineteenth century as well as in the twentieth, played a significant part in mythologizing and idealizing the role of political exile.³³

Writers of the so-called Second Great Emigration – a term designating those who left Poland during or after World War II – were expected either to celebrate their nation's resilient heroism or to depict Poland from the 'martyrological' perspective by commemorating its suffering. The latter model was rooted in the Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz's *Księgi narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* (*Books of the Polish Nation and Polish Pilgrimage*), written in Paris a year after the suppression of the November Uprising of 1831. The bard proclaims:

Bo kto siedzi w Ojczyźnie i cierpi niewolę, aby zachował życie, ten straci Ojczyznę i życie; a kto opuści Ojczyznę, aby bronił Wolność z narażeniem życia swego, ten obroni Ojczyznę i będzie żyć wiecznie.*³⁴

Comparing Poland's partitions to the crucifixion of Christ, Mickiewicz announces his nation's role as the redeemer of Europe. His poem-cum-pamphlet continued to function as a touchstone of the Polish exile writer's patriotic commitment even in the mid-twentieth century.³⁵

Gombrowicz responds to the revival of Mickiewicz's messianic model of exile authorship with an intensified antagonism towards both Romantic and patriotic discourses. Although his opposition to the bond between the writer and the nation dates back to the very beginnings of his literary career, in *Trans-Atlantyk* he challenges Mickiewicz's authority head-on.³⁶ Ursula Phillips delineates the way Gombrowicz's novel parodies Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* (1834), Poland's national epic, through plot episodes such as 'the duel fought over a matter of honour and the hunting expedition – both of which prove to be pointless since there are no bullets and no hares; the ridiculous sleigh-ride on a boiling hot summer's day; the dancing of the polonaise, which ends in drunken hilarity'.³⁷ In 1968 Gombrowicz affirms that *Trans-Atlantyk* was conceived as a confrontation with Mickiewicz's epic:

Trans-Atlantyk rodził mi się poniekąd jako *Pan Tadeusz à rebours*. Ten poemat Mickiewicza, też na emigracji pisany sto lat temu z górą, arcydzieło naszej narodowej poezji, jest afirmacją polskości z tęsknoty poczętą. W *Trans-Atlantyku* pragnąłem przeciwstawić się Mickiewiczowi. (D4 104)[†]

* 'For whoever dwelleth in the Fatherland and suffereth slavery, that he may save his life, he loseth his Fatherland and his life; but he who forsaketh his Fatherland, that he may defend Freedom by the hazard of his own life, he defendeth his Fatherland, and shall live forever.' Trans. from Polish by Dorothea Prall Radin in Adam Mickiewicz, *Konrad Wallenrod and other writings of Adam Mickiewicz*, trans. from Polish by Jewell Parish and others (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), pp. 131-82 (p. 152).

† '*Trans-Atlantyk* was born in me like a *Pan Tadeusz* in reverse. This epic poem, written by Mickiewicz in exile over a hundred years ago, the masterpiece of Polish

Gombrowicz's definition of *Trans-Atlantyk* as '*Pan Tadeusz à rebours*' echoes a letter to his brother Janusz, written as early as 1952. Having received indignant letters from Polish readers around the world Gombrowicz appears amused by his new notoriety: 'Bardzo to wzmogło moją popularność w Narodzie i dziś jestem już nieomal oficjalnym wieszczem, acz nieco *à rebours*.'* 38

Besides the usual meaning of *à rebours* as 'against the grain' – a meaning that could have been expressed in Polish as *na odwrót*, *na opak*, *przewrotnie* or *na wspak* – Gombrowicz's use of the French expression echoes Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *À rebours* of 1884 (which Julian Rogoziński translated in 1976 as *Na wspak*). Reading *Trans-Atlantyk* in the light of this epitome of 'decadent' literature, it appears that Gombrowicz assumes a posture of self-conscious defiance of the dominant movement: just as Huysmans's novel constitutes a break with literary Naturalism and a turning point in the author's career, Gombrowicz demonstratively turns away from Romanticism and the Romantic model of exile authorship, while at the same time performatively announcing a new beginning in his trajectory as a writer. What is more, Huysmans's anti-hero Jean Des Esseintes provides a model for the decadent, debauched Gonzalo in Gombrowicz's novel: Des Esseintes, abandoning his life of dissipation, retreats to his country residence, which, filled with an eclectic art collection, becomes the setting for his life of aesthetic and intellectual contemplation. Gonzalo, in Gombrowicz's Postmodern riposte to Huysmans's Symbolist aesthetics, fills his villa in the Argentinian pampa with art only to reduce their its by their the sheer impression of overabundance; he never enters his library, but pays his

poetry, is an assertion of the Polish spirit inspired by nostalgia. In *Trans-Atlantyk* I wanted to stand up to Mickiewicz.' KT 107, translation modified.

* 'It has increased my popularity tremendously, in the Nation, and today I am almost an official bard, though somewhat in reverse.'

minions to read his collection of rare books for him. In this sense, Gonzalo represents a Jean Des Esseintes *à rebours* no less than Gombrowicz represents a Mickiewicz *à rebours*.

Gombrowicz's open rivalry with Mickiewicz represents a strategy of artistic self-fashioning. According to Stefan Chwin, Gombrowicz saw in his situation an opportunity to flaunt both collective and individual values: 'To be a bard, and at the same time to not be one! Because that was imposing and compromising at once! But how "to be a bard"? Naturally – by writing the "anti-*Pan Tadeusz*".'³⁹ Even while he casts himself as the anti-Mickiewicz, however, Gombrowicz also assumes the role of an even greater prophet and leader of his people. In his *Dziennik* of 1953 he proclaims:

Sto lat temu litewski poeta wykuł kształt polskiego ducha, dziś ja, jak Mojżesz, wyprowadzam Polaków z niewoli tego kształtu, Polaka z niego samego wyprowadzam... (D1 59)*

The idea that he would head the Poles' exodus out of national form, just as in the Old Testament Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt, makes clear how far Gombrowicz was from subscribing to Mickiewicz's model of exilic authorship. He envisioned his contribution to the national cause in a paradoxically anti-patriotic manner: he would become his nation's prophet of individualism.

Besides caricaturing the plot of *Pan Tadeusz* and fashioning himself as the anti-Mickiewicz who would lead the Poles out of their national form, Gombrowicz also parodies the Romantics through the pseudo-Baroque style of his novel. Chwin describes the stylistic mishmash of *Trans-Atlantyk* in terms of a culinary concoction:

* 'A hundred years ago, a Lithuanian poet forged the shape of the Polish spirit and today, I, like Moses, am leading the Poles out of the slavery of that form. I am leading the Pole out of himself.' DE 44.

[Gombrowicz] takes the seventeenth-century Polish *szlachta*'s provincial, anachronistic language smacking of Jan Chryzostom Pasek's diaries, mixes it with Sienkiewicz's phrases, seasons it with the Romantico-messianistic particularities of nineteenth-century Polish language, throws in the clumsy phraseology (and even stranger spelling) of the diaries of emigrant peasants, and onto this Sarmatian provincial-Baroque-rustic rambling he bestows the shape... of a philosophical tale about freedom and authentic life. That which is 'weak,' 'low' and anachronistic is transformed into something 'strong' and independent, and – yes! – something modern.⁴⁰

Chwin refers to the seventeenth-century *gawęda*, a colourful and uniquely Polish Baroque genre. Initially, from the sixteenth until the eighteenth century, it was an oral tradition rooted in the Sarmatian nobility – the *szlachta*. The storytelling gentleman would typically entertain friends with accounts of his pilgrimages and heroic exploits. The *gawęda* developed into a written diaristic tradition with Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł 'Sierotka' ('the Orphan'), who published an account of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1601, and Jan Chryzostom Pasek, whose legendary memoirs date from the end of the seventeenth century.⁴¹ During the Enlightenment the *gawęda* was discredited for its grotesque exaggerations and lack of consistency, but in the first half of the nineteenth century the Romantics revived the genre as a source of Polish beauty and authenticity. Henryk Rzewuski's *gawęda*-novel *Pamiętki Soplicy* (*Memoirs of Soplica*), published between 1839 and 1841, was an inspiration to both Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* (1834) and Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Trylogia* (*Trilogy*, 1884-88).

Although the *gawęda* was entirely obsolete by the time Gombrowicz took its obvious weaknesses ad absurdum, most Polish readers would have been familiar with it thanks to Mickiewicz's and Sienkiewicz's persistent popularity.⁴² In *Trans-Atlantyk* Gombrowicz not merely parodies the Baroque tradition, but also and above all he satirizes the nostalgia and sentimentality with which the Romantics appropriated it.⁴³ In the diary of 1953 he comments on Sienkiewicz: 'nigdy chyba nie było tak

pierwszorzędnego pisarza drugorzędnego' (D1 352)*. This paradox betrays Gombrowicz's understanding of the *gawęda* as a genre that was attractive not despite its faults but because of them.

Despite overwhelmingly negative reactions to *Trans-Atlantyk* in the Polish and émigré press, the novel's linguistic wizardry and intertextual density astounded readers in the 1950s and influenced the debate on exile writers' putative loss of their mother tongue.⁴⁴ Gombrowicz's choice of a culturally specific and therefore almost untranslatable language also represents a deliberate refusal to enter the global literary market through an easily translatable and universally appealing work. Embracing the *gawęda* he acknowledges his indebtedness to the Polish literary tradition but also indicates that he is in no way disenfranchised by it. Finally, his innovative use of the archaic and discredited genre allows him to enact, through the style of his writing, an alternative to the constricting binaries of tradition and originality.

* * *

A few years after his masterful refusal of Polish Romantic models of exile authorship, Gombrowicz engaged in an explicit debate on contemporary literature produced in emigration. In 1952 Jerzy Giedroyc asked Gombrowicz to translate the Romanian writer Emil Cioran's essay 'Avantages de l'exil,'⁴⁵ and to respond to it in a commentary to be published alongside Cioran's article in *Kultura*. An expanded version of this commentary appears in the *Diary* (D1 64-68; DE 48-52). Gombrowicz begins by contesting the very notion of 'an exile writer,' a label that unhelpfully

* 'there has probably never been such a first-rate second-rate writer.' DE 274.

groups together artists of every calibre. Great writers, he argues, always find themselves in the position of exiles, even within the borders of their homeland:

*Sztuka naładowana jest pierwiastkami samotności i samowystarczalności, znajduje ona swoje zadowolenie i swoją rację bytu w sobie samej. Ojczyzna? Przecież każdy z wybitnych, wskutek po prostu wybitności swojej, był cudzoziemcem nawet u siebie w domu. Czytelnicy? Przecież nigdy nie pisali oni 'dla' czytelników, zawsze 'przeciw' czytelnikom. Honory, powodzenie, rezonans, sława – przecież stali się sławni właśnie dlatego, że więcej cenili samych siebie niż swe powodzenie. (D1 64-65, italics are used in the original)**

Given that art is by definition a lonely pursuit which alienates the artist from society, the condition of exile should not be unfamiliar to any writer of merit.

Actual exile, according to Gombrowicz, serves to distinguish the genuine artist from the amateur whose success at home was only made possible by the artificial mechanisms supporting domestic literary production. Those whose careers are destroyed by emigration never had a chance to become 'authentic writers' in the first place. To the remaining few, expatriation 'should constitute an incredible stimulus' [*powinno stanowić niesłychaną podniętę*]:

Oto elita kraju zostaje wyrzucona za granicę. Może ona myśleć, czuć, pisać z zewnątrz. Uzyskuje dystans. Uzyskuje niesłychaną swobodę duchową. Pękają wszystkie więzy. Można być bardziej sobą. W powszechnym zamęcie rozluźniają się dotychczasowe formy, można w sposób bardziej bezwzględny dążyć do przyszłości. (D1 66)†

* 'Art is loaded with elements of loneliness and self-sufficiency, it finds its satisfaction and sense of purpose in itself. The homeland? Why, every eminent person because of that very eminence was a foreigner even at home. Readers? Why, they never wrote "for" readers anyway, always "against" them. Honors, success, renown, fame: why, they became famous exactly because they valued themselves more than their success.' DE 48-49, italics are used in the original.

† 'For lo and behold the country's elite is kicked out over the border. It can think, feel, and write from the outside. It gains distance. It gains an incredible spiritual freedom. All bonds burst. One can be more of oneself. In the general din all the forms that have existed until now loosen up and one can move toward the future in a more ruthless way.' DE 50.

Gombrowicz extols the freedom afforded by exile, but he also emphasizes that an excess of freedom may threaten the émigré writer's development: removed from the critical apparatus that regulated his self-expression at home, he is prone to slide off into 'anarchy' – an aspect of exile authorship that is more detrimental than the obvious difficulties relating to the lack of practical support or the absence of a readership. This is how Gombrowicz explains the fact that contemporary exile writers – even the best ones among them – do not 'roar like lions': '*są zanadto wolni. Sztuka wymaga stylu, porządku, dyscypliny*' (D1 66)*. What is more, those writers who fail the test of emigration may end up subscribing to the patriotic cause in order to regain the homeland where they had enjoyed literary success. This endeavour is doomed, since it embroils the writer in a vicious circle that jeopardizes his *raison d'être* as an artist: '*nie umie być pisarzem bez ojczyzny – lecz, aby odzyskać ojczyznę, musi przestać być pisarzem, pisarzem na serio*' (D1 67)†.

In the final section of his argument Gombrowicz proposes that writing in emigration is more in touch with reality than either Western European writing, which is produced by a cultural elite for its own consumption, or the Communist-inspired model of literature for the proletariat: since the dogma of Socialist Realism is imposed on writers from above, Gombrowicz argues, it is intrinsically even more elitist than the Western model. Turning the logic of the Communist regime against itself, he places his own literary practice on the highest rung of the ladder of pragmatism and authenticity: the exile writer is confronted with reality in the sense that he is directly in touch with his readership, that is to say the small community of

* '*they are too free. Art demands style, order, discipline*'. DE 50.

† '*He does not know how to be a writer without a homeland – but, in order to regain his homeland, he has to stop being a writer, at least a serious writer.*' DE 50-51 (translation modified).

fellow émigrés who are usually his intellectual inferiors, and who may or may not support him. Gombrowicz compares the expatriate writer to a bankrupt count who realizes that his salon manners are of no use where there is no salon: he will be in danger of isolating himself from his readers, or, alternatively, of letting his circumstances push him ‘w “demokratyczną” płaskość, w dobroduszną pospolitość lub w ordynarny “realizm”’ (D1 67)*. Exile writers, he insists, ought to find a way ‘aby znowu poczuć się arystokracją (w głębszym tego słowa znaczeniu)’ (ibid.)†. Gombrowicz concludes his polemic by pointing out once again that the challenges of writing outside one’s native country are directly related to the intrinsic challenges of literature: ‘Musimy wytworzyć tę porcję swobody, śmiałości i bezwzględności, a nawet powiedziałbym – nieodpowiedzialności, bez której twórczość jest niemożliwa’ (D1 68)‡.

Katarzyna Jerzak compares the strategies of exile authorship as proposed by Cioran and Gombrowicz. She argues that both writers engage in ‘a redefinition of exile which opposes the twin modernist topoi of, on the one hand, the nostalgia for the lost sense of belonging or, on the other, the glorification of homelessness’.⁴⁶ Despite his contentiousness, Jerzak suggests, Gombrowicz concurs with Cioran on several points, such as the idea that exile does not offer a facile substitute for the discipline of style. She also demonstrates that when Gombrowicz translated Cioran’s article, he manipulated it in such a way as to attenuate the original text’s positive representation of exile: this translation, which at Gombrowicz’s behest was left

* ‘Sometimes this pushes people in the direction of “democratic” shallowness, into a kindly ordinariness or into a crude “realism” and sometime it condemns them to isolation.’ DE 51.

† ‘to feel like aristocrats once again (in the deeper sense of the word).’ (Ibid.).

‡ ‘We have to produce that portion of freedom, boldness, ruthlessness, and even, I would say, irresponsibility, without which creation is impossible.’ DE 51-52.

uncredited, renders the French title ‘Avantages de l’exil’ as ‘Dogodności i niedogodności wygnania’ [‘Advantages and disadvantages of exile’]. According to Jerzak, ‘this blatant addition to the original title has done Cioran a great disservice in the eyes of the Polish readers. Cioran’s text is a celebration of exile, but ever since the title’s mistranslation, and Gombrowicz’s polemical response, Cioran’s supposed pessimism in face of exile has been juxtaposed to Gombrowicz’s verve and optimism.’⁴⁷ Developing his model of exilic authorship, Gombrowicz he not only rejected Mickiewicz’s Romantic notion of the selfless bard putting his gift to the service of the nation. As Jerzak’s comparative reading indicates, he also made sure, in a manner that was less than honourable, to distance himself from contemporary exile writers’ representations of their shared predicament.⁴⁸

Gombrowicz’s polemic with Cioran signals how his model of authorship had evolved since he left Poland. In particular, it allows to identify an important shift in his view of the relationship between the artist and his audience. As we saw in the previous chapter, the narrators of his pre-war novel *Ferdydurke* debunk idealizing notions of art. One of them dismisses the pretensions of high art in favour of the more pragmatic strategies of popular writers.⁴⁹ He also argues that the writer ought to take into account the reader’s real-life experience, and that to expect readers to get through an entire book in one sitting is unrealistic, as they will certainly get distracted in the course of their reading: ‘Na to więc konstruujemy całość, aby cząstka części czytelnika wchłonęła cząstkę części dzieła, i to tylko częścią?’ (F 65)*. Gombrowicz put his fictional narrator’s proposition into practice in his next novel, *Opętani* [*Possessed; or, The Secret of Myslotch*], which was serialized in two local newspapers in 1939. This work, which caters to all sorts of lowbrow tastes at once,

* ‘Is this why we construct a whole, so that a particle of a part of the reader will absorb a particle of a part of the work, and only partly at that?’ FE 71.

fulfilled Gombrowicz's dream of making some quick cash with a novel for the masses.⁵⁰ But *Opętani* is not as much a potboiler as an experiment with the production of compelling rubbish, kitsch, or *tandeta*. Its publication in serial form embraces the idea that readers rarely get through a work cover to cover without stopping. Although it appeared under a pseudonym, this popular novel can be seen as an enactment of the theory of authorship proposed in *Ferdydurke*, as well as the culmination of Gombrowicz's early experiments with pragmatic attitudes towards literature.⁵¹

What is striking about the way Gombrowicz's views on literature developed is the fact that he ostentatiously courted the public before the war, when he was an upcoming artist from a privileged family. In Argentina, however, when he found himself in serious financial trouble, he categorically refused to cater to popular tastes, and proclaimed that art was inherently self-sufficient and demanded sacrifices:

*Przykrą jest rzeczą nie mieć czytelników – bardzo nieprzyjemnie nie móc wydawać swoich utworów – wcale nie jest słodkie być nieznanym – wysoce niemile jest widzieć się pozbawionym pomocy tego mechanizmu, który wypycha na wierzch, robi propagandę i organizuje sławę... ale sztuka naładowana jest pierwiastkami samotności i samowystarczalności, znajduje ona swoje zadowolenie i swoją rację bytu w sobie samej. (D1 64-65)**

This ironic twist in Gombrowicz's vision of authorship reflects changes in the cultural and historical context of post-war Poland, namely the resurgent popularity of patriotic literature and the dominant status of 'proletarian' Socialist Realism. Instead of a desire to please the public, Gombrowicz now declares his commitment to the loftiest and most 'aristocratic' ideals of artistic integrity. In Argentina he celebrates

* 'It is very painful not to have readers and very unpleasant not to be able to publish one's works. It certainly is not sweet being unknown, highly unpleasant to see oneself deprived of the aid of that mechanism that pushes one to the top, that creates publicity and organizes fame, but art is loaded with elements of loneliness and self-sufficiency, it finds its satisfaction and sense of purpose in itself.' DE 48.

the image of the solitary writer who remains indifferent towards readers' expectations – the exact image he had previously ridiculed.

But Gombrowicz's post-war works are not free of contradictions. While in his autobiographical works he proposes the ideal of the uncompromisingly independent artist, in *Trans-Atlantyk* he enacts the opposite model, namely that of the émigré writer who is tempted to let himself be co-opted into a patriotic agenda. The anti-hero Witold does not lack an instinct for self-preservation; it is to save his own hide that he refuses to fight for his country, but then accepts the task of representing Poland as the national author: 'A co ja darowanemu koniowi w zęby patrzeć będę!' (ibid.)^{*}. When his compatriots glorify his genius, he knows that their veneration is founded on an equally base utilitarianism, but at the same time he cannot help feeling flattered: 'Ale święty, błogosławiony, prawdziwy hołd bo Czoło moje, Oko moje, Myśl moja i prawda moja i szczerłość serca mojego i śpiew mój i dostojność Moja!' (TA 35)[†]. Although Witold has nothing but contempt for his public, he figures that through their adoration he will become a great artist – a logic that mirrors the transubstantiation of the Eucharist: 'Ja, co z waszej Natury tępej a chytrej poczęte, wedle Natury mojej przyjmę i gdy mnie g... karmicie ja to jak Chleb i Wino jadł będę i się najem' (ibid.)[‡]. But his plan is doomed to fail. The magic transformation of 'sh.t' [*sic*] into 'Bread and Wine' – of institutional support into inspired verbal performance – fails to take place, and Witold is vanquished by the *Gran Escritor*.

^{*} 'And why look a gift horse in the mouth!' TE 28.

[†] 'Yet holy, blessed, true homage as that Forehead of mine, and the sincerity of that heart of mine, and that song of mine, and that dignity of Mine!' (Ibid.).

[‡] 'Whatever conceived by your Nature, blunt and wily, I will take according to my Nature and whilst with sh.t you feed me, I as Bread and Wine will eat it and will be Filled.' (Ibid.).

Having forfeited the endorsement of the *Polonia* he embarks on the adventures that will eventually provide the material for his story.

Witold's trajectory radically challenged contemporary readers' assumptions about artistic integrity. Not only is the protagonist cast as a deserter, but when he decides to comply with Mickiewicz's model of patriotic exile authorship, it is only for material gain; he is the quintessential 'writer-prostitute' – an image I will discuss in the next chapter. Witold's initial choice to enlist as the 'Great Polish Author' is portrayed as both compromising and futile. Instead, Gombrowicz presents the narrator's break with the Polish community as the beginning of Witold's becoming as an artist. With such a chain of violations of national pieties, a scandal was to be expected when excerpts of the novel appeared in *Kultura* in 1951 (issues 5 and 6). More subscriptions were cancelled in protest against *Trans-Atlantyck* than in reaction to any politically controversial article.⁵² After its complete publication (Paris, 1953; Warsaw, 1957) *Trans-Atlantyck* was mostly read as a straightforward representation of Gombrowicz's biography and ideological convictions, and critics were quick to accuse him of treason and moral aberration.⁵³ Michael Goddard suggests that 'for Gombrowicz, exile necessitated taking up a confrontational position in order to bring himself into existence for a second time in an even more virulent manner than he had done with *Ferdydurke*'.⁵⁴ But Gombrowicz, impolitic though he was, anticipated that most readers would have little understanding for his seemingly anti-Polish diatribes, and attempted to guide his audience towards what he considered the 'correct' interpretation of his work. Marian Bielecki observes that Gombrowicz wrote more prefaces to *Trans-Atlantyck* than to any other of his works.⁵⁵ Gombrowicz also asked the respected émigré writer Józef Wittlin to contribute an article in support of *Trans-Atlantyck* to *Kultura*. Wittlin stresses in his 'Apologia Gombrowicza' that 'a great

deal of courage is required for a Pole to admit, in Poland's most tragic hour, to his own cowardice,' and therefore 'respect is due to the protagonist of *Trans-Atlantyk*, who publicly confesses his lack of reverence' for such Polish sanctums as the fatherland, war, and the cult of status.⁵⁶

Artistic courage, integrity and self-gratification are key to the public image Gombrowicz forged for himself in the post-war years. Writing about the difficulties he endured owing to his defiant attitude, in his diary of 1960 he emphasizes his marginality and uprootedness with almost masochistic relish:

Dziś obudziłem się w rozkoszy, że nie wiem co to nagroda literacka, że nie znam honorów oficjalnych, karesów publiczności i krytyki, że nie jestem 'nasz', że wszedłem do literatury siłą – arogancki i kpiący. Ja jestem *self made man* literatury! Niejeden jęczy, że miał ciężkie początki. Ale ja debiutowałem trzy razy (raz przed wojną, w kraju, raz w Argentynie, raz po polsku na emigracji) i żaden z tych debiutów nie oszczędził mi upokorzenia. (D2 224)*

Gombrowicz's rhetoric of disregard for pragmatism and prudence, which simultaneously reproduces and subverts the traditional messianic model of the author's self-sacrifice, also marks his account of the production of *Trans-Atlantyk* in *Testament*. He insists that he wrote the novel without any hope for immediate success, and that the creative process was fuelled by nothing other than the desire for self-expression and the reckless pleasure of artistic creativity:

Jakimż wariactwem był ten *Trans-Atlantyk*! Pod każdym względem! Gdy pomyślę, że coś takiego napisałem, ja, wyrzucony na brzeg amerykański, bez grosza, zapomniany od Boga i ludzi! Przecież w moim położeniu trzeba było pisać na gwałt coś nadającego się do przetłumaczenia i wydania w obcych językach. Albo, jeśli już dla Polaków, to niechby przynajmniej nie obrażało uczuć narodowych. A ja zdobyłem się na ten szczyt niepoczytalności, że

* 'Today I awakened in the delight of not knowing what a literary award is, that I do not know official honors, the caresses of the public or critics, that I am not one of "ours," that I entered literature by force – arrogant and sneering. I am the self-made man of literature! Many moan and groan that they had difficult beginnings. But I made my debut three times (once before the war, in Poland; once in Argentina; and once in Polish in emigration) and none of these debuts spared me one ounce of humiliation.' DE 460-61.

sfabrykowałem powieść i niedostępną dla obcych z powodu trudności językowych i prowokującą emigrację polską, jedyne środowisko, na którego pomoc mogłem liczyć.

Oto co się zdarza, gdy w najczarniejszej degrengoladzie własnej i narodowej pisze się jednak i mimo wszystko dla przyjemności. Na jakież luksusy pozwalałem sobie w mojej nędzy! (D4 103)*

Gombrowicz stresses the sheer joy with which he produced a work that was going to antagonize his compatriots while doing nothing to alleviate his isolation from the international literary milieu. This insistence on the disinterested pleasure of the creative act was doubtless intended to bolster his credibility in the eyes of his readers. In fact it is surprising, in the light of his effort to create a public image of radical independence, that he makes so little of the fact that he never accepted lucrative official appointments with the government of the People's Republic of Poland.⁵⁷

In the text of *Trans-Atlantyk*, a sense of irresponsibility and pleasure [przyjemność] underlies the extravagant style and dynamic plot development. But the novel is more than a product or enactment of Gombrowicz's devotion to artistic independence and self-gratification; on the contrary, it also addresses the importance of limiting freedom and self-indulgence. A subtextual allegorical reading of the character constellation, as I will argue in the following section, reveals how in this novel Gombrowicz foregrounds the role of silence in the creative process,

* '[*Trans-Atlantyk*] was such a folly, from every point of view! To think that I wrote something like that, just when I was isolated on the American continent, without a penny, deserted by God and men! In my position it was important to write something quickly which could be translated and published in foreign languages. Or, if I wanted to write something for the Poles, something which didn't injure their national pride. And I dared – the very height of irresponsibility! – to fabricate a novel which was inaccessible to foreigners because of its linguistic difficulties and which was a deliberate provocation of the Polish émigrés, the only readership on which I could rely!

That is what happens in the hour of defeat. One writes, in spite of everything, for one's own pleasure. What a luxury I permitted myself in my misery!' KT 106.

anticipating his postulate that ‘*art demands style, order, discipline*’ (DE 50) in his polemic with Cioran of 1952.

* * *

Birgit Harreß argues that unlike in *Ferdydurke*, in *Trans-Atlantyk* Gombrowicz’s concern with authorship is ‘nicht narrativer Natur, sondern sozial-ontologischer,’ and that his engagement with literature is primarily ‘[eine] Auseinandersetzung mit dem Dichteramt’.⁵⁸ Although, as I showed above, Gombrowicz thematizes the practical aspects of the writer’s life and role in society, and engages in debates on the ‘socio-ontological’ aspect of exile writing, his exploration of literary creativity in *Trans-Atlantyk* transcends the ‘Auseinandersetzung mit dem Dichteramt’ and engages with the philosophical problem of *Dichtertum* – the nature of poetic existence. The problem of authorship in this novel is, to use Harreß’s term, of a profoundly ‘narrative’ nature. Gombrowicz hints at this subtextual layer in *Testament*, when he begins his discussion of *Trans-Atlantyk* with the following dialogue:

R.: Jaka jest akcja w *Trans-Atlantyku*?

G.: U mnie akcja to coś ubocznego, to tylko pretekst. (D4 103)*

By branding the plot as a ‘pretext’ Gombrowicz indicates that it must stand for something else. In the diary of 1954 he had used the concept of a ‘pretext’ in relation to writing and the author’s subjectivity: ‘nie wiadomo: czy dzieło jest tylko pretekstem abym ja się wypowiedział, czy też ja jestem pretekstem dla dzieła’ (D1 125)[†]. In the above-quoted passage of *Testament*, written about 15 years later,

* ‘The plot of *Trans-Atlantyk*? For me plots are never very important, they are only a pretext.’ KT 106.

† ‘is the work a mere pretext for expressing myself or am I a pretext for the work.’ DE 97.

Gombrowicz does not claim that *Trans-Atlantyk* (or its plot) represents a pretext for his self-expression. We are not told what the real purpose or significance of his novel might be, but the etymology of ‘pretext’ is suggestive: the word derives from the Latin *praetextum*, ‘disguise,’ and *praetexere*, ‘to weave in front’. It involves the notion of two layers: the pretext is immediately apparent, but it is merely a guise, a ploy, a fabricated story that conceals the true text hidden underneath. By exposing the plot of *Trans-Atlantyk* as a pretext Gombrowicz implies a deeper and more essential narrative, but he refrains from pinning down that alleged (sub)text, thus inviting his readers to search for the *text* underlying the *pretext*, that is to say the subtextual allegory of *Trans-Atlantyk*. Gombrowicz also implies the plot’s allegoricity by summarizing it in some detail, and by emphasizing the binary structure in the character constellation:

Opowiadam staroświecko-gawędziarską prozą, jak to w przeddzień wojny w Argentynie wylądowałem, jak wybuch wojny tam mnie złapał.

Ja, Gombrowicz, zawieram znajomość z ‘puto’ (pedek) zakochanym w młodym Polaku, i okoliczności czynią mnie arbitrem sytuacji: mogę pchnąć młodzieńca w objęcia pederasty, lub sprawić, by przy ojcu został, zacnym i honorowym majorze polskim starej daty.

Pchnąć go w objęcia tego ‘puto’, to wydać zboczeniu, zepchnąć na bezdroża, w odmęt dowolności, w bezgraniczność anormalności.

Wydrzeć go pederastie i przywrócić ojcu, to utrzymać go w dotychczasowej, tradycyjnej, bogobojnej postawie polskiej.

Co wybrać? Wierność przeszłości... czy wolność dowolnego stwarzania się? Przykuć do dawnego kształtu... czy dać swobodę i niech robi ze sobą co chce! Niech sam się stwarza!

Dylemat kończący się w powieści wybuchem powszechnego śmiechu, który i tę formę – dylematu – przewycięża. (D4 103-04)*

* ‘In an archaic prose, as though it were set in the distant past, I tell how, just before the war, I landed in the Argentine, how war broke out when I was there.

I, Gombrowicz, make the acquaintance of a *puto* (a queer) who is in love with a young Pole, and circumstances make me arbiter of the situation: I can throw the young man into the queer’s arms or make him stay with his father, a very honourable, dignified and old-fashioned Polish major.

To throw him into the *puto*’s arms is to deliver him up to vice, to set him adrift, to push him into the abyss of freedom, into limitless abnormality.

It is remarkable to what extent Gombrowicz dwells on the narrator's dilemma in this synopsis, and to what extent the dichotomy represented by the father and the *puto* seems to stand for the binary concept of Form and Anti-Form that Gombrowicz reiterates across his oeuvre.⁵⁹ But in as far as the father in *Trans-Atlantyk* stands for tradition and discipline, while the *puto* embodies deviation from tradition and the freedom of self-creation, the character constellation also coincides with Gombrowicz's paradigm of authorship as a reconciliation of creativity and control. In the exclamation 'Niech sam się stwarza!' ['Let [him] create himself!'] Gombrowicz echoes Gonzalo's assertion that Ignacy should be free to make his own choices. The elision of the Polish pronoun *on* [him] causes some ambiguity concerning the grammatical subject in the imperative: the sentence could also be translated as 'let *it* create *itself*'. This double meaning suggests that the character constellation contains an allegory of creativity or authorship. At the same time, Gombrowicz's reference to self-creation resonates with his notion of the text's self-engendering power. However, while in *Ferdydurke*, as I argued in Chapter 2, the ghostly double embodies the writer's previous work, there is no evidence anywhere in Gombrowicz's oeuvre for an equation between Ignacy and the emerging text in *Trans-Atlantyk*. The relevance of the paradigm of 'creativity and control' to Ignacy's subtextually allegorical role in this novel remains, therefore, to be assessed.⁶⁰

Among the four main characters in *Trans-Atlantyk* – Witold, Gonzalo, Major Kobrzycki and Ignacy – the first three clearly enact the dialectics of Gombrowicz's model of authorship: Gonzalo and Major Kobrzycki play the opposing roles of

To wrench him away from the queer and make him return to his father is to keep him within the confines of the honest Polish tradition.

What to choose? Fidelity to the past... or the freedom to create oneself as one will? Nail him to the old form... or let him loose and may he do what he likes! Let him create himself! In the novel the dilemma leads up to a general burst of laughter, which sweeps away the dilemma.' KT 106-07, translation modified.

originality and tradition, or creativity and control. The narrator Witold, carrying the author's name and torn between loyalty to old forms and the freedom of self-creation, represents a recognizable embodiment of the writer plagued by the need to negotiate these opposing forces. The symbolic role of the fourth character, Ignacy, is less straightforward. The boy exerts an irresistible attraction on Gonzalo as well as Witold; he generates the antagonism that drives the plot, and he sets in motion the novel's finale. Despite this central position, however, he remains almost entirely speechless. His silence, which complements his physical attractiveness, represents Ignacy's key characteristic. By disrupting the binary structures of Form and Anti-Form, or creativity and control, this silence underlies the allegory of authorship in *Trans-Atlantyk*, thus adding a new dimension to Gombrowicz's model of authorship.⁶¹

To my knowledge only Chwin has remarked on Ignacy's silence:

'Throughout the novel Ignacy does not even utter a single word – but does physical beauty need to speak at all? He speaks through a graceful promise of delight [Jego mową jest wdzięk rozkosznej obietnicy].'⁶² This statement is not quite accurate, as Gombrowicz does in fact show Ignacy to be possessed of language: when Gonzalo mentions that his mules cannot be mounted, Ignacy declares, 'ja spróbuję' (TA 97) ['I will try' TE 96]. This one utterance, addressed to no one in particular, remains unanswered. Ignacy's words bear hardly any consequence; if anything, they indicate his remoteness from the realm of language. Ignacy and Horacjo try to ride the mules; they fall off and burst out laughing ['śmiechem wybuchają']. It is this laughter that carries weight, not Ignacy's speech. Later Witold hears Ignacy's laughter again and is enchanted by it: 'Syn przede mną, a *głos* jego świeży, rześkie śmiechy, ruchy,

całego ciała radość, zręczność!’ (TA 107, my emphasis)*. This laughter, here as well as during the finale, remains non-verbal – a signifier without a signified.

The nearly wordless Ignacy has a predecessor in Gombrowicz’s oeuvre, namely the heroine of his first play, *Iwona, księżniczka Burgunda* (*Ivona, Princess of Burgundia*), completed in 1935 and published in 1938. Iwona, an unattractive commoner whom the Prince marries in protest against conventions of desire, remains almost speechless throughout the play. The royal family perceive her silence as a mode of resistance and decide to assassinate her.⁶³ Ignacy’s speechlessness, in opposition to Iwona’s, is not thematized in the fictional universe and cannot be accounted for in psychological terms, however broadly defined. Iwona’s silence is perplexing, but Ignacy’s is abstract, which heightens its allegorical significance.

Ignacy’s speechlessness functions in the context of a series of other silences in *Trans-Atlantyk*. The first moment of silence occurs during the verbal duel between Witold and the *Gran Escritor* at the beginning of the novel. Appointed as the token genius of the Polish nation Witold is set up to compete with the Argentinian maestro. He ends up defeated by his eloquent rival, and in his humiliation he realizes that he is speechless:

Ja się bez słowa zostałem! A bo już języka w gębie zapomniałem! A łajdak, tak mnie oniemił, że i słów nie miałem, bo co moje nie Moje, podobnież Kradzione! (TA 39)[†]

In exile, it seems, Witold has no voice, since verbal prowess and prestige are owned entirely by the local poet laureate. Michał Paweł Markowski reads this scene as one of symbolic castration.⁶⁴ I would juxtapose the narrator’s silencing – his

* ‘the Son before me and his fresh *Voice*, brisk laughter, movements, the whole Body’s Blitheness, sprightliness!’ TE 110, my emphasis.

† ‘I was left with no words for I had lost my tongue! And the scoundrel, he had made me mute so that I had no Words, as what is mine is not Mine, apparently Stolen!’ TE 34.

mut(e)ilation – with the deliberate quietness that characterizes the *Gran Escritor*:

‘Głos swój nieustannie ściszał, ale, im ciszy, tym właśnie donośniej, bo inni, ścisząc się, jeszcze bardziej go nasłuchiwali (choć i nie słuchają)’ (TA 38-39)*.

This scene presents silence simultaneously as a threat to authorship and as an attribute of the great writer. After this duel of wits the *Gran Escritor* disappears from the novel, but the themes of silence and authorship assume a central position.

Somewhat later in the novel Major Tomasz Kobrzycki is shown to control his environment in a way that is similarly authoritative: Gonzalo throws a beer glass at him, but the old major, bleeding from a cut on his forehead, remains motionless and silent. His dignified attitude quietens the rowdy company: ‘Od kropel tych Tomasza cichych cicho się zrobiło i Tomasz na nas patrzy a my na Tomasza; i tylko jemu piąta Kropla ścieka’ (TA 56)†. Witold is impressed with the way both the major and the *Gran Escritor* command respect through their masterful use of silence.

Witold also experiences silence as a conveyor of erotic tension. As he wanders through Gonzalo’s palace at night, he keeps stumbling over servant boys sleeping on the floor. Disgusted, he spits on the ground, but his spittle hits one of the boys in the face: ‘Jakoż tam Chłopak czarniawy, dość duży, leżał, na którego ja, nie chcąc, naplułem i jemu po uchu plwocina ściekała. On nic nie mówi, tylko na mnie spogląda’ (TA 93)‡.65 Just as the major silently allows his blood to trickle down his face, so the servant boy passively lets Witold’s spit dribble down his ear; the verb

* ‘That voice of his he quietened constantly but, the quieter the louder indeed, as other, having quietened themselves, all the more intently did listen (though they listen not).’ TE 32; translation modified to render Gombrowicz’s use of capital letters.

† ‘From Tomasz’s silent drops all became silent and Tomasz looks at us and we at Tomasz; and the fifth Drop dribbles.’ TE 52.

‡ ‘Indeed there a Boy, darkish, quite Large, a-lying was, whom I, not wilfully, did bespit and down his ear the Spittle was dripping. Naught he says, only at me gazes.’ TE 93.

‘ściekać’ is used in both cases (TA 56 and TA 93). And yet, while the old man’s stoicism appears brave and honourable to Witold, the servant boy’s impassivity strikes him as a provocation. He spits at him again and again in his outrage. The intense erotic undertone in this passage is exacerbated by the narrator’s contemptuous speech, until the scene comes to evoke a sadistic scenario:

Cóż do wszystkich diabłów, ścierwo, to ja pluję na ciebie, a ty nic, draniu, łajdaku, to jeszcze raz ci Napluję w pysk, w mordę, żebyś wiedział!... Naplułem, ale [...] widzę, że leży, nic, na mnie spogląda. [...] ja już na głos powiadam: – Ty taki owaki, już ty mnie ścierwo, draniu, nie przemożesz, a może ty myślisz, że ja pluć przestanę, ale niedoczekani twoje, już ja ci Napluję i pluć będę, ile mnie się zachce! Jakoż mu Naplułem, ale ani się ruszy i [...] widzę, że na mnie spogląda. (TA 93-94)*

Eventually Witold becomes aware of the incident’s latent homoeroticism: ‘A może on myśli, że ja tak dla przyjemności, dla Rozkoszy mojej?’ (TA 94)[†]. At this thought he panics and flees into a random bedroom, where (echoing Freud’s account of his ‘uncanny’ return to the prostitutes’ quarter in an Italian town⁶⁶) he finds himself, once again, facing the sleeping, naked Ignacy. Throughout *Trans-Atlantyk* Witold’s silent encounters with Ignacy and the servant boys connote a loss of control and a threat to the narrator’s sense of self.⁶⁷

Silence takes on yet another layer of meaning in the episode of the ‘Chevaliers of the Spur’. The recruits are imprisoned in a cellar whose doors are left open. They sit in deathlike silence, fearing torture if they draw attention to

* ‘What, to all the Devils with it, you carrion, I spit on you and you naught, you rogue, you Knave, so once more I will Spit into your craw, into your gullet so that you know!... And I spat but [...] I see that a-lying he is, naught, at me gazes. [...] whereupon I aloud say: “You something or other, you will not, you carrion, you rogue, you will not outdo me, and perchance you think that I will stop Spitting but just you wait, for I will Spit and am going to spit as much as I would!” Indeed I Bespat him but he moves not and, when a match I lit, I see that at me he does gaze.’ TE 93.

[†] ‘perchance he thinks that I so for my Pleasure, for my Delight?’ (Ibid.).

themselves: ‘nikt słowem się nie odzywa, [...] oddech prawie zapierają’ (TA 100)*.

The narrator, too, is perfectly quiet: ‘jak trup, nic nie mówię, nie oddycham, siedzę’

(ibid.)†. The atmosphere is tense and oppressive: ‘Owóz chyba ze trzy albo cztery

godziny my tak Przesiedzieli, jeden przy drugim, bez ruchu, bez głosu, a coś tam

Między Nami rosło, rosło, rosło’ (ibid.)‡. Although most of the Chevaliers have been

coerced to join the Order, there is no escape, since every movement is severely

punished by a stab in the leg, and the failure to discipline an insubordinate member

of the conspiracy is sanctionable by even greater violence. Dehumanized by this

terror the Chevaliers spend their days in silence. ‘I tak od rana do wieczora

Siedziemy, Siedziemy i Milczemy’ (TA 104)§. At night, however, they whisper

meaningless syllables:

Coraz więc szumniejsze, bujniejsze ponocne Pogwary i jeden tam się miota,
rzuca, drugi ‘chuli, buli’ szepcze, albo ‘klumka, klumka,’ i od ty mowy mnie
włos się jeżył a serce mdlało, jakbym w piekielnych przebywał okręgach.
(TA 105)**

In this episode silence is used to present life among the Polish community as a dystopian fantasy of surveillance, restriction and loss of meaningful expression.

Trans-Atlantyk is rife with representations of silence, and yet its role eludes classification. On the surface of the text, silence connotes a range of phenomena: the minor author’s domination by the established author; artistic and moral authority;

* ‘no one says a word, [...] breath they nigh seal’. TE 99.

† ‘as a Corpse speak naught, breathe not, sit.’ (Ibid.).

‡ ‘Ergo perchance three or four hours we Sat in this way, one next to another, with no movement, with no sound, and something there Amongst Us was growing, growing’. (Ibid.).

§ ‘from morn till eve we Sit Sit and keep Silence, speak little’. TE 105.

** ‘Evermore then sonorous, raucous nightly Natterings and there one squirms, Wiggles, another “Chuli, buli” whispers, or “klumka, klumka,” and from that Speech my hair stood on end and my heart grew faint as if I in the circles of Hell abided.’ (Ibid.).

overwhelming, unspeakable desire; and finally the deadly crushing of individual expression, repression, fear, and the pressure of the group on the individual. On a subtextual, allegorical level, however, silence pervades *Trans-Atlantyka* in the portrayal of Ignacy, who finally initiates the novel's explosive – and noisy – finale.⁶⁸

Witold's relationship with Ignacy is filled with ambiguity. On the one hand, the narrator clings to the traditional value system in which the son must be subjected to the father's will, but on the other hand, he is seduced by Gonzalo's revolutionary vision of *synczyzna*. Witold's contradictory feelings are expressed in his tendency to lose control of his walking: whenever his walking becomes automatic he finds himself drifting towards Ignacy. Thrice he enters the boy's bedroom :

Chód w stronę Syna mnie kieruje; i tak, ni stąd, ni zowąd, ja do Syna idę (a Chód mnie stał się powolny, nieśmiały). Syn, Syn, do Syna, do Syna! (TA 75)^{*}

Chodzę tedy i Chodzę. Ale gdy tak Chodzę, chód mój jakby dokądś iść zaczął i dokądś mnie wiódł (choć sam nie wiem dokąd)... tam zaś Ignac gdzieś, uśpiony, leży... owóż Chód mój chodzi i chodzi i chodzi, a tam Ignac... (TA 92-93)[†]⁶⁹

The third time, Witold does not enter Ignacy's room involuntarily. 'Wówczas do Syna iść postanowiłem. O Syn, Syn, Syn! Do niego ja pójdę, jego ja jeszcze raz w nocy zobaczę i może w sobie jakie uczucie poczuję... może świeżością jego się odświeżę...' (TA 113)[‡]. However, Witold is uncertain of the manner and purpose of his visit to Ignacy: 'a już sam nie wiem, czy jako zausznik Gonzala idę, czy

* 'the Going itself directs me towards the Son; and so of a sudden I to the Son go (and that Going of mine has become slow, shy). The Son, the Son, to the Son, to the Son!' TE 73.

† 'Ergo I walk and Walk. Yet when I so Walk 'twas as if my walking began to go somewhere and to lead me somewhere (although I myself know not where)... and in some place there Ignac sleeping lies... then that Walk of mine walks and walks and walks and there Ignac...' TE 92.

‡ 'Then to the Son I resolved to go. Oh Son, Son, Son! To him I will go, him once more by Night I will see and perchance within some feeling I will feel... perchance his freshness will refresh me...' TE 114.

Tomasza... a może idę żeby młodzieńca tego z ramienia Kawalerów Ostrogi mordować...' (ibid.)^{*}. Witold repeatedly finds himself standing in front of the naked boy, but his fascination is never carried to its erotic conclusion. The sleeping Ignacy's silence apparently prevents Witold from ever letting himself go completely.

On one occasion Witold comments on the fact that when he walks, even if he has an aim in mind, he will end up going astray:

Otórz Idziesz, ale Błądzisz, i postanawiasz co, planujesz, ale Błądzisz i niby tam *wedle woli swej układasz*, ale Błądzisz, Błądzisz i *mówisz*, robisz, ale w Lesie, w Nocy, błądzisz, błądzisz... (TA 72, my emphasis)[†]

The references to composition, language and intentionality in this passage indicate the self-reflexive allegoricity of Witold's automatic walking. His metanarrative comments appear to have slipped in, as if the narrator had deviated unintentionally from his subject (his account of *walking*) and ended up betraying his fascination with *language*. His tendency to stray in his walking appears to be bound up with his susceptibility to drift off, in his storytelling, into a preoccupation with language: both appear to defy his (authorial) control, and both appear to lead to an encounter with silence, as Witold encounters the silent sleeping Ignacy, while his text, once it becomes self-aware, leads him to confront the limits of language. Writing, Gombrowicz suggests, has a tendency to concern itself with writing; language is intrinsically self-reflexive.

* * *

^{*} 'now myself know not whether I as a talebearer of Gonzalo's go or of Tomasz's... and perchance I Go on behalf of the Chevaliers of the Spur that youth to murder...' (Ibid.).

[†] 'Thus you Go but you Stray, and you resolve, plan but you Stray, and *seemingly according to your will you contrive* but you Stray, Stray, and you *speaks*, Do but in a Wood, at Night, you stray, stray...' TE 70, my emphasis.

The significance of silence for Gombrowicz's model of authorship resonates with contemporary reflections on writing and silence, in particular Maurice Blanchot's collection of essays *L'espace littéraire* of 1955. Blanchot explores a series of dilemmas that bring to mind Gombrowicz's search for a model of authorship. In particular, the philosopher addresses the necessity to complement the sheer urge to write by embracing silence. To write literature, Blanchot asserts, is not to pursue self-expression, but to renounce it. It is to become the echo of an inner voice that speaks automatically, without beginning or end. This voice does not belong to individual subjectivity, nor does this voice express some 'universal' or communal truth. In order to give expression to this never-ending flow of inspiration, and to give it a coherent form, the writer must interrupt this flow: 'Ecrire, c'est se faire l'écho de ce qui ne peut cesser de parler, – et, à cause de cela, pour en devenir l'écho, je dois d'une certaine manière lui imposer silence.'⁷⁰ By imposing silence – his own *authorial* silence – on this incessant 'giant murmuring' of inspiration, the writer retains control and authority, and asserts his individual 'tone':

Le ton n'est pas la voix de l'écrivain, mais l'intimité du silence qu'il impose à la parole, ce qui fait que ce silence est encore le *sien*, ce qui reste de lui-même dans la discrétion qui le met à l'écart. (p. 22)

Blanchot argues that the writer cannot affirm his authorial identity through language. Language only expresses that interminable being [l'être] which is removed from the writer's 'I,' whereas the space of authorial self-expression is the silence that the writer imposes on the flow of language.

Blanchot proposes a visual image to elucidate the duality at the heart of literary creativity: the hand that writes incessantly, that will not let go of the pen, must be stilled by the hand of mastery. The writer's authority and individuality reside in that hand which silences the flow of writing:

La maîtrise de l'écrivain n'est pas dans la main qui écrit, cette main 'malade' qui ne lâche jamais le crayon, qui ne peut le lâcher [...]. La maîtrise est toujours le fait de l'autre main, celle qui n'écrit pas, capable d'intervenir au moment où il faut, de saisir le crayon et de l'écartier. La maîtrise consiste donc dans le pouvoir de cesser d'écrire, d'interrompre ce qui s'écrit, en rendant ses droits et son tranchant décisif à l'instant. (p. 19)

There is a crucial ambiguity in Blanchot's view of authorship as a 'silencing' of the incessant murmur of language. On the one hand the writer maintains the authoritative though silent affirmation of the effaced 'I' by renouncing his individual subjectivity; he breaks the bond between himself and language: 'Ce silence a sa source dans l'effacement auquel celui qui écrit est invité.' But on the other hand this silence expresses his authority: 'il est la ressource de sa maîtrise, ce droit d'intervenir que garde la main qui n'écrit pas, la part de lui-même qui peut toujours dire non' (p. 22).

Blanchot's paradoxical notion of renouncing and asserting one's ego, of relinquishing self-expression in order to impose on the text the unique quality of one's own silence, illuminates Gombrowicz's view of authorship as developed allegorically in *Trans-Atlantyk*. The father, Major Kobrzycki, stands for form, (literary) tradition, and authorial control; Gonzalo, the *puto*, represents free-flowing, formless inspiration and unrestrained creativity; Ignacy embodies a cluster of notions centred on the fascination of silence. To reconcile the opposing duo of creativity and control (Gonzalo and Major Kobrzycki), Witold must confront the potentially explosive force of the silent Ignacy. He must surrender to the passive boy's magnetic pull, and let himself go (walk or wander) toward him, without ever giving in completely, without arriving, touching, or 'coming'. Witold is overwhelmed with erotic tension and at the same time fears this eroticism; he is just as affected by Ignacy's peaceful silence (his sleeping body) as he is affected by the contagious noise of his laughter (his ecstatic body).

For Gombrowicz, to write – especially to write in exile – is to experience the full impact of two contradictory desires: to remain part of a tradition and to launch oneself into the unknown. Ignacy's figure allows him to explore the libidinal dimension of silence. By confronting silence – without, however, being seduced by it – the author, in Gombrowicz's view, allows the work to emerge on its own terms and at the same time restrains its free development. So far there is an overlap between Gombrowicz and Blanchot. But in the allegorical representation of writing in *Trans-Atlantyk*, the author does not need to *impose* silence on the work, as Blanchot suggests: Witold does not try to appropriate the kind of silence with which the *Gran Escritor* and Major Kobrzycki command the crowd. Silence is not merely a means of exerting control, nor can it become, in itself, an expression of creativity (the servant boys are entirely passive; the Chevaliers of the Spur are paralyzed with fear and sit around in deadly silence). In order to enter the space of composition, Witold, the author in the story, needs to find the silent space where creativity and control intersect.

* * *

Gombrowicz gives a fairly detailed account of the genesis of *Trans-Atlantyk* in his diary of 1957. He begins by reminding his reader of the tension between his person and his work, and the mutual influence between his life and his writing:

Historia mego stawania się to dzieje ciągłego przystosowywania się mego do mych dzieł literackich – które zawsze zaskakiwały mnie rodząc się w sposób nieprzewidziany, jakby nie ze mnie... Do

pewnego stopnia książki moje wynikają z mojego życia – ale w większej mierze życie urobiło mi się z nich i nimi. (D2 18)*

He then goes on to describe the moment of inspiration that led to the creation of *Trans-Atlantyk*. He reports that one night, as he was walking the streets of Buenos Aires, he entertained himself by weaving a story about his adventures in emigration. He insists that this was before he had even considered writing an autobiographically inspired novel. As he went along, a certain style, unusual but artistically promising, impressed itself upon him:

Razu pewnego, gdy wracałem w nocy z Caballito na piechotę, zacząłem się bawić układając sobie wspomnienia z pierwszych dni pobytu w Buenos Aires we wzór jakiegoś Grand Guignolu a zarazem, mocą samej przeszłości, poczułem się anachroniczny, udrapowany w stylu antycznym, uwikłany w jakiś sklerotyzm, nieomal pradawny – i to tak mnie ucieszyło, iż przystąpiłem zaraz do pisania czegoś, co miało być moim prapradawnym pamiętnikiem z owego czasu. (D2 18)†

This playful creativity brings Gombrowicz such joy [‘tak mnie ucieszyło’] that he begins to work seriously on the emerging project, transposing it from a mental improvisation to a written text. Again he emphasizes the work’s force of self-creation and its defiance of authorial intention:

Ale naturalnie – i jak zawsze – napoczęty utwór wymknął mi się, zaczął się sam pisać: to co obmyśliłem jako kronikę pierwszych moich poczynań po wylądowaniu przeobraziło się [...] na drodze chyba tych tysiącznych ustępstw, czynionych formie, w dziwaczną opowieść o Polakach, z ‘puto,’ z pojedyńkiem, z kuligiem nawet...

* ‘The history of my becoming is the history of my constant adjustment to my literary works – which always surprised me by being born in an unpredictable way, as if not of me... To a certain degree my books are a result of my life – but my life was formed in greater measure from them and with them.’ DE 295.

† ‘Once when returning from Caballito at night, I began to amuse myself by composing reminiscences from my first days in Buenos Aires on the model of some sort of Grand Guignol, and, at the same time, by dint of the past, I felt anachronistic, draped in an antique style, entangled in some sort of almost ancient scleroticism – and this gave me so much joy that I immediately commenced writing something that was to have been an antiquated memoir from that time.’ DE 295, translation modified.

Po roku z okładem ujrzałem, że jestem autorem *Trans-Atlantyku*.
(D2 18-19)*

Setting the moment of inspiration in the streets of Buenos Aires at night,

Gombrowicz recalls his fictional narrator Witold walking and talking to himself:

Otóż Idziesz, ale Błądzisz, i postanawiasz co, planujesz, ale Błądzisz i niby tam wedle woli swej układasz, ale Błądzisz, Błądzisz i mówisz, robisz, ale w Lesie, w Nocy, błądzisz, błądzisz... (TA 72)†

The coincidence of walking and writing that occurs in Gombrowicz's autobiographical text as well as in his fictional narrator's (interior) monologue connects the author and his alter ego, and indicates the autorepresentational aspect of the motif of walking in the novel.

It is also remarkable that in the diary Gombrowicz portrays writing in relatively cheerful terms: he omits to address, as he does in his accounts of writing *Ferdydurke* for instance, his struggle against the text's self-creation. His authorship of *Trans-Atlantyk* is not presented as the result of a resigned compromise, but as a happy realization after the fact, as the novel apparently did not require the drastic imposition of authorial control onto the wild creativity of the emergent work. It would be difficult to find a more contented or optimistic representation of literary composition by Gombrowicz than this. After *Trans-Atlantyk*, as I will discuss in the following chapter, the role of authorial control reappears in a new guise:

Gombrowicz invokes it not as a means of taming the flow of the writing, but employs his mastery in an effort to approach the source of creativity.

* 'But naturally – and as always – the commenced work began to slip away from me and began writing itself: what I had conceived as a chronicle of my first undertakings after landing had transformed itself somehow [...] into a strange novel about Poles, with a "puto," a duel, and even a sleigh chase... After a little more than a year, I noticed that I was the author of [*Trans-Atlantyk*].' DE 296.

† 'Thus you Go but you Stray, and you resolve, plan but you Stray, and seemingly according to your will you contrive but you Stray, Stray, and you speak, Do but in a Wood, at Night, you stray, stray...' TE 70.

Gombrowicz later belittled the scandal of the publication of *Trans-Atlantyk* and showed himself disappointed by its impact: ‘Nikt nie wziął tych cudactw zanadto na serio. Dynamit nie został dostrzeżony’ (D4 103)^{*}. And yet, after a decade of non-existence on the literary scene, with *Trans-Atlantyk* Gombrowicz re-enters the literary scene with a bang, or, to quote the closing words of Carolyn French and Nina Karsov’s translation of the novel’s closing words, with a ‘bam, boom, boom, bam Boom!’ (TA 122). He does not discuss his encounter with silence, but by thematizing the to-and-fro movement between walking and writing, writing and silence, silence and laughter, he posits *Trans-Atlantyk* as a self-conscious coda to his second debut – his debut as an exile writer.

¹ This text appeared in *Kultura* 6 (1952), pp. 3-6. I quote from Gombrowicz’s diary of 1953.

² On 28 April 1939 Germany unilaterally withdrew from both the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact of 1934 and the London Naval Agreement of 1935, but Poland was backed by a guarantee from Britain and France (signed on 31 March 1939) which stated that Polish territorial integrity would be defended with their support. The threat of war only became imminent after the unexpected signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on 23 August. By this date Gombrowicz had already left Poland. It is possible that Kępiński exaggerates his friend’s optimism as for the political situation in order to deflect accusations of Gombrowicz’s desertion. Jerzy Szymkiewicz-Gombrowicz, the writer’s brother, gives an account that is perhaps closer to the truth: ‘Witold hésitait parce que, à Rome, où il avait passé les fêtes de Pâques, on parlait déjà à haute voix d’une agression que Hitler préparerait contre la Pologne. Je l’incitais au départ, ne m’imaginant pas cet antimilitariste décidé, au milieu d’actions militaires. Il n’y avait pas de réserves de nature patriotique, car il était, eu égard à sa santé, exempt du service militaire.’ See ‘Mon Frère Witold et

^{*} ‘People ignored it. It was too bizarre to be taken seriously. The dynamite passed unnoticed.’ KT 106.

nos origines’, in *Cahier Gombrowicz*, ed. by Constantin Jelenski and Dominique de Roux (Paris: l’Herne, 1971), pp. 19-38 (p. 38); for the Polish original see ‘Mój brat Witold i nasi przodkowie’, *Miesięcznik Literacki*, 3 (1972), pp. 49-66.

³ Tadeusz Kępiński, *Witold Gombrowicz i świat jego młodości* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1976), pp. 388-89.

⁴ During the Nazi occupation the production of literature was officially suppressed; all artistic and literary institutions were disbanded; secondary schools and universities were shut down; about 85% of library holdings were liquidated. See Ryszard Matuszewski, *Literatura polska 1939-1991* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1992), pp. 9-10. See also Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006) and ‘Eastern Europe’, in *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism*, ed. by Pericles Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 216-33. On Nazi German campaigns that aimed to eliminate the Polish cultural elite, esp. the Intelligenzaktion of 1939-40 and the Außerordentliche Befriedungsaktion of 1940, see Maria Wardzyńska, *Był rok 1939: Operacja niemieckiej policji bezpieczeństwa w Polsce. Intelligenzaktion* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009), as well as *Nazism 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader*, 3 vols (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1983-1988), III: *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination* (1988), ed. by J. Noakes and G. Pridham, p. 965.

⁵ Cf. Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 445-53.

⁶ See Gombrowicz’s letter to his brother Janusz, dated 24 October 1949, in *Witold Gombrowicz: Listy do rodziny*, ed. by Janusz Margański (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004), p. 27.

⁷ Maria Delaperrière, ‘L’émigration en tant que pulsion identitaire: L’exemple de Gombrowicz’, in *Littérature et émigration dans les pays de l’Europe centrale et orientale*, ed. by Maria Delaperrière (Paris: Institut d’Études Slaves, 1996), pp. 91-103 (pp. 92-93).

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- ⁸ Giedroyc was in favour of Polish exile writers signing a declaration of non-cooperation with Soviet-controlled publishing houses in Poland. To argue against this proposal was obviously in Gombrowicz's interest.
- ⁹ Besides the fictionalized account of the gay scene in Buenos Aires in *Trans-Atlantyk* Gombrowicz also wrote about his Retiro adventures in the *Diary* (D1 208-11; DE 162-64).
- ¹⁰ Gombrowicz gave this talk, titled 'Doświadczenia i problemy Europy mniej znanej' ['The Challenges and Problems of the lesser-known Europe'], on 28 August 1940. Klementyna Czernicka (later Suchanow) reconstructs the argument from announcements and reviews in the press. See 'Odczyt Gombrowicza w Teatro del Pueblo', *Teksty Drugie*, 3 (2002), 252-56.
- ¹¹ See Klementyna Suchanow, *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005), p. 46.
- ¹² See Czernicka, 'Odczyt Gombrowicza w Teatro del Pueblo', p. 256.
- ¹³ These essays were translated into Polish by Ireniusz Kania and published with a preface by Rita Gombrowicz as Witold Gombrowicz, *Nasz dramat erotyczny* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003).
- ¹⁴ *Aurora: Revista de la resistencia*; dated 6 October 1947. Translated into Polish by Ireniusz Kania in Witold Gombrowicz, *Varia I: Czytelnicy i krytycy: proza, reportaże, krytyka literacka, eseje, przedmowy*, compiled by Maria Rola (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004), pp. 358-65.
- ¹⁵ For a discussion of *Aurora* see Marian Bielecki, *Interpretacja i pleć: szkice o twórczości Gombrowicza* (Wałbrzych: Wydawnictwo Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Angelusa Silesiusa, 2005), pp. 181-99. On Gombrowicz's relationship with Argentinian writers, see Klementyna Suchanow, 'Gombrowicz et l'Argentine', in *Witold Gombrowicz entre l'Europe et l'Amérique*, ed. by Marek Tomaszewski (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2007), pp. 225-35.
- ¹⁶ The original Polish version of *Ślub* did not appear until 1953, when it was published alongside *Trans-Atlantyk* with the Instytut Literacki in Paris. In Poland the joint edition appeared with *Czytelnik* in Warsaw in 1957.

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- ¹⁷ See *Gombrowicz en Argentine: témoignages et documents 1939-1963*, ed. by Rita Gombrowicz (Montricher: Noir sur Blanc, 2004), p. 122.
- ¹⁸ *El Casamiento* appeared with EAM in Buenos Aires in 1948. See Suchanow, *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza*, pp. 259-61.
- ¹⁹ According to Thomas F. Anderson the style of the writing in some of Gombrowicz's Spanish publications indicates that '[Virgilio] Piñera often corrected and collaborated in Gombrowicz's texts in Spanish'. See *Everything in Its Place: The Life and Works of Virgilio Piñera* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), p. 54.
- ²⁰ See Rita Gombrowicz, ed., *Gombrowicz en Europe: témoignages et documents 1963-1969* (Paris: Denoël, 1988), p. 320.
- ²¹ See Suchanow, *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza*, pp. 148-55 and pp. 261-62.
- ²² The narrator is mostly referred to as 'Gombrowicz,' but I use his first name to distinguish him from the author.
- ²³ See for instance: 'Szła Gonzala,' TA 72 ['A-going hers was Gonzala,' TE 78]; 'Gonzala chytra,' TA 120 ['artful Gonzala,' TE 114]. The English translation cannot reproduce the genitive and accusative forms of the masculine name 'Gonzalo,' which in Polish is 'Gonzala'. To the reader of the Polish text, accustomed to this regular declination, the feminized nominative version 'Gonzala' will appear less striking than to the reader of the English translation. By implication, Gonzalo's gender-bending exploits are more insidiously masked in the Polish text, as the following example demonstrates: 'Znów tedy na *Gonzala* patrzę w osłabieniu mojem, ale nie Gonzalo to chyba, a *Gonzala*,' TA 118, my emphasis ['Again then at *Gonzalo* I look in that weakness of mine, yet not Gonzalo 'tis perchance but *Gonzala*,' TE 112, my emphasis.].
- ²⁴ Michał Głowiński, 'Parodia konstruktywna: O *Pornografii* Gombrowicza', in *Gombrowicz i krytycy*, ed. by Zdzisław Łapiński (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), pp. 365-83 (p. 373).
- ²⁵ Hanjo Berressem, 'The Laws of Deviation', in *Gombrowicz's Grimaces: Modernism, Gender, Nationality*, ed. by Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 89-131 (p. 114).

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- ²⁶ On Straszewicz's life and work see Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, p. 524.
- ²⁷ The jealousy and ambivalence that marked Gombrowicz's relationship with Borges can be gleaned from his diary entry of 1955 (D1 212-13; DE 166), as well as from Borges's accounts of his meetings with Gombrowicz in 'Dwugłos', in *Tango Gombrowicz*, ed. by Rajmund Kalicki (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), pp. 132-34. Rita Gombrowicz observes: 'Alors que Gombrowicz n'a jamais cessé de "s'occuper" de Borges, dans ses conversations, dans ses écrits [...], alors qu'il avait lu l'œuvre de Borges et admirait certains de ses contes [...], Borges, au contraire, a toujours ignoré l'œuvre de Gombrowicz et gardé le silence sur lui.' *Gombrowicz en Argentine*, ed. by Rita Gombrowicz, p. 68.
- ²⁸ Ricardo Piglia, '¿Existe la novela argentina?', *Espacios de Crítica y Producción*, 6 (1987), 13-15 (p. 13). I am not aware of any references by Gombrowicz to Maella or Láinez. For an analysis of Gombrowicz's relationship to his Argentinian colleagues, see Dieter Reichardt, 'Gombrowicz vs. Borges', in *Gombrowicz in Europa: deutsch-polnische Versuche einer kulturellen Verortung*, ed. by Andreas Lawaty and Marek Zybura (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), pp. 17-28, my translation.
- ²⁹ Alejandro Rússovich, 'Russovich o Gombrowiczu', *Teatr*, 9 (1995), 10-12 (p. 12). Reinaldo Arenas, a friend of Piñera's, gives a graphic portrayal of Piñera and Gombrowicz as cruising buddies. See *Before Night Falls*, trans. by Dolores M. Koch (London: Serpent's Tail, 2001), p. 80. Suchanow questions the truthfulness of Arenas's story in *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza*, p. 63. For Piñera's account of his friendship with Gombrowicz see *Gombrowicz en Argentine*, ed. by Rita Gombrowicz, pp. 73-77.
- ³⁰ See Czernicka, 'Odczyt Gombrowicza w Teatro del Pueblo', p. 254.
- ³¹ Guillermo Cabrera Infante, 'Mea Cuba', in *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. by Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 481-87 (p. 482).
- ³² On the Polish tradition of the national bard or *wieszcz* see Carl Tighe, *The Politics of Literature: Poland 1945-1989* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 5.

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- See also Fernando Presa González, 'Polish Literature in the Great Emigration of 1830: Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński', in *Literature in Exile of East and Central Europe*, ed. by Agnieszka Gutthy, Middlebury Studies in Russian Language and Literature, 30 (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 53-71.
- ³³ Janusz Kryszak, *A po ziemi wychodźcy idą w obce kraje: O poezji i poetach Drugiej Emigracji* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2010), p. 7.
- ³⁴ Adam Mickiewicz, *Księgi narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego*, ed. by Zygmunt Dokurno (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1979), book VII, v. 3, p. 233.
- ³⁵ Mickiewicz's poem was, for instance, among the works that the Instytut Literacki reprinted within a year of its foundation (1946). For a discussion of Mickiewicz's messianic 'utopia of peace and brotherhood' see Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 87. See also Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 239-46.
- ³⁶ See Beth Holmgren, 'Witold Gombrowicz within the *Wieszcz* Tradition', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 4 (1989), 556-70 (p. 558).
- ³⁷ Ursula Phillips, 'Gombrowicz's Polish Complex', in *New Perspectives in Twentieth-Century Polish Literature: Flight from Martyrology*, ed. by Stanislaw Eile and Ursula Phillips, Studies in Russia and East Europe (SSEES) (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 28-46 (p. 36). Charles S. Kraszewski points out the novel's parodic engagement with Mickiewicz's *Dziady III* and Słowacki's *Król Duch*. See 'Witold Gombrowicz – *Trans-Atlantyk*', in *The Romantic Hero and Contemporary Anti-Hero in Polish and Czech Literature: Great Souls and Grey Men* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1998), pp. 213-32.
- ³⁸ Letter to Janusz Gombrowicz, 15 February 1952, in Witold Gombrowicz: *Listy do rodziny*, p. 38.
- ³⁹ Stefan Chwin, '*Trans-Atlantyk* wobec *Pana Tadeusza*', *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 4 (1975), 97-121 (p. 100).
- ⁴⁰ Stefan Chwin, 'Gombrowicz i Forma polska', afterword to Witold Gombrowicz, *Trans-Atlantyk* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004), pp. 129-49 (pp. 140-41).

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- ⁴¹ On Pasek's memoir see Catherine S. Leach's 'Foreword', 'Preface', and 'Introduction' to Jan Chryzostom Pasek, *The Writings of Jan Chryzostom Pasek, a Squire of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania*, ed. and trans. by Catherine S. Leach (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. xiii-lxi.
- ⁴² Cf. Leach, 'Foreword', p. xvi.
- ⁴³ On the style of *Trans-Atlantyk* in relation to the Polish literary tradition see Krystyna Schmidt, *Der Stil von W. Gombrowicz' 'Trans-Atlantyk' und sein Verhältnis zur polnischen literarischen Tradition*, Slavisch-Baltisches Seminar der Westfälischen Wilhelms Universität-Münster, 18 (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1974); see also Stanisław Balbus, 'Stylizacja polemiczna (parodystyczna)', in *Między stylami* (Cracow: Universitas, 1996), pp. 347-56. Balbus emphasizes that 'if Gombrowicz speaks in the language of his remote ancestors, it is not to ridicule them, but to ridicule their presence *in himself*' (p. 354). George Z. Gasyňa reads *Trans-Atlantyk* alongside Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, presenting it as 'a bravura performance of autonomous language deployed by a deracinated – because exilic – speaking subject'. See *Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise: Exilic Discourse in Joseph Conrad and Witold Gombrowicz* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 145 (and pp. 158-59 on the use of the *gawęda*).
- ⁴⁴ On this debate see Hans-Christian Trepte, 'Zur Problematik kultureller Identität bei Witold Gombrowicz', in *Gombrowicz in Europa*, ed. by Lawaty and Zybura, pp. 55-67 (p. 65).
- ⁴⁵ E. M. Cioran, 'Avantages de l'exil', in *Œuvres*, ed. by Ives Peyré (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Quarto, 1995), pp. 854-57. The philosopher and essayist Emil Cioran (1911-1995) left his native Romania for France in 1937 and wrote exclusively in French after 1945.
- ⁴⁶ Cf. Katarzyna Jerzak, 'Defamation in Exile: Witold Gombrowicz and E. M. Cioran', in *Gombrowicz's Grimaces*, ed. by Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, pp. 177-209 (p. 178).
- ⁴⁷ Jerzak, 'Defamation in Exile', p. 203 n. 1.
- ⁴⁸ On representations of exile by Gombrowicz, Cioran, and Czesław Miłosz see Wojciech Karpinski, 'The Exile as a Writer: A Conversation about Sorrow and

Joy', in *Literature in Exile*, ed. by John Glad (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 131-38.

⁴⁹ In the metafictional chapter four of the 1937 edition of *Ferdydurke* Gombrowicz writes:

Przypuszczam, że Szekspir i Goethe prędzej podaliby rękę autorowi zwykłego kryminalnego lub kolejowego romansu, niż wam. Gdyż kryminalny, ale popularny, stoi na własnych nogach, na nogach swoich czytelników, a wy Dostojewskiemu wisicie u paska, [...] przedrzeźniacie nędznie to, co on powiedział dobrze, wytwarzacie nadmiar, tłok i ścisk tam, gdzie na tłok nie ma miejsca. (F 382)

I suppose that Shakespeare and Goethe would rather have shaken hands with the author of a simple crime novel or railway romance than with you. For a criminal but popular author stands on his own feet, on the feet of his readers, whereas you're hanging on to Dostoevsky's belt, [...] and by aping pathetically what he said ably you create a surplus, a squeeze and a throng where there is no space for a throng.

Gombrowicz removed this passage from the 1957 edition.

⁵⁰ According to his brother Jerzy, Gombrowicz was paid 5000 złoty for this novel, which was a large fee at that time. See Jerzy Szymkowicz-Gombrowicz, 'Mon Frère Witold et nos origines', p. 30.

⁵¹ In *Wspomnienia polskie (Polish Memories)* Gombrowicz discusses three early attempts to write popular fiction. See in particular his account of a novel for the masses that he co-authored with his above-mentioned friend Tadeusz Kępiński:

Zacząło się od tego, iż z Tadzkiem Kępińskim, moim ex-kolegą szkolnym, postanowiliśmy napisać na cztery ręce powieść sensacyjną żeby zarobić kupę forsy. Nie wątpiliśmy iż intelektom wyższym, jak nasze, nietrudno będzie spłodzić taką brechtę — łatwą a pasjonującą. Wkrótce jednak rzuciliśmy wszystko do kosza, przerażeni niezdarnością naszych gryzmołów. (WP 48)

It began when Tadzio Kępiński, my former school friend, and I decided to co-author a thriller to make ourselves a pile of money. We didn't doubt that superior intellects like ours would have no problem producing such tripe — easy and gripping reading. Soon, however, we threw everything into the trash, dismayed at the gracelessness of our scribblings. (PM 45-46)

⁵² See Jerzy Giedroyc, *Autobiografia na cztery ręce*, ed. by Krzysztof Pomian (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1994), pp. 163-64.

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- ⁵³ See Gasyňa, *Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise*, pp. 144-45. For an account of the novel's enthusiastic reception by the cultural elite of Poland in 1957 see Stanisław Barańczak, 'Introduction', in TA ix-xxi (p. ix).
- ⁵⁴ Michael Goddard, *Gombrowicz, Polish Modernism, and the Subversion of Form* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2010), p. 88.
- ⁵⁵ Bielecki, *Interpretacja i pleć*, p. 205.
- ⁵⁶ Józef Wittlin, 'Apologia Gombrowicza', in *Gombrowicz i krytycy*, ed. by Zdzisław Łapiński (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), pp. 83-92 (p. 89). First printed in the double issue *Kultura*, 7/8 (1951), 52-60; a slightly altered version of this text appeared as a preface in Witold Gombrowicz, *Trans-Atlantyk. Ślub* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1953). On the two writers' personal relationship see Jerzy Jarzębski, 'Gombrowicz i Wittlin: dwaj spiskowcy', in *Pożegnanie z emigracją: o powojennej prozie polskiej* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1998), pp. 161-79. On their converging ideas about exile literature, see Jerzy Jarzębski, *Podglądanie Gombrowicza* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000), p. 157.
- ⁵⁷ On Gombrowicz's rejection of a post as cultural attaché for Communist Poland's Argentinian embassy see Suchanow, *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza*, pp. 83-95.
- ⁵⁸ Birgit Harreß, *Die Dialektik der Form: Das mimetische Prinzip Witold Gombrowiczs* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 142.
- ⁵⁹ For a discussion of how this antithetical system plays out in *Trans-Atlantyk* see Jan IJ. van der Meer, *Form vs. Anti-Form: Das semantische Universum von Witold Gombrowicz* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), p. 76.
- ⁶⁰ Gasyňa describes the metonymic functions of several characters in *Trans-Atlantyk*: the narrator represents a 'synecdoche' in as far as he 'finds himself invested in a personal drama of self-making that posits him *against* the nation, against the norm of the imagined cultural community'. See *Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise*, p. 148. Ignacy represents 'a metonymy of exilic becoming which may – or ought to – be undertaken apart from the strictures of national patriarchy' (p. 150). The marginal figure Cieciszowski, finally, is presented as 'a metonymy for the "in-between" émigré, paralyzed into inaction by a primary sense of liminality and attendant

ambivalence, trudging softly [...] back and forth between the host culture and the patriotic/anachronistic agencies of the expatriate “colony” ’ (p. 153).

- ⁶¹ Ignacy’s physical allure brings to mind Thomas Mann’s novella *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912). Like Ignacy, the beautiful Polish boy Tadzio finds himself in a southern land with a stern parent and becomes the object of an older man’s desire. Tadzio is not silent – he speaks Polish with his family, but his admirer Gustav Aschenbach does not understand the language, and the boy’s words are never quoted in the text. His perceived speechlessness arguably adds to his charm, and could have represented a model for Gombrowicz’s Ignacy.
- ⁶² Chwin, ‘Gombrowicz i Forma polska’, p. 145.
- ⁶³ For a feminist reading of Iwona’s silence see Monika Żółkoś, *Ciało mówiące* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2001), pp. 13-24.
- ⁶⁴ Michał Paweł Markowski, *Czarny nurt: Gombrowicz, świat, literatura* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004), p. 31.
- ⁶⁵ Witold’s spitting in the face of the boy echoes Gombrowicz’s sketch ‘Ferdydurke’ of 1935, where the narrator chases his ghostly double by spitting him in the face. Both scenes mix desire and violence, contempt and admiration. The *manner* in which Gombrowicz’s fictional creations exert physical violence on one another deserves a separate study. See also Chapter 4, n. 67 on Gombrowicz’s fascination with the nature of *stabbing* in the play *Iwona* and the novel *Pornografia*.
- ⁶⁶ Sigmund Freud, ‘Das Unheimliche’, in *Studienausgabe*, ed. by Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards, and James Strachey, 8th edn (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1989), IV: *Psychologische Schriften*, pp. 241-74 (p. 260).
- ⁶⁷ I agree with José Quiroga, who argues that the stylized language of *Trans-Atlantyk* enacts a tension between control and loss of control – a tension that is symptomatic of Gombrowicz’s play with silence as a code of homosexuality. See *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 137.
- ⁶⁸ For a Bakhtinian reading of the finale as ‘carnavalesque’ see Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, ‘The Scar of the Foreigner and the Fold of the Baroque’, in *Gombrowicz’s Grimaces*, ed. by Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, pp. 213-44 (p. 224).

⁶⁹ Olaf Kühl suggests about the passage quoted here that grammatical nominalization renders Witold's 'walking' more 'independent,' allowing it to become the agent that 'pushes' Witold 'where he himself would never have dared to go'. See *Stilistik einer Verdrängung: Zur Prosa von Witold Gombrowicz* (Berlin: Freie Universität, 1995), pp. 72-73.

⁷⁰ Maurice Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 21.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘NAKED REALITY’:
REALISM, EROTICISM, AND AUTHORSHIP IN *PORNOGRAFIA*

Nie wierzę w filozofię nieerotyczną.
Nie ufam myśleniu, które wyzwala się z płci...

Gombrowicz, 1960 (D2 249)*

[Literary pornography] could not have been written
except for that agonized reappraisal of the nature of
literature which has been preoccupying literary Europe
for more than half a century.

Susan Sontag, 1967¹

In his fourth novel *Pornografia*, which tells the story of the mutual seduction of two middle-aged men and two sixteen-year-olds, Gombrowicz departs from the experimental structure and style of *Ferdydurke* and *Trans-Atlantyk* and turns to a more traditional narrative model. Ewa Thompson observes that ‘for the first time in Gombrowicz’s works, the characters seem to be round rather than flat, the narration free of neologisms and proceeding in a chronological manner’.² The language is unadventurous compared to the novels discussed in the previous chapters.³ What is more, *Pornografia* is free from metanarrative digressions and thinly veiled polemics with contemporary writers and critics; only the poet Stanisław Piętak (1909-1964), Gombrowicz’s acquaintance from pre-war Warsaw, is mentioned briefly at the

* ‘I do not believe in a nonerotic philosophy. I do not trust thought that frees itself from sex...’ DE 481.

beginning (P 8; PE 4) as if to stress the realism of the narration. Relying on his memories from pre-war Poland to create an authentic atmosphere, Gombrowicz set the main plot near the village of Ćmielów, just a few kilometres from his native Małoszyce. His representations of the local customs, the landscape, and even the special quality of the light in the region were deemed convincing; just after the novel's publication in 1960 Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz complimented Gombrowicz in a letter: 'It's astonishing how well you remember the Polish village – everything, the hedges, the earth, the clay wall with holes for the potatoes.'⁴ But *Pornografia*, unlike *Trans-Atlantyk*, does not invite speculation on direct biographical sources. Even though the first-person narrator is portrayed as a middle-aged writer named Witold Gombrowicz, the plot is set in Poland in 1943, while Gombrowicz the author spent the war years in Argentina. This departure from teasingly autobiographical fiction, along with the emphasis on local flavour and authenticity, positions *Pornografia* closer to the realist model than to Gombrowicz's earlier experimental fiction.

Gombrowicz makes sure to draw attention to this shift in style. In his preface to the first edition he declares that *Pornografia* was 'odrobione na wzór taniego romansu z gatunku Rodziewiczówny, czy Zarzyckiej' (P 5)*. These two authors, Maria Rodziewiczówna and Irena Zarzycka, specialized in the popular genre of *romans ziemiański*, the gentry love story set on an idealized country manor and vaguely associated with psychological realism.⁵ *Pornografia* is indeed set on a *dworek* (the traditional Polish manor), but the setting is ostentatiously presented as anachronistic and theatrical:

Dom [...] oszołomił jak nieskalane zjawisko z [...] przedwojnia... i w swej dawności nie naruszonej zdawał się być prawdziwszy od terażniejszości... a jednocześnie świadomość, że to nieprawda, że on kłóci się z rzeczywistością,

* 'conceived on the model of a cheap romance [*romans*] in the manner of Rodziewiczówna or Zarzycka'. PE xvii, translation modified.

czyniła go czymś w rodzaju teatralnej dekoracji... więc w końcu ten dom, park, niebo i pola stały się zarazem teatrem i prawdą. (P 13-14)*

As far as the plot is concerned, Gombrowicz also ridicules and subverts the generic conventions of the country romance. Instead of a nubile young couple in pursuit of romantic love he presents a pair of cynical middle-aged artists trying to pervert two sixteen-year-olds who are already too corrupt to be interested in one another.

In *Pornografia* eroticism also suggests problems that have nothing to do with romantic love. No matter how absorbed the two gentlemen are in their passion for the youths, they always treat sex in aesthetic and quasi-scientific terms. They create tableaux vivants from which they derive both sexual titillation and artistic satisfaction, and they use their companions' initials to formulate 'explosive' chemical equations, such as 'A (Amelia) multiplied by (H + K) (Henia plus Karol)' (P 69; PE 97). Such abstract representations stand for the sex act in *Pornografia*, and even an intellectual dialogue can suggest copulation. Observing the duel-like encounter between the atheist Fryderyk and the Catholic Amelia, the narrator remarks: 'Wszystko to przypominało bardzo kopulację, duchową oczywiście' (P 65)†. This logic of substitution indicates that both realism and eroticism are treated with ironic distance in *Pornografia*, and that they are engaged in a metaphorical exploration that has nothing to do with either the pursuit of love or reality.

Gombrowicz thematizes his allegiance with realism in *Testament*. 'Jestem skrajnym realistą,' he declares. 'Jednym z naczelných zadań mojego pisanía to

* 'the house overwhelmed us like an unspoiled vision from [...] prewar time[s]... and in its untouched bygone state it seemed more real than our present time... while at the same moment the awareness that there was no truth to it, that it as inconsistent with reality, turned it into something akin to a stage set... so then this house, the park, the sky and the fields became both theatre and truth.' PE 13.

† 'The whole thing was reminiscent of copulation, a spiritual one of course.' PE 91.

przedrzeć się poprzez Nierzeczywistość do Rzeczywistości’ (D4 21)*. The capital ‘R’ in ‘Rzeczywistość’ [Reality] suggests that his goal is not to attain what is broadly understood as reality with a small ‘r,’ but the Reality with a capital ‘R’ that lies beyond or underneath. To attain this higher or deeper ‘Reality’ one has to become an ‘extreme realist’ [skrajnym realistą]. Gombrowicz’s willed determination to approximate ‘Reality’ may even involve violence on a symbolic level: where the English translation has Gombrowicz ‘cut a path’ through Unreality to Reality, the Polish original uses the reflexive verb ‘przedrzeć się,’ literally to tear through, push through, or to penetrate.

By declaring his commitment to ‘extreme’ realism Gombrowicz not only challenges the conventions of mainstream realist fiction, but also engages with contemporary debates on the adequate representation of reality in modern times. Roman Jakobson argued as early as 1921 that ‘the modernists [...] have more than once steadfastly proclaimed faithfulness to reality, verisimilitude – in other words, realism – as the guiding motto of their artistic program’.⁶ The Surrealists’ goal to attain a higher or deeper reality through technically experimental writing comes to mind in this context. In the first Surrealist manifesto (1924) André Breton defines the movement as follows:

Automatisme psychique pur par lequel on se propose d’exprimer [...] le fonctionnement réel de la pensée. Dictée de la pensée, en l’absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale.⁷

Gombrowicz shares the Surrealists’ interest in automatic writing as a way of accessing a higher reality, and, like them, he also harnesses erotic motifs to this project.⁸ But his ties with Surrealism end here. As I suggested in Chapter 2,

* ‘I am an extreme realist. One of the main objects of my writing is to cut a path through Unreality to Reality.’ KT 31, translation modified.

automatic writing is for Gombrowicz only a first step in the creative process. To produce meaningful art the writer must assert his subjectivity and exert control over the emerging text.

Susan Suleiman argues that while the Surrealists placed eroticism at the centre of their preoccupations with cultural subversion, it was the textual critics of the 1960s – Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Philippe Sollers and the *Tel Quel* group – who fully elaborated ‘the potential for a metaphoric equivalence between the violation of *sexual* taboos and the violation of *discursive* norms’.⁹ In 1963 Barthes claims in his discussion of George Bataille’s literary pornographic novella *Histoire de l’oeil*: ‘à la transgression des valeurs, principe déclaré de l’érotisme, correspond – si elle ne la fonde – une transgression technique des formes du langage.’¹⁰ Susan Sontag similarly argues in 1967 that literary pornography ‘could not have been written except for that agonized reappraisal of the nature of literature which has been preoccupying literary Europe for more than half a century’.¹¹ Gombrowicz’s *Pornografia* may not be quite ‘pornographic’ enough to fall into Sontag’s definition of literary pornography, but it contributes an original perspective on the relationship between pornography and modern writing. As I argue in this chapter, its form (the pseudo-romance referencing popular sentimental novels), its style and themes (which resonate with the contemporary French *nouveau roman*) and its provocative title participate in the ‘reappraisal of the nature of literature’ by problematizing the relationship between eroticism, literature and the real world, the status of popular cultural production in literary fiction, and the role of the artist in the modern world. A key passage of *Pornografia*, meanwhile, allegorically explores conceptualizations of the modern ‘non-phallic’ text, anticipating French feminist theorists’ search for alternative models of writing in the 1970s. According to Suleiman the transgressive

content of a work of literary pornography ‘must be read primarily as a metaphor for the transgressive use of language effected by modern writing’.¹² It is in this sense, I suggest, that Gombrowicz’s novel *Pornografia* intertwines realism, eroticism and authorship.

Pornografia is divided into two parts consisting of seven and five chapters respectively. The plot is relatively straightforward compared to *Ferdydurke* or *Trans-Atlantyck*. The narrator Witold Gombrowicz is portrayed as a writer making a living on the black market in Nazi-occupied Warsaw. His friend and business partner Fryderyk is a man of the theatre. They leave the city to visit Witold’s friend Hipolit on his *dworek* in south-eastern Poland, but once they arrive Witold realizes that there, too, time-honoured traditions seem to be facing their imminent collapse. The presence of German officers overshadows the peaceful atmosphere; the customary order is threatened by the local peasants’ increasingly desperate poverty, by tensions within the underground Home Army, and finally by the young generation’s alienation from country mores. The *dworek*, ostensibly the bastion of traditional Polishness, becomes the setting for a violent transformation of moral and artistic values.

The two city intellectuals are ill adapted to the idleness of the country, and in their boredom they begin to imagine an erotic tension between Hipolit’s sixteen-year-old daughter Henia and her childhood friend Karol. Looking for vicarious pleasure and rejuvenation, Witold and Fryderyk indulge in increasingly risky voyeuristic activities and seek to provoke the teenagers’ sexual union. Henia and Karol are indifferent towards one another, but they soon become susceptible to the older men – especially to Fryderyk. Taking on the role of the novel’s ‘*entremetteur*-

en-scène,¹³ he invites them to stage suggestively erotic pantomimes in the garden; at the same time he instructs Witold to have Henia's fiancé, the respectable lawyer Waław, observe the tableau vivant from a distance, but without telling him that the young pair act under the direction of the old dramaturge. Soon thereafter the teenagers squash a worm in a coquettish display of their youthful thoughtlessness. Fryderyk, hypersensitive to any 'significant' configuration between the boy and girl, pushes the logic of this scene to the extreme: the paradoxically innocent act of torture suggests to him the possibility of a union between Henia and Karol – if not in sex, then in a crime that must be committed for the benefit of the older men. Fryderyk also decides that the worm stands for Waław, whose breakdown he and Witold must orchestrate in collaboration with the teenagers. Witold, though torn between moral considerations and what one critic calls Fryderyk's 'Iago-like manipulation of [Waław's] jealousy,'¹⁴ executes his friend's orders, hoping to make reality conform to their shared fantasy.

In the second part of the novel the plot moves rapidly towards its violent finale. A conflict within the Polish resistance army requires the liquidation of officer Siemian, and Fryderyk arranges for the job to be assigned to Karol and Henia. After the act, however, the young assassins realize that they killed not Siemian but the heartbroken Waław. This is one of four murders committed with a kitchen knife: Waław assassinated Siemian before he let himself be stabbed by Karol – a self-sacrifice resulting from his false conviction that Henia was in love with the boy. Waław's mother Amelia has already been killed in mysterious circumstances by Józek, a sixteen-year-old farmhand, who is knifed by Fryderyk at the same time as Karol stabs Waław. Immediately after the symmetrical double murder of an older

man by a youth and of a youth by an older man the novel ends with the four main characters – Witold, Fryderyk, Henia and Karol – looking into each other’s eyes.

* * *

In *Ferdydurke* and *Trans-Atlantyk* Gombrowicz portrays narrators who strive (and possibly fail) to become writers: the aspiring author Józio is thwarted by Pimko, and the *Gran Escritor* undermines Witold’s prestige as a Polish man of letters.

Pornografia, too, thematizes the narrator’s authorship, but there is an important difference: Witold’s status as an author is no longer at stake in the fictional universe. He thinks of himself as ‘ja, pisarz polski, ja, Gombrowicz’ (P 29)^{*}, and his professional status earns him the trust and respect of the other characters. Waclaw turns to him for emotional support, while Siemian approaches Witold with a plea for compassion: ‘Pan jest inteligentny człowiek, *pisarz*, niech pan zrozumie’ (P 119, my emphasis)[†]. Witold’s authority is never at issue on the surface of *Pornografia*. His struggle for authorship takes place on the level of language, and is enacted through stylistic and structural devices.

In the first sentence of *Pornografia* Witold addresses his audience: ‘Opowiem wam inną przygodę moją, jedną chyba z najbardziej fatalnych’ (P 7)[‡]. This beginning recalls the oral *gawęda* tradition and echoes the opening of Gombrowicz’s previous novel, *Trans-Atlantyk*. This tongue-in-cheek intertextual reference to the other Witold (the narrator of *Trans-Atlantyk* as well as to the author himself) casts doubt

^{*} ‘I, a Polish writer, I, Gombrowicz’. PE 38.

[†] ‘You’re an intelligent man, *a writer*, so please understand me [...]’. PE 174, my emphasis.

[‡] ‘I’ll tell you about yet another adventure of mine, probably one of the most disastrous.’ PE 3.

on the apparent transparency of the narration right at the outset. What is more, Witold immediately announces that his adventure ended ‘disastrously’ [fatalnie], which implies two contradictory notions: the notion of failure and the notion that Witold must be, literally or figuratively, a survivor – one who has withstood a trying experience. He does not elaborate on the circumstances of his retrospective narrative position, but the story is presented as an account of the events that lead up to its creation. In this sense the opening sentence indicates the novel’s metanarrative design, identifying it, somewhat ironically perhaps, as a pseudo-oral version of a *Künstlerroman*.

Following the self-referential introduction, the narrator begins the story as such. ‘Wówczas, a było to w 1943-im, przebywałem był w byłej Polsce i w byłej Warszawie, na samym dniu faktu dokonanego’ (P 7)^{*}. This precise positioning of the story in space and time (Warsaw, 1943) emphasizes the novel’s realist underpinning as well as the narrator’s control over his subject matter. However, an unorthodox use of grammar undermines this notion of mastery. The past perfect tense of ‘przebywałem był w byłej Polsce’ [I had been living in what had once been Poland] places the narration in an uncertain temporality that implies a precarious grasp on both language and reality. According to Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska this temporal paradox – combined with the metaphorical contamination of ‘na samym dniu faktu dokonanego,’ from the expressions ‘być na dnie’ [to be at the bottom] and ‘dokonany fakt’ [fait accompli] – marks this statement out as another self-conscious ‘sign of illusion’.¹⁵ As we will see below, the narrator’s idiosyncratic use of language will

^{*} ‘At the time – the year was 1943 – I had been living in what had once been Poland and what had once been Warsaw, at the rock-bottom of an accomplished fact.’ PE 3, translation modified to render the past perfect.

continue to throw doubt on his apparently established position as a ‘Polish author’ (P 29; PE 38).

Critics have pointed out a number of self-reflexive elements in *Pornografia*. Hanjo Berressem discusses the two voyeurs’ pseudo-artistic manipulations as a clue to the novel’s self-conscious dimension:

If painting is the attempt to copy life and nature while simultaneously providing it with a higher existence in the realm of artistic ideality, tableaux vivants retranslate artificial, artistic representations into the realm of concrete life and nature. Because they retain the framework of artistic composition, however, they reverse this process only partially. If in a painting art copies nature, in a tableau vivant nature copies art. As such, it is an attempt to return life to itself via the detour of art.¹⁶

Berressem also argues that when Fyderyk recruits Karol and Henia for his erotic pantomimes, he becomes no less than ‘the *auteur* of an imaginary film that plays itself out in his head;’ when Fryderyk explains his artistic idea to Witold, moreover, he provides ‘a precise description of the *ars combinatoria* of *Pornografia*’ (p. 176). Michał Legierski relates *Pornografia* to the *Künstlerroman* by highlighting parallels with Thomas Mann’s *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912): the weary protagonists leave the city only to find themselves in a place threatened by a cataclysm, and this situation awakens their Dionysian sensuality.¹⁷ Patricia Merivale similarly argues that Gombrowicz creates an artist-hero who, like the narrator in Henry James’s novel *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), ‘uses the lives of others as the raw material for his own “work of art,” which is contained within, and is the main substance of, the text we read’.¹⁸ But despite these references to cinematic *auteurism* and the *Künstlerroman*, *Pornografia* has not yet been presented as part of Gombrowicz’s sustained engagement with the problem of authorship.

Critical discussions of *Pornografia* revolved around the representation of reality and eroticism until Gombrowicz joined in the debate and directed it toward a consideration of the nature and purpose of literature. In the early 1960s the novel caused controversy because of the use of a realist framework in an artistic experiment that diverged from a historically accurate portrayal of the subject matter.¹⁹ Artur Sandauer, Gombrowicz's erstwhile supporter, condemns the unrealistic portrayal of World War II in *Pornografia* in a *Kultura* issue of 1965.²⁰ Gombrowicz did not take these attacks too seriously, but he reacted vehemently against Sandauer's ambition to address realities of a more personal nature. The stated goal of Sandauer's article is 'to tell the truth not only about [Gombrowicz] the writer, but also about the man' by 'unmasking' his secret desires as manifested subconsciously in his fiction.²¹ Reading the doppelganger motifs in Gombrowicz's fiction as signs of the author's subconsciously libidinal motivations, he proposes that the first-person narrator Witold in *Pornografia* represents an obvious authorial double, while Fryderyk serves as a surreptitious vent for Gombrowicz's deviant sexual inclinations (as well as for his arrogance and egotism – effects of his international success).²²

Gombrowicz's riposte to Sandauer's article appeared in his *Kultura* diary in 1966. He fiercely disputes that the doppelganger theme and homoerotic motifs were introduced without premeditation: 'Mnie dobrze wiadomo, że za prawo do dumy płaci się pokorą i wcale nie uchylam się od badań, które zresztą sam prowokuję mymi połowicznymi konfidencjami' (D3 210)*. Bringing up his own 'half-hearted confidences' Gombrowicz evokes the homoerotic themes that pervade his fiction and

* 'I know very well that the right to pride is paid for with humility and I am not avoiding analyses that I myself provoke with my half-hearted confidences.' DE 681.

diary.²³ He then goes on to problematize the notion of an essential homosexuality that would be discoverable in his works:

(Dlaczego konfidencje są połowiczne? A nuż dlatego, że jest się homoseksualistą i nie jest; że się jest w pewnym okresie życia; lub w pewnych okolicznościach [...]. Trudno w tej dziedzinie domagać się spowiedzi zbyt kategorycznej.) (D3 210)*

The question, Gombrowicz proposes, is not whether or not he may be homosexual, but to what avail he uses (homo)erotic themes his writings.

Gombrowicz then turns to the problem of literature and reality, emphasizing that literary creativity is a highly self-conscious affair, and that the purpose of art is to give insight into unfamiliar aspects of reality:

Powieści, te zwiewne *bajeczki*, nabierają wagi dopiero, gdy świat przez nie odsłonięty stanie się dla nas czymś *prawdziwym*. Dostojewski pozostanie *bajeczką* dla kogoś, kto nie uchwyci go w jego *nagiej rzeczywistości*. Kafka, Valéry, Dante, surrealizm, dadaizm, cokolwiek w sztuce, wszystko w sztuce, ma rację istnienia tylko, o ile odnosi się do *rzeczywistości, do jakiejś rzeczywistości, nowej, zaskakującej nieraz*, którą czyni dostępną, żywą, namacalną. (D3 211, my emphasis)[†]

By naming some of his literary predecessors – all of them landmarks of European literature – Gombrowicz implicitly positions his own work within the literary canon. (He strategically omits to mention any of the *popular* literary sources that had provided him with fresh perspectives on reality since the 1930s.) Practices of reading and writing, he asserts, are embedded not in semi-conscious erotic impulses but in a keen awareness of literary conventions.

* '(And why are the confidences half-hearted? Because one is and is not a homosexual; because one is at a certain period in one's life or in certain circumstances [...]. It is difficult to demand too-categorical a confession on the subject.)' DE 681.

† 'Novels, those volatile *fairy tales*, become significant only when the world unveiled by them becomes something *real* to us. Dostoevsky will remain a *fairy tale* for someone who does not grasp him in his *naked reality*. Kafka, Valéry, Dante, surrealism, Dadaism, anything at all in art, everything in art, has the right to exist only insofar as it pertains to *reality*, to some new, sometimes shocking, *reality* which it makes accessible, alive, palpable.' DE 681.

Gombrowicz's irritation with Sandauer deterred other commentators from discussing the erotic motifs in his fiction as anything but metaphors for his philosophical ideas, and consequently Gombrowicz's concept of Form became a touchstone in the reception of *Pornografia*.²⁴ In 1995 the German critic Olaf Kühl resuscitated the question of the author's suppressed homosexual desire. Avoiding the kind of reductive biographical diagnosis that marred Sandauer's analysis, Kühl condemns the "entkörperlichende" und "desexualisierende" Allegorese' that characterized most discussions of Gombrowicz's eroticism since the 1960s.²⁵ He reverses the trend of reading the concrete and physical in Gombrowicz's work as a signifier for the abstract and metaphysical, and proposes to view Form as a metaphor for the body, and not the body as a metaphor for Form. Kühl's work represents a milestone in Gombrowicz scholarship in that it takes his eroticism seriously without either reducing it to sensational trivia or subjugating it to his own programmatic writings. Following Kühl other critics have tackled Gombrowicz's formal and stylistic constructions as manifestations of 'unspeakable' desire.²⁶ My study represents an alternative approach to Gombrowicz's eroticism. The debate on whether the physical stands for the metaphysical or vice versa collapses when erotic motifs are shown to express a theoretical concern that is in itself already charged with eroticism. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Gombrowicz's notion of authorship – for instance in his search for a model of authorship through an encounter between the author and the reader – is intrinsically erotic.

The question of *Pornografia*'s 'pornographic' status also poses a series of challenges. In 1970 Czesław Miłosz famously remarked that 'Gombrowicz's oeuvre is unique in the twentieth century since it contains not one description of copulation'.²⁷ Early critics of *Pornografia* responded in the same spirit, proposing

that what is striking and provocative about the novel is the way Gombrowicz withholds representations of sex.²⁸ Hans Mayer, for instance, underlines the imaginary and quasi-parodic nature of the novel's eroticism in 1962:

Übrigens hat es, um das sogleich abzutun, mit 'Pornographie' im herkömmlichen Sinne gar nichts zu tun. Wer einigermaßen vertraut ist mit den Clownerien des Witold Gombrowicz, konnte bereits beim Anblick des Titels '*Pornografia*' dergleichen ahnen. Nirgends wird überhaupt eine reale Situation der Geschlechtlichkeit geschildert. Wenn von geistiger Obszönität gesprochen werden darf, was hier durchaus möglich ist, so liegt sie gerade darin, daß *kein* natürlicher Vorgang geschlechtlichen Lebens geschildert wird, weder zwischen Jugendlichen noch zwischen der Jugend und dem Alter. Keine geschlechtliche *Wirklichkeit*. Alles bleibt im Zustand der sexuellen Möglichkeit und auf die Imagination angewiesen.²⁹

The title '*Pornografia*' tends to be presented as one of Gombrowicz's attempts to mislead, tease or mock readers' expectations. It is likely that readings such as Mayer's correspond to the unsettling effect Gombrowicz intended, but there is more to say about his conscious and unconscious motivations.

The fact that *Pornografia* is free of explicitly erotic scenes begs the question what the titular 'pornography' should designate. The word 'pornografia' appears only once in the text of the novel, namely when the frustrated narrator admits that Henia and Karol have no erotic interest in one another: 'Nic, nic! Nic, tylko moja, żerująca na nich pornografia!' (P 27)*. As early as chapter three Witold acknowledges that there is nothing to see, nothing to tell. And yet, the story continues, weaving something out of nothing. By withholding representations of sex, the narrative replicates or performs the unattainability of the protagonists' desires. As for the title, Gombrowicz's *Pornografia* – like Witold's 'pornografia' – appears not to be based on 'facts' but on narrative skill and imagination. Rather than provoking and then deriding the reader's expectation of easy erotic stimulation, the title

* 'Nothing, nothing! Nothing but my own pornography preying on them!' PE 34.

announces discrepancies between fact and imagination, truth and representation, or reality and fiction.

Gombrowicz wrote the novel in the 1950s, about a decade before the explicit portrayal of sex was gradually legalized and commercial pornography became ubiquitous.³⁰ Explaining the title ‘Pornografia’ in *Testament* he declares: ‘Wtedy był to tytuł nie taki zły, dziś wobec nadmiaru pornografii stał się banalny i w kilku językach zmieniono go na “Uwiedzenie”’ (D4 117)^{*}.³¹ But his ambivalence about the title is not merely due to its retrospective association with the sexual revolution; it can be traced back to the time of the novel’s composition and publication. In 1958 Gombrowicz publicly announced in his diary: ‘4 lutego [...] skończyłem *Pornografię*. Tak sobie tymczasowo to nazwałem. Nie gwarantuję, że tytuł się utrzyma’ (D2 11)[†]. His correspondence documents that he toyed with the alternative title ‘Akteon,’ after the Greek mythological hero, until very late in the creative process. This title appears in a posthumously published letter to Jerzy Giedroyc from 1957;³² an as yet unpublished letter to Gombrowicz’s friend, the critic Konstanty Jeleński, reveals that this rejected title remained in usage until as late as April 1960, when the novel was already printed with the title ‘Pornografia’: ‘Ukończona powieść “Akteon” jeszcze nie ogłoszona’[‡].³³ This ghost title never appeared in print in Gombrowicz’s lifetime, but he had evidently taken it very seriously.

The myth of Actaeon survives in a number of archaic and classical versions, which all converge on the motif of the Theban hunter Actaeon incurring the wrath of

^{*} ‘It wasn’t too bad a title at the time, but today, with the invasion of pornography, it has become rather banal and certain translators have chosen to call it *Seduction*.’ KT 121.

[†] ‘On 4 February [...] I finished *Pornografia*. This is what I have called it for the time being. I am not promising that the title will stay.’ DE 372.

[‡] ‘The finished novel “Actaeon” hasn’t been announced yet.’

the virgin goddess of the hunt Artemis (or Diana in Latin). The version of the myth that became most popular in Renaissance and post-Renaissance depictions is based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Actaeon accidentally stumbles upon the naked goddess bathing in a spring. As a punishment she transforms him into a stag, whereupon his own dogs tear him to pieces.³⁴ Gombrowicz refers to this Latin variant in his description of a statue in the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris in 1963: 'był to Akteon z marmuru, który, przed chwilą Dianę nagą zobaczywszy, teraz uciekał... a własne psy jego za nim, wyszczerzone, z kłami już, już dopadają, już go zagryzają!...' (D3 131)*. The unexpected erotic vision in the Actaeon myth entails a reversal of roles (the hunter becomes the hunted), a betrayal of the most undoubted of loyalties (that of a dog to its master) and a complete loss of control on behalf of the hero. These themes resonate with Gombrowicz's novel: Witold and Fryderyk, once they catch a glimpse of Karol and Henia, become completely dependent on the teenagers, while language, instead of doing their bidding, constantly threatens to turn against them with a vengeance.

Opting for the title 'Actaeon' Gombrowicz would have invoked a rich literary and artistic tradition, thus implicitly placing his novel within the sphere of high European culture. But he relinquished this respectable intertextual reference in favour of a more indecorous one. Choosing the title 'Pornografia,' which connotes the most vehemently condemned category of popular cultural production, he embraces triviality, sensationalism and consumerism. This title also challenges traditional concepts of literary fiction in that it implies a relationship between eroticism and literature through its etymology: like the proper name 'Actaeon,' the

* 'It was a marble Actaeon who, having seen Diana naked a moment earlier, now fled... but his own dogs were after him, baring their teeth, their fangs, they are upon him, they are biting him to death!' DE 619.

word ‘pornografia’ has Greek roots; it derives from *pornē* [prostitute] and *graphein* [to draw or to write]. Etymologically ‘Pornografia’ signifies the (artistic) representation of prostitutes.³⁵ This word history indicates a preoccupation with the relationship between (commercialized) sex and authorship. The question of what aspect of the novel the ‘prostitution’ implied in the title should refer to, however, is open to debate.

Karol and Henia could be described as prostituting themselves since they indulge Fryderyk by participating in his erotic-artistic pantomimes in return for little ‘a little gift’. Witold perceives the girl’s indecency as particularly shocking: ‘było osłupiające żeby ta wierna narzeczona chodziła w krzaki na takie seanse... w zamian za obiecany “prezencik”...’ (P 94)*. Apart from Henia and Karol the ‘representation of a prostitute or prostitutes’ implied in the novel’s title could also refer to Gombrowicz’s alter ego, the writer-narrator Witold. Like the teenagers, he also cooperates with Fryderyk and helps him achieve gratification; he prostitutes himself, not in the primary sense of engaging in sex for payment but in the secondary sense of becoming ‘a person entirely or abjectly devoted to another,’ ‘a person devoted to shameful or corrupt practices [...] who [...] sacrifices his or her self-respect for the sake of personal or financial gain’.³⁶ Witold’s gain is that he obtains material for his story (i.e. the narration that constitutes the main text of *Pornografia*); he prostitutes himself for the sake of becoming an author. This allusion to prostitution refers to – perhaps ironically – late nineteenth-century artists’ preoccupation with prostitution and its metaphorical relationship to art. There comes to mind Charles Baudelaire’s aphoristic definition of art at the beginning of his *Journaux intimes*: ‘Qu’est-ce que l’art? Prostitution.’³⁷ While for Baudelaire art itself connotes prostitution, Catherine

* ‘it was astounding that the faithful fiancée would go into the bushes for such séances... in return for the promise of a “little gift”...’. PE 137.

Gallagher discusses the metaphor of the *writer* as prostitute in the Victorian period, where the author ‘does not go to market as a respectable producer with an alienable commodity, but with *himself* or *herself* as commodity’.³⁸ Gallagher’s formulation shows that the metaphorical relationship of art and prostitution did not necessitate a strict gender division; the convention of representing the artist as male and the prostitute as female that dominated the Impressionist painters’ work did not necessarily stretch across the other arts.³⁹ Gombrowicz, in as far as he takes on the roles of the artist and the prostitute at once, contributes to a broader fascination with prostitution as a metaphor for authorship.⁴⁰

* * *

The allegoricity of *Pornografia* is inscribed into its text in a way that distinguishes it drastically from Gombrowicz’s previous novels. While the narrators of *Ferdydurke* and *Trans-Atlantyk* were oblivious to their symbolic significance, Witold in *Pornografia* experiences the entire adventure of which he is part as a sort of palimpsest in which he must prise apart the different layers of meaning. In the penultimate chapter he observes Hipolit’s family and their guests at lunch, and the scene strikes him as ‘niczym tekst wpisany w tekst...’ (P 123)*. This comment represents an explicitly metatextual moment, indicating that in this novel Gombrowicz moves away from the model of the subtextual allegory of authorship, and approaches instead the overtly metafictional allegory as described by Linda Hutcheon.⁴¹ On a number of occasions, Witold tries to understand the real meaning of the situations which he deems symbolic, and his search for signification suggests

* ‘like a text written within another text’. PE 180.

the possibility of a self-reflexive reading. Throughout the novel, the characters are presented as belonging to one of two categories – youth and age. Age is associated with power, self-control, and unattractiveness, while youth is presented in terms of beauty and openness to adventure. ‘Youth’ and ‘age’ complement one another in that ‘youth,’ bursting with energy and ready to act, needs ‘age’ to direct its movement; ‘age,’ meanwhile, lacks the vitality and irresponsibility that are necessary for action, and therefore it requires ‘youth’ to execute its vision. The characters in the novel are aware of this logic. It underlies their decision to have Karol assassinate Siemian – the adult men are too conscious of what it means to kill a human being; Karol, they decide, can do it thoughtlessly (P 131; PE 192).

The association of age with (self-)consciousness on the one hand, and youth with thoughtlessness on the other hand is laid out early in the novel and maintained throughout. It characterizes the behaviour of all the characters and informs descriptions of their corporality. The country gentleman Hipolit, for instance, is branded ‘wulkan ziejący mięsem’ (P 12)*; he apologizes for his inappropriate rotundity (people are starving, after all); what is more, he has a nervous tick that causes him to repeat quietly to himself everything he says. The description of Waław, Henia’s balding but meticulously groomed fiancé, is even more unforgiving, as the lawyer’s self-consciousness about his physical appearance is ludicrous in the eyes of the narrator, who sarcastically describes every detail of Waław’s elegant and sensual but over-refined appearance, concluding with a harsh judgement on the enlightened adult male’s body:

Cielesność zwykłego chama tę ma ogromną przewagę, że cham nie zwraca na nią uwagi, wskutek czego ona nie razi, choćby była skłócona z estetyką – lecz mężczyzna który siebie pielęgnuje, wydobywa, uwypukla cielesność i

* ‘a volcano disgorging flesh’. PE 10.

dłubie się w niej, babrze, a wtedy każdy defekt staje się zabójczy. Skądże jednak we mnie taka wrażliwość na ciało? Skąd ta pasja podglądania wstydliwego i niechętnego, jakby z kąta? (P 37)*

Witold's aversion to Waclaw's physicality brings to mind the possibility of his repressed homoeroticism, especially since at this stage in the plot the narrator is already hankering after Karol. But he openly addresses his recent 'sensitivity to the body' and 'passion for snooping'. His distaste for Waclaw, therefore, rather seems to be due to the fact that Karol's youthful charm (like the innocent corporality of the imagined 'boor') stands in stark contrast to the middle-aged man's artificial pulchritude.

While the bodies of Hipolit and Waclaw strike Witold as embarrassing and ludicrous, his most striking portrayals of the corporality of other men pertain to Fryderyk. Fryderyk's paralyzing self-consciousness is established right at the beginning of the narration, as Witold describes his awkward behaviour:

Podano mu herbatę, którą wypił, ale pozostał mu na talerzyku kawałek cukru – i wyciągnął rękę żeby go podnieść do ust – ale może uznał ten ruch za nie dość uzasadniony, więc cofnął rękę – jednakże cofnięcie ręki było właściwie czymś bardziej jeszcze nieuzasadnionym – wyciągnął tedy rękę powtórnie i zjadł cukier – ale zjadł już chyba nie dla przyjemności, ale tylko żeby odpowiednio się zachować... wobec cukru, czy wobec nas?... i pragnąc zatrzeć to wrażenie kaszlnął i, aby uzasadnić kasznięcie, wyciągnął chusteczkę, ale już nie odważył się wytrzeć nosa – tylko poruszył nogą. Poruszenie nogi, jak się zdaje, nasunęło mu nowe komplikacji, więc w ogóle uciął i znieruchomiał. To szczególne zachowanie (bo on właściwie nic tylko 'zachowywał się,' on 'zachowywał się' bez ustanku) [...] wzbudziło moją ciekawość [...]. (P 8)†

* 'The carnality of an ordinary boor has the huge advantage that the boor pays no attention to it, and as a result, it doesn't annoy you, even if it's in conflict with the esthetic – but when a man takes care of himself, brings out, accentuates his carnality, picks at it, messes with it, then his every defect becomes deadly. However, where did I come by such sensitivity to the body? Whence came this passion for snooping, timid and unfriendly, as if from a hole in the corner?' PE 49-50.

† 'He was served tea, which he drank, but a piece of sugar remained on his little plate – so he reached for it to bring it to his mouth – but perhaps deeming this action not sufficiently justified, he withdrew his hand – yet withdrawing his hand was

Witold uses quotation marks to enact stylistically Fryderyk's awkward, unnatural demeanour. A little later he wonders if he should invite Fryderyk to the *dworek*; Fryderyk's strangely disquieting corporality is expressed through the use of quotation marks: 'A jego ciało, to ciało tak... 'specyficzne'?... Jechać z nim nie bacząc na tę jego niestrudzoną "nieprzyzwoitość milcząco-krytyczną"?' (P 9)*.42

Fryderyk's physical presence causes Witold anguish. As the two men give up the hope of ever seeing Henia and Karol united (with each other and with them, the voyeurs), Fryderyk's body provokes in Witold pangs of disgust:

Oblicze człowieka starszego trzyma się skrytym wysiłkiem woli, zmierzającym do zamaskowania rozkładu [...] w nim zaś nastąpiło rozczarowanie, rezygnacja z czaru, z nadziei, z namiętności i wszystkie zmarszczki rozsiadły się i żerowały na nim, jak na trupie. Był potulnie i pokornie podły w tym poddaniu się własnej ohydzie – i mnie zaraził tym świństwem tak bardzo, że robactwo moje zaroilo się we mnie, wylazło, oblaźło. (P 52)†

Fryderyk's wrinkles come alive and crawling over his face – and then Witold's – like over a corpse. The detailed description brings to mind Gombrowicz's declaration of his 'extreme realism' quoted above (D4 21; KT 31): the symbolic image of facial wrinkles turning into vermin communicates the narrator's horror of old age more

something even less justified – so he reached for the sugar again and ate it – but he probably ate it not so much for pleasure as merely for the sake of behaving properly... towards the sugar or towards us?... and wishing to erase this impression he coughed and, to justify the cough, he pulled out his handkerchief, but by now he didn't dare wipe his nose – so he just moved his leg. Moving his leg presented him, it seemed, with new complications, so he fell silent and sat stock-still. This singular behavior (because he did nothing but 'behave,' he incessantly 'behaved') aroused my curiosity [...]. PE 4.

* 'And his body, that body so... "peculiar"?... To travel with him and ignore his untiring "silently-shouting impropriety"? ...' PE 5.

† 'An older man's countenance is held up by a secret willpower aimed at masking his disintegration [...] but in his case there was disappointment, he renounced magic, hope, passion, and all his wrinkles spread around and preyed on him as if on a corpse. He as meekly and humbly vile in the surrender to his own repulsiveness – and he infected me with his swinishness to such an extent that my own vermin swarmed within me, crept out and crawled all over me.' PE 72.

tangibly than a realistic description of his feelings could do. The language and style of *Pornografia* challenge realist conventions on more than one occasion, but this fantastic passage is unique in the novel since it violates the conventions of realism on the level of the plot. Gombrowicz's technique brings to mind works of magic realism – an influence, perhaps, of his encounter with Argentinian literature.⁴³ Continuing to describe the extreme distress of never being able to unite 'youth' and 'age,' the narrator focuses on the erotic aspect of this experience:

Nie na tym jednak polegał szczyt obrzydliwości. Jej groteskową okropność wywoływało to przede wszystkim, że byliśmy jak para kochanków, zawiedzionych w swoich uczuciach i odepchniętych przez tamtą parę kochanków, nasze rozplómenienie, nasze podniecenie, nie miało na czym się wyładować i ono teraz grasowało między nami... nic teraz nie pozostawało nam, prócz nas samych... i, brzydząc się sobą, byliśmy jednak ze sobą w tej zmysłowości naszej, rozbudzonej. Dlatego usiłowaliśmy nie patrzeć na siebie. (P 52)*

The idea of being left in an erotic combination with Fryderyk, instead of Karol and Henia, fills Witold with absolute horror, because what he desires is not another old man's hyperconsciousness, but the frivolity and recklessness of youth.

While Fryderyk is characterized by an extreme and debilitating self-consciousness, the teenagers' main attribute is lightheartedness. The 'vermin' that metaphorically invades the faces of the older men reappears a page or two later, when Henia and Karol spot an unusually big earthworm. At first the worm is described as 'glista' and then as 'robak' (P 54) echoing the 'robactwo' [vermin] from the previous scene. The teenagers slowly squish the creature under their feet in a provocative display of their nonchalance. Perhaps it is the worm's association with

* 'However, this was not yet the pinnacle of revulsion. The ultimate grotesque horror came from the fact that we were like a couple of lovers, let down in our feelings and rejected by the other two lovers, and our aroused state, our excitement, had nowhere to discharge itself, so now it roamed between us... now there was nothing left except ourselves... and, disgusted with each other, we were still together in our awakened sensuality. That was why we tried not to look at each other.' PE 72-73.

old age that inspires Fryderyk's intuition that the youngsters must treat Henia's fiancé Waclaw, who is too old for her, with similarly unceremonious brutality.

Witold, meanwhile, contemplates how the teenagers' thoughtlessness must affect Fryderyk, their dialectical opposite:

Oddawał się myśli o tym co zaszło, o nogach lekkomyślnych, które połączyły się na drgającym ciele we wspólnie dokonanym okrucieństwie. [...] Nie, nie okrucieństwo, bezmyślność raczej, która dziecinnymi oczami przygląda się uciesznym podrygom konania, nie czując bólu. Był to drobiazg. Ale dla Fryderyka? Dla świadomości, która potrafi wnikać? Dla wrażliwości, która potrafi się wczuć? (P 54-55)*

This passage epitomizes the opposition between the teenagers' 'lekkomyślność' [recklessness] or 'bezmyślność' [thoughtlessness] on the one hand, and Fryderyk's 'świadomość' [consciousness] and 'wrażliwość' [sensitivity] on the other.

The complimentary characteristics of youth and age in *Pornografia* coincide with Gombrowicz's binary model of authorship and suggests its erotic dimension. Even before they kill the worm, the teenagers ostentatiously perform their lack of restraint and modesty in front of the old men. Henia, for instance, casually tells Witold about a one-night stand with a stranger. Witold is enchanted by her unembarrassed attitude. Her promiscuity implies a disregard for order, an openness to the unknown, and a taste for adventure and risk. As far as Gombrowicz's theory of literary creativity is concerned, Henia's licentiousness (even if it is merely a fantasy or provocation) corresponds to his notion of the early stages of writing. Karol, too, behaves with a spontaneity and brazenness that evoke, on an allegorical level, the category of uninhibited creativity. Witold is thrilled when the boy plays a prank on an old village woman, pulling up her skirts to reveal her nudity:

* 'He was thinking about what had just happened, about the thoughtless legs that had joined in the cruelty they committed jointly to the twitching body. Cruelty? [...] No, not cruelty, thoughtlessness rather, which, with children's eyes, watches the droll throes of death without feeling pain. It was a trifle. But for Fryderyk? To a discerning consciousness? To a sensitivity that is capable of empathy?' PE 75-76.

Oszołomienie moje [brało się] z tego że wybryk, choć tak rażący, stał się od razu, w innej tonacji, w innym wymiarze, czymś najnaturalniejszym w świecie... i Karol szedł teraz z nami, nawet – pełen wdzięku, z wdziękiem dziwnym wyrostka rzucającego się na stare baby, z wdziękiem, który rósł mi w oczach a którego natury nie rozumiałem. Jak mogło to świństwo z babą obdarzyć go świetnością takiego uroku? Czar bił z niego, niepojęty, a Fryderyk położył mi rękę na ramieniu i mruknął, prawie niedosłyszalnie: – No, no! (P 40)*

The character constellation in this scene dovetails readily with Gombrowicz's accounts of literary creativity: Karol's 'inconceivable magic' connotes the unrestrained inventiveness and inspiration of the first phase of composition. Fryderyk's composure, expressed in his admonition, 'No, no!' ['Well, well!' or 'Come, come!'], stands for the element of control in the writing process. But while Fryderyk remains calm, Witold struggles to contain his excitement. On the level of the plot he is torn between the teenager's reckless spontaneity and Fryderyk's hyper-conscious restraint; allegorically, the scene presents Witold striving to reconcile the two poles of authorship – creativity and control.

On one occasion Witold explicitly attempts to combine the two opposites of self-abandonment and self-control. During the celebration of Henia's betrothal to Waclaw he gets drunk expressly in order to reach a state of heightened mindfulness:

Alkohol. Sznaps. Upijająca przygoda. Przygoda niczym kieliszek wzmocnionej – i jeszcze kieliszek – ale pijaństwo to było śliskie, co chwila groził upadek w brud, w zepsucie, w zmysłowe błoto. Jakżeż jednak nie pić? Przecież picie stało się naszą higieną, każdy oszałamiał się czym mógł, jak mógł – więc ja także – i tylko próbowałem uratować coś z mojej godności

* 'The reason [for my bewilderment] was that the prank, even though so jarring, became all at once of a different tonality, in another dimension, the most natural thing in the world. ... And now Karol walked with us – full of charm even – with the strange charm of a teenager who pounced on old hags, with a charm that grew in my eyes, and the nature of which I did not understand. How could the swinishness with the hag bestow on him the splendor of such charm? Magic radiated from him that was inconceivable, while Fryderyk placed his hand on my shoulder and mumbled, almost inaudibly, "Well, well!"' PE 54.

zachowując w pijaństwie minę badacza, który mimo wszystko śledzi – który upija się aby śledzić. Śledziłem tedy. (P 43)*

Witold's quasi alchemical experiment with intoxication and sobriety (or creativity and control) suggests that his dignity (as an artist) resides in his ability to maintain an equilibrium between opposites. In 1955, while he was working on *Pornografia*, Gombrowicz wrote the following observation in his *Diary*: 'Wszystkie sprzeczności dają sobie we mnie *rendez-vous* – spokój i szal, trzeźwość i pijaństwo, prawda i blaga, wielkość i małość' (D1 312)[†]. The paradox of 'sobriety in drunkenness' apparently fascinated Gombrowicz.

The binary character constellation in *Pornografia*, just as that of *Trans-Atlantyk*, overlaps with Gombrowicz's model of authorship: in *Trans-Atlantyk* Gonzalo represents creativity while Major Kobrzycki stands for control; in *Pornografia* Karol and Henia embody creativity and Fryderyk symbolizes control. But while in *Trans-Atlantyk* the meaning of the youth-age dichotomy is exceedingly clear to the characters within the fictional universe (they talk about age and youth in terms of the ideals of *ojczyzna* [patria] and *synczyzna* [filistria]), in *Pornografia* age and youth are divided but not quite as comprehensible to the characters themselves. What is more, the narrator in *Trans-Atlantyk* does not explicitly search for the meaning of the character constellation; the obsession with the 'meaning' of youth and age only appears in *Pornografia*. Witold recognizes that his companions in the

* 'Alcohol. Schnapps. An inebriating adventure. An adventure like a shot of strong drink – one more jigger – though this was slippery drunkenness, each moment threatened a downfall into filth, into depravity, into sensual muck. Yet how could one not drink? In truth, drinking became our mental hygiene, everyone used whatever he could to stupefy himself, in any way he could – so did I – though I did try to salvage something of my dignity by preserving, in my drunken state, the demeanor of a researcher who, in spite of everything, keeps watching – who gets drunk in order to watch. So I watched.' PE 59.

† 'All contradictions hold their *rendez-vous* in me: calmness and fury, sobriety and intoxication, truth and claptrap, greatness and smallness' DE 245, translation modified.

story represent some sort of allegory, and he explicitly tries to decode its meaning. For instance, when he catches Karol and Fryderyk spying on Henia and her suitor, Wacław, the scene before him strikes him as a ‘szyfr’ [code] that he must decipher:

Sytuacje w świecie są szyfrem. Niepojęty bywa układ ludzi i w ogóle zjawisk. To, tutaj... przerażająco wymowne – ale nie dawało się zrozumieć, odcyfrować w pełni. W każdym razie świat zakłębił się w jakimś przedziwnym sensie. (P 41)*

Later on Witold observes how Fryderyk has Karol hold up a lamp as he tends to the wounds of the sixteen-year-old Józiek. Again, Witold is enchanted, but he cannot figure out the meaning of this scene: ‘A bardziej jeszcze znaczące wydało mi się to, że młody starszemu oświetlał młodego – choć dobrze nie chwytałem, co to znaczy...’ (P 91)†. The repetition of ‘znaczące’ [significant] and ‘znaczy’ [signifies] stresses Witold’s search for the meaning of youth and age.

The narrator’s preoccupation with a search for meaning may be due to the fact that Fryderyk, despite his paralyzing self-consciousness, takes the leading role in the plot, leaving Witold barely able to follow his mysterious machinations. The relationship between these two characters, both representatives of the ‘age’ pole, has mostly been represented in terms of the doppelganger dynamics that characterize all of Gombrowicz’s novels.⁴⁴ A closer examination of the narrator’s ambivalence toward his demonic double, however, reveals how Gombrowicz harnesses Witold and Fryderyk into his exploration of authorship. In the first part of the novel Witold is fundamentally jealous of Fryderyk’s ability to spy on and manipulate the teenagers. Then, in the second part, he seems to acknowledge his friend’s authority,

* ‘Situations in this world are written in code. Inscrutable at times is the configuration of people, and of phenomena in general. This, here... was terrifyingly expressive – nonetheless beyond understanding, beyond deciphering. In any case, the world swirled with strange meanings.’ PE 57-58.

† ‘And it seemed even more significant that it was a young one lighting up another young one for the older one – though I didn’t quite know what that signified.’ PE 132, translation modified.

and apparently satisfies himself with trying to understand the deeper significance of the situations created by his friend. But the narrative structure indicates that Witold may not have succumbed entirely to Fryderyk's domination: Fryderyk writes Witold five secret letters (all in the second part of the novel). Witold is supposed to burn these incriminating documents, but instead he reproduces them in his narration: they are inserted into the text of *Pornografia*, printed in italics as if to suggest handwriting (this 'reproduction' of Fryderyk's letters of course contradicts the oral character of Witold's narration, implied in the first sentence of *Pornografia*). It is unclear if Witold consciously defies Fryderyk's orders, perhaps keeping the letters with the intention of using them later in his narration. It is possible that we are to assume that he did burn the letters as instructed, but then reconstructed them from memory. In any case the narrative suggests that Witold ultimately regains a measure of control and manages to produce *his* version of the events.

This is not to say, however, that Witold, as an author, is entirely in control. Throughout *Pornografia* he apologizes for the shortcomings of his narration, which keeps slipping out of its realist framework. This is how he describes Henia and Karol:

Przyciśnięta chłopcem (jeśli tak mogę się wyrazić) i pod jego parciem, stała się *a priori* zgwałcona (jeśli to określenie w ogóle coś znaczy) i nie tracąc nic z dziewiczości, owszem potęgując ją nawet w objęciach jego niedorobłości, była wszakże sparzona z nim w ciemnościach jego, nie dość męskiej jeszcze, przemocy. (P 26)*

Korwin-Piotrowska identifies Witold's interjections, such as the parenthetical comments above, or his question 'jak to wyjęzyczyć' (P 29)[†] a few pages later, as

* 'Under his pressure (if I may express it this way), she was raped *a priori* (if this expression means anything at all) and, losing none of her virginity, indeed strengthening it even in the arms of his immaturity, she was actually mated with him in the darkness of his not quite yet masculine brute force.' PE 32.

[†] 'how to put it into words?' PE 38, translation modified.

meta-discursive ‘signs of illusion’ – a term that designates the speaker’s epistemic distance to the object of the enunciation.⁴⁵ Like the use of quotation marks, through which the narrator draws attention to his inadequate command over language, the use of parentheses around certain words relating to Karol and Henia undermines the realist narrative and highlights Witold’s uneasiness with words. Parentheses around the word ‘boy’ occur for the first time when his gaze is irresistibly attracted toward Karol during Sunday Mass – a vision which I will discuss in detail later, and they are maintained around the words ‘boy,’ ‘girl,’ and even ‘young’ throughout the novel. Witold explicitly addresses this idiosyncratic use of the punctuation mark in his description of Henia’s neck:

To było jakby jej kark (dziewczyny) wrywał się i związywał z tamtym (chłopięcym) karkiem, kark ten jak za kark chwycony przez tamten kark i chwytający za kark! Proszę wybaczyć niezręczność tych metafor. Trochę niezręcznie mi o tym mówić (a także będę musiał kiedyś wytłumaczyć dlaczego słowa (chłopiec) i (dziewczyna) biorę w nawias, tak, to również pozostaje do wyjaśnienia). (P 21)*

The narrator continues emphatically to apologize for his choice of words: ‘Obawiam się, iż doprawdy, być może, w ostatnim zdaniu posunąłem się nieco za daleko...’ (P 22)[†]. He also continues to insist that he must justify his use of parentheses: somewhat later in the novel he promises again, ‘(kiedyś wyjaśnię sens tych nawiasów)’ (P 42)[‡]. But the parentheses remain unexplained, leaving the question of Witold’s adequacy as an author unresolved.

* ‘It was as if the nape of her neck (the girl’s) was taking a run for and uniting itself with (the boy’s) neck, this neck as if taken by the scruff was taking the other neck by the scruff of the neck! Please forgive the awkwardness of these metaphors. I feel a little awkward talking about this – and also at some point I’ll have to explain why I’m putting the words (boy) and (girl) in parentheses, yes, this too needs explaining.’ PE 24.

[†] ‘I’m worried that perhaps I have truly gone too far in my last sentence...’ PE 25.

[‡] ‘(someday I’ll explain the meaning of these parentheses)...’ PE 57.

Recent commentators have discussed the parentheses enclosing words like ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ in terms of semantic ambivalence, the limits of knowledge and language, and the subject’s linguistic, psychological and philosophical alienation. Olaf Kühl and German Ritz read this stylistic oddity as a graphical representation of repression and the unspeakability of homoerotic desire; for Hanjo Berressem the parentheses separate Henia and Karol from the natural flow of language, and Michal Oklot suggests that the parentheses represent one of Gombrowicz’s major symbolic operations, ‘simultaneously bringing matter into the foreground of the text and banishing it from the discourse’.⁴⁶ David Goldfarb links the parentheses to Gombrowicz’s experience of exile, proposing that they ‘do in language what the window and the balcony do in the field of vision,’ so that Witold’s bracketed separation from the (boy) stands for Gombrowicz’s spatial and temporal separation from the homeland he left in 1939.⁴⁷ Michał Paweł Markowski takes a different angle, focussing on a resonance between the use of parentheses [nawiasy] in the text and Fryderyk’s demonic force, which Witold on two occasions describes as ‘parenthetical’ [nawiasowy]. The first use of ‘nawiasowy’ occurs before Witold’s first encounter with Karol. According to Markowski, Witold puts the word ‘boy’ in parentheses because his discourse is already contaminated by his demonic doppelganger.⁴⁸ But Markowski overlooks the fact that it is Witold, in his retrospective narrative, who describes Fryderyk’s demonic force as ‘parenthetical’. There is no evidence that Fryderyk uses the concept *before* Witold; neither his dialogue nor his letters contain any reference to parentheses.

One of the paradoxes about the parentheses in *Pornografia* is that even while on the surface of the text they convey the narrator’s uneasiness about language, they also assert the author’s creativity and originality. Gombrowicz knew that an

experimental style would impress international literary critics, and in his diary of 1960 he openly discusses the use of parentheses in the context of his contribution to modern literature. First he evaluates his ambitious contemporaries, whose works he finds difficult and unattractive. *Pornografia*, he emphasizes, was intended to be accessible and immediately captivating:

Pakuję w tekst wszystkie smaczne smaki, wszystkie uroczone uroki, faszeruję podnieceniami i krasami, nie chcę pisania suchego, nie zachwycającego... szukam melodii najchwytliwszych... aby dojść, jeśli się uda, do czegoś bardziej jeszcze 'biorącego'... (D2 247-48)*

The temptations Gombrowicz describes here evoke the titillation of mass-produced erotic novels, and resonate with the erotic associations of the title 'Pornografia'.

Besides the positive connotations of 'excitement and colour' [podniecenia i krasy], however, a sense of excess and surfeit emanates from the repetitive enumeration of seductive ingredients, from the tautology of 'tasty tastes' and 'charming charms' [smaczne smaki; uroczone uroki], and from the reference to stuffing [faszeruję]. As a result Gombrowicz's penchant towards popular literature appears not merely self-conscious and strategic, but also contrived and somewhat uncomfortable.

In the following paragraph Gombrowicz explicitly problematizes his strategy of revitalizing his work through popular references. The process of writing *Pornografia*, he claims, was exacting and even painful:

Boże! Co za ból! Co za rozpacz! W tym dążeniu moim, ciężkim, bolesnym, do odmłodzenia, odświeżenia mojej sztuki, nie cofnąłem się nawet, ach, wyznajmy... przed chłopcem z dziewczyną! O, wstyd! Któż w literaturze dzisiejszej jest bardziej odważny? Na taką zdobyłem się śmiałość! (D2 248)†

* 'I load the text with tasty tastes, charming charms, I stuff it with excitement and colors, I do not want dry, unprepossessing writing... I am seeking the most graspable melodies... in order to get at, if possible, something even more "captivating"...' DE 480.

† 'God! What pain! What despair! In my heavy, painful striving to rejuvenate, to freshen my art, I have not even refrained from, ah, let us confess... boy with girl. Oh, shame! Who in today's literature is bolder? This is my boldness!' DE 480.

Gombrowicz ostentatiously passes over the genuinely innovative and challenging aspects of his novel, and only highlights the artistic boldness [śmiałość] it took to write about ‘a boy with a girl’ – a motif that is remarkable only for being archetypal. This incongruous statement is followed by the exclamation, ‘O, wstyd!’ [Oh, shame!], which again clashes with the banality of ‘a boy with a girl’. This exclamation caricatures ambitious contemporary writers who would never deign to use such an unsophisticated theme. At the same time the mention of shame [wstyd] ostentatiously points to the subtext of unspeakability, which implies that the ‘boy and girl’ may represent a self-conscious sublimation of the protagonists’ desire for Karol and Józiek, the two boys in *Pornografia*. In this sense the passage also contains an element of self-parody.

Discussing the style of *Pornografia* Gombrowicz refers to his leading competitors on the international literary market:

Ja, przeklęty, mogłem zbliżyć się do ich nagości tylko w stroju bardziej wyrafinowanym niż to, na co się zdobywa najnowocześniejsza awangarda, najsuchszy intelekt! Ja ich wziąłem w nawias!

W nawias wziąłem, nie mogłem inaczej wyśpiewać! (D2 248)*

Even though he disapproves of his colleagues’ oversophisticated gimmicks, Gombrowicz implies, his art calls for such avant-gardist techniques as printing certain words in parentheses. A sense of reluctant submission to the demands of the text marks his description of the parentheses as a ‘costume’ [strój] in which the writer may approach the overpowering ‘nakedness’ [nagość] of the boy and girl. Admitting that he ‘couldn’t sing any other way,’ Gombrowicz conceptualizes the composition of the novel as a painful but necessary compromise between on the one

* ‘I, accursed one, could approach their nakedness only in a costume more sophisticated than that worn by the most modern avant-garde, by the driest intellect! I made them parenthetical!

I made them parenthetical; I couldn’t sing any other way!’ DE 480.

hand his intentions to attain the unmediated nakedness of the teenagers (or, by extension, a literature that would be spontaneous and alluring) and on the other hand the emergent work's tendency to become experimental, difficult, or intellectual. The notion of the compromise between the author and the work reflects Gombrowicz's concept of writing as a reconciliation of creativity and control. It is noteworthy, however, that in this diary entry the emergent text is associated with 'the driest intellect' [najsuchszy intelekt] and not, as in most of Gombrowicz's accounts of literary composition, with an element of sensuality and exuberance. In *Ferdydurke*, for instance, the work is described as the product of an erotic encounter with lustful stallions; in the preface of *Trans-Atlantyk* Gombrowicz refers to the work as 'zwariowan[e] dzieck[o] pijanej Muzy'*.⁴⁹ These descriptions of authorship stand in contrast with the above-quoted autocommentary. Gombrowicz's professed frustration with the fact that *Pornografia* turned out to resemble the works of 'the most modern avant-garde,' therefore, betrays the depth of his anxiety of influence, which compelled him to assert his originality in the most assertive, complex and often contradictory manner.⁵⁰

Gombrowicz readily acknowledged his debt to remote classics – Rabelais, Pasko, Shakespeare, Goethe, Dostoevsky – as well as to writers and genres which he referenced in a parodic manner, such as the sentimental country romance. He found it more difficult to discuss the influence of those writers who were closest to him. In his *Diary* of 1953 he asks rhetorically in relation to philosophical movements: 'czyż nie muszę wyodrębnić się z obecnej europejskiej myśli, czyż moimi wrogami nie są kierunki, doktryny do których jestem podobny; i trzeba mi zaatakować je, aby

* 'the crazy child of a drunken Muse'.

zmusić siebie do odrębności – i was zmusić do jej potwierdzenia’ (D1 58)*. A similar logic underlies his relationship with literary trends.

Gombrowicz’s anxiety of influence explains perhaps why he repeatedly accused writers associated with the French *nouveau roman* of being pretentious and boring to the point of being unreadable.⁵¹ Feeling that the *nouveau roman* was uncomfortably close to his own work, he all but eclipsed its influence from his accounts of the genesis of his later novels. And yet, the parallels between such works as Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *La Jalousie* of 1957 and Gombrowicz’s *Pornografia* are striking. In particular the themes of transgressive eroticism, voyeurism and obsession deserve a comparative reading (no such comparative discussions have been undertaken to my knowledge). Witold’s descriptions of Fryderyk’s bizarre awkwardness, for instance as he eats a lump of sugar, bring to mind passages in Robbe-Grillet’s novel where the narrator, who suspects his wife A... of an affair with their neighbour Franck, painstakingly describes Franck’s behaviour at dinner:

Bien qu’il ne se livre à aucun geste excessif, bien qu’il tienne sa cuillère de façon convenable et avale le liquide sans faire de bruit, il semble mettre en œuvre, pour cette modeste besogne, une énergie et un entrain démesurés. [...]

Evitant tout défaut notable, son comportement, néanmoins, ne passe pas inaperçu. Et, par opposition, il oblige à constater que A..., au contraire, vient d’achever la même opération sans avoir l’air de bouger – mais sans attirer l’attention, non plus, par une immobilité anormale.⁵²

The narrator’s obsession with the almost imperceptible correspondence between his wife’s movements and Franck’s also has an equivalent in *Pornografia*, as Witold is fixated on the (merely imagined) echoing between Henia and Karol: ‘Henia poruszyła się... Karol przypadkiem także się poruszył... ruch, wiążąc ich ze sobą,

* ‘Don’t I have to distinguish myself from current European thought? Aren’t my enemies the currents and doctrines to which I am similar? I have to attach them in order to force myself into contradistinction and I have to force you to confirm it.’ DE 43.

trysnął, rozszalał się nieznacznie' (P 27)*; later, Karol provokes Witold by touching his fork when Henia touches hers (P 126; PE 183). These similarities indicate that Gombrowicz, despite his criticism of the *nouveaux romanciers*, may also have drawn inspiration from them on a close textual level.⁵³ His 'anxiety of influence,' to take up Harold Bloom's term, concerns not as much his masterful forebears as his contemporary rivals in literary fiction, such as Jorge Luis Borges, André Gide, Thomas Mann, or Alain Robbe-Grillet. For Bloom, poetic influence entails a 'misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction'.⁵⁴ But Gombrowicz, in his encounter with Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie*, does not proceed by parodic tactics of 'self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism'. He rather seems to play an intertextual game with his rival. Taking up and appropriating one of Robbe-Grillet's recognizable scenes, Gombrowicz engages in a kind of duel with the French *Gran Escriitor*, whose novel *La Jalousie* he singles out as a book that lends itself to a challenge:

Damy z ostatnią powieścią Robbe-Grilleta, *La Jalousie*, w rękach.
Przechodzą. Każda mówi: – Tego podobno nie można doczytać do końca...
Ja doczytam! Powiedziałam sobie, że doczytam! (D3 195)[†]

Gombrowicz frequently contrasts his own lively and readable writing with the boring and cerebral works of the *nouveaux romanciers*, but he never mentions their influence on his writing. This task he leaves to his readers, the arbiters in the confrontation.

Intertextuality and allegoricity go hand in hand in *Pornografia*, as Gombrowicz situates his work in a literary historical context and casts his

* 'Henia stirred... Karol also happened to stir... this motion, binding them together, burst forth, raged imperceptibly'. PE 34.

† 'Ladies with Robbe-Grillet's latest novel, *La Jalousie*, in their hands. They pass. Each says: – People apparently can't get through this book... I will! I told myself that I would!' DE 670, translation modified.

protagonists as embodiments of the binary of thoughtlessness and consciousness. In his commentaries on the novel Gombrowicz emphasizes both his engagement with his literary predecessors and the negotiation of creativity and control that marked his experience of writing it. But the allegorical meaning or substance of *Pornografia* also transcends the basic framework of creativity and control, as Gombrowicz adds an erotic dimension to it. The two key scenes in this context occur close to the beginning of the novel and at the very end, and both scenes present acts of killing: in the first scene Fryderyk assassinates the Holy Mass; in the second scene Siemian, Waclaw, and Józiek are stabbed to death.

Arriving for Sunday Mass with Hipolit and his family, Witold observes that Fryderyk's presence in the church is somehow destabilizing. His awkward behaviour causes an uncanny double layer of meaning to appear in social conventions as well as in the ritual of the Holy Mass. Witold is disconcerted, until the congregation enters the church and the familiar sight of the villagers disperses his discomfort: 'wówczas zniknęła zaczajona wieloznaczność – jakby ręka, mocniejsza od nas, przywróciła ład górujący nabożeństwem' (P 16-17)*. The 'hand' that renders the world coherent again need not represent the Christian God, but could stand for any abstract guarantor of meaning. At any rate, its effectiveness is short-lived, and Witold soon observes that Fryderyk's pious behaviour conjures up another 'hand' which now robs the Mass of its meaning, thus reversing the first hand's action. The sacred ritual collapses under Fryderyk's nearly imperceptible critical deconstruction:

'Modli się' wobec innych i wobec siebie, ale modlitwa jego była tylko parawanem, zasłaniającym bezmiary jego niemodlitwy... więc to był akt wyrzucający, 'ekscentryczny,' który wyprowadzał z tego kościoła na zewnątrz, na obszar bezgraniczny zupełnej nie-wiary – w samym rdzeniu swoim zaprzeczający. [...] Ale – cóż takiego się działo? Właściwie – nic,

* 'then the lurking multiplicity of meanings vanished – as if a hand, more powerful than we were, had re-established the dominant order of the holy service'. PE 18.

właściwie stało się, że czyjaś ręka zabrała tej mszy wszystką jej zawartość, całą treść [...] msza oklapła w strasznej impotencji... zwisająca... niezdolna już do zapłodnienia! To zaś pozbawienie treści było morderstwem, dokonanym na marginesie [...] tytułem bezgłośnego a zabójczego komentarza osoby przyglądającej się z boku. [...] nastąpiło to za sprawą jakiejś nawiasowej interpretacji [...]. A ten uboczny komentarz, ta glossa zabijająca, była dziełem okrucieństwa – dziełem świadomości ostrej, zimnej, przenikającej na wskroś, nieubłaganej... [...] wprowadzenie tego człowieka do kościoła było czystym szaleństwem, na Boga, należało trzymać go z dala od tego! Kościół był jego miejscem najstraszniejszym! (P 18)*

At first Witold is horrified at Fryderyk's deconstructive action and longs for the restoration of the status quo, but he gradually comes to enjoy the terrifying spectacle. Observing the faces of the parishioners turning into 'karykatury, którym odebrano model' (P 18)†, he overtly rejoices at the collapse of the individuality and authenticity of the human face. This triumph of the caricature over the original ushers in a higher reality, a truth that is less naive: 'Proces, który się odbywał, był docieraniem do rzeczywistości *in crudo*...' (P 18)‡. Witold experiences his post-apocalyptic reality as incomprehensible, vertiginous and lonely, but at the same time more *real* than the everyday world or the metaphysical values that were lost in the process: 'nie byliśmy już w kościele, w tej wsi, ani na ziemi, tylko – i zgodnie z

* 'He was "praying" in relation to others and in relation to himself, but his prayer was only a screen covering up the immensity of his non-prayer... so this was an ejecting, an "eccentric" act that was taking him outside the church, into the boundless territory of total non-belief – a refutation to the very core. [...] But – what happened? In fact – nothing. What actually happened was that a hand had removed all the content, all the meaning from the Mass [...] the mass was collapsing in a terrible impotence... it was flagging... no longer capable of begetting life! And this loss of meaning was a murder committed on the periphery [...] by way of a voiceless yet lethal commentary delivered by someone looking on from the side. [...] it happened owing to some parenthetical interpretation [...]. His incidental commentary, his killing *glossa*, was a work of cruelty – the work of a harsh consciousness, cold, utterly penetrating, relentless... [...] introducing this man into the church was sheer madness, one should have kept him away from it all, for God's sake! The church was the most terrible place for him to be!' PE 19-20, translation modified (Borchardt renders 'nawiasowy' as 'tangential').

† 'caricatures that have had been deprived of a model'. PE 20.

‡ 'The process that had taken place arrived at reality *in crudo*...' PE 20.

rzeczywistością, tak, zgodnie z prawdą – gdzieś w kosmosie, zawieszeni’ (P 19)*.⁵⁵

His mix of fascination and horror in the face of ‘rzeczywistość’ [reality] recalls the notion of ‘extreme realism’ from *Testament*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

As the narrator comes to see himself as part of an ultimate ‘cosmic’ reality in the village church, he believes that there are no limitations to his power:

Sam w ciemności absolutnej... więc dotarłem do ostateczności mojej, osiągnąłem ciemność! [...] Ale było to dumne, zawrotne, naznaczone nieubłaganą dojrzałością ducha, już samoistnego. [...] pozbawiony wszelkiego oparcia, czułem się w sobie jak w rękach potwora, mogąc wyrabiać z sobą wszystko, wszystko, wszystko! (P 19)[†]

Witold seems oblivious to the fact that his apocalyptic experience hinges on Fryderyk. Instead he expresses his sense of complete self-determination by referring again – now for the third time – to the image of the hand: ‘czułem się w sobie jak w rękach potwora!’ [‘I felt in myself as if in the hands of a monster’].

After one mysterious ‘hand’ imbued the Mass with coherence and then another ‘hand’ emptied it of meaning, Witold now finds himself in (his own) monstrous and omnipotent hands. Gombrowicz suggests again that two opposite forces are reconciled in Witold, who derives his sense of power from a union of contradictions. Besides the youth-age dichotomy that mirrors the system of creativity and control, *Pornografia* also contains a corresponding dichotomy of ‘hands’: age and control are represented by the hand that maintains or restores order, while youth and creativity find their expression in the hand that deconstructs. These two hands, which bring to mind Blanchot’s image, described in the previous chapter, of the hand

* ‘we were no longer in church, in this village, not even on earth, but instead – and in keeping with reality, yes, in keeping with the truth – we were somewhere in the cosmos suspended’. PE 21.

† ‘alone in absolute darkness... so I have reached my limit and attained darkness! [...] Yet it was all lofty, giddy, marked by the relentless maturity of the spirit, finally autonomous. [...] devoid of any resistance, I felt in myself as if in the hands of a monster, and that I was capable of doing anything with myself, anything, anything!’ PE 22, translation modified.

that writes and the hand that stills the writing,⁵⁶ also coincide with the models of authorship Gombrowicz explores in *Pornografia*: the first hand symbolizes the model of the classical realist Author, while the second represents the extreme-realist model of the Modernists.

The cosmic catastrophe of Fryderyk's 'prayer' (quotation marks are used in the text) exposes mankind's delusional yearning for unity and authority. Analogous to Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God, Fryderyk's silent commentary deconstructs the possibility of any discourse that might veil the abysmal nature of reality. But a close reading of this scene reveals its self-reflexive allegorical content. Once the power of rituals and social conventions has been undermined, the creative power of the sovereign Author collapses, along with the Holy Mass and God the Creator, 'w strasznej impotencji... zwisająca... niezdolna już do zapłodnienia' ['in a terrible impotence... [...] flagging... no longer capable of begetting life']. On a subtextual allegorical level, Fryderyk's emasculation of the Mass disrupts individualistic and phallogocentric concepts of authorship. But a new deity is born immediately after the cosmic catastrophe. Witold has a strange, dreamlike premonition of bliss and enchantment: 'Cudowność, niczym we śnie, miejsca zawołane, których pożądamy nie mogąc odgadnąć i krążymy wokół nich z niemym krzykiem, we wszechpożerającej tęsknocie, rozdzierającej, szczęsnej, zachwyconej' (P 20)*. The paradox 'z niemym krzykiem' ['with a mute cry'] recalls the 'cry that *was not*' from the 'Rio Paraná Diary,' discussed in Chapter 1. It is taken up again later in the novel, as Witold observes Henia and Karol's erotic pantomime in the garden: 'Olbrzymi, wyzwalający krzyk nasycający bił niemo z tego miejsca'

* 'A marvel, as in a dream, shrouded places that we desire yet are unable to discern, and we circle around them with a mute cry, with an all-consuming longing that is heartbreaking, exultant, enchanted'. PE 22.

(P 93)*. This echoing between the diary passage written in 1954 and the novel that Gombrowicz started writing the following year suggests that *Pornografia* is also concerned with the paradoxical experience of inspiration. This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that Witold's premonition of bliss is described as a 'źródło bijące rozkoszy' (P 20) ['the gushing spring of bliss' PE 22]. This image of a spring pulsating with delight evokes Gombrowicz's descriptions of inspiration.

While in the 'Rio Paraná Diary' the narrator's homoerotic desire was merely hinted at, in *Pornografia* Gombrowicz devotes a lengthy scene to the narrator's ephebophilic longing for a sixteen-year-old boy whom he glimpses from behind among the congregation. Witold describes his vision of the boy as nothing less than 'Bóg i cud! Bóg i cud!' (P 20)†. On the printed page versification and parentheses highlight the materiality of the words and evoke layers of poetic meaning:

Co to było, jednak?
 To było... Kawalek policzka i nieco karku... należące do kogoś kto
 stał przed nami, w tłumie, o kilka kroków...
 Ach, omal nie udławiłem się! To był...
 (chłopiec)
 (chłopiec)
 I pojawiwszy, że to tylko (chłopiec), ja zacząłem gwałtownie
 wycofywać się z ekstazy mojej. Bo zresztą ja jego prawie nie widziałem,
 tylko trochę zwykłej skóry – karku i policzka. Gdy wtem poruszył się i ruch
 ten, nieznaczny, przeszył mnie na wskroś, jak niesamowita atrakcja!
 Ależ przecież (chłopiec).
 I nic tylko (chłopiec). (P 20)‡

* 'A gigantic scream, liberating and satisfying, resounded silently from this place'.
 PE 134.

† 'it's God, and a miracle! God and a miracle!' PE 22.

‡ 'What was it, though?

It was... part of a cheek and the nape of a neck... it belonged to someone
 standing in front of us, in the crowd, a few steps away...

Oh, I almost choked! It was...

(a boy)

(a boy)

And realizing that it was just (a boy), I began to rapidly retreat from my
 ecstasy. Because in fact I barely saw him, just a little ordinary skin – on the back of

On the surface of the text the narrator tries to contain his ‘ecstatic’ but socially unacceptable and therefore almost unspeakable desire for the boy. Subtextually, however, both his enchantment and his struggle against it convey the model of authorship that Gombrowicz substitutes for the phallogocentric framework, which has been rendered obsolete by Fryderyk. As he continues to stare at the boy, Witold expresses his enchantment in symbolic terms: ‘ział boskością będąc czymś przepysalnie urzekającym i ujmującym w pustce bezmiernej tej nocy, źródłem ciepła i światła oddychającego. Łaska. Cud niepojęty: dlaczego nieważność stała się ważna?’ (P 20-21)*. From the moment he notices Karol among the crowd, Witold sees him as representing more than just a desirable youth. Karol is the ‘insignificant’ object of desire that becomes ‘significant’ by taking on larger-than-life dimensions. On a subtextual allegorical level, he represents an alternative model of authorship – a model that has something to do with a silent cry, with a desire that one is ‘unable to discern,’ with a spring pulsating with delight – images that recur in Gombrowicz’s oeuvre as he attempts to give a name to his vision.⁵⁷ Throughout the novel Witold’s fascination with Karol, and his resistance to the boy’s charms, mirror Gombrowicz’s ambivalent relationship to modern *écriture* – the ambivalence that, in the diary entry of 1960, inspired him to refer to himself as ‘przeklęty’ [accursed] not only because he felt compelled to write about his shameful desire for a boy (and girl), but also

the neck and on the cheek. Then he moved abruptly, and this movement, imperceptible, pierced me through and through, like an extraordinary attraction!

And indeed (a boy).

And nothing but (a boy)’. PE 22-23.

* ‘And he exuded godliness, wonderfully enchanting and engaging as he was in the boundless emptiness of this night, he was a source of a breathing warmth and light. Grace. Unfathomable miracle: why did this insignificance become significant?’ PE 24.

because the text eluded his control and came to resemble a work of the over-refined contemporary avant-garde (D2 248; DE 480).

The scene in the church ends with Witold catching sight of Henia and associating her neck with Karol's neck. The girl's youthful charm hardly causes a shock, to the point of suggesting that her appearance represents a mere alibi or detraction from Witold's forbidden desire for the boy. Throughout the remaining narrative Witold and Fryderyk scheme to bring together the two teenagers, but finally their gratification comes from a different incident. In the finale of *Pornografia* Fryderyk stabs the farmhand Józiek. The boy dies at precisely the same moment that Waclaw, having substituted himself for Siemian, is stabbed by Karol. These two deaths – a boy's murder by an older man, and an older man's by a boy – fulfil Fryderyk's perverse vision. What is more, Józiek's killing, perverse because it lacks a rational motive, satisfies Fryderyk's twisted erotic desire, since the murder weapon, a kitchen knife, becomes an ersatz tool of sexual penetration.⁵⁸ Susan Sontag's remarks on the structure of works of literary pornography illuminate the almost farcically violent ending of *Pornografia*:

What pornography is really about, ultimately, isn't sex but death. I am not suggesting that every pornographic work speaks, either overtly or covertly, of death. Only works dealing with that specific and sharpest inflection of the themes of lust, 'the obscene,' do. It's toward the gratifications of death, succeeding and surpassing those of eros, that every truly obscene quest tends.⁵⁹

Witold's retrospective account of the night of the triple murder presents itself in unexpected terms. Lying on his bed he listens to the footsteps of the young assassins approaching Siemian's door. He anticipates the satisfaction of his desire – the teenagers' union through a crime. But then the plan goes awry, and Karol stabs Waclaw instead of Siemian while Fryderyk insanely kills Józiek. Witold experiences this finale not as voluptuous, but as steeped in a sense of unreality or fiction: 'jak

z bajki, jak z bajki...’ (P 151)*. The unplanned killing of Waław and Józiek represents to him nothing less than the mind’s climatic penetration by mindlessness: ‘Jak gdyby idea śmiertelnie ostateczna została przewiercona na wskroś lekkomyślnością...’ (P 151)†. Eroticism intersects with the dichotomy of thoughtlessness and consciousness, bringing together the key themes of *Pornografia*. This final union of mind and mindlessness does not fulfil the narrator’s erotic desire; it can only be read as an (unfulfilling) enactment of his *aesthetic* fantasy. The novel ends with the four main characters – the voyeurs and the teenagers – looking into each other’s eyes: ‘I przez sekundę, oni i my, w naszej katastrofie, spojrzeliśmy sobie w oczy’ (P 151)‡. ⁶⁰

The contrived image of four characters looking into each other’s eyes at the very end of the novel provokes the reader to question the narrator’s reliability. In this final aporia, Gombrowicz boldly disrupts conventions of the realist narrative, as if by contravening rational plausibility he could, somehow, bring about the desired but impossible union between youth and age. On a subtextual allegorical level, this scene suggests that the writer-narrator can achieve a higher or deeper reality by entering into the realm of fantasy. In order to reconcile youth and age, creativity and control, the author must impose his impossible fiction, boldly and defiantly. The result, which will not be realistic in the conventional sense, but ‘jak z bajki, jak z bajki...’ (P 151)§, transgresses the limits of realistic representation, but at the same time it allows the writer to achieve rejuvenating creativity.

* ‘as in a fairy tale, as in a fairy tale’. PE 220.

† ‘As if an idea, deathly final, had been pierced right through by recklessness...’ PE 220.

‡ ‘And for a second, they and we, in our catastrophe, looked into one another’s eyes.’ PE 221.

§ ‘as in a fairy tale, as in a fairy tale’. PE 220.

* * *

In his diary of 1958, in an entry written a few days before completing *Pornografia*, Gombrowicz discusses his desire to attain the depths of his self through controlled style:

Źródło moje bije w ogrodzie, u wrót którego stoi anioł z mieczem ognistym. Nie mogę tam wejść. Nigdy się nie przedostanę. Skazany jestem na wieczyste krążenie wokół miejsca, gdzie święci się moje najprawdziwsze oczarowanie.

Nie wolno mi, bo... te źródła wstydem tryskają, jak fontanny! Ale ten nakaz wewnętrzny: zbliż się jak najbardziej do źródeł wstydu twojego! Muszę powołać do działania wszystek rozum, świadomość, dyscyplinę, wszystkie elementy formy i stylu, całą technikę, do jakiej jestem zdolny, aby zdobyć przybliżenie do tajemniczej bramy tego ogrodu, za którą kwitnie mój wstyd. Czymże, w takim razie, jest moja dojrzałość, jeśli nie jest środkiem pomocniczym, sprawą wtórną?

Wiecznie to samo! Ubierać się we wspaniałą płaszcz aby móc zejść do portowej knajpy! Zażywać mądrości, dojrzałości, cnoty, aby zbliżyć się do czegoś *wręcz przeciwnego!* (D2 110)*

Gombrowicz lists an impressive array of devices associated with the principle of control: ‘rozum,’ ‘świadomość,’ ‘dyscyplina,’ ‘forma,’ ‘styl,’ ‘technika,’ ‘dojrzałość,’ ‘mądrość,’ and ‘cnota’ [reason, consciousness, discipline, form, style, technique, maturity, wisdom, virtue]. The principle of creativity is more difficult to pinpoint. It is described as the source of the self [‘źródło moje’], as something

* ‘My springs pulsate in a garden whose gate is guarded by an angel with a flaming sword. I cannot enter. I will never get through. I am condemned to an eternal circling of the place where my truest enchantment is sanctified.

I am not allowed in because... these springs are gushing with shame like fountains! Yet there is the internal imperative: get as close as you can to the sources of your shame! I have to mobilize all my reason, consciousness, discipline, all the elements of form and style, all the techniques of which I am capable, in order to get closer to the mysterious gate of that garden, behind which my shame bursts into flower. What, in this case, is my maturity if not an auxiliary means, a secondary matter?

Eternally the same thing! Dress up in a splendid coat in order to step into an inn on the docks. To use wisdom, maturity, virtue, in order to get close to something that is *just the opposite!* DE 371, translation modified.

shameful and unspeakable, but also as the sacred and almost magical place where his ‘truest enchantment is sanctified’ [‘święci się moje najprawdziwsze oczarowanie’]. The homoerotic subtext of this passage is plain to see: the angel holding a burning sword brings to mind a forbidding phallic symbol, while the mention of the inn at the docks evokes a scene of gay cruising. The reference to shame and unspeakability – a frequent code for homosexual desire – is especially suggestive since the verb ‘tryskają’ in ‘nie wolno mi, bo... te źródła wstydem tryskają, jak fontanny!’ [‘I am not allowed in because... these springs are gushing with shame like fountains!’] evokes *wytrysk* [ejaculation].⁶¹ This diary entry resonates with the passage in *Pornografia* where Witold sees Karol for the first time. As I mentioned before, his vision of the boy is preceded by a premonition of ‘źródło bijące rozkoszy’ (P 20) [‘the gushing spring of bliss’ PE 22]. The paradisaical garden pictured in the diary passage evokes, moreover, the lush setting of *Pornografia* and the tropical scenery around the Rio Paraná – surroundings in which the narrator hears troubling, silent cries. The pulsating springs in Gombrowicz’s oeuvre hint at the erotic sources of his inspiration, and they indicate how his model of authorship as a reconciliation of creativity and control courts both ecstasy and shame, eroticism and the maturity that augurs death.

Reading this diary entry of 1958 in the light of Gombrowicz’s subtextually allegorical model of authorship, the forbidden erotic source of the self coincides with the source of spontaneous creativity and inspiration, while the element of control is needed to reach that source. Here Gombrowicz redefines the respective roles of creativity and control as presented in the preceding chapters: the diary-I’s ‘nakaz wewnętrzny’ [‘internal imperative’] is not to subdue the overflowing abundance of

the source (of inspiration), but to get as close to it as possible, through discipline and all kinds of technical devices.

This passage anticipates Gombrowicz's statement from *Testament*, written ten years later, that his challenge as a writer is to apply an extreme kind of Realism in order to break through Unreality to Reality. Taken together, *Pornografia*, the diary and *Testament* suggest a new phase in Gombrowicz's search for a model of authorship: in *Ferdydurke* he portrayed writing as a struggle against the wild force of the emergent text; his experience of *Trans-Atlantyk* was characterized by a sense of relatively effortless balance between spontaneous creativity and authorial control. In *Pornografia*, finally, the writer seems to doubt his ability to create merely by 'letting himself go'. Rather than entering into a state of active passivity or controlled surrender, he now feels the need to employ his authority in order to attain the source of inspiration.

The fact that he harnesses images of youth and eroticism into this quest draws attention, once again, to the link between Gombrowicz's concepts and his embodied experience of authorship, which, in the late 1950s, had begun to be marked by the experience of illness and aging. It was, perhaps, Gombrowicz's awareness that he did not have much time left that motivated his urge to consolidate his legacy through a vast body of autocommentaries and programmatic texts over the next decade. Plausibly, a preoccupation with his works' reception after his death also inspired his last novel, *Kosmos*, an overt allegory of interpretation.

¹ Susan Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination' [1967], in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Dell, 1969), pp. 35-73 (p. 44).

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- ² Ewa Thompson, *Witold Gombrowicz* (Boston: Twayne, 1979), p. 89. Thompson does not take into account Gombrowicz's novel *Opętani* [*Possessed*].
- ³ Marek Ruszkowski demonstrates that the language of *Pornografia*, though not orthodox, is less idiosyncratic than in Gombrowicz's other novels. See *Składnia prozy Witolda Gombrowicza* (Kielce: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna im. Jana Kochanowskiego, 1993). According to Łukasz Garbal, in *Ferdydurke Gombrowicz* confronts all four critics who had published disparaging reviews of his earlier short story collection. See *Ferdydurke: biografia powieści* (Cracow: Universitas, 2010), p. 26. On the fictionalization of real-life writers in *Trans-Atlantyk* see Chapter 3.
- ⁴ *Witold Gombrowicz: Walka o sławę: Korespondencja*, ed. and introduction by Jerzy Jarzębski, 2 vols (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1996-98), I: p. 169 (letter dated 2 July 1960). According to Gombrowicz's brother Jerzy, the landscaped park in *Pornografia* closely resembles the park designed by their mother in their country residence in Małoszyce. See Jerzy Gombrowicz, 'Mon Frère Witold et nos origines', in *Cahier Gombrowicz*, ed. by Constantin Jelenski and Dominique de Roux (Paris: l'Herne, 1971), pp. 19-38 (p. 26).
- ⁵ Gombrowicz's decision to name two female novelists betrays his misogynistic association of femininity with triviality. The same unflattering association already appeared in *Ferdydurke*, where the simpleminded critics who misunderstood Józio's first book are described as 'ciotki kulturalne' (F 9) [cultural aunts, FE 6].
- ⁶ Roman Jakobson, 'On Realism in Art', in *Language in Literature*, ed. by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 19-27 (p. 20) quoted in Peter A. Zusi, 'Echoes of the Epochal: Historicism and the Realism Debate', *Comparative Literature*, 56 (2004), 208-26 (p. 211). Zusi points out that for defenders of Modernist techniques in the 1930s 'artistic representations corresponding to the complexities of modern reality could only be achieved through intricate processes'. Those representations, Zusi continues, 'often generated startling, counter-intuitive forms' (p. 211).
- ⁷ André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. 36.
- ⁸ To my knowledge the only discussion of Gombrowicz's work in the light of Surrealist practice is in Rochelle H. Ross, 'Witold Gombrowicz: An Experimental

-
- Novelist', *The South Central Bulletin*, 31 (1971), 214-16. Ross focuses on the 'automatic' aspect of Gombrowicz's writing but ignores both his insistence on the element of control and his experiments with eroticism.
- ⁹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 74.
- ¹⁰ Roland Barthes, 'La métaphore de l'Œil' [1963], in *Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), p. 244, quoted (in English translation) by Suleiman.
- ¹¹ Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*, p. 44.
- ¹² Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p. 75.
- ¹³ This evocative amalgam of *entremetteur* [matchmaker] and *metteur-en-scène* [stage producer] appears in Koukou Chanska and François Marié's translation of *Testament*. See Witold Gombrowicz, *Testament: entretiens avec Dominique de Roux*, trans. from Polish by Koukou Chanska and François Marié (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 145. In Polish, Gombrowicz describes Fryderyk in a less fanciful manner as a 'Rajfur-Reżyser' [Procurer-Stage Director] (D4 127).
- ¹⁴ Patricia Merivale, 'The Esthetics of Perversion: Gothic Artifice in Henry James and Witold Gombrowicz', *PMLA* 93 (1978), 992-1002 (p. 1001).
- ¹⁵ Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska, *Powiedzieć świat: kognitywna analiza tekstów literackich na przykładach* (Cracow: Universitas, 2006), p. 102.
- ¹⁶ Hanjo Berressem, *Lines of Desire: Reading Gombrowicz's Fiction with Lacan* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 173.
- ¹⁷ Michał Legierski, *Modernizm Witolda Gombrowicza* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich, 1999), p. 57.
- ¹⁸ Merivale, 'The Esthetics of Perversion', p. 992. Merivale compares this aspect of *Pornografia* to Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).
- ¹⁹ Alfred Gall discusses this broad disapproval in *Performativer Humanismus: Die Auseinandersetzung mit Philosophie in der literarischen Praxis von Witold Gombrowicz*, Series Mundus Polonicus 1 (Dresden: Thelem, 2007), p. 247.

²⁰ Sandauer was not oblivious to the truth-value of Gombrowicz's non-realistic works. Some years previously he had defied the Polish government's sponsorship of Socialist Realist literature, expressing his admiration for Gombrowicz's '“nierealistyczne” książki' (D2 41) [“unrealistic” books’ (DE 313-14)], but the breaches of historical accuracy in the apparently realistic *Pornografia* evidently disturbed him. He deems several plot details unconvincing in the context of the Nazi occupation, such as the characters' casual use of shotguns at a time when the possession of firearms was punishable by death. See Artur Sandauer, 'Witold Gombrowicz: człowiek i pisarz', in *Zebrane pisma krytyczne*, 3 vols (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981), I: pp. 581-613 (p. 611, n. 62). Sandauer also deplores Gombrowicz's decision to set his protagonists' fanciful machinations against 'a sky darkened with smoke from the crematoria'. This allusion represents to my knowledge the only critical commentary on the (non-)representation of the Shoah in *Pornografia*. Witold observes chimneys on the horizon during his train journey from Warsaw, but it is not clear whether they should be factory chimneys or allusions to Nazi extermination camps. (Realistically, no such camps would have been visible from a train on this line.) The only explicit reference to the Shoah in *Pornografia* is Witold's brief comment about the absence of Jews in the village of Ćmielów. Jan Jakób Kolski's filmic adaptation *Pornografia* (2003) places the motif of the Holocaust squarely at the centre of the plot. For a discussion of Kolski's film, including his use of footage from the Warsaw Ghetto over the credits, see Marek Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), p. 170.

²¹ Sandauer, 'Witold Gombrowicz: człowiek i pisarz', p. 582.

²² Sandauer, 'Witold Gombrowicz: człowiek i pisarz', p. 608 and p. 610. Sandauer does not take into account that by the mid-1950s manifest and latent doubles had become staple signifiers of homoerotic desire in Polish literature. Ritz argues that 'in the morphology of the language of unspeakable desire, as it appears in Iwaszkiewicz, Breza, or Mach, the multiplication of characters is an encrypted sign for the nonexistent or suppressed identification of the homosexual I. Gombrowicz belongs to this tradition, but also transcends it.' See *Nić w labiryncie pożądania*, p. 204. See also German Ritz, 'Inexpressible Desire and Narrative Poetics:

Homosexuality in Iwaszkiewicz, Breza, Mach and Gombrowicz', in *Gender and Sexuality in Ethical Context: Ten Essays on Polish Prose*, ed. by Knut Andreas Grimstad and Ursula Phillips; Slavica Bergensia 5 (Bergen: University of Bergen, 2005), pp. 254-76 (pp. 273-75).

²³ Agnieszka Sołtysik argues that in Gombrowicz's diary homoerotic motifs are often expressed through forms of doubling: 'the use of the third person [...] appears almost always in connection to issues related to the gay problematic'. See 'Witold Gombrowicz's Struggle with Heterosexual Form: From a National to a Performative Self', in *Gombrowicz's Grimaces: Modernism, Gender, Nationality*, ed. by Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 245-66 (p. 260). Marian Bielecki discusses the 'homoerotic discourse' in Gombrowicz's *Diary* in *Interpretacja i pleć: szkice o twórczości Gombrowicza* (Wałbrzych: Wydawnictwo Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Angelusa Silesiusa, 2005), pp. 115-52.

²⁴ Jerzy Jarzębski discusses the 'metaphorical' representation of sex as analogous with Gombrowicz's concept of Form in *Gra w Gombrowicza* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982), pp. 307-08. He presents the eroticism of *Pornografia* as an idiolect of a higher order between the characters as well as between the author and the reader (p. 350 and p. 356). Janusz Pawłowski presents a similar approach to eroticism and Form. See 'Erotyka Gombrowicza' [based on a paper presented in 1975], in *Gombrowicz i krytycy*, ed. by Zdzisław Łapiński (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), pp. 531-60 (p. 542). For Pawłowski, Gombrowicz's language of desire represents nothing less than a 'secret laboratory' and a 'metalanguage' for his artistic and spiritual achievements (p. 558), but passes over the role of *homoeroticism*, and hardly even addresses the relationship between language and the unspeakability of desire. Obscure and disembodied discussions of Gombrowicz's eroticism continue in the work of Jean-Pierre Salgas, who suggests that Gombrowicz's 'homosexualité philosophique' finalizes the death of God; that the body represents a domain of pleasure (*ars erotica*) rather than truth (*scientia sexualis*); and that Gonzalo in *Trans-Atlantyk* and Fryderyk in *Pornografia* embody, respectively, the 'point de fuite' and the 'point de vue' of Gombrowicz's

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- eroticism. See *Witold Gombrowicz ou l'athéisme généralisé* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), pp. 137-40.
- ²⁵ Olaf Kühl, *Stilistik einer Verdrängung: Zur Prosa von Witold Gombrowicz* (Berlin: Freie Universität, 1995), p. 206.
- ²⁶ The works of German Ritz, Knut Grimstad and Gudrun Langer are relevant in this context (see Bibliography). Ten years after Kühl's monograph appeared in German it was also published in Polish translation as *Gęba Erosa: tajemnice stylu Witolda Gombrowicza* (Cracow: Universitas, 2005). Berressem does not enter into dialogue with Kühl in his monograph, *Lines of Desire*, but he arrives at comparable conclusions about the 'repressed text of sexuality' (p. 196) and the 'chiastic meeting of a metaphysical physics and a physical metaphysics' (p. 161) in *Pornografia*.
- ²⁷ Czesław Miłosz, 'Kim jest Gombrowicz?' (1970), in *Gombrowicz i krytycy*, ed. by Łapiński, pp. 185-200 (p. 193).
- ²⁸ Klementyna Suchanow points out that every single review of *Pornografia* in the Polish press in Argentina refers to the novel's non-pornographic nature. See *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005), pp. 207-08.
- ²⁹ Hans Mayer, 'Ansichten des Witold Gombrowicz', in *Ansichten zur Literatur der Zeit* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1962), pp. 180-92 (p. 188).
- ³⁰ In Western democracies this development took place in the late 1960s and 70s; in Poland, hardcore pornography was not legalized until 1998.
- ³¹ The title is reproduced in Georges Lisowski's French translation, *La Pornographie* (1962), monitored closely by the author. Gombrowicz agreed, however, to modify the title in the Italian and Spanish versions, *La Seduzione* (1962) and *La Seducción* (1965). Borchardt remarks on her English translation: 'Perhaps when he chose to call his new work "Pornography," the word suggested something rare, hidden, a dark secret. I have left the title in Polish to convey shades of meaning the English may not have.' See 'Translator's Note', PE xi-xiv (p. xi).
- ³² Letter dated 3 October 1957 (L 324).

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- ³³ This letter, dated 16 April 1960, is not reproduced in Gombrowicz's published correspondence with Jeleński, *Walka o sławę*, ed. by Jerzy Jarzębski (vol. 2, 1998). Łukasz Garbal refers to it in his article, 'Edytorskie problemy z *Pornografią*', in *Archiwum Emigracji, Studia, Szkice, Dokumenty*, 4 (2001), pp. 29-41 (p. 33 n. 18), from which I quote here. The original letter is archived at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT, 'Witold Gombrowicz's Papers' (Uncat. Ms. Vault 816).
- ³⁴ The nature of Actaeon's transgression is variously portrayed: he can be a hubristic boaster, a deliberate voyeur, or even a mortal in amorous pursuit of a deity. For a discussion of the myth in classical literature see John Heath, *Actaeon, the Unmannerly Intruder* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).
- ³⁵ Żaneta Nalewajk translates the Greek not as 'writing about prostitutes' but as 'writing about the body' [pisanie o ciele] as well as 'writing with the body' [pisanie ciałem]. The title 'Pornografia,' she suggests, distances Gombrowicz's work from the ancient Greek adventure novel, which depicts an innocent couple's trying journey toward marriage: in pornographic works the encounter is reduced to pure physicality, and subject to a manipulating director's vision. See *W stronę perspektywizmu: Problematyka cielesności w prozie Brunona Schulza i Witolda Gombrowicza: Prolegomena* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2010), p. 185 and p. 188.
- ³⁶ *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, ed. by Angus Stevenson, 6th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 2376-77.
- ³⁷ Charles Baudelaire, 'Fusées I', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1975), I, pp. 649-67 (p. 649).
- ³⁸ Catherine Gallagher, 'George Eliot and *Daniel Deronda*: The Prostitute and the Jewish Question', in *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, ed. by Ruth Bernard Yeazell (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 39-62 (p. 43).
- ³⁹ See Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 7-9 and *passim*.

⁴⁰ The role of *male* prostitution in Gombrowicz's life and work is yet to be discussed. He refers to it in *Trans-Atlantyk*, where the homosexual millionaire Gonzalo picks up young boys for a couple of pesos (TA 42-3; TE 37). Reinaldo Arenas makes the unverified claim that Gombrowicz engaged in sex for money in Buenos Aires. See *Before Night Falls*, trans. by Dolores M. Koch (London: Serpent's Tail, 2001), pp. 80-81.

⁴¹ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 56.

⁴² Quotation marks, known in Polish as *cudzysłów* – literally 'another's words' – indicate not only Fryderyk's strangely inauthentic behaviour and physicality; they also draw attention to the opacity of language, and undermine the apparent realism of the narrative, thus implying the narrator's alienation from his own language and experience. Outside of *Pornografia* quotation marks also appear in relation to inauthenticity and alienation. Gombrowicz discusses quotation marks as a key signifier in his poetics of authenticity in his diary:

(prawdę mówiąc, nie doświadczam uczuć inaczej, jak w cudzysłowie). (D1 69) [(to tell the truth, I do not experience emotions other than in quotation marks). (DE 52, translation modified)]

Być człowiekiem to znaczy być aktorem – być człowiekiem to znaczy udawać człowieka – być człowiekiem to 'zachowywać się' jak człowiek, nie będąc nim w samej głębi – być człowiekiem to recytować człowieczeństwo. (D2 9) [To be a man means to pretend to be a man – to be a man means to "act like" a man while not being one deep inside – to be a man is to recite humanity. (DE 288)]

Quotation marks indicate that Form and interhuman dynamics preclude spontaneous action and unmediated feeling, both for the fictional Fryderyk and for Gombrowicz himself. On the deconstructive function of Gombrowicz's quotation marks, see Michał Paweł Markowski, *Czarny nurt: Gombrowicz, świat, literatura* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004), pp. 97-98, n. 52.

⁴³ It is not unlikely that Gombrowicz should have been familiar with Alejo Carpentier's novel *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*) of 1949, prefaced by Carpentier's discussion of his concept of a uniquely American form of magical realism, *lo real maravilloso americano*:

The marvelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state [*estado límite*]. (Alejo Carpentier, 'On the Marvelous Real in America', trans. from Spanish by Tanya Huntington and Lois Parkinson Zamora, in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. and introduction by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Farris (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 76-88 (pp. 85-86))

As the editors Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Farris argue in their introductory note to Carpentier's essay, his "marvelous American reality" does not imply a conscious assault on conventionally depicted reality but, rather, an amplification of perceived reality required by and inherent in Latin American nature and culture' (Editors' Note, p. 75). It is also worth bearing in mind that the Spanish translation of the German art critic Franz Roh's essay 'Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei' (1925) was influential among literary critics in Latin America. Irene Guenther observes that this Spanish translation (a part of which first appeared in Ortega y Gasset's *Revista de Occidente* in Madrid in 1927, followed by a complete translation in book form the same year) 'curiously reversed Roh's German title. By placing *realism mágico* first, *post expressionism* second, Magic Realism was granted a privileged position from the outset'. See 'Magic Realism, New Objectivity, and the Arts during the Weimar Republic', in *Magical Realism*, pp. 33-73 (p. 55).

⁴⁴ Thompson notes about Gombrowicz's four novels that each narrator has an alter ego, 'playing a greater role in the plot than the narrator himself. [...] In comparison to him, the narrator's figure and voice pale and become insignificant'. See *Witold Gombrowicz*, pp. 63-64.

⁴⁵ Korwin-Piotrowska, *Powiedzieć świat*, p. 103.

⁴⁶ Olaf Kühn, *Stilistik einer Verdrängung*, p. 160; German Ritz, *Nic w labiryncie požądania*, p. 208; Hanjo Berressem, *Lines of Desire*, p. 158; Michal Oklot, *Phantasms of Matter in Gogol (and Gombrowicz)* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009), p. 20.

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- ⁴⁷ David Goldfarb, 'Gombrowicz's Binoculars: The View from Abroad', in *Framing the Polish Home: Postwar Cultural Constructions of Hearth, Nation, and Self*, ed. by Bożena Shallcross (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), pp. 301-16 (p. 314).
- ⁴⁸ Markowski, *Czarny nurt*, p. 185.
- ⁴⁹ 'Przedmowa do *Trans-Atlantyku* [1953]', in TA 136-41 (p. 141).
- ⁵⁰ I borrow Harold Bloom's term for the poet's ambivalence with respect to his precursors. See *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
- ⁵¹ For Gombrowicz's criticism of the *nouveau roman* see his diary (D3 132; DE 620) and *Testament* (D4 134-36; KT 138-40); see also Pierre Sanavio's interview with Gombrowicz, translated from Italian into Polish by Katarzyna Bielas and Francesco M. Cataluccio as 'Gombrowicz: Forma i rytuał', in *Dzieła XIV: Publicystyka, wywiady, teksty różne 1963-1969*, ed. by Jan Błoński and Jerzy Jarzębski (1997), pp. 390-449 (p. 410).
- ⁵² Alain Robbe-Grillet, *La Jalousie* (Paris: Minuit, 1957), pp. 23-24.
- ⁵³ For a comparative reading of Gombrowicz's novel *Kosmos* and the *nouveau roman* see Jarzębski, *Gra w Gombrowicza*, pp. 441-45. On the relationships between the *nouveau roman* aesthetics and *Kosmos* see George Z. Gasyňa, *Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise: Exilic Discourse in Joseph Conrad and Witold Gombrowicz* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 224-26.
- ⁵⁴ See Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 30, italics used in the text.
- ⁵⁵ Markowski reads this scene with a Heideggerian framework, but also mentions the Lacanian *Réal* in the context of Fryderyk's behaviour in *Pornografia*: p. 55 and pp. 136-37.
- ⁵⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 19.
- ⁵⁷ In as far as Gombrowicz's assassination of the Mass in *Pornografia* deflates the phallic power of the Author, he can be said to anticipate negative conceptualizations of the traditional Realist novel in terms of unity, phallic potency and dominance, proposed by French feminist theorists in the 1970s. Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray oppose the 'male' Realist novel with concepts of the modern,

experimental text modelled on images of the female body and female eroticism (see Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p. 40). Gombrowicz replaces the phallic, unitary text not with the female body, but with the eroticized body of the male youth: Witold's vision of Karol's neck and cheek, and the fact that the word 'boy' is placed in parentheses – a punctuation mark that suggests an embrace – betray the intense eroticism of his vision.

In contemporary Polish the noun *policzek* ['cheek' in the sense of 'either side of the face'] is distinct from *pośladek* ['cheek' in the sense of 'either side of the buttocks'], but a dated use of *policzek* can refer to the buttocks (see *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, ed. by Jan Karłowicz, Adam Kryński and Władysław Niedźwiedzki, 8 vols (Warsaw: Mianowski, 1900-27), VIII (1908), p. 533); in any case, the fact that Witold glimpses Karol's neck and cheek from *behind* implies his erotic fascination with the boy's back(side). The modern poetics of this passage reach to the core of Gombrowicz's view of authorship as a reluctant submission or controlled surrender to the emergent text. The transgressive modern text comes to be associated with darkness, monstrosity, extreme or 'cosmic' reality, as well as with a deep sensuality in which hierarchies are overturned: 'nieważność stała się ważna' ['insignificance become significant'].

⁵⁸ The ordinary nature of the knife arguably allows Fryderyk to conquer the peasant boy's prosaic charm. Gombrowicz's fascination with the nature of *stabbing* already appears in his absurdist play, *Iwona, księżniczka Burgunda* (1938). Prince Filip debates whether he should stab his fiancée, Iwona: 'Cóż, wsadzić w ciało... Ale jest straszna trudność... Jest straszna łatwość, a w tej łatwości jest właśnie straszna trudność.' Witold Gombrowicz, *Dzieła VI: Dramaty*, ed. by Jan Błoński (1986), p. 78 ['Easy enough to push this into the flesh... the problem will still be there... unresolved. It's horribly easy and that makes it so horribly difficult.' Witold Gombrowicz, *Iwona, Princess of Burgundia*, trans. from Polish by Krystyna Griffith-Jones and Catherine Robins (New York: Grove Press, 1970), p. 62]. The Lord Chamberlain proposes that Iwona, a commoner, should be killed not 'from below' (with a knife) but 'from above,' in a manner so exceedingly silly that nobody would suspect the royals. Iwona is consequently made to die choking on a fish bone.

⁵⁹ Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*, pp. 59-60.

⁶⁰ Andrzej Juszczyk draws together the threads of realism, eroticism, and intertextuality in the final sentence, emphasizing the impossibility of the ending of *Pornografia*:

The final sentence of *Pornografia* relates an impossible gesture (four people cannot in one instant look into each other's eyes!), reminiscent of Sade's descriptions of impossible bodily acts that contradict the anatomy of human arrangements during an orgy. Despite its apparent realism, Gombrowicz's work, like Sade's, is deeply symbolic. The last scene of *Pornografia* conveys a communion of gazes finding in each other subjects freed of their bodies and of language.

See 'Apetyt na starość: uwodzenie, pożądanie i przemoc w *Pornografii*', in *Gombrowicz nasz współczesny*, ed. by Jerzy Jarzębski (Cracow: Universitas, 2010), pp. 316-27 (p. 327).

⁶¹ For Markowski this scene represents an allegory of authorship: Gombrowicz knows that the spring in the 'forbidden garden' is unattainable. He can only dream about this source, this 'primal scene' that contains the shameful memory of suspect physicality, the beginning of desire and of writing – the condition of creativity. See *Czarny nurt*, p. 372. Michael Zgodzay argues that 'the metaphor of the fountains erupting with shame has a decidedly *positive* character – it is vital and intensive. Gombrowicz's sources do not feed some quietly flowing little brook – they are, quite to the contrary, an eruptive force. I do not see even a trace of failure or mythical banishment here.' See 'Wstyd, oczarowanie, agresja – poetyka afektu W. Gombrowicza', in *Spojrzenie – spektakl – wstyd*, ed. by Jan Potkański and Robert Pruszczyński (Warsaw: Elipsa, 2011), pp. 197-209 (p. 199).

POSTSCRIPT

WHERE CREATIVITY AND CONTROL INTERSECT

London, 24 March, 2013

Szanowny Panie,

I am sending you a copy of my recently completed doctoral thesis, in which I analyse your concepts of authorship. I believe you will find it interesting, since my critical approach represents an alternative both to the readings you encountered in your lifetime, and to the interpretations you yourself recommended. What I admire most about your oeuvre is its complex self-reflexivity. It goes without saying that my reading, like any interpretation, is subjective and limited in its outlook and scope. Analysing your work through the lens of my personal fascinations, however, I have drawn on all available sources in order to produce as accurate an account of your life and work as research permits. My goal was not to uncover or recover your conscious intentions, but to retrace the factors – real-life experiences, historical circumstances, literary influences and unconscious motivations – that determined your work in combination with your deliberate design.

Writing several decades after your death, from an academic tradition that has seen significant transformations since the glory days of Structuralism, I am confident that

you will find interest in my work. It may remind you of forgotten resonances, and it may make you aware of structures and developments that you never consciously envisaged. But perhaps we could discuss these things in a posthumous interview. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Z poważaniem,

T. B.

Note on the text

Quotations from Gombrowicz's works are printed in bold letters. Square brackets indicate all modifications apart from changes of tense (past tense to present tense), changes of person (mostly first person singular to second person singular), and changes in punctuation, which I made liberally throughout. Gombrowicz's unmodified originals are presented in the footnotes.

Gombrowicz's monosyllabic interjections are taken from his interview with himself, 'J'étais structuraliste avant tout le monde'.¹ In that text it is the interviewer who is made to chime in with almost nonsensical remarks; here it is Gombrowicz. I leave these parts in French. All other parts of the dialogue are presented in English.

Transcript from an interview conducted on 26 March 2013 in a silent space where creativity and control intersect.

T.B.: Panie Witoldzie, I would like to ask you a few questions about your concepts of reading, which, I think, are as important as your concepts of writing when it comes to understanding your views on literature.

W.G.: **Oh...**

T.B.: It seems to me that while you have always considered the internalized image of the reader an important factor in the process of writing, your focus shifted over the

years. Towards the end of your career you moved away from a concern with broader, sociological factors, such as the readership's conditioning by cultural authorities and their resulting bad faith in relation to art.

W.G.: *Aie!*

T.B.: In your last two novels, *Pornografia* and *Kosmos*, you describe the dilemma of narrators who are never quite certain if the signs and situations that they see around them are real (within their fictional universe) or imagined. To me these works betray your preoccupation with the individual reader's experience of the interpretive process.

W.G.: *Top.*

T.B. [*Amused*]: Well, how would you describe your experience of reading, or the process of interpreting literary texts?

W.G.: **I'm no critic, and I wouldn't be one for anything on earth. (KT 138)* How many sentences can one create out of the twenty-four letters of the alphabet? How many meanings can one glean from hundreds of weeds, clods of dirt, and other trifles? (C 31)†**

* 'Nie jestem krytykiem i za nic nie chciałbym nim zostać.' D4 134.

† 'Ileż zdań można utworzyć z dwudziestu czterech liter alfabetu? Ileż znaczeń można wprowadzić z setek chwastów, grudek i innych drobiazgów?' K 29.

T.B.: Clods of dirt and other trifles? Do you mean that when you read, you can never forget that some of the implications of the text will necessarily elude you?

W.G.: The way I see it, looking at a text is like looking at a **moonless star-filled sky [...]. Constellations emerge out of the swarms of stars, some I know, the Big Dipper, the Great Bear, I identify them, but others, unfamiliar to me, are also lurking there, as if inscribed into the distribution of the major stars, I try to fill in lines that might bind them into forms...** (C 12)*

T.B.: Isn't that the pleasure of reading?

W.G.: **This deciphering, this charting [...] wearies me.** (C 12)†

T.B.: But you don't give up easily...

W.G.: No. **I begin anew, though reluctantly, to look for forms, patterns, I no longer feel like it, I am bored and impatient and cranky.** (C 12)‡

T.B.: So why do you do it?

* 'Gwiazdzistość nieba bezksiężycowego [...] w tych wyrojeniach wybijały się konstelacje, niektóre znałem, Wielki Wóz, Niedźwiedzica, odnajdywałem je, ale inne, mnie nie wiadome, też czaiły się jakby wpisane w rozmieszczenie główniejszych gwiazd, próbowałem ustalać linie, wiążące w figury...' K13.

† 'to rozróżnianie, narzucanie tej mapy, zmęczyło mnie'. (Ibid.).

‡ 'niechętnie zaczynałem też tutaj szukać figur, układów, nie chciało mi się, byłem i znudzony i niecierpliwy i kapryśny'. K 14.

W.G.: I realize that what rivets me to these objects, how shall I put it, what attracts me to the ‘behind,’ the ‘beyond,’ is the way that one object is ‘behind’ the other, that the pipe was behind the chimney, the wall is behind the corner of the kitchen, just like... like... like... at supper when Katasia’s lips were behind Lena’s little mouth. (C 12)*

T.B.: I lost you.

W.G.: Not surprisingly, because too much attention to one object leads to distraction, this one object conceals everything else, and when we focus on one point on the map we know that all other points are eluding us. (C 13)† There is something like an excess of reality, its swelling beyond endurance. (C 68)‡ How is it that [...] no sooner do you look [at chaos] than order... and form... are born under your very eyes? (C 25)§

T.B.: So the reader’s task is to resist the obvious meanings imposed by the text, and instead try and include the less obvious ones?

* ‘uprzytomniłem sobie, że to, co w tych przedmiotach mnie przykuwa, bo ja wiem, przyciąga, to ‘za’ ‘poza,’ to to, że jeden przedmiot był ‘za’ drugim, rura za kominem, mur za rogiem kuchni, jak... jak... jak... katasine wargi za usteczkami Leny’. K 14.

† ‘Cóż dziwnego, nadmierne skupienie uwagi na jednym przedmiocie prowadzi do roztargnienia, ten jeden przedmiot przesłania całą resztę, wpatrując się w jeden punkt na mapie wiemy jednak, że wymykają się nam wszystkie inne punkty.’ (Ibid.).

‡ ‘Istnieje coś jak nadmiar rzeczywistości, jej spęcznienie już nie do zniesienia.’ K 57.

§ ‘Jak to jest, że [...] nie możemy nigdy z [chaosem] się zetknąć, zaledwie spojrzymy, a już pod naszym spojrzeniem rodzi się porządek... i kształt.’ K 24.

W.G.: Yes and no. [*Coughs, wheezes.*] I suppose that *ideally* to read means to look away, to **restrain yourself, turn away from [the text] so as not to influence anything, or interfere...** (C 18)*

T.B.: That is not how *you* read literature, as far as I can tell from your reviews and comments on other writers!

W.G.: No. The ideal reader who only looks away will end up with nothing to say about the text at all. When I read, I wait until I begin to **sense in [the] series of events [in the text] a propensity for congruity, something hazily linking them together [...] – something [...] trying to break through and press toward meaning, as in charades, when letters begin to make their way toward forming a word. What word? Indeed, [after a while] it seems that everything wants to act in the name of an idea... What idea?** (C 33)†

T.B.: Have you ever tried to describe this process of reading?

W.G.: No. **I wouldn't know how to tell this... this story... because I'd be telling it *ex post*. [...] But how can one describe something except *ex post*? Can nothing be ever truly expressed, rendered in its anonymous becoming, can no one ever**

* 'tłumiłem [napięcie], odwracałem się od tego w inną stronę, byle nie wpływać na nic, nie mieszać się'. K 18.

† 'jakaś skłonność do składowości, coś jak gdyby mgliście zahaczającego, dawała się wyczuwać w szeregu tych zdarzeń [...] przebijało się w nich jakieś parcie ku sensowi, jak w szaradach, gdy litery zaczynają zmierzać do ułożenia się w słowo. Jakie słowo? Tak, wydawało się jednak, że wszystko chciałoby sprawować się w myśl jakiejś myśli... Jakiej?' K 30.

render the babbling of the nascent moment, how is it that, born out of chaos, we can never encounter it again? (C 25)*

T.B.: Why?

W.G.: Because ([when] I try to read this charade) there is no doubt (and it is a painful puzzle) that I myself am the secret of the [...] union, it happens within me, I and no one else has created this union. (C 109)†

T.B.: You, and not the author?

W.G.: Attention! [...] Am I not really the one who [...] establishes a bridge uniting everything... in what sense? Oh, that isn't clear, but in any case something begins to form itself, an embryo of a totality is being born. (C 109-10)‡

T.B.: Does that have anything to do with your theory of Form?

W.G.: *Chut!*

* 'Nie potrafię tego opowiedzieć... tej historii... ponieważ opowiadam *ex post*. [...] Ale jak opowiadać nie *ex post*? Czy więc nic nigdy nie może zostać naprawdę wyrażone, oddane w swoim stawaniu się anonimowym, nikt nigdy nie zdoła oddać bełkotu rodzącej się chwili, jak to jest, że, urodzeni z chaosu, nie możemy nigdy z nim się zetknąć [...]'. K 24.

† 'Albowiem (próbowałem odczytać szaradę) nie ulega kwestii (i była to bolesna zagadka), że sekretem związku [...] jestem ja sam, on we mnie się dokonał, ja, nie kto inny, stworzyłem ten związek'. K 88.

‡ '(uwaga!) [...] czy rzeczywiście ja [...] nie ustanowiłem pomostu łączącego wszystko... w jakim sensie? Och, nie było jasne, ale w każdym razie coś tu zaczęło się formować, rodził się embrion jakiejś całości'. (Ibid.).

T.B.: But it sounds like a dialectical process emerges between you as a reader, and the text...

W.G.: Maybe. When I read, I *gaze* at the text, at first I see **a congestion of words like the congestion on the dirty wallpaper... on the ceiling...** (C 163)* But I gaze at it, **drown in it and in my own complexities, I gaze and gaze without any particular effort yet stubbornly, until in the end it is as if I were crossing some kind of a threshold.** (C 23-24)†

T.B.: That is exactly how I felt about reading your novels! The allegory of the ‘Rio Paraná Diary’ practically jumped at me, but with your novels, it was different, it required a lot of *gazing*...

W.G.: **Oh, the wild power of feeble thought!** (C 41)‡

T.B.: [*Laughs, embarrassed.*] But it sounds like you’re saying that as a reader you follow the clues of the text. So what did you think about my work?

W.G.: **It’s interesting, the way coincidences happen more often than one would expect, stickiness, the way one thing sticks to another, events, phenomena, they are like those magnetized balls, they search for one another, and when they’re**

* ‘Zagęszczenie słów, jak na brudnej tapecie... na suficie...’ K 129.

† ‘Wpatrzony, zatopiony w tym, i we własnych zawłościach, wpatrywałem się i wpatrywałem bez specjalnego wysiłku a jednak uparcie, aż w końcu było to jakbym jakiś próg przekraczał’. K 22.

‡ ‘Dzika potęga myśli wątlej!’ K 36.

close, pam... they unite... randomly, as often as not... (C 145-46)* I always said it was astonishing how much meaning and structure one can discover **thanks to a persistent though silent cerebral effort.** (C 9)[†]

T.B.: To my mind, the key problems rather seemed to emerge out of your texts.

[*Pause.*] The elements of ‘creativity’ and ‘control’ across your works really were like magnetized balls... at least once I had managed bring them into focus.

W.G.: Are you saying that your **looking around was mindless**, that you **did nothing more than look?** (C 92)[‡]

T.B.: No, not at all. I wasn’t just *looking* – I was certainly *gazing*. It took a lot of time, a lot of what you call ‘persistent though silent cerebral effort’. I’m not claiming that this is an objective reading, in case you’re worried about that.

W.G.: Good. **The pseudoscience of today’s criticism is becoming unbearable.** (D 424)[§]

T.B.: Would you elaborate on this?

* ‘ciekawe [...], że zbiegi okoliczności zdarzają się częściej, niżby można było przypuszczać, lepkość, jak jedno z drugim się zlepia, zdarzenia, zjawiska, są jak te kulki namagnetyzowane, szukają siebie, gdy znajdą się blisko, paf... łączą się... byle jak, najczęściej...’ K 115.

[†] ‘dzięki wytrwałemu a cichemu wysiłkowi mózgowemu’. K 11.

[‡] ‘to moje oglądanie było bezmyślne, przyglądałem się i nic więcej’ K 75.

[§] ‘Pseudonaukowość dzisiejszej krytyki staje się już nie do wytrzymania.’ D2 177.

W.G.: **How catastrophic this method of occupying oneself exclusively with the work, torn away from the person of the author, turned out to be!—after this abstraction came others, which separated the work from the author even more, conceiving of it as a self-sufficient ‘object,’ conceiving of it ‘objectively,’ transferring everything to the realm of a false, lame [...] pseudo-mathematics, opening the gates wide to pedantry and prating analysis as well as to license, dressed superficially in majestic scientific precision. (DE 424)***

T.B.: But nowadays nobody claims to be objective. (I really do wish you had lived to see Poststructuralist thought gain a stronger footing...) Besides, as a PhD candidate I am expected to prove not only my ‘scientific’ credentials, but also my originality, relevance, and creativity.

W.G.: This sounds even worse! Now **science is competing with literature in the field of psychological truth!**[†] You can’t compare creative writing to critical writing.

T.B.: Of course I can.

W.G.: No, you can’t! The stakes are entirely different.

* ‘Jakże katastrofalna okazała się metoda polegająca na zajmowaniu się samym tylko dziełem, w oderwaniu od osoby autora – za tą abstrakcją poszły inne, odrywając jeszcze bardziej dzieło od osoby, ujmując je jako samoistny “obiekt”, ujmując “obiektywnie”, przenosząc wszystko na teren fałszywej, kulawej pseudo-matematyki [...], otwierając na oścież wrota pedanterii i gładzącym analizom, oraz dowolności, ustrojonej w pozór majestatycznej ścisłości naukowej.’ D2 177.

[†] Based on the title of Gombrowicz’s essay, ‘**Nauka ściga się o prawdę psychologiczną z literaturą: o brudach i urokach**’, first published in *Kurier poranny*, no. 263 (1935), reprinted in *Dzieła XII: Varia: Proza, reportaże, krytyka, 1933-1939*, ed. by Jan Błóński and Jerzy Jarzębski (1995), pp. 179-82.

T.B.: How?

W.G.: Granted, sometimes **I too am difficult.** [...] **But I am a humourist, a joker, an acrobat, a provocateur. My works turn double somersaults to please. I am a circus, lyricism, poetry, horror, riots, games – what more do you want? I am difficult, I admit. When I can't be otherwise. But if there is a man who writes in the mortal terror of being boring, I am he!** (KT 140)

T.B.: But we're in a similar situation! Would you be surprised to hear that I'm much less anxious about getting facts right than I am about my style? I, too, write in the mortal terror of boring my reader!

W.G.: Hm!

T.B.: The gap between critical and creative writing has shrunk, and that's also thanks to writers like you. You yourself always insisted on the personal and creative dimension of reading, forbidding your critics to be boring!

W.G.: So **the time of ordinary reading is over.** (KT 134)*

T.B.: Certainly. And what's more, do you know how many books have been written about you? Try and find an original approach in that sea of scholarship. The obvious

* 'Minął czas czytania zwykłego.' D4 130.

aspects of your works have been discussed for decades, so naturally the outcome will have to be personal. Have you read any of the more recent criticism on your work?

W.G.: Ah, **in the role of an intellectual [the avant-garde critic] is reminiscent of goulash, bigos, a little salad, tripe in oil, cabbage with peas.** (DE 423, translation modified)*

[T.B. *laughs.*]

W.G.: **Take a look at the sentences which oppress the reader with their *dernier cri* terminology while their construction, punctuation, and grammar are lousy. A magnificent tie worn with a grimy shirt.**[†] (DE 423-24, translation modified)

T.B.: That's a harsh judgement!

W.G.: Of course it's harsh. This is a serious matter. You ask me about my opinion about contemporary criticism. Well, your average critic makes me think of **an *élégant* with slovenly underwear and dirty fingernails, because all this tends to be poorly laundered, not thought through, and poorly written... pretentious shoddiness, terrorizing both readers and editors.** (DE 423)[‡]

* '[...] krytyk awangardowy [...] w roli intelektualisty [krytyk awangardowy] przypomina gulasz, bigos, sałatkę, flaki z olejem i groch z kapustą.' D2 176.

† 'Przypatrzcie się ich zdaniom, które przygniatają terminologią *dernier cri*, gdy ich budowa, znakowanie, poprawność gramatyczna, bywa pod zdechłym Medorem. Wspaniały krawat, brudna koszula.' (Ibid.).

‡ '[...] elegantem o niechlujnej bieliźnie i brudnych paznokciach – bo to wszystko bywa nie domyte... nie domyślane i nie dopisane... nieraz tandeta pretensjonalna i terroryzująca (czytelników, także redaktorów).' (Ibid.).

T.B.: Does that mean you insist on solid research and meticulous attention to detail?

W.G.: If criticism [...] has become fictional, pompous, deceptive, it is because it is suspended in abstractions [...] in art, culture, philosophy, and other such generalities – well, one can easily drown reality in this and then there's no limit to your creativity!* (DE 424, translation modified)

T.B.: So what is to be done in order to ground literary analyses in reality?

W.G.: Criticism cannot function far from any kind of concrete flesh, blood, and bone. (DE 424)[†] I do not at all demand that a work be interpreted naively through the biography of the writer and that his art be tied to his life's experiences – my point is the principle contained in the aphorism 'style is the man'. (DE 424)[‡]

T.B.: In the light of what you have just said, how would you describe my approach?

W.G.: I'm not convinced you were honest enough, or that you included enough of yourself. You read my works, once, twice, thrice, and then you happened to find a

* 'Jeśli krytyka [...] staje się fikcyjna, dęta, oszukańcza, to ponieważ zawieszona jest w abstrakcji [...], w sztuce, kulturze, filozofii i w innych takich ogólnikach – no, w tym łatwo można utopić rzeczywistość i wtedy hulaj dusza bez kontusza!' D2 176.

[†] 'z dala od jakiegokolwiek konkretnego ciała z krwi i kości'. (Ibid.).

[‡] 'Nie domagam się bynajmniej aby naiwnie interpretowano dzieło biografiją twórcy i wiązano jego sztukę z jego życiowymi przygodami – idzie mi o zasadę zawartą w aforyzmie, że "styl to człowiek".' D2 177.

neat allegory in each of them, just like that, just by looking at my texts from the objective point of view of my representations of authorship!

T.B.: Not looking – *gazing*. I tried to make clear that this was a subjective, not an objective, point of view. But the subtextual allegories I describe stem from an immanent reading of your texts. I am aware of your resistance to allegorical interpretations. In the last interview you gave, in July 1969, you were asked if your plays contained any symbolic meaning, and you replied with indignation that you were not, after all, a writer of the nineteenth century.

W.G.: Yes, I remember.

T.B.: Your dramatic works were hugely successful in Western Europe in the 1960s, perhaps because they seemed to lend themselves so readily to interpretations conducted along the lines of various fashionable ‘isms’. In 1964, one of your committed supporters, the French critic Lucien Goldmann, challenged Freudian analyses of your plays, but only to propose that they represent social satires in which the individual characters embody the different forces of the class struggle.

W.G.: Ah, yes, Professor Goldmann. **He was at the Récamier theater at a production of *The Marriage*, participated in the discussions, explained to people left and right where the whole secret lay, until he finally came out with an article in *France Observateur* entitled “Critics Understood Nothing” in which he gave his own interpretation of the play. [...] He made the Drunkard into the**

rebellious masses, Henry’s fiancée into the nation, the King into the government, and me into a ‘Polish squire’ (DE 670, translation modified) *

T.B.: You protested in your diary that your works could not be reduced to one single meaning, and you wrote disparagingly about the idea of...

W.G. [*cuts in*]: ...but making **Molly the nation and Father the state...?!** (DE 670)[†]
 Above all, I took issue with Goldmann’s **rabid Marxist imperialism.** (DE 670)[‡] **He decreed that I did not know, that he knew better!** (DE 670)[§] It wasn’t right **that Goldmann was interpreting me and not the other way around.** (DE 670)^{** 2}

T.B.: But I have not tried to colonize your work with my criticism. I have imposed no ready-made structures on your work. The allegories I perceive in your texts do not concern extra-textual realities – they *stem from an immanent reading of your texts*, and they point back at the texts.

* ‘Był na premierze *Ślubu* w teatrze Récamier, brał udział w dyskusjach, tłumaczył ludziom na prawo i lewo w czym sekret cały, aż wreszcie wystąpił z artykułem w *France Observateur* pod tytułem “Krytyka nic nie zrozumiała,” w którym dał własną interpretację sztuki. [...] Z Pijaka zrobił Goldmann lud zbuntowany, z narzeczonej Henryka — naród, z Króla — państwo, ze mnie “polskiego szlachcica” [...]’ D3 195.

[†] ‘ale żeby Mania była narodem, a Ojciec państwem...??’ D3 196.

[‡] ‘Wściekły imperializm marksizmu!’ (Ibid.).

[§] ‘[Z]awyrokował, że ja nie wiem, a on wie lepiej!’ (Ibid.).

^{**} ‘[...] że Goldmann mnie interpretuje, a nie ja jego’ D3 195.

W.G.: From **farther off [...] it looks like a symbol.** (C 74)* **And for every sign deciphered by accident how many might go unnoticed, buried in the natural order of things?** (C 37)†

T.B.: An infinite number, I suppose? When I decided to focus on your representations of authorship I knew I was going to have to leave aside a whole lot of other concerns... That is not to say, however, that I wilfully ignored them.

W.G.: Oh **the mind's helplessness in the face of overwhelming, confounding, entangling reality... No combination is impossible... Any combination is possible...!** (C 177)‡

T.B.: But can we ever know the difference between the structures and meanings that are *there* in reality, and those that we make up when we look?

W.G.: **You have become such a reader [...] that, in spite of yourself, you examine, you search and study, as if indeed there were something here to decipher [...]. Yet nothing, nothing.** (C 106-07)§

* 'z daleka [...] wyglądało to na symbol'. K 61.

† 'Na jeden znak, przypadkiem odcyfrowany, ileż mogło być niezauważonych, zaszytych w naturalnym porządku rzeczy?' K 33.

‡ 'o bezsilności umysłu wobec rzeczywistości przerastającej, zatracającej, spowijającej... Nie ma kombinacji niemożliwej... Każda kombinacja jest możliwa...' K 139-40.

§ 'a ja takim stałem się czytelnikiem [...], że mimo woli badałem, szukałem i rozpatrywałem, jakby tu co było do odczytania [...] Ale nic, ale nic.' K 86.

T.B.: It is a matter of prioritization... Anyway, that's why I wanted to talk to you. Does it seem to you that I made up all these meanings and structures? I think they were already there in your texts, I only made them explicit... I wouldn't search for subtextual allegories of authorship, or antithetical images of creativity and control, in any other writer.

W.G.: By the time I reached your second chapter, **it was as if the surrounding reality was already contaminated by the possibility of meanings, and this pulled me away, constantly pulled me away, from everything else, yet it seemed comical that something like a stick could affect me to such a degree** (C 38).*

T.B.: I am surprised that you dislike it so badly!

W.G.: You find some random elements, say a cat and a sparrow, in my text, and immediately they are **somewhat related, a cat eats sparrows after all, ha, ha, how sticky is this cobweb of connections! Why does one, as a writer, have to suffer from the favor and disfavor of a critic's associations?** (C 94)†

T.B. [*irritated*]: Oh do I make you suffer?

* 'rzeczywistość otaczająca była już jak zakażona możliwością znaczeń i to mnie odrywało, ciągle od wszystkiego mnie odrywało, przy czym wydawało się komiczne, że takie coś, jak patyk, zdołało w tym stopniu mnie poruszyć.' K 33.

† 'to dosyć pokrewne, zresztą kot jada wróble, ha, ha, jaka lepka, ta pajęczyna związków! Dlaczego jest się wydanym na łaskę i niełaskę skojarzeń?' K 76.

W.G.: Stop connecting – associating! (C 153)* You silently lived the ecstasy of this mutual understanding, albeit false, albeit one-sided, concocted by you... (C 97)†

T.B.: Oh thanks!

W.G.: You felt happy about the symmetry! (C 78)‡

T.B.: Yes I did, but also terrified!

W.G.: You got a deep satisfaction that finally [one element] had become connected with [another]. You had connected them! At last. As if you had performed your duty. (C 181)§ But who can guarantee that the wasp is not merely a pretext for the hands rising in connection with [your] little hand... A double meaning... and this doubling was perhaps connected (who can tell?) with [some other] doubling... You wander about. You stroll on the periphery.

* ‘Przestać łączyć – kojarzyć –.’ K 120.

† ‘Przeżywałem po cichu ekstazę tego porozumienia, choć fałszywego, choć jednostronnego, przeze mnie przyrządzanego...’ K 79.

‡ ‘ucieszyła mnie ta składowość!’ K 64.

§ ‘zadowolenie głębokie, że na koniec ‘usta’ połączyły się z ‘wieszaniem’. Ja je połączyłem! Nareszcie. Jakbym spełnił swój obowiązek.’ K 143.

[...] [Everything] emerges and suggests... (C 47)* And well well, there are also other leads providing food for thought... (C 131)†

T.B.: You are caricaturing my work!

W.G.: Do you want to know what I thought, reading your thesis?

T.B. [*pouting*]: Yes.

W.G.: I thought: **She is lying. No, she is not lying! This is the truth and a lie at the same time. The truth, because it corresponds to reality. A lie, because her words (I knew it already) are not important for their truth but only because they originated from her, from you – like your gaze, your smell.** (C 81)‡

T.B. [*shocked*]: My smell?!

W.G.: Yes, your smell. Don't forget about **your Achilles heel, namely your body.** (PE 210)§

* ‘ale któż mógł zaręczyć, czy osa nie była tylko pretekstem dla wezbrania rąk w związku z jej rączką... Podwójny sens... a to rozdwojenie łączyło się może (któż mógł wiedzieć) z rozdwojeniem ust Kataśka-Lena... [...] Błądziłem. Spacerowałem sobie na peryferiach. [...] Kawałek korka [...] wyłania się i nasuwa...’ K 41.

† ‘ba, ba, były i inne poszlaki, dające do myślenia’. K 104.

‡ ‘Kłamała. Nie, nie kłamała! To była prawda i kłamstwo jednocześnie. Prawda, bo odpowiadało rzeczywistości. A kłamstwo, bo jej słowa (o czym już wiedziałem) nie były ważne ze względu na swoją prawdę, a tylko, że z niej, Leny, się poczynały – jak jej spojrzenie, zapach.’ K 66.

§ ‘naszą piętę achillesową ciało’. P 144.

T.B.: My Achilles heel?

[*Gombrowicz pinches T.B.'s arm.*]

T.B.: Ouch!

W.G.: Pain. It's not unlikely that the Achilles heel of the Humanities [...] will turn out to be what I see as their overly detached, overly Olympian relationship with Pain. Too serene are their considerations of humanity. You do with it whatever you like. The day that Pain enters your minds, your structures will become... more difficult... more painful... *

T.B.: What would you do, then, as a literary critic?

W.G.: I, if I cultivated this profession of an avant-garde critic, would stand on my head to change and improve something here, to break out of this deadlock.

(DE 423)[†]

T.B.: But how? Seriously, what advice would you give a literary critic?

* 'Oui, c'est ça: c'est la Douleur. Il se pourrait que le talon d'Achille des sciences humaines [...] soit sa relation trop flegmatique, dirais-je, et trop olympienne, avec la Douleur. On raisonne trop tranquillement sur l'homme. Vous faites avec lui ce que vous voulez. Le jour où la Douleur s'introduira dans votre pensée, vos structures deviendront plus... difficiles... plus douloureuses...' 'J'étais structuraliste avant tout le monde', p. 231.

† 'Ja, gdybym trudnił się tym fachem – awangardowego krytyka – na głowie bym stanął żeby coś tu zmienić i ulepszyć, jakoś wybrnąć z sytuacji.' D2 176.

W.G.: Do not judge. Simply describe your reactions. Never write about the author or the work, only about yourself in confrontation with the work or the author. You are allowed to write about yourself. (DE 95)*

T.B.: I like that!

W.G.: In writing about yourself, however, write so that your person takes on weight, meaning, and life, so that it becomes your decisive argument, do not write as a pseudo-scientist but as an artist. Criticism must be as tense and vibrant as that which it touches. Otherwise it becomes gas escaping from a balloon, a sloppy butchering with a dull knife, decay, an anatomy, a grave. (DE 96)†

T.B.: That's a very strong opinion... I'm not sure if I...

W.G.: If you don't feel it or you can't – just leave. (DE 96)‡

* '[...] nie sądz. Opisz tylko swoje reakcje. Nigdy nie pisz o autorze ani o dziele – tylko o sobie w konfrontacji z dziełem albo z autorem. O sobie wolno ci pisać. D1 123.

† 'Ale, pisząc o sobie, pisz tak aby osoba twoja nabrała wagi, znaczenia i życia – aby stała się decydującym twoim argumentem. Więc pisz nie jak pseudo-naukowiec, ale jak artysta. Krytyka musi być tak natężona i wibrująca jak to, czego dotyka – w przeciwnym razie staje się tylko wypuszczaniem gazu z balonu, zarzynaniem tępym nożem, rozkładem, anatomią, grobem.' D1 123-24.

‡ 'A jeśli nie chce ci się lub nie potrafisz – odejdz.' D1 124.

T.B.: No, I would give it a go. Can you say a bit more about the critic's person taking on 'weight, meaning, and life'? How is that to be integrated with the traditional work of literary criticism?

W.G.: While establishing [...] contact with the person of the author, should not the critic also introduce his own person onto the stage? Analyses, sure, syntheses, yes, dissections and parallels, well, so be it, but at least let this be organic, red-blooded, pulsating, permeated with the critic, let it be him, his spoken voice. Critics! Write so that the person reading you knows whether you are blond or brunet. (DE 425, translation modified)*

T.B.: Hm. I feel uncomfortable about this hair colour business.

W.G.: Why?

T.B.: You never seem to imagine a *blonde* or a *brunette*. I suppose you don't mean to raise the question of ethnicity when you pick hair colour among the many attributes of a critic's being or personality. But whenever you stress the embodied aspect of literary criticism you exclude the female critic...

[*Gombrowicz rolls his eyes.*]

* 'Nawiązując [...] z osobistością autora, czyż krytyk nie powinien wprowadzić na scenę własnej swojej osoby? Analizy, owszem, syntezy, tak, rozbiory i paralele, no, trudno, ale niechże to będzie organiczne, krwiste, dyszące nim, krytykiem, będące nim, jego głosem mówione. Krytycy! Tak piszcie żeby było wiadomo po przeczytaniu, czy pisał blondyn, czy brunet!' D2 178.

T.B.: I'd also like to hear what you have to say about your misogynistic representations of female critics, starting with the *ciotki kulturalne* or 'cultural aunts' in *Ferdydurke*.

W.G.: **Literary criticism is not the judging of one man by another! Who gave you this right?** (DE 85)*

T.B.: I'm not judging you, but I demand an explanation!

W.G.: **What a devilish contrariness! The farther, the closer! The more trivial and nonsensical, the more intrusive and powerful! What a trap, what a hellishly malicious arrangement! What a snare!** (C 124)†

T.B.: Didn't you say I was supposed to describe my reactions?

[*For a second [Gombrowicz], in [his] catastrophe, looks into [T.B.'s] eyes.* (PE 221)‡. *Then he catches a leg of the table with his hand. He mutters that he does it 'so that the rapidity of it all wouldn't carry him off,' and calls his performance 'a belated gesture. Rhetorical actually. Humbug'.* (C 166)§]

* 'Krytyka literacka nie jest osądzaniem człowieka przez człowieka (któż dał ci to prawo?) [...].' D1 123.

† 'Diabelska przekora! Im dalej, tym bliżej! Im bardziej błahe, niedorzeczne, tym natrętniejsze, potężniejsze! Cóż za pułapka, co za urządzenie piekielnie złośliwe! Co za potrzask!' K 98.

‡ 'I przez sekundę, oni i my, w naszej katastrofie, spojrzeliśmy sobie w oczy.' P 151.

§ 'Złapałem się ręką za nogę krzesła żeby mnie gwałtownością swoją nie porwało. Gest późniony. Retoryczny, zresztą. Błaga.' K 130.

W.G.: **God Almighty, merciful God, why can't one focus one's attention on anything, the world is a hundred million times too abundant, what will I do with my inattention. (C 112)* The [cultural aunt] is no longer an issue; and yet, by not being an issue, it is an issue. (C 104)† [Wheezing] Can we return to the question of word-monsters (C 22)‡ another time?**

T.B.: Sure.

W.G.: Just some concluding words about your thesis. **It will be difficult to continue this story of yours. I don't even know if it is a story. It is difficult to call this a story, this constant... clustering and falling apart... of elements... (C 173)§ I think you should ask yourself what you were really looking for, my dear. 'Creativity and control' might be just as much about you and your reading practice as it is about me and my writing. If you could appropriately decipher the arrangement of those places and things, you might find out the truth about your having strangled the cat. (C 91)****

T. B.: Strangled the cat?!

* 'Boże święty, Boże miłosierny, dlaczego niczemu nie można poświęcić uwagi, świat jest sto milionów razy za obfity i co ja pocznę z moją nieuwagą.' K 90.

† 'Tamto było już nieaktualne; ale była aktualne, jako nieaktualne.' K 84.

‡ 'słowostworem' K 21.

§ 'Trudno będzie opowiedzieć dalszy ciąg tej mojej historii. W ogóle nie wiem, czy to jest historia. Trudno nazwać historią takie ciągłe... skupianie się i rozpadanie... elementów.' K 136.

** 'gdybym zdołał właściwie odczytać zespół tych rzeczy i miejsc, dowiedziałbym się może prawdy o mym zaduszeniu.' K 74.

W.G.: I mean it metaphorically. And think about **what you were looking for. Some basic tone? A leading melody? Or a core round which you could re-create, compose the story of your life?** (C 92)*

T.B.: Am I guilty of such narcissism?

W.G.: Nothing else is worth the effort.

¹ Witold Gombrowicz, 'J'étais structuraliste avant tout le monde', *La Quinzaine littéraire*, 5 (1967), 228-32.

² Gombrowicz negates the symbolism of his dramatic works in Witold Gombrowicz, 'L'ultime interview', in *Varia: textes variés*, ed. and trans. from Polish and English by Allan Kosko (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1973), pp. 209-13 (p. 212). For Lucien Goldmann's article see 'Le théâtre de Gombrowicz', in *Structures mentales et création culturelle* (Paris: 10/18, 1970), pp. 265-89. Gombrowicz's polemical reply to Goldmann's interpretation can be found in his diary (D3 195; DE 670).

* 'czegoż ja szukałem, czegoż szukałem? Tonu podstawowego? Naczelnej melodii, trzonu jakiegoś, wokół którego mógłbym sobie moje dzieje tutaj odtworzyć, ułożyć?' K 75.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to produce a systematic account of Witold Gombrowicz's search for a model of authorship. I have presented my analyses of his major novels and literary diary (*Dziennik*) in the context of his output as a whole, drawing on the large body of his non-diaristic autobiographical writings, programmatic texts, as well as early versions of his main works and correspondence. This inclusive approach has allowed me to make the case that the overtly metafictional commentaries pervading his narrative prose are complemented by an implicit preoccupation with the nature of literary creativity. Gombrowicz conceives of authorship as a paradoxical reconciliation of creativity and control. However, while he insistently theorizes the binary structures across his works in terms of his dialectics of Form, I have argued that the negotiations such opposites as 'spontaneity and discipline,' 'passivity and activity,' or 'mindlessness and consciousness,' in his novels as well as in his diary, translate into allegorical images of literary composition. These 'subtextual allegories of authorship' transcend and complicate the binary structures proposed by the author, allowing him to explore elusive or ineffable aspects of writing. I have drawn attention to subtextual allegories of authorship in Gombrowicz's works from the 1930s through the mid-1950s, arguing that towards the end of his literary career he moved away from the model of an implicit allegory of writing and approached, instead, the model of an explicit metafictional allegory of reading.

My study complements the rich existing literature on Gombrowicz: by drawing out the hitherto undertheorized allegoricity of his major works, I have revealed the depth and complexity of his preoccupation with authorship, thus

proposing an original interpretation of his output. What is more, by positing the model of a subtextual allegory of authorship in one writer's work, my study enhances our understanding of the broader literary theoretical problems of allegorical and metanarrative modes in twentieth-century Western literature. While these have been my main contributions to the field of literary scholarship, I have also proposed, in the final part of my study, an experimental engagement with Gombrowicz's work. Questioning the boundary between creative and critical writing, I have contributed to the exploration of alternative, practice-based modes of literary scholarship.

By highlighting the significance of Gombrowicz's lived experience of authorship with respect to his representations of literary creativity, my study has laid the groundwork for an analysis of his private diary, which is about to be published with the Wydawnictwo Literackie in Cracow.¹ This work, titled *Kronos*, was written from 1952 or 1953 until shortly before the author's death. According to Paweł Goźliński and Małgorzata Niemczyńska from the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, who have viewed the manuscript, this intimate diary contains Gombrowicz's records, sometimes in the form of lists and tables, of facts and experiences ranging from worries about his financial situation, to his erotic encounters with men and women, and also his health problems. The manuscript consists, reportedly, of no more than a few dozen pages, and is non-literary in character:

On the one hand, we will see the directed and edited life of the *Diary*, and on the other, life in its naked and ordered facts in *Kronos*. A battle for fame and recognition on one side, and on the other – a struggle to survive. The adventures of a thinking man in the *Diary*, and the rebellious, aging and sick body in *Kronos*.²

It is the experience of the aging and sick body that promises to shed new light on Gombrowicz's views of literary creativity, in particular in his late fiction. My argument provides the tools to analyse the embodied aspect of authorship in this

forthcoming publication, thus opening up new avenues to study Gombrowicz's literary output.

¹ 'Kronos – Gombrowicz's Unknown Journal', *Culture.pl*, article dated 27 February 2013. < http://www.culture.pl/web/english/literature-full-page/-/eo_event_asset_publisher/iCU6/content/kronos-gombrowicz-s-unknown-journal > [accessed 1 April 2013].

² Paweł Goźliński and Małgorzata Niemczyńska, 'Pośmiertna prowokacja Gombrowicza', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22 February 2013. < http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn1,130900,13446732,Posmiertna_prowokacja_Gombrowicza.html > [accessed 1 April 2013].

APPENDIX

Page 7 of the typescript of Gombrowicz's diary fragment to appear in *Kultura* in 1956. Section N.12, chapter XX. *Kultura* archives, Maisons-Laffitte, France

(11.12) z 7

I nadal nic się nie dzieje, a najdoskonalszy detektyw nie znalazłby
 żadnej poszlaki, nic do czego można by się przyczepić. "emy z apety-
 tem i obficie. Rozmowy nasze są beztraskie. Wszyscy są zadowoleni.
 Lekarz Paragwajczyk podnosi paczkę "Particulares", która wypadła
 brunetowi z krzaczastymi brwiami i brunet macha ręką na znak że w
 paczce nie ma papierosów; a jednocześnie dziecko przebiega ciągnąc małą
 lokomotywę i zarazem estanciero woła na swoją żonę, która właśnie za-
 wiązała sobie chusteczkę na szyi, tam zaś na schodkach fotografuje się
 para w podróży poślubnej. Coż w tym szczególnego? Któryż statek bar-
 dziej zwykły? Dokład bardziej banalny? Ale dlatego właśnie, o, właśnie
 dlatego jesteśmy zupełnie bezbronni... wobec tego czegoś co zagraża...
 nic nie możemy począć gdyż nie ma żadnych podstaw do najłżejszego na-
 wet niepokoju i wszystko jest w najzupełniejszym porządku... tak,
 wszystko jest w porządku ~~xxxxxxx~~ ... poki pod ciśnieniem już
 niezmierzonym nie pęknie ~~nieco~~ *struna, struna, struna!*...
~~jaka mamy na ustach:~~

Tego samego dnia wieczor. - Woda anonimowa, ogromna. Płyniemy.
 Lekarz zartował ze mnie, gdyż przegrałem ^{u hocky} partię z fuszerem, któ-
 rego przedstawił mi jako mistrza Santa Fe, Goldberga. Powiedział:

- Przegrał pan ze strachu

Powiedziałem: - Mogę mu dać wieżę i wygram.

Ale i moje i jego słowa są jak cisza przed burzą. Płyniemy
~~ku czemuś~~ ^{emieramy do...} ~~ku jakimś rozważaniom~~ i widzę teraz jasno ze twarze,
 rozmowy, ruchy są naładowane czemś olbrzymim i ~~ostatecznym~~ ^{nieuniknionym}, co się
 zbliża. Porazone, ~~patosom~~ ^{napiscie} "astygile w nieublaganym doprowadzaniu cze-
 gos do ~~ostatecznego~~ konca. Nieobliczalna i ~~kosmiczna~~ ^{napiscie} groza czai się
 w najdrobniejszym poruszeniu. Płyniemy. Ale ten szal, ta rozpacz,
 to przerażenie są niedosiężne gdyż nie ma ich i - i, ponieważ ich
 nie ma, są w sposób niemożliwy do odparcia. Płyniemy. Płyniemy po
 wodzie niezazwanej, pod znakiem oddalonej planety, a noc zaczyna

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