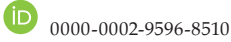


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# Form and Power

## On the Disciplinary Coding of National Identity in “Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego” by Witold Gombrowicz

### SUMMARY

The aim of this article is to analyse Witold Gombrowicz’s short story entitled “Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego” in the context of the convergence between the writer’s worldview and the philosophy of Michel Foucault. Nietzschean motifs inspired both authors to formulate a similar constructivist anthropology and a similar criticism of the concept of discipline. The themes of form and creating a human being by a human being – central to Gombrowicz’s writing – correspond to Foucault’s notion of the production of the subject. In such a perspective, “Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego” can be read as a record of the experience of an individual subjected to social practices of disciplinary embarrassment, aimed at producing a subject defined by nationality and heteronormativity, as well as the experience of rebellion against an imposed identity. Such a reading reveals the political stakes of the literary output by the author of *Ferdydurke*: expressed in the deconstruction of authoritarian forms of empowerment and in the pursuit to replace them with forms of subjectification based on irony, fluidity and distance.

### Keywords

Witold Gombrowicz, Michel Foucault, discipline, national identity, repulsion

According to Ryszard Nycz, modern literature conveys a particular epistemological complexity: its task is to express and describe an experience which is denied any claims to directness.<sup>1</sup> The centre of its interest is no longer the objective world; it focuses instead on the mechanisms of social and psychological construction of experience. Modern literature seen in this way would reveal its closeness to the intellectual work of social philosophers and cultural anthropologists.

An experience that is portrayed particularly often in the works of Witold Gombrowicz is one of being subject to disciplinary restraint. Hence, the silent moments of embarrassment are so eagerly captured in the narration of the author of *Ferdydurke*, in which it seems to be too late to say anything to defend oneself. This is also where the blades of the Knights of the Golden Spur from *Trans-Atlantyk* come from, cutting into the bodies of those who will take the liberty to violate the designated forms, particularly that of heteronormativity which is, in the opinion of the writer, programmatic for the Polish national identity.<sup>2</sup> Despite the differences between the conceptual rigour of philosophy and literary creation, the discourses of Witold Gombrowicz and Michel Foucault seem to illuminate the same segment of reality. This article aims to understand the possible convergence between the two authors and the detailed interpretation of Gombrowicz's early short story titled "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego," developed from the perspective set out by a critical analysis of the concept of discipline.

It is possible to speak of a specific trend in which Gombrowicz's work is presented in the context of French structuralism and poststructuralism.<sup>3</sup> It is worth quoting here Marian Bielecki's suggestion of reading Gombrowicz's meta-literary views with regard to the critical dialogue which they may hold with Foucault's *The Order of Things*<sup>4</sup> as well as Karol Hryniewicz's analysis of the vision of carnality included in *Kronos*, a vision which uses the idea of the care of the self typical of Foucault's late reflections.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the concept of discipline developed in such works as *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* or *The History of Madness* seems to be absent from the work of researchers of the author of *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania*. Given the popular association of Gombrowicz's name with the vision of the school as an authoritarian institution, this seems even more puzzling. And

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ryszard Nycz, "Literatura nowoczesna wobec doświadczenia," *Teksty Drugie*, 6 (2006): 59.

<sup>2</sup> Ewa Płonowska-Ziarek wrote on the links between social coding of sexuality and the performance of national identity in the texts by Gombrowicz. Cf. Ewa Płonowska-Ziarek, "Blizna cudzoziemca i barokowa fałda. Przynależność narodowa a homoseksualizm w *Trans-Atlantyku* Witolda Gombrowicza," in *Grymasy Gombrowicza. W kręgu problemów modernizmu, społeczno-kulturowej roli płci i tożsamości narodowej*, ed. Ewa Płonowska-Ziarek, trans. Janusz Margański, (Kraków: Universitas, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ewa Płonowska-Ziarek, Introduction to *Grymasy Gombrowicza. W kręgu problemów modernizmu, społeczno-kulturowej roli płci i tożsamości narodowej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Marian Bielecki, *Literatura i lektura. O metaliterackich i metakrytycznych poglądach Witolda Gombrowicza* (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), 256-405.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Karol Hryniewicz, "Przygody ciała w dziennikach Gombrowicza zapisane (perspektywa nie tylko fenomenologiczna)," in *Gombrowicz z przodu i z tyłu*, eds. Krzysztof Cwikliński, Anna Spólna, Dominika Świątkowska (Radom: Wydawnictwo UHT, 2013).

as Foucault wrote, pointing to the prison as a model of modern disciplinary institutions:

The practice of placing individuals under 'observation' is a natural extension of a justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures. Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labour, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?<sup>6</sup>

Gombrowicz himself encouraged the reading of his texts through the prism of structuralist thought. Answering the survey of *Wiadomości*, a Polish cultural magazine published in London, the writer hoped that "today's structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Lacan, together with some, God forbid, war, will make immersion in the cosmos of my *Cosmos* as easy as bathing in a nearby pond on a clear day."<sup>7</sup> A fake interview titled "Byłem pierwszym strukturalistą" [I Was the First Structuralist] seems to be of particular importance in this context. Despite the extremely perverse construction of the text – the interviewer's statements are often reduced to murmurs such as "Hey!," "Bam" and "Hush!," while the interviewee mocks the style of French intellectuals of the 1960s, which, according to Gombrowicz, was over-intellectualised – and the fact that *Course in General Linguistics* by Ferdinand de Saussure was published by 1916 when the writer was only twelve years old, it seems that the declaration in the title is more than just an attempt to lead readers by the nose.

Both Foucault's micro-physics of power and Gombrowicz's literary discourse seem to be based on similar ontological assumptions inspired by the works of Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>8</sup> According to Gilles Deleuze, the concept of antagonistic pluralism of forces was the theoretical background to both the Nietzschean genealogy of morality as well as Foucault's perspective. Deleuze explained this concept in his book titled *Nietzsche and Philosophy*: "All force is appropriation, domination, exploitation of a quantity of reality. Even perception, in its diverse aspects, is the expression of forces which

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 227–228, accessed October 11, 2020, [https://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Foucault\\_Michel\\_Discipline\\_and\\_Punish\\_The\\_Birth\\_of\\_the\\_Prison\\_1977\\_1995.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Foucault_Michel_Discipline_and_Punish_The_Birth_of_the_Prison_1977_1995.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Witold Gombrowicz, [A response to a survey by *Wiadomości*: A welcome question to Tarnawski], in Witold Gombrowicz, *Publicystyka, Wywiady. Teksty różne 1963–1969*, eds. Jan Błoński, Jerzy Jarzębski (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997), 522.

<sup>8</sup> The relationship between the perspective of Gombrowicz and that of Nietzsche was widely commented in literature. Cf. Piotr Dziewoński, *Fryderyk Nietzsche i światopogląd ironiczny w „Ślubie” Gombrowicza* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2008). Foucault wrote of the inspiration he drew from Nietzsche's philosophy in the text titled "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." Cf. Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, genealogia, historia*, in Michel Foucault, *Filozofia, historia, polityka. Wybór pism*, trans. Damian Leszczyński, Lotar Rasiński (Warsaw-Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000).

appropriate nature.”<sup>9</sup> In this perspective, a question about the meaning of a phenomenon is a question about what forces have taken possession of it or what kind of the forces it represents. In his monograph devoted to the intellectual output of the author of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Deleuze wrote that: “Foucault’s general principle is that every form is a compound of relations between forces. Given these forces, our first question is with what forces from the outside they enter into a relation, and then what form is created as a result.”<sup>10</sup> Hence, Foucault’s philosophical methodology consists in considering discourses and disciplinary institutions (psychiatric hospital, clinic, school) as a configuration of forces serving to produce a subject exposed to social domination.<sup>11</sup> From this point of view, discipline is a form of power exercised over the bodies of individuals through institutions such as schools, workhouses, hospitals, barracks and prisons:

The disciplinary mechanism is characterized by the fact that a third personage, the culprit, appears within the binary system of the code, and at the same time, outside the code, and outside the legislative act that establishes the law and the judicial act that punishes the culprit, a series of adjacent, detective, medical, and psychological techniques appear which fall within the domain of surveillance, diagnosis, and the possible transformation of individuals.<sup>12</sup>

The situation of a “subject” in a disciplinary institution is therefore described in the binary category of what is permitted and what is prohibited, and then, on the basis of this knowledge, the staff of these institutions apply a series of practices and procedures for subordination and socialisation or re-socialisation.

The social mechanism, which in Foucault’s texts was called the production of the subject, is referred to in Gombrowicz’s language as the form. Three sequences of *Ferdydurke* end with a vision of a swarm of human bodies: when a socially established symbolic order implodes, the protagonists of the novel turn into a disorderly, magmatic mixture in which the boundaries between the different characters are blurred. In the writer’s world, the apparent reality of the form seems to be reduced to a configuration of biological disorder determined by social interaction. What gives shape here – always felt to be inadequate – is the interpolation applied by the other subject. In “Byłem pierwszym strukturalistą” the basis of comparison is therefore

<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London–New York: Continuum, 2002), 3, accessed October 10, <https://antilogicalism.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/nietzsche-and-philosophy.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, ed. Seán Hand, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis–London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 124, accessed October 10, 2020, <https://altexploit.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/gilles-deleuze-sean-hand-foucault-university-of-minnesota-press-1988.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> An example of the composition of forces analysed by Foucault can be provided by the famous figure of the panopticon. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 195–228.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, edited by Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 5.

the conviction that the nature of man is determined by factors external to him, impersonal and abstract:

As a matter of fact, I repeat, it is about a certain way of seeing a human being, and it is on this basis that my “formal” human being can make a number of confessions to a “structural” human being. (...) Do you not say that the human being makes themselves known through certain structures independent of them, such as language, and is constrained by something that simultaneously pervades and defines them, so that their *vis movens* is external to them? Well, such a person can be found in my books.<sup>13</sup>

Just as the individual turns out to be a function of the form in Gombrowicz's work, analyses of structuralists reduce the individual to an update of linguistic, socio-cultural, economic or psychological structures. The construction of the characters described by the author of *Cosmos*, consisting mainly of reactions to the behaviour of others and a sense of inadequacy to cultural norms, presents a vision of subjectivity concentrated around the concept of intersubjectivity. In turn, in his sketch titled “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” Gilles Deleuze argues that “the subject is essentially intersubjective.”<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, in “Byłem pierwszym strukturalistą,” the writer highlights the differences between his own perspective and the point of view of the then fashionable current of thought: “It is different in the case of structuralists: they look for their structures in culture, I look for them in the immediate reality.”<sup>15</sup> Whereas structural analysis seeks to draw up a theoretical model of the structure under study, the literature of the author of *Pornography* aims to reflect the effects of social structures in a concrete experience.

Gombrowicz's short story titled “Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego” was first published in the anthology titled *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* [A Diary from Adolescence] in 1933 (The original title of the work was “Pamiętnik Jakóba Czarnieckiego” [A Diary of Jakób Czarniecki]). It presents the impact of the social coding of bodies by Polish nationalism and anti-Semitism on the experience of a person of mixed Polish-Jewish origins.<sup>16</sup> The motif which structures the composition of the story is the theme of “the language of the mystery.” Initially, it is connected with the unspoken knowledge of the Jewish roots of the eponymous character's mother. In the following parts of the text, however, it is referred to the social sphere of

<sup>13</sup> Witold Gombrowicz, “Byłem pierwszym strukturalistą,” trans. from French Maciej Broński, in *Gombrowicz filozof*, eds. Francesco M. Cataluccio, Jerzy Illg (Krakow: Znak, 1991), 146.

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” in Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953–1974*, trans. Michael Taormina edited by David Lapoujade (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 190, accessed October 15, <https://palmermethode.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/semiotexte-foreign-agents-gilles-deleuze-desert-islands-and-other-texts-1953-1974-2003-semiotexte.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Witold Gombrowicz, “Byłem pierwszym strukturalistą,” 323.

<sup>16</sup> Eric Hobsbawm wrote about considering the category of the nation as a social construct (cf. Eric Hobsbawm, *Narody i nacjonalizm po 1780 roku: program, mit, rzeczywistość*, trans. Jakub Maciejczyk, Marcin Starnawski (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Difin, 2010)).

sense production. It is a mystery for the eponymous character of the story to see the behaviour of his classmates who prefer to bully a frog and nurture a swallow as well as the language of national narcissism which he encounters at school and the contempt which others show to him, conditioned by the anti-Semitism of the surroundings. This problem was discussed by Jerzy Jarzębski:

the society creates a kind of 'common cage' woven from popular beliefs and a generally accepted ideology that defines the semantics of each phenomenon. Gombrowicz refers to what is consequently created as 'the language of the mystery.' The process of upbringing and the acculturation of an individual consists in learning this 'language,' while maturity – in internalising stereotypes.<sup>17</sup>

Although Foucault remains absent from Jarzębski's interpretation of Gombrowicz's works, the literary scholar built his understanding of "the language of the mystery" on the basis of penitentiary metaphors. What seems interesting in the prose of the author of *The Marriage* is the fact that it relates internalised stereotypes not only to the level of discursive understanding of the world by the characters described, but also to the perceptual and affective dimensions.

Gombrowicz's narration in "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego" depicts the discourse of Polish nationalism, anti-Semitism and militarism as well as patriarchal masculinity as a kind of whole written down in the thoughts, gestures and experiences of the characters. The secret is guarded by the iron discipline exercised over Stefan, whether by his parents, teachers, classmates, his beloved or, ultimately, military regulations. It was implemented by gestures of intimidation and embarrassment, expressing contempt or disgust. The reverse of this discipline seems to be the compulsive bigotry of his Jewish mother, by means of which she legitimises her presence in the "Polish home" and which allows her to express her resentment towards her husband in the form of moral condemnation of his numerous marital infidelities. Czarniecki is disciplinarily implemented into the language of the mystery in four areas of social life: family, school, erotic life and the army. Each of these areas urges Gombrowicz's protagonist to adopt a specific identity, tames him, produces the given form of subjectivity. The family is presented as a space for the production of national and religious identity, in the same way as the school. His erotic contacts, Stefan's rendezvous with his beloved Jadwisia, are intended to produce a heterosexual identity, while the army is intended to produce the identity of a soldier who is ready to willingly sacrifice his life for his country.

Błażej Warkocki wrote about the fundamental importance of the category of shame in the process of social construction and imposition of subjectivity in *Tancerz mecenasa Kraykowskiego*.<sup>18</sup> While it is shame that seems to play the main role in the short story opening *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania*,

<sup>17</sup> Jerzy Jarzębski, *Gra w Gombrowicza* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982), 142.

<sup>18</sup> Błażej Warkocki, "Co za wstyd! Pamiętnik z okresu queerowego dojrzewania: prolegomena," *Teksty Drugie*, 4 (2016): 88–105.



this role in "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego" is assigned to the demonstration of repulsion.<sup>19</sup> The protagonist of the short story comes across this form of disciplinary power already in his family home: "I soon noticed that the father avoided touching my mother like a fire. Even more so, he avoided looking into her eyes and, speaking most often, looked sideways or at his fingernails while talking to her."<sup>20</sup>

Stefan's father is an impoverished nobleman who, motivated by a desire to maintain his high position, married a woman from a wealthy Jewish family, which led to the questioning of the material basis of his power as a patriarch. One way to keep it is to show contempt and disdain, which is conveyed in the following way by Gombrowicz's style prone to hyperbole and the grotesque: "I once overheard him yelling at my mother, cracking his knuckles: 'You're going bald! 'You're soon going to be as bald as a coot! (...) Oh, you're so awful. You can't know how awful you are.'"<sup>21</sup> The father of the eponymous character also subjected him to strict, almost phrenological observations, scrutinising his physiognomy in the search of the predominance of the alleged features of the Polish "race" over the alleged features of the Semitic "race." As the story unfolds, Stefan is subjected to numerous tests and examinations during which, in accordance with the Foucault's scheme of disciplinary institutions, his body acts as the third element in relation to the binary system dividing the world into what is allowed (prescribed by the cultural model) and what is prohibited. Showing disgust is depicted, in turn, as a way of establishing a hierarchy of dominance and a corrective mechanism aimed creating the willingness in Stefan to "improve."

The unspeakable mystery of the protagonist's dual Polish-Jewish origin becomes the reason why he is rejected by the school environment. He discovers that the nursery rhyme "Raz, dwa, trzy, wszystkie Żydy psy, a Polacy złote ptacy, a wychodzisz ty" [One, two, three, four, each Jew is a dog, each Pole's a golden boy, and it's your go]<sup>22</sup> speaks the language of the mystery. It is about the experience of anti-Semitism and disciplinary behaviour that reinforces it in the earliest stages of adolescence. The binary division, described by Foucault, between what is allowed and what is forbidden, is superimposed on the difference between Polish and Jewish identities, the discipline of disgust and contempt serves to implement this structure in the dimension of everyday, standardised experience. Neither a Jew nor a Pole, the protagonist cannot find himself in the symbolic order of the society described, and he is assigned the position of an outsider. Stefan perceives this order as arbitrary and incomprehensible. This will allow him to understand the conventional nature of socially established identities in the climax of the story.

<sup>19</sup> It is possible to talk about a certain change in the perspective here since shame can be described as an emotional correlate of the practice of showing disgust. However, if, in the context of reading Gombrowicz, I prefer to write about showing disgust, it is because shame can be experienced individually, while the expression "showing disgust" directly connotes a type of social interaction.

<sup>20</sup> Witold Gombrowicz, "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego," in Witold Gombrowicz, *Bakakaj* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, Wrocław 1986), 16.

<sup>21</sup> Gombrowicz, "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego," 17.

<sup>22</sup> Gombrowicz, "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego," 20.

Therefore, Gombrowicz seems to share the intuition later expressed by Julia Kristeva about repulsion as an emotion that appears in response to the disruption of the socially established symbolic order and of the identities that are based on it.<sup>23</sup> The philosopher's reflections also shed light on the fact that anti-Semitism belongs to the subject matter of the story that focuses on showing repulsion in a social context: "Anti-Semitism, for which there is an object as phantasmic and ambivalent as the Jew, is a kind of para-religious formation: it is a sociological thrill, or rather a story that is created by believers as non-believers so as to feel repulsion."<sup>24</sup> In other words, the anti-Semitic phantasm of the Jew functions as an affective machinery for generating disgust. As Gombrowicz's narrative indicates, the mental energy, which is initially associated with the feeling of disgust crafted in this way, is then utilised by disciplinary practices aimed at instilling hierarchical identities.

The production of nationalised subjectivity, which began in the family home and which is subsequently referred to as "the national form"<sup>25</sup> by Gombrowicz in *Trans-Atlantyk*, later continues at school. In his memoirs, Czarniecki evokes the figure of a history and literature teacher: "'Gentlemen,' he would say, coughing in his large foulard handkerchief or shaking something out of his ear with his finger, 'which other nation was the Messiah of nations? The bulwark of Christianity? Which other nation had Prince Józef Poniatowski?'" Such education can be defined by the expression with which Foucault described prison and other disciplinary institutions' staff in the quotation above: "the teacher of normality." The climax of Stefan's education is, of course, an examination: a paper on the alleged superiority of Poles over other nations, which the protagonist concludes with the following words: "Only Poles do not fill us with disgust."<sup>26</sup> He comments that he wrote these words without conviction yet with a sense of bliss resulting from mastering the language of the mystery.

The erotic thread is introduced in the story in close connection with the coding of national identity which takes place at school.<sup>27</sup> Stefan recalls the following words of one of his professors: "A Pole has always been what they say: a rascal and a rebellious soul. He will not sit in one place... this is why Swedish, Danish, French and German women are very fond of us, but we prefer our Polish girls, because their beauty is world famous,"<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> "Thus it is not a lack of cleanliness or health that makes something repulsive; repulsive is what disturbs the identity, the system, the order" (Julia Kristeva, "Potęga obrzydzenia. Esej o wstręcie," trans. Maciej Falski, Krakow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2007, 10).

<sup>24</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Potęga obrzydzenia. Esej o wstręcie," 166.

<sup>25</sup> Witold Gombrowicz, *Trans-Atlantyk* (Krakow-Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Gombrowicz, "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego," 24.

<sup>27</sup> Foucault criticised the concept of gender/sexual identity as a correlate of a certain composition of power relations in *The History of Sexuality*. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Historia seksualności*, trans. Bogdan Banasiak, Tadeusz Komendant, Krzysztof Matuszewski (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, 2010). Foucault's theory, in addition to Lacan's thought, also gave grounds to classical considerations for the gender performativity theory of Judith Butler. Cf. Judith Butler, *Uwikłani w płęć: feminizm i polityka tożsamości*, trans. Karolina Krasuska (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Gombrowicz, "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego," 21.



and then he goes on to say: "These and other similar remarks affected me so much that I fell in love with a young lady, with whom we studied on one bench in the Łazienki Park."<sup>29</sup> "The young lady" arranges the relationship with Stefan within the framework of quite cynically played conventions of the Young Poland woman-vamp and chivalrous love, in which the admirer has to prove his feeling with unusual deeds. To put it bluntly, she bullies Stefan and humiliates him.

Gombrowicz's narration points to the conventional nature of heteronormativity imposed top-down and its relation to the performance of national identity.<sup>30</sup> Just as the Jewish identity was marked by a disciplinary ban in the family home and in the school yard, the homosexual desire becomes excluded in socially accepted eroticism. From the narrative perspective, this motif makes it possible to show the erotic experience as founded on socially established forms as well as to present – from the perspective of power analysis – disciplinary practices aimed at maintaining and domesticating these forms. The protagonist sums up his recollection of erotic experiences in the following way: "But she never wanted to respond to my 'I want you.' 'There is something in you,' she spoke with embarrassment, 'I don't really know, some kind of distaste.' 'I knew very well what it meant.'"<sup>31</sup> In the direct experience of both Stefan's father and his 'girlfriend,' the disciplinary power manifests itself in the form of a sense of disgust which is to guard the racist phantasm prohibiting the "mixing of races."

Czarnecki is constructed by Gombrowicz as a figure who fails to understand "the language of the mystery" and who is unable to find himself in the symbolic order. Stefan gets rid of the feeling of alienation for the first time in the army: "I had no doubt about how to act and what to choose; tough army discipline was a signpost of the Mystery."<sup>32</sup> As the main character points out, the very act of putting on the uniform already provides him with an opportunity to receive a tribute, to which he was denied access before. The narration of the story captures the mood of optimistic nationalism which swept across the society shortly prior to the outbreak of the war. It shows in a grotesque and comical way how militaristic discourse is implanted in a soldier's psyche by associating it with the social mechanisms of producing a model heterosexual desire: "Every time I managed to fire a rifle properly I felt as if I was hanging on an inscrutable smile of women and on the bars of a military song, and even, after much effort, I succeeded in obtaining the graces of my horse (...), which till then had only been picking and biting me."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Gombrowicz, "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego."

<sup>30</sup> Błażej Warkocki puts forward a similar thesis with reference to "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego." Cf. Błażej Warkocki, *Pamiętnik afektów z okresu dojrzewania* (Poznań-Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2018), 72–94. The author referred to the analysed story by Gombrowicz also in his earlier text. Cf. Błażej Warkocki, "Rasowy kształt niemieckości. O Pamiętniku Stefana Czarnieckiego Witolda Gombrowicza," *Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media*, 1 (2016): 97–112.

<sup>31</sup> Gombrowicz, "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego," 23.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

For Stefan, the war experience is initially associated with a sense of identification with the symbolic order. As compared to Gombrowicz's later works, the main characters of his debut collection of short stories are distinguished by the fact that they are not – in such an obvious way – the author's *porte parole*.<sup>34</sup> In the starting points of the plots, the protagonists are often presented as naive, devoid of the paranoid perspicacity in the interpretation of social life, which is characteristic of the narrators of *Ferdydurke*, *Trans-Atlantyk* or *Cosmos*. "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego" can be read as a text which speaks about the development of this particular perspective.<sup>35</sup> During the battle, Stefan hears the hysterical laughter of his mortally wounded comrade-in-arms. The traumatic experience once again makes the protagonist unable to identify with the symbolic order and convinces him of the conventional status of socially constructed meanings. Jerzy Jarzębski seems to be right in pointing to the affinity of "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego" with the "sneering nihilism" of the literature of "the Lost Generation" which expressed the alienation of World War I veterans in works such as "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg.<sup>36</sup>

The climax of the analysed story concerns the eponymous character's affirmation of his own otherness. His personal secret is that, being neither a Pole nor a Jew, he is – as he calls himself – "a rat without any colour,"<sup>37</sup> a man without qualities or a clearly defined place in the social imaginary. He responds to the incomprehensible arbitrariness of social conventions with the arbitrariness of his private programme which involves the continuous subversion of universally recognised holiness. Parody becomes his tactic for political action: generating counter-senses and opening up spaces of existential liberation. Gombrowicz's satire is directed against the desire to submit to authority and discipline. The final effect of reading the story is the deconstruction of nationalistic, militaristic, anti-Semitic or machismo discourses, which consists in drawing attention to experiences that reveal their productive character. Contrary to the claims of nationalism, militarism or machismo to be established in a normative notion of nature, the writer points out that the objects of reference of these discourses appear in reality only as effects of disciplinary practices.

<sup>34</sup> Jan Błoński wrote in an interesting way about the relationship between Witold Gombrowicz, the writer, and Witold Gombrowicz, the subject of first-person narrative: "in novels, the narrator tends to be inaccurately and mendaciously identified with the author." Cf. Jan Błoński, "O Gombrowiczu," *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 8 (1970): 46.

<sup>35</sup> The belief that *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* announces almost the entire scope of topics of Gombrowicz's mature works seems to be quite well rooted in the literature on the subject. Cf. Andrzej Kijowski, "Strategia Gombrowicza," in *Problemy literatury polskiej lat 1890–1939. Seria II*, eds. Hanna Krichner, Zbigniew Żabicki (Wrocław: Instytut Literatury, 1974), 261–298.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Jerzy Jarzębski, *Gra w Gombrowicza*, 172.

<sup>37</sup> Gombrowicz, "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego," 23. Marek Mikołajec presented an interesting analysis of the metaphor of "a rat without any colour" in the of Gombrowicz's attitude to the theories of Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel. Cf. Marek Mikołajec, "Arcyludzkie i zwierzęce na przykładzie *Pamiętnika Stefana Czarnieckiego*," in Marek Mikołajec, *Profanacje, rewizje – przeciw doktrynom. Dwa opowiadania z debiutanckiego tomu Witolda Gombrowicza* (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 2014), 74–92.

The political dimension of Gombrowicz's writing manifests itself in this context. Although the author of *Ferdydurke* often put on the mask of an artist – a spiritual aristocrat not involved in the trivial reality of political games – this dimension is indeed present in both his early and later works. "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego" was written between the late 1920s and early 1930s, i.e. during the period when fascist and far-right organisations were developing both in Poland and in Europe. In 1920, whose memory undoubtedly shaped the image of the war in the short story in question, sixteen-year-old Gombrowicz was then sent not to the army, but to alternative military service, which resulted in social stigmatisation. Later, the mature writer recalled the period of his adolescence in the following words: "I was mortified, and at the same time I was in a state of rebellion... for the first time I turned against the fatherland, the state, and other instruments of collective pressure on the individual."<sup>38</sup> The above formula clearly indicates the direction which the type of political commitment inherent in Witold Gombrowicz's literary output is directed against.

As Błażej Warkocki points out, the classical reception of "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego" was primarily focused on the issue of anti-Semitism.<sup>39</sup> This is where he places the interpretation of the story proposed by Michał Głowiński<sup>40</sup> and Bożena Umińska, from whose reflections he recalls a passage according to which it would contain "probably the most interesting parabola in the literature of the interwar period, concerning the distribution of values in Polish-Jewish relations."<sup>41</sup> As a peculiar curiosity, it is worth mentioning a text titled "Kosmo-małki" written in 1933 by Adolf Nowaczyński, who – in a gesture of tragic inability to understand the ironic and grotesque formula of the work – perceives Gombrowicz's short story as a warning against the disastrous effects of "mixing of races."<sup>42</sup> It seems, however, that the change of the title (from "Pamiętnik Jakóba Czarnieckiego" to "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego" in the post-war edition of the debut collection) was motivated by the desire to prevent the anti-Semitic reading.<sup>43</sup>

The writer himself distanced himself from Nowaczyński's unexpected enthusiasm for his work:

it was my misfortune that the hero of one of my short stories was born of a Polish father and a Jewish mother. This was enough for me to be showered with praise by Adolf Nowaczyński, a pathological Jew-hater; (...) I was utterly innocent: In the story in question racial issues in the everyday

<sup>38</sup> Witold Gombrowicz, *Polish Memories*, trans. Bill Johnston (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Błażej Warkocki, *Pamiętnik afektów z okresu dojrzewania*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Michał Głowiński, *Gombrowicz i nadliteratura* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002), 45.

<sup>41</sup> Bożena Umińska, *Postać z cieniem. Portrety Żydówek w polskiej literaturze od końca XIX wieku do 1939 roku* (Warsaw: Sic!, 2001), 275.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Adolf Nowaczyński, "Kosmo-małki," 275 (1933). The danger of anti-Semitic reading of "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego" is further analysed by Kazimierz Adamczak. Cf. Kazimierz Adamczak, *Doświadczenia polsko-żydowskie w literaturze emigracyjnej (1939-1980)* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2008), 25-38.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Błażej Warkocki, *Pamiętnik afektów z okresu dojrzewania*, 74.

sense of the word were of no interest to me; I had a great number of Jewish friends and had never engaged in anti-semitism (...).<sup>44</sup>

In fact, Gombrowicz's story seems far more radical in his criticism of anti-Semitism than a parody of common clichés of that discourse. As Karl Marx wrote: "To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But, for man, the root is man himself."<sup>45</sup> The subject of Gombrowicz's criticism is not the superficiality of anti-Semitic discourse, but the structure of subjectivity created through its internalisation.

Indeed, disciplinary practices are produced not only by dominated individuals, but also by those who want to dominate and who are only able to see the social world in dominating-dominated categories. According to the thesis expressed by Theodor Adorno in *The Authoritarian Personality*, racial bias has a quasi-transcendental character: it does not represent misconceptions but the tools of misinterpreting the reality.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, in the philosopher's view, in the case of people who are extremely biased, education and contact with representatives of the groups against which they are prejudiced will not be an effective way of breaking the stereotype.<sup>47</sup> We had already seen in "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego" that the construction of Gombrowicz's characters seems to be based on similar epistemological assumptions, according to which socially induced stereotypes turned out to be structures allowing for specific affective reactions and actions.

In the context of reading the political aspects of Gombrowicz's early story, it is worth referring to the theoretical proposals presented by Klaus Theweleit in his book titled *Male Fantasies*. According to the author's perspective, the source of the subjective formation with fascist characteristics lies in the disciplinary imprinting of puerile bodies with male chauvinist, militaristic or extremely national discourses.<sup>48</sup> In such an interpretative context, the political significance of "Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego" would be included in the criticism of those mechanisms of social life which, although they function in everyday life under the guise of normalisation, they lead, in fact, to the production of fascist identity.

In the introduction to *Trans-Atlantyk*, one of his most openly political texts, Gombrowicz wrote that that with this book he wants to make "a very far-reaching revision of our relationship to the nation" aimed at "strengthening, enriching the life of the individual, making him more resistant to the oppressive superiority of the masses."<sup>49</sup> The author's writing can be reco-

<sup>44</sup> Witold Gombrowicz, *Polish Memories*. 125.

<sup>45</sup> Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), accessed October 10, 2020, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1f80/c14a0b1cd94d6814d2e893792d88e763615e.pdf>, 15.

<sup>46</sup> Cf.: „Rather, experience itself is predetermined by stereotypy” (Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, (New York: Norton, 1969), 617.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Klaus Theweleit, *Męskie fantazje*, trans. Mateusz Falkowski, Michał Herer (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2016).

<sup>49</sup> Witold Gombrowicz, *Trans-Atlantyk*, trans. by Danuta Borchardt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), xvi-xvii.

gnised as a symbolic activity of political nature: its meaning would consist in the re-formation of subjectivity by breaking the apparent coherence of fascist discourses and revealing the disciplinary practices that guard them. It would be a deconstruction of the authoritarian personality and its replacement by new forms of subjectivisation. Such ways of becoming oneself, which would be characterised by the humorous lack of seriousness, ironic distance, but also by a fundamental inner openness and dynamism – liberation from the nameless orders, and bans of the superego and the toxic structures of subjectivity which they produce. In such a perspective, the Nietzschean ontology of power would turn out to be a tool to express emancipatory hopes. The fullness of individual life, which in the philosophy of the author of *The Gay Science* is to be considered the highest value, turns out to be impossible to achieve in conditions of social oppression.

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