

“No Light in the Dark, Quiet, Locked Building”?¹

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I recalled a crime story nearby a small labyrinth made of espaliers. It's night time nearby an English castle. A woman suspects someone of bad intentions; this person runs away from her. An espalier labyrinth. She follows him. Both end up in an alley. Now she's scared. She can hear his suppressed and tired breathing.

Miron Białoszewski, *Chamowo*

1.

Personal associations with castles are perhaps similar for everyone. The fairy-tales I read as a child depicted castles as a symbol of lack of access or something quite monumental. If memory serves correctly, the castle would always be on a hill; thus for a child's imagination it was additionally lifted up, in the metaphorical and literal sense, versus a number of tiny buildings surrounding its power. I loved the books in

¹ Title taken from *Maria Antoni Malczewski*

which characters of low social status aspired to become fully-fledged inhabitants of the castle thanks to their exemplary virtues. Swineherds, menials and princesses would fall in love with each other. I supported these stories whole-heartedly, unaware of course that this order would inevitably turn the vision of the world upside down, one that was, perhaps not quite fairly but from the point of view of the social peace, the only order possible. It took me a dozen years to switch from the clear-cut egalitarian position to a rational one which was even closer to the opinions of the one and only Charles Darwin (even though Darwin, completely in contrast with his biological theory, was a liberal when it came to social issues). In a gossip magazine I once read about a wealthy Hindu princess who became involved in a love affair, of the type one can find in Gombrowicz’s works, i.e. with a homeless, unemployed man. It seemed like silly gossip, but it made me furious, and only because of her to-be or not-to-be husband (I don’t know how the story ended). A princess is a princess. She is allowed such idealism, perhaps she rebelled for ideological reasons. But her fiancé! For me it was an act of idolatry – to think about such aspirations. Here he was cheeky enough to try to make it happen. At that point the rest of my childhood tolerance had vanished. Castles, princesses, kings, menials, everything should have its own place. A castle should once and for all remain an unbreakable fortress, an eternal aspiration. It should be lifted above the average. The idea of this institution is in it being cut off by a deep moat with a drawbridge. The charm of art means turning the order inside out, finding excuses for misalliances and absolving the commoner’s sin, as well as making an

attempt to capture a stronghold only not to capture it. In the end, the whole fun lies in the ceaseless longing.

I am not a traveller. Apart from Malbork and Wawel I have never seen any castle with my own eyes. Only in films. However, even this experience has allowed me to understand that castles they are rather cold, stony, heavy, strange, cellar-like and tomb-like places. They are ambivalent, both tempting and repulsive but surely not livable. When I was little I moved to a newly built estate. The metaphor of a ruined castle was right under my nose. Next to my apartment building stood a two-story house with only a few bricks left and with holes where windows used to be and piles of rubble around it. It was our childhood castle, where we used to play games and swift offensives, of capturing and defending the “castle”. There was no need to read adaptations of Gothic novels; no need for reproductions of Caspar David Friedrich’s paintings. It was enough for use to watch one adventure film with knights, no matter if it was consistent with any historical knowledge, and replay it in my neighborhood. Never again did I find this topic fascinating enough to act as a stimuli for detailed studies. Imagination had already exploited the issue in my childhood. A castle remained a monumental and dark place, immersive and inhuman, regardless of whether still untouched by history or already in ruins. These dichotomous associations can hardly be considered a very deep statement. That’s all when it comes to my personal experience. However, as it will turn out, the cultural symbolism contributes to the topic only slightly more.

2.

In his dictionary of symbols, Władysław Kopaliński enumerates a dozen meanings for the notion of “castle”, which is not a lot,² since most other entries have much larger semantic capacities. A high number of meanings found by Kopaliński reflects my childhood intuitions, for instance this word clearly symbolizes power and authority strengthened by the element of lack of access when it is built on a “steep hill surrounded by walls and a moat”. It symbolizes wealth (the opposite of the cottage), safety and “protection from intruders”. There are also “castles on ice” which can refer to unfulfilled dreams and unachievable projects. One does not “build castles on sand” either, as the Matthew the Apostle warned. According to a Celtic legend, “the Rotating Castle” is inaccessible for daring ones “since it has no entrance and rotates fast; it’s a castle with flowing fountains, with no sickness or old age.” At the same time, “the Castle of Love” means virginity and purity. In order to keep the balance we make a note on “the Castle of Doubt” as well as “the Castle of Darkness” which is barred from mortals. Various Black Castles, tabernacles of hopelessness, hell, wandering souls, maltreated memory and vague desires belong to this category as well. These can be counterbalanced by the Castle of Light, “the sum and fulfilment of all noble, positive aspirations and dreams – perfection. This castle usually has a treasure; it is inhabited by a knight on his way to salvation through atonement; there is also his sweetheart; the castle appears and disappears suddenly.” The last point is heraldry and

² W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warsaw 1991, p. 486.

the coat of arms, according to which the symbol of a castle symbolizes nobility, durability, defense and greatness.

That is it. Let us move on to literature.

3.

The castle appeared in the literary world mostly in the Gothic novel. In 1764 Horace Walpole wrote *The Castle of Otranto* which initiated one of the most popular and, at the same time, the most schematic genre of novels. The phenomenon which we usually associate with the romantic era (similarly to Beethoven's symphonies) began years earlier. Walpole's subtitle: *A Gothic Story* was successfully applied to all similar literary productions. However, the real mistress was Ann Radcliffe and she made this genre famous. Such novels as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or *The Italian* not only became classic tales of fear but also a genuine inspiration for unquestionably serious romantic literature: Byron, Schelley and Keats. In Poland both Zygmunt Krasiński and Anna Mostowska remained under her strong influence; the latter wrote an unsuccessful book *Fear in a Little Castle* and her novel moved even further in schematizing what was already outlined in the genre's scheme.

There is a simple formula for the Gothic story. It lies in the interference of the supernatural –negative forces in the rational reality represented by the bourgeois culture. The character crosses the border of their world and steps into the reality where initially they feel completely vulnerable. This border is typically the area of a haunted castle. Not

only is the character forced to escape, but they also have to go through another initiation process in order to once again become a fully-fledged member of the rational world. This is because they are contaminated when in the spoiled space. The position of the character is additionally complicated by the fact that these are not symmetrical worlds. Manuel Aguirre argues that the border between the conflicted realities indisputably belongs to the alien sphere which manages the border. This alienation has a tendency to spread its dominance beyond its own spheres.³

There is no doubt that a castle is an alien and hostile space. It's a nest of evil, but it can generate evil as well. It constitutes a reliable entourage of the Gothic story as well as its hallmark as the central place. The castle is situated in a biological environment that is hostile to an outsider; it is surrounded by marshes or located on the top of rocks, as if all of these elements were in alliance with the evil whose headquarters are in the castle. Its interior is a labyrinth in the contemporary form.⁴

The traditional labyrinth was a type of road full of obstacles that lead towards an exit. It was a job to be completed, one that led to freedom. With time, approximately in the 16th century, the myth of the labyrinth began evolving. It became a subjugation, a trap leading to nowhere. It was no longer a way towards goodness, towards the order, or a reward for one's virtues. In fact, the classic labyrinth

³ M. Aguirre, "Geometria strachu", [in:] G. Gazda, A. Izdebska, J. Płuciennik, *Wokół gotycyzmów. Wyobrażenia. Groza. Okrucieństwo*, Kraków 2002, p. 15–32.

⁴ A. Izdebska, "Gotyckie labirynty", [in:] *Wokół gotycyzmów*, op. cit. p. 33–41.

is a part of the world of law and order while its threshold and border most definitely belong to the better world. The later labyrinth is quite the opposite: its alienation is total. There is no movement towards the exit, only walking around in circles. This is the scene for the drama based on the intertwining of good and evil, divine good and devilish evil. Maria Janion stresses the importance of the religious element in the Gothic reality.⁵

This is yet another burden for the character visiting from our reality. Moreover, as I mentioned before, an emphasis is put on the bourgeois character of the culture which was to confront the demonic order. And one more, key issue lies here as well. Janion notices that the model demonic phantom remained emotional in the human sense. Although her studies are based on the behavior analysis of characters of the German expressionist cinema, this diagnosis might also be true for the Gothic story. The demonic subject has an inferiority complex, hence its predilection for sadistic and masochistic behavior. Such is the diagnosis of the author of *Romantic Fever*. And, interestingly, it was Gothicism that discovered sadism, as if it sensed it, well before Dostoyevsky or even Freud himself.

That is the story in a nutshell. On face value, the plot of the Gothic story is dynamic and full of surprises. As we commonly say in this case: it has you on the edge of your seat until the very end. Indeed, while it is built on a rather banal pattern of a battle of good versus evil; it requires

⁵ M. Janion, "Zbójcy i upiory", [in:] *Gorączka romantyczna*, Kraków 2000, p. 171–272.

ceaseless self-restraint from its author. This problem is going to affect primarily Witold Gombrowicz, the last author mentioned in this paper. Let next address three writers who chose a castle for the background in their stories, i.e. Bram Stoker, Franz Kafka and Witold Gombrowicz. The first one is the author of possibly the most renowned and definitely the most well-known Gothic story. Kafka, on the other hand, found in the castle a source of human suffering but one recognized in a completely different way than in the case of the black and white world of the Gothic story. When it comes to Gombrowicz, we are talking about *Obsessed*, an awkward piece of work produced by the author of *Pornography*, and a story that readers tend not to discuss; it is perceived as the writer's guilty conscience, a flaw of the youth and adolescence. These reasons are sufficient enough to remind the world about that novel.

4.

Bram Stoker wrote *Dracula* in 1897, several decades after Charles Darwin shook the world with his revelations and left it shocked, especially the puritan Victorian England. The Darwinian "evolutionary idea undermines the theory of the generally established and unchangeable human nature, faith in God, Nature and Reason perceived as transcendent forces."⁶

The Victorian Man broke the ties with Nature, so characteristic for the construction of romantic subjectivity. For this reason the author of *On the Origin of Species* found

⁶ N.V. de Courville, "Teorie eugeniczne i behawiorystyczne w gotycyzmie wiktoriańskim" [in:] *Wokół gotycyzmów*, op. cit., p. 212.

it difficult to obtain approval of these ideas. However, in those times people found easy recipes for satisfaction and showed little enthusiasm for deep speculation. Darwin's eugenic theory was a heavy blow, but only in one point. It caused universal fear, additionally fueled by luminaries of traditional humanities whose ideals originate from the Bible, Reason – i.e. totally different sources. Darwin's discovery was swiftly and paradoxically resisted in a humanistic way; if man has some animal element, even the smallest one, this animalism is to be restrained. It was a simple instruction for getting rid of an intense but reflective pain. No romantic melancholies, no "Nothing that hurts". Apart from everything else, the era of naturalism was different from romanticism in that scientific attempts were made in the positivist order to specify the problems as closely as possible related both to whole social groups and individuals. Man at that time asked no questions. They clarified the problem and searched for conclusive advice. Utopia for those who don't search, for those whose happiness is based on presented truths and whose life duty, right and happiness is to reproduce the existing order. The quintessence of the Victorian reality, the ideal of every "bourgeois". The ideal of a grand narrative. Henryk Markiewicz writes that "biological monism [...] was a source of humanistic pride for young positivists. However, while it made man dependent on the laws of nature and took away hope for immortality, it provided biological factors which rule over intellect and will, a significant role in the character structure; in this way it made man a slave of nature, degraded him and hence became

a source of pessimism."⁷ This head-on collision of faith and pessimism forms the basis of Stoker's story.

Dracula is a schematic story both in terms of ideology and genre. A young solicitor named Jonathan Harker leaves London for Transylvania in order to sign a contract for the purchase of land by Count Dracula. He leaves a place that is fully tamed and safe. Obviously, for the needs of the story, Stoker is idealizing London in order to show the Count's place in an even more negative light. In fact, the capital of Great Britain at the end of the 19th century was a place that can easily be called appalling. Hunger, homelessness, prostitution, also involving children, violence with whole districts being enclaves of crime. In one of them called Whitechapel, the legend of Jack the Ripper emerged, a bit earlier than when Stoker wrote his story.

However, an antithesis was needed for effect. Harker leaves the place which symbolizes Western culture and civilization. It is no wonder, then, that his travelling companions whom he meets on his way or during short breaks warn him against travelling further, handing him crucifixes for protection. Harker is, however, driven by diligence, loyalty towards his company and the prospect of the money he will make for the job done. Harker is the best example of the place and time which has shaped him. When he arrives at the castle he can sense an eerie strangeness from the start (let's not forget that the castle itself can emit evil). These are "dead ruins",⁸ notes the Count's guest

⁷ H. Markiewicz, *Literatura pozytywizmu*, Warsaw 1998, p. 11.

⁸ B. Stoker, *Dracula*, translation: D. Ściepuro, Jelenia Góra 1990, p. 18.

with alarm after casting just one glance. The building was erected on the edge of a cliff, which belongs to the order of the genre matrix, since the border remains in power of the evil; a savage space. Everything is made of steel or stone. It has the structure of a labyrinth. What is more, the guest is prohibited from entering some of the chambers. Harker soon realizes he is in a prison (moreover, the Count immediately insists on him staying for three months). His life becomes a struggle for his own freedom, but also a confrontation of two orders: one based on the religion of goodness and the brutal, avenging evil which is tempting, such as the scene where three female vampires encourage Harker to cheat. This is thwarted by the Count in the last minute and only because the body of the young man belongs to him. A vampire can spread, and also reproduce. The area of their destructive activity goes beyond the castle. However, when leaving its territory, they must take whole chests of the cursed soil. So they have their limitations, but one needs specialized knowledge to recognize these weaknesses. There's a lot at stake since the Count has a whole bunch of people at his disposal and one bite applied to a healthy human turns him into a vampire with a similar superpower. Vampire legions have therefore an unrivalled power of reproduction. It's a fight for survival, like between one species and another – a true Darwinian conflict. In the story science is represented by Van Helsing who not only has to fight with the monster but he must also prove to the disbelievers that vampires really exist, since the Count attacks those who do not believe in his real power. Van Helsing must diagnose Dracula's

pathology which is understood in biological terms and he must eliminate him from society, the same way misfits are eliminated in nature. It's worth noting that acceptance of Darwin's theory led to a real eugenic madness. "During that period, negative aspects of social life, such as poverty, unemployment, physical disabilities as well as fortunes that don't benefit whole societies are exaggerated and demonized. The abovementioned factors are a threat to the idea of social order and progress."⁹

In Stoker's story, *Dracula* there is a metaphor of social exclusion: of poverty, alcohol addiction, drug addiction, Jack the Ripper, physical pathology, freaks of nature: Joseph Merrick¹⁰ and Julia Pastrana.¹¹ Van Helsing knew that the Count's case cannot be judged from the moral perspective or exclusively from materialistic positions, nor could to an illness that is not perceived in moral categories and is not confronted on this platform. So, first he had to annihilate Lucy Westenra who was seduced by the Count and became a vampire. Van Helsing knows that killing her will save many lives since her numerous admirers perceive her exclusively as an object of sexual desire and never as a vampire. They are easy prey for her. In fact, Lucy became a totally self-centered and mean subject and in her life, if continued in the new embodiment, she would end up instinctively striving for survival and continuation of the

⁹ N.V. de Courville, *Teorie eugeniczne i behawiorystyczne*, op. cit., p. 214.

¹⁰ Known as the Elephant Man, famous in the Victorian era for very severe deformities caused by a then unknown disease. A medical phenomenon and an attraction of a circus. David Lynch made a film about him.

¹¹ A Mexican woman displayed as an oddity in numerous European countries in the 19th century because of very thick hair covering the whole body.

vampire species. Dracula is driven by similar motives but Van Helsing is the only person in the story who realizes how serious the threat is. “Darwin’s evolution theory leads to cognition of dual nature. First of all, it eliminates the duality of Nature and Reason since both Nature and Reason are not inborn but acquired. Being aware of this situation makes one feel scared but also pushes one towards socialization, sexual drive, control and elimination of misfits [...]. Secondly, Darwin’s evolution theory leads to cognition of deeply hidden ferocious human drives that might pose a threat to freedom and human advancement.”¹²

The elimination of Lucy and the Count is hence natural, fully justified and professor Van Helsing not only gets away with murder and desecration of the corpses but he is also elevated to the positivist firmament alongside such madmen as Doctor Jekyll, Sherlock Holmes, Professor Geist, Cyprian Bodzanta, and a whole bunch of scientists from Verne’s stories. These are aesthetic idealizations of scientific progress. The birth of Count Dracula’s story, one of the most recognized stories of modern culture, is of a purely ideological character.

5.

In the case of Kafka we enter the world of metaphors, since his whole writing is a metaphor of his multidimensional discontent. It was Walter Muschg who wrote about this phenomenon in his incredible book: “His spiritual heights were the fruit of an illness of impurity. As a Ger-

¹² N.V. de Courville, *Teorie eugeniczne i behawiorystyczne*, op. cit., p. 219.

manized Jew from Prague, alienated both from the Jewish and Czech culture, he felt like a pariah. To this experience he added Pascal and Kierkegaard's works which opened his eyes to the spiritual position of contemporary man. He had strong faith and recorded the dissolution of the orders with great sensitivity. In this way, as a writer, he had no choice but to only strictly and clearly formulate the endless contradiction between man and God [...] Faith in existing law and a fear of judgment are purely Jewish heritage; his tireless and often pedantic commenting on events brings Talmud to mind. Because of this dialectic form itself Kafka's works are in fact parabolae which, thanks to their motives, become priestly poetry for awakening. They are ordinary metaphors of a loss."¹³

The road to salvation is closed. God exists but is inaccessible; the border between good and evil has faded away while faith remains only a desperate longing. Kafka's pain is ubiquitous, multidimensional and seems impossible to destroy. It is deeply rooted. Even though it has been diagnosed in terms of its genesis, it is somehow "vague"; to paraphrase George Poulet. Something like an intermediate and a negative position. It cannot be compared with the unambiguousness of Stoker's punctual pain. It is no different in the case of Kafka's symbolism of the castle. It is yet another metaphor of his existential drama. There is no point in searching for the origin of Kafka's Gothicism in any specific literary tradition. It is an unoriginal convention mixed with pure imagination in unequal proportions,

¹³ W. Muschig, *Tragiczne dzieje literatury*, translated by B. Baran, Warsaw 2010, p. 317–318.

with the latter prevailing. It is a characteristic reality “reflecting some aspects of Gothicism, although transforming it [the castle, author’s note] into a psychological structure; an irrational but visible fear of Medieval castles and ruins moved to the insides of human souls, invoked and connected with the castle scenery that symbolizes a specific structure of fatal psychological processes.”¹⁴

For Kafka the castle is like his America, i.e. a pure invention, a dream, a notion he did not verify with any source. And so it remains a symbol of internal fear, not even for the characters (*The Castle* or *The Trial*) but for Franz Kafka himself. His face peers out from every page of any of his writings. There are writers who keep their works completely separate from themselves, as if they were totally independent. Stoker is an example of such a writer. There are critics who insist that Kafka’s works be set aside from his biography, his everyday life. Some of them argue that there are no questions and no answers. Several oppressive office hours that the writer complains about in his diary, a nap, dinner, a walk, some free time dedicated to writing, and sleep. And that is all. Over and over again. An apathetic, little life. Everything is in the literature and there is nothing else. This is only half of the truth. While it is true that everything is in the literature, it doesn’t end there; it goes beyond the world of tales, novels and a diary. There is something that peers out of this literature and it is the dispiritedness of a very personal nature, the author’s dispiritedness, his loneliness, his cultural complex that Muschg

¹⁴ I. Pospiil, “Rosyjskie i czesko-niemieckie inspiracje gotyckie”, [in:] *Wokół gotycyzmów*, op. cit., p. 246–247

wrote about, but also the dullness of an everyday treadmill. Hours spent in the office, unsatisfying sleep, eating compulsion, his father's orders and Sunday social calls. Every one of these oppressions finds a place in Kafka's gloomy pieces and conscious reading of this boring and suffocating biography does not spoil it in any way; and it does not make it any poorer. I personally like to have the face of the author of *Amerika* in the back of my mind when reading his books. I do not want to know everything about him. Historical and literary detailed knowledge would only spoil the reading. But a few facts from his life, his loneliness, his faith in writing – they only enhance the reception.

Kafka does not formulate any questions. Neither does he provide any answers in the philosophical, exact meaning. He delivers a vision of a tough, bullying reality. This is a clearly poetic vision since Kafka is a writer and that's the form of communication he chose for himself. I have written that for the author of *The Trial* the castle is a metaphor. The castle is a sign of everything that makes him uncomfortable. The negative power of this symbolic building is obviously not limited to this book. For a novel geometrician it is a bureaucratic juggernaut which will either deliver a positive decision or not and if the latter is the case then it will force his personal imperative of professional duty. In fact, however, the castle is the author's everyday curse. The castle is present in every place where Kafka feels unwell; it is what hurts him. It's his father, his illness, and his religiousness. In other words, it is a metaphor of his life. The castle is in his soul. When writing about Kafka and his books, Georges

Poulet notices a compilation of very detailed episodes kept separate from one another, as if they were independent perceptions. This creates a uniform dark mass. Somewhere in the foreground, beyond the curtain of a murky, opaque, alien and chilly, ascetic, black and white world of novels, everything is filled with the atmosphere of some timeless, hard to define, both predictable and already ongoing failure, existence that seems not to stand a chance for filling. Poulet diagnoses Proust with a similar issue.¹⁵ Both are left with writing.

Writing is a means of escape. It is a window cut in the space of closure. The only moments of light. According to Milan Kundera, these windows are only left ajar. Kafka, unlike Proust, writes only about sadness, loneliness, the struggle of an individual. However, Albert Camus¹⁶ notices that this was exactly Kafka's deliverance, his idle fate transposed into art. And at this moment, as Camus emphasizes, the creator can no longer separate himself from his creation; art and life are an integral whole. A sharp border between an author and a character does not exist. These are merely artificial, clean idealizations. Here, there is one subject: Franz Kafka. Looking up in to the sky, he explores the phenomenon of walls, bars, or moats. He spends his free moments on thoughts that temper the prison. He finds solace in the dark thought rather than in the banal, shallow and philistine optimism. "Kafka is the

¹⁵ G. Poulet, *Myśl nieokreślona*, translation and foreword by T. Swoboda, Warsaw 2004, p. 262–267.

¹⁶ A. Camus, "Hope and Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka" [in:] *ibidem*, *Essays*, translated by J. Guze, Warsaw 1974.

K," writes Walter Hilsbecher. "As a geometrician he seeks his right to cut the surrounding landscape with dividing lines, to create permanent points that allow man to learn about the terrain, just as our writer Kafka fights with the darkness surrounding him and the sleepy uncertainty of existence with use of means of language."¹⁷

Kafka's fate was tragic but not banal. It was uncompromising. The more so that under his last will everything he had written was to be burned. The only value in his life and the only guarantee of his optimism was to go up in flames.

6.

It is in the area of a castle that Witold Gombrowicz chose for the location of his most bizarre novel. *Possessed*, a novel written, as Gombrowicz claimed himself, only for money, was printed in 1939 in instalments in *Kurier Czerwony* (Red Courier). The fact he wrote this unusual novel makes contemporary critics believe that it was a sort of guilty conscience; the aftermath of a temporary youthful weakness of the writer who spent his life fighting for no compromise in art, including literature. Among the very high number of scholarly articles dedicated to Gombrowicz *Possessed* goes almost unnoticed. It was probably only Konstanty Jeleński and Maria Janion who found some kind words for the book. First of all, Janion's¹⁸ article. For her Gombrowicz's novel is a purely Gothic story with some elements of a crime story and mystery. It is a story to be taken quite seriously, for less sophisticated

¹⁷ W. Hilsbecher, *Zamek Kafki*, [in:] ibidem, „Tragizm, absurd, paradoks”, Warsaw 1972, p. 118.

¹⁸ M. Janion, *Gorączka romantyczna*, Warsaw 1975.

readers. And this is all the outcome of his aesthetic and ethical awareness, this Gombrowicz-style pursuit for inferiority. So, what was the story then? Was it a moment of weakness or a conscious choice? If the latter is the case then what was Gombrowicz ashamed of; why did he keep silent? What made him keep the whole thing a secret?

The works of the author of *Cosmos* are treated as a metaphoric lecture on his specific existential philosophy. If in Kafka's books loneliness has no borders; in Gombrowicz's books it is interpersonal and purely existential. Everything starts with man and ends with an interpersonal interaction. We create ourselves through contact with others; our subjectivity is not given to us once and for all, it is of a dynamic character. The subject is lonely but among other subjects. The category of God has been eliminated. Loneliness has become destiny. Man creates himself ceaselessly and makes himself through permanent artificiality. Gombrowicz is longing for naturalness – all of his works mean turning inside out the interpersonal lie of auto-creation in numerous configurations, i.e. the cultural, patriotic and class one. In Kafka's works we also deal with subjectivity understood in the Cartesian, self-sufficient and independent way. In Gombrowicz's case the language comes from the outside, just for a moment, in order to utter some words through the lips of the subject.

Thanks to the very democratic form of the Gothic novel and his decision to write a novel for cooks, Gombrowicz could deal with several important issues. He used the low

style so that he could truly express, like in a confession, without paying attention to the language form which was necessary when writing his other prose. It also let him avoid the schizophrenic paradox which is characteristic for his artistic projects, i.e. fighting any form with use of his own invented one. This is one of the dramatic cracks the writer was very well aware of already before the war when writing *Ferdydurke*. It was then that in this book, the fundamental problems and paradoxes of his writing were founded with one fundamental element: a common lack of understanding. He fought against that from the very beginning. He made an effort to add comments to his writing. Where commentators saw poetical metaphors of deep thoughts he pointed at simple allegoric translations. *Possessed* is written in a smooth language with care for common communication. Philosophical accuracy is replaced by simple sincerity. A dream of validating inferiority, making it the topic of a fully-fledged discourse is what he got, apart from the other things, when working as a guest writer for *Kurier Czerwony*. Researchers are reluctant towards the novel since the whole philosophical high-class knowledge of the books, which lets one show off their interpretative erudition, is missing there. This book is literal, obviously up to a point expressed in the language convention, and present even in these parts of communication that we find natural. Jarzębski¹⁹ doesn't find any value in the book; Markowski²⁰ mentions it only once in his otherwise excellent monograph. There is no place to show off.

¹⁹ J. Jarzębski, "Kicz jest w nas (Gombrowicza romans z kiczem)", *Teksty Drugie* 4/1996.

²⁰ M.P. Markowski, *Czarny nurt. Gombrowicz, świat, literatura*, Kraków 2004.

The novel is made of conventions just like Kafka's *Castle* was made of all possible castles belonging to the genre. It is deprived of idiomaticity, as if it were made of words and sentences that were already around. It is damaged by time, set in the marshes, in the mist; it is repulsive, evil, with a labyrinth of corridors. Maja even dreams of one of the chambers, which additionally underlines the schematic character of this space. On the one hand, there is a fear and a secret; on the other hand, however, everything is predictable, as if it was a template. It is in line with the expectations and predictions of the female character who knows this simple cultural pattern. The castle is marked with evil and this evil spreads onto those who are there. It is different though than what is in Stoker's books, where the castle looks scary but the whole evil potential comes from the Count. In *Possessed* evil is a kind of cosmic power which works mechanically through things or human activity. Evil in Gombrowicz's book is autonomous. It sets its power in motion very easily, much easier than good. It is evil that is a moderator of history, which makes it resemble a Shakespearean drama. Leszczuk and Maja often get involved in evil but there is no director, someone who would be in charge of everything, someone to direct the lives of others, like for instance Fryderyk in *Pornography*. This is also the only story by Gombrowicz where evil is actively opposed (which in turn belongs to the genre of the Gothic story). There is no space for cheap moralizing, in ethical terms it is a very serious novel. The writer never treated the question of form in the category of the inherent and dehumanized structure. Neither did he do it here.

At the center he always places man caused by form, creating form, dominated by form, facing inferiority and youth – man in the face of man; open doors of every rebellion.

Possessed, as a model execution of the pattern of the Gothic story, has all the characteristics of a novel for cooks. But not only that, since here we are dealing with a parody. Here and there the author sends signals that there's more to it. As if he were a painter, coding on the painting, Gombrowicz drops elements that are invisible at first glance. They remain invisible if, when reading *Possessed*, one sticks to the fundamental Gothic key, for instance in the form of evil and the whole related philosophy: unpersonified evil while the reader wishes to see *Schwarzcharakter* in a precise personified form. Or the towel, so banal as a source of evil leaves the reader unsatisfied, but it is, from the empirical point of view, fully-fledged and rational. I have already mentioned the schematic nature of the castle. A less sophisticated reader is, however, unable to spot the wink; the most they can do is to be disappointed and remain not fully *purified* since they will not see the culprit. Generally speaking, a parody of a genre model as well as the natural and submissive language, as Barthes would have it, will not eliminate the potential of this servitude. Therefore, the execution of the philosophy of a descent towards inferiority cannot be challenged.

Thanks to this simple trick, Gombrowicz could introduce a completely different strategy for confronting the form. He usually parodied form (political, interpersonal, patriotic or social) by hitting it with exaggerated form. This can be seen

in all his novels, including *Possessed*. But here he additionally introduced the convention of natural and democratic speech. The reception which is brought down to this level allowed Gombrowicz to solve the problem of dialectics: form versus form, at least towards a certain reader type. This is one of the fundamental accusations thrown towards Gombrowicz's aesthetics: one cannot avoid form, cannot fight form without deploying some new form. Over and over again.

So why was Gombrowicz ashamed of this serial novel commissioned by a working class paper? It seems to be a question of contradiction, not only in the aesthetics but probably also is the psychological layer of the author of *Bacacay*. Aristocracy. The writer liked to get immersed in inferiority and in the literary meaning of this word as well. He used to visit brothels, dodgy districts, and filthy places, especially in his youth. He advocated for its emancipation (he was enthusiastic about *The Man with White Eyes* by Leopold Tyrmand). But deep down inside he remained an aristocrat, which is confirmed in his *Diaries*. He was reluctant towards commonness and rude towards imperfection. This also refers to art from which he had absolutely top expectations. He was ruthless towards those who would write (and paint or compose) and towards himself. This truest, not designed by himself, part of him ordered Gombrowicz to exclude *Possessed* from common memory.

7.

Castles are merely a literary decoration, an element of reality filled with imaginary humans. Obviously, similarly to

any artistic space, they can be of a semantic, symbolic and emotional value. The main topic of the paper has inevitably become its background. I have chosen three novels by three different authors. Stoker filled the mainstream (I guess we may call it that) with the Gothic story, which makes the castle central in terms of the sense of dread and its mysterious and its labyrinth like topography is perfect for an action story. It is the Gothic story that kept alive the legend of the castle space. Franz Kafka, in turn, allegorized the castle. For the author of *The Trial* it was the story setting but primarily a metaphor of existential loneliness. On the other hand, Witold Gombrowicz turned the Gothic story, of which the castle is one element, into an experiment to compensate for inferiority being unfairly pushed onto the margin of art. In a sense, the novel was written for everyone and no one, since *Possessed* is a book for everyone which finds confirmation in its pre-war reception but, on the other hand, almost all reviewers turned away from it, as did Gombrowicz, which is not only interesting and incomprehensible but simply illogical. I cannot account for Gombrowicz's decision differently than as a kind of fake, perhaps pushed away, unacceptable but still a fake. The writer longed for inferiority; he kept emphasizing its full legitimacy but, at the same time, he kept eliminating all its signs, both from himself and his circles.

Translated by Justyna Chada