

SUMMARY

The politics of human nature in the context of the nature versus nurture debate in Witold Gombrowicz's anthropology

Witold Gombrowicz's work, widely discussed in literary and philosophical studies over the past decades, today constitutes a research area that poses a considerable challenge for interpreters. Analyzing the literature on the subject, one might be led to believe that Gombrowicz studies is already too well-explored a niche to offer any further valuable contribution. It turns out, however, that a political science perspective opens a new avenue for reading the writer's works. In them, *Ferdydurke* outlines a largely innovative vision of the world; employing the grotesque, absurdity, and a distinctive sense of humor, he portrays the drama of human existence, and avant-garde "political thought" becomes a byproduct of his rather pessimistic, yet clearly universal, reflections.

The term is placed in quotation marks because Gombrowicz himself never directly aspired to be a political philosopher, and – moreover – he frequently emphasized the artistic dimension of his texts, distancing himself from entanglement in political disputes. This largely explains the gap in the state of research: reading his works in relation to the political can be perceived either as an ignorant overinterpretation or as deliberate manipulation. Yet, paradoxically enough, it is often precisely the overly narrow and colloquial understanding of the concept of politics by scholars that makes the idea of applying a political science lens seem controversial and unworthy of implementation. However, by examining Gombrowicz's statements, it is clear that the writer's critical approach is solely to the entanglement of art in politics, understood as actions aimed at gaining and/or maintaining power. In other words, the writer's declared apoliticality is expressed in his reluctance to take a specific stance in contemporary political/ideological disputes, as well as in his reluctance to create so-called "engaged literature". However, this does not necessarily mean distancing himself from reflection on politics in the broadest sense, which goes far beyond the issue of electoral preferences. Gombrowicz devotes considerable attention to the specificity of Polish political culture, the bankruptcy of political ideologies, the relations between citizens and the state, and the foundations of political community. In his journalism, diaries, and literary fiction, the writer inadvertently engages in political science reflection on the margins of quasi-philosophical considerations at a higher level of generality.

The primary goal of this dissertation is therefore to reconstruct the "political thought" of the author of *Ferdydurke*. It emphasizes the political dimension of human nature in relation to the

nature vs. nurture debate. A key goal is also to demonstrate the validity of applying an interdisciplinary perspective – one that transcends the social sciences – to research on the history of political thought. The main research problem can therefore be reduced to the following question: is Gombrowicz's "interhuman church", and the concept of political community, a direct consequence of this construct, a product of nature or culture/nurture? Simply put, the analysis of individual works should lead to a determination of whether humans are inherently political, or the opposite. The behavior of the protagonists in Gombrowicz's works seems to be underpinned by a kind of social instinct, or - more precisely – herd instinct. On the other hand, the author of *Ferdydurke* repeatedly emphasizes the artificiality of human actions. At one point, Gombrowicz's characteristic biologism is combined with a conviction of the unnaturalness of interpersonal relationships. This – in the author's opinion – apparent internal contradiction makes the decision to precisely place Gombrowicz's views on the axis between the values of "nature" and "nurture" less than obvious.

The starting point for considering the political nature of human nature in Gombrowicz's literary anthropology is a confrontation of his works with the concept of the *Cogito*. The Polish writer refers expressly to Descartes's flagship idea in "Course of Philosophy...", while Cartesian thought seems to permeate the concept of the "interpersonal church", the quintessence of which can be found in "The Marriage". In the first chapter, the Cartesian element of Gombrowicz's work is discussed in reference to "The Banquet", a short story that synthesizes the key elements of his style. Only immersion in literary fiction allows for a non-simplistic political science interpretation. The next stage of the research concerns the context that will properly structure the reflection on Gombrowicz's "political thought". This is the nature vs. nurture debate, for which the clear foundations – from a political scientist's perspective – were laid by Aristotle and Thomas Hobbes, who would argue with him centuries later. The second chapter is devoted to this issue. Discussing a debate that has evolved over time and transcended the boundaries of the humanities and social sciences also necessitates a more precise understanding of the concept of "human nature". The simplistic yet widespread identification of nature with "essence" often leads to stifling discussion and dismissing a still-important and current issue as anachronistic. It's reasonable to assume that viewing "nature" as a "structure" and nuanced consideration of the "accidents" within it completely changes the situation. As in the first chapter, in parallel with the discussion of philosophical and political issues, an analysis is conducted of selected works by Gombrowicz that most effectively illustrate the concept of human nature. In this case, the work requiring the most attention is *The Rat*, which creatively disputes the category of nature while simultaneously drawing on Nietzscheanism. The third stage of research (and thus the third chapter of the dissertation) addresses the fundamental issue: an attempt to resolve the problem of the (a)political nature of human nature and the

"interpersonal church". For clarity, a division is made into premises demonstrating the elements of nature and nurture. Individual works are interpreted from both perspectives, allowing an attempt to determine which view dominates Gombrowicz's texts. The final step is a discussion of Gombrowicz's fundamental concept of Form in relation to political science, with particular emphasis on the Polish "un-Form". Chapter four, therefore, aims to demonstrate that Form can be a political science category and that knowledge of it allows for an effective analysis of the mechanisms that control the world of politics.

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