

Summary

The book *Memoirs of Affects from a Time of Immaturity Gombrowicz – queer – Sedgwick* provides a detailed analysis and interpretation of one of Witold Gombrowicz's books, i.e. his literary debut entitled *Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity* as it stood in 1933. The queer theory has been used as an interpretative tool, especially in the approach suggested by an American scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. The analysis provided here is a combination of "close reading" and "thick description". The main interpretative themes are paranoia (as reconceptualised by Sedgwick) and masochism (as understood by Gilles Deleuze), the latter being more of an additional comment related to paranoia. Silvan Tomkins' theory of affects also plays an important role here, especially with its category of shame (from the book co-edited with Sedgwick, i.e. *Shame and its sisters*). From this point of view, Gombrowicz's work proves to be a complex story of non-normative identity, i.e. a particular kind of a "Diary of the queer adolescence phase".

The author of this book reads *Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity* in its own right, just as it was shaped by Gombrowicz in 1933, i.e. neither from the perspective of his other works, nor as their potential forerunner. Obviously, this kind of stance is very difficult to achieve. It is hard to suspend the knowledge of the further literary path taken up by Gombrowicz, although the author of this publications strives to suspend this epistemological filter. This is exactly why the interpretation provided here deals solely with the short stories comprising *Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity* as autonomous parts complementing the whole. Therefore other short stories that were written before 1939 and became part of the *Bakakaj* [*Bacacay*] volume are not taken into consideration in this analysis.

The introductory chapter, *Suspicious reading. Introduction to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory*, provides the theoretical and methodological foundations of the whole book. The main research themes taken up by this American scholar are outlined here. They focus on the concept of paranoia, the critique of its Freudian articulation and the consequences that it creates for all "hermeneutics of suspicion". All this serves as the background for the concept of the "paranoiac Gothic" i.e. male homosocial desire and homosexual panic. Of particular importance is Sedgwick's late essay *Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You* and a sort of autocratic turn towards the theory of affects, especially shame. The first chapter also

includes an explanation of the main assumptions determining the reading of *Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity*.

Chapter One, *Hidden Memoires*, presents a detailed explanation of the fundamental interpretative gesture, i.e. why it is important to read Gombrowicz's debut as a separate autonomous whole, rather than as a part of what was published after the Second World War under the title *Bakakaj*. Of special importance here are Ewa Graczyk's comments included in her *Przed wybuchem wstrząsnąć. O twórczości Witolda Gombrowicza w okresie międzywojennym* [*Shake before explosion: on Witold Gombrowicz's works in the interwar period*].

Chapter Two, *Strenuous Shame*, is an interpretation of the first short story from the volume, i.e. *Lawyer Kaykowski's Dancer*. The author of the present publication reads this short story as a tale about identity scared with shame, which is understood, following Tomkins as interpreted by Sedgwick, as a primary negative affect. Here shame highlights the identity of the main character as a misfit and an outcast who consequently represents a particular queer performativity. Another important theme in the interpretation is also a masochistic contract that binds the two main characters of the story, i.e. the dancer and his lawyer.

Chapter Three, *Language of Mystery*, provides an interpretation of another short story from the volume, i.e. *The Memoirs of Stefan Czarniecki*. The mainstream interpretation of this piece is as a tale about being different, being a misfit, especially in the context of the Polish anti-Semitism of the interwar period. The main character is a son of an impoverished Polish aristocrat and a wealthy Jewish woman, which results in a feeling of stigma and inner alienation. However, the author of this publication points to the important, yet frequently overlooked, meaning of the masculinity/non-masculinity opposition and the category of effeminacy. This serves as a starting point for the deconstructive reading, which discerns the hidden and inexpressible question of the homosexuality of the main character. This leads consequently to the conclusion of a dynamic aporia, i.e. it is impossible to state unambiguously whether this overt masculinity/non-masculinity opposition contains a hidden homosexual aspect. Of particular importance for this kind of interpretation is Marcel Proust's *Against Sainte Beuve* (1909) and his analyses contained in *Epistemology of the Closet* by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

Chapter Four, *Incorporated Crime*, constitutes a "close reading" of the short story entitled "*Premeditated Crime*". This work was usually interpreted as a parody of a detective story. However, the author of the present publication points instead to the similarity with the Freudian logic from his study *Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia*. As a consequence, it is possible to recognize the convention of the paranoiac Gothic in the short story analyzed here. The real problem is that Freudian homosexuality placed beneath homophobia was supposed to be the "cause" that had to be then "discovered" in the act of interpretation. A similar strategy is used by Antos (the main character in the short story) with the investigating lawyer, i.e. he makes up "causes" that then will have to be "discovered" and on the basis of that issue a sentence

(therefore interpret them correctly). This gesture resembles Sedgwick's "epistemology of the (homosexual) closet", which is rooted in the idea that the homosexual secret actually has particular substance, whereas in fact it is hollow.

Chapter Five, *Sadism of the Institution*, provides an interpretation of Gombrowicz's short story *Dinner at Countess Pavahoke's* (*Biesiada u hrabiny Kottubaj*). The interpretation here is based on two complementary themes. On the one hand, Bourdieu's critique of social distinctions, which is contained in the microcosm of the consumption around an aristocratic table that the commoner Dróbek has been invited to join. On the other hand, the "paranoiac hypothesis" is used, which renders this short story more coherent through the particular motif that, following Sedgwick, can be called a male paranoid plot. The conclusion here is that this time, unlike in the case of *Lawyer Kaykowski's Dancer*, the parties involved do not strike a masochistic deal. On the contrary, the short story depicts what is (in Deleuze's terms) a sadistic strategy of humiliating the commoner by the aristocratic circle. This way Gombrowicz's piece confirms Gilles Deleuze's thesis from his essay *Coldness and Cruelty* that masochism and sadism are not complementary; they do not supplement each other.

Chapter Six, *The will of ignorance*, provides an interpretation of the short story entitled *Virginity*, which presents the incompatible relationship between Paweł and Alicia, depicted against the background of a garden (an almost Biblical one at that). Alicia serves here as something of a mirror reflection to Paweł, who represents doxa, common sense and uncritical acceptance of stereotypes. It is thanks to this mirror that Paweł begins to question widely-held beliefs, predominantly those related to gender. At the same time, the story highlights the concept of virginity through the gender asymmetry in culture. Thus, in his own way, Gombrowicz sketches out something that Judith Butler framed in philosophical language as heteronormativity. In Gombrowicz, and later in the works of this philosopher, heterosexual norms shape the gender coherence. However, it is only the unique internal residuum of this story, centred on regression, that escapes from sexual discovery, which entails sexual pathology, violence. This is a superbly written sequence of events, and the completely understandable will to ignorance.

Chapter Seven, entitled *Sail away from here. National literature, homosexual panic and Wilde at heart* is the most expansive, and presents an interpretation of Gombrowicz's final two "maritime" stories, of which the first (*Adventures*, originally titled *Five minutes before falling asleep*) (*Przygody, Na pięć minut przed zaśnięciem*) is read as a "dream" preceding an "incident" described in the final story *The Adventure on the brig of the "Banbury"* (*Zdarzenia na brygu „Banbury"*).

The first part of the volume places the emphasis on word plays employed by the author, and particularly on intertextual allusions to Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the last play he wrote before his infamous trial in 1895. Gombrowicz uses a Polonised version of Wilde's word "Bunbury" to create an effect that might be termed "doubletalk", where a subliminal message appears in addition to the literal meaning. This is essential to an understanding of the tale of escaping Europe on the brig of the same-sex "Banbury".

The second part presents an analysis of the story *Five minutes before falling asleep* (*Na pięć minut przed zaśnięciem*), which is analyzed as a dream subjected to condensing and read according to Freud's classic *The Interpretation of Dreams*. From one point of view this is a story about the fear of falling from the path of heteronormative destiny; from the other, it is the story of a desire to become a Great Polish Writer. Yet the conclusion presents a structural fissure in this dream: one cannot become a Polish national writer by presenting queer subject-matter. National discourse is based on an idealized model of male identity.

Part three of the final chapter shows that the real point of reference, the master and powerful poet (Harold Bloom) is a writer who transcended the semi-periphery of the Polish condition and was deemed a classic of hegemonic literature. For Gombrowicz the point of reference from the time of his artistic maturing was Joseph Conrad. This context explains the paradoxical way in which Gombrowicz uses maritime themes and the attitude to hegemonic masculinity. The author of this paper interprets Gombrowicz's debut story as one which needs to be read not as a hidden homoerotic text but, on the contrary, as a tale of the fear of being different in the context of a harsh hierarchy that disciplined along masculine lines on a men-only vessel. Ultimately, the story presents what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called "male homosexual panic" and the necessity of staying in the closet.

The final chapter – *Instead of a closing: the periperformative circumstances of "immaturity"* – presents an analysis of the reception of *Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity* before 1939. Of particular significance is the dissonance between the literal content of the review and sketches (presented by Jerzy Jarzębski as generally positive), and the trace in Gombrowicz's memory that presents things as "slandering", using the metaphor of a public slap in the face. The key to this lies in the word "immaturity" in the title, which when read through the Freudian connotations of the time, formed the basis for euphemistic performatives suggesting the Gombrowicz's homosexuality (as in Ignacy Fik's renowned 1935 sketch *Literature of illness maniacs*). The author also presents the way Gombrowicz sought to create periperformative frameworks (Sedgwick's term) in order to effect something of a demoralizing the offensive connotations of the word "immaturity".

In this way *Memoirs from a Time of Immaturity* was presented as the Polish interwar period's most important text on queer subject-matter, and at the same time as an example of what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari called *minor literature* when referring to F. Kafka.