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Commentaries on "Ślub" (The Marriage)

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Michał Głowiński

Commentaries on *Ślub* (*The Marriage*)

Andrzej Falkiewicz¹ has pointed out that there is now a fair number of exegetes of Gombrowicz's work. As a matter of fact they form quite a large group. Gone are the days when one could rejoice in writing solo. More and more often it is necessary to take into account the fact that one is repeating the opinions pronounced earlier—and perhaps better—by a colleague. Both original and repeated opinions ("it is by repeating—says the Master in *Ferdynand*—that all mythology is best formed") constitute the body of views and ideas on Gombrowicz which for a long time to come will shape popular knowledge of his works.

Commentary No. 1: On Shakespearianism, History and Tradition

At first glance the world of Gombrowicz's plays is a conventional world, peopled with characters unknown to his narrative works: kings and queens, princes and counts, ladies-in-waiting and courtiers, chancellors and chamberlains. We are in high society even when it is an innkeeper, a former country gentleman who turns into a king, and the metamorphosis takes place right before our eyes. What a contrast with Gombrowicz's novels, whose characters also find themselves in socially unstable situations, but never

¹ A. Falkiewicz, „Niczym tekst wpisany w tekst” (Like a Text Within a Text), *Teksty*, 1974, No. 5, p. 15.

attain the splendours of sovereignty. This is a clear sign that the writer is referring here to traditions different from those recognizable in his narrative works, namely to the greatest dramatic tradition—to Shakespeare, and thus—indirectly—to the great romantic and post-romantic drama. His relation to a more recent tradition—to the plays of S. I. Witkiewicz—is another matter² and I shall not dwell upon this subject here: Witkiewicz's theatre certainly made a certain type of dramatic construction possible, but it is not present in Gombrowicz's works, at least not in the sense of serving as a counterpoint which would enable the playwright to create a different world of his own; it is not an object of references and allusions. The influence of Witkiewicz, or modern grotesque theatre in general, must be noticed by a literary historian who aims at indicating Gombrowicz's points of departure, while the influence of Shakespeare must be seen by anybody who wants to understand these dramas. This is not a question of the genesis, the recognition of which may be quite irrelevant in the course of perception, but a question of the structure. Shakespearianism in Gombrowicz cannot be overlooked, just as it cannot be overlooked in Witkiewicz's plays, or at least in some of them; yet the problem of the extent to which—if at all—Witkiewicz's Shakespearianism affected the author of *The Marriage*, though naturally essential to literary historians, is rather insignificant to the audience.

The world of high society, that titled world, is in itself a literary allusion, or even to a certain extent—a quotation. At one point Henry has to become a prince in order to achieve his ends, and it is for a similar purpose that the Father becomes King. The Drunkard has to turn into an ambassador at least for a while, so that he might fulfil his role. The world of *The Marriage* is a world of metamorphoses, suspended somewhere between a military camp in France and the Polish countryside, with its dubious quality of mingling an inn with a manor, yet at the same time it is an imitation of the Shakespearian world. We shall refrain

² Also—as has been pointed out by Wiesław Juszczak—his relation to the play *Hamlet II* by Roman Jaworski, of which some extracts have been published. See W. Juszczak, *Wojtkiewicz i nowa sztuka (Wojtkiewicz and the New Art)*, Warszawa 1965, pp. 162–164.

from a detailed analysis of all the elements which combine to this imitation, even though there would be enough material for a separate essay (for instance the military camp in France may be reminiscent of the battlefields in Shakespeare's historical chronicles). We are concerned with the general mechanism which steers the process of imitation, as this is of fundamental importance for *The Marriage*.

The play situates itself in the tradition of great historical chronicles, the one of perhaps the most vital import in perception of Shakespeare's works, and reflected also in Polish literature. The plot is built up as a series of scenes which succeed one another in chronological order, and the historical time and place are precisely indicated. Is it then a piece of drama depicting recent history? Certainly not. When Gombrowicz makes use of any tradition, he at the same time rejects it; this duality is expressive of his dialectic. *The Marriage* is ahistorical, even when historical realities come to the fore. And if it is so, it is not because the author was unable to cope with history, for he had definite views on it, as explicitly declared in the essay *O Dantem (On Dante)*:

The past is a panopticum made up of remnants '[...]' that is what it really is [...]. So it is curious that we should still want it complete, alive, filled with people, concrete... and that we are so obstinate in this need³.

How can historical dramas be written by someone who thinks that "the past is after all something which does not exist,"⁴ that it consists of trifling documents, such as the one which says of the purchase of two yards of fustian and some ginger by one of the author's great-grandmothers on the day Michał Wiśniowiecki was elected the king? In such plays history cannot be a series of chance happenings, it cannot be chaotic, it cannot consist of remnants. History has to make sense, and Gombrowicz does not see the sense. He merely uses historical facts and the form of historical drama as a pretext for dealing with what he considers to be substantial and not bound by the whims of historical

³ W. Gombrowicz, *Sur Dante*, L'Herne 1968, p. 26.

⁴ *Ibidem* p. 22.

documentation: one would be tempted to say, with the eternal, if the word were adequate to Gombrowicz's world—as it is not. The essential question is not how people make history and how history fashions them, but how they form themselves in the process of interaction.⁵ History might only serve to exemplify this, but the writer is not interested in particular historical determinations—the problem is of a more general character. And yet: the world of *The Marriage* is the world of Shakespearian chronicles; it is constituted by cruelty and treason, coups d'état and intrigues, in short—by the struggle for power. For all this, however, it does not really lend itself to any contemporary, topical political interpretation,⁶ or at least not as easily as Shakespeare. *Hamlet* was possible after the 20th Party Congress (as Jan Kott pointed out), but it is doubtful whether an appropriate interpretation of *The Marriage* would be possible after, let's say, the 44th Congress. Still, the fact that the characters, placed in the panopticum of history create one another and one another's roles is not insignificant, if only because it brings this process into focus: the country squire turned into an innkeeper, the innkeeper—into a king, the king—into a slave, etc. History is only a pretext, but it speeds up the metamorphosis of roles, and above all, it provides a general structural framework.

The Shakespearianism of *The Marriage* is not, however, confined to this aspect only. The main hero is a Shakespearian character, he is a Hamlet thrown into a world that is in principle non-Shakespearian, but still somehow similar to it. Henry not only takes part in a series of events, he not only brings them about, but also reflects upon his situation, and never ceases to ask himself fundamental questions about it. Moreover, he does this irrespectively of the phase of his metamorphosis: as a soldier in France, as successor to the throne, and finally as a tyrannical king. We are dealing here with a specific dissociation of personality: there is no longer any unity of reflection upon one's situation and par-

⁵ See the study by Z. Łapiński, „Ślub w kościele ludzkim” (The Marriage in the Human Church), *Twórczość*, 1966, No. 9.

⁶ An attempt has been made by L. Goldmann, „Le Théâtre de Gombrowicz,” [in:] *Structures mentales et création culturelle*, Paris 1970.

ticipation in the events (that unity which is unquestionably to be found in Shakespeare), and the commentary may no longer be adequate to the action.⁷ At the risk of a certain oversimplification, we can say that this dissociation has a formal equivalent: the division into monologues and dialogues, the latter being the sphere of action, the former—of inner thoughts and questions, and of explanations. Generally, the dialogues create the domain of outer reality, the monologues—of inner life. One thing is certain: Henry's monologues belong to the dramatic game, although—and we shall expand on this—they may be interpreted as a breakdown in the scenic illusion.

Contrary to appearances, the monologues do not introduce any psychology. Gombrowicz is as consistently apsychological as he is ahistorical. Their function is quite different. Monologues—if we put aside monodramas, which are a different matter—hardly ever appear in contemporary theatre, and when they do, they need a very special justification. And indeed, it is for special reasons that they appear in *The Marriage*: they are a literary allusion to that traditional model of drama of which monologues were an integral part, to most people still remaining the specific feature of drama (you need not have read *Hamlet* to know that "to be or not to be, that is the question"). In short: they serve as an evocation of the Shakespearian model, so their justification is of an intertextual character.⁸

Yet the monologues are only one instance of what we might call intertextuality. This quality is also manifest in parody, that peculiar Gombrowicz's kind of parody, which I have elsewhere described as constructive parody.⁹ Parody of Shakespeare is a means of constructing a complete drama, where everything that once belonged

⁷ Note the relationship between Henry and Johnny. Up to a certain point, Johnny is Henry's *alter ego*. They form a pair typical of Gombrowicz's works, just like Witold and Frederick in *Pornografia* (*Pornography*). We can also say that Johnny is to Henry what Horatio was to Hamlet. On this matter see M. Janion, „Sobowtóry i dwoistości Gombrowicza” (The Second Self and Duality in the Work of Gombrowicz), *Dialog*, 1975, No. 2.

⁸ See the intertext theory formulated by M. Arrivé, *Les Langues de Jarry. Essai de sémiotique littéraire*. Paris 1972.

⁹ See my essay "Constructive Parody," *Literary Studies in Poland*, vol. VII, 1981.

to that genre can be present. It is a means and not an end, for the intention is not to imitate an out-of-date model, but to adapt it to what the author considers important. This end is achieved by introducing such archaic devices as asides or soliloquies, as well as the monologous discourse and generalizations, which had been abandoned since the time when the *pièce à thèse* lost its attraction. By reviving these techniques Gombrowicz is able to carry out his themes on two planes: that of events and that of discourse.

Commentary No. 2: On Tradition-parody, Metatext and Discourse

In our times the adoption of such a conception of drama necessitates some additional premises, of which a key one is tradition. Tradition, or parody; for in Gombrowicz's case these notions are almost synonymous: tradition can exist only in parody, no other modes of existence are possible for it. In order to use certain techniques ("tricks"), at the same time you have to negate them. At the same time, for in Gombrowicz the process is homogeneous. The shaping of tradition-parody allows him to introduce discourse which often includes what we know to be the verbalization not only of the problems of the writer's immediate concern, but simply of his own beliefs as expressed in his non-fictional writing, above all in the *Dziennik (Journal)*. In this respect his works are all amazingly uniform, for he does not observe the principle that no generalization or philosophical reflection is to be admitted into a work of fiction. On the one hand discursive language must be a part of the character's language, and consequently—at least to a certain extent—it has to reflect his general outlook. On the other hand, however, it comes close to what we might call "the author's language," that language of his non-fictional prose, where it does not have to comply with the mentality and beliefs of the hero. In *The Marriage* the characters do not speak in accordance with what their status or a given situation would require—this principle of realistic drama is not respected. Gombrowicz prefers to provide his characters with certain potentialities

which form a kind of framework for their verbal expression, and within this framework various changes can take place—as those resulting from the metamorphosis of roles. The Drunkard-as-the Drunkard's language obviously differs from that of the Drunkard-as-the Ambassador. This is not, however, an absolute rule, and every utterance may contain elements which we would be inclined to consider a dramatic equivalent of the author's language. After all, it is the Drunkard who—still in his condition as the Drunkard—articulates the main point of the play:

Now I shall tell you something and cleverly, too
 About that religion whose priests we both are. Between ourselves
 And through ourselves is our God born
 And not to heaven, but to earth does our church belong
 We create God and we alone, whence does arise
 That dark and terrestrial, ignorant and bestial
 Intimate and inferior, humanly human mass
 Whose priest I am!

(p. 84)¹⁰

In this short monologue the Drunkard appears as an ideologist expressing his convictions in a conceptualized form, though in other episodes the main instruments of his arguments are "finnger" and "tough".¹¹ Yet the part of the chief ideologist in the play was given not to him, but to the protagonist; it is Henry—that Hamlet suspended between dream and reality, between the battlefield and the inn transformed into a king's court—who pronounces the essential questions of the drama. His numerous monologues serve to articulate the problems and meanings involved both in his unusual situation and in what is generally happening on the stage. These monologues, as it has been already pointed out, are possible thanks to the Shakespearian model, according to the principle of tradition-parody. And again, we can find in them such phrasings of ideas as could have been as well put into the *Journal*:

¹⁰ Quotations from *The Marriage* are from: W. Gombrowicz, *The Marriage*, transl. from the Polish by L. Iribarne, New York 1969.

¹¹ See the interpretation of this monologue in Janion, *op. cit.*, p. 30. It seems exaggerated to say that the Drunkard expresses best the philosophy of the play. The same ideas are expressed by other characters as well.

Being mutually united, we are forever arranging
ourselves into new forms
And these forms well up from below. What a peculiar haze!
An inexplicable melody! A delirious dance!
An ambiguous march!
And an earthly human church
Whose priest I am!

(p. 157)

For our purposes it is quite irrelevant at the moment that the above extract from Henry's soliloquy is almost an exact replica of the Drunkard's monologue, though it is perhaps worth mentioning that in *The Marriage*—unlike in his other works—Gombrowicz has applied a strategy of profusion, particularly in monologues where reiterations play an important role (the dialogues, as part of the action, are free from repetitions). What is relevant is the fact that Henry's monologues develop in questions and exclamations, and consequently the many ideas which are present in them do not take the form of apodictic statements, but just seem to come naturally as the character is speaking. This is also justified by the Shakespearian tradition. Henry's great soliloquy from Act III is almost exclusively a series of interrogative or exclamative sentences, and its diapason is wide: from statements of fact to invectives ("Oh, you demagogues! [...] Whose mouths are full of morality and self-righteousness!"). Any monologue is a parody, even when it expresses most vital ideas, simply because it is seen as a relic of the past, as belonging to tradition. However, the monologue has also other functions. Within the play, it is a kind of metatext. When viewed from the perspective of traditional dramatic techniques, Gombrowicz's soliloquy might be considered as a means of breaking the stage illusion, as with remarks such as:

And now, to bring
This monologue to a close

(p. 136)

Monologues break up the action, or the flow of events at the inn turned into a royal court, in order to introduce reflection on the mode of existence of that strange world which is neither dream nor reality. We shall come back to this matter. Now let us just point out that the difference between the text and the metatext has

been translated into spatial relations, it has become the principle which organizes the space on the stage and divides it into two separate areas. The rear of the stage has been reserved for the action, which in this case is the incessant metamorphosis of social roles, while the forestage is the domain of metatextual monologues, it is the domain of Henry, who tries to understand his situation and to get his bearings as to his relationships with this in-royal-court world, where he is and yet is not. The remarkable feature of *The Marriage*, however, is the fact that the two kinds of text and the two areas play equal parts in the drama, and that the relation between them constitutes in itself one of the themes of the play. Questions concerning the principles of the very existence of the drama have become its integral and by no means insignificant part. In this sense Falkiewicz was quite right when he wrote: "*The Marriage* is a play about the *impossibility* of writing a play,"¹² though from a different standpoint this statement may seem somewhat farfetched. Paradoxically, in order to introduce this idea into a drama, the writer had to use its time-honoured form.

The adoption of such a principle results in a large number of metalinguistic statements made by all the characters, but particularly by Henry. An interesting example of this is the opening sentence—"The curtain has risen." It is certainly ambiguous: it may be just a metaphor indicating that something has started, but it may also be the first metatextual reflection suggesting that what we have before us is theatre within theatre. Thus at the very beginning the drama reveals to us its rules. These are made manifest over and over again in frequent remarks concerning language:

And consequently all of this is just a lie! Nobody says
 What he wants to say, only what's considered proper. Words
 Join together behind our backs like traitors
 And it is not we who say words, but words which say us
 And betray our thoughts, which in turn betray
 Our treasonous feelings... Oh treason!
 Incessant treason!

(p. 91)

¹² A. Falkiewicz, „Dramat powszechnej niemożności” (The Drama of Universal Inability), [in:] *Mit Orestesa*. Poznań 1967, p. 82.

To a certain extent it can even be thought of in scientific terms. Words evoke certain psychic states in us... They create worlds of reality between us... If you said something similar to that... something strange... then I could say something even stranger and then, by mutually assisting one another, we could go on and on. So you see—it's not quite as difficult or as absurd as it seemed.
(p. 132)

Comments on language are also comments on the behaviour of the characters, for language not only plays an active role in the process of people fashioning one another, but it is—perhaps—the main factor behind it. In the play, words call to life new social roles and new situations, so they are by no means the opposite of “action”. Viewed in this context, *The Marriage* is a kind of the theoretical statement on language. In his works, Gombrowicz creates his own linguistics—or, to be more precise, sociolinguistics, conceptualized, but at the same time determining the actions of the characters and expressed through them. Language itself is here a form of action, perhaps even the primary one. In this sense the play continuously reveals its linguistic nature and thereby—its own rules.

Commentary No. 3: On Artificiality

The fundamental rule is artificiality. Gombrowicz himself emphasized this in his preface to the book edition of the play:

By studying the text of a normal play, an actor is usually able to infer from the contents how a given line should be delivered. In this play, however, the problem is more complicated: for one thing the dialogue is more artificial, and quite frequently the most pedestrian words are charged with artificiality (pp. 17–18).

The principle of artificiality is also realized and reflected upon by the characters; it therefore forms a part of the central theme of the play:

The point is if I told you in an ordinary manner
It would not be convincing. Everything depends
On how we speak. That is why
I have to tell you this in a manner which is perhaps a trifle

Artificial.

And I must ask you on your part not to respond to me in a normal manner.

but to conduct yourself exactly as I tell you. No one will be coming in here. We'll lock the door.

(p. 127)

Who would have ever believed it? It's nothing but a dream. The whole thing is even extremely artificial. And yet he's lying there

And she is standing over there

(p. 155)

Artificiality appears then both as a programme and as a theme. But what does the term mean? It can be interpreted in various ways.¹³ The simplest explanation would be this: there is a vast sphere of usages of language that we consider normal, ordinary, natural, that do not arouse any doubt and do not surprise us, where language is transparent, pointing straight to the meaning of a text. There have been authors who aimed at reproducing such rules of language usage in literature, and their works were supposed to be as natural and normal as colloquial language. Hence the idea of the word which is adequate to the object and, above all, to the situation in which it is pronounced. Presumably Gombrowicz would have cherished the idea of this mimetic aesthetics turned *à rebours*; words, sentences and expressions in conflict with objects and situations. Even then the point of reference and chief criterion would still be the colloquial usage of language, its most common and socially accepted forms, in other words, the idea of a natural and simple language. Yet Gombrowicz's idea of artificiality cannot be reduced to this only, since it is more than merely a form of contrariness. His conception is much more profound and serious: language itself, language as a whole, in all its forms of expression, is the domain of artificiality. When speaking—no matter how we speak or what we might say—we are always being artificial. The belief that certain uses of language are natural or simple is only a proof of false consciousness. Usages that depart from the norm, from what is common (not in the depreciative sense of the word) are by no means to be treated as abusages or acts of sheer contrariness. They simply reveal the very nature of speech. Since language is essentially artificial, since it has never known the state of innocence and disinterestedness, its artificiality

¹³ See my remarks on Gombrowicz's artificiality in "Constructive Parody".

has to be continually amplified and demonstrated, for only then can we hope not to fall victim to it, and be rid of a naïve faith. And since for Gombrowicz the question is not only a theoretical one, but in the first place of practical nature, his conception is reflected in the actual choice of language. In *The Marriage* we have on the one hand verse, on the other—dialect (or, to be more precise, pseudo-verse and pseudo-dialect). The former is meant to elevate the language, the latter to lower and trivialize it. The stylistics of the play is determined by those two extremes. Verse is used for parody, and on the whole it is of a uniform character, though now and then we come across a piece of rhymed verse, as if taken from a cheap opera libretto:

Look, my good fellow, look how they dance!
Lulled by the chorus into a wondrous trance
Oh, the sweet perfume that dreams engender
Oh, 'tis a night of golden-haired splendor...

(p. 137)

But such delightful doggerels are rare. The prevailing type of verse in *The Marriage* is the blank, irregular verse, with characteristic enjambment—that is, a verse which is to be reminiscent of the versification of the great dramatic tradition: it is not melodious and is meant to be delivered on the stage. For all its smoothness Gombrowicz's verse is expressive and suggestive of certain choices as regards words, phrases and metaphors—but this important question will not be discussed here, for it goes beyond the scope of this essay. It is intended to be a parody of the Shakespearian verse, though not of its original form, but of that which it has traditionally assumed in Polish culture. Verse, the intensified form of linguistic artificiality, appears mostly in the monologues (can a contemporary Hamlet speak in prose?). It would be difficult, however, to find an absolute rule which would explain its distribution in the play. It seems always potentially present.

The same may be said about dialect, although it cannot be found in Henry's monologues; it occurs mainly in the dialogues. In any case, just like verse, dialect is not a constant attribute to mark the speech of some characters only, it is merely one of the linguistic elements at their disposal (the Father usually

speaks in dialect, but in his monologue at the end of Act II his language is of a irreproachably literary kind). The switching over from dialect to the speech that is in harmony with the norms of literary language is associated with the fluency of changes in social roles, the main phenomenon in *The Marriage*.

At this point we should consider whether linguistic artificiality in *The Marriage* is at all justified. The answer appears to be no, if we accept the rules of traditional drama (or some of its forms) and assume that each character must speak accordingly to his social status and the situation he happens to be in. The adoption of such a principle would put an end to the problem. Yet it does not apply to *The Marriage*. At the very most we can say that the deliberate artificiality of the language is related to the specific artificiality of the situation in which the heroes find themselves, that it somehow corresponds to it. There is a homology of speech and dramatic situation, the latter being in itself also unnatural, obscure and changeable. It should be emphasized that it is in fact the question of correspondence, and not of direct justification. The world of the play is meant to be artificial and this quality must be manifest both in the language of the characters and in their situation; these are treated as if on the same plane. Now we are ready to pose the following question: is this artificiality, not confined to the language only, but viewed as the main feature of the dramatic construction as a whole, in any way motivated?

Commentary No. 4: On Motivation

It seems that what is most revolutionary and at the same time unusual about *The Marriage* is the fact that the author decided to abolish all motivation. This applies to both the macrostructure and the microstructure of the play. The events simply take place according to certain prefixed rules, or—it might be said—according to a certain immanent logic. Their justification is irrelevant; indeed what really matters is the very fact that the justification has been eliminated, removed. This is contrary to the expectations of the spectator, who is accustomed to being able to discern a set of rules underlying the course of events in a play,

rules which introduce some kind of order and which correspond with his vision of the world and its mechanisms. Justification implies reducing the unknown to the known, the particular to the general, the extraordinary to the ordinary. Viewed in this way motivation would be a kind of pact with social consciousness, a concession to the common ideas of the audience, and perhaps even to a certain extent a manifestation of the author's conformist attitude. Gombrowicz does not make such concessions, he does not seek a compromise. What was supposed to play the role of justification, in fact performed this function—as we shall see—only seemingly.

In *The Marriage* the most important factor creating that apparent motivation is the dream. The fact that Gombrowicz availed himself of this literary device could be interpreted as one more reference to tradition. Dreams have been used in literature from time immemorial, particularly to justify the presence of what might be otherwise considered strange or contrary to common sense. The dream was on the one hand to put more possibilities at the author's disposal, and on the other to moderate the reaction of the audience by making the unexpected the expected (in a dream you can expect anything to happen). At first glance, the dream in *The Marriage* has the same functions. However, this impression is delusive, misleading.

One proof of this is the fact that the dream is the subject of constant questioning in the play, that it is in itself problematic. Analyzing his situation, the hero reflects:

Henry (to Johnny):

This is nothing but a dream, it's only a dream...

a little naïve maybe, but what do I care

Johnny:

That's right! What do you care whether or not it's

a dream... as long as it gives you pleasure.

(p. 60)

But perhaps

This is not a dream, perhaps I really have gone crazy

Perhaps I'm not here at all, but in reality I'm lying

in some hospital, and while feverishly thrashing about

I only imagine that I am here... Who knows what might

have happened to me?

Perhaps my brain has been damaged by a bullet?

Or by an explosion?

Perhaps I've been taken captive and tortured or perhaps

I fell on something, or something fell on me

Perhaps I became bored... and was no longer able...

(p. 78)

Anyone watching the play should ponder on the question along with the hero rather than assume that what he sees is a dreaming character and the world that has been revealed to him in the dream. The dream and the world both belong to the same dramatic reality, they appear side by side, but their relationship is never one of cause and effect. The most that can be said is that this relationship constitutes a problem in the play and that it is visible in the division of space: the supposed dream world occupies the back of the stage, while the dream, or more precisely, the hero's reflections on the dream, belongs to the foreground. By solving the matter in this way, Gombrowicz has made the dream one of the subjects of the play instead of just a motivation for something else. Questions concerning motivation—i.e. the dream—are part of the play, just like the metamorphoses of roles.

There are also some other, minor factors which appear to have a justifying function; one of them is the historical setting of the play, in a military camp in France. It has been mentioned before that it plays the role of a literary allusion. It is a pretext rather than a motivating agent in the strict sense, a pretext which allows the play to be divided into two planes. Its "historical content" is in fact unimportant.

The cancelling of motivation involves the general organization of the presented world according to principles which are different from those the audience might be used to. This world is all the time in the very act of its coming into being, and there is a perpetual genesis; it is not the rules which are important, but the process itself. *The Marriage* reveals a new ontology of the presented world, one that does not require any outside justification, and which is self-sufficient; it is a kind of world without cause (inquiry into the causes can only be one of the dramatic elements), a world of games and pure phenomena—a world without motivation.

Is it really possible? Once more we have to return to the main subject of this study. The motivating factors, if they may be

called that at all, have been moved to quite a different sphere; their role has been taken over by the ever-present intertextual references. Everything that falls within tradition-parody is justified, for tradition is the main point of reference, as opposed to common ideas and widely held views. Because of the specific dialectics of tradition-parody, that *sui generis* motivation is both an affirmation and a negation; it appeals to the cultural consciousness of the audience and at the same time questions it. This is one of the discoveries of *The Marriage*.

Conclusion

This then is my small contribution to the interpretative works on this magnificent play. "Great literature—says a poet—is simply language packed with meaning to the highest possible degree."¹⁴ and *The Marriage* certainly satisfies this condition. I am only too well aware that I have revealed a small portion of its riches.

March 1975

Transl. by *Agnieszka Kukulka* and *Maria-Bożenna Fedewicz*

¹⁴ E. Pound. *ABC of Reading*, New York 1960, p. 28.