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## A DEMONIC CHRYSALIS: THE CONCEPT OF BOURGEOISIE IN POLAND\*

### Abstract

This paper investigates the history of the concept of bourgeoisie in Poland, emphasising troubles with its assimilation into the Polish language, and its special entanglement with the socialist and modernist discourse. The concept, it is argued, was borrowed in the late nineteenth century from France, where it concerned the urban upper-middle class; it arrived in Poland as part of the socialist discourse of the time, which gave it strong negative and derogatory connotations. The ambiguity that arose was further complicated by a number of other factors as well. First, the understanding of the term 'bourgeoisie' within the leftist discourse was itself ambivalent, combining the strictly theoretical definition encompassing the class of capitalist owners of the means of production, and the practical and emotional label attached to the urban classes. Second, also for the reasons indicated above, the concept of bourgeoisie was not able to replace the older Polish concepts regarding the urban population [*mieszczanie*], and the differences between them remained vague, and occasionally disputable. Third, not only did the term 'bourgeoisie' never fully emancipate itself from the domination of the indigenous concepts, but it also suffered from its translation into Polish, where it was regularly omitted when regarding Western European realities, but where it was a permanent fixture in the case of Russian and Soviet literature. Finally, the paper searches for the reasons behind the relative elimination of the concept from the Polish discourse, or at least large segments thereof, in the last half-century.

**Keywords:** bourgeoisie, *mieszczanie*, philistinism, patriciate, plutocracy, middle class, Marxism, avant-garde

### I INTRODUCTION

The concept of bourgeoisie (Polish: *burżuazja*) has been functioning with different degrees of intensity and in different registers of the

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Polish language since at least the 1880s, although it has niched over the last several decades. It is unique in its ambiguousness and, primarily, its linkage with the historical dynamic of its appearance in various types of discourse. One reason for this specificity is probably identifiable in the very process of acquisition of this originally French concept by the Polish language – an acquisition that was partly mediated and, thereby, somehow appropriated by the Marxist left ideology. This, as I will try to demonstrate, is reflected in the translation habits of the time.

The concept's halfway and shallow rootedness in the Polish language might have also been caused by the lack of a standard Polish equivalent of the personal noun *bourgeois*, which appears rarely, and only in its original French spelling. Its uses seem marginal if compared to the vulgarised and derogatory form *burżuj* (fem. *burżujka*) – relatively popular in all sorts of discourse (except the academic one). This rather unique configuration, given the standards of Polish, situates the term 'bourgeoisie' halfway between the 'full' sets of morphologically and semantically akin concepts from the social world – including the nobility, landed gentry, intelligentsia, peasantry, *mieszczanństwo* (rendered in English variously as bourgeoisie, burghers, or townspeople/townfolk), and so on, with their respective personal complements and concepts without personal forms (middle class, for example). Its status might be compared to those concepts which, having no abstract forms, enable one to refer to a social group only using the plural of the noun denoting its member (e.g., gentleman, pariah, businessman). This incompleteness or, perhaps, hybrid status is also visible in the use of double standards depending on the national context. Hence, *burżuazja* quite often functions as a partly-Polonised foreign concept that refers to non-Polish realities – such as *burszostwo* ('student fraternity' [from the German *Burschenschaft*]), *mandaryni* (mandarins), *apasze* (the 'Apaches' – members of a criminal demimonde), or *gryzетки* (Fr. *grisettes*). The situation seems parallel in Russian, with 'burzhui' being much more popular than 'bourgeois,' whose alien nature is not, however, emphasised by a foreign spelling because of the Cyrillic alphabet.<sup>1</sup>

Except for those authors who referred to Marxist categories and considered the bourgeoisie as an indispensable element of the social

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<sup>1</sup> I should take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Prof. Sergey Sai of the Linguistic Department of the St Petersburg branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences for confirming this intuition.

structure in all the countries affected by the development of capitalist social relations, the concept is typically associated with France and countries culturally akin to France, like Italy and Spain, where the bourgeoisie is supposed to form an obvious ingredient of the social landscape, with its definition intuitively discernible. Thus, what is perceived as a bourgeois way of life in the French context is not necessarily considered as such in the Polish one – because it is the context that makes a bourgeois. For example, a contemporary historian qualified a Polish insurgent from the 1830–1 uprising who had owned a small shop as a *mieszczanin* (burgher/townsmen), and redefined his status as a bourgeois when he settled down in France and opened a shop again.<sup>2</sup> Some aspects of this approach also function in the German- and English-speaking countries, as will be demonstrated below.

This rule refers mostly to the scholarly literature and the socio-political journalism and essays, where the concept of bourgeoisie still appears today, although much less frequently than it did in the first half of the twentieth century. In belles-lettres it is not as frequent: another rule is prevalent there, quite strictly related to yet another aspect of the history of the concept. In general, Polish fiction usually renders the Western (again, mainly French) notion of *bourgeois* as *mieszczanin* or, more colloquially, *mieszczuch* ('townie' in a rough rendering), while translations from Russian usually preserve the 'folksy'-sounding *burżuj*. Thus, paradoxically, the Polish reader typically has to do with the bourgeoisie in its Russian rather than its French version. Moreover, the vast majority of the *burżuj*s a Polish reader may encounter are to be found in the post-Revolutionary Soviet literature, which deemed the bourgeoisie to be a 'liquidated' class that essentially belonged to the past in the Soviet realities, and yet remained inimical to the revolution. As a result, Polish history textbooks tell us that France is the native land of the bourgeoisie whose full bloom took place in the nineteenth century; while Polish translations of Balzac, Stendhal, or Flaubert do not tell us of a single *bourgeois*. They do appear, as *burżuj*s, only in Polish modernist authors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, multiplying in the interwar period – particularly in translations of

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<sup>2</sup> "... in contrast to the later Polish economic emigrations, predominantly proletarian as they were, the post-November [Insurrection] emigration was composed predominantly of intelligentsia and petit bourgeoisie, as regards its social and vocational structure formed when already in exile, at least in France", Sławomir Kalemka, *Wielka Emigracja* (Toruń, 2003), 247.

Soviet authors (primarily in the phantom version, as ‘former *burżujs*’), transformed into *zombies* used as a repellent by literature, propaganda, and handbooks in the first years of post-war communist Poland, only to virtually disappear. In the twenty-first century they can basically be found in the scholarly discourse, and on websites dealing with obscure conspiracy theories. What is more, all the efforts made in the Polish intellectual tradition to define what the *burżuazja* was, is, and ought to be, date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the concept was still fresh to the local usage. Later on, as is the case with many concepts and ideas, Polish authors referring to the term seemed to assume that the reader knew very well what was being referred to. Yet, a more penetrating reading makes one suspect that the authors themselves were not always well aware of the term’s meaning.

## II DEFINITIONS AND THEIR LIMITS

Let us return for a moment to the concept’s semantic field. Two basic, and not mutually exclusive, meanings tend to be ascribed to the term ‘bourgeoisie’. First, the bourgeoisie is understood as a class of affluent people in modern post-estate society, though usually except for landed gentry and intelligentsia. In this sense, the bourgeoisie is a successor of urban patriciate – or a broader and less exclusive equivalent of plutocracy – encompassing the upper stratum of people making their living in trade, industry, certain liberal professions, and dividends from equities and realty. There is no clear criterion in place that would separate the bourgeoisie from the less affluent class, which is often referred to as the petit or petty bourgeoisie [Polish: *drobnomieszczaństwo*]. In the Polish society of the latter half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, those not well-off enough to earn the name of ‘bourgeoisie’ as such were referred to as petty bourgeois<sup>3</sup> or, seemingly much less frequently, petty bourgeoisie [*drobna burżuazja*].

As we shall see, *burżuazja* tends to be identified with the wealthy townspeople, and so considered to be a more modern equivalent of

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, Marian Leczyk, *Oblicze społeczno-gospodarcze Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa, 1988), discerns among the ‘moneyed classes’ the great landowners, bourgeoisie, and petite bourgeoisie (based on a general census of 1921).

*mieszczanństwo*. However, the latter term was domesticated in the Polish language for good, and therefore the two concepts are used alternately, if not complementarily. In scholarly and journalistic or publicist texts, *burżuazja* and *mieszczanństwo* are at times mentioned in one breath (occasionally together with patricians and philistines – the latter in literary-historical discourse). Translations and national contexts make this picture even more complicated: the Western bourgeois is typically considered as *mieszczanin* in the Polish context and vice-versa, as is the case with Maria Ossowska's classical study *Moralność mieszczańska*, published in English as *Bourgeois Morality*.<sup>4</sup> Finally, numerous authors embed the disputable term in inverted commas, as if to emphasise the concept's ambiguous status.<sup>5</sup>

An alternative definition of bourgeoisie, which was sanctioned by the official political and academic doctrine in the early years of post-war communist Poland, and which had originated in the early French socialist tradition, described it as “the capitalist society's governing class, encompassing the owners of basic production tools and resources, and drawing profits from contracted labour of workers”,<sup>6</sup> or simply as ‘the capitalist class’.<sup>7</sup> It may seem that such a dogmatic decreeing of the strictly Marxist understanding of the term contributed to the elimination of the term ‘bourgeoisie’ from the colloquial Polish of the time, where its career had developed unrestrainedly in the preceding century. In any case, this definition, inspired by *The Communist Manifesto*, became firmly established in the academic discourse. Władysław Kopaliński, the most distinguished Polish post-war lexicographer, repeats it, word by word, in his 1996 dictionary.<sup>8</sup>

As far as historical realities are concerned, both definitions are mostly complementary: in pre-Second World War Poland – a capitalist and owner of production tools who hired and contracted workers typically lived a bourgeois life. Thus, post-war Polish historiographers of the bourgeoisie (Ireneusz Ihnatowicz, Ryszard Kołodziejczyk,

<sup>4</sup> See Maria Ossowska, *Moralność mieszczańska* (Warszawa, 1985), esp. 15–19; English version: *ead.*, *Bourgeois Morality* (London, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Florian Znaniecki, ‘Studia nad antagonizmem do obcych’, in *id.*, *Współczesne narody*, with an introduction by Jerzy Szacki (Warszawa, 1990), 356.

<sup>6</sup> *Słownik języka polskiego*, ed. by Witold Doroszewski, i (Warszawa, 1958) (hereinafter: Doroszewski), 741–2.

<sup>7</sup> *Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN*, i (Warszawa, 1963), 242.

<sup>8</sup> Władysław Kopaliński, *Podręczny słownik wyrazów obcych* (Warszawa, 1996), 125.

Sławomir Pytlas)<sup>9</sup> used the two definitions interchangeably. They paid their tribute to the Marxist definition and phraseology, and established additional criteria to distinguish the bourgeois, such as the profession performed or a number of employees hired. Clearly, the definition provided by Marx and Engels had limited value for the Polish historians' actual research. Initially, it combined scientific formalism and some fascination with the modernity of 1848 AD, essentially being a description of the period's reality and a programme for the future. Had the Polish researchers treated Marx and Engels's concept seriously, they would not have narrowed their understanding of the bourgeoisie to members of certain professional groups, people with a specified income, or those employing a defined minimum number of employees. As a rule, the Polish historians' understanding of the bourgeoisie is closer to the ideas prevalent in France in the time of Marx, with all their ambiguity, rather than to the strict definition that Marx and Engels intended to impose.

### III FRENCH ORIGINS AND EUROPEAN CONTEXTS

Let us now reconsider the origins of the concept 'bourgeoisie' in France in the first half of the nineteenth century. According to Koselleck, the concept was sporadically in use in the years of the French Revolution, and then made a meteoric career during the Restoration and the July Monarchy. In Koselleck's opinion, the term was mainly used to differentiate between the moneyed classes and those on the low levels of the social ladder, particularly in the context of the debates concerning how financial positions would define electoral eligibility.<sup>10</sup> Yet the sense of political debates of the period tends at times to be

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<sup>9</sup> See, among others, Ireneusz Ihnatowicz, *Obyczaj wielkiej burżuazji warszawskiej w XIX wieku* (Warszawa, 1971); Ryszard Kołodziejczyk, *Burżuazja polska w XIX i XX wieku. Szkice historyczne* (Warszawa, 1979); Sławomir Pytlas, *Łódzka burżuazja przemysłowa w latach 1864–1914* (Łódź, 1994); Mariola Siennicka, *Rodzina burżuazji warszawskiej i jej obyczaj* (Warszawa, 1998); *Mieszczanństwo i mieszczańskość w literaturze polskiej drugiej połowy XIX wieku*, ed. by Ewa Ihnatowicz (Warszawa, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Dzieje pojęć politycznych. Studia z semantyki i pragmatyki języka społeczno-politycznego*, transl. into Polish Jarosław Merecki and Wojciech Kunicki (Warszawa, 2009), 465–85. Originally published as *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache* (Frankfurt a.M., 2006).

interpreted otherwise.<sup>11</sup> In any case, bourgeoisie never became a strictly political concept denoting the stratum eligible to vote; although perhaps being a bourgeois was deemed to legitimise the demands for political rights. As Victor Hugo put it, “attempts were made to turn the bourgeoisie into a class, whilst it is, simply, the satisfied part of the people”.<sup>12</sup>

Bourgeoisness, or bourgeoisdom, commonly tended to be associated with modernity and Frenchness; in other words, with the society’s development à *la française*. In Guizot’s view, it is “the most active element, and the decisive one in French civilisation – the one that determines its development and character”. The Larousse dictionary ostentatiously exposes this Frenchness in the subtitle of the historical section of the entry for ‘Bourgeoisie’:

The history of bourgeoisie is, so to say, the history of French society as such. ... The concept of bourgeoisie is only known to modern Europe, and France was the only European country to have experienced a comprehensive development of this institution ... the whole of France has become the Third Estate: it has become bourgeois.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the bourgeoisie became the third estate in the post-Revolution French world, a result of its assumption of real leadership and dismissing the gentry from the function. At the same time, bourgeoisness became France’s mandate for leadership or, in any case, its predominance in the modern world. France was believed to be Europe’s most modern country because it was governed by the bourgeoisie.

It was already in the 1830s that an interpretation hatched out (and was later on popularised by Marxists) whereby the bourgeoisie was a new ‘universal class’ of capital owners in a society that was basically composed of two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, “The splits appeared not along the lines of a social and estate pattern: the new burghers [*nowe mieszczaństwo*], bourgeoisie [*burżuazja*], liberal professions, against the nobility, aristocrats and bishops, but according to the ideological and political criteria: those of the enlightenment camp against those of the royal camp”, Andrzej Chwalba, *Historia powszechna. Wiek XIX* (Warszawa, 2008) [quoted after the National Corpus of the Polish Language (hereinafter: NKJP)].

<sup>12</sup> *Grand dictionnaire universel*, par Pierre Larousse (Paris, 1865), 1124–7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. Adeline Doumard, *Les bourgeois et la bourgeoisie en France depuis 1815* (Paris, 1987), 30–44.

“Where is it that bourgeoisie begins? It is where proletariat ends”, the authors of an 1839 political dictionary claimed.<sup>14</sup> The Larousse lexicon pointed to Proudhon as the father, or main propagator, of this argument (although other sources referred to Saint-Simon). According to Proudhon, the bourgeoisie did not really own the ‘means of production’: essentially, its members made their living from dividends and capital transactions, and were something like a modern aristocracy since they did not have to work other than managing the owned property and multiplying it through skilful investments. In parallel, we can find a view in Proudhon that was later repeated and elaborated on in *The Communist Manifesto*: the bourgeoisie is, namely, a thoroughly amoral class. Whereas in the *Manifesto* its immorality was, in a sense, a side effect of bourgeoisie’s expansiveness and vitality, Proudhon’s criticism focused on the moral aspects. In his opinion, the notion of absolute value is alien to the bourgeoisie; in its perception, value “is essentially arbitrary”, for it is determined by the transaction and the law of supply-and-demand. The only value the bourgeoisie strives for is profit as such and its members’ own comfort.<sup>15</sup> This is worth remembering since the idea of immanent immorality became one of the distinctive traits of the bourgeoisie also in the Polish discourse.

The French concept of bourgeoisie had connotations much broader than merely political: it was also – or, in fact, primarily – used in the context of daily mores, morals and customs. Let us take note, once again following Larousse, of a specific trait that has clung to the image of bourgeoisie also in its foreign varieties, including the Polish version: its practicality, level-headedness, and life realism, combined with the diligent strivings around one’s own benefit. This is, possibly, best visible in the uses of the adverb *bourgeoisement* noted by Larousse, as in Balzac: “to die bourgeoisically amidst the business of one’s firm”; “bourgeoisically takes a look at life and assesses it more realistically”; and so on.<sup>16</sup> As Ossowska wrote: “The word *bourgeois* is at times associated with prosperity and pleasure; some other times with perseverant labour and self-abnegation; whereas it

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Bourgeois’, entry in *Dictionnaire politique*, ed. by Eugène Duclerc and Laurent Antoine Pagnerre (Paris, 1839).

<sup>15</sup> *Grand dictionnaire*, par Larousse.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



is frequently difficult to identify a socially-oriented regularity in the historical development of the concept”.<sup>17</sup>

William Morris, a British painter, poet, and utopian socialist, recalled his youth as a dull time “oppressed with bourgeoisdom and philistinism”.<sup>18</sup> Flaubert is the patron of the criticism of the bourgeoisie from the intellectual and aesthetic/bohemian positions (this point is discussed in more detail below). For him, a bourgeois is “anybody who thinks in a mundane way”.<sup>19</sup> This definition is the key, as it sets up an alternative current in comprehending the bourgeoisie – not as a social group but as a mental predisposition, loosely associated with the class from which it originates. As we shall see, this current has proved inspirational and influential.

To better understand the problems associated with the reception of the concept of bourgeoisie in other European countries, let us briefly consider its developments in Germany, a country where French culture and French ideas had an ambivalent reputation; one that combined fascination and nationally-motivated antagonism. Moreover, Germany had a strong urban political culture that was mirrored by language customs and a peculiar political vocabulary. Hence, Germany did not assimilate the concept of bourgeoisie easily. The *Besitzbürgertum* – *Bildungsbürgertum* – *Staatsbürgertum* triad efficiently satisfied the German demand for a description of the social and political relations within the urban classes, forming a system that was resistant to imports of foreign concepts or ideas. The ambiguity inherent to the all-encompassing concept of *Bürgertum*, and the resulting ambiguity between *citoyen* and *bourgeois*, is obviously deemed to have been significant and seminal,<sup>20</sup> but in essence this is not part of the subject matter hereof. One can point to an evolution in the comprehension of the *Bürgertum* under the influence of the French *bourgeoisie* – for instance, in stressing its modern quality and pretence to the status of a ‘universal class’. In 1851, Wilhelm H. Riehl could claim that burghers and modern society are the very same thing, as all the other estates

<sup>17</sup> Ossowska, *Moralność mieszczańska*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Fred Henderson, 19 Oct. 1885, in Edward Palmer Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London, 1955), 878.

<sup>19</sup> After Zenon Przesmycki (‘Miriam’), *Wybór pism krytycznych*, ed. by Ewa Korzeniewska, ii (Kraków, 1967), 47.

<sup>20</sup> See Koselleck, *Dzieje pojęć politycznych*, 449–57; *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert. Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich*, ed. by Jürgen Kocka, i (München, 1988), 30 ff.

were a relic of the old times. Bourgeoisie, in turn, was approached as an alien concept, one that referred to the specific French conditions (e.g., *Wochenblatt des Nationalvereins* reported in 1867 that it denoted the people granted electoral eligibility in the Second Empire).<sup>21</sup> The German concepts were so strongly rooted that Ferdinand Lasalle protested in 1862 against their universalisation, including the replanting into his native soil of the Marxian (and French too, after all) concept of the ‘bourgeoisie–proletariat’ dualism: “We are all *Bürgern*”, the leader of the German workers’ movement proudly remarked.<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, once it finally appeared in Germany, the concept of bourgeoisie was German in a dual and extremely specific way (to recall the peculiar Polish analogies: always as *der Bourgeois* – a representative of his/her class). The belles-lettres had a *bourgeois* appearing as a nouveau-riche parvenu entering the salons of the gentry and the patriciate, whose background is the former townfolk elite. The guest is welcomed of course with a hint of irony and with brows meaningfully furrowed. He is suspected of a lack of manners and education, not being a classy piece of work; but even if he has all this, he definitely lacks ‘the sanction of history’ – as Thomas Mann put it, whose *Buddenbrooks* is, in its social aspect, the most famous story about the old urban patricians colliding with the new ones, impersonated by the Hagenstrom family.<sup>23</sup> The bourgeois moreover lacks the traditional virtues of restraint, modesty, moderation, and piousness. On the other hand, this means that he is free of some vices and flaws typical for the burghers or townfolk, which brings us closer to the aforementioned thread of bourgeoisie as a more modern, more self-confident and more ambitious version of the urban population. At least this is what the character of Theodor Fontane’s novel considered himself to be: “You say, Madam, that I am a *bourgeois*, and it is quite possible that I am one; but I am no townie, and if I approach life not too ideally or sublimely, I do not approach it overly mundanely or loutishly, either, after all”.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, quoted after *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart, 1972), 720.

<sup>22</sup> *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 722.

<sup>23</sup> For more, see Adam Kożuchowski, ‘Zmiercz patrycjatu i narodziny burżuazji w literaturze niemieckiej epoki wilhelmińskiej’, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, xlvii, 4 (2003), 159–77.

<sup>24</sup> Theodor Fontane, *L’Adultera*, in *Sämtliche Werke* (Darmstadt, 1962), 98.

Let us add that this interpretation is not solely German: among the many mutually contradicting ideas in circulation in France at that time, there was one – somewhat extravagant but promoted by Émile Zola – claiming that the bourgeoisie was the ‘offspring of the parvenus’.<sup>25</sup>

The other version of the *bourgeois* is related to a singular, but worthy of note, specifically German, apology of bourgeoisie proposed by Werner Sombart in his 1913 programme study in the spirit of the *Kultursoziologie*, later elaborated on by Edward Spranger and Max Scheler.<sup>26</sup> Sombart’s *bourgeois* was a great entrepreneur and, at the same time, a visionary and leader of social change, a burgher made mighty by the dynamism of economic transformation, driven by Protestant ethics and “by the entire love the modern man is still capable of”, focused on his enterprise.<sup>27</sup> In this context, the French word had no negative connotation: it emphasised the cosmopolitan character of the class of new guides or leaders of humanity (the key characters in Sombart’s book are Carnegie and Rockefeller, the American millionaires). This vision, formulated at the peak epoch of free trade and fascination with technological progress, seemingly exerted no influence on the language custom, and *bourgeois* remained a strongly exotic concept in the German linguistic tradition. It was soon to be appropriated by the Marxist thought, disseminated and finally popularised by the communist propaganda in a universal version which has been referred to above.

#### IV BOURGEOISIE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

Eventually, the one-phrase definition of bourgeoisie as the class of owners of the means of production (which we come across in all the Polish dictionaries, with no reference to the source<sup>28</sup>) was added by

<sup>25</sup> See Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience. Victoria to Freud*, i: *Education of the Senses* (New York–Oxford, 1984), 22.

<sup>26</sup> See Ossowska, *Moralność mieszczańska*, 182–95.

<sup>27</sup> Werner Sombart, *Das Wirtschaftsleben im Zeitalter der Hochkapitalismus* (Leipzig, 1927), 26–7.

<sup>28</sup> One may obviously pose the question whether the authors of dictionaries and encyclopaedias from the communist period wrote of bourgeoisie ‘in good faith’ or just because its definition could be found in the *Manifesto* – having the censors in mind, if anything. However, bearing in mind that the definition has survived

Engels to the 1888 English edition of the *Communist Manifesto*. In the original, the bourgeoisie stands for the embodiment of the vital forces of modernity and progress:

The world market has given an immeasurable stimulus to the development of trade, sea-transport and land communications. This development has produced in turn an expansion of industry, and just as industry, commerce, sea-trade and railways have expanded, so the bourgeoisie has developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background all pre-existing classes from the Middle Ages onwards.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without continually revolutionising the instruments of production, hence the relations of production, and therefore social relations as a whole. By contrast the first condition of existence of all earlier manufacturing classes was the unaltered maintenance of the old mode of production. The continual transformation of production, the uninterrupted convulsion of all social conditions, a perpetual uncertainty and motion distinguish the epoch of the bourgeoisie from all earlier ones. All the settled, age-old relations with their train of time-honoured preconceptions and view-points are dissolved; all newly formed ones become outmoded before they can ossify.<sup>29</sup>

This lengthy quotation is not meant to demonstrate what exactly Marx and Engels had in mind when referring to the bourgeoisie in the year 1848. As a matter of fact, their interpretation does not seem precise at all, nor was it designed as such. What should be emphasised instead is its marching and militant tone, the vigorous and proud attitude that is supposed to be essentially bourgeois. For Marx, like for Guizot, the bourgeoisie epitomises the most vibrant powers of the modern age. This aspect proved crucial for the Polish understanding of the concept.

Apparently, it would seem that the terms *mieszczanństwo* and *burżuazja* may be used interchangeably in Polish. As demonstrated, even the authors of scholarly monographs on the bourgeoisie hardly differentiated between them. However, this is because scholars tend to avoid emotionally-coloured language, and they pretend to be blind as far as the subconscious contexts of words are concerned. And yet, the crucial

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Stalinism as well as the post-war communist Poland, we can see that it has taken root and its source has sunk in oblivion, for a good reason indeed.

<sup>29</sup> Excerpt from *The Communist Manifesto*, 'translated from the first edition by Terrell Carver (1996)', quoted after *The Cambridge Companion to "The Communist Manifesto"*, ed. by Terrell Carver and James Farr (New York, 1996), 238–9.

difference between the two terms is that they express two radically different concepts regarding one social group, or indeed one single person. A bourgeois, in the Polish discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, is a more ambitious, energetic, self-confident, and occasionally more openly immoral incarnation of this person.

In the eyes of an intellectual, the urban middle class were the ‘terrible townfolk’ from Julian Tuwim’s poem *Straszni mieszczanie*: reserved scrooges, false prigs who are afraid of any unconventional thought and much more: money, reputation, the tomorrow, the salvation of their souls, and earthly property. Like so many poets in all corners of the Western world, Tuwim found them deplorable individuals, pondering on their “trousers darned on the bottoms” and “nudging their heads against cool chamber-pots”. In Poland, and in many other countries, scholars and journalists eagerly expressed pity for their mediocrity, their narrow-mindedness, and lack of perspectives.

The same people, however, if we are to believe other authors of the epoch, were as odious as they were fascinating with their naked, unscrupulous and shameless materialism, licence and sensuality – and the word ‘bourgeois,’ preferably in its vulgarised version (*burżuj*) – was employed to emphasise this aspect of the middle-class culture. Let us here take a look at a few examples. An interwar author informs us with a bang: “Up there, the fat petty bourgeois are brandishing a mazurka with their podgy woman”,<sup>30</sup> and we realise immediately they enjoy it and don’t care about others’ opinions. When a female protagonist declares brazenly: “I am a ‘bored’ petty bourgeois” it is naturally considered as a promiscuous invitation.<sup>31</sup> Yet another character of the interwar fiction, a young man, notes: “A bourgeois shame overwhelmed me: what’s this, a bachelor with no dough!” – and what is bourgeois about this observation is the openly expressed idea that success with women depends on money.<sup>32</sup> Or let us consider a socialist, class-powered indignation from the 1950s: “He worked for *Dziennik Polski* [a daily] where he debunked reactionaries. When he heard a broadcast on the radio about a flower *corso* in Nice, he unmasked its ideological meagreness. A war is on in Indochina, women

<sup>30</sup> Stanisław Górniak, *Bojowym szlakiem* (Warszawa, 1923), 197.

<sup>31</sup> Helena Łysakowska, *Szrapnel i krzyż* (Warszawa, 1939), 46.

<sup>32</sup> *Republika* (Łódź, 4 Nov. 1934).

and children getting killed in rice fields; and what is the bourgeoisie doing? They are having fun, blithely”.<sup>33</sup>

In short, the difference between *burżuazja* and *mieszczanństwo* is that the former were having fun, blithely and brazenly – they overtly worshipped profit and success, were never embarrassed about it and didn’t even care about their hypocrisy. Quite clearly, what we have to do with here is an intuitive, entirely non-strict criterion. However, it may serve as an explanation of why the term *burżuazja* has remained so unpopular, and why it is rarely a fixed item in the language of the Polish intelligentsia. *Mieszczanństwo* has stayed a more convenient construction: timid by definition, embarrassing, disrespectable and snubbable – hardly a rival for the status of the social elite. If the bourgeoisie – as it was understood in mid-nineteenth-century France and by Marx and Engels – was to be the society’s elite in all respects, setting its tone and direction, and if we accept that language determines consciousness, it was in the intelligentsia’s interest that no *burżuazja* ever appeared in the Polish conceptual universe, and that this group was to remain the *mieszczanństwo*, “falling asleep with the muzzle on the breast” (still quoting Tuwim’s poem). Squaring our hypothesis now, it should be noted that this backfired after the fall of communism, when the intelligentsia felt marginalised and disinherited by the elementally developing, expansive, loose, and uninhibited class, thus shaped after the classically bourgeois fashion and called ‘the middle class’ in the sociological jargon. With no colloquial equivalent in place, there is no epithet that could be used to defend oneself against this emerging class.

## V

### BOURGEOISIE AND THE LEFT

The term ‘bourgeoisie’ first appeared in Polish dictionaries and encyclopaedias of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. What is striking at this point is the uncertainty of the authors regarding its status in the context of the Polish language: some claimed it was a modern (or, simply, new and different) name for what had formerly been referred to as the burgher estate, while others would describe

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<sup>33</sup> Mariusz Urbanek, *Kisielewscy: Jan August, Zygmunt, Stefan, Wacek* (Warszawa, 2006) (quoted after NKJP).

it as “a French word ... equivalent to the Polish *mieszczanństwo*”.<sup>34</sup> Obviously, this state of affairs might be regarded as a natural and transitory stage in the adaptation of foreign notions into local language usage. However, as mentioned above, *burżuazja* has never fully passed through this stage. In other words, we come across the term, in its entire Polish career, in the form of a fully Polonised ‘butterfly’ as well as a ‘chrysalis’. It is worth noting as well that no mention yet appeared at this stage suggesting that the bourgeoisie were a better-off, or in any way special, part of the urban class.

These same dictionaries observe, in parallel, that bourgeoisie is a concept from the arsenal of socialist thought and propaganda. An 1895 Polish concise universal encyclopaedia (*Podręczna encyklopedia powszechna*) points to Saint-Simon as the father of the view that modern society consists of the bourgeoisie and proletariat.<sup>35</sup> Other dictionaries or encyclopaedias tell us outright that, in the sense given to it by the Left, bourgeoisie “is a sort of disparaging sobriquet”,<sup>36</sup> or refers to a “political party of the third estate, in a negative meaning”.<sup>37</sup>

This seems to have reflected the period’s language practice, where a negatively marked savour was dominant. Reprehensions targeted at the bourgeoisie and petty capitalists or *burżujs* – as profiteers and exploiters, covetous persons, money-grubbers, obscurants or philistines, poseurs, hucksters, pettifoggers, speculators, and a stratum that crouches before the authorities because of their dirty profits and that manipulates the world of politics from the backseat – were expressed from most diverse positions: socialist, intelligentsia-related, post-nobility, intellectual, and artistic. They were often hard to discern, and identifying a statement with a specified ideological position is at times not easy. Thus, it may seem that no such position was necessary: defying and outraging the *burżujs* might have been purely ritual. In any case, the dislike for the bourgeoisie impressively displays a supra-political and supra-class universality, bringing to mind anti-Semitism as the only analogy worthy of its name.

<sup>34</sup> *Encyklopedia. Zbiór wiadomości z wszystkich gałęzi wiedzy* (Lwów, 1905), i, 168.

<sup>35</sup> *Podręczna encyklopedia powszechna podług piątego wydania Meyera*, ed. by Adam Wiślicki, i (Warszawa, 1895), 605.

<sup>36</sup> *Encyklopedia*, i, 168.

<sup>37</sup> *Słownik języka polskiego*, ed. by Jan Kryłowicz, Adam Kryński, and Władysław Niedźwiedzki, i (Warszawa, 1900), 240.

The origins of this merciless criticism seem to have been based on the idea that the bourgeoisie rules the world. However, most Polish observers agreed that “we [in Poland] have never had a bourgeoisie proper”,<sup>38</sup> or that the “bourgeoisie that is the fundamental pillar of capitalism in the West hardly exists in Poland”.<sup>39</sup> Such conclusions referred to the general weakness and un-Polish character of the third estate, dating back to the medieval times. Let us just remark here that the Polish concept of ‘bourgeoisie’ had bad luck: it appeared on the stage of history along with the anti-Positivist upheaval of the 1880s and 1890s. With the rise of neo-Romanticism restraint and moderation, labour, science and enrichment were replaced with the gusts of the heart as the values most praised in Polish literature and journalism. Clearly, the criticism of the virtues described by Ossowska in her *Bourgeois Mentality* did not fade out in Poland together with Positivism (in fact, it seems that the National Democracy excelled in them in the first half of the twentieth century). Characteristically, however, they were associated with burghers/townspeople, the third estate, or later with the middle class. It may seem that bourgeoisie as a merely descriptive concept regarding the more affluent urban strata appeared only in the conservative discourse that consciously opposed this allegedly dominant practice. In fact, however, the conservatives, representing a different moral and emotional attitude, also respected the definition which juxtaposed the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. This may be well exemplified in Adolf Bocheński’s analysis: “In Poland, the political constellation is based upon the attitudes towards history rather than the pure conflict of the left against the right, that is the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, that is the poor against the rich”.<sup>40</sup>

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Among the earliest attested uses of the concept in question in Polish, we can notice expressions of moral shock with the insufficiently patriotic attitude dictated by “the shrewdness of the shoppish bourgeoisie” – as noted by a November Insurrection (1830–1) historian;<sup>41</sup> or by the capitalistic distribution of profits – as in Bolesław Prus: “The fortunate

<sup>38</sup> Stanisław Kozłowski, ‘Burżuazja’, *Kurier Warszawski* (1 Jan. 1906), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Adolf Bocheński, *Historia i polityka. Wybór publicystyki* (Warszawa 1989), 321.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>41</sup> Stanisław Barzykowski, *Historia powstania listopadowego*, i (Poznań, 1883), XLIII.



bourgeois [*burżuj*] is stripping twenty-thousand roubles for the iron ore having been created by God, whilst an intelligent proletarian can hardly work out two-thousand!”.<sup>42</sup> These two quotations offer an eclectic merger of concepts and political threads. The shoppishness of the bourgeoisie does not yet point to full-fledged capitalists. For Prus, perhaps the most insightful Polish novelist of the late nineteenth century, the socialist nomenclature goes hand in hand with God so that the span of income could be condemned – a range that must seem, and must have seemed then, suspiciously modest, and which makes one guess that it would not have been so outrageous in the novelist’s perception had it been *not* the *burżuj* who stripped the twenty-thousand roubles.

Hence, one may suppose that in the early twentieth century the word *burżuj* still did not sound overly brutal or coarse, but somewhat familiar and colloquial in round terms, being more of an epithet than a pure invective. In any case, apart from Prus, Stefan Żeromski – an author of strongly leftist but never of an orthodoxly socialist sensitivity – used the word regularly and invariably with a pejorative tint. “The petty bourgeois [*burżuj*] will always tell you that the money he has stripped off you is some nation’s or public money”, says the proletarian character of the novel trilogy *Zamieć*. Another one is afraid of “sliding down into dirty petty bourgeois dealings [*burżujstwo*], which so easily clings to the soul weighted with the awareness of being really well-off with gold”.<sup>43</sup> And, lastly, the word appears in a deliberately twisted form, uttered by a drunken shoemaker during a workers’ parade in one of the years 1905–07: “Come downstairs, bourgeois! We prettily ask you to join us for the walk!”.<sup>44</sup>

Arguably, the highly critical image of the bourgeoisie in the literary fiction of the time – varying from open hostility to sarcasm – did not differ radically from that present in the other types of discourse, and particularly in the press. For example, in his article *Burżuje* published in *Kurier Warszawski* in March 1906, Zygmunt Gloger discussed the proletarian view of the concept:

... the working people and socialists in towns consider today *burżuj*s all those who wear top-hats or furs, also gloves, possess golden watches, a clean handkerchief and a hand not overworked at the workbench. In a word, every

<sup>42</sup> Bolesław Prus, *Nowele*, iii, 183; quoted after Doroszewski, 741–2.

<sup>43</sup> Stefan Żeromski, *Zamieć*, 187, 173, quoted after Doroszewski, 741–2.

<sup>44</sup> Stefan Żeromski, *Nagi bruk*, ed. by Stanisław Pigoń (Warszawa, 1957), 12.

hardworking private official, physician, teacher, lawyer, fairly plenteous handicraftsman, and, all in all, anybody who, rather than manufacturing with his own hand, buys ready-to-use products of the others, is presently considered by our working class as a ‘burżuj’ ...<sup>45</sup>

This opinion might be considered to be a mirror, if not a reverse-mirror image, of Victor Hugo’s ironical definition, according to which the bourgeoisie was composed of people satisfied with their social position. The ‘reverse-mirror’ part consists of the fact that in the Polish version it is not about satisfied people *per se*, but those who are considered to be so by the unsatisfied. This is rather important since in the Polish language usage bourgeoisie is almost exclusively ‘the others’ – those accused or suspected of bourgeoisness. In the Polish tradition, the bourgeois class’s self-awareness is, frankly speaking, oxymoronic: something that was successfully overborne in oneself; or, an element of contrariness, derision, or a joke. A rule to which only the academic discourse would not yield (save for a very few exceptions) is, again, that *burżuazja* appears almost exclusively in a negative context – as something to be stigmatised, dispraised, or renounced with abhorrence or astonishment.

Let us pay attention, however, to Gloger’s mention of the socialists: it was they who propagated among the proletarians the vulgarised Marxist concept of bourgeoisie as everyone who was not proletarian him/herself. This distinction, of course, was not based on the analysis of the means of production, but an intuitive criterion of physical appearance, dress-code, language customs, etc. In practice, such a comprehension of the bourgeoisie was reinforced by the Bolshevik Revolution, which – at least until the end of the Stalinist period – carried on its banners the name of *burżuj* as synonymous with the enemy of everything the Revolution aspired to represent. Such an interpretation – based on the denial of, and resistance to, the ideology and vision of the world arrangement promoted by the communists – was also exported to Poland, where the “thoroughly anti-revolutionary, anti-people, and basically narrow-minded Polish bourgeoisie”, in Leon Kruczkowski’s words, appeared to be the bastion of resistance against the communism.<sup>46</sup> In everyday practice – which consisted mainly in acts of brutal persecution – a definition was

<sup>45</sup> Zygmunt Gloger, ‘Burżuje’, *Kurier Warszawski* (24 March 1906), 2.

<sup>46</sup> Leon Kruczkowski, *Prawo do kultury* (Warszawa, 1952), 27–8.

assumed that was, according to Gloger's analysis, confusingly similar to the one professed by the Polish proletariat at the beginning of the century. The difference between the two basically boiled down to the lowered bar: in the realities of 'building socialism' in the Soviet Union, a trifle of a material or moral nature, making a person different from the proletarian norm, sufficed to recognise somebody as a *burżuj* (analogous to suspecting somebody of kulakism in the collectivisation period). However, neither the translations nor the originally Polish texts concerning revolutionary Russia needed to explain to the reader what precisely the term *burżuj*-ness should have meant (for example: "... he signed up for the Arsenal at the Kremlin. Initially, they didn't want to admit him as his hands were a *burżuj*'s hands").<sup>47</sup>

As it seems, shortly after the year 1917, the leftist and proletarian approach to the bourgeoisie fell under strong pressure from the Soviet models. Bourgeoisie ceased to be a social class, because this class was officially liquidated, and became a synecdoche of any non-communist socio-political relations and their related values. In this dimension, bourgeoisie and bourgeoisness demonstrate an almost unlimited semantic polymorphism and virtually elude any definition. A watch, earrings, a sentence, or the absence of work-worn hands might be considered as defining a bourgeois, that is an enemy of communism, and all enemies of communism were classed as bourgeois. Moreover, the odious stamp of being bourgeois was capable of being employed to stigmatise spiritual realities as well. A self-aware leftist, or simply 'progressive,' intellectual might have found a politics, morality, thought, or even the entire world, bourgeois.

Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, a Polish poet of the time who was particularly gifted for introspection, confessed that: "I don't intend to enclose myself in a framework of party-laden ideas; for me, bourgeoisness is the world as it is in its entirety – the world I live in, and find increasingly difficult to quit".<sup>48</sup> This citation shows the most expressive trait of the Polish understanding of bourgeoisness: namely that it is impossible to determine what it is, as it is an inescapable, and scandalously ubiquitous, aspect of not only the social but also of the psychological and intellectual reality. It is a communist equivalent of

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<sup>47</sup> Walenty Miklaszewski, *Diaspora (Tulaczka w Rosji 1915–1918 r.)* (Warszawa, 1929), 299.

<sup>48</sup> Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzieła. Opowiadania*, iii (Warszawa, 1979), 111.

sinfulness: odious, detestable, and perversely attractive. A proletarian was supposed to hate the bourgeoisie because it lived a comfortable life and exploited the masses. An intellectual was supposed to detest it because it was amoral: egoistic, careless, licentious, etc.

However, it was politics that established the proper context of all anti-bourgeois attitudes. And again, ‘bourgeois’ was a label attached to all aspects of the reality that were non-revolutionary. “The old man has no idea whatsoever that he has written a great satire on the bourgeois and bureaucratic system of our time”, Janusz Korczak wrote in his 1906 novel *Dziecko salonu*.<sup>49</sup> The author did not feel compelled to explain what exactly he meant by ‘the bourgeois system,’ but we can take it for granted it was a system he disapproved of. On the one hand, ‘bourgeois’ was often employed as equivalent to the rotten, corrupted, and immoral politics. On the other, however, it merely denoted anti-communists or just non-communists. Notably, this rhetoric was also adopted by non-communists. For example, a month before Hitler was appointed chancellor, *Dziennik Łódzki*, a daily with no particular party affiliation, wrote highly critically of the German communists: “... they can attain their goal of bringing about a civil war the easiest way through the demolition of the German camp and debilitation of bourgeois republican Germany”.<sup>50</sup> The author seemingly had nothing particular in mind: the bourgeoisness of the Weimar Republic’s political system was highlighted for the sole purpose of showing the antagonism against the communists.

The word ‘bourgeois’ in the Polish interwar discourse notoriously provokes such ambiguity. For example, Antoni Słonimski, a poet and essayist, pondered in one of his press articles: “Are we plastered with lies of the bourgeois press, or perhaps, deceived by the Soviet propaganda?”<sup>51</sup> Did he simply mean the press of all the trends but communist, or did he deliberately use a word with such strongly negative connotations to make plausible the suggestion that something suspicious and ambiguous was the point (as the verb ‘plastered’ indicates)?

<sup>49</sup> Janusz Korczak, *Dziecko salonu* (Warszawa, 1906), 315.

<sup>50</sup> *Dziennik Łódzki* (3 Dec. 1932); quoted after Jan Wawrzyńczyk, *250 tysięcy ciekawych słów. Leksykon przypomnień*, ii (Warszawa, 2016), 89–90.

<sup>51</sup> Antoni Słonimski, ‘Moja podróż do Rosji’, in *100/XX: Antologia polskiego reportażu XX wieku*, i: 1901–1965, ed. by Mariusz Szczygieł (Wołowiec, 2014), 413.

Moreover, one can come across some artful constructions that seem to have uttered more than their authors might have conceived. Let us, for example, consider the following opinion on Paweł Jasienica, a historian and journalist, in the 1970 edition of the most influential Polish émigré journal *Kultura*: “The great role in the shaping of Jasienica’s worldview at that time [i.e. during the Second World War years] was played by the ‘end of the *mieszczanństwo* morality’ – that is, the conviction that fascism and Hitlerism were a logical and correct consequence of the bourgeois morality, even in its best version”.<sup>52</sup> The argument sought to explain Jasienica’s coming to terms with communism. The author uses the phrases ‘*mieszczanństwo* morality’ and ‘bourgeois morality’ as if they meant one and the same thing. One may suppose, however, that the latter is mentioned to reinforce the argument: the former did not form a force sufficiently demonic to give birth to a Hitler. On the other hand, if the author had confined himself to the ‘bourgeois morality’, the émigré reader could perceive the phrase as sounding overly Marxist. To sum up: ‘bourgeois’ was a strong invective, and it was strongly leftist.

And, finally, labelling someone or something as a ‘bourgeois’ in the left-oriented discourse was a mortal blow: an object so classified is sentenced to civil death, without the right to explain anything. A leftist monthly, for example, characterised the marvellously decadent poetry of Józef Czechowicz as follows: “However, decline and bourgeoisness are not the only words with which you could conclusively straighten out accounts with Czechowicz”.<sup>53</sup> The phrase ‘straighten out’ can be deemed characteristic: once a poet is described as a ‘bourgeois’, there is no need to deal with him at all, or explore what it should have actually meant. Let us pay attention, though, to one more trait in the last quoted citation: Leninism/Stalinism was different from Marxism, and the twentieth century from the nineteenth, in that (among other things) the bourgeoisie – once the society’s leading stratum, bursting with energy, entrepreneurship and rapacity, the engine of transformation and progress – evolved into a decadent stratum, a carrier of backwardness (in revolutionary Russia, into a stratum of ‘the former

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<sup>52</sup> Józef Lewandowski, ‘Paweł Jasienica’, *Kultura*, x (1970), 74–82.

<sup>53</sup> *Dźwigary. Miesięcznik poświęcony sprawie polskiej kultury proletariackiej*, November 1934; quoted after *Depozytorium leksykalne języka polskiego*, ed. by Piotr Wierzchoń (Poznań, 2014), 682.

people'). Along this line, we arrive at yet another opponent of the bourgeoisie – that is, the avant-garde.

## VI BOURGEOISIE AND THE AVANT-GARDE

Bourgeoisness and *burżuj* were the names that a genuine intellectual and, above all, a real artist – whether he/she was a servant of progress or a servant of the Muse – found abhorrent. Once again, the object and, frequently, the expression of abhorrence are apparently indistinguishable from the ideological enmity of the Left. Still, the two are not to be confused with each other: we have essentially to do here with an international, possibly global, myth that unites the aristocrats of spirit and the warriors for the international proletariat's cause. According to Oscar Wilde, the definite prevalence of France over England consisted in the fact that in *France*, every bourgeois wished to *become an artist*, while in *England* every artist wanted to become a bourgeois.<sup>54</sup> The scheme was simple: the bourgeoisie was supposed to admire, adore, and sponsor the artists; whereas the real artists had to abhor the bourgeoisie, arousing (by the way) its delight – as is summarised by the French phrase *pour épater le bourgeois*. The scheme had nothing to do with one's political affiliation. Vladimir Nabokov, who had more in common with Bolshevism than Wilde in that he consciously hated it, stated the following in his fictional biography of Chernyshevski:

... such a man is much more angered by irrational innovation than by the darkness of antiquated ignorance. Thus Chernyshevski, who like the majority of revolutionaries was a complete bourgeois in his artistic and scientific tastes, was enraged by the 'squaring of boots,' or the extraction of cubic roots from boot tops.<sup>55</sup>

The concept of bourgeoisie was unlucky enough to appear in the Polish language in the anti-Positivist upheaval days, with its increasing influence of the Left, and on the eve of the advent of neo-Romantic modernism. In the perception of authors affiliated with the latter, *burżuj* was mentioned in one breath with the true artists' arch-enemy,

<sup>54</sup> Roger B. Henkle, *Comedy and Culture: England 1820–1900* (1980), 3.

<sup>55</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *Дар//The Gift*, transl. Michael Scammel (London, 1963), 229.

the philistine.<sup>56</sup> The stars were rising of such philistine-busters as Gabriela Zapolska, Adolf Nowaczyński, Stanisław Przybyszewski, or Zenon Przesmycki (also known as 'Miriam'). The latter author, making use of Flaubert, announced that the bourgeoisie was the primary opponent of an artistic comprehension of the world:

... bourgeoisie is not composed of a single class, a certain stratum of the society, but all those who think and feel at a low level, flatly, and in an earthbound manner ...; who renounce all the ideal longings and desires, and subject them to things 'practical' and 'real'; who mock at any ascent, embitter themselves with any effusion and ardour; who cannot understand a 'life soaring above the life' ... So, all the democrats who, inebriated with that title of theirs, tend to forget that they are all human beings, in the first place.<sup>57</sup>

Animated by this kind of attitude, the modernists and leftists of the early twentieth century traced, identified, and stigmatised the bourgeois in all domains of public and intellectual life. A vegetarianism propagator from Cracow jeered in 1910: "in analysing their bourgeois [*burżujski*] soul, our 'intelligentsia' sees the high point of 'poetry and arts'".<sup>58</sup> As we are tracing the history of the concept, it befits us to emphasise that the critics of the time (as well as the later literary historians) noticed that the smear campaign against the *burżuj*s and philistines in modernists' literary works assumed obsessive forms, as *burżuj*s were 'perceptible' in everybody and everywhere. The modernist authors fled from strictness, more or less purposefully, to chastise and stigmatise for the sake of stigmatisation. As a contemporary critic wrote of Nowaczyński, "The hatred of philistines, precisely resulting from the indeterminacy of what the philistinism is, resides in him as an ever-vigilant instinct – so watchful that several times it gives a signal even where there is no essential incentive".<sup>59</sup> Philistinism went hand-in-hand with bourgeoisie in international Marxist propaganda

<sup>56</sup> See Jadwiga Zacharska, *Filister w prozie fabularnej Młodej Polski* (Warszawa, 1996).

<sup>57</sup> Quoted after *Programy i dyskusje literackie okresu Młodej Polski*, ed. by Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska (Wrocław, 1977), 320.

<sup>58</sup> Janiśław Jastrzębowski, *Precz z mięsożerstwem! Praktyczne wskazówki dla naszych postępowców dla wyzyskania drożyzny mięsa w celu duchowego odrodzenia narodu polskiego* (Kraków, 1910), XXXIV.

<sup>59</sup> Jan Sten, *Pisarze polscy* (Lwów, 1903), 147; cf. Andrzej Z. Makowiecki, *Młodopolski portret artysty* (Warszawa, 1971), 92; Zacharska, *Filister*, 33–4.

as well, with both terms expressing the profound immorality of the anti-revolutionary attitudes.<sup>60</sup>

What was a taunt in Wilde, became a sacrosanct axiom in the subsequent generations, which, in a reality check, instantly invalidates the reality: the greater the bourgeoisie's delight with avant-garde and modernity, the more a genuine intellectual and artist was bound to claim that, as a matter of fact, the bourgeoisie hates the avant-garde. Hence, the true intellectuals were obliged to claim that what bourgeoisie actually epitomises is, in essence, not an avant-garde – under the appalling threat that they would themselves be categorised as bourgeois. This dialectical wrestling was reported by the essayist Jerzy Stempowski: "In this way, the affluent bourgeoisie, with its taste for the most recent and most beautiful artistic manifestos, could remain loyal to the oldest and most widespread traditions in its general attitude toward art".<sup>61</sup> The diabolical nature of bourgeoisie reveals itself once again: its favourite entertainment was wearing the habit of an adherent of progress and connoisseur of arts. And, the other way round; as Maria Ossowska wrote (clearly distancing herself from the view under discussion):

We all know the theory claiming that formalism in art is a product of the perishing bourgeoisie. Those who realise that a collapse is impending are, according to the latter, turning their backs at the reality. This tendency is reportedly expressed in art by non-representative painting. In literature, this same tendency is, apparently, expressed through psychologism ...<sup>62</sup>

Thus, the vicious circle of dislike toward the bourgeoisie closes itself. Those who appreciated avant-garde trends accused the bourgeoisie of conservatism. And those to whom the avant-garde seemed to be a disgusting denaturalisation considered it a natural symptom of bourgeois decadence. In the event that the *burżujs'* sympathy for the trend one supported could not be denied, the bourgeois would have

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<sup>60</sup> For example, Karl Kautsky argued: "The Russian revolutionary movement that is now flaring up will perhaps prove to be the most potent means of exorcising the spirit of flabby philistinism and coldly calculating politics that is beginning to spread in our midst, and it may cause the fighting spirit and the passionate devotion to our great ideals to flare up again...", 'Slavyane i revoljutsiia', *Iskra* 18 (10 March 1902), 1–2.

<sup>61</sup> Jerzy Stempowski, *Chimera jako zwierzę pociągowe. 1929–41*, quoted after NKJP.

<sup>62</sup> Ossowska, *Moralność mieszczańska*, 363.



been accused of a sham, opportunism, superficiality, and hypocrisy. Lastly, those who showed no interest in arts were mocked at for their philistinism, coarseness, and materialism. Due, at least, to the period concerned, it is hard to neglect the association with the logic of anti-Semitic accusations cast at the Jews – for being a propelling force of both capitalism and communism, yet who in parallel strove for the demolition of both these systems. Jews tended to support bad art, being naturally incapable of understanding the true art; and so on, and so forth.

## VII CONCLUSIONS

This brief history of the concept of bourgeoisie in Poland provokes a series of theoretical questions, to which this essay can provide no clear answers. Still, the questions might hopefully serve as a point-of-departure for the so-called further research, should it consider the term ‘bourgeoisie’ or the history of concepts in general.

The first thing to consider is the transfer of the word, with its evident incompleteness. Did the term ‘bourgeoisie’ appear in Poland along with the formation of a stratum whose character was indeed specific, and which had at least an embryonic sense of autonomy and identity of its own, and waited to be named? The answer should be positive if we assume that *mieszczanństwo* is indeed a feudal concept too strongly related to the estate-based social structure to serve as a concept expressing the modern social realities. However, this is only partly true: despite its being an overtly anachronistic concept, *mieszczanństwo* is related closely enough to the city (*miasto*) to be employed as a term designating urban dwellers, or the urban middle class, still in the twenty-first-century discourse.

An obvious difficulty in the formation of the Polish bourgeoisie was a strong position, and prestige, of the intelligentsia. Educated people, in general, were naturally regarded as its members, which encompassed representatives of liberal professions and who would be considered as the backbone of the bourgeoisie in France or Italy. Needless to say, the representatives of this group in the Poland of the late nineteenth and twentieth century – such as lawyers, doctors, journalists – preferred to be regarded as members of the intelligentsia than as bourgeoisie. As a result, there remained a relatively narrow

group of people who might qualify as bourgeois, and whose need to be self-defined was, apparently, satisfied by profession-related terms. Therefore, the hypothesis comes out as natural and tempting that the problems with the internalisation of the concept of bourgeoisie resulted from a faint awareness of what it would have reflected. This points to how weak was the stratum barely called the Polish bourgeoisie – with its poor embeddedness in the national self-awareness, the dictatorship of the intelligentsia-based viewpoint in public discourse, and so on. In short, there were never enough people in Poland who would consider themselves as bourgeois, or who would accept being defined as such, for the concept to become firmly established in the popular imagination. This interpretation proposes a relationship between the socio-historical realities and language so straightforward and transparent that it may seem too simplistic.

Alternatively, the unsuccessful career of the concept of bourgeoisie in Poland might be explained by its being appropriated by the socialist discourse, which coloured it with contempt, and indeed gave it the form of an insult. If this be the case, rejection of the term would merely have been incited by a psychological impulse rather than some 'objective' social reality. Obviously, this factor might have simply been added to the list specified in the preceding paragraph – one more piece of evidence why the concept of bourgeoisie found it so difficult to settle down in Poland. Moreover, it is difficult to answer the question whether the word *burżua* (a Polonised and phonetised form of the French *bourgeois*) did not gain a foothold because of the two vowels at the word's end – a form alien to the Polish language and causing difficulties with declension – or whether because the abusive term *burżuj* satisfied the social demand in this respect.

The next question to consider is that of the two-way transfer: initially from France and then, later on, from the Soviet Union. To what extent did the French and Soviet understandings of the concept of bourgeoisie collide with each other, complement each other, or become molten in the Polish synthesis? It seems evident that the Polish *burżuj* encompassed both the French *bourgeois* as well as the Soviet *burzhui* – unwashed and frightened paupers, expropriated of their social status and civic rights by the Revolution. This, however, does not preclude a continuum of attitudes – a process that might be completely ungraspable in the real world – which the concept endeavours to impose on our views.

Finally, one needs to answer the questions: Why did the term become so unpopular in Poland in the second half of the twentieth century? Did communists simply liquidate the Polish bourgeoisie, or did they successfully erase the concept from the popular vocabulary by claiming they had liquidated the bourgeoisie as a social group, resulting in its consistent elimination from statistics, official and scholarly analyses, and the like? Or was communist propaganda eventually successful in making the concept abhorrent to Poles? Considering the popular attitudes toward the bourgeoisie discussed in this paper, it seems that the Polish public opinion might have been well prepared for the latter scenario.

The National Corpus of the Polish Language (NKJP) reassures us today that the concept of bourgeoisie is not entirely dead,<sup>63</sup> although it appears almost exclusively in specialist literature. The term chiefly refers to a bygone reality, mainly to the nineteenth century, and usually occurs in non-Polish contexts, certainly, most often in reference to France.<sup>64</sup> The contexts in which the term is used are predominantly pejorative, symptomatic of pathologies such as ‘white-collar bourgeoisie’, ‘mafia bourgeoisie’, and the like.<sup>65</sup> Of course, there are exceptions to the rule; for example, the author of a 2005 sector-oriented article on life insurance was happy to ascertain that:

The so-called new Polish bourgeoisie is growing strong, after all: it mainly consists of thirty-five to forty-five-year-olds moving on with corporations or show business and earning 10,000 to 50,000 zloty per month. As per the Main Statistical Office, their number has increased threefold during the last five years!<sup>66</sup>

To sum up, it seems that in the end communism squeezed the bourgeoisie out of the daily language and that although in the twenty-first

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<sup>63</sup> As of 24 March 2018, NKJP records a total of 506 uses of the word; among the dozen-or-so which refer to Poland after 1989, invectives on the internet and reports on sessions of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland prevail (*sic*); see at: [www.nkjp.pl](http://www.nkjp.pl).

<sup>64</sup> The French bourgeoisie may appear in a positive and warm light, even to an intellectual, as a cultured and mannered stratum (the ‘good old bourgeoisie’, something like ‘genuine landed gentry’); see Andrzej Bobkowski, *Szkice piórkem* (Paris, 1957); quoted after NKJP.

<sup>65</sup> See *Dziennik Polski* (25 July 2006).

<sup>66</sup> Marek Śliperski, ‘Powszechny dotyk ryzyka’, *Gazeta Ubezpieczeniowa* (22 Nov. 2005).

century it is much more potent as a social class than ever before in Polish history, it has been eliminated as a socio-political concept. However, one can incidentally come across the ‘red bourgeoisie’ as an insult cast from the right side of the political scene,<sup>67</sup> because it is the right that is supposed to represent the healthy anti-bourgeois approach in our days. However, they clearly have a number of more efficient and frequently-used insults at their disposal.

Modern Polish capitalism condemned its presumed ancestor to almost complete oblivion. The concept of bourgeoisie has not re-emerged after the fall of communism, neither as a forbidden fruit nor a spontaneous or market-oriented discovery of the old traditions after the collapse of communism, as was the case with the landed gentry, merchants, factory owners, ‘village nobleman’s backwater areas’, and even peasant’s huts – all of them patronising innumerable commercial projects. According to the Google search engine, the most renowned institution in Poland that has the word as part of its name is presently (in 2018) an amateur football club *Burżuazja*, the 2017 winner of an indoor charity tournament in the locality of Frampol. Resulting from fierce competition, the team came out ahead of its rivals, including *Leśne Dziadki* [Old Fellow Forest Friends], *Banda Grubego* [The Fat Guy’s Gang], *Kanonierzy* [Gunners], and *Przepraszam Pomyłka* [Sorry, You Got It Wrong]. Clearly, apart from love for football, they all share an inclination toward self-irony, and all these names are supposed to be more laughable than serious. The charm of the bourgeoisie is so discreet today it becomes grotesque when exposed publicly.<sup>68</sup>

*transl. Tristan Korecki*

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<sup>67</sup> See, for example, *Czerwona burżuazja i nomenklatura*, bankier.pl (Published: 5 July 2015); report on the session of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland held 6 Oct. 1999; *System wartości czerwonej burżuazji*, salon24.pl (Published: 25 Oct. 2017). In a discussion broadcast on the radio, the phrase was meaningfully commented on by Councillor Lubiński of the Left Democratic Alliance (SLD) from Wałbrzych (“It is a rather complicated epithet, itself denying logic...”), who suggested that by definition bourgeoisie could not possibly be ‘red’, *Gazeta Wrocławska* (4 Feb. 2002).

<sup>68</sup> *Dziennik Wschodni* (31 Dec. 2017).

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