



Jens Herlth, Edward M. Świdorski (eds.)

# STANISŁAW BRZozowski

## AND THE MIGRATION OF IDEAS

Transnational Perspectives on the Intellectual  
Field in Twentieth-Century Poland and Beyond

[transcript] Lettre

Jens Herlth, Edward M. Świderski (eds.)  
Stanisław Brzozowski and the Migration of Ideas

**Lettre**



JENS HERLTH, EDWARD M. ŚWIDERSKI (EDS.)  
with assistance by DOROTA KOZICKA

**Stanisław Brzozowski  
and the Migration of Ideas**

**Transnational Perspectives on the Intellectual Field  
in Twentieth-Century Poland and Beyond**

**[transcript]**

This volume is one of the outcomes of the research project »Standing in the Light of His Thought: Stanisław Brzozowski and Polish Intellectual Life in the 20th and 21st Centuries« funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (project no. 146687). The publication of this book was made possible thanks to the generous support of the »Institut Littéraire Kultura«.

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 (BY-NC-ND) which means that the text may be used for non-commercial purposes, provided credit is given to the author. For details go to <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

To create an adaptation, translation, or derivative of the original work and for commercial use, further permission is required and can be obtained by contacting [rights@transcript-verlag.de](mailto:rights@transcript-verlag.de)

Creative Commons license terms for re-use do not apply to any content (such as graphs, figures, photos, excerpts, etc.) not original to the Open Access publication and further permission may be required from the rights holder. The obligation to research and clear permission lies solely with the party re-using the material.

© 2019 transcript Verlag, Bielefeld

Cover layout: Maria Arndt, Bielefeld

Cover illustration: Stanisław Brzozowski, photo from the second edition of »Le-genda Młodej Polski« (Lwów: Księgarnia B. Połonieckiego, 1910)

Printed by Majuskel Medienproduktion GmbH, Wetzlar

Print-ISBN 978-3-8376-4641-2

PDF-ISBN 978-3-8394-4641-6

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446416>

# Table of Contents

---

## **On Brzozowski's Presence and Absence in Poland and Beyond: Introduction**

Jens Herlth | 7

## **TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

### **"Sounding out idols": Brzozowski and Strindberg as Nietzsche Readers**

Jan Balbierz | 23

### **"Ibsen! Oh, let us not invoke this name in vain!" Brzozowski's Ibsen Not-quite-read**

Ewa Partyga | 39

### **Stanisław Brzozowski and *Die Neue Zeit***

Gábor Gángó | 57

### **Les Déracinés: Brzozowski and Barrès**

Maciej Urbanowski | 77

### **The Cult of Will and Power: Did Brzozowski Inspire Ukrainian Nationalism?**

Jens Herlth | 107

### **Brzozowski and Cioran: *The Legend of Young Poland* and *The Transformation of Romania***

Andrzej Zawadzki | 133

### **Brzozowski and the Italians**

Joanna Orska | 139

### **Brzozowski and Rorty: Coping with the Contingent Self**

Edward M. Świderski | 159

# **BRZozowski's PRESENCE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY**

## **Stanisław Brzozowski and Romantic Revision (Meyer Howard Abrams, Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom): Prolegomena**

Eliza Kącka | 187

## **Brzozowski as Precursor to Contemporary Studies on Cyprian Norwid's Legacy**

Krzysztof Trybuś | 209

## **Brzozowskianism: The Trouble with the "Great" Brzozowski and His Followers**

Dorota Kozicka | 237

## **"...actually speaking, this man converted me": Jerzy Liebert, Brzozowski, and the Question of a Modern Religious Poetry**

Christian Zehnder | 249

## **Stanisław Brzozowski as Harbinger and Enabler of Modern Literary Theory in Poland and the West**

Michał Mrugalski | 273

## **The Stalinist Reception of Stanisław Brzozowski's Philosophy: The Case of Paweł Hoffman**

Paweł Rams | 303

## **Brzozowski and the Question of Engagement: On a Different Concept of the Autonomy of Art**

Przemysław Czapliński | 321

## **Brzozowski or Plots of the Future**

Marta Wyka | 339

## **Epilogue**

Andrzej Mencwel | 351

## **Contributors | 359**

# On Brzozowski's Presence and Absence in Poland and Beyond

## Introduction

---

Jens Herlth

In 1924, the German physician and writer Alfred Döblin undertook a journey of two months to Poland. In the account of his journey he noted, writing about the current situation in Polish literature and criticism: “The essayist and writer Brzozowski continues to have a strong impact; he, too, is a Europeanist.”<sup>1</sup> This remark, as intriguing as it is for everyone interested in Brzozowski and his legacy, leaves us with some questions as to the actual circumstances or sources that allowed Döblin to assess this “strong impact.” He was not entirely unfamiliar with Brzozowski; he had included some enthusiastic remarks on the latter’s novel *Łomienie* (Flames) in a short critical piece published four years earlier.<sup>2</sup> But Döblin did not know Polish, therefore he is not much of an eyewitness when it comes to critical debates in contemporary Poland. In this, he entirely depended on his Polish interlocutors. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure who exactly was his informer in this specific case.<sup>3</sup>

- 
- 1 “Der Essayist Brzozowski wirkt stark nach, auch er Europäer.” Alfred Döblin, *Reise in Polen* [Journey to Poland] (München: DTV, 1987), 60.
  - 2 Alfred Döblin (pseud. Linke Poot), “Leidenschaft und Landleben” [Passion and country life], in *Schriften zur Politik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2015), 180–190, 189 (first published in: *Die Neue Rundschau*, September 1920, Vol. 2, 1098–1105).
  - 3 According to Marion Brandt’s commentary to Döblin’s *Reise in Polen*, this anonymous “connoisseur of Polish literature,” as Döblin introduces him (*Reise in Polen*, 60), could have been Jacek Frühling, a Polish-Jewish translator and journalist. Marion



It was of course wholly justified to stress Brzozowski's presence in the intellectual debates of the new Polish republic. Some of Brzozowski's friends or supporters of the pre-war years were still alive and active; some, such as for example Zofia Nałkowska, Witold Klinger, Ostap Ortwin, or Karol Irzykowski, had made their way into the cultural establishment of the new state. Brzozowski was considered the informal "Patron" of the mainstream literary journal *Wiadomości Literackie* (Literary News), the most important literary review in Interwar Poland, founded in 1924.<sup>4</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, his works were read by ardent Catholics, by supporters of Piłsudski, and even attracted radical nationalists.<sup>5</sup> Still, in all its generality and superficiality, Döblin's statement is somewhat typical of the destiny of Brzozowski's afterlife in Poland—and beyond: It is nothing more than a mere proposition, without any further arguments or references—and it is, of course, heavily compromised by its author's ignorance of Polish. Although, even in Poland references to Brzozowski, despite all their stereotypical emphasis, are often quite superficial in their actual treatment of his ideas.

During and beyond his lifetime the reception of Brzozowski's writings has been overshadowed by what became known as "the Brzozowski affair." In 1908, the Galician social-democratic party newspaper *Czerwony Sztandar* (The Red Banner) published a list of alleged informers of the tsarist secret police with Brzozowski's name at the top. The allegations were never fully clarified. Due to his tuberculosis Brzozowski lived mostly in Florence since 1906; he was able to attend the first part of the citizens' court trial convened by various social-democratic parties in 1909, but his poor health did not allow him to return to Cracow for a continuation of the trial. There is tragic irony in his situation: The writer who most loudly attacked Polish Romanticism and *fin de siècle* modernism for their self-complacent isolation from society found himself secluded in his Florentine sickroom, banned and despised not only by his long-term adversaries from the national-conservative camp, but also by an overwhelming part of the left-wing activists in partitioned Poland. When he died in 1911, Brzozowski was despised by some parts of the trans-imperial Polish public and nearly forgotten

---

Brandt, "Erläuterungen zu Alfred Döblins 'Reise in Polen'"; <http://www.alfred-doeblin.de/data/erlaeuterungen-zu-doeblins-reise-in-polen.pdf>

- 4 Małgorzata Szpakowska, "*Wiadomości Literackie*" prawie dla wszystkich ["Literary news": almost for everyone] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2012), 373.
- 5 For a comprehensive study of the debates around Brzozowski and his intellectual legacy in Interwar Poland: Marian Stępień, *Spór o spuściznę po Stanisławie Brzozowskim w latach 1918–1939* [The controversy about Stanisław Brzozowski's legacy in the years 1918–1939] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie), 1976.

by others. Thus, for instance, the *Dziennik Poznański* (Poznań Daily) wrote in a short obituary that he had “once been popular amongst circles of young radicals in Warsaw.”<sup>6</sup>

Ever since the Interwar Years, Polish intellectuals have tried to change this; in 1928 a monument to Brzozowski was erected in the Trespiano cemetery in Florence. In the same year the young critic and painter Józef Czapski vigorously complained about the Polish intellectuals’ “failure to fulfill their basic duties” towards Brzozowski’s legacy and called for the creation of a “Stanisław Brzozowski Society.”<sup>7</sup> The 1930s saw the appearance of several monographs on various aspects of Brzozowski’s writings and the project of an edition of his collected works was launched.<sup>8</sup> In 1961, the poet Czesław Miłosz, a member of the “generation of 1911,” for whom the encounter with Brzozowski’s writings had been a crucial moment in his biography, wrote:

Editors and critics always approach Brzozowski with alarm and trepidation, although the reasons for their attitude change according to fluctuations in political circumstances. This means that he is always our contemporary, and that he has not yet become a subject of literary-historical research.<sup>9</sup>

“Always our contemporary”—it would be difficult to come up with a higher rating of Brzozowski’s continuing relevance for at least Polish cultural history. In the early 1960s, Miłosz planned not only to launch a revival in Brzozowski studies in the circles of the Polish émigrés gathered around the Paris journal

---

6 “[...] w swoim czasie głośny wśród młodych radykalnych sfer Warszawy.” *Dziennik Poznański* 102 (04.05.1911): 3.

7 Józef Czapski, “O Towarzystwo im. Stanisława Brzozowskiego” [On the Stanisław Brzozowski Association], *Wiadomości Literackie* 28 (1928): 1.

8 Only three volumes were actually published, the project was then abandoned and renewed in the early 1970s.

9 Czesław Miłosz, “A One-Man Army: Stanisław Brzozowski,” in *Emperor of the Earth. Modes of Eccentric Vision* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 188. This is a translation from his monograph on Brzozowski, originally published in 1962: *Człowiek wśród skorpionów. Studium o Stanisławie Brzozowskim* [Man among scorpions. A study on Stanisław Brzozowski] (Kraków: Znak 2000), 12 (“...jest ciągle nam współczesny...”). “Always our contemporary” was also the title of a conference held at the University of Fribourg in October 2014, where first versions of the essays collected in this volume were discussed. For more on this conference see Andrzej Mencwel’s “Epilogue,” 351ff.

*Kultura* and its editor Jerzy Giedroyc (himself a devoted ‘Brzozowskian’),<sup>10</sup> in addition he aimed to make Brzozowski known in the West. He intended that Brzozowski’s basic writings be translated and discussed by critics and philosophers in Paris and New York. Not much of this could be realized indeed. Only some chapters of Miłosz’s book on Brzozowski were translated into English and published, first in a scholarly journal, then in his collection of essays *Emperor of the Earth*.<sup>11</sup> The overall echo was disillusioning.

Despite a recent rise in interest in Brzozowski in Poland—due to a number of contemporary critics and scholars, but also due to the activities of the “Krytyka Polityczna” publishing house with the “Stanisław Brzozowski Foundation” at its basis—publications on Brzozowski in ‘Western’ languages remain extremely rare and often difficult to access. A highly interesting dissertation on Brzozowski by Jan Goślicki, defended at the University of Zurich, was only partly published in 1980.<sup>12</sup> Rena Syska-Lamparska’s book on Brzozowski and Vico gives invaluable insight into the Italian contexts of Brzozowski’s thought; she deals with Vico’s, but also with Labriola’s, Sorel’s, and Croce’s influence.<sup>13</sup> Holger Politt’s dissertation *Stanisław Brzozowski. Hoffnung wider die dunkle Zeit* (Hope against Dark Times) puts the emphasis on the political ideas of the Polish critic.<sup>14</sup> Lately, a special issue of *Studies in East European Thought* offers some articles on various aspects of Brzozowski’s writings.<sup>15</sup> There exists a highly valuable entry on Brzozowski in the *Encyclopedia of the Essay*, and the *Literary Encyclopedia* published an entry on Brzozowski as well.<sup>16</sup> Of course, language is

10 Jerzy Giedroyc, *Autobiografia na cztery ręce* [Autobiography for four hands], ed. Krzysztof Pomian, Warszawa: Towarzystwo Opieki nad Archiwum Instytutu Literackiego w Paryżu, 2006, 185, 18.

11 Czesław Miłosz, “A One-Man Army,” 186–253.

12 Jan Goślicki, *Der junge Brzozowski. Das Werk von Stanisław Brzozowski bis 1906* [The young Brzozowski: Brzozowski’s works until 1906] (Zürich: Juris, 1980). This brochure has 59 pages, the original manuscript 379 (I am grateful to the author’s widow, Annemarie Frascoli, who for making it accessible to me).

13 *Stanisław Brzozowski: A Polish Vichian*, preface by Wiktor Weintraub (Firenze: Le lettere, 1987).

14 Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996.

15 Jens Herlth, Edward M. Świdorski (eds.), *Stanisław Brzozowski (1878–1911)*, special issue of *Studies in East European Thought* 63, 4 (2011).

16 Stanisław Eile, “Brzozowski, Stanisław,” in *Encyclopedia of the Essay*, ed. Tracy Chevalier (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 120f. (unfortunately, the bibliography lists Syska-Lamparska’s abovementioned book as “Stanisław Brzozowski: A Polish Vision”); Jens Herlth, “Stanisław Brzozowski,” *The Literary Encyclopedia*

a crucial obstacle in the international reception of Brzozowski. Only few of his texts were translated into Western languages, with a characteristic preference for his literary works: The novel *Plomienie* (Flames) was even translated into German twice, his *Pamiętnik* (Diary) was published in French.<sup>17</sup> Recently, a collection of his essays was published in Italian—to my knowledge this is the only edition of a selection of Brzozowski's critical and philosophical writings in any language other than Polish.<sup>18</sup>

Arthur O. Lovejoy once stated that “ideas are the most migratory things in the world.”<sup>19</sup> More than four decades earlier, the Polish sociologist Ludwik Krzywicki had developed the concept of the “migration of ideas” to explain the detachment of the superstructure from the social bases in the development of societies. The “migration of ideas,” he argued, allowed societies to incorporate concepts that normally would have taken more time to develop were it not for the exchange of ideas across borders and the transmission of “foreign experience” from more to less developed countries.<sup>20</sup> Brzozowski's writings are a good example of this. From his early years on, he ardently followed the newest ideas in European philosophy, literature, psychology, and sociology. His activity was embedded in a broader context of so-called non-governmental, *social* endeavors of popular education; the early years of the twentieth century saw a considerable popularity of cheap brochures on science and philosophy. There was a peculiar fashion for intellectual work and a high esteem for its proponents.<sup>21</sup> Brzozowski not only popularized the ideas of Taine, Sorel, Nietzsche, and others, but also checked them against his own experiences and historical background. He used and reworked them according to his needs—his own and those of Polish culture as he understood it. His own highly non-systematic world-view was a peculiar

---

(first published 17 July 2017). <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=13829>

17 Stanisław Brzozowski, *Histoire d'une intelligence: journal 1910–1911*, trans. Wojciech Kolecki (Paris: le Bruit du temps, 2010).

18 Stanisław Brzozowski, *Cultura e vita* [Culture and life], ed. Anna Czajka (Milano: Mimesis, 2017).

19 Arthur O. Lovejoy, “Reflections on the History of Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1,1 (1940): 3–23, 4.

20 Ludwik Krzywicki, “Wędrówka idei” [The migration of ideas], *Szkice socjologiczne*, cz. I (*Dziela*, vol. 9), Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1974, 189–202, 190 (first published in 1897).

21 Bohdan Cywiński, *Rodowody niepokornych* [Genealogy of the defiant], 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Warszawa: PWN, 2010), 72; Janina Żurawicka, *Inteligencja warszawska w końcu XIX wieku* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1978), 222.

blend of Marxist social critique, a Vico-inspired philosophy of history and a voluntarist approach in the understanding of man and society. Although none of the single features of this world-view was entirely original, Brzozowski's energetic plea to the Polish people to adopt a position of self-conscious, creative, and heroic historical activity was in fact something new in the context of East-Central European literary criticism and the philosophy of culture of the time.

How can we explain then, that Brzozowski's ideas did not migrate to other languages and cultures, that his intellectual heritage has been practically ignored outside of Poland for more than over a century since his death in 1911? Most likely, this is because his contribution to Polish philosophy, literary theory and criticism—so esteemed by Polish experts in the field—did not so much consist of *ideas* than of something else, something that can approximately be described as a posture, a certain ethos. In an insightful statement, the literary critic Kazimierz Wyka called Brzozowski “a great creator of philosophical emotions.”<sup>22</sup> There is reason to assume that philosophical emotions are more *emotional* than *philosophical*—and the channels for their transmission are probably others than those we typically deal with in the history of ideas. This is why it is so difficult to capture them appropriately. Andrzej Mencwel, for example, who speaks of the intense reception of Brzozowski in the circle associated with the nationalist underground journal *Sztuka i Naród* (Art and the Nation) as well as in the socialist-orientated group “*Plomienie*” (Flames) in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, simply argues that these young enthusiasts referred to Brzozowski “more as to an ideologist than to a philosopher.”<sup>23</sup> Maybe it was not so much the ideological content but rather the elevated emotional temperature and the morally engaging, truly challenging nature of Brzozowski's essays that made them so popular, especially among young socially sensitive readers, throughout the first decades of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, ‘Brzozowski’ as a figure, as a point of reference, has been of continuous importance in many contexts and configurations of Polish intellectual history of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A quote from Brzozowski or the mere mention of his name or his works was perceived as endowed with symbolic capital, a capital, alas, that has practically not been convertible to non-Polish areas. Eminent scholars, such as Bronisław Baczko, Leszek Koła-

---

22 Kazimierz Wyka, “O ocenie myśli Brzozowskiego” [On the assessment of Brzozowski's thought], in *Stara szuflada* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1967), 57–64, 59. The original article was published in 1934 in the weekly *Pion* (Plump)

23 Andrzej Mencwel, *Stanisław Brzozowski. Postawa krytyczna. Wiek XX* [Stanisław Brzozowski. The critical attitude. The twentieth century] (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2014), 588.

kowski, or Krzysztof Pomian, who were responsible for a revival in Brzozowski studies after the years of Stalinist prohibition and were forced to leave the PRL at the end of the 1960s or early 1970s, did not publish a single line devoted to the hero of their pre-émigré theoretical quests—the only (though important!) exception being the chapter on Brzozowski in Kołakowski's *Main Currents of Marxism*.<sup>24</sup> The new-comer from the outside often has a special feel for formal and informal intellectual hierarchies and how ideas and figures are rated in his or her new frame of reference.<sup>25</sup> Apparently, Baczeko and his former colleagues understood well that, in the context of Western scholarly debates, there was nothing to gain by dealing *with* or even only referring *to* Brzozowski's writings. Back in Poland in the 1960s, 'Brzozowski' had been for them, maybe in the first place, a vehicle to explore the field of Marxist revisionism, an area they were inclined to abandon, moving forward to other fields of research and other theoretical affiliations in the 1970s.<sup>26</sup>

In a conversation with Bronisław Baczeko in his Geneva apartment in July 2013, we asked him directly why he did not refer to Brzozowski in any of his later writings. Baczeko simply stated that, when he arrived in Geneva in the early seventies, other topics were of far higher interest to him. At the time, he considered Brzozowski a closed chapter in his professional career, and there was nobody around who would have shown interest in Brzozowski. We insisted that he is considered one of the leading figures of the "Warsaw School of the history of ideas" after all and that one of the common points of reference for this school's exponents was notably Brzozowski. But Baczeko retorted by pointing out that the whole construct of a "Warsaw School" seemed highly doubtful to him and that it was only Walicki who had proclaimed and continuously nourished the idea. As far as Baczeko himself was concerned, there was no and had never been such thing as a "Warsaw School of the history of ideas."<sup>27</sup>

To study Brzozowski's presence in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Polish culture requires, among other things, confronting the problem that this presence cannot be reduced to situations of actual, textually verifiable real 'impact' or 'influence'. References to Brzozowski can often be found in personal memories, they are articulated and transmitted in the sphere of emotions, they take the form of symbolic gestures. In fact, a good part of Brzozowski criticism

---

24 Leszek Kołakowski, "Stanisław Brzozowski: Marxism as Historical Subjectivism," in *Main Currents of Marxism. Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution*, vol. 2, *The Golden Age*, trans. Paul S. Falla (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981), 215–239.

25 Pascale Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 70.

26 I am grateful to Edward Świdorski for pointing this out to me.

27 The conversation was led by Edward Świdorski and me on July 2, 2013.

is devoted to typological parallels and resemblances, in the realm of *the possible* rather than that of *the real*. Thus, for instance, in his *Brzozowski and the Beginnings of 'Western Marxism'*, the abovementioned Andrzej Walicki highlighted the hidden affinities between Brzozowski's thought and that of non-orthodox twentieth-century Western Marxists, above all Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci by all probability never came across any of Brzozowski's writings, neither did any other relevant representative of twentieth-century Western Marxism. Still, Walicki's discussion of the topic is highly instructive for everyone interested in the matter. One could continue in this direction: Cornelius Castoriadis's influential reflections on the social imaginary as deeply entangled in social practice, his rejection of a primordial naturality and, above all, his postulate of history as "the domain of *creation*," his emphasis on the self-creation of (a new) society,<sup>28</sup> strongly remind us of Brzozowski's ideas on the role of man in history. This is obviously not due to any hidden influence, but rather because of a common line of thought, a common perspective on modern societies, which Brzozowski shared with some of the most theoretically advanced minds in post- or neo-Marxist social theory of the twentieth century. Even Brzozowski's seemingly idiosyncratic recourse to the "soul" in his late essays on Polish society and on what he called "the crisis in European consciousness" seems a lot less outdated when we think of the crucial role ascribed to psychoanalytical models in critical interventions in contemporary society as practiced in the wake of Lacan's writings during the last decades. Castoriadis extensively refers to Lacan; the "psyche" is one of the central categories in his book on the social imaginary. One could also quote a recent example from Poland, namely Andrzej Leder's study of the paradoxes of consciousness in Polish society of the Post-War period.<sup>29</sup> Leder does not mention Brzozowski as a reference for his approach, but his heavy indebtedness to Lacanian metaphors makes him an interpreter of the cultural "soul" in the—methodologically problematic, though critically inspiring—sense that Brzozowski ascribed to this concept in the essays of *Legenda Młodej Polski* (1909, The Legend of Modern Poland) and in his posthumously published collection *Głosy wśród nocy* (1912, Voices in the Night).

The quest for parallels between Brzozowski's writings and representatives of European thought and literature dates back to the Interwar Years. Maksymilian Boruchowicz (later Michał Borwicz), in an essay published in the monthly

---

28 Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 202, 45.

29 Andrzej Leder, *Prześląona rewolucja. Ćwiczenie z logiki historycznej* [The slept-through revolution: an exercise in historical logic] (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2014).

*Sygnaly* (Signals), analyzed “obvious parallels” between Brzozowski and the French writer Malraux.<sup>30</sup> The focus falls on a comparative reading of *Flames* and Malraux’s *La condition humaine* (The Human Condition, 1933), but he also takes a look at the theoretical ideas of the two writers, their views on aesthetics and Marxism. The parallels, as he says, are all the more astonishing as they cannot be explained by a direct influence, since Malraux, for all we know, could not have read Brzozowski.<sup>31</sup>

One of the explicit goals of the present volume is to take into account this tendency in the reception of Brzozowski’s work. Our special focus is not only on hitherto neglected configurations or individual readings of Brzozowski, but also on typological patterns and lines of thought, on affinities that might not have been consciously elected, but that still shed a light on what Brzozowski meant or at least *could have* meant for Polish culture in its European and global context. Indeed, this last aspect is not entirely new: One could go so far as to state that traditionally there is an important strand of “had it been the case that ...” in the history of Brzozowski criticism. Tomasz Burek once suggested a prospective reading of Brzozowski’s novels which meant to analyze them against the background of the works of the great writers of modernism (Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Hermann Broch).<sup>32</sup> Marta Wyka drew parallels between Brzozowski and György Lukács and above all Walter Benjamin, for whom, as she says, Brzozowski was a kind of “progenitor” (“protoplasta”).<sup>33</sup> And Czesław Miłosz’s abovementioned book is a long lament about the ignorance of twentieth century philosophers and critics as far as their Polish precursor is concerned. The bottom line of all these speculations is: Brzozowski *would have* been a great, widely-read twentieth century philosopher and literary critic had he opted for a language other than Polish. Still, for honesty’s sake, one should probably add some more ‘would-be’s’ to this: had Brzozowski been born in the Austro-Hungarian (as opposed to the Russian) Empire, had his family been well-off (and not precariously impoverished), had he studied in Heidelberg or Berlin (rather than at the Russian-language Imperial University of Warsaw), had he been granted a chair at the University of Lwów...<sup>34</sup> It is instructive to note that the first one to

30 Maksymiljan [sic] Boruchowicz, “Brzozowski i Malraux” [Brzozowski and Malraux], *Sygnaly. Miesięcznik. Sprawy społeczne, literatura, sztuka* 28 (1937): 2.

31 Ibid., 3.

32 Tomasz Burek, “Arcydziało niedokończone” [The unfinished masterpiece], *Twórczość* 6 (1966): 73–96, 81f.

33 Marta Wyka, *Czytanie Brzozowskiego* [Reading Brzozowski] (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 190, 337.

34 Brzozowski, *Listy*, vol. 1, 98. See also: Mencwel, *Stanisław Brzozowski*, 572.



have adopted this mode of counterfactuality in dealing with Brzozowski's legacy was actually Brzozowski himself. In the diary he wrote during the last few months of his life he stated that had he been given some more time he would certainly have been able to "change the character of Polish literature for whole generations."<sup>35</sup> However, as we know today, this—and far more—did *not* happen. Brzozowski did *not* overcome his illness and died only four months after he noted this conviction.

This is a book about parallels and converging vistas, it reveals hidden paths and neglected contexts. It is a book about failures, missed encounters and possible, but never pursued paths. It is also a book about cultural domination, about intellectual contagion—and immunity. We (re)construct intellectual encounters which, although not all of them actually 'happened', still might help in assessing the significance of Brzozowski's specific contribution to Polish culture. There is little probability that Emil Cioran or Richard Rorty ever heard of Brzozowski, nevertheless a comparative glance at some aspects of their thought reveals striking resemblances to Brzozowski's own peculiar version of 'Kulturphilosophie'. Particular attention is paid to the relevance of Brzozowski's legacy for recent developments in literary criticism and cultural theory. Due to their openness and a lack of systematic coherence Brzozowski's writings have turned out to be highly suggestive for later generations of cultural theorists and literary scholars.<sup>36</sup> His most important contributions in this regard appear to be the performativity of the reading act, the implication of the reader, and the heightened attention to the relationship between reading and the creation of communities. These are crucial issues in any substantial discussion of the role of literature and intellectual activity in contemporary societies.

In the end, it might as well turn out that Brzozowski was just a provincial intellectual, provincial in a triple sense: geographical, linguistic, and historical. *Geographical*, because he spent his formative years in the remote region of Podolia, at the outskirts of the old Polish-Lithuanian Empire. Later he came to the centers of development of modern Polish culture, the cities of Warsaw and Łwów—for many contemporaries the provinciality of these very centers was a steady issue of complaint. *Linguistic*, because he published his works in Polish—

---

35 Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, 48.

36 Two recent book projects of significant scope and insight should be mentioned here: *Stanisław Brzozowski – (ko)reperytycje* [St. Brzozowski: private lessons], 2 Vols., ed. Dorota Kozicka, Joanna Orska, and Krzysztof Uniłowski (Katowice: FA-art, 2012), and *Konstellacje Stanisława Brzozowskiego* [St. Brzozowski's constellations], ed. Urszula Kowalczyk et al. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012).

a language that is unfortunately traditionally marginalized and neglected in the so-called West. *Historical*, because he did not live to see the Interwar period when Poland established its own state-financed institutions. During his lifetime, Polish society was partitioned between the three *zaborcy* with their diverging legislation and restrictions in the field of press and public education. The socialist movement in the first decade of the twentieth century was marked by fierce internal struggles. The unfortunate affair around Brzozowski's alleged activities as an informer of the Tsarist secret police, his illness, and, not to forget, his precarious position as a freelance writer led to his isolation. György Lukács, who is so often quoted as a counterfactual role model for Brzozowski, came from a wealthy family, moved to Berlin, Heidelberg, and later to Moscow—each of these cities being an intellectual bastion in its own right. He was in touch with the Max Weber and Stefan George circles and later became the core of the so-called Lukács-Lifshits "Current," a circle around the journal *Literaturnyi kritik* (Literary Critic),<sup>37</sup> that is, one of the hatcheries of the theory of socialist realism in the 1930s, the literary ideology that reigned in Post-World War II Poland when publications by and on Brzozowski were prohibited for some years (this being one of the many bitter ironies, in which Brzozowski's life and afterlife abound).

However, from today's point of view, 'provinciality' does not mean irrelevance, quite to the contrary: Pre-World War I Central Europe was a cultural field of extreme variety and enormous intellectual richness. The various literary and philosophical contexts that Brzozowski absorbed and digested and the manifold intellectual processes that he triggered and inspired (up to the present) testify to this. It is worth reading Brzozowski notably for the space of possibilities that his intellectual legacy introduces to us. To think about *what could have been* proves a useful tool to understand the actual functioning of a cultural setting, a historical configuration. We acquire new perspectives and often unexpected insights in the history of philosophy and literary criticism—not only in Poland. Brzozowski's province really is the "world of human history," in the sense once proposed by Erich Auerbach:

Whatever we are, we became in history, and only in history can we remain the way we are and develop therefrom: it is the task of philologists, whose province is the world of human history, to demonstrate this so that it penetrates our lives unforgettably.<sup>38</sup>

---

37 Natalia Poltavtseva, "Platonov i Lukach (iz istorii sovetskogo iskusstva 1930-kh godov)" [Platonov i Lukács (from the history of Soviet art of the 1930s)], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 107 (2011): 253–270.

38 Erich Auerbach, "Philology and 'Weltliteratur,'" *The Centennial Review* 13.1 (1969): 1–17, 6.

## NOTE ON QUOTATIONS FROM BRZOWSKI'S WORKS

Quotations from Brzowski's work are cited according to the *Dzieła* (Works) edition. The volumes of this edition are not included in the "Works Cited" sections of the single chapters. In the footnotes, they are referred to by the name of the author and a short title. The full bibliographical references of these volumes are as follows:

*Listy* [Letters]. 2 vols. Edited by Mieczysław Sroka. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1970.

*Kultura i życie* [Culture and life]. Edited by Mieczysław Sroka. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1973.

*Wczesne prace krytyczne* [Early critical works]. Edited by Mieczysława Sroka (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1988).

*Współczesna powieść i krytyka* [The contemporary novel and contemporary criticism]. Edited by Mieczysław Sroka and Janina Bahr. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984.

*Idee* [Ideas]. Edited by Mieczysław Sroka and Stefan Góra. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1990.

*Legenda Młodej Polski* [The legend of modern Poland]. 2 vols. Edited by Janina Bahr. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001.<sup>39</sup>

*Sam wśród ludzi. Książka o starej kobiecie* [Alone among people. A book about an old woman]. Edited by Maciej Urbanowski. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011.

*Pod ciężarem Boga. Wiry. Płomienie* [Under the weight of God. Whirlpools. Flames]. Edited by Maciej Urbanowski. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2012.

The following two works have not yet been included in the *Dzieła* edition. They too are referenced by a short title and are not listed in the "Works Cited" sections:

*Głosy wśród nocy. Studia nad przesileniem romantycznym kultury europejskiej* [Voices in the night. Studies on the romantic crisis in European culture]. Edited by Ostap Ortwin. Lwów: Księgarnia Polska B. Połonieckiego / Warszawa: E. Wende i Sp., 1912.

---

39 All references are to the first volume of this edition.

*Pamiętnik* [Diary]. Edited by Maciej Urbanowski. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 2007.

## **NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION OF TEXTS FROM POLISH**

We translate all Polish (German, Ukrainian...) quotations to English. The original Polish text is given for Brzozowski's works and in cases where it is essential for the sake of argument.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Several chapters of this book were translated from the Polish; the name of the translator is indicated at the end of the texts. Most of the translated chapters were fundamentally revised by the editors, a process in which Andrew Niemann and Florence Lanz provided invaluable assistance. We would like to express our deep gratitude for their excellent work. We would also like to thank Eliane Fitzé and Christian Zehnder who helped us in preparing the ultimate edition of this book.



# **TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**



## **“Sounding out idols”: Brzozowski and Strindberg as Nietzsche Readers**

---

*Jan Balbierz*

There can be no strong, canonical writing without the process of literary influence, a process vexing to undergo and difficult to understand. [...] The anxiety of influence is not an anxiety about the father, real or literary, but an anxiety achieved by and in the poem, novel or play. Any strong literary work creatively misreads and therefore misinterprets a precursor text or texts. An authentic canonical writer may or may not internalize her or his work's anxiety, but that scarcely matters: the strongly achieved work *is* the anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

The formation of a new literary canon and the displacement of the boundaries of the classical one played a crucial role in the cultural debates around the turn of the twentieth century; this era included Nietzsche finally being received in Europe, which led to one of the most spectacular canonical shifts in European modernism. Nietzsche's dramatic rise in influence from a virtually unknown private scholar before 1890 to a cultural icon and *the* philosopher of modernity, was mostly created by three Scandinavian writers: Georg Brandes, Ola Hansson, and August Strindberg.

---

1 Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon. The Book and Schools of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 8.



## The European Nietzsche Boom

The European Nietzsche boom began in the spring of 1888 at the University of Copenhagen, when Georg Brandes, a Danish critic and culture historian, delivered a groundbreaking series of lectures on Nietzsche; these were later published under the title “Friedrich Nietzsche. En Afhandling om aristokratisk Radikalisme” (Friedrich Nietzsche: An Essay on Aristocratic Radicalism).<sup>2</sup> Around the same time, the Swedish author Ola Hansson published an article on Nietzsche, which, when translated into German, played an important role in the European reception of Nietzsche at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Brandes had probably heard of Nietzsche as far back as early 1880, and their correspondence began in 1887 when Brandes wrote:

Aber vieles stimmt mit meinen eignen Gedanken und Sympathien überein, die Geringschätzung der asketischen Ideale und der tiefe Unwille gegen demokratische Mittelmäßigkeit, Ihr aristokratischer Radikalismus.<sup>4</sup>

Much of it coincides with my own thoughts and sympathies, the ascetic contempt of ideals and the profound disgust with democratic mediocrity—your aristocratic radicalism.

Nietzsche answered with his famous and often quoted compliment, “ein solcher guter Europäer und Kultur-Missionär” (such a fine European and cultural missionary).<sup>5</sup>

Brandes’s presentation of Nietzsche in *Aristokratisk Radikalisme* may seem antiquated for today, but it was groundbreaking for the time. The main focus of the text is on Nietzsche’s critique of the liberal-democratic developments in Europe and his aversion to Christianity, and yet, most importantly, he did not give considerable attention to the formal developments of art and literature. Despite Brandes’s fierce diatribes against romantic aesthetics in the text, he exudes the influence of the romantic “cult of genius.” For him Nietzsche was one of those

- 
- 2 Georg Brandes, “Friedrich Nietzsche. En Afhandling om aristokratisk Radikalisme (1889),” *Samlede Skrifter*, vol. 7 (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, 1901), 596–664.
  - 3 Ola Hansson, *Friedrich Nietzsche. Seine Persönlichkeit und sein System* [Friedrich Nietzsche: his personality and his system] (Leipzig: Fritzsche, 1890).
  - 4 Paul Krüger, *Correspondance de Georg Brandes III, L’Allemagne* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1966), 439.
  - 5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Briefe 1861–1889* [Letters], ed. Karl-Maria Guth (Berlin: Cuntumax, 2013), 339.

great minds who shared many of the same views as the “Modern Breakthrough,” a movement that contested the remnants of romanticism which emerged in the literatures of Scandinavia from the end of the 1860s onward. Brandes mainly focuses on Nietzsche’s critique of the liberal-democratic developments in Europe and his aversion to Christianity.

Brandes also introduced Strindberg to Nietzsche by giving him *Der Fall Wagner*; in October 1888, Strindberg thanked him for the gift:

Thank you for so kindly sending me Nietzsche in the midst of my desolation, an acquaintance for which I am greatly indebted to you, since I find him the most liberated, the most modern of us all (not least, of course, on the Woman Question).<sup>6</sup>

Then for a few weeks between 1888 and 1889, Strindberg began a correspondence with Nietzsche, but it was interrupted by Nietzsche’s nervous breakdown.<sup>7</sup> The small but well-known cache of letters between them is mainly concerned with the possibility of translating and promoting each other’s works. More interesting though are the passages on Nietzsche in numerous other letters that Strindberg mainly sent to other fellow writers. Strindberg wrote to Brandes’s brother,

I am studying a German philosopher. His ideas and mine agree so completely that I find him excellent, the only philosopher alive that I have any use for. We have been in touch with each other for a few years. His name sounds strange and he is still unknown. His name is Friedrich Nietzsche. But he is a genius.<sup>8</sup>

---

6 August Strindberg, *Strindberg’s Letters Vol. 2, 1892–1912*, trans. Michael F. Robinson (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), 285.

7 Directly after Nietzsche’s collapse Strindberg wrote to Brandes: “Dear Doctor, I know I am pestering you with letters, but I now believe our friend Nietzsche is mad, and what’s worse, that he can compromise us. Unless, that is, the crafty Slav (remember Turgeniev-Daudet, bear in mind the cunning Tolstoy) isn’t playing a trick on all of us! Read his letters in succession. In No. 1 he asks me to translate *Ecce Homo*—into French! To discourage him, I let him know what I had to pay for the translation of *Mariés* (1,000 Francs). In No. 2 he draws back—and sends me *The Genealogy of Morals*. I’m amazed to find I had already speculated about ‘Remords’ (Pangs of Conscience) before I ever heard of him, and send him my story. Whereupon he replies with No. 3, signed Nietzsche Caesar. *Was thun?* In haste, Yours August Strindberg.” Strindberg, *Letters Vol. 2*, 299.

8 Ibid., 125.

To the writer Verner von Heidenstam he wrote, “Buy a modern German philosopher called Nietzsche [sic], about whom G.B. has been lecturing. Everything is there! Don’t deny yourself this pleasure! N. is a poet too.”<sup>9</sup> Some months later he added: “Read Friedrich Nietzsche. (Jenseit von Gut und Bose [sic!]).”<sup>10</sup> In yet another letter he wrote that Nietzsche enabled the “fermentation of my ideas” and that “the uterus of my mental world has received a tremendous ejaculation of sperm from Friedrich Nietzsche, so that I feel like a bitch with a full belly.”<sup>11</sup> Strindberg was suffering from a strong anxiety of influence, he declared that his ideas were astonishingly similar to Nietzsche’s proposals even though he claimed to have developed them independently. In a letter to Brandes, he wrote that he himself had “anticipated the man [Nietzsche] [...] he entered my life immediately after I had arrived at his position, without my knowing him, his point of view coincided with mine.”<sup>12</sup>

Karin Hoff argues that Nietzsche’s correspondence with the Scandinavians in part contained debates on the canon which were always intertwined with issues of power and authority and that Strindberg’s and Nietzsche’s writings from this time were a kind of dialogue on the questions of social and biological hierarchy as well as symbolic capital. Along with this, Hoff claims that the *dispositifs* of power and the will to power are the “ideological nucleus”<sup>13</sup> of Strindberg’s play *The Father*, which Nietzsche praises in one of his letters. The play presents mechanisms of violence and subjugation; it shows how attributes of power are transmitted and acquired through language games and how rhetorical devices help to maintain prestige, or on the contrary, lead to the destruction of traditional values established under the authority of the main character. A large part of the drama deals with symbolic capital and its transmission and substitution before concluding in the breakdown of social conventions.<sup>14</sup>

## Brzozowski’s Analysis of Nietzsche

Brzozowski analyzes Nietzsche in two texts, the philosophical dialogue “Fryderyk Nietzsche,” which was written in 1906 and then published in 1907, and the

---

9 Ibid., 277.

10 Ibid., 288.

11 Ibid., 283.

12 Ibid., 328.

13 Karin Hoff, “...‘Ein angenehmer Wind von Norden’. Nietzsche und Strindberg im Dialog” [“A pleasant wind from the North.” Nietzsche and Strindberg in dialogue], *Arcadia—International Journal for Literary Studies* 39,1 (2004): 61.

14 Ibid., 56.

essay “Filozofia Fryderyka Nietzschego” (Friedrich Nietzsche’s Philosophy) from 1907, which was published in *Przegląd Filozoficzny* (Philosophical Review) in 1912. Along with these essays, Brzozowski makes numerous references to Nietzsche that are scattered throughout his works. Brzozowski’s writings can be viewed in the context of the first phase of Nietzsche’s reception in Europe, like Strindberg he makes frequent references to the “superman,” “will to power,” and the “revaluation of all values.”<sup>15</sup>

Strindberg and Brzozowski were both compulsive readers and had a voracious appetite for books; along with reading, the two were obsessive canon-makers. Much of their works deal with removing or adding to the canon; the body of works they drew from was huge and always in flux so that there were constant reevaluations of the same texts, making these canons impossible to define. On several pages of Brzozowski’s *Pamiętnik* (Diary), for example, there are varying references to writers such as Arnold, Swinburne, Newman, Coleridge, Blake, Keats, Meredith, and Shelley.

Nietzsche occupies a central place in the personal canons of Strindberg and Brzozowski; both of them recognized the novelty and modernity of his philosophical thought and vindicated different aspects of his philosophy. In order to justify their own poetics and philosophies, both Strindberg and Brzozowski were selective in their readings of their respective canonical authors. For Strindberg, Nietzsche was a modern perspectivist (like Strindberg himself) and he was, as well, an antidemocrat, an aristocratic radical, who foresaw the downfall of European culture through its decadence.<sup>16</sup> In December 1888, Strindberg summarized Nietzsche’s philosophy, stating:

Nietzsche heralds the downfall of Europe and Christianity [...]. Nietzsche is the modern spirit who dares to preach the right of the strong and the wise against the stupid and small

---

15 The topic of Brzozowski and Nietzsche is one of the earliest in the study of the works of the Polish philosopher and critic; in the mid-1930s Kazimierz Wyka delivered a paper on the topic and he was followed by Czesław Miłosz, Paweł Pieniążek, and Andrzej Walicki.

16 *By the Open Sea* (I havsbandet, 1890) is usually interpreted as a part of the *Übermensch* debate with its main character, the fishery inspector Axel Borg, being seen as a Swedish appropriation of the concept. Tobias Dahlqvist sees it as the most “Nietzschean” of Strindberg’s novels that was “clearly conceived within a decadent horizon of expectations.” Tobias Dahlqvist, “By the Open Sea—A Decadent Novel? Reconsidering relationships Between Nietzsche, Strindberg and Fin-de-Siècle Culture,” in *The International Strindberg. New Critical Essays*, ed. Anna Westerståhl Stenport (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 201.

(the democrats), and I can imagine the suffering of this great spirit under the sway of the petty host which dominates this feminized and cretinous age. And I hail him as the liberator, ending my letters to my literary friends like his catechumen with: Read Nietzsche!<sup>17</sup>

In the preface to the *Twilight of the Idols* (a book that Strindberg received from Nietzsche in 1888) Nietzsche coins the “phrase sounding out idols”:

Another mode of convalescence [...] is sounding out idols. There are more idols than realities in the world [we must] pose questions with a hammer, and sometimes to hear as a reply that famous hollow sound that can only come from bloated entrails—what a delight to one who has ears even behind his ears, for me, an old psychologist and pied piper before whom just that which would remain silent must finally speak out.<sup>18</sup>

In Brzozowski’s texts, Nietzsche appears among a rather heterogeneous group of predecessors such as Novalis, Vico, Boehme, Kleist, and Słowacki and contemporary philosophers such as Marx, Sorel, Simmel, or Avenarius. He is one of the cultural *maiores* and becomes one of the most important figures in Brzozowski’s cultural canon. Brzozowski’s reading of Nietzsche focuses on his critique of contemporary culture, life-philosophy, and the reevaluation of historicism. Like Nietzsche, Strindberg, and Ibsen, Brzozowski, especially in *Legenda Młodej Polski* (The Legend of Young Poland), sounds out the idols of contemporary Polish social life and public debate, revealing the “mystified consciousness” (zmystyfikowana świadomość)<sup>19</sup> of the cultural Philistines; he criticized archaic rituals, conspicuous consumption of the ruling classes, and eventually the clerics’ futile aspiration of living outside of history. If we employ the classifications that Nietzsche proposed in *Untimely Meditations*, the central agenda for Brzozowski is a critical approach to history that opposes its nationalist monumentalization as well as the naive positivist quest for objectivity. The introductory chapter of *Legenda*, entitled “Nasze ‘ja’ i historia” (Our “Self” and History), is an attack on ahistorical thinking in which he writes that the fictions produced by literary historians “are only the specific form, the specific result of more general, and more fundamental delusions that one could describe as delusions of cultural consciousness” (są tylko poszczególną postacią, poszczególnym wynikiem złudzeń bardziej ogólnych i zasadniczych, które nazwaćby można złudze-

---

17 Strindberg, *Letters Vol. 2*, 295.

18 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale.

19 Brzozowski, *Legenda Młodej Polski*, 16.

niami kulturalnej świadomości).<sup>20</sup> One cannot liberate oneself from history, one can only misapprehend it. Contrary to Nietzsche he offers a *remedium* to that grand “system of delusions and illusions” (system złudzeń i iluzji) and the “flights from history” (ucieczek przed historią)—“labor” (praca).<sup>21</sup>

Leszek Kołakowski's *Main Currents of Marxism* provides a chapter on Brzozowski that continues to be the main source of information on the writer for non-Polish speakers. Kołakowski notes that Brzozowski's concept of the worker goes beyond the Marxist relations of production and the distinction between the proletariat and capitalists; instead, “to him the proletariat was the instrument of a Promethean ideal derived from metaphysical reflection and not from observation of the actual tendency of the workers' movement.”<sup>22</sup> And that “it was only from the point of view of labor that men could understand the meaning of their own efforts, it was from the class of direct producers that humanity must learn to understand itself and be imbued with the necessary hope and confidence to govern its own destiny.”<sup>23</sup> The free, efficient worker is not subjected to any superior power; he is a messenger for a better world in which he serves as a sort of secular messiah. Brzozowski continues to use quasi-religious language to describe this ideal society when he states:

Póki społeczne życie nie stanie się współżyciem dopełniających się i potęgujących się wzajemnie, w niczym zaś nie krępujących jedne drugich – *wolnych duchów*, póty zadaniem sztuki będzie ponad społeczeństwem stwarzać dla wszystkich – *promienne państwo bezgranicznej swobody*, dziedzinę, w której każdy wreszcie będzie mógł żyć sam siebie całkowicie, w której nie będzie skłonności tak odrębnej, tak nowej, która by nie mogła znaleźć dla siebie całkowitego, nie pohamowanego niczym wyrazu.<sup>24</sup>

As long as social life does not become a community of *free spirits* that complement and strengthen each other, that do not embarrass one another, the mission of art is to create the *shining state of limitless freedom* above society for everyone, a sphere in which everybody can finally fully realize oneself, in which there would not be a penchant so special, so new that could not find for itself an expression that is not restricted by anything.

---

20 Ibid., 13.

21 Ibid., 26.

22 Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism. Its Rise, Growth and Dissolution. Vol. II. The Golden Age*, trans. P.S. Falla (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 234.

23 Ibid., 231.

24 Stanisław Brzozowski, “Teatr współczesny i jego dążności rozwojowe” [Contemporary theater and its development] in *Wczesne prace krytyczne*, 342–343.

His prophecy of the resurrection of the working class has failed, as all historiosophical prophecies do. Despite this, the figure of the worker does not necessarily need to be understood in terms of class struggle because Brzozowski's opposition is between anyone who actively changes the course of history and the material foundations of society, i.e., the workers, and what Thorstein Veblen called "the leisure class," which Brzozowski equated with unproductive intellectuals who "consider their adventures in acquiring culture, their ideological development, their state of mind to be the core of history" (uważają swoje perypetie w nabywaniu kultury, swoje przejścia ideologiczne, stany dusz, za właściwy rdzeń dziejów).<sup>25</sup>

Most critics recognize Brzozowski's philosophy as being rooted in Marxism. If this is correct, his idea of the workers and the proletariat would be another variation of the phantasma of the "working class" as the driving force of history, which has been so dear to the academic upper-middle class since the nineteenth century. However, Brzozowski's affiliations to Marx and his followers, especially, were complicated. In *Legenda Młodej Polski* he writes, "historical materialism was forged [...] initially as a method of research that finally turned into some sort of socialist Esperanto" (Materializm dziejowy został sfalszowany [...] z metody badania, stał się tylko pewnym rodzajem socialistycznego Esperanto).<sup>26</sup> In his essay on Nietzsche, he expresses even more strongly his disgust with left-wing group-thinking, "Nothing is more infamous than the modern theories of social solidarity that throw around the notion of altruism" (Nic dla nas nie ma ohydniejszego niż szermujące terminem altruizm nowoczesne teorie solidarności społecznej).<sup>27</sup> The main aim of the proletariat is not class struggle but rather the creation of the new man—one of the central myths of early modernism:

Ruch klasy robotniczej rozpatrywany z tej strony posiada całkiem inne znaczenie niż to, jakie mu się nadaje zazwyczaj, jest to tworzenie się nowej arystokracji, powstawanie nowego typu człowieka, zdolnego objąć świadomy ster dziejów. Różni się on głęboko od demokratycznych dążeń, z którymi splatają go jednodniowe interesy polityki.<sup>28</sup>

From this perspective, the working-class movement has a fundamentally different significance from that which it is normally ascribed to; it entails the creation of a new aristocracy, the emergence of a new type of man who will be able to take the helm of history in

---

25 Brzozowski, *Legenda Młodej Polski*, 13.

26 Ibid., 231.

27 Brzozowski, "Filozofia Fryderyka Nietzschego," in *Kultura i życie*, 683.

28 Brzozowski, *Legenda Młodej Polski*, 231.

hand. It profoundly differs from the democratic aspirations with which it is merged by ephemeral interests of politics.

In his essay on Nietzsche, Brzozowski makes a lengthy argument for the role of the worker in history and how “the ideal of freedom today is the worker” (ideałem swobody ludzkiej jest dziś robotnik),<sup>29</sup> who is supposed to be skillful and flexible. He defines “true freedom” in relation to labor and not as something spiritual because a free man produces the basis of his life for himself.<sup>30</sup> This philosophy focuses on the formulation of ideas rather than on knowledge (especially with the creation of the idea of labor instead of the earlier idea of being) which results in the creation of a new type of man whose existence is based on freedom. This man, as opposed to the rest of the world, is a worker.<sup>31</sup>

Kořakowski notes that Brzozowski’s proletariat is “a collective warrior with the traits of a Nietzschean hero”,<sup>32</sup> indeed Brzozowski’s “worker” and his “working class” share certain characteristics with Nietzsche’s concepts of the artist and superman. For Nietzsche, the artist is not only someone who writes poems or stands at an easel, instead he is anyone who is capable of changing his own life by exceeding its boundaries and recreating himself. The concept of the worker for Brzozowski is emblematic of an existence that is free, creative, and open to continuous transgression. In place of being a class-related category, it becomes an existential imperative of self-mastery, and thus an important part of Brzozowski’s moral philosophy. This similarity is explicitly stated in the dialogue “Fryderyk Nietzsche” in which Brzozowski refers to the superman as a “creator” (twórca) and writes that “every creation is always tantamount to this slogan: beyond the man!” (wszelka twórczość zawsze i wszędzie równoznaczną jest z tym hasłem: ponad człowieka!)<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche also appears in the article “Filozofia Fryderyka Nietzschego” as an example of an ideal man who is “capable of a free life”<sup>34</sup> (zdolny do swobodnego życia) and reliant on the chaos of history. Here the argument continues with a critique of an earlier philosophy that could only provide “mythological falsifications” (mitologiczne fałsyfikacje). Brzozowski states that Nietzsche’s writings are a document of the “decomposition of a certain type of consciousness” (rozkładu pewnego typu świadomości),<sup>35</sup> but also

29 Brzozowski, “Filozofia Fryderyka Nietzschego,” 650.

30 Ibid., 679.

31 Ibid., 673.

32 Kořakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 233.

33 Stanisław Brzozowski, “Fryderyk Nietzsche,” in *Kultura i życie*, 643.

34 Brzozowski, “Filozofia Fryderyka Nietzschego,” 648.

35 Ibid., 657.



the heralds of a new consciousness. In his interpretation of Nietzsche, Brzozowski first criticizes the idea of “being” as something that is granted to humankind and then relying on Nietzsche he proposes a philosophical project built on the idea of the individual subject actively fighting with and changing reality in its material aspects. Brzozowski states that “Nietzsche’s philosophy is essentially a philosophy of courage: dare to live, dare to struggle for life” (Filozofia Nietzschego jest właściwie filozofią śmiałości: śmiej żyć, śmiej walczyć o życie)<sup>36</sup> and that in dealing with the forces of life, courage is more important than unchangeable moral values, laws, or ethical systems.

If we interpret Brzozowski’s philosophy in this post-Nietzschean context, it radically changes from a variant of Marxism to a philosophy of existential courage. In the chapter “Odrodzenie indywidualizmu” (The Rebirth of Individualism) of his lecture “Estetyka pogładowa” (The Aesthetics of Perception), he writes that according to Nietzsche, the end of the nineteenth century is characterized by a “fear of responsibility”<sup>37</sup> (obawa przed odpowiedzialnością):

Współcześni nasi boją się wprost – mówi on – być sprawcami czegokolwiek, lękają się każdego czynu, który by był prawdziwie ich czynem, nie śmia oprzeć się nigdy wyłącznie na samych sobie, szukają poza sobą lub ponad sobą czegoś, co by nimi kierowało i uświęcało ich kroki, co by działało niejako za nich.<sup>38</sup>

Our contemporaries—he [Nietzsche] says—are simply afraid of being the agents of something, they are dreading every act which would really be their own, they do not dare to rely exclusively on their own selves, they are searching for something beyond or above themselves that would guide them and illuminate their path, that would somewhat act for them.

This new philosophy proclaims a sovereign life based on the concept of *labor*. Only when labor is recognized as the sole form of “life that produces effects in the world beyond man” (życia wytwarzającą pozaludzkie, bytowe skutki)<sup>39</sup> can human existence become sovereign: “Nie miej religii, lecz bądź religią – tak formułuje się stanowisko Nietzschego. [...] Sam dla siebie musisz zostać bogiem, stworzyć swego boga”<sup>40</sup> (You should not have a religion but be one—that is how Nietzsche’s attitude can be defined. [...] You have to become a god for

---

36 Brzozowski, “Filozofia Fryderyka Nietzschego,” 664.

37 Stanisław Brzozowski, “Estetyka pogładowa,” in *Wczesne prace krytyczne*, 79.

38 Ibid., 79n.

39 Brzozowski, “Filozofia Fryderyka Nietzschego,” 688.

40 Ibid., 690.

yourself, to create your own god). Or, as Brzozowski puts it elsewhere, “All of our everyday reality is our constant achievement. Nietzsche knew about this as well as all the other *deep* religious moralists” (Cała powszednia nasza rzeczywistość jest naszym nieustannym dziełem. Wiedział o tym zarówno Nietzsche, jak i każdy z *głębokich* moralistów religijnych).<sup>41</sup> The affirmative aspects of Brzozowski’s idea of labor are also derived from Nietzsche, whose “reckless individualism” (indywidualizm bezwzględny) means to utter “the holy and creative word ‘yes’” (świętego i twórczego słowa “tak”).<sup>42</sup>

One of the most important features of the literary and philosophical discourse of the turn of the twentieth century was the instability of the narrative point of view. Nietzsche’s perspectivism, for example, his reflections on the impossibility of creating neutral perspectives, the incommensurability of truth(s), and the necessity of interpretation, can be seen in the broader context of the changing narrative patterns in modernist literature.<sup>43</sup> Despite numerous recurring themes in Nietzsche (as well as in Brzozowski and Strindberg), the narrative points of view change synchronically and diachronically, their discourses are often incoherent, concepts are turned upside-down, and the twisting and turning of ideas never ends. Since conventional philosophical language had degenerated to clichés as a columbarium of mummified truths and “a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms,”<sup>44</sup> the only way to renew philosophy was to make the language performative. “Creativity” (twórczość) then must have its own life, it must grow directly out of the “active relations of the given, living person” (czynnych stosunków danej, żywej istoty), and yet be unprecedented and radically new. A performative act of language then can transform reality:

Twórczość – powstanie absolutne, początek bezwzględny, jest poza nawiasem tego, co jest. Można mówić o niej słowem „*będzie*”, a właściwie i tak nawet nie, lecz jakimś nieokreślonym i nieustającym „*niech się stanie*”.<sup>45</sup>

Creativity—absolute emergence, the unconditional beginning is outside the realm of what exists. One could depict it with the words “it will be,” but even this is not exact, rather some indefinite and continuous “let it emerge.”

41 Stanisław Brzozowski, “Prolegomena filozofii pracy,” in *Idee*, 244.

42 Brzozowski, “Estetyka poglądowna,” 83.

43 Cf. Michał Paweł Markowski, *Nietzsche. Filozofia interpretacji* [Nietzsche. A philosophy of interpretation] (Kraków: Universitas, 2001).

44 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1982), 46.

45 Brzozowski, “Fryderyk Nietzsche,” 614.

The most profound consequence of the shift from representation to the performativity of language are the perpetual inconsistencies of discourse in Nietzsche, Strindberg, and Brzozowski which make it impossible to construct a coherent worldview—they were all anti-systematic thinkers. In a letter to Brandes from December 1888, Strindberg wrote: “Strange that through Nietzsche I should now find the method in my madness of ‘opposing everything’. I reassess and put new values on old things!”<sup>46</sup> Brzozowski also commented: “Ważne jest to, co stawia opór spójności myślowej i jedności perspektywicznej, co nie daje się objąć w jednym i tym samym planie” (The important thing is to resist the coherence of thought and the unity of perspective, so that it could not be comprehended on one single level).<sup>47</sup>

Brzozowski’s “Fryderyk Nietzsche” exemplifies the narrative inconsistencies typical for the subversive thinking of Brzozowski and Nietzsche. From the dialogue a cultural canon evolves, and Brzozowski shows how his own works are embedded in that canon. Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer, introduced overlooked philosophical problems that develop new issues associated with the concepts of life, action, and labor; Brzozowski declares himself to be among the same philosophical tradition as he strives to solve these problems through the two main pillars of his philosophy—life and labor. Nietzsche is presented as a precursor of the “philosophy of life,” and Brzozowski postulates a “socio-psychological” point of view that takes into account both the individual and what is socially conditioned.

“Fryderyk Nietzsche” plays on the narrative tradition of Platonic dialogue with all the aporias and contradictions that are associated with this genre. Two key issues with the text would be whose voice does the speaking and what its significance is in relation to the overall narrative. The irony of the introduction encapsulates the text whose plot takes place during a symposium between a handicapped sculptor who can no longer use his tools, a tubercular actress, and a philosopher. The characters have all their “possibilities blocked in their development” (możliwości powstrzymane w rozwoju)<sup>48</sup> and they are left discussing philosophy because “for those who do not live themselves, nothing remains except to scrutinize life” (tym bowiem, którzy sami nie żyją – nie pozostaje nic prócz zgłębiania życia).<sup>49</sup>

Nietzsche’s fundamental place in Brzozowski’s cultural canon is merited by the fact that he created a new anthropology:

---

46 Strindberg, *Letters Vol. 2*, 296.

47 Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, 39.

48 Brzozowski, “Fryderyk Nietzsche,” 605.

49 Ibid., 606.

Usiłuje on [Nietzsche] wydobyć, przeżyć jak najwięcej „stanów duchowych”, czy jak się to nazywa, uwolnionych spod władzy i kontroli koordynujących perspektyw. Ma się przecież wrażenie, że Nietzsche śmieje się prosto w twarz wszelkim teoriom, normom i ideałom: „tyle chcecie zostawić z człowieka, tyle znacie; a to? a to? I tych „a to?” jest bez końca. Filozofowie badają człowieka zazwyczaj z punktu widzenia przydatności jego do takich a takich celów, a tu mamy samorodność żywą, drgającą, nerwowo zmienną, chwiejną, wielokształtną. Cel – cel? Jam jest, który stawiam, stwarzam cele!”<sup>50</sup>

He [Nietzsche] tries to retrieve, to live through, the greatest possible number of “states of mind,” or how should one call it, which are free from the power and control of perspectives. There is a saying that Nietzsche simply laughs in the face of all theories, norms, and ideals: “so this much is what you would like to leave of the man, this is what you know; and this? and this? And there is no end to these “and this?”. Philosophers usually study man from the point of view of his applicability to these or other goals, but here we have a living self-creation, twitching, nervously variable, unstable, multifaceted. *A goal*—a goal? It is I who sets, who creates goals!

Nietzsche represented “the new type of philosopher” who was anticipated by Giambattista Vico. Philosophy today puts new issues on the agenda, it has to awaken to the “self-government” (samowładza) of humankind. Thus, it becomes a part of personal and social liberation. Nietzsche’s radical novelty lies in the fact that he reformulated the undertaking of philosophy: “człowiek sam wyznacza sobie ten cel, dla którego ma żyć, chce żyć. [...] Filozofia przestaje być poznawaniem idei – staje się ich tworzeniem” (man himself sets the goal that he wants to live for. [...] Philosophy ceases to be the cognition of an idea—it becomes its creation).<sup>51</sup> For Brzozowski, Nietzsche’s uniqueness lies in his exploration of the tragedy of existence and, as Rüdiger Safranski puts it, his struggles with the “enormity” of life.<sup>52</sup> The merit of Nietzsche’s philosophy is that no one ever represented better the erratic, pulsating, irrational, creative “life.” Moreover, Nietzsche’s discourse is characterized by “breaking up with bookish ‘theoreticizing’” (zerwanie z książkowym “teoretyzmem”).<sup>53</sup> Just as the ancient metaphysicians were apologists for religious beliefs, Nietzsche writes apologies for the unrestrained life.

50 Brzozowski, “Fryderyk Nietzsche,” 622.

51 Brzozowski, “Filozofia Fryderyka Nietzschego,” 646.

52 The term “das Ungeheure” (the uncanny) is used in: Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche. Biographie seines Denkens* [Nietzsche: a biography of his thought] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002), 15ff.

53 Brzozowski, “Filozofia Fryderyka Nietzschego,” 645.