

“Ibsen! Oh, let us not invoke this name in vain!”¹ Brzozowski’s Ibsen Not-quite-read²

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Although Stanisław Brzozowski truly admired Henrik Ibsen in his early years, he did not publish very much on the playwright. Before 1905 he only reviewed two Ibsen productions—*Samfundets Støtter* (Pillars of Society) in February 1903 and *Gengangere* (Ghosts) in November 1904. Between late 1905 and early 1906 he wrote two works devoted to Ibsen following Wilhelm Feldman’s lectures on his dramaturgy in Zakopane. Both of the latter texts were published in *Przegląd Społeczny* (Social review) soon after Ibsen’s death in 1906. Brzozowski’s ideas from the dialogue in verse “Nad grobem Ibsena” (Over Ibsen’s Grave) were subsequently presented in a more systematic way in the important essay “Styl Ibsena” (Ibsen’s Style). Finally after 1906, Ibsen became one of the negative protagonists of *Legenda Młodej Polski* (The Legend of Young Poland) where he appears in varying chapters with the unrewarding role of a consoler of his generation.³ In *Legenda*, Brzozowski announces his intentions of discussing Ibsen in greater detail in a future work. As he writes in a letter to Ostap Ortwin, the Ibsen passages that were eventually not included in *Legenda*, figured in *Idee* (Ideas) under the title “Herezje o Ibsenie” (Heresies about Ibsen).⁴ However, they did not make it into the eventual publication of the work; what is more, Ortwin could not find them in Brzozowski’s papers after his death. It is possible that Brzo-

1 “Ibsen! O, nie wzywajmy imienia tego nadaremno!” Brzozowski, *Wczesne prace krytyczne*, 655.

2 The research for this article was supported by the National Science Center Grant, no. UMO-2013/11/B/HS2/02494 (Narodowe Centrum Nauki).

3 Cf. Brzozowski, *Legenda Młodej Polski*, 215.

4 Cf. Brzozowski, *Listy*, vol. 2, 175. Ortwin quotes this letter in his introduction to *Głosy wśród nocy* [Voices in the night].

zowski came to regard these considerations as backward with respect to *The Legend*. In any case, there is a lot to suggest that he deemed Ibsen's case a closed chapter by the end of 1909.

In 1906 Brzozowski wrote, "Ibsen – to jedno z najdroższych kłamstw naszych. Mówić o nim spokojnie niepodobna; i dlatego warto jeszcze mówić"⁵ (Ibsen is one of our most precious lies. It is not possible to speak about him calmly; and that is why it is still worth while talking about him). Did he decide three years later that Ibsen was no longer worth talking about? Did he want to symbolically kill his Ibsen with silence? Even if this were the case, Brzozowski did not forget his love for Ibsen's plays. This is evident from a letter to Feliks Brzozowski from late December 1910:

Każdy z nas wyrobił sobie swój własny świat wewnętrzny, w który wierzy. Świat wewnętrzny każdego człowieka jest ciasny w porównaniu z wielkim, jaki istnieje, choć nie jest nigdy poznany, więc właściwie ja i Ty, i wszyscy możemy być pewni, że jesteśmy raczej błędem drukarskim historii niż czymś innym. No, ale jeżeli tak, to ponieważ i tak zecer wyjmie nas z formy i rzuci do kaszty (plagiat robię z Ibsena i jego odlewacza guzików w *Peer Gynt*ie, którego, jeżeli nie znasz, przeczytaj – w jakim chcesz języku, choćby po rosyjsku, bo jest to jeden z fragmentów najszczerzej i najmędrzej, odważnej poezji, jakie zostały w tych nie bardzo mądrych i nie bardzo odważnych czasach wytworzone [...]).⁶

All of us have created our own inner world that we believe in. Every man's inner world is narrow in comparison to the big world that exists, although it is never perceived, hence you and I and all the others can be sure that we are rather a misprint of history than anything else. But if this is the case, then the typist will take us out of the form and throw us to the type case anyway (I am plagiarizing Ibsen with his Button-Moulder in *Peer Gynt*, which you should read if you haven't read it yet—no matter in what language, even in Russian, since this is one of the pieces of the sincerest and wisest poetry that has ever been created in our not so wise and not so brave times [...]).

In the abovementioned texts that were written between 1903 and 1909, Brzozowski constructed a picture of Ibsen by commenting on a relatively small body of the playwright's works. In the review of *Pillars of Society*, Brzozowski mentions three texts in passing: *Bygmester Solness* (The Master Builder) and *En Folkefiende* (An Enemy of the People), both are spoken of favorably, and *Fruen fra Havet* (The Lady from the Sea), which he criticized for its light-hearted ending. *Rosmersholm* appears as context for a conversation between a playwright

5 Brzozowski, *Kultura i życie*, 211.

6 Brzozowski, *Listy*, vol. 2, 507.

and an actress in “Nad grobem Ibsena.” *Legenda* mentions the earlier plays, *Peer Gynt* and *Brand*, as well as Ibsen's last play, *Når vi døde vaagner* (When We Dead Awaken), which Brzozowski held in highest regard. In *Pamiętnik* (Diary), he lists texts that constitute a still valuable Ibsen canon: *Kongs-Emnerne* (The Pretenders), *Peer Gynt*, *Vildanden* (The Wild Duck), *The Master Builder* (or at least parts of it), and, again, *When We Dead Awaken*. Brzozowski's references to Ibsen are always cursory and the plays do not seem very closely read. Moreover, Brzozowski's reading is not as original as would be expected and one can easily identify the words of other critics.

Ibsen's reception in Poland was always somewhat superficial because reviewers discussed his plays along the lines of the current intellectual and artistic concepts rather than offering an original approach to the texts. Although Jan Michalik⁷ and Michał Głowiński⁸ consider Brzozowski's voice as one of the most profound in the chorus of shallow Ibsen exegetes, it should be noted that he rarely overturned established criticism on Ibsen, he merely develops and deepens others' perspectives by translating them into the terms of his own critical idiom. Moreover, there are strong indications that Brzozowski, following his deep conviction for the existential dimension of any significant text, reads Ibsen's works in the context of the playwright's biography and general worldview. In the reviews, Brzozowski seems to have specific passages from Ibsen's letters in mind as some excerpts of his letters were published and discussed in Poland in *Czas* (Time), *Prawda* (Truth), or *Biblioteka Warszawska* (Warsaw Library) in 1904 and 1905.⁹ Critics, including Brzozowski, employed his epistolary utterances and polemical remarks, which were fragmented and taken out of context, as his worldview—gleaning his ideological/artistic declarations or his “theory” of literature from them.¹⁰

7 Jan Michalik, *Twórczość Ibsena w sądach krytyki polskiej 1875–1906* [Ibsen's work in Polish criticism] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1971), 39–41.

8 Cf. Michał Głowiński, “Deux critiques littéraires sur Ibsen (Ortwin – Brzozowski),” in *Swedish-Polish Literary contacts*, ed. Nils Åke Nilsson (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1979), 61.

9 Polish translations were based on letters published in 1904 in *Die neue Rundschau*.

10 Some of the passages most popular with Ibsen commentators constitute an interesting background for observations developed by Brzozowski: “For a man of a certain spiritual development, the old notion of motherland is no longer sufficient [...]. I believe that the sense of nationality is already dying out, and is going to be replaced by the sense of tribe.”; “For an individual, in turn, it is by no means necessary to be a citizen.” (from letters to Brandes, translated into Polish by Józef Flach, “Listy Ibsena do Brandesa” [Ibsen's letters to Brandes], *Czas* 201 [1904]): 1; “Everything that I have

Brzozowski considered Ibsen to be an important part of his own spiritual and intellectual biography and counted him among the writers and thinkers whom he cherished. Therefore, for Brzozowski, criticizing Ibsen was like criticizing himself. By undermining Ibsen's beliefs and judgments, he reevaluates and overcomes his own views. What were these judgments and beliefs? First of all, Brzozowski portrays Ibsen as a spokesman for "absolute individualism," which he also advocated for at the beginning of his writing career. Later on though, he polemized against this stance and denounced it for its futile indulgence in contemplative attitudes—a habit Brzozowski persistently sees in Ibsen's protagonists. Secondly, Ibsen, in Brzozowski's view, advocated for the idea of society as the coexistence of free spirits; a topic that Brzozowski repeatedly revisited in order to better define the social dimension of individual existence.¹¹

Brzozowski's whole dispute with Ibsen is very coherent and consistent. The texts on Ibsen can be read as a kind of three-act autobiographical drama with Ibsen as a foil. These portraits may differ in some detail, yet the principles and perspectives in them are much less unstable than those of his other critical projects. As a result, the image of Ibsen in these texts is not as polemically loaded as that of Stanisław Wyspiański, for example,¹² but it grows stable and becomes increasingly unequivocal and one-dimensional.

Act One: Ibsen in Brzozowski's Play Reviews

In his review of *Pillars of Society* from February 1903, Brzozowski clearly had his doubts about Ibsen's early play, which he regarded as outdated and immature

created remains strongly connected with what I have lived through, but have not experienced. Every new work fulfilled its aim with respect to myself, serving as a liberating and cleansing process. For man is never without his share of responsibility and blame before the society to which he belongs. This is why I wrote the following dedication in a copy of my book: To live—means to defeat in oneself / the spectre of dark nights. / To create—to pass judgement / over one's own self." (translated into Polish by Bertold Merwin, "Listy Ibsena", *Prawda* (49): 1904).

- 11 These explorations are discussed, e.g., by Andrzej Mencwel and Paweł Pieniążek in their books on Brzozowski.
- 12 The ambivalence in Brzozowski's attitude towards Wyspiański was recently discussed by Magdalena Popiel, "Brzozowski – Wyspiański. Dwie formuły 'pathosu wyjątkowości'" [Brzozowski—Wyspiański: Two formulas for the "pathos of exceptionality"], in *Konstelacje Stanisława Brzozowskiego*, ed. Urszula Kowalczuk et al. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012).

in terms of its depth.¹³ He ridicules the “abundance of naive excitement” (zbytek naiwnego oburzenia) and the “varnish of commonplaces” (pokost komunałów) that smother “every sincere and frank outburst” (każdy szczerzy i śmielszy wybuch).¹⁴ Optimism was always “an ideological mask for passivity” (ideową maską bierności)¹⁵ for Brzozowski, so he was particularly put off by the play’s happy ending and bluntly describes it as a lie, “Even Ibsen, his Viking power notwithstanding, sometimes had to lie to himself in order to live” (nawet Ibsen, pomimo swej mocy Wikinga, potrzebował niekiedy kłamać przed samym sobą, by żyć).¹⁶ However, he also highlights some points on Ibsen that invariably fascinate him; namely the expression of creative fervor, the deliberate incompleteness of some of his other plays, and his refusal to be contented with what he had already done. This appeals to Brzozowski because Ibsen—fortunately—could not be entitled a perfect artist. Thus, Brzozowski’s appreciation at the time stems from the formation of his philosophical belief in the “primacy of function over product.”¹⁷ What matters above all is the deep conviction that Ibsen’s writing was not art for art’s sake: “Sztuka nigdy nie była u Ibsena sama przez się i sama dla siebie celem, nigdy nie była czymś ostatecznym i jedynym”¹⁸ (For Ibsen, art never was a goal in and for itself, was never something final and unique).

This idea, which is concurrent with Brzozowski’s conception of art, is based on the prevalent thoughts that had already been a critical key to Ibsen’s works at the time. Since the mid-1890s, these thoughts were regarded as Ibsen’s “confrontation with himself, an attempt to consider, analyze, and overcome his own illusions, mistakes, ideals.”¹⁹ Some critics like Feliks Konieczny analyzed Ibsen’s writing through his biography so that in his plays his “personal problems are given a universally human dimension, and in this way become objectified,”²⁰ while others treated it as his method of acquiring spiritual maturity or development. Thus, when Brzozowski writes that Ibsen’s works “were always

13 Brzozowski, *Wczesne prace krytyczne*, 558.

14 Ibid., 556.

15 Brzozowski, *Legenda Młodej Polski*, 191.

16 Brzozowski, *Wczesne prace krytyczne*, 558.

17 Ryszard Nycz, “Wywoływanie świata. Zadania krytyki i sztuki w pisarstwie filozoficznym Stanisława Brzozowskiego” [Invoking the world: the tasks of criticism and art in Stanisław Brzozowski’s philosophical writings], in *Język modernizmu. Prolegomena historycznoliterackie* (Wrocław: Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 1997), 123.

18 Brzozowski, *Wczesne prace krytyczne*, 557.

19 Michalik, *Twórczość Ibsena*, 84.

20 Quoted from: Michalik, *Twórczość Ibsena*, 85.

for him [Ibsen] only stages: they did not exist for and through themselves, but were always just the efforts of some inner liberation” (były zawsze dla niego tylko stopniami: nie istniały one same dla siebie i przez siebie, lecz były zawsze tylko usiłowaniami jakiegoś wewnętrznego wyzwolenia),²¹ he does not do anything groundbreaking in Ibsen criticism. However, he does include Ibsen in his reflections on the contradiction between artistry and creative work. The latter is characterized by incompleteness and openness on the one hand and a tight link between artistic or cultural activity and the process of self-definition on the other.

In the review of *Ghosts*, Ibsen becomes Brzozowski's accomplice in a passionate and ruthless attack against the “Lechitic idleness” (lechicka gnuśność) and the “urban self-adulation” (mieszczuchowskie samouwielbienie)²² of the Warsaw psyche. Brzozowski portrays the blabbering Oswald who loses touch with reality as a symbol of the future of Polish audiences who watch tragedy with the indifference of condescension. In a highly affected manner, Brzozowski calls for a deeper reading of *Ghosts* that would draw back the conventional language of the moment and reveal something more. At the time, *Ghosts* was conventionally regarded as the epitome of naturalism, but Brzozowski tried to reveal a deeper meaning in the play:

Jest tylko jeden grzech, za który nie ma przebaczenia, grzech przeciwko wiecznie twórczej, wiecznie rwącej się w świat poza siebie żądzy życia. Jest jeden tylko grzech: wyprzeć się własnych bogactw duchowych, które się ma, i tych, które się zdobyć może. Jest jeden tylko grzech: zabić tę żądzę życia, żądzę piękna, potęgi w sobie lub kim innym.²³

There is only one sin for which there is no forgiveness, the sin against the eternally creative will to life, eternally striving for the world beyond itself. There is only one sin: to renounce one's own spiritual riches, those which one already has and those which one can obtain. There is only one sin: to kill the will to life, the will to beauty, to the power in oneself or in someone else.

Brzozowski is not alone in this view of *Ghosts*. In Polish criticism after 1900, such concepts as “żądza życia” (the will to life) or “żądza mocy” (the will to power) were frequently used with reference to Ibsen's protagonists in order to

21 Brzozowski, *Wczesne prace krytyczne*, 557.

22 Ibid., 649.

23 Ibid., 651.

bring out their Nietzschean traits,²⁴ even though these approaches were contested as well.²⁵ In these reviews Brzozowski still presents Ibsen as an author who fulfills the critic's then valid postulates regarding art. However, it turns out that the Norwegian playwright no longer meets Brzozowski's demands towards creative work.

Act Two: Brzozowski's Ibsen in 1906

The first of Brzozowski's two texts on Ibsen, "Nad grobem Ibsena," was a dialogue in verse that staged a conversation between actress and playwright after a showing of *Rosmersholm*. This setup was probably inspired by Stanisław Wyspiański's "Studium o Hamlecie" [Study on Hamlet], a work that links the dramatis personae with the actors' true bodies and personalities, including Shakespeare. Brzozowski gradually blurs the boundaries between the actress playing a character, the character itself, and its maker. Wyspiański presents these relations in a constant flux while in Brzozowski they are clearly defined. The actress and playwright discuss the inevitable and permanent rupture between art and life experienced by Ibsen's protagonists, the actors struggling with playing their roles, and finally the author himself. Thus, Ibsen himself eventually becomes the protagonist of the dialogue—Ibsen made to resemble an Ibsenian character. The act of consigning the author into the fictional world of his own works emphasizes the key topic of Brzozowski's text, the problem of unembodied desires, which turns Ibsen's fight for individuality into a dead end:

Wszedł w ciszę śmierci / Człowiek, co błyskawic łąknął chrztu / [...] / Lecz by zobaczyć
Boga piorun jasny, / Trzeba uwierzyć / W szczyt, że jest nasz własny. / Trzeba stać na nim
nie myślą – marzeniem, / Lecz ciałem – pracą. / Bezcielesnymi Bóg gardzi myślami.²⁶

And the Man who yearned for the baptism by lightning entered the silence of death [...]. But to see God's bright thunderbolt, you have to believe in the summit that is ours. You have to stand on him not in thoughts or in dreams, but as a body—by labor. God despises those who are bodiless.

The key concept of this stage of Brzozowski's reflection on Ibsen is the lack of corporeality within experience which he sees as being manifested in these works.

24 At that time, Brzozowski also readily associates Ibsen with Nietzsche, cf. *Wczesne prace krytyczne*, 104.

25 Cf. Michalik, *Twórczość Ibsena*, 82f.

26 Brzozowski, *Kultura i życie*, 174f.

This idea was not new in Ibsen criticism as there were frequent claims that his protagonists came from forms of self-reflection and purely intellectual explorations, a certain “algebraism of thought.”²⁷ Their primary role in the inner development of Ibsen’s individuality was noted by Ortwin,²⁸ while Feldman underscored that the author’s late plays occur “only in the realm of the soul: all characters only signify the states of the artist’s soul; [...] here, the material body is only an appearance, and the symbolized experience of the soul is everything.”²⁹ In a side remark to his discussion of *Rosmersholm*, Feldman claims that “Ibsen aimed to separate man from the directness of any life, to bridle all forces of nature, and throw them at the spirit’s feet.”³⁰ Brzozowski does not explore such critical views or set them against the concrete text; instead, he uses them as an argument in constructing his philosophy of action and labor. First of all, he places Ibsen among those whose thought and art are occupied with the mind and are thus solely contented with theatrical gestures that do not live up to action. This finally undermines Ibsen’s individualism, which, as Brzozowski sees it, always remains sentimental and contemplative so that it never becomes heroic nor tragic.

Aphoristic and poetically phrased, the propositions of the dialogue were discursively expanded and specified in the essay “Styl Ibsena.” Brzozowski’s distinction between dream and work is reformulated as he revises and generalizes both categories under the evaluative framework of a confrontation of idealism and tragedy.³¹ For the first time Brzozowski sketches a fuller portrait of Ibsen as someone representing his whole generation, a generation that realized its worldview in the playwright’s style. Connecting Ibsen with his era allows Brzozowski to portray a characteristic attitude toward the world termed “Ibsen’s style” that serves as an inspiration for his contemporaries. In the essay, Ibsen plays the role of “one of the—devilishly rare—arguments that allow us to believe in the spiritual dignity of modern man” (jednej z racji – diabelnie nielicznych – pozwalających wierzyć w godność duchową nowoczesnego człowieka).³² Yet, at the same time he has already become “one of our most cherished lies”

27 Michalik, *Twórczość Ibsena*, 122.

28 Cf.: Ostap Ortwin, “Ibsen w rozwoju dramatu” [Ibsen in the development of drama], in *O Wyspiańskim i dramacie*, ed. Jadwiga Czachowska (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1969) (Ortwin’s article was first published in 1900).

29 Quoted from: Michalik, *Twórczość Ibsena*, 131.

30 Ibid., 90.

31 This essay is discussed from a comparative perspective (Brzozowski–Ortwin) by Michał Głowiński, “Deux critiques littéraires sur Ibsen (Ortwin – Brzozowski).”

32 Brzozowski, *Kultura i życie*, 211.

(jednym z najdroższych kłamstw naszych). His plays have helped the whole generation to maintain certain illusions: "Ibsen – to nasza legenda o wewnętrznej wolności człowieka, to baśń o jaźni oczyszczającej się przez duchowy samosąd w filisterskim ciele"³³ (Ibsen is our legend of man's inner liberty, the fairy tale of the "I" that purges itself through a spiritual trial against oneself in a philistine body). Thus, Ibsen turns into a symbol of absolute individualism—the shielding of the self against the world in order to safeguard one's inner spiritual freedom. According to Brzozowski, his own generation always heard the same call in Ibsen's plays, namely to be, and be faithful to, oneself as well as to one's own truth. However, the fascination with this seemingly radical call turned out to be merely a substitute for life, a dangerous form of idealism. This leads to the inevitable mind-body split that goes so far as to disregard the body altogether; it also makes the structural basis for "Nad grobem Ibsena" in that "[t]he body is the organ of our relations with the universe; in thought we are only communicating with ourselves" (Ciało jest organem naszych stosunków z wszechświatem; myślą obcujemy tylko sami ze sobą).³⁴ Ibsen's protagonists nurture their dreams of inner freedom and are attuned to their "beautiful souls," yet they are deaf to the calls of the external world and thus doomed to "their souls becoming rotten." He concludes the essay by explaining how Ibsen's characters remain forever "sub-tragic"³⁵ because they are devoid of their bodies. Tragic destruction cannot result from the fulfillment of one's self in the framework of individualistic spiritualism; it can only follow from the transcendence of one's self, which Brzozowski defines as labor. After 1906, he no longer doubted that Ibsen's self did not know this kind of labor and thus could not long for it in the first place.

Act Three: Ibsen in *Legenda Młodej Polski*

As Głowiński correctly notes on the capricious, paratactic narrative of *Legenda*, Ibsen first appears at random, momentarily becomes a lead character and then

33 Ibid. This conviction echoes Stanisław Przybyszewski's view of Ibsen. Cf. Stanisław Przybyszewski, *O dramacie i scenie* [On drama and scene] (Warszawa: Księgarnia Naukowa, 1905). Perhaps indeed it was the model of Ibsen reception proposed by Przybyszewski that influenced the young Brzozowski's views, which later petrified him as he was rethinking his old beliefs.

34 Brzozowski, *Kultura i życie*, 216.

35 Ibid., 216.

slips into the background as a generic example.³⁶ Brzozowski seems to be much more extreme in his evaluation of Ibsen in *Legenda* through stressing the barrenness of the playwright's relations with his generation. His Ibsen counts among those who are not able to go "beyond the limits of this historical phase, which brought about, which produced our entire psyche" (poza granice tego odłamu dziejów, który wysnuł, wyprządl całą naszą psychikę).³⁷ Through a confinement in himself, Ibsen becomes the representative of the modern mind; one that can merely be cultured but never creative since it turns "the result of historical labor" into "an individual adventure without any way out."³⁸ Thus, Ibsen is the exclusive symbol of ruined romanticism in *Legenda*. Unlike Adam Mickiewicz or Andrzej Towiański, he is unable to overcome the literary movement because he considers the problem of individuality "from the point of view of an individual who lost his individuality, or never did have one." ("z punktu widzenia jednostki, która indywidualność utraciła lub nie miała jej nigdy").³⁹ He becomes an example of someone who intentionally separates one's self-creating effort from one's corporeal and collective life. As well, he is someone with a self-alienating tendency, a tendency described by Brzozowski as "our psyche's striving for separation" (pęd naszej psychiki ku odosobnieniu).⁴⁰ The deliberate separation of self and community inevitably leads to one's disregard for the specific cultural and historical grounds that are essential for an individual. Ibsen can leave social life indefinitely, if—as Brzozowski has it—what counts is only "the freedom in the domain of the personal self" (swoboda w obrębie własnego ja).⁴¹ However, a self that renounces reflection and work on the conditions that shape it ceases to be an individual. Under these circumstances, Ibsen's idea of faithfulness to oneself turns out to mean faithfulness to an illusion while "limitless individualism is nothing but poeticized slavery" (bezgraniczny indywidualizm jest tu tylko upo-

36 Michał Głowiński, "Wielka parataksa. O budowie dyskursu w *Legendzie Młodej Polski* Stanisława Brzozowskiego" [The great parataxis. On the construction of discourse in *The Legend of Young Poland*] *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (1991): 50.

37 Brzozowski, *Legenda Młodej Polski*, 16.

38 Ibid., 10.

39 Ibid., 188.

40 Ibid., 220.

41 Paradoxically, Brzozowski restores some accusations from the "social medics," a group of critics from the 1890s who regarded Ibsen as a fanatic individualist and deaf to national and social problems. An example of this would be: Władysław Bogusławski, "Skandynawizm w literaturze. Henryk Ibsen" [Scandinavism in literature. Henrik Ibsen], *Biblioteka Warszawska* 4 (1891).

etyzowaną niewolą).⁴² This line of reasoning recurs several times in *Legenda* in order to transform Ibsen into the patron of living in the fiction of one's own self.

Based in part on his interpretation of *When We Dead Awaken*, Brzozowski intermittently tones down his criticism in order to stress that "Ibsen felt his inner contradictions himself. He felt that his severe self-examination was still a compromise [...], that he confronts a full life with psychological dialectics" (Ibsen sam czuł wewnętrzną sprzeczność. Czuł, że jego surowy samosąd jest jeszcze kompromisem [...] że pełnemu życiu przeciwstawia dialektykę psychologiczną).⁴³ Yet, he is ever more resolute in denying Ibsen's modernity because he reduces experience to the feelings and dilemmas of "a lonely psyche that is hovering somewhere above life" (samotnej i unoszącej się ponad życiem psychiki)⁴⁴ Ibsen's individualism is more of a ritualized or representative category (należy do kategorii obrzędowych, reprezentatywnych).⁴⁵ As well, Brzozowski contrasts Ibsen's individualism with Knut Hamsun who has what Ibsen mostly lacks in "the extension of creativity to the whole, so to say, the zoological domain of life, to the sphere in which the psyche is liberated from the very process of organic life" (rozszerzenie twórczości na cały rzeźby można zoologiczny obszar życia, na całą tę dziedzinę, w której wydobywa się psychikę z samego procesu organicznego życia).⁴⁶ Thus, in Hamsun it is not the psyche, not the soul, but the body that becomes the *principium individuationis*.

The negative portrait of Ibsen concludes with the charge that his works are only serious, and contrary to this seriousness, Brzozowski states:

Humor jest postawą duchową, pozwalającą nam myśleć o samych sobie nie w kategoriach słuszności, lecz tworzącego się życia. [...] Wyprowadza on nas poza szranki podmiotowości – a jednocześnie nie zamraża w żadnym gotowym, wykrystalizowanym już przedmiocie.⁴⁷

Humor is the spiritual attitude that permits us to think about ourselves not in terms of rightness but in terms of life creating itself. [...] It guides us beyond the limits of our subjectivity—and at the same time it does not freeze us in any ready-made, crystallized object.

42 Brzozowski, *Legenda Młodej Polski*, 220.

43 Ibid. 216f.

44 Ibid., 220.

45 Ibid., 243.

46 Ibid., 245.

47 Ibid., 294.

Brzozowski cannot hear Ibsen's laughter; he only sees him as a stern fanatic. Again, the sentimentally contemplative Ibsen is contrasted with another author, namely Robert Louis Stevenson. According to Brzozowski, sometimes

[...] wobec uśmiechniętej mądrości tego Szkota rozplywa się cała tragiczna mgła otaczająca postacie Ibsena, że ponad nimi wszystkimi: Rosmerem, Borkmanem, rzeźbiarzem z epilogu – dźwięczy oceaniczny śmiech tego pisarza⁴⁸

[...] in comparison to the humorous wisdom of the Scotsman [Stevenson], the whole tragic fog that is surrounding Ibsen's characters clears and the oceanic laughter of this writer resonates over all of them: Rosmer, Borkman, and the sculptor of the epilogue.

At the same time, Brzozowski makes it clear that Stevenson's writing does not really come from his talent but rather from the superiority of British culture.⁴⁹ The aim of this brief comparison of Ibsen and Stevenson is to confirm, yet again, Brzozowski's fundamental assertion, which recurs in *Legenda* in many varieties: "the artist's form is always a reflection of the state of values in a specific nation" (forma artysty odbija zawsze stan wartości w narodzie⁵⁰).

Although the remarks and observations on Ibsen are scattered throughout *Legenda*, they still constitute a coherent image that becomes a gradually solidifying mask. Brzozowski wants to show that Ibsen is dangerous since he affirms the audience's impuissance and encourages each person to retreat inside him or herself. It is as though, in this case, Brzozowski forgot that it is up to the reader to determine what the text produces for the reader.

Performative Dialogue or Theatrical Monologue?

Jan Władysław Dawid's often-quoted view is relevant to Brzozowski's statements on Ibsen: "Coming into contact with a new system of thought, Brzozowski did not care to familiarize himself with it thoroughly and present it as it was; he treated it as a point of departure, as a thread on which he could weave out his own dealings."⁵¹ These reflections on Ibsen formed a kind of autobiographical play in three acts. Ibsen is supposed to be a partner for discussion or a dialogue, yet does he appear on the stage of this "drama"? In the first act we only get his

48 Ibid., 296.

49 Ibid., 297.

50 Ibid., 373.

51 Jan Władysław Dawid, *Psychologia religii* [Psychology of religion] (Warszawa: "Nasza Księgarnia", 1933), 104.

after-image, for Brzozowski's interpretation contains few references to Ibsen's work, yet there are still pre-processed echoes of criticism in it. We cannot hear Ibsen's voice. In the second act, the after-image disappears and there is only Ibsen's corpse, stiff in his mask of the "ruins of romanticism," and, to make it worse, only playing an extra. It is impossible to recognize Ibsen behind the mask. Brzozowski stays center stage in act three to continue—without the doubts that had appeared in the previous acts—his monologue in which he sticks a final dagger in Ibsen's body to prevent him from haunting the living, from producing the feeling of powerlessness in those who take him seriously.

Ibsen cannot be present in this autobiographical play because it seems that, despite writing about him, Brzozowski does not read him and seems to only rely on his memory.⁵² Ibsen's own words do not serve as a vantage point for Brzozowski. He creates his own Ibsen using labels and critical formulas taken from the existing criticism on the playwright. Out of this material he forms the portrait of an Ibsen who is characteristic of Young Poland. Indeed, when translated into Brzozowski's critical thought, much of these empty interpretative slogans are gradually filled with meaning. Moreover, this method seems quite fitting for Brzozowski's aim. After all, Brzozowski repeatedly underscores that he is interested in Ibsen as a legend for himself personally as well as for his generation. Thus, the negative portrait that was sketched in several takes in *Legenda* was on the one hand made and shaped by Scandinavian or Germanic culture, while on the other, the Ibsen as seen by Young Poland. Hence, it comes as no surprise that the contours of this image of Ibsen were largely determined by the preexisting, already-used terminology. By taking over the language that described Ibsen, Brzozowski also appropriates the public's conception of the playwright so that he can present Ibsen's impact on the culture of Young Poland by deconstructing the "Ibsenizing" tendency of the age as a form of group thinking. At the same time, however, he cements Ibsen's image in this form and thus makes it a part of his legend.

In refraining from a dialogue with Ibsen in *Legenda*, Brzozowski prevents Ibsen's texts from really coming to life. His criticism of Ibsen, read as an autobiographical drama with Ibsen as a foil, seems to be more of a spectacle than a performance. It is a spectacle that did have an effect on the reader thanks to its well paced suspense and several perfectly played out climaxes, however, there are no traces of performative reading or writing. Although Brzozowski does

52 Although perhaps he would have liked to: his letters from Nervi contain repeated pleas for a delivery of Ibsen's collected works dating back to 1906. When in late autumn 1910 he finally received several volumes, he complained about still not having the particular texts that he wanted most.

consider Ibsen's works several times at different stages of his intellectual development, they never qualified for the "reading between texts," which Andrzej Zawadzki understood as Brzozowski's hermeneutical practice.⁵³ Hence, coming back to Ibsen Brzozowski is not interested in the creative dispersion of discovered or constructed meanings, on the contrary, he aims at specifying or hyperbolizing the already established horizon of a legend whose substance is constituted by Ibsen's not-quite-read dramas. Writing from memory, Brzozowski does not allow these dramas to resonate within himself so that only his own preconceived thoughts about their author work. Thus, it is difficult to share Głowiński's view that Brzozowski reads Ibsen using a hermeneutic strategy.⁵⁴ In *Legenda*, he is rather a teacher-cum-pamphleteer.

In Brzozowski's critical autobiographical play, Ibsen appears as an afterimage and corpse and was thus cast in a clearly defined role. This Ibsen is a purely nineteenth-century product and Brzozowski uses him to explain how to overcome those times. To a certain extent, Brzozowski mimics the early-twentieth-century critics who make Ibsen seem antiquated in order to avoid giving his works thorough consideration. In his discussion of the allures and threats of Ibsenizing, Brzozowski is much more consistent and precise than the rest of the Young Poland Ibsen interpreters. Like the other critics of his time, Brzozowski fails to really understand Ibsen's work, but, in a way, he values the somewhat out-of-date Ibsen. Brzozowski makes the playwright a gauge to the crisis of culture, yet this aspect is limited because it exhausts itself in idealistic dreams that offer no solutions for this crisis. For this reason, Brzozowski questions the "real-life productivity" (*zyciowa wydajność*)⁵⁵ of Ibsen's plays. Ibsen may have indeed accurately represented nineteenth-century dilemmas and anxieties, but he was incapable of transgressing them creatively and this results in him offering nothing new in a creative sense. In other words, Ibsen's plays lack the power to bring forth reality and due to the sterile nature of his diagnosis of the world as seen by Brzozowski, the features of his texts that were formerly assessed positively for their incompleteness and openness later become symptoms of powerlessness and stupor.

53 Andrzej Zawadzki, "Między tekstem czytać". Kilka uwag o hermeneutyce Stanisława Brzozowskiego" ["Reading in between the text." Some remarks on Stanisław Brzozowski's hermeneutics], in *Stanisław Brzozowski – (ko)reptycje*, vol. 2, ed. Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, Andrzej Skrendo, and Krzysztof Uniłowski (Katowice: FA-art. 2013), 92f.

54 Głowiński, "Wielka parataksa," 66.

55 Brzozowski, *Legenda Młodej Polski*, 23.

In order to see if Ibsen could be read as a twentieth-century author, one would have to pose new questions about his plays rather than limit oneself to the old repertoire of often-repeated questions. As a relic of romanticism, i.e., a relic of the nineteenth century, Ibsen has nothing interesting to say to Brzozowski. Thus, it is no wonder that Brzozowski's utterances on this subject are invariably monologic and increasingly unambiguous in character. Does Brzozowski lose much from not listening to Ibsen? After all, the twentieth-century Ibsen inspired the likes of Sigmund Freud, Rainer Maria Rilke, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and many others. What could Brzozowski have talked about with Ibsen if he had chosen a performative dialogue over a one-sided, domineering monologue? We should recall that Brzozowski, before his death, recommended *Peer Gynt* to his brother and also how he waited with impatience, first in Nervi and then in Florence, for the delivery of Ibsen's plays. It is as though he felt that he had not fully read Ibsen.

If this were the case, Brzozowski was right. Had he read Ibsen more carefully, he could have found a partner that would have challenged his portrayal of absolute individualism because Ibsen repeatedly questioned this concept. Brzozowski, following Przybyszewski, reduced Ibsen's ideas to "being true to oneself," which actually constituted only one stage in the development of Ibsen's thinking on the condition of modern man and the status of human subjectivity. In the majority of the plays written after *Rosmersholm* (a text that was undeservingly disregarded by Brzozowski), Ibsen's characters mostly differ in their approach to identity, which is experienced more often as decentralized, processual, or incomplete, identity understood as a self-transforming practice.

Also, Ibsen always considered the social dimension of individual existence. As early as in *Peer Gynt*, he stressed the negative effects of an absolutization of the individual's autonomy and freedom and searched for a way out of the vicious circle of individualism's isolating factors. One of the key themes of the play was the relational nature of subjectivity. It was also one of Ibsen's reasons for choosing theater as a privileged form of artistic creation that enabled him to present subjectivity as a result of interpersonal bonds, and language as an "an organ of human living-together" (*organ ludzkiego współżycia*)⁵⁶—to cite an expression from *Legenda*, which is fitting for Ibsen's plays. Even when they look for a private language or try to tear away from a network of relations, Ibsen's protagonists confirm that this network is constitutive for human identity. Brzozowski and Ibsen could have also been brought together by their similar approach to the duties of art. After all, they both shared a deep conviction that art is meaningful only if it is critical and has an impact on the world; they were as

56 Ibid., 86f.

well averse to any alienating forms of artistic creation. This theme recurs in many of Ibsen's plays and it is a central subject in his later works. This is why in the second half of the twentieth century Ibsen influenced critical theatre in Germany and Asia, but in Poland the critical potential of his plays still remains unused.

Thus, it seems that at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was none other than Brzozowski who would have been in a position to undertake a significant dialogue with Ibsen by introducing the Ibsen of the twentieth century to Polish culture and it is even more a pity that Brzozowski's conversation with the playwright never took place.

Translated by Zofia Ziemann

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