

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

Przemysław Czapliński

In the history of Polish literature, Brzozowski has been commonly regarded as the first critic to draw an opposition between pure and socially engaged art. In a series of polemics—against Henryk Sienkiewicz, Zenon Przesmycki “Miriam,” and finally the poets of Young Poland—the author of *Legenda Młodej Polski* (The Legend of Young Poland) is said to have pointed to the consequences of aestheticism and made a case for ethical writing.

This was how Brzozowski was regarded throughout the twentieth century, especially on those occasions when due to a change in the political situation, artists felt obliged to make a clear declaration and alter their writing accordingly. The first decade of the interwar period was marked by interest in form; in the second decade, artists moved “from Formism to moralism.”¹ Following the Second World War, the period of engaged art continued despite the increasing censure of Brzozowski’s work, but it was interrupted in 1955, with artists once again declaring their allegiance to pure ethics. Yet this phase also soon ended: In the mid-1970s—with the increasingly severe censorship, the rise of independent channels of communication, and the first organised political opposition—a shift occurred, and, as Stanisław Barańczak put it, ethics took precedence over poetics.² And in the mid-1980s, when fulfilling ethical obligations yielded in litera-

1 Cf. Konstanty Troczyński, *Od formizmu do moralizmu. Szkice literackie* [From formism to moralism: literary sketches] (Poznań: Jan Jachowski Księgarnia Uniwersytecka, 1935).

2 Cf. Stanisław Barańczak, *Etyka i poetyka* [Ethics and poetics] (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1979). The eponymous pair introduced by Barańczak immediately entered Polish literary criticism, and survived until the early 1990s. The categories of “ethics”

ture merely noble forgone conclusions, artists heard again that they should choose “solitude” over “solidarity.”³

The foregoing summary of the history of engagement and aestheticism in twentieth-century Poland is far too schematic. Seen in these simplified terms, history is marked by an alternating radicalisation of attitudes and artists’ biographies are governed by the neurotic repetitiveness of the same dilemma, which can only be addressed with a zero-one response. On the other hand, it can hardly be denied that the history of modernity bears some resemblance to compulsive neurosis, to obsessive repetition of the same predicament and the endless need to decide either to defend art as a value irreducible to economic calculation or social benefit or to subordinate artistic matters to a particular idea that constitutes the quintessence of the artwork and the social justification of art. In other words: either self-concerned art or art in the service of important goals of collective life.

Those who think that the obtrusiveness of this antinomy disappeared at the end of the twentieth century, when the lesson of deconstructionism taught us to know better than to trust in dichotomies, should take a closer look at present-day evocations of Brzozowski in disputes about art. It will turn out that today the literary-critical consciousness is still determined by the belief in the opposition between autonomy and engagement in art and the conviction that the patron saint of this distinction is none other than the author of *Idee* (Ideas). To give an example, in an interview tellingly entitled “Wróg Polski dzieciinnielej” (The Enemy of a Poland Gone Puerile), Sławomir Sierakowski claims:

[...] we embrace the idea of engaged art developed by Brzozowski in his campaign against Zenon Przesmycki (Miriam) and the ‘art for art’s sake’ of Young Poland. We share his view that it is impossible to abstract art from social life.⁴

and “poetics” were used both to describe the positioning of art vis-à-vis society and to create a certain code of values, helpful in evaluating particular works.

- 3 I am referring here to Adam Zagajewski’s much-discussed book *Solidarność i samotność* [Solidarity and solitude] (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza MARGINES, 1986), in which the author writes that following the birth of the Solidarity movement, the cultural struggle against the totalitarian regime became “something childishly easy, [...] rather anachronistic, almost unnecessary, even exaggerated.” He expressed the hope that “thus, perhaps the more difficult works of the spirit will regain their timeless significance” (62).
- 4 “Wróg Polski dzieciinnielej.” Interview with Sławomir Sierakowski by Tomasz Diatłowski, *Focus Historia*, June 25, 2011. <http://www.focus.pl/artykul/wrog-polski-zdziecinnielej>

Igor Stokfiszewski, also from the circle of *Krytyka Polityczna* (Political Critique), wrote in his book *Zwrot polityczny* (The Political Turn):

Stanisław Brzozowski [...] believed that the category of real literature should be reserved for texts which, regardless of genre, influence society's perception of reality, change the course of our intellectual choices, readjust the world and life.⁵

Both critics—young, active, influential—refer to Brzozowski when they want to say that “real” art has an impact on social life, whereas its opposite, i.e., literature of lesser importance, is art for art's sake. With such a clear-cut division it is possible to oversee the entire realm of artistic creation, enjoying the right to select and evaluate. Thus, with recourse to articulate slogans, critics can situate, on one side, the Demirski/Strzępka team, Masłowska, the author of *Paw królowej* (The Queen's Peacock/Spew), and, on the other side, Stefan Chwin or Jacek Dehnel. However, it behoves us to ask whether it is indeed Brzozowski to whom we owe the division between pure and engaged art.

Double Negation

What the young critics did not develop was the idea that by criticising the aesthetics of the *Chimera* art magazine and Przesmycki's achievements Brzozowski took a stance against autonomous art and in behalf of engaged art. The idea was born much earlier. In *Main Currents of Marxism*, Leszek Kołakowski wrote:

Brzozowski was, it is true, the most active exponent in Poland of modernist or ‘neo-Romantic’ thought, but he would have nothing to do with that aspect of it which he regarded as a continuation of the ‘bad side’ of Romanticism, i.e. the view that art should be completely free [from real life, P. Cz.] and unfettered by any consciousness of its social functions.⁶

5 Igor Stokfiszewski, *Zwrot polityczny* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2009), 156.

6 Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution*. Vol. 2: *The Golden Age*, trans. Paul S. Falla (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 217. It is to this side that Sławomir Sierakowski refers when he claims: “For Brzozowski *l'art pour l'art* will be the recognition of inactivity and the incapacity to act as the symbol and symptom of spiritual superiority / elevation.” *Powrót zbawionego heretyka* [The return of a saved heretic]. In: *Brzozowski. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* [Brzozowski: *Krytyka Polityczna* guidebook], ed. *Krytyka Polityczna* editorial team,

It is not difficult to find in Brzozowski's works interpretations originating in this approach or relevant firm statements, such as this oft-quoted sentence: "Sztuka i twórczość jest zjawiskiem społecznym, jest zawsze wynikiem społecznego dowartościowywania przeżywanych wzruszeń"⁷ (Art and creativity are a social phenomenon, are always the result of the appreciation of deeply felt emotions). The problem, however, lies in the fact that Brzozowski's concept of art as a "social phenomenon" does not entail acceptance for social art. In other words, in negating aestheticism by no means does the author of *Idee* turn to engaged art. After all, it is noteworthy that in *Main Currents of Marxism* Kołakowski framed his interpretation of Brzozowski's attitude towards the two opposing poles of art with the following comment:

He was equally opposed to the positivist, utilitarian approach and to the doctrine of 'art for art's sake'. He wished to preserve a place for artistic creation which was not determined by the laws of 'progress' and did not owe its significance to other than human powers, yet at the same time did not represent a breach of historical continuity or claim to be exempt from social responsibility.⁸

Kołakowski's remark is noteworthy, because it reveals a double negation. If Brzozowski questioned both modernist aestheticism and utilitarian art, he must have formulated his judgement from a different perspective—from a third space. This space did not overlap with either the pole of pure art or the pole of engaged art. It would be very convenient to make a hasty discovery and locate this space outside the dichotomy in question. Yet the problem with Brzozowski is that his concept of the relation of art to itself and to society, albeit based on the negation of both extremes, does not in fact go beyond them at all.

"There is no entitative being"

In order to shed light on this problem, we must place Brzozowski's concept of art in the framework of his philosophy.

In a nutshell, his philosophical program can be extrapolated from three pairs of assertions:

Katarzyna Szroeder-Dowjat (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2011), 16.

7 Stanisław Brzozowski, *Mitologia estetyczna – Miriam* [Aesthetic mythology: Miriam] in *Współczesna powieść i krytyka*, 262.

8 Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 217.

1. There is no entitative being—there is only being.
2. Being is unfinished—the essence of being is free creativity.
3. Creative freedom in is not a value in itself—its aim is mutual freedom.

The assertion that there is no entitative being means that there is no idea that determines human life. Stated in an existentialist idiom, no essence precedes human existence. In Brzozowski's understanding, entitative being—physical or metaphysical—determines the forms of human existence, leaving no space for free self-creation. If there is entitative being, the human being does not exist. This follows from classical ontology, which, according to Brzozowski, revealed the impossibility of entitative being; it defined the conditions human beings must recognize in order to understand what their life is. Thus, the anthropological task of the philosophy of entitative being is to make us aware of the conditions to which the human being is subject. The simplest of these is at the same time the strongest: we were born, so we must die; we have bodies, so we must accept the decay of matter; we partake in the exchange of goods, so we are governed by the laws of economy. In light of the philosophy of entitative being, the only thing a human being can do is to understand that there is nothing s/he can do. This is why, as Hegel put it, freedom is the recognition of necessity.

But if the human being does exist, then there is no entitative being. Human beings exist, i.e., they undergo changes throughout historical ages and introduce these changes into social reality. Since change is possible, entitative being as the broadest possible framework determining the human being does not exist. There is no entitative being, there is only being. "There is no entitative being," because "the essence of the world is free creativity. Deed and creation are not an illusion, but the highest truth."⁹ If Heidegger argued that philosophy after Socrates forgot being, Brzozowski—alongside Nietzsche—would be among the first who brought being back to mind and pointed to others who did so as well.

Once being is brought back to mind—i.e., the absence of destiny, fate, and a framework of determination—the human being regains self-creating potency, yet at the same time is left lonely with respect to being. For there is no plan of creation which could be realised in existence, nor any foundation with respect to which a given stage of human activity could be evaluated: "[...] człowieczeństwo nie ma żadnego 'gruntu', na którym by stało [...] jest samo dla siebie

9 Stanisław Brzozowski, "'Miriam' – zagadnienie kultury" ["'Miriam': the question of culture; 1904], in *Programy i dyskusje literackie okresu Młodej Polski* [Literary programs and discussions of Young Poland], 3rd ed., ed. Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2000), 547.

wsparciem ostatecznym”¹⁰ (humanity has no “ground,” on which to stand [...] it is its own ultimate support). Brzozowski holds that the human being—even when lacking plans or aims—nevertheless preserves a value relating to every deed. This value is “freedom,” i.e., the quality of being free from previous limitations and constraints. Once we regard value as something that transcends and justifies any given end, “freedom” can be understood as the gauge of human achievement.

It would seem that by negating entitative being and defining freedom as freeing oneself from constraints, Brzozowski is close to existentialism. The difference comes, however, with the following point, i.e., the problem of human self-creation. The author of *Idee* argues that being makes the human being metaphysically but not ontically lonely. This is because endowing being with value does not manifest itself in individual emancipation, in individual self-liberation from frameworks previously regarded as unchangeable. Attributing value to being is possible only by binding together that which has been freed. Brzozowski formulates this idea in an oxymoronic-sounding postulate: “Uczynić swobodnymi względem samych siebie i wzajemnie wszystkie uczucia, wzruszenia, popędy etc. istniejące – oto jest zadanie kultury”¹¹ (The task of culture is to render each and every sentiment, emotion, drive, etc. free in itself and in relation to all the others). I say oxymoronic, because normally one can either “render” something “free in itself” or “in relation to all the others.” The former consists in loosening ties, the latter in creating them; to free things is to make them independent of one another, whereas to “free mutually” is to bind the freeing of one thing with the winning of freedom by another. In this sense, freedom can only be attained by creating ties.

The non-existence of entitative being, the indeterminacy of being, and mutual freedom—these are the three fundamental paradoxes of Brzozowski’s philosophy. Could they find expression within the framework of any existing philosophical system? Brzozowski answered this question in the negative: “nowa filozofia [...] nie istnieje”¹² (There is no [...] new philosophy). It does not exist, because it is not a philosophy in the established sense of the word; however, it is a practice. There is no system, no ontological affirmations—but what does exist is the critical mode of investigation. Lacking foundations practice draws the justification of its groundlessness from the concept of being devoid of foundations. According to this approach, philosophy is worked out, not practiced. It is—just like any other human activity—processual, incomplete, unfinished,

10 Brzozowski, *Głosy wśród nocy*, 247.

11 Brzozowski, “Miriam,” 551 (emphasis mine, P. Cz.).

12 *Ibid.*, 545.

inconclusive. It must be continuously produced, despite the awareness that it will never be definitively created. When Brzozowski writes that “scientific ‘notions’ and ‘methods’ need to be recognized as a means of artistic expression” (trzeba uznać “pojęcia” i “metody” naukowe za jeden z środków ekspresji artystycznej),¹³ he expresses the belief that scientific discourse uses language in the same way art does—for the sake of being, and not entitative being. That is: not in order to name that which is because it must be, but rather that which is coming about, because it can become.

Hence, there is no difference between philosophy and art, because both are forms rather than domains of activity. Culture is the process of producing reality, and this production does not have a ready-made program. This is the first reason why Brzozowski cannot be deemed a supporter of social art: socially engaged art would have to fulfil the postulates of some other, superordinate domain, e.g., that of the social sciences or the laws of production. Were he to acknowledge the existence of some such superior domain, the artist would have to admit that objective truth also exists. However, in that case truth of an economic or social nature would not only dictate to the artist the content of his work, but also contradict the previously stated view that truth about reality is truth produced. Acknowledging socially useful art that advocates a specific program would mean that there is entitative being; and were such to exist then there could be no human being, i.e., the being who constitutes and decides about itself. And if the abode of humans is being—not entitative being—art is situated on the same level of indeterminacy as science or production.

Second, social art is not possible due to the subjectivity Brzozowski ascribed to it. If the philosopher had come to the conclusion that art serves society, he would have situated it on a level lower than, say, practical needs. The existence of a higher level would arrest the searching movement: the human being would know that certain spheres of human activity are privileged and other subordinate. As a result, the artist would be deprived of creative freedom, i.e., the very aspect which Brzozowski regarded as the prerequisite of a creative act. Consequently, the artist would need to reconcile, in some specific way, freedom and oppression, much like a factory laborer who dances merrily alongside a machine producing hundreds of identical screws.

Thus, to sum up concisely, socially engaged art understood as the simple opposite of pure art would have been the Trojan horse of Brzozowski’s conception. Adopting this idea would have meant that there exist objective truths and standards of value external to art, and that it would be necessary to subordinate the artist to these truths, making him serve the freedom of others.

13 Brzozowski, *Idee*, 391.

A Different Autonomy

In order to resolve this dilemma, we can refer to Brzozowski's polemics with Sienkiewicz and Miriam. Breaking with the prevalent critical tradition of considering the two disputes separately, Andrzej Mencwel has argued that in both cases Brzozowski resorted to pairs of the same categories, albeit in each case interpreted differently:

The logic of two-sided polemic forced [...] Brzozowski to reinterpret his understanding of the whole relation of expression and communication. With respect to Miriam, it assumed a concept of expression other than that of passive contemplation, and with respect to Sienkiewicz—a concept of communication other than one that is particularly restricted. [...] expression had to be “active,” and communication “universal,” while both were supposed to be inseparably linked together. This way of thinking was decisive for the anti-Modernist orientation of Brzozowski's aesthetics.¹⁴

According to Mencwel, in the second half of the nineteenth century “expression” was synonymous with poetry, i.e., the true outpouring of an artist, who comes to expression in the work of art; “communication,” in turn, was understood from the point of view of true poetry as “production of literature,” i.e., writing not “from oneself,” in one's own name, but for a rather nondescript collective reader. “Expression” projected a passive, contemplative attitude of the reader that Brzozowski found in the poetry of Young Poland, and with which he contrasted the necessity of inciting an active attitude. “Writing for the many,” in turn, even if it was “active” and activating, remained particular as in Sienkiewicz, i.e., oriented to a selected area of culture: the family, the history of the Polish ‘republic of nobility’, religion. Hence, particularism should be understood as isolation of specific aspects of being; for now let us define the opposite of such an attitude as universalism. Thus, a consistent reading of Andrzej Mencwel's proposition reveals four varieties of art: passive expression (Miriam) and active expression (e.g., Leopold Staff in the period when his poetry aimed to overcome impotence), as well as communication of a particular (Sienkiewicz) and universal kind.

It is universal art activating the recipient that can be deemed the essence of Brzozowski's explorations. We will see this once we translate the categories suggested by Mencwel into notions related to engagement. Let us not forget that Brzozowski's polemic with Miriam is regarded—even in university teaching—

14 Andrzej Mencwel, *Stanisław Brzozowski – kształtowanie myśli krytycznej* [Stanisław Brzozowski: the formation of critical thought] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1976), 235.

as foundational for the opposition between aestheticizing and engaged art. We already know, however, that in challenging “art for art’s sake” Brzozowski did not deny the autonomy of art. He was looking for such an art that would be autonomous and engaged at the same time. He resolved this contradiction by proposing a different understanding of both these features. In the already quoted text “‘Miriam’ – zagadnienie kultury”, he wrote: “[...] dziś pracujemy dla *kultury integralnej*, dla wielkiego wyzwolenia wszechżycia. Stąd i swoboda nasza nie jest już przywilejem, lecz czymś głębszym nawet niż prawo – istotą naszą”¹⁵ (today we are working for an integral culture, for the great liberation of the entirety of life. That is why our liberty is no longer a privilege, but something even deeper than law—it is our very essence).

Instead of contrasting autonomy with engagement, Brzozowski contrasted integration with alienation. The true aim of art is to create an integral culture. An obstacle for the development of this culture is not autonomous art, but rather art for the sake of its own or another’s liberation, but never for the sake of linking its own freedom with the freedom of others. Art can be egoistically focused on its own freedom or altruistically devoted to the freedom of others—and in this sense both pure and engaged art can be threatened by alienation. Integrating art, in turn, by freeing a given aspect of human life, includes that which is freed in the entire culture.¹⁶ Under this approach, the value of art, its aim and its form-producing power is the capacity to overcome alienation. To integrate the emancipated areas means to make their free existence mutually bound: a new word discovered by a poet, unblocked feelings and drives, the idea of a new institution, or a plot about changed social relations will acquire an integrative value only if they do not reproduce conditions of alienation. Thus, in Brzozowski’s philosophy the real name of “engagement” is “art integrating being.” This cannot, however, be conventional art, which neglects its own form. Socially useful conventional art is a case of voluntary self-alienation: acting for the sake of liberating others, it remains dependent in artistic terms, which, as Brzozowski has it, means that the creator of this kind of art has neither diagnosed the problem correctly nor formulated his/her own answer to it, has not run it through himself. The artist must produce form only under the influence of the problem he has noticed, only when faced with alien reality, so the more engaged he wants to be, the greater should be his defence of the autonomy of art. If the real aim of art

15 Brzozowski, “Miriam,” 551 (emphasis mine, P. Cz.).

16 Brzozowski strove to achieve a state in which “personal life uses the whole of history as an instrument and creates its own organism in it” (życie osobiste posługuje się całą historią jako swoim organem i tworzy w niej swój organizm); *Pamiętnik*, 9.

is to reveal alienated aspects of being and continuously integrate culture, then the autonomy of art is a precondition of, not an obstacle to, integration.

Brzozowski criticised “art for art’s sake” not for its autonomy, but for its isolation from reality. Romanticism invented the idea of art in opposition to the world, and early Modernism turned this into a programmatic tenet. The author of *Idee* did not want to deprive art of autonomy; what he did want, though, was that this autonomy be marked by solidarity. The measure of the value of a work is not the sum of freedoms gained by the author, but rather the sum of “mutual freedoms” secured for the human world. This means that the philosopher was not searching for an opposite of autonomy; he was searching rather for a different mode of its realisation. In this way, he came to the opposition between isolating and integrating autonomy.

This can be illustrated as follows:

activity...	...that is alienating	...that is integrating
autonomous art	self-oriented autonomous art, isolating itself from the rest of reality (e.g., art for art’s sake)	autonomous art integrating all emancipated aspects of life
socially useful art	conventional art oriented towards the liberation of one social group: the proletariat, women, peasants, etc.	conventional art aiming to integrate all of existence (e.g., present-day variants of eco-art)

Thus, Brzozowski should not be regarded as the patron of the opposition “pure art versus engaged art.” In his conception, they are not opposites, but rather two varieties of autonomous art. The difference between them lies in the scope of emancipation: the “pure” artist is interested in exploring the language of art, liberating his or her domain from entanglements in and dependencies on any other languages, whereas the “integrating” artist states his case in such a way as to include others in the emancipation and connect the emancipated parts within a new whole. Put differently, the “pure” artist, obtaining independence for his/her own domain, alienates its language from the sphere of social communication, using it as a tool for individual emancipation, whereas the integrating artist triggers the process of de-alienation, which does, admittedly, begin in the work of

art, but then expands in the form of connections ranging over the entire spectrum of social life. Thus understood, engaged art is still autonomous; in contrast to “art for art’s sake,” which seeks autonomy for itself, “engaged” art acts for the sake of solidary autonomy. What matters here is not the extent to which a work of art becomes autonomous with respect to social life, but rather how many freedoms revealed by this work in social being will be bound together in an integrated culture.

The Troublesome Relevance of Modernity

The reading of Brzozowski’s philosophy proposed above and the ensuing necessity of reinterpreting the opposition between pure and engaged art seem to create an opportunity for a different approach to Polish art of the modern period. Throughout the twentieth century, artists faced a changing reality and an unchanging list of problems. Political events forced them to take a stance with respect to the dilemma “ethics or aesthetics”; due to the development of mass culture, every dozen or so years they had to describe themselves in terms of the “mass or elite” extremes; blurring borders among genres and the surge of non-fictional forms renewed the problem “truth or fabrication.”

The basic strategy adopted by artists of the interwar period manifested itself in the logic of alternating radical choices: members of the Skamander literary group began with a demonstrative turn against engaged art, glad to be able to praise spring rather than Poland, but in the 1930s some of them, like Tuwim, abandoned the path of “non-engagement” for the sake of ethical art. Several Futurists took the opposite path: Wat, Młodożeniec, or Czyżewski entered public life by manifestly rejecting traditional versions of aestheticism and seeking out forms of social communication with a strong and immediate impact. Yet by the 1930s they stood at the opposite end of the scale, exploring folk language, searching for simple forms, creating poetry that was not translatable into ideological slogans and programs. A similar course was taken by Czesław Miłosz: from the path of engagement during his time with the journal *Żagary* (Brushwood) and his debut collection *Poemat o czasie zastygłym* (A Poem on Frozen Time) to the ethical orientation adapted following his much-publicized breakup with the left. But is the Miłosz of post-engagement phase a representative of pure art?

By posing this question, we reveal the problem of any dichotomous classification. If great artists fail to fit it, the division must be inadequate. By way of example—was Tadeusz Peiper, with his references to Brzozowski, an engaged artist? For sure. Did he pursue autonomy in art? Definitely.

The case of Peiper indicates that the division into pure and engaged art is both necessary for understanding the dilemmas of modern art and insufficient for explaining the most advanced artistic solutions. It is true that modernity was dominated by the dynamics of alternating extremisms; however, the most interesting artistic results appeared when artists followed Brzozowski's course. Here, the aim of artistic explorations was to maintain the inner tension between the pairs of opposites while at the same time preserving the key values of each. On the basis of the lesson Brzozowski taught us we know that in order to find a solution it was not a matter of choosing between autonomy and its negation, but rather between two different scopes of autonomy. But how was this really accomplished?

Tadeusz Peiper seems to have been the first to see the necessity of a different resolution of the dilemma awaiting artists in modernity. This is indicated by his double-edged polemics: he criticised engaged as well as pure art. In Peiper's well thought-out conception, correlated with the problems of modernization, the autonomy of poetry is manifested in the right to violate syntactic and phraseological linguistic rules. Destroying stock patterns of poetic creation stems from the conviction that language and the social perception of reality are linked; according to Peiper, we see the world in the way language allows, and what we see determines how we take part in reality and how we transform it. In other words, we can only change what we are able to name in a changed way. Consequently, social changes are not possible without the renewal of language. But Peiper takes his thinking even further, as it were in the footprints of Brzozowski: He argues that the rationale of poetry is to integrate the unintegrated, i.e., to bind together separate elements of the world. Poetry teaches its readers relational thinking and acting. Yet it teaches them not by means of direct instruction, as revolutionary poetry does, but by training their sense of functionality. Poems turn the mass into a society.

Following Peiper, the history of integrating autonomy was carried forward by very different representatives of Polish modernity. I would include here Miron Białoszewski, the post-war Miłosz, the poets of the late phase of the New Wave,¹⁷ as well as Zbigniew Herbert who in his poetry prior to the mid-1970s

17 My inspiration here is Jacek Gutorow's opinion, expressed in his interpretation of the poetry of Julian Kornhauser: "The lesson of Kornhauser shows that he is not only after poetics or rhetoric in the narrow sense of the word. He is also, or perhaps above all, after a certain vision of being—being understood as remaining open to all languages, the higher and lower, those fully conscious and those outside consciousness, resulting from an impulse coming from elsewhere. Nothing is given. One has to decide, choose, get engaged—but blindly, not owning even oneself, taking everything

(i.e., before the collection *Pan Cogito* [Mr Cogito]) and his essays gradually broadens the scope of human sensitivity, and binds ethics with aesthetics, making aesthetic taste a prerequisite for the individual's moral sovereignty.

Does this idea continue to have significance? Is it justified to extend modernity beyond 1989? One could risk the following answer: modernity lasts as long as the human being produces alienation or is unable to overcome it. As long as alienation remains a result of human activity, whether its main or side effect, the idea of integrating is still relevant.

Uncertain about further names, I would mention—hesitantly—Magdalena Tulli (as the author of the novels: *Sny i kamienie* [Dreams and Stones], *W czerwieni* [In Red], *Tryby* [Moving Stones], *Skaza* [Flaw]), Zbigniew Kruszyński (*Szwedenkräuter*, *Szkice historyczne* [Historical Sketches]), Jacek Dukaj (as the author of *Czarne oceany* [Black Oceans], *Perfekcyjna niedoskonałość* [Perfect Imperfection]), and Marek Bieńczyk (as the author of *Terminal* and *Tworki*, as well as the essays *Melancholia* and *Przezroczyść* [Translucence]). Even if I am wrong in my choice of names and achievements, it is clear that I am selecting those who pursue solidary, integrating autonomy. Hence, it is not about those who point to the necessity of returning freedom to particular collective subjects: women, sexual minorities, children, Jews or animals. Artists active in the sphere of solidary autonomy look for the broadest possible basis of coexistence, finding it in communication (and not in human language itself), in improvised network connections (and not only in stable networks). Thus, their efforts are directed against the mechanics of exclusion, rather than against the exclusion of a particular social group or natural species. In their art, the represented autonomy, played out in the plot, is linked with the autonomy of the means of expression, i.e., language, of form or composition. At the same time, the emancipation awarded to particular beings is reintegrated, in hypothetical mode, with a broader sphere of reality. Here, the question is not, “How and in what name to liberate a given subject?” but rather, “How to make sure that emancipation does not lead to isolation?”

The foregoing sketch of an idea, which as yet does not even deserve the name of a précis of Polish modernist literature, seems worth considering insofar as the opposition between the autonomy and heteronomy of art persists. Gone or at least lessened are the oppositions between mass and elite culture or truth and fiction. Yet the dichotomy of autonomy and heteronomy has maintained its status, dramatic fervour, and relevance.

that comes our way.” *Języki Kornhausera* [Kornhauser's languages] in: *Niepodległość głosu. Szkice o poezji polskiej po 1968 roku* (Kraków: Znak, 2003), 56f.

Today, even the very reflection about the shrinking autonomy of culture has itself become a non-autonomous form, contributing to a certain ritual of frustration. Revealing the subordinate character of literature serves cynical reason and leads to a bitter conclusion: Since writers cannot be independent of the market, let them live off their own dependence. On the other hand, the market, an area heteronomous to art, accepts and rewards tales about the integration of humans with nature, objects, or even machines. Ideas of a harmonious life in communion with nature, especially in a lakeside cottage, like that depicted in a popular TV series, of active concern for the climate, pro-environmental thinking, recycling—all of this is in line with the expansion of capitalism. Thus, the present changed position of Brzozowski's idea is conditioned by the fact that although modernity at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has recourse to the ideology of integration, it thereby conceals vast areas of exclusion, both economic and ecological. This poses a double challenge for art. The first task is to reveal the dangers of coercion hidden in integration. The second, opposite task is to focus attention on everything from which people of late modernity isolate themselves with full awareness and for the sake of survival. Viruses are the literal and metaphorical example of phenomena from which people take distance, and epidemiology provides models of isolation procedures. In response to this challenge, art would have to raise the question about the limits of integration laid down by human beings in the name of self-defence. Put differently, today the greatest problem of solidary autonomy is the question whether at the end of the day it is only humans who should benefit.

With the above-stated problem, I would like to return to present-day claims to Brzozowski's legacy. Even though contemporary literary criticism practiced under the patronage of the author of *Idee* can be interesting, it does bypass the crucial challenges formulated by him. I would single out three most important issues.

First of all, the main categories of Brzozowski's philosophy—labor, culture, nation, church—are too often separated. In their interpretations, leftist critics employ the notions of “labor” and “culture,” while right-wing critics reach for “nation” and “church”; the left avoids the undesirable motif of community ties rooted in tradition, the right refuses to admit that in Brzozowski's view man creates himself. Secondly, taking as its point of departure the dichotomy “pure art versus engaged art,” present-day criticism reverses the necessary action, assuming that forms of engagement are given, whereas Brzozowski regarded artistic form as a result of coming to know reality and as an individual expression of solving a particular problem. He wrote:

Każda treść w dziele sztuki ujawniona jest wywalczona, zdobyta, przeżyta, zawiera więc w sobie ciężar własny i powagę własną rzeczy głęboko istniejących. [...] Nie jest wytworem myśli, jest rzeczywistością kanciastą [...]. Walka z nią, z jej określonością, usiłowanie oddania jej niezawisłego, indywidualnego kształtu, tworzy rdzeń wysiłków formalnych w sztuce. Ona to – ta walka z określonością własnych czynów i sił, które tym czynom się przeciwstawiają – rozsądza zawsze wszelki sztywniejący szablon w sztuce, manierę. Styl własny, forma własna – nie wynajdują się i nie wymyślają. Jedna jest tylko droga do nich prowadząca – życie własne.¹⁸

Each content brought forth in a work of art has involved struggle, achievement, deep experience, and hence bears its own weight and the authority of things that exist deeply. [...] It is not a product of thought; it is an angular reality [...]. The struggle with it, its determinate contours, the attempt to provide it with an independent, individual shape, constitutes the core of formal efforts in art. This struggle against the fixed determinacy of one's own deeds and the forces opposing them rips apart every congealed template, manner, in art. A personal style, a personal form, these are not discovered nor conjured up by thought. Only one road leads to them—one's own life.

In other words: form emerges when individual thought meets the resistance of reality; it is neither superimposed on the world by the mind nor borrowed from literary tradition. Finding a solution to an artistic problem, the artist at the same time finds the solution of a specific general and his own individual problem. The form suggested by the artist combines individual biography and shared culture. Thanks to that, Brzozowski could postulate an engagement that is inseparable from the freedom of artistic exploration.

Third, Brzozowski's conception is—exclusively and expansively—anthropocentric, and this anthropocentrism is complemented by the image of nature as a foreign continent, which must be conquered and subdued. This image is dangerously consonant with the colonising approach to nature in modernity. If in Brzozowski's philosophy only the human is to be the subject of integration of being, this means that his conception legitimates cruel forms of alienation—concerning animals, plants, bodies of water, but also human bodies. If, on the other hand, integration could encompass not only human beings, but also everything that coexists with them and often threatens them, we would need to ask where in Brzozowski's thought is the passage that would allow the transition from the human to the post-human world.

It seems that these three problems—the problem of community, artistic form, and anthropocentrism—today pose a challenge to anyone who wants to comment

18 Brzozowski, "Miriam," 556.

on the development of engaged art by referring to Brzozowski. In his view, autonomy is the precondition of engagement, while integration is the aim of autonomous actions. Thus, art of value cannot exist without community or autonomy. This seems to open up a new perspective on Polish modern culture as a whole—one aimed not at works which confirm the opposition of pure and engaged art, but rather at finding a poetics that would act for the sake of overcoming this dichotomy. Perhaps this perspective could encompass the art of late modernity of the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The ideal of “mutual freedom” suggested by Brzozowski does, after all, seem to constitute a link missing from present-day social life and contemporary art. As postulated by art today, emancipation is rarely accompanied by thinking about mutuality, while mutuality more often than not appears among those who have already gained freedom. Brzozowski’s idea enjoins us to remember that the freedoms which we enjoy acquire value only when they free others. This concerns also the autonomy of art.

Translated by Zofia Ziemann

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