

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

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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.¹

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).² 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.³ 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 Gering-schätzung der asketischen Ideale und der tiefe Unwille gegen demokratische Mittelmäßigkeit, Ihr aristokratischer Radikalismus.⁴

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).⁵

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

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- 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: Fritsch, 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: Con-tumax, 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).⁶

Then for a few weeks between 1888 and 1889, Strindberg began a correspondence with Nietzsche, but it was interrupted by Nietzsche’s nervous breakdown.⁷ 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.⁸

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.”⁹ Some months later he added: “Read Friedrich Nietzsche. (Jenseit von Gut und Bose [sic!]).”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ 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.”¹²

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”¹³ 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.¹⁴

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.”¹⁵

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.¹⁶ 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!¹⁷

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.¹⁸

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 *majores* 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)¹⁹ 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).²⁰ 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).²¹

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.”²² 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.”²³ 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 współzyciem 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 wyżyć sam siebie całkowicie, w której nie będzie skłonności tak odrębnej, tak nowej, która by nie mogła znaleźć dla siebie całkowitego, nie pohamowanego niczym wyrazu.²⁴

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 historical 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).²⁵

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).²⁶ 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).²⁷ 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.²⁸

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),²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.³¹

Kołakowski notes that Brzozowski’s proletariat is “a collective warrior with the traits of a Nietzschean hero”,³² 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!)³³ Nietzsche also appears in the article “Filozofia Fryderyka Nietzschego” as an example of an ideal man who is “capable of a free life”³⁴ (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),³⁵ but also

29 Brzozowski, “Filozofia Fryderyka Nietzschego,” 650.

30 Ibid., 679.

31 Ibid., 673.

32 Kołakowski, *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*)³⁶ 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”³⁷ (*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.³⁸

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*)³⁹ can human existence become sovereign: “Nie miej religii, lecz bądź religią – tak formuluje się stanowisko Nietzschego. [...] Sam dla siebie musisz zostać bogiem, stworzyć swego boga”⁴⁰ (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).⁴¹ 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”).⁴²

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.⁴³ 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,”⁴⁴ 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”.⁴⁵

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!”⁴⁶ 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).⁴⁷

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)⁴⁸ 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).⁴⁹

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!*⁵⁰

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).⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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”).⁵³ 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.

There is an entire body of writings, shared by early Nietzsche readers like Strindberg and Brzozowski. The most prominent authors figuring in this list were Charles Darwin and Arthur Schopenhauer—“the educator” of a whole generation. Other, more forgotten influences were Ernst Haeckel, with whom Strindberg corresponded; Henry Buckle and his *History of Civilisation in England* (he appears several times in Strindberg’s autobiographical novel *The Son of the Servant*); Maurice Barrès’s trilogy *Le culte du moi*;⁵⁴ and eventually, though surprisingly, Emanuel Swedenborg, a major influence on late Strindberg whom Brzozowski described as an “uncommon [...] thinker [...] and scholar” (niepospolity[...] myśliciel[...] i uczoney) who will be fully appreciated along with “progresses in preternormal psychology” (postępy psychologii ponadnormalnej).⁵⁵

The array of cultural topics is also easily recognizable: physiology and the politics of the body, the mythologies and rituals of the upper middle-classes, emancipation, the decay and possible healing of European culture, objectivity, and the *Was-ist-Wahrheit* question. In her book on Ibsen, Toril Moi argues that our understanding of the term modernism is a result of historical amnesia:

Most of the numerous nineteenth-century struggles over realism had nothing to do with modernism, and everything to do with idealism. [...] What we have forgotten is that idealism did not simply die with romanticism, but that it remained a powerful aesthetic norm for most of the nineteenth century, and that weak, degraded forms of idealism lasted until just about all the aesthetic conflicts that raged in Europe throughout the century, and particularly in the bitter struggles that mark the period after 1870.⁵⁶

Most aspects of modernism in Nietzsche, Strindberg, and Brzozowski can be seen in the light of the discreditation of the idealistic assumptions of late post-romantic culture and the operative delusions of the European upper-middle classes that were usually referred to under the umbrella-term of idealism. In a European context, Brzozowski’s rewriting of Nietzsche can be seen as the backdrop of a cultural movement whose main aim was the debunking of this idealism.

Translated by Zofia Ziemann

54 To his friend Leopold Littmansson, Strindberg commented on his own essay “Moi” in Summer 1894: “The only thing that exists is the self (le culte du moi), and I know nothing about the world and ‘other people’ except through myself.” Quoted and translated by Robinson in: Strindberg, *Letters Vol. 2*, 241.

55 Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, 115n.

56 Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism. Art, Theatre, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

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