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**LYRICISM AS A POLEMICAL CONCEPT IN NORWID,
BRZozowski, AND SZTUKA I NARÓD****LIRYZM JAKO KONCEPT POLEMICZNY: NORWID, BRZozowski,
SZTUKA I NARÓD**

Słowa kluczowe: teoria liryki, romantyzm, krytyka kulturalna, afekty, Cyprian Norwid, Stanisław Brzozowski, *Sztuka i Naród*

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Historically, the term “lyricism” designates a Romantic poet’s inspired self-expression. But in common language it also refers to a dream-like mood, in which the subjective origin is rather blurred. This ambiguity matters if one traces the usage of the concept in the aftermath of Romanticism. To be sure, the French neologism *lyrisme* had become ambiguous very soon after its appearance in the end of the 1820s. In what is one of the first evidences of the word’s appearance, Alfred de Vigny used it to explain the need of a capacity of stylistically rising the intonation “up to the highest lyricism” (*remonter jusqu’au lyrisme le plus haut*) to render, in French, the freedom of Shakespearean language¹. *Lyrisme*, as Jean-Michel Maulpoix puts it, “addresses song without the support of music”, or is supposed to be just the “equivalent of song within poetry”². It is, then, an agonal notion and represents the striving of Romantic poetry to embrace the other arts. The introduction of the term occurred, however,

¹ A. de Vigny, *Lettre à Lord*** sur la soirée du 24 octobre 1829 et sur un système dramatique*. In: *Oeuvres complètes, idem*, ed. F. Germain et A. Jarry, Paris 1986, vol. 1: Poésie, théâtre, p. 409. – All translations are mine, Ch. Z. This article was written during an “Advanced Postdoc. Mobility” fellowship of the Swiss National Science Foundation. I thank Jens Herlth and Jared Warren for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

² J.-M. Maulpoix, *Incertitudes d’un néologisme*. In: *Du lyrisme, idem*, 2nd ed., Paris 2000, p. 23, 33.

as Maulpoix points out³, at a moment when Romanticism had long been able to view itself critically. Only some five years after Vigny, a character in Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) could make fun of himself by saying, "I let myself go nicely with lyricism [...], for a while I've been pindarizing quite ridiculously"⁴. Since the mid-nineteenth century, dictionaries too record as a second signification of *lyrisme*: false pathos, stereotypical enthusiasm, epigonic Romantic style. Sometimes a third, metaphorical usage is defined that characterizes a certain affective or sentimental *attitude of a person*.

It seems as if the initial drive of lyricism to compete with music was later widely abandoned and the vigour of the term has been absorbed by purely musical references in contemporary English, German, Polish, or Russian (to mention just a few European languages). "Lyricism", I would say, today typically serves to characterize elegiac voices both in musicology and journalistic discourse on music. Interestingly, this tendency is only partly reflected by standard dictionaries⁵. Entries on "lyricism", "Lyrismus", "lyryczność", "лиризм" are still clearly biased by the semantics of exalted sentimentality and sensibility both as artistic style and personal behavior. Those definitions show, in a way, only the repercussions of lyricism's expansion into other realms: a metaphorized sentimental melodiousness. Whereas initially, the term was meant to express the energy of Romantic writing, the generalized definitions of recent dictionaries represent it predominantly as a nostalgic, passivist mood. My impression is that this semantics is, however, not so widespread anymore even in sophisticated conversation, for lyricism has – more or less – become a musical *terminus technicus*. Ironically, this understanding of lyricism actually *excludes* lyric poetry as it now foregrounds music's (at times also a film's or even a painting's) capacity to be "lyric".

The French language reveals a slightly different tendency. It grasps a quality in *lyrisme*, some quasi-orphic or troubadour-like element that still might inform literary texts – not only poetry; Maulpoix's and a whole range of other recent publications on the subject are proof of this possibility⁶. Now a growing scholarly interest in the "lyric" can also be noted beyond France, namely a reappraisal, and neater distinction, of lyric vis-à-vis the "poetic", which was dominant in literary criticism as long as structuralism and poststructuralist textualism were, in one way or another, its most influential methodology. In structuralism, the "poetic" was considered a universal function of language crucial to a certain degree for any text insofar as there are self-referential aspects at work in it. Roman Jakobson's iconic example shows this well:

³ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

⁴ "Je me suis joliment laissé aller au lyrisme [...], et voilà bien du temps que je pindarise assez ridiculement." The Chevalier d'Albert in the 1834 epistolary novel in T. Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. In: *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, *idem*, ed. P. Laubriet, Paris 2002, vol. 1, p. 267.

⁵ Such as *Oxford Dictionary*, *Duden*, *Ozhegov/Shvedova's Tolkovy slovar' russkogo iazyka*, *Słownik języka polskiego PWN* (visited online).

⁶ See, among others, M. Broda, *L'amour du nom. Essai sur le lyrisme et la lyrique amoureuse*, Paris 1997; A. Rodriguez, *Le pacte lyrique. Configuration discursive et interaction affective*, Sprimont 2003; J.-M. Maulpoix, *Pour un lyrisme critique*, Paris 2009.

Eisenhower's slogan for the U.S. presidential election of 1952, "I like Ike"⁷ is poetic in terms of an overstructured way of putting the words, but there is certainly nothing "lyric" to it.

Among contemporary endeavors, one can name the case of German *Lyrikologie*, which seeks to define lyric in analogy to narratology⁸. Robert von Hallberg's *Lyric Powers* or Jonathan Culler's recent *Theory of Lyric* should be noted, among others, for the English-speaking part⁹. In this international context, the example of Polish Studies is typical and yet particular. In the last years, there has been undertaken an attempt to actualize the category of *liryczność*¹⁰, a term already used by Romantic critics¹¹ and revisited in the twentieth century by Czesław Zgorzelski (1908–1996) as a conceptual alternative to traditional genre discourse¹². Zgorzelski was an eminent specialist of Adam Mickiewicz, and in the context of Mickiewicz's *Lausanne Lyrics* (*Liryki lozańskie*, 1839), *liryczność* will hardly face objections, unless that one of a too close relation to its object. But the idea of a renewal of *liryczność* is clearly not only an analytical proposition. It involves instead elements of a literary anthropology, namely the idea of a reintegration of the (post)modern subject¹³.

Zdzisław Łapiński, a former student of Zgorzelski's, unambiguously criticizes the idea of universalizing the category of *liryczność* – unsurprisingly, with reference to Polish structuralism. The "lyricality" of a text, he argues, cannot possibly be measured, in contradistinction to "poeticity", whose degree can be assessed by analyzing rhetoric devices. Moreover, Łapiński asks whether the assumption of a stable subject bearing the lyric utterance, made by the authors of the *Liryczność* volume, is defendable at all under postmetaphysical conditions¹⁴. What is clear is that the Polish attempt to renew the category of lyricism differs markedly from other reappraisals in that it is much more voice-oriented and takes for granted a subject "behind" the poem.

⁷ R. Jakobson, *Closing Statement: Linguistic and Poetics*. In: *Style in Language*, ed. T.A. Sebeok, second printing, Cambridge, Mass., 1964, p. 357.

⁸ See F. von Ammon, *Lyrikologie*. In: *Handbuch Literarische Rhetorik*, ed. R. Zymner, Berlin–Boston 2015. See also the recently established International Network for the Study of Lyric (INSL).

⁹ See R. von Hallberg, *Lyric Powers*, Chicago 2008; J.D. Culler, *Theory of Lyric*, Cambridge, Mass., 2015.

¹⁰ *Liryczność. W kręgu problemów estetyki, teorii i historii literatury*, eds B. Kuczera-Chachulska, E. Skalińska, Warsaw 2013).

¹¹ M. Stanisławski, *Prawdziwa poezja serca i duszy. Kategoria liryczności w polskiej krytyce literackiej wczesnego romantyzmu*. In: Kuczera-Chachulska/Skalińska, *Liryczność...*

¹² See, among many other texts, Cz. Zgorzelski, *Liryczność poezji romantycznej*. In: *Zarysy i szkice literackie*, *idem*, Warsaw 1988.

¹³ See A. Stoff, *Liryczność w życiu i w literaturze (W poszukiwaniu źródłowego sensu pojęcia)*. In: Kuczera-Chachulska/Skalińska, *Liryczność...* Stoff (*ibidem*, p. 276) speaks about lyricism as "place of encounter between life and art." Teresa Dobrzyńska, in her paper, describes lyricism as a factor of the "creation of sense" (T. Dobrzyńska, *Utwór liryczny a status podmiotu w kulturze współczesnej w świetle spójności i interpretacji tekstu*. In: Kuczera-Chachulska/Skalińska, *Liryczność...*, p. 283).

¹⁴ In her introduction, head of the project Bernadetta Kuczera-Chachulska cites at length Łapiński's internal review of the volume (*O problemie liryczności (uwagi wstępne)*. In: Kuczera-Chachulska/Skalińska, *Liryczność...*, pp. 8–9).

Interestingly enough, Zdzisław Łapiński himself, decades earlier, had made a point on lyricism of literary-*sociological* relevance: In his essays and letters, the late Romantic poet Cyprian Norwid (Łapiński noted *en passant*) extensively uses the concept *liryzm* with regard to *extra-literary* phenomena.¹⁵ This usage is not a surprise if we keep in mind the initial drive of *lyrisme* to extend “the lyric to domains that hitherto were untouched by it”¹⁶ – not only to other genres but also to everyday life. Still, the phenomenon is so prominent in Norwid that it deserves more attention.

The authoritative dictionary of the Polish language of the nineteenth century, *Słownik języka polskiego*, the so-called “Varsovian” (*Słownik Warszawski*), does not define *liryzm*. It cross-refers to *liryczność*, and from there, to the adjective *liryczny*. The entry lists, very much as French dictionaries did, a metaphorical usage: “*sentimental, exaggeratedly affective*”, with the example of someone singing “lyric songs on friendship”¹⁷. It should be noted that this example for *behavioral* lyricism remains lyric-related, and such closeness to the literary is a feature of respective French dictionary entries, too. That is to say, a complete detachment of the concept from the literary context is unusual.

Here lies the originality of Norwid’s usage. As a matter of fact, he speaks, for example, of “lyric citizenship”¹⁸. With Norwid, one can observe the transformation of a critical, still partly genre-specific notion into what, in Reinhard Koselleck’s phrase, is a “universally applicable pejorative polemical concept”¹⁹. To be sure, the intrinsic possibility of a pathetic collapse of *lyrisme*, as pointed out earlier, *had* been in the mind of the French Romantics when they were championing a transgeneric mode of poetic speaking. Moreover, *lyrisme* had become very early a purely pejorative concept in the criticism of Francis-Alphonse Wey (1812–1882)²⁰. However, even Wey’s discourse remains literary. The topic of the present paper is instead a political or more precisely, *metapolitical* reframing of “lyricism” in the writings of several Polish writers.

What seems essential in the examples I will address is the referential shift, for it is not subjective expression or a “singing” mode of speaking as such that is denied. Such a refusal would be typical of a classicist or of a realist/positivist viewpoint. Rather, the concept of lyricism is specifically adopted and functionalized anew. An *appropriation* takes place, which obviously shares many of the premises of Romanticism. My hypothesis is thus the following: Lyricism – transformed into a polemical concept

¹⁵ Z. Łapiński, *Norwid* [1971]. In: *O Norwidzie. Rzeczy dawne i najdawniejsze*, *idem*, Lublin 2014, p. 224.

¹⁶ J.-M. Maulpoix, *Incertitudes d’un néologisme...*, p. 26.

¹⁷ “[...] *sentymentalny, przesadnie uczuciowy*: liryczne zapiewania o przyjaźni.” *Słownik języka polskiego*, eds J. Karłowicz, A. Kryński i W. Niedźwiedzki, Warsaw 1900, p. 748, 1st column (emphasis in the original).

¹⁸ I will discuss this notion in more detail in the section “Lyricism as a Compensatory Mechanism and as ‘Asceticism’ in Norwid”.

¹⁹ “[...] universal verwendbarer pejorativer Kampfbegriff”. R. Koselleck, *Zur Begriffsgeschichte der Zeitutopie*. In: *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache*, *idem*, Frankfurt/M. 2006, p. 272.

²⁰ See J.-M. Maulpoix, *Incertitudes d’un néologisme...*, pp. 39–41.

– attacks social and/or political conventionalizations of Romanticism, and implies the suggestion of “another” Romanticism. In other words, as a polemical concept, it does not remain purely pejorative. As I will argue, it clearly retains, or regains, a *positive* facet.

The first case I will address is that of Norwid, the most significant representative of the second generation of Polish Romanticism, who by all means tried to avoid the epigonism of his fellow poets and discovered a highly paradoxical rhetorical weapon in *liryzm*. Secondly, I will discuss the functioning of “lyricism” in the writings of the *fin de siècle* philosopher, critic, and writer Stanisław Brzozowski (1878–1911), who was deeply indebted to Norwid for a specific cultural criticism. The harshness of Brzozowski’s socially framed anti-lyricism conforms with his notorious anti-Romanticism. I will be also focusing, however, on how sympathetic he could be toward lyricism. Finally, I will address the case of the right-wing underground magazine *Sztuka i Naród* (*Art and Nation*, Warsaw, 1942–1944) and the young poets and critics gathered around it. They used Norwid and Brzozowski as key references in order to advocate an engaged yet autonomous art. Their fights with “lyricism” were a way of discussing both literary and existential issues in the midst of daily terror and the devastation of the Occupation.

Lyricism as a Compensatory Mechanism and as “Asceticism” in Norwid

Cyprian Norwid *was* a lyric poet, very much so. And he himself expressed a deep belief in the reality of song within poetry, i.e. that the “lyre” could and should constitute an effective, and not merely nominal, counterpart to the heaviness and darkness of (printer’s) “ink”²¹. “I do not feel the strings trembling under your finger – / You are a printer of poetry!” he stated in his poem “Lyric and Print” (“Liryka i druk”) from the poetic cycle *Vade-mecum* (1866)²². Moreover, he expects from any poet to acknowledge “[t]hat strings lighter than those visible / Do exist [...]”²³. Norwid was, then, even a lyricist in the strictest sense of the term. But he was also concerned, very consistently so, with the *grounding* of musical exaltation in what he once calls “architecture of reason”²⁴.

²¹ Norwid writes about his contemporaries that “if they were told to sing so as the *stones would stack up city walls*, each of them would wet his finger with ink...” (“gdyby im kazano śpiewać tak, aby kamienie się składały w mury miasta, to każdy z nich palec by w atramencie umoczył...”) C. Norwid, *O Juliuszu Słowackim. IV*. In: *Pisma wszystkie, idem*, ed. J.W. Gomulicki, Warsaw, 1971–1976), vol. 6, p. 439 (emphasis in the original).

²² “Nie czuję strun, drżących pod palcem twym – / Jesteś poezji drukarz!” C. Norwid, *Liryka i druk*. In: *Pisma wszystkie, idem*, vol. 1, p. 24.

²³ “Że od widzialnych strun – struny lżejsze / Są [...]” (*ibidem*, p. 25). To be sure, other poems in *Vade-mecum* such as “Cacka” (Gem) give a more ambiguous account of the status of the “lyre” and the resonance of its strings (*ibidem*, p. 131).

²⁴ “[...] poezja ma architekturę rozsądku swego” (C. Norwid, *Do Marii Trębickiej. Maj 1954, New York*. In: *Pisma wszystkie, idem*, vol. 8, p. 209). Rolf Fieguth puts it aptly: “Norwid was, in both prose and poetry, an author who wrote musically, and who in many ways broke and deformed yet never completely suppressed his melodies.” R. Fieguth, *Gedanken zu Norwids Essay*

Given this prestige of, and identification with, the lyric, it is astonishing to see how easily Norwid could convert it for polemical purposes²⁵. Writing “lyricism”, or sometimes just “lyric”, he addresses, in a most direct way, matters of the public and pursues his merciless critique of Polish society. His aim is to show the necessity of national self-criticism. Examples of this usage include the following remarks on a “lyric” enactment of citizenship: “[...] Hitherto, Poles keep making lyric appeals in order to gain nerves and spasms! – or, driven not by a creative but an imitatory routine of ideas developed by other people, they try hard to get an official stamp and seal in advance.”²⁶ A slightly different accent can be observed in a polemical note on the occasion of the death of Wincenty Pol (1807–1872), a minor Romantic poet, participant in the November Uprising of 1830–31, and professor of geography in Cracow:

When Wincenty Pol died, *lyric* citizenship came up with the idea of burying the poet on Wawel Hill.

I dissolved into spiritual tears as they adopted the idea not in reaction to the softening of the Republic but because they never thanked any poet during his lifetime. That’s why they must be, and are, generous after poets pass away²⁷.

In the first the two cited passages, “lyricism” stands for a kind of agitation of one’s self. With a contemporary term one could speak of an ostentatious cultivation of *indignation*. Such “nervous” lyricism, according to Norwid, goes hand in hand with unoriginality, epigonism, and a bureaucratic mindset of self-preservation. “Lyricism” would be, then, a mask – stolen as it were from the authentic sentimental culture of Romanticism – dissimulating political and cultural “disheartenment”. In a way, this insinuation is an emphatically *Romantic* critique of conventionalizations and instrumentalizations of Romantic subjectivity. The second passage shows the same tendency even more acutely. By means of the metonymy “lyric citizenship”, Norwid is fighting what could be called a parasitic participation in lyricism. (To what extent Norwid’s sarcasm applies to Wincenty Pol himself and his public career as a professor in partitioned Poland, is difficult to say).

Das Schweigen. In: *Gedächtnis und Phantasma. Festschrift für Renate Lachmann*, eds S.K. Frank, E. Greber, Sch. Schahadat, I. Smirnov, Munich 2001, p. 627.

²⁵ In the sense of ‘Romantic exaltation’ Norwid’s rejection of *liryzm* is discussed by Michał Kuziak. See M. Kuziak, *Norwid et le problème du sujet*. In: *Norwid notre contemporain*, ed. M. Delaperrière, Paris 2015, pp. 179–180. Norwid does not use the more common *liryczność* (see J. Puzynina’s and T. Korpysz’s, *Internetowy słownik języka Cypriana Norwida*, online). The use of *liryzm* instead is indicative of the fact that there was an important impact of French *lyrisme* on Norwid.

²⁶ “[...] Polacy dotąd robią odezwy liryczne, aby nerwy sobie zyskać i spazmy! – albo, idąc nie twórczą, lecz naśladowniczą rutyną dokonanych przez inne ludy pomysłów, starają się naprzód o zyskanie pieczętki i timbru oficjalnego: że poczciwe jest poczciwe.” C. Norwid, *Nota z dziewięciu punktów*. In: *Pisma wszystkie, idem*, vol. 7, p. 153.

²⁷ “Kiedy zmarł Wincenty Pol, obywatelstwo *liryczne* pomyślało poetę pogrześć na Wawelu. / Zapłakałem w duchu, bo to nie dlatego oni pomyślili, iż Rz[eczpospo]lita zniewieściła już, ale dlatego, iż żadnego poety nigdy za żywota nie u-wdzięczyli, przeto hojnymi muszą być i są po zgonach.” C. Norwid, *Do Józefa Bohdana Wagnera [Paryż, początek grudnia 1874?]*. In: *Pisma wszystkie, idem*, vol. 10, p. 32 (emphasis in the original).

Turned into a pejorative polemical concept, lyricism thus describes a compensatory mechanism. Rhetorically – “I dissolved into spiritual tears” – Norwid takes, for his part, a highly lyric stance not to be confused with an outburst of emotion, though, but being based on a carefully *shaped* emotionality. Elsewhere, he mentions a language of “expressions of precise power”, aiming at a controlled expression, behind which an even deeper emotionality would dwell. “Lyricism”, he writes, “is the opposite pole [to such controlled expression]”²⁸. It displays, according to him, a sensationalist exhibition of feelings as concealing the lack of a citizen’s substantial cultural vision.

The scope of the polemical concept goes beyond that compensatory mechanism. It includes namely the phenomenon of self-delusion in view of the *conditions* under which nineteenth-century culture evolved. In a letter from 1863 Norwid wrote:

I know that lyricism would answer that it does not actually matter [how the publishing market is organized in Poland] since there will always be both graves for the promulgation of tradition and those ruins shrouded in mystery about which, God knows, I would sing far more beautifully if I did not know under what vault one has to sing, and under which one speaks and acts²⁹.

To “sing beautifully” appears to be a question of context. I would like to explain this aspect with a letter from 1856, where Norwid deals with the poetics of a friend of his, the notorious lyricist (*lirnik*) Teofil Lenartowicz (1822–1893). Here, the use of the term is generally literary. Still, what is at issue is the status of lyric song *under the premises* of already conventionalized “social” lyricism. Norwid wrote:

I know very well how much, by virtue of his *lyricism*, he [Lenartowicz] has been approaching consumption, [...] however, he lives in a conventionalized world, [in this world] as it is, in such a way that he has behaved like someone who, the more he enters the circle of heartlessness the more subtly he prepares his aching strings, so as to be all the more unjustifiedly plucked³⁰.

Maverick Norwid, with his extremely acute consciousness for social mechanisms, is describing the vulnerability of a modern Orpheus (i.e. Lenartowicz) who actually *does not* manage to “read” the social sphere and to anticipate its dynamics. But with his awkwardness – here comes Norwid’s serious objection – Lenartowicz is also

²⁸ “[...] wyrażen ścisłą mających moc”, “Liryzm przeciwnym tego jest biegunem” (C. Norwid, *[W sprawie uczczenia prześladowanych unitów]* [1874]. In: *Pisma wszystkie, idem*, vol. 7, p. 177).

²⁹ “Wiem, iż liryzm odpowiada na to, że to nic, bo zostaną zawsze mogiły głoszące tradycje i te ruiny owiane legendami, o których dali Bóg że ja też daleko piękniej zaśpiewałbym, gdybym nie wiedział, pod jakimi sklepieniami się śpiewa, a pod jakimi się mówi i rzecze.” C. Norwid, *Do Leona Kaplińskiego. [Paryż, maj–czerwiec] 1863*. In: *Pisma wszystkie, idem*, vol. 9, p. 100.

³⁰ “Ja wiem bardzo dobrze, jako niedawno *liryzmem* swym już, już suchot bliski był, coraz to subtylizując najeteryczniejsze wdzięki tklivości, a żyjąc w świecie konwencjonalnym, jaki jest – w sposób, że podobny był do człowieka, który w miarę jak w więcej bezserdeczne koło wchodzi, tym subtelniej przygotowuywa struny zbolale, aby tym niesprawiedliwiej szarpany był.” C. Norwid, *Do Marii Trębickiej [Paryż] 15 września 1856*. In: *Pisma wszystkie, idem*, vol. 8, p. 287 (emphasis in the original).

unable to serve, so to say, the cause of tenderness. The task set by Norwid is to give lyricism a kind of sober harshness, which would provide it with agency. As he puts it, “Song is not only art and flowers but it is also work. I know well that *in any obligation there is always a certain proportion of indelicacy*. This is, however, a most sacred indelicacy [...]”³¹. And he goes on by rephrasing lyricism as “asceticism”: “I said to him [Lenartowicz]: ‘You can reach the highest lyricism, but [by doing so] you have to walk in sandals or barefoot and with a pilgrim’s staff [...].’ Lyricism is always ascetic, fruitless. Passive asceticism without being a sacrifice *for* something is suicide.”³² Lyricism, this mode of elevation and stylistic excess, appears now to be a device of reduction. What Norwid means by this lyric “asceticism” is probably the license to suspend social aspects and the relativization of the mimetic element in poetry. But such a reduction, according to him, might be justified only by a highly conscious dealing with the *framework* of poetry. Artistic reduction must be accompanied by a reduced life-style, that is to say, by ascetic practice and the perseverance characteristic of a pilgrim. Lyricism has to be bought by a sensible price. In turn, asceticism might be able to transform elevation into a kind of second-degree-realism: into a particular clear-sightedness in social matters.

A Symptomatology of “Slavish Lyricism” in Brzozowski

Stanisław Brzozowski considered Norwid – almost fully unknown by the end of the nineteenth century and rediscovered by the Symbolist Zenon Przesmycki (Miriam) in 1897 – interestingly enough, under the label “lyricism of ruins” (*liryzm ruin*). Such lyricism, Brzozowski wrote in 1905, would “mock” the ephemeral output of modern culture “by virtue of its calm” (*szydzi spokojem*), with “sculptural disregard” (*posągowe lekceważenie*) for the seemingly most relevant matters of the day³³.

Some years later, in *The Legend of Young Poland* (*Legenda Młodej Polski*, 1909), Brzozowski’s critical *opus magnum*, a specific Norwidian lyricism becomes the synonym of a silent, ultimately unquestioned rootedness in totality: “Lyricism is not unfamiliar to Norwid, [...] lyricism is the breath of the whole, telling the single stones that the edifice endures and stands firm”³⁴.

³¹ “Pieśń jest nie tylko sztuka i kwiat, ale i dzieło – wiem ci ja, że w *każdym zobowiązaniu jest pewna proporcja niedelikatności* – ale to niedelikatność najświętsza [...]” *Ibidem* (emphasis in the original).

³² “Mówiłem mu: ‘Można i najwyższego liryzmu sięgać, ale trzeba przy tym w sandałach chodzić albo boso i z kijem w rękę [...].’ Liryzm jest zawsze ascetyczny; ascetyzm jałowy, bierny, bez ofiary za coś, jest samobójstwo.” *Ibidem* (my emphasis, Ch.Z.).

³³ S. Brzozowski, *Cyprian Norwid. Próba*. In: *Kultura i życie, idem, Zagadnienia sztuki i twórczości. W walce o światopogląd*, ed. A. Walicki (*Dzieła*, ed. M. Sroka), Warsaw 1973, p. 155.

³⁴ “Liryzm nie jest obcy Norwidowi, ale ma on u niego specyficzne zabarwienie, jest on jakby milczeniem i dumą potężnej katedry. [...] liryzm jest tchnieniem całości, zwiastującym oddzielnym kamieniom, że trwa i stoi gmach.” S. Brzozowski, *Legenda Młodej Polski. Studia o strukturze duszy kulturalnej*, ed. J. Bahr (*Dzieła*, ed. M. Sroka), Cracow 2001, p. 342. Curiously, “solitary” lyricism seems to have an affinity with historical “activity”: “Lonely, Norwid bore a world of construction and deed; he had in him the belief of an integral historical man”

There are other curious instances of a revalorization of lyricism in *The Legend of Young Poland*, namely a surprisingly sympathetic account of the Symbolist poet Jan Kasprówic (1860–1926)³⁵. Nonetheless, Brzozowski basically used the term by no means less polemically than did Norwid himself, and he gives it an even vaster scope as he applies it to the Polish and eventually the European intelligentsia as a whole, in an age of what he calls “Romantic crisis” (*przesilenie romantyczne*)³⁶. There are numerous descriptions of a hedonistic and narcissist cultivation of solitude and the melting of contours in Brzozowski’s writings, and he typically attacks them as “lyricism”:

Nothing tells me to see what I am, I have the right to dream of what I wish, as I wish it – thus one could conceptualize the source of *slavish lyricism*. Polish lyric irrationalism is taking actually the same spiritual attitude as confessed by progressive rationalism. There [in the latter], the creed declares its confidence in a recognized mechanical process, here [in lyricsm] it is [confidence] in elementary, undefined becoming. Life is understood here in such a way that a fruitless, idle, sentimental existence of the Polish “loners” should be somehow especially Polish – that is the only method of historical action we know³⁷.

The idea that lyricism, qua “irrationalism”, stands back to back with societal rationalism, naïve scientism, and progressivism is a model that played already a role in Norwid’s analyses. And the parallels between him and Brzozowski reach even further. Very much like in Norwid’s cultural criticism, “lyricism”, in Brzozowski’s account, is a pretext for ignoring the modern condition of life and for *delaying* artistic, cultural, or religious responses to it. Reflecting on Maurice Barrès, the French *Fin de siècle* writer and politician, Brzozowski wrote:

(“Norwid dźwigał w samotności świat konstrukcji i czynu: miał w sobie wiarę pełnego historycznego człowieka”; *ibidem*, p. 310).

³⁵ Reframing Kasprówic’s “lyricism” socially, Brzozowski writes: “Lyricism is the flow of life as it flows, the source out of which can arise the deed” (“Liryzm jest potokiem życia, gdy płynie, źródłem, z którego może powstać czyn”). *Ibidem*, 340. See on this aspect C. Zehnder, *Tätiger Augenblick: Zur „poetischen Ethik“ in Stanisław Brzozowski, Legende des Neuen Polen. Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie* 2018, no. 74(2), pp. 341–343.

³⁶ An excellent outline of Brzozowski’s anti-Romanticism and Romanticism *sui generis* is M. Piwińska, *Legenda romantyczna i szydery*, Warsaw 1973, pp. 121–134 and passim. Piwińska, adapting herself Brzozowski’s style, speaks of the “fireworks of lyricism” (*fajerwerki liryizmu*; *ibidem*, p. 131) in Symbolism (in Miriam, i.e. Zenon Przesmycki, and others). Moreover, she uses the highly Brzozowskian phrase *rozpływali się w liryzmie* (*ibidem*, p. 147) with regard to Stefan Żeromski and Stanisław Wyspiański. See also, with a more European scope, T. Burek, *Miejsce Brzozowskiego w dwudziestowiecznym sporze o romantyzm. Wstęp do zagadnienia*. In: *Wokół myśli Brzozowskiego*, ed. A. Walicki, R. Zimand, Cracow 1974.

³⁷ “Gdy wyczerpię wszystko, co jest na zewnątrz mnie i co mojej woli podlega, mam jeszcze siebie [...]. Nasza kultura bezwiedności w innym zmierza kierunku: nic nie każe mi widzieć, czym jestem, mogę marzyć o czym zechcę, jak zechcę – tak dałoby się określić to źródło niewolniczego liryzmu. Polski liryyczny irracjonalizm to właściwie ta sama postawa duchowa, która wypowiada się w postępowym racjonalizmie. Tam wypowiada się zaufanie do poznanego mechanicznego procesu, tu do żywiołowego, nieokreślonego stawania się. Życie pojmowane jest tu tak, aby bezpłodne, beczynne, sentymentalne trwanie polskich ‘samotników’ było jakąś specjalnie polską, nam tylko znaną metodą dziejowego czynu.” S. Brzozowski, *Legenda Młodej Polski...*, pp. 210–211 (my emphasis, Ch.Z.).

We need to understand the *construction of modern action*, the law that defines the crystallization of culture today. The life of culture has its own concrete logic: We have to comprehend it if we want our thoughts to be thoughts and not merely symptoms, physiological reflexes – to the *lyricism* that has become the most dangerous temptation for Polish thought³⁸.

Lyricism as a “symptom” of the lack of intellectual penetration of modern life: Brzozowski is emphasizing, again, an objection Norwid had raised against compensatory tricks by intellectuals in partitioned Poland. What both Norwid and Brzozowski aim at is a sincere, incorruptible reflection upon the modern conditions of creativity.

As some of his early postulates remained uncovered by practice, Brzozowski notes self-critically in his late *Journal (Pamiętnik, 1910–11)*, he helped himself with a “lyric” on the one hand, a “demagogic” element on the other³⁹. Lyricism served him, he admits, as a sensationalist device with a compensatory function. Clearly, the structure of this observation is consistent with Norwid’s concerns. Already in an earlier entry in the *Journal*, Brzozowski addresses the dangers of lyricism for his own writing: “I was bold once and did not treat my work as *self-expression, lyricism*, which – somehow by chance – help me make a living. Whatever your spiritual world is, you have to make of it an instrument of struggle and work! That has to be your foundation.”⁴⁰ A pivotal principle is, then, the minimization of emotional interest in writing and a markedly unemotional, economic use of intellectual and artistic practice. Later in the *Journal*, the same polemic against lyricism appears in the context of the novel of Brzozowski’s time: “An author of novels that do not appeal to conscious consent is forced to act by other means: sensation and sympathy, lyric hypnosis.”⁴¹ And Brzozowski suggests two antidotes highly untypical, it would seem, of his critical agenda: “stylism” (*stylizm*) and “egotism” (*egotyzm*). One has the impression that lyricism is thus to be beaten by its own arms: In order to understand his surprising “stylism” and “egotism” claim, it is important to know that Brzozowski, at that time, was considering new cultural models for his criticism, namely English literature and

³⁸ “Musimy zrozumieć *budowę nowoczesnego czynu*, prawo określające dziś krystalizację kulturalną. Życie kulturalne posiada swą własną konkretną logikę: pojąc ją musimy, jeżeli chcemy, aby myśli nasze były dziś myślami, a nie symptomatami tylko, fizjologicznymi odruchami, *liryzmem*, który stał się najniebezpieczniejszą pokusą myśli polskiej.” S. Brzozowski, *Maurycy Barrès (ze studiów nad myślą francuską)* [1909]. In: *Głosy wśród nocy. Studia nad przesileniem romantycznym kultury europejskiej, idem*, intr. C. Michalski, afterword A. Bielik-Robson, Warsaw 2007, p. 202 (emphasis in the original).

³⁹ “[...] liczyć na pomoc elementu lirycznego”, “bezwiednie [...] demagogicznego” (S. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, intr. M. Wyka, ed. M. Urbanowski, Wrocław–Warsaw–Cracow 2007), p. 168; February 12, 1911.

⁴⁰ “Byłem kiedyś odważny i nie traktowałem mojej pracy jako *autoekspresji, liryzmu*, które – przypadkowo niejako – dają mi byt. Czymkolwiek jest twój świat umysłowy, musisz z niego uczynić narzędzie walki i pracy! musi on być twoją podstawą.” *Ibidem*, p. 18 (December 16, 1910) (my emphasis, Ch. Z.).

⁴¹ “Powieściopisarz nie apelujący do świadomego przyzwolenia musi działać za pomocą innych środków: ciekawości i współczucia, lirycznej hipnozy.” *Ibidem*, p. 129 (January 18, 1911).

seventeenth-century French Classicism⁴². Self-expression should, it seems, not so much be avoided than soberly defined and neatly delimited. This is how late Brzozowski conceptualized the contribution of literature (poetry) to a “creative self-definition of man”⁴³.

Lyricism as Detachment from the Here and Now in *Sztuka i Naród*

The young poets and critics gathered around the right-wing underground magazine *Sztuka i Naród* in occupied Warsaw adopted a particularly polemical view of lyricism. As Andrzej Trzebiński, the most prolific essayist of the circle, notes in his *Journal (Pamiętnik, 1941–1943)* (which was consciously designed on the model of Brzozowski’s):

Remember never to speak of one’s self. That is bad style, a lack of taste, lyricism. [...] Remember that in general, speaking is our last weapon. My attack is and has to be – silence. Silence and evaluation. Simply some: “that’s bad”, or “that’s good!” Even with my eyes I shall speak little⁴⁴.

In a later entry Trzebiński notes, maybe referring specifically to Brzozowski’s *Journal*: “[You should] treat writing the least lyrically, the least immediately possible. Remember that writing is a means to gain money.”⁴⁵ Trzebiński is convincing himself of the need for distance towards his own artistic practice in order to keep control over it. We might say that this twenty-year-old writer adopts Norwid’s and Brzozowski’s arguments – which tried to overcome the existing public of partitioned Poland as wallowing in self-complacent “lyricism” – in the context of war. And Trzebiński obviously radicalizes that project. Whereas Norwid called for intellectual independence and Brzozowski explained the need for intellectually matching up with technical

⁴² On Brzozowski’s sympathetic remarks on (French) Classicism and moralism in the context of his late turn to Catholicism see T. Burek, *Miejsce Brzozowskiego w dwudziestowiecznym sporze o romantyzm...*, p. 30. Burek also outlines Brzozowski’s particular interest in English Romantic poetry as a model of a “mature” Romanticism (*ibidem*, p. 35).

⁴³ “Poezja musi być pojmowana jako twórcza autodefinicja człowieka.” S. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik...*, p. 13 (December 10, 1910) (emphasis in the original). However, Brzozowski’s metaphorical “poetry” discourse works differently from his “lyric” discourse. To live “poetically” is most often a positive trope, meant to express *intensity*. In his novel *Flames (Płomienie, 1908)*, the narrator Michał Kaniowski, an activist in the Russian terrorist movement, notes, “Each moment of human life contains poetry, creates it. Poetry, this is the acceptance of the present moment.” (“Każdy moment ludzkiego życia ma w sobie poezję, wytwarzają ją. Poezja – to jest przejęcie się chwilą.”) S. Brzozowski, *Pod ciężarem Boga. Wiry. Płomienie*, afterword by M. Wyka (*Dzieła*, ed. by A. Mencwela, t. 5), Cracow 2012, p. 748. On the “poetry” discourse of *The Legend of Young Poland* see C. Zehnder, *Tätiger Augenblick: Zur „poetischen Ethik“...*, pp. 333–345.

⁴⁴ “Pamiętać, że nie mówimy nigdy o sobie. To jest zły styl, brak smaku, liryzm. [...] Pamiętać, że w ogóle mówienie jest naszą ostateczną obroną. Atakiem moim jest i ma być – milczenie. Milczenie i ocena. Jakieś jedno – „to źle”, albo – „to dobrze!”. Nawet oczyma mówić mało. Uczuć się tego.” A. Trzebiński, *Pamiętnik*, ed. P. Rodak, Warsaw 2001, p. 182 (undated).

⁴⁵ “Pisanie traktować jak najmniej lirycznie, bezpośrednio. Pamiętać, że pisanie to metoda zdobywania pieniędzy.” *Ibidem*, p. 196 (undated).

progress and Modernity, Trzebiński's issue is how to maintain practical authority and agency in the field of underground culture and of organized resistance. Lyricism has become a caricature to be fought by means of an intimidating silence which he thought to be the highest expression of control and sovereignty⁴⁶.

Trzebiński's reflexion is, however, more complex than it could seem. In a text entitled "A Sheaf of Life and Thistle (From the Cycle: *From the Battles for a Contemporary Lyric no. 1*)" (1942) he shows himself torn between the idea of a hierarchization of "lyrical values" (*wartości liryczne*) and the conviction that a lyric is, each time, new, singular, incommensurable and, therefore, resists any hierarchization. "Lyricism" refers now to an aesthetic stance that denies lyric the power of affecting readers *hic et nunc*, perhaps precisely because it was, supposedly, experienced too immediately during the creative process. As one could put it, Trzebiński is denouncing lyricism as a *waste of immediacy*. In contradistinction to such futile lyricism, he develops his presentist standpoint and attacks the vague hope "that the avant-garde can serve to prepare for a future [postwar] poetry, that it can accumulate some store of condensed lyricism, of poetic charm"⁴⁷. For, Trzebiński continues, "if those spoils and supplies [...] are real and if they are really so remarkable then it is high time to cut into them *now*, that is to say, by the time of war, to work them up in an edible way, to feed on them [now]"⁴⁸. Lyricism thus stands for a dysfunctional *deferment* of the future instead of its anticipation. (Trzebiński might be drawing here, again, on Norwid's expression "lyricism of waiting", *liryzm czekania*⁴⁹).

In terms of genre, Trzebiński and his fellow poets took the "lyric" actually quite seriously, which is shown by the fact that they tried to find a new kind of lyric expression – answering to the extreme conditions of war – in the "lyric poem in prose"

⁴⁶ One may see a reference in this idea to Norwid's essay "Silence" ("Milczenie", 1882) which, however, did not mystify silence but highlighted "concealment" (*przemilczenie*) as a chain link to which an interlocutor can refer and freely react, not only in dialogue but also metaphorically, in literature (reader response) and, more broadly, in cultural tradition (one epoch "speaks out" what remained "unsaid" by the previous one). Norwid uses the phrase "to be great *by silence*" ("jakże wielkim jest albo bywa *milczeniem* ten...") but he understands "concealment" in what one could call a dialectical interplay with speech. C. Norwid, *Milczenie*. In: *Pisma wszystkie, idem*, vol. 6, p. 231, 241 (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁷ "[...] awangarda może stanowić przygotowanie poezji przyszłości, nagromadzić jakieś spichlerze skondensowanego liryzmu, poetyckiej urody." A. Trzebiński [pseud. Stanisław Łomień], *Snopek życia i ostu (z cyklu: Z walk o współczesną lirykę nr 1)* [*Sztuka i Naród* 1942, no. 3/4]. In: *Aby podnieść różę... Szkice literackie i dramaty, idem*, ed. M. Urbanowski, Warsaw 1999), p. 80.

⁴⁸ "[...] jeżeli te zdobycze i zapasy (te niby eksperymenty) naprawdę są i to takie znakomite, to czas je *teraz* – w czasie wojny właśnie – napocząć, przyrządzić na sposób jadalny, pożywić się z nimi." *Ibidem*, p. 77 (my emphasis, Ch.Z.).

⁴⁹ C. Norwid, *Pięć zarysów. III. Ruiny* [1849]. In: *Pisma wszystkie, idem*, vol. 3, p. 494. Norwid's phrase is likely to be an ironic allusion to the cult of the Slavs in Adam Mickiewicz's *Paris Lectures* (1840–1844). In them, Mickiewicz ascribed a particular eschatological inclination to the people (*lud*) of the Slavs. He conceived of them as bearing "a special mark, the mark of *waiting* [...]" ("Lud ten posiada szczególne znamię, znamię *oczekiwania*"). A. Mickiewicz, *Literatura słowiańska. Kurs trzeci* [March 14, 1843], Warsaw 1998 (*Dzieła*, vol. X, oprac. J. Maślanka), p. 176 (emphasis in the original) ("Ce peuple offre un caractère particulier, celui de l'*attente* [...]"; A. Mickiewicz, *Les slaves. Cours professé au Collège de France, Paris 1849*, vol. 4, p. 273.

(*liryk prozą*)⁵⁰. To put it in Norwid's terms, they were looking for an *indelicate* version of lyricism. Nonetheless, Trzebiński's "The Lyric Generation and the Dramatic Generation" („Pokolenie liryczne i dramatyczne”, 1942), his best known polemical piece, is marked by a completely denigrating understanding of “lyric”. In the form as it had dominated the literary scene before the war, he argues, lyric is merely a “technique of departing” (*technika oddalania się*), that is, contemplative detachment, escapism. And even in its aspiration to embrace war “thematically”, it never could succeed. He writes: “*War has easily become a theme but it lacked any lively or new form.*”⁵¹ The structure of Trzebiński's argument is remarkable, as he criticizes the mechanism by which “the person of the author, his true, private life becomes, through reception, an element of composition of the lyric poem”⁵². What is crucial for Trzebiński is the idea of an opposition between such author-centered lyricism and the “objectivity” (*obiektywność*) of drama – an art somehow purified from its author without the mediation of a subject perpetuating himself or herself through lyricism⁵³.

It should not be overlooked that within the circle of *Sztuka i Naród* there existed quite significant disagreement. In a reply (to be published for the first time only two decades later) to Trzebiński's text, his fellow Zdzisław Stroiński (1921–1944) detects a trivializing conception of lyric. Under “lyric”, Stroiński eloquently points out, Trzebiński understands something “tearful, blurred, egg-less, sickly-sentimental, emphatic, forced”⁵⁴. In other words: Trzebiński defines lyric in a deliberately reductionist way as the poet's detachment from reality in order to then reproach him for this detachment⁵⁵. In fact, Stroiński goes on, the degree of participation of lyric in reality is virtually impossible to *measure*, especially in the midst of the “apocalyptic reality”⁵⁶ of the Occupation. Escaping the dichotomy between activity and passivity, subjectivism and objectivism, Stroiński defines lyric instead – somehow anachronistically yet all of a sudden, almost subversively – as an “elementary cry from the most metaphysical ground of essence”⁵⁷. And respectively of Trzebiński's slogan of the “epoch

⁵⁰ See A. Kluba, *Wojenne „liryki prozą”*. In: *Poemat prozą w Polsce, eadem*, Warsaw–Toruń, 2014.

⁵¹ “*Tematyka stała się wojenna bez trudu, ale żywej i nowej formy zabrakło.*” A. Trzebiński, *Pokolenie liryczne i dramatyczne* [*Sztuka i Naród* 1942, no. 5]. In: *Aby podnieść różę...*, *idem*, p. 105 (emphasis in the original).

⁵² “[...] osoba autora, jego prawdziwe, prywatne życie staje się tu – przy recepcji – elementem kompozycji w liryku.” *Ibidem*, p. 107.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ “[...] płaczliwy, rozmazany, bezjajski, ckliwo-sentymentalny, emfaticzny, wymuszony” (Z. Stroiński [pseud. Marek Chmura], *O liryce, dramacie, etymologii i innych figlach (w związku z artykułem St. Łomienia Pokolenie liryczne i dramatyczne)*. In: *Ród Anhellich, idem*, ed. L.M. Bartelski, Warsaw 1982, p. 90.

⁵⁵ See A. Kluba, *Wojenne „liryki prozą”*, p. 383.

⁵⁶ “Ocenienie oddźwięku naszej apokaliptycznej rzeczywistości w literaturze jest zupełnie niemożliwe.” Z. Stroiński, *O liryce, dramacie, etymologii i innych figlach...*, p. 92.

⁵⁷ “[...] krzyk elementarny z najbardziej metafizycznego dna istoty” (*ibidem*). Clare Cavanagh convincingly argues that it is precisely the insistence on lyric subjectivity that turned out to be the most relevant political dimension of poetry in the context of the repressive regimes of the twentieth century. C. Cavanagh, *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics: Russia, Poland, and the West*, New Haven–London 2009.

of the deed” (*epoka czynu*), soon to be entered by the “dramatic generation”, Stroiński notes: “How bronze-like that sounds!”⁵⁸

Conclusion

The transformation of “lyricism” into a polemical concept proves to be a highly instructive instance of the lasting impact of Romanticism in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. The cases of Norwid, Brzozowski, and *Sztuka i Naród* show how Romantic subjectivity remains a central point of reference throughout manifold contestations thereof. Despite their anti-subjectivist agendas, none of those poets and critics is willing to fully renounce the imaginative potential of lyricism as both inspired exaltation and a “passivist” mood. After all, the main enemy turns out to be not Romanticism as such but Romanticism as a social convention and as a means of dissimulation of *what is to be done*. The polemical use of “lyricism” for extra-literary phenomena, at some point, turns into an attempt at its purification, at a paradoxical fusion of Romantic transgression with acute self-discipline.

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⁵⁸ “[...] jak to brzmi spizowo” (Z. Stroiński, *O liryce, dramacie, etymologii i innych figlach...*, p. 84).

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Streszczenie

Pojęcie liryzmu (*lyrisme*) weszło w obieg we Francji w latach 20. XIX wieku i posłużyło do określenia szczególnie wyegzaltowanego, „śpiewnego” trybu wypowiedzi poetyckiej. Można go ponadto oddać jako narzędzie samoutwierdzenia się romantyzmu. Tymczasem w kontekście późnego romantyzmu określenie to niedługo przybrało zabarwienie ambiwalentne, gdyż opisywało coraz częściej konwencjonalizowany styl romantyczny, i to nie tylko w piśmienności, lecz także w zachowaniu. W artykule tym omawiam szereg przykładów z literatury polskiej, w których liryzm/liryczność przechodzi nie tylko taką częściową, lecz – jak się wydaje – zupełną dewaluację. Funkcjonuje wówczas jako koncept polemiczny o pejoratywnym wydźwięku i uniwersalnym zakresie zastosowania – zgodnie z koncepcją Reinharda Kosellecka. U późnego romantyka Cypriana Norwida „liryzm” opisuje specyficzne zabiegi retoryczne rozpowszechnione wśród polskiej elity, które mają kompensować brak odwagi cywilnej i autorefleksji. Filozof, krytyk i pisarz Młodej Polski Stanisław Brzozowski, używając tego samego określenia, krytykuje „dekadenckie” upieranie się przy autonomii sztuki jako pretekstu do uniknięcia nowoczesności i akceptacji rozwoju technicznego. Wreszcie młodzi poeci konspiracyjnego czasopisma „Sztuka i Naród” (Warszawa 1942–44) – wyraźnie nawiązując do strategii Norwida i Brzozowskiego – eksploatowali koncept „liryzmu” jako dyskursywną broń przeciw „defetystycznym” reprezentantom literatury dwudziestolecia międzywojennego oraz jako pole odniesienia przy ciągłym przepracowywaniu własnej postawy w konspiracyjnym polu literackim okresu okupacji. Te polemiczne zawłaszczania „liryzmu” – oto teza artykułu – ujawniają taki tryb kontestacji, który przyczynił się do kontrowersyjnego przekazywania miast odrzucenia podmiotowości romantycznej.

Summary

The concept of “lyricism” (*lyrisme*) was coined in France in the late 1820s to declare a particularly exalted, “singing” poetic mode. It can be understood as a way of codifying Romantic self-empowerment. However, in the context of late Romanticism, the term soon became ambivalent. It now often described a conventionalized Romantic literary manner and, moreover, an exaggeratedly sentimental behavior. This paper presents a series of examples from Polish literature where lyricism (*liryzm/liryczność*) undergoes not only such a partial but, as it were, complete devaluation and functions instead as a universally applicable pejorative polemical concept in Reinhard Koselleck’s sense. In the late Romantic poet Cyprian Norwid (1821–1883), “lyricism” describes specific rhetorical moves that compensate for the lack of civic courage and self-reflection among Polish intellectuals. The *fin de siècle* philosopher, critic, and writer Stanisław Brzozowski (1878–1911), dwelling on the same notion, criticizes the “decadent” insistence on artistic autonomy as a pretext to avoid both facing modernity and acknowledging technical progress. The young right-wing poets gathered around the underground magazine *Art and Nation* (*Sztuka i Naród*, Warsaw, 1942–44) – obviously referring to Norwid’s and Brzozowski’s strategies – used “lyricism” as a discursive weapon against some of the “defeatist” representatives of prewar literature and as a negative foil for the constant reworking of their own stance in the field of clandestine literature during the Occupation. These polemical appropriations of “lyricism”, the paper argues, instantiate a mode of contestation that contributed to a controversial tradition of Romantic subjectivity, rather than to abandon it.

Biography

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